

A Study On Socio-Economic Transformation Of Bihar After LPG Reform

Saurabh Anand,

Research Scholar, University Department Of Economics, L.N.M.U. Darbhanga, Bihar

Dr. Md. Masroor Alam,

Assistant Professor, University Department Of Economics, L.N.M.U. Darbhanga, Bihar

Abstract

Economic liberalisation in Bihar has brought about a slow-yet-steady socio-economic change in this state since its adoption in 1991. Bihar, one of the poorest states in India in the past, has witnessed a steady growth of its economy with Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) and per capita income improving significantly over the last decades. Economic growth has been accompanied by structural diversification, which is fueled by rising role played by services sector and slow industrial growth. At the same time, there is an increased level of social indicators (literacy, health outcomes, Human Development Index (HDI)) and the decrease in multidimensional poverty. In spite of these developments, the state is still struggling with the same problems such as gender inequalities, low industrialisation, minimal formal jobs, and massive migration. Gathered relying on the secondary data on official sources and research papers, this paper examines the economic and social course of the post-1991 Bihar through its descriptive and comparative analysis. The results explain the gains made and the structural limitations that are still in place, and hence the necessity to develop Bihar through inclusive and employment-intensive development strategies in order to achieve sustainable schedules of socio-economic development.

Keywords: Bihar, Socio-Economic Transformation, Economic Liberalisation, Human Development Index, Poverty, Employment, Sectoral Composition, Inclusive Growth, Gender Disparity

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I. Introduction

Ever since India switched to economic liberalisation in 1991, the macroeconomic structure of the nation became more market oriented. Such reforms involved opening up, deregulation and integration with the world market. The reforms marked the beginning of a continued era of national expansion and an enabling climate in which the states themselves started to boost their growth via structural diversification and public investment increase (Ekta Yadav, 2025). Nevertheless, liberalisation has had an unequal effect on the Indian states, as some states have progressed faster than others because of the changing governance, human capital, infrastructure, and the institutional capacity (Shri Kumud Ranjan & Dr. Smita Premanand, 2024). Traditionally, Bihar as one of the most backward states in India, because of its low per capita income, low human development indicators and low level of industrial base provides a unique example of the socio economic change in the post 1991 period (Sharma, 2025) (Santra, Swarup and Kumar, Rajesh and Bagaria, 2014).

Bihar had a hard time getting investment or creating formal jobs in the years just after liberalization because of structural problems and a poor industrial base. But throughout time, the state's economy and social indices have changed a lot (Rafat, 2018). The Bihar Economic Survey 2024–25 says that the state's gross state domestic product (GSDP) at current prices rose sharply from a relatively low base, reaching an estimated ₹8,54,429 crore in 2023–24. This was a 14.5% increase at current prices and a 9.2% increase at constant prices, showing that the state has grown and stayed strong in recent years. The average income per person also went up a lot, which means that the average economic well-being got better.

Bihar has also witnessed development in major social aspects including literacy, reduction of poverty and human development in addition to economic growth although there are still issues (Kumar, 2020). As an example, multidimensional poverty in the state fell to 33.76% in 2019-21 (down by 51.89% in 2015-16), with losses in health, education, and living standards deprivations. Simultaneously, the social indicators, including literacy and labor participation, remain lower than the country average, which highlights persistent disparities and the necessity of comprehensive policies to address them.

II. Review Of Literature

(Z. R. and N. Alam, 2017) This article delves at the reasons why Bihar's economy hasn't been booming, even though the state has plenty of natural resources. Contrary to popular belief, the research shows that the lack of economic development is the result of a complex interplay of social, economic, and political forces with their origins in macroeconomic policies both past and present. Even after gaining independence in 1947, Bihar's exploitative landlord class persisted in preventing the state from advancing economically and socially. This economic marginalization of Bihar started during the colonial era. The federal central government's policy of 'freight equalization,' which subsidized railway freights of industrial inputs like coal, iron ore, steel, cement, and other bulk resources, effectively neutralized Bihar's comparative advantage in natural resources and further entrenched the state's marginalization. The states' ability to invest in health, education, and other social and physical infrastructure has been eroded, leading to low human development. This is on top of the comparatively low financial resources obtained from the central government during the consecutive plan periods. Reasons for Bihar's underwhelming performance include the state's low human capital, ineffective institutions, and outdated infrastructure, as well as political unrest and social unrest stemming from caste, class, and ethnic divisions in politics.

