CHAPTER V
GENDER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

On the basis of data analyzed in the last three chapters, it may be inferred that gender continues to be a very important variable in access to higher education, especially in rural Punjab. Whether it is a matter of giving liberty to girls at home or providing them with opportunities outside home, patriarchy continues to operate. If given an opportunity to go in for higher education, girls show better academic output than boys as has been observed in the present study. But in spite of all efforts to raise the level of education for girls, there is still a huge gap between male and female literacy.

It has been observed from the analysis of data that although all our respondents expressed the opinion that girls were entitled to as much education as boys, yet, the personal interaction with the student respondents, parents, teachers and the Panchayat members presented a totally different picture on the issue. There are many observations emerging out of the study. It has been observed that though parents are sending their girls from villages to cities to attain higher education, there are enormous strings attached, e.g. they are not encouraged to take part in sports and youth activities. Incidents like ‘Ruchika molestation and suicide case’, where even after 20 years of harassment, Ruchika’s family is still waiting for justice, often come in the way of liberation of girls (The Tribune, Dec. 29, 2009). If the family is financially weak and can not afford to educate all the children, girls will be the first ones to suffer. Even if they are allowed to go in for higher education, they face more problems than boys, especially in accessing and sustaining their stay in the college.

All these facts point towards the deep rooted tradition of discrimination against female sex, which exists not only in India but throughout the world. The decision on the policy to be taken up to tackle the problems of rural youth will not be of any use, unless we take the gender issue into account, which largely has remained unattended in the rural areas. If this is the situation in rural Punjab, one can well imagine the plight of girls in less developed States of India. Hence, an attempt has been made in this chapter to address the issue of gender discrimination in terms of various theoretical perspectives that have been put forth.
Over the centuries women have spoken out for their sex, and articulated in different ways their complaints, their hopes and their needs. There is a popular movement called ‘Feminism’, which started almost 200 years ago in the Western countries and has now united all the women of the world. It is a movement that seeks to enhance the quality of women’s lives by impacting the norms and moves of a society, instilling the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, powers and opportunities as men. Most of the feminist movements promote women’s rights, interests and issues and believe that women have the right to more information to make informed choices about their lives. Those together constitute a movement for social, political, and economic equality of men and women because feminists view the world as being unequal. My case studies brought out a similar inference with the female respondents admitting that the society has different rules for men and women.

A detailed review of the feminist movement and its changing contours will give an idea about how the issue has been understood by feminists in different parts of the world and from time to time. It is the story of the few brave women, who dared to speak against discrimination and male oppression at moments when such an outburst was not tolerated.

**Feminism**

The early editions of ‘The Oxford English Dictionary’ defined feminism, as a state of being feminine or womanly. Linda Kealey found the term used by 1890s to refer to the new woman (Kealey 1979). The Webster’s Dictionary defines the term ‘feminism’ as (a) the principle that women should have political rights equal to those of men, (b) the movement to win such rights for women. Toril Moi says, ‘The words ‘feminist’ and ‘feminism’ are political labels indicating support for the aims of the new woman’s movement which emerged in the later 1960s” (1986).

The word ‘feminism’ however must be understood in the broadest sense as referring to an intense awareness of identity as a woman, and interest in feminine problems. Its meaning must not be restricted to the advocacy of women’s rights. According to the feminist doctrine, the subjugation of women is a central fact of history, a key to most of our social
and psychological disorders. But the word 'feminism' has picked up so many connotations that it seems to have no precise meaning, and what it stands for, may easily be misunderstood. Feminism believes that there are reasons for thinking that women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex (http://en.wikipedia.org). Lisa Tuttle (1986) attempts to define feminism as a term taken from the Latin word 'femina' (woman), originally implying as having the qualities of females. It began to be used in reference to the theory of sexual equality and the movement for women’s rights, replacing womanism in the 1890s.

The early feminists did not use the term ‘Feminism’. Had they given any name to themselves, possibly it would have been something like ‘defenders’ or ‘advocates’ of women. Their immediate aim was to oppose mistreatment of women. By exposing ideology and opposing the prejudice and narrowness it fostered, they stood for a general conception of humanity.

Feminism does not have a single fundamental definition. Feminism believes that each individual is a valuable human being in his or her own right. Sex is a biologically based category, but the gender norms can be changed as these are constructed by society. Gender is learned and performed; it is formed by cultural forces that indicate how people should "be", based on their sex. Gender is an identity shaped through interactions with others. Feminists view the world as being unequal on the basis of gender. They wish to see the gender gap and the idea that men are superior to women, decreased or even abolished. So feminist philosophy works on the belief that women, like all human beings, have the right to be born, to have the same opportunities to live and work using their full potential. They must not be discriminated against because of their gender and that they must be able to make their own choices on how to live their lives. The inequalities against which the feminists protest – legal, economic and the social restrictions on the basic rights of women – have existed throughout history and in all civilizations.

Of course, feminism has been maligned and misunderstood for as long as it has existed. Often we hear women asserting, 'I'm not a feminist', but the claims they make depend upon and would be impossible without a feminist
groundwork. The American feminist Estelle Freedman argues that right since its origin, the word ‘feminism’ has carried negative connotations (Freedman 2002). Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley called their third collection of essays, “Who is afraid of Feminism” in which they argued that ‘feminism’ is now the same name given to the disliked or despised women much as ‘men hater’. They added that women also have to expose and eradicate the misogyny in feminism itself. So there are many inhibitions related to this word and many educated, sensible, mature and even daring women do not want themselves to be tagged as feminists although they are doing a lot for the rights of women (Oakley and Mitchell 1997).

Feminism comprises a number of social, cultural and political movements, theories and moral philosophies concerned with gender inequalities and equal rights for women. Feminists have divided feminism’s history into three ‘waves.’ The first-wave refers to the feminist movement of the nineteenth through early twentieth centuries, which dealt mainly with the Suffrage movement. The second-wave (1960s-1980s) dealt with the inequality of laws, as well as cultural inequalities. The third-wave of feminism (1990s-present) is seen as both a continuation and a response to the perceived failures of the second-wave (Walters 2005).

The Feminist Movement

The feminist movement started almost two centuries ago when in Europe, some women dared to resist male oppression. They did so within a religious framework by pretending to have visions of the Providence commanding them to improve the lot of women. Some of the prominent among these women are Hildegard of Bingen in 11th century, Julian of Norwich in the 15th century and Margery Kempe in the 16th century. By the late 16th century, an increasing number of women started showing their concern for women’s issues more consistently and aggressively. As a result, more women got a chance to attain education but such women had to tackle powerful negative scriptural image of women and scriptural prohibitions. Saint Paul was regularly invoked against women who spoke out or asked awkward questions about Christ’s attitude to women. He instructed the men folk that
their ladies' should not speak in church. If they want to ask something, let
them ask their husbands at home as it is a shame for women to speak in the
Church. In 17th century in England, some female prophets like Lady Eleanor
and Anna Trapuel were easily dismissed as crazy. ‘The Women’s Sharpe
Revenge’ (1640), written by an unknown writer, argues that women’s
exclusion from learning was devised by men to secure their own continued
domination.

The Seedy and Cynical World of Restoration, London provided some
unexpected opportunities for women that they can become actresses,
although this was hardly a socially respectable profession and these types of
women were considered not more than prostitutes. Yet it gave chance to
many talented women to work as playwrights and contribute to the feminist
movement. Aphra Behn’s Play ‘The Rover’ is a cool, clever eyed analysis as
to how women have to negotiate – and make inevitable compromises in their
dealings with men, who are portrayed almost uniformly as cold hearted
exploiters in the play. Macaulay in her writings firmly rejected the notion that
women were the mere property of man with no rights to dispose of their own
persons. She insisted that women should take education and should make
them aware about their rights as human beings (Macaulay 1790).

