

**CHAPTER – VIII****RAYS OF HOPE**

Literacy, communication and media have brought immense impact on the lives of average Biharee, and people residing in its far flung rural areas have also been not left untouched. People are keen to know things which happen around them. They are regular readers of newspapers and those who cannot read still look forward to information which is delivered by the reader to the gathering sitting around him. Conception of Chowpal is ingrained in the mindset of rural residents of Bihar. Earlier radio-transmission was regularly listened in evenings and now televisions attract people to know about the events affecting them. The information transmission has really helped people to understand changes taking place and effecting their lives.

Women are getting literate. They are no longer behind veil. Even women of Yadavs (OBC) in villages do not hesitate to associate themselves with the men folk in welcoming guests. There has been considerable change in their outlook. OBC mothers residing in villages, now send their young daughters to prosecute studies in divisional towns. They participate in meetings arranged in places at long distances from their villages. They openly raise questions to outsiders and not feel shy to answer the questions put to them. Our investigations have revealed that women have done electioneering themselves and have won elections after keen contest.

Schedule castes constitute the majority of weaker sections and symbolise deprivations of economic gains and are regular victims of atrocities committed against their women. However literacy rate of schedules castes in Bihar since 1961 onwards have improved as per following figure:

| Census | Total SC literacy | Decadal growth | S.C. Female literacy | Decadal growth |
|--------|-------------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------|
| 1961   | 5.9               | -              | 0.92                 | "              |
| 1971   | 6.53              | 0.63           | N.A                  | "              |
| 1981   | 10.40             | 3.87           | 2.91                 | "              |
| 1991   | 19.49             | 9.09           | 7.07                 | 5.06           |

The decadal growth in eighties in total literacy of S.C. was nearly the literacy rate which the schedule castes had achieved in three decades during 1951 to 1981, whereas the literacy rate among females in eighties had been nearly twice of the literacy rate gained during this thirty years period.

This jump in female literacy after 1981 has great impact in their socio-economic outlook and in the overall rural scenario of Bihar. S.C. parents send their children to schools, even handicapped child (e.g. in Akania village) also goes to school their habitations are neat and clean. Even their hand-pumps are used by other persons of comparatively higher castes. Rise in education among S.Cs. have given them employment in both government and non government jobs. The S.C. women are now better clad and their living conditions have improved specially in last two decades.

The literacy rate in rural areas of Bihar has been as follows :-

| Census | Persons literacy | Decadal growth | Female literacy | Decadal growth |
|--------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 2001   | 47.53            | 10.04          | 33.57           | 11.58          |
| 1991   | 37.49            | "              | 21.99           | "              |

This means that decadal growth of literacy rate among females has been higher than the growth of overall literacy rate.

In our household survey we had interviewed ten households in each of the 36 sample villages of the state. Results have shown encouraging features suggesting rural peoples' enthusiasm for giving education to their children. 66 percent of villagers residing in South Bihar desire to educate their daughter while such percentage is 79 percent for North Bihar villagers. Similarly 79 percent of parents in villages of South Bihar desire their son to

be educated where as 90 percent of parents in North Bihar want their sons to be educated.

Parents send their girl child to schools at an early age. Nearly 68 percent girls of age upto 5 years of age are sent to schools in South Bihar, while such percentage is 61 for North Bihar. Similarly 67 percent of boys in the age upto 5 years are sent to schools, in South Bihar, whereas 63 percent of boys of the age are sent to schools in North Bihar.

We wanted people to indicate whether they could sell land to give higher education to their children and if so, whom would they prefer between boys and girls for higher studies in such eventuality. Sex bias still persists in villages and so is the choice of son over girls but this is dictated by concern for security. 33 percent of South Bihar villagers want to give college education to boys and 30 percent of villagers in North Bihar also hold the same view. But 44 percent villagers in South Bihar and 49 percent of villagers in North Bihar want to give college education to both boys and girls even after selling their land. This is very heartening and signifies the appreciation of impact of education.

