REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To get a better insight into the gender inequality of Muslim women, a brief review of the available studies on inequality of women is presented. This review includes a few related studies carried out abroad and a few fragmentary pieces of information available form studies carried out in India. It focuses on the findings of these studies with regard to the socio-economic, political, legal, family and religious dimensions of inequality of women. The intended to identify gaps in the study, which would help raise some issues for detailed discussion.

Studies have been conducted on women’s position in society and in the family. These tried to address issues like; recognition of power and its implications, discussion of power in original thoughts to identify and applied models to explain the relation between power of women in the family. Methodology used in these studies is documentary. They have indicated that due to social changes, male domination is changing within the family sphere, and, with women’s involvement in the decision–making process, gender inequality in the family is being undermined (Sarookani, 2006; Mahmoodian, 2004). Another study of gender consciousness conducted by Azamzade (2003) demonstrates that some factors such as structural, demographical, women’s experiences; ideological tendencies and attitudes are mostly responsible for shaping gender consciousness. Along with other factors ideological prejudgments, life conditions in adulthood, cultural and gender socialization, access to some resources such as education for women, women’s authority in the family and society are considered to be important factors affecting gender identity and consciousness. Despite the fact that social attentiveness towards gender inequality has grown remarkably, reaction of the public especially women is still uncertain. For instance, it is not clear how Iranian women with different background evaluate their position in the family and social hierarchy (Azamzade, 2003).
Studies conducted on socio-political role of women tried to discuss three different in contemporary history of Iran. Those who believed that throughout the history of Iran, the role of women has never been significant were first. Contrary to this others argued that women have had some roles but it was rather destructive. Still others believe that Muslim women have had the most important role in socio-political development over the last decades. But despite the common belief, these women who played an active role in socio-political development were related to royal families or intellectual communities. However, these approaches are scrutinized based on the documents and finally it is possible to conclude that Iranian women have played a rather constructive role in its development but they were not able to publicize their thoughts due to their lack of access to the publication facilities (Movahed, 2003; Shiroodi, 2004).

Studies on relationship of gender roles perception and gender contentment were conducted in Tehran. One such study gathered data through questionnaires on a sample group of over 500 high schools students. Research findings demonstrate significant differences among girls and boys in such a way that gender beliefs among boys in comparison to girls were more non-stereotyped. If born again, girls wished more than boys to have a different sex. This shows an indication of girls being less content than boys about their gender. Considering that girls with active and social characteristics and behaviors, and boys with emotional characteristics and behavior were more frequently criticized, it seems gender stereotyping is a prevalent practice in the society and getting away from abnormality (Zohrevand, 2001).

Women are part of the population and their position is important in development process of countries. Improving their status is a necessary condition for their sustainable development. To attain this goal many efforts have been made to empower women throughout the world (Enayat, 2005). A survey on women’s demand for Higher Education and investments in female
education in Iran was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methods. This research investigates an increase in number of women in higher education. It suggests that after the Iranian revolution of 1979, the number of women in higher education has increased substantially. On the other hand it indicates that investment in female education not only reduces the gender gap, but also leads to greater efficiency, increasing production, and higher income. The findings reveal that increased education similarly affects the wage levels. However, greater investment in higher levels of education (because of increasing financial and opportunity costs) produce lower returns. Additionally, economists believe that female education has a higher social return because of the important role educated women play in promoting the health, well-being, and education of their children (Movahed, 2003).

A study of macro economic policies and labour market for women in Iran indicated that while economic growth improves macroeconomic capacities unemployment rate is reduced only slightly. Fertility rate has been reduced noticeably in recent years. This study shows that there is minimal impact on women’s participation rate. Inflation encourages women to enter labour market with an increasing number of women graduating from universities. But labour market has not been able to meet the demands of the female population. Elmi predicts Iran will encounter a new crisis (Elmi, 2005).

In West Bengal a study was conducted on situation of Muslim Women (Mondal, 2002). The study observed that Muslim society in West Bengal is not homogeneous. It is divided into various groups and sub-groups. The major difference between them is that the Muslim women in West Bengal are comparatively free from orthodoxy and rigidity of some traditional customs and restrictions. Growth of education, secular socio-political environment, modernization and reform movements are considered as the crucial factors. However, due to deep rooted tradition, poverty and relative isolation, the Muslim women of West Bengal have been suffering from economic,
educational, health and other socio-political problems. But if we consider their role in family management and retention of culture and heritage we can not ignore their important social position. Actually the role played by women in Muslim society is “invisible” (Mondal, 2002). Their lesser say in community life and lack of control over resources may give us an impression about their lower and marginal social position. But their concealed power and position in functioning of Muslim society is very crucial one. On the one hand, the Muslim women enjoy respectable position in domestic sector and also enjoy some privileges given by the society. But on the other hand there is evidence of discrimination. They enjoy some degree of autonomy in the sphere of ascribed role and status, but at the level of achieved role and status they are still in disadvantageous position (Mondal, 2002).

