This thesis has reviewed the public policy towards women's education and its growth at the primary and secondary stages between 1947 and 1985. Upon independence India inherited a very limited and weak infrastructure of women's education. Throughout this period the independent Indian Government endeavoured to introduce universal free elementary education, thereby bringing the girls within the ambit of formal schooling. Despite this, even in 1985 only 65 girls for 100 boys were enrolled at the elementary stage.\(^1\) Census of India, 1981 indicates that 47.82 per cent of urban women and 17.96 per cent of rural women were literate\(^2\). This study deals with the formulation of public policy towards women's education and an analysis of its success and failure.

The first chapter of my thesis has traced the development of women's education under the Colonial rule. A survey of the Colonial period indicates that despite the Government's negligence, female education started to develop during this time. Missionary activities, the efforts of enlightened Indians and above all the nationalist leaders all fostered its development. But the development of women's education in this period was conditioned by the extant societal norms. The national leaders, social reformers or even the progressive women were believers in the Victorian concept of a woman's role as a mother and a wife. "The new patriarchy advocated by nationalists conferred upon women the honour of a new social responsibility and bound them to a new and entirely legitimate subordination"\(^3\).

It was assumed by the male-oriented system that women should be interested in education only to enhance the efficiency of their wife-mother role. Women themselves, also, could not go beyond this societal norm. Even Sarala Ray\(^4\) remarked:

> If education has any value for a girl, it must make her more fit for her household work and daily life.

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1. A.C. Mehta - Projections of student Enrolment and Flows NIEPA, p. 18
2. Census of India 1981, Series I, India in Women in India p. 16
4. Sarala Ray Centenary volume p. 5

FN. Sarala Ray was a leading educationist and social reformer. She founded the Gokhale Memorial school.
The character of women's education was moulded by the gender bias of the society and the Colonial Government did little to improve the status of women or to change the societal perception of women.

The independent Indian Government had not only the responsibility of spreading women's education but also of changing the societal attitude to facilitate its growth. In chapters II, III and IV of my thesis I have studied the post-independence growth of women's education till 1985 in several phases.

The second chapter of my thesis has covered the period between 1947 and 1966. During this period several committees and commissions were appointed and surveys conducted to evaluate the educational scene in India. Based on these recommendations, specially of the Kothari Commission, a National Policy of Education was formulated.

Though women's education progressed during this period, the basic nature of women's education did not undergo any major transformation. There is, therefore, an element of continuity between the Colonial and the immediate post-independence educational programmes. Even the diversification of education at the secondary level was influenced by the same social norms. Regarding the content of the course, the evidence recorded by Hansa Mehta Committee indicated that in devising courses of electives meant for girls, a girl's role as a homemaker only had been kept in view by the curriculum planners. Thus Home/Domestic Science, Hygiene, Needle Work and Fine Arts were treated as exclusive subjects for women. A note of protest against this concept, however, may be observed when Hansa Mehta said that time had come "when homemaking should be treated not as the exclusive demain of women, but as a joint responsibility of man and woman."

The Kothari Commission, however, was happy with the development of girls' education as

"...the progress in the last fifteen years has been almost phenomenal. The rate of expansion of education of girls is much faster than that among the boys so that the gap between them is gradually and steadily narrowing."

While the commission emphasised the need to pay "adequate attention to the problems of training and employment of women" it did not suggest any

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5 Report of the Hansa Mehta Committee p. 28
6 Ibid p. 32
7 Kothari Commission Report pp. 136 and 138
8 Ibid p. 138
measure to change the societal perception of women's education.

The third chapter of the dissertation has traced the growth of women's education between 1966 and 1974. While quantitatively education had registered remarkable growth, its quality had suffered. Hence, this period witnessed attempts to improve the quality of education by changing the substandard single teacher schools to at least double teacher schools and by increasing the salary of the teachers as an incentive. However, due to overall fund limitation the outlay on education could not be increased in line with the actual requirements. Thus the Government faced a deadlock. If more teachers with better qualifications and higher salary were to be appointed then the schools would not get enough money to spend on teaching aids and equipments. On the other hand, if more money was spent on equipments, laboratories, etc. then precious little would be left for qualitative strengthening of the teaching cadre who would actually put these equipments to proper use.

