

Bihar

State (pop., 2008 est.: 93,823,000), northeastern India.



Hon'ble Governor of Bihar - Devanand Konwar



Hon'ble Chief Minister of Bihar - Shri Nitish Kumar

Hon'ble Cabinet Ministers of Bihar



Sushil Kumar Modi

Deputy Chief Minister

Finance, Commercial Taxes.

Additional Charge: Urban Development & Housing.



Ramashray Pd Singh

Cabinet Minister

Energy, Parliamentary Affairs.



Nand Kishore Yadav

Cabinet Minister

Health.



Bijendra Pd Yadav

Cabinet Minister

Industry.



Narendra Singh

Cabinet Minister

Food and Consumer Protection



Vrishin Patel

Cabinet Minister

Rural Works.



Sudha Shrivastava

Cabinet Minister

Planning and Development.



Ashwini Kumar Choubey

Cabinet Minister

Public Health & Engineering.



Ramnath Thakur

Cabinet Minister

Law, Information & Public Relations.



Prem Kumar

Cabinet Minister

Road Construction.



Narendra Narayan Yadav

Cabinet Minister

Revenue & Land Reforms.



Dr. Renu Kumari Kushwaha

Cabinet Minister

Agriculture.



Jeetan Ram Manjhi

Cabinet Minister

Schedule Caste/Schedule Tribe



Shahid Ali Khan

Cabinet Minister

Science & Technology.

Additional Charge: Minority Welfare.



Chedi Paswan

Cabinet Minister

Building Construction.



Damodar Rawat
Cabinet Minister
Social Welfare.



Ramanand Singh
Cabinet Minister
Transport.



Hari Narayan Singh
Cabinet Minister
Human Resources.



Hari Prasad Sah
Cabinet Minister
Panchayati Raj, Backward Class and
Extremely Backward Class Welfare.



Shri Bhagwan Singh Kushwaha
Cabinet Minister
Rural Development.



Dinesh Prasad
Cabinet Minister
Minor Irrigation.



Awadhesh Narayan Singh

Cabinet Minister

Labour Employment and Training.



Giriraj Singh

Cabinet Minister

Co-operative.



Renu Devi

Cabinet Minister

Youth, Art and Culture.



Ramnarayan Mandal

Cabinet Minister

Animal & Fish Resources.



Ram Pravesh Rai

Cabinet Minister

Tourism.



Devesh C. Thakur

Cabinet Minister

Disaster Management

Hon'ble State Ministers of Bihar



Dr. Anil Kumar

State Minister

Independent Charge

Information Technology.



Gautam Singh

State Minister

Independent Charge

Sugarcane.



Ram Chandra Sahni

State Minister

Independent Charge

Mines and Geology.



Ramji Rishidev

State Minister

Independent Charge

Environment & Forest.



Vyasdev Prasad

State Minister

Health.

Physical Features

- Latitude 24°-20'-10" ~ 27°-31'-15" N

● Longitude	82°-19'-50" ~ 88°-17'-40" E
● Rural Area	92,257.51 sq. kms
● Urban Area	1,095.49 sq. kms
● Total Area	94,163.00 sq. kms
● Height above Sea-Level	173 Feet
● Normal Rainfall	1,205 mm
● Avg. Number of Rainy Days	52.5 Days in a Year

Administrative Units

● Divisions	9
● Districts	38
● Sub-Divisions	101
● CD Blocks	534
● Panchayats	8,471
● Number of Revenue Villages	45,103
● Number of Urban Agglomerations	9
● Number of Towns	130
- Statutory Towns	125
- Non-Statutory Towns	5
● Police Stations	853
- Civil Police Stations	813
- Railway Police Stations	40
● Police Districts	43
- Civil Police District	39
- Railway Police District	4

Key Statistics - as per 2001 Census (Provisional)

● Population	8,28,78,796
- Male	4,31,53,964
- Female	3,97,24,832
● Population (0~6 Years Group)	
- In Absolute Numbers	1,62,34,539
	Male: 83,75,532
	Female: 78,59,007
- Percentage of Total Population	19.59%
	Male: 19.41%
	Female: 19.78%
● Literacy	
- In Absolute Numbers	3,16,75,607

