Chapter 3

CASTE IN BIHAR: A SOCIO-HISTORICAL PROFILE
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This chapter will deal with the issue of caste in Bihar in a socio-historical perspective. To understand the caste in Bihar we have to analyse it historically and than relate with the present context. In post independence era this province has been constantly witnessing a series of caste riots, sometimes resulting in serious social and political crisis. Each caste appears to be organised to influence every social and political activity. One can observe very easily the intense inter-caste bitterness and rivalry in all walks of Bihar society. This chapter will try to understand the deeper meaning of caste in the modern day Bihar along with the emergence of different caste associations and their role in the politics, taking into consideration, the socio-Historical aspect of it.

Conceptualisation of Caste

Roland Inden in his seminal work has pointed out that 'caste is conceptualised as the peculiar Indian essence that distinguishes the country from every other and particularly the western, and again 'caste has became essentialised and turned into the substantialised agent of History'. Different anthropologists, sociologists and other authors have

explained caste in different ways. The old religious books like Rig Veda, Purusasukta, Satpatha Brahmins, Taittirriya Brahmins, Manu Shastras, Mahabharata, talk about caste system that has been existing in Indian society. All these texts have different views and opinions regarding the origin of caste. However, all of them agree with one point i.e. Brahminical superiority. The religious texts teach people to worship and respect Brahmins. Prominent sociologist Max Weber points out, caste is and remains essentially a social rank. A caste is doubtlessly a closed status group. Betellie and Bailey have stressed the prevalence of Brahminical superiority over others and their social, economic and political influence in affairs of village.

Caste may be defined as a collection of families or group of families bearing common name, which usually denotes, or is associated with specific occupations. Betellie, Ghurye and others view caste as a hierarchical system, although the nature of this hierarchy may be difficult to ascertain, except in certain broad terms. The popular impression of hierarchy is clear-cut derived from the idea of the Varna i.e. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra.

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5 Andre Betellie, op. cit.
Caste system is also described as a system of "institutionalised inequality". In its extreme forms, caste stratification subsumes all other stratification systems to the extent that it could be questioned how appropriate it is to talk of different dimensions of stratification in such a society, consequently, the system is called homogenous or non-complex.\(^7\)

Kothari\(^8\) writes that no one can deny that caste is continuing to have a stronghold in the economic and political life of the people. There is a suggestion about the disappearance of caste phenomena, but a social institution cannot be simply abolished. Kothari's concluding remarks that no society lives without tradition and the essential challenge of modernity is not the destruction of tradition but the traditionalisation of modernity. He further says that the essential tests of India's strategy of social change lies in this criterion of traditionalisation of modernity.

According to Ketkar\(^9\), there are mainly two characteristics of a caste as a social group:

- Membership is confined to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born.
- The members are forbidden by the inexorable social laws to marry outside the group. Each one of such groups has a special name by

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\(^7\) Nadel S.F.), The Theory of Social Structure, Cohn and west, London, 1957.  
\(^8\) Rajni Kothari (eds), caste in Indian Politics,orient Longman, Delhi. 1970  
which they are called. Several of such aggregates are grouped together under a common name while these larger groups are but subdivision of groups still larger which have independent name.

Nesfield defines caste as a class or community, which disowns any connection with any other class and can neither inter-marry nor eat nor drink with any but with the persons of their own community. According to Marx, caste system is the product of pre-industrial society and relates (Asiatic) mode of production to the stability of the caste system in India.

Sociologically speaking caste is founded on the principal of the division of labour. Caste is nothing more than the systematisation of occupational differentiation. Even though a caste is not merely associated with an occupation but has a limited kind of monopoly over it. It could be argued that, in the context of growing population, the occupational aspect of caste system would have broken down completely in artisan, trading and servicing castes either had not been absorbed in agriculture or were able to migrate to other areas. Caste as a division of labour has its own history.

It was about 1000 B.C. when the Aryans settled between the Indus and Gangatic region and it was here that they learned the art of cultivation. With the coming of the agriculture, the division of labour

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10 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
came into existence. Once the conquerors settled as agriculturalist and experienced the consequential development, the Aryan society also got involved into grouping known as four-fold varna system that later developed into various groups and came to be known as caste system. The priestly community elevated themselves to the status of Brahmins and warriors to Kshatriyas. The third group got involved into agricultural occupation. Soon by 600 BC a new grouping emerged in the Aryan community. Whenever a community takes to agriculture some agriculturalist developed surplus and accumulative capital. This surplus capital was used to meet the growing requirements of the people. Such an activity naturally brings to the forefront groups to the people dealing with trade and commerce. This is how vaishyas came into existence. Since the emergence of this community is rooted in surplus generated by agriculture, the erstwhile Shudras community moved up to form the new grouping, while the conquered people and mixed Aryans became Shudras.

