

# **CHAPTER- 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

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## **Chapter 1**

# **Introduction**

In an ideal society, men and women are equal. However, throughout the world, in most societies and cultures that are strongly patriarchal, women have a subordinate status. The Constitution of India has conferred on all Indians, the Right to equality as a fundamental right. All Indians are equal before the law (article 14), no one can be discriminated against by the State on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth (article 15 (1)), all Indians are guaranteed equality of opportunity in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State (article 16). The Constitution directs the State to secure equally for men and women, the right to an adequate means of livelihood, equal pay for equal work (article 39 (a) and (d)), just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief (article 42). In fact, the Constitution directs the State to make special provisions in favour of women (also children) (article 15(3)) and to promote harmony and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (article 51(A)(e)) (Menon-Sen and Shiva Kumar, 2001). In addition to these constitutional provisions for the equal treatment of women, the Seventy third and Seventy fourth constitutional amendments have provided reservation of 33 percent seats for women in the Panchayats and Municipalities, to promote their political participation. Despite the existence of these constitutional guarantees and the fundamental right to equality, there are wide disparities between men and women in India in terms of important human development indicators such as education, economic and political participation, and health. The wide disparities in education, economic and political participation and health are the manifestation of the discrimination against women, which has been practiced for centuries.

## **1.1 Status of Women in India: A Glimpse through History**

Jawaharlal Nehru has rightly said that the most reliable indicator of a country's, character is the status and social position of women more than anything else. According to Altekar (1944) one of the best ways to understand the spirit of the civilization and to appreciate its excellence and realize its limitations is to study the history of the position and status of women in it.

The status of women differs from country to country and from time to time. In India, centuries of discrimination against women has resulted in their low status in society. On turning the pages of history, one would find how the status of women in Indian society declined.

### **1.1.1 Women in the primitive period**

In the primitive period, women would appear to have been equal to men, both mentally and physically. Observations made among savage races of the present days which are presumably at a similar stage of civilization, also point to this conclusion, that no differences between the male and female, either in physique or intellect.

In the most primitive stage of human life, there was no permanent union between man and woman. Then the custom of marriage arose, out of which developed the system of home, the family, the tribe and the nation. It was a woman who reared children, built the rude hut in which the family lived, made scanty clothes they possessed, fed the household. Later on, with the human race increasing, it was found incumbent to sow and plant, it was chiefly women at harvest time gathering in the crops. Subsequently, the nomadic life of the tent was abandoned for that of a fixed home.

As societies became more patriarchal, patrilocal, patrilineal, boys in the family assumed adult status and roles within the same family, where they were born and brought up. They were permanent members of their family. Girls were looked up as

members of other's families, because they had to be transferred to their husbands' family. As a result they were considered as a burden to their natal family.

### **1.1.2 Women in the Vedic age**

In the Vedic age, women took part freely in the social and political life and in the celebration of religious functions and rituals. Instances quoted from the Vedas, establish the fact that women enjoyed an equal status to that of men in the Vedic period. A husband and wife had to jointly perform the *yadnyas* or sacrifices. For instance, when Brhaspati went away for practising penance, leaving his wife, Juhu at home, the God regarded his act of performing penance alone improper as he did it alone without his wife. A woman could compose *mantras*. Indrani, the wife of Indra, was well versed in the sacred texts.

Women could move freely with their husbands and lovers and they had the freedom to choose their husbands. Boys and girls were married only after they had reached maturity. Widow could remarry or resort to *niyoga*, if they desired to bear a child. Women's rights of inheritance and succession as daughters or unmarried women were fully recognized. They took up a number of professions and worked as dyers, embroiderers and basket-makers, etc.

Girls were educated like boys. Some evidences available in the ancient literary sources like the Vedas and the *puranas* (scriptures), which are the sources of information for periods before the sixth century BC, suggest the possibility of the concept of universal education of providing a minimum standard of education to every boy and girl (Dange, 1949; Desai, 1961). The 'Rig Veda' provides information on female education. Studies by Altekar (1938, 1944) and Mukherjee (1951) show that higher learning was imparted in *Gurukuls*. There is no indication of any disability attached to women regarding studies. Women have been described as highly educated and cultured. There was no heroine in any drama or poem, who did not have a proper education.

According to Desai (1976), during this period, the initial education took place at home. A member of the family was the teacher and all brothers and sisters in the family sat together and received education from elders. Thus it is obvious that there was no segregation of boys and girls in education, co-education was not only natural but also inevitable.