	Male:	2,09,78,955
	Female:	1,06,96,652
- Percentage of Total Population		47.53%
	Male:	60.32%
	Female:	33.57%
● Decadal Population Growth (1991-2001)		130
- Absolute		1,83,48,242
- As Percentage		28.43%
● Highest Decadal Growth at	Sheohar District (36.16%)	
● Lowest Decadal Growth at	Nalanda District (18.64%)	
- Civil Police Stations		813
- Railway Police Stations		40
● Density of Population		880 per sq kms
- Highest Density	Patna, 1471 per sq kms	
- Lowest Density	Kaimur, 382 per sq kms	
● Sex Ratio (Females/Thousand Males)		921
- Highest Ratio	(Siwan) 1,033	
- Lowest Ratio	(Patna) 873	
● Highest Literacy Rate	Patna, 63.82%	
● Lowest Literacy Rate	Kishanganj, 31.02%	
● Average Population of a District		22,39,967

Bordered by Nepal and West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh states, it occupies 38,301 sq miles (99,200 sq km); its capital is Patna. Its area was the site of the ancient kingdoms of Videha and Magadha in the 2nd and 1st millennia bce. In the 4th century ce the area came under the Gupta empire, whose capital was at Pataliputra (Patna). Bihar was overcome by the Muslims c. 1200. In 1765 it was taken by the British and made part of Bengal. The area was the scene of revolts against the British in the mid-19th century and of Mohandas K. Gandhi's nonviolent movement in the early 20th century. Bihar was made a single province of British India in 1936; in 1950 it became a state in independent India. It is one of India's least urbanized yet most densely populated states, and most of its people engage in agriculture. In 2000 the state of Jharkhand was created from Bihar's southern districts.

It is bounded by Nepal to the north and by the Indian states of West Bengal to the northeast and Uttar Pradesh to the west. In November 2000 the new state of Jharkhand was created from Bihar's southern provinces and now forms the state's southern and southeastern borders. The capital of Bihar is Patna.

Bihar occupied an important position in the early history of India; for centuries it was the principal seat of imperial powers and the main focus of Indian culture and civilization. The derivation of the name Bihar from the Sanskrit *vihara* (Buddhist monastery) reflects the prominence of such communities in the region in ancient times. Area 38,301 square miles (99,200 square km). Pop. (2008 est.) 93,823,000.

Land

The state is naturally divided by the Ganges (Ganga) River into two regions—the North Bihar Plains and the South Bihar Plains, which together form part of the middle Gangetic Plain. Except for the foothills of the Himalayas in the extreme northwest, the North Bihar Plain is a flat alluvial region, less than 250 feet (75 metres) above sea level and prone to flooding. The Ghaghara, the Gandak, the Bagmati, the Kosi, the Mahananda, and other rivers flow down from the Himalayas of Nepal and make their way to the Ganges in frequently changing channels. Depressions and lakes mark the abandoned courses of streams. The Kosi River, long known as the “Sorrow of Bihar” for its tendency to cause destructive floods, has been confined within artificial embankments. The soil of the northern plain consists mostly of new alluvium—chalky and light-textured (mostly sandy loam) west of the Burhi (Old) Gandak River and nonchalky and heavy-textured (clay and clay loam) to the east. Another natural hazard—seismic activity—also affects this area, which lies within the Himalayan earthquake zone. The earthquakes of 1934 and 1988 were especially severe and caused widespread devastation and loss of life.

The land of the South Bihar Plain is more varied than that of its northern counterpart, with many hills rising from the level alluvium. The southern rivers, with the exception of the Son, are all small; their water is diverted into irrigation channels. The soil consists mainly of older alluvium, composed of a darkish clay or yellowish loam, with poor, sandy soils predominating toward the south of this region. In the southwest, beyond the Son River valley, lies the Kaimur Plateau, with horizontal sandstone strata over a limestone base.

Climate

There are three well-defined seasons: the hot-weather season, lasting from March to mid-June; the season of southwest monsoon rains, from mid-June to October; and the cold-weather season, from November to February. May is the hottest month, with temperatures regularly exceeding 90 °F (32 °C), except in the extreme north. The coolest month is January, with temperatures typically rising into the low 70s F (about 22 °C). The normal annual rainfall varies from about 40 inches (1,000 mm) in the west-central part of the state to more than 60 inches (1,500 mm) in the extreme north. Nearly all the rain falls between June and October, with July and August being the wettest months. The cold-weather season is the most pleasant part of the year.

