Chapter 2

Review of Literature

After the declaration of Women’s Decade by UNO, (1975-85) research on women entered the centre stage in sociology in the world in general and India in particular. Since the present researcher planned to focus her research on Women and Religion, the literature survey is restricted to four aspects of research-Hinduism and Women, Women and Society, Women and Religion and Feminist Studies.

We now attempt, in brief, a review of literature on Hinduism and Women. Though there are a few studies which focus on religion most of the studies touch upon Hinduism as a way of life. We shall deal with a few important insightful studies, as the present thesis is an empirical survey and not a library-based study.

In the discussion on Women and Religion it is found that in the earliest scriptures, particularly Manu Smruti, considered by many as one of the great works on law and deals with women, their nature and their rights, is considered as one of the compendium on customary law. Manu, in fact, is considered as one of the greatest law givers of ancient India.

Most of the earlier religious works, which were in sanskrit, dealt with women mainly from the view of scriptures, which are ideal typical codifications.
Kane’s Magnum Opus, History of Dharmashastras (1930), discusses women’s position as revealed in the shastras from time to time and in different works. Though he offers some comments on the present state, they are few and more in the nature of impressions.

The British rule in India, industrialization, westernization, unification of India, introduction of modern education and legal system lead to a critical response from the Indians. The 19th century saw the emergence of many religious movements like Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, etc. Among others in Maharashtra, Mahatma Phule and Maharsi Karve took active steps in promoting the cause of women. In the 19th century, some legislations were passed to protect the interests of women and provide them some measure of equality. There were also powerful writings by women for example Smrutichitre (स्मृतिविचित्र) by Laxmibai Tilak (1934). At the socio-anthropological level, the early literature on women is found in ethnographic studies which discuss the position and conditions of women. These are found in the various Gazettes and works of Enthovan which were basically concerned with caste and the information regarding women were mainly in that context.

The first major work dealing with women from the sociological point of view was Altekar’s ‘Position of Women in Hindu Civilization’ (1938). But this work also is not an empirical study. Altekar, who discusses the position of Hindu woman, emphatically states, ‘Hinduism as it is known to and practised by the masses today is not the Hinduism of the Shruties or Smruties but the Hinduism of Puranas and women have been its most devoted followers and patrons.’
Pandharinath Prabhu's work, 'Hindu Social Organization', first published in 1937, has been an influential work which is used as a text for post-graduate studies in sociology, for the past several decades. In his chapter on 'Attitude Towards Women and Her Place in Society.' Prabhu discusses the position of women in the Vedas, Upanishads, Brahmans, Smruties and Epics. He also discusses at length the rites and rituals of family, marriage and funerals.

Another early work on women is P. Thomas, 'Indian Women through the Ages' (1964), as the title suggests, it deals with women in the vedic period, post-vedic period and the tantric cults. It discusses some of the early critiques of injustice against women such as astronomer Varahamihir, poet Bana, Medhatithi, Virat, Deven Bhat etc. He also deals with Buddhist, Jain and Muslim women. The book, though lacking in theoretical frame work, provides valuable information historically. Most of the earlier works on religion and women dealt with women, but mainly from the point of religious books.

**Sociological Studies on Women:**

The empirical tradition in Indian sociology came of age with the works of M. N. Srinivas’ (Religion and Society Among Coorgs, 1952) and S. C. Dube (Indian Village, 1956).

The major critical feminist writings of Simone De Bouver (1952) and Germaine Greer influenced the women sociologists of the west and their influence percolated into Indian sociology. Many eminent Indian women, sociologists like Neera Desai, Leela Dube, Veena Majumdar and Maitreyi Krishnaraj have written several articles and books on Women and Feminism.

The first significant work on women from the sociological point of view was by Margaret Cormack. In her two books, 'The Hindu Woman' (1953) and 'She Who Rides a
Peacock’ (1961), Margaret Cormack tried to dispel the wrong notions about Indian women in the minds of western people. She dared to render advice to Sarswati, the Goddess of learning to dismount her peacock of academic tradition, look to India’s needs in higher education and help her future leaders to understand and construct a new way of life. This advice given by her to the planners of education to model the educational policy in such a way that the students’ indiscipline and defying of authority is reduced. In these two books Cormack has dealt with the problem of employment and the changes brought about by the educated women.

