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A Nostalgic Socioeconomic History of Tarar

By Sudhanshu K. MISHRA †

Abstract. This paper uses an autobiographical mode in narrating the evolution and role of institutions in the development and the subsequent decline of a village economy in Bihar, India. It shows how cooperation help and later envy, discordance and destructive attitudes overpower the constructive attitudes to life, how such attitudes enter into the cultural fabric of the people and how such changes make the village fall on its knees. The paper highlights the role of social capital in economic development.

Keywords. Autobiographical, Village economy, Envy-barrier to development, Cultural economics, Destructive leadership.

JEL. B40, P36, P37, P49, Z13.

1. Introduction

I was born on August 18, 1950 in village Tarar (तारर) as the second son and 7th child of my parents, Smt. Tara Devi and Shri Anant Mishra. The families of my caste, about 60 in number, live in two clusters, the one (the Jha conglomeration) in the western and the other (the Mishra conglomeration) on the eastern side of the village. They are of two different ancestral lineages and their close blood relatives (mostly *Dauhitrās* or the offspring of a daughter), although in the eastern cluster there are some Jha families who belong to the lineage of those living in the western cluster. The eastern cluster is also inhabited by the Jha families who were *dauhitrās* (the descendants of a daughter) of the Mishra family, as well as the Rajhans, the Thakur and the Choudhary Brahmin families, although only a few in numbers. It is quite likely that the Brahmin families in the eastern side of Tarar settled later as compared to their counterpart in the western side of the village. Possibly, the Mishras of the eastern cluster out-migrated from Andoli (of Saharsa district, Bihar which is quite prone to floods of the Kosi river). Their *mool* (origin, see Jha, 2011) is *Jalebār (or Jalewar) Andoli*. I am ignorant of reliable or recorded facts, but the precedence of the western cluster of Brahmins is possibly substantiated by the location (closer to the access road to the village), density (which is higher in the western cluster that might have been caused by the recurrent sharing of the ancestral residential land among the longer chain of descendents), altitude of the location (they are settled on relatively higher land as the slope is towards the east), Jajmani relationship (the Brahmins of the western cluster have Jajmani relations with the richer Rajput families) and the level of education (which is higher among the families of the western cluster of Brahmins). The rajputs live in the southern side while the Yadavs live in the northern side of the village. Those families have lived in Tarar for many generations, such that almost none remembers the origin they came from.

† North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, 91 - 793022, New Delhi, India.

☎. 918130397754

✉. mishrasknehu@hotmail.com

I love my village; I love the people of my village. I am nostalgic of the past of my village and I am also worried of the present and the future of my village. The said nostalgia and worry make me write this essay and, therefore, the objective of this autobiographical scribble is to present the past and the present of Tarar as elaborately as I can and as earnestly as my memory permits. I should admit that I have not done any elaborate or systematic research on it. But I have grown up and been educated in Tarar; until I did my MA, I lived in Tarar. I may not know the details, but I do know the outlines of what I am writing on. I have not seen any write-up on Tarar and I hope that this essay will fill in the gap. One would agree that much of our history is forgotten and becomes irretrievable only because it was not documented. It has happened in the past; it is happening even today. We have forgotten our origins; we have lost our folklores; we have estranged ourselves from our traditional village songs that described our culture. The effort in this essay is a step forward to document the history of Tarar. It is also a hint to assess the role of institutions, the habits of mind and their evolution, the sociological facts, the social and cultural capital, etc. on socioeconomic development, stagnation and regression. This documentation, howsoever sketchy, may also provide a starting point to more elaborate, more fact-oriented, more analytical sociological research on my village.

Tarar is a village located alongside the road that joins Ghogha railways station at some 3 kilometres north and Sonhaua, the Police Station, Tehsil and Block Development Office of Bhagalpur District (Bihar), some 12 kilometres south from my village. Tarar is a large village inhabited by over 10 thousand people. According to Census 2011, Tarar (geographical area: 371 hectares) was inhabited by 2006 households and its population was 10641 of which 5725 were males while 4916 were females. The dominant caste in village is the Rajput (locally called 'Banaut', बनौत) who make the majority (about 43%) as well, followed by the Brahmins and the Yadavs (who are about 20% and 16% respectively). There are some 18% households that fall under the Scheduled Caste category (and had a population of 1810 persons, as per Census, 2011). The households belonging to others castes are only a few that make a minority.

Tarar has three *tolas* (cluster of households); Tarar proper (inhabited by Brahmin, Rajput, Yadav, and various others castes families), Dogachchhi (inhabited solely by Rajput families) and Makarpur (inhabited mostly by Rajput families and a handful of other castes families). Dogachchhi *tola* is in the north-eastern corner of Makarpur *tola*, separated by a distance of not more than a quarter kilometre, but the distance between Tarar (proper) and Dogachchhi is about half kilometre or a little more, towards the east, towards the Gerua river. Thus, Tarar (proper) *tola* is alongside the Ghogha-Sonhaua road, Dogachchi *tola* is to east of Tarar (proper) *tola* while Makarpur is in the south-eastern corner, making an arch of cluster of houses that resembles the right half of a circle (or the shape ☪; see Tarar Google Map).

2. The Name of my Village

The village is located on a land which is slightly higher in altitude than its surroundings, the slope being sharper to the east, the altitude gradually declining for about 5 or 6 kilometres to reach the Gerua river, a tributary to the Ganges. In the west, chaur land is there, which has a lower altitude than the village has. As Gerua flows to the north (to the Ganges, some 6 kilometres away from Tarar), the land to the north of the village is relatively a low land. Tarar has never evidenced an incidence of flood. There was a Hindi poem titled "Hey Tarar" (that appeared in the Tarar High School Magazine in the 1960s) written by Shri Moti Singh (alias Mathilisharan Nehmidhi), who was a teacher in Tarar High School, which mentioned that the name "Tarar" came from "Tānd" टांड, which means an upland. Since an upland was occupied by the people to inhabit, it was named Tāndar wherefrom the name Tarar came forth ("...Tānd bhūmi ābād huyi. Tārar iskā nām

pad gayā paribhāsā yun yād huyi” टांड भूमि आबाद हुई। तांडर इसका नाम पड़ गया परिभाषा यूँ याद हुई। It is believed that Tarar was settled as a village towards the end of the 18th century, just after the introduction of Zamindari system by the British government. It may be noted that Tarar (including Dogachchi and Makarpur *tolas*) is the only village in the locality (with over 50 villages around) where the Rajput and the Brahmin communities live. Other villages are inhabited by scheduled castes and other backward castes, including Yadavs. It is believed that the original inhabitants of Tarar and the surrounding area were Bhars (who could be boatmen and the ancestors of Gangotas or the Ganga-Gotriyas) and Chero communities. They were an agriculture community. They also had animal husbandry as an important component of their livelihood. It is likely, therefore, that the Rajputs and the Brahmins inhabiting Tarar are immigrants to the area.