Thus the available evidence suggests that in the Vedic and the Epic (Puranic) period, women had an equal status as men. They occupied an important position in society. Not only in spheres of education but also in other fields women were treated with men on equal terms. Vyas (as cited in Garewal, 1977) however contends that women were treated as chattel, kings even commoners bought and sold women as slaves. In the Ashvamedha rites, kings offered their queens as part of the fee to priests who could exchange them for money. A wife was often considered expendable. Quoting from the epic Ramayana, he states that when Laxman was seriously wounded in the battle against Ravana, Ram is said to have exclaimed that anyone could find a wife anywhere, but not a brother.

Women's religious, social, and educational status began to decline after 300 BC, when Aryans began to marry non-Aryan women (Garewal, 1977). This development ultimately led to the gradual withdrawal of the girls' right to undergo the *upanayana* ceremony. This denial of the *upanayana* rights to girls gradually cut through their opportunities for education.

Women became more and more dependent on men. Women's independence was curtailed by the *Manu-smruti* (Laws of Manu), which prescribes that "By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house. In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent". Women were to be prevented from performing religious rites and even the knowledge of the Vedas was to be kept away from them. Thus, women, who were one time the authors of some of the finest Vedic hymns, were denied the right to study Vedas. Women's education disappeared completely due to the social

changes that took place in the later years. The evil of child marriage, which also gradually crept into society, made the education of girls virtually impossible (Mathur, 1973).

### **1.1.3 Women in the Buddhist society**

As in the Vedic period, in the Buddhist period also, women had an equally high position in Indian society. Buddhism, in its essence is a religion of self culture and self restraint. One who is able to develop these two qualities whether a man or a woman, can have access to Nirvana. Hence, even a woman was able to attain the Nirvana. Thus, after a very long period, since the dissolution of the Vedic society, the doors of religion were once again opened to women and their right to salvation proclaimed. Thus Buddhism offered great freedom and equality for women in the sphere of religion. Even former courtesans like Amrapali and Vimala were admitted in the Buddhist Order of *Bhikkhunis* (or nuns).

### **1.1.4 Women in the medieval period**

The social political and economic changes that took place in the medieval age brought down further the status of women. Child marriages came into vogue because the *smrutis* declared that it was a heinous sin for the parents, if they did not arrange their daughter's marriage before a specified age, that is, before they attained their adolescence. Since the marriage had to be within the same caste, the choice of a suitable husband was extremely difficult as it was limited. The problem of the daughter's marriage was an immense anxiety for the parents as soon as the daughter was born. Hence, when they found a suitable match, the marriage was contracted even though the couple might be children.

The Indian society throughout this period remained a patriarchal society with father as the head of all domestic and social affairs. The family being patriarchal women's position was inferior. Greater significance was attached to the male child, which finally resulted in polygamy and female infanticide. The husband was God for the wife. Women could not take their own decisions. They had to depend on their brothers, husbands or sons. Widow remarriage was totally banned. Since widow

remarriage was totally banned, the fate of the child widow was to be worst. She was compelled by social customs and even forced physically to burn herself alive on the funeral pyre of her dead husband. This practice was known as *Sati*, was prevalent until it was finally banned by the Colonial Government in 1829. Thus, the emergent cultural, religious and political factors in Indian society dealt a death blow to women's status resulting in their exclusion from social, economic and political participation and increasing their dependence on men.

According to available historical records, free movement of women was rather impossible because of the family traditions and the rigid *purdah* systems, which compelled them to remain within the four walls of the house. It was not considered befitting for women of high and noble families to move out from home unaccompanied or without a *purdah*. The latter was a symbol of nobility and culture.

A consequence of this was complete withdrawal of girls from public spaces and this consequently reduced the opportunities for girls' education. Higher learning took place in *pathshalas* (Mathur, 1973). The instructions were through Sanskrit and curriculum covered all sorts of traditional classical learning. Teachers were mostly Brahmins. Although girls used to study in these pathshalas, they were not the female children of the masses. They were daughters of either royal families or of affluent Brahmins (Mathur, 1973). Thus, women of the upper classes were highly accomplished and respected, but their numbers were few. The middle and lower class women who constituted the major part of society led a degraded life without any status and education.

Altekar (1944) remarks, "society had a general prejudice against female education. It was believed that a girl taught to read and write would become a widow." He concludes that women had almost ceased to be literate towards the eight century A.D. There existed a large network of indigenous elementary schools, which only upper caste girls attended. Thus one could conclude that women's social, religious and educational status was by and large very low in medieval times.

Only a very limited number of females from high castes had enjoyed both status and education.

