INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is the light of life and Education is the instrument for achieving it. Etymologically, the word ‘education’ means ‘to bring up’ or ‘nourish’. It also means that the child has to be brought up according to certain aims and ends in view. It is derived from the Latin word, ‘educus’, which means ‘to lead out’ or ‘to draw out’ – ‘e’ means ‘out’ and ‘ducus’, means ‘to lead’ or ‘to draw out’ rather than ‘to put in’. There is yet another interpretation according to which the term ‘education’ means ‘the act of teaching’ or ‘training’. Education is the most important instrument for human resource development.

The word ‘education’ implies the characteristics of both the types of knowledge, namely, material and spiritual. According to Confucius, knowledge is ‘to know both what one knows and what one does not know’.

Education is the basis of human life. Every human society has to perform the task of transmitting its accumulated stock of knowledge, skills, beliefs and wisdom from one generation to another and such transmission is called education. Education is rightly regarded as the very basis of civilized life. In the broadest meaning, education is any person by which an individual gains knowledge or
insight or develops attitudes or skills. In a narrow sense, it simply means mere acquisition of knowledge.¹

Education has been an inevitable part of life throughout human history. At all times, society has been interested in entering into new avenues of knowledge.

Education develops the personality and rationality of individuals, qualifies them to fulfill certain economic, political and cultural functions and in the process, improves their socio-economic status. It provides vertical mobility and can thereby help to equalize status between individuals coming from different social strata.

The role of education should be for the growth and development of individual personalities for achieving growth, modernization, self reliance, social justice and structural changes in the economy, socio – cultural changes in the value system and the institution, psychological changes in the attitudes and motivations of people. Education is an essential tool for all these changes and thus it obviously assumes a significantly dominate role in the process of development.

Education acts as an instrument which effectively brings forth one’s abilities, inborn qualities, capacities, creativity and triggers human ‘thoughts which in turn marks the development and welfare of the society.²

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights regards education as one of the basic rights to every human being.

Education is an instrument of fiqr (rationality), ziqar (thought and observation), ijtihad (critique and forming of independent opinions), and above all, social transformation and economic advancement. It is one of the major factors that can influence and condition people’s outlook and aspirations, challenges inequalities in society and preserves an egalitarian order. Education is a crucial and basic factor for the development of society. It bestows on society the requisite comprehensive knowledge and expertise for development in various fields. It moulds social psychology and thereby enables the society to have desirable aims and objectives and to devise its activity. It causes the emergence of conscious, conscientious and bold leadership which dedicates itself to the development of society.

Education is the study of historical experience, contemporary life and trains the individual for collective or community life. Education inculcates the human values and prepares the people for the life of dedicated service, pure thought and helps them to co-ordinate with one another. Education is indispensable in the modern time for every man and woman to lead a good life. Education is a process which involves three referents -individual, the society and national community of an individual. It plays a predominant role in ascertaining the nature and destiny of man and the society.

Its economical value ensures better existence of the society; social values supply social norms and system; political values guide the citizen to be true to
democracy; intellectual values enlighten the people and aesthetic values assure harmony in the society. Thus education means opening the door to the blossoming of the citizens. Education is thus intrinsically related to the society.  

There is no second opinion in considering education as a key to all kinds of developments, individual, social and national. Therefore, emphasis has to be laid upon its continuous improvement, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Madras Presidency, the southernmost part of British India, comprised of the whole of present Tamil Nadu, and parts of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka and Orissa. It came into existence neither on linguistic basis nor on geographical factors. It was a multilingual, multi – religious and multi – racial Presidency, created by the acquisition of Kongunadu from Mysore, Thanjavur from the Marathas and Carnatic from the Wallajas by the East India company. It was the oldest among the presidencies. The English East India Company succeeded, slowly but steadily, in establishing their rule over this Presidency through ‘wars, alliances and diplomacy’

In those days, education to the womenfolk was neglected. They were in the clutches of social evils like female infanticide, child marriage, devadasi system, sati, gender discrimination, polygamy, purdah system, etc., The only way to overcome these social evils was by providing education to girls.

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Education is not the sole property of the male segment of the society in the world. Women have equal rights over education which is indispensable for their life and survival.