(M. Alam, 2025) Bhagalpur is an area in India famous for its traditional industries, and this research looks at how the economic changes of 1991 affected the unorganised workers there. Changes in employment trends, working conditions, and the social and economic difficulties encountered by informal workers after reform are all thoroughly examined. Problems including low wages, employment instability, and a lack of social safety nets are brought to light by the research. The impact of structural vulnerabilities on labor resilience in Bhagalpur's economy is examined. The report provides policy-oriented suggestions to promote inclusive growth, boost social protection, and improve lives in the unorganised sector based on findings from the field. Bhagalpur, informal economy, economic reforms, social protection, employment trends, and inclusive growth are some of the key phrases.

(Sinha, 2025) The economic trajectory of Bihar is analyzed in this research, which aims to uncover important factors, long-lasting limitations, and potential strategies for revival. Reforms implemented after 2005 resulted in substantial growth; for example, Bihar had a 20% decrease in poverty and double-digit increase because to investments in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and governance practices. High unemployment, dispersed agricultural landholdings, insufficient healthcare facilities, and social inequalities are some of the structural obstacles that continue to this day. The paper examines developments in Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) and Per Capita Net State Domestic Product (PCNSDP), highlighting sectoral contributions, using workforce indicators from the 2017–18 Periodic Labor Force Survey and 2011–12 base-year data. Bihar showed remarkable resilience in the face of external shocks, experiencing a contraction of 5.00% during the 2020-21 pandemic and then recovering with a rise of 14.40% in 2022-23. Disparities in infrastructure, industrialization, and wealth are seen, however, when comparing the state to Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. Because 80 percent of Bihar's population works in agriculture, the state's economy needs to diversify. Industrialization, pro-business policies, and expanded infrastructure are key development factors. Persistent floods, ineffective government, and political dynamics based on caste all work against advancement. Proposed policies center on making the state more business-friendly, investing in people's education and skill sets to increase human capital, and bringing state laws in line with national and international economic trends. Additional research on the long-term economic trajectory of Bihar, inequities across states, and the socio-environmental impacts of industrialization is necessary for this study to provide crucial insights for inclusive and sustainable growth.

(Singh et al., 2024) This research explores the human development path of Bihar after the liberalization policy of 1991, specifically looking at the years 1993–1994 to 2020–21. This research examines the interplay between Bihar's economy, healthcare system, and educational system via the prism of the Human Development Index (HDI). Finding complex socioeconomic trends and offering thorough insights into the developmental environment of the state are the goals of the article. In order to better comprehend the distinctive socioeconomic setting of Bihar after 1991, the study expands upon previous research on human development and economic changes in India. The goals include looking at how Income, Health, and Education have changed, how Bihar's HDI has changed over time, and how it compares to the national HDI to put Bihar's growth in perspective. This approach makes use of the HDI, which takes into account factors such as life expectancy, predicted years of schooling, mean years of schooling, and gross national income per capita. Economic growth, improved healthcare, and substantial advancements in education are hallmarks of Bihar's transformational path, which reflects the state's dedication to improving the quality of life for its citizens. The success of Bihar's holistic development strategy is seen by the temporal evolution of HDI. Although there have been some encouraging improvements, the comparative study highlights the importance of focused policies and ongoing initiatives to improve Bihar's human development metrics and bring them in line with national standards. In order to close the development gap and promote holistic development in Bihar, the study suggests a wide range of policies,

including healthcare infrastructure improvement, education sector reforms, rural development initiatives, women empowerment programs, technology integration, and a strong monitoring framework.

