CHAPTER II

SUB-REGIONAL IDENTITIES IN BIHAR
Linguistic Identities in Bihar

Introduction

Language plays a significant role in the formation of the regional identity in India. When a region is referred as a linguistic region, it connotes a specific cultural tradition of the people living in that region. Culture draws its material from the historical memories associated with that region. Through language, culture finds expressions and the local history is encoded in the memory of the people. It stores them either in written form or through mutually intelligible speech signals and symbols, which is retold from generation to generation. Thus in a way a linguistic lineage structure is created which helps in locating and determining the boundaries of social groups.

The essential functions of a language are:

i. maintenance of cultural boundary marker - both as a symbol of ethnic or national identity, and

ii. selection and transmission of information. Language creates a horizontal unity among the people which ultimately results in the creation of a linguistic community.

But the significant problem one faces is that of determining the linguistic boundary of the people, because one cannot draw a clear line between a language and dialect. Even the test of mutual intelligibility does not closely
differentiate between two speech communities of the same language family or between two different language families into two distinct or related languages or dialects. Therefore, as Charles A. Ferguson observes:

Mutual intelligibility is difficult and impossible to test, and it alone does not serve to delimit satisfactorily the units of analysis referred to as languages, since the dialects of some languages are further apart in structure and mutual intelligibility than whole languages are from each other in other cases.¹

The problem is even complicated further when two groups are linguistically close, they may prefer to emphasize differences rather than similarities. Conversely, when the two groups, though linguistically dissimilar, may choose to emphasize similarities.² What becomes important is the attitudes of the speakers towards their language. Rubin says further "that the definitions of a language and of a speech community are to be based not simply upon language structure but also on social perceptions, values, and attitudes".³ Thus from the perspective of identity formation of languages and determining of their boundaries, the differences between language and dialect, between the speech form and the written language are no longer significant. What becomes important is how much memory is shared and commonality (in terms of cultural and historical past) is emphasized when two people enter into interpersonal communication through a language. And how much the
people of a particular region differentiate and dissociate themselves from the people of the other adjoining regions. Such differentiation is usually made in terms of cultural continuity and discontinuity between two sets of people. In the rural and agricultural societies, the communication is usually through folk-language. Folk-language is more local and comprehensive to the masses than those of developed and literary language of the educated elite. Here one finds a class-division in the use of a language. In agricultural societies, identity is sustained through folk-language. Identity-assertion through a well-developed standardized form of language may not have universal appeal among the masses. More or less, when a linguistic community is divided further along other ethnic categories, like caste, there is possibility that the developed literary tradition may be considered as an artefact and monopoly of certain caste. In this situation, a language may become an instrument of domination for the selected category of people. The crux of the argument here is that the folk-language has got more potential and effectiveness in the linguistic identity formation than the sophisticated language of the elite. Here it does not mean that a language should not develop and acquire sophistication, rather language development should be commensurate with the overall development of the masses.
Linguistic Identities in Bihar

On the basis of language-cum-culture, the present day Bihar can be divided into four distinct categories of sub-regional identities - Maithili, Bhojpuri, Magadhi and the tribal language(s) of the Jharkhand region. Grierson has described the language of Bihar as Bihari, which in his scheme of classification belongs to the Eastern group of Hindi, covering an area of 90,000 square miles and is spoken by the 36,000,000 people from the Himalayas on the north to Singhbhum on the South, and from Manbhum on the South-east to Basti on the north-west.

Bihari is bounded on the North by the Tibeto-Burman languages of the Himalayas, on the East by Bengali, on the south by Oriya, and on the West by the Chhattisgarhi, Bagheli and Awadhi dialects of Eastern Hindi. It is most western of the languages which form the Eastern Group of the Indo-Aryan Vernacular.

He further observes that "it is a direct descendant, perhaps the most direct of the descendants, of the old form of speech known as Magadhi Prakrit". In terms of phonology, grammatical structure and the selection of vocabulary, the Bihari occupies the middle place between Bengali and Eastern Hindi. Further, it has closer ethnic affinities with Uttar Pradesh than with Bengal.

