1.1. INTRODUCTION

‘Teach a man and you have taught only one, but teach a woman and you have taught a family’ goes a famous saying. There is a lot of truth in this saying. A woman influences every member of the family in her different roles such as mother, sister and so on. This powerful influence on the part of the woman has existed since ancient times.

1.2. WOMEN IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

1.2.1. The Vedic Era (Before 200 B.C.)

During the Vedic era, boys and girls had equal opportunities for advanced education. The girls used to spend the early years of their life, like the boys, in bramcharya ashram after participating in the Upanayana Sanskara ceremony. Upanayana (sacred thread ceremony) was required for the study of the Vedas. Therefore, in the Vedic age, Brahmacharya discipline and training was as much necessary for girls as for boys. If Upanayana was not performed for a girl, then the girl would be reduced to the status of a Sudra, and she could not marry. After the Upanayana ceremony, girls were given the same education that was given to boys, but they were permitted to quit early as they were expected to marry at the age 16 or 17.

In those days, women dominated teaching. Boarding school facilities were available for girl students under the able protection of women. During the Vedic period some women were so learned that they publicly challenged men of letters and held their own in discussions on philosophical and metaphysical subjects. Women took an active part in agriculture and in the making of war weapons like bows and arrows (Retrieved from http://ramanuja.org).

Women and the Intellectual Field

Twenty-seven women Rishis were responsible for the composition of mantras for Vedas especially the Rig Veda. Some of them were Vishvarava Ghosh and Apala Atreyi, Indrani, Kakhi Vati Ghosh, Surya Savitri, Dakshina Prajapati, Vak Ambhireni, Ratri Bharadwaj, Gasha, Shrudha Kamayani, Yami Shachi Paulomi, Sarparajni and
Urvashi. The majority of the hymns in the Rig Veda are dedicated to mythological beings and the personification of abstract qualities (Retrieved from http://ramanuja.org).

1.2.2. Post-Vedic Period (200 BC- 1200 AD)

Manu, the author of Manusmriti, or the ancient laws, was of the opinion that women were not eligible for the study of the Vedas, or for the reciting of mantras in performing sacraments, except in the case of marriage. The nuptial ceremony was to be the only Vedic sacrament for women. According to Manu, serving one's husband was equivalent of living in the house of a teacher and receiving spiritual teaching. For women, household duties were equated with yajna. Manu states that sacraments must be performed for females so as to sanctify the body at the proper time and in the proper order but without recitation of sacred mantras. The concern apparently was that because girls were getting married early, they would not be able to learn the mantras properly, and thus would make mistakes. Earlier women were married at 16 and 17 but in this period the age of marriage dropped down to 12. However, girls from rich and noble families continued to receive fairly good education. Besides the study of Sanskrit and Prakrit, they were given solid grounding in housekeeping and arts like music, dance, painting etc. Educated women made a great contribution to literature in this era (Retrieved from http://ramanuja.org).

1.2.3. The Beginning of the Muslim Rule (1200 - 1800 AD)

The literacy rate went down rapidly during the Muslim rule. Society became prejudiced towards female education. The Purdah system came in the way of female education but liberal education was given to princesses and girls from noble and rich families. Some of the women who really made a mark came from royal families were Razia Sultan (who ascended the throne of Delhi), Gulbadan Begum (Babur’s daughter), Noor Jehan (Jahangir’s wife), Mumtaz Mahal (Shahjahan’s wife) and Jahanara Begum (Aurangzeb’s daughter). It was also in this era that a girl’s school was started by Akbar. In 1820, David Hare started the first school for girls in Calcutta (Retrieved from http://wikipedia.org).

1.2.4. Social Reform Movement (1800 - 1854 AD)

At the beginning of the 1800s, the condition of women was very pitiable. For some strange reasons, both women and untouchable castes were compared to drums, and
declared to be unfit for learning. However, the efforts of social reformers led to some positive changes in the way women were perceived. For instance, practices such as female infanticide, child marriage and Sati (immolation of the wife on the husband’s funeral pyre) were abolished and widow remarriage was encouraged.

Touched by the work done by missionaries and philanthropic Englishmen, several Indians lent their support to the opening of girl’s schools. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Eashwar Chandra Vidyasagar actively fought for the emancipation of women. In this regard, the first move was made by Lord Dalhousie, the then Governor-General. He actively supported female education and gave orders that women’s education was something that could not be ignored. The orders were later confirmed by the Educational Despatch of 1854 (Retrieved from http://wikipedia.org).

