

The Nonlocal Entanglement of Violence and ‘People’: A Study of Bihar Movement, 1974

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Sadiyon ki thandhee-bujhee raakh sugbuga uthee,
Mittee sone ka taaj pahan ithalaatee hai;
Do raah,samay ke rath ka gharghar-naad suno,
Sinhaasan khaalee karo ki janata aatee hai.

Phaavade aur hal raajadand banane ko hain,
Dhoosarata sone se shrrngaar sajaatee hai;
Do raah,samay ke rath ka gharghar-naad suno,
Sinhaasan khaalee karo ki janata aatee hai.

Ramdhari Singh ‘Dinkar’

The justification of the rather unwieldy title for the proposal is necessary. The two terms ‘nonlocal’ and ‘entanglement’ come from quantum physics. These concepts are extremely complex and mathematical and are objects of intense debate in physics. What we are interested in here is the popular definition of these as given by the physicists and that which eminently suits our purpose in the analysis of popular movement. Albert Einstein called nonlocality “spooky actions at a distance” and it is defined “as the apparent ability of objects to instantaneously know about each other’s state, even when separated by large distances (potentially even billions of light years), almost as if the universe at large instantaneously arranges its particles in anticipation of future events.” Entanglement is a phenomenon whereby “particles that interact with each other become permanently correlated, or dependent on each other’s states and properties, to the extent that they effectively lose their individuality and in many ways behave as a single entity.” We are using these two concepts integrally for our analysis of popular movement and violence. The

hypothesis of the research project is that what we understand as an upsurge of a singular moment of popular movement like the Bihar Movement is, in fact, informed and fundamentally shaped by various small, local, sporadic yet sustained and most importantly violent struggles that first articulates the demand and, to a large extent, the tactics of a popular movement. However, a popular movement like the Bihar Movement is not simply a sum total or the grander version of these small but varied struggles. It also signals a great schism, a break and a leap, spatially and temporally, between the local struggles and the emergent popular movement. It is in the moment of the schism and within that schism that 'people' which go on to make the popular movement are formed. This schism, break and leap is necessary to make a popular movement. Also, this break will necessarily be violent and hence it can be said that a popular movement, in this case the Bihar Movement, is reordering and reconfiguring violence. The terms nonlocality and entanglement then make perfect sense as analytical too. Violence effects, at large distance (from Nav Nirman Movement in Gujarat to Bihar Movement, from Musharai to Patna), the formation of the people and also that their political destinies are inextricably linked. The objective is to study this relationship between violence and 'people'.

Lalan Tiwari in his exhaustive work *Democracy and Dissent: A Case Study of the Bihar Movement 1974-75* begins his narrative from March 6, 1974 when students and youth started to protest against unemployment, rising prices, corruption and black marketing. The protest spread and by March 18 it had engulfed almost whole of Bihar and on that day clashes broke out between police and the students which resulted in opening of fire by the police and several students dead. It was here that Jayprakash Narayan entered the fray on the invitation of the students and took the leadership to the extent that the whole movement became synonymous with him. It was now also known as the JP Movement. This, according to Tiwari, was the

beginning of the tumultuous popular movement which was going to redefine politics and democracy in post-independent India. This might well be true and it is for the historians to come to a conclusion on that but it is important to analyse what this movement had as repertoire (in the sense of Charles Tilly) available to itself and what it added to it. Tiwari mentions some of the most exemplary experiments by the Bihar Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti especially in organizing at the grassroots level to stridently asking the legislative members for their resignation as an act of protest. When JP entered the movement to lead with the call for a 'Total Revolution' the template was almost set and the challenge for him was to construct a people who will bring that total revolution.

