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Economic development and human Rights challenges and Prospect in Bihar

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Abstract:

Bihar, one of India's historically rich yet economically lagging states, presents a complex interplay between economic development and human rights. This research paper critically analyzes the dual concerns of economic growth and the protection of basic human rights in Bihar. It explores how developmental indicators—such as poverty alleviation, employment generation, industrialization, and infrastructural expansion—interact with socio-economic rights like education, health, and gender equality. Despite consistent growth efforts through central and state-led initiatives, challenges such as poor governance, corruption, caste-based disparities, and regional inequalities continue to hinder inclusive development. The study employs a multidisciplinary approach combining economic data analysis with human rights evaluation frameworks. Using secondary data from government reports, NHRC findings, and global indices, the research identifies key areas where economic development has either positively impacted or failed to uplift human rights in Bihar. The paper also evaluates Bihar's position in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), to measure its developmental trajectory. Further, the study highlights prospects such as digital transformation, youth-led innovation, migration-linked remittances, and increasing private sector participation as pivotal to bridging the development-human rights gap. The paper concludes that for Bihar to achieve holistic economic development, a rights-based approach must be integrated into every layer of its economic planning.

Keywords: Economic development, social inequality, governance, Sustainable Development Goals, inclusive growth, education, poverty alleviation.

Introduction

Economic development and human rights are two essential pillars of any progressive society. While economic development is generally associated with the expansion of wealth, infrastructure, employment, and

industries, human rights pertain to the assurance of dignity, equity, and basic freedoms for all individuals. Both concepts, although distinct in definition and framework, are deeply intertwined in practice. India, as a developing nation, has witnessed notable progress across multiple sectors. However, the story of development remains uneven across its states, with Bihar being a prominent example of such disparity. Historically, Bihar was a center of learning and trade, but over time it has grappled with challenges like poverty, low literacy rates, underdeveloped infrastructure, and poor health indicators. As per various economic reports, Bihar's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) has seen positive growth in recent years, especially post-2005, owing to infrastructural investment, road development, and welfare schemes. However, this growth often fails to translate into tangible improvements in people's lives, especially for marginalized communities. This discrepancy highlights the significance of exploring the deeper relationship between economic indicators and the realization of human rights.

The relationship between economic development and human rights is often described as symbiotic. On one hand, economic growth can provide the necessary resources for the state to improve education, healthcare, sanitation, and housing. On the other hand, the presence of strong human rights ensures equitable access to these resources and fosters a climate of social stability and trust, which in turn supports sustainable economic growth. In this context, economic development is not merely a matter of increasing state revenue or private investment but must be evaluated through the lens of inclusivity and fairness.

Amartya Sen, in his seminal works, has emphasized that development should be viewed as a process of expanding freedoms rather than only income growth. According to Sen, the removal of substantial unfreedoms, such as lack of access to education and health care or social exclusion, is integral to development. This perspective underlines that human rights are both the means and the end of development. In the case of Bihar, the state's attempts to enhance its economic profile must be accompanied by institutional mechanisms that safeguard and uplift the rights of all sections of society. The failure to do so not only weakens the foundation of democracy but also leads to unrest and long-term underdevelopment.

Bihar's socio-political environment and economic history make this study particularly relevant. Despite being rich in natural and human resources, the state has long struggled with poor governance, limited industrialization, and socio-economic inequalities. Various reports suggest that while urban centers in Bihar are slowly witnessing development, rural and remote areas continue to face neglect. Moreover, challenges like lack of access to quality education, child labor, gender-based violence, and inadequate healthcare are prevalent, reflecting deep-rooted human rights concerns. The state has also seen a high rate of out-migration, especially among youth seeking employment and better living standards. This phenomenon not only highlights the lack of economic opportunities within Bihar but also raises concerns regarding the right to work and livelihood. The success of development programs such as MNREGA, rural health missions, and public distribution systems depends largely on their transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability, all of which are directly

connected to human rights governance.

Economic Development in Bihar: An Overview

Bihar, a state endowed with rich cultural heritage and historical significance, has long been categorized as economically underdeveloped within the Indian federation. Over the past two decades, however, Bihar has made considerable strides in economic growth, particularly in areas such as infrastructure, agriculture, and service sectors. Despite these improvements, the broader picture of economic development in Bihar remains complex and uneven. Economic development is typically measured through a range of indicators including Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), per capita income, employment levels, literacy rates, infrastructure development, and poverty reduction. In the context of Bihar, some of these indicators reflect positive change while others continue to signal persistent backwardness. For instance, Bihar's per capita income remains one of the lowest in India, reflecting wide economic disparities despite high overall growth rates. Infrastructure development, especially in road connectivity and electricity supply, has improved, but public health, education, and sanitation services remain substandard in many regions of the state.

