INTRODUCTION

Rural Bihar has witnessed many agrarian revolts and movements. Unorganised, sporadic and isolated uprisings—the Santhal insurrection of 1855-56, the Munda uprising of 1899-1901 and the Indigo riots of 1867, 1877 and 1907; to organised and less sporadic ‘Champaran Satyagraha’ of 1917, are some of them.

However, the peasant movements took on a militant posture and developed into a mass movement in 1930s under the banner of the Kisan Sabha. The Sabha launched famous struggles, such as the Bakasht movements during 1936-38, against the Dalmia Sugar Factory at Bihta in 1938-39, the Rewra struggles in Gaya in 1933 and 1938, etc. One of the most significant achievement of the Kisan Sabha was Zamindari abolition but that came to fruition after independence. However, the Kisan Sabha could neither resolve the contradiction within the peasantry, nor it could bring the poor peasants and landless labourers under its fold. The Sabha was used, by and large, by the rich and middle peasants.

Many parties were formed to co-ordinate the grievances and to use the revolutionary potential of the Indian peasantry, beginning from the Kisan Sabha to the Khet Mazdoor Union led by the CPI. And yet, they all failed to address the basic socio-economic hardships of the rural poor. Later, their revolutionary energy was effectively channelised by the Naxalite organisations, which came into existence mostly after the formation of the CPI(ML) in 1969.

In Bihar, peasant militancy took on a new cutting edge and assumed some sort of sharpness under the guidance of the Maoist groups. The radical peasant movements not only challenged the hitherto unquestioned domination of the dominant caste/class, but also seek change of the system, through revolution based on Marxist-Leninist and Maoist thoughts.
However, the radical peasant movement falls in the domain of social movement because it is based on ideology and leadership, has its own communication channel and mobilisation mechanism, is goal oriented, and seek change in the relationship pattern between owners and peasants (who subsist on agricultural operation through labour) in the socio-economic and political spheres. Thus, inorder to understand the radical agrarian movements, it is important to focus upon the conceptual dimensions of the soical movements.

Further, literature of the social movements is enriched by the two discordant streams of thought— Marxist and Functionalist. These two contending theoretical schools have produced very interesting and divergent concepts, hypotheses, methods, etc. This provides penetrating analytical tools and offers deeper understanding of the social movements. The Marxists and the Functionalists have diametrically opposite view points on the question of 'social change' and 'consensus value'. Functionalists, due to their over emphasis on 'equilibrium', do not view social change as progress through various historical phases. Whereas, Marxists emphasize that the society develops through resolving contradictions in different historical epoch.

However, the key concepts of the structural Marxists — Althusser, Gramsci and Poulantzas; have been applied in this thesis, inorder to understand the rise and growth of the Naxalite movements in central Bihar, and its impact on the formation of Senas by the landed gentry. The central hypothesis of this research paper is that the the landed gentry of central Bihar launched their caste Senas to maintain their hegemonic position, which is effectively threatened by the Maoist movement in the region. According to Gramsci, “a crisis of authority is precisely the crisis of hegemony...” [Gramsci, A., 1971 : 210]. The author further argues, “When hegemonic position of the ruling class is threatened, it organises and re-organises to defeat the threat...” [Ibid. : 210 - 11]. However, contradiction in the mode of production is the ‘Principal Contradiction’. But this contradiction is not sufficient to induce a
'revolutionary upsurge'. To do so, the Principal Contradiction *must act in conjunction* with the dominant contradictions in the superstructure at that time [Althusser, L., 1971: 99 - 100, emphasis added]. Althusser's theoretical position brings us closer to understand the *Sena* phenomenon in central Bihar, where caste and class are inter-linked and mobilisation of *Senas* has a distinct caste-class nexus. However, Poulantzas' theoretical concepts— Ruling class is not homogeneous and has competing interests, and "state is relatively autonomous" [Poulantzas, N., 1972: 279]- help us to understand the limitations of *Senas*, and nature of the state.

Further, the Marxist scholars have generated interesting debate on the different forms of Mode of Production and their impact on the agrarian social formation. Some of them have analysed the disintegration of Feudal Mode of Production and emergence of Capitalist Mode of Production, and its effect upon the contemporary agrarian social formation. But none of them have applied the above theoretical concept to analyse *Sena*. However, this perspective will be applied in the new context to understand the *Sena* phenomenon.

The above concerns, together with others, form the backbone of the first chapter.

The second chapter deals with the agrarian movements under two broader categories: movements which sought change *within* the institutional frame-work, and those which sought change *beyond* the institutional frame-work. Further, it will be divided into All India Landscape, to assess their impact on the Bihar peasant movements in general, and the Maoist movements in the state in particular, and its probable effects on the formation of *Senas*. Then we will focus upon the Regional (Bihar) context.