### **1.1.5 Women in the Muslim period**

The Muslim invasion brought about further deterioration in the position of women. The Hindu Society became more and more rigid. Child marriages continued to be common and Sati was prevalent among many classes of the Hindus. Polygamy and purdah were two of the most important social institutions of the Muslim conquerors of India. This system prevailed among the Hindus as well as Muslims. Under the purdah system not only women required to live in a secluded (private) apartment in the house but also they had to dress in apparel that completely covered their body except their eyes. They lived in seclusion and under the purdah in towns. Women were completely dependent upon their male relatives for subsistence. In the villages, where women had had to work the position was less rigid. Restriction on women's rights and freedom made their hardships aggregated. Only a few of the upper classes were educated.

However, women's life at the Mughal Court was relatively free of restraint. The ladies of the royal harem mixed freely with their male friends and visitors. They often dressed in male attire, played polo, and engaged in music. They were free to remarry after divorce and some did so more than once after divorce. Mughal women enjoyed a large degree of freedom in choosing their partners and marriage was not devoid of personal choice. There was no system of child marriage among Muslims. Mughal women played pivotal role in politics and commerce. Emperor Akbar's mother, Maryam, played an important role during the initial years of her minor son Akbar's rule. She retained a commanding till the last days of her life, although there were other ladies at court who were active players in Mughal politics and played a vital role towards her son Akbar. Nurjahan Begum, Emperor Jahangir's queen, played an active role in the administration of the Empire during his reign and was the only Mughal queen to have her face inscribed on a coin of the realm. The mothers, daughters and wives of the Mughal emperors enjoyed all the rights like men.

The historical evidences show that the Mughal women were generally more educated. Sahay (1968) observes "The age of the great Mughals also witnessed the establishment and growth of a number of first rate libraries in this country. They were in Lahore and Multan. However, agencies of women's education were mostly temples, mosques and homes."

The diaries and autobiographies of Baburs daughter Gulbadan Begum, Shahjahans daughter Zebunnisa are well known as both historical and literary documents. One can easily say that the general status of women's education during the Muslim period was progressive. Muslim women possessed wide knowledge of the sacred and classical literature.

According to Mathur (1973) with the event of the Muslim period, another system of education was imported in to the country. The Muslims had the *maktabs*. The schools generally attached to the mosques and functioned with the primary objective of teaching boys and girls to read and write and to read the holy Quran. The *Madarasah* was an institution of higher learning. The language was Urdu and Persian. The teachers were *Maulvis* or the religious preachers. The general population of the Muslim women of the upper, middle and lower classes were considered sufficiently educated. This was possible because the Islamic faith acknowledges the equality of men and women in both ability and intelligence. The acquisition of knowledge is enjoined in Islam as compulsory on every man and woman and the significance of education emphasised by Prophet Mohammed himself (Sahay, 1968).

Hindu women however, did not enjoy all these rights. In this respect, Altekar's (1938) conclusions are worth noting, "During the Muslim rule, the percentage of literacy among Hindu women went down with great rapidity. Rich and cultured families were as a rule ruined by the new political revolution. They were no longer in a position to make special arrangements for the education of their daughters." The decline of literacy among Hindu women was marked and the steady deterioration of women's status continued till the nineteenth century.

### **1.1.6 Women in the British rule**

When Indians came in vital contact with the British in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the position of the Indian women had reached the maximum degree of deterioration. Both Hindu and Muslim societies were feudal in character, and the position of the woman was very low. The patriarchal joint family, the customs of polygamy and purdah system, the property structure, child marriage, self immolation of the widow (Sati) or a personal inferior status, all these smothered the development of women. Ideologically, women were considered a completely inferior species, inferior to the male, having no significance, no personality or aspirations of their own. A woman had no separate status as a member of the family or society. A daughter was a burden to be disposed of as quickly as possible through her marriage. For her husband, the woman was an object for having male children. She was further regarded unfit for participation in social, political or religious function of any significance, she was not even worthy of receiving education. Thus, not only social institutions and customs thwarted the free growth of her personality, but the prevailing ideology also assigned the Indian woman an inferior status.

The British rule, in the middle of the eighteenth century brought a visible effort from a group of social and religious reformers to improve the condition of women in Indian society. Social reforms were introduced, the practice of Sati was abolished, female infanticides were banned, re-marriages of widows were legalized and inter-caste marriages were recognized, the age of marriage was raised, education for girls came into the picture. Reformers like Rajaram Mohan Roy, justice Ranade, Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and others encouraged education of girls and worked to remove all evil customs from the Hindu society.

Later, in the twentieth century Mahatma Gandhi also tried his best that women should be freed from social and legal disabilities and raised from their inferior position concerning guardianship, inheritance and marriage. Because of his encouragement that opinion in favour of a unified civil code covering subjects such as marriage and divorce, succession, guardianship and adoption emerged.