The First-wave Feminism

What historians refer to as “first-wave feminism” arguably began in the
late 18th century with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft’s Vindication of
the Rights of Woman (1792), and ended with the ratification of the Twentieth
Amendment of the U.S. Constitution in 1933, which protected a woman’s right
to vote. First-wave feminism was concerned primarily with establishing, as a
point of policy, that women are human beings and should not be treated like
property.

Mary Wollstonecraft was one of the first English women to write
eloquenty and at times angrily, about the rights of women and the wrongs
they often experience. Her writings have never really gone out of fashion and
many women have responded gratefully and eagerly to her work.
Her great feminist polemic, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) argued that women were not naturally inferior to men, but appeared to be so, only because they lacked education. According to her, women were dubbed as silly and superficial as men have denied them the opportunities for getting education. She writes poetically:

*Taught from infancy that beauty is woman’s sceptre*

*The mind shapes itself to the body and roaming around*

*Its gilt cage, only seeks to adore its prison* (quoted in Walter 33).

She admitted that in the times in which she lived, women were inferior, oppressed from birth, uneducated and insulated from the real world, so most women grew up ignorant and lazy. Although her book is still highly readable and has remained one of the foundation stones of contemporary feminism, yet it is sad that other women, some highly literate ones, like Hannah More, were among her sharpest critics.

Interestingly, Wollstonecraft (1792) wrote that any woman who tries to act like a human being, risks being labelled as ‘masculine’. She admits that the fear of being thought unwomanly runs very deep in her sex. But if ‘masculinity’ means behaving rationally and virtuously, she recommends that we all grow more and more masculine. She defends women’s potential powers – their capacity for all kinds of intellectual actions.

The 19th century saw an increasingly widespread and articulate statement of women’s claims, perhaps in reaction to the emergence of an image of true ‘feminity’. Though many women and men spoke for the rights of women, it was in the second half of the century that any organised campaigns particularly for better education for women, for the possibility of their working outside their home, for reforms in the laws affecting married women and for right to vote, emerged.

In 1843, a married woman, Marion Reid published ‘*A Plea for Women*’ in which she objected to the way her contemporaries talked so confidently about a woman’s sphere equating ‘womanliness’ with the ‘renunciation’ of self. She wrote: “Womanly behaviour in practice means good humour and
attention to husband, keeping her children neat and clean, and attending to domestic arrangements”. Reid insisted that this apparently noble and virtuous ‘self renunciation’ in practice usually involves criminal ‘self elimination’. While advocating women’s equal rights just as men, she argued, “If women’s rights are not the same as those of men’s, then what are they”? She said that there is no doubt that woman was made for man, but in another and higher sense, she was made for herself first (Quoted in Walters 2005 p 41-2).

The two best known 19th century arguments for women’s rights were written by men, though in both cases the authors - William Thompson and John Stuart Mill – acknowledge the influence and inspiration of their wives. In 1825, the Irish born William Thompson published, “Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Restrain them in Political and Thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery”. In this writing, he concentrated on the situation of a married woman, who is reduced to being a piece of “movable property and an ever obedient servant to the bidding of man”. He goes on to attack the unthinking assumption that the interests of husband and wife are always identical and criticised bitterly this unjust situation of a married woman, for whom her own home becomes a ‘prison house’. John Stuart Mill’s ‘The Subjection of Women’ (1869), argued that the subordination of women was unjust and wrong. He blamed this injustice as chief hindrance to human improvement. He made a formal protest against the then existing law of marriage and rejected blatantly the unequal relationship between spouses. In an ideal world, Mill believed, men and women would resemble each other, men would be more unselfish and women would be free of the exaggerated self alienation expected of them. He insisted there is no justification for not giving women the right to vote immediately and under the same conditions as men, in fact he remarked, many of them deserve it more than some of the present voters. Mill's sympathetic attitude towards feminism was one aspect of his belief that the liberty of the individual is absolutely necessary for the development of the society.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman put the case for women’s economic freedom in her ground breaking text ‘Women and Economics’, where she argued that a manner of dominating women is by not granting them economic independence as it was in the interest of the patriarchy to keep women
dependent (Gilman 1898).

It was not until the second half of the 19th century that anything like a true women’s movement began to emerge in England. This movement converged particularly around Barbara Leigh Smith and the group of friends known as ‘Ladies of Langham Place’, who initiated more organised campaigns around issues as ‘women’s urgent need for better education and for increased possibilities of employment as well as improvement of the legal position of married women’.

During the 19th century, the right to vote became central to feminist demands, as denial of representation in legislature was a clear message of second class citizenship. It was seen as important both symbolically and practically, but winning the vote proved a complicated struggle, one that lasted for decades. On Oct 1866, Leigh Smith and a group of friends met at Elizabeth Garrett’s House in London to form a Suffrage Committee, which the following year became the London Society for Women’s Suffrage.

By the 1890s, women’s sense of disparity and injustice increased sharply. They pointed out that men who were poor and barely literate had been given the vote, while well educated women, who paid taxes were still excluded from full citizenship. By the early 1870s, a few women were taking the idea of ‘no taxation without representation’ literally and were refusing to pay taxes. Emily Davison sacrificed herself for this cause for winning the right to vote for women, by throwing herself under the king’s horse on Derby Day in 1913. Ultimately in 1918, women above the age of 30 were given the vote and in March 1928, they finally won it on equal terms with men.

At the time of First World War, many women got an opportunity to work outside their homes. The new demand of feminists aspiring for an equal pay for equal work emerged. In 1920s, many new magazines directed at women were started. The magazine ‘Time and Tide’ started in 1920 became famous for important contributions made by Virginia Woolf, Rebecca West and Rose Macaulay. This magazine argued that women must act independently, to put pressure on all the political parties to tackle women’s concerns. It raised a
whole lot of issues concerning the female folk including the position of unmarried mothers and widows and guardianship of children.

All through this period, the popular press, whether nervously or sarcastically kept on portraying a feminist as a frustrated spinster or a harridan. One journalist of this time remarked that because of war many young women had become desexed and masculinised and the neuter state so patent in them that the individual was described (unkindly) no longer as 'she' but 'it'. Women teachers as well as women in civil service sometimes had to fight against discrimination. 1920s also saw the beginning of economic recession and so often, women were the first to face unemployment (quoted in Walters 2005: 46).

One of the most interesting and in the long run, most significant episodes in the early 20th century concerned a subject that had rarely been publicly discussed, and which could still arouse bitter opposition: contraception. In 1877, Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh, were put on trial for publishing an American tract on the subject called 'The Law of Population'. Margaret Sanger, who had worked as a nurse was also tried for publishing 'obscene', and lewd material, when she offered contraceptive information through her magazine 'Woman Rebel'. In spite of the strong opposition many women kept writing on these issues as Marie Stopes wrote 'Married love' (1916), 'Wise Parenthood' (1918) and 'Radiant Motherhood' (1920). In all these works she insisted that the normal man's sexual needs are not stronger than the normal woman's.

Virginia Woolf was certainly ambivalent about the term 'feminism'. When she wrote 'A Room of One's Own' (1929), she admitted that she was anxious, when the book was first published, that she might be attacked for being a feminist. In her work 'Three Guineas' (1938) written in shadow of approaching war, she directly attacked the word 'feminism'. She said that it was an old, vicious and corrupt word that had done much harm in its day and had gone now 'obsolete'. Her writings highlighted the politics of patriarchy that prevented women from realizing their true potential. Woolf remarked: 'Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and
delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size” (quoted in Walters 2005, p95).

She describes the effect of suffrage campaign, which rekindled an extraordinary desire in man for self assertion as his egoism was challenged with the women getting the right to vote. This is called the early phase of feminism or the first-wave feminism.