(Sindhu, 2012) It is indisputable that Bihar is among the most economically underdeveloped and impoverished states in India. The state's dismal track record of socioeconomic growth is particularly noteworthy, given its abundant natural resources. Institutional, political, and economic variables are mostly to blame for the terrible conditions in Bihar, according to this chapter's analysis of the causes of the issue. Furthermore, it implies that the state's noble efforts to rectify historical injustices experienced by particular tribes and castes have amounted to little more than slicing a decreasing cake into smaller pieces for the selected few.

III. Objectives Of The Study

- To analyze Bihar's post-1991 economic growth and changes in sectoral composition.
- To assess improvements in social indicators such as literacy, health, and HDI.
- To examine poverty, employment patterns, and migration trends in the state.
- To identify persistent challenges and policy implications for inclusive development.

IV. Research Methodology

The current research follows a descriptive and analytical research design in reviewing the socio-economic change of Bihar since economic liberalisation was introduced in the year 1991. The study is purely based on the second type of data which is the secondary data that have been gathered through reputable and authoritative sources of data collection and those include the Census of India, Bihar Economic Survey, reports of NITI Aayog, Reserve Bank of India, Ministry of statistics and Programme Implementation, and publications of international organisations like UNDP and the World Bank, as well as the relevant research articles and books. To be able to discuss the long-term dynamics of economic growth, sectoral structure, social indicators, poverty, and employment patterns in the state, the study spans the post-liberalisation era 1991-2024-25. The analysis of the collected data has been performed with help of such simple statistical tools as tabulation, percentage and trend analysis, comparative analysis and with the help of graphical representations as line graphs, bar diagrams and pie charts to clearly illustrate the changes with time. The research area is limited to macro-level socio-economic metrics and it is not based on primary survey and field research. The research paper is based on secondary data and this paper can be subject to some limitations but these are not essential.

V. Socio-Economic Transformation Of Bihar Since 1991

Bihar has experienced a marked socio-economic change since the liberalisation of the Indian economy in 1991, despite the fact that its developmental process has been widely divergent with most of other states in India. Bihar which is historically one of the poorest states of India has witnessed a high growth in the economy in recent decades. State data indicates that the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) at current prices in Bihar has risen to approximately ₹8.77 lakh crore in 2023-24 and projected ₹9.91 lakh crore in 2024-25, with growth rates of more than 13 per cent in both years, suggesting continued growth of the economic activity.

The rise in GSDP since the early 2000s reflects structural and institutional changes; the state's per capita income has also risen substantially, reaching over ₹69,000 in 2024-25, although it remains below the national average, highlighting ongoing welfare and productivity gaps. This growth has been supported by an increased contribution from non-agricultural sectors: the services sector accounted for more than half of the Gross State Value Added (GSVA) in recent years, while the shares of industry and agriculture remain relatively balanced, indicating a shift from a predominantly agrarian economy to a more diversified structure.

Bihar has achieved commendable developments in the field of social development besides economic growth. The state literacy rates have increased drastically since 1991; the total literacy rate in the state increased by nearly 37 percent in 1991 to much bigger numbers in the 2010s and later when the literacy rates among females saw significant increases yet remaining under the national levels. Nevertheless, the results of education still have weaknesses in basic literacy and fundamental levels of learning, especially in the rural regions; this is reported in education reports.

The indicators of poverty are also positive but ambivalent. In Bihar, multidimensional poverty has decreased to approximately 34 per cent in 2019-21 (as compared to almost 52 per cent in 2015-16), and the subsequent years have seen the projections of further reductions in the deprivations in health, education, and living standards. However, the poverty level in the state is still high in comparison with most of the Indian states which underlines the existence of structural problems.

Although employment trends have changed, there is still a barrier to sufficient job creation. Large-scale formal sector employment development is still restricted, which contributes to persistent underemployment and out-migration seeking employment, even if the percentage of the workforce engaged in agricultural activities has declined over time due to growing possibilities in services and small-scale industries.

