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The United Nations Proclamation of 1990 as International Literacy Year (ILY), a product of pressure by non-governmental organizations, focuses on the problem of illiteracy among various nations and cultures. The objectives of International Literacy Year specifically identify 'women and girls' among the priority beneficiaries (ILY,1990). As regards literacy, women are particularly under-privileged. In India it is still worse because of the sex-segregated character of the society, the condition of poverty and the traditional value system. (Khan and Ayesha, 1982) According to the provisional results of 1991 census, there are a total of 362 million literate people in India, out of them, only 132 million-- about one out of three--are woman. (Jejeebhoy, 1991)

Women's education has been the greatest achievement of independent India. During the past four decades, there has been a remarkable change in the field of female education. Today, the girl students are proving to be tough competitors. But still we have to go a long way as there is dismaying evidence of a large number of girls not attending school at all. The girls enrolled in primary school accounted for 69% in 1990. The goal of achieving universal elementary education seems nowhere near. The poor families, especially in rural and tribal areas keep their girls away from the schools. (Sahai,1985) A gap exists between the enrolment of girls and boys at all levels of education. Right from the primary school to the university, we find that the number of girl students is considerably lower than the number of boy students. Besides there
is a wide regional & districtwise disparity in the level of female education. (Kapur, K.B, 1973)

Social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, M.G.Ranade and others believed that education of women of India will pave the way for social progress. Thus it was felt by these pioneers that lack of education among women was a formidable obstacle to social amelioration. The eradication of social evils such as infanticide, child marriage or permanent widowhood can largely be possible if women of the country are educated. (Maurya, 1988)

Similarly, our late Prime-Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, in her special message to the All-India Workshop held at Kasturbayram in Sept. 1984, said, "One of the major objectives of our struggle for freedom was to spread education among women and enable them to participate more meaningfully in every aspect of national effort. But, despite the large expansion in educational facilities from the primary to university level, women's education still lags behind. Illiteracy is one of our major national problems and specially worrisome is illiteracy among women. Only by educating women can we rise above our backwardness". (Menon, L. 1984)

The differences between the position of men and women in society will not lessen, leave aside disappear, so long as there are differences between the education of men and women. Inadequate education is the
most important factor responsible for the backwardness of our masses, especially our women folk. (Kapur, K.B. 1973)

It is believed, women's indifference towards their own educational development was imbedded in their social system. Our society is a male-dominated society, where the women's place has been primarily confined to the home, her role limited to procreation, and upbringing of children. Girls are not considered equal to boys and do not get the same opportunity for education. This tendency is prevalent all over the world, especially in the third world. In India the age old prejudices support this tendency. These prejudices are the result of our socio-cultural heritage and religious traditions. Our treatment of the girl child is conditioned by the society's expectations of the woman. (Chattarji, J. 1990)

For countless centuries Indian women had been subordinated to men and socially oppressed. The various religions practised in India as well as the personal laws based on them consigned women to a status inferior to that of men. Woman could not lead a free life and she lived under the tutelage of her parents, her husband or her sons. (Maurya, 1988) The early law books treated the women as equivalent to the 'Sudras'. (Chitnis, 1991) The position of women during the Vedic period was considerably better than during later periods. But it is true that during any historical period, women did not enjoy equal position or status with men. (Role and status of women in Indian society, 1978) The most
noteworthy feature of ancient Indian education is the education of women. Women were given equal rights with men in all walks of life, including education. Ladies have been quoted as authors of some of the Samhitas of Rigveda. But as conditions changed, when girls started to lose the privileges of education, the marriage age came down, they lost their equality, they came to be considered as mere possessions and, by Manu's time, they were ascribed completely to a dependent status. During the middle ages, seclusion was added to the existing subordinate status of women and, in course of time, women became completely illiterate. (Pillai, 1990) Thus before independence, woman did not have an important existence of her own. She existed for men and always played the second fiddle to them. (Maurya, 1988)