Goswami (1998) conducted a study on Muslim women and empowerment in Bangladesh. He divided the factors behind disempowerment of Muslim women into three broad categories as economic, socio-cultural and political factors. i) Economic Factors: Muslim women are not economically independent. Due to their non wage economic activities, majority of the women are economically dependent on men. Further, lesser scope of employment and lack of ownership of land and other capital, force women to depend on men. This male dependency is a serious obstacle to empowerment of women. ii) Socio and Cultural Factors: Most of the Muslim women are either illiterate or less educated. Moreover, in traditional Muslim society the women are socially ignored in many cases. This neglect has tremendous impact on women’s mind and made them weak in decision making both within the family and outside. There has also been a cultural apathy towards women’s empowerment. Some cultural practices of the Muslim society also affect women negatively. This is particularly true in respect of rigidity of social restrictions on the part of women in their day to day activities. On the other hand, the system of dowry on part of bride as now noticed among the Indian Muslims is detrimental to women’s position. The institution of purdah (Muslim women covering hair and
face) prevents women to participate in social, economic and political activities, which are considered to be very important to empower themselves. It has often been argued that men want to keep women in purdah to keep them under control. In recent times, the rise of fundamentalism for petty political gain of a section of political elite has facilitated the growth of fundamentalist political policies. This ultimately affected not only the status of women but also their struggle for empowerment. iii) Political Factors: Owing to lack of education, social isolation and various other obstacles, the Muslim women are not much aware about their political rights and privileges. Hence the political participation which is needed for empowerment is beyond their reach. All these clearly reveal that it is the social system of the Muslim community which acts as a barrier towards empowerment of women in their access to resources, opportunities and decision making process (Goswami, 1998).

A study was conducted on ‘Deconstructing Muslim Women’s Choice between culture and Gender Justice’ in India by Sarah Mehta (1989) It highlighted the fact that Muslim women in India constitute a “double minority,” experiencing discrimination as (1) Muslims in a Hindu-majority state, and (2) women subject to patriarchal religious traditions. With the intensification of religious hostilities in India and the consequent insecurity of the Muslim population, Muslim women are compelled to choose between their identity as Muslims and as citizens. Ironically, women’s religiosity is not safeguarded by Muslim religious elites, who consolidate their authority as community spokesmen first, by emphasizing the dichotomy between gender justice and Islamic tradition and second, by denying women’s input in the definition of Muslim tradition and identity.

Kian has argued for a discourse where both Islamic and secular perspectives are engaged and held accountable. Such a dialogue could be employed to achieve gender justice for Muslim women in India by erasing the perception of a choice between religion and rights. Until now, community-state
“interaction” in India has been limited to the establishment of extremist and vocal elite as representatives of Muslim community. With this endorsement, the state precipitately closes the door on debate and deliberation within the Muslim community and de-legitimizes any concept that Muslim women themselves may harbor their cultural identity. Engaging with Islamic resources to create a more robust conception of gender justice will diminish some of the perceived costs on women for exercising their rights as citizens. But the difficulties of this approach should not be discounted: simply looking inside Islamic texts for supporting traditions will not challenge patriarchy. But such a discourse is imperative if the dichotomy between gender justice and religious identity is to be deconstructed (Kian, 1995).