In her study about ‘The Hindu Family in it’s Urban Setting’ (1961) Aileen D. Ross, tried to study the position of woman in Indian Society. She gave more importance to the changes in the institution of family, marriage, patterns of friendship, education and the authoritarian structure. The change in these institutions is studied in terms of educated boys and girls in bringing about these changes.

Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein in their study of ‘Women’s Two Roles : Home and Work’ (1956), in four western countries, tried to find out how the employed women tried to resolve their role conflicts. Here the dimension of education, which has changed the attitude of women, is not studied.

In her study of ‘Indian Women’ (1948), Chandrakala Hate depicted the position of destitute and downtrodden women in Indian society in the pre-independence era. However, our society has progressed in leaps and bounds which has brought about tremendous changes in the social institutions. Women started getting educated and joined the employment sphere. Now a days, we do not find an office, a profession or occupation where women are not employed.
The declaration of women’s Decade by UNO (1975 to 1985) resulted in various studies being undertaken about women’s life in India. The Government of India’s Social Welfare Ministry constituted a high power committee to examine the status of women. The report of this committee, Towards Equality (1975), examined the position of women in various spheres like education, employment, health and religious institutions. This comprehensive research report which can be called a bench mark document, suggested ways and means of improving the position of Indian women.

Under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, The Perspective Plan for Women 2000 A.D. was presented by Margaret Alva, Minister of State in Charge of Women and Children. This document also looked at the position of women and suggested steps to help the women to attain equality and merge in the main stream. It pointed out the obstacles in solving the problems of women and further suggested ways and means of overcoming them.

In 1991 the Rajiv Gandhi government introduced the amendments for panchayat legislation. This included one-third reservations for women. The 73rd and 74th amendments were passed in 1993. West Bengal became the first state to hold elections with one-third reservations for women at all levels of panchayat.

Shrama Shakti 1989, a work on self-employed women by Ella Bhat is also a document of women’s empowerment.

In 1990 Maharashtra also produced a Perspective Plan for Women. All the four above mentioned documents assessed the status of women in India and gave guidelines to improve the same. Unfortunately no financial allotments were made and it was presumed that the concerned ministry will find the funds and implement them. One can conclude that these documents are good research works but yet to be implemented in any big way.
With the advent of Women's Decade and the CSWI's Towards Equality report, the shocking status of women and the injustices against them, and diplorable socio-economic conditions came to be highlighted. Subsequently there was a renewal of interest in research on women. The UGC setup 22 Women's Study Centres in universities including Pune and S.N.D.T. as well as in deemed Universities like Tata Institute of Social Sciences. These centres created awareness among academicians and started examining each and every aspect of women's life. Some of them adopted feminist perspectives from conservative to socialist and even radical.

We are not reviewing all the studies of academecia. Most of the researchers focussed interest on the inequalities experienced by women. Few studies on religious inequalities have often been dealt with in a general way.

M. N. Srinivas, the doyen of Indian sociologists, deals with the 'Changing Position of Indian Women' (1981). He brought out the enmeshing of the religious and the secular and the secular goals and dimensions of rituals. He notes that rituals provide women some power over men and observes that there is more egalitarianism in lower castes, very often at a later age, the high caste woman's power was concealed behind symbols of wifely deference and patriarchal expressions.

Prof. A Ramanamma (1979) states that Maharashtrian women are torch bearers of culture and highlights the various rites, rituals and vrathas performed by them during the course of the year. She analysed the results expected by women through rites, rituals and vrathas and pointed out that women do not ask anything for themselves. Majority of the vrathas performed are for the health, prosperity of the husband (Mangalagauri), some vrathas are for begetting male progeny and their long life, while some rituals are performed for long life of brothers and their well-being. None of these rituals are performed for women's own
health, the health of the daughters or for the welfare of the mother, sister, etc. These rituals, strictly followed by women, show the dependency of women on men and the partiaarchal value system.

