

Tempering Patriarchy and Reinventing Gender: Impact of Male Outflow on Women in Rural Bihar

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Prologue

This paper is based on an ongoing research that intends to understand the interplay of the response of poor women, whose immediate male relatives have migrated, to the patriarchal institutions and gendering—or ‘engendering’, as it is sometimes termed—of development in contemporary rural Bihar. The research started in March 2018 in three villages of Bihar: two in Saharsa (Pahadpur and Habeebpur of Simari Bakhtiyarpur block) and one in Siwan (Sahasrawan of Andar block). The research is in its initial stage and hence the paper is based on my preliminary interactions, observations and review of available literature. This research was done in 2018 started although I had been interacting with poor women of Bihar for over a decade, and especially with Bihar’s rural women since 2014, while working on a research project on the declining female workforce participation in India. The dynamics of rural Bihar had been changing swiftly. Women, despite their constrained mobility and exposure, were outnumbering their male counterparts in local governing bodies and were also actively engaged in implementing government initiatives as Asha, Mamta and Jeevika *didis*. The interesting aspect was that this change was not an outcome of women’s initiatives but a manifestation of policy interventions by the government. More importantly, this change was occurring in the wake of male out-migration.

These changing dynamics of twenty-first century Bihar called for study and the idea of this research was conceptualised about two years ago. The impact of this change is apparent in the improving gender development indicators of Bihar (IIPS 2017). Thus, the model of ‘engendering’ development and politics adopted by the Government of Bihar appears to be a successful one. The findings of the National Family Health Survey 2015–16 (NFHS-4) and NSS 2013 (see Damodaran 2015) make this research more significant than ever as it reflects the progression of a paradoxical trend in Bihar, where a process of engendering development and politics is materialising in the wake of a degendering economy. In other words, women in Bihar are outnumbering their male counterparts in local governing bodies and are vibrantly active in the implementation of development projects while their participation in the workforce is declining. Interestingly, female workforce participation in Bihar has been alarmingly low despite substantial male out-migration. Through this research, I intend to understand how women,

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overburdened with their numerous responsibilities in the absence of their migrant husbands, are negotiating with the changing dynamics of Bihar, where the state projects them as the face of development while rejecting the worth of their contribution in the economy.

As noted above, the research is in its preliminary stage and, in this paper, I make an attempt to situate my preliminary interactions with research participants in a review of available literature and my previous experience of working with women in Bihar. The first section of the paper offers a context of the research, which is followed by the main objectives of the research in the second section. The third section attempts to examine the state of women in the drive for improving indicators in Bihar. The following two sections focus on poor women's organisational base in rural Bihar, which is followed by a section on the responses of 'left-behind women' to the changing dynamics of twenty-first century Bihar.

'Left-behind Women' and the Interplay of Gender and Development

To a great extent, the image of Bihar as almost an antonym of the idea and practice of development has been fixed in the collective perception. Words like feudal, semi-feudal, underdeveloped, 'traditional' are often used to characterise this state. These adjectives certainly reinforce Bihar as a state with a constrained space for women. However, a long history of male out-migration from the state also indicates that though the majority of Bihari women, especially in rural Bihar, have had to live in oppressive patriarchal settings, they have not necessarily been under the constant and direct control of their male counterparts. In many households of rural Bihar, men are virtually absent and women are left with all the responsibilities of family, society and economy. Furthermore, rural women, with their limited exposure and mobility, are forced to deal with the changing dynamics of the economy, often shaped by a neoliberal agenda. It would not be inappropriate to state that Bihari women symbolise the numerous paradoxes manifested by the intersection of the dominant institutions of rural Bihar and the development drive of a neoliberal regime. Yet, it is the idea of 'left-behind' women that prevails as *the* image of rural Bihari women.

Researches on 'left-behind' women clearly indicate that wives of migrant men are not necessarily passive recipients of patriarchal hegemony (see Datta and Mishra 2011; Desai and Banerjee 2008; Jaitley 1987). To a great extent, this label disconnects rural Bihari women from their historical experience of tempering patriarchy while reproducing and reinventing it in response to the changing dynamics of contemporary society. Needless to say, patriarchal institution of caste and gender discrimination continue to prevail as the dominant determinants of rural Bihar's society and, as some researches underscore, men continue to be the prime decision-makers in the households and communities of rural Bihar (Datta and Mishra 2011). It is also true that male out-migration is not a new phenomenon in the state. But women outnumbering men at polling booths, especially in the wake of the state's pro-women policies, is certainly a new phenomenon that demands attention. A recent report of the NFHS (2015–16) (IIPS 2017) reflects substantial improvement in the overall condition of women in Bihar.