However, one of the main concerns of this thesis is to examine the factors that contributed to the birth and development of the CPI(ML) in Bihar. In doing so, the paper takes into account: (i) The socio-economic conditions of the poor peasants
and landless agricultural labourers in Bihar. This is examined in the context of their ever growing discontent and frustation under feudal forms of exploitation and suppression. (ii) The role played by the left parties, especially CPI and CPI(M), in channeling the explosive energy of the poor masses for radical transformation of the existing social structure will also be examined. The period that has been taken into consideration for this purpose is divided into two phases. The first phase commences from April 1968, when the first radical argarian movement under the leadership of the CPI(ML) was reported at a village called Gangapur in Muzaffarpur district in Bihar. Then after several Naxalite activities were reported in different parts of the state.

The first phase of the movement came to an end in the year 1972. This paper takes into account the failures and achievements of the first phase and the strength and prospects of the current phase, which started from 1973-74, and has steadily grown across the state [see, Banerjee, S., 1980 : 385 - 89].

Regarding the current phase, emphasis has been given to analyse as to why CPI(ML) led movements are concentrated in south and south-central Bihar and not in other regions— north Bihar and Chotanagpur. This is of sociological interests because north Bihar has large landlords and Chotanagpur a strong tribal components. Judging from Naxalite successes in West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh one wonders why the contryside in these two regions remained by and large, unmoved by Naxalism. Hence, it is not as if there are one or two factors which have paved the way for radical agrarian movement in central Bihar, but there are bundle of factors. In this connection, an attempt has been made to answer the following questions. Did the specific character of different regions contribute to the differential development of radical agrarian movement? What is the political history of various classes of different regions? What is the degree of implementation of Zamindari abolition and land reform laws and their impact in each region? The Green Revolution and the
resultant widening economic disparity also poses the question of distributive justice and relative deprivation. But existential conditions in themselves are not sufficient to produce the sense of deprivation. One has to have the ability to perceive this deprivation as well [Oomen, T. K., 1984: 140] as distributive injustice does not fully explain the emergence and growth of agrarian unrest [Bardhan, P., 1970: 1239-46]. Further, inorder to understand agrarian tensions one has to see it in relation to the number of days agricultural labourers find to work, for the mere increase in wage rate does not reflect the economic status year round of the agrestic workers. The proportion of agricultural labour force to total population is another important variable in aggravating rural tensions. Furthermore, urbanisation, the level of literacy and the role of the educated middle class, need also to be factored in, if one endeavours to understand the emergence of this phenomenon.

Therefore, it is not one or two factors which provided ground for the emergence and development of the Naxalite movement in central Bihar, but there are several factors at work. The socio-politico-economic and cultural transformation has played decisive role in this direction. The third chapter dwells upon the above transformation.

However, the radical assertion of poor peasants, sharecroppers and landless agricultural labourers has posed formidable challenge to the hegemonic position and status quoist ideology of the landed gentry in central Bihar plains. Dominant caste(s) made a battle cry, 'the Kisans' lives and property are in danger, and the government has failed miserably in protecting them; so the Kisans must themselves protect their lives and property' [The Flaming Fields of Bihar, 1986: 70, emphasis added]. The growing radicalism in agrarian structure of central Bihar forced the landed elite to mobilise their fellow caste men, which resulted into the formation of various Senas.
Now the question arises as to what is the nature and significance of these Senas? How they are mobilised and articulated? Their historicism, area of operation and support base, ideology and organisation. Why they came into existence, i.e. what is the socio-economic and political factor which led to the formation of these Senas?

The fourth chapter is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the socio-economic roots of the Senas. The second part concentrates on the descriptive dimension of the selected 'Senas'.

Finally, in the fifth chapter various already discussed facts will be gleaned through for conclusion and a critical appraisal.

I was drawn into the vortex of research endeavour on the radical agrarian movements at my M.Phil level. This research paper is an extension of my earlier dissertation.

However, there are many factors which have motivated me to work on the present research topic, suffice to mention some of them. First, this movement is not only a recent phenomenon, but one which has gained tremendous popularity in a short span of time and represents one of the most important ongoing movements in India. Second, sociologically, the most interesting feature of the current phase of the Naxalite movement in Bihar is the formation of private armies (Senas) by the dominant peasants on caste line. In traditional set-up, landlords maintained bandits to perpetuate their hegemonic position. But those bandits were not organised exclusively on caste line. Now Senas are mobilised on caste line, as an organised force for physical violence. This gives the impression that there is use of caste for physical oppression in a non-traditional context. The need for armed combat of this kind not only robs caste of its integrative ideology, but also focuses on the internal dynamics and change in agrarian structure of central Bihar. Thus, analytical understanding of Senas shall throw new lights on the agrarian social formation of
central Bihar. *Third*, although, there is enough literature which deal with the changing aspect of Bihar’s agrarian structure. But very few writings are available on my central theme, viz. the socio-economic roots of the *Senas* in central Bihar. Further, *Sena* is an unique phenomenon, of the current phase of the Naxalite movement in Bihar, and in the entire history of the Naxalite movements in India. *Fourth*, as a person who grew-up in a ‘peasant family’ of Bihar, I have had a direct experience of rural life, its mode of operation and its social and cultural systems. All these factors, together with many others, have helped me to make-up my mind.