A crucial parameter in understanding economic development in Bihar is the improvement in human capital—such as literacy and skill development—which contributes directly to productivity and indirectly to socio-economic empowerment. Nevertheless, a large portion of Bihar's population still depends on low-paying informal sector jobs or seasonal agricultural labor, which do not significantly raise household income or living standards. Poverty levels, although declining, are still disproportionately high in rural and marginalized communities, indicating that economic gains have not been equitably distributed across population groups and regions.

In recent years, Bihar has registered commendable GDP growth figures. Between 2015 and 2020, Bihar's economy recorded an annual growth rate often exceeding the national average, driven by government spending on construction, transportation, and rural development programs. The contribution of the service sector to the state's economy has increased, particularly through public administration, education, and financial services. However, this growth has not translated into proportional employment opportunities, as evident from the continued out-migration of the state's youth to other states in search of work.

The industrial sector in Bihar remains underdeveloped, largely due to historical neglect, poor infrastructure, and lack of private investment. Industrial growth has been limited to small-scale units, food processing industries, and some textile production, mostly in urban and peri-urban areas. The lack of a strong manufacturing base is a major constraint on employment generation and value-added production. On the other hand, agriculture continues to be the backbone of Bihar's economy, employing over 70% of the workforce. The state is a significant producer of food grains, vegetables, and fruits, and has seen a rise in the use of hybrid seeds and irrigation coverage in recent years. Despite this, productivity remains low compared to other states due to land fragmentation, flood-prone geography, and poor access to markets and credit.

One of the most critical challenges to Bihar's economic development is the stark regional imbalance within the state. Northern Bihar, frequently affected by floods from Himalayan rivers, remains economically stagnant compared to southern regions which have better connectivity and relatively stronger urban centers. Districts like Patna, Gaya, and Bhagalpur have witnessed moderate industrial growth and urban expansion, while regions like Sitamarhi, Purnia, and Araria continue to lag behind in infrastructure, education, and health services.

Status of Human Rights in Bihar

Human rights form the cornerstone of a just and equitable society. In the Indian constitutional framework, they are not merely philosophical ideals but actionable rights guaranteed by law. In the context of Bihar, a state marked by deep-rooted socio-economic challenges and historical inequalities, the discourse on human rights takes on a particularly urgent and practical dimension. Human rights refer to those basic rights and freedoms to which every individual is entitled, simply by virtue of being human. These rights are universal, inalienable, and interdependent. They are broadly categorized into civil and political rights, and economic, social, and cultural rights. In the context of Bihar, the most pressing concerns lie in the domain of social, economic, and educational rights.

Social rights include access to basic amenities such as healthcare, clean drinking water, housing, and sanitation. Economic rights involve the right to livelihood, equal pay for equal work, and freedom from exploitation. Educational rights ensure access to quality education without discrimination. In a state like Bihar, where a significant portion of the population resides in rural areas and lives below the poverty line, the realization of these rights is not merely a legal issue but a developmental imperative. Although constitutional provisions and various welfare schemes aim to address these rights, implementation often remains inconsistent and inaccessible to the most vulnerable sections of society. Marginalized communities in Bihar—including Dalits, women, tribal groups, and children—continue to experience structural discrimination and deprivation. Dalits, who form a substantial portion of the population, frequently face caste-based violence, limited access to land ownership, and social exclusion from education and employment opportunities. Despite the existence of protective legislation, atrocities against Dalits remain underreported and under-prosecuted, which weakens the community's trust in legal institutions. Women in Bihar face layered discrimination based on gender, class, and often caste. Early marriage, domestic violence, low literacy rates, and inadequate reproductive healthcare remain persistent issues. Although government schemes such as Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao are in place, their outreach and impact are limited by societal norms and poor administrative reach.

Bihar operates under the larger constitutional and legal framework of India, which guarantees fundamental rights to all citizens, including the right to equality (Article 14), right to life and personal liberty (Article 21), and right to education (Article 21A). In addition, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, and the Right of Children to

Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, provide specific legal safeguards for marginalized groups. Institutionally, the Bihar Human Rights Commission (BHRC), established under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, plays a key role in monitoring violations and recommending remedies. However, the functioning of BHRC is often limited by understaffing, delayed case disposal, and lack of enforcement power. Various non-governmental organizations and civil society groups also work at the grassroots level to advocate for human rights, though their efforts often remain fragmented due to lack of institutional support.