3. A Historical Perspective of Tarar

In the beginning of the 19th century, Tarar was a small village, inhabited by some 25 families with a population of some 200 persons. Six Rajput, four Brahmin and three Yadav families were the main holders of land and livestock resources. Of course, there were Mochi (leather workers, shoe-makers; the Mochi women were also experts in gynaecological and child-birth services), Dusadh (Pasvan or watchmen), Teli (oil workers), Halavai (sweet meats workers), Kayastha (doing court and all paper work that requires literacy and the knowledge of official procedures relating to land, etc), Hādi (cleaners), Luhār (iron workers or blacksmith), Sonār (gold workers or goldsmith), Badhaee (carpenters), Nāu (barbers) and other castes families also to provide various services. All those families owned some land for their subsistence. The villages surrounding Tarar were the major suppliers of agricultural labourers. The Rajputs mainly depended on land while the Brahmins had land as well as the Brahminic profession for their livelihood. The Yadavs had some land resources and animal husbandry as the main source of their livelihood. The Mochis and the Dusadh also worked as agricultural labourers. The economy revolved around land, agriculture and animal husbandry.

A recent history of Tarar – its rise and its fall: Over two centuries and seven to eight generations, Tarar has grown in population size and amenities & facilities. Primary school, Girls’ school and a High School were established. The postal facilities were improved. Primary Health Centre was started. Irrigation facilities developed. Earlier, a kutchra (mud-top) road joined the Railways Station Ghogha and the Tehsil Head Quarters, Sonhaua. In the mid 1950s the road was black-topped and private buses to and fro Bhagalpur (the nearest township at some 25 kilometres from Tarar) and Sonhaua started plying. Tarar High School served the educational requirements of thousands of students in Tarar and the surrounding villages. Up to mid-1970s, it was considered to be the most prestigious and coveted school in the locality. In due course, a college was established in the Tarar High School premises.

But, now Tarar is only a resort of those who have nowhere to go. Now Tarar is a spent force. Social, economic and even educational status of Tarar has declined severely. The educational services have seriously declined in quality. The number of students as well as their attendance in the school has dwindled down. There is a serious problem of unemployment and the young people see no future for themselves. In Tarar village, out of total population of 10.6 thousand (Census 2011), 5.5 thousand were engaged in work activities. Some 19.59 % of workers described their work as Main Work (Employment or Earning more than 6 Months) while 80.41 % were involved in Marginal activity providing livelihood for less than 6 months. Of 5.5 thousand workers, 493 workers engaged in Main Work, 198 were cultivators (owner or co-owner) while 356 were Agricultural labourer.

Why did the decline take place? Tarar reached the peak point of its development sometime in the mid 1970s, after which a decline became visible or conspicuous. Interestingly, Tarar village has lower literacy rate compared to Bihar. In 2011,

literacy rate of Tarar village was 59.49% compared to 61.80 % of Bihar. In Tarar, male literacy stood at 68.92% while female literacy rate was 48.28%. It is interesting because Tarar has a Primary school, a Girl's school, a Secondary (or High) school as well as a college (up to BA/BSc). The college, which is the youngest among the educational institutions is no less than 30 years old and has been affiliated to TM Bhagalpur University for over 15 years. Tarar also has a post office, a public health centre, a bank branch, ATM outlets, means of public transport, etc. In spite of all these, a poor literacy rate is indeed agonising.

This decline was not caused by the external forces or the natural calamities. The events having a negative feedback started accumulating from the mid-1950s only, but it could eclipse the social life of Tarar only in the mid 1970s. To understand the rise and decline of Tarar, we have to look back into the historical events - a chain of unfortunate incidences.

4. The sociological and institutional make up of Tarar

To understand the reasons that account for the rise and fall of Tarar, one has to go deeper into its sociology and institutions – its mores, the habits of mind of the people in the village and the cultural aspects. The rise and the fall of Tarar are deeply connected to the Rajput community of Tarar. Hence one must understand the psyche of the Rajput families and their world view.

4.1. A history and social characteristics of the Banaut (Rajput) community

It is believed that the Banauts are Bundela Rajputs, and come originally from Orchha in Bundelkhand (Madhya Pradesh). The Banauts are said to have left Orchha to escape the Mughals. Although some research is required to establish it, the folklores indicate that in the early 17th century, Raja Jhujhar Singh rebelled against the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, whose armies devastated the state and occupied Orchha from 1635 to 1641. In that latter year, the conquerors installed the former raja's brother on the throne. Orchha was the only Bundela state that remained fighting tirelessly and could not entirely be subjugated by the Mughals or the Marathas in the 18th century. During mid-17th to mid-18th centuries a large number of rebel or endangered Orchha (Bundela) Rajputs out-migrated and settled in groups in various locations of eastern Bihar. Possibly, they occupied the woody lands for settlement wherefrom their name Banot (living in forest and at a distance from other people) originated. In the villages at their back, the Banauts are sometimes abused by other caste people as *Banpars*, meaning the people who inhabit forests, and are possibly uncivilized, quarrelsome and offensive, which may be memetic (Dawkins, 1976) in nature, though, Banpars are a separate caste in Bihar. The culture of Banauts also matches that of rajputs of Orcha region. They inhabit some twenty and odd major villages in the eastern part of Bihar, in both the sides of the Ganges. Those major villages are: Tarar (three *tolas*, namely Tarar-proper, Dogachchi and Makarpur), Bhawanpura, Dharhara and Kaharpur villages in the district of Bhagalpur; Belari, Rahmatpur, Sahjadpur villages and Asargunj (township and surrounding villages) in the district of Munger; Sarsi, Aligunj, Dhamdaha and Sukhasana in the district of Purnia; Kalasan village in the district of Saharsa; Guagachhi, Baluaghatti and Chandwa villages in the district of Katihar; Tamghatti, Pothiya, Narhki, Uphrail and Narsimhapur villages in the district of Araria. Except a few villages in Bhagalpur and Munger districts, all other villages (about 75 percent) are to the north of the Ganges. Their marriage relations are in those twenty and odd villages making them a closely connected and well-knit community. The Banauts are an endogamous community (as they shun marriage relationship in other sub-castes of Rajput). Yet, although the inhabitants of the villages in the north to the Ganges do have marriage relations in the villages to the south of the Ganges (and vice versa), the northerners prefer to remain in the north while the southerners prefer northern villages for marriage relationship. Tarar, by no means is a preferred village for marriage relationships and, therefore, there are several cases of endogamy across the three *tolas* of Tarar. It may also be noted that

the villages to the north of the Ganges have more productive land, better communication and transport facilities, more congenial sense of community and perhaps a stronger will to economic development.

The Banauts, over the generations, have acquired a particular set up of mind, a particular world view. This world view is highly materialistic, valuing landed property very highly, working hard on land, frugality or prudence in spending and high propensity to save money. They are tactful, highly adaptive, responsive to opportunities, and having a great patience; they bend down in adverse situations but remember who and what did hurt them and wait for an opportunity to pay the offenders back in their own coins often with appropriate returns thereon. In matters of material interest, they are highly individualistic to which all other relations are subservient or of little significance. They also have a great tenacity and fearlessness in fighting. They remember enmity for long; they can hide their inner feelings and seek for an opportunity to avenge. The Banaut women are hardworking, highly practical, alert, tactful and cheerful. They also advise their husbands in most critical matters and their husbands pay an attention to their advice. They have a good sense of 'persona' and their appearance is pleasing and delightful. When educational facilities became available in the villages (inhabited by multiple castes, including the Banauts), the Banauts girls took advantage of it to the fullest as they were supported and encouraged by their parents and the community. However, the Brahmin girls lagged behind due to lack of support from their tradition-bound and myopic parents as well as their own Brahmin community blinded by false vanity. Female education yielded high returns to the Banaut community, socially, culturally and economically.

