Chapter 1. Introduction to the Study

1.1. Introduction:

Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. But the hegemonic masculine ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal opportunities in different parts of the world. The rise of feminist ideas has, however, led to the tremendous improvement of women's condition throughout the world in recent times. Access to education has been one of the most pressing demands of these women’s rights movements. Women’s education in India has also been a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society as educated women can play a very important role in the development of the country.

As there is gender inequality everywhere, women in India have always been topics of concern. The family and society at large consider women as second-class citizens. Though there is growing respect, worship and devotion on female goddesses such as Durga, Saraswati, Parvati and Kali, there is no respect for women. Valmiki’s Ramayana teaches that Ravana and his entire clan were wiped out because he abducted Sitadevi. Veda Vyasa’s Mahabharata teaches that all the Kauravas were killed because they humiliated Draupadi in public. But the status of women in society as recorded in history was very much lower. She was treated to inferior to the male and object of labour. The women are abused in the form of Child-marriage, Devadasi, female infanticide, Sati, Sexual harassment and many more. In India, the families are always ‘Patriarchal’ i.e. male dominated. Women were never given any “Rights” of liberty and equality. They were always treated as inferior as an item or showpiece in the house. In many households, women were considered as ‘Machines’ for giving birth to children. The condition of women was so bad that if she gave birth to a girl child she was treated in a humiliated manner. The boy child was seen as ‘kul-ka-depak’ (taking the family name ahead in generations). Women were not only refrained from being educated but also not allowed to step out of the house. They were asked to eat after their husbands and other males have eaten. They were given the remains of their husband’s food to eat as a convention in many families in the society. This is the situation of the women in India. But it is highlighted that the secondary status of women is not ancient, but
from medieval age in India. Women status was high during the Vedic period, become lower in medieval period and still the status is increasing in modern period in India.

The status of women in ancient India can be better studied in the following stages. That is women in the Vedic and post-Vedic period. The classical name for India, however, as usually employed in Sanskrit races, is “Bharate” or “Bharata-Varsha”, the country of Bharat’, - a king who appears to have ruled over a large extent of territory in ancient times (Shrivastava, 1999). It is emphasized that India is recognized as “Mother India” by all the Indians, which shows the importance given to women.

The names of Lopa Mudra, Gargi and Arundathi as creators of the Vedic rucha/richa have been mentioned. This freedom to follow intellectual and spiritual concerns and to participate in the creation of an ethos was also substantiated by reference to Leelavati and other women who lived in periods ranging from the Vedic era to the seventh century AD. As a substratum of these two streams, participants also mentioned the Ghandarvas and Kiratas, the Vanaras, the Nags, Yadavas and other ethnic groups. According to them, their women shared an equal status with men. They walked, drank and enjoyed the pleasures of life with them even fought alongside them in wars. Chitrangatha, Hidamba, Kaikeyi, Satyavathi, Surpanakha, Shakuntala and other women were mentioned in this context. According to the participants, in both the Aryan and Non-Aryan traditions, women were considered to be the equal of men socially and psychologically. They could, if they wished, woo men, leave their husbands and even live with another man without going through the sacramental rituals. In the ultimate consolidation of the Aryan and non-Aryan traditions into a more general Indian ethos, this aspect of life was recognized and legitimized. For instance, Manu recognized eight modes of marriage, only one of which was sacramental. Later, Draupadi, Kunti, Tara, Mandodari and Sita, all five of whom had been accused of either an open liaison with other men or whose virtue was suspect, were declared eternal virgins. Thus in this formulation, women seem
to have had a wide spectrum of roles, freedom of choice and a comparatively open life-space (Parikh and Garg, 1989).

The important place assigned to women in India dates back to the time of the Vedas and Smritis. Man declared that where women were adored, Gods frequented that place. During the Vedic age the position of women in society was very high and they were regarded as equal partners with men in all respects. Who had not heard of Maieryi, Gargi, Sati Anusuya and Sita (Ralhan and Others, 1995).

Women are said to be the deities of prosperity. The persons who desire affluence should honour them. By cherishing women one cherishes the goddess of prosperity herself and by afflicting her, one is said to pain the goddess of prosperity. In another place the same idea is developed in a still clearer form by laying down that women ought to be looked after carefully, as they are worthy of regard, virtuous, full of noble qualities and are bright adornment to the house and are in fact synonymous with the prosperity of the house.

The learned sage Sri. Ramakrishna Paramahansa firmly believed in the spirit and essence in the Bhagavad Gita: “It is my Cosmic Mother who has become everything. She of omnipotence has become the Universe and the beings in it. She reveals herself as the body, the intellect, the virtuous path and the spiritual pursuit. Sakti and Brahman are one. In the manifest state she is Sakti and in the absolute state, Brahman. Without knowing the Shakti, Ishwara cannot be known” (Kaul, 2000).

European-inspired histories and the Indian texts they cited shared a belief in a unique female nature. Indian texts emphasized women as devoted and self-sacrificing, yet occasionally rebellious and dangerous. Texts on religion, law, politics and education carried different pronouncements for men depending on caste, class, age and religious sect. In contrast, women’s differences were overshadowed by their biological characteristics and the subordinate, supportive roles they were destined to play. Occasionally Indian texts and historical narratives singled out one woman for special attention but usually this was because her accomplishments were
significant by male standards. Topics that were intimately interwoven with women’s lives—household and agricultural technology; religious rituals and sentiments; fertility and family size; furnishings, jewellery and clothing; inheritance and property rights and marriage and divorce—were largely overlooked (Forbes, 2000).