Overall, the socioeconomic transformation of Bihar since 1991 shows a complicated trajectory: although improvements in social indicators, economic growth, and structural diversification show positive progress, ongoing difficulties in reducing poverty, creating jobs, human development outcomes, and comparative living standards imply that inclusive development is a continuous process.

Economic Growth Trends

Economic liberalisation of India in 1991 has seen a steep rise in the economic performance of the state of Bihar, especially in Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) and per capita income. As per Bihar Economic Survey 2024-25 the GSDP of the state in current prices was about ₹8,54,429 crore in 2023-24 with a growth of 14.5% and 9.2% in current and constant prices respectively compared to the previous year. Per Capita income also rose to ₹66,828 at present value and ₹36,333 at the constant rate during the same year, which displayed better personal economic welfare. Additional government statistical data indicate that it is estimated that the GSDP will increase to approximately ₹9,91,997 crore in 2024-25, GSDP growth rates of 14.94% and 13.09% in 2023-24 and 2024-25 respectively and also per capita income will also increase correspondingly. This represents a continuous economic growth in the past years. The growth of Bihar has at some point outpaced the trend of general national growth making it one of the quicker growing states in India. The trends portray significant economic robustness and structural development on the economy of Bihar during the post-1991 period.

Table 1: Economic Growth Trends in Bihar (2011–12 to 2024–25)

Year	GSDP at Current Prices (₹ crore)	GSDP Growth Rate (%)	Per Capita Income (₹)
2011–12	2,47,144	12.0	22,136
2015–16	3,68,337	10.5	34,413
2019–20	5,89,558	10.9	46,390
2021–22	7,57,026	9.8	54,383
2022–23	7,46,417	7.5	59,637
2023–24	8,54,429	14.5	66,828
2024–25	9,91,997	13.1	69,321

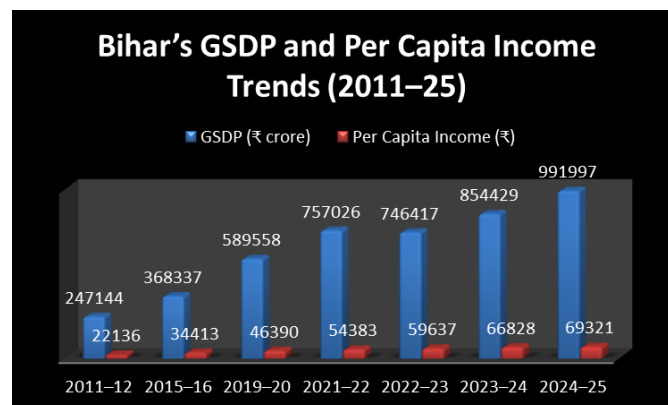


Figure 1: Trends in Bihar's GSDP at Current Prices (₹ crore) and Per Capita Income (₹) from 2011–2025, showing steady growth in both overall economic output and individual income over time.

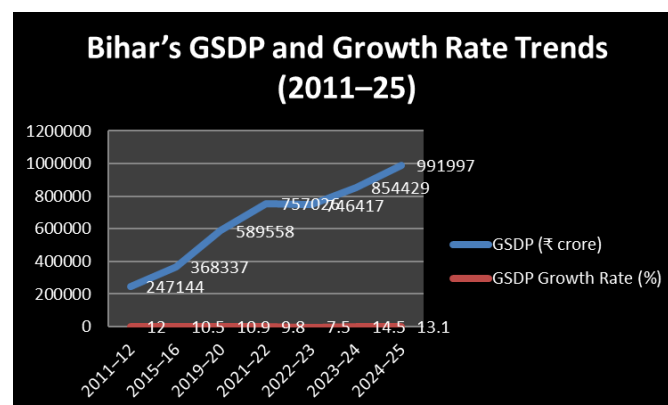


Figure 2: Trends in Bihar's GSDP at Current Prices (₹ crore) and GSDP Growth Rate (%) from 2011–25, highlighting fluctuations in annual growth despite continuous expansion of the state economy.