Islam, Democracy, Women and Modernization

Norris and Inglehart (2002) found that democratic values are supported more or less the same in Muslim and Western countries, whereas values regarding gender equality and sexual liberalization differ widely. This led them to the conclusion that Huntington (1996) was mistaken and that the core clash between the West and Islam concerns gender equality (Norris and Inglehart 2002; Inglehart and Norris, 2003). Both Huntington (1996) and Norris and Inglehart (2002) seem to consider the Islamic and Western civilizations as more or less homogeneous blocks. However, when we compare countries within the Muslim world with regard to an important indicator of gender equality viz, women’s labor market participation (LMP) the position seems untenable. The data provided by the ILO (2006) shows that work participation rate of Muslim women range from 19.2 percent in Oman, through 41.4 percent in Morocco, 55.2 percent in Indonesia, and 62.3 percent in Uzbekistan to 77.3 percent in Guinea. If the Muslim civilization is characterized by an absence of gender equality, how can labor market participation of women show such a wide variation among these countries?
According to Inglehart’s modernization theory (Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart and Baker 2000; Inglehart and Norris, 2003), economic development influences the value systems of people in the direction of democracy and gender equality. Baker (2000) argues that this development has two distinct phases. In the first phase of modernization (called industrialization) there is a cultural shift from traditional to secular-rational values, due to occupational specialization, growing organizational complexity, and rising educational levels. This modernization brings women into the (non-agricultural) labor market. Furthermore, the public becomes more articulated and occupations more often require people to think for themselves, as a result of which political participation increases.

The second phase (called post-modernization) encompasses a cultural shift from survival to self-expression values, due to the existential security of generations growing up in modern industrialized welfare states. In post-modern societies, gender and sexual roles tend to loosen and the public is less easily led by authoritarian forces. Improvements in women’s position lead to increased gender equality and, while the first phase of economic development could lead to both democratic and authoritarian regimes, post-modernization is conducive only of democracy. With regard to Muslim countries, Inglehart and Norris (2003) argue that these countries are still in the first phase. Therefore, women’s relation to the labor market would still be the most important aspect of gender equality there. Thus an increase of economic development within the Muslim world is expected to influence women’s LMP positively.

Liberal approaches to development expect that gender relations will change more or less automatically when women gain full participation. However, others say that it is necessary that women get better access to critical resources before patriarchal structures are undermined and gender equality can be attained (Rathgeber, 1990; Moghadam ).
Family Planning in Iran and India

After 1988 in the Islamic Republic of Iran a national family planning programme was established which successfully led to a decline in the country as country’s total fertility rate (Roudi, 1999). The United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) considers the Iranian family planning programme to be one of the best functioning (Roudi, 1999). However, in some areas social, cultural and religious institutions may be inhibiting the expansion of family planning like Sistan Baluchistan province which has the highest population growth in the country and is considered a priority for family planning (Rakhshani, et.al. 2005).

In many studies it was found that spousal communication about family planning should be developed as a component of family planning programs and spousal communication does indeed predict contraceptive behaviour even when other factors are controlled (Bawah, 2002). A study conducted in Iran’s reported that women also perceive men’s participation in contraception as a support for them to use contraceptive methods that are highly efficient. One proper way for health workers to promote women’s knowledge is consultation because consultation is a way to help the person to make a conscious and voluntary decision about family planning. One report from Turkey found that only 16 percent of the women decided about family planning methods and 23 percent of them were influenced by their husbands in selecting modern methods.

Research reports from India reveal that men have little information about reproductive health and women depended on men about health care decisions (Singh et al 1998, 123). A study conducted in a clinical trial in a group counseling to change high-risk sex especially in men showed that after intervention, change their behaviour when compared to control group (Balmer, 1998).
Women and employment opportunities

In the last few years women are getting job opportunities as economic and social conditions necessitate both men and women have to work for their living in Iran. However, there are no legal hurdles for women in this regard. Article 28 of the Iranian Constitution clearly states: "Everyone is entitled to choose and select his or her desired employment, as long as it is not against Islamic principles, public interest and does not interfere with the rights of others. The government is duty bound to create jobs for all able bodied individuals equitably and according to the needs of the society" (Hamshahri, 2001). According to available statistics, of the 1.97 million people employed in public sector in 1993, more than 630,000 were women. The largest percentage of government employed women is in the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education. The smallest figure is for the industrial and technical areas such as the Ministries of Energy, Industries and Mines. About one fifth of university faculties are women. In 1976 the percentage of women in the scientific, technical and specialist fields was only 13 percent. The ratio grew to 32.8 percent by 1986, 39.7 percent by 1991 and 48 percent in 1998 (Hamshahri, 2001). On the other hand, women are forbidden from becoming judges by long standing edicts by Islamic jurisprudents and Islamic rule. However, they are allowed to climb the promotion chain and advance in the judiciary on an equal basis with men by becoming legal advisers to various civil and administrative courts, a prosecutor, a defense attorney, etc. The limitation only extends to being a presiding judge and issuing a ruling.