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Indicator	Bihar (2005–06)	Bihar (2015–16)	India (2015–16)
Women who are literate	37%	49.6% (70.6% urban, 46.3% rural)	68.4%
Women aged 20–24 who married before 18	60%	39.1% (26.9% urban, 40.9% rural)	26.8%
Women who have experienced spousal violence	59%	43.2% (40.2% urban, 43.7% rural)	28.8%
Women with a bank account they themselves use	8%	26.4% (36.9% urban, 24.6% rural)	53.0%
Women with below normal BMI	45%	30.4% (22.2% urban, 31.8% rural)	22.9%
Married women who take part in household decisions	69%	75.2% (77.6% urban, 74.8% rural)	84.0%

Source: IIPS (2007), and IIPS (2017)

Although Bihar’s health and education-related gender development indicators are much behind the national average, the condition of women in the state, as the table above shows, has improved remarkably in the past ten years. There has been an impressive rise in the proportion of women with ten or more years of schooling, from 13.2 per cent in 2005–06 to almost 23 per cent in 2015–16. The proportion of literate women has also increased and almost 50 per cent of the women in the state are now literate. Women’s education has often had an impact on age at marriage as well as health of women and children. There has been a decline of almost 21 per cent in the rate of marriage among under-18 girls and a rise of almost 44 per cent in institutional deliveries. A substantial decline in anaemia among women (over 7 per cent) and children (about 15 per cent) has also been recorded in the past ten years. Moreover, women’s involvement in decision-making processes of the household has also increased (6 per cent), and about 59 per cent of the women own a house and/or land (alone or jointly). About 50 per cent of them have a mobile phone and around 41 per cent have a bank saving account that they themselves use.

These indicators reflect some crucial transitions in the lives of Bihar’s rural women, a group often labelled ‘left-behind women’. Although there are some studies on this group (see Jaitley 1987; Desai and Banerjee 2008; Datta and Mishra 2011), how wives of male migrant labour negotiate with the intersectionalities of caste, gender and development in contemporary rural Bihar remains an underexplored research area. An important publication in this field is the Institute for Human Development’s (IHD) report on the ‘Status of Women in Bihar: Exploring Transformation in Work and Gender Relations’ (Datta and Rustagi 2012). But this research is based on a ‘survey of groups of women in 14 selected villages across 9 districts of north and south Bihar’ (1). The survey was not designed to gather information from individuals but aimed at recording the ‘collective

perceptions of the groups of women'. This perception, as the authors clearly register in the beginning of their report, 'may, at times, differ from what one may elicit from individuals covered in a household survey' (2). Another important publication that specifically addresses the issues of Bihar's left-behind women is Archana K. Roy's *Distress Migration and 'Left Behind' Women: A Study of Rural Bihar* (Roy 2011). This book attempts to address the impact of migration in a holistic manner, keeping left-behind women at its centre. However, it was published in 2011. IHD's study was also published in 2012. Most of these publications are primarily based on researches conducted in the 2000s. But it is the period between 2005 and 2017 (or between NFHS-3 and NHFS-4) that seems to be a crucial time for women in rural Bihar. I could not find any research that captures the transitions that occurred in the past ten years in rural Bihar where left-behind women are emerging as a group with a substantial impact on the state's policies. Considering the paucity of research/publications on contemporary rural Bihar's women, this research intends to understand the interplay of the responses of left-behind women to patriarchal institutions and the engendering of development policies in Bihar.

Research Aims

Contemporary Bihar is witnessing a transformation that indicates some correlation between male out-migration and the 'engendering' of development policies and politics. This context has propounded some very intriguing research questions. For instance, what prompted the government to envision women as an important group of citizens in a state like Bihar where patriarchal norms often restrict women's mobility and their participation in decision-making processes? Is the state exploring possibilities to integrate women into the mainstream political economy while ensuring the continued inflow of remittance through male out-migration? In what ways has male out-migration influenced the production relations of rural Bihar? How have the socioeconomic backgrounds of migrants shaped the push factors of rural Bihar? How are women in rural Bihar negotiating with the intersections of class, caste and gender while interacting with concerned officials to avail benefits of the state's policies to facilitate women? How are women tempering patriarchy while reproducing and reinventing it in response to the changing dynamics of contemporary Bihar? These questions are the prime trigger of my ongoing research. The research approaches these questions through an analysis of women's response to the interplay of state, women's organisations and social institutions like caste and gender. I recognise these three players in the axis of those dynamics that shape gender relations in contemporary Bihar. At this stage, I do not have substantial information to analyse left-behind women's response to social institutions, and hence this paper is confined to my preliminary observations of poor women's interface with their organisations and the state.