The social reforms increased women's participation in the freedom movement and they became more visible in public and in leadership roles. Women's movement in India took place in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The wives, sisters and daughters of reformers joined the movement. By the early twentieth century women's own autonomous organizations began to be formed. By the thirties and forties a special category of "Women's activism" was constructed. There were uncountable women who took active part in freedom struggle. Sarojni Naidu, from Hyderabad, worked for the cause of women's suffrage. Aruna Asaf Ali from Bengal was actively involved in the Salt Satyagraha, addressing public meetings and leading the manufacture of salt. Rani Gudiiallo from Nagaland got involved in the struggle for independence at the age of thirteen. In 1931-32 she led a no-tax campaign. There were many women revolutionaries. Preetilata Wadedar, a staunch believer in and follower of the Swadeshi movement, joined nationalist groups at college and learnt how to wield *lathis* and swords. Durga Bhabhi, a contemporary of Bhagat Singh, helped him to escape from Lahore. Bina Das made an attempt to assassinate Stanley Jackson, the Governor of Bengal. The 72-year-old Matangini Hazra, who took active part in Quit India movement, was felled by police bullets. Shanti Ghosh and Suniti Chaudhary were sentenced to life imprisonment for their 'terrorist' activities. Thus, women in India took an active part in the struggle for freedom.

### **1.1.7 Women in the Independent India**

The Preamble to the Constitution of India resolved to secure all its citizens, justice to social, economic and political aspects, liberty of thought and opportunity and to promote among them all fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation. The constitution of India provides with equal rights and privileges for men and women. The right to equality is considered to be the fundamental right for every citizen without discrimination on the basis of gender, race, social class, caste, creed, economic group etc. As also mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, equal rights are guaranteed by articles 14, 15, 16, and 39 of the Constitution of India. A number of laws and legislations have been put in place to ensure women's

civil, economic and political rights. For instance, bigamy and polygamy were made illegal in 1955-1956 under the Hindu Marriage Act and daughters' share in ancestral property, equal to that of sons, was acknowledged in the Hindu Succession Act. The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1976 increased the age for marriage of a girl to 18 years from 15 years and that of a boy to 21 years. The Factories Act of 1948 (amended up to 1976) provides for establishment of a crèche where 30 women are employed (including casual and contract labourers). The Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 provides for equal pay to men and women for equal work. The Prohibition of Dowry Act (1961), the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act of 1986 and the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 have also been passed to protect the dignity of women and prevent violence against them as well as their exploitation. India has also made an international commitment to eliminate discrimination against women and promote gender equality by ratifying the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Though improvement in the status of women was a pledge made by the constitution makers and admitted by the Government from the very beginning as one of the major tasks facing the country, women still face considerable discrimination. Coonrod (1998) has identified seven major areas of discrimination against women in India: malnutrition (tradition requires they eat last and least throughout their lives), poor health (receive less health care than males), lack of education (girls less likely to be educated than boys and more likely to be withdrawn from school), overwork (work longer hours, more arduous but least recognised work), unskilled (primary employment sector is agriculture), mistreatment (rise in dowry harassments, deaths, sexual assaults), and powerlessness (no autonomy on who they will marry, inheritance rights).

The Government of India has been implementing various programmes for the alleviation of poverty as well as specific programmes for women in the Five-Year Plans. Committee on the Status of Women appointed in 1971, gave its report in 1974 which was titled "Towards Equality" (Department of Social Welfare, 1974). The

report was a turning point for the women's rights. It made the following recommendations:

- Equality not merely for justice but for development
- Focus should be on economic empowerment of women
- Child bearing a shared social responsibility
- Recognition of household work as national productivity
- Marriage and motherhood should not be a disability
- Emancipation of women to be linked to social emancipation
- Special temporary measures for de facto equality

The Sixth Five Year Plan included a chapter on "women in development and gave place to employment generation strategies for poor rural women. The Seventh Five Year Plan declared long term objectives of the development programs for women to bring them into the mainstream for national development. The National Perspective Plan for women up to 2000 A.D. and the Report of Commission on Self-employed Women are additional commitments by the Government on issues concerning woman's development. In 2001, the National Policy for Empowerment of Women was adopted.

In spite of these efforts, the status of women has still not improved, mainly due to social constraints. Low educational attainment among women is a major barrier. Low literacy rate leads to limited training, underutilization of health facilities, and lack of power or autonomy to exercise legal and constitutional rights.

## **1.2 Significance of the Education of Girls and Women**

Significance of the education of girls cannot be underemphasised. For full development of human resources, the improvement of home and for moulding the characters of children during the most impressionable years of infancy, the education of women is of even greater importance than that of man.