Before, we set out to investigate how JP created the people of the movement it is essential to examine what this movement had at its disposal in terms of strategy and tactics. It will be fruitful to trace one strand of JP movement in the peasant movement led by Sahjanand Saraswati. This is important because the question of land and peasant will be at the heart of politics in Bihar for the entire post-independent period. To this what was available to the Bihar Movement was the experiment of Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan Movement. The split between Bhave and JP is one of the more interesting moments in the politics of Bihar Movement. Finally, the spring thunder of the Naxalbari movement provided another articulation for the movement. One should bear in mind that JP came back to active politics in late 1960s with his intervention in the violence of Musahari and more importantly understood the futility of the Bhoodan/Gramdan Movement. JP in the instance of Musahari must have acutely realized the importance of calibrating violence to solve the problem of agrarian unrest in Bihar. As a proponent of non-violence his greatest dilemma must have been to make clear distinctions between force, violence and non-violence. It is thus no surprise that in the later stages of the movement JP gave a call to the soldiers to refuse

to follow the orders what they thought was wrong, unjust and against their conscience. Clearly, the Total Revolution was a break from the Gandhian non-cooperation and civil disobedience. However, even here the template was already provided by the mutiny of the PAC in UP in 1973. At the heart of this mutiny was the demand of better working conditions and stopping the humiliating behavior of the officers. The demand to not follow unjust order has already been raised and with violence.

We see, thus, that there were competing political forces and movements which were already present in Bihar. In fact, according to one estimate, there were around 700 agrarian agitations in 1970 alone in Bihar. One should also keep in mind that Bihar was still coming to grips with the famine of 1966-1967. Paul Brass in an excellent study has shown the calculations of electoral politics, factionalism in Bihar and famine. In a telling observation Brass says that the crisis of famine was not only politicized from the onset but that it was democratized. It was democratic in the sense that politicians, press, people, the central government as well as the state government were in confrontation with each other to define the crisis. This leads us to investigate the more obscure arena in the study of popular movements: political economy. There is a link between political economy and the formation of the people that this research project wants to investigate. One has to ask the question as to what were those material conditions that made it possible for several classes and identity groups to form political alliances, howsoever contingent, unstable or fluid. One needs to keep in mind the imposition of professional tax in 1973 which bristled the middle classes at the time when unemployment, price rise and hoarding were rampant. Coupled with the agrarian crisis on the edge it is hardly a wonder that such an alliance could be forged.

Few things are clear from the brief narrative above. There were material conditions for a popular radical political alliance, the situation of political economy made that condition possible, there

was enough violence to concern the state and allow it to use repressive violence (the movement had entered in the realm of forbidden claim-making to invoke Tilly again), and there was the emerging vanguard to lead the movement and that vanguard was not only JP but the new forms of organization that came up during the movement. In any analysis of the Bihar Movement it is necessary to meticulously investigate the emergence of these new forms of organization because it is a contention of this research project that the structure, politics and ideology of electoral parties will never remain the same. It is in these organizational apparatuses that new forms of political networks and patronage were formed for the new brand of socialism in India. However, all this still does not explain the event of Bihar Movement. As mentioned earlier, the attempt of this research project is to analyse not only as a continuity of the past and contemporary movements but as a break from them and this hypothesis will inform the research questions and the research method of the project.

Research Questions

Principal research question: How did Bihar Movement produced the 'people' by galvanizing the competing and collaborating movements and demands and making a break from them to propel it as a popular movement?

Secondary research questions:

- a) What role did violent movements played in the making of the Bihar Movement?
- b) What were the organizational innovations of the Bihar Movement?
- c) What were the political ideologies that emerged which gave it coherence, Total Revolution, etc.?

d) What were the inherent contradictions of the Bihar Movement especially around caste mobilizations?

e) How did Bihar Movement and its populism informed the processes of governance?

f) How did it informed other movement such as the All India Railway Strike of 1974 which began just a few months later than the Bihar Movement? Ranabir Samaddar in his study has already shown the complexity of struggles between the rank and file workers, leadership of the union and governmental bureaucracy. It is important to see the link as well as the discontent between a popular movement and a working class movement.

Research Method

The research method will revolve around collecting instances of violent and non-violent movements from local newspapers. The period that will be looked will be 1973-74. It will also require an intensive reading of speeches and works of the leaders of the time especially, JP, Ram Manohar Lohia, George Fernandes and Vinoba Bhave. This is required to understand the political philosophy and theory of the vanguard of the movement. A close reading of available records of the various grassroots organization will be studied to investigate its political dynamics and programmes. In exceptional cases, structured interviews will be conducted with some participants and leaders of the movement.