**Historical Roots of Casteism in Bihar**

The writings on caste though very rich in underlining the changes in caste structure and its role in modern India, but have failed to trace the genesis of casteism in modern period historically.
The new opportunity in colonial period led to the emergence of new interest groups with new identity, but the various restrictions did not allow the new identities to crystallise. Moreover, there grew a severe competition for being the beneficiary of the new situation. In absence of a new strong identity, the interest groups had to recast the old identities into new forms and religious and caste ties served their purpose. Thus, one has to go back to colonial rule to trace the phenomenon of casteism in Bihar.

Andre Bettelie\(^\text{13}\) writes, “Caste in traditional sense is certainly changing but there is continuity in name, personal identity”. Moreover, interaction of caste with modern politics has given more strength to the institution of caste. With this special conception in mind, Dumont\(^\text{14}\) has termed the process of change occurring within caste structure as the process of substantialisation.

Contemporary Indian sociology is marked with an intense debate on transformation of caste into class. One group tends to accept caste riots to be the corrupted form of class struggle. Other group argues that caste, instead of being weakened, is getting stronger day by day. Marx\(^\text{15}\) described caste as stereotype that had survived the break-up of village economy and traditional political system. Each caste has its own cultural

\(^{13}\) Andre Betelle, Closed and Open Social stratification, European Journal of Sociology, 7(1966), pp.224-246.

\(^{14}\) Louis Dumont, Homo- Hierarchicus, vikas publications, Delhi, 1970.

\(^{15}\) Marx Karl, the British Rule in India, Selected Works-2, New York.
heritage and in that sense, acts independently of other caste. While caste prescriptions finds expressions in the behaviour of members, conformity to prevailing usages, norms and values in a large measure accounts for the differences among villages.

The relation between caste and Indian politics has been a topic of intense debate and controversy for political sociologists—Indian as well as Westerners. There have been a great number of monographs on this subject, but most of these writings deal with the post independent period.

The Bihari Hindu society has three hierarchical layers, namely the upper or forward castes, the intermediate or backward castes and the scheduled castes.

- The first category of layer includes only four castes, the Brahmins, the Bhumihars, the Rajputs and the Kayasthas.

- To the second category belong a large number of castes consisting either of craftsmen or of men pursuing certain types of professions. Among them the important one are Yadavas or the Gwallas(milkmen), the Koiries(vegetable growers or cultivators), the Mallies(gardeners and horticulturalists), the Kurmies (cultivators) , the Kahars(domestic workers or palanquin-bearers), the Kandus (confectioners), the Lahars(the blacksmiths), the
Kalwars (sellers of liquors), the Barnawals, the Roniyars (traders, shopkeepers and hawkers of wares), the Sonars (goldsmiths), the Barhis (carpenters), the Kumhars (potters), the Baris (messengers and makers of leaf-platters), the Nais (barbers), the Nuniyas (makers of salt), the Telis (oilmen), the Dhanuks (cultivators or domestic servants and rope makers), the Mullahs (fishermen and boatmen), the Tatwas (weavers) etc.

The third categories are the most inferior castes in the hierarchy of caste. They are: the Bantras (engaged in basket making and thatching the houses), the Bauris (earth-workers and palanquin-bearers), the Bhogtas (agricultural labourers), the Bhuiyas, the Bhumijs, the Chamars (tanners and shoe-makers), the Dabgars (leather workers), the Dhobis (washer men), the Doms (basket makers, disposers of the dead and the executioners), the Dusadhs (village watchmen, messengers and peons), the Ghasis, the Kanjars (hunters of jackals and other wild animals, catchers of snakes and makers of strings of hemp and cotton), the Kauriyars (breeders of pigs and scavengers), the Mehtars (sweepers), the Mushers (agricultural labourers), the Nats (acrobats), the pans, the Pasis (toddy tapers), the
mehtars are also called Bhangis, Dharikars, Halalkhors, Haris and Lalbegis.\textsuperscript{16}