Plant and animal life

The natural vegetation of Bihar is deciduous forest, but only a small portion of the total area is forested. Most forests occur in the Himalayan foothills; those on the plain have largely been removed in order to cultivate the land. Valuable resin-yielding sal trees (*Shorea robusta*) are found in the Himalayan foothills, along with an abundance of bamboo, reeds, and grasses. Common trees of the plain include banyans (*Ficus benghalensis* or *F. indica*), Bo trees (*F. religiosa*), and palmyra palms.

The more inaccessible forest regions of Bihar are home to various species of large mammals, most notably Bengal tigers, leopards, elephants, and several types of deer. Crocodiles are most numerous along the Kosi River. In the early 21st century significant populations of the endangered adjutant stork (*Leptoptilos dubius*) were found in the Kosi and Ganges floodplains. Small mammals, birds, reptiles, and fish are common throughout the state.

Population composition

For the most part, the peoples of Bihar are classified according to religion, social caste and lineage, and language, rather than by specific ethnic affiliation. Hindus constitute the majority of the population, and Muslims are the largest minority group. Most Muslims live in northern Bihar, particularly in and around the city of Purnia in the northeast. The Hindu population comprises the elite upper castes (Brahmans, Bhumihars, Rajputs, and Kayasthas); the officially designated Backward Classes (Yadavas, Kurmis, and Baniyas), constituting the socially and economically disadvantaged; and the Scheduled Castes, formerly known as “untouchables” (Chamars or Mochis, Dusadhs, and Mushars). There also are smaller groups of distinct indigenous peoples, the Scheduled Tribes, that fall outside the caste hierarchy; most are Hindus, and a few are Christians.

Indo-European languages—including Hindi, Urdu (primarily the language of Muslims), and the Bihari languages of Bhojpuri, Maithili, and Magahi—are spoken by most of the population. Bhojpuri is spoken in the western districts of Bhojpur, Rohtas (also called Sasaram, after its administrative centre), Saran, and East and West Champaran; Maithili is spoken in Darbhanga and Saharsa; and Magahi is spoken in Patna, Gaya, and Munger. Austroasiatic languages are spoken by the Munda, Santhal, and Ho indigenous minorities, while another Scheduled Tribe, the Oraon, speak a Dravidian language.

Settlement patterns and demographic trends

Bihar is one of India’s most densely populated states, with well over 850 people per square mile (more than 325 per square km). In the early 21st century the state also had one of the country’s highest population growth rates. The state is primarily rural, with the vast majority of the population living in compact or clustered villages in the cultivated plains. The harnessing of the Kosi River has stabilized settlement in its valley, while a highly developed system of irrigation supports a large population on the South Bihar Plain. The major cities in Bihar are Patna, Gaya, Bhagalpur, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Munger, and Bihar Sharif.

Economy

Agriculture engages nearly three-fourths of Bihar’s population, and Bihar is one of India’s top producers of vegetables and fruits. Despite significant gains in mining and manufacturing in the late 20th century, the state has continued to lag behind other Indian states in per capita income; by government standards, a large segment of the population remains below poverty level. At the turn of the 21st century the creation of the state of Jharkhand from Bihar’s southern region further strained Bihar’s struggling economy.

Agriculture

About half of Bihar is under cultivation, but population pressure has pushed cultivation to the furthest limits, and little remains to be developed. The transitional nature of the climatic zone is reflected in the cropping pattern, which shows a mixture of wet and dry crops. Rice is everywhere the dominant crop, but wheat, corn (maize), barley, and pulses (legumes) are important supplementary crops. Sugarcane is grown in a fairly well-defined belt in the northwest. Jute, a crop of the hot, moist lowlands, is found only in the easternmost plain districts. There are three harvests in a year: *bhadai*, dominated by corn that is sown from May to June and gathered in August and September; *aghani*, consisting primarily of rice

sown in mid-June and gathered in December; and *rabi*, made up largely of wheat that ripens in the plains in the spring (March to May).

Fruits and vegetables are grown extensively. Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga are particularly noted for mangoes, bananas, and litchi fruits. Vegetables are important in the vicinity of large towns. The potato-growing area near Bihar Sharif, in Patna district, produces the best variety of seed potato in India. Chilies and tobacco are important cash crops on the banks of the Ganges.

