

# **Governing Flood, Migration, and Conflict in North Bihar**

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**2012**

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## Flood, a Village and a Quarrel

Madhura, a village in Supaul district of Bihar is, by all standards imaginable, a nondescript village. The population is less than 1500 (1404 to be precise) mostly inhabited by the Yadav community with a small Mahadalit population.<sup>1</sup> Most in the Yadav community are peasants (with holdings ranging from 2-4 *bighas*<sup>2</sup>) and the Mahadalits are landless labourers or sharecroppers on their fields. On May 16, 2011, the village came into prominence for a short period of time when some people from the Yadav community attacked the settlement of Mahadalits, razing a shop and burning down the settlement situated opposite the government school in the village. For more than a month after the incident Bhubaneswariji (a local leader of the Mahadalits) was meeting district officials to intervene actively in the matter so that the perpetrators of the crime could be punished.

He went from village to village on 'fact-finding' trips. The impromptu meetings were significant and spoke of the dynamics of interaction between communities. Typically, a meeting would start in less than cordial fashion with each side accusing the other of trespassing and breaking the peace that had existed between the communities, with the 'impartial observer' caught in the middle. In one meeting, some from the Yadav community came up with papers that (to their mind) proved incontrovertibly that the land belonged to them and was donated to the government for setting up a school for girls. To add weight to their claim they even shared the 'history' of the village, according to which it was settled by brothers of a single Yadav family. Bhubaneswariji, understandably, contradicted the authenticity of those papers. In a meeting with the families of the Mahadalit community, a different version of the incident emerged. There are 35 families now living in housing once provided through the Indira Awas Yojana,<sup>3</sup> surrounded strategically by the Yadav community. The families expanded and the earmarked space was no longer adequate. Some people decided to build huts on the land that was available and belonged to the government. Tension was simmering and on that day it boiled over, causing violence and injuries. The Mahadalits were not allowed to use the fields for relieving themselves and were not allowed inside the Yadav *tolas*. But the main punitive consequence for the Mahadalits was that, caught in the violence, they could not go to earn their livelihood as seasonal migrant agricultural labour in the fields of Punjab and Haryana. And therein lies the rub.

The Bihar that was and is still now known for caste-based massacres and violence is not visible here with the usual force and menace. As in the case of various economic-social indicators, violence and conflict in this region is at a low pitch. From the infamous Belchi Massacre in 1977 to the Mianpur Massacre in 2000, the 'flaming fields' of Bihar were firmly located in Central and South Bihar, with Bhojpur, Jehanabad and Gaya occupying the pride of place or notoriety depending on which side of the political divide one is. During this period of turmoil, no one tried to ascertain why

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North Bihar with equal levels of poverty and oppression, if not more, never underwent the kind of turmoil that was witnessed elsewhere, although it played its part in the JP Movement.<sup>4</sup> It is important to study the patterns of migration to understand the absence of a sharp conflict in North Bihar – a phenomenon which is perhaps unique to the region and compounded by the fact that the history of ‘development’ in this region is different from the other regions of Bihar.

This paper focuses on the districts of Saharsa, Madhepura, Supaul and Darbhanga (see maps, pp. 17-19), which together constitute a flood-prone region. Saharsa, Madhepura and Supaul were devastated in the floods of 2008 when the Kosi embankments were breached, affecting millions of people. In 2011, Darbhanga was reeling under floods caused by a breach in the embankments of the Kamla and Bagmati. Floods, flood control and migration together form the stuff of life and conflict in this region.

In the context of perennial floods and consequential migration in this region, this paper discusses conflicts and governmental strategies to cope with them. To do so, the paper divides itself into five parts: (a) an introduction to the districts discussed here; (b) land relations and wages in the region; (c) migratory patterns of labour; (d) flood and disaster management in this area by the government; (e) and, finally, various schemes that forms the governance mechanism in the region.

### **A Brief Statistical Profile of the Region**

The districts of Saharsa, Madhepura, Supaul and Darbhanga are among the poorest in the state. According to the data provided in the *Economic Survey of Bihar 2010-11*,<sup>5</sup> the Gross District Domestic Product (GDDP; 2005-06 and 2006-07) for these districts was Rs. 1052.6 crore and 1196.7 crore, Rs. 847.8 crore and Rs. 948.2 crore, Rs. 979.3 crore and Rs. 1150 crore, and Rs. 2036.3 crore and Rs. 2381.1 crore respectively. The corresponding per capita GDDP were Rs. 6324 and Rs. 7051, Rs. 5095 and Rs. 5603, Rs. 5197 and Rs. 6004 and Rs. 5636 and Rs. 6473 respectively. When we compare this with the figures in Patna, Jehanabad, Gaya, Buxar and Bhojpur (districts with a well-documented history of armed and violent peasant insurrection popularly called the Naxalite Movement) it tells a revealing story. The GDDP in these districts for the same period was Rs. 16142.8 crore and Rs. 19804.1 crore, Rs. 562.5 crore and Rs. 676.2 crore, Rs. 2386.8 crore and Rs. 2900.3 crore, Rs. 928.7 crore and Rs. 1075.5 crore, and Rs. 1556.3 crore and Rs. 1853.6 crore respectively. The per capita GDDP was Rs. 31,302 and Rs. 37,737, Rs. 5586 and Rs. 6607, Rs. 6289 and Rs. 7510, Rs. 6091 and Rs. 6940 and Rs. 6470 and Rs. 7604 respectively. It is important to note that Patna district includes the capital city of Patna, the commercial centre of Bihar and hence the figures. However, figures for the other districts suggest that, largely, the regions of South and Central Bihar were better off than their North Bihar counterparts.

The literacy rates for these four districts are among the lowest in the state. According to the Census of India 2001 the literacy rates of Saharsa, Madhepura, Supaul and Darbhanga were 39.1, 36.1, 37.3 and 44.3 per cent respectively. The literacy rates of Patna, Jehanabad, Gaya, Buxar and Bhojpur were 62.9, 44.4, 50.4, 56.8 and 59 per cent respectively. The male and female literacy rates for the four districts of North Bihar were 51.6 and 25.2, 48.7 and 22.1, 52.4 and 20.8 and 56.7 and 30.8 per cent respectively. For Patna, Jehanabad, Gaya, Buxar and Bhojpur the corresponding figures were 73.4 and 50.9, 28.9 and 15.3, 63.3 and 36.6, 71.9 and 39.9 and 74.3 and 41.8 per cent respectively. The figures quite clearly suggest that the literacy rate in North Bihar is worse than that of South and Central Bihar both in terms of overall figures as well as in terms of gender balance.

A report published by the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (BRLPS) titled *Poverty and Social Assessment: A District wise Study of Bihar* is quite revealing.<sup>6</sup> According to this report, the

availability of land per rural household (in hectares) in Saharsa, Supaul, Madhepura and Darbhanga were 0.43, 0.52, 0.51 and 0.29 respectively. The corresponding figures for Patna, Bhojpur, Buxar, Gaya and Jehanabad were 0.48, 0.64, 0.78, 0.44 and 0.29 per cent respectively. The percentage of rural workers engaged as agricultural labourers for Saharsa, Supaul, Madhepura and Darbhanga were 34.3, 38, 40.4 and 35.3 respectively. The corresponding figures for Patna, Bhojpur, Buxar, Gaya and Jehanabad were 31.1, 25.6, 24.8, 33.5 and 24.4 per cent respectively. These figures would suggest that land was more equitably distributed in the districts of South and Central Bihar than those in North Bihar. In terms of social stratification based on caste, the 1991 census gives the following figures.<sup>7</sup> For Saharsa, Supaul, Madhepura and Darbhanga the percentage of Schedule Castes/Scheduled Tribes among the rural population was 15.49, 15.47, 16.34 and 14.56 respectively. The corresponding figure for Patna, Bhojpur, Buxar, Gaya and Jehanabad were 15.48, 14.89, 13.48, 29.58 and 18.39 per cent respectively. Except for Gaya and Jehanabad, the figures for SC/ST population do not deviate so much from the figures of the districts of North Bihar. It is true that Gaya and Jehanabad saw gruesome massacres but it was true for Patna, Bhojpur and Buxar as well along with Rohtas and Aurangabad.