It is significant to note that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had rightly included education as the fundamental right of human beings. The constitution of UNESCO has also rightly directed its efforts to achieve the idea of equality, of educational opportunity for all without any regard to distinctions made on the basis of race, gender, social standing, economic class, etc.

Education has been recognized by the Government of India as pivotal for the achievement of women's equality and it is also a vital component of the overall strategy of securing equity and social justice in education (The Programme of Action, 1992). The National Policy on Education (NPE) envisages that education would be used as a strategy for achieving a basic change in the status of women.

While considerable inroads have been made in the area of women's education, the scenario is still dismal. Only 54 percent of women in India are literate (Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, 2001). Besides the low rate of reduction in women's illiteracy, the retention rates in schools are low. For instance, for every 100 girls in school in rural areas, there are only 40 in class V, 18 in class VIII, 9 in class IX and only one in class XII. The corresponding figures for urban areas being 82, 62, 32 and 14.

In 1971 more than three fourths of the children who were not enrolled in schools were girls. It has now decreased to 60 percent though it is still a very unsatisfactory position. The total enrolment in professional courses, the 1991 figures for women were 32.3 percent in medicine, 7.9 percent in engineering, 8.2 percent in veterinary science, 7.2 percent in agriculture and 10 percent in law. This was an improvement, considering that in 1971, enrolment in medicine was about 20 percent and in the engineering and technology it was less than 1 percent.

In 1971, out of 237000 persons working as proprietors, doctors, managers in business only 5300 were women. Even today women executives are miniscule proportions less than 1 percent. In the Government services, proportion is only 6 percent. In all civil services 7.5 percent in IAS and 105 numbers in all foreign

services. In the judicial service at the level of judges, sub-judges and magistrates, for every 40 men there is just one woman. Among university teachers, there is one female teacher for every 10 male teachers; in research institutions, the ratio is 1:9; in colleges of professional education the ratio is 1:6; and in colleges of general education the ratio is 1:4 among the professors in the universities, women constitute about 2 percent. On an average, there are about 10 women vice chancellors out of total 179 vice chancellors (Pillia, 1993 as cited in Sharma and Sharma, 1995).

Many still believe that girls need no education since their roles in the society are those of wives and mothers. Though this attitude is changing, certain courses of study like home science, needle work, fine arts, etc., are still considered as courses of study for girls, while mathematics, science and engineering are the subjects to be pursued by boys.

### **1.2.1 Barriers to girls' education**

There is more to the low levels of female literacy than just poverty. According to Khan (2004) Some of the significant factors contributing to low female literacy are:

- *Inadequate school facilities.* In many of the Indian states, there are not enough classrooms, schools often lack basic sanitary facilities and water
- *Lack of qualified female teachers* Girls are more comfortable with lady teachers, and parents, especially in rural areas, are hesitant to send their girls to schools that have only male teachers.
- *Lack of transport facilities.* Middle and secondary schools, especially in rural areas, are located far away and girls need transportation.
- *Lack of hostel facilities for girls.* Education facilities beyond the middle level are at great distances from the homes and there are no hostel facilities for girls who want to pursue education above middle level
- *Fear of sexual harassment.* Parents fear for the personal security and safety of their adolescent girls due to instances of abduction, rape, molestation, and withdraw them from school after a certain age.

Niranjan Pant (1995) in his book *Status of Girl Child and Women in India* explains why educating the girl child remains a low national priority: "A boy's education is generally viewed as a possibility of increasing the earnings and status of the family. The value of a daughter's education is gauged in terms of her marriage prospects. However, marriage of an educated girl carries its own practical difficulties, and the benefits of her education in any case are seen as going to her husband's family. Therefore the desire or motivation to send girls to school and ensure its completion is circumscribed by high economic costs, unfriendly school environment and social sanctions."

Sonalde Desai (1994) in *Gender Inequalities and Demographic Behavior* notes that "parents' reluctance to educate daughters has its roots in the situation of women. Parents have several incentives for not educating their daughters. Foremost is the view that education of girls brings no returns to parents and that their future roles, being mainly reproductive and perhaps including agricultural labor, require no formal education. As more and more boys are engaged in education, there is a growing reliance on the labor of girls. Girls are increasingly replacing their brothers on the farm while carrying on their usual responsibilities in housework. A large proportion of the roughly 40 million "non-working" girls who are not in school are kept at home because of responsibilities in housework." According to Desai, "another disincentive for sending daughters to school is a concern for the protection of their virginity. When schools are located at a distance, when teachers are male, and when girls are expected to study along with boys, parents are often unwilling to expose their daughters to the potential assault on their virginity."