Resources and power

Bihar's mineral wealth was virtually depleted when the mineral-rich Chota Nagpur plateau became part of Jharkhand. Still, there are a few pockets in the state where minerals are found. Bauxite is found in Munger. The Rohtas district has dolomite, glass sand, cement mortar, and other minerals. Mica deposits are found in Gaya, Nawada, and Munger. Gaya and Munger also produce salt, as does Muzaffarpur.

Bihar's energy is provided by a small number of thermal and hydroelectric power stations, but these do not meet the needs of the entire state. Several power stations were lost with the partitioning of Jharkhand. In the early 21st century less than half of the state's villages had regular electricity.

Manufacturing

Bihar has been slow to develop industry. A number of agencies have been set up by the state government to boost the pace of development. Most workers in the manufacturing sector are employed in household industries; the rest are employed in steel and other metal-based and food-processing industries.

The larger industries are mainly in Dalmianagar (paper, cement, chemicals), Baruni (petrochemicals), and Patna (light manufacturing). Among the agriculturally based industries are sugar refining, tobacco processing, silk production, and jute milling. Traditional cottage industries are popular in Bihar; they most notably include sericulture (raising of silkworms and raw silk production), lac (resin used to produce shellac) and glasswork, handloom products, brassware, and pottery. Paintings of mythological stories produced on cloth in and around the town of Madhubani have become a foreign-exchange item.

Transportation

The waterways, once important, are now of little significance. Although all-weather roads reach just over one-third of Bihar's villages, several national highways pass through the state, including the venerable Grand Trunk Road, which is one of India's oldest roadways. Road service is best around Patna, where Allied operations during World War II brought many improvements. The rail line between Kolkata (Calcutta) and Delhi, which crosses Bihar, opened in 1864. Because of the dense population, the railways carry a heavy load of traffic. They generally run parallel to the rivers because of the difficulty of constructing bridges. Consequently, travel between important towns is often long and tedious. Regularly scheduled airlines serve Patna.

Constitutional framework

The structure of Bihar's government, as in most other Indian states, is defined by the national constitution of 1950. The state has a bicameral legislature consisting of the upper-house Legislative Council (Vidhan Parishad) and the lower-house Legislative Assembly (Vidhan Sabha). Appointed by the president of India, the governor is the head of the state and functions on the advice of the chief minister, who is the head of the Council of Ministers. The bureaucratic hierarchy, located in the Patna secretariat, is headed by a chief secretary.

The state is parceled into several divisions, which are further divided into districts. Administration is the responsibility of a deputy commissioner at the district level. Below the district, each subdivision has its own administrative officer.

The police force is headed by an inspector general, assisted by superintendents at the district level. There is a high court at Patna, with a chief justice and several other judges. Below the high court are district courts, subdivisional courts, *munsifs'* (subordinate judicial officers') courts, and village councils.

Health and welfare

Medical facilities, though improving, are still inadequate outside the towns. Villages are served mainly by allopathic (traditional Western) and ancient Indian medical (Ayurvedic) dispensaries. Unani (traditional Muslim) and homeopathic systems of medicine are also popular. Large and well-equipped hospitals and medical colleges are located at Patna, Darbhanga, and Bhagalpur. Respiratory diseases, dysentery, and diarrhea figure prominently among the causes of death. Cholera and malaria seldom occur, and smallpox and bubonic plague have been eradicated.

Education

Although the literacy rate has nearly tripled in the second half of the 20th century to nearly half the state's population, Bihar still ranks low in literacy among Indian states. The rate for men is significantly higher than that for women. The state's general aim is to educate all children at least up to the age of 14. In the early 21st century most of those eligible were enrolled in the primary schools. However, only a small proportion were able to continue to the secondary level, as economic necessity forced them to work. Vocational and technical schools are sponsored by government departments.

Prominent institutions of higher learning in Bihar include Patna University (1917), the oldest and most important, at Patna; Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar Bihar University (formerly Bihar University; 1960), at Muzaffarpur; and Tilka Manjhi Bhagalpur University (formerly Bhagalpur University; 1960), at Bhagalpur. The latter two schools offer graduate programs and have a number of affiliated colleges.

Cultural life

The cultural regions of Bihar show a close affinity with the linguistic regions. Maithili is the language of old Mithila (the area of ancient Videha, now Tirhut), which is dominated by orthodoxy and the Maithil Brahman way of life. Maithili is the only Bihari language with a script of its own, called Tirhuta, and a strong literary history; one of the earliest and most celebrated writers in Maithili was Vidyapati (15th century), noted for his lyrics of love and devotion.

