

Source: William R. Pinch, ed., *Speaking of Peasants: Essays on Indian History and Politics in Honor of Walter Hauser* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2008), 421-452.

Success and Failure in Rural Development: Bihar, Bangladesh and Maharashtra in the Late 1980s

Harry Blair

This paper is offered to Walter Hauser as an effort to promote and provoke dialogue on what I consider to be his lifetime research project: what makes rural Bihar the fascinatingly and exasperatingly backward place that it has been and continues to be? The paper represents the last stage of a research project that has occupied me from the early 1970s to the late 1980s, tracing rural development first in Bangladesh, then Bihar, and finally Maharashtra.¹ The three regions offered a nice set of contrasts in rural development—the relatively successful track record in Maharashtra, particularly the sugar-growing area in the western part of the state, as against the abysmal failures experienced in Bihar and the mostly (though not completely) bleak course established by Bangladesh. My hope is that this comparative inquiry can provide some understanding of how rural development was progressing and stalling in these three parts of the subcontinent in the 1980s, and in the process contribute a bit to Walter Hauser's main research enterprise.²

Here I rough out a set of ideas as to why rural development had become more or less successful in western India by the 1980s, while it unquestionably continued to fail in most of the eastern part of the subcontinent. Specifically, I concentrate on western Maharashtra as a relative success story, though the concepts to be sketched out here in many ways apply to Maharashtra as a whole and within broad limits to Gujarat as

well. As cases of failure in rural development, I discuss Bihar and Bangladesh, though much of the reasoning would apply with equal force to eastern Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Between the two cases of failed development, Bihar clearly appeared the more intractable, though perhaps not absolutely and hopelessly so, while in Bangladesh silver linings on the dark clouds of reality seemed somewhat brighter.³

Before getting on with things, a few definitions and terms are in order. 'Rural development' is used here in a fairly wide sense; it encompasses economic growth and distributional equity (across lines of class, ethnicity and sex) in the countryside, as well as advances in such 'life quality' measures as literacy, infant mortality, and life expectancy. Political and institutional development are also a part of rural development, but more as means than as ends. In particular, popular participation in decision-making is treated here as instrumental to such ends as better public health or social welfare. As a shorthand, I shall refer to western Maharashtra as WM, and to Bihar/Bangladesh as BB.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN BIHAR AND BANGLADESH

The story of Bihar and Bangladesh is a depressingly familiar one to students of the Indian subcontinent,⁴ and can be summed up in Figure 1, which can be taken to represent that wide swathe of territory running from eastern Uttar Pradesh through Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, as well as including Bangladesh,⁵ whether one is viewing the scene as an academic researcher or a rural development practitioner. Its only redeeming virtue is an elegant simplicity which makes it dismayingly easy to lay out in a few words. There were three groups of significance here in this semi-feudal⁶ rural political economy, connected together by an age-old binding of patronage, support and exploitation. The first level comprised the state, lying uneasy at the apex of the structure, concerned principally to maintain itself in power.⁷ Its primary objective with respect to the countryside was to assure a relative peace and to prevent serious disorder from breaking out (previously, an additional objective was to extract rents, but this revenue function had attenuated virtually to the vanishing

point not long after Partition). The state attained this goal by forming and keeping a *de facto* alliance with village-level landowning elites, guaranteeing property rights (despite periodic rhetorical fusillades fired off promising land reform) and provided patronage in the form of rural development programme spending, in return for which rural elites kept local order and supported the regime.

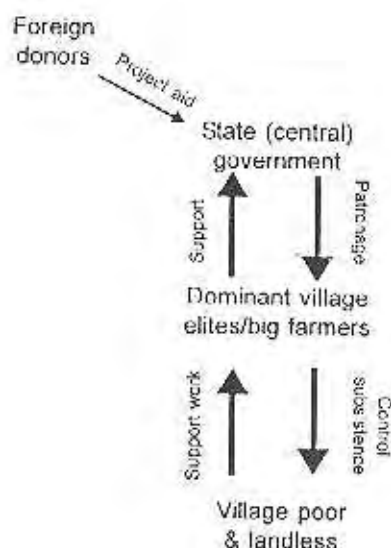


Figure 1: Political-Economic Development Linkages in Bihar & Bangladesh
Mid-1980s

Village elites in their turn exercised a control over the lower orders through the customary machineries of patron-client relationships, moneylending, sharecropping, wage labour, dominance over institutions of local self-government, and of course the traditional *goondas*, *lathials* (or in Bangladesh *mastaans*) kept on retainer to enforce elite authority. The objects of these attentions were of course the remainder of the village population, the small and marginal farmers, the artisan families and those who without either land or traditional craft skills, i.e.

the landless agricultural workers and their families, who formed the residual occupational category. In return for the subsistence that was provided to them and in consequence of the control that was exercised over them, these poor and landless worked for their patrons and provided support to them by accepting the *status quo* in the countryside. At times, things would wear too thin and protest would reach a magnitude that could not be easily subdued by village thugs; on these occasions, the state would send in sufficient armed constabulary to subdue whatever trouble had arisen. But such outbreaks were relatively rare and isolated, such that the usual systems of control generally sufficed to keep things in order.

Whatever resources came into this system, whether from foreign donors or the central government's development budget, fit easily into it and even reinforced it. Thus funds for agricultural credit or irrigation equipment or small-scale rural industries were diverted into the hands of local elites. But this pattern of rural development perversion should not, as Keith Griffin⁸ among others has pointed out, be viewed as 'failure', but rather should be seen as evidence of a successful attempt to maintain the *status quo* in the countryside. The overall rural economy, then, was an impressively homeostatic structure, into which an independence movement could come, political parties could flourish (even competitively for much of the time), a zamindari system could be abolished, sizeable infusions of development funding could be poured, hordes of development administration personnel could be deployed, and a 'Green Revolution' in agricultural technology could be introduced, all without producing much more than ephemeral change. Indeed, in the years after the Green Revolution began transforming the rural scene in the Punjab, Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh, the annual rate of growth in Bihar's agricultural production sank to the lowest among all the major Indian states save Kerala.⁹

That all these developments served primarily to reinforce an enduring reality can be explained in large part by the overall orientation of the landed class, which was essentially to preserve its position and to maintain control over the lower orders, rather than to maximize income or wealth. For their part, the rural poor found that their most pressing need in an environment

of steadily increasing pressure on the land and surplus labour eking out a living from that land was simple survival. If acceptance of elite dominance was the price to be paid for survival, then the bargain was not a bad one, and in any event, the alternative was most likely not to survive.¹⁰

The picture presented here is certainly a greatly simplified one. There were other classes or strata in the countryside beside elites and the poor. One significant group here was a 'middle farmer' segment of the peasantry attracted by the prospect of increasing income through raising productivity, thereby offering a way out of the semi-feudal economy. This was the heart of the middle-caste Lok Dal constituency that at the onset of the 1980s seemed on the verge of consolidating a breakthrough in Bihar, but which then succumbed to a restoration of high-caste, large farmer control (in Bangladesh there has not as yet appeared any political party to champion the interests of this stratum, though the 'progressive farmer' spirit certainly existed to some extent). And there was a pattern of increasing unrest at the bottom of the class/caste spectrum, particularly in Bihar, which saw a growing activism among landless Harijans, met often by brutal repression.