Infact, education of women is more important, as they play a significant role in the society as daughters, wives and mothers. Education is a key element that enables a woman to gain experience and knowledge to play her role in an effective and efficient manner.\(^4\)

The Report of William Adam on the State of Education, observes that “A superstitious feeling is alleged to exist in the majority of Hindu families, principally cherished by the women and not discouraged by men, that a girl taught to read and write will soon after marriage become a widow”. Adam also commented on the fear, shared by Hindus and Muslims, that a “Knowledge of letters” might facilitate female intrigue. Because Hindu women were totally dependent on fathers, then husbands and finally sons for support, they said prayers and performed rituals to insure longevity for these men. If learning to read would lead to a husband’s death, then pursuing knowledge was tantamount to suicide. This was a sex-segregated world and men and women did different work and occupied separate spaces.

The biological differences between man and woman determine the difference in their functions. In spite of the fact that though woman is a

counterpart, a better half of man, sharing the joys and sorrows, achievements and failures, obligations and responsibilities, biologically man and woman are different human beings. Variations are visible physiologically, psychologically and socially. Therefore, different kinds of training, treatment and education should be given to them.\(^5\)

**Women and Education: A Historical Perspective**

Education is a social phenomenon related to the past, the present and the future. The roots of education in each country have, therefore, to be laid in the past history and at the same time the future is to be related to its aspiration and goals of development.

The historical perspective of women education in India is essentially related to the background of the past history of the country. Women education is a very long and sordid story. 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 in education. Women are reported to have been authors of some of the samhitas of Rig-Veda. The women philosophers and Brahma vadanis dedicated their whole lives to education. Women had the freedom to remain single as well as freedom to choose their life partners. Ample evidences proved that co-education existed in the Ashrams. But as conditions changed when girls started to lose the privileges of education, the marriage age came down, they lost their

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equality, came to be considered as mere possessions and by 100 A.D. Manus’
time, they were ascribed completely to a dependent status. Thus the Lawgiver has
said, “By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged, nothing must be done
independently even in her own home”. During the Vedic period, women enjoyed a
high social status. Women enjoyed equality in all walks of life. During the post
Vedic period, education of women declined. women were merely treated as the
property of men. In the age of Buddhism there was protest against the rigid
Brahmanical culture. Once again, women were assigned equal position.

Traditionally, education meant learning to read sacred literature. Among
Hindus, members of the priestly caste called Brahmins, were learned in all
branches of sacred knowledge, while the other twice born castes (Kshatriyas and
Vaishyas) were given a less rigorous program but also learned practical skills.
Shudras and most women were not taught the sacred books but some women were
taught to read. Some women from the upperclass ‘vaishnavite families learned to
read puranic literature.

During the Middle Ages, Muslim girls were expected to learn the Quran
and some accounting skills but the strict seclusion observed by upper-class
families prohibited their daughters from attending schools seclusion or purdah was
added to the existing subordinate and subservient status of women and in course of
time, women became completely illiterate. Consequently, what they learned about
their religion, they learned at home, either from their families or through tutors.
Within the Madras Presidency, in Malabar and Zamindari of Vizagapattam, large numbers of girls from castes other than Brahmmins like Chetti and Vaishya attended school. Some Muslim girls received school education in Trichnoploy and Salem. From amongst the Hindu girls, Sudras and other castes attended school in Masulipatnam, Madura, Tinnevelly and Coimbatore. It is difficult to explain as to why only some girls in some region went to school. The survey reports of the company officials are silent on the issue but the collectors of these regions have observed that all the girls who went to school, were slated to be dancing girls or devadasis in temples.\(^6\)

Women occupied a very low status in the early modern society in the Madras Presidency. Lack of educational facilities, practice of child marriage, prohibition of widow remarriages, prevalence of devadasi system, practice of purdah system etc., were some of the social barriers responsible for the low status and miserable condition of women who were reduced to the position of glorified slaves.

Since the East India Company did not require educated women in its office, it was indifferent towards education of women. For the first 60 years of its rule in India, the British East India Company – a trading, profit making organization – showed little interest in the education of Indians. It was aware of the need to improve the education scene in India but was reluctant to interfere with Indian

traditions for fear of alienating the local people whose support was necessary for
the Company to legitimize its power and authority.  

The Battle of Plassey was the defining event for British presence in India. After this victory, the British embarked on the process of consolidating its rule in India. From then onwards, it encountered issues that compelled it to define its policy towards education in the country.