We now come to a crucial issue. If it is true, as the figures suggest, that the districts of Central and South Bihar were better off in terms of social indicators, differences in land distribution and caste structure cannot explain why these districts experienced militant and violent movements while North Bihar did not. We shall focus in detail on land relations and condition of agricultural labourers in Saharsa, Supaul and Madhepura where the first leg of the survey for writing this paper was conducted in June 2011.

## **Land and Wages**

The *gram* panchayats that were covered in the survey of June 2011 were Naharwar and Mahishi in Saharsa district, Mehasimar and Kishanpur (South) in Supaul and Patori in Madhepura. It involved extensive discussions with villagers, government officials, local leaders and NGOs. This study covered mostly the Mahadalits. We must, however, take into consideration some information about the Mahadalit communities and the difference between Mahadalits and Dalits before we proceed.

The poorest Dalits were declared Mahadalits in Bihar. A state government commission identified 18 of the 22 Dalit sub-castes in its first interim report. They constituted 31 per cent of the Dalit population in the state. The commission had not included four Dalit castes – the Paswans, Pasis, Dhobis and Chamars – in the Mahadalit category in the first report. These four castes constituted 69 per cent of the Dalit population in the state. The Nitish Kumar-led government in Bihar announced a special package of Rs.300 crore for the socio-economic development of the poorest among the Dalits. Bihar was the first state to constitute a commission to study the status of the neglected sub-castes among the Dalits and suggest ways to uplift them. The commission in its first interim report to the government painted a bleak picture of the Dalit sub-castes. The report said there were no high-school teachers or senior officials from these castes in the state despite reservations in government jobs for them. The 18 Mahadalit castes identified in the first report were the Bantars, Bauris, Bhogtas, Bhuiyans, Chaupals, Dabgars, Doms, Ghasis, Halalkhors, Hadis, Kanjars, Kurarias, Lalbegis, Musahars, Nats, Pans, Rajwars and Turis. In the second report, Dhobis, Pasis and Chamars were added to the Mahadalit category. In the third report, the Chamars was also added to this category. This is a consolidated list and the castes in the Mahadalit category are not organized into a hierarchy. A not-so-subtle calculation of electoral politics was behind the expansion of the category. It is widely believed that this categorization by the Nitish Kumar government was an

act of social engineering to secure a reliable vote bank. In fact, Ram Vilas Paswan, leader of the Lok Janshakti Party, a former cabinet minister at the centre and the most prominent leader of the Paswans, went on record saying that the commission was unconstitutional and that it should be disbanded<sup>8</sup> and demanded a white paper on the Mahadalit status.<sup>9</sup> However, the move had already borne fruit for Nitish Kumar as he won the assembly elections of 2010. More importantly, it gave an instrument of governance to the state to bring under its ambit, more efficiently, a section of society whose situation was increasingly becoming desperate. Through government spending, the Nitish Kumar government was able to ensure, at least temporarily, a firm alliance with this section. Several schemes including giving 3 decimals<sup>10</sup> of land for construction of houses to landless Mahadalit are now in place. We will come to the issue of governance later in the paper.

It must be said at the outset that studies of the Kosi area have been undertaken by various scholars for quite some time now. It has been a fertile field for scholars, activists and bureaucrats. However, the most relevant study for our purposes has been done on Purnea district by Gerry Rodgers and Janine Rodgers over a period of almost 40 years (starting in 1973).<sup>11</sup> Rodgers and Rodgers studied two villages, namely Pokharia and Dubaili Biswaspur, covering variables like wages, land relations and cropping patterns. Valuable as the study is, it was conducted during the heyday of the 'mode of production' debate and it is apparent that the results obtained during the survey fit very uneasily with the concept of a semi-feudal mode of production, which the authors seek to apply to the situation. It is not the purpose here to enter into an extensive debate surrounding the mode of production but some preliminary refutation of the notion of a semi-feudal mode of production existing in the region is in order. Rodgers and Rodgers identified (borrowing from Pradhan H Prasad) unequal land distribution, tenancy, a mix of attached and casual labour and indebtedness as the indicators of semi-feudalism.<sup>12</sup> Except for the forms of labour, the other three indicators are not per se unique to the semi-feudal mode of production. However, we will defer a lengthy critique of this concept till we have outlined the facts pertaining to the region.

We will begin our study by describing the types of land in terms of agricultural productivity and land relations that are found in this region. As we mentioned above, these districts belong to the Kosi region, the type of land depends on its distance from the embankments. In Saharsa, the *gram* panchayats that were covered mostly had waterlogged land, which was unfit for traditional food-grain production. However, on the other side of the embankment nearer Darbhanga, the land is more suitable for cultivation. The main crops grown on the waterlogged land are *makhana*, *garma dhan*, and pulses (*moong*). The production level is highly unpredictable and in the words of one of the respondents, agriculture there is like gambling. Landholdings are highly skewed in this region. There are landowners who own up to 400 *bighas* of land but they are now more of an exception than the rule. Most of the big landowners in this region are Rajputs. Tenancy based on a fixed amount paid in cash after the harvest (known as *manhunda*) as well as sharecropping (known as *batai*) on a 50:50 basis, both in terms of cost and share of output, are the dominant forms of land relations in the *gram* panchayats visited. Alongside agriculture, the peasants also practised fishing on the land they had taken up as a tenant. It was also found that big landowners with suitable land for agriculture often cultivated their lands themselves with hired workers and owned tractors and other mechanical equipments. They also hired out tractors and threshers both to smaller landowners as well as sharecroppers. The rate of hiring a tractor with a driver is Rs. 150 per hour and the diesel has to be provided by the person who was hiring the vehicle. Here, it will be fruitful to describe the settlements that were visited in Saharsa.

As mentioned previously, most of the respondents questioned belonged to the Mahadalit communities. The settlements that were visited were alongside the embankment, nearer the tenanted

land. Interestingly, those settled here did not have a legal entitlement to the land which they were occupying but were those who had not received the land that was promised to them when they were dislocated from their original place of inhabitation when the Kosi embankments were beginning to be built. Another significant finding was the form of ownership of cattle among these peasants. In one of the settlements in Naharwar *gram* panchayat, cattle was owned collectively.

