Introduction

Prior to the advent of Mahatma Gandhi on the national scene there had been very little nationalist political activity in Bihar and no distinctive “Bihari” style of national politics had emerged whereas in neighboring Bengal and in Maharashtra a creative regional intelligentsia had established a strong sense of regional identity and assumed the leadership of the national movement. This was partly due to the continued social and political dominance in the region of the traditional ruling elite of large landlords. Although they no longer fulfilled their traditional role in Bihar society and had developed into what D.A. Low has called “Husk Culture”¹, they were politically unchallenged until the second decade of the twentieth century. Bihar also lacked the advantages of a city like Calcutta. Patna, the major town and the future capital, hosted in 1901 a mere 1, 34,753 inhabitants.² It had no industries worth recording and offered few opportunities at hand. Bihari youth had not only to travel to Calcutta to further their education but also tended to find jobs and take up residence in that city or Allahabad (the process is still continuing with Delhi replacing the former two).

This was the time when adjoining Bengal was experiencing the impact of first movement for socio-religious reforms initiated in India “the Brahmo Samaj”, under the impact of western ideas, culture and technology (the Brahmo Samaj was almost 50 years old by 1876). Though the objective of the reform movement supported by the new elites, was not to attack the prevalent patriarchal system in any way or do challenge the power and position neither enjoyed by men nor even to make women more equal partners of men in the societal or economic roles outside the family. Its purpose was to improve the position of women within the patriarchal framework and to make them more capable of fulfilling their roles as wives and mothers within the family.³ The impact of the Bengal “Renaissance” percolated into Bihar in a slow manner. In the early nineteenth century in India, women were almost excluded from the formal system of education, since there were strong and deep-rooted prejudices against women’s education. This was in continuance with the early times when Vedic

² Census of India, Delhi, 1901, VI, p.31.
³ Ibid.
rituals dominated, and a major part of Bihar being a stronghold of Vedic rituals remained resistant to the idea of formal education of women. The formal system of schooling based on evaluation, age wise distribution into classes and certification, often at a location spatially removed from the houses of the pupils came along with colonial rule. Prior to such institutions, children learnt basic literacy skills; familiarity with the scriptures at Pathshalas and Maktabs. The British government was the principal agent in disseminating modern education in India. The system of formal education set up by the British colonial power, clearly reflected a bias in favour of the native males. The English were primarily interested in educating men rather than women in India; they generally refrained from assisting the educational activities for girls.\footnote{T.S. Rajagopal, \textit{Indian Women in the New age or Women in Young India}, New Delhi, 1936, p.199.} This approach in part was in keeping with the overall attitude towards women, whether of the Indian or the British middle classes, namely that they should be trained not to pursue careers but to be good wives and competent mothers; it was also due to the anxiety of the British not to incur the displeasure of Indians by supporting schools which were suspected of intentions of proselytization.

In the present work "Women's Education In Bihar:1890-1950", not only the problem and issues of women's education, the circumstances amidst which it could develop, the obstacles which it faced with, the social implications of its growth, and the pioneers, are dealt with. The focus of the work is to present a historical narrative of the attempts at introducing education in Bihar and to locate within the framework, the development of women's education which took off a little later and acquired less significance compared to other states of India, e.g. Bengal, Maharashtra, Madras. The approach adopted is historical because it seeks to examine the growth and development of women's education chronologically breaking up the theme into appropriate historical periods. It has also been the aim of this study to analyze the typical social and political environment in which the education of women developed and the individual and organizational endeavors of those who developed it.

In the period selected for the study (1890-1950) education of women had definitely come to be a public issue, opposition to it notwithstanding. The slogan of Indian leaders and social reformers by this time had become "educating a girl means educating a family. The 1920s were a period of immense social and political
awakening in India followed by internal social reforms efforts. Thus, the issue of women’s status, long the focus of social reform, was also reflected in a series of legal enactments relating to or affecting women. To mention only a few, the Sati Abolition Act was passed in 1829 and the Widow Remarriage Act in 1854. The Special Marriage Act followed in 1872 (later amended in 1923). By 1929, Indian women had been granted the right to vote. The Sarda Act, which set the minimum age for girls at 14, was enacted in 1929. The Montague-Chelmsford Act of 1919 permitted greater Indian initiative in education policy and the introduction of compulsory education by local option. The British Government had also gradually changed its position vis-à-vis women's education and was willing by that time to lend support. Meanwhile, the emergence of a class of women, who were aware that organized action was necessary to ameliorate their lot, was our additional factor in helping to focus on the current position of women and the need to educate them. (Forbes 1979: 162). During this period Gandhi and Annie Besant also supported women's causes by opposing purdah and supporting widow remarriage. Many writers (McDonald 1943:157, Basu 1976:37; Menon 1975: 23) credit Mahatma Gandhi with breaking the age-old barriers of purdah and bringing women out of their homes. Quite literally he made women more visible. Furthermore, he tried to channel their traditional qualities of forbearance and self-sacrifice into the non-violence movement (Ahmad, 1984). Gandhi stressed the need for educating women. The impression [that gained currency all over India was that Gandhi was not only a social reformer but a reformer who had a special message for women (Srinivas 1978: 26-27). Clearly the impetus for women's education had increased by the third decade of the twentieth century.