The term Bihari refers to a group of related dialects - Maithili or Tirhutia, Magahi, and Bhojpuri. Grierson divides them into two groups viz., Maithili and Magahi on the one
hand, and Bhojpuri on the other. He records local variations in each dialects and on the basis of pronunciation and grammatical forms has indicated three sub-dialects of each.

The three dialects are spoken in three geographical regions of Bihar, and they differ from each other on the phonetic, phonemic and grammatical level. In terms of ethnic similarities and dissimilarities, the three linguistic regions refer to three distinct cultural zones of Bihar. While in Mithila, the Brahminical cultural tradition, based on religious conservatism, dominated the cultural spectrum of social life, the Magadh is connected with the growth, emergence and spread of Buddhism, which rejected the Brahminical tradition. The medieval period witnessed the infusion of Muslim culture in the Magahi culture and tradition. On the other hand, Bhojpuri region has been referred by Grirson as 'fighting nation of Hindustan'.

Suniti Kumar Chatterji holds the opinion that modern languages like Bengali, Assamese, Oriya, Magahi, Maithili and Bhojpuria are the representative languages of Magadhi Apabhransa. He classifies the Magadhan speeches into the following three groups:

1. **Eastern Magadhan**: Bengali, Assamese, Oriya.
2. **Central Magadhan**: Maithili, Magahi.
3. **Western Magadhan:** Bhojpuriya with Nagpuriya or Sadanji.\(^{10}\)

Grierson calls 2 and 3 as the Bihari language.

Even at the existential level of language perception of the people of Bihar, there does not exist any language like Bihari. People either identify with standardized and sanskritized Hindi or with their mother tongue or local dialects. Moreover, socio-linguistically, it is not important that a language or dialect belongs to a particular language family, but what is important is that such dialect should help people to imagine and cultivate a linguistic kinship in forming a separate and distinct linguistic community. Linguistic variations also connote the variation and change in tradition and culture. Each dialect of the region, besides having some linguistic affinities with each other, forms a separate language group at the social, cultural and political level.

**Magadhi**

The word 'Maghi' is a deviant of Sanskrit word *Magadhi*. And the region in which this dialect is spoken is referred as Magadha. The ancient land of Magadha now roughly corresponds to the present districts of Patna and northern half of Gaya district. Though the Magahi language extends to the other parts of Bihar such as Nalanda,
Aurangabad, Nawada, Monghyr, Giridih, Hazaribagh, Dhanbad, North-eastern Palamau, Northern Ranchi and the other parts of Bihar, the purest form of Magahi is preserved only in the districts of Patna and Gaya. This may be referred as a 'core region' of the Magahi language. Core region preserves not only the purity of dialect and cultural distinctiveness, it also helps in the determination of and scaling in the variation of the dialect or language. Magahi is linguistically bordered on the North by the various forms of Maithili spoken in Tirhut across the Ganges. On the West it is bounded by the Bhojpuri spoken in Shahabad and Palamau. On the North-East it is bounded by the Chhika-Chhiki Maithili of Monghyr, Bhagalpur and the Santhal Parganas, and on the South-East by the Bengali of Manbhum and East Singhbhum.11

Among all the local languages of Bihar, Magahi is the least developed. The reason is partly historical. Before Aryan expansion, Magadha was the centre of pre-Aryan civilization. It belonged to the Munda and non-Aryan group.12 "The orthodox Brahminical literature condemns Magadha as the land of low castes and it is looked upon with aversion by the Vedic Aryans. Manu did not include Magadha in the list of Brahminical lands. The name does not occur in the Rigveda."13

It is only with the advent of Aryans and the establishment of Aryan dynasties that the Magadh received Aryan language. Even the Aryans who ventured into Magadh were referred as
non-vedic Aryans, who differed from vedic Aryans in dialect and in the performances of religious (vedic) rites and rituals. "The Aryans of the vedic cults called these non-Vedic Aryans 'Vratyas', outcastes, or riteless people. The Vratyas could obtain admission into the vedic community by the performance of a ceremony or sacrifice...."¹⁴ Thus with Aryanas came the vedic culture to this region.