The rising cost of living and the consequent need for jobs prompted the girls, specially from urban areas, to go for formal education. Yet, the basic attitude towards female education underwent only marginal changes. The parents tried to educate their daughters because men now preferred literate wives. They withdrew their daughter from school when marriage was fixed for her.

The growth of women's education between 1974 and 1985 has been analysed in the fourth chapter. In spite of special schemes to promote girls' education, it was observed that even in 1985 girls' education lagged far behind that of boys. The new schemes introduced under the Minimum Needs Programme were believed to be very effective. But in practice their implementation was hampered by inadequacy of fund and official indifference. The disbursement of funds was often so delayed that scholarships or stipends reached the girls towards the end of their academic session and in many cases after the course was completed thus putting them under financial constraint. While education was transferred from State List to Union List, it did not materially affect girls' education.

The allocation for education had also increased, at least in absolute term, through successive Five Year Plans (Rs. 169 crores in the First Plan to Rs. 2524 crores in the Sixth Plan). But this increase was substantially offset by the rate of
inflation and growth of population. The per capita expenditure on education rose from Rs. 12.4 in 1968-69 to Rs. 33.9 in 1973-79. But during this period the price level also rose by 110 per cent and to that extent increase in real term was less.9

This paucity of fund was possibly responsible for the perpetuation of the old education system and old social concepts. The Government could not and probably did not effectively try to change the gender bias of the society at large, specially in the rural and backward areas. It appears that the process of urbanisation and some post independence legislations for the benefit of women made some differences in the value judgment of the parents in towns and cities. These urban areas mostly accounted for impressive increase in the enrolment figures for girls in school. Proximity to an urban centre meant more possibility for the development of women's education in rural areas. Growth of secondary education of girls, for example, took place in cities and towns without any special Governmental scheme to boost it. The Government had special schemes for girls only at the elementary stage upto 14 years age. The girls in the urban and semi-urban areas came out to join schools to seek job opportunities created by the increased industrialisation in these growth centres. The girls in the far away places in rural India continued to suffer from parental apathy and Government's lack of will to change it.

The fifth chapter of my thesis has tried to identify the obstacles to the spread of female education and the Government's ability or inability to remove those. While the crying need was to provide a clear economic motivation to accelerate women's education, in actual effect it was the reverse situation where the girls found themselves stone walled with very limited job opportunities. As the formal education itself had not undergone any major transformation, the girls suffered from lack of enough vocational avenues. Their access to technical education specially in nontraditional occupations has been minimal. There was no proper assessment of the crucial role the women played in economic activities in agriculture, wage labour segment etc. Their contribution to agricultural economy in actual field work remained, for some strange reason, invisible. Subjects related to house hold management got more importance in preference to science and mathematics in a girl's curriculum. There was practically no attempt to train the women even in agriculture and other farm

9 Bhabatosh Dutta Commission Report p. 310
based productive activities where the girls were already firmly rooted.

The country has so far failed in using education as a basic instrument for transforming the women's status, specially in rural India. Social status and education go hand in hand. As long as girls are not considered as having rights and obligations to earn as boys, they will not be sent to schools or allowed to remain there to complete their education like their brothers. As long as girls remain uneducated, they will not achieve social status and empowerment.

Educational needs in India varied from Province to Province and it was very difficult to devise a common programme which would suit the priority requirement of every State. An educationally backward State like Rajasthan needed to give high priority to women's education in a generalised way but an advanced State like Madras, where girls' education had developed adequately, might need emphasis on technical education. Besides, legislations or executive actions tended to ignore the variety of life-styles that characterised the women of India. For upper and middle class urban girls, education was a means of securing jobs, acquiring status in the family and getting freedom from societal restrictions. To an urban slum dweller earning money was more important than education. A rural girl accustomed to accept the society assigned norms, would only think of substantiating the family income within the social structure. A girl from a poor agricultural family would not be able to devote the required time to education. Obviously, the system of education must be different for these different categories. The very fact that the elementary schools function only on a full time basis implies that elementary education is literally denied to children of the poor who are required to work and cannot attend school on a whole time basis.