Second-Wave Feminism

Second-wave feminism emerged after the Second World War in several countries. One of the most remarkable French writers, Simone de Beauvoir gave many important explorations of a woman’s experience through her writings including four volumes of her autobiography and several novels. In her book ‘The Second Sex’ (1949), she argues that woman has been denied full humanity, the human rights to create, to invest, to go beyond a mere living to find a meaning for life in projects of ever widening scope. Man remodels the face of the earth, creates new instruments, invents and also he is the one who shapes the future of woman. On the other hand, a woman is always seen by and for man, always the object and never the subject. Her writings offered the first sustainable analysis of the construction of woman as ‘other’. She stated that woman appears to man essentially as a sexual being. She is forced to take a secondary position in relation to man. She also pointed out that a woman is not biologically feminine but she is made so by constant cultural conditioning. “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the female presents in society. It is civilization as a whole that produces the creature which is described as feminine” (quoted. in Walter 2005 p98).

Although Beauvoir always opposed any feminism that championed women’s special virtues or values, firmly rejecting any idealization of specifically feminine traits, yet she insisted that women must take their destiny into their own hands. In the late 1960s, there began a spate of diverse criticism, often of a polemical nature. This is known as a period of intermission in the history of the women’s rights movement, when a sense of so-called victory on the issue of suffrage and a New Feminist Movement started. This
was a period of protest movements – civil rights, peace, the New Left, anti-poverty. But the revival of the feminism was a startling event. People with traditional views stood aghast, feeling that these must be sick, unbalanced women, or at best just bored housewives. They were puzzled as to what these women meant by 'liberation' or 'oppression'. By this time it had become clear that women’s liberation was not just a fad, it had come to stay. Carden (1974) explains that this new feminism is not about the elimination of differences between the sexes, nor even simply the achievement of equal opportunity, it is actually concerned with the individual’s right to find out the kind of person he or she is and to strive to become that person.

Betty Friedan’s ‘The Feminine Mystique’ (1963) demystified the dominant image of the happy American suburban housewife and mother. Friedan’s book gives a passionate indictment of the fact that even affluent middle class women lead restricted lives and too often lapse into a depressed acceptance of that restriction. She insisted that each woman must at least ask what she truly wants. Then she may indeed realize that neither her husband nor children nor the things in her home, nor sex, nor being like all the other women, can give her a self. Friedan was in favour of the new feminine rhetoric of equal rights. In her book ‘The Second Stage’ (1981), she admits both how much has changed for women – and how little. She insisted that women still needed to do a lot to improve their status in society.

An influential book by Kate Millet, ‘Sexual Politics’ (1970), examined how power relations worked and how men manipulated and perpetuated male dominance over women. In this book she quotes Tennyson’s poem to describe the prevalent situation.

*Man for the field and woman for the hearth;*

*Man for the sword and for the needle she;*

*Man with the head, and woman with the heart;*

*Man to command and woman to obey;*

*All else confusion* (Millet 1970).
In England, the Austria-born German Greer’s lively and provocative book ‘The Female Eunuch’ (1970) challenged the ‘sense of inferiority or natural dependence’, which women have too often accepted placidly and passively and thus impoverished their lives. Greer in this book denounced all such efforts made to make women look sensual. Woman is supplied with cosmetics, foundation, garments, stockings, wigs, pastiches and hairdressing, jewels and furs to give an impression of artificiality and frivolity. In 1979, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in ‘The mad Woman in the Attic’ identified madness as a form of resistance to patriarchy through which an authentic female voice can assert itself. The mad woman sums up virtually everything feminism wishes to say about the suppression of women’s speech.

One of the most urgent concerns of second-wave feminism putting up resistance against the denial of the right of a woman’s right over her body. Susie Orbach’s, ‘Fat is a Feminist Issue’ (1981), and Naomi Wolf’s, ‘The Beauty Myth’ (1990), both explore the physical self-hatred and the fear of ageing that plague so many contemporary women. Driven by tantalizing glamorous media images, women seek refuge in fashion and dieting to the point of anorexia and go in for cosmetic surgery. Many feminist theorists question the value placed on woman’s external appearance.

Feminists all over the world have been striving for bonds of sisterhood through shared experiences for ‘consciousness raising’, a term used by an American feminist Katie Sarachild in 1968. Its aim was that women must meet regularly and talk about their own experience in order to understand the private fears and shared oppression that control women in a wider context. The notion that it takes a woman to study women was also quite popular in 1970s and early 80s. However the phrase ‘sisterhood is powerful’, did not hold true for women of weaker sections. Black American poet Audre Lorde in 1983 and Australian writer Len Ang in 1995, showed their concern about the issues of weaker sections in feminist movement. Both writers believe that white middle-class women often seem to be dictating a feminism that concentrates on gender discrimination while tending to outlook for example, the class differences and racial differentiations that complicates ideas about gender. So, many writers of this period blamed that the educated women of
the middle and the upper classes because of their articulation and their
proficiency monopolized the women's issues related to their lives and scant
attention was received by women of weaker sections (Walters 2005).

During 1970s, many feminist writers raised their voice against the
images of women in texts written by men to expose a sexist bias in the
misogynistic stereotyping and other misrepresentations of women. Elaine
Showalter is one of the most important feminist critics in America. In ‘Towards
a Feminist Poetics’ (1970), she resisted the focus of writing which had been
predominantly male-centred (centric). Despite their claim to universality,
literature by men has usually been biased against women and gave mainly
male view of experiences. Even in popular children's storybooks, gender
inequalities abound. For instance in Kenneth Graham’s ‘Wind in the Willows’
(1908), most of the characters are male, ‘Winnie the Pooh’ (1926), depicts
overwhelmingly male world. Gender representation in literature for adult
readers carry the same gender bias, for example in J.R.R Tolkien’s fantasy
world of ‘The Lord of Rings’ (1954), the main characters are male with the
exception of very few female ones (Goodman 17), most of the women in this
are either presented as seducers and temptresses or as shrews.

Virginia Woolf, Helene Cixous and several others believed that
woman's writings should be located in her own self, in her body, giving
prominence to its pleasures, experiences, etc. Toril Moi’s book ‘Sexual /
Textual Politics’ (1985), is one of the pioneer, critical and comprehensive
introductions to feminist theory. Her essay on feminist literary criticism defines
three terms, central to feminist criticism; ‘Feminism’, ‘female’, and ‘Feminity’.
She briefly describes feminism as a political position, femaleness as a matter
of biology and feminity as a set of culturally defined characteristics. These
feminist writings undermine phallocentric texts. Helene Cixous deconstructs
patriarchal thought based on binary opposition. Under the heading, ‘Where is
she?’ (Rice 2002), Cixous lines up the following list of binary oppositions:

- Head / Heart
- Activity / passivity
- Intelligence / Sensitivity
- Culture / Nature

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These binaries are situated in hierarchical opposition i.e. one side is elevated above the other, and these binaries are rooted in patriarchal values. The feminine in the patriarchal thought is always seen as powerless and negative and masculine as positive and powerful.

The feminist writers of the 20th century feel that feminism is the place wherein the most natural, organic way subjectivity and politics have come together. Their basic purpose is to focus on four major areas; the first is the identification and publication of women’s writings that have been neglected or misunderstood and therefore out of print. The second is to take up an analysis of the portrayal of women in existing literature, especially in the works of men. The third is the critical reviewing of the existing interpretation of women writers’ works and the fourth and widely discussed concern of feminist’s criticism is the creation of a whole new body of work, based on the equality of gender, which is the core of the feminist theory.

Third-Wave Feminism

Rebecca Walker, a 23-year-old, African-American woman born in Jackson, Mississippi, coined the term "Third-Wave feminism" in a 1992 essay. Walker is in many ways a living symbol of the way that second-wave feminism has historically failed to incorporate the voices of many young women, non-heterosexual women and women of color (http://civilliberty.about.com/od/gendersexuality).

Both first-wave and second-wave feminism represented movements that existed alongside, and at times in tension with, civil rights movements for people of color, a slight majority of whom happened to be women. But the struggle always seemed to be for the rights of white women, as represented by the women's liberation movement, and black men, as represented by the civil rights movement. Both movements, at times, could have been legitimately accused of relegating women of color to asterisk status.

