

*International Seminar on*

**WOMEN, EMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY IN BIHAR**

**7-8 November 2009, Patna**

*Organized by*

**Department of Industrial Relations and Personal Management,  
Patna University and IHD Eastern Regional Centre, Ranchi**

**I. BACKGROUND**

Bihar is one of the poorest states in India with nearly 40 per cent people being officially poor. Apart from high incidence of poverty, social and human development indicators reveal persistent gender, caste and class disparity. Women fare worse than men with respect to most of the indicators. The gender disparity is too glaring for any further neglect in development strategy; it cries for urgent attention from policy-makers and activists so that the society can move to a more democratic and equitable development. In 2001, there were 921 women for 1000 men in Bihar (933 for All-India) and the literacy rate was 60 per cent for men and 34 per cent for women (the All-India figures were 76 per cent and 54 per cent respectively). Educational improvements in the overall sense have been modest, yet these are expectedly socially skewed with the backward sections being most deprived. This reality affects the nature of women's labour market participation quite adversely.

The vulnerability of women is also reflected by their lower participation rate in the labour market. The labour force participation rate of women in Bihar was only 13.8% in rural areas and 6.5% in urban areas in 2004-05; the corresponding percentages for India as a whole were 32.7% and 16.6% respectively. An overwhelmingly large percentage of women workers are either illiterate or below primary educated and around 86% are employed in agriculture. No wonder as high as 98.5% of women workers of Bihar work in the low-paid unorganized sector. It is revealing to note that the percentage of women having technical degree/diploma in workforce is only 0.2% in Bihar, whereas it is as high as 9.2% in Kerala; the All India percentage being 1.5%.

The urbanisation rate being very low (around 10%), poverty in Bihar is predominantly rural. A large proportion of the population is landless and near landless, and therefore the majority of the rural poor tend to depend on agricultural wages or casual non-farm jobs for income. Over the years seasonal migration of mainly male workers in search of alternative income opportunities has substantially increased. How have the temporary absence of men and the supplementary incomes generated impacted village life and individual households? Has this led to a change in the status of women both in the public and private spheres?

There have been some positive developments with regard to the empowerment of women in the state. A very important development is the provision of 50 per cent reservation for women in all three tiers of the local bodies. This is a recent introduction and its impact on the lives of women has not been systematically examined so far. Certain questions need to be empirically answered: Has it had any impact on the gender relations or has there been a transformation in the economic participation of women subsequent to the introduction of this provision that has enabled 44 per cent women's entry into local governance?

## **II. OBJECTIVES AND THEMES OF THE SEMINAR**

The major objective of this seminar is to discuss the nature and pattern of women's employment and poverty; evaluate the roles of various policies and programmes in enhancing their employment opportunities and alleviating poverty; and suggest suitable strategy for improving their lives and livelihoods.

The major themes to be discussed in the seminar would be the following:

- Gender, poverty and employment in India: conceptual Issues and empirical evidence
- Status of women in Bihar
- Nature, and pattern of women's employment in Bihar
- Poverty, vulnerability and women workers
- Dimensions of gender discrimination
- Women and informal sector
- Migration and women workers

- Education, skills and women workers
- National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and women workers
- Impact of various policies and programmes on women's well-being and gender relations
- Institutions and legal provisions for women's empowerment

### III. PARTICIPATION, VENUE AND DATE

Altogether about 100 scholars, experts, development practitioners, policy-makers, social activists, etc. will be participating the seminar. An edited book based on the selected and revised papers will be brought out after the conclusion of the seminar.

The seminar is being organized by the Department of Industrial Relations and Personal Management, Patna University in collaboration with the Eastern Regional Centre of the Institute for Human Development, Ranchi. Dr. Sunita Roy of the PMIR is the seminar coordinator. It will be held during November 7-8, 2009 at the A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna.

### IV. TENTATIVE PROGRAMME

#### 7 November 2009

1000 -1100	:	<b>Inaugural Session</b>
1100 - 1115	:	Tea
1115- 1245	:	<b>Session I: Gender, Poverty and Employment in India: Conceptual Issues and Empirical Evidence</b>
1245 -1330	:	Lunch
1330-1500	:	<b>Session II: Status of Women in Bihar</b>
1530-1545	:	Tea
1545-1700	:	<b>Session III: Nature and Pattern of Women's Employment</b>
1700-1800	:	<b>Session IV: Poverty, Vulnerability and Women Workers</b>
1800-1815	:	Tea

1815-1930  
**Parallel Sessions**

: **Session V: Migration and Women**

**Session VI: Women in the Informal Sector**

**Session VII: Institutions and Legal Provisions  
for Women's Empowerment**

**8 November 2009**

0930 – 1100

: **Session VIII: Dimensions of Gender  
Discrimination**

1100-1115

: Tea

1115-1245

: **Session IX: Education, Skills and Women  
Workers**

1245-1330

: Lunch

1330-1530

: **Session X: NREGA and Women Workers**

1500-1515

: Tea

1515-1630

: **Session XI: Impact of Various Policies and  
Programmes on Women's Empowerment and  
Gender Relations**

1630-1730

: **Valedictory Session**