The Bhojpuri language has hardly any written literature but does have a considerable oral narrative tradition. Magahi too has a rich tradition of oral literature. The North and South Bihar plains also have contributed significantly to contemporary Hindi and Urdu literature.

Many villages of the Scheduled Tribes have a dancing floor, a sacred grove (*sarna*) where worship is offered by a village priest, and a bachelor's dormitory (*dhumkuria*). The weekly market, *hat*, plays an important part in the tribal economies. Tribal festivals such as Sarhul, which marks the flowering of the sal trees, and Soharai, celebrated after the rice harvest, are occasions of great festivity.

Places of religious and cultural interest abound in Bihar. Nalanda is the seat of the ancient and celebrated Nalanda Buddhist monastic centre; the nearby Rajgir Hills area, with its ancient and contemporary temples and shrines, is visited by people of many faiths; and Pawapuri is the place where Mahavira, the renowned teacher of Jainism, attained nirvana (enlightenment, or freedom from an endless cycle of reincarnation). Gaya is an important place of Hindu pilgrimage, and nearby Bodh Gaya, where the Buddha attained enlightenment, is the holiest place of Buddhism; in 2002 the Mahabodhi temple complex at Bodh Gaya was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site. Hariharkshetra, near Sonpur, north of Patna, is famous for one of the oldest and largest animal fairs in India, which is held every November. Among the numerous Hindu celebrations held in Bihar, Holi (a colourful spring fertility festival) and Chaat (a tribute to the Sun, primarily by women) are indigenous to the region.

History

Bihar, the ancient land of Buddha, has witnessed golden period of Indian history. It is the same land where the seeds of the first republic were sown and which cultivated the first crop of democracy. Such fertile is the soil that has given birth to innumerable intellectuals which spread the light of knowledge and wisdom not only in the country but in the whole world. The state has its capital at Patna, which is situated on the bank of the holy river Ganga. The state as it is today has been shaped from its partition from the province of Bengal and most recently after the separation of the tribal southern region now called Jharkhand.

Ancient History

The history of the land mass currently known as Bihar is very ancient. In fact, it extends to the very dawn of human civilization. Earliest myths and legends of hinduism the Sanatana (Eternal) Dharma - are associated with Bihar. Sita, the consort of Lord Rama, was a princess of Bihar. She was the daughter of King Janak of Videha. The present districts of Muzaffarpur, Sitamarhi, Samastipur, Madhubani, and Darbhanga, in north-central Bihar, mark this ancient kingdom. The present small township of Sitamarhi is located here. According to legend, the birthplace of Sita is Punaura, located on the west-side of Sitamarhi, the headquarters of the district. Janakpur, the capital of King Janak, and the place where Lord Rama and Sita were married, lies just across the border in Nepal. It is reached via the rail station of Janakapur Road located in the Sitamarhi district, on the Narkatiyaganj - Darbhanga section of the North-Eastern Railway. It is no accident, therefore, that the original author of the Hindu epic - **The Ramayana** - Maharishi Valmiki - lived in Ancient Bihar. Valmikinagar is a small town and a railroad station in the district of West Champaran, close to the railhead of Narkatiyaganj in northwest Bihar. The word Champaran is derived from champa-arnya, or a forest of the fragrant Champa (magnolia) tree.

It was here that Prince Gautam attained enlightenment, became the Buddha- at the present Bodh Gaya- a town in central Bihar; and the great religion of buddhism was born. It is here also that Lord Mahavira, the founder of another great religion, Jainism, was born and attained nirvana (death). That site is located at the present town of pawapuri, some miles to the south east of patna, the Capital of Bihar., it is here that the tenth and last Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh was born and attained the sainthood of sikhism, that is became a Guru. A lovely and majestic Gurudwara (a temple for Sikhs) built to commemorate his memory - the harmandir- is located in eastern Patna. Known reverentially as the Patna Sahib, it is one of the five holiest places of worship (Takhat) for Sikhs.