Sectoral Composition of the Economy

Bihar's economy has changed over time since liberalization, with a big movement away from agriculture and toward services. Bihar has always been an agricultural state, and farming has always been the biggest source of jobs and wealth for the state. But over time, agriculture's share of the Gross State Value Added (GSVA) has gone down, while the share of non-agricultural sectors, especially services, has gone up. This change in structure is a sign of bigger changes in the economy, such as more people moving to cities, more public services, and more trade, transportation, education, and health services.

However, over the past few years, the services sector, making over half of the GSVA of the state, has become the main contributor in the economy of Bihar. Public administration, education, healthcare, banking, transport, and communication have become steadily developed as a result of which the main factors are the investments of the population and government spending. Industrial sector is improving to some extent, and still has a very low share considering the limited amount of privately invested funds, lacks proper infrastructure, and does not have any large scale production. In the meantime, the agricultural sector is important in terms of employment with almost fifty percent of the labor force being employed and its economic support has diminished because of unfavorable productivity and reliance on monsoon conditions.

The shifting sectoral structure suggests that the economy is less agriculture based and more services based though the pace of industrialisation is very slow and makes the growth pattern in Bihar a major challenge among the balanced and employment based growth pattern.

Table 2: Sectoral Share in Bihar's Economy (GSVA %) – 2022–23

Sector	Share in GSVA (%)
Agriculture & Allied Activities	24.3
Industry	17.2
Services	57.1

Source: NITI Aayog, Macro and Fiscal Landscape of the State of Bihar; Government of Bihar, Economic Survey (2023–24).

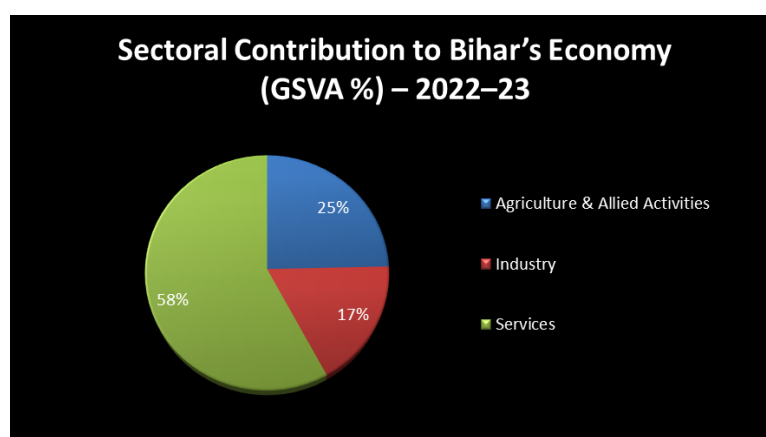


Figure 3: Sectoral Composition of Bihar's Economy (2022–23)

Changes in Social Indicators

In Bihar, between 1991 and 2015, there have been observed improvements in the major social indicators like literacy and health outcomes, and human development though the rate has been as much slower than the national rate. The growth in government-sponsored welfare programmes, rise in the popular expenditure in education and health, and the introduction of specific social interventions has helped in slowing social change. Nevertheless, structural issues like poverty, gender inequality and regional differences still determine the overall development.

Improvement in the level of literacy has been one of the greatest social transformations. The literacy rate of the entire population in Bihar rose to 61.8 percent in 2011 as compared to 37 percent in 1991 and in recent years, the rise in literacy rates have been further recorded by use of survey-based estimates. There has been an increase in female literacy but still there is a large gap between the female and national literacy levels. In spite of the gains, Bihar remains one of the states with low literacy levels in India.

There is also an improvement in health indicators since the post-liberalisation era. There has been increased institutional births, immunisation coverage and life expectancy and this is as a result of programs like the National Health Mission and infrastructure enhancement on the primary healthcare. However, Bihar is still struggling with issues on maternal death, infant death, malnutrition and availability of good healthcare services especially in rural regions.