For many second-wave feminists, non-heterosexual women were seen as an embarrassment to the movement. The great feminist activist Betty Friedan, for example, coined the term "lavender menace" in 1969 to refer to what she considered the harmful perception that feminists were lesbians. She
later apologized for the remark, but it accurately reflected the insecurities of a movement that was still very heteronormative in many ways. First and second-Wave feminism also tended to emphasize the rights and opportunities of middle-class women over poor and working-class women. The debate over abortion rights, for example, centered on laws that affected a woman's right to choose an abortion—but economic circumstances, which generally played a more significant role in such decisions today, were not necessarily taken into account. If a woman has the legal right to terminate her pregnancy, but "chooses" to exercise that right because she can't afford to carry a pregnancy to term, is this really a scenario that protects reproductive rights?

First and second-wave feminism, as movements, were largely confined to industrialized nations. But third-wave feminism takes a global perspective not by merely attempting to colonize developing nations with Western practices, but by empowering women to actualize change, to gain power and equality, within their own cultures and their own communities and with their own voices. Some second-wave feminist activists have questioned the need for a third wave. Others, both inside and outside of the movement, disagree with respect to what the third wave represents. But it is important to realize that third-wave feminism is a generational term—it refers to how the feminist struggle manifests itself in the world today. Just as second-wave feminism represented the diverse and sometimes competing interests of feminists who struggled together under the banner of women's liberation, third-wave feminism represents a generation that has begun with the achievements of the second wave.

Calls for the fourth wave feminism have also started with the demise of Hillary Clinton's campaign in early 2008 and the blatant, repugnant sexism that so publicly followed her bid for the presidency. Perhaps the most notable call was Amanda Fortini's New York Magazine article "The Feminist Reawakening: Hillary Clinton and the Fourth Wave," which appeared in April 2008 and documented a revival of feminist feeling (http://nymag.com/news/features)

Third-World Feminism

The feminist movement is basically attached to the European countries and hence there is always a major issue of the applicability of feminist thought
in other parts of the earth especially in the third world countries. More than political and economic equality between the sexes, there are problems of class, race, ethnicity and even honour killings, dowry, sati pratha and domestic violence in case of countries like India and Pakistan.

The main objection of third world feminists to the first world feminists is that they have been ignoring issues like race, ethnicity and class pertaining to women of third world countries. The western feminists assume hegemonic stance and view the third world women as inferior, illiterate, conservative and submissive, while women in the first world are perceived as educated, modern and free. There are emerging tribal studies also in the third world feminists who include Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Kum Kum Sangari, Kumare Jayawardena, Susie Tharu, Sara Suleri, Fatima Mernissi and many others. These feminists have dealt with problems of women in third world countries, particularly South Asia. These feminists have paid attention to issues like dowry deaths, honour killings, resurgence of Sati, Hudood Ordinance, practice of Watta-Satta and many more such issues.

Related to the rise of feminism among women of colour is the area of postcolonial studies. Among its most prominent feminist voices is that of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. She examines the effects of political independence upon subaltern or sub proletarian women in the third world countries. Spivak makes clear the major differences among feminists depending upon class and political structure (Guerin 2006). According to Spivak’s highly polemical essay, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1988), everything that a subaltern requires to speak her mind like – the language, the texts, the channels, are implicated in colonial politics.

The ‘Islamic and Muslim feminists’ have utilized secular or non Muslim feminist discourses to critique misogynist attitude towards women as expressed by men. Egyptian writer Abbas Mahamud Aqqad in his book ‘Women in Quran’ (1959), said, "Men are the sole source of every accepted definition of good conduct whether for men or women. Women have never been true source of anything to do with ethics or good character even though
she brings up children, the guidelines are provided by the males” (quoted in Waines 256).

The Islamic feminists advocate the deeply rooted teaching of Quran which regard all Muslims equal. They support women’s rights, gender equality and social justice grounded in an Islamic framework. The Muslim feminists are either secular liberals or radical feminists. The secular feminists are against polygamy, seclusion of women at home and the privileged right of the husband to divorce. The radical feminists believe that the question of women’s rights is irrelevant, for Islam established these rights centuries before they were achieved in Western society. But these feminists are against women taking political and public responsibilities. The radicals accept the patriarchal norms as genuinely religious because of the sense of security women derive from following these norms. These feminists see the western institutions as threat to its Islamic values. According to them, women, far from being inferior to men, differ biologically and psychologically. Men and women thus perform different but necessarily complementary roles.

**Ideological Pinning of Feminism**

Several distinct ideologies can be discerned within feminism. All ideologies stem from one fact, that women require freedom and equality but all these viewpoints differ on the philosophic questions about the nature of freedom and equality, the functions of the State, and the notion of what constitutes human, especially woman. If we take the most influential of the current feminist ideologies, one thing becomes clear that specific debates over feminist questions can not be settled in isolation and can only be resolved in the context of a theoretical framework derived from the fundamental issues of social and political philosophy. Apart from the separatist ideologies and social feminist ideology, mainly four ideologies can be outlined, which are as under:

**Conservative Feminism**

The conservative view implies that the differential treatment of women, as a group, is not unjust. They admit that some individual women do suffer hardships, but this suffering is not a part of the systematic social oppression, as Janet Redcliffe Richards calls it (Richards 1982). The conservative
feminists rationalise the differences between women's and men's roles in two ways:

(a) that the female role is not inferior to that of male;

(b) that the women are inherently better adapted than men to the traditional female sex roles.

The first claim of the conservative feminists advocates a kind of sexual apartheid, but the second postulates an inherent inequality between sexes - both physical and psychological. This school of thought further explains these differences as women's emotional instability, greater tolerance for boring details, incapacity for abstract thought and proneness to submission. Writers who support such a view range from Rousseau, Fichte, Nietzsche, Freud and Steven Goldberg.

The conservatives are fully convinced of the inherent unequal abilities of men and women, all of them emphasizing that one of the main tasks of the state is to ensure that the individual performs his or her proper social functions. They argue that social differentiation between the sexes is not unjust, since justice not only allows but requires us to treat unequal unequally.

Liberal Feminism

This School of thought in feminism takes liberation of women as the most important agenda of the feminist movement. Liberal feminists want that women should have freedom to determine their own social roles and equality with men as much as possible. This view advocates every kind of liberty for all the members of the society. In this world every individual is engaged in constant competition with every other in order to maximise her or his own self interests and the function of the state is to make sure all these competitions are fair and unbiased. It should give equal opportunities to all its members irrespective of their class, race or sex. So 'equality of opportunities to women' is the main agenda of these liberal feminists. The proponents of this school agree that it is not necessary to change the whole social structure in order to procure women's liberation nor do they see the possibility of its being achieved simultaneously for all women. This school of thought also involves liberation for men, since they are not only removed from a privileged position
but are also comparatively free of the responsibility for such things as the support of their families and the defense of their country (Singh 1997).

Classical Marxist Feminism

For Marxists, oppression is the chief characteristic of a society, where, a small class of individuals owns the means of production and hence is able to dominate the lives of the majority who are forced to sell their labour power in order to survive. So the classical Marxist feminist views the oppression of women as historically and currently a direct result of the private property. So feminism must be seen as a part of a broader struggle to achieve a communist society because the long term interests of women are those of working class. Marxists recognized that women suffered special forms of oppression to which men were not subjected and this oppression was rooted in capitalism so women should work for overthrowing that economic system. Though Marxists do not claim that women's oppression is a creation of capitalism, they believe that it intensifies the degradation of women because capitalism and male supremacy reinforce each other.