Magadh has also been the birth place of Buddhism and Jainism. These two religions opposed the Brahminical traditions of vedic rituals and rites. Though Magadh flourished exceedingly during the time of the palas who were the professed Buddhists, one finds a decline in the cultural and literary tradition since 12th century when Turks conquered Bihar. Suniti Kumar Chatterji observes:

In Magadha, all indigenous literary culture was at an end.... The desolation of the country favoured the incoming from the south of the Musaharas and other non-Aryan (Kol) tribes, who were partially Aryanised, and took up the Aryan speech from the original Magadha people. All sense of connection with the past was lost, all knowledge of the glories of pre-Moslem Magadha.... There was no cultivation of the language of the country. The masses were rude, and to a great extent, in the lower classes, recruited from aborigines. The new upper classes were Brahmans and Ksatriyas as well as Kayasths, mostly from the west: the original Brahmans, the 'Babhans' took to agriculture and became degraded. The aristocratic communities spoke or affected Hindi (Braj-bhakha and Awadhi) as well as Urdu. The local dialect was never seriously employed in literature, so that Magahi... has had to lead the existence of a humble patois from the very beginning of its life. But the masses....
sought to express themselves in this *patois* of their daily life, and as a consequence in Magahi we have small literature of ballads and folk songs...\textsuperscript{15}

Magahi does not have a history of indigenous written literature. The language was used and expressed through folk-songs at the popular level. In the Magahi language, the contents of folk-songs were mostly devotional. This is particularly applicable to the *Siddha* period and *Nath* period of Magahi language development.

The saint tradition in *Magahi* poetry has continued throughout the 18th and 19th centuries and even in the present century. The carriers of this tradition have been the *Magahi saints* of the *Kabirpanthi, Sheonaraini, Sarbhang* and *Sakhi* sects....\textsuperscript{16}

This tradition was (and is) preserved and promoted by the devotional places like *Mathas, asthans, peethas* and *Ashramas*. Why the Magahi language did not develop at a literary level? Many reasons are put forward for this. But the most valid reason seems to be that unlike the other two languages of Bihar (*Bhojpuri* and *Maithili*), no state patronage was extended to Magahi, especially during medieval period.

...when the local or regional languages were taking their literary form, the political activity of Magadh had shifted to Kannauj, Mithila and Lakhanawati, and that is why Gaharwars, Karnats and Sens extended state patronage to eastern Hindi, Maithili and Bengali respectively which helped these languages to grow and prosper, but no such state patronage was available to *Magahi* which could not move in step with these languages.\textsuperscript{17}

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The medieval period is marked by the classic stagnation and desolation in the development of Magahi language. It is only in post-independent India and with the establishment of Magahi Parishad in 1952 at Patna and the publication of the monthly journal Magahi\textsuperscript{18} that the linguistic consciousness has been gradually developing.

Having a close similarity of Magahi with Maithili, Grierson clubbed Magahi as a dialect of Maithili. But, Magahi having its own literary tradition, culture and history can in no sense be said as a dialect of Maithili. Linguistic differences also indicate a cultural difference between the peoples of Magahi and Maithili regions. As mentioned earlier, the content of Magahi language is often drawn from the devotional and Bhakti tradition, and Jainism, while Maithili language usually upholds the shakti tradition and the Brahminical tradition of the Hindu religion.

**Bhojpuri**

Properly speaking Bhojpuri is the language of Bhojpur, "the name of town or pargana in the North-West of the district of Shahabad."\textsuperscript{19}

In Bihar, the district in which it is spoken are Bhojpur. Rohtas, Chapra, Gopalganj, Siwan, Champaran, Motihari, Palamau, Ranchi, Hazaribagh, western portion of Vaishali and Muzaffarpur,\textsuperscript{20} besides in some parts of Santhal Pargana.
Bhojpuri language and culture have always been under the influence of West and Western forms of speech like Brajbhasa, Awadhi and Hindostani. Further, the history of Bhojpuri language and literature is connected with the social and spiritual movements that were launched in the 9th century by the Siddhas or various spiritual sects of that time in Bihar and Bengal. The Sant Sahitya produced Bhakti literature and was written in Bhojpuri language. This tradition continued upto 19th century. Except in this century, no conscious effort was ever made to cultivate this dialect. It is a folk-language of the rural people who expressed lores and tales through this language.