The level of social development of the state is explained by the Human Development Index (HDI) that is a combination of the indicators of health, education, and standard of living. Even though the value of Bihar in HDI has been improving over the years, the rate of improvement is lower than the national average meaning that there is slower pace in the transformation of the economic growth into human development. Gender inequality further impacts socially in terms of low literacy rates among females, labor force, and health rates when compared to the males.

the social indicators reforms indicate that Bihar has achieved quantifiable improvements since 1991, however, the social development did not match the economic one. The needs to solve gender inequality, enhance healthcare quality, and enhance educational results have all been part of the goals of inclusive and sustainable development.

Table 3: Literacy Rate – Bihar and India (Census 2011)

Category	Bihar (%)	India (%)
Overall Literacy	61.8	74.0
Male Literacy	71.2	82.1
Female Literacy	51.5	65.5
Gender Gap	19.7	16.6

Source: Census of India 2011

Table 4: Selected Health Indicators – Bihar and India

Indicator	Bihar	India
Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births)	47	35
Maternal Mortality Ratio (per 100,000 live births)	118	93-97
Institutional Deliveries (%)	76-88	88.6
Life Expectancy (years)	~69	~70.8

Source: Sample Registration System (SRS), National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)

Table 5: Human Development Index (HDI) – Bihar and India

Region	HDI Value
Bihar	0.609
India	0.644

Source: UNDP India Human Development Report

Table 6: Gender Gap in Key Social Indicators (Bihar)

Indicator	Male (%)	Female (%)
Literacy Rate	71.2	51.5
Workforce Participation	22.9	4.1
Secondary Education Completion	Higher	Lower

Source: Census 2011; Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS 2018-19 / 2020)

The comparison tables make it abundantly evident that, despite improvements in literacy, health, and human development since 1991, Bihar still lags behind national norms and has enduring gender gaps in all of the key social indices.

Poverty and Employment Scenario

Since 1991, poverty and employment have been the key concerns in the social economy of Bihar. Despite the recent years with the state registering a high growth in the economy, the fruits of growth have not been equally spread. Historically, Bihar has recorded one of the worst poverty ratios in India, yet it has been reported to have slowly improved as a result of the growth in economy, the social welfare schemes, and the poverty alleviation programmes. However, the Poverty in Bihar is still higher than the national average, which indicates structural factors including low levels of industrialisation, low employment and population pressure.

The official estimates show that the poverty ratio in Bihar has decreased substantially in 2004-05 and 2011-12, and continuing decrease is being witnessed since 2015. Recent statistics on Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) issued by NITI Aayog show that Bihar has recorded significant strides in alleviating multidimensional poverty especially in the aspects of sanitation, housing, electricity, and school attendance. Nonetheless, even with this improvement, Bihar still records the highest ratio of multidimensionally poor population among all the states in India, which symbolizes the perpetual deprivation in health, education, and the standard of living.

The employment patterns in Bihar remain low in productivity industries. The percentage of the labour force still largely relies on agriculture and related activities with very low levels of employment in the industry. The services industry has grown and has taken over an increasing proportion of the working population, but

most of this work is not formal. The slow rate of growth of manufacturing jobs and formal jobs has led to underemployment, and job security especially among the educated youths.

Migration has become a major strategy of adjustment in the labour market in Bihar. The workers migrate to other states in search of good wages and secure jobs because of the lack of opportunities in employment in the state where they are virtually moving either seasonally or permanently in search of the same. It has been observed that interstate migration and particularly in the direction of the states of Delhi, Maharashtra, Punjab and Gujarat has become a characteristic of the employment picture of Bihar. Although migration pays off in terms of household income by way of remittances, it is also an indication of the structural weakness of the state economy to provide sufficient local jobs.

In general, the current state of poverty and employment in Bihar after 1991 is a mixed result of the development policies. Although there has been a drop in poverty and improvement in the basic living standards, the lack of employment opportunities in the informal sector, limited industrial job opportunities, and high rate of migration demonstrate the importance of employment and inclusive growth plans.

