



## COMMUNAL POLITICS AND THE ROLE OF VARIOUS POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES IN BIHAR: 1940-45

**Mahesh Kumar Deepak**

*Assistant Professor, Department of History, Dyal Singh Evening College, Delhi University.*

### Abstract

*Colonial India witnessed some of the worst communal violence during the penultimate years of her independence. The Bihar province too had its own share of communal agony as communal violence engulfed the province during the months of November-December 1946. Often termed as an aftermath and a reaction to the Calcutta Communal Riots which preceded it, this paper seeks to establish a relatively independent character of the Bihar disturbances(1946). It would also try to portray the role of local political-ideological dynamics as carried out by the various political and semi-political groups in the province during 1940-45, which formed the background of Bihar Communal riots of 1946.*

**Keywords:** *Communal, Sectarian, Language, Muslim League, Khaksars, RSS.*



*Scholarly Research Journal's is licensed Based on a work at [www.srjis.com](http://www.srjis.com)*

The mid 1940s in the context of Bihar pose for the modern day historians various sets of politico-communal incidents which are perplexing, interwoven yet distinct in their character. On surface, these developments may appear as a "monolithic" block of events with a linear pattern of origin, development and their impact; but their close micro level scrutiny point to their dimensional character as well as influences.

Bihar disturbances of 1946 are often portrayed in the form of "retaliation," backlash and revenge of what had happened in East Bengal. At the same time it is also very important to note that the process by which the "simple looking peasants" were transformed into "fanatic killers" do not take place overnight. According to Paul. R. Brass "the politicized communal situation" existed much before the actual happenings of 1946.<sup>1</sup>

In this regard, the "Calcutta Killings" might not have played more than the immediate cause for Bihar where similar mayhem had taken place in October-November 1946. Even the Government reports and accounts preceding the communal riots in Bihar repeatedly point

<sup>1</sup> Paul R. Brass, *Forms of Collective Violence; Riots, Genocide and Pogroms in Modern India*, 2006, p.13.

towards the growing inter-communal antagonism at various levels. In fact, the process of translating "political message" into "religious fervor" at the populist level holds the key in this context and needs further attention to unravel the truth behind the 'Bihar disturbances' of 1946. In this context, the role played by various "Sectarian" organization and political parties must be elaborated. They not only channeled and gave vent to "community specific feelings/demands," but also made sure that they reach the grass root level through populist participation. In the case of Bihar, important mentions may be made regarding the Muslim League, Khaksars and the Rashtriya Swyamsewak Sangha (henceforth RSS).

The Bihar Provincial Muslim League was established in March 1908 under the Presidentship of Nawab Sarfaraz Husain Khan. Sayyid Ali Imam, Maulana Mazharul Haque and Sayyed Hosain Imam were some of the important League leaders in the Province. Since then and that too in a short period of time, it won the bulk of middle as well as the lower middle class within its fold. Things really reached during the tenure of first Congress Ministry (1937-39), when it carried out first ever active and organized propaganda against the Congress party.

The Bihar Provincial Muslim League by way of its opposition to hoist the congress flag on all institution and introduction of Bande Mataram, through the boycott of local bodies election, raising the question of low-protection and the "suppression" of Urdu Language by the Congress government, certainly created an anti-congress atmosphere in the province. The League felt no reluctance in asking the Muslims of Bihar, "to decide soon whether they should migrate from this province or face annihilation, if the present state of constant conflicts with a section of Hindus and perpetual insecurity, sufferings and humiliations continue owing to the present policy of the congress government."<sup>2</sup>

During the heightened tensions of Mid 1940s the Provincial Muslim League in Bihar received instructions regarding the formation of "Direct Action Committees" to train the people to carry out the 'Direct Action Plan' and at many places, Muslim National Guards were trained. In its July 1946 issue, the Muslim League of Bihar's mouthpiece "*New Life*" issued a very thinly veiled threat that, "if an interim government is formed by Nehru, the Muslims of Bihar should resort to "Direct Action."<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> The Pirpur Report , 1938, p.47.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to all District Magistrates including the Additional Deputy Commissioners of Dhanbad, Singhbhum and A.D.M. of Saharsa, Ranchi, 21<sup>st</sup> Aug, 1946, File No.: 317/47, Political Special, Bihar State Archives (hereafter B.S.A.), Patna.

The RSS worked with an objective to give "unity and potential strength to the Hindu society so that no one in the world challenge the superiority of the Hindus.<sup>4</sup>It extended it's organization chiefly in eleven districts all lying in the northern half of the province along the Ganges.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the district as well as *Mofussil*"Shakhas" (Branches) were established during the years between 1938 to 1943. This period incidentallyco-insides with the tenure of the first congress ministry, 1937-39 and the Quit India Movement. The year 1943 witnessed a quickening in the activities of the R.S.S. and it's ramifications in Bihar. Even more striking was the pace and fast success it achieved in expanding its base among the Lawyers, government pleaders, officials and most importantly, the students and even congressmen. According number of R.S.S. members were students and that the activities of the Sangh made a powerful appeal to the Hindu youth.<sup>6</sup> For example, in Nawada, a Shakha was started in 1943, with a strength of 25 members, all school boys of ages varying from 8 to 16, with a result the superintendent of Police recommended the organization should be declared unlawful.<sup>7</sup> Similarly in Monghyr, out of the total membership of 850, 50% were below the age of 14.<sup>8</sup>

The most alarming feature of the R.S.S. in Bihar was the pace with which it was radicalizing the political thought of its members, especially the students. For example, in Muzaffarpur where some congressmen were also amongst its members, some student members were heard to remark that the aim of the Sangha was to drive away the British and the Muhammadans' from India."<sup>9</sup> The members were fast acquiring political ideas to the extent that in Monghyr district, some students were heard criticizing Gandhi's policy of non-violence and favoured a violent struggle instead.<sup>10</sup> Thus, these small units were the "nuclei" towards forming a larger "militia" which at a critical historical juncture like 1946, were ready to play their role in fomenting the communal flare-up.