**The Christian Missionaries**

Before the British had established themselves in India, the Christian missionaries were quite active in India. Their efforts influenced the status of women. They realized that they would be able to plant Christian values into Hindu homes and thus fulfill their mission of religious conversion. So women became their prime focus. These missionaries continued to work freely before the arrival of the British. When the British government was established, they felt that Indians would see no distinction between them and the missionaries, and, therefore, opposed them. So, the British ethic to drive the missionaries away and gain favour with Indians.

Quite contrary to their expectations, the missionaries received a lot of support from the Indian elite. As the British rule stabilised, the Indian elite realised that it was necessary for them to learn the English language in order to gain employment. They also felt that they could gain entry into social circles by cultivating the social etiquette approved by the British. Initially, the men folk sought to identify with the British. Later on, women too joined in. Women learnt the language and the social styles of the English. Educated men employed tutors for their wives. Well-spoken young men were sought after in the marriage market. Out of this demand grew the ‘zenana’ school. Literally translated, ‘zenana’ means harem or women's quarters. These schools were initially conducted in women's quarters, in private homes. Gradually, they emerged as separate institutions (Retrieved from http://wikipedia.org).
1.2.5. The Era of the Uprising (1854 - 1882 AD)

With the Educational Despatch of 1854, the State promised financial assistance and immediate action. But the uprising of 1857 slowed the effort. Municipalities were coming up and the levy of local funds, aiding primary education for women, helped the establishment of several primary schools. An English social reformer Mary Carpenter felt that the establishment of training colleges was a must. Her high-level contacts made it possible to bring into immediate effect her proposal for the first training college for women. By 1822, there were 2600 primary schools, 181 secondary schools, 15 training institutions and 1 college (Retrieved from http://wikipedia.org).

1.2.6. The Indian Education Commission (1882- 1902 AD)

The Indian Education Commission was established in 1882-83. It recommended payment of liberal grants-in-aids, offer of freesthips, scholarships, emancipation of lower class women etc. Unfortunately, because of financial stringency in the government, adequate grants could not be sanctioned. The education of women depended on private enterprise. One significant development was the opening of a career in medicine for women (UNICEF, 2004).

1.2.7. The ‘Indian Motherhood’ (1902 - 1921 AD)

The period between the appointment of the Indian Universities Commission in 1902 and the transfer of education to Indian control in 1921 showed better progress due to the great awakening and the First World War. In this period there were 19 colleges, 675 secondary schools and 21,956 primary schools but the burden was still on private effort. The age of marriage for girls went up, thus increasing the educational opportunities. A significant event of this era was the establishment of the SNDT University by Maharishi D.K Karve - the only women’s university. Many women took up technical careers.

Between 1910-1920, the cause of education for women received fresh support and acquired yet another dimension owing to Gandhi's approach to the nationalist movement for freedom. Gandhi’s philosophy was inspired by the lives of Indian women. He saw tremendous moral strength and dignity in women's capacity to suffer silently. He believed that this moral strength made them withstand all trials and tribulations. He
referred to it as “stree shakti” (the power of womanhood) and declared that this strength would arm the troops for India's passive, non-violent struggle for freedom. Gandhi’s open acknowledgement, that his concepts of passive resistance and non-violence were inspired by the lives of women, gave tremendous lift to the status of women in India. A further step was to call upon women to step out of the secure walls of their homes and join the movement. His unique contribution to the higher education of women in India is that he sent many of the young women who joined his movement to universities (UNICEF, 2004).

1.2.8. During 1921 - 1947

Favourable factors of this century were further rise of the age for marriage for women, the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, the phenomenal awakening of Indian motherhood and the introduction of Provincial Autonomy. This period was a period of financial stringency and political struggle. Owing to greater initiative showed by state government and local bodies, the burden of private effort reduced considerably. There was also an increasing trend towards co-education (UNICEF, 2004).

The Second World War

When India's movement for political freedom was at its peak, World War II took place. The high cost of living during the war years made it necessary for women from middle class families to earn in order to make both ends meet. Before the war, few Indian women who attended universities intended to join careers or take up employment. The social reformers who had introduced the idea of educating women for self-reliance had believed that the need for a woman to earn an independent living would arise only when there was a crisis like widowhood and desertion. But during the war, women's earnings came to be seen as a contribution, enabling the family to make ends meet. As Indian families experienced the advantages of having women in the family earn money, prejudices against their gainful employment weakened. Over the years, the idea of a ‘second income’ as the means for a better standard of life for the family came to be fairly well established.