In this work, the term "education" has been used to refer to the "vernacular" education" as well as "English education" but the emphasis is on the "English education". Apart from this indigenous institutions and system of education envisaged by missionaries and social reformers for women has also been included. Though a vast corpus of literature exists on the educational policies of the British Government the reforms introduced in the nineteenth century, women's education in general and Bengal (Basu 1982, Bagal 1936, Borthwick 1984, Sarkar 1999) Punjab (Chanana 1984) in particular, no such studies have been attempted before in Bihar (keeping the fact in mind that the much applauded Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain of Bengal began her first educational adventure in Bhagalpur, Bihar).
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical background against which my thesis has taken its course is centered on the issue of women's education. The argument is that growth and development of women's education in India is caught in two simultaneous processes. On the one hand, the state policy and public discourse on education puts a premium on the need to promote education among women to generate positive forces at the macro level. On the other hand, the macro level forces rooted in the family, the kin group and culture determine the educational policies, programmes and ability of girls and women to access them. Moreover, it is not possible to confine the study to the structural characteristics of education as an institution or to look merely at its growth or absence of development due to financial and administrative constraints but it is necessary to look at its interplay with culture and religion.

Traditionally, education had emphasized memorization and oral transmission of sacred texts and some mathematics. In the colonial era it meant literacy and written examination on temporal subjects, while mission schools stressed religious study and literacy in the Gospel. One has to be sensitive to ways of discovering and observing the uses and meanings of educational practices to local people themselves—that is everyday literacies, which may lead to different measurement and claims for outcomes and to different curriculum and pedagogy than in many traditional educational programmes; Street1993b, 1995; Barton 1994]. An alternative to traditional approach will be that literacy is not just a set of uniform 'technical skills' to be imparted to those lacking them but rather that there are multiple literacies in communities and that literacy practices, [I have employed the phrase 'literacy practices' as a meaning of focusing upon ‘the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing’] are socially embedded. [Heath1983] When I look more closely at the characterization ‘illiterate’, it seems that there were quite different practices associated with literacy- those in the traditional ‘Quranic’ school, private home tuitions, tradition of ‘Katha’, folk songs, and pictorial representation of epic tales related to various rituals all practiced by and for women and the period under the study envisaged comprehensive efforts from Gandhi to open up the world of women through social-national-educational programmes namely Vidyapeeths [Bhithiharwa, Barharwa-lakhsan both in 1917, Bihar Mahila Vidyapeeth-1927].
It is therefore imperative to reexamine the validity of some prevalent historical theories on Indian female instruction, and to recognize the paucity of data on the substantial regional differences in the educational movement. While there is a growing awareness that such history has to be rewritten, there is no single work on Bihar. We are thus forced to question prior methods of evaluating women's history and to reexamine what actually constituted 'education' for women from Bihar, by redefining the term with specific reference to them. Moreover, a new range of unused sources gives us a fresh glimpse into the subject.

It seemed imperative to recognize both the common and the specific threads of national and regional change. Caste, class and region were important determinants of the quality of female life in the varied social mosaic of this large multiethnic, multilingual state where the people in urban centers and in border districts were noted for multiculturalism and fluency in Maithily, Bhojpuri, Hindi, Magahi, Angika, Bangla and Urdu.

History has traditionally relied upon written records, these sources present problems since in the first place, women are less likely to be the authors of written documents, and secondly many of the official records either omit women through prejudice or neglect or write about them in a biased way. Occupational censuses for example, frequently ignore women’s work.

So, this provides us with an opportunity to expand the sources like oral history and folklore, which can be added to our repertoire. Traditional sources can also be used in new ways and re-examined to fill in the gaps in our knowledge. As long as women’s history has addressed itself to making women visible in existing historiographical frameworks, it has contributed new information but not a distinctive methodology. At this point in the writing of women’s history, no single theory or method prevails. Borrowing from social, linguistic and psychoanalytic theory, historians of women have begun to articulate the need for a method and theory that is definably feminist, historical in its uses and conceptions and applicable not only to western experience, but to the rest of the world. Only comparative work will test the possibility of such a unified methodology; it is more likely that diversity and variety in method and theory will continue to characterize this field of study.
Geographical Area

Area wise focus of study would primarily be on three districts (Patna, Darbhanga, Bhagalpur).