Further north in Supaul and Madhepura, known to be dominated by the Yadav community, the quality of land improves and the crop pattern follows the traditional Rabi and Kharif seasons. Apart from that, maize is the most important crop. An interesting fact was mentioned by one of the respondents in Supaul. Jute, at one point of time, was a major crop in the region. The farmers supplied the raw material to the few jute factories that existed in Purnea. However, as the jute factories closed down there, the production of jute was no longer profitable. The little amount of jute that is grown now is for personal use. Rodgers and Rodgers in their study mention the falling production of jute but do not provide the reason for its decline or the existence of a link between agriculture and industry in the region. Land-holdings in Supaul and Madhepura are more equitably distributed in the sense that the majority of landowners have holdings ranging from two to five *bighas*. Most of the landowners in the areas visited belonged to the Yadav community. The presence of big landowners is an exception. For example, in Patori *gram* panchayat the biggest landowner was the de facto *mukhiya*<sup>13</sup> (the wife is the elected *mukhiya*) whose holding, according to his workers was around 200 *bighas*. The manager of the *mukhiya* refused to give the exact figure. The Mahadalit communities, with a very few exceptions, were all landless and migration among them was the maximum. This is not to say that migration among the Yadav community does not exist. However, there are important differences in the pattern of migration between these communities which we will discuss later. An interesting development among the Mahadalit communities is the rise of a section of class that has benefited from government schemes. For example, in Madhura village under Mehasimar *gram* panchayat, the person who has been allotted a shop under the Public Distribution System (PDS) also acts as a labour contractor. The nascent political leadership that is emerging from the Mahadalit communities belongs to this particular class as also to a class that has some ownership over land.

Finally, another kind of landownership has to do directly with the geographical character of the region as a flood-prone area and the governmental response to it. When the Kosi embankments started to be constructed in the 1950s there was large-scale displacement of people as large tracts of land were submerged under water. Those displaced were allotted homestead land measuring not more than 2 decimals. These resettled settlements are known as *punarwas gram*. Needless to say, this allotment did not take care of livelihood issues and most of the people settled in these resettlements belonged to the Mahadalit communities. Also, not all the displaced were allotted land and litigation is still pending in the lower courts for the allotment of land. Labour migration is most evident among this category of people.

The forms of wages in these three districts are quite varied although payment of wages in cash is rare. The most common form of wage is payment in food grains. Wages in this form is paid over the region at the rate of 3 kg of grains for a day's work and breakfast. Another form of wage is seen during the harvesting of *moong*. For every 8 *kitta* harvested by a worker he receives the produce of 1 *kitta*. Despite my attempts, I was not able to find the metric equivalent of *kitta*. As migrant agricultural workers in Punjab and Haryana, a typical worker in a sowing season gets Rs. 2,500 for every 1 *kitta* of land sown.<sup>14</sup> Each worker saves around Rs. 20,000 in a sowing season after spending on food and clothing. Shelter is provided by the person who hires the agricultural worker.

Land relations and wages follow the same pattern in Darbhanga. An important feature of migration and remittances is that the money earned as wages at the destination is used in farming as a sharecropper by the landless labourer at home. However, employment and wages are seasonal and not sufficient enough to provide for the entire year. It is a situation where the worker is forced to earn his livelihood both as a wage-earner as well as sharecropper. This makes him, simultaneously, a wage-earner as well as someone who is not completely free from the means of production as the worker might own livestock, seeds and other farming equipment. Thus, this worker eludes the classical Marxist concept of the proletariat who is free to sell labour power and is free from the means of production. In a classical Marxist sense, then, capitalist development is not 'sufficient and strong' enough to aid him in a situation where his exploitation as a proletariat is perpetual. He is, seasonally, a proletarian or a peasant. But does this qualify the 'mode of production' as semi-feudal? The answer, to my mind, is negative. The reason is that the gap between the proletarian and the peasant is filled by state intervention through state spending. This spending comes in various guises. In the case of the Kosi region, this spending first came in the 1950s with the construction of the Kosi embankments which changed the pattern of land irretrievably. In 1954, before the Kosi embankments were built the total flood-prone land was 2.5 million hectares. Upon completion, flood-prone land has increased to 6.89 million hectares, completely changing the agricultural and livelihood patterns of the region, forcing the precarious agricultural labourer to migrate for work as agriculture has become less and less productive and profitable.<sup>15</sup> This is just one part of the story, though, when it comes to state intervention in inducing 'development'. In a Calcutta Research Group study, Manish Jha shows how the construction of the Kosi embankments created a class of contractors, bureaucrats and politicians who depended on state spending and the massive corruption that resulted in the name of construction and maintenance of the embankment.<sup>16</sup> These were imperatives not only of development but 'democratic' governance. This allowed the socially strong sections of the upper castes to consolidate their political position and diversify their economic interest away from agriculture.

Now to come back to the mode of production issue: The most glaring problem in the 'mode of production' debate of the 1970s was that the protagonists of the debate never took into account the role of the state in manipulating contextual conditions and thereby the relations of production. Even in terms of classical Marxism, the factors used for identifying a 'semi-feudal mode of production' by Rodgers and Rodgers do not have a very strong theoretical basis. Let us take indebtedness as an illustration. Usury has been claimed to be the most important indicator of the existence of semi-feudalism; in fact, it was cited as the prime reason why India was semi-feudal. However, Marx saw things differently. In Volume 3 of *Capital*, Marx talks about usury thus:

On the whole, interest-bearing capital under the modern credit system is adapted to the conditions of the capitalist mode of production. Usury as such does not only continue to exist, but is even freed, among nations with a developed capitalist production, from the fetters imposed upon it by all previous legislation. Interest-bearing capital retains the form of usurer's capital in relation to persons or classes, or in circumstances where borrowing does not, nor can, take place in the sense corresponding to the capitalist mode of production; where borrowing takes place as a result of individual need, as at the pawnshop; where money is borrowed by wealthy spendthrifts for the purpose of squandering; or where the producer is a non-capitalist producer, such as a small farmer or craftsman, who is thus still, as the immediate producer, the owner of his own means of production; finally where the capitalist producer himself operates on such a small scale that he resembles those self-employed producers. What distinguishes interest-bearing capital—in so far as it is an essential element of the capitalist mode of production—from usurer's capital is by no means the nature or character of this capital itself. It is merely the altered conditions under which it operates, and

consequently also the totally transformed character of the borrower who confronts the money-lender.<sup>17</sup>

The reason for providing this rather lengthy quotation is to demonstrate the complexities of the functioning of usury. By itself, isolated from the existing relations of production, usury and indebtedness do not explain anything. We have seen the ‘transformed character of the borrower who confronts the money-lender’. In fact, usury can act as a means to free labourers from bondage and enable them to sell their labour-power in the market to the highest bidder, albeit in the case of this region, seasonally.

The other important factor in the nature of the development and dynamics of capitalist mode of production in the countryside is the differentiation of the peasantry. Lenin in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* has this to say about the function of usury and its role in the mode of production:

Consequently... the question to be answered is: Is merchant’s and usurer’s capital being linked up with industrial capital? Are commerce and usury, in disintegrating the old mode of production, leading to its replacement by the capitalist mode of production, or by some other system? Furthermore, that ...the role of capital is not confined to bondage and usury, that capital is also invested in production, is apparent from the fact that the well-to-do peasant puts his money into the improvement of his farm, into the purchase and renting of land, the acquisition of improved implements, the hiring of workers, etc., and not only into trading establishments and undertakings. If capital in our countryside were incapable of creating anything but bondage and usury, we could not... establish the differentiation of the peasantry...the whole of the peasantry would represent a fairly even type of poverty-stricken cultivators, among whom only usurers would stand out, and they only to the extent of money owned and not to the extent and organisation of agricultural production...Finally...follows the important proposition that the independent development of merchant’s and usurer’s capital in our countryside retards the differentiation of the peasantry... Another important phenomenon in the economy of our countryside that retards the differentiation of the peasantry is the survivals of corvée economy, i.e., labour service. Labour-service is based on the payment of labour in kind, hence, on a poor development of commodity economy. Labour-service presupposes and requires the middle peasant, one who is not very affluent (otherwise he would not agree to the bondage of labour-service) but is also not a proletarian (to undertake labour-service one must have one’s own implements, one must be at least in some measure a “sound” peasant).<sup>18</sup>

The conditions mentioned above by Lenin exist in the three districts which were surveyed. As for payment of labour in kind, it has been already shown that they exist extensively in these districts but in a different form and content. Payment in kind is received not so much by the ‘sound peasant’ but by the agricultural proletariat. And usury is not retarding the differentiation of the peasantry but actually increasing and accelerating it.