In folk tales and songs, one comes across the socio-cultural, religious and political aspects of Bhojapuri life. Some of these songs are Sohar, Jhumar, Purbi, Janeo-geet, Bahura, Sitala, Ropani ke geet, Parati, Bhajan, Nachari, Kajari etc.

About the ethnic differences among the linguistic and cultural zones of Bihar, Grierson observes:

...Maithili and Magahi are the dialects of nationalities which have carried conservatism to the excess of uncouthness, while Bhojpuri is the practical language of an energetic race, which is ever ready to accommodate itself to circumstances.... The Bengali and the Bhojpuri are two of the great civilisers of Hindostan, the former with his pen and the latter with his cudgel.21
Jharkhand and Tribal Regionalism

This is yet another geo-ethnological zone of Bihar which comprises of Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas. The region is mineral rich and has several tracts of forests. Ethnologically, the region is predominantly tribal, having distinct socio-cultural, linguistic and religious patterns. Externally, they represent a distinct cultural stock, but internally they are high differentiated from each other. However, they nurture a separate ethnic identity.

Socially, the population of the region consists of many tribal communities - Munda, Oraon, Santhals, Ho, Kherwar, Birhors, Birjia, Lohra, Bhuiya, Sauria, Paharia, Gorail etc. Linguistically, they belong to two separate families of Munda and Dravidian, having scores of dialects such as Mundari, Birhor, Turi, Asuri, Kharia, Kurukh, Karmali. But the most prominent dialects are Santhali, Oraon and Mundari.

Though they are socio-culturally and linguistically different, they have assumed a distinct ethnic identity. This identity is nurtured around ‘we-they’ feeling. ‘We-they’ dichotomy represents the total syndrome of the society and economics of the region.

Tribes of Jharkhand are mostly peasants. Tribes earn their sustenance from agriculture which is further supplemented by the income from the forest. However,
...the expansion of industries in Bihar since the fifties and development of the commercial exploitation of the forests have accelerated a process of land alienation and limited alternative sources of subsistence, undermining the adivasi peasant economy which was already marked by bonded labour and chronic indebtedness. An unequal labour market has developed in Bihar’s industrial sector in which poor and landless adivasi peasants are integrated as unskilled workers.23

Having immense economic potentialities, the region witnessed the inflow of outsiders from adjoining districts of Bihar. Migrants constitute ‘they’, who in local dialect is referred as ‘dikku’. By exploiting certain socio-cultural practices, they dispossessed tribals from their land. Tribal framework of community ownership of land and resources were privatized by the migrants. But, the story of exploitation does not stop here. Move was initiated to culturally assimilate the tribes into four fold model of Varna hierarchy. Thus the factor of economic exploitation converged with cultural dislocation and social discrimination of native population ‘We’ by the outsiders ‘They’. This generated a ‘tradition of protests’ in the Jharkhand region which gradually coalesced different tribal communities into one by inventing certain common ethnic traditions.

Part of Jharkhand’s history and cultures have been selected and reformulated to legitimize a political discourse based on ethnic referents and to call for a broad ethnic solidarity. Images of the past, not the flow of history, have been chosen by the reformists and often
institutionalized. The ensuing invented traditions are concerned with establishing a continuity of the political discourse with the past and not with an understanding of historical discontinuities or the presence of social contradictions.24

Thus in the process, Birsa Mundu was idealized on; as a symbol of unity. Other symbolic contents such as arrow, bow etc. have been commonalized as the symbol of tribal solidarity and unity.