The ancient kingdoms of Magadh and of Licchavis, around about 7-8th century B.C., produced rulers who devised a system of administration that truly is progenitor of the modern art of statecraft, and of the linkage of statecraft with economics. Kautilya, the author of Arthashastra, the first treatise of the modern science of Economics, lived here. Also known as Chanakya, he was the wily and canny adviser to the Magadh king, Chandragupta Maurya. As an emissary of Chandragupta Maurya, Chanakya traveled far and wide in pursuit of promoting the interests of the State and dealing with the Greek invaders settled in the northwest of India, along the Indus valley. He succeeded in preventing the further onslaught of the Greeks. Indeed, he brought about amicable co-existence between the Greeks and the Mauryan Empire. Megasthenes, an emissary of Alexander's General, Seleucus Nicator, lived in Pataliputra (ancient name of Patna, the Mauryan capital) around 302 B.C. He left behind a chronicle of life in and around Patliputra. This is the first recorded account by a foreign traveler in India. It describes in vivid terms the grandeur of life in Patliputra, a city established by King Ajatshatru, around 5th Century B.C., at the confluence of the rivers Sone and Ganga.

Another Mauryan king, Ashok, (also known as Priyadarshi or Priyadassi), around 270 B.C., was the first to formulate firm tenets for the governance of a people. He had these tenets, the so called Edicts of Ashok, inscribed on stone pillars which were planted across his kingdom. The pillar were crowned with the statue of one or more lions sitting on top of a pedestal which was inscribed with symbols of wheels. As the lion denoted strength, the wheel denoted the eternal (endless) nature of truth (dharma), hence the name Dharma (or Dhamma) Chakra. This figure of lions, atop a pedestal, with inscription of a wheel, was adopted as the Official Seal of the independent Republic of India (1947). Also, Ashok's dharma chakra was incorporated into the national flag of India, the Indian tricolor. Remains of a few of these pillars are still extant, for example at Lauriya-Nandan Garh in the district of West Champaran and at vaishali, in the present district of the same name. Ashok, a contemporary of Ptolemy and Euclid, was a great conqueror. His empire extended from what is now the North West Frontier Province (in Pakistan) in the west, to the eastern boundaries of present India in the north, and certainly, up to the Vindhyan Range in the south. Ashok was responsible also for the widespread proselytization of people into Buddhism. He sent his son, Prince Mahendra, and daughter, Sanghamitra, for this purpose to as far south as the present country of Sri Lanka (Sinhala Dweep in ancient times, and Ceylon during the British Empire. Some historians, particularly Sinhalese, consider Mahindra and Sanghamitra as brother and sister.

Ancient Bihar also saw the glorification of women in matters of state affairs. It was here that Amrapali, a courtesan of Vaishali (the present district of the same name) in the kingdom of the Licchavis, attained and wielded enormous power. It is said that the Lord Buddha, during his visit to Vaishali, refused the invitation of many princes, and chose to have dinner with Amrapali instead. Such was the status of women in the Bihari society of several centuries B.C.!

A little-known, but historically and archaeologically documented, event is worth mentioning in this context. After his visit with Amrapali, Lord Buddha continued with his journey towards Kushinagar (also called Kusinara in Buddhist texts.) He travelled along the eastern banks of the river Gandak (also called Narayani, which marks the western border of Champaran, a district now administratively split into two- West and East Champaran.) A band of his devoted Licchavis accompanied Lord Buddha in this journey. At a spot known as Kesariya, in the present Purbi (meaning, East) Champaran district, Lord Buddha took rest for the night. It was here that he chose to announce to his disciples the news of his impending niravana (meaning, death); and implored them to return to Vaishali. The wildly lamenting Licchavis would have none of that. They steadfastly refused to leave. Whereupon, Lord Buddha, by creating a 3,000 feet wide stream between them and himself compelled them to leave. As a souvenir he gave them his alms-bowl. The Licchavis, most reluctantly and expressing their sorrow wildly, took leave and built a stupa there to commemorate the event. Lord Buddha had chosen that spot to announce his impending nirvana because, as he told his disciple Anand, he knew that in a previous life he had ruled from that place, namely, Kesariya, as a Chakravarti Raja, Raja Ben. (Again, this is not just a mere legend, myth or folk-lore. Rather, it is a historically documented fact supported by archaeological findings. However, neither this part of Buddha's life, nor the little town of Kesariya, is well-known even in India or Bihar.

At Nalanda, the world's first seat of higher learning, an university, was established during the Gupta period. It continued as a seat of learning till the middle ages, when the muslim invaders burned it down. The ruins are a protected monument and a popular tourist spot. A museum and a learning center- **The Nava Nalanda Mahavira** - are located here.