In fact, the answer to the question as to which ‘mode of production’ exists has to look beyond the concepts of ‘semi-feudal’ and ‘capitalist’ mode of production as used by the protagonists of the debate. Instead, a more fruitful approach may be to study the region with the realization that ‘development’ has been thrust from above by the post-colonial state in the form of governance mechanisms, manipulating the conditions of production existing in the colonial era. There will, of course, be similarities with the colonial methods of governance but it would be a mistake to emphasize only the similarities and not the radical dissimilarities of post-colonial governance. In a qualified manner the following words of Marx in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* are also true of a post-colonial state and society:

What we have to deal with here is a...society, not as it has *developed* on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it *emerges*...which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually,

still stamped with the birth marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges<sup>19</sup> [emphasis in the text]

Of course, this change is not a revolutionary change as Marx was saying about a communist society but an intensely conservative change and that is why its development is so dissimilar from the concepts that the protagonist of the 'mode of production' debate were working with. We can now discuss the crucial question of migration which holds the key to an understanding of the questions discussed above, namely, conflict, development and governance.

## Migration or Exodus

We can now look at the process and pattern of migration in these districts. Labour migration in these districts is predominantly short-term and cyclical in nature and depends on the agricultural season both at the source and the destination. At the time this survey was conducted, in June 2011, it was the peak season of migration to Punjab with the sowing season beginning there. These workers would then come back during *chatth* puja. However, not all workers stay there for the whole period and those with skills only in sowing come back after completing their work.

The workers migrate either through the agency of labour contractors or form batches of 20-30 people for better bargaining power with the employers at the destination. Rodgers and Rodgers have shown that migration through the agency of labour contractors declined over their period of study. That may be the case but there is no denying the significant presence of these contractors, who among themselves have different living practices. There are separate labour contractors for providing agricultural and non-agricultural work. In case of hiring by the contractors the workers do not have access to their employers. The latter are also unaware of the cut that the contractor receives. The contractor negotiates the terms of hiring workers both with the employers as well as the workers. A typical labour contractor goes around neighbouring villages, rounding up people and paying for their train journey to the destination. In some cases, though few, the labour contractor also advances some money for the family of the worker which is left behind. However, most workers now prefer to go in batches formed by themselves which provides them stronger bargaining power. In most cases, with several years of migration and accumulated experience, the workers develop a network of employers so that it works to the benefit of a new migrant worker to attach himself with a batch of this kind. In that case, the batch of workers presents itself to an employer who had earlier hired them with wages and shelter negotiated. In other cases, they have to produce themselves at labour *chowks* which are located, quite strategically, near the railway stations.

One of the labour contractors interviewed said that there are at least 10 labour *chowks* in Ludhiana. It is important to mention here the fact that the migrant labour not only creates the condition of earning his own wages but also creates a condition in which the act of travelling and the need for transit creates a plethora of economic activities at the destination. An illustration would make things clear. Most workers do not carry personal possessions such as clothes with them while travelling to the destination. Once they reach their earmarked destination they go to a small market which is near the railway station where used clothing is sold. In Ludhiana, a respondent in Kishanpur said, business is brisk during the season of migration of labour. This kind of market is not unique to Ludhiana but all major railway stations where migrant workers take up work.

The journey for these workers is not easy though. Travel facilities for the migrant workers from these districts are extremely poor. There is only one railway station at Saharsa that caters to the need of Saharsa, Madhepura and Supaul. There are only two trains that the workers generally take. The Poorabiya Express which goes to Delhi, and the Jan Seva Express, which goes to Amritsar.

None of these trains have catering facilities and the state's apathy towards migrants is self-evident. Both these trains are known as trains that transport migrant workers and no facility for provision of subsidized food has ever been contemplated. Ironically enough, the Garib Rath from Saharsa to Amritsar which is completely air-conditioned and was started by Lalu Prasad, former chief minister of Bihar and former union railway minister, is used by traders, businessman and bureaucrats in the region. It is small wonder that the train is a target for colourful abuses from the workers both for its name as well as the people it carries. In the peak season, when this survey was conducted, the train journey is a nightmare. Workers arrive at Saharsa station and have to wait for several days for the opportunity to board a train. In one instance, a batch of workers from Patori village went home after waiting for three days and went again after a day's rest. The case of Darbhanga district is similar. The survey there was conducted in October 2011, when the district was still in the initial stages of recovering from a devastating flood. In a discussion with a group of workers from Khatwara village in Gaura Budam block on their way to Karnal, the hardship that the migrant labourers have to face became clear. The group comprised about 10 workers who had walked for 4 km before taking a boat ride of one and a half hours to reach Biraal from where they were to catch a passenger train to Darbhanga from where again they would take a train to Karnal. According to them, they were going to work in the fields of Karnal and almost all the men upwards of 16 in their village migrated to either Punjab or Haryana during the agricultural season. There was a recent report that migration of labour in Bihar has come down by 25-30 per cent.<sup>20</sup> However, going by the desperation to find work outside and the hardships that the migrant workers have to undergo, this assertion does not ring true. The cause for this fall, in part, is being attributed to the 'successes' of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). However, interestingly, the deputy chief minister of Bihar, Sushil Modi is on record saying that MGNREGS has little to do with the 'fall' in migration. He attributed the 'beginning trend of falling migration from Bihar' to the state government's spending on numerous schemes.<sup>21</sup> It is, however, interesting to note that this triumphalist posture was struck in Mumbai where attacks on Bihari workers by the right-wing Maharashtra Navanirman Sena (MNS) were rampant. The media have been reporting this 'fall' for quite some time now. This claim appears to be specious, however; we will analyse it in the course of this paper. Also, there is still no data to ascertain the number of migrant labourers moving from one state to another.<sup>22</sup> The role of MGNREGS and other state government schemes in checking migration, or otherwise, will be examined later in the essay.

Although labour migration occurs across the caste divide in the region, there are important variations. An overwhelming majority of the landless Mahadalit workers take up agricultural or unskilled work. The network in which they operate is not very lucrative. On the contrary, workers from the Yadav community have greater chances of diversifying their occupation because it is relatively easier for them on the basis of their landholdings to attain a skilled worker status. A typical example is a respondent from Patori. His father owned four *bighas* of land and after passing the matriculation exam he went to Delhi to his relative who owned a small furniture workshop. After working for four years he returned to his village, started his education and worked as a carpenter. After the devastation caused by 2008 floods and the subsequent relief provided by the government to the affected through the Indira Awas Yojana, he is making a decent living fitting windows and doors in houses. Similarly, it is much easier for this community to find work in factories in the surrounding areas of Delhi due to the networks they have access to. These are not as developed in the case of the Mahadalit communities although there are a substantial number of people from these communities who now migrate to Delhi for unskilled work. However, an overwhelming number of landless Mahadalit migrant labourers still work as agricultural workers in the fields of Punjab.