The Indian cultural tradition begins with the Vedas. It is during the Vedic period Indian women enjoyed relatively a high status. In various areas their position was equal to or nearly equal to men. Literary and historical records and researches have revealed that women held a position of equality with men during the Vedic periods. Women never observed purdah in the Vedic period. They enjoyed freedom in areas such as education, marriage, economic production, spending money, religious activities etc. They had liberty in selecting their mates. They could educate themselves. Widows were permitted to remarry. Divorce was however, not permissible to them. Women were given complete freedom in family matters and were treated as “Ardhanginis” (better halves) (Shankar Rao, 2006).

Girls also received education like boys and went through the Brahmacharya discipline including the “Upanayan” ritual. The Atharva Veda observes how a bride had no chance of a good match, if she had not been educated as a brahmacharini. Women studied the Vedic literature like men and some of them, like Lopamudra, Ghosa and Sikata Nivavari, figure among the authors of the Vedic hymns (Kuppu Swamy, 2002).

During the early Vedic period, Women in India enjoyed almost an equal status with men in different spheres of life. Vedic studies were then not the prerogative of man. Girls and boys were required to undergo Upnayanam ceremonies in order to undertake Vedic studies (Upadhyay, 1997).

Though marriage was considered a religious duty, women had the right to remain spinsters throughout their life. Marriage was not forcibly imposed on them. There was no restriction on the age at marriage. Child marriages were unknown.
Girls were given in marriage only after puberty that too, after completing their education and women had the right to select their life-partners. The practice of “Swaymavara” would serve as an evidence for the girl’s right to marital choice. Often there were also love marriages called “Gandharva Vivaha”.

During the Vedic period, monogamy was generally followed though there were several instances of polygamous marriages being held in the circle of upper class and the royal class. Remarriage of widows was allowed. The practice of sati is nowhere mentioned in the Rig Veda. The practice of taking dowry was there but it was only symbolic. It had not emerged as a social evil.

In family matters, Vedic women were bound by the patriarchal tradition. This tradition invested the husband with greater powers in the management of the household. Still in many respects the wives were regarded as equals of their husband. The term “dampati” would suggest that husband and wife were regarded as the joining heads of the household. The wife was, however, expected to be obedient to the husband helping him in the performance of his duties including the religious ones.

Mukherjee (1958) believes that “the Rig Veda shows abundant evidence pointing to the fact that women were fully the equals of men as regards access to and capacity for the highest knowledge, even the knowledge of absolute or Brahma”.

Vedic women had economic freedom. They did not serve as labourers and earn wages only because it was not necessary for them. Home was the place of production. Spinning and weaving of clothes were done at home. Women helped their husbands in agricultural pursuits also. Some women were engaged in teaching work (Shankar Rao, 2006).

In property matters there were disparities between men and women. Women’s rights were very much limited in inheriting property. A daughter had no share in her father’s property; but each unmarried daughter was entitled to one-
fourth share of patrimony received by her brothers. Women had full control over their “Stridhan” (gifts and property etc. received by a woman at the time of marriage). Stridhan was inherited only by unmarried daughters. The bulk of the family property was under the control and management of the patriarch. Later Vedic texts expressly declared that women had no right of inheritance as they were weak. An exception was, however, made in favour of the brotherless daughter, who was allowed to inherit the patrimony.

In the religious field, wife enjoyed full rights and regularly participated in religious ceremonies with her husband. Vedic religious ceremonies and sacrifices were performed jointly by the husband and wife. Women even participated actively in religious discourses. Women could offer “sandhya” and even perform yajnas or sacrifices by themselves in the absence of their husbands. The rishis used to teach sacred scriptures to their wives and there was no bar for women to read or study any of our sacred literature (Shankar Rao, 2006).

Women never suffered from any type of seclusion in the Vedic society. They could move freely in the company of their husbands or lovers. Women could shine as debaters in public assemblies. They usually occupied a prominent place in social gatherings lending charm to them by their graceful dress. Women, of course, were not permitted entry into the “Sabhas” (Assemblies) because these places were also used for gambling drinking and such other purpose.

The women of epic age in India held a honourable position at home. The two classical epics Ramayana and Mahabharata have also given a respectable place for women. In fact, women are the focal points of both the epics. Sita in the Ramayana and Draupadi in the Mahabharata are the cause for the wars which occur at the final phase of these epics. Both the epics make mention of the continuation of the marital practice of “Swayamvara” In both of these, we find vast references of the expression of courage, strong will power, and valour of women like Kaikeyi, Sita, Rukmini, Satyabhama, Subhadra, Draupadi, Savithri and others.
During this period of Dharmashastras and Puranas, the position of women underwent a major change. Daughters were regarded as second-class citizens when freedom of women was curtailed. Sons were given more importance. According to Altekar (1962), “The discontinuance of Upanayanam, the neglect of education and the lowering of age at marriage produced disastrous consequences upon the position and status of women” during this period.