The castes irrespective of the fact that they are categorised as the upper or the backward or the lower, are further divided into a number of sub castes. In 1891 the following were the numbers of sub castes recorded for certain castes.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{center}
\textbf{TABLE-3(i)}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textbf{SUB-CASTES OF DIFFERENT CASTES}
\end{center}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Caste</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bhumihars(or Babhan)</td>
<td>843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bari</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnwal</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bind</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhanuk</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dusadh</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatik</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koeri</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mushar</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hajjam</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{16}Government of India(1965), The Report of The Advisory Committee on the Revision of the Lists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Delhi

\textsuperscript{17}Census of India, 1891, Volume V.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcaste</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barhi</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halwai</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandu</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tantwa</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalwar</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasi</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamar</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: census of India, 1891

Generally speaking sub castes get formed and their places in the caste hierarchy fixed according to various factors including the name of the place to which they originally belonged.

The Bihari Brahmins are divided into three main groups of subcastes, namely, the Paschima (western) Brahmins, The Tirhutiya or Maithili Brahmins, and the Magadh or Sakadwipiya Brahmins.

The first group belong to saruparins(those who originally belonged to the areas across the river Saryu,i.e., original inhabitants of the kingdom of Kosal, the Kanyakubjas(originally from the Kannauj region), the Yamunaparins(originally from across the river Yamuna), the Yajurvedies(the traditional masters of the yajurvedas), the Sarswats(who originally inhabited the valley of the now extinct river),etc. as it is evident from the name, they are migrants from the districts of U.P., Haryana, Panjab and Rajasthan.
The Paschima group of Brahmins are at present, found mostly in Sahabad (Bhojpur, Buxar, Bhabhua and Rohtas districts), Champaran (East and West Champaran districts), Muzzafarpur (Vaisali, Sitamari and Muzzafarpur districts), Western parts of Patna district, and some parts of Gaya district. For them Varanasi is the main cultural and religious centre. The majority of them speak bhojpuri. The most numerous among the Paschima Brahmins are suryuparin Brahmins and kanyakubja Brahmins. Generally, the suryuparin Brahmins live in villages whereas majority of kanyakubja Brahmins are settled in towns and normally engaged in trade and business.

The turhutiya or Maithili Brahmins are supposed to be the original inhabitants of Tirhut or mithila. They are concentrated generally in the districts of Darbhanga, Madhubani, Samastipur, Bhagalpur, Muzzafarpur, Monghyr, Begusarai and Sitamari etc. For them Darbhanga is the main cultural and religious centre. They have their own custom and tradition. They speak maithili language.

The last group of Brahmins includes Magadh or sakaldwipa Brahmins. There has been a lot of controversy about the identity of Sakaldwipa Brahmins. One belief is that they were brought by Lord Rama from Sri Lanka because they were well versed in medicine. Risley found that ‘Sakaldwipi’ themselves prefer the legend associating themselves
with Rama's famous invasion to that connecting them with the country proverbial among Hindus for its ceremonial impurity. A number of scholars hold that the sakaldwipas are the last entrant to the fold of Brahmans. They originally came from Sakadwip, a part of Persia.

There are Brahmins who have got them degraded on account of their acting as priests of low castes or by their discharge of duties of Mahapatra. These duties include receiving certain types of offerings at Sradha ceremony. Their caste status is so low that good Hindus consider their touch to be contaminating.

The sub castes of Bhumihars and Rajputs are not of much significance except for the fact that they indicate their respective places in the caste hierarchy. The inter-sub-caste marriages are not at all prohibited.\(^{18}\)

The census data reveal that 30 castes have been present in every part of the state. Among them, Brahmin, Rajputs, Barhi, Barai, Chamar, Dhobi, Kumhar, Mali, Lohar, Teli, Bania, Roniyar, Barnwal, Kurmi, Koiri, Dom, Sonar, Mallah, Gwala, Hajjam, Kandu etc.

The last census to gather and publish data for different castes was 1931. In the 1951 census which was the first of its kind in independent

\(^{18}\) Girish Mishra and Braj Kumar Pandey, Sociology and Economics of Casteism in India, a study of Bihar, Pragati Publications, 1996.
India, caste data were not gathered because the government had ordered the abolition of caste for the purpose of full enumeration and tabulation.