There was also, it should be conceded, some evidence of rural development efforts achieving a modest success. A new bridge across the Ganga at Patna at the end of the 1970s, for instance, connected a large swathe of previously isolated north Bihar with the larger economy and brought a more rapid economic growth to the area. In Bangladesh, fertilizer and tubewell use grew substantially over the late 1970s and 1980s. Rural electrification made some progress in both areas. But these qualifications are comparatively minor, indicative perhaps of social transformations slowly and even glacially emerging, but as of the end of the 1980s, they seemed small currents and isolated eddies set in a huge and essentially stagnant backwater. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN WESTERN MAHARASHTRA

On the other side of the ledger, there is the sugar economy of western Maharashtra in the later 1980s,¹¹ as shown in Figure 2.

The institutions and linkages portrayed in Figure 2 apply to Ahmednagar District in particular, which might be said to be the central or core region of the sugar belt, but *mutatis mutandis* the analysis here would apply to the remainder of western Maharashtra as well and, in a somewhat modified fashion, to the state as a whole.¹²

The first thing to note is that the structures of Figure 1 are also present in Figure 2. Village level elites (here labelled 'big and middle farmer', noted as A in the figure) and the rural poor and landless (B) are still there, as is the state government, though the latter is renamed 'representative political system (D)', for reasons which will become apparent as the discussion proceeds. But there are a good number of other institutions present as well.

What is important here is not only the institutions but also the linkages connecting them. Both aspects were far more highly developed in WM than in BB by the mid-1980s. In general terms, the institutions of WM were also present in BB, but in the former case, they had become functionally specific, in the Parsonian sense, such that they could and did perform the tasks they were nominally assigned, whereas in BB the rural political economy virtually ensured that whatever the formal purpose of an institution, its true function was simply to grease the machinery supporting the *status quo*. Thus development projects like the Mula irrigation scheme in WM (J in Figure 2) did in fact provide water to farmers in timely fashion, sugar cooperatives (E) had become immense, powerful engines of rural development, and the Employment Guarantee Scheme (K) established a welfare 'floor' which guarantees a wage to all in the rural areas of the state.

Several features of Figure 2 deserve mention, even in a treatment as brief as this one. The sugar co-operatives have been an outstanding success story in the annals of rural development. Begun in the early 1950s, by the mid-1980s they were processing the overwhelming majority of a steadily increasing sugar crop in the state, providing immense direct benefits to their members, and exercising a large (some would

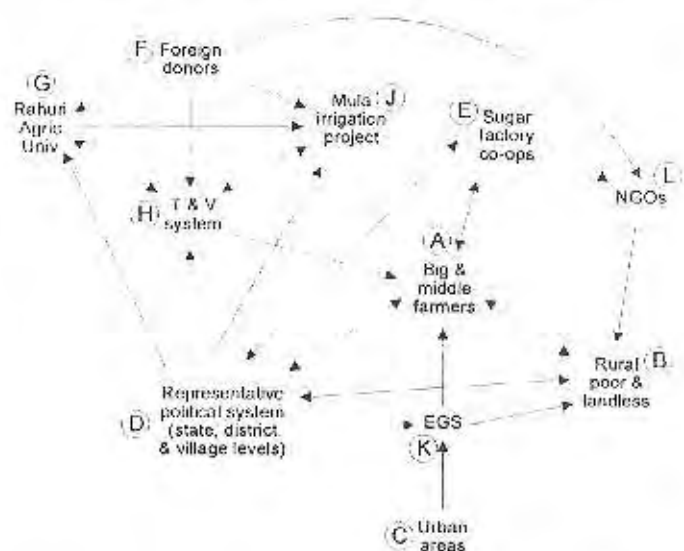


Figure 2: Political-Economic Development Linkages in Rural Western Maharashtra: Ahmednagar District, Mid-1980s

say inordinate) influence in the state as a whole. Various reasons can be cited for their success, perhaps chief among them the several peculiarities of sugar cane production which make it relatively easy for cooperatives to maintain a close linkage to their growers. To begin with, sugar is a crop that, unlike food grains, needs significant processing before it can be used by consumers. Some variations on that processing can be fairly rudimentary, such as *gur* (crude brown sugar) making, which consists essentially of squeezing the juice from the cane and boiling it down in large vats.¹³ But by the 1980s the major demand was for refined white sugar which sold at a considerably higher price. Refining had become a highly sophisticated technology, necessitating a very large outlay in terms of investment. The point is that before sugar can be sold retail, it must be processed by organizations standing between producer and consumer.

It was this need for processing that gave the cooperative its leverage, for growers found they had to sell (at least most of) their crop to the cooperative, and when they delivered it, the cooperative could deduct from the price the cost of whatever loans had been made. There was in other words a built-in mechanism for recovering loans, a feature which allowed the coop to remain solvent, thereby avoiding the problems of loan default that so devastated coops elsewhere. A second quality of sugar here is that it is highly perishable. After cutting, the cane begins immediately to lose its sucrose content; it 'spoils as rapidly as milk,' in the local aphorism. Accordingly, long storage to wait for a price rise or transport to distant processors who might offer a better price is just not feasible. And third, sugar is an extremely thirsty crop; its need for water is far in excess of any other crop grown in the region, which means in semi-arid WM that sugar is dependent on reliable irrigation.

But these were far from the only reasons for sugar's success. In addition to these factors of crop production and processing technology, there was a very strong connection to the *political sector* (D in Figure 2) in the form of massive subsidies bestowed on the sugar cooperatives. These subsidies came in several forms. First, the state government provided large-scale loans to sugar cooperatives to help them raise the sizeable start-up capital required. Second, the water supplied through the various irrigation schemes was priced to farmers at a fraction of its true cost.¹⁴ Third, electricity used to lift water for sugar was heavily underwritten by the Maharashtra State Electricity Board.¹⁵ And last, government provided cane price supports that mean the domestic price of sugar in India has been a multiple of several times the world price.¹⁶ Thus water was a massively subsidized input provided by the state at high cost, to be wastefully used in growing and processing a crop to be sold at a very handsome price and profit in lieu of what would have been a rather cheap imported commodity.

The mechanism involved in securing this bounty to the cooperative sugar sector was one that would be very familiar indeed to North Americans or Europeans. Simply put, the cooperatives used a portion of their profits to back candidates for political office, and then put pressure on those elected to

obtain and maintain massive subsidies to sugar. The story sounds strikingly like the saga of Florida and Louisiana cane sugar and western beet sugar growers in the United States, who have also been able through political pressure to push the domestic price of sugar in the United States up to three or four times world levels.

The *Employment Guarantee Scheme* (K in Figure 2, known throughout the state by its English acronym, EGS) has been another remarkable institution in Maharashtra.¹⁷ Begun in the early 1970s; by the mid-1980s it virtually assured a daily job in unskilled labour at minimum wages to anyone who asked for one, subject to the stipulations that there can be no unmet demand for agricultural labour in the area and that the wages paid by EGS should not be higher than those prevailing in the local agricultural sector. In the early 1980s, EGS provided annually about 150 million person-days of work, at a cost of about Rs 140 crore (US \$115 million) a year. There were a number of problems, to be sure. Much of the rural works constructed, for instance, turned out to be land improvements such as bunding and levelling on land belonging to richer rural households, rather than community assets. Second, in some areas (particularly the drought-prone districts of WM), officials were at the point of running out of projects that could be taken up through EGS. Just about all the work that could be done had been done, leaving less and less for future years. Third, the EGS itself could be seen in a cynical light as a device perpetrated by urban elites (C in Figure 2) for keeping rural hordes in the countryside (bribing them to stay out of Bombay). It was funded mainly through a combination of urban professional taxes, sales taxes and general state revenues, most of which came from Bombay. And last, there was considerable political pressure on elected officials to implement the programme to nurse their constituencies. But the long and short of it is that the EGS built a rural social safety net that at the time did not exist in like form anywhere else in the country.¹⁸

It is of course true that similar institutions existed in BB. There were cooperatives, representative political institutions, and rural works schemes in both regions. But in this environment, rather than to raise agricultural production, the entire cooperative

structure served mainly to channel state funds into the hands of rural elites by allowing and even encouraging them to take over cooperative units, steer loan monies to themselves, and then default on their overdues. Institutions of local and state government were dominated by these same elites, who were thereby able to abet in perverting the cooperative structure, while doing nothing for the rural poor and landless. Likewise, programmes specifically aimed at such groups were also swept into the politics of patronage and corruption, yielding little but further rewards for the rural rich.