Manu, the law giver, gave an injunction: “A woman has to be under her father during childhood, under her husband during youth and under her son during old age. At no stage shall she deserve freedom.” He however, balanced this with the statement that a society in which the woman was not honoured would be condemned to damnation.

The woman in this period was made to accept the secondary position. In several mythological stories wife’s loyalty to the husband was very much stressed. It was in this period that, masculine and priestly dominance began to take root and prevail. Girls were prevented from learning the Vedas and becoming Brahmacharinis.

Due to the various restrictions imposed on the freedom of women some problems started creeping in. “In the social field, pre-puberty marriages came to be practiced, widow remarriage was prohibited, husband was given the status of god for a woman, education was totally denied to women. Custom of ‘Sati’ became increasingly prevalent, ‘purdah’ (veil) system came into vogue and practice of polygamy came to be tolerated. In the economic field, a woman was totally denied a share in her husband’s property. In the religious field, women were forbidden to offer sacrifices, prayers, practice penance and undertake pilgrimages” (Ahuja, 1993).

In the Buddhist period, some of the rigidities and restrictions imposed by the caste system were relaxed. Buddha preached equality. He tried to improve the cultural, educational and religious statuses of women. Buddhism never regarded marriage as an inescapable thing for women, widowhood was not considered disrespectful. Women could resort to an educational career if they so desired.
Women were permitted to become “Sanyasis” Many women joined the Buddhist order, became religious sisters, wore the yellow robe and came to be known as the “Bhikshunis”, women had their sangha called the Bhikshuni sangha which was guided by the same rules and regulations as those of the monks (Shankar Rao, 2006).

During the benevolent rule of the famous Buddhist kings such as Chadragupta Maurya, Ashoka, Sri Harsha and others, women regained a part of their lost freedom and status due to the relatively broadminded Buddhist philosophy.

The medieval period proved to be highly disappointing for the status of Indian women for their status further deteriorated during this period. The Muslim invasion of India changed the direction of Indian history. The influx of these foreign invaders and the Brahmanical iron laws were the main causes for such degradation.

After the death of Harshavardhana (646 A.D), with the beginning of medieval era, the Brahmanism without the benevolence of the Vedic period took hold of the Indian society with all its severe restrictions and rigidities. As a result women suffered a lot. Their freedom was curtailed, knowledge of scriptures and even of letters was denied. They were made the parasites on men. Caste laws dominated social life. Property laws reduced women to the status of slaves. Widow Remarriage and levirate or “Niyoga” were now disallowed. Women could not inherit property. Girls were treated more as burdens or liabilities than as assets. This period is notorious, for the women in this period had to face a number of problems of which the following may be noted.

In the medieval period, after the establishment of Mughal imperialism the status of women became much more pitiable. In order to save Hindu religion, maintain purity of blood and protect chastity of the women, the Brahmins made the rules regarding the women much more rigid. Education of girls was almost finished, Purdah system got much more encouraged and the age of girl’s marriage lowered down up to four years. The number of unseen and unmatched marriages increased.
Widow Remarriage stopped completely and custom of Sati reached its peak. They were made subordinate under men from birth to death and after snatching all their rights and freedom the ‘household’ was made the only centre of their activities and hopes. She became the maid servant and the thing of consumption for her husband who got the right of exercising atrocities on her. Regarding the property, surely some improvements were made in this period. The widow and brotherless daughter started having some rights of succession respectively on the property of her husband and father. But the women could only consume it; neither could sell it nor could present it, so that it could be preserved for the next successor (Mishra, 2002).

Women were also rulers in the medieval period. Some of the great women rulers were Razia Sultan, the only women monarch to rule the throne of Delhi. The Gond queen Durgavati ruled for fifteen long years, before she lost the battle to Mughal emperor Akbar’s general Asaf Ali. Chand Bibi also fought the Mughals in 1590’s. Nur Jehan the only Mughal women ruler is still today considered the most effective ruler. In spite of all these successful women, the condition of poor Indian women was the same.

In concluding this vast phase of history in the context of women’s position, it may be mentioned that particularly after the establishment of class society and the rise of private property in the post-Vedic period, women’s position in the society declined Patriarchal values relating to sexuality and regulation of her movement, thus controlling her purity got entrenched during this phase (Pachauri, 1999). In this period certain methods and practices were started, which curtailed the freedom of women in the society in all respects. They are discussed as under:

1. Practice of Child Marriage:

The practice of arranging the marriage of boys and girls before the attainment of puberty is known as child marriage. This made the girls to suffer a lot. The fear that Muslim invaders would kidnap or seduce the girls brought heavy pressure on the parents to arrange the marriage of their daughters at a very early age.
Young girls had to bear the brunt of the family life, get children at an inappropriate age when they themselves were mentally immature, problem of ill-health made them still weak. Those who were unfortunate enough to lose their husband at an early age had to spend the rest of their lives in the most pitiable manner as unwanted widows (Shankar Rao, 2006).

2. Prohibition of Widow Remarriage:

Dharmashastras strictly prohibited the widow remarriage. The glorification of the ideal of ‘Pativrata’ was another hurdle in the path of widow-remarriage, child widows had a miserable life. They were denied education, public life and most of the religious activities were tabooed for them. Their very presence on important occasion was considered to be disgraceful for they were treated as symbol of ill-omen. They were made to work like servants throughout their lives.