The Banaut women in general are very efficient housewives, effortful in keeping their houses and belongings tidy and well-maintained. When I was a young boy and then living in my village, Tarar, I often visited the homes of my friends some of whom were from the Banaut families. In those days, many houses were not *pucca* (made of bricks). Houses had mud walls and *khaparail* roofs (covered with terracotta roofing tiles) or even thatched roofs (made of paddy straw). I had noted that the mud architecture, finishing and upkeep of Banaut houses were so clean, tidy, attractive and proportionate in structure. It was so distinct from the Brahmin occupied houses that were only poorly built and ill-maintained. Perhaps, the image of a house and its upkeep was there in the Jungian (Jung, 1970) collective unconscious (or so to say), seated in the deep layers of the hardwired memories of the Banaut community since the days of their stay in Orchha. Surely, it could not have been built in the woods or during those days when they were struggling for a permanent settlement over generations. Surprisingly enough, the Brahman community and the Banaut community lived together in the villages for generations, but the architecture, finishing and upkeep of their houses remained particulars to them, unaffected by each other. They also maintained some sort of peculiarity in their spoken language, so much so that a keen listener can make a distinction between a Banaut, a Brahmin or a Yadav for that matter.

The characteristics of the Banaut community are highly pro-development and indeed they prospered as compared to other castes. Land and material resources at their disposal increased over time and made them socially influential. With betterment of economic condition, they also went in for some sort of generalized sanskritization (Srinivas, 1952; 1976) or emulation (Veblen, 1899) of the better off families, but only selectively and to the extent such that sanskritization or emulation did not jeopardize their economic progress. This selectivity was possible for them because they were more or less a close community living far away from their larger community wherefrom they were disconnected after their diaspora, and, therefore, they had a lot of flexibility in making a convention and mores of their own. They imitated the high-ups in their own community inhabiting some twenty and odd villages. The sanskritization hypothesis has some basis. Fergus (2012) points out that the Banauts are also known as the Rautas. O'Malley (1911: p. 68), a

British Raj Indian Civil Servant, writes: “There is one class which appears to be peculiar in this district, viz. Known as Banaut. It is reported that they formerly belonged to the *Goāla* caste and were called *Mandals*, but for the last 4 or 5 years they have been using the *janeo* or sacred thread, like high caste Hindus, and have been arrogating the title of Singh as if they were Rājputs. They are found in Dhamdāha, Raniganj, and Manihāri thanas, and are by occupation cultivators and mahjaans.” There may be some truth in it since two or three generations earlier the ancestors of some Banauts (who use the surname ‘Singh’ now) used the surname ‘Rai’. However, the authenticity of such a view may be a matter of investigation. Land ownership records may be useful in this regard. I am no physical anthropologist. However, my hunch is that a study on the lines of Mahalanobis *et al.* (1949) and Bharati *et al.* (2005), taking stature, sitting height, standing height, cephalic Index, nasal Index and total facial Index measures as well as skin coloration into consideration, the Banaut population may be significantly discriminated from the local Yadav population and thus might not support the hypothesis based on the observations made by O’Malley (1911) or Fergus (2012). Whatever might be the truth, the fact is notable that the Banauts were keenly effortful to climb up the socio-economic ladder and finally they succeeded. In passing, it may be mentioned that the Yadavs of today also have gone through the sanskritization process. Some 60 or 70 years past they were using ‘gope’ or ‘rai’ as their surname and even today the local people call them ‘goālā’ (in their absence). They did not make any serious attempt to join the higher rung of the rajput. Perhaps, the caste-based politics and the rise of Lalu Yadav in Bihar gave a different turn to the process of sanskritization and the ladder of ascent.

On the other hand, the Brahmin community was more traditional; for a generalized sanskritization they only have had to look towards the Maithil Brahmins in the north to the Ganges, especially in Saharsa, Katihar and Purnia. It may be noted that their ancestors belonged to those areas and, therefore, they might have had some emotional and social affinity with them. They wanted to be connected to their past. But that sort of sanskritization of the Brahmin community in Tarar was economically and, in due course, socially disastrous.

With their progressive, materialistic, forward-looking and adaptive social psyche – the collective unconscious, the world view and the habits of mind – the Banaut community in the villages (mentioned earlier) progressed socially as well as economically. As a close community, the Banauts in one village learned and imitated the practices of the influential families of their lot in Tarar or other villages, which, by the way, was highly materialistic, individualistic, egotistic, selfish and identity-seeking. They helped each other in appropriating the opportunities open to them, especially if an alternative course of action would have benefitted the communities other than theirs own. They also helped each other against the perceived threats/encroachments from other communities.

4.2. *The dynamics of ownership of land resources*

The number of families and population of the village continued increasing. Over the generations, inheritance made the land holdings smaller. A redistribution of land resources also took place on a significant scale. The Brahmin families had Jajmani as one of the sources of income. Moreover, they could not till the land on account of social customs. Land had to be given in many cases for share-cropping. However, they had to pay rent to the zamindar for holding the land. All these issues made land a second rate source of income and livelihood to the Brahmin families. Moreover, the Brahmin families in Tarar valued their marriage relations with the Brahmin families in the villages north to the Ganges (Purnia, Saharasa, Katihar, etc.), closer to the Mithila culture, which was also the culture of their ancestors. Marriages across the Ganges were a costly affair for the Brahmins of Tarar since their northerner counterpart did not prefer crossing the river. This deference was often converted into readiness by the financial plug. So, very often the Brahmins

of Tarar sold their land to acquire financial resources to marry in the families of the willing northerner counterpart, who were paupers and needed money as a compensation for crossing the Ganges in marriage relationship. This practice was more prevalent among the Mishras of Tarar. The incidence and the pace of pauperization of the Brahmin families of the eastern side of the village (the Mishras in particular) were conspicuous and faster perhaps because they indulged more in imitating the Maithils of the north and establishing marriage relationships with them. It could have been due to their perceived inferiority vis-à-vis the Brahmin families in the western side of the village (the Jhas) and thus in need of urgent sanskritization through marriage relationships. On the other hand, the Rajputs were more materialistic and solely depended on land for their livelihood. They also cultivated their land with the help of agricultural labourers. They were prudent to save money and invest it on buying land. So, in due course, much of the land earlier owned by the Brahmin families went into the hands of the Rajput families, gradually making the latter economically as well as socially dominant.

Especially after 1930, the struggle for independence intensified in India. The zamindars became increasingly more interested in receiving rent (which was in terms of money), partly to pay a huge sum to the British government and partly to build up their own strong financial base lest the zamindari system be abolished (before or after the possible independence of India, as the Congress was against the zamindari system). The Tehsildars and their men came down upon the people who failed to pay rent in time and proceed to auction the land held by the defaulter. The small landholders did not have enough money to pay. Money was a scarce resource and could be arranged for exorbitant interest only. The village people, in general, were innocent, illiterate and ignorant. In this milieu, some Tehsildars and their men grabbed the land owned by many small landholders. This incidence took place in a conspicuous manner in Tarar. Mr. Bhupal Singh (born in an economically modest Rajput family) was somewhat educated and working as Tehsildar for the Zamindar. About 1930, within a span of 15 years or so, he managed to acquire the land of many people, especially the small landholders of the lower castes, making almost all of them landless. The Brahmins and the Rajputs had initially no clash of interest with Mr. Bhupal Singh, which made him respectable among the people of the village.

