

BEYOND THE NARROW VISION

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Bihar is a crumble of ceaseless social and political churning and change. It is one of the most innovative and indelible signatures of radical popular mobilization in today's India.

It is easy to cite any number of economic parameters to show the degree of Bihar's backwardness. It is also customary to recall the rich cultural heritage of Bihar dating back to the days of Buddha and Mahavir, Pataliputra and Nalanda. The contrast between the bright cultural past and the sordid economic present often leads to a self-renewing pattern of intellectual self-pity and every such school has its own list of culprits and scapegoats. Some people blame Bihar's social and political landscape, some others blame the bifurcation of the state and the consequent loss of minerals and industries.

Is it possible to imagine Bihar as a state that is able to drastically reduce the level of outward migration by providing employment and livelihood to those who are forced to seek work in faraway states like Punjab and Haryana, Maharashtra and Gujarat, or Assam and Meghalaya? Is it possible to imagine the average Bihari workers - rural as well as urban - possess a level of purchasing power that can create a vast market for ordinary articles of mass consumption? Is it possible to imagine a pattern of industrialization that caters primarily to this pent-up demand of a hitherto undiscovered market? The answer is it is perfectly possible and urgently necessary to unleash such an imagination.

Bihar is perhaps the least urbanized among all the states of India. Yet how often does one hear all this tall talk of making Patna a world-class city sparkling with all the gloss and glamour of globalization! For many development enthusiasts, a 'beautified' 'globalized' Patna is the be-all and end-all of development - basic civic amenities of urban life do not count for much in this vision, what to speak of radical rural reforms and developed rural infrastructure!

The incidence of absentee landlordism is still quite high in Bihar. Can't one visualize a restructuring of land relations in Bihar whereby all kinds of landlordism will be completely eliminated and land will be owned only by those who till it? If that seems still a distant dream, is it not possible to make sure that tenants and sharecroppers have inheritable right of cultivation and get all necessary assistance from the state for improved farming? Is it not possible to guarantee a sincere implementation of laws like Minimum Wages Act and NREGA and ensure that violators of such laws are subjected to due punishment?

Bihar is known as a state that exports manual and also skilled workers to all parts of the country and also abroad. The contribution of Bihari workers ranks high in Punjab's now faded story of green revolution or in the ongoing saga of economic boom in states like Maharashtra and Gujarat. Bihari workers also form an important segment of Indian workers abroad who have made India the number one country in the world in terms of remittance received. Last year India received more than \$25 billion from Indian workers working abroad - an amount

nearly triple the size of foreign direct investment flowing into the country - and the Bihari workers who are slogging it out against all odds in the Gulf region account for a significant portion of this remittance. Yet inside Bihar, labour comes last in terms of social respect while wealth, property and so-called social status and politico-administrative power continue to dictate terms in every sphere of social life.

Bihar was a key battleground of 1857 and again, Bihar was the base that provided the initial mass peasant dimension to Gandhi. Bihar produced Sahajanand and his radical anti-feudal peasant mobilization, and Bihar made 1942 a real story of people's upheaval. It was Bihar again that supplied the decisive strength to the 1974 movement.

Most importantly, Bihar is the land of Bhojpur, the living and glowing symbol of a gigantic awakening of the oppressed that inspired poet Nagarjun to hail the reincarnations of Bhagat Singh in the oppressed and the youth of Bihar. Defying the phenomena of private armies and massacres of rural poor perpetrated under public-private partnership, the spirit of Bhojpur has kept spreading to ever newer corners of Bihar and India. It is this death-defying spirit and growing revolutionary mobilization and consciousness of the rural poor that is the ultimate guarantee of a *Naya Bihar*.

This exciting journey of Bihar has never lost its way forward. It has never lacked in the stamina or zeal to withstand and overcome any difficulty. The Bindeshwari Dubeys and Jagannath Mishras have come and gone, the Lalu Prasads and Nitish Kumars have stepped in only to fade out, but the battle of Bihar will go on till the people reach *Naya Bihar- Naya Bharat*. □□□