1.2.9. Independence and After (1947 and Beyond)

India acquired independence from the British colonial rule in 1947. The Constitution of India firmly affirmed the equality of all citizens before the law. It said
that women, as weaker sections of society, were wronged and discriminated against for
generations, that they deserve special facilities and support for advance. In the five-year
plans that followed, the Indian government consistently emphasised education as one of
the principal instruments for the advance of people.

1.3. IMPACT OF COMMISSIONS ON WOMEN EDUCATION

1.3.1. The University Education Commission

In 1948 - 1949, almost immediately after independence, the government of
India appointed a major national Commission focusing on higher education.
Known as the University Education Commission, this Commission was headed by
Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, one of India’s most distinguished scholars and philosophers and a
man very sympathetic to the cause of women. He later became the President of India.

The chapter on university education for women, in the Commission report, included a
statement on how the British government had done nothing to advance women's
university education in India. The chapter pointed out how unfair this was, considering
that as early as 1869 John Stuart Mill had written about the subjugation of women and
need for their equality. But the chapter did not articulate the concept of a career woman

The other major contribution of the Commission was that it recommended that
the number of women's colleges in the country should be increased. Over time, this
recommendation has been put into effect. There were less than a hundred women's
colleges in the country when the Commission submitted its report. Today there are more
than twelve hundred.

1.3.2. National Commission on Women

In 1958-59, almost ten years after the appointment of the University Education
Commission, the government of India appointed a National Commission for Women.
This Commission was headed by a woman Dr. Durgabai Deshmukh, who had been
active in the nationalist movement, she was a member of the first Planning Commission
appointed in Independent India, and was the first chairperson of the country’s Central
Social Welfare Board. She had also been active in the nationalist movement for freedom,
and was one of those whom Gandhi had chosen to send for a university education.
The National Commission for women recommended special hostels, special colleges and special scholarships for women. It recommended special syllabi for women and specified that these syllabi should focus on creating the right attitudes among them. The recommendations of the Commission led to the establishment of the National Council for Girls, the establishment of a Comprehensive Development Plan for Women, and to the allocation of special funds for women in the central and state ministries of education and the establishment of separate units for the educational needs of women. It looked carefully into the needs for occupations in which women were preferred, and pointed out that qualified women were needed, in large numbers, to function as pre-primary school teachers, nurses, midwives, women doctors, pharmacists and social workers. On this basis it recommended the promotion of education for women in these fields (Retrieved from http://ncw.nic.in).

1.3.3. National Commission on Education

In 1964, the National Commission on Education, also known as the Kothari Commission, was appointed. In its report, the Commission lamented that the education of women in India was not moving fast enough. But it failed to make any firm recommendations on how the pace of the growth of higher education among women should be advanced. And yet, in terms of the impact that the various Commissions have had on government programmes, on voluntary action and on the attitudes of people towards education in independent India, the Kothari Commission is considered to be the most powerful.

By the beginning of the seventies, there was growing anxiety that development was not proceeding as planned. Prominent among the several reasons identified as the cause for the slow pace of development, was the fact that women had not been participating actively in the process. It was pointed out that economic growth had suffered because women's role in the economy had been neglected and because their capabilities were neither fully developed nor utilised. In this connection, the failure to provide them with career and employment-oriented education was particularly blamed. It was underlined that women must be urgently equipped with the capabilities required for them to take up new responsibilities. These revelations and recommendations gave birth to the concept of women as “partners” in development and took the issue of the importance of their education to a new threshold.
More than two million women are enrolled for higher education in India today. The figure may sound impressive to those who are not fully aware of the size of the population of the country. However, these 2 million women constitute just 34% of the total enrolment of 6.5 million students in higher education. It is interesting that the percentage of women is slightly higher at the post-graduate level (39%) than at the under-graduate level (34%) (Retrieved from http://ncw.nic.in).

1.3.4. National Policy on Education

The National Policy of Education (1986) lays special emphasis on the eradication of disparities with a view of equalizing opportunities by attending to the specific need of those who have been denied equality so far, particularly women. The NPE states that education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women (Atma Ram and Sharma, K.D., 1995, P. 32). It is intended that the National Education System will play a “positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women” by promoting women’s studies as a part of various courses, and national institutions will be encouraged to take up active programmes to further women’s development. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a “well-conceived edge” in favour of women.