Nearby, Rajgir, was capital of the Muaryan Empire during the reign of Bimbisara. It was frequently visited by Lord Buddha and Lord Mahavira. There are many Buddhist ruins here. It is also well-known for its many hot-springs which, like similar hot-springs elsewhere in the world, are reputed to have medicinal property.

Medieval History

This glorious history of Bihar lasted till around the middle of the 7th or 8th century A.D. - the Gupta Period - when, with the conquest of almost all of northern India by invaders from the middle-east, the Gupta dynasty also fell a victim.

In medieval times Bihar lost its prestige as the political and cultural center of India. The Mughal period was a period of unremarkable provincial administration from Delhi. The only remarkable person of these times in Bihar was Sher Shah, or Sher Khan Sur, an Afghan. Based at Sasaram which is now a town in the district of the same name in central-western Bihar, this jagirdar of the Mughal King Babur was successful in defeating Humayun, the son of Babur, twice - once at Chausa and then, again, at Kannauj (in the present state of Uttar Pradesh or U.P.) Through his conquest Sher Shah became the ruler of a territory that, again, extended all the way to the Punjab. He was noted as a ferocious warrior but also a noble administrator - in the tradition of Ashok and the Gupta kings. Several acts of land reform are attributed to him. The remains of a grand mausoleum that he built for himself can be seen in today's Sasaram (Sher Shah's maqbara.)

Modern History

During most of British India, Bihar was a part of the Presidency of Bengal, and was governed from Calcutta. As such, this was a territory very much dominated by the people of Bengal. All leading educational and medical centers were in Bengal. In spite of the unfair advantage that Bengalis possessed, some sons of Bihar rose to positions of prominence, by dint of their intelligence and hard labor. One such was Rajendra Prasad, native of Ziradei, in the district of Saran. He became the first President of the Republic of India.

When separated from the Bengal Presidency in 1912, Bihar and Orissa comprised a single province. Later, under the Government of India Act of 1935, the Division of Orissa became a separate province; and the Province of Bihar came into being as an administrative unit of British India. At Independence in 1947, the State of Bihar, with the same geographic boundary, formed a part of the Republic of India, until 1956. At that time, an area in the south-east, predominantly the district of Purulia, was separated and incorporated into West Bengal as part of the Linguistic Reorganization of Indian States.

Resurgence in the history of Bihar came during the struggle for India's independence. It was from Bihar that Mahatma Gandhi launched his civil-disobedience movement, which ultimately led to India's independence. At the persistent request of a farmer, Raj Kumar Shukla, from the district of Champaran, in 1917 Gandhiji took a train ride to Motihari, the district headquarters of Champaran. Here he learned, first hand, the sad plight of the indigo farmers suffering under the oppressive rule of the British. Alarmed at the tumultuous reception Gandhiji received in Champaran, the British authorities served notice on him to leave the Province of Bihar. Gandhiji refused to comply, saying that as an Indian he was free to travel anywhere in his own country. For this act of defiance he was detained in the district jail at Motihari. From his jail cell, with the help of his friend from South Africa days, C. F. Andrews, Gandhiji managed to send letters to journalists and the Viceroy of India describing what he saw in Champaran, and made formal demands for the emancipation of these people. When produced in court, the Magistrate ordered him released, but on payment of bail. Gandhiji refused to pay the bail. Instead, he indicated his preference to remain in jail under arrest. Alarmed at the huge response Gandhiji was receiving from the people of Champaran, and intimidated by the knowledge that Gandhiji had already managed to inform the Viceroy of the mistreatment of the farmers by the British plantation owners, the magistrate set him free, without payment of any bail. This was the first instance of the success of civil-disobedience as a tool to win freedom. The British received, their first "object lesson" of the power of civil-disobedience. It also made the British authorities recognize, for the first time, Gandhiji as a national leader of some consequence. What Raj Kumar Shukla had started, and the massive response people of Champaran gave to Gandhiji, catapulted his reputation throughout India. Thus, in 1917, began a series of events in a remote corner of Bihar, that ultimately led to the freedom of India in 1947.

Sir Richard Attenborough's award winning film, "Gandhi", authentically, and at some length, depicts the above episode. (Raj Kumar Shukla is not mentioned by his name in the film, however.) The two images here are from that film. The bearded gentleman, just behind Gandhiji, in the picture on the left, and on the elephant at right, is Raj Kumar Shukla.

Gandhiji, in his usual joking way, had commented that in Champaran he "found elephants just as common as bullock carts in (his native) Gujarat"!!