Dorraine Jacobson (1986) in her study of ‘Women in North and Central India’ deals with the daily worship of women and the diversity of rituals performed. Though she deals with Islam, the focus is on Hinduism. She observes that the number and diversity of Hindu rituals performed throughout India are astounding and an encyclopedia could hardly catalogue them all. Her observations and findings are quoted in the relevant chapters of the thesis.

Rehana Ghadialy brought out a reader ‘Women in Indian Society’ in 1988. It contains several articles which are perceptive and provide some empirical data. It contains an article by Suma Chitnis, ‘Feminism: Indian Ethos and Indian Convictions,’ where she pleads for an Indian perspective in judging the status of women vis-a-vis men. She is opposed to the acceptance of western formulations uncritically.

Susan Wadley in her article, ‘Women and the Hindu Tradition’, reprinted in ‘Women in India’ (1986) and ‘Women in Indian Society’ (1988) analyses the Hindu cosmology and the Hindu concept of femaleness. She touches on the two dimensions woman as Prakriti and as a part of which she is also Shakti. She discusses the ideal of Hindu woman under several heads such as role of wife and mother, rules for proper conduct, ideal women like Seeta and Savitri, malevolent women, etc. She also discusses religious practices and religious specialists and analyses at some length their participation in calendrical rituals and life cycle rituals. Since insights and observations of Wadley are discussed along with our empirical analysis, we do not present any further details here.
V. G. Pundlik’s study ‘Religion in the Life of College Teachers’ (1970), focuses on some of the structural and changing aspects of Hinduism as concretely manifested in the lives of Marathi speaking college teachers in Pune. Both religious beliefs and actions are studied. In his total sample of 300 of whom 27 are women 200 (68.7%) respondents are believers, 43 are agnostics and 43 are non-believers. One-fourth and possibly more of the agnostics show a pronounced leaning on the side of beliefs. There are almost no militant atheists in the sample. The social and cultural bonds of these two groups with religion and religious tradition remain fairly intact. Certain directions of change and decline in this sphere is witnessed, i.e. declining of Brahmanic orthodoxy, abridgment of rites and rituals and their nature being social rather than religious.


Sumati Kirtane’s study, ‘Religious Practices of the Educated Women in Poona’ of 408 Hindu women of different castes, 41 of them Brahmins, shows that 70 percent offer daily and occasional prayers, 45.2 percent read sacred books as a matter of faith, as well as due to other reasons. 94.3 percent have reported observance of fasts, of these 20.7 percent observe it as a matter of faith. 26.7 percent believe in fasts but they have also given some other reasons. 17 percent fast only due to custom and convention. 31.8 percent believe in astrology, 35.8 percent do not and 20.7 percent are unsure about it. 26.7 percent have reported that they had undertaken religious vows. (in Pundlik, 1970 P. 349-50).

Y. B. Damle’s study ‘Modernization and Youth’ is based on a random sample of 300 college students of Poona belonging to different religions of the 300 respondents, 167 (55.6%) are males and 133 (44.3%) are females. Their age group is in between 15 years and
27 years. Amongst them majority (44.6%) are Brahmin, 30.6 percent are from other castes like Marathas, Saraswats, C.K.P., etc. Few are S.C. and S.T 8.3 percent are Christians, Muslims, etc. Majority of them, 75 percent believe in God, 49.33 percent believe in greatness of God, 63.33 percent in divine help. 56 percent students have stated that religion promotes social solidarity, 64.33 percent are of the opinion that religion prevents people from doing wrong deeds. 54.3 percent have expressed necessity of religion in personal life. (in Pundlik, 1970 P. 350-56).

B. Suguna’s study, ‘Working Women and Religion’, (1994) of 300 working women in Tirupati from different religions, i.e. 271 Hindus of all castes, 8 Muslims and 21 Christians, who are between 15 and above 51 years of age, majority being educated, have faith in God. As regards practicing and observing the rituals and ceremonies there is no significant change. Some rituals are declining but essential rituals associated with various ceremonies and festivals are still in practice. In respect of festivals, all Christian and Muslim respondents observe and celebrate their festivals. All the Hindu, Christian and Muslim respondents faith in their respective places of worship and majority Hindu respondents believe in major concepts of Hinduism.