It would, however, be wrong to assume that mere formulation of public policies is sufficient for the progress of female education. Unless the concept of a woman's role in society is changed and unless there is a transformation of social traditions and beliefs, universal elementary education for the girls will not be a reality. Discrimination against a girl child and preferential treatment for a male child still prevail in a vast majority of households. Nutritional deficiencies in the critical age-group of 0-6 when the brain develops rapidly, may lead to permanent damage which may not be cured by any remedial measures in later.
years. This obviously implies that millions of girls from undernourished poor families never get a proper start in life. This familial discrimination arising out of social circumstances must be eliminated if girls are to be properly educated.

This is not to say that the administrative authorities would remain passive observers till social consciousness is aroused. The Government will have to play the catalyst role in motivating the people at large to join the movement of education for all. It will have to be a people's programme and the local communities will have to be fully involved. In a sense the Government's over dependence on its bureaucratic machinery to implement its public policies on education had made it difficult for the country to think differently from official perception and formulate alternative models. The Government's educational management system has to break away from its monolithic past and respond to the challenge of launching a truly mass movement at micro level Radio broadcasting, television programmes, public hoardings etc. may be utilised for inculcating public consciousness regarding the utility of women's education.

In order to secure full cooperation from private enterprise, grants-in-aid to private schools and schools run by voluntary organisations may be made more liberal. True, this may lead to creation of urban elite schools imparting superior education as distinct from Government or Government sponsored rural schools imparting less effective education. But this divide may be bridged by improving the standard of Government schools. Public participation in education not only strengthens the association of the people in the development of education but is also essential for the preservation of academic freedom and educational progress.

A scheme that has been put into effect in Madras may also be extended, to other parts of India. Under this scheme, prominent people of the village come forward to help in the maintenance of village schools, in the improvement of buildings, in laying of gardens and gifting of library books etc. People's movement in the field of dissemination of knowledge and popularisation of education may thus the heralded.

The library movement to boost literacy that was so successful in Kerala may also be followed elsewhere. "Granthasala Sangham" (library movement) with

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10 Nurul Hasan, Equalisation of Education p. 2
5000 libraries spread all over the State, mainly in rural areas, proved a catalyst to Kerala's progress in literacy. Unless backed by a library even the literate girls would gradually dwindle to illiteracy.

There is a distinct need for agricultural education for the "farm women" as they are very powerful co-workers in agricultural operations. Training in dairy farming, village craft, health and hygiene are essential for village women so that they can substantiate their family income. At the same time if any girl in a village demonstrates scholastic aptitude, she may be allowed to take up general or vocational education, whichever suits her. Provision for adequate scholarships should be made to help her pursue academic courses.

Regarding the ways and means of spreading women's education, women activists, however, hold varying opinions. Mrinalini Dasgupta believes that the State Government along with Local Self Government should take complete responsibility of universalising elementary education. Ashoka Gupta, on the other hand, suggests that Non-Governmental Organisations will do a better work in this field, if given the responsibility. Non-Governmental Organisations such as voluntary agencies, charitable institutions, religious organisations etc. have always played an important role in educational advancement of States which are close to achieving universal primary education and have also high rate of literacy. Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Nagaland, Mizoram etc. exemplify the role that can be played by the NGOs. Involvement of right type of voluntary agencies and NGOs appears to have the potential to play a crucial role, specially in the backward rural segments. Universalisation of elementary education at the micro level may require many more support systems than what the Government can singularly provide. No doubt it is difficult to identify good voluntary agencies. But so far no serious attempt has been made to survey the voluntary agencies and assess their capacity. It may reasonably be assumed that the required decision, in this respect, will be taken by the Government after giving due consideration to these views.

In conclusion, it may be pointed out that depriving the women of their right to education is a means of keeping them under subjugation. Education, it is

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11 The Telegraph, dtd. 6th March, 1995
13 Ibid p. 54
feared, will lead to empowerment of women and may even result in a reversal of existing social norms and values.

Few questions, however, remained unanswered in this thesis. Is patriarchal social system still stonewalling the progress of women's education? After so much of hue and cry for social justice, has there been any significant qualitative change in gender bias? Are the men controlling the administrative machinery, somewhat unconsciously, reluctant to ensure the growth of women's education in real terms lest the educated women swamp their traditional strong hold? Do they fear competition from educated women in the shrinking job market? Finally, has the time come to leave the women's educational planning and implementation, by and large, in the hands of a body of experts of which the majority would be female? These issues require an in-depth research on educational planning. Proper answers to these questions are important for a clear perspective of the entire ambit of women's education. My study should provide an entry point for further research on these issues.