However, the present day tradition of political and economic protests is predated by the several social movements, which took place in the Jharkhand region in the 19th century and early twentieth century. These movements though reformists, were agrarian in character. Some of the important movements are: Tamar revolts (1801 and 1820), Great Kol insurrection (1831-32), Sardari agitation (1858-95), Birsa insurrection (1895-1900), Tana Bhagat movement (1914), Kol insurrection (1931-32) etc.25

This long ‘tradition of protests’ finally culminated in the political protest movement for a separate Jharkhand state in the thirties when a memorandum was presented to the Simon Commission and the Cripss Mission. However, more systematized demand for a separate state was channellized in 1950 when the Jharkhand party26 - a political outfit of Adivasi Mahasabha - was organized by Jaipal Singh. A memorandum was also presented to the States Reorganization Commission in 1954. The SRC rejected the demand on several
counts.27 (i) In the ethnic demography of the Chota Nagpur division and Santhal Pargana division, the tribals are 'only a little more than one-third of the total population' and that they are linguistically divided; (ii) separation of South Bihar would affect the entire economy of the existing state; and (iii) "The separation of Chota Nagpur will upset the balance between agriculture and industry in the residual state which will be a poorer area with fewer opportunities and resources for development. At the same time, the centres of higher education, like the Patna and Bihar universities, will be outside the Jharkhand area. Obviously, it would be very inconvenient for the north as well as for the south if the state were to be broken up."28 This has overwhelmingly influenced the opinion of state and Central governments regarding the Jharkhand Movement and the formation of a Jharkhand state.

However, sustained efforts for separate Jharkhand state have always been made by regional political parties of Jharkhand during 1960s, 70s and 1980s. The movement reached its zenith in 1992 with the infusion of militancy by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, All Jharkhand Students Union etc. The protagonists have demanded the formation of a separate state of Jharkhand consisting of Palamau, Hazaribagh, Giridih, Dhanbad, Deoghar, Godda, Sahibganj, Ranchi, Lohardaga, Gumla, Singhbhum districts from Bihar, Sarguja
and Raigarh districts from Madhya Pradesh; Sundargarh, Sambalpur, Kendu Jhargarh, Mayur Bhanj districts from Orissa and three districts - Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia - from West Bengal. The leaders of the movement have justified the creation of a separate state by summarizing the general feeling of the tribals in the following words:

...as long as the Jharkhand region remains divided into four states and the centres of political power remain at Patna, Calcutta, Bhubaneshwar, etc., the people of Jharkhand region will continue to be victims of cultural suppression and economic exploitation. The efforts on the part of the Government for a balanced development through the mechanism of the Fifth schedule have utterly failed to deliver the results and the people are not ready to wait any longer.29

Unlike the earlier phases of the Jharkhand movement, the leaders of different factions seem to be united on the cause of separate Jharkhand state.

However, the attitude of neither of the four states to be affected by the new state seem to be positive. They have rejected the demand of a separate state. As pointed out earlier, their attitudes are heavily governed by the observations of SRC in this regard. Instead of parting with Jharkhand region, the state government seeks to provide the region with certain type of institutional and structural arrangements like development councils with certain amount of autonomy to look into the local matters of tribal development.30 West Bengal Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, has
outrightly rejected the demand on the plea that the:

Jharkhandis did not form the majority of the population in any of three West Bengal districts mentioned in this connection. While the tribal population was 10.5 per cent in Bankura, it was 7.99 per cent in Midnapore and 18.79 per cent in Purulia. Besides, the tribals in these three did not live in contiguous area but were interspersed with non-tribal population.31

On the other hand, in 1989 the Central Government appointed a committee on Jharkhand matters, whose report was tabled in the Lok Sabha on 30 March 1992. The committee recommended an Autonomous General Council, modelled on the pattern of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, with limited legislative and executive power for the 13 districts of Bihar.32 The Committee rejected the demand for a separate state. The impasse between state governments and the Jharkhand movement over the administrative status of Jharkhand region has yet to be resolved. In this impasse, the Centre is playing a third party role.