The study indicates that though adherence to religious rituals and practices is changing to some extent, their internal belief in some of them is not completely undermined or severely shaken. Hindus still have immense faith in the Hindu way of life.

Along with these major works some researchers have tackled religious attitudes and behaviour of women in their studies. In the following pages we are discussing results of their studies in brief.

Cormack’s study ‘She Who Rides a Peacock : Indian Students and Social Change’, (1961) shows that the majority of the Hindu students felt that 'God' is an ‘authority’. ‘Love
of all mankind' was the major response of the respondents as an important aspect of religion. For majority, their family members observed festivals and visited temples. Their families were not taking caste too seriously.

Inderjeet Kaur's study 'Status of Hindu Women in India', (1983) indicates that God mindedness still continues to shape the outlook of Hindu women.

Manjusri Chaki-Sircar's study 'Women in Society' (1984), focuses on the basic foundation of feminism i.e. women's individual self-reliance and sisterhood or collective solidarity in a society under strong Brahmanic influence. The study is based on anthropological field-research in the urban and rural communities of the Manipur valley focused on women's traditional sex-roles and the changes that are now being brought in. Her study indicates that in most of the rituals both sexes participate together. In some, women have more prominence than men. Meitei Hindu women participate in central rituals, especially dance in public. They not only participate in simple folk dancing, they also take prominent part in spectacular classical Vaisnavite ceremonial dances in public. Another important non- sanskritic aspect of Meitei culture is the spirit of male-female co-operation in religion. In the major Vaisnavite festivals, women's prominence in Raslila dancing and male prominence in Sankirtana present complementary role models.

In the contemporary context, a paper based on Santoshi Ma, by Veena Das, (1985) analyses the emergence of a cult in which an obscure local goddess achieves a place in the pantheon of mother- goddesses. The analysis basically focusses on the grammar of myth-making in the Indian tradition as deciphered in this present day goddess-making phenomena. The growth and popularity of the cult can be attributed to the decline of a priest-centred religion, the need for a simple non-ritualised worship and the role of commercial cinema.
The paper on ‘Bhakti Movement’ by Neera Desai, (1985) claims that by making religion available to women, Bhakti elevated the status of women within the family, some sects denounced purdah and advocated independent selection of a husband as well as widow remarriage. The non-conformist private lives of women saints like Meera, Muktabai, Bahinabai, were inspiring for other women (in Sangari and Vaid (ed.) 1985).

Rekhadevi Raju’s study ‘Status of Women,’ (1988), of rural and tribal women in Karnataka reveals that rural women have higher status in the religious field than tribal women.

Mullatti Leela (1989) deals with the indigenous protest movement called Bhakti Movement, comprising Bhakti cults of many hues and colours, which had an impact on the status of women in India. Many of these cults tried to do away with the manifold taboos, pollutions and rituals with which Hindu religion was cluttered. While some expected the equality of men and women, others reinforced the inequalities in practice.

The present case-study of Veerasaivism, a populous sect in Karnataka, deals with the impact of this movement on the status of women. After a careful research on a hundred families with first and second generation women, the author finds that precepts and practices meet here in a unique way, child training practices, the institution of marriage, the family and kinship systems, the economic and socio-religious life of Veerasaiva women enables them to enjoy a comparatively high status.

Anthony Giddens, (1990) in his chapter on Religion as regards gender and religion states ‘Churches and denominations are religious organizations with defined systems of authority. In these hierarchies, as in other areas of social life, women are mostly excluded from power. This is very clear in Christianity but is also characteristic of all the major religions.’
Gabriele Dietrich, (1990) argues forcefully that materialistic and rationalistic heritage is only one approach which ‘leaves the reservoir of humanism within religion entirely untouched’ and women’s movement should cooperate with enlightened religious intellectuals. (in Grover, V. 1990).