We can now turn to the chronicle of a man-made disaster. This was the flood of 2011. The field survey in Darbhanga conducted to study its effects (the second part of the survey done for this paper, the first being done in the dry season of June 2011) was done from October 1 to 15, 2011, at a time when floodwaters were at their highest. As has been mentioned above, flood control through construction and maintenance of embankments has been the favoured policy of the state for obvious reasons. However, the sequence of events and the subsequent attempts at disaster management will bring into relief the mechanism through which the state rules its subject, controls populations, and keeps a majority of the population in a position of precariousness through government expenditure on small doles.

Floods due to breach of embankments are a man-made disaster. Heavy rains compound the problem but the decisive role is played by the breach. Let us rewind to a few years earlier. The 2008 floods were caused by the breach in the Kosi embankments and not by heavy rains. According to a report, the rainfall in the hills of Nepal in August was below normal. The river discharge in August 2008 was 4,729 m<sup>3</sup>/s, significantly below the maximum flood peak recorded in August 1968 which was 25,878 m<sup>3</sup>/s.<sup>23</sup> Yet the breach was so wide that it engulfed the entire region causing massive loss of life and property. The expected government response followed, with experts estimating Rs. 525 crore for the reconstruction of the embankments and the wheels were set in motion again.<sup>24</sup> The same story was repeated in Darbhanga in 2011 although on a much smaller scale.

Before going into details and analyses it is necessary to keep in mind the following information about the rivers that flow through this region and are responsible for floods. The most important river of this region is the Bagmati, originating from the Shivpuri range in Nepal. Along with the Bagmati, the Khiroi and the Adhwara group of rivers, the Kamla, Hasanpur Bagmati, Lakhndei rivers, flow through the region. The floods were caused by heavy rains from September 20<sup>25</sup> after which the embankments were breached in the districts of Darbhanga, Madhubani, Samastipur, Sitamarhi and Muzaffarpur. The Maharaji embankment on the Kamla was breached on September 27<sup>26</sup> along with embankments on the Khiroi in Darbhanga and the Karpuri embankment on the Noon in Samastipur. The Maharaji embankment, repaired at a cost of Rs. 4 crore in Madhubani, was breached and in Sitamarhi the embankments on the Marha suffered the same fate.<sup>27</sup>

In Darbhanga, according to the data submitted at the meeting of the Monitoring and Supervision Committee comprising local representatives (*mukhchias* and ward members) and local administrators on October 10, Hanumannagar, Jaale, Kewati, Singhwara, Bahadurpur and Darbhanga Sadar were the blocks which bore the brunt of the floods. A total of 44 panchayats were fully affected while 42 were declared partially affected by floods; 318 villages were affected. The number of families affected totalled 109,000. More than 50 per cent of standing crops were destroyed on 21,414.02 hectares of irrigated land and 6600.35 hectares of non-irrigated land. Twenty-three embankments and 91 roads were destroyed. A generous amount of money was spent for the relief and rehabilitation of people in the flood-affected areas. For the relief of flood-affected families Rs. 2.80 crore was sanctioned; for the provision of drinking water Rs. 50 lakh; for the prevention of epidemics, Rs. 50 lakh; for the treatment of livestock, Rs. 20 lakh; for relief of displaced people, Rs. 1.50 crore, and for emergency expenditure and boats Rs. 53.50 lakh. Twenty-five people died in floods and a compensation of Rs. 1 lakh each was provided to the family of the deceased.<sup>28</sup> The political logic of monetary help will be discussed in detail later. Illuminating as these statistics are, a narrative of the situation before the floods, its onset and the response of the administration will provide a richer understanding.

At the beginning of September, Darbhanga was gripped by a fear of disaster, not a flood but drought. There was no sign of rain and the crops were wilting in the oppressive heat.<sup>29</sup> In fact, the

department of disaster management in the local administration was preparing itself to provide irrigation through diesel pumps. Political parties were demanding the provision of such facilities. Government, as a result, decided to allocate Rs. 9.65 crore for diesel in Darbhanga, Rs.9.78 crore in Samastipur and Rs. 15.56 crore in Madhubani, based on the area under crop cover.<sup>30</sup> When the rain arrived, the farmers released a collective sigh of relief, little knowing that another disaster was in the offing. Local media highlighted the possibility of an impending disaster. The warning signs were ample. On September 25, an embankment in the *gram* panchayat of Brahmputra (East) in Jaale block was breached and paddy fields were submerged and the sluice gate was destroyed. Yet the administration brushed it off as an isolated incident. Surely enough, the flood proper began from September 28 and the response of the administration was predictably slow and wanting.<sup>31</sup> As Darbhanga faced its worst flood since 2004, the administration claimed it was adequately prepared. The first signs of a tussle between the local administration and the people came to pass on September 29 in Kewati block where residents blocked the main road in protest against administrative negligence. People claimed that they had informed the administration of the impending disaster beforehand but no action was taken. Even officials admitted to confusion within its ranks as to who was to take care of the complaints. The buck was passed between the circle officer and the block development officer and they sat on the decision to repair the embankments on Chhoti Bagmati. The local MLA arrived on the scene and reprimanded the residents for not filing an FIR for the repair of the embankments when they knew it had become weak. The administration claimed it was a one-off incident and the situation was not deteriorating. However, by September 30, flood waters started to enter the lower areas of Darbhanga town. The usual rumour of Nepal releasing water began doing the rounds as the Bagmati, Kamla Balan and Khirai rose above the danger level. As the news of people being stranded started to pour in, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was pressed into service. The situation in Singhwara worsened and the administration claimed that 1000 food packets were distributed in Kewati and 1800 in Jaale amidst counter-claims by the people that there was no relief even though the district magistrate conducted a survey on a motorboat. Next there was the claim by the officials to the effect that water had stopped rising and even started receding. However, as a precautionary measure, the holidays of all the officials were cancelled under the Disaster Management Act of 2005.

The worst nightmare of the district management came true by October 1, forcing it to acknowledge the crisis and a high alert was announced along with measures for evacuation in the worst-affected areas. Officials of the revenue department were directed to start preparing a list of affected families, the burden of which was later passed to the local representatives when people began to feel restless, as we shall see. On October 2, it was announced that 86 *gram* panchayats were either fully or partially affected and the affected population was pegged at 344,000. By this time, people were being displaced from their homes and taking shelter on the highway. On October 3, the district magistrate abandoned the motorboat and conducted an aerial survey of the affected areas. The rising tension between the people, local representatives and administration was palpable by now. The people were pressing their representatives for relief and the latter were now forced to contemplate a showdown with the administration. Already, people started to speak of the flood being as devastating as those of 1987, 2004 and 2007. On October 4, finally, compensation was announced. Each affected family was to receive 1 quintal of grain and Rs. 250 in cash. This relief has come to be known as *quintaliya baba*. However, the compensation came with a caveat. Only those families were qualified to receive the compensation whose homes had been submerged for at least 24 hours and where the level of water had risen to the hearth. This became a bone of contention between the people and the administration. The logic of this rather arbitrary classification is explained by the

condition of this region. This becomes clear when we look at the case of Rajwa, a village in Biraul block. The village is surrounded by water for six-eight months in a year. Some of the homes, especially of the Mahadalit communities, are surrounded by water for the entire year and people have to use a boat to reach even the village road. The water does not, however, enter their homes as they have been forced to build their homes on an elevated spots. According to the commonsensical definition of flood, they should be entitled for compensation, which the administration wants to avoid paying.