The two processes of land dynamics led to concentration of economic powers in the hands of the Rajput families and in turn, the Brahmin families turned poorer and the lower caste people became landless. The Brahmin families (except a few) became solely dependent on Jajmani, but the Rajputs continued to be their supporters. The lower caste people, many in number, were reduced to agricultural labourers or paupers.

4.3. The emergence of two centres of power

Initially, only one Rajput family was well-to-do and owned a large acreage of land. They were called the Madar (in Deonagri script मडर, derived from Mandal?) family. The Madar family group of Rajputs live in Tarar (proper), in its southern part, from where Makarpur *toila* is well within a quarter kilometer. They were and are influential, respectable and somewhat more educated, too. The emergence of Bhupal Singh & brothers (BSB) in Dogachchhi *toila* as a new centre of power led to the disequilibrium of the socio-political and economic system of the village. The village was already having a primary school, established with the initiative of the people of the village in which the Madar family as well as the influential and well-to-do Brahmin families were contributors. With the initiatives of Mr. Bhupal Singh, a High School was established to which a large donation (in terms of landed property) was made by Mr. Singh and brothers for maintenance of the school. Thus, Mr. Bhupal Singh encroached upon the political and social territory traditionally under the Madar Family. Additionally, the Rajput and the Brahmin families that depended socio-economically on the Madar family started moving closer to the BSB. The two power centres must then clash – and the rivalry arose

very soon to scheming, planning and keeping a watch on the loopholes of each other. Unfortunately, both the centres of power crystallised around destructive leaders (Padilla *et al.*, 2007). Leaders of both the groups had personalized need for power, negative life themes, ideology of envy, jealousy or hatred and the capability to keep their followers bound to them, mostly through economic dependence and defence patronage. Even the followers had a lot of bitterness, venom and hatred, although directionless, deep-seated in their hearts, which might have been caused by poverty and its consequences. It may be noted that in the villages the inhabitants live for generations. There is nothing that people bear more impatiently, or forgive less, than contempt; and an injury is much sooner forgotten than an insult (Stanhope, 1746). The memories of help and honour evaporate in no time; the memories of insult accumulate. Those accumulated toxins pollute the village life. They also seek for its appropriate outlet. Consequently, almost each family of the village becomes contributor as well as subject to what Schoeck (1966) called 'envy-barrier to development', to which Becker (1974) draws our attention. To Veblen (1899) as well those motives become the very stuff of life that dominates everything else. The pleasure of malevolence (Bentham, 2007 originally 1780) becomes the dominant drive to social behaviour.

4.4. The corollaries of power

Power must manifest and manifestation is encroachment on the territories hitherto occupied by somebody else. The encroachment may be on the economic, political, social, religious, or moral domain. It may be impinging on ownership, social status, relationship, hierarchy, functions, rights or anything of that sort. The *nouveau riche* (not being used pejoratively or even in usual sense of the term, exactly) family members of Mr. Bhupal Singh, especially the youthful ones, started transgression on the territories of other families to manifest their power. There was retaliation to this encroachment. Power cannot tolerate retaliation and may react violently.

4.5. Offence on Shaligram Singh and aftermath

Shaligram (alias Shalkhoo) Singh and Shyamlal (alias Shamali) Singh were two brothers, living in the neighbourhood of Mr. Bhupal Singh and brothers. Both the brothers were physically enormously strong and hardy. (I have seen Shalkhoo Singh when he was about 60 years old. A strong young man's wrist would be crushed if Shalkhoo Singh held the wrist in his hand and applied his power to crush it. That Shalkhoo Singh was made invalid by the offenders through beating his thighs with staff and iron rods such that one of his legs, just above the knee, was to be amputated. Shalkhoo Singh survived, but walked on his single leg with two crutches (*baisakhis*) held under his arms). Shalkhoo Singh had retaliated to the encroachments made by the family members of Mr. Bhupal Singh and brothers. So, he was made invalid. But things did not stop there. Shyamlal Singh reacted violently to the offence made to his elder brother. He soon found out the opportunity and murdered Mr. Bhupal Singh, the fountainhead of power, in the broad daylight. It is anybody's guess as to the role of the Madar Family, especially Mr. Suraj (alias Suraju) Singh and his younger brother Mr. Sharda (alias Shardhu) Singh in scheming, planning and supporting Shyamlal Singh to murder Mr. Bhupal Singh and thus curbing the rival centre of power. But once again, that was not the end. A few months passed and Shyamlal Singh was murdered in the broad daylight. All these things did not take much time to happen.

4.6. Formation of rival groups and loosely defined cluster formation in the village

The murder of Bhupal Singh and the murder of Shyamlal Singh in its revenge were the outbursts, but court cases of those murders lingered and engulfed many people whether true or suspect participants in scheming, planning and executing the murders. The Rajput families of Tarar (and other villages in the area where they

have had family ties) are very closely knit by marriage relationship. Thus, whether some families were involved in those murders or not, almost all families had to be relatively closer to the one group and distant from the other. But all such families were also suspect of double game since all of them had some sort of family relations with both the groups. Group loyalty of almost every family was suspect and under watch by the core members of both the groups. The core of the first group was the Madar family, with Suraj Singh and Sharda Singh in the centre. The core of the second group was the BSB, with Uday (alias Uddhan) Singh and Phanindra (alias Phaim) Singh. A cold war began between those two rival groups and each group made attempts to bring in the peripheral Rajput families into its own fold. The predicament of the peripheral Rajput families was that a refusal or even indifference to enter into the closer circle of the one group was considered as the indication of interest or involvement in favour of the rival group. The activities which could bring in a peripheral family into the closer circle were involvement in crime, joining *darvars* (informal meetings by visiting the families of the core members), collecting and sharing information on the activities of the rival group members, economic dependence on and display of intimacy with the members of the core and so on.

4.7. Rise of Parashuram Singh

Dogachchhi was the mainstay of Bhupal Singh and brothers family. As it has been mentioned earlier, the Rajput families living in Tarar have close family ties, within and without. So is the case with the families inhabiting Tarar (proper), Dogachchhi and Makarpur *tolas*.