In the Fifth National Conference of the Indian Association for Women’s Studies at Jadavpur University during 9-12 February 1991, papers were submitted by Divya Pandey, ‘Rise of Religious Fundamentalism in Secular India- A case of Sati’, Ila Pathak, ‘The Opposition of the Religious Heads and Politicians to Women’s Awareness Raising’, Pratibha Ranade, ‘Role of Religion and Govt. as Lawmaker with Reference to Women’s Issues during 19th century in Maharashtra’. ‘The Role of Assamese Women in the Freedom Movement and Post Independence Politics’ by Doopali Barua, ‘Religious Trends in Family Law As Reflected In Legislative Policy’ by Indira Jaisingh and Kirti Singh were related to women and religion, but none of the papers were based on field data.

In an article entitled, ‘Religion, Women and the Transformation of Public Culture’ (1993), Davison, Hunter, Howl and Sargent state, ‘women have long been the carriers of religious sensibility from one generation to the next.’ They have discussed the feminization of religious authority in America. According to them as women arrive in positions of leadership they bring with them an agenda of significant ideological and vocational change. They conclude, ‘Although religious feminism at present remains a relatively small movement, the afore mentioned cultural developments are likely to be harbingers of future social change.’

An article in the ‘Pioneer’ (16th Nov., 1994), entitled ‘A Fight Against Religion’ makes a scathing attack on organised religion, and how religion opposed the emancipation of women throughout history and it continues to do so even today.
Thalatha Seneviratne and Jan Currie in their article, ‘Religion and Feminism, A Consideration of Cultural Constraints on Sri Lankan Women’ (1994) argue that besides the blatant structural aspects of the economy that subordinate women, it is the cultural conditioning of both men and women that contributes to women’s subordinate position in society. This study found that no matter which religion, Buddhist, Hindu or Christian, Sri Lankan women followed certain religious practices which led them to see females as inferior or submissive to males. It was only the Feminist group of women who were critical of all religious practices that subordinated women and questioned the role of women in these religions.

In the article ‘Religion and Culture’ by Sabala, (1995) the unequal and exploitative position of women sanctioned by religion and practised through culture, is questioned.

In 1998, ‘India Today’ carried out a poll among young adults on the right side of 30 with a view to understanding how strongly they felt about their religion. The survey was carried out in Mumbai, Delhi, Calcutta, Chennai and Bangalore among 811 men and women aged between 16 and 30. The sample consisted of 71 percent Hindus, 13 percent Muslims, 11 percent Christians and 5 percent Sikhs. The study indicates that 94 percent believe in God, 56 percent said that they were religious ‘somewhat’. 35 percent visited place of worship once a week. Majority of them were doing pujas, observed religious festivals. For more religious mindedness of younger generation following were the reasons given by them - general insecurity, dissatisfaction with life, peer pressure, upset with falling values of society, inability of parents to guide, uncertainty about the future, unable to face competition and loneliness.

The article by Varsha Joshi and Rima Hooja, entitled ‘Vrat and Vrat Kathas: Ritual, Women and Patriarchy’ (1999) deals with the relationship of vrat and their kathas (stories)
with patriarchal control on women and recent changes in the process and patterns of rituals. This study is based on a series of interviews of women, girls and men, along with both oral and written versions as well as secondary data in Rajasthan (in Singhi and Joshi, 1999).

The survey of important books and articles has given the researcher some parameters to study. Since most of the authors dealt with religious practices or beliefs, these indicators were taken by the researcher to formulate the questionnaire. Factors like belief in religion, ritual practices, values in society, attitudes and the role of patriarchy in society formed the base of questions in our study.

**Women and Religion :**

Margaret Anderson in `Thinking about Women : Sociological Perspectives on Sex and Gender’ (1988), argues that Sociologists are not so much interested in the truth or falsity of a religious belief system but in how belief systems and religious institutions shape social behaviour. Almost all over the world, women are more religious than men, both in the degree of religiosity and in rituals. While religions everywhere has denied positions of authority to women, the Civil Rights Movement in America demonstrates that religious institutions can provide liberation movements with leadership and organizational support. The persecution of women as witches is a historical case of the imposition of serious sanctions (being burnt alive!) against women who lived beyond the control of the patriarchal religious bodies and outside the control of men.