By October 9, 2011, the pressure exerted on local representatives by the people had increased to an extent where the Mukhiya Sangh was forced to stage a protest against the administration. They wanted that the entire district be declared flood-affected thereby qualifying the people for compensation. This is a logical conclusion of the kind of development that the Nitish Kumar led government has envisaged for Bihar.

While the flood waters began to recede by October end, the pressure on local representatives and administration had not abated as people complained of the grain supplied being less than a quintal. The circle officer of Hanumannagar block was beaten by the people due to this when he came to visit the relief distribution centre at the block office as a result of which the centre was shifted to a government school near the Darbhanga collectorate. It was clear by now that the local representatives were not always in control of the people. On October 10, residents of Darbhanga Sadar block vented their ire on the block development officer who had to take refuge inside his office even as women armed with *lathis* laid a siege. They refused to be placated by either the local representatives or the police. The Mukhiya Sangh was forced to demand compensation for crops destroyed to be paid both to owner-peasants and *bataidar* (sharecroppers).

On October 12, the district magistrate gave in as the flood began to recede. He announced a compensation of Rs. 4,000 per acre for crops. He also gave the official reasons for the cause of floods. Insufficient embankments were blamed for the disaster. Unsurprisingly, it was decided that more embankments would be constructed the next year, in a rerun of the Kosi floods in 2008. Temporary repair and restoration of the breached embankments were also announced and so ended the story of the disaster and governmental response.

## Networks of Governance

Ranabir Samaddar in his analysis of the politics of West Bengal following the attempts at forcible land acquisition efforts by the state government in Nandigram and Singur brings into relief various forms of claim-making that a ruler has to face. He identifies them as prescribed, tolerated and forbidden.<sup>32</sup> In the context of North Bihar, it can be said that the state is always on the lookout for ways and means to negate the possibilities of forbidden forms of claim-making and tries to restrict them to the prescribed, stretching as far as possible tolerated forms of claim-making. This the state does by creating a network of formal and informal forms of governance that creates reliable allies in the business of governing people, in this case people on the point of precariousness, and not let a situation become socially explosive.

One such mechanism is Panchayati Raj. As we know, the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Indian Constitution, which consolidates the Panchayati Raj system, was passed in 1992, a couple of years after the Indian state decided to shed the vestiges of the welfare state and join the bandwagon of neo-liberal development euphemistically and variously called globalization, liberalization, and market-driven development. Need arose perhaps due to the uneven nature of development which was followed in this epoch. Also, with the rise of new politico-economic exigencies it was necessary to

effectively govern recalcitrant populations. This was to be ensured at the grassroots and it took various forms. In North Bihar, Panchayati Raj was informed by strong kinship and caste ties which ensured a relative ease of interaction and manipulation between the elected representatives of the panchayat and their subjects. The relationship between the representative and his/her subject will be clear from the following discussion.

We have to note in the first place that the development narrative of Bihar and its alleged success is built around a system of governance where the major emphasis is on providing people with monetary benefits. Whether or not it helps in creating a productive economy is a different story altogether. The emphasis is on consumption. A clear indication of this is the sheer volume of loans and monetary benefits distributed through various schemes. Examples from Darbhanga will help in understanding the politics of relief distribution during flood. A recent governmental intervention in execution of schemes has been in the form of the holding of camps that distribute loans under the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) Scheme, Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY), Prime Minister's Employment Generation Scheme (PMEG), Ground Water Irrigation Scheme and others. These camps are run with the help of nationalized banks that provide the credit.

An example will illustrate the point. On September 6, 2011, the District Rural Development Department organized camps in every block of Darbhanga at which Rs. 36.12 crore was distributed among 2,515 beneficiaries under schemes such as KCC, PMEG and SGSY.<sup>33</sup> The case of SGSY is quite interesting. Money under SGSY is given to self-help groups (SHGs). One respondent, a beneficiary, said that she was part of an SHG that comprised 12 members. They collected Rs. 200 each, opened an account through an intermediary at a State Bank of India branch and got a loan of Rs. 25,000 against that account. The government gives a subsidy on Rs. 10,000 so that the interest has to be paid on Rs. 15,000, which comes to Rs. 600 and has to be paid after three months. What is done is that the intermediary keeps the Rs. 15,000, deducts Rs. 600 from the subsidized Rs. 10,000 and distributes equally the sum of Rs. 9,400, which is then used for consumption. Of course, there are other ways of circumventing the provisions of SGSY. This is only one such example. The story of consumption driven schemes does not end here. There are several other instances. For example, on September 10, the Public Health Engineering Department minister Chandra Mohan Rai distributed cheques of Rs. 15,000 each to construction workers registered by the Labour Resources Department. The cash dole was accompanied by the advice that it be spent judiciously.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, on September 23, in Singhwara block alone, 82 beneficiaries got Rs. 61 lakh under the KCC scheme in a camp organized all over Darbhanga district.<sup>35</sup>

To understand the logic of such spending, it is important to take into consideration the all-important factor of labour migration. In a scenario in which labour migration is rampant, there consumption-driven credit schemes make a lot of sense. Migration also explains the emphasis on Indira Awaas Yojana, which ensures that the family left behind at least has a shelter. An example of the Indira Awaas Yojana will place things in context. On September 24, 10,975 beneficiaries of Indira Awaas Yojana were given Rs. 33 crore.<sup>36</sup> The timing is unmistakable as this is the height of the season of labour migration. Also, the payment of various loan-driven schemes become viable for the government and the banks as their repayment is ensured by the money that the migrant labour earns as wages. Also, in the case of projects under Indira Awas Yojana it is a given that the *mukhiya* will receive Rs. 5,000 as his cut. The state, in the era of globalization, is forced to 'democratize' its patronage and spread its cover widely to incorporate allies belonging to the erstwhile neglected sections of society. Therefore, along with the earlier usual suspects of bureaucrats, contractors and politicians, we have new additions in the form of the representatives of local governance institutions

often culled selectively from the downtrodden sections of the society, especially in the case of reserved seats for Mahadalit communities, minorities and women.

The spending by the government ensures that citizens have a stake in the mechanism of governance. This penetration of government and governance is manifested in the political arena as well through local elected bodies. The *mukhiya* and the ward members become the link between the state and the citizens, which helps in management of conflicts and ensures to a large degree that claim-making does not cross the tolerated boundaries. In this structure of power, the state ensures that any collective action is mediated through the local elected bodies. We have already seen the role of the Mukhiya Sangh during the floods and how they reflected popular resentment in manageable forms of protests and petitions. The local representative bodies also help in the logistics of relief distribution and managing small conflicts of interests that are inevitable in any programme of relief distribution.