Position of Muslim women in India is little different. Unlike many other traditional societies, Indian society is highly gender stratified. Work participation rate among Muslim women is very low. The low status has been a matter of concern for many years, and the Indian government has implemented various policies and programs to improve their situations. The Indian
Constitution (1950) has stressed gender equality in all spheres of life. Since 1950 (Article 45) the Government of India has made various efforts to provide free and compulsory education for all children between the ages of 6–14 years. Even as the literacy rate among Muslims in India has increased, the gender gap remains very significant (Government of India, 2000). Many girls face barriers in accessing education, including poverty, negative attitudes towards educating a daughter, social norms, fear of threats to chastity, and fear of violence (Velkoff, 1998). In 1990, the National Commission for Women was established to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. One of the main objectives of India’s Ninth Five Year Plan was to provide employment opportunities for women. Only one fourth of the country’s women (25.6 percent) were involved in officially recognized economic activities. Among these working women, only 35.7% were literate. The enactment of the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution in 1993 has reserved 33% of the seats in local governments such as, Panchayats and Municipalities for women so as to encourage their participation in social decision-making. Since 1994, the Micro Credit Scheme (MCS) has also been in operation in India. During 1998–1999 more than 100,000 poor individuals, mainly women, benefited from MCS assistance through 32 Micro Finance Institutions or Non Governmental Organizations.

**Women Development Policies in India**

India’s women’s development policy is not restricted to one caste or religion but it is common for the country. Since independence this women’s development policy has undergone various shifts of emphasis, largely progressive in nature. A few important changes occurred in the mid-1980s, particularly in the Seventh Five-Year Plan, which claimed a move towards equality and empowerment. New institutional structures were established to implement plans of action. The Department of Women and Child Development, under the Ministry of Human Resource Development is one such
institution, which has now its counterparts in almost all the states. Women's Development Corporations have also been set up in most states to implement plans of economic development of women through enterprises and employment. Their activities include facilitating access to training, entrepreneurship development, credit, technical consultancy services and marketing facilities. Empowerment of women was given a priority, at least in terms of policy, in the Eighth Five-Year Plan, envisaging women as equal partners in the development process.

Any analysis of poverty scenario in a country cannot afford to ignore the gender dimensions. It is increasingly recognized that ‘poverty has a woman’s face’ (UNDP 1995). Although it may sound to be a simple statement, gender dimension of poverty is much more complex. While lack of income is taken to be the simplest way of measuring poverty, one is aware that poverty also means several other things like lack of access to basic services, lack of opportunities, social and cultural subordination, and exclusion. While these are the hallmarks of the life of poor, it is now being recognized that there is a difference to the extent men and women share these burdens.

Women have all along been a crucial part of the Indian economy, constituting nearly one-third of the national labor force. They have been the largest contributors to the survival of the family, particularly in non-measurable economic and non-economic ways. Rural women have been the pillars of Indian agriculture, a majority being agricultural laborers. They are among the poorest sections of Indian society. As in many other respects, gender based division of labour is rampant in agriculture. They are engaged in activities involving physical labour as against men who work with machinery and other implements. Wages paid to women are much lower than those paid to men. A vast majority of rural women in India are unskilled, and generally have no control over land and other productive assets. Consequently they tend to get excluded from access to institutional credit (UNDP 1995).
Continued advocacy for equitable growth opportunities for women is increasingly being reflected in state government policies and plans. There have been some positive results. Although, India has been doing its best in setting the gender equations right, there is still a long way to go, whether in terms of women's literacy, education, or providing equal economic and political opportunities.

Following the 73rd Constitutional amendment, the nation marched ahead in a marked manner by ensuring a one-third representation for women in the elected local bodies. In different forums we hear now of better opportunities for empowerment of women through such a political space created for women. However, there seems to be a limit to political empowerment of women at other levels, for there has been a prolonged stalemate over the issue of reservation of seats for women in parliament and state assemblies. Considering that there has been a steady decline of elected women representatives in the parliament and assemblies of different states, there is a need to examine afresh the gender-biased nature of emerging polity in the country.

A number of studies have indicated that the poverty alleviation programmes could achieve only a mixed success in a few states and their effectiveness was confined only to a few groups or sections. The record of the last decade on this front does not come up to the expectations. There is stagnancy in the rate of decline in poverty. Even after fifty years of Independence, the regions and groups with initial advantages appear acquiring larger part of the gains of development. The most disturbing outcome of this is the economic fragility of some sections and regions and the mainstream in development process. It is in this context that the role of state becomes prominent and essential for the welfare of the downtrodden and weaker sections of population including women. The role of the state becomes important but certainly along with a responsibility to act on the welfare counts
with full public accountability and transparency towards poverty alleviation programmes (Sen, 2001).