Saryug Singh, inhabiting Makarpur *tola*, was murdered in the sequel to the murder of Shyamlal Singh. Saryug Singh was the son-in-law of Indra Mohan Singh of Tarar (proper) *tola* who was not in the Madar family; rather he was against the hegemony of the Madar family in Tarar. It was quite natural, therefore, that Indra Mohan Singh and his son-in-law would be closer to the BSB. Parashuram Singh lived in Makarpur *tola*. He was a blood relative of the BSB family (the mother of Parashuram Singh was a daughter of the BSB family). However, Parashuram Singh (and his brothers) was economically modest while his maternal uncles in the BSB family were well-to-do. Parashuram Singh expected some share in the riches of his maternal grandfather, which claim was not acceptable to his maternal uncles. This family feud, though latent, made Parashuram Singh antagonistic to his maternal uncles and, therefore, he might have come closer to the Madar family group of Tarar (proper) *tola*. Saryug Singh was associated with the BSB group. In due course, it was alleged that Parashuram Singh and his associates eliminated Saryug Singh. Saryug Singh was survived by his two minor sons, Dushyant Singh and his younger brother (Nand Kishore Singh), who, when they came of age, entered into the world of crime.

Entry of Parashuram Singh and his associates on the one hand and Indra Mohan Singh and associates on the other into the power game made village politicking, crime, encroachment, tyranny and fear ubiquitous, partly because Parashuram Singh and his associates emerged as the third centre of power. The BSB family removed itself from active over-the-board politics and resorted to scheming, planning, tacitly supporting, instigating and destabilizing the society. Sharda Singh and Suraj Singh were eliminated. The Madar group of Tarar withdrew from over-the-board feuds but kept on hatching the discord. On the whole, the entry of Parashuram Singh in the village politics in an overactive way is extremely complex and intricate and, therefore, difficult to understand.

With the advent of Parashuram Singh in the village scene, a number of changes took place. Earlier, politics, crime and tyranny were limited to affect the active members of the rival groups. The rivalry was contained and more structured or crystallized. However, Parashuram Singh and associates made it ubiquitous, partly because the dedicated members of the older rival groups had no enough reasons to join the third group. Parashuram Singh had to make his group with the people who

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were not very close either to the Madar or to the BSB group. The older groups kept the young boys at bay. They did not encourage Brahmin families to join the group. However, the new centre of power was indiscriminate in franchising and recruiting the young boys. The earlier groups possibly did not have an access to firearms (or if they have had any, they did not display them). Parashuram Singh and associates moved with the firearms, displaying them as a sign of power. The young boys were rather dying to hold a pistol (or revolver) in their hands. This opportunity they could get only by being close to the members of Parashuram Singh group. So they did, and the criminalization of entire village took place. A new culture of drinking and roaming on the village streets in a drunken state was initiated by Parashuram Singh and his associates. The young boys soon adopted this new culture. Hooliganism prevailed; everybody felt unsafe; everyone was living under fear; anybody could be transgressed; everyone became overcautious.

It may also be mentioned that earlier the Brahmin families in general were not the participants in the inter-group feud of the two centres of power. Of course, Mr. Ram Jha did not pull on well with Mr. Suraj Singh of Madar family, but their discord was contained to them only and did not implicate others in their mutual (perhaps very personal) rivalry. It appears that both Mr. Ram Jha and Mr. Suraj Singh were highly disciplined in maintaining their disagreement and rivalry. In passing it may be mentioned that Mr. Chulhay Singh (from the Madar family of Rajputs), who was a matriculate of those days and owned a sizeable area of land, became the first Mukhiya (village headman) of the Tarar Gram Panchayat after the Gram Panchayats were constituted. He remained Mukhiya for several terms. Mr. Ram Jha was vying to become Mukhiya and contested. His discord with Suraj Singh might have arisen due to that contest which could have been interpreted as a challenge to the hegemony of the Madar family. Ultimately, Mr. Ram Jha became Mukhiya of the Tarar Panchayat.

However, when Parashuram Singh rose to power his group extended to Brahmins as well as Yadavs. That was a novelty. Yet, the participation of Brahmins and Yadavs in Parashuram Singh group remained limited only to one or two Brahmin and Yadav families. In general, Brahmins and Yadavs were subject to tyranny, but their profession and economic status did not permit them to join the tyrant group over-the-board.

4.8. Procurement of financial resources for management of the gang

It has already been mentioned that Parashuram Singh and his associates were from modest economic background. The group (or rather gang) activities, including drinking, needed financial resources. Financial resources were also needed to buy firearms and ammunition. So they resorted to use their muscle power and hooliganism to procure financial resources by obtaining tenures to use public resources which were auctioned from time to time. Gerua river had a large stock and steady replenishment rate of a good variety (coarse grains) of sand needed for construction activities. The gang captured it. Similar was the case for the water-bodies that were used for raising fish as well as operating the village hāts (weekly markets). Additionally, Parashuram Singh and associates often captured or seized the crops in the lands of the adversaries wherever they could. A few incidents of extortion also took place. These were the new dimensions of and drive for the power game in the village and its surrounding.

4.9. Adverse effects on education in the village

Since most of the henchmen of Parashuram Singh and associates were involved in the one criminal activity or the other, the police used to search after them. They could not sleep in their houses in the night. They also were prone to be attacked by those who they had enmity with. Very soon they identified Tarar High School hostels as a safe place for living, since the rear side of those hostels had large open area used as paddy fields that made an easy exit should the police raid the hostel for them. This encroachment on the hostels made the life of the hostellers

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miserable and soon they vacated the hostels. Unrestricted entry of unruly and armed boys in the school premises discouraged the students from the surrounding villages to come to the school. The number of students on roll as well as their attendance declined very sharply. Teachers in the school also did not want to interfere in the affairs for fear and want of personal safety. All these together made Tarar High School a fast declining school quantitatively (in terms of the student population) and qualitatively. In this milieu, the school going population in Tarar also lost their interest in attending the school.

4.10. Adverse effects on other social facilities

Some incidents took place that frightened the doctors, nurses and the staff in the Primary Health Centre. They stopped coming to their duties. The pump station operators were frightened and they left. Soon, the pump sets were used for taking bath rather than irrigating the land. It did not take much time that the pump sets were stolen and sold. Even the bricks used there were carried to the homes of any and everyone who showed an interest in doing so. Village weekly hats discontinued. Electricity connections were damaged and the (aluminium) cables connecting the poles were sold out. Exorbitant amounts of money were extorted from the private buses in the name of hegemony of Tarar and it rose to the extent that private buses stopped plying on the Bhagalpur-Sonhaua road. Of course, no public buses were ever plying on that road. In short, every facility that the village has had declined or become dysfunctional.

4.11. The rise of Suman Singh in Tarar and Dushyant Singh/Nand Kishore Singh in Makarpur

Parashuram Singh died or was killed under mysterious circumstances. Some of his associates also were killed and the gang disbanded. However, two new gangs emerged; one from Tarar (proper) *tola* under the leadership of Suman Singh (initially a good and lovable boy who turned into a broad daylight murderer to take revenge of *dacoity* in his house) from the Madar family and the other from Makarpur *tola* under the leadership of Dushyant Singh and his younger brother, the sons of Saryug Singh. They were rival gangs fighting with each other, keeping watch on the activities of each other as well as on the general public who were always suspected as potential informers. The two gangs vied for capturing public resources (sand resources of the Gerua River, public water-bodies, mango orchards, the High School property, etc.) depending on their strength and the territory of their influence. Wielding lethal firearms and their display became very common. The condition of schools and, therefore, education dropped from bad to worse. An atmosphere of fear, suspicion, transgression, insult and physical offence prevailed in the villages. The people who had left the village for employment felt safe in never returning to or even visiting Tarar. Many houses started deteriorating or dilapidating in want of maintenance. Off and on, there were incidents of burglary, manhandling, and other physical transgressions on innocent, socio-economically weaker, families.