The immediate reaction of the Company was to support the prevailing system of education. It was in the midst of extreme defiance that the Company debated its plan towards women’s education. Though restrained, the company was convinced that women should be educated and it marked the colonial policy towards women’s education. Company officials such as Mount Stuart Elphinstone and Lord Dalhousie argued that the diffusion of knowledge among men and women would end many of the social evils which degraded the condition of women. Despite understanding the need for moral and financial support for the spread of women’s education, they did not guarantee schools for girls. The Government purposely abstained from acting towards its female subjects as it was positive towards male in the field of education. Various socio-religious reform associations, missionaries, reformers took efforts for the progress and emancipation of women. The female emancipation was the direct offshoot of

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western humanism, “which came along with the introduction of English education”

The Colonial Government, despite pressure exerted by missionaries and liberals, was unconcerned about female education. The missionaries were interested in female education and schools for girls because, they argued, women needed to be brought into the fold to make conversions permanent. But since men made the decisions, female education was ancillary.

Unmarried female missionaries arrived in India in the 1840’s and were assigned to work with women and children. These missionary women, educated and eager to prove their worth, concentrated on converting adult married Indian women to Christianity. They gained entry into households as teachers where they read stories, taught needle work and attempted to bring their charges to accept Christ.

The beginning of British Rule, the introduction of English education and the consequent flow of western ideas were responsible for inculcating a new spirit and thought in India. For the first time, the British Parliament investigated seriously and sympathetically the development of Indian Education. The evidence submitted to the committees of the Lords and the Commons, formed the basis of Sir Charles Wood’s epoch – making Dispatch of 1854, which determined the

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8 Kay, J.W., *Administration of East India Company*, Kitab Mahal Publishers, Allahabad, 1966, p. 120.
whole subsequent course of Indian educational development. Girls’ education received great impetus by the passing of the Wood’s Dispatch of 1854. The Dispatch of 1854 recognized women’s education as an integral part of the state system of education. The Dispatch bestowed serious attention on the subject of female education and stated that, “the importance of female education cannot be overrated and we have observed with pleasure the evidence which is now afforded of an increased desire on the part of many of the natives of India to give a good education to their daughters.” But even after fourteen years after the passing of the Dispatch, the Government of Madras was yet to take any step to encourage female education.

In 1868, the Government of India sanctioned a female Normal School at each of the three Presidency Towns. In 1880, to supervise and suggest ways and means for progress of female education the Secretary of State for India sanctioned an Inspectress of girls’ schools. Mrs. Isabel Brander was nominated for the Post of Inspectress of the Presidency of Madras in 1880. English education worked as a great catalyst from the beginning of the Nineteenth Century to bring about a social change in Modern India. It resulted in the replacement of blind faith in tradition, beliefs and conventions by the spirit of rationalism. This revolt of the mind against the tyranny of social dogma and customs is the first requisite for freedom of
thought and conscience out of which emanates progress in social, religious and political rights of women.¹⁰

Unlike the Christian Missionaries and the intelligentsia, the British Government took the responsibility of women as early as 1854. In fact, the Educational Dispatch of 1854 not only mentioned government support to female education but also stated that grant-in-aid would be given to female schools. A similar sentiment was echoed in the Hunter Commission Report (1882). Among other things, it clearly mentioned that women’s education should be encouraged in all aspects, namely, syllabus, teaching staff, Women inspectors and others. In other words, its recommendations included an improvement in all aspects regarding women’s education.

Thus the efforts of missionaries, male and female intelligentsia and the British Government, led to an overall expansion of primary, secondary and collegiate education of women. As a result of the formal as well as informal education received by women, they succeeded in laying the foundation of organization which promoted social welfare and educational work. A significant development during the period was establishment of an all India organization for women known as the Women Indian Association. It was founded on 8th of May 1917 at Adyar in Madras. Its members consisted of women belonging to different castes and communities. Most of the issues pertaining to women were decided

through consensus. Its activity succeeded in promoting communal solidarity and national consciousness among women.\textsuperscript{11}

The reformist and revivalist sects like the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya samaj intensified their efforts at promoting education for girls by voluntarily creating favorable public opinion. This helped in changing the views of parents towards the education of their daughters. Various Mohammadan Educational Associations and Hindu Associations and backward and depressed classes associations had become active in the field of education by 1920’s.\textsuperscript{12}

In 1921-1922, the number of colleges, secondary schools and primary schools for girls increased. Though direct government effort had considerably increased, the burden still lay heavy on private effort. A very significant development during this period was the considerable rise in the age of marriage, especially in urban areas and upper classes of society. Thus women could choose a number of new careers.

The control of education was transferred from the Imperial Government to the Indian Minister at the Centre under the system of Dyarchy in 1921. Provincial autonomy was introduced in 1937 and the States began taking increasing interest in the promotion of women’s education. Various legislations enacted during this period created general interest in women’s education. The Sarda Act in 1929 fixed

\textsuperscript{11} Narayanaswamy Pillai, T.M., (ed.), \textit{Women Pioneers in Education}, Tamil Nadu Society for Promotion of Education in India, Madras, 1975, p. 50.