According to Marxist feminists, the special oppression of women results primarily from their traditional position in the family. This excludes women from participation in public production and relegates them to domestic work in the private world of home. From its inception to the present day, monogamous marriage was designed to perpetuate the consolidation of wealth in the hands of a few, and these few are men. Friedrich Engels (1942) writes that from the very beginning of surplus production, “the sole exclusive aims of monogamous marriage were to make the man supreme in the family, and to propagate as the future heirs to his wealth, children indisputably his own” (http://www.marxist.org).

Marxists indicate the direction in which women must move to get rid of this oppression. They suggest that the first condition for the liberation of wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry. Only then will a wife cease to be economically dependent on her husband. They suggested that the economic functions performed by the family should be undertaken by the government and this could happen only under socialism, where married
women will be able to participate fully in public life and end the situation where, again in words of Engels, "within the family the husband is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat" (1942). Thus the Marxist feminism treats women's oppression as a function of the large socioeconomic system. It also believes that the restructuring of society as envisaged by it will bring freedom to men from his traditional responsibility to 'provide'.

Radical Feminism

This school of thought is a recent attempt to create a new conceptual model for understanding many different forms of social oppression in terms of the basic concept of sexual oppression. This new view in feminism devised by writers like Atkinson and Firestone rejects the liberal claim that the basis of women's oppression consists in their lack of political and civil rights. They even deny the classical Marxist view that basically women are oppressed because they live in a class society and the root cause for their exploitation is the system of capitalism.

It is the view of radical feminists that the woman is the most oppressed being in existence and will continue to be so unless she can take back her power of womanhood in various forms. They believe that men have constructed female sexuality to serve as a man's wants, needs, and interests. For these feminists, feminism is a primary means to human liberation (i.e., the liberation of men as well as women, and men and women from other social problems.

The radicals claim that the roots of women's oppression are biological and their subjection lies in the fact that as a result of the weakness caused by childbearing, women become dependent on men for physical survival. So long before the institution of private property and its corollary, class oppression, physical subjection of women by men was historically the basic form of oppression. The power relationships that develop within the biological family provide a model for understanding all other types of oppression such as racism and class society. The battle against capitalism and against racism is subsidiary to the more fundamental struggle against sexism.

So radical feminists recommended a biological revolution for women's liberation in which technology can play a very important role. They believed
that only through technology women can be liberated from ‘the fundamental inequalities of the bearing and rearing of children’. They talk of achieving this through the development of techniques of artificial reproduction and then both the biological and economic bases of the family will be removed. The most important form both historically and conceptually, of oppressive and authoritarian relationships, the role system, must be abolished through the help of technology.

Thus all these schools of thought work on the ‘consciousness of victimization of women’. To apprehend oneself as victim is to be aware of an alien and hostile force which is responsible for the blatantly unjust treatment of women. This hostile power is, for some feminists, ‘society’, or the ‘system’, for others, it is, simply, ‘men’. This consciousness also brings a sense of solidarity with other victims. In some, feminist consciousness is the consciousness of being radically alienated from her world and often divided against herself. It perceives woman as a being who sees herself as victim and whose victimization determines her being-in-the-world as resistance, wariness and suspicion. Woman is immersed in social reality that exhibits to her an aspect of malevolent ambiguity. She is an outsider to her society, to many of the people she loves, and to the still unemancipated elements in her own personality.

**Recent Trends in Feminist Thought**

The present day feminist thought encompasses a moral vision and emerges as a holistic, anti-materialistic and life affirming philosophy. Toril Moi (1988) has used the term ‘post-feminism’ to cover the different configurations of feminism.

Thus, today feminism must be viewed as a rapidly developing major critical ideology or system of ideas in its own right. The concept incorporates a broad spectrum of ideas and possesses an international scope. Its developmental stages have historically been dependent on male-centered political and intellectual discourse. In ultimate analysis, feminism emerges as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and movement for sociopolitical change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women’s subordination within any given society. As a philosophy of life, it
opposes women’s subordination to men in the family and society, along with men’s claims to define what is best for women without consulting them, thereby offering a frontal challenge to patriarchal thought, social organization and control mechanism.

The present day feminism though seeks to destroy masculinist hierarchy but not sexual dualism. It is necessarily pro-woman, but this does not mean that it has to be anti-man. This acts as a rebalancing factor between women and men of the social, political and economic power within a given society. It is viewed as a humanistic philosophy, which prefers the word ‘transformation’ rather than ‘revolution’. So the modern feminism emerges as a thought system, a point of view to reorganize the world realities, a positivist holistic approach to life, a step towards sanity in human relationship and perhaps the only mode for preservation of human existence on this planet.

Feminism therefore appears to be an all inclusive theory using concepts from post structuralism, post colonialism and post modernism. Regarding its heterogeneous nature, Annettee Kolodny’s, ‘Dancing Through the Minefield’ argues that the strength of feminism is precisely its diversity, that feminists should not feel compelled to aim for methodological and ideological coherence and homogeneity of Marxism, but should aim at a strategic diversity and range of practices and discourses (quoted in Rice 2002). Though feminism has uplifted the status of women by fighting against social and political inequalities, yet there are many challenges especially in the Third World countries. Bell Hooks, one of the most eminent and articulate spokespersons of black feminist thought, has pointed out that black feminists are concerned about economic survival and ethnic and racial discrimination as well as sexism. She finds faults with the main stream white women’s movement for failing to speak on these issues (quoted in Rice 2002). Feminism has to combat sexism in the form of deep rooted local beliefs and practices, to do away with class, caste, religion and ethnic biases. Issues like genital mutilation in African countries and stoning as a legal punishment in Iran have to be handled urgently.
Critique of Feminism

Feminism has attracted attention due to its tremendous impact upon social change in Western society. While feminism in some forms is generally accepted, dissenting voices do exist. Some conservative groups see the feminist movement as destroying traditional gender roles which believed to strengthen social harmony. Some feminists believe that these traditional gender roles have served to silence and oppress women throughout history.

A number of detractors of the feminism note that social change and legal reforms have gone too far and now begin to negatively impact men; for example, they argue that custody hearings in divorces are biased towards the mother. While some feminists generally disagree with the view, other feminists, especially third-wave feminists agree that a greater equality between the sexes is necessary to bring a balance in the society. Opponents of feminism claim that women's quest for this kind of external power, as opposed to the internal power to affect other people's ethics and values, has left a vacuum in the area of moral training. Some feminists reply that education, including the moral education, of children has never been, and should not be seen as the exclusive responsibility of women.

Feminism has certainly affected the nature of heterosexual relationships in Western and other societies. While these impacts have generally been seen as positive, there have been some negative consequences. In some of these relationships, there has been a change in the power relationship between men and women. In these circumstances, women and men have had to adapt to relatively new situations, causing confusions about role and identity. Women can now avail themselves more to new opportunities, but some have suffered due to the demands of living up to the so-called "superwomen" identity, and have struggled to 'have it all', i.e. manage to happily balance a career and family.

Indian Feminism

The history of the Indian woman is one that has witnessed some grave assaults. In fact, Sati, child marriages, segregation of widows and intermittent
sexual exploitation still exist in certain parts of the country. Women in every
sphere of their lives face opposition and criticism. Constantly, they are
reminded that their status is lower than that of men. Human rights and
equality are constitutionally provided, but when it comes to the territory of
home or for that matter work, these rights cease to exist, failing to protect a
woman’s integrity and body. Woman has always existed on the margins of
human existence, assuming gender-specific roles in the periphery of a circle
that centers on the man.

Compared to the West, women empowerment and independence in
India is seen in a different light. The rise of feminism can be traced back to the
1800s when social evils like Sati were practised. Pre-colonial social structures
and women’s role within them reveal that feminism was theorized differently in
India than in the West. Colonial essentialization of “Indian culture” and
reconstruction of Indian womanhood as the epitome of that culture through
social reform movements resulted in political theorization in the form of
nationalism rather than as feminism alone. Historical circumstances and
values in India make women’s issues different here as compared to the
western feminist rhetoric. The idea of women as “powerful” is accommodated
into patriarchal culture through religion. This has retained visibility in all
sections of society, by providing women with traditional “cultural spaces”.
Another consideration is that whereas in the West the notion of “self” rests in
competitive individualism where people are described as "born free yet
everywhere in chains", by contrast in India, the individual is usually
considered to be just one part of the larger social collective, dependent for its
survival upon cooperation and self-denial for the greater good.