Soon, in the Tarar High School compound a police chawki was established. Many of the hooligans, the unruly boys of Suman Singh, lived in the School hostels (then completely vacated by students for fear of being mishandled), hundred meters away from the police chawki. The policemen and the hooligans, some of whom were dreaded criminals, lived close to each other in complete harmony, sharing joint parties in preparing evening course of bhang (marijuana) and enjoying it. In the eyes of the policemen, while the job of the police was to catch the culprits and criminals, the boys enjoying bhang with them in the evening were simply the village youths, jobless and with nowhere to go. They were nice boys. In the eyes of the unruly boys, the police chawki and the policemen there were nice guys whose job was to catch the criminals, miscreants and the culprits and they must do it. However, they, the boys themselves, were all nice boys having nothing to do with the criminals and their activities. In short, the police chawki was greatly

ineffective. People of the village lived under fear and stress, having none to complain to and none to complain against. In Dogachchi and Makarpur, the other group was ruling. People simply adapted themselves to the tyranny. During those years many murders and cruelties took place for no significant reason. Insulting, transgressing, manhandling and even murdering became an expression of power. Some people from Brahmin families also were killed. Shri Ram Jha was killed. Two other persons, Jayaprakash Mishra and Ajay Rajhans were killed. Who killed them and why did one kill them are not to be thought upon. Some unruly boys were trigger-happy. They wanted to express their nuisance value in transgression and killing. So they did it. It may also be noted that in the later part of his indulgence, before being caught by the police and sent to jail, Suman Singh became Mukhiya of Tarar Gram Panchayat and did a lot of constructive works as well as organized a series of *yajnas* in Tarar that left a good impression of him on the minds of the local people in general.

4.12. Nitish Kumar Government in Bihar and the changes in Tarar's scenario

With Nitish Kumar forming the government in Bihar, certain policy changes took place. Suman Singh was arrested and jailed. Some of his associates either died or were jailed. Nand Kishore Singh died under mysterious circumstances. Dushyant Singh withdrew from active gang-works, though living cautiously. At present, there are no organised gangs, but complaints against each other, memories of insult, manhandling and transgression, economic injustice and all types of ill will of the one against the other are dormant in the mind of many. The education system, the school functioning, is completely damaged. Youths are unemployed loitering on the roads and the play field of Tarar High school. Boys prefer to play and roam around purposelessly while they should have been in the schools. Their guardians also are indifferent. A deep sense of pessimism, dejection and withdrawal prevails. The entire village is old, sick, disabled, demoralized and devoid of any hope for the future. Tarar is now a morose, sulky village. People are afraid, they are afraid of their own shadows; they fear that some incidence may take place any day and to anyone for any reason. Those who could afford out-migrated from the village; those who can afford have an alternative place to stay elsewhere nearby. Those who grew and prospered in Tarar to find an employment elsewhere seldom returned back.

5. A Retrospection of the Socio-economic History of Tarar

The initial progress of Tarar much owes to the Banauts of the village. The progress of Tarar assumed a marked pace after 1933, when Tarar High School was Established. A primary school was run for many years on the land given by Shri Adhiklal Jha, father of Shri Ram Jha, and the contributions given by the well-off families in Tarar, was already there. The primary school was internalized and upgraded to primary & upper primary school by the Education Department of the State (Bihar) in 1951. Tarar High School began as a private school, by the courtesy of the people of Tarar, but it was located on the land donated by Shri Bhupal Singh. Shri Singh also donated a substantial landed property to the High School for the necessary expenses to run it. Its first Headmaster was Shri Satyanarayan Jha, who came there from a far off village to manage the school. After his retirement, Shri Rudra Pratap (R.P.) Singh, the nephew of Shri Bhupal Singh (son of Shri Moti Singh, brother of Shri Bhupal Singh) became the headmaster of the school. By the time Shri R.P. Singh became the headmaster of Tarar High School, the school had earned a good reputation and also had a sound financial status, thanks to the stream of income flowing from the produce of the land belonging to the school as well as revenue from the students and assistance of the Govt. of Bihar. Shri R.P. Singh was a man of vision, very particular to maintain discipline among the students and regularity in conducting/attending classes. His own economic status and support of

the Banauts (his caste people) made him even stronger. In his time so many buildings, including the hostels for the students coming from other villages, were constructed. The school compound was fenced by a strong brick wall with proper gates. School buildings were renovated and repaired wherever needed. A separate science block for teaching and experiments was constructed. The laboratories were well equipped. The primary school was brought inside the compound of the high school. A Girls' School was established and for many years was managed by Shri R.P. Singh with a great enthusiasm. Shri R.P. Singh also built his own big house (now although in a pretty good condition, but almost abandoned by his son) by the side of the school and thus he was around all the twenty four hours of the day to look after the school interests. Shri Singh was a patron of all extracurricular activities, games and sports in the school. Although he was a bulky man, he had a strong constitution. Almost every evening, he, with the school students, played football in the school field. Occasionally, he played volleyball also. Students of the High School had a very good rapport with him and he was easily accessible to them off the school hours. He was also quite courteous and respectful to the guardians of his students. However, in the last part of his career as the headmaster of Tarar High School, some people started questioning his financial integrity since the school had a lot of revenue and its management was *de facto* in the hands of Shri R.P. Singh, although the school had a managing committee to look after the financial aspects, their utilization, etc. Such voices were raised only after the early 1970s when the village society of Tarar had already moved on to the path of decline. There may be some truth in the doubts and allegations made against Shri R.P. Singh, but despite all such allegations, one thing is clear and above board. Education prospered in Tarar and Tarar High School earned a good reputation on account of the able management of Shri R.P. Singh. The School infrastructure that used to be rich, well-maintained and impressive was the contribution of Shri R.P. Singh.

6. Decline of Tarar

Although Tarar is inhabited by the Banauts, the Brahmins and the Yadavs, all significant in number, but the history of Tarar - its progress and its regress - mainly owes to the Banauts; the Brahmins have had only minor contribution to it. The Yadavs, although they have become politically important in the recent years, have historically been of no consequence.

6.1. Decline in educational environment

After Shri R.P. Singh retired, the school showed the signs of a free fall in regularity of teaching, number of students on school rolls, quality of teaching, maintenance of the school infrastructure, safety of students and teachers in the school, and above all reputation of the school. How much of it was due to absence of Shri R.P. Singh and how much it was due to the overall decline in the village life ravaged by increasing factionist politics and the tyranny of gangs having internecine feud is a subject matter of research. It may also be mentioned that during the mid-1970s, Bihar experienced a great turmoil and political instability, intensifying caste-based politics. The aftermath of that turmoil was a clear and spectacular decline in the social conditions, educational sphere in particular (Mishra, 2016). Tarar High School was already under the governance of the Education Department of the Govt. of Bihar. The teachers started receiving their salaries from the Government. The teachers' community, after its salaries were raised, job security was enhanced and the control of the management committee or the headmaster reduced, promptly exhibited the tendencies of what is well-known in economics as the '*backward bending supply curve of labour*' (Sharif, 2000; Dessing, 2002; Dasgupta & Goldar, 2006). Teachers became complacent. Increased sense of 'power' and nuisance value of the students that gained an impetus in Bihar made them undisciplined. Increasing incidence of unemployment made the students as well as their guardians disillusioned as to the utility of

education. Moreover, dependence on private tuition became the trend of the time. The possibilities of a poor person receiving good education or opportunities reduced substantially. Private tutoring flourished as a business. All these factors as well changed the scenario of Tarar and its educational environment.