Life for them made a few to lead an immoral life and some even became prostitutes. To prevent such sex offences child widows were forced to shave their head and forsake all types of beautification in order to make them sexually unattractive.

3. Practice of Sati:

The practice of ‘Sati’ indicates the decline in the status of Indian women. ‘Sati’ refers to a horrible practice in which the married women used to jump into the funeral pyre of their husbands with the hope of attaining ‘Sadgati’ or ‘Moksha’. It was actually an act of self-immolation. The glorification of ‘Pativrata’ and the degraded and intolerable widow life made many women to become ‘satees’ there were horrible instances in which women were forcibly pushed into the funeral fire of their husbands. This custom was very much prevalent particularly in Rajaputana and central India. There was also the horrible practice of “Johar” in which the Rajput women immolated themselves collectively with a view to protect their chastity
whenever it was endangered. The practice of ‘Sati’ had continued even after the end of Muslim rule.

4. Purdah System:

Purdah or Purdha system refers to the practice of women wearing a gown or veil to cover their face and upper part of the body. It was a common practice among the Muslim women. Purdah system was in practice only in the wealthy and royal classes among the Hindus. But, after the Muslim invasion, the Hindu women were also forced to wear the ‘Purdah’ mainly to escape from the sexy looks of the invaders and to protect themselves from being kidnapped or seduced. The purdha system led to the complete seclusion of women. Hence, the facilities of education and public life were totally denied to them. Women had to confine themselves to their own world and their progress was halted. Women became the objects of exploitation.

5. Devadasi System:

Devadasi system represents another social evil which caused the degradation of Indian women. It is a custom that denies, in the name of religion, marital opportunity to a few women, insisting on them to become devadasis or basavises to serve the god in the temple as dancers and singers. They were sometimes made to cater to the sexual needs of pilgrims. The devadasis and basavises thus were compelled by the circumstance to become prostitutes. This system grew into a social evil during the medieval age and spoiled the prospects of many young girls.

The social position of Muslim women was also not better than that of the Hindu women, though Muslim rulers were mostly controlling Indian territories. Throughout the medieval period the status of women went on declining. However, the bhakti movement organized by the great devotees and saints like Ramanujacharya, Chaitanya, Nanak, Meerabai, Kabirdas, Ramdas, Tulsidas,
Tukaram and others served to improve the status of women a little. But it had not done any miracles.

6. Economic and Political Life:

During the Muslim rule, the women were completely lost the economic freedom, as they were not allowed to work outside and participate in productive activities. Further, the political aspects and rights of the women were also curtailed.

During the British rule, the “quality of life” of Indian women remained more or less the same. However, some substantial progress was achieved in eliminating inequalities between men and women in education, employment, social rights and so on. Some social evils such as Child Marriage, Sati system, Devadasi system, Purdah system, prohibition on widow remarriage etc. were either controlled or removed by suitable legislation. Social reformers with patriotic spirit on the one hand, and the British Government on the other, together took several measures to improve the status of women and to remove some of their disabilities. Number of factors contributed to the change in the status of women during this period.

Along with the British people the western culture, its life-styles and values also came to India. The western way of life which the British represented had its influence on the Indians. The western values, their world-view, their liberal principles, rationalistic attitude towards problems, critical approach towards issues, the right to question and criticize, social equality, etc, had their impact on the Indians the western belief in the individual enterprise, equal importance for the rights and duties of man and such other things influenced the Indians’ way to life and particularly their attitude towards women.

Many of the socio-political thinkers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, etc were organized social movements for the emancipation of women and struggled against social evils like child marriage, Sati practice, etc and also emphasized for the women’s education.
Many of the reform societies and organized were also found for the emancipation of women and Dalits and a few include Arya Samaj, Arya Mahila Samaj, Brahma Samaj, etc.

The British followed the policy of non-interference in the religious and social life and activities of people. But they were compelled to take up some social legislative measures in three related areas namely, marriage, property and employment. Consequently the Prevention of Sati Act 1829, the Widow Remarrige Act 1856, The Special Marriage Act 1872 and The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, the Married Women’s Property Act 1874, etc.

The status of Indian women has radically changed since independence. Both the political and cultural changes that followed independence provided equality of opportunities to women in education, employment and political participation. The women’s movement in India grew out of male reformist efforts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was a bourgeoise feminist movement involving middle class women who campaigned for extension for educational opportunities and acting rights and later property rights. The reformists of the last century infused in their women relatives their favourite ideologies and encouraged them to participate in public life through forming associations and holding conferences. The ideas was to project a progressive image to impress Britain in order to win more political power (Upadhyay, 1997).

State governments and Central Government were given 33% reservation in Government employment to women.