Women: A 'Left-behind' Constituent of the Indicators

As per NFHS-3 (2005–06) (IIPS 2017), Bihar had the most critical gender development indicators in India. The following year turned out to be the onset of an era of 'engendering' politics and development in Bihar. The newly elected Government of Bihar reserved 50 per cent seats for women in the local governing bodies and introduced

several policies specially to facilitate poor women of the state. It is important to note here that the Nitish Kumar government of 2005-14 thrived when India was rapidly emerging as a globally known economic power. Gender was a special focus of state intervention because many states, especially the ones in the Hindi belt spread across the Ganges, were marked with a critically low GDI (Gender Development Index). Special funds such as the Backward Region Grant Fund (launched in 2006) were allocated to the states to improve the condition of marginalised groups such as women. Bihar certainly was one of the needy recipients of such grants and received financial support from the central government as well as other concerned agencies like the World Bank for improving its extremely critical HDIs (Human Development Indices) and GDIs. These initiatives, combined with the Bihar government's proactive attempts at engendering development, played a crucial role in improving the gender development indicators of the state.

Preliminary interactions during this research, however, offer a counter-narrative; there seems to be a clear gap between the rhetoric of data and the reality. For instance, many children enrolled in the government schools rarely attend their classes as they are either concurrently enrolled in private schools or have migrated along with their families. The attendance records of the absentee students are maintained as the school authorities are expected to achieve the targeted rates of enrolment and check the school dropout rates. On the other hand, the parents of the absentee students envision this arrangement as an opportunity to avail of the benefits provided by the government for poor children. The fixation on improved data has resulted in neglect of the real challenges that need to be addressed for a natural process of improved indicators.

The prime focus of the state seems to be improving the gender development indicators; the actual well-being of women is disregarded. For instance, the rate of institutional delivery in the state has increased from about 20 per cent in 2006 to about 64 per cent in 2016. This boost is a matter of serious concern as the quality of services provided by the public health institutions of Bihar is worst in the country (Kumar and Singh 2016). The condition of the labour rooms is extremely unhygienic and, yet, the state seems to be determined to ensure institutional delivery through incentive cum monitoring mechanisms like Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY). Effective implementation of JSY, a scheme to incentivise institutional delivery in India, is touted as the prime factor behind the improvement of institutional delivery data in the state. The proportion of JSY beneficiaries in the state (54 per cent) is much higher than the national average (36.4 per cent) and the state government celebrates this as one of its most successful initiatives. However, considering the condition of labour rooms, this is a matter of concern rather than celebration. Moreover, as the preliminary interactions for this research indicate, the incentive component is actually holding back this scheme.

None of the eight households I visited in May 2018 in a Dalit *tola* of Pahadpur village (Simari Bakhtiyarpur, Saharsa) had opted for institutional delivery in the past two years. JSY's inadequate incentive was cited as the key reason behind poor families' reluctance to opt for institutional delivery. The amount people are compelled to pay to the PHC (Primary Health Centre) staff after delivery is often more than what they receive as incentive through JSY. Out of pocket expenditure after institutional delivery was another

additional expense and demotivating factor mentioned by the poor Dalit families. Undoubtedly, the public health officials are not unaware of these lacunas. However, the ones I interacted with for the research opted to justify women's preference for giving birth at home over public health centres/hospitals as a manifestation of their ignorance and illiteracy. Interestingly, the block level government officials found male out-migration a constraint in their mobilisation initiatives, aimed at motivating 'left-behind' women to avail of the benefits proffered by the state. They pointed to the challenges involved in dealing with 'illiterate' Dalit women in the absence of their immediate male relatives. Poor levels of educational attainment and awareness among the mobilisers, who are expected to facilitate and motivate women to avail of the benefits offered through public health institutions, was considered another critical limitation. In sum, the government officials viewed these factors—the literacy levels of Dalit women, living in the absence of their migrant husbands and being motivated through barely literate health mobilisers—as the practical hurdles in improving the rate of institutional delivery as well as other developmental indicators of the state.