6.2. An account of drainage of economic resources

In Tarar (the three *tolas* - Tarar proper, Dogachchhi and Makarpur put together), hundreds of students received their high school education in Tarar High School. Many of them went in for higher education and obtained well-paid jobs and good status in different parts of Bihar and elsewhere. However, they did not keep any meaningful relations with their families (in larger sense) left behind in the village. They claimed their shares in the property at the village but conveniently skipped any financial or even social contribution back to the village in return for what the village economy and the society had forwarded to them in making them what they grew up to. It is well known how the “money-order economy” of coastal Karnataka and Kerala had transformed the lives of people in the region. The Uttarakhand economy also was boosted up by the money-orders received from its youths working in the army. Siwan and Gopalganj economies in Bihar have substantial remittances from their people working outside. Arrah, Bhojpur and Chapra economies in Bihar also have been strengthened by the money sent to its villages by its people working elsewhere. Back in the villages inhabited by Banauts, in several villages, especially in the northern side of the Ganges, the educated and employed out-goers kept their relationship with the village alive and contributory to their families living in their villages. The resources thus obtained helped them purchase more land sold by other communities, make better houses, educate their children and earn a respectable identity in the respective localities.

But the educated youths that left Tarar for working elsewhere did little to keep up or reinforce the economic conditions of their families left behind in Tarar. This may be particularly due to a hostile environment that Tarar developed in the late 1960s and deteriorated further in the mid-1970s and onwards. The youths that left Tarar left it virtually forever and settled elsewhere minimizing their interaction with the people of Tarar as much as they could. This negation of their relationship left the village society of Tarar high and dry. It was drainage of educated manpower, money and material resources from Tarar. It made the society and the economy of Tarar empty, hollow and shrinking.

It is well-known that growth reduces stress on redistribution, but stagnation or decline falls back upon redistribution. In turn, redistribution begets disagreements, disharmony and conflict. It may beget violence and even crime. Disharmony, violence, and conflict in turn further reinforce the causes that work against growth and development. It follows the law of cumulative causation (Myrdal, 1957; O’Hara, 2008). This has really taken place in Tarar. Widespread crimes, signs of someone’s progress begetting envy, jealousy and hatred of others, incidences of extortion and encroachment on the crops standing in the farm-lands, a climate of fear, etc made Tarar a spot of detraction for living and investment. Much resource was also drained out on court cases. Stagnation and disintegration led redistributive forces take up criminal characteristics. Tarar was caught into the vicious circle of poverty, retrogression and degeneration. It has long been caught in the vicious circle of transgression and criminality.

6.3. Lack of avenues of employment

In Tarar and its surrounding there are no avenues to employ the youths. There are no industries around. The sole source of livelihood is agriculture. Agriculture has remained underdeveloped and productivity is not high. At this juncture I remember Shri Lakshmi Singh of Tarar (proper). He was a small farmer, but ahead of his time in adopting new practices of cultivation. He demonstrated on his own farm how productivity might be increased and how one can progress while living in a rural society. He was a very enthusiastic man and loved interacting with the

youths. I wonder, however, that the cultivators' society in Tarar ever took him seriously. They continued their old practices of cultivation. Commercial crops were never raised. Irrigational facilities were jeopardized. The village youth took to the "leisure class culture" (Veblen, 1899) and they did not want to soil their hands. In want of an outlet to the constructive affairs, they easily developed destructive tendencies.

6.4. Poor state of social capital

If agriculture cannot sustain them and manufacturing activities cannot be started, why do the people of Tarar do not go into business? One has to reflect on this question. One realizes very soon that business requires investible funds as well as a favourable environment and trustworthy interpersonal relationship for its success. Business requires a sense of accounting, an ability to make a difference between revenue and income (net of cost). Business requires patience. It requires an atmosphere of trust and dependability. It requires social capital (Dasgupta & Serageldin, 2000; Adler & Kwon, 2002). Social capital constitutes connections among individuals-social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (Putnam, 2000). In the last forty years, Tarar has lost its social capital and instead it has earned such an evil reputation in the surrounding villages and Bhagalpur that the environment of trust cannot possibly be created in the near future. Hence, the people of Tarar cannot enter into business, too. If they have had a will and social capital with themselves, they could have entered into various businesses in Olpura, Ghogha, Sonhaura, other near-by localities and also in their own village, Tarar.

Elsewhere (Mishra, 2003) I have discussed the importance of fortitude, aptitude and attitude of the rural people with regard to their development. As to fortitude, the people of Tarar are not deficient. However, aptitude and attitude to development are critically lacking. Bijay (son of Shri Lakshmi Singh) was fairly good at studies and his father suggested him to join ITI rather than to go in for general higher education. That was a correct move, which, however, was not appreciated when this decision was made. In general, people have an apathetic attitude to ITI education that generates skill or aptitude adding to employability and development in turn. General education has a great likelihood to render the youths unemployable. At that, people in general lack in modernization ideals (Myrdal, 1971). Destructive attitudes overpowered the constructive attitudes to life and such attitudes have now entered into the cultural fabric of the people (Hofstede, 2001; Tabellini, 2010).

The development of Olpura, a village along the Ghogha-Sonhaura road, hardly at a distance of a third of kilometre north to Tarar, has prospered so much in the last 40 years. It is a village mostly inhabited by Sao community (which is a business community). They all, barring a few, were poor some 40 years past. Jaggan Sao and Moti Sao of Olpura worked for creating the social capital in Olpura as early as 1960s. They succeeded and Olpura was transformed. They started rice husking mills at a small scale and employed their fellow neighbours to prepare paddy for making rice, oftentimes parboiled rice for local consumption. They entered into the business of buying paddy, processing it into rice and selling the latter in the market. They worked hard and cooperated with each other to establish themselves in business. It may be noted that in the seasons when paddy is harvested, the prices are much lower than what they may be sold at in the months when paddy plants are grown in the fields. The difference in prices is significant that may fetch a good return, attractively more than what the deposits in the banks would fetch, if paddy is hoarded for six to seven months. Processing of paddy to rice also adds to its value significantly. Additionally, the enterprise of buying paddy from different farmers, processing it and disposing it off into the market generates employment. The Saos of Olpura took advantage of this fact. Today all the households in Olpura are well off. Amenities and facilities were developed in due course there. A school was also established in Olpura to meet the needs of the

children, who now need not come to Tarar. Presently, the Mukhiya of Gram Panchayat, Tarar is an inhabitant of Olpura, an incidence that could have been considered impossible in 1970s or even in 1980s. Vis-à-vis Olpura, Tarar lost the social capital. It lost all prospects for development and now it is a morose village.