**Women’s Education:**

The credit of making the first organized effort to educate Indian girls goes to the American Missionary society which opened the first native girl’s education society in Bombay in 1824. By the year 1829 no fewer than 400 female pupils were receiving instruction in the school. The Scottish Missionary Society followed the example and R. R. Wilson, one of the most respected names in India, established on its behalf six school for native girls in Bombay in 1829. In 1840 this society opened five schools for high class Hindu Girls in the neighbourhood of Poona. In 1851 the students literary and scientific society was formed which counted among its founders the earliest workers such men as Dadabhai Naoroji and Mr. Mandik. This society began its operations with nine vernacular free schools, attended by more than 650 girls. In 1854, the court of director addressed to the Government of India the famous dispatch on education, which laid down the lines on which the work of educating the Indian people was to be undertaken by the Government. This dispatch laid great stress on the urgency and importance of female education in India. In 1854, there were 65 girl’s schools, attended by 3,500 pupils. In 1869 the number of schools had risen to 209, and that of pupils to over 35,000 in Bombay Presidency. In Madras Presidency, the first attempt at providing schools for native girls was made in 1841 by the Missionaries of the Scottish Church. In 1845, the first girl’s School under partial native management was opened. When the dispatch of 1854 arrived in India, there were 256 girl’s Schools in Madras Presidency attended by 8,000 girls. In 1881 the number had risen to 557 and that of pupils to over 35,000 (Gokhale, 1934).

The Dispatch of 1854 found 288 girl’s schools with nearly 7,000 pupils in Bengal. The number of girl’s schools in 1881 stood over 1,000 with an attendance of over 41,000 pupils (Gokhale, 1934). In this way the work started by the missionaries and the British got impetus in education of women in other parts of the country also.
From 1882-1947, the progress of girl’s education was reported to be slow but steady, confirmed as it was to the effluent sections of the society or those families which were in the favour of foreign rulers. Nevertheless, starting from no education at the advent of British rule that is zero percent of the total enrollment of educational institutions under formal systems, the enrollment of women increased to nearly 25 percent of the total enrollment by the end of the British regime (1947) and this is in no way a mean achievement. But still there is disparity in girls’ education in India. After very long time, the idea of educating women emerged during the British period. The Christian missionaries took interest in the education of girls. A girl’s school was started for the first time in Bombay in 1824. By 1829, there were about 400 girls studying in that school. Lord Dalhousie had also said that education of female children would help the family to reap the benefits for other changes taking place in society. The Hunter Education Commission of 1882 also emphasized the need for female education. The Universities of Bombay, Madras did not give admission to girls until 1875. It was only in 1882, girls were allowed to go for higher education. In 1881-82, India had only 6 women studying in universities. After 1882, there has been a continuous progress in the extent of education among women especially at the college level. The literacy percentage among females in India increased from 0.6% in 1901 to 7.0% in 1941, 24.88% in 1981 and 39.42% in 1991. It further increased to 54.16% in 2001.

By the end of the 19th century, sizeable number of educated Indian women entered for the first time the field of salaried professions. The education commission of 1882 had recommended the employment of women teachers in the schools and the appointment of women as inspectors of the girls, schools. It also recommended that special women entered the newly opened schools and colleges to qualify themselves as nurses and doctors and as teachers. In course of time, women entered other professions to work as clerks, accountants, receptionists, typists and in such other capacities. Apart from these employment opportunities, many of the women also joined national movement against the British.
After the independence, women in India took education in a relatively larger number. For example, in 1901, the literacy level of the females in India was just 0.6% and increased to 65.46% in 2011. This brought down the gap between male and female literacy rates from 28.84% in 1991 to 16.68% in 2011. Various benefits such as free education, scholarship, loan facility, hostel facility etc. are being given to women who go for higher education. By making use of the new opportunities, a large number of girl students go for higher education today. For example, in 1950-51 the percentage of girl students pursuing higher education was 10.9% that is, out of the total enrollment) and this increased to 32.0% in 1992 in fact, the National Educational Policy 1986, has been in favour of empowering woman through education. It gave a call to remove the gender prejudices by the inclusion of relevant lessons in the curriculum. It promoted the opening of women study centres in colleges and universities (Shameem, 2006).

In many towns and cities, educational institutions meant only for female children have been established. For example, in 1958-59 there were 146 colleges meant exclusively for women and the number increased to 824 colleges in 1992. The educational performance of girl students at high school and college levels, is proving to be better than that of boys especially after 1990s, this performance of girls makes it evident that intellect is not the monopoly of men alone.

The nation has gone much ahead in the field of female education and we have today some universities exclusively meant for women such as:

i) SNDT (Shrimathi Nathibai Damodar Thackersey University) for women at Poona.
ii) Padmavathi University for Women (Tirupati).
iii) Mother Teresa University for women (Kodai Kenal, Tamil Nadu)
iv) Karnataka State Women’s University, Bijapur (Karnataka)

Girl students are getting admitted on merit basis to the prestigious engineering and medical colleges in relatively a bigger number during the recent years. Women have now realized that education makes a lot of difference in the
social status of the individuals whether they are men or women. It must be noted here that even though city women are quite conscious of education and its importance, more than 60% of rural women in India are still illiterate and only a negligible number of them develop their educational career.