To some extent, the absence of men in the poor households was envisioned as a phenomenon that not only de-capacitates the households but also incapacitates the implementation process of state's policies. Neither the issue of re-capacitating poor households through initiatives to check male out-migration nor the plight of overburdened women of those 'de-capacitated' households emerged as a concern in my interactions with officials of three blocks across two research districts. What remains the ethos of official concern is improvement of indicators; or rather, achievement of the target of improving indicators. It is not surprising that women, whose well-being was projected as the prime concern of the Bihar government, seems to be the 'left-behind' constituent in this race towards improving indicators. In fact, poor women, especially those whose husbands have migrated, are often framed as a somewhat disabled category whose constrained exposure, educational attainment and mobility impede the sacred cause of development.

Poor Women and Their Organisational Base in Rural Bihar

An important avenue for poor women has been their organisation. Women's groups in India have been playing a crucial role in organising, capacitating and facilitating poor women since the 1970s. These initiatives have also been apparent in the changing gender dynamics of society. In the last quarter of the past century, lobbying for engendering policies was a crucial agenda of women workers' organisations in the country. One of their most prominent initiatives was the establishment of the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), the world's first trade union of self-employed women workers, in the early 1970s. In Bihar, organisations like ADITHI, established in 1980s, have been offering critical support to poor women, often overburdened with the responsibilities of family and society in the absence of their migrant husbands. ADITHI, SEWA, NIDAN, Srijani and Prayas are some of the numerous organisations constantly working to facilitate poor women in Bihar.

Most of these women's organisations operate through small self-help groups (SHGs) of women. To a great extent, SHGs have been a forum for facilitating and capacitating

disenfranchised women. As the term denotes, SHGs are formed by women from similar socioeconomic backgrounds to help themselves with the support of larger organisations. SHGs have been a popular forum for poor women in rural Bihar. Surprisingly, the preliminary observations of this research indicate that the concept of SHG seems to be fading in rural Bihar. The new alternative for the SHG, the rural women research participants revealed, is the Jeevika Group. Some of the research participants were members of a Jeevika Group. Although the Jeevika groups act like SHGs, the ethos embedded in the term ‘self-help’ seems to have been obliterated, both literally and conceptually, in the new discourse for grouping women.

Jeevika, a project of the Bihar government to promote livelihood options among rural women, may be the prime trigger for the changing gender dynamics in rural Bihar. This project was started in 2007 in six districts of Bihar and is now implemented in all thirty-eight districts of the state. The project primarily operates through savings-led SHGs of women from the poorest and most socially excluded communities. As a state-run project, Jeevika has a well-defined structure of district, block, village and community level organisations. The aim is to capacitate women individually as well as collectively so that they can opt for appropriate livelihood options for themselves and subsequently—as the World Bank’s research team for Jeevika terms it—‘undo gender’ in rural Bihar (Sanyal, Rao and Majumdar 2015). This team, comprising three academics—Paromita Sayal, Vijayendra Rao and Shruti Majumdar—have written collectively and individually on how Jeevika has facilitated ‘recasting [of] culture to undo gender’ in rural Bihar.

Jeevika started with the formation of SHGs of marginalised rural women, and in most of the cases, as I observed while assessing the impact of the project in 2012, the formation processes included creating new or ‘adopting’ already existing SHGs. In reality, the process of adopting implied co-opting the existing SHGs. Gradually, most of the SHGs of rural Bihar were transformed into Jeevika Groups. Jeevika has altered the language of women’s organisations, which now boast about their role in facilitating not their own SHGs but the Jeevika Groups of their project area. In some cases, representatives of women’s organisations say that they do not prohibit the members of their SHGs from joining Jeevika as this would mean losing the opportunity to avail of the benefits offered by the government through the scheme. Hence, in some cases, poor women are members of both SHGs and Jeevika Groups. Joining Jeevika, thus, is a channel to not only access credit at a very low rate of interest but also the benefits offered by the government. These benefits, however, are not reaching poor women for free. The cost the poor women are paying to avail these benefits is the autonomy of their organisational entity. Jeevika has gradually transformed poor women in rural Bihar into indebted agents of the governmental agendas and politics. This context has no room for initiating any dialogue about poor women’s real issues such as checking migration, generating livelihood options, effective implementation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), etc.

