Chapter 7

SUMMING-UP
The aim of the present study was to make an empirical study of the nature of the politics and society at the grass root level in rural Bihar. The real value of such a study does not lie in the degree of validity of its conclusions for a wider area. It is rather, of particular value in that it spotlights the complexities of the situation, the political processes and their impact on the nature and working of the society.

Bihar is always on the fore-front of political movement and caste remains till today a dominant force of political mobilization. New social factors and agencies of political socialisation have further added to class-consciousness among the backward classes. As a result, there are several hostile groups in the villages. A new type of social conflict, which was not visible in the past, has emerged in the village scene. A complete sense of rivalry between the forward and the backward castes is also witnessed in day-to-day affairs. The new and coming generation of the village community is not ready to swallow the evils of the traditional society, which were the outcome of caste system, zamindari system and other traditional conservative customs. The present day rural society is very conscious for its rights and duties. Therefore, we can say that there is a structural shift in the rural areas of Bihar and there is complete shift in these areas in terms of politics. Voting in rural areas is closely related to the prevailing inter and intra caste relationship. This is especially true in
both the villages. Politics has got involved with the caste structure and its leadership. It is the caste system, which made available to the leadership structure an ideological surface for political mobilization. It provided an in-built organization for the politicians and caste leaders for their support base in both the villages. Our study points out that power elites of different castes are the dominant figure in the village politics.

The study investigated the condition of rural society at the three levels i.e. at the national level, at the state level and at village level in the context of changing political scenario. The study thus tried to see the condition of rural politics at macro level and then relate it to the village level. In order to understand the problem in a holistic manner, the study has made use of both micro and macro approaches. At macro level, the different issues of caste, land, land reforms has been looked from socio-historical and institutional perspectives. This study has covered two villages from the district of Buxar namely Sondhila and Piprarh. The reason for selecting two villages was that they differently exposed to the forces of political socialisation and modernisation and thus they will together give an authentic picture for this study.

It can be said that ownership and landholdings are proportional to the prestige and status of the owner and to the network of relationships which confers a position of dominance or opposition. There is a nexus between land ownership of land with caste hierarchy. The ownership of
land and social prestige and social control being coterminous, are directly linked to the caste hierarchy. We thus came to the conclusion that land, caste and power are the three interdependent variables through which we can understand the nature of dominance of the particular group or the persons in the rural society. The land reforms of course made some changes in the rural areas, but the landowning castes still hold large part of fertile land and through land possession, they acquire the social prestige and dominance. The upper castes despite land reforms and land redistribution, not clearly lost their power at the national and at the state levels. The upper castes especially Brahmins and Rajputs are still more powerful by virtue of their landholdings. The villages are now part of the larger social and political networks like open market and the state.

Land continues to be the main apparatus of dominance in terms of both income and employment in rural society of Bihar and thus the power is mostly derived by the possession of land which is being concentrated in a few hand. On the other hand the landless agricultural labourers are mostly from the lower untouchable castes.

In the two villages which we have studied, there is hardly any significant occupational mobility, and whatever seems apparent, is only a shift to agriculture. A few, who had shifted to occupations other than agriculture, have left the village. The basic patterns of economic relations are sustained rather than disturbed by the emergence of the new
economic institutions, is shown by the fact that the composition of these institutions reflects the domination of the hierarchical relations of caste/sub castes. We found that the utilisation of educational opportunities was related to the economic prosperity, thus the link between differential exposures of various castes/sub castes to education is of utmost importance. The data on education shows that in both the villages the percentage of females undergoing education is far less than that of the male population. The growth of the new educational elites is associated with education and economic prosperity. The illiteracy is quite prevalent in both the villages.

The study of social conflicts reveals that social upliftment programmes, political teachings, and new employment opportunities have brought a good deal of social change, which has ultimately given birth, to new social conflicts in the village communities. These conflicts have an orientation towards economic status, social status and power politics. In a nutshell the changes taking place today should be viewed in terms of unequal distribution of resources. The political and economic interests play a vital role in the genesis of new social conflicts, which are often forged by caste and class sentiments.

As in the case of any other Indian village, the rural social system here is essentially represented by the caste system. Rigidity in the commensal ties and caste distance though is loosening its hold in the
present caste structure. The restrictions on taking food and water from
different castes are not observed with the same intensity as they used to
be observed in the traditional structure. The caste structure though has
undergone a change; still there are caste feelings and practices which
persists in both the villages. The new political alignments have to an
extent transformed the old practices but these are reflected at the time of
elections. The caste sentiments come on the surface if there are political
mobilisation for the acquisition of power at all the levels of elections i.e.
panchayat, assembly and parliamentary level.

In the parliamentary and assembly elections almost all the families
belonging to forward castes (Brahmins, rajputs, Kayasthas) voted for
B.J.P. Almost all the families belonging to scheduled castes (chamars,
Dusadhs, Gond) voted for the communist or the RJD. As for the category
of backward castes concerned, almost all the families belonging to them
voted either RJD or the ally of JD (U), which is an ally of the B.J.P. In the
villages, the voting pattern in the parliamentary and assembly elections is
not class based, rather it is purely caste based. People belonging to all
classes have voted for the candidates belonging to the major political
parties (B.J.P., communist, RJD). The percentage of families belonging to
different classes that voted for a candidate does not vary much.

Earlier, the status of an individual or a group in society was
determined mainly based on his place on the purity pollution scale, thus,
while emulating higher castes, the lower castes tend to move from pollution to purity. However, pollution as a criterion for assigning one a lower status in society has greatly weakened in modern times. It is not the purity but the extent a group holds and wields power in society to muster his conciseness and make advantage out of it, has become the dominant mode of acquiring prestige in the modern society.

Political participation and modernization now become alternative tools in the hands of the people in the lower castes echelon to make a bid for empowerment. More progressive leaders and elites among middle and the lower castes find it more meaningful for themselves as well as for their caste mates and fellow men, who have more or less similar ritual status, to unite and struggle for political power and thereby exploit educational and economic opportunities in order to emulate higher castes rather than being absorbed into them. The emergence of the backward castes in rural Bihar has not only displaced the upper castes from pre-eminence in the landownership but has also established their political dominance.

Owing to the specific nature of the study, it is not easy to make generalisations. Two villages cannot be perfectly representative of the entire country or for that matter even of a state. Therefore, the problems and conclusions emerging out of the study may or may not be valid for other areas.