**Images of Women in Religion :**

Feminists contend that the traditional view of women in most religions idealises and humiliates women. Religious texts reflect and create stereotypical sex roles and legitimate social inequality between men and women.
The humiliation of women is specially clear in religious depictions of female sexuality, defined by all religions as a dangerous force to reckon with, purified and controlled by men.

Feminists see misogyny as depicted in the stories of male-dominated cultures in which women are responsible for all evil. In most of these legends women are seen as sexually alluring, gullible and insatiable.

The Biblical story of Adam and Eve is a classic example of woman tempting man to taste the forbidden apple, thereby dooming them to live in a world of trouble and evil. The Hebrew version of the legend is that it was Lilith who persuaded Eve to eat the apple from the Tree of Knowledge. Feminists point out that this creates dual stereotypes of women as evil and as gullible. Either way women are defined as bad.

Sociologists see all religious texts as cultural and historical documents not containing truth per se but as cultural artifacts.

**Feminist Interpretations:**

Carroll, T.F., (1983) gives an introduction to religion and tradition. She has written on Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, with reference to women’s education and population. She has examined the four major world religions and their contribution to conditioning social environment within which women live and work. She placed her analysis in the context of development and the influence of religion on women which is neglected by social scientists.

Carrol has indicted all the organised religions for their treatment of women. She distinguishes between doctrines and practices which are responsible for all inequalities from which women suffer. She blames the misguided interpretation of the prophetic teachings. She
shows the underlying sense of justice and flexibility of these religions and how religious institutions retarded progress and impinged on women’s liberty. She further shows that all religions are capable of changing and of being valuable agents of change. According to Carroll religion has a profound, positive effect in the shaping of modern society.

Rosemary Tong (1984), highlights the perspectives of feminism and identifies the following approaches – Liberal, Marxist, Radical, Socialist, Psychoanalytic, Existential and Post-modernist. According to her all these perceptsives give a partial, provisional answers to the women’s question, their oppression, repression and suppression. They also highlight how women have beaten the system. In this study, Tong elaborates these approaches with a detailed analysis of societies and the interpretations given through the theoretical approach to the study of women’s question.

Olive Banks (1986) states that feminism as a social movement has been of less interest than the documentation of an explanation for women’s continuing inequality. Consequently, most studies may be said to deal more directly with women’s place in society than with the efforts of an organised women’s movement to change it. Studies of feminist movement are becoming plentiful, most of them dealing with relatively restricted areas of both time and place. This study is the only one that attempted to see the old and new feminism as one single historical process and assesed systematically how one movement developed into another.

Bassnett, Susan (1986) views the women’s movement as a global phenomenon and deals with the differences in four cultures without in any way being prejudiced in favour of anyone. She focusses on the violence of Italian women’s movement and on it’s intellectualism and while dealing with the American women’s movement, on the roots in the past and it’s inherent contradictions in different ethnic groups.
In Germany (G. D.R.), Bassnett shows how a sense of feminism, on a completely new basis has emerged through organised women’s movements elsewhere. She has also looked into the relationship between feminism and Marxism. While viewing the British women’s movement Bassnet looks at feminism as a problem of class, as the British class system had an impact on Britian’s women’s movement.

Kauffman, Linda (1989) focusses, on the relationship between feminism and social institutions. She approaches feminism not as an issue of individual rights but theorises about the ideolological constructions of subjects. She found that the past twenty years have been characterised by sharp polarities between dramatic advances and equally dramatic setbacks in family arrangements, reproductive rights, the work place and global politics.

While dealing with the transformation of institutions she focuses both on the forces of oppression and the seeds of resistance. In her discussions on gendering, post-modernism and post-structuralism, Kauffman examines the legacy of feminism’s encounter with deconstruction. She suggests alternatives to the dysfunctions which formalist notion creates in relation to feminist politics. She further suggests alternative methodologies-post-modernism should be studied in the context of institutional history rather than literary history in order to expose the concrete operations of power and oppression.