6.5. Factors that make reversal to normalcy impossible

What keeps Tarar caught in quagmire? An anecdote may shed some light on it. Decades past, I was travelling by a train from Bhagalpur towards Sahibganj onwards. In Kahalgaon a person from my village, who was a dreaded criminal, boarded into my compartment. We knew each other very well and on account of my non-involvement in the village politics and long absence from my village we had no misgivings from and dubious relationship with each other. He was travelling without ticket. He sat by my side and requested me to see that he exits the platform gate in Sahibganj station. I told him that I would do that. After a few minutes, we were almost settled and started gossiping. In that course, I inquired as to what he was doing those days on which he said that he was very well involved in the same activities that had become normal for him. The gist of our discourse, which is in my questions and his answers, is as follows:

I: *Do you earn enough from your activities that keeps you going on comfortable?* He: No. First, the people do not keep much money or ornaments, etc. in their houses. Then, we are not thieves; we are dacoits or robbers. We make a plan of our attack and there are at least 10 people in our group. Our group meetings are expensive. Once in action, we have to carry out a lot of firing to terrify the people. Ammunitions are expensive. The victims do not part with their money or ornaments without a struggle. So, we have to severely beat them, including their women and children. We do not like that, we are not heartless people, but being soft, kind, considerate, humane etc. would defeat our purpose. If our mission is successful, we have no more than 15 to 20 thousand, often much less, for each of us. We also have several types of expenses, including a good deal of money to buy drinks, and the robbed amount does not last for more than one or two months. So, we have to be on lookout for another commitment. Many times we have nothing to eat and go hungry.

I: *Why don't you take some job somewhere to have an alternative livelihood?* He: Who will give us a job? People in the locality know us and avoid a contact with us. The police are always after us. Moreover, suppose, someone gives us a job, he would like to exploit our criminal involvements. Then, we remain where we are. Further, we have a hot, non-tolerating and explosive temperament. A person who will give us a job will also command us. That would hurt our ego and arouse anger. We are criminals. We have committed many crimes, including murders. The first murder is a disturbing experience. But subsequent murders are not. Our intolerance of the conduct of job-giver may result into something unfortunate to him. Then, why to enter into something that is going to fail soon?

I: *Well, it is understandable. But why do you people continue harassing, insulting, and assaulting the persons who are innocent?* He: Chiefly for two reasons. First, the people that you call innocent are really not so. They are people of poor intelligence, poor capabilities but enjoy showing off their connections with us, only falsely, to impress upon other fools like themselves. We have to discipline them before their mindless activities create a real muddle. Physical assault to them also keeps up an environment of terror, which is necessary for our survival. We thrive on the relationship of fear and not that of love.

I: *You know that in the profession of yours people usually do not live long. Aren't you afraid of untimely death?* He (laughs): I have killed so many people, some of them with minor faults. Their women and children were great sufferers, which often pained me. If I am killed that will be unfortunate to me and my family, but it will be only a natural justice. I wouldn't like to be killed, but if I am killed, then I have no regrets.

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I: *You are travelling alone and bare-handed; when you boarded the compartment you came across me sitting here. But you could have encountered your enemies, too. Then what would have happened?* He (laughs): If you think that I am bare-handed, you are wrong. We do not even go to bed at home without that stuff with us. And alone! This is so by design. None should know where will we board which train or travel by which mode and when and where will we go for what purpose. The day others will start knowing that we will be no more. We move with utmost care and ready to take necessary action if the circumstances demand that. Otherwise, we keep cool, avoid interaction with the people. And do you really think that we would board a compartment without proper inspection and wouldn't be alert when travelling? Alertness, suspicion, presence of mind, readiness to take drastic action and so on are built there in our nature. That is why we survive. The day we would be careless, we will cease to live. I am much at ease with you, but don't think I am not alert; you are there and many others are there. The train stops every now and then on different stations passing by. People come in and go away from the compartment. I am vigilant, although you are not.

After some time Sahibganj came. I saw him off at his exit from the railways platform. I think he was truthful to me. But his story tells us why there is no return to normalcy. Normalcy and criminals cannot coexist. Moreover, crime and criminals breed further crime and more criminals.

7. Concluding remarks

I feel sad when I reflect upon the socioeconomic condition of Tarar. It is my village; I was born and brought up there. My ancestors lived there. The families of my kin men still live there. Many of the friends of my younger days, with whom I played, are still living there. I have a house in the village that I visit occasionally. People are well-behaved to me. It is perhaps because I never indulged in the village politics; I did not have enough time and opportunity as well as interest in doing so. I wanted and worked consistently to be educated, obtain a job and build my career and economic position secure. I succeeded but at the cost of being far away from my village, from my own people. Since 1975, when I left Bihar, I only occasionally visited Tarar. But whenever I visit my village, the old memories and emotion overcome me. How can I forget the people with whom I played when I was a child? How can I forget the lost glory of my school where I was educated and which I boasted of? Even now I hear, coming only from my within, an echo of the prayer in the school (रविरुद्रपितामहविष्णुनुतं हरिचन्दनकुंकुमपङ्कयुतं), but it is only an illusion, a reverberation simulated by my memories. My school has now been reduced to a sick institution, somehow pulling on. Whenever I visited my High School, I found that the teachers over there are indifferent. Even if I tell them that I have been a pass out from that school, it does not interest them; they seldom value the love of an ex-student to his *alma mater*. Back, within my village, some 50 meters away from my house there is a small *thākurbādi* (a temple), now almost denuded, barren, unattractive and forlorn. Those days when I was young, rather a child, it was green, full of flowers, a peaceful place, a beautiful site to visit in the morning and the evening. Vaikunthi Kaka worked hard on maintaining it, beautifying it, decorating it, planting trees in it, nursing flowers in it. Recently I met Vaikunthi Kaka. An old man, now he has forgotten, nay, he wanted to forget, about the *thākurbāri* that he served and nourished for over a decade, more or less singlehandedly.

We used to have three major celebrations every year, (Chaitriya) Durga Puja, Dipavali including Kali Puja and Holi. Of course, we also had Saraswati Puja and Krishnashtami under the Kadamb tree in our cluster. In Kali Puja we had had the tradition of Validān in which many goats and a male buffalo also were sacrificed. The male buffalo had to be beheaded in a single stroke. Manni Luhār only could perform that feat. In Durga Puja and Dipavali/ Kali Puja dramas were played – Maharana Pratap, Vir Shivaji and many others based on historical and social

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themes. Memorising their dialogues and rehearsals used to start a fortnight before the days the dramas were to be played. Dramas were often played in Kali Sthan since it had a lot of space. Many boys were keeping themselves busy to make the stage. Men and women, boys and girls, used to watch dramas, sometimes for three consecutive nights. Balaram Thakur's jokes and witty humorous poems were awaited by the audience in between the acts. There were boys who used to sing appropriately fitting songs in the intervals of the play. All of us used to enjoy. Holi used to be really colourful in the evening but mud-full in the early hours.

Those days have slipped away into the fathomless shady cave of the past. The younger generations have no idea of the past glory of Tarar. Now, the youths have almost no social or even personal purpose to reckon with. They are hiding themselves in their houses; they are afraid of their own shadows. They speak cautiously and stroll cautiously. The village has lost its life force, it has lost its shine, it has lost its present and it has lost its future.

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