Needless to say, I have exaggerated the picture somewhat here. It would be hard to find many successful coops in BB, but there was some evidence that the political system was having to pay some attention to the middle class/caste farmers in Bihar that formed the backbone of the Lok Dal, if only by buying their allegiance to the Congress Party.¹⁹ In Bangladesh, the Rural Works Programme that began under Ayub Khan in the early 1960s was a case study in all the abuses outlined above, but later efforts emerged that developed better management, such as the CARE Food for Work Scheme, which by the mid-1980s was generating some 20 million days of work annually in Bangladesh and had become a model of development administration.²⁰

But the overall tenor of the rural development experience in WM and BB could scarcely be more different. In WM there was some corruption and considerable public waste offset against a pattern of steady and significant rural development that has had a real effect in raising income and living standards across the entire spectrum.²¹ In BB on the other hand, there was some indication of development here and there, but the overall pattern was one of stagnation and decay. The question, then, is *why* should things be so different in the two regions? It is to this issue that the discussion turns in the next section.

EXPLANATIONS: WHY ARE THE TWO REGIONS SO DIFFERENT?

As might be expected with anything so complex as success and failure in rural development over the past four decades, possible explanations abound. For convenience, they are grouped here in

terms of history, demography, socio-economic and cultural dimensions, and political style, an ordering which in a very loose sense constitutes a spectrum between what is more causal and what is more consequential. Some of my thinking here is well supported in the literature, but a good part of it is inferential, based on my experiences in these places from the late 1960s up to the present. I hope that some of my conjecture here might contribute to future research agendas.

History

1. *Land tenure systems.* The basic outlines of the differences between the ryotwari and zamindari systems of land revenue and tenure are sufficiently well known (certainly so to students and colleagues of Walter Hauser) that I need not spend time on them here.²² Their consequences are also well appreciated by those who have worked in the vineyard of the subcontinent's rural economy. In many, many ways the former zamindari areas of India and Bangladesh still labour under the historical weight of a system that discouraged husbandry and land improvement among the peasantry while rewarding indolence and parasitism among the landlord class. On the other hand the relatively freehold tenure enjoyed by the peasantry of the Bombay Presidency in the British period gave it a head start as a class producing independently for a market. For the former, the feudal/semi-feudal concerns of status and control were paramount, while for the latter, landowners were more concerned with maximizing income.

2. *Urban-rural linkages.* The *mofussil* of the Bengal Presidency constituted a hinterland supporting with its rents a cosmopolitan elite in Calcutta, whereas the rural areas of Bombay Presidency, though in many ways a hinterland of Bombay city, did have a cultural self-sufficiency and self-identity with centres of culture and economic dynamism like Pune, Ahmedabad and Vadodara that were lacking in the Bengal hinterland (Dhaka, Patna, and Cuttack, were just not on a par with the western towns). When the various segments of territory from the Bombay Presidency, Central Provinces, Hyderabad, and a wide scattering of smaller princely states all joined together in the states reorganization of

the 1950s to make up the Maharashtra that emerged in 1960, Nagpur and Aurangabad replaced the Ahmedabad and Vadodara that went to Gujarat state. In sum, Maharashtra developed a relatively integrated regional culture and economy.

In BB, on the other hand, an urban regional infrastructure did not develop after the 1912 splitting off of Bihar and Orissa. The new province continued to be dominated by Calcutta down through the partition in 1947. Even at the end of the 1980s, as shown in Table 1, its population remained barely more than 10 per cent urban, among the very lowest in all India.³³ Bihar had nothing like a developed urban regional economy, as is clear in Table 2, where it will be observed that this area of more than 53 million could support just one city—Patna—with (barely) over one million in population. The second largest municipality was Gaya, which in 1991 had fewer than 300,000 souls, making a revealing comparison with Maharashtra, where Pune as the second city had about 2.5 million inhabitants in 1991. Perhaps most strikingly, to the north of the Ganga, the largest urban agglomeration that the Tirhut division with more than 20 million people could support was the headquarters at Muzaffarpur with just over 250,000 population.

TABLE 1

Urbanization in Bihar, Bangladesh and Maharashtra, 1981-2001

(Figures in per cent, boundaries as of 2001)

| | <i>Bihar</i> | <i>Bangladesh</i> | <i>Maharashtra</i> |
|------|--------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1981 | 9.8 | 15.1 | 35.0 |
| 1991 | 10.4 | 19.6 | 38.7 |
| 2001 | 10.5 | 23.1 | 42.4 |

For Bangladesh, the story in East Pakistan days was one of even less urbanization, as East Pakistan became cut-off from its Calcutta metropolis in 1947, leaving the new province of 40 million people with its capital Dhaka a mere 200,000 inhabitants. Even in 1961 Dhaka still had less than 600,000 people, though its growth as the capital of independent Bangladesh has been quite rapid indeed, so that by 1981 it boasted almost 3.5 million

TABLE 2
Five largest cities of Bihar, Bangladesh and
Maharashtra, 1981-2001
(Figures in millions of inhabitants, boundaries as of 2001)

| | <i>Largest city</i> | <i>2nd largest</i> | <i>3rd largest</i> | <i>4th largest</i> | <i>5th largest</i> |
|-------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Bihar 1981 | 0.92 | 0.26 | 0.22 | 0.19 | 0.18 |
| Bihar 1991 | 1.10 | 0.29 | 0.26 | 0.24 | 0.22 |
| Bihar 2001 | 1.71 | 0.39 | 0.35 | 0.31 | 0.27 |
| B'desh 1981 | 3.44 | 1.39 | 0.62 | 0.17 | 0.16 |
| B'desh 1991 | 6.95 | 2.35 | 1.00 | 0.54 | 0.21 |
| B'desh 2001 | 10.71 | 3.39 | 1.31 | 0.70 | 0.32 |
| Maha 1981 | 8.23 | 1.69 | 1.55 | 0.65 | 0.52 |
| Maha 1991 | 12.57 | 2.49 | 1.66 | 0.72 | 0.62 |
| Maha 2001 | 16.37 | 3.76 | 2.12 | 1.15 | 0.89 |

Notes: Boundaries. Bihar's territory shrank in the year 2000 when 18 of its 55 districts in the south were hived off to form Jharkhand State. Census figures shown above were readjusted to correspond to the reduced area remaining in Bihar after 2000.

Sources for data: *Census of India* (2001c and 2001d); BBS (2003).

people and ten years later it had virtually doubled in size. The drop-off in the rank-size listing in Table 2 remains remarkable, however. After the first two cities (Dhaka and Chittagong), number three (Khulna) had only a million, and the fourth highest was less than 200,000.

By contrast, Bombay had become a mega-city even in the British period, and continued as the leading financial and industrial centre of the country through the 1980s. By the 1980s, the state's second (Pune) and third (Nagpur) cities had also become financial and industrial centres with substantial populations.

In these respective processes of urban growth and non-growth, the linkages that tie city to countryside progressed quite differently. Calcutta had (and to some extent Patna still has, though by now in Dhaka the situation is rather different, I believe) an essentially exploitative relationship with its *mofussil*, extracting rural rents to maintain a sophisticated urban lifestyle.

Bombay, Nagpur, and Pune are scarcely innocent of exploiting their hinterlands, but in the bargain they provide an array of developmental assistance (state services, finance, trade, etc.) that has actually promoted economic growth in the countryside.

3. *Martial history.* WM was the base of Shivaji's operations in the eighteenth century, when the Maratha Confederacy began to push out the Mughal Empire and then gave a fair challenge to the East India Company for dominance of western India, before its final collapse in 1818. There is thus a legacy of martial self-assertion in WM that contrasts markedly with the experience of BB, which has been under the sway of 'foreign' (though some of them indigenized themselves quite well) rulers for the last thousand years or so. One obvious manifestation of this is the equestrian statues of Shivaji that one sees all over WM (almost always in a traffic circle fenced in by wickets shaped like military shields with crossed spears), proclaiming the martial legacy of the citizenry. Self-assertion *vs* subjugation by foreigners is the theme here.

Demography

The social makeup of WM has one clearly dominant caste, as indicated in Table 3. The Marathas constitute about 35 per cent of total population in Maharashtra (people commonly say 40 per cent, but as best as I can tell from the 1931 census²⁴ it seems to be about 35 per cent, assuming population growth *pari passu* among all the state's communities). The next largest group are the Mahars, a Scheduled Caste community with about 10 per cent of the population. They do have some political clout (the Nava Buddhist movement and the Dalit Panthers, for instance, are mainly Mahar in their leadership and composition), but they are not in any serious way rivals to the Marathas for dominance. The result is that Marathas determine the political leadership of the state. They do have factions among themselves, to be sure, but this has not been enough to allow other groups to move into control. Even when a non-Maratha has been in charge, e.g. V. P. Naik as Chief Minister in the 1960s, his sitting on the *gaddi* was possible only because a substantial segment of Maratha political chieftains agreed to it.

TABLE 3

Principal Ethnic/Religious Groups in Bihar, Maharashtra and Bangladesh
(groups with >2% of population in the 1980s)

| | <i>Bihar</i> | | <i>Maharashtra</i> | | <i>Bangladesh</i> |
|------------------|--------------|-----|--------------------|-----|-------------------|
| All Hindu Castes | 84 | | 88 | | 14 |
| 'Twice-borns' | Brahman | 5 | Brahman | 4 | |
| | Bhumihar | 3 | Maratha | 32 | |
| | Rajput | 4 | | | |
| 'Backwards' | Yadav | 11 | Mali | 3 | |
| | Kurmi | 4 | | | |
| | Koiri | 4 | | | |
| | Teli | 3 | | | |
| Harijans | All castes | 14 | All castes | 13 | |
| | Chamar | 4 | Mahar | 9 | |
| | Dusadh | 4 | | | |
| | Musahar | 2 | | | |
| All Muslims | | 14 | | 8 | 85 |
| All other groups | | 3 | | 4 | 1 |
| Grand total | | 100 | | 100 | 100 |

Notes: Boundaries for Bihar are those extant in the 1970s (i.e. including present-day Jharkhand State).

Adivasis can be any religion, and so are not included here.

Mahars in Maharashtra include both Hindus and Buddhists.

Sources: Mainly 1931 census for Hindu castes, with boundaries adjusted to conform with 1981 areas; 1971 census for Muslims (1974 for Bangladesh). See Blair (1980, 1981) for more details on the Bihar data.

In Bihar the largest Hindu community with about 11 per cent of total population (again making the same assumptions on growth of different groups at the same pace since the 1931 census) is the middle ('backward' in the Bihar lexicon) caste of Yadavas. Then there are three major upper caste ('forward') communities in contention (Brahmans at 5 per cent, Bhumihars at 3 per cent and Rajputs at 4 per cent), as well as two other prominent 'backward' caste groups (Kurmis and Koiris, both at 4 per

cent). The consequence in Bihar is that since the first Congress government in the late 1930s there has been intense caste rivalry over gaining control of the state's politics. It is not indulging in hyperbole to say that an incredible amount of time and energy was squandered ever since the 1930s on fights for caste dominance in state politics, leaving very little of either available for leading serious development efforts.

Bangladesh of course is 90 per cent Muslim and so caste conflict is really not an issue there. The implication is an interesting one. In so far as Bihar and Bangladesh are similar cases, and given that caste conflict is not present in the latter, then that same caste conflict cannot explain more than a part of the backwardness of the former. Obviously, the two are not the same, and so caste can carry some of the explanatory freight for one of them, but the similarities in most other respects of their histories, cultures, and economies are so striking that the explanations of their backwardness must be similar in many ways as well.

Social Relations in the 1980s

1. *Interpersonal relations* were generally less harsh in WM than in BB. In a palpable sense, people were nicer to each other. This manifested itself in all sorts of ways. For one thing, the *superior/subordinate relationship* in BB was characterized by arbitrary arrogance from above and a fawning sycophancy from below—the '*ji buzoor*' mentality pervaded all hierarchical organizations. While WM was scarcely egalitarian, the relations between higher and lower status levels seemed significantly less rigid and exploitative. Secondly, *social behaviour* was more public-regarding. People in BB hardly ever stood in queues in public places like bus stops and post offices, they had virtually no civic consciousness in throwing out refuse, they drove and parked vehicles with no regard to convenience of pedestrians.²⁵ In WM people were much more socially conscious on these counts.

2. The *status of women* was much higher in WM. Women were more conspicuous in public and less restricted in habits of dress and movement. The whole milieu of *purdah*, which was so pervasive in BB was hard to discern in WM. In Pune women

wearing dresses were so common in the 1980s as to be ordinary, while in Bihar and Bangladesh dresses were only for small girls. In WM women riding bicycles or motorscooters by themselves were piloting perhaps 15-20 per cent of the two-wheeled vehicles on the roads, whereas in BB they were almost never seen doing so. Women were also better represented in the professions in WM—as doctors, professors, lawyers, etc. ‘Eve teasing’ (the public abuse of adolescent females by males of the same age, including verbal harassment, pinching, punching, etc., but very rarely rape) had become a growing pandemic in north India. In WM, on the other hand, it seemed exceedingly rare. It was not part of the culture there.

Perhaps the most telling statistics are those for *female literacy*, as can be seen in Table 4. The effort to educate females began

TABLE 4
Literacy in Bihar, Bangladesh and Maharashtra, 1981-2001
(Figures in percentage, boundaries as of 2001)

| | <i>Bihar</i> | <i>Bangladesh</i> | <i>Maharashtra</i> |
|-----------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Male literacy | | | |
| 1981 | 47.1 | 33.8 | 70 |
| 1991 | 51.4 | 38.9 | 77 |
| 2001 | 60.3 | 49.6 | 86 |
| Female literacy | | | |
| 1981 | 16.6 | 17.5 | 44 |
| 1991 | 22.0 | 25.5 | 52 |
| 2001 | 33.6 | 40.8 | 68 |

Notes: Boundaries. Bihar's territory shrunk in the year 2000 when 18 of its 55 districts in the south were hived off to form Jharkhand State. Census figures shown above were readjusted to correspond to the reduced area remaining in Bihar after 2000.

Definitions. For 1991, the Indian Census changed the definition of literacy to apply to persons seven years of age and older (previously the cut-off had been five years). Figures shown above were readjusted for 1981 but not for earlier years. For Bangladesh only those seven and older were canvassed for literacy for all years shown above.

Sources for data: Census of India (2001a and 2001b); BBS (2003).

in modern times in Maharashtra with Mahatma Phule (see a below), but in terms of literacy things geared up only after the Partition. By 1981, literacy among females in Maharashtra was getting close to levels for Bihar males and well ahead of Bangladesh males. Ten years later female literacy in Maharashtra had pulled significantly ahead of the male figures in Bangladesh (which had even retrogressed somewhat in the 1970s) and was just about even with Bihar in this respect.

3. There is a *tradition of social reform* movements in WM, stretching back into the nineteenth century if not earlier. Mahatma Jyotirao Phule was the first of the great social reformers, responsible in large part for displacing the small Brahman community from their traditional dominance in the Bombay Presidency and for beginning efforts at uplift of women. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is undoubtedly the premier social reformer of the twentieth century and his statue is probably second or third in popularity in public places. But there are many less well-known leaders as well. One way to put this tradition in perspective is to note that it is considered a worthy and respectable avocation for successful men in their later years to involve themselves in social uplift activities (or perhaps more important, there seems some social pressure on them to appear to be doing so, even if in fact they are not).

By contrast, the leading social reformer in Bihar up through the 1970s was generally regarded to be Sachchidanand Sinha, whose great contribution was to lead the movement for a Bihar Province separate from the Bengal Presidency. This was 'social reform' in a sense, but it was also very much and mainly an effort to set-up a Bihar for his caste brethren, the Kayasthas, to administer and manage, independent of the *bhadrolok* Bengalis who had all the good jobs in running the Bengal Presidency. Similarly, the great hero of modern times in Bangladesh was A.K. Fazlul Huq, the *Sher-e-Bangla* ('Tiger of Bengal'), whose main contribution was perceived to have been establishing the political dominance of the Muslim majority in undivided Bengal during the brief popular governments of the late 1930s, thereby displacing Hindu control.²⁶

In more recent times, of course, there was Jayaprakash Narayan in Bihar, whose credentials as a genuine social reformer

were very high indeed, while on the other hand Y.B. Chavan might have taken Sachchidanand Sinha as his role model in making his early career as a politician by masterminding the bifurcation of Bombay state into present-day Maharashtra and Gujarat, thereby establishing a state where Marathas could manage things (acting in the name of Maharashtrians generally, of course). But these are exceptions, I would argue. The impulse to social reform has not been unknown in Bihar, but it has been certainly rare. Political opportunism is definitely found in Maharashtra, and it is scarcely rare, but it is not so overpoweringly the motif that one finds in BB.

Political Culture

1. There was a kind of *accommodational approach* in the politics of Maharashtra absent in the more vicious 'winner take all' politics of BB. In Maharashtra political winners were expected to reserve some share of rewards for losers, or at least to keep the losers working within the system. Winners in Congress Party factional struggles did not try to purge losers of all rewards of political life, for today's losers were expected to stay in the game, maybe even to win later on. In my time in 1985, the main political issue of the day centered on Sharad Pawar, a former chief minister who had left the Congress to form his own party, a splinter group which had lost badly in the parliamentary and assembly polls earlier. Instead of trying to eliminate him completely from political life (which is what the winners would have done in Bihar), the winners in Maharashtra were dickering with him on the terms of his readmission to the Congress Party (a move that eventually occurred in late 1987). This mellowness no doubt reflected the Congress' leadership's assessment of Pawar's own real strength, but what was most interesting was the mentality that says 'let's make a deal' rather than 'let's liquidate the other side while we can'. By contrast, politics in BB tended to follow what might be called a *spoils approach*, in which winners took all the benefits of office they could lay their hands on, completely excluding losers.

2. *Rural violence* offers much evidence, but it tends to be contradictory. To begin with, even though it is hard to measure

in any valid way (people killed is a concrete gauge, sure enough, but beatings, rapes, or intimidations are much more elusive), there can be no doubt that violence in Bihar increased greatly in the 1980s, with the advent of the various rural Marxist movements and *senas* (armies) organized by castes of all levels in rural Bihar.²⁷ In Bangladesh, to the contrary, rural violence, though far from absent, appeared much attenuated over what it had been in the early 1970s, when the well-armed remnants of various freedom fighter groups roamed the countryside. So while agrarian violence was obviously a critical matter in Bihar, it did not figure that much in Bangladesh.

On the other side of the ledger, *communal violence* was probably no higher in Bihar than in Maharashtra during the 1980s.²⁸ In Bangladesh, communal violence did not come so much in large scale outbursts of atrocity as in slow harassment of the Hindu minority, which steadily diminished during the decades after partition from 28.0 per cent of the population in 1941 to 10.5 per cent in 1991 as Hindus left (or fled) to India. Just during the 1980s, their numbers diminished from 12.1 per cent in 1981 to 10.5 per cent ten years later.²⁹

3. The *standards of judgement for officeholders*. The ways in which the culture evaluates political leadership was quite different in the two regions. In Maharashtra the principal criterion seemed to be *performance*, with integrity in a strong second place. It was expected that there will be some corruption, leakage, lobbying for special interests, or nursing of constituencies, but it was also expected that government deliver something concrete in promoting rural development (and development in general, for that matter). Programmes intended to raise agricultural production had to deliver inputs so that they would be used to improve irrigation, get fertilizer onto the fields, make credit available to those who would use it to increase crop production, and so on. In WM's archetypal example, the Employment Guarantee Scheme had to provide unemployment relief for the rural poor (though it would also be beneficial to local politicians in the process, there would be some bungling and embezzling, etc.).

In BB *patronage* seemed the main criterion for judging officeholders. It wasn't really expected that inputs would ever

be used as intended, that irrigation projects would actually deliver much water to farmers, that roads would be built to handle the traffic load for which they were designed. The first purpose of government development activity was to provide patronage and build allegiance for those who can deliver the patronage. A second and allied purpose was to maintain the rural gentry's *control* over the lower strata at village level by diverting the loot that comes down from higher level to reinforcing their own positions, as per the earlier discussion of Figure 1.

The 'upazila' development scheme undertaken under Ershad in the 1980s provides an excellent illustration of patronage masquerading as development. This massive decentralization initiative put elected officials in charge at the thana (renamed upazila) level in non-partisan elections, for the ostensible purpose of creating local decision-making unencumbered by party affiliation. But it soon became evident that the underlying purpose was to put in place a cohort of local office holders who could then be enticed into supporting Ershad's Jatiyo Party in exchange for gaining control over development funds coming into their areas.³⁰

It probably goes too far to say that the local power structure in BB was *hostile* to any significant economic growth on the grounds that such growth might encourage the lower orders to be more demanding, for there were some (albeit feeble) signs of the beginnings of an agricultural transformation to a market-oriented agriculture. But there was certainly a massive reluctance on the part of the gentry to see any benefits go to the rural poor. To sum up, one could ask: was an effective EGS even remotely conceivable in rural Bihar during the 1980s? To ask such a question, regrettably, was to know the answer.

A good illustration of the difference in standards of judgment of officeholders can be seen in the resignations of chief ministers A.R. Antulay and Shivajirao Patil-Nilangekar in Maharashtra. Both were forced out because of corruption scandals aired and publicized in the media—Antulay in a cement allocation scam (awarding allocations of this perennially scarce commodity in return for contributions to a political fund) and Patil-Nilangekar in medical examination fixing scheme (getting the marks adjusted

on the state gynecological exams so that his twice-failed daughter could pass).³¹ By contrast, at about the same time as Patil-Nilangekar was resigning in Maharashtra, a medical scandal was emerging in Bihar in which Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey was trying to 'regularize' the appointments of (i.e. give permanent civil service status to) the one-third of the state's health service cadre who had been given their jobs on various ad hoc schemes over the previous eight years. Needless to say, more than a few of these appointments had been made on the basis of qualifications other than medical, but there was no threat to the chief minister on this ground.

Indeed, in Bihar it was inconceivable that a chief minister would be sacked on grounds of corruption or incompetence. There were forced departures and even hints of scandal connected with them, but the ousters had always been mainly concerned with factional intrigues and power bases. The most notable example in the 1980s was chief minister Jagannath Mishra, who had been strongly implicated in massive corruption at the state fertilizer cooperative. He was dismissed by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, but no one interpreted the departure as seriously related to the fertilizer scandal. Rather, it was because of factional shifts against Mishra in the Bihar Congress and because the personal dynamic between Rajiv Gandhi and Mishra was highly negative (by contrast, Indira Gandhi, who had a well-known 'soft corner' for Mishra, had kept him in office no matter what the aroma of misdeeds surrounding him). Perhaps the best way to put it is to observe that a chief minister in Bihar would have been judged wanting if he were *not* fiddling with medical exams and cement allocations on behalf of relatives, caste-fellows and cronies.

4. *The styles of politics.* Politics in Maharashtra was characterized in the 1980s by what might be called a *transactional style*, in which people involved themselves in the political arena to exchange benefits. Trading and deal-making were the modes of participation. In BB, the dominant pattern was an *allegiant style*, whereby one played politics to build-up and nurture a support base. Goods and services did change hands, but they did so as a means of buying and selling support, whereas in Maharashtra the exchanges were made with a view to using the

goods and services to produce and build things. True, transactional politicians needed their support bases too, and the goods and services traded by allegiance-oriented politicians did sometimes serve to increase economic and/or social productivity. But in the main, there is a meaningful distinction here. The sugar nexus in WM is illustrative of the transactional style, for all the vote-trading, surreptitious candidate-funding and so on really did lead to more investment in rural infrastructure, while in BB, the horsetrading that goes on was designed to build or destroy patronage empires.

This makes Maharashtra sound more like an idealized Western political system than perhaps it should. It was not, after all, pluralist in quite the sense that the US claims to be (though it may have more resemblance to the US system as it in fact is—somewhat pluralist but not all that far away from the elite-domination end of the spectrum). Furthermore, the EGS did not prove to be a panacea for rural poverty. The point is that it may have put a floor under rural incomes, in total contrast to BB. There real income for agricultural labour appeared to fall for most of the 1970s and 1980s, as this pool of residual rural labour grew. The EGS may even have raised rural incomes slightly in Maharashtra. The social/economic/political infrastructure of Maharashtra thus, provided a kind of security for the rural poor that was simply nowhere in sight in BB, and it also provided an integrated dynamic of rural development absent in BB.

A Developmental Bottom Line

For some years now, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has compiled a 'Human Development Index' (HDI), that has become widely accepted in the world as a standard measure usable across countries to gauge attainment and (by comparing across years) progress in promoting human welfare. The HDI comprises a combination of gross domestic product per capita, literacy and schooling rates, and life expectancy. A number of countries including India have carried the idea down below the national level, and so it is possible (with some manipulation¹²) to compare Indian states with

Bangladesh, as is done in Table 5. Here Bihar and Bangladesh show up roughly even in 1980 and almost exactly even for 1990. The gap between them and Maharashtra widened from 160–180 points in 1980 to almost 200 points in 1990. In this latter year, Maharashtra at .610 compared in HDI with countries like Bolivia (.603) and Indonesia (.623), while BB at .416 and .417 were on a level with Tanzania (.413) and Zaire (later Congo, at .414). Little prospect for catching up seemed to be in the cards for either Bangladesh or Bihar at that point.

TABLE 5

Human Development Index for Maharashtra, Bihar and Bangladesh, 1980–1990

| | <i>Maharashtra</i> | <i>Bihar</i> | <i>All-India</i> | <i>Bangladesh</i> |
|-----------|--------------------|--------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1980-UNDP | 525 | 342 | 437 | 363 |
| 1981-GOI | 363 | 237 | 302 | |
| 1990-UNDP | 610 | 416 | 514 | 417 |
| 1991-GOI | 452 | 308 | 381 | |

Notes: Italicized figures imputed from UNDP calculations (note that GOI uses a much more rigorous standard in calculating the HDI than does the UNDP; the italicized figures have been adjusted to the UNDP standard to facilitate comparison with Bangladesh).

Sources: UNDP (2005) for India and Bangladesh 1980 and 1990 data; GOI (2002) for 1981 and 1991 figures for Bihar, Maharashtra and All-India.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

In Maharashtra, or certainly WM, the themes of rural development in the 1980s appeared to be capitalist agriculture, co-operative-based politics, interlinked institutional infrastructure to support development and (to a more modest extent) social responsibility. In BB, the predominant themes were a semi-feudal agriculture, a predatory politics reinforced by a functionally diffuse institutional infrastructure, and a lack of social responsibility. The key difference in terms of rural development strategy would seem to be the emergence of an infrastructure of (more or less) functionally discrete institutions in WM that did

not get sucked into or perverted by the maelstrom of patronage politics but instead could actually deliver goods and services to promote rural development. What then were the prospects for rural development policy changes at the end of the 1980s that might improve things in BB?

In Bihar there had been some indications of an agricultural transformation and the mobilization of a constituency to support it (with Karpoori Thakur and the Lok Dal being the premier case in point), but the process was at best slow and seemed to have stalled indefinitely after the brief Lok Dal surge to power in the late 1970s.³³ Would it have been possible to regain the momentum, whether with the Lok Dal or with a reoriented Congress Party that sought to mobilize 'progressive farmer' strata? A case might be made in counterfactual history, but in reality the beginning of the 1990s saw the rise to power of Laloo Prasad Yadav as chief minister of Bihar and the onset of his long dominance of the state's politics, which continued into the new millennium. Under him, backward caste men gained the spoils of office but so far as rural development was concerned, little changed. Corruption continued as the principal theme of government programmes (reaching a high point in 1997 when he was forced to resign office in the wake of a fodder scandal³⁴), rural violence continued to roil the countryside, and agricultural production continued to stagnate. Any semblance of a state accountable to its citizens for fostering rural development remained far from view. Elections continued to be held, but Laloo's tactical success, at least until the last state elections in 2005, in rendering them into what amounted to caste referenda on the Backwards' right to dominate the polity, made them useless as occasions for parties to put programmatic policy platforms before the voters.

In Bangladesh on the other hand there was considerably more room for policy manoeuvre. Unlike Bihar, where rural elites with large landholdings linked directly into the upper echelons of state power, in Bangladesh the dominant elements in the countryside have been smaller in scale—in Bihar they would be middle peasants, a situation partly due to land pressure fragmenting holdings and partly to the departure of so many Hindu zamindars after the partition of 1947, thereby leaving

the field to the smaller fry. Thus while the state has needed local élites to help maintain order, it never became beholden to them in quite the same way as in Bihar, for they themselves did not loom so large as a class on the wider scene of state politics.

One of the consequences of this relative separation is that the state has had somewhat more autonomy to pursue reformist rural development policies. Nothing on the order of land reform has been on the cards, to be sure, but the state has had more latitude to support policy reforms in the agricultural sector. Probably of equal importance, it has also had a good deal of direct pressure from its donors to pursue such changes (and when those same donors were pumping in US \$1-2 billion annually, as they were throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the pressures were hard to ignore). Thus it was that over the later 1980s and 1990s, the state privatized the fertilizer trade, and then tubewells and pumps, allowed private international trade in grain (basically with West Bengal), and invested heavily in such infrastructural needs as electricity and roads. In effect, the state traded in the *dirigiste* policies it had been following since gaining independence in 1971 for a variant of the 'Washington consensus' on agricultural policy. The early steps came under the dictatorship of H. M. Ershad, but the trajectory carried over into the democratic era that began with his overthrow at the beginning of the 1990s. The result has been an annual growth rate in foodgrain production of 3.3 per cent during the 1990s, a trend that has led to falling rice prices and higher consumption, increasing agricultural wages, and even switching from *bargadar* (sharecropper) status to rent tenancy as cultivators have been able to gain better terms from landowners—together an amazing set of developments.³⁵

Will these changes enable Bangladesh to restore the *Sonar Bangla* ('Golden Bengal') of mythical antiquity? Probably not, but the changes do seem to have provided a significant improvement over the 1970s and 1980s. At the same time, the Bangladesh trajectory represents quite a different path from that taken in western Maharashtra, with its combination of government-subsidized production, wasteful allocation of resources (to sugar), and political culture demanding that those in office have to deliver a modicum of developmental goods.

To close, it could be said that western Maharashtra has followed a state-subsidized path to rural development, and Bangladesh has pursued a donor-induced market path; both have led to increased rural welfare in terms of steady or rising wages and higher food consumption, albeit at the expense of the environment in Maharashtra and precariously balanced on continued good monsoons in Bangladesh.³⁶ In contrast, Bihar has taken a counterproductive path of casteism, corruption and violence that scholars like Walter Hauser have charted all too well.

NOTES

1. I thank the American Institute of Indian Studies, the Fulbright research programme, the Social Science Research Council, the Rural Development Committee at Cornell University, Bucknell University, and the A.N. Sinha Institute for Social Studies in Patna for their support at various stages along the way.
2. After writing the first version of the paper in 1988, my own research trajectory changed markedly, first narrowing to a largely exclusive focus on Bangladesh, and then broadening away from the subcontinent to the global democratization support initiative then being undertaken by the international donor community, an enterprise that still engages the largest part of my research attention. The experience has been an exciting one, but a part of the opportunity cost has been an almost total neglect of the subcontinental research that attracted me for so long. The Hauserfest offers an excellent opportunity to return to those earlier ruminations, to see if they still make sense.
3. As things turned out, Bangladesh did experience significant agricultural growth in the 1990s and on into the new century, while Bihar has continued to stagnate. See Raisuddin Ahmed, Steven Haggeblade and Tawfiq-e-elahi Choudhry, *Out of the Shadow of Famine: Evolving Food Markets and Food Policy in Bangladesh*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, also Harry Blair, 'Civil Society and Pro-poor Initiatives at the Local Level in Bangladesh: Finding a Workable Strategy', *World Development*, vol. 33, no. 6, June 2005, pp. 921-36.
4. The literature on both Bihar and Bangladesh is immense. For Bihar see, e.g., Arun Sinha, *Against the Few: Struggles of India's Rural Poor*, London: Zed Press, 1991, Arvind N. Das, *State of Bihar: An*

Economic History Without Footnotes, Amsterdam: Vu University Press, 1992; Pradhan H. Prasad, *Lopsided Growth: Political Economy of Indian Development*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1989; Pradhan H. Prasad, *India: Dilemma of Development*, edited by Meeta Krishna, New Delhi: Mittal Publ., 2000; also Harry Blair, 'Rising Kulaks and Backward Classes in Bihar: Social Change in the Late 1970s', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 15, no. 12, January 1980, pp. 64-74. For Bangladesh, Betsy Hartmann and James Boyce, *A Quiet Violence: View from a Bangladesh Village*, London: Zed Press, 1983 remains an outstanding account; see also Harry Blair, 'Rural Development, Class Structure and Bureaucracy in Bangladesh', *World Development*, vol. 6, January 1978, pp. 65-82; and Harry Blair, *The Political Economy of Participation in Local Development Programs: Shortterm Impasse and Longterm Change in South Asia and the United States from the 1950s to the 1980s*, Ithaca: Rural Development Committee, Center for International Studies, Cornell University, 1982.

5. West Bengal belongs geographically in this same area, and before the Partition in 1947 belonged in many ways socio-economically as well. But by the 1980s it had diverged markedly onto a different path, charted largely by the Marxist government then in power. So I omit it from the present analysis.
6. I take refuge in this term, which is I believe reasonably accurate, but at the same time sufficiently vague that it is possible to avoid the 'mode of production' debate that bedevilled much analysis of the subcontinent in the 1970s and 1980s.
7. For Bihar the government is a state which is part of a larger central government, whereas in Bangladesh the state is of course a national government in its own right. In terms of the rural political economy, however, the state has virtually the same relationship to the countryside for both cases. The maintenance of state power in the late 1980s means continuation of a Congress ministry in Patna and of the Ershad regime in Dhaka.
8. Keith Griffin, *The Political Economy of Agrarian Change: An Essay on the Green Revolution*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974.
9. From 1969-70 through 1983-4, reports Prasad (*India: Dilemma of Development*, p. 135), Bihar's growth rate in agricultural production was 0.49 per cent. Maharashtra, by contrast, clocked in at 5.50 per cent over the same period.

10. Geof Wood, a longtime observer of both Bihar and Bangladesh, has elaborated on this 'Faustian bargain' in 'Staying Secure, Staying Poor: The Faustian Bargain', *World Development*, vol. 31, March 2003, pp. 455-71.
11. Literature on the political economy of sugar in western Maharashtra is not as rich as for rural Bihar and Bangladesh, but fortunately it has had two exemplary analysts explaining it. See B.S. Baviskar, *The Politics of Development: Sugar Co-operatives in Rural Maharashtra*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980; Donald W. Attwood, 'Social and Political Pre-conditions for Successful Co-operatives: The Co-operative Sugar Factories of Western India', in D. W. Attwood and B. S. Baviskar, eds., *Who Shares? Co-operatives and Rural Development*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 69-90; Donald W. Attwood, *Raising Cane: The Political Economy of Sugar in Western India*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1992. For a simpler account, see Harry Blair and Charles Mann, 'Assisting Indian Agriculture, 1940s to 1980s', unpublished essay, 1986.
12. It is more difficult to deal with regions in Maharashtra than for Bihar and Bangladesh, in large part because while the latter have been more or less identifiable since the division of the Bengal Presidency in 1912 (and in many ways date back long before that), Maharashtra is a much more recent creation, having been formed in its present shape only in 1960. The focus of this essay is on the western Deccan lava of Maharashtra that is the major sugar producing area of the state; this consists of the Pune division's six districts plus three from Bombay division (Nashik, Dhule and Jalgaon), or altogether nine of the state's 27 districts (as of the 1980s), which are collectively often called Western Maharashtra. All of the nine save Kolhapur and a portion of Sangli districts (which were former princely states) were part of the Bombay Presidency during the British period, thus giving them a common history not shared by the Marathwada and Vidarbha regions to their east. For Bihar I should note that the present analysis applies basically to the Gangetic plain region of the state, not to the largely tribal area of Chota Nagpur, which was split off in 2000 along with the old Santal Parganas district to form the new state of Jharkhand.
13. Even *gur*-making is too complex to be done at home. The process requires a huge investment and perhaps a dozen or more employees working at any one time.