Her main focus in this collection of essays is to show how the act of theorising is essential to formulate the issues, to expose the invisible mechanisms of ideology, to reveal what is at stake in the struggle of and for discourses and to explain how that struggle is linked to material oppression, writing the work and watering down the rites. Hae G. Henderson deals with the oppresive rites and wants them to be modified.

Pamela Abott and Claire Wallace (1990) claimed that Sociology is a male dominated discipline. While majority of students taking the subject are women, the majority of lecturers
are male. Women are taught malestream sociology—that is, they are induced into knowledge that plays a key role in justifying the inferior structural position given to women. They conclude that there is need for a sociology from the perspective of women. They argue that gender divisions are socially constructed and can not be explained by references to sex differences.

While discussing women and stratification, the authors claim that all women’s lives are structured by expectations of role appropriate behaviour, the idea that women are dependent on men and the notion that women’s fulfillment comes from marriage and caring for a husband and children. These assumptions are a key to women’s subordination exploitation and why women lack control over resources in the First and the Third world. The authors, are of the opinion that the experiences of girls and young women are conditioned by ideologies of femininity and especially by their acceptance that their major role is to be a wife and mother. While formally girls have equal educational and training opportunities with boys (not in India), the way the curriculum is structured, the ways in which girls make sense of their experience of schooling and work and the assumptions of teachers, parents and employers all serve to encourage girls to select subject options that propel them into women’s jobs and prepare them for domesticity.

According to Abott and Wallace the Victorian feminists fought for the rights of middle class women to work on the assumption that work would lead to liberation and many, later day Marxists- including those in the Soviet Union have done the same. The authors see that work is not necessarily a source of liberation. Often the work that women do merely reinforces their traditional roles within the family. It is important for sociology to be aware of women’s work as well as men’s, that women are paid to do jobs different from that of men and receive less pay and less status than men’s jobs. Skill is used as a means of justifying
differences between man’s and woman’s jobs. Feminists argue that skill is an idea constructed by male workers. Women experienced work in different ways from men because of their different relationship to the labour market. Feminists further argue that malestream sociology has naturalized the real work that women do in the domestic sphere— that it has made it seem the exercise of a normal function rather than the performance of real work.

Joanna Frugh and others (1994), offer a wide range of feminist criticism. Sparked by ideas, administrative and social protest, they emphasised issues of art censorship, abortion rights, racial injustices, capital, aids activism, ecology, homelessness and unemployment. The authors explored what female artists and critiques want, their reasons for valuing feminism as an arena of stimulation, as a place of promise that offers freedom from familial demands and imposed gender roles and as an environment that is constantly schooling people in the challenge of differences in race, class, age, ethnicity and gender. Feminists exhibited a radical and mighty skepticism regarding official systems of authority and it shows in every probing piece of art and art criticism, created visual and written records. The authors emphasised that to change perceptions women must provide alternatives in multiple concepts and in diverse avenues of resistance and power.

Hemalata Swarup and Sarojini Bisaria (Eds.), in ‘Women, Politics and Religion’ (1991), gives a historical perspective of ancient and medieval India. The editors trace how there was a consolidation of power by the ruling priesthood, warriors, Brahmmins and Kshatriyas. There was a violent over-throwing of mother-right and women were relegated to subordinate status.

Dharma as a mode of existence and the law of its being changes the modes of production, relations of production and the whole superstructure of culture, ideology and philosophy built round it. Women’s movement for equality and justice, along with the
establishment of non-exploitative structures of society can be achieved by this concept of Dharma!

Kosambi Meera D. (1995), traces the roots of current tensions between the progressive and fundamentalist efforts to mould social change which is embedded in the 19th century conflict between social reform and orthodoxy.

Gender reform and religious beliefs intersected in 19th century Maharashtra, both of which were interlocked in an ongoing conflict within the dialectics of social reform.

There are three articles on Pandita Ramabai’s contribution to women’s cause, women’s emancipation and equality. This was orchestrated by men for women’s emancipation, in 19th century. Kosambi demonstrates how high caste women, while preserving the orthodoxy, were leaders and subjects of social awakening and reforms. The next article deals with the Indian response to Christianity. Pandita Ramabai’s conversion to Christianity was due to the fact that she had no supportive structure of kinship, caste and community. With the Christian support she worked for women’s education and self-reliance. She could get social space by her inner energy and pursued radical feminism in a world peopled by male giants both on the side of reform and orthodoxy.

The next article deals with child brides and socio-legal change: The Age of Consent Bill, 1891 controversy. The Age of Consent Act was passed in 1891 but in the years to come it was claimed by the champions of political reform who succeeded in stalling further social laws. This law provided for legal protection to child-brides. These essays give inter-faith dialogue and show how one can reconstruct and critique and include some proved transformations and growth of feminist thought which will create, liberate and empower women in the world religions.
Paula M. Cooey and others (Eds.) (1996) deal with a wide variety of articles on Black Women’s Surrogacy Experience and the Christian notion of Redemption, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist Women and Patriarchy, the transformations and the feminist approach to religious tradition. The authors deal with, ‘After patriarchy’ and ‘can the World Religions Evolve beyond Patriarchy’?

Cooey and others selected Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Christianity and tried to find out whether these religions legitimised and encouraged oppression of women. They enumerated the ideas, images and rituals in these religions which might help move religions beyond patriarchy. The authors are of the view that there is some hope for world religions and highlight that there is an insight which can be learnt from Hindu feminist concept of Kali, Christian Feminist reinterpretations of the meaning of Christ, from Buddhist feminist reappropriation of the ideal community.

Morag Shiach (1999) deals with the shifting relations between cultural analysis and political critique over the last 30 years. The author discusses consuming and commodities, age of mechanical reproduction and has rich data from U.K., U.S.A. and other countries, it adopts the inter-disciplinary approach and the analysis is based on feminist perspectives.

John Joyce George states that the context of feminist theologising is the situation and struggle of it’s people, specially of women. The Feminist Liberation Theology began at a time when women realised that men and women were not on an equal footing in the different spheres not even in the institution of the Church which was preaching equality and justice for all citizens and human beings. Joyce believes ‘Not that God created man and woman unequal but created them both in His likeness with different roles and purposes for the betterment of society.’ Feminist theologians questioned the language used even to speak of God. God is always referred to as ‘He’ in religious symbols. In social language also we speak of human
beings as `Mankind’. Feminist theologians try to fight against the male dominated structures in the church and society and tries to abolish hierarchical structures within the same were the early church successfully eliminated women from leadership positions and took away from them the right to teach and instruct over centuries. And therefore the effort to establish the right of women irrespective of marriage and pregnancy, to read and teach and instruct, is an entirely legitimate one. The shifting of focus from the comparison of texts from different scriptures as a theological exercise to the addressing of human issues in the light of the faith of women governed by their religions could also lead to understanding one’s position in a deeper and more meaningful way.

The feminist liberation perspective upholds the margins, the peripheries and the minorities. It’s task is to consolidate a chorus of diversified and multiple voices and hence provides counter balance to the hegemonist tendency of a dominant centre. Feminist theology seeks a holistic spirituality which affirms a mutuality and inter connectedness between persons, between humans and the world and between humans and the spirit. Each of these depends on the other and relates to it intrinsically such an affirmation of holistic world views in theology not only means to break down dichotomous, religious categories, but also to dissolve the alienation between man and woman, the powerful and the powerless, the centre and periphery. For sure, Liberation Theology Education must do no less than building such a holistic vision of Christian Community as well as society at large.

These works point out the inadequacies of male-stream disciplines and highlight the shortcomings of the theoretical positions of conventional sociologists.

Feminism does seek to speak of the experiences of women to understand reality from the view point of women. It is argued by the authors that the production of knowledge from a
woman’s point of view leads to a less distorted view of society. It is also claimed that the feminist studies provide an alternate knowledge obtained from feminist struggles.

**Conclusion:**

We have done a limited literature survey on Women and Religion, Women and Hinduism, Feminism and Religion and Feminist Interpretations which were different from malestream sociology. However, in our study, we have used the methodology of sociology with reference to Women and Hinduism. May be, feminist methodology, if applied, could have produced different results, but it was not attempted in this study.