

BIHAR'S MAGADH REGION AGRICULTURE CONFLICT IN EARLY 1980S

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Introduction

Both north Bihar and south-east Bihar's agricultural battles shared some distinct characteristics with respect to organization, mobilization, agrarian problems, social-economic tyranny, and aristocratic abuse. There has been a lengthy tradition of agricultural uprisings and battles in the north of Bihar. North Bihar has a lengthy history of having a unique physical character. Due to the Ganges river acting as a natural border, north and south Bihar have different languages, cultures, economic systems, and societal customs. The lowlands of north Bihar are traversed by numerous waterways, including the Kosi, Gandak, Bagmati, Mahananda, etc. The soil has been made extremely fruitful by these rivers, but the floods and promiscuousness of their paths cause the richness of the soil to be counterproductive. Due to yearly storms, the Kosi, also known as the sadness of Bihar, greatly damaged social and economic life, resulting in destitution and backwardness. North Bihar was noticeably and in comparison to other regions "more

backward in terms of population dependent on agriculture, low level of industrialization, and the meagre industrial facilities, covering aspects such as irrigation, power, rail and road communications."(Chakravarti 2001a: 1451).

Purnea- Agrarian Conflicts

In the Purnea region of Bihar, large zamindars controlled thousands of acres of property and governed the social and economic lives of the rural impoverished people. In the area, sharecropping was widely practiced, debt and abuse were imposed by interest, and the same economic elite owned all the property. (Bhaduri 1973; Prasad 1987b). Since the 1930s, sharecroppers in the area had fought for their rights. (see Chakravarti 1986). Sharecroppers engaged in a violent agricultural conflict in the 1950s, led by the CPI and communists.

Agrarian Struggles in Madhubani: Protracted Battle of Sharecroppers

Sharecroppers battled for their rights in a number of communities in the Madhubani region in the late 1940s under the direction of the CPI. Sharecroppers in the communities of Salempur, Kataiya, Dhakjari, and Andbari banded together to protest the oppression of landowners and the unjust crop distribution on batai territory (land used for sharecropping). (Karna 1981: 190). The problem of a mahanth's batai property in the hamlet of Andbari ignited the most intense conflict. Due to his unkind interactions with sharecroppers, he was well-known among them. Under the direction of CPI chief Bhogendra Jha, the sharecroppers arranged a sizable

parade on the mahanth's property on January 4, 1947. The parade was shot at by the mahanth thugs. As a result, Paltu Yadav, a follower of Bhogendra Jha, was slain. Intense communist actions were sparked by this event in a number of towns, including Khirhar, Barh, Akuli, Pokhrouni, and Hisar. (Karna 1981: 191). Despite the limited success of the 1947 uprising, it helped prepare the way for a protracted agricultural conflict that took place in the region in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Apart from a few random instances, no direct action was done against the local landowners and mahanth between 1947 and 1967. However, the CPI organised sharecroppers, impoverished villagers, and landless farm workers during this time under the party's "red flag." They were informed of the different privileges and regulations outlined in the Bihar Tenancy Act. The uprising in the district's north-west was reinforced by the gathering. The Basopattv, Benipatty, Bisfi, Harlakhi, Jayanagar, Khajouli, Ladanis, and Madhwapur districts served as battlegrounds between 1967 and 1975. (Karna 1981: 193).

Gangapur: Advent of Naxalite Movement

The first village in Bihar from which an armed agricultural fight that was inspired by the Naxalbari movement of West Bengal arose was Gangapur village, which is located in Musahari subdivision of Muzaffarpur district. (A.D.R.I. 2008: 57-58). The village served as the focal point of the violent conflict in the Musahari block of the district, but it also served as a catalyst for uprisings in several other villages against farmers, large proprietors, and moneylenders. The conflict was primarily focused on two issues: caste-based oppression and prejudice, and the distribution of property to the cultivator. (A.D.R.I.

2008: 58). The peasantry had initially brought up the subject of property rights. It was they

They were adamant that all the property they worked on belonged to them and that it was unacceptable for the landowners to hold any of the land. (Singh 1969: 21).