Concluding Observation

Jharkhand represents a unique case of development of composite nationality amidst variegated socio-cultural segments living in contiguous regions. Such a nationality develops around the dichotomy of 'we-they'. This dichotomy is expressed through organization of protests - agrarian, social and cultural - by the native population against the outsiders. This dichotomy is seminally significant in any
theorization on regional identity formation and its expression through the ideology and practice of regionalism.

**Caste Identities in Bihar**

Any attempt to analyze the socio-cultural, political and economic process of the state of Bihar would be incomplete if one does not take into account the phenomenon of caste which has always been a primary but basic unit of mobilization for secular and non-secular activities. It is something more than only a sociological unit of social stratification or culturally determining the relative position of two caste-groups in the social hierarchy of 'superiors' and 'inferiors'. Politically, it is the basic unit of electoral mobilization as well as for the 'authoritative allocation of value' in the state power-structure. Further, caste assumes class character in the political economy of the state where agrarian conflict or violence is articulated along caste lines. Thus caste is an all pervasive phenomena. It is perhaps because of its 'pervasiveness' that all other bases of ethnic identity are relegated to the secondary position. Caste identity cuts across the sub-regional identification of people. Also while other identity marker is sub-regional in appeal, caste-appeal is universal. It invokes unity among caste-people across the different cultural zones of Bihar. As a
result, the process of sub-regional identity formation gets diffused and dislocated. Probably because of this that sub-regional identity is yet to assume salience in the state politics.

Given the pervasiveness of caste-system, it would be in the fitness of things to take into account the operational and functional dynamics of caste-identity i.e., what kind of caste-interest is served and how it is served. But before that, one has to briefly recapitulate the profiles of Jatis in Bihar. Broadly, there are three major caste groups in Bihar. Upper castes consist of four major jatis, namely, Brahmin, Bhumihar, Rajput and Kayastha. They together constitute 13.0 per cent of total population. There are certain important characteristics of upper castes - (i) except Kayasthas, they are land-based or land-owner castes; and (ii) "each of these caste represent different cultural stocks".34

At the middle level, there are four upper backwards - Bania, Yadava, Kurmi and Koeri. They together constitute 19.3 per cent of the total population. Among them Yadav, Kurmi and Koeri are numerically dominant. Yadav constitute 11.0 per cent; Kurmi 3.6 and Koeri 4.1 per cent. These three castes are categorized as "the tenants and small cultivating castes".35
On the other hand, lower backwards consist of numerous jatis, important among them are Barni, Dhanuk, Hajjam, Kahar, Kumhar, Lohar Mallah and others. 32.0 per cent of the lower backward castes is followed by 14.4 per cent of the Scheduled Castes; 9.1 per cent of the Scheduled Tribes and 12.5 per cent of the Muslims. Lower backwards, besides performing traditionally (rather ritually) assigned occupation provide major labour force to the agrarian economy of Bihar. They are mainly field workers.

It was during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century that the urge for status mobility, under the influence of various socio-religious movements and the introduction of modern values by the colonial rule, promoted different caste-groups to form sabhas and associations. The move for status mobility was not only among the upper or lower backwards but was present also among the two upper castes - Kayasthas and Bhumihars. The move for status improvement was mostly a claimed status. The claimed status was acquired by adopting the religious and cultural endowments of two-upper castes - Brahmins and Rajputs. On the other hand, backward class also stressed the importance of education and economic uplift for their status mobility. The move for status mobility across different castes can be gleaned from the following table.
Table 1

Jatis and Their Claimed Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jati/Sub-jati</th>
<th>Designation claimed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Babhan</td>
<td>Bhumihar Brahman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barhi, Kamar (Lohar)</td>
<td>Vishvakarma Brahman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhat</td>
<td>Brahman, Bhat Brahman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hajjam</td>
<td>Nai Brahman, Kulin Brahman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dosadh</td>
<td>Gahlot Rajput</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goala</td>
<td>Yadava, Jadubansi Kshatriya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalwar (Kala, Kalar)</td>
<td>Haihala Kshatriya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurmi</td>
<td>Kurmi Kshatriya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koeri</td>
<td>Dangi, Kushwaha, Kshatriya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rawani Kahar</td>
<td>Chandrabansi Kshatriya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jolaha</td>
<td>Sheikh, Sheikh Momin.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The urge for status mobility had important bearings in forging unity among sub castes and among inter-castes having similar status in the social structure.