In the Indian society wherein transition from traditionalism to modernism is taking place, working of women outside home is being gradually encouraged. Although modern industry came to India after it was well established in other countries, the women in the name of weak sex were abused and exploited as in other countries. Whenever an attempt was made to bring about an improvement in their working conditions, it was resisted. The condition of women in India today leaves much to be desired and they are still far away from the status of equality with men. Though our constitution has guaranteed certain fundamental rights and special provisions for protection of women, yet they in reality are relegated to an inferior status, economically, socially and politically. This is especially true of the vast majority of women in the rural areas, who are illiterate and ignorant of their rights under the law. In the urban areas, with the spread of education and the increase in the number of women working outside their houses, the situation is however turning to a bit better (Chopra, 2001).

The reasons for such disparities in female education are differently stated by different authors in their respective studies. It has been generally observed that employment in the services sector is not gender neutral and is influenced, dominated and virtually controlled by males. Women find the working environment unfriendly and insecure. Questions of fair representation of genders and equality of opportunity have been pushed into the background under the guise of quality, merit and ability. The planning and implementation process must be possessed of a vision that encompasses both the public and private owned sectors, keeping its gaze fixed on ensuring equality of opportunity and being alive to gender sensitivities. The current ‘ad-hoc approach’ lacks a conceptual framework and is fraught with negative implications for women’s access to higher education. A study of women scientists in biological sciences in the central universities and the national laboratories
concluded that when it came to permanent faculty positions women were worse off as compared to men as a proportion of those that had obtained research degrees (Bal, 2004). It has been argued that researchers join as faculty members in their early thirties; this is a time when women are either getting married or in need of a break to raise a family. The break makes it impossible for to keep pace cannot compete with men in research and professional experience. This filtering out continues despite the fact that at junior faculty level one finds that there were more women in the faculty than there were men. Gender disparity at all levels and its adverse impact on women has become a fact of life. This is partly due to biological role and responsibilities of women as mothers, but mostly due to traditional mindsets, which visualize women as being child-bearers and homemakers, and men as breadwinners (Bamji, 2005).

Ghosh and De (2005) provided the statistical information regarding educational composition of Population by Number of Years of Schooling in India. The Statistics revealed that of the total 2.7% of the population which between 12-14 years of education, the women population constitutes only 1.1%. Further, only 0.3% of the women population gets above 15 years of education. The statistics also disclosed that in India, only 2,76,000 girls get education up to pre-primary level, about 4,74,53,000 up to Primary level, about 1,58,41,000 girls got Middle education, 67,17,000 girls get Secondary education, only 33,87,000 girls got Senior Secondary education and only 21,29,000 girls got higher education in 1996. In Karnataka, about 107000 girls got pre-primary education, about 3077000 girls got Primary education, about 1099000 girls got education up to Middle School, only 4,74,000 girls got Secondary education, about 3,95,000 girls got Senior Secondary Education and only 1,32,000 girls got higher education in 1998. It is also noted that in 1998, about 2, 85,137 boys took graduation in Engineering as against 57,968 girls.

On the progress of women’s education, free and compulsory primary education is made by all the state governments. The Indian Government took education measures to women in a relatively larger number. Growth in access to schooling has been matched by a steady increase in enrolment with the most dramatic upswing since 1990s in girls’ participation levels. From 13.8 million boys
and 5.4 million girls enrolled at the primary level in 1950-51, the number rose to 69.7 million boys and 61.1 million girls in 2004-05. At the upper primary level, the enrolment increased from 2.6 million boys and 0.5 million girls to 28.5 million boys and 22.7 million girls. The proportion of girls in the total enrolment has also been growing. Girls’ enrolment at the primary stage increased from 28.1% in 1950-51 to 46.7% in 2004-05. At the upper primary stage, girls’ enrolment rose from 16.1% in 1950-51 to 44.4% in 2004-05. The overall improvement in girls’ enrolment with respect to total population of girls clearly shows that there is a near universal enrolment at primary level. The gap and challenge exists now at upper primary stage, but there too the gap is narrowing steadily. It is noted that in 1901, the literacy level of the females in India was just 0.6% in increased to 65.46% in 2011. This brought down the gap between male and female literacy rates from 28.84% in 1991 to 16.68% in 2011. Various benefits such as free education, scholarship, loan facility, hostel facility etc. are being given to women who go for higher education. By making use of the new opportunities, a large number of girl students go for higher education today. For example, in 1950-51 the percentage of girl students pursuing higher education was 10.9% that is, out of the total enrollment and this increased to 32.0% in 1992 in fact, the National Educational Policy 1986, has been in favour of empowering woman through education. It gave a call to remove the gender prejudices by the inclusion of relevant lessons in the curriculum. It promoted the opening of women study centres in colleges and universities. The National Policy of Education 1986 highlights the problems related to women’s education. It clearly mentions that it is not only the subordinate status given to women in society, but also lack of pursuit of well designed programmes for granting them equality of opportunities in all walks of life, nor equal opportunities for education, that has obstructed the growth of women. There are project for women’s equality, universalisation of education at primary and elementary levels, secondary and higher education and non-formal education. As such, many of the colleges and universities were opened for women. In the Integrated Child Development Scheme, there is full integration of child care and pre-primary education, both as feeder and a strengthening factor for primary education and human resource development in general.
For women, participation in higher education faces additional hurdles of culture and tradition that militate against their post-primary education opportunities. And these cultural problems are even more pronounced for rural women where the old traditions of protection of young women, subordination to their husbands and the place of women in society as focused on the home and child rearing are the strongest and exposure to feminist reforms are the weakest. Nevertheless, the Government has declared policies of educational equality and opportunity and, within its limited resources, has made remarkable accomplishments. As stated by Richard L Ottinger in his presentation on ‘Need for Higher Education of Women in Rural Areas of India’ during the Forum on Higher Education of Women and Minorities in India at H.K Women’s College, Rajasthan in 2002, the statistics and focusing on the role of women in higher education, 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. But it is not, as may be acknowledged from the fact that 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 postgraduate level (39%) than at the under graduate level (34%), and that this is higher at this level than the enrolment in the diploma level (26%). Data on the faculty-wide distribution of women show that of all the women enrolled in higher education the largest percentage (54%) are enrolled in the faculty of Arts and the Humanities, 20% are enrolled in the faculty of Science, 14% in the faculty of Commerce, 4% in Medicine, Agriculture, Management, 2% in law and 1% in Engineering. The data clearly reveal that the overall representation of women in higher education is poor, and that they are poorly represented in the faculties that lead to prestigious and lucrative occupations such as engineering and management. However it is significant that the decadal increase of enrolment in higher education has consistently been larger for women than for men. The figures are as follows. In the 1950's enrolment of women in higher education increased by 275% and of men by 126.4%, in the 1960's women's enrolment increased by 187.33% and men’s by 108.78%, in the 1970's women's by 73.55% and men's by 31.60%, and in the 1980's women's by 92.11% and men's by 49.18%. Women’s representation, in all disciplines, has also gone up substantially. Today
one sees increasingly larger numbers of women in every field, including those from which they were practically excluded until a few years also. In fact women are moving steadily towards equality in higher education.