**TABLE-3(ii)**

**POPULATION OF 17 MAJOR CASTES & THEIR RELATIVE SHARE IN TOTAL POPULATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage of the Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahir</td>
<td>34,55,141</td>
<td>11.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beahman</td>
<td>15,40,306</td>
<td>4.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajput</td>
<td>13,70,338</td>
<td>4.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurmi</td>
<td>13,57,302</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koeri</td>
<td>13,01,473</td>
<td>4.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dusadhar</td>
<td>12,84,398</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamar</td>
<td>12,55,689</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhumihar</td>
<td>8,94,657</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhanuk</td>
<td>5,47,308</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kahar</td>
<td>5,24,030</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandu</td>
<td>5,06,384</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallah</td>
<td>4,59,560</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hajam</td>
<td>4,56,779</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayasth</td>
<td>3,68,431</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasi</td>
<td>1,72,061</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dom</td>
<td>1,51,621</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halalkor</td>
<td>20,742</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1931 Census.

It appears from table that the four upper castes together constitute only 13.25 percent of the total population of Bihar in 1931, while the three most numerous backward castes, namely Ahir, Kurmies and Koeri accounted for 19.50 percent of the total population of the province. This
fact is very crucial to the understanding of political development in Bihar during 1960s and 1970s. Another fact to be noted here is that the Dusadhs were numerically more than Chamars. Among the upper castes Brahmans, Rajputs and Kayasthas were present all over the Bihar.

With the establishment of British colonial rule a new superstructure was imposed on existing traditional set-up. This imposition, nevertheless, brought far reaching change in the economic and social milieu. But the change did not occur in all regions at a uniform rate due to the inherent logic of the colonial rule and local factors. Like other areas, Bihar too underwent the process of change or superimposed modernisation, but this process was hesitant, late, and painful in Bihar, opportunities were less and restrictions were more. That is why uniformity of new political system could not lead to the same rate of social change in Bihar.

It is a general notion that the traditional Indian social structure was bound within the caste framework and was a closed system. There was not much scope for individual mobility, but there are some sociologists who hold that even the traditional social order was not completely closed but had its own source of flexibility.

Dumont has taken- up this issue of subordination of individual to community and has argued that individual was completely subservient to
the caste order. But Betellie\textsuperscript{20} thinks differently. In his view groupings based on religion, castes and other primordial ties directed individual’s action to an extent but even the traditional structure had avenues of individual mobility such as civil and military bureaucracies and commercial and literary activities. By achieving distinctions in these fields, one could improve his social position despite the virtual immobility of his caste status. Yet in any comparative perspective, the caste membership was remarkably closed. The caste system is marked by two features- its rigidity and elaborateness.

Traditional social order had a very elaborate kind of differentiation which was the product of the geographical factors and of the long historical process. Along with the distinct regional patterns, the absorption of successive waves of migration made the traditional Indian social order more elaborate. The identity of individuals was determined by his region, sect, caste, sub-castes and lineage and these identities had a crucial bearing in social, economic and political hierarchies.\textsuperscript{21} Political and economic power generally vested in corporate groups, often in a single caste which had more or less determined status in a hierarchical system. This combination of caste status, economic and political

\textsuperscript{19} Dumont Louis (1970), op. cit.
\textsuperscript{20} Betellie, Andre, Castes: Old and New, Asia Publishing House Bombay, 1969.
\textsuperscript{21} ibid.
dominance has been conceptualised as “Dominant Caste” by Srinivas.\textsuperscript{22} For him a dominant caste is one which has considerable influence economically and politically and numerically strongest at the village or local village or local level. Another term for this combination has been put forward by Kothari\textsuperscript{23} as “the entrenched caste”. This term can be differentiated from dominant caste. Kothari has accepted all the attributes of dominant castes pointed out by Srinivas but differs so far as numerical strength is concerned. For him the entrenched castes are numerically quite small. Thus we can say that the pre-British Indian society was marked with supremacy of caste, feudal economy and fluid political pattern.