However since getting a girl married is the basic responsibility of parents, 53 percent of villagers in South Bihar and 50 percent of villagers in North Bihar want their girl child to study upto their marriage, 90 percent of parents in South Bihar want their daughters to study till 15 years of age. Only 3 percent want them to study till 18 years and 7 percent want them to study beyond 18 years. However in North Bihar 79

percent villagers want their daughters to study till 15 years, but 21 percent want their daughters to study beyond 18 years and only 3 percent want them to study beyond 18 years of age. When questioned whose study would you

like to discontinue in the event of necessity to bring them for employment, only 39 percent of villagers in South Bihar would like girls to discontinue their studies, as against 60 percent of North Bihar villagers.

On the query whether they send their children to school only for sake of getting nutritive diet, the parents in villages of both South Bihar and North Bihar have denied it. This reveals their positive attitude towards the necessity of getting their off springs educated. Even 52 percent of parents of South Bihar and 43 percent of parents of North Bihar have rejected the suggestion that they might discontinue the education of their children as soon as they are fit for employment.

Villagers have not responded on the suggestion of income they might have received as wages of their working daughters. However only 8 percent in South Bihar and 26 percent of North Bihar have received income from their working sons.

Search of employment outside the villages has also given them exposure to outside environment. They have seen the effects of healthy and clean lives and want to lead their lives accordingly. They sincerely try for it. They take baths daily. In South Bihar, 75 percent of families residing in villages take bath daily whereas such percentage is 100 for North Bihar.

On the query about disposal of house-rubbish, the following reply of villagers confirm their desire to keep surroundings among houses neat and clean. The figures are as follows:-

|                     | (Figures in Percentage) |                    |
|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
|                     | <u>South Bihar</u>      | <u>North Bihar</u> |
| Near the house      | 24                      | 26                 |
| Away from the house | 61                      | 54                 |
| Anywhere            | 3                       | 3                  |
| At a fixed place    | 12                      | 17                 |

Disposal of house dust and rubbish "any where" is indicative of unhealthy practice which only 3 percent of villagers would like to do. As it is difficult to mark a fixed place in the vicinity, the reply on this query is not clear. That majority favoured its disposal away from their houses signifies desire for keeping environment around house neat and clean. Even S.C. habitations gave this impression. All villagers replied in affirmative to keep their houses clean.

Only 21 percent of villagers in South Bihar and 17 percent in North Bihar have toilets facilities. Rest go outside to ease themselves. Toilets existed in selected houses of the well to do families. But rise of literacy rate and contacts outside villages have urged the villagers to going for private toilets. This is indicative of growing concern for living healthy life.

Necessity of drinking clean water has been realised by villagers. They know that drinking dirty water would harm their health. Now only 37 percent villagers in South Bihar and 9 percent in North Bihar drink water from well. The villagers have installed private hand pumps 77 percent of the sample villages have hand pumps in North Bihar. Village women attending rallies often carry drinking water bottles.

Gradually villagers are understanding the value of small family norm, they do not want to have more than five children. 76 percent of villagers in South Bihar and 60 percent in North Bihar desire to keep this norm. only 15 percent villagers in South Bihar and 20 percent in North Bihar still want to have more than 5 children. Sex bias for children still continues. In actual number of children born boys out number girls. The figures are as follows :-

(Figures in Percentage)

South Bihar      North Bihar

Children :

|                      |    |    |
|----------------------|----|----|
| (a) Upto 2 years     |    |    |
| (i) Boys             | 22 | 14 |
| (ii) Girls           | 15 | 11 |
| (b) 3 to 5 years     |    |    |
| (i) Boys             | 37 | 31 |
| (ii) Girls           | 21 | 19 |
| (c) As above 5 years |    |    |
| (i) Boys             | 3  | 16 |
| (ii) Girls           | 2  | 9  |

Awareness towards family welfare and family planning has come to villages. 68 percent of people are aware of the meaning of family welfare in South Bihar while 85 percent know about it in North Bihar. Family planning methods is known only to 59 percent in South Bihar against 81 percent in North Bihar. For keeping smaller families some villagers practice certain methods. Following figures indicate about the percentage use of the methods.

|               | (Figures in Percentage) |                    |
|---------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
|               | <u>South Bihar</u>      | <u>North Bihar</u> |
| B.C.P.        | 23                      | 21                 |
| IUCP/Loop     | 4                       | 0                  |
| Condom        | 32                      | 0                  |
| Other methods | 41                      | 79                 |

Growth of literacy and rise in the numbers of educated persons in rural areas appear to have helped villagers in developing scientific outlook. This is exhibited in rejection by 48 percent of villagers of South Bihar from the spell of Ojhas. In North Bihar, substantial 74 percent of villagers do not get influenced from the charms and spells of the ojhas etc. this is a positive

development indicating growth of rational outlook towards social life in rural areas of Bihar.