\textsuperscript{12} Aparna Basu, \textit{The Growth of Educational and Political Development in India, 1890-1920}, Oxford University Press, London, 1949, p. 120.
the age of marriage of women at not less than 14 years. The women obtained the right to vote in the Legislative Assembly in 1923 and the right to contest in elections to the Legislative Assembly was granted in 1931. Various organizations for women came into existence to improve their socio-economic position and their education. The All – India Women’s Conference came into being in 1926. And the first All India Women’s Educational and Social Conference was held in 1927 to bring about educational reforms, especially in the curriculum for girls’ education. The Hartog Committee (1937) recommended the equality of educational opportunities and careers for women. However, it was a period of financial stringency and political struggle. In spite of these difficulties, the education of girls made considerable progress.

New professions such as law, medicine, commerce, agriculture, engineering and technology became popular among educated women and these professions were formerly closed to them.  

**Choice of Topic**

The work ventures to examine the trends in women’s education in Madras Presidency, especially the Colonial City of Madras. To understand the rise and progress of female education in the Madras Presidency, the work concentrated primarily on the period from Nineteenth and up to Mid-Twentieth Century. Several attempts have been made to trace the history of education in India and

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some research works have been published on the history of education in Madras Presidency, especially the Colonial City of Madras. The City had played a vital role in the growth of women education in the Madras Presidency. Hence the Scholar has chosen this study for her doctoral research.

**Area and Period of Study**

The area chosen for the present study was the Madras Presidency, with special reference to the Colonial City of Madras. The study covered a period of ninety three years and commences from 1854 when the Wood’s Dispatch was made and ends in 1947 when the Colonial Rule came to an end. The main area concentrated in this topic was the Colonial City of Madras.

The Wood’s Dispatch of 1854 is regarded as the Magna Carta of English Education in the Pre-Independent India. It is indeed a landmark in the history of the educational growth in the Indian subcontinent.

The present City of Madras itself may be said to have existed in the shape of separate scattered villages for centuries before the coming of the English. It was the first City of South India and it is now the capital of Tamil Nadu. It lies between 13.4 degrees north latitude and 80.17 degrees east longitude. It has been an important centre of intellectual and commercial activities ever since its formation in 1639.

The headquarters of the then Madras Presidency has been the nucleus of educational activities for the entire Presidency. The educational progress of
women, produced a profound impact on the Presidency as a whole in a significant manner in various spheres.

**Significance of Study**

Women are the cradle of civilization for progress and prosperity of any country and hence the contribution of women is very important. It is the women who may indirectly lead because they shape the family from which leaders emerge. The systematic expansion of women education is necessary for the achievement of all sided developments of the nation and state.

**Objectives of the Study**

The main objectives of the present study are as follows.

- To analyze the influence of western ideas and thoughts on the education of women in the Madras Presidency, with special reference to Colonial City of Madras.
- To highlight the works of indigenous societies, various missionaries, British Government policies and acts, role of social reformers for the enhancement of women education in the Madras Presidency, with special reference to the Colonial City of Madras.
- To portray the development of primary, secondary, higher education of women in the Madras Presidency with special reference to the Colonial City of Madras.
To examine the British policy towards women education in the Colonial Period.

**Hypotheses**

This Study proposes to test the following hypotheses.

1. There was gradual educational Development in the Pre-Mutiny Period of the Colonial Rule.

2. The Colonial British Rule laid the foundation for the Modern Educational System in Madras Presidency.

3. The Wood’s Dispatch marked the milestone which ensured the educational activities of the women.

4. The seclusion of women from learning was brought to an end and it was the beginning of learning for all women irrespective of caste and religion.

5. The primary, secondary, higher education of women gained growth and many educational institutions emerged in the colonial City of Madras.


7. The Christian Missionaries were the pioneers in providing education to the women.
Chapterization

The present study consists of six Chapters, excluding an Introduction and a Conclusion.

The Introduction Chapter deals with the condition of women through the ages, early political history of the City of Madras, choice of topic, area and period of study, significance of study, objectives, hypotheses, chapterization, sources and review of literature methodology and limitations.

The First Chapter focuses on the position of women in the ancient and medieval period. From the Vedic Period, women enjoyed equal status with men in every field such as political, social, economic and religious. They were treated with dignity and respect. The prejudices and discrimination against the birth of a female child were unknown.