Now to talk of Bihar, like any other region, it was socially a seat of conservatism, economic stagnation, fully superstitious and evil practices. The cardinal features of social life of Bihar were the rigidity and importance of caste system. Social conflicts arose due to the existence of a good number of sub castes. Every caste had numerous sub castes. Inter-caste or inter-sub caste marriages and inter dinning was completely out of the question. Person belonging to lower castes also rigidly observed the caste rules.\textsuperscript{24}

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\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{22} Srinivas M.N, caste in modern India, Asia Publishing House, Bombay.
\textsuperscript{23} Rajni, Kothari, caste in Indian politics, orient Longman, Delhi, 1970
\textsuperscript{24} Buchanan, (1925), Accounts of the district of Patna and Gaya, Patna.
\end{flushleft}
Like the rest of the country, there was well regulated caste-policy for the enforcement of caste rules over individuals and for maintenance of effective social control over them. Early marriages of both boys and girls formed a noticeable feature in society.25

In 18th century Bihar, there was striking absence of a “dominant caste” on provincial level. One cannot give this status to a single caste in Bihar. Landlords in Bihar plains came from almost all upper castes. Brahmins, Bhumihars, and rajputs were major landowning castes and even today, they own a sizable portion of land in Bihar. Consequently these castes together wielded economic and political power. Of course Kayasthas were not landowning castes still they wielded economic and political power because of their education26. Thus ritually Brahmins formed themselves as most superior caste; and economically and politically they shared power with Bhumihars, Rajputs and Kayasthas. Further in Bihar, there were no strong intermediary castes, who owned substantial amount of land like, in Andhra(Kammas and Reddies), Mysore(Okkalingas), Gujarat(Patidars) etc. Yadavas and Kurmies who are landowning castes in contemporary Bihar, although controlled land on the village or local level, they came into prominence only in late 19th century and early 20th century. In economy Bihar was similar to the rest

25 Dutta K.K. Survey of India’s social life and economic conditions in the 18th century, 1707-1813, Delhi. 1976.
26 ibid.
of the country. On the eve of the British conquest, the agrarian structure was marked with Zamindars at the top and vast masses of landless agricultural labourers at the bottom.

In Bihar, the permanent settlement of 1793, the administrative unification of the colonial government and commerce did not upset the existing social relationship. The dominance of four upper castes remained unchanged throughout 19th century and in the early 20th century. Land settlements were also not very upsetting for Bihar. Consequently the settlement served to confirm the place of the high castes as landlords and also rescued them from farmers of revenue who had been placed over them. Thus with few changes only, the high caste zamindars largely retained their proprietary rights in land much as in pre- British days. This continuing dominance of zamindars served to stabilise the established order and to impede the growth of political consciousness in the state. In brief, Bihar did not receive much from colonial commerce. It failed to develop its own commercial class which could have directly participated in the colonial commerce and expansive capitalism.

**Condition of Education**

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27 O’ Malley, L.S.S, Bengal District Gazetteers, 1907.
28 Hunter, W.H, Statistical Accounts of Bengal, 1877.
In 19th century attempts were made to introduce a new type of education. These attempts were made by Christian missionaries and private individuals. Yet the East India Company was not committed to expanding modern education in Bihar. Meanwhile, a strong public opinion in India began to advocate a new form of education. The middle classes living in the neighbourhood of the metropolis to whom knowledge of English was a passport for the government jobs clamoured for the introduction of English. In 1833, the funds for the disposal of committee were increased by an act of parliament from one lakh to ten lakh of rupees per year.

Bentinck agreed with the views of Macaulay, and on the 7th March 1835, passed a resolution in favour of promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India and laying down that all the funds appropriate for the purpose of education would be best employed in English education alone. The scheme for vernacular and English education was devised in 1835 for Bihar, according to which two educational circles were established. One at Bhagalpur and another in South Bihar. There was to be a central college with as many zila schools as there were districts in the circles. Zamindars were assisting the government in establishing the institutions imparting English education.

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The first attempt for higher education in Bihar was made in Patna by the mid 19th century. Patna College, the first modern college of Bihar was founded in 1863 with five students only and with a monthly fee of Rs. 2. There seemed to a very limited response to higher education in Bihar in this period. The introduction of English in place of Persian provided several new opportunities. The expansion and extensions of railways too demanded a number of personnel. By 1899, Patna College had 216 Bihari students and 85 Bengali students. The second college to be established was T.J. Jubilee of Bhagalpur in 1877. In 1899, Patna got the second college namely Bihar National College. By 1900, Monghyr, Muzzafarpur, and Hajaribagh had one college each.30

In the field of female education the first institution for the girls was founded in Patna namely, “The Bankipur Female High School” by some leading Bengalis, Like Shri Prakash Chandra Roy and his Wife Aghore Kamini Devi in 1857.31

It is important to understand the specific connection between and higher education in the earlier period of its growth in Bihar. The kayasthas in the traditional system certainly ranked below Brahmins, Bhumihars and Rajputs but they were far ahead of them in the field of education.32 Kayasthas had never been generally landlords. They had

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30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
been traditionally salaried class. Srivastava- a kayastha sub caste – were first to take up English education. Over a period of time, upper sections of other castes realised the importance of English education and started sending their children for it. Bhumihars were the second caste to do it. The intermediary castes in general came into fray only in 20th century.

Bihar society was not prepared to accept a modern ideology as the traditional social order did not undergo the same radical change as in other parts in India. The colonial rule was only interested in collection of revenue, supply of food grains and raw materials. Whatever changes came were the unintended results of colonial rule in Bihar. Between 1888-89 and 1904-05, the percentage of primary education remained virtually static at about 2 percent. Secondary and collegiate education was in no better condition. Further in Bihar there was lack of employment opportunities. Bihari youths had not only to travel to Calcutta for advance education but tended also to find jobs and take up residence in that city.

Emergence of Caste Associations

In this period the social relationships remained unchanged. The traditional dominance of upper-caste landlords remained unchanged, at the same time people got several new opportunities and there emerged a

33 Sahaya(1932), op. cit.
new social group with different interest from those of the traditional leadership. The modern educated people got divided on caste lines instead of organising themselves under the banner of broad based voluntary organisation. Thus developed a number of caste association. In the 19th century only upper caste people were able to form their caste associations as they were rich in resources. It was only in 20th century that the intermediate and lower castes could form their associations. The early politics of the province was centred on these associations of upper castes peoples. The main thrusts of these policies were the competition among the four upper-castes for access to the new opportunities. Besides caste- associations, the only modern organization to emerge was Bihar Landlords Association. In 1887, it was founded by landholders who were more concerned in maintaining the permanent settlement then generating political consciousness.34

In traditional society the supreme authority within the caste was located in the caste panchayat or caste sabha. The main function of the caste panchayat was to look if there is any violation of the castes rules and if any violation what should be the level of punishment to the erring members. The structure of the caste panchayat was not representative. It was composed of small groups of influential people and there had some expertise in caste rules and regulations. The leadership of caste

association was hereditary.\textsuperscript{35} Regarding caste panchayats, Blunt\textsuperscript{36} has noted three types of arrangements. In one case there was no panchayats, second had a permanent assembly, in third case, there was no permanent assembly. The first case was the feature of superior castes. The second type of arrangement was non permanent sabha, for Blunt, it was converted only at the request of aggrieved party which was excommunicated without following the set procedure. This intermediate type of sabha between the preceding and following ones was extra ordinary as it was found in few castes only. The permanent was found in operation among numerous lower castes. The caste panchayats covered a small area; it was generally confined to the limits of the village or town.\textsuperscript{37}

The colonial rules with the introduction of new judicial system took away most of the powers of these panchayats. Yet they exist even today among various lower castes, but their influence has been eroded considerably.

The caste associations in contrast to traditional caste panchayats were wider and consisted all the caste members who had common language. These associations geared to cater the general interests of the respective caste, to defend its status in ritual hierarchy. These associations established their banks, charitable houses, several hospitals. For Rudolph these associations were “paracommunities” who

\textsuperscript{35} Dumont (1970); op. cit.
\textsuperscript{36} E. A. H. Blunt did this classification on the basic census report of 1911. Quoted in Dumont, 1970; op. cit.
helped the caste members to strive for social mobility.\textsuperscript{38} In this process caste institutions acquired new functions and structures which they had lost previously.\textsuperscript{39} Unlike the traditional caste panchayats the modern caste associations drew leadership from modern educated lot.\textsuperscript{40} For Ghurye\textsuperscript{41} caste associations represented a new form of solidarity and caste consciousness. He has termed this solidarity as "caste patriotism". In his view, the emergence of modern caste association is the community aspect of caste which became more comprehensive, extensive and permanent. In pursuit of new interest individual's dependence on the caste increased and this in turn intensified the caste solidarity.\textsuperscript{42} Dumont\textsuperscript{43} has termed the changes in caste structure as the process of "Substantialisation". In his view, due to certain changes, sub castes came closer and caste appeared as a collective one. As a substance and interdependence of various castes was replaced by competition with one another.