A good example would be the case of distribution of relief for Narsara *gram* panchayat, which consists of 14 villages and 13 wards. A carefully calibrated system of responsibilities was in place. The list of affected families was to be prepared by the ward member in consultation with the people, which was then forwarded to the *mukhiya*, who insisted on removing some names. This list was then forwarded to the block development officer by the *mukhiya* and the officer would then demand the removal of some more names. The final list would then be signed by officials distributing relief. It is quite an efficient method of distributing the pressure from the people as these representatives are also bound by kinship ties which lessens the tension, although the process can also be quite messy and the existence of disgruntled families whose names have been removed from the list is quite common. In fact, one of the ward members complained that she could not make any money because she had to make sure that compensation was provided to every needy person since all of them lived in her own *tola*. It must be said here that not everyone who gets the compensation is really needy. There is a competition for getting relief as an added benefit also. Some observers have said that this has created a culture of living on relief or 'harvesting relief' when a disaster like a flood occurs.<sup>37</sup> This is not surprising in a milieu where consumption is encouraged by the government. However, it is quite clear that the local representatives come in handy to regulate the process of claim-making and evenly distribute and channel of the pressures from below between various organs of the state which, on the surface, look fairly autonomous with respect to each other. This entire process is a very good example of how a strong centralized state allows the flow of power, in a regulated manner, through various local grids and is not shy of creating more such grids and networks when it suits its purpose of 'effective governance'.

We now come to the analysis of the claim that labour migration has come down to the tune of 25-30 per cent in Bihar due to MGNREGS and Government of Bihar schemes. We have seen the manner in which some of the schemes function and their objectives. As stated earlier, they just create newer avenues for the labouring poor to eke out a precarious living and there is no evidence to suggest, at least in North Bihar, that such schemes have checked labour migration. The case of MGNREGS is more complex though. As of now, it is premature to say beyond doubt that the scheme has checked labour migration by benefiting the poor to the extent that other existing options, which helped the poor live a precarious life, have been rendered redundant.

Apart from the fact that there is rampant corruption in the functioning of MGNREGS, the statistics do not paint a very encouraging picture in the case of North Bihar. According to several NGOs no large-scale tangible asset has been created through MGNREGS in North Bihar. The scheme is mired in corruption as *mukhiya* keep the passbook and the job card of the workers with

himself. They then give a certain amount of money to the workers who have been allotted the wages and pocket the rest.

According to the latest statistics available on the website of MGNREGS for Bihar, the number of households that got the guaranteed 100 days of work was dismally low. The number of household that were issued job-cards in 2011-12 in Saharsa was 296,050, in Supaul it was 27,5780, in Madhepura it was 284,293 and in Darbhanga 454,426. The number of household that completed 100 days of employment were eight in Saharsa, 41 in Supaul, 155 in Madhepura and 185 in Darbhanga. It is laughable even to contemplate calculating the per centage of households that got employment for the full period. And this is the case throughout the state of Bihar.

However, to establish a correlation between labour migration and the scheme it is necessary to see the month-wise distribution of work demanded and work provided. This is a very interesting comparison. The following table provides the details of work demanded by households in 2011-12:

Month	Saharsa	Darbhanga	Supaul	Madhepura
April	4519	10584	6968	6539
May	1630	11183	3070	6266
June	637	6284	1631	4017
July	70	1413	1184	2610
August	86	1385	1088	3304
September	300	630	677	2580
October	1691	583	624	3051

Source: [http://nrega.nic.in/netnrega/demand\\_emp\\_demand.aspx?file1=dmd&fin\\_year=2011-2012&page1=s&state\\_code=05&state\\_name=BIHAR](http://nrega.nic.in/netnrega/demand_emp_demand.aspx?file1=dmd&fin_year=2011-2012&page1=s&state_code=05&state_name=BIHAR)

#### Employment Provided to the Household

Months	Saharsa	Darbhanga	Supaul	Madhepura
April	4410	10473	6884	6430
May	2146	11421	3238	6501
June	819	6672	1852	4256
July	136	1141	1139	2566
August	88	1046	1107	3291
September	332	116	790	2686
October	1620	112	632	3056

Source: [http://nrega.nic.in/netnrega/demand\\_emp\\_demand.aspx?file1=empprov&fin\\_year=2011-2012&page1=s&state\\_code=05&state\\_name=BIHAR](http://nrega.nic.in/netnrega/demand_emp_demand.aspx?file1=empprov&fin_year=2011-2012&page1=s&state_code=05&state_name=BIHAR)

An important thing to note is the cropping seasons of Haryana and Punjab. The sowing season for rice in Punjab is from May to July and that of harvesting September to October. For Haryana it is the same. The sowing season for wheat in Punjab and Haryana is October to November and that of harvesting April to May. The sowing season of rice in Bihar is June to July and that of

harvesting November and December. For wheat the sowing season is November to December and harvesting March to April. The cropping seasons at the source and destination, as can be seen, clash. This is one of the reasons why it is hard for peasants in North Bihar to hire agricultural workers during the cropping season. Women are thus quite frequently hired to work in the fields. The dramatic decrease in the work demanded under MGNREGS from the month of April to July across the four districts point to the fact that once the head of the household migrates to work in Punjab or Haryana, the formal demand for work decreases appreciably. However, it can also be seen that the employment provided under MGNREGS is more than has been demanded, indicating that women do engage in work under the scheme. However, in terms of the number of job cards given to a household, the employment provided is miniscule to the point that it can be ignored. Nevertheless, the work demanded and received follows faithfully the season of labour migration. Therefore, a correlation between MGNREGS and migration in the sense that the increase in jobs under the former has reduced the latter is rather tenuous.

As for the various reports that have appeared about the decrease in labour migration, several other important variables have been overlooked. Reports about this phenomenon began to do the rounds from 2008 when the global meltdown occurred and several economic sectors took a hit, especially the real estate sector. Also, these reports do not take into consideration footloose labour, which does not stay at one place for too long but is always on the look-out for higher wages and is ready to migrate to the place where it expects a higher price. More studies needed to be done, keeping in mind these variables before it can be decisively claimed that there is a direct link between government schemes and migration.

## **Conclusion**

This essay began by narrating an incident of a low-intensity conflict in one of the districts that was surveyed. It went further to do a comparative analysis between the less violent North and more violent regions of Central and South Bihar. The comparative absence of conflict in North Bihar has been attributed largely to large-scale migration and patterns of migration. With seasonal migration, the problem of political mobilization and organization becomes a tricky issue. Empirically, there is evidence to suggest that the patterns of migration in South and Central Bihar are very different from that of North Bihar. An extensive study needs to be done to bring out the differences between the two regions of Bihar. The decline of these movements in the militant regions can then perhaps be shown as being caused by a combination of both change in the pattern of migration and governance.

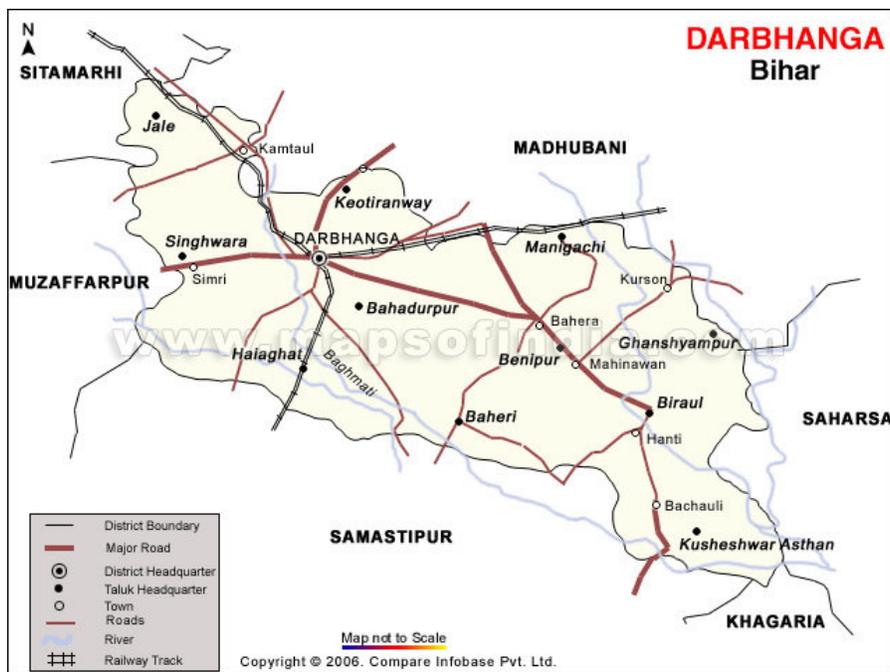
In short, in the North Bihar region, political mobilization and organization are issues to be seen in the context of large-scale seasonal migration. Migration has, however, allowed women to come out of their homes and participate in the economic process and earn wages, thereby asserting their political rights in a more effective manner, an example of which we have seen above already.