Table 7: Poverty Ratio in Bihar and India (%)

Year	Bihar	India
2004–05	54.5	37.2
2011–12	33.7	21.9
2019–21	26.0	15.0

Source: Planning Commission; NITI Aayog

Table 8: Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) – Bihar

Year	MPI Poverty Headcount (%)
2015–16	51.89
2019–21	33.76
Reduction	18.13

Source: NITI Aayog, *National Multidimensional Poverty Index Report*

Table 9: Employment Structure in Bihar (2022–23)

Sector	Share of Workforce (%)
Agriculture & Allied Activities	49.6
Industry	5.7
Services	28.9
Others / Informal	Remaining

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)

Table 10: Migration Pattern from Bihar

Type of Migration	Characteristics
Seasonal Migration	Construction, agriculture, informal jobs
Permanent Migration	Industrial and service sector employment
Major Destination States	Delhi, Maharashtra, Punjab, Gujarat

Source: Census of India; PLFS Reports

Although poverty and multidimensional deprivation have reduced significantly since 1991, Bihar is seriously challenged by issues on employment creation and mass migration, which presuppose adopting policies based on job creation.

VI. Discussion

An economic development analysis, sectoral structure, social indices, and relationships between poverty-employment depict that in Bihar since 1991, there has been a noticeable, but uneven socio-economic change. Its long-term increase in GSDP and increase in per capita income, especially since the mid-2000s, points to better macroeconomic performance and makes Bihar one of the quickening state economies over the last few years, but the persistent disparity between Bihar per capita income and the national average means that the aggregate growth has not sufficiently reflected in the well-being of its citizens. The industrial transformation to a more service-oriented economy is structural change in line with the wider national changes but the fact that the industrial sector has not expanded as much as possible has limited the generation of employment and the ability of the economy to absorb excess labour in the agricultural sector. The positive difference in social indicators e.g. literacy, health outcomes, HDI and still Bihar is below the rest of the country, and uneven social development is revealed through the gender disparities in literacy, workforce participation, and health outcomes. Despite the significant decrease in poverty ratios and multidimensional poverty as it shows the increasing access to basic amenities and social protection, the employment pattern is highly concentrated in low-productivity agriculture and informal sector work, which leads to underemployment and massive migration

to other states. In general, the discussion indicates that post-1991 development in Bihar has been marked by high growth rate of the economy with scanty structural deepening, with reduction in income and poverty not yet being fully accompanied by growth in employment-intensive industrialisation and human development and thus the need to have development strategies that are more inclusive and job-oriented. The policies in the future should be centered on job-based industrialization, generation of skills and decreasing gender and geographical disparity to promote inclusive development.

VII. Conclusion

The current research drawing out the conclusions is that Bihar has experienced a significant socio-economic transformation since the beginning of economic liberalisation in 1991 which has been characterized by a sustained economic growth, steady structural transformation, and a quantifiable enhancement in social indicators. The gradual rise in the GSDP and the per capita income, especially between the years 2005 and 2008, is an indicator of improved economic performance, whereas, the rising share of the services sector is an indication of the not being an agriculture-based economy. Meanwhile, the positive role of government interventions and welfare programmes can be observed in the form of better literacy, health outcomes as well as cuts in multidimensional poverty. However, the process of change is still not even-handed, and human development, gender equality, and the creation of jobs continue to be the problems. The structural weakness of the economy of the state is evidenced by the continued reliance on low-productivity agriculture, the prevalence of informal jobs, and massive migration. Generally, the paper concludes that even though Bihar has had considerable improvements during the post-1991 period, inclusive and sustainable development is yet to be attained by paying more attention to employment-intensive industrialization, human capital building, and alleviation of regional and gender inequalities. Future studies may test state-based industrial policies and gender-focused initiatives to increase further on the growth of inclusivity in Bihar.

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