Aids is a dreadful disease and government is anxious to inform people about this disease and to educate them on its prevention. 40 percent of villagers in South Bihar and 56 percent of villagers in North Bihar are aware of this disease. It is an indication of advancement of knowledge among villagers. 55 percent of villages in North Bihar know how it is caused and also how it can be prevented. However, in South Bihar only 47 percent of villagers know the reason for this disease and 46 percent know how it could be prevented. Such knowledge in rural areas is a welcome reflection of development of information system in the rural areas of this State.

Panchayat Raj Institution have now become a reality in this state. We have found one Mukhiya genuinely getting pucca drains constructed. This mukhiya had done some earth repair work through shramdan with the co-operation of villagers. He has intimate knowledge of all households and its inhabitants. People do not appear to have any ill will for this Mukhiya who is a young man in his thirties. He has influence over his villagers who approach him for solving their problems. He is critical of wastage involved in execution of some schemes. He feels that Rs.10,000/- released by B.D.O. as grant to put concrete roof on the mud walls of houses of I.A.Y. constructed some years ago is bound to go waste. Such Mukhiyas are expected to change the shape of developmental work in village. They can formulate schemes required to suit local developmental needs. Some Mukhiyas carried investigators on the pillion of their motorcycles to help our field work. This also exhibits their desire to cooperate in studies about the villages. The functionaries of Panchayat Raj Institution are likely to revolutionise

implementation of development schemes through participation of local people.

Despite ineffective delivery system and near absence of public health facilities, people in view of rise in their consciousness have by and large exhibited concern for securing expert medical treatment. Our survey indicates that 60 percent patients in the villages of South Bihar are treated by qualified MBBS doctors whereas such figure for North Bihar is 74 percent. This has resulted in improvement of infant mortality rate in the state. The IMR of Bihar compares favourably with its neighbouring states as is indicated below:-

|                | Infant Mortality Rate (per thousand) |      |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|------|
|                | 1998                                 | 1999 |
| India          | 72                                   | 70   |
| Bihar          | 67                                   | 63   |
| Uttar Pradesh  | 85                                   | 84   |
| West Bengal    | 53                                   | 52   |
| Orissa         | 98                                   | 97   |
| Madhya Pradesh | 97                                   | 90   |

The infant mortality rate in Bihar has declined much as compared to its neighbouring states. It is a healthy sign of positive attitude towards concern for infants' health. The IMR of Bihar is better than all its neighbouring states except West Bengal.

As per latest available data (1999), the life expectancy in Bihar is 59.6 years as against 57.8 for UP, 57.2 for Orissa.



Such data suggest that Bihar is marching ahead in improving its quality of life.

Similarly there has been improvement in enrolment ratio in classes I-V and in Middle School level in Bihar as compared to its neighbour Uttar Pradesh. The figures are as follows:

| Standard                                   | 1997-98 |      | 1998-99 |       | 1999-2000 |       |
|--|---------|------|---------|-------|-----------|-------|
|  | Bihar   | UP   | Bihar   | UP    | Bihar     | UP    |
| 1. Primary Classes (I-V)<br>age 6-11 years |         |      |         |       |           |       |
| Boys                                       | 90.9    | 74.1 | 93.20   | 75.97 | 94.97     | 78.43 |
| Girls                                      | 59.4    | 48.9 | 61.51   | 49.31 | 49.31     | 50.18 |
| Total                                      | 75.9    | 62.3 | 78.02   | 63.35 | 63.02     | 64.97 |

Enrolment of Boys in primary stage is increasing every year. It can be presumed that by now over 95 percent boys are going to primary schools. It is heartening that parents are sending their boys to school at the initial stage. This worthy tendency is also increasing in respect of girl child. Improvement in case of girls would take some time but it will be effective with increase in women literacy. It is good for Bihar that tendency to send children to schools is higher among parents of Bihar as compared to UP. This amply suggests that people of Bihar have accepted the necessity of sending children to schools for education. Educating child is no longer unnecessary for parents in Bihar. This healthy tendency augers well for Bihar.