Interconnection between Economic Development and Human Rights

The interrelationship between economic development and human rights is both dynamic and deeply rooted in the socio-political fabric of any region. In the context of Bihar, this relationship becomes more complex due to the state's long-standing socio-economic disparities, institutional weaknesses, and the marginalization of large segments of its population. Economic growth plays a foundational role in creating an enabling environment for the realization of human rights. When a state experiences growth in terms of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), per capita income, and public investment, it generates the fiscal capacity to fund and expand welfare measures, education, healthcare, and social security systems. These developments, in turn, directly influence the fulfillment of basic human rights such as the right to food, shelter, education, and health.

In Bihar, increased public investment in rural infrastructure, roads, and electrification over the past two decades has led to some degree of socio-economic transformation. Schemes like Mukhyamantri Gramin Sadak Yojana and Saat Nischay Yojana have aimed to improve access to essential services, especially in remote regions. The establishment of educational institutions, polytechnics, and health centers, fueled by economic planning, has laid the groundwork for ensuring rights that were previously denied or inaccessible to vast sections of the population. Moreover, welfare schemes like MNREGA not only generate employment but also secure the right to livelihood and human dignity for the rural poor. Thus, economic development, when aligned with social justice, acts as a vehicle for realizing rights-based entitlements.

While economic development can strengthen human rights, the inverse is equally true—violations of human rights can severely obstruct development. When individuals or communities are denied access to education, healthcare, property rights, or face systemic discrimination, the productive potential of a significant portion of the population remains untapped. In Bihar, caste-based exclusion, gender inequality, and child labor not only violate constitutional rights but also restrict economic participation and innovation.

For example, the marginalization of Dalits and backward castes from mainstream economic activities—such as land ownership or skilled employment—has limited the state's capacity to fully mobilize its human resources. Similarly, the denial of educational rights to girls, either due to poverty, patriarchy, or unsafe environments, reduces their future earning potential and restricts their contribution to economic productivity.

Human rights violations further lead to poor health outcomes, higher dropout rates, and social unrest—all of which impose significant costs on the state's development machinery. Institutional barriers, such as delayed justice, lack of legal awareness, and underperforming welfare departments, further compound these issues. When people do not feel safe, respected, or entitled to legal redress, they become disengaged from state-driven development, leading to ineffective implementation of growth-oriented policies. The erosion of trust in state institutions also deters private investment, which is crucial for long-term economic sustainability.

Government Policies and Initiatives

The holistic development of any region requires not only a robust economic framework but also the safeguarding of fundamental human rights. Bihar, one of India's most populous yet economically challenged states, has been at the center of several developmental experiments aimed at bridging the gap between growth and equity. Over the last two decades, both the central and state governments have launched a series of policy measures to stimulate economic development and ensure the protection of human rights.

Among Bihar's state-led development initiatives, the Saat Nischay Yojana stands out as a flagship policy. Introduced in 2015 by the Government of Bihar, this seven-point agenda aims to ensure basic public services and infrastructure for all, particularly focusing on rural development, skill training, women empowerment, and youth engagement. Under its ambit, programs like Har Ghar Nal Ka Jal (tap water to every household), Shauchalay Nirman (toilet construction), Bijli Har Ghar (electricity for all), and Arthik Hal Yuvaon Ko Bal (economic empowerment through youth training) have been implemented with significant budgetary commitment. The second phase, Saat Nischay Part-2, launched after 2020, expanded its focus to include urban development, technology education, sustainable livelihoods, and clean environment. These efforts indicate a conscious attempt by the Bihar government to integrate economic development with quality of life improvements and access to basic rights. However, the success of these schemes depends greatly on transparent implementation, effective monitoring, and minimizing leakages at local levels.

Legal protection of human rights in Bihar functions under the broader framework of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees fundamental rights such as equality, freedom, and protection from exploitation. Bihar has taken additional steps by establishing institutions like the Bihar Human Rights Commission (BHRC), which plays a vital role in reviewing human rights violations and recommending corrective action. The Commission, though limited in enforcement power, has been instrumental in addressing cases related to police brutality, custodial violence, and denial of government services. Additionally, laws like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, the Right to Education Act, and the Domestic Violence Act are administered by state-level departments and welfare boards. The State Commission for Women, Child Rights Commission, and Minority Welfare Commission have also been formed to address specific human rights challenges. Administrative measures such as awareness campaigns, helpline services, and legal aid

centers have furthered access to justice, particularly for marginalized communities.

