Conclusion

Between 1813, when the East India Company granted Rs.100,000 for education, and 1835 when government policy changed, advocating restraint from ‘interference and injudicious tampering with the religious belief of the students’, missionary agencies struggled to maintain girls’ schools with a modicum of state help. The landmark in Indian educational history was Charles Wood’s Dispatch of 1854 which first evinced a special interest in girls’ schooling. While its tone on female education was rather general, its proposal on grants, curriculum and local support were to have an important effect on girls’ schools. It urged the government to give aid to private establishments of local or other inspiration, which offered a ‘good secular education’ and allowed government inspection. The Dispatch also stated that while it gave grants for secular education, it would not inquire into after school instruction in religious matters. The Dispatch also recommended a system of Anglo-vernacular education similar to that adopted by missions, and stated that while English should be taught wherever a ‘demand’ was apparent, the vernaculars should not be neglected. These pronouncements shaped official attitudes and indirectly fostered female education, although the Dispatch had merely expressed a desire to see it improved.

The emergence of socio-religious reform movements in the nineteenth century was a pan-Indian phenomenon, but at the time, Bihar, in the shadow of Bengal, was still fighting for its legitimate position as a separate state, so the intelligentsia of Bihar still in the awe of Bengal reformists, could not perceive changes, required to the specific needs of the state. Since women occupied a crucial position in society as mothers and wives their social status became the gauge of civilized society. But the point which emerges is the limited extent to which education spread among women. The major problem with regard to women’s education was the conservative attitude of the orthodox Hindus and Mussalmans. Moreover, the problem of non-availability of properly trained women teachers, the short school going period of four to five years, the universal practice of early marriages of girls, non-existence of separate schools

1 K.S. Vakil and S. Natarajan, *Education in India*, Bombay, 1948, p.120.
for girls and above all the indifferent attitude of the parents and the fear of widowhood due to education and insufficient fund allocated by the government for the same purpose made the whole problem extremely complex as evident from the following:

The progress in female education is still slow the reasons being (i) the difficulties imposed by the prevalent social customs i.e., the Purdah system and early marriages; (ii) the scarcity of trained women teachers due partly to social customs which stand in the way of women when they wish to be trained or to accept posts after training except in their own villages, and partly to the lack of suitable quarters and the low rates of pay offered; (iii) the conveyance problem; and (iv) the general unwillingness on the part of parents to pay anything towards the education of their girls.²

However, while one school of thought regarded education as the magic panacea for all ills afflicting women, other viewpoints have increasingly problematized the impact of education, regarding it as a process not of liberalization but of the reification of stereotypes. By second half of the nineteenth century it was apparent that upper and middle class women themselves sought zenana teaching as an avenue for expanding their intellectual horizons, but this mode of instruction had some negative effects. It had legitimized women’s seclusion under the guise of exposing them to the larger world through the means of books. In another less conservative society such newly educated women may have sought employment outside, but under the watchful eyes of the Bihar men who were uncertain about the value of ancient traditions in a changing world, such education merely served to reinforce their domestification, probably that was the reason for someone Bheshnath Jha to write Vyavhar Vigyan (scientific conduct) for the new readership of these neo-literate section of women and specifying right conduct for a women and laying out her routine based on seasonal variation, to lead a healthy family life. Similarly there came a mushrooming in Bihar in the literary arena of conduct book writing.

In looking at the various catalytic processes such as social changes and education that helped to radicalize (if not wholly ameliorate) the traditional self image of women, one must not overlook the contribution of political consciousness and activism both in the heady days of the nationalist movement and in the post-independence period. Mahatma Gandhi, tried to channel women’s traditional qualities of forbearance and self-sacrifice

² Third Quinquennial Review of the POE in Bihar & Orissa (1922-27), Patna, p. 96.
into the non-violence movement and along with several other reformers, was instrumental in breaking the age-old barriers of purdah and bringing women out of their homes and into the streets, in case of Bihar, Prabhavati Devi, wife of Jayaprakash Narayan, inspired and motivated by Gandhian movement spent her entire life in spreading his message, took vows of celibacy, founded ‘Mahila Charkha Samiti’ at Patna, another life inspired in question are founders of ‘Bihar Mahila Vidyapith’ at Majhauliya, Darbhanga, by Pt. Ramnandan Misra and his wife Saraswati Devi, who gave up their comfortable life and started anti-purdah movement in Bihar along with move to educate illiterate women at the Vidyapith, which can also be termed as social-national education. According to Engels, even Hindu revivalism gradually turned femininity from a passive object of adoration to a powerful agent for political mobilization. So far as the nationalists were concerned, ‘women were reared for household work, and through cultural and national orientation, for their role as guardians of Bengali culture and tradition’.

While we should not dismiss the movement for women’s education in Bihar, neither should we expect a sweeping or revolutionary social change to emerge from it. Indeed women’s education in Bihar in the early twentieth century was more symptomatic of social change than causative. Men wanted education for their women in order to make their own lives more harmonious, to make better wives, better mothers, and sought to shape a curriculum that would include a practical knowledge of household skills, as evident from the Report on POE for the year 1922-1927:

Young girls presumably are sent to school in order that they may grow up to be good wives and mothers and learn at least a minimum of such subjects as sewing and hygiene.

Women who went on to earn BAs and MAs often did so as enhancements their marriage value and as ornaments to their families status and honor. On the subject of the curriculum, the Hartog report noted the dilemma faced by all those who would educate women:

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6 Third Quinquennial Review of the POE in Bihar & Orissa (1922-27), Patna, p. 99.
Two aims, those in most countries are not always reconciled. The first is to make women's education equal to that of men's and the second of prepare women for married life, while giving them a liberal education.

The Report on the POE in Bihar for the year (1938-39), added:

At the primary level most provinces considered the needs of girls by including courses in household management, nature study, drawing, music, embroidery hygiene. There is not a single higher middle school in which girls are not devoting some portion of heir time to work which is outside their ordinary curriculum: first aid, nursing, gardening, plays, fancy needle work, paper flower making, mass literacy, painting, music, weaving, basket and mat-making, pottery painting, cooking and many domestic arts. Schools frequently contribute the musical part of the programme at social, political and religious meetings.7

But at secondary and higher levels the curriculum was less flexible and the most women's schools and colleges emphasized the first aim, equality to men's education (as in the case of Patna Women's College where a range of subjects were taught). The committee did not say so but given the structure of the examination system and the prestige of degrees, this was hardly surprising. Indeed their report seemed to accept that a woman would either be as professionally qualified as a man in order to became an educator or that she would marry:

There is a necessity that India should produce women who after receiving the highest academic education are capable of inspecting and advising in the planning of women's education of all grades. On the other hand, the fact must be kept in view that the overwhelming majority of Indian girls are destined for married life.8

British educational policy seemed fixed upon the model of separate spheres. The British authorities seemed incapable of imagining that there right be women in India who would combine marriage and professional activity as these were in their own country – or, conversely, that there might be women who had the means to achieve higher education for the love of learning and as a mark of prestige, who would then stay at home, serving society in voluntary ways. The urban middle class of

7 Report on the POE in Bihar for the year (1938-39), Patna, p. 56.
Bihar had fewer resources and smaller households but women still had an important role to play in 'status production'.

Meanwhile the British authorities seemed mainly concerned with teaching those 'destined for married life a modicum of domestic science and how to play the harmonium'. Besides the Christian Missionaries and various Reform Movements, in Bihar, the voluntary agencies consisted of the Zamindars and landlords, philanthropic persons, nationalist leaders, caste associations and societies. Nothing substantial however was done in the direction of mass education, by the Government, because of the apathy of the people towards Western education. In the end, reformers and educational authorities alike left to women themselves the job of reconciling the seemingly irreconcilable aims of their education in the course of their everyday lives, which was not expected to generate its own dynamics. However, in some cases, especially, in urban areas, the intellectual awakening and economic independence of women, made possible by education may have shown the seeds of subsequent challenges to prevailing social norms and values. Some women and even men have questioned the traditional male dominated structure of gender roles and society. Perhaps, their ideas mere aberration, then again, perhaps they were the logical outcome of the process that occurs whenever you begin to educate, individuals, a process that is expected to produce a reforming of family and societal roles.

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