1.4. SOCIAL STATUS OF INDIAN WOMEN

Women are a neglected lot in our social fabric. But, it cannot be denied that they have a defined and definite role to play in society, in general and family, in particular. Over the years, the researchers have been engaged in studying and analyzing matters related to the better half of the human beings.

Over the past thousands of years, our family life and our society have evolved and developed. Today, people claim a strong presence of women in all walks of life, still the lot of the female community in our land has remained more or less same - worse. They have suffered for centuries together, and they are suffering even now.

Both Indian men and women believe that females are the weaker sex - weaker physically, emotionally and in the opinion of some, intellectually as well. Most parents do not want girls because they are considered liabilities. They must be protected, given a dowry and married in a good family. Hence, during childhood girls hold an inferior
position in the family. The differential treatment they receive develop within them the
typical qualities or characteristics of Indian womanhood. The Indian girls upbringing
determines their aspirations and motivations. They desire a virtuous, modest life centred
around their husbands and children. They aspire for men of good character and
education who can maintain them decently as their wives.

In a study by Cora Vreeda de Stuers, girls responded that their parents educated
them so that they would be able to marry well. Girls by and large drop out of school as
soon as their marriages are arranged unless their betrothed or in-laws wish them to
continue their studies. In such cases, they continue their studies to fulfill the aspirations
of others, rather than their own. to another question of Cora put to 203 postgraduate
women students of Jaipur, the answers were on traditional lines (Muniruddin Qureshi,
2003, P. 12).

The women reported that: “a women’s main destiny to be is marriage and
motherhood”. The aspiration of a woman after her marriage are confined to her family’s
welfare and needs. Even working married women are more concerned about their
families than their jobs. If a conflict occurs, the family comes first. The welcome
pregnancy as a chance to bear a male child. Usha Agarwal (1995) wrote, 16 “the girls had
difficulty in imagining in their married lives other than serving their husbands and the
children they would bear them” (P. 27).

Women in the 40’s and 50’s were full of romanticism born of struggles for
emancipation. They envisioned a society where men and women might mix freely
socially and make choices based on love. In reality, such choices were hard to come by.
Women had to either depend on the choice of their parents or remain unmarried.

The modern man in India wants equality between the sexes; in principles. But he
feels much difficulty and pain in accepting equality with his wife, daughter, mother or
sister. The women demand protection and security from him and in return for it he
demands their loyalty and respect. The psyche of modern male seems to be that the be
given their freedom to the extent that they respect their wishes look after him well and
remain loyal and faithful to him. The male wants woman to have aspirations as long as
they do not come in conflict with his own whims. He may allow his wife to move out of
the house or join the world of work, but he is extremely jealous if she associates with any colleague or friend.

On the other hand, he feels as his right as a male to mingle with her female colleagues and co-workers. Thus, he believes in the double standards of conduct for males and females. The significant difference between the modern Indian male and his ancestors is that he does acknowledge that women have the right to an equal and decent life but it must be lived under his supervision and protection. They should seek a partnership relationship in which the question of superiority and inferiority does not arise nor does one individual engulf the individuality of the other. When a clash of opinion occurs, it should be resolved through mutual love, respect and consideration (Muniruddin Qureshi, 2003).

At present, there are various agencies which are working in the directions of woman’s empowerment. Their impact is certain towards the achievement of higher status and position of the women in the society. The women belonging to the poor families or of rural areas are beyond their influence. It is, therefore, extremely desirable that educational effort be extended to these neglected sections of womenhood. In providing education to them care has to be taken that it develops in them right attitudes, higher aspirations and motivations for better achievements. The education should equip the women for building a better world in which mutual love, respect and effort become the ideals for living.

1.5. SOCIAL PERCEPTION

In psychology and cognitive sciences, perception is the process of acquiring, interpreting, selecting and organizing sensory information. The word perception comes from the Latin capere, meaning “to take”, the prefix per- meaning “completely”. Methods of studying perception range from essentially biological or psychological approaches through the philosophy of mind or in Merleau-Ponty’s affirmation of perception as the basis of all sciences and knowledge.

Perception is the faculty of acquiring sensory experience. Study of the processes by which humans gather and interpret visual information is largely the province of social psychologists, who have identified several general principles of perception, and also some effects upon it of motivation and attention.
Perception refers both to the experience of gaining sensory information about the world of people, things, and events, and to the psychological processes by which this is accomplished. Krech and Crutchfield divide the determinants of perception into two major categories; structural factors and functional factors.