Later, during the era of Indian independence, a number of women
hailing from different cultures and castes abandoned their families and homes
for the independence of the nation. Some prominent women leaders of the
time were Kadambini Ganguli, Bhikaji Cama, Sucheta Kriplani and Sarojini
Naidu. In the contemporary scenario, writers and social activists like Amrita
Pritam, Sarojini Sahoo and Madhu Kishwar foregrounded women’s sexuality
and inextricably and linked it with the dominant patriarchal modes of living and
existence. The most striking feature of Indian Feminism is that women are
expected to emancipate and liberate themselves within the sphere of their relations and families. Indian feminists do not seek mere rebellion; rather the search is for a system where they can be who they want to be, without anybody raising their eyebrows.

Although the goal has not yet been achieved, a very sincere concern has been raised by this wave of feminism. Feminism is not an insular term, its connotations reach beyond being a woman to an appreciation of who and what a woman is, her essence and her gravitas. At least in the modernist culture, women have been able to overcome the insipid status given to them by men. The feminist movement has helped them reach their true identity. As Malavika Karlekar of the Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS) says that while teaching even western feminist theory, we use examples from our own milieu (http://www.cwds.ac.in).

Many women believe that Indian feminism is relevant only to the rural, poor or uneducated and cannot be explained on the same lines as western feminism, as it is located in a different cultural consciousness and talks about someone else, and it is hard to get worked up over other people's fights. To be more relevant, in India, feminism has to be more current in context, more communicative, more inclusive and less judgmental. That is why, if western feminism has concentrated on the issues like fight for vote, equal pay for equal work, equality of opportunities, reproductive rights, and against female foeticide, sexual harassment, domestic violence etc., Indian feminism is taking up many new issues like equal rights at work, maternity policies, lack of awareness, domestic violence, abuse issues, divorce laws, marital rape, inequality in terms of housekeeping and parenting, sexual harassment at the workplace, rape, control over contraception, unwanted pregnancy, abortion etc. The feminist movement, though subjected to scrutiny and criticism, seeks to uplift women in their entirety rather than in fragments.

Though India has emerged as an independent nation, the cause of female emancipation still seems to be in its nascent stages. Although many leaders of feminism have been women, not all women are feminists and not all feminists are women. Some feminists argue that men should not take positions of leadership in the movement, but most accept and even seek the
support of men. Sahitya Akademi award-winning writer Shashi Deshpande opined that perhaps it is not easy for men to associate themselves with feminism, since the very word carries connotations of 'women' (Times of India 22 July, 2001). Ashok Khosla, director of the NGO Development Alternatives who has worked for many years in areas of women's welfare, offers a male perspective. "A number of Indian feminists have a hands-on, problem-solving kind of approach," he says. "And they are practical about what they want" (http://www.outlookindia.com/article). Shanta Gokhale, journalist and author, opines that more men's groups like MAWA (Men against Women Abuse) are needed in this movement. He says, "In any case, the success of the feminist movement is essentially because issues have been tackled from within the community rather than imposed from outside" (Outlook, December 20, 1995).

Today women's movement has not only grown but has also matured. Voices of self-criticism are being increasingly raised. Dr Vrinda Nabar, former head of the English Department at the Bombay University, says “The commitment of many women to the movement has created greater awareness, but there is not enough of an effort to address the middle-class consciousness which is an important catalyst for change. As a result the suspicion that feminists are subversive women, is all too common" (Outlook, December 20, 1995).

The Indian women's movement has a history of its own. Indian feminism is in the summertime of its campaign years. While the rather narrow sphere of sexual politics may occupy trans-Atlantic thought, here it is the nuts and bolts of the female predicament that are central, how to secure one's livelihood, to stop men folk from consuming too much alcohol, to ensure that women get good post-natal care and to guarantee literacy for children. In the turmoil of modernizing India, campaigns must be made of sterner stuff than theories.

When Action India, a women's organisation, travelled to Saharanpur to raise awareness about equal rights, they realized the limits of their own awareness. Rajbala, an elderly resident of the area, posed a question to which Action India had no answer. "Equality? Equality with whom? Equality for
what? Will my stomach be filled with equality? I don’t want equality with my man. I want equality with you, you who have cars and send your children to English-speaking schools." In a situation of extreme poverty, trying to secure equal rights for women is meaningless. Where men and women are both demeaned by poverty, why ask for equal status with a man? "Irresponsible conscience-raising," says Karlekar, "is, I think, a thing of the past. The point is, after exhorting women to revolt, where will they go? Can we offer jobs? Or shelter? There is a need to look at the entire picture from all angels" (http://www.dishin.org/reports).

The issue of abortion, a vital demand for western feminist, that it should be treated as a choice to be made only by the pregnant woman in India is fraught with complications. The practice of amniocentesis and sex determination ultra-sound tests means that abortion is often not a choice but is imposed by social pressures. Thus a pro-abortion crusade can often play into the hands of forces inimical to the feminist agenda.

Indian feminism in the 90s is trying to reach a stage where it draws an indigenous tradition of emancipation for its growth. As such it works within the confines of Indian society instead of trying to overthrow the system from the outside. So religion is no longer denied, but communalism is combated; family is not sought to be destroyed, only reformed from patriarchy; equality with men is no longer seen as the ultimate prescription for freedom; and abortion and contraception are no longer absolute imperatives for the health of Indian women. Ideology still divides, but not as crucially as in the West where perhaps it would be unthinkable for left-wing and conservative women to work together. In India the Seven Sisters — a group of seven women’s organizations with different political affiliations have worked together to secure law reform, press for petitions and function as a pressure group on the government. Says feminist lawyer Lotika Sarkar: "We have nothing to do with the West. We are very down to earth and as far as women’s issues are concerned, there is a united front" (http://www.outlookindia.com/articles).

So, there is a new identity-in- the-making for Indian feminism in the decade when the movement has come into its own as a pressure lobby on the government. It is hybrid, yet rooted; western in theory but indigenous in
practice; rationalist in inspiration but at the same time forced to come to terms with some aspects of Indian custom and tradition.

**Feminists on Education**

Even today woman fights against the traditional role in which she has been cast. She wants to do other things than just sew, bake, cook and procreate. Society has always been male dominated or patriarchal. Traditionally, men have tried to shape women into preconceived patterns and when some women did not fit into the mould easily, they were regarded with suspicion. Talented and creative women have been a threat to the male world and women were encouraged to be vain and frivolous. Women who tried to be equal to men and tried to gain knowledge were considered wicked and sinful. Women were not expected to have sharp minds and an ambitious woman was considered unusual and unnatural.

Women in quest of self-hood therefore had a dual task before them – to deconstruct the circumscribing identity handed down to them from male dominated culture and then to establish a new self through an affirmation of the positive values of womanhood that have been earlier ignored. This was never possible without the help of education. So it is seen that during the whole struggle for equal rights for women, education was at the center. The educated women were the ones who dared to take firm stand on the issue of women oppression. They started writing about all these issues claiming that women and men often perceive the world differently and with the help of education they can record their experiences in different ways. The male literary tradition has advocated objective, impersonal, erudite and political writing. Women usually write in simpler language, their writings have been more communicative, realistic and personal not obscure and arrogant. Instead of expressing cosmic visions, some have written about their own experiences and their relationships with husbands, lovers, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, children and other women. Others have written about their thoughts and feelings, their minds and bodies and their joys and sorrows. So, most of the feminists stressed that every women needs to attain education, as this is the best human quality a person can attain. Catherine Macaulay who responded thoughtfully to the Revolution in France wrote in 1790, *Letters on Education*, in which she explained that women’s apparent weaknesses were
not natural, but simply the product of mis-education. Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) also wrote that as men have denied the opportunities of getting education to women, so they have remained inferior.