All of the adults in the hamlet who were from the socioeconomic category of impoverished peasants, most of whom were from lower classes, joined the Kisan Sangram Samiti (peasant fight committee) as members. The Samiti conducted several sessions to deliberate on important initiatives and combat tactics. It also listed its allies and adversaries. Similar to this, other communities established their own samiti to guide conflicts. The villagers debated strategies, objectives, tactics, implementation, adversaries, and allies in the conflict during community samities. In addition to the village samities, an Area Kisan Sangram Samiti was established to lead the protest and oppose the police and landowners' methods of encirclement and repression. The area level samiti gave the village level samities a stronger forum to organise and expand their fight. The Bihar State Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries, headed by prominent rebel Satyanarayan Singh, was connected to these tragedies either openly or secretly. (Singh 1969: 22; A.D.R.I. 2008: 57).

Ram Deo Paswan, Taslimuddin, Ashok Singh, Sri Pat Mahato, Ram Prit Ram, and Raj Kishore Singh were well-known neighbourhood figures who were actively engaged in organising the local peasantry and waging guerilla warfare against the landowners in Musahari block. (A.D.R.I. 2008: 58). The rebel figure with the greatest popularity among the populace was Raj Kishore Singh. Prior to joining the Communist Party of India (Marxist), he

participated in student campaigns. He subsequently joined the party and became a prominent member. When he visited Calcutta for business, the Naxalite movement's philosophy influenced him. (Louis 2002: 148).

Agrarian Struggles in Munger

One of the areas where sharecroppers began a vigorous farmer fight during the anti-colonial campaign was the Munger district, guided by Sahajanand Saraswati. Nevertheless, despite the enactment of numerous acts and regulations pertaining to rental changes after India's freedom, the issues facing sharecroppers remained unresolved. Sharecropper problems, such as the required legal distribution ratio, were once more brought up in the 1970s. In this respect, the fight of the sharecroppers in Tilkari hamlet was noteworthy. This time, sharecroppers in this region were similarly engaged on the CPI and CPI (M) (Sinha 1976a: 445).

Sharecroppers led an agricultural conflict against a few distant landowners in the Kharagpur block's Tilkari hamlet. Deoki Mandal, one of the landowners in the hamlet, owned 125 bighas of property. Additionally, it was claimed that he owned 5000 acres of property that were dispersed throughout several communities. (Sinha 1976a: 445). Deoki Mandal resided in the Bariarpur hamlet, which is 50 miles from Tilkari and where half of the people made their livelihood through sharecropping.

They farmed the 125 bighas of ground as sharecroppers. They were under the control of eight supervisors known as pahalwan (muscleman) in the area. Those who were sharecroppers adhered to

On the edges of the hamlet, lesser classes, in particular Dalit clans, resided in clay homes. The

pahalwans' treatment of the sharecroppers' women was extremely degrading. The pahalwans would enter the sharecroppers' tola whenever they needed to sate their carnal urges. But since they always had firearms with them, the sharecroppers were powerless to fight back. However, things started to shift incrementally in the 1970s. Young communists started organising sharecroppers for their rights. They convinced them to submit judicial applications for their rights. Thus, numerous requests were submitted. The requests heightened the village's agricultural unrest. In relation to the ownership of growing harvests in fields, a claim and counterclaim were made.

One day when Deoki Mandal was in Tilkari and proceeded to his field, a sharecropper didn't glance up and folded his hands for the landlord's reverence, which caused the anxiety to rise once more. He was stared at by the owner, who then questioned, "So you [were] bent on fighting the case?" The sharecropper boldly turned to face him and replied, "Yes." (Sinha 1976a: 445). The owner was incensed by the sharecropper's attitude, so he summoned his pahalwans and gave them instructions to discipline him. Another time, a sharecropper from the Dalit community who had disrespected the owner was brutally assaulted. The village's women participated equally in the men's fight for their rights. (Sinha 1976a: 445-446). Sharecroppers and gender-based abuse were just two of the agrarian problems in Munger; the salary problem was also significant. In Goghi Bariarpur hamlet, there was a noteworthy fight for better pay.

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