---

<sup>4</sup> Para 123 of Bihar Police Secret Abstract of Intelligence Report, Date 17.7.1943. File No: 6/1944, Political Special Section, B.S.A., Patna.

<sup>5</sup> Bihar Situation Report No. 18, dated 13/16.2.1994, File No: 6/1944, Political Special. B.S.A.

<sup>6</sup> D.O. NO. 28 C-9, Commission, Muzaffarpur to Deputy Secretary, M.S. Rao, I.C.S., Bihar Political department, Date 30<sup>th</sup> April, 1944. File No. 6/1944, B.S.A., .

<sup>7</sup> Letter to the Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar, from the Inspector-General of Police, Bihar, Date 6<sup>th</sup> May 1944, File No. 6/1944, Political Special, B.S.A.,.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Para 123 of Bihar Police Secret Abstract of Intelligence, Date 17.7. 1943, Political Special File No. 6/.1944, B.S.A.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.,

It is to be noted that the Khaksar organisation, although an ineffectual body, was potentially as representative of Militant Islam as the R.S.S. was of 'aggressive Hinduism.' During the years of Mid 1940s, it had its own influence among a section of Muslim and the Bihar Provincial Muslim League.

Nor were the Bihar disturbances and uni-linear chain of events during which the blood thirsty Hindus indiscriminately killed Muslims. There were strong undercurrents of co-existence also which needs to be investigated and highlighted. There were more than one instance in which Hindus, especially in the villages, extended protection to their Muslim co-villagers, often at the risk of their own life and property. A close study of such instances help us in establishing important relationship between two important categories of caste and communalism and at the same time study the mob behaviour and related issues. People belonging to Teli, Mahto and other low caste Hindus helped the Muslims while riefers belonged to Rajput, Bhumihar, Goala, Dusadh and Kurmi communities in particular. Although no central pattern emerge and we should escape generalizations for in many instances we find various castes mentioned above changing their roles due to many localized factors and circumstances.

One very important aspect of Muslim League's propaganda regarding Bihar in the mid 1940s was its desire to form a confederation of East Pakistan and *Adibasistan* (Chotanagpur) Riding high on the support of "Adibases' Nagpuria Muslims," who raised the slogan of 'PakistanZindabad' along with the cry of "Adibasistan Zindabad", the Muslim League concluded that, "a confederation of Adibasistan and East Pakistan will be practical, defensible, solvent and self sufficient."<sup>11</sup>. The Adibasi leaders Col. Jaipal Singh agreed that Chota Nagpur was more akin to Bengal than to Bihar and even entered into a formal pact with the league for *Adibasi*-Muslim liberation in the fight for Pakistan and Adibasistan. But it remains to be an inue of investigation as to what the common tribal-person was perceiving about the political development of the day and whether the ideal of *Adibasistan* was one more tactic played by the League to ensure that the coal, Mica and iron mines of Chota Nagpur went to East Pakistan only if at all it was formed.

### **Conclusion.**

These were the circumstances during which the Calcutta riots started. This incident certainly had a psychological effect which helped members of both communities to construethe charging political situation according to their our suitability. These were certainly interpreted in different and disturbing ways creating a cumulative negative effect on the communal relation

---

<sup>11</sup> S.S. Pirzada, *Select speeches of M.A. Jinnah*. p. 306.

in Bihar during 1946. It was to create a condition of communal discord whereby a belief set in that survival meant killing. Thus, more than five thousand innocent lives were set to be lost in Bihar province at this juncture of Indian freedom movement.

### **I. Primary Sources.**

*Bihar State Archives, Patna.*

*Bihar Government of Bihar, Political (Special) Department Records, 1942-47.*

*Freedom Movement Papers-Selection from Provincial Government and Collectorate Records.*

*National Achieves of India, New Delhi.*

### **Secondary Sources.**

*Ahmad, Jamil-ud-din, Qaid-e-Azam As seen by His Contemporaries, Lahore, Publishers United, 1966.*

*Ahmad, Rafiuddin, The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906, A Quest for Identity, Oxford University Press, 1988.*

*Akbar, M.J., India: The Siege Within, Viking Penguin, New York, 1985.*

*Brass, Paul.R. Brass., Forms of Collective Violence; Riots, Genocide and Pogroms in Modern India, Three Essays Collective, 2006,*

*Chatterjee, Joya, Bengal Divided-Hindu Communism and Partition, 1932-1947, Cambridge, 1996.*

*Chopra, P.N., ed., Quit India Movement: British Secret Documents, New Delhi, 1986.*

*Hasan, Mushirul, ed., India's Partition-Process, Strategy and Mobilization, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1993.*

*Khaliquazzaman, C., Pathway to Pakistan, Longmans, Pakistan Branch, Lahore, 1961.*

*Tomlison, B.R., The Indian National Congress and the Raj, 1929-42: The Penultimate Phase, Palgrave MacMillan, United Kingdom, 1976.*