Though the social and economic status of Indian women has been changed considerably, their condition is not yet satisfactory. Even today women by and large, whether literate or illiterate, working or nonworking, rich or poor, all the same suffer at the hands of men and society. The recent practice of 'Sati' (the wife's immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre) in Rajasthan, child marriages and dowry deaths are some of the examples. In spite of several independent universities existing for women only, it is disheartening to know that they seem to be unaware of these developments. (Vijay Kumar & Ram Mohan, 1991)

Realizing the intensity of the problem, various efforts have been made at international as well as national levels. The recommendations of
the United Nations World Conference of International Women's Year, Mexico, 1975; The Conference of the Non-Aligned and other Developing Countries on the Role of Women in Development - Baghdad, 1979, and The Havana Meeting of the High Level Experts of Non-Aligned and other Developing Countries on the Role of Women in Development, 1981 recognised that the promotion of the status of women and their role in development represents one of the crucial strategic questions of the struggle for progress and a more humane life. And education was one of the high priority areas that needed to be addressed for this. (Verma, J. 1989)

The planners in our country are also awakening to these facts. After independence, our constitution guaranteed complete equality of men and women. A series of progressive legislative Acts have removed many disabilities under which Indian women had to suffer terribly. The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929, popularly known as the 'Sarada Act', prohibited throughout India the marriage of girls under fourteen and of boys under eighteen years. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 put an end to polygamy and made monogamy universal. After the abolition of Sati (1829), life-long widowhood posed a problem. The Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 permitted the remarriage of widows. The Succession Act of 1956 was a landmark in the history of Hindu Law. A provision was made under the 1956 Hindu Succession Act for a daughter and a widow to inherit parental property. (Patai, 1967)
Various committees have been appointed to raise the educational condition of women. The National Committee on Women's Education (1958-59) was set up by the Government of India to consider the whole question of women's education. It recommended that "the education of women should be regarded as a major and a special problem in education for a good many years to come and a bold and determined effort should be made to face its difficulties and magnitude and to close the existing gap between the education of men and women in as short a time as possible". (Deshmukh, 1959)

The Kothari Education Commission (1948-49) has rightly asserted that, "there cannot be an educated people without educated women. If general education had to be limited to men or to women, then an opportunity should be given to women, for then it would most surely be passed on to the next generation". (Bhatia & Co, 1981)

The National Policy on Education (1986) is a landmark in the approach to women's education. It has attempted for the first time to address itself to the basic issues of women's equality. In the section titled "Education for Women's Equality", the policy states: "Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralise the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education System will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women". (UND, 1989)
Today, Indian women are proudly entering into every sphere of human activity and are enriching it by their valuable contributions. Independent India has her women ambassadors, cabinet ministers, M.L.As, M.Ps, women judges and magistrates, teachers, doctors etc. Mrs. Indira Gandhi rose to the place of the highest honour as a Prime Minister of India. Vijai Laxmi Pandit, Sarojini Naidu, Padmaja Naidu, Sucheta Kriplani etc., are the names of Indian ladies who joined higher political posts and served the country very efficiently. (Maurya, 1988)

The women's education is essential for their welfare, equality, development and peace for improving the quality and output of their work and for increasing the awareness of their rights and responsibilities. (Joseph, V.V. 1975) "A literate woman is a surer guarantee of the education of the rising generation than a literate man". (Desai, N. 1968) A reasonably educated girl would make a better housekeeper, better mother and a better wife than an uneducated one. (Nair, R. 1983) She will be able to harmonise the relationship in the family and will be more capable to establish proper adjustments between the family and the larger society. (Desai, N. 1968) Therefore Gandhiji had stated long back: "Educating a man is educating an individual, while educating a woman is educating a family." (Rao, Usha, 1983) Hence the issue of female access to educational opportunities in general and in rural areas in particular assumes prime importance. The education of girls, therefore, should be dealt with by more concrete and scientific research studies.
Scope of the Study

Illiteracy is one of the glaring social problems of India. It is a serious impediment to an individual's growth and to a country's socio-economic progress. Abject poverty, disease, socio-economic disparities, environmental negligence, failure of development programmes etc., are all due to illiteracy and ignorance. An illiterate man is not only a burden to himself but also a burden to the community at large. Studies have shown that there is sizable gender discrepancy in Indian education. The problem is more intensive in rural areas. The villages form the backbone of our country and are so numerous too. Seventy percent of India's souls live in more than five lakh villages. Therefore illiteracy is necessarily a rural problem. It is in villages that the education of girls has to be popularised, so that the vast number of girls there become educated, enlightened and responsible citizens of India.