As Chanana (2001) also observes "...the concern with protection of female sexuality accounts for whether girls have access to education or not. It also determines the quality, type and duration of education they receive and what they do with it later, i.e., whether they work or not and what kind of jobs they take up; whether they work to earn before or after marriage."

Social control of girls persists among communities that enforce gender separation, even when they live outside of their own socio-cultural milieu, i.e., in social environments that do not practice strict gender separation. The study conducted by Branston (1977) supports this. Branston studied the attitude of parents towards girls and boys in a sample of Asian girls. It was found that Asian girls, even with teachers' note are not allowed for a picnic or a trip. Some of them are not even allowed to take their friends home or go out for a walk. But at the same time Asian boys are given much more freedom than their sisters.

### **1.2.2 Government efforts to improve girls' education**

After independence the Government has given more emphasis to girl's education. The National Council for Women's Education (1968) recommended that there should be special programmes for preparation of girls for different vocations, and occupations. Education at the secondary stage should be vocationalised with a view to diverting the student in to different walks of life. The National Institute of Higher Education and Training should train women to positions of high level leadership and responsibility.

Education Commission (1964-66) fully endorsed the recommendation of the three committees which have examined the problem of women's education in recent years.

- (a) The National Committee on the Education of Women under the chairmanship of Shrimati Durgabai Deshmukh.
- (b) The Committee on the Differentiation of Curriculum Between Boys and Girls under the chairmanship of Shrimati Hansa Mehta
- (c) The Committee under the chairmanship of Shri M. Bhaktavatsalam which studied the problem in the six States where the education of girls was less developed.

During last 25 years, the Commission observed, the role of women goes much beyond the home and bringing up of children. Women are adopting a career of their own and sharing equally with man the responsibility for the development of

society in all its aspects. Women's education has made marvellous progress. It has passed from the stage of indifference to that awakening. Girls in India are no longer stepchildren of nature. They consider themselves an important element in social life.

The Commission invited special attention to the following recommendations of the National Committee on Women's Education:

- (1) To close the existing gap between the education of men and women in as short time as possible.
- (2) The requirement for them should be provided on a priority basis.
- (3) It should bring together officials and non officials in the planning and implementation of programs for women's education.

The National Committee (1976) stated that gap between the education of men and women should be filled to encourage girls to join schools and colleges in larger numbers, and women teachers should be appointed to the staff of the co-education institutions.

Nayar (1991) highlighted in her presentation how the under development of women's education has impeded women's development in the south Asia region including some other Asian countries. The underdevelopment of women's education has had negative impact on overall development. Development needs women as much as men need development, perhaps more. Although a few urban middle class women have had education and managed to reach the higher levels of professional and administrative hierarchies and have influenced the national policies and legislations, generally women's education and development have not reached the majority of women. Patriarchy and low status are conducive to keeping women down and the girls out of formal school.

The entire approach to women's education and development in all politico-social and economic contexts is characterized by 'social expediency' model (that is, how to make women more useful to the family) This social expediency model is to be rejected, since it views women only as mother and wives and in doing so, it

ignores the necessity of restructuring the relationships within the family, economy and polity.

Female literacy is dependent on the social policies and ideological persuasions with regard to the roles and status of women. Non-formal education of women and schooling of girls should go hand in hand with effective health and nutrition policies.

Though improvement in the status of women was a pledge made by the constitution makers and admitted by the Government of India from the beginning as one of the major tasks facing the country, women continue to face considerable gender bias. Manifestations of gender bias against women abound in Indian society in their day-to-day experiences, so much so that most of the people accept it as nothing worth noticing or questioning.

The law and policies reflect gender bias and so do media, literature, customs and folk songs. Mythology and religious preaching play a crucial role in maintaining the gender myths and stereotypes. Social attitude, discriminations and double standards are the constant reminders of the persisting inequalities, crossing the boundaries of time nation and culture. It can be observed that men are also victims of gender bias but problems of women in patriarchal society are more acute.

### **1.3 Understanding Sex and Gender**

The most important category in which human beings are placed is sex: male and female. Although the words 'sex' and 'gender' are used everyday, most people are not aware of the distinction in their meanings and these words are used synonymously or interchangeably. According to the *Wikipedia* (on-line Encyclopedia), sex refers to biological differences between males and females; chromosomes, hormonal profiles, internal and external sex organs. Gender describes the characteristics that a society or culture delineates as masculine or feminine. Gender defines the social statuses and roles that people are socialized into based on cultural concepts about the sexes (Crapo, 1996).