However, a caveat needs to be added in regard to this paper. This paper is a result of a preliminary investigation into the economy, conflict, and governance of North Bihar. More research is required for a comprehensive understanding of the question. It is an attempt to arrive at a methodology and determine the variables in order to break ossified concepts, and hopefully become a base for more extensive research on the theme of conflict and governance.

The crucial question remains: How to situate the state and its evolving techniques of governance in the context of the economy and conflicts it generates? The mode of production debate almost sidestepped the issue of the state, hence today that debate provides scarcely any clue about the way antagonisms are developing in the countryside of India, or at least North Bihar.



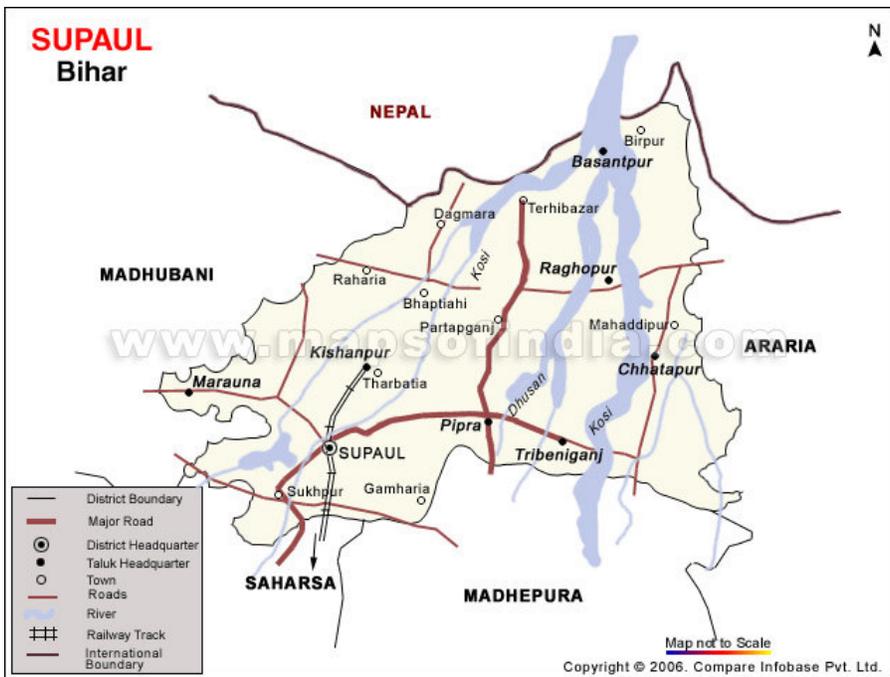
District Map of Bihar



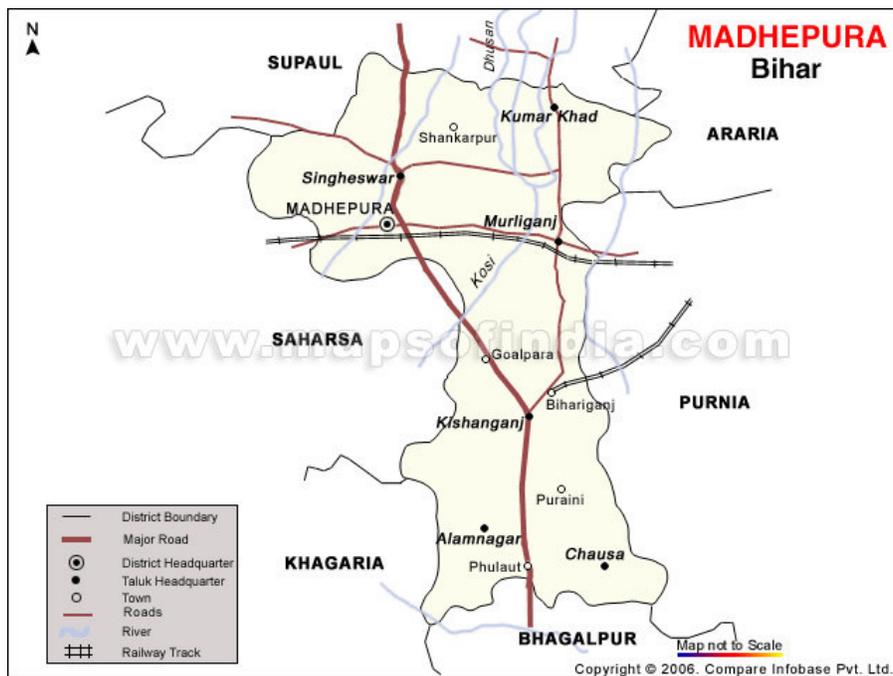
Map of Darbhanga



Map of Saharsa



Map of Supaul



Map of Madhepura

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Bihar government decided to constitute a commission known as State Mahadalit Commission in 2007 to identify the castes within the category of Scheduled Castes who lagged behind in the development process. The commission was formed to study educational and social status and suggest measures for the uplift of these castes, to recommend actions for initiating measures for educational and social facilities together with increasing avenues for their employment. The commission came up with three interim reports and a list of the castes included in the Mahadalit category. The list and the political ramifications of the decision are discussed later in the paper. For details on the Mahadalit Commission, please refer to the website of Mahadalit Mission at [http://www.mahadalitmission.org/BMVM-Introduction.php#.TzDKT'sWmmPA\\_](http://www.mahadalitmission.org/BMVM-Introduction.php#.TzDKT'sWmmPA_) (accessed on 29 November 2011)

<sup>2</sup> *Bigha* is not a standard unit of measurement and varies from region to region. In Saharsa, Supaul, Madhepura and Darbhanga, 1 *bigha* = 1.2 acres.

<sup>3</sup> Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) was launched in May 1985 as a sub-scheme of Jawahar Rozgar Yojana. It is being implemented as an independent scheme since January 1 1996. For details, please refer to the website of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India at <http://iay.nic.in/netiay/home.aspx> (accessed on 29 November 2011)

<sup>4</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, a veteran of India's struggle for independence, started the JP Movement in 1974 against the Congress regime led by the then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi.

<sup>5</sup> *Economic Survey 2010-11*. Finance Department, Government of Bihar, 2011

<sup>6</sup> The report can be accessed at: <http://brlp.in/admin/Files/Poverty%20and%20Social%20Assessment%20A%20districtwise%20study%20of%20B.pdf> (accessed on 20 December 2011)

<sup>7</sup> The 1990s saw the worst massacres in Bihar. Refer Prakash Louis, *People Power: The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar*, New Delhi: Wordsmiths, 2002

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