**International Women’s Year 1975**

The year 1975 was declared as International Women’s Year by the United Nations. Thirty years after establishment (in 1945), the United Nations (UN) first announced its commitment to ensure equality between men and women. In order to improve the status of women and create awareness among the general public throughout the world over the continuing unequal status for women, the United Nations declared the year 1975 as International Women’s Year. To fulfill this aim, the UN later declared the decade 1975-1985 as women’s decade and devised both long term and short term programmes to improve the status of women. A historical conference was held at Mexico in June, 1975 and was attended by women delegates from as many as 130 countries. International women’s year aimed at achieving universal equality, integration of women in the social, economic and political spheres and maintenance of international peace.

Concern over the problems of women is not a recent phenomenon. Nonetheless, many years before the United Nation was established several international organizations had dealt with the question of equal rights for women. These include the American Commission of Women, an Organisation in America States. The preamble to the UN Chapter, , declares that the people of the United Nations are determined to reaffirm faith in the fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations, large or small. The Economic and Social Council of the United Nations established a full commission on the status of women. The function of the Commission was to prepare recommendations and reports for the promotion of women’s rights in political, economic, social and
educational fields and make recommendations on urgent matters concerning women’s rights.

**Hypothesis**

Gender inequality is a universal phenomenon in human history. In most of the human societies, both in the time and space, women have been variously oppressed. Certain tribal groups, both of the old-world and the new, are notable exceptions. This explosion has been variously justified starting with the basic fact that male are generally physically stronger than the female because males are capable of expanding short bursts of energy. The next argument that is put forward is the facts that as the women have to bear children they have to be tied to home and hearth. In fact these biological basic differences have been variously molded by the male dominant human groups in the guise of terms like patriarchy, patri-lineage, patrimony etc. Those societies, which have been today been able to maintain matrilineage have been able to remain outside of the system of male –domination.

Such a domination of one sex by another is contrary to any system of egalitarianism. Even the apparently most advanced societies of the world are not beyond systems of male domination, thus Gr. Britian, the country which claims to be the mother of adult franchise, did not allow her women to vote till well into the twentieth century. Thirty years after its formation, the UNO declared 1975 as the international women’s year. Soon however UNO was forced to extend it to a decade till 1985 when the extent of problem became apparent after a few pilot studies. Such is the case of the prime world body and a country of the first world, the position of women in the third world countries can well be imagined. It will be all the more interesting to find out the extent of gender inequality in the societies governed by a religion like Islam.
We know the degree of gender inequality varies by education and work status of women. The inequality comprises of the economic advantage for women given by their family members. The women working at home and outside home and the physical security family provide to women when they are disabled. The benefit provided by their husbands or family members would be in the form of financial, residential and physical support that her children provide to their parents in their old age.

As such hypothesis that the present study hopes to be able to test are:

- Whether the concept and practice of gender in equality inherent in human society.
- Patriarchy system has more influences on gender inequality than Islamic belief.
- Education of women is an important factor determining the equality status in the family in Muslim community. There is direct relationship between household income and women work participation in work.
- Educated women as well as non-educated women bear violence although kinds of violence are different in Muslim community.
- Muslim Women have less property compared to men even when they are earning and have jobs.
- Educated women have more awareness about health although some of them are careless about their health.

**Limitations of the Study**

The present study although designed in a holistic, scientific perspective, has some limitations as mentioned below:

1) It is limited to only one city in India and one city in Iran which are comparable in some broad respects.
2) It has attempted to review the impact of only inequality among women to assess their development
3) Since the field work was done during the post independence period, pre-independence situation was captured only by asking appropriate questions to women in both the countries, and the others in the household, some key informants in the neighborhood, knowledgeable persons etc, and religious documents were also referred to substantiate some of the responses.

**Research gap**

Though several studies have been conducted on Muslim women both in Iran and India they have not identified the extent of inequality exiting between men and women in Islamic society. Most of the studies conducted in both the countries have highlighted documentary work and are continued to generation research to study conflict between two generations. The studies lack theoretical framework and failed to identify factors responsible for disparity among men and women in Islamic society. In addition, these studies differ in methodology and sampling frame. Thus the present study tries to fill up these gaps by conducting comparative survey in Mashhad of Iran and Bangalore city in India.