Socio-Cultural Profile of the Region

The term Bihar is used primarily to denote the current geographical area, 21°58'10" to 27°31'15" N Latitude and 82°19'50" to 88°40' E Longitude, spread in 94,163 Sq.Km. (Rural-92,257.51 Sq.Km., Urban-1,095.49 Sq.Km.). Bihar is an entirely landlocked region and is surrounded by W. Bengal in the East, Uttar Pradesh in the West, Nepal in the North and newly created Jharkhand in its south. According to 2001 census Bihar has a total population of 8,28,78,796 (Male-4,31,53,964, Female-3,97,24,832) with a literacy rate 47.53% (Male-60.32%, Female-33.57%), Districts having highest/lowest Sex Ratio are Siwan (1033) and Patna (873) respectively, with an interesting literacy indicator - Patna having highest literacy rate (63.82%), which is even higher than the total literacy rate of the state.

The term Women refers to the age group 6-40.

The temporal span of my work [1890-1950] is on the basis of a judgment about the historical pattern of development of women's education in India as well as in the state. Around the middle of the nineteenth century, the institutional structure of the education system as it was in the twentieth century began to take shape. Contrary to the usual stereotypical description privileging and highlighting the colonial government's initiative, it can be argued that this institutional structure was shaped by the negotiation and interaction between the indigenous intelligentsia and the British Indian government. The interaction process from the mid-nineteenth century, set off by indigenous initiatives as well as the policy of the government, mark the 1850's as watershed years when the institutional and ideational infrastructure of primary, secondary and tertiary education were developed.

This study is projected into a regional unit of India, the society of Bihar, since it is presumed that a better picture of social change in Indian society can be obtained.
by studying the transformation taking place in various regional sub-cultures which in a continent like country of India have been having their own distinctive influences over a considerable period of time. Neera Desai (1964, p.3) has particularly expressed the view that unless a close study of the changes that have taken place in different regional communities of India under the British impact is made, a rich and adequate understanding of the concrete changes that have taken place, in India as a whole will not be possible. Concurring with this view I am attempting to study a regional unit of India, that is Bihar.

The study has been divided thematically into various sections. In the first introductory chapter, the background of the creation of Bihar, socio-political condition prevailing, along with a brief introduction and the position of women, as well as rituals and customs prevailing at that time. It is seen why Bihar demanded separation and how far English education and employment issues served as a cause. By keeping the focus on the women's position in the society I am trying to point out the overarching importance and impact of socialization on the lives of girls and women. This process is moreover, so intertwined in women's lives that it determines motivations, expectations, perception and attitudes to formal education of girls' and women's. Therefore, it seems relevant to stress that formal education can not be effective unless we understand its strong interlinkages with the socialization process in so far as socialization involves internalization of values and identity formation. In the next segment the general state of education in Bihar, establishment of schools by missionaries is provided. It is seen how English education became a qualification of jobs and how it seemed to create a new class that in fact was receptive to changes and new ideas. The next chapter traces the development of institutions for women's education, efforts put (made) by several organizations and individuals, and the genesis of women's organization in the state. The next section is an attempt to provide a detailed description of the two pioneers: One individual crusader, a woman to start a school for girls in the region against all odds and one institution to provide higher education to the women of Bihar for the first time. In this chapter I have tried to

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portray both, the personality (who made it possible) and her efforts and the institution. In the last segment a text *Islah-un-nisa* and its context has been analyzed.

**Collection of Sources**

The materials for this work have been and mostly from primary sources and from scattered secondary sources, in the Bihar State Archives, Patna, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, ICHR Library, New Delhi, Central Reference Library, New Delhi, Planning Commission Library and finally from my college and one school (Bankipur Girls’ School) from Patna, Bihar. I have used oral sources for my work where no written material was available. For the various interviews as well as collection of scattered written material, especially for collection of souvenirs, I have traveled in the state far and vide i.e. Majhaulia in Darbhanga, Bhagalpur, Chhapra, Madhubani, Patna, Giridih, Ranchi, Jamshedpur (specially for missionary’s sources). It is hoped that the present study will be able to subtly show how in a caste-ridden, feudal, patriarchal set up women’s issues gathered momentum and evolved in due course.