The question of education for girls remained crucially important all through the feminist movement. Whether at home by governess, who was often barely trained or at inadequate schools, where there were hardly any facilities for girls, the issue of education for girls remained a hit and miss affair. Even if women had any education in the 19th century they were not allowed manifesting any of it. It just was not proper for women to give any signs of intelligence and a brain of their own. They were to prepare themselves to become wives and mothers only.

In 1843, Marian Reid objected to the quality of education given to women by saying that the education that most girls are given merely cramps and confines them and with such education any symptom of independent thought is quickly repressed. The majority of girls are subdued into mere automations. Reid also comments bitterly on the almost insurmountable difficulties many women face in obtaining the means of a good substantial education in her writing. Most girls are brought up to a mechanical performance of duty, their minds lying barren and fruitless. Thompson’s ‘Appeal’ looks forward to a time when the children of all classes, both girls and boys will be equally provided the facilities for attaining education.

Emily Davis in the 19th century advocated good quality of education for women. She argued that education was central to any improvement in women’s lot. She said that people, who have not learnt to do anything, can’t find anything to do. She managed to raise money to found a women’s higher education college in 1878 (quoted in Hamilton and Schroeder 2007).

By 1920s, there were more women being adequately educated in schools and in universities, but the treatment that was meted out to them in the educational field was discriminatory as they were treated as the inferior sex. For example in ‘A Room of One’s Own’ (1929), Virginia Woolf, in her typically oblique way explains how women were second class citizens in Cambridge University. She describes being barred from entering a famous
library being a woman and dining not like the men on sole and partridge, but on gravy soup and beef. The battle for legal, civil and educational equality has been and to some extent still is a central element in feminism, but the movement has also highlighted the differences between the sexes, and asked for a new and deeper understanding of women’s special needs as wives and mothers.

Women have come a long way since the 19th century. They have been trying to prove to the male dominant world that they are equal and are capable of imbibing every kind of knowledge that had hitherto remained a man’s domain. They can perform and complete any tasks equal, or in some cases better than man. In the early and mid 20th century, more and more women were getting educated and looking for employment opportunities that had power (Walters 2005).

**Education of Girls in India: Some Challenges**

Education is a critical input in human resource development and is essential for a country’s economic and social development. Literacy, especially female literacy, has a direct impact on several socio-economic indicators of development, e.g birth rate, infant mortality rate, health and nutritional status, age at marriage, etc. The literacy rate of women was recorded as 54% in the Census of India 2001. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) has been increasing steadily from 32.1% in 1950-51 to 82.4% in 2001-02, and the gender gap in the enrolment ratio between boys and girls has been steadily decreasing. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the programme of the Department of Education, which aims to have all children in school by 2010, was launched after the 86th Constitutional Amendment, guaranteeing the right to education to all children. However, with other educational indicators, regional and gender disparities are still conspicuous in regard to enrolment and retention. Girls’ enrolment has grown at the primary stage and upper primary stage. The rate of growth of enrolment of girls has been higher than that of boys but disparities still persist. Although, the drop-out rates for girls at primary and middle levels has reduced from 62.5 and 79.4 respectively in 1980-81 to 42.3 and 58.0 in 1999-2000, the level of literacy of boys is still
higher than that of girls. Government has identified urgent priorities for gender equality in education by touching upon the following aspects:

1. Access to and improved quality of education for girls and women;
2. Removal of obstacles that hamper active participation of girls and women in education and

The gap between participation of boys and girls in education is in essence a primary reason for preferring a male child to the female child particularly in rural areas. So the solution of this problem does not lie entirely in the educational system, though education can certainly play a positive role of social engineering towards the improvement in the status of girls.

The constraints to girls' education relate to demand and supply factors. The demand factors include poverty, where the family is not in a position to bear the direct and opportunity costs of girls' schooling, as well as social and cultural traditions deriving from low status, early marriage, poor health, poor nutrition and future job market discrimination. On the supply side are the realities of insufficient school places for girls, distant location of schools, inflexible timings, irrelevant and gender insensitive curricula, lack of female teachers etc.

Most of the girls do not attend schools or drop out after initial enrolment, because of lack of physical facilities and congenial environment in schools, particularly in case of mixed schools. Lack of proper place for girls in the class-rooms, non-availability of separate toilets for girls, absence of separate arrangement for games and sports, existence of widespread rowdyism by boys, unkind and discriminating attitude of teachers and male oriented atmosphere in the institutions adversely affect the enrolment rates of girls in schools. These factors came to light during discussions with the parent respondents and Panchayat members during field work. According to the information provided by villagers, though government has provided one primary school at the radius of 1 km under Sarv Siksha Abhiyan, yet, they are hesitant in sending their girls to schools because of many such hurdles. Schools lack infra-structure especially for the girl students. They also claimed
that after Primary Schools, they feel discouraged to send their daughters to some other village as they are worried for their security. It was the observation of the researcher also that High school facility is not available in every village. If girls want to continue with their studies, they need to cross 4-5 villages to reach up to their school, which is not at all convenient for the girls as well as their parents.

Molestation of girls: A Grave Challenge to Girls’ Education

The most dangerous challenge to a girl’s education is molestation in an educational institution. There are many narratives about exploitation of young innocent girls within the premises of schools and colleges. These reported cases are only the tip of the iceberg, as there are many more, which go unreported. Girls are persistently being subjected to various forms of abuse—physical, emotional and sexual. These incidents take place everywhere, i.e. within homes, at institutions run by the government and non-governmental organizations, schools, in the streets, in tuition classes and in buses and trains. Parents often complain of the insecurity faced by girls while attending schools and colleges. Occurrence of cases of abduction, rape and molestation of girls often dampen the enthusiasm of girls in pursuing education beyond a certain age, while their parents bind them to homes.

Some of such shameful and shocking incidents which occurred recently in different parts of the country, especially in Punjab and Haryana, are as under:

- In 2006, Rishi Sagar, Manager of the privately-run Vishvas Senior Secondary School in Hisar, Haryana, was found sexually molesting and threatening girls of classes V and VI in his office.
- In February, 2006 two teachers of Durjanpur village in the Jind district of Haryana were found to have been raping seven school girls for several months in the health education room. The truth came out when some girls got pregnant.
- In April 2006, Prabhjot, a girl studying in Phillaur Government Girls Senior Secondary School, Punjab, was allegedly poisoned to death by her teacher Harbhajan Singh who had been sexually exploiting her for several months. Prabhjot was apparently pregnant. All the education
department did, on learning about the teacher's deeds, was, to transfer him to another village. Only when the town rose up in protest after Prabhjot's death was he arrested by the police.

- Chudiali village in Ambala district, Haryana, erupted with anger in February 2006, when a schoolmaster raped a 15-year-old girl from his school. He reportedly offered her a lift on his scooter to a nearby school where she had to appear for an exam, but instead took her to a sugarcane field and raped her.

[All the four cases above are reported by Chander Suta Dogra for October 02, 2006 Edition of the magazine ‘Outlook’].

- Six girls of a Municipal Corporation of Delhi school in Mangolpuri have accused one of their teachers for molesting them (The Hindu, July 31, 2007).

- In March 2008, a story appeared in the newspapers about young schoolgirls in class III and IV, studying in an English medium primary school outside Mumbai, being sexually molested by their school principal. He would call them for extra tuitions on a Saturday and instead of teaching them, would molest them and threaten that if they told anyone, he would ensure that they failed in their exams. Three of the girls finally broke down and told their parents. These young girls were really traumatized (The Hindu, March 09, 2008).