14. Some perspective here might be gained from reflecting on the awesomely high subsidies given to water supplied in the western United States by the US Bureau of Reclamation.
15. Much of the irrigation in WM is through gravity flow channels that do not require pumps, but a good part comes from wells, which are charged primarily through underground percolation from unlined channels of the surface water irrigation system, which leak a good deal of their water into the adjacent soil. For the many farmers benefiting from this indirect water supply, electricity for pumps is a major consideration.
16. In the summer of 1987, for example, the world price of sugar was about US 6¢/lb., while inside India it was the equivalent of around US 25¢. At times the world price may have been in excess of the internal Indian price, but for most of the late twentieth century, the international price has tended to stay quite low.
17. The EGS has been the subject of considerable analysis: John Echeverri-Gent, 'Guaranteed Employment in an Indian State: the Maharashtra Experience', *Asian Survey*, vol. 28, no. 12, December 1988, pp. 1294-1310; and Ronald Herring and Rex M. Edwards, 'Guaranteed Employment to the Rural Poor: Social Functions and Class Interests in the Employment Guarantee Scheme in Western India', *World Development*, vol. 11, no. 7, July 1983, pp. 575-92.
18. There are other programmes patterned on EGS that were initiated in the 1980s by the centre, in particular the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Scheme and the National Rural Employment Programme, but neither proved to be more than a pale imitation of the original.
19. See Harry Blair, 'Electoral Support and Party Institutionalization in Bihar: Congress and the Opposition, 1977-1985', in Richard Sisson and Ramashray Roy, eds., *Diversity and Dominance in Indian Politics: Changing Bases of Congress Support*, vol. I, New Delhi: Sage, 1990, pp. 123-67, for some speculation on this.
20. Altogether the various food for work programs in Bangladesh were estimated to generate upwards of 70 million work days annually around this time.
21. That effect has been uneven, with those better off getting a larger share—but then what place outside of China in the Cultural Revolution has nor? The point is that those in the lower income deciles have been getting something tangible from the rural development process, whereas in BB this was evidently not the case.
22. There are many excellent analyses of land tenure and its legacies.

- For a good overview, see Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne H. Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. The classic study remains Baden-Powell's 3-volume opus published in 1892 (B.H. Baden-Powell, *The Land systems of British India: Being a Manual of the Land tenures and of the Systems of Land-revenue Administration Prevalent in the Several Provinces*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892).
23. This figure applies to the area occupied by the truncated state of Bihar as of 2001, as do all the census data in this essay. But even including the entire state as it existed in 1991, urbanization had reached just over 13.2 per cent, still among the lowest in the country.
 24. The 1931 census was the last to provide anything close to a full-scale enumeration of the major Hindu castes. For an assessment of the validity of those old data for present-day uses, see Harry Blair, 'Caste and the British Census in Bihar: Using Old Data to Study Contemporary Political Behavior', in N. Gerald Barrier, ed., *The Census in British India: New Perspectives*, Delhi: Manohar, 1981, pp. 149-75. Updating Bihar's caste distribution is fairly straightforward, but reconstructing the present area of Maharashtra from compilations of the British period is a tedious task, for it involves adding in and subtracting out a number of districts from different British provinces as well as a large group of princely states. Bihar and Bangladesh are a great deal easier to deal with in this respect.
 25. To some extent these observations may be more revealing of north-south (or Aryan-Dravidian) differences in India than east-west divisions.
 26. Ironically, Haq himself devoted much of his energy to keeping Hindus and Muslims united, but that is not what he is remembered for.
 27. See Walter Hauser, 'From Peasant Soldiering to Peasant Activism: Reflections on the Transition of a Martial Tradition in the Flaming Fields of Bihar', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 47, September 2004, pp. 401-434, for an account of the violence and its origins. Also Prasad, *Lopsided Growth*, Ch. 9.
 28. And Bihar largely escaped the communal violence of the 1990s—one of the few real achievements of Laloo Prasad Yadav's time as chief minister.
 29. BBS (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics), *Population Census 2001, National Report (Provisional)*, Dhaka: BBS, Planning Division, Ministry of Planning, 2003, p. 66.

30. See Harry Blair, 'Politics, Civil Society and Governance in Bangladesh', in Rounaq Jahau, ed., *Bangladesh: Promise and Performance*, London: Zed Press, 2000, pp. 181-217, for more on the patronage aspects of the upazila scheme. The initiative did have the potential to become a viable decentralized development mechanism, at least in my view, rather like the zila parishads in Maharashtra, but never grew out of the patronage phase.
31. Rumors at the time focused on the irony that S.B. Chavan, Patil-Nalingekar's Predecessor as chief minister, had engaged in a similar impropriety but had not been caught by the media.
32. The Indian Planning Commission evidently used a considerably more rigorous standard than UNDP, so its all-India calculation for 1981 put HDI at .302 (on a scale running from zero to 1.000) for 1980, whereas the UNDP set India's HDI at .437, compared with .363 for Bangladesh. Table 5 imputes HDI figures for Bihar and Maharashtra for 1980, so that they can be compared with Bangladesh. It should be noted that the data in Table 5 include both urban and rural areas, meaning that Bombay (and to a much lesser extent Pune) pulls up the overall state figures for Maharashtra. Even so, the differences are significant.
33. See Blair, 'Rising Kulaks and Backward Classes in Bihar'.
34. Laloo Prasad Yadav responded to this setback by moving his wife into the chief ministership. See John E. Burns, 'Official in India Sets up a Dynasty of His Own', *New York Times*, 28 July 1997.
35. Raisuddin Ahmed, 'Rice Economy of Bangladesh: Progress and Prospects', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4 September 2004, pp. 4043-52 gives an account of these policy changes and their effects. See Ahmed et al., *Out of the Shadow of Famine*, for a fuller analysis. For some speculation on potential downstream impact in terms of a widened scope for grassroots civil society advocacy, see Blair, 'Civil Society and Pro-poor Initiatives at the Local Level in Bangladesh'.
36. I do not wish to end this essay with the impression that all is well in Bangladesh. As agricultural production has steadily increased, the political situation has deteriorated rapidly in recent years in an atmosphere of corruption, widespread political gangsterism and self-destructive behavior of the political leadership. For a cogent analysis of the scene as of mid-decade, see inter alia Rehman Sobhan, 'Structural Dimensions of Malgovernance in Bangladesh', *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 2004, vol. 39, no. 36, pp. 4101-8.