The interdependence between central and state governments has played a crucial role in implementing development policies and safeguarding rights in Bihar. Central government schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Swachh Bharat Mission, National Rural Health Mission, and Skill India Mission have been effectively integrated with Bihar's developmental strategies. Financial assistance, policy frameworks, and technical support from the Centre have enabled the state to expand its development agenda beyond fiscal constraints. Moreover, joint initiatives like Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (for integrated school education) and POSHAN Abhiyan (for nutritional security) represent successful models of shared governance. These collaborations help ensure that development and rights-based frameworks are not operating in silos but reinforce each other. However, disparities in fund release, administrative delays, and lack of real-time coordination often limit the full potential of these cooperative programs.

Future Prospects and Opportunities

The future trajectory of Bihar's development lies in its ability to align economic progress with the principles of equity, justice, and human rights. The current developmental challenges, while deeply entrenched, also open avenues for transformation, especially if addressed with long-term vision and participatory governance. With India committed to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Bihar finds itself at a crucial juncture where opportunities exist to bridge gaps in economic development and human rights. Moving forward, the focus must shift toward building inclusive institutions, investing in people, harnessing technology, and empowering local governance structures. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015 provide a comprehensive framework for countries and states to achieve inclusive and sustainable growth by 2030. For Bihar, the SDGs are particularly relevant given the state's socio-economic vulnerabilities and developmental backlog. Goals such as No Poverty (SDG 1), Quality Education (SDG 4), Gender Equality (SDG 5), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), and Reduced Inequality (SDG 10) directly address the issues Bihar grapples with.

Bihar has begun integrating SDGs into its planning process through the formulation of the Bihar SDG Vision 2030 document, which aligns state-level schemes with global targets. However, the effective realization of these goals requires inter-departmental coordination, data transparency, and consistent monitoring. The state's ability to meet the SDGs will serve not only as a benchmark of its development success but also as a signal of its commitment to upholding the rights and dignity of every citizen.

One of the most promising prospects for Bihar lies in the investment in human capital—particularly in health, education, and skill development. With a large youth population, Bihar holds immense demographic potential. However, this potential remains underutilized due to gaps in quality education and employable skills. Strengthening school infrastructure, ensuring teacher accountability, promoting digital literacy, and expanding vocational training are crucial for transforming the state's

human capital into a productive force. Capacity building must also extend to the public administration system, civil society, and grassroots governance. Training government officials in rights-based approaches, modern administrative tools, and policy implementation practices can significantly improve the delivery of developmental programs. Enhancing human capital is not merely an economic imperative but a pathway to ensuring every individual's right to livelihood, dignity, and participation in democratic life.

In an era increasingly defined by technology, Bihar has the opportunity to leapfrog traditional barriers through innovation and digital transformation. The expansion of mobile networks, digital financial services, e-governance platforms, and online education has already shown promise in increasing accessibility. Digital platforms like Bihar Bhumi for land records and e-Nagarsewa for urban services are steps in the right direction.

The Panchayati Raj system in Bihar has the potential to become a cornerstone of both democratic governance and grassroots development. Decentralization ensures that local needs are addressed more effectively and that planning and execution reflect community participation. Empowering Gram Panchayats with financial autonomy, administrative support, and training can enhance their role in implementing government schemes related to sanitation, education, health, and rural employment.

Conclusion

The relationship between economic development and human rights is neither superficial nor isolated; it is deeply rooted in the socio-political, institutional, and economic realities of any region. In the context of Bihar, this interconnection has been a subject of increasing relevance due to the dual challenges of historical economic underdevelopment and the continued marginalization of vulnerable communities.

The study reveals that while Bihar has recorded notable progress in terms of infrastructure development, road connectivity, and improvements in certain economic indicators such as GSDP and public investment, this growth has not been uniformly distributed nor has it translated into substantial enhancement of human rights. Sectors such as education and health continue to underperform, especially in rural and remote areas. Marginalized communities—particularly Dalits, women, tribals, and children—still face systemic barriers to accessing basic services and exercising their rights fully. To ensure balanced and equitable development, Bihar must focus on a few critical areas. First, investments in human capital must be prioritized. This includes improving the quality of education at all levels, expanding vocational and skill-based training, and strengthening healthcare services, particularly in rural and underserved areas. The state needs to shift from a welfare-based to a capability-based approach that empowers individuals to participate meaningfully in economic activities. Second, good governance must be strengthened by promoting transparency, accountability, and community participation in development planning. Anti-corruption mechanisms should be institutionalized within all administrative processes to ensure that public funds are used effectively. Strengthening local governance through Panchayati Raj Institutions will also play a vital role in aligning

development with local needs. Empowering people through awareness, education, and democratic decentralization will ensure that economic benefits are not confined to the privileged few but reach those who have historically been excluded. As Bihar aspires to rise on the economic ladder, its growth must carry the promise of justice, inclusivity, and human dignity for every individual.

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