Here two distinct varieties of identity were emphasized. In some cases, for example in the case of Rajputs, the traditional concept of *Varna*, ..., came to be of crucial importance. In others, particularly in the case of those castes which were traditionally already at the bottom of the *Varna* hierarchy, a new identity transcending sub-caste barriers and emphasizing occupational as well as social affinities was sought to be forged. Such an identity although not coincidental with the *Varna* was instrumental in
levelling, or, at least, neutralising traditional barriers erected either between various sub-castes of a single caste or between similar status caste groups.36

This new claimed status and identity was emphasized through various caste associations. These caste associations, besides maintaining further the new assumed identity of backward castes, brought unity among the different strata of a single caste or various castes by singling out their identical interests. In this process, social and cultural identity of a caste or of identical caste groups was transformed into separate political identity. This has considerable impact on the overall political process of the state. On the other hand, among the upper castes, caste associations, besides safeguarding the cultural hegemony of the upper castes, projected political and economic interests of dominant groups as caste interests. Thus, at the initial stage of the formation of caste-association, caste ideology based on the concept of purity and pollution was invoked by the leaders of the association.37 It is in this context that caste personalities were glorified and the ancestry of each caste was located near the ancestry of Brahmin and Rajput castes. Once the caste-status is culturally defined, caste-identity is sustained and perpetuated by promoting 'we-ness' around "rhetoric such as 'economic backwardness', 'economic development', etc., of the caste members."38 Also, "in order to bind together the
caste members, caste associations occasionally pass resolutions, ventilating grievances of the exploiting strata of the caste against the government." These caste associations also undertake different welfare and social reform activities like promoting education among caste people by providing scholarship etc.

After briefly analyzing the broader functional attributes of the caste-associations, it is worthwhile to take into consideration the individual caste associations.

Upper Caste Associations

Among the upper castes, Kayasthas and Bhumihars were first to organize caste associations. The Census of 1901, while classifying caste according to Varna model of social stratification, clubbed Kayasthas and Bhumihars with Yadav, Koeris, and Kurmis thereby making their position secondary to two upper castes - Brahmins and Rajputs. This was resented by them and they soon organized caste sabhas to uplift their social status.

The developed segment among the Bhumihar organized Akhil Bhartiya Bhumihar Brahman Sabha. To substantiate the higher status of Bhumihars, Swami Sahjanand Saraswati, the famous Kishan Sabha leader, scanned the religious scriptures and texts and proved that Bhumihars were culturally similar to Brahmins. He urged the Bhumihars to
take up Purohiti function\(^4^1\) (priestly function). As a result, the subsequent caste enumeration in the Census of 1931 listed a larger section of Bhumihars with Brahmins. Subsequently Bhumihar Brahman Sabha started defining and protecting the economic and political interests of the Bhumihars. The Bhumihar had another important sabha - Pradhan Bhumihar Brahman Sabha (1889) to

'Improve moral, social and educational reforms of the community and to represent the wants of the community to the government.' The Sabha concentrated almost entirely on asserting their claim as bhumihars to brahman status by starting schools to teach Sanskrit and rid the community of brahman priests.\(^4^2\)

On the other hand, Kayasthas organized the Bihar Kayasthas Provincial Sabha in 1889 for the purpose of social reform and upliftment of caste fellows. Woman literacy, widow remarriage, ending of sanctions against overseas travel, starting of school, motivating the people to take western education etc., were some of the major areas of activities of the Sabha.\(^4^3\)

Thus the first priority of Kayastha Mahasabha was to improve the caste status of the Kayasthas. Under the leadership of Dr. Sachchidanand Sinha, Mahesh Narain, Nand Kishore Lal, Rai Bahadur Krishna Sahay and other, the Mahasabha demanded the separation of Bihar from Bengal.\(^4^4\) Being educationally advanced, the motivating factor for seeking separation was to seek maximum employment in the government services, which until then were monopolized by the Bengali Kayastha in the United Province of Bihar and Bengal.
Besides these two pioneer caste associations, other important active upper caste's associations are: the Saryupari Brahman Sabha (1906), The Rajput Sabha (1906), The Maithili Brahman Sabha etc.