While discussing disparity between men and women, the Nobel Laureate Prof. Amartya Sen (2001) stated that there are inequalities between women and men can take very many different forms. Indeed, gender inequality is not one homogeneous phenomenon, but a collection of disparate and interlinked problems. He stated about seven types of inequality all over the world. They are Mortality inequality, Natality inequality, Basic facility inequality, Special opportunity inequality, Professional inequality, Ownership inequality and Household inequality. He grouped that educational disparity in Basic facility inequality. He described gender disparity considering the situations in South Asia and particularly India.

Education is a double-edged instrument; it can contribute to and be an ally of structural changes in society by training people in required skills- old, newly emerging and anticipated. It is also a value-generating process-influencing the behaviour, norms and cultural attitudes of people, particularly younger ones. From the beginning of the movement for the equality of women in recent history, great emphasis was placed on education as the major instrument for the elimination of gender inequality. Developing countries have viewed education as an instrument to stimulate development in all fields, and to reduce their dependence on external advisers. The basic problems were to promote a rapid expansion of development and cultural structures to meet the manpower requirements of development and cultural progress in general. Scarcity of resources and the shifting priorities of development have constrained the balanced pursuit of these aims. One of the objectives which had a low priority in the allocation of efforts and resources was the elimination of gender inequality (Shamsi, 2006).

The 2005 Human Development Report estimated that had this goal been achieved, 14 million girls would be in school right now. Of those, 6 million are in India and Pakistan alone, with another 4 million in Africa. The Report’s Statistical
Tables outlined progress that has been made in many countries since 1990, but despite this, Commonwealth South Asia and Sub Saharan Africa continue to exhibit female net enrolment ratios at both the primary and secondary level that tell us the problem will persist for some years to come. Eliminating gender disparity by increasing access to education for girls is ultimately integral to the attainment of the 2015 Education MDG on Universal Primary Education.

Even though, the Governments (States and Central) at different levels formulated many policies and programmes, for the development of women socially, politically, economically and educationally, still it seems that they are inadequate. This is so because, the women are also have to act positive to the policies and plans of these governments.

Along with the Government policies, it is extremely important that the perceptions of women towards education and their status should be understood properly. Further, the perceptions of the society, including the parents, brothers and sisters of the women should be changed that ‘women should be given education and also equal to men in all respects’. Then only, the ultimate goal of women’s education and equality will be achieved. Hence, present study is made to assess the perceptions of girl students towards education. For this purpose, comparative analysis of perceptions of girl students studying in secondary education and higher education in Gulbarga district was made. The particulars of the study are discussed as under.

1.2. Statement of the Problem:

As revealed from the statistics, there is inequality of education among the male and female population in the world and India. Many of the studies were already made to reveal educational progress and development among the females. But comparatively less numbers of studies were made on the analysis of perceptions of girls towards education, especially girls studying in secondary and higher education in India and in Karnataka. Hence, the present study was made to compare the perceptions of girl students on education and female participation in secondary and
higher education in Gulbarga district and is entitled as “Women in Secondary and Higher Education: A Comparative Study in Gulbarga District”.

1.3. Objectives of the Study:

As discussed above, the present study have main object of comparing the participation of women in secondary and higher education and the particular objectives are:

1. To know about the social and family background of the women in secondary and higher education;
2. To look into the problems of women in participation of education;
3. To analyze whether the girls are getting lesser opportunities in secondary and higher education; and
4. To assess the problems and obstacles of the women in active participation in secondary and higher education.