Thus, sex is biologically determined, whereas gender is socially and culturally constructed. Because a person's sex as male or female is a biological fact, it remains the same in any culture or society (unless changed through medical or surgical intervention). Gender defines what role one has in society as a 'man' or a 'woman'. Therefore gender can be quite different across cultures.

### **1.3.1 Sex differences and gender differences**

Sex and Gender are not the same. Sex differences are not gender differences. Using the definitions given for sex (biological differences between males and females) and gender (socially defined differences between men and women), one can say that sex differences are only those differences that can be attributed solely to biological difference. Human females and males differ biologically from each other in various ways: genetically (females have XX chromosomes, males have XY), primary and secondary sexual characteristics, physiologically (males are slightly larger than females), manifestation of physical strength (males exert higher levels of energy for short periods, while females have greater endurance). Some studies also point to psychological differences between the sexes (Crapo, 1996). Alternative theories argue that males and females are basically similar, at least with regard to intellectual and emotional potentials. In this view, difference between women and men reflect cultural factors, the expectations placed on males that differ from those placed on females (Mead 1935; Oakley 1972).

Gender differences delineate those differences that exist between men and women. Gender is a social identity that consists of the roles that a person is expected to play because of his or her own sex. People are born with sexual characteristics, but gender is something that they must learn (Crapo, 1996). Because gender is culturally defined, the specific roles assigned to men and women differ from culture to culture.

### **1.3.2 Gender stereotypes**

Gender stereotypes are preconceived ideas about the distinction between appropriate “male” behaviours and roles and appropriate “female” ones. These are preconceived ideas about how women and men differ in their personality traits, behavioural skills, and predispositions. They are preconceived ideas about what behaviours and roles are considered “masculine” or “feminine” (Crapo, 1996).

For instance, men are considered to be strong and women are weak, men are said to be rational while women are emotional. Being “active, dominating adventurous, rational and creative” are identified as masculine traits, while being “passive, timid, emotional and conventional” are considered feminine characteristics (Abrams, 1993). Tenderness, emotionalism, nurturance, forbearance, vanity, jealousy, etc. are considered to be feminine traits.

### **1.3.3 Male and female roles**

‘Gender role’ refers to the characteristics and behaviours that different cultures attribute to the sexes. What it means to be a ‘man’ in any culture requires male sex plus what our various cultures define as masculine characteristics and behaviours, likewise a ‘woman’ needs female sex and feminine characteristics and behaviours. Gender roles are guided by gender stereotypes, which tell men and women how they are expected to act (Carpo, 1996). For instance, a woman would be considered unfeminine, if she behaves in an assertive or competitive manner; she is termed as masculine and aggressive.

These beliefs lead to norms and rules about how men and women should behave in society. For example, men can be articulate and must express themselves while women must not express themselves or be articulate. Such norms and rules define the roles and responsibilities of men and women in society. For instance, men must be breadwinners; women must be nurturers and caregivers. Because women are weak they remain at home and must be protected and men are strong so they go outside. Thus the division of labour is on the basis of sex. Women remain at

home; they work indoors, while men work in public domains, outside the house. Thus the social and economic roles and responsibilities of men and women are determined by their sex. Women's roles are primarily reproductive, i.e. giving birth, taking care of children and being caregivers. Men's roles are always productive, i.e., earning a livelihood (WOHTRAC, 2002). These stereotyped gender roles are perpetuated in the process of socialization.

#### **1.3.4 Gender identity**

Gender identity is a person's own feeling of belonging to a gender. It is a person's self identification with being a man or a woman, but also can be used to refer to the gender that other people attribute to the individual on the basis of what they know from gender role indications such as clothing, hair style, etc. The formation of gender identity is a very complex process. Most cultures categorise every individual either as a man or a woman.

#### **1.3.5 Socialisation of gender differences**

Socialisation of gender differences begins at an early stage, when society assigns different activities and roles to males and females. It has been demonstrated that family, which is the very first exposure to the child exerts its differencing influence as soon as the child is born. The content of sex roles in a society is derived from the prevalent and dominant ideology which defines what are masculine and feminine behaviours and what are the specific roles of men and women. Several researches have shown the differences in the socialization of girls and boys, in the way that they are treated by parents starting from birth. In the observations of the interaction of infants (7-18 months of age) and their mothers, mothers were seen to initiate more interaction, were significantly more responsive, and showed a more distinct pattern of reciprocity towards sons than towards daughters. Goffman (1971), Masters (1970) and Mischeal (1970) conclude that females are socialized for dependence and males for achievements and autonomy.