The primary concern of a sociologist is to investigate the rural social system in the changing conditions and present the position of women. However, the studies in the problem of female education are relatively scanty. Though there is some literature that is concerned with urban women, little research is focused on rural women and different aspects of their education and employment, what little there is covers limited areas, touching mostly general progress of education. Therefore, the present study is an effort to investigate into the state of female education at village level in the social context. Moreover, information on
the girl's education as related to major religious groups and caste groups is scanty. Hence the present study intends to fill up these gaps to some extent.

In the present work, we are interested in the study of the relationship between social system and female education. The social system consists of various subsystems which are inter-related. We are concerned with the relationship between various subsystem and education of the rural girls.

Rural women still live in backward conditions. Their position has not yet improved. Even today the Indian parents are worried about the birth of a girl child. Naturally they are less bothered about her personal interests and progress.

Various studies have shown that education of women is an important variable affecting demographic behaviour, such as age at marriage, reproduction, infant and child mortality, migration and labour. Compared to their urban counterparts, rural girls lag behind in education. Urban women, whether they are from upper or lower strata, have educational facilities. Economic and social conditions do not prevent them from getting an education. Western culture, education facilities, employment opportunities have widened their role and raised their status. At present, in urban areas the educated employed woman is considered as an asset to the family. But rural women do not have these facilities. It is
believed that the society in which the women are living is mainly responsible for it. In other words, the rural social system operates as a constraint on girl's education. Hence the need to investigate the condition of girl's education in the context of the social system in rural areas.

Our government aims at Universal Primary Education by 2000 A.D. So it is essential that both boys and girls should be enrolled in the schools. Unless the parents/decision-makers in the family realise the importance of the education of girls, the girls may not be sent to school and the aim of universal literacy will remain a dream.

The present study is a system-analysis of rural India. The main focus of this study is to investigate how the rural system is disposed towards female education. The main determinants of female education in the rural social system are religion, caste, values, occupation, family, traditions and customs. It is a study of education in the cultural setting.

It is the parents who are the decision-makers of female education in rural India. So the study is concerned with family background and various components of social system that affect their attitude towards daughter's education.

The family is the key factor in a girl's accessibility to education. Recent studies of the rural educational attainment process and dropout
behaviour have ignored the family question, (Hobbs, 1991) Hence, the study deals with family system as far as it helps or hinders the rural female education. It is, therefore, essential to assess whether the educational background of parents and size of the family affect parents' attitude towards their girl's education.

The economic system is an important factor in female education. It is necessary for this study to investigate whether income and occupation of the family influence parents' attitude towards their girl's education.

Stratification plays an important role in the girl's accessibility to education. And also social inequality gives rise to unequal distribution of educational facilities. This study intends to analyse whether social stratification based on caste acts as a barrier in the girl's education among the different segments of population. We are concerned with how the position of parents in the caste hierarchy affects their aspiration regarding their daughter's education.

Religious system is another factor in the girl's accessibility to education. As India is moving from a society dominated by religion to a society that has increasingly cherished and adopted secularism as its goal, the inter-relationship of education and religion becomes an important area of study. It is essential for this study to find out whether the position of women in different religious groups affects their access to educational opportunities.
Studies have shown that social attitudes and traditional value system of our society affect girl's access to education. This study aims to throw light on how the values of different castes and religions affect the aspirations of parents towards their daughter's education. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse the attitude of parents towards their girl's education.

Other factors like urban contact of the family and inter-generational progress of female education play an important role in female education. It is essential to assess how the urban contact of the family and progress of woman's education in different generations in the family affect female access to education.