Now talking for Bihar, it was the Kayastha castes who were most educated and according to the census of 1931, the kayastha were far

\textsuperscript{38} Rudolph and Rudolph, The political Role of India's caste associations, in C.E. Welch, Jr. (eds), Political Modernisation, Wordsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, Cal, 1967
\textsuperscript{39} ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Ghurye, G.S, caste and class in India, popular Book Depot, Bombay, 1957.
\textsuperscript{41} ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Dumont (1970), op.cit.
ahead of other upper castes in the field of modern education.\textsuperscript{44} Being the most literate castes, they were the persons to organise themselves first. In 1894, the local branch of All India Kayastha Mahasabha was established in Bihar. This brought reactions from other privileged castes particularly from the Bhumihars who were major land-owning caste. In Bihar, the provincial services were dominated by migrant bengalies and local Kayasthas. In this scenario, it became essentials for the Bhumihars landlords to prepare their own caste fellows to enter into the colonial administration. Thus emerged the Bhumihar Brahman Sabha- the strongest caste association. With the establishment of this association, there grew a series of Bhumihar colleges, schools, hostels etc. these institutions received liberal financial assistance from the big Bhumihar landlords. These caste associations competed with each other and used every means to establish their supremacy in getting the existing opportunities. In 1899, Maithili Brahmans under the leadership of Maharaja of Darbhanga, and rajputs under the leadership of few educated zamindars, started their respective associations.\textsuperscript{45}

Bhumihars were claiming Brahmin status which was being disputed by Brahmins. Kayasthas were pushed to shudra status by other upper castes. These two caste associations through a series of articles in

\textsuperscript{44} Census of India, Bihar and Orissa, 1931.
\textsuperscript{45} Q. Ahmed and J.S. Jha, Mazrul Hague., New Delhi. 1974
their official magazines claimed higher status. Similarly kayasthas strongly denied having been shudra. They also fought a long legal battle in Allahabad and Calcutta High courts and finally were able to secure recognition as an upper caste. Though the objective of caste associations was social in nature, they saw seed for the transformation of social identity into political one.

The limited opportunity led to intercaste competition. Later when politics emerged as an alternative source of power and prestige, this competition entered in political life, and politics became a phenomenon of caste politics. Had there been more avenues for mobility for the ambitious groups caste would not have a crucial role in politics.46

Emergence of Modern Politics

The birth of modern politics in Bihar, marked by a variety of public activities, coincided with the movement of separate Bihar. The growth of the regional nationalism helped in the evolution of regional cultural patterns; at the same time in Bihar, the sense of being a Bihari was

46 Ramasray Roy, Caste and political recruitment in Bihar in Kothari Rajni (eds), 1970 op. cit.
weakened by the vitality of caste identities. Thus in the given situation caste-ties were very effective instruments for mobilisation.

As, at that time, most of the government jobs were held by Bengalis, and this condition was not liked by the educated kayastha caste of Bihar, thus they started demanding a separate Bihar first and their leader was Sachidanandad Sinha. At last a united front of educated Muslims, Hindu leadership and landlords were formed to fight for separate Bihar. They gave the slogan- "It is a question of now or never". At last after lots of agitation and demonstrations, Bengal was repartitioned. Bihar and Orissa were joined in a separate province with headquarters at Patna. Finally in the year of 1936, Orissa was separated from Bihar. After the separation in new Bihar, the urge to capture the new job opportunities had been the prime mover in the early public life of Bihar. Every caste competed with each other to grab the government jobs and the new opportunities. The aim of caste associations was apparently social, but their main objective was the upliftment of their respective caste men. This attempt of raising and preserving the social status of particular castes was resented by other castes. This resentment and resistance strengthened the sense of caste solidarity and hardened the inter-caste antagonism. When politics emerged as another field for

\[47\] Roy Ramasray (1970), op. cit.
\[48\] Muslim Patriot, 15 August 1907.
power and prestige in early decades of 20th century, this inter-caste rivalry was transformed into political sphere. Thus the social identity was transformed into political identity.49

For the large landlords, politics was a support for their economic position. Other than the government jobs politics became a status symbol by which they measured their position in the social hierarchy. The caste associations of the upper castes lost their importance with the rise of the congress politics but informal caste groupings developed inside the congress. The elections for various bodies gave strength to caste based politics. In the period between 1917-1947, as the congress acquired power first at the municipal and district level and later at the provincial level, there arose a scramble for power and position, in which the caste base became the main source.