It was natural, therefore, that many people from Bihar became leading participants in India's struggle for independence. Dr. Rajendra Prasad has been mentioned above. Another was Jay Prakash Narayan,

affectionately called JP. JP's substantial contribution to modern Indian history continued up until his death in 1979. It was he who steadfastly and staunchly opposed the autocratic rule of Indira Gandhi and her younger son, Sanjay Gandhi. Fearing people's reaction to his opposition, Indira Gandhi had him arrested on the eve of declaring National Emergency beginning June 26, 1975. He was put in the Tihar Jail, located near Delhi, where notorious criminals are jailed. Thus, in Free India, this septuagenarian, who had fought for India's freedom alongside Indira Gandhi's father, Jawahar Lal Nehru, received a treatment that was worse than what the British had meted out to Gandhiji in Champaran in 1917, for his speaking out against oppression. The movement started by JP, however, brought the Emergency to an end, led to the massive defeat of Indira Gandhi and her Congress Party at the polls, and, to the installation of a non-Congress government -The Janata Party - at Delhi, for the first time. With the blessings of JP, Morarji Desai became the fourth Prime Minister of India. JP remained the Conscience of the Janata Party and of post-Gandhi - post-Nehru India. He gave a call to all Indians to work ceaselessly towards eliminating "dictatorship in favour of democracy" and bringing about "freedom from slavery". Sadly, soon after attaining power, bickering began among the leaders of the Janata Party which led to the resignation of Shri Desai as the Prime Minister. JP continued with his call for "total revolution" (sampporna kranti), but he succumbed to kidney failure at a hospital in Bombay in 1979.

Subsequent bickering in the Janata Party led to the formation of a breakaway political party - the Janata Dal. This political party is a constituent unit of the current ruling coalition at Delhi, the so called, United Front. It was also from this party that Laloo Prasad Yadav, the Chief Minister of Bihar was elected. The bickering continued. A new party led by Mr. Yadav was formed as - the Rashtriya Janata Dal - which went on to rule for almost 15 years in Bihar.

This was also a period when Hindi literature came to flourish in the state. Raja Radhika Raman Singh, Shiva Pujan Sahay, Divakar Prasad Vidyarthi, Ramdhari Singh Dinkar, Ram Briksha Benipuri, are some of the luminaries who contributed to the flowering of Hindi literature, which did not have much of a long history. The Hindi language, certainly its literature, began around mid to late nineteenth century. It is marked by the appearance of Bhartendu Babu Harischandra's (a resident of Varanasi in U.P.) drama "Harischandra". Devaki Nandan Khatri began writing his mystery novels in Hindi during this time (Chandrakanta, Chandrakanta Santati, Kajar ki Kothari, Bhootnath, etc.) He was born at Muzaffarpur in Bihar and had his earlier education there. He then moved to Tekari Estate in Gaya in Bihar. He later became an employee of the Raja of Benares (now Varanasi.) He started a printing press called "Lahari" which began the publication of a Hindi monthly, "Sudarshan", in 1898. One of the first short stories in Hindi, if not the very first, was "Indumati" (Pundit Kishorilal Goswami, author) which was published in 1900. The collection of short stories "Rajani aur Taare" (Anupam Prakashan, Patna, publishers) contains an extended history of the origin and evolution of the short story as a distinct literary form in the Hindi literature.

For its geographical location, natural beauty, mythological and historical importance, Bihar feels proud of the assets it has been gifted by time. And for its moral contributions in the fields of arts-literature and religion and spiritualism, it knows no competitors centuries old stories related to this land are told even today. The state is the same kingdom, which once upon a time ruled the country as well as the neighbouring countries . Many great rulers have lived here and it fills us with a sense of pride when we think of Bihar as the 'Karmabhumi' of Buddha and Mahavir. Bihar, to liven up the glorious tale of which land, words fall short.

Upon India's independence in 1947, Bihar became a constituent part (becoming a state in 1950), and in 1948 the small states with capitals at Saraikeela and Kharsawan were merged with it. In 1956, when the

Indian states were reorganized on a linguistic basis, a territory of some 3,140 square miles (8,130 square km) was transferred from Bihar to West Bengal. In 1990, for the first time since independence, a state government was elected from a party other than that controlling the national government, and in 2000 most of the Chota Nagpur plateau in Bihar's southern region became part of the new state of Jharkhand.