**Structural Factors**

By structural factors, it means those factors driving solely from the nature of the physical stimuli and the natural effects, they evoke in the nervous system of the individual. Thus for the Gestalt psychologist, perceptual organizations are determined primarily by the psychological events occurring in the nervous system of the individual in direct reaction to the stimulation by the physical objects. They would insist that those sensory factors which are independent of the perceiving individual’s needs and personality and which force certain organizations in his cognitive field are referred to as “Structural factors in perception”.

**Functional factors**

The functional factors of perceptual organization, on the other hand are those, which derive primarily from the needs, moods, past experience, and memory of the individual. All functional factors in perception are social in the usual sense of the term. In one experiment, for example, Levine, Chein and Murphy presented a series of ambiguous drawings to hungry college students and found a marked tendency for such drawings to be perceived as food objects – sandwiches, salads, roasts, etc. There was no such effect when the same drawings were shown to students who had just finished eating.

The different perceptions of the hungry and not-hungry students could not be due to “structural” factors, since the same pictures were presented to both groups but could be due only to the differences in need or motivation of the members of the two groups. While quantitative laws of how these “functional” factors actually operate in perception are lacking, a great deal of experimental work is available that demonstrates their pervasive influence in perception.
Interrelationship between Structural and functional factors

The interaction that is true for most psychological processes is also characteristic of the operation of structural and functional factors in perception. Neither set operates alone; every perception involves both kinds of factors. Although one can experiment with structural factors alone in perception or with functional factors alone, it must be realized that this is done only for experimental convenience, that whatever perception is being observed is a function of both sets of factors.

It is important to recognize the interrelationships between these two sets of factors because it is at this point that a necessary rapprochement can be made between the experimental psychologists who tends to analyze man into his component functions and the social psychologist who seeks to treat man as an indivisible entity.

1.6. NEED FOR THE STUDY

Individuals as a cluster living in a particular area form a society of their own. The society, in turn, helps the member individuals to form a family of their own to lead a peaceful life and fulfill the needs of the society. The reciprocation on both the sides stems from the mutual understanding of the individual members. The family formed of a man and a woman with children provides all required things for the well-being of the members of the family. That is, the family being a unit of the society works for the betterment of the society, which as a bigger family safeguards the interest and the life of the individual families. Therefore, in a society, the life and work of both men and women play a significant role. The gender difference among the adult members has become a common concern for the growth and development of the society. When men and women join together for bringing up their children, the future members of the society, they solve the differences coming up now and then for common good.

In a society, one may come across varied problems pertaining to the life of the individuals as well as the life of the society. The bigger the society, the more complex is the responsibility of both men and women. When education attempts to bridge the difference between men and women, the members of the society, in fact, confront with the problems created by education itself, proving education alone as a factor cannot set the emotion and the perception of the individuals. The mind that will fancy about the nature and course of life may differ according to the nature of the gender. Since the
gender differences are very prominent, in conative and psychomotor domains, their perception of life and the nature of emotionality of both men and women are likely to differ. The society which functions with the help of its individuals may have different contributions from men and women though inherently they are the same.

Therefore the investigator assumes that the perception of the individual members about the various issues of the society and different agencies of the society may be different. Moreover, the investigator, being a female teacher educator is able to perceive subtle differences among the women of different categories. The young and school going may form a perception of the society on the basis of the happenings in the family and the institution in which they study. Though the perception is well-formed, it is likely to be changed when there comes a change in their intellectual as well as social realms. The women students of higher education may take up the social issues, social problems and the social agencies in a different perspective because of their confrontations with the reality of social living.

Similarly, the educated or uneducated women slowly shouldering the responsibility of the family in the capacity of a housewife will have a perception of the society according to the life and position of her family in the society. However, the women acting as a breadwinner of the family in addition to the household responsibilities will strike a contrast to all other categories for the reason that they are well exposed to all phases of reality in the society in which they live. They are a category which serves the vital unit of the society and the society at large, almost in par with their male counterparts. Therefore, the investigator has focussed her study on the working women who are known to be crucial for the very existence of the family and its contribution to the welfare of the society. Hence, the problem of the study has been stated thus:

1.7. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

To study the Social Perception of Working Women in all the districts in Tamil Nadu in terms of different background variables.
1.8. REFERENCES

1. http://ramanuja.org
2. Ibid
3. Ibid
5. Ibid
6. Ibid
7. Ibid
10. Ibid
12. http://ncw.nic.in
13. Ibid