The other notable feature of this period was the growth of the consciousness among the intermediary castes like Yadavas, Koiries and Kurmies. These castes organised their own caste associations and over a period of time they came together to claim their share of power and other benefits. Their aspirations and assertion brought instant reaction from the privileged upper castes who were not ready to share much with the socially and economically inferior castes. This in turn led to a

49 Roy Ramasray(1970), op. cit.
confrontation between the two groups, which are reflected even today in
the politics of Bihar.

During the last decade of 19th century, the members of small
landlords proliferated in rural Bihar. Those who have made money by
money-lending, lucrative governmental jobs and other professions were
buying land with zamindari rights. Thus, o the village level a new group
of zamindars emerged. These small zamindars along with the rich
tenants started dominating village life. In most cases, these zamindars
and their allies who were rich peasants came from the same castes and
this further strengthened their dominance at the local level.\textsuperscript{50}

The struggle for land became the bone of contention between large
and small landlords. It was the problems of the land acquisition which
led to conflict between large and small landlords. The antagonism
between them was intensified when small landlords and rich peasants
became relatively more dominant on the village level due to extension of
franchise in 1919.\textsuperscript{51} As they were leaders of the villages, they controlled
the vote banks and became deciding elements in local elections.

The period from 1935 to 1942 was marked with several political
activities. In these years several organisations and political parties took
birth. Branch of Congress Socialist Party, birth of Bihar unit of

\textsuperscript{50} Baden-Powell, B.H. A Short History of the Land Revenue and its Administration in British India, Oxford
University Press. 1936.

Communist Party of India and the establishment of the Hindu Mahasabha are some of the examples.\textsuperscript{52}

As kayasthas were most dominant group in Bihar, being western educated caste, they were challenged by the other castes namely Bhumihars, rajputs and Brahmins with the spread of modern education. These castes being the landed group were in a position of financing the education and political career of their family members.\textsuperscript{53} The competition from the more numerous and economically entrenched castes, particularly from Bhumihars posed threat to the position of Kayasthas. To save their position, it was essential for kayasthas to enlist the support of one or another or the more castes. This initiated the process of alliances and counter alliances. This process brought more and more castes into the web of politics.\textsuperscript{54}

Thus the area of political competition expanded. With the growth of the consciousness among politically immobile castes, brought a new set of competitors and the upper caste domination in the state politics came under severe strain.\textsuperscript{55} The awareness on the part of the intermediary caste led to an attempt of organising several organisations like Yadavas Movement (1914-1925) and Triveni Sangh were part of the efforts to

\textsuperscript{52} Jha (1972), op. cit.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Roy Ramasray (1970), op. cit.
prepare the yadava, koeiries and kurmies to participate in the state politics more effectively and assertively.

Thus one can see a large number of people from middle castes entering politics in this period. The three caste associations namely “Gop Jatiya Mahasabha”, “The Kurmi Sabha”, and “Koeri Sangh” respectively for yadavas, kurmi and koiries met at Patna in late 1925 and decided upon a common programme and resolved to fight under a combined front. They kept its name at Sahabad as triveni Sangh. Triveni sangh tried to secure congress support for its candidates in 1936 elections, but congress did not support. This unity did not last long and it was subsequently defunct. This was the period which saw the seeds of confrontations between intermediary and higher castes.

In the elections of 1937 congress came into majority, which the congress fought with the alliance of depressed caste league. During this election first time lower castes organised themselves politically. There were separate organisations of depressed castes communities for social reforms such as Pasi Sudhar Sammelan, the Dusadh Mahasabha and the Raidas Mahasabha. For political purpose they organised themselves

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57 Ibid.
under the leadership of Jagjivan Ram under the banner of Depressed classes league.\textsuperscript{58}

\textbf{Conclusion}

Thus we can say that the emergence of modern day caste politics in Bihar has the historical roots and in the present context it is being exploited by the modern day politicians in a variety of ways. We also come to the conclusion that the emergence of the other backward classes and castes opened up a new type of rural politics which is now based on their numerical strength. The inter caste competition for the power in modern day polity started long before. It was when the Britishers consolidated their hold over the Indian administration and society and consequently several new opportunities came to be known to the people. The emergence of several caste associations and caste sabhas also paved the way for competition between the different castes and communities for the power and other scarce resources. It may be said that there always has been a race for power between the higher and the middle castes after the democratisation of politics.

\textsuperscript{58} Draft Election manifesto of Bihar & Provincial Depressed classes' league, 1937.