- Recently in September, 2009, in the Government Senior Secondary School in Khajuri Khas, panic-stricken children jostled and shoved on the narrow staircase, resulting in a stampede that killed five of them and injured 29 others, who had come to sit for their first-term exam. All five students who died were girls and so were the most of the injured students but the police and the girls who witnessed the incident reported that this accident happened only because the boys of that school tried to molest girls. The 22 narrow steps became a death trap for the girls, who were trapped between two groups of boys. (Indian Express, September 11, 2009).

- In October, 2004 in Tamil Nadu, four college students were arrested on charges of molesting three minor tribal girls of a residential school at
Melpakkam in Tindivanam. It is said that the final year undergraduate students of the A. Govidasamy Government Arts College entered the school, run by the Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department, and sexually harassed the 10-year-old girls studying in standard V, on five consecutive nights (from October 15 to 19), in the absence of a warden (The Hindu, October 25, 2004).

- Two teachers, Rajiv Abrol and R.S Manhas of Government Higher secondary school of Katra, Jammu were held, for alleged involvement in molestation of school girls (Indian Express, February 17, 2009).

- A minor girl of Government Girls School, Rajkot, Ahmedabad was raped by 50-year-old watchman of the hostel in May 2008 (Indian Express May 18, 2008).

- In March, 2009, in the town of Patan in north Gujarat, an 18-year-old Dalit girl, under training to be a primary school teacher, revealed that she had been gang-raped on numerous occasions by six male teachers for six months. They threatened to fail her if she reported these incidents (Indian Express, March 8, 2009).

- In Jan, 2007 in Indore a School bus operator was held for molestation of the minor girls studying in a local school. Parents have complained that the girls were being molested in the school bus as well as inside the school premises for over a year (The Hindu, January 27, 2007).

Akshara, a Mumbai-based NGO recently conducted a survey on sexual abuse across 44 city colleges in Mumbai. According to the report presented by Anita Aikara in December, 2007, 61 per cent of the 533 female students interviewed have been sexually harassed in the college (www.dnaindia.com).

These are just a few incidents but the danger they are likely to cause is beyond our imagination. We can not even think about the trauma through which a girl passes after an incident of this kind. Most of the girls either drop out of school or try to commit suicide. While concerted efforts to educate girls are beginning to pay dividends, male teachers, using a mix of allurement and threat, have been raping their girl students with sickening regularity. Faced with mounting public pressure, the governments of two states, i.e. Punjab and
Haryana, have fallen back on what to many is a potentially regressive step, having only women teachers in girls' schools. For many social workers and educationists, this is not the solution of the problem. The appointment of only female teachers is not a healthy step to fight against such problems; neither can this assure the security of these young girls. In the opinion of Dr. Kiran Bedi, Director General, Bureau of Police Research and Development, there should be a mix of both men and women to teach girls because eventually these girls have to work and deal with men in society. The solution to the problem, however, has to come from within society, via organized bodies like committees against sexual harassment with parents and teachers part of it (http://www.outlookindia.com/articles.asp). Noted educationist, Dr J.N. Joshi argued, "At a time when modern teacher training programmes stress on co-education and removal of gender differences, restricting male teachers from teaching girls isn't a healthy step. It would be better if speedy and severe punishment is meted out to offenders." (quoted in Dogra 2006).

Activists are demanding that Gender Sensitization Committees against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH) must be constituted in all universities following a Supreme Court directive and should be extended to schools as well. Dr Reicha Tanwar, Director of the Women's Study Centre at Kurukshetra University, says that the Gender Sensitization Committees against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH) set up there a few years ago has been quite effective. "Redressal is within a time-frame and the Committee's composition is routinely circulated within the campus. There should be similar committees in schools too," she says (http://outlookindia.com/articles.asp).

Now the parents of the girls are beginning to wonder whether it is safe for anyone to send their daughters to school. At least up to the primary level, there is a noticeable increase in the number of girls who enroll in schools; one can see these girls excitedly running towards their schools in the morning. But then, if incidents of this kind of sexual molestation circulate, the entire effort to enhance girls' education could suffer a serious set back. Parents would prefer to protect their daughters by keeping them at home rather than risk sending them to such schools. Or they might make same sex schools with same sex teachers a precondition. Of course, none of these can guarantee that their
daughters will be “safe”. In Punjab, the authorities have just begun to look at the problem. However, educationists agree that the entire system needs an overhaul—teachers have to be made more accountable and sensitive, and appointments have to be made transparent.

Rural Urban Disparity in Education: A Case of Rural Girls

In the present study, it has been observed that there are huge urban-rural disparities in education. The girls and boys coming all the way from villages to cities to attain education face a lot of hurdles. There are problems waiting for them everywhere; their suffering primarily spring from the poor quality of education that they receive in government schools in their villages, which makes it difficult for them to compete with students educated in private schools located in cities. While boys somehow manage to overcome some of the hurdles, the girls have to face a tough time as they have to tackle the traditional mindset of the village elders as well as prove their worth in order to continue their college education. Not only this they had to ward off undesirable elements while commuting by public transportation and strike a balance between studies and domestic chores. In spite of equal rights given to them legally and socially in theory, there are troubles for girls everywhere when they actually go for higher education. Traditions do not allow them to raise their voice against any issue. As described in chapter IV, even their opinion regarding social issues is not given any importance and they are expected to remain quiet making all sorts of sacrifices just like their mothers did. If a family lacks resources to educate the children, it will be the girls who will be deprived of education and not the boys. If parents find some NRI match for their daughter, they will not think twice before discontinuing her education and get her married as early as possible. Because of all these discriminations, there remains a huge gap between the literacy rate of girls and boys in India as well as in Punjab. The literacy rate of rural girls is only 46.58% in comparison to the literacy rate of rural boys, which is 71.18%. Girls from urban areas are at somewhat better position as 72.99% girls are educated as compared to boys, whose literacy rate is 86.42%.( Census of India 2001). This data points to two extreme groups regarding literacy rate; urban males with 86.42% literacy and rural females with 46.58% literacy rate,
which itself depicts the position of rural girls in the education sector in India. Many student respondents (majority being girls) admitted in the present study that society has different rules and norms for girls and boys and even after becoming highly qualified, girls are unable to raise their voice against injustice due to deep rooted prejudices against girls speaking out their minds in public.

Conclusion

On the basis of the facts discussed in this chapter, many inferences can be drawn. The rural youth is facing many challenges in attaining higher education. They do not have an easy access to higher education as institutions are mainly located in the urban areas. Their coming to cities from villages is full of hurdles, no wonder there is a huge gap between the level of urban and rural education.

The girls in the villages face even more problems, when they opt for higher education. On the one hand they suffer because of financial, infrastructural, cultural and social constraints just like village boys, while on the other, they fight against the injustice and discrimination exercised on them because of their sex. The majority of the cases of girl molestation discussed in this chapter are from rural areas and from Government schools and colleges. While government is taking every possible action to encourage the education of girls, it is still turning a blind eye to the exploitation of girl students and culprits in cases of molestation of girls do not get proper punishment. In majority of the cases of molestation of girls discussed in this chapter, the guilty teachers were transferred to some other schools. This was hardly any punishment for the guilty and absolutely no consolation for the traumatized girl and her parents. So long as such shameful events continue happening within the premises of pious institutions of learning, no programme and policy for the education of girls can address the issue effectively.

It can also be concluded that no single ideology of feminist movement as well as policy of education for girls discussed under this chapter, can actually explain the situation of the education sector in India with special reference to female education. In Indian culture, neither can we agree with the policy that ‘Man is a born master.......’ nor can we support the Radical’s policy.
of ‘development of techniques of artificial reproduction’. For the liberation of women, India needs to use a mix of different ideologies to suit specific needs of the society and the challenges, which it is facing at present like poverty, female foeticide, drug abuse, honour killings, dowry deaths, domestic violence, communal violence in which women are the worst victims. It needs to adopt a humanistic approach, under which all human beings should be given equal opportunities to live an independent, happy and secured life irrespective of their sex, caste, class and race.