The Second Chapter explains the origin and development of women’s education prior to Wood’s Dispatch. There are historical references from the Seventeenth and the Eighteenth Centuries to women in South India, who were honored for their erudition.

Traditionally, education had emphasized learning by rote and oral transmission of sacred texts and some mathematics. While some communities had traditionally educated their daughters in indigenous pyal school which was conducted on verandahs and a few upper caste girls had private home
tutors. Formal education was outside the realm of girls until Christian missionaries started schools in the Eighteenth Century.


The Fourth Chapter highlights the Wood’s Dispatch of 1854 and its impact on women education. The landmark in Indian Educational History was Charles Wood’s Dispatch of 1854 which first evinced a special interest in girls’ schooling. The 1854 Dispatch also recommended a system of Anglo-vernacular education similar to that adopted by missions.

The Fifth Chapter deals with British Government’s policy towards women’s education from 1854 to 1900. It was only in 1866 that the subject of female education came under serious consideration by the Government though earlier several missions had taken practical steps towards the establishment of elementary schools for girls.

The Sixth Chapter makes an attempt to project women education in Madras Presidency in general and the Colonial City of Madras especially in the first half
of the Twentieth Century. During this period, there was considerable increase in the number of schools, which imparted education to women. Many girls could obtain education at all levels.

In Conclusion, the summary of the chapters which deals with the activities of the missionaries, the educational activities and policies of the British Government and how they improved the girl’s education in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century’s, is given. It also contains a survey of the trends in women education in Madras Presidency in general and Colonial City of Madras in particular. Further, general and specific findings of the study are highlighted. The hypotheses of the study are substantiated.

**Sources and Review of Literature**

The source materials used in this thesis are varied. They are broadly categorized as primary and secondary sources. The primary sources utilized in the preparation of the thesis consisted of mainly archival records, Government orders, Reports, Almanacs, Handbooks, Gazatteers and Manuals.

The Almanac and compendium of Intelligence, published by the Madras Government in 1865, 1875 and 1890 and Directory of Madras and Southern India, published by the Government of Madras from 1908 – 1936, furnished valuable statistical data pertaining to the educational activities in the Madras City. The official handbook of the City of Madras Published by the Corporation in 1933 and
Handbook of the Madras Records, authored by J. Tallboys. Wheeler also constituted very valuable primary source for the study.

C.D. Maclean’s *Manual on the Administration of Madras Presidency*, printed and published by the Madras Government in 1885 has provided data which were quite vital and relevant for the present research. Early evangelical literature, by both men and women tended to romanticize the Hindu women’s plight and urged fervently that Christianity alone would release women from bondage. This is evident in the London Missionary Society’s records, among others. Syed Nurullah and J.P. Naik’s *History of Education in India: During the British Period*, presents the educational developments in India and education of women during the Modern Period. Women’s Education in India 1813 – 1966 by Y.B. Mathur focuses on early nineteenth century social customs and spectacular transformation due to the spread of education and the dedicated efforts of the missionaries, the zeal and sacrifices of the social reformers, the generous financial help by philanthropists as well as the helpful policies of the Government. The story of south Indian Schools (1973) by K.N. Brockway’s, *A Larger Way for Women Aspects of Christian Education for Girls in South India 1712 – 1948*, gives a detailed account on female schools in South India. S. Satthianadhan’s *History of Education in the Madras Presidency*, the first of its kind, throws light on the continuous history of educational operations in the Madras Presidency. P. Thomas’s *Indian Women Through the Ages*, gives an elaborate account on women education in India. The review of the above studies clearly indicated that
the women education in the Madras Presidency was very scanty. A critical and comparative study of the different sources helped the corroboration of evidences and the pursuit of the theme of research in a scientific way.

**Methodology**

The methodology employed in the preparation and presentation of the thesis was historical and analytical. Deductive process was utilized to arrive at logical conclusion in the light of the relevant data collected. Data were gleaned and culled out from a plethora of source materials pertaining to the topic of research. These source materials were judiciously employed to present the facts and findings in a coherent and logical manner so as to bring out certain information not so far explored.

**Limitations**

Though a conscientious effort was made in the present study to maintain clarity and coherence, repetition of known facts was at times unavoidable. It has not been possible, however, for want of time and space to include certain aspects within the scope of this study. Only significant aspects, issues and measures related to women education in the given period of the study were covered. Though the scope of the study was confined to the Madras Presidency, with special reference to the Colonial City of Madras, on some occasions, it was found impossible to strictly adhere to it and the British India was also taken for the background.