1.4. Hypotheses:

Following are the hypotheses for the present study:

1. Majority of the family decisions are made by the male members of the family.
2. To a greater extent, there is gender equality in the family of the respondents.
3. Majority of the respondents are not satisfied with their social life.
4. To a greater extent, majority of the respondents are getting education, to gain employment.
5. Girls are getting Equal Opportunities for Education.
6. Status of Women is improved in all aspects.
1.5. Research Methodology:

The study was begun with the literature search. The researcher referred Sociological Abstracts, leading regional, national and international journals and books published in the fields such as female participation in education, females in secondary education, female literacy, females in higher education and professional education, etc. On the basis of such published secondary literature, the secondary information is derived, which formed basis for the present study. The collected secondary literature is reviewed in the review of literature.

1.5.1. Sample Units:

The female students studying in secondary education and the female students studying in higher education are the sample units for the present study. As such the information was collected from these students.

1.5.2. Sampling Technique:

The scope or area of Gulbarga district is vast to cover and survey all the female students studying in secondary education and higher education. Hence, the present study was based on sample survey. Sampling was made using stratified random sampling method. 200 female students studying in secondary education, of which 100 are from rural areas and 100 are from urban areas and towns and also 200 female students studying in higher education, of which 100 are from rural areas and 100 are from urban areas and towns. Hence, totally 400 female students were interviewed to collect the primary data.

1.5.3. Collection of Statistical Data:

The present study is made on the female participation in secondary education and higher education. As such, statistical data plays significant role in revealing the extent of female participation in secondary and higher education. As such, statistical data was collected from secondary and statistical sources such as Reports of the
Government departments, Year books, India Infrastructure Database and web source, Indiastat.com

1.5.4. Collection of Primary Data:

In addition to the statistical information on gender-wise enrolment of students in secondary and higher education, the present study included responses from the students and scholars on attitudes of females studying in secondary and higher education in Gulbarga district as reflected in their families and the society. The responses of the students and scholars are collected through questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed and structured keeping in view the prime objectives of the present study. Enough care was taken to see that the method was reasonably valid and reliable in eliciting the relevant data. It helped to observe and seek first hand information on the current situation of the secondary and higher education in Gulbarga district. Five types of techniques of data collection are used in the study. They are as follows:

1) Collection of Statistical Information on the enrolment of students and research scholars at state and national level
2) Collection of Primary data through Questionnaire
3) In-depth interviews with female students
4) Observation technique to observe the students’
5) Coding and Tabulation of the collected data through SPSS package

1.5.5. Analysis and Discussion of the Primary Data:

The collected primary data is analyzed with the help of tables and diagrams wherever necessary. Percentages of the collective responses were used to analyze and interpret the data. Further, suitable statistical techniques such as Chi-square and correlation are applied wherever necessary.
1.6. Limitations of the Study:

As discussed in the methodology, the present study is made in Gulbarga district. Further, the female students studying in secondary education and higher education are the respondents for the present study. Due to the time limitations, 200 female students studying in secondary education and 200 female students studying in higher education and research were selected and surveyed for the present study. Hence, the study is limited to 400 respondents only.

1.7. Chapterization:

The present research report contains total six chapters and two appendixes.

The first chapter gives brief background information to the research topic. Further, here research problem is clearly defined. The need for the study of the problem is discussed. The importance of this research topic is stated briefly. Aims and objectives are stated clearly. The limitations are set in this chapter. Some generalizations and assumptions are fixed as hypotheses of the study. Research techniques and methodologies that are used for the present study are discussed in the chapter. Hence, the first chapter is drafted under the title “Introduction to the Study”.

The second chapter covers ‘Review of Literature’, which discusses about literature survey conducted. In other words, here the various publications published which are relevant to the present study are stated in brief, so as to find research gap in the research study.

There is need to discuss on the women education in general and women’s participation in secondary and higher education in particular. Further, it is essential to present statistics related to the women’s education at the national level and state (Karnataka) level. From the published sources, it is necessary to generalize the reasons and obstacles for the female education. Hence, these concepts are described
in third chapter under the title “Growth and Development of Women’s Education: An Overview”

Area or profile of the study and research methodology plays an important role in deciding the parameters and standards that are set for every research work. The profile includes geographical area or coverage where the present study is conducted. Here profile of the study is Gulbarga district. Hence, brief profiles of the Gulbarga district including the number of secondary schools and the higher education colleges with the enrolment of female students are stated in the present chapter. As the fourth chapter covered profile of the study under the title “Profile of the Study Area”.

The most important part of every research report is Analysis, Interpretation and Discussion of the Primary data. The collected primary data through questionnaire is analyzed, interpreted and discussed in the fifth chapter under the title “Analysis, Interpretation and Discussion of Primary Data”.

After the analysis and interpretation of the collected data, output of the research was presented as summaries and findings. The sixth chapter also provided suggestions and discussion. After analyzing all the information and literature covered in the study, suitable conclusion is given in the sixth chapter under the title “Findings and Conclusion”.

Besides the above chapters, a list of the research papers, articles, books, research reports and web sites referred should be provided under the title “Bibliography” as first appendix to the research report. Finally questionnaire used to conduct present study and collect primary data is given in the second appendix.

1.8. References: