



# THE UPSURGING BIHAR»

Bihar is undergoing a transformation in economic, social and consumption spheres. The Bihar model encompasses social change through reduction in inequality along with reduction in economic inequality. It focuses on bringing out this transformation through initiatives taken by state government, writes **V Mukunda Das**

**T**he changing state of Bihar highlights a new correlation between development variables, social change and change in lifestyle mostly because of changing in consumption. The reduction in social inequality is paving the way for increased self esteem which has contributed to introspection on existing lifestyles, by rural people. A manifested outcome

of this is the change in consumption basket of people in rural areas. While in terms of social inequality index, Bihar was very high, before 8-10 years, which is now reducing because of multi-prong developmental initiatives taken during the last 7-8 years.

## REDUCING INEQUALITY

The development transformation going on



in Bihar as many dimension. As stated earlier, the transformation has a social change dimension. The social change in Bihar is unique and scholars from all over the world are appreciating it. Social Change Management in Bihar, in all its dimensions, is not fully understood by scholars and researchers. Social inequality reduction is very noticeable in the development acceleration happening in Bihar. Scholars in western countries are more interested in studying the different dimensions of the social change process happening in Bihar. Even in the millennium development goals, social inequality reduction is to be focused more than it is now. A systematic study of social change in Bihar would highlight the qualitative change in social identity in Bihar, especially in rural areas. Comparisons based

consumption pattern is moving away from traditional consumption basket to a basket with items more similar to urban consumption. Rural Market of Bihar is one of the fastest growing, for consumer non durables. All national level FMCG companies are getting into rural Bihar and reaping the benefit. The rate of flow of urban consumer products to rural Bihar is one of the highest compared to other states in India. Further, every rupee invested in infrastructure development and employment creation in rural areas is increasing the demand and market for urban based consumer products. It is because of the cash income, at an increasing rate, coming to hands of rural people.

The future research agenda between CIMP and some European universities will look at rural



on pure numbers or economic parameters do not reflect the positive change in social identity of rural people. The Bihar model subsumes this positive change.

Social change happening in Bihar will be a reference point for other developing countries and other states in India. Bihar could achieve the twin goals of economic development and positive social identity creation. This is the most important sign of socio-economic transformation. International researchers are interested in mapping the unique socio-economic transformation in a state like Bihar. CIMP is collaborating with Stockholm University to study drastic changes in rural consumption in Bihar.

Some studies have shown that rural consumption among socially and economically lower segments of Bihar society, is showing considerable upward trends. And Bihar has one of the highest percentage of population in rural areas, in India. Their

consumers and their speed of adoption of new urban products for their consumption. Some segments of the rural consumers are fast in adoption, whereas some are not, in accepting and using urban products. Examples are more for women based products (especially hygiene products) in rural areas as a result of which their life styles are changing. The reduction in social inequality has accelerated the propensity to adopt such lifestyles, more so by women in rural areas. Some of this consumption are positively impacting on the health and hygiene levels of women in economically and socially lower sections. The research will also look at the factors that speed up the adoption of "services" in rural areas. Preliminary studies by CIMP have shown that the social and cultural values of different social segments in rural Bihar act as catalyst in the acceptance of new ideas, be it products or services. The quality perceptions are different in urban and rural areas for many products of daily consumption.





The Bihar model of women empowerment through Self Help Groups (SHGs) especially by JEEViKA livelihood programme is substantially contributing to this.



The picture emerging in Bihar will be very useful to marketing companies planning to market their products in rural areas.

#### PARADIGM SHIFT

The paradigm shift in the pattern of rural consumption is because of several reasons. One is the inflow of cash income received by the rural people which improve the demand side for buying urban consumer products. Alongside with this is the increase in the level of awareness of urban consumer products and other products among the new and first generation consumers of such products. This is made possible by the intensive efforts of urban consumer marketers reaching out to rural areas through push and pull strategies, as a result of increasing competition in the urban market place. The improvement in access to rural areas made possible by improved infrastructure facilities, such as roads and other communication facilities also contributed to this paradigm shift. The increased availability of electricity at the household level and the exposure of rural people to television and other visual media also accelerate the change in lifestyle of rural consumers, affecting the totality of consumption

in rural areas. Thus, the contents of the consumption basket of rural people are undergoing changes.

#### INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

The Bihar model of women empowerment through Self Help Groups (SHGs) especially by JEEVIKA livelihood programme is substantially contributing to this. Another example is the bicycle distribution for girls going to school. In some sense, this improved role identity of women in social and economic life in rural Bihar is emanating from the intervention strategies outlined in the unique Bihar Model.

The Bihar Model is focusing on improving the quality of life, especially in rural areas, for which international collaboration in research is initiated, of late. The research will also focus on identifying technological innovations which can help poorer segments of society for improving their quality of life.

Such research will focus on new technology which can reduce, for example, drudgery of women in poor rural households and improve their hygiene and health. The Bihar Model is giving ample opportunities to initiate new research on identifying strategies of social development along with economic growth.

*(The writer is an acclaimed expert on rural issues and is currently Director of Chandragupta Institute of Management, Patna)*