Women and the Flux of Jeevika

Although Jeevika members were motivated to opt for a livelihood, as I had observed during my first interaction with Jeevika officials in 2012, there seemed to be limited

scope for women members' own agendas. Besides, women associated with Jeevika eloquently advocated for various schemes of the state government as well as bank schemes, such as replacing the PDS (Public Distribution System) with a cash transfer system. At present, one of the top priorities of Jeevika officials is making Bihar open defecation free (ODF). Jeevika officials are actively engaged in a shaming campaign to discourage those who defecate in open. They are also expected to promote other governmental schemes as well as participate in the rallies called by the state and, now, also by the central government. Members of Jeevika from all over Bihar were summoned to gather in East Champaran to attend the 'Satyagrah se Swachhagrah' campaign, launched by the Prime Minister on 10 April 2018. In this programme, as some research participants from Saharsa shared, Jeevika members took an oath as Swachhagrahis, and are now also working as Swachhagrahis.

Thus, Jeevika members, who introduce themselves as (Jeevika) *didis* (older sisters), can be summoned to participate in the rallies of the Chief Minister and also in the Swachhagrah campaign of the Prime Minister. They are expected to work as Swachhagrahis and also motivate people to actively join the campaign for the prohibition of alcohol. To a great extent, Jeevika has converted poor women of rural Bihar into the state agents who are expected to morph themselves as per state requirement. Nevertheless, Jeevika is a celebrated initiative of the state government and is often referred to as a project that has brought revolutionary changes to the lives of women in rural Bihar. It is not surprising that this 'revolution', like many other 'revolutions' of neoliberal regimes, is not an outcome of an initiative resulting from any particular groups' passion for change but rather a strategically planned activity.

To a great extent, the NGO-isation of the women's movement in the past century was one of the major phenomena that created the grounds for the emergence of the government's non-governmental avatar in the form of programmes like Jeevika. I have written elsewhere about how Non-government Organisation (NGOs) played a crucial role in mobilising women while convincing the poor that they can improve their condition by strategising their saving habits and making their products marketable (see Priyadarshini 2011). The idea was to facilitate SHGs into becoming small entrepreneurs and to gradually incorporate them into the market-led development drive; here, it is not the state but the citizen who is considered responsible for her disadvantageous condition. Thus, NGOs initiated a rhetoric of putting the responsibility for the amelioration of the disadvantaged conditions of the poor on the poor themselves and thereby established the poor as a class that was responsible for its own oppression. Such rhetoric was also instrumental in diverting the poor from the structural factors responsible for their marginalisation—factors which were not the outcome of the poor's inability to save or market, but of the market-led model of development.

With the advent of the Jeevika model, the movement of women's NGOs has moved to a new era. Jeevika has blurred the distinction between the Government Organisation (GO) and NGO. The paradox of Jeevika is that it is a non-governmental organisation of the government. And as an NGO, Jeevika is engaged in a project that involves mobilising poor women to take on the onus of their disadvantageous condition and to work collectively for improving their lives by actively participating in the promotion and

propagation of various governmental projects. This key role of Jeevika problematises Jeevika's complex status as an NGO of the government. While Jeevika is not accorded the status of a governmental institution, it is expected to be responsible for the promotion, implementation and success of numerous governmental programmes despite a very limited stake in the decision-making processes of programme implementation. A daunting manifestation of such an arrangement could be the strangulation of the possibilities for the organic evolution of the women's movement towards closing the gender gap, which remains considerably wide in Bihar despite the wave of 'engendering' politics and development.

The Response of Left-behind Women

In the age of Jeevika, it would not be inappropriate to argue that the 'left-behind' women of rural Bihar are left with minimal autonomous organisational support. Some of the women participants of Siwan and Saharsa discussed the women's organisations they have been associated with. However, they are also Jeevika *didis*. And considering Jeevika's mediating role between the poor women and the government, a preference for Jeevika over the autonomous women's organisations becomes inevitable for poor women. On the other hand, the political party in power envisions Jeevika as a readily available and easily alterable cadre base. A village leader in Simari Bakhtiyarpur brilliantly summarised this flux: *'Kono party ke aai ke date ma mass base chhai? Nai chhai. Sarkar Jeevika nai banaitai ta rally ma bheed kata sa jutetai? Bhala gharak lok ta rally ma jetai nai. Je jatai yah gareeb-gurua sab. Aa gareebo ma purukh sab chail gelai pardes kamaba. Raih gelai yah janani sab. Ta aab okre sabka bajail jaai chhai.'* (Does any political party have a mass base today? None. How will the government pull crowds in rallies if it does not *make* Jeevika? People from good families would not go. It's only the poor who will go. And even among the poor, men have migrated to earn. It's only women who are left behind. Hence they will be called.)

