

## Contextualizing Ranveer Sena

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The word "Sena" was foisted upon the Ranveer Samiti by Lalu regime. This peasant organization was formed in October 1994 at the village Belaur in Bhojpur district of Bihar. In 1995, it was called Ranveer Kisan Mahasangh at the district level as it was a loose federation of different village level Ranveer Samitis. Its guerilla squad was called Ranveer Sangram Samiti. The Bihar government banned all the three organizations and gave the name *Ranveer Sena*. This fact was told to this writer by Ranveer Sena chief Brahmeshwar Nath Singh in his interview in September-October 1999 which was published in *Frontier*, (Vol. 32, No. 14).

Ranveer Samiti was formed in self- defense in the wake of the armed attacks by the guerilla squads of the CPI(ML) Liberation when a section of the peasants were resisting the demand of wage hike of the labour as the peasants were not in a position to pay the higher wages. The peasants were not permitted to cultivate their lands as there used to be the *nakebandi* of the village by the units of the CPI(ML) Liberation. In one of the meetings of the peasants in the afternoon at Belaur village when it was being discussed how to counteract the *nakebandi* they were surrounded by the guerilla squads and were being fired upon. It was then decided to form an organized resistance to such kinds of *nakebandi*.

When this correspondent had asked Mukhiaji, as Brahmeshwar was commonly called among the peasantry across the plains of Bihar, that the media image of his organization is one of an upper caste Zamindar Sena committing massacres on Dalits, his reply was profound. He had stated that where are the zamindars and how much landholdings they still command. He explained that the average landholding per family among the upper castes in the three old districts of Bihar namely Patna, Gaya and Shahabad (Bhojpur), which are paddy cultivating regions, is less than 5 bighas (1 bigha is less than an acre). Only where joint families exist and there has been no division of cultivable land, the landholdings may exceed this average. But this is rare. In such situation, the ordinary peasant cannot agree to the demand of land reforms and higher wages as it is economically *unviable*. In fact, he stated that they are the marginalized kisans worse than a section of the OBCs and Dalits who are the beneficiaries of governmental schemes specifically formulated for the OBCs and the Dalits. The upper caste peasantry, as a result, is compelled to migrate to different parts of India as security guards and working hands in the factories.

When the question on Dalit massacre was repeated, he shot back why don't you ask similar question to CPI(ML) Liberation cadres when they kill peasants. "Then we become feudal lords whose killings are better for society and they become revolutionaries". He had subsequently explained that in the darkness of the nights and in the rural topography innocent persons got

killed by mistake which was thoroughly unwanted and regrettable. Actually, the strategy was to counter-act or preempt to neutralize the cadres of the CPI(ML).

Here it may be added that the zamindari abolition in Bihar in Nehruvian era benefited a segment of Kurmi, Koeri, Yadav and few castes of Dalits who supported the Sena along with a section of Rajputs and Bhumihars. This turned out to be essentially a conflicting peasant mobilization between two sections of peasantry led by Ranveer Sena and CPI(ML) Liberation that proved disastrous for both and benefited the Lalu regime who enjoyed long term in power without any development work.

There is another interesting fact. Both Ranveer Sena and CPI(ML) Liberation operated primarily in the paddy cultivated region where the average landholding per family was meagre. In the other regions of Bihar, where the concentration of landholdings was relatively large there was neither the existence of Sena nor of the Liberation.

The killing of Brahmeshwar Nath Singh will hamper the peasant mobilization in Bihar on the platform of Akhil Bhartiya Rashtrvadi Kisan Sangthan (a registered body at Delhi) which he was planning to initiate for the peasants' demands. It is a known fact that market economy has destroyed the peasant holdings and their rural settings over the decades in an irreversible way. His idea was to use this economy for the maximum benefit of the peasantry in Bihar. The emotional outbursts after his killing and the subsequent pouring of the masses onto the streets in his funeral reflect the popular support that he commanded across the castes and the regions in Bihar. □□□