**Backward Caste Associations**

Lead in forming the caste associations among backwards was first provided by the Kurmis. As a reaction and protest to the "British policy of declaring Kurmis 'criminal' caste, thereby preventing their recruitment into the police and Army," the Kurmis of Bihar formed the All-India Kurmi Mahasabha in 1894, by linking and associating Mahato Kurmis of Chotanagpur, Awadhia Kurmis of the plains and the Dhanuks in North Bihar. "Under the influence of the Arya Samaj, members sanskritized their social and ritual practices, established educational institutions and propagated a mythology of descent from the God Indra to claim Kshatriya status." However the most important social movement was the Ahir (Goala) movement which developed around 1914. But before this, the Gopajatiya Sabha was formed in 1909 to socially awaken the 'Cognate' castes. The Goala movement was initially cultural protest movement where emphasis was laid on wearing of sacred thread, appointing of own caste-priests, ending the practice of early marriage and to
carry out socio-educational reforms among Yadavas with a view to improve their caste-status. Caste-identity was perpetuated around the ancestry traced to Lord Krishna. But this cultural protest movement soon incorporated within its fold the economic issues like refusal to do begari for zamindars (mostly upper castes) and "discontinuation of the sale of chipris (cow-dung cakes), milk, curds, etc., except at the bazar rates to their landlords and the maintenance of unity among themselves." As a result, an anti-Gwala movement was organized by the upper-caste zamindars.

The object of this movement was purely retaliatory and in pursuance of its objects Gwalas who refused to sell milk in the bazar were to be deprived of the services of barbers, washerman and midwives, and were not be allowed to graze their cattle on the zamindar's waste lands. This opposition only served to make the Gwalas more determined than ever.

Such a social conflict only strengthened the further caste unity and caste-consciousness. Caste became the basis of cultural and economic protests.

Another important development which took place was the formation of Triveni Sangh in 1934. Triveni Sangh symbolized the working unity of the Ahirs, Kurmis and Koeris. Its aims were broad and comprehensive: "fostering solidarity among different sections of the caste community, participation in the democratic politics, opposing and retaining upper caste tyranny like corvee, begar, rape and social ostracism." Such an horizontal extension of caste-
interests and subsequent formation of broad based organizations have weakened further the demarcation between caste and class in Bihar.

Formation of class in the context of Bihar is not exclusively an economic phenomena. Rather it is a longdrawn process of convergence of cultural and economic interests of associated caste-groups. It is because of this that conflict in the socio-cultural spheres is soon transformed into agrarian and other forms of economic conflicts. However, in every conflict caste remains the unit of mobilization and every conflict intends to serve the caste interests.
References


4. Bihari language excludes the language of Tribals.


6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid, p.3.


10. Ibid, p.92.


13. Ibid.


17. Ibid, p.588.
23. Ibid, p.15.
32. For details of the proposed Council see paras 32-43 in the Report of the Committee on Jharkhand Matters.
33. The percentage figure of caste groups is adapted from W.H. Blair, *Voting, Community Society: Exploration in Aggregate Data Analysis in India and Bangladesh*, New Delhi, 1979, p.5.


37. For the functions of caste associations especially in the case of upper caste association read Ghanshyam Shah, "Caste in Contemporary India", in *Caste, Caste Conflict and Reservations*, op.cit., pp.1-11.

38. Ibid, p.10.

39. Ibid.

40. Exact date of formation of Akhil Bhartiya Bhumihar Brahman Sabha has not been located from the sources consulted.


46. Ibid.

47. In the Hindu mythology, only the twice-born castes can wear the sacred thread *Janaeeyu*. People at the lower level of hierarchy were debarred from wearing this 'cultural thread'.

48. Reference to this practice can be found in Madhubani district in North Bihar.