The loss of their cadre base in rural Bihar for most political parties is 'making' Jeevika, a forum for rural poor women, an unavoidable strategy for the government. Jeevika has become an interlocking channel between the government and the poor women in Bihar. This context has certainly left a deep imprint on women's organisational capacity in rural Bihar. Almost all members of Jeevika with whom we interacted for this research complained about the humiliating responses they face in society while motivating people to participate in rallies or not to defecate in open. Many of them were not convinced about their role as Jeevika *didis*. Yet, all of them had some hope in Jeevika.

The fundamental questions of poverty, unemployment, women's rights, etc. have already retreated from the politics of women's organisations during the wave of NGO-isation in the late twentieth century. The most compelling question for the poor women in rural Bihar now is to ensure their access to their means of subsistence. Women participants of the research often struggled while trying to identify the livelihood options available for them in their village. A miniscule proportion of them worked as agricultural labour and few as domestic workers. Stories of corruption in MGNREGA was a popular topic of day-to-day conversation among the research participants in Simari Bakhtiyarpur of Saharsa. A few of the women participants in Simari Bakhtiyarpur had once worked for

MGNREGA and they saw it as a promising programme, but one which, as a Dalit woman of Pahadpur Mushahari put it, is now confined to government files and has ceased to exist for the poor in real. She labelled migration as the only promising livelihood option for the male youth of her community. The state's lack of interest in generating employment in rural Bihar is glaringly apparent. Yet, this issue seldom emerges in the discussions of Panchayats, Jeevika and other forums of not only women but all the 'left-behind' people in rural Bihar.

Most of the participants identified remittance as the prime source of their household income. Yet, the discourse of local governing bodies as well as women's organisations, rarely touches on daunting issues like poverty, unemployment, caste and gender. However, against all odds, the dominant perception about Bihari women—which often compresses varied dimensions of their persona into monolithic gender identities like 'left-behind women' and 'proxy representatives of local governing bodies'—is being challenged. Most of the migrant men remit money in the account of their wives who, in the wake of demonetisation and the cash crunch in ATMs and banks, are compelled to visit banks and ATMs regularly. In case of women members of local governing bodies, many women have contested and won elections from unreserved seats in the past ten years. They are also consolidating along caste lines to influence the electoral politics and are showing a more conscious understanding of their space in the political economy of the twenty-first century Bihar. Issues of gender, however, rarely emerge as a main concern in the politics of women representatives.

The fundamental issues emerging from people's day-to-day struggles as marginalised groups (poor, women, minorities and Dalit)¹ are often subsumed by the dominant discourse shaped by the government's grand projects like 'Satyagrah se Swachhagrah' and complete prohibition of alcohol. The preference for agendas set by such programmes tends to be a prescription for upward mobility and also for creating space in the nexus of power within rural politics. In other words, distancing themselves from issues of poor women in favour of the propagation of the government's development drives manifests a process of 'sanskritization' for the representatives of marginalised groups such as women and Dalits. Thus, the 'engendering' of politics and development does not necessarily instigate a gender sensitive atmosphere. However, it must be noted that in most of the cases, poor women are not passive recipients of patriarchal hegemony. Despite minimal exposure and limited mobility, many women leaders are able to comprehend and critique the striking absence of women's issues in the wave of 'engendering' of development and politics. I conclude this paper with a woman ward member's terse response to the 'engendering' processes of development and politics in Bihar. When asked about the impact of the government's incentives for rural women, such as reservation in local governing bodies and Jeevika, this ward member of Sahasrawan (Siwan) responded: '*Sarkar ta kulhe mehraru sabke ekke kaam me jotale ba: ki ghare-ghar jaayin, aa jaake sabke samjhayin, ki bahar na jayin, ghara hi karin*' (The government has immersed all the women in only one programme and that is: go from home to home and convince people not to defecate in the open and only defecate inside the home).

1. The term Dalit is used for members of lowest caste groups. Literal meaning of the term is "Oppressed".

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