Children learn about sex roles in the pre-school years as the treatment meted out to them is role based says Kulashreshtha (1990). In India as elsewhere, the

strong beliefs, is held that girls and boys are different and they should be made to learn the 'right' sex roles. The girls are told from the beginning that they should behave in a particular manner because they have to grow up into 'nice' and 'sophisticated' women, or they have to go and stay with their in-laws, whereas the boys are supposed to grow into 'strong' men. Because women have been assigned the role of wives and mothers, as girls they are socialised to fulfil only these roles. In contrast, boys are socialised to become breadwinners, achievers, leaders.

Tibbett (1975) studied elementary school children and indicated that sex role stereotypes are established by the early grade school years.

It has been observed that a female grasps the essentials of her sex role before the age of three and her subsequent experiences of reinforcements of such role fulfilment in the family, curricular contents, and teacher practices in schools interaction with peer group, other social institutions and media help her internalize the behaviour completely.

#### **1.4 What is Sexism?**

Sexism is negative discrimination against a person on the basis of sex. Sexism is the belief that differences in the sex roles of males and females are biologically determined (Crapo, 1996). Sexism can refer to beliefs that one sex is superior to the other, that men and women are very different and this should be strongly reflected in society, language, etc. Sexism can also refer to hatred of men (misandry) or women (misogyny) (*Wikipedia*, on-line).

According to Kalia (1979), a sexist can be a person of either sex, who believes that: a) gender is the most important criterion for grading human nature, abilities, character, potentials and performances; b) that physical differences between man and woman constitute differences in the opportunities presented to them; and c) that society should continue to nurture gender based socioeconomic equality. Kalia defines sexism as the sum of attitudes, action and policies that use biology as the criterion for discrimination. To justify itself, sexism sets up false

distinctions between sexes. To institutionalize itself, sexism generates practices, laws customs, norms and ideologies that limit the activities of one gender, while not limiting the activities of the other (Kalia, 1979, as cited in Joseph, 1996).

Sexism is tentatively based on assumptions about sex differences which are widely held in society. Since many of these assumptions have been developed to justify an unfair treatment of women sexism is often taken to mean discrimination against women (Stratton et al., as cited in Joseph, 1996). While the view that women are superior to men is also sexism, only in recent years has an awareness of this "reverse sexism" begun developing in public discourse (Wikipedia).

### **1.5 Sexism in Curriculum**

A curriculum represents the totality of learning experiences be it curricular, co-curricular or extra curricular, to which pupils are subjected with a view to getting them educated. According to Crow and Crow (1962) curriculum is a list of activities that includes all the learning experiences in or outside the school that are included in a programme, which has been devised to help the pupils to develop mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually and morally.

As mentioned earlier, parents play a major role in sex role socialization, which begins at an early age. Besides parents, the education system plays a major role in the socialization of boys and girls. Although, the content of sex roles in a culture or society is derived from the prevalent and dominant ideology, which parents practice, the dominant ideology takes roots also in the education system, and is reflected in the curriculum, the classroom practices, the attitudes of teachers and the contents of the textbooks. All of them reinforce sexism. According to Manjrekar (1999), a child acquires knowledge of her / his gender through the process of primary socialization, which takes place through interaction with adults in the immediate family/community. Secondary socialization occurs through the child's social interactions outside of the immediate context. The school is a significant area of secondary socialisation and it reaffirms the understanding of one's gender acquired through primary socialization. In schools, value transmission occurs by the consciously directed transmission of

'knowledge' embodied in school texts, i.e., the overt curriculum, as well as unintended messages of the 'hidden' curriculum. From the 'hidden' curriculum, children continuously and unconsciously imbibe gender laden messages. Teacher's attitudes and classroom behaviour, the organisation of learning activities in the classroom and within also contribute to gender prejudice (Manjrekar, 1999).

The last twenty years have brought about a re-interpretation of established ways of thinking about what is proper for men and women with respect to their roles in society. In the West, feminists made attempts to shake women's traditional values attitudes and aspirations (Chafetz, 1984). However, research shows that around the world traditional sex roles continue to be reinforced in the educational institutions. The content analysis of textbooks used in schools in many countries has also demonstrated that the manner of portraying women and men is similar in all of them. In these texts women appear as centered on the family or have jobs that are considered fit for a woman, while men devote themselves to professional activities, the arts, politics, etc. (MacCoby and Jacklin, 1974; Fischer and Cheyne, 1978).

In a progressive society, men should share responsibilities with women. The role of education therefore is to equip women to carry out the multiple roles as citizens, wives, mothers, contributors to family income and builders of new society. At this point it is important to note that way back in 1965, the Education Commission of India recommended that the psychological differences between the two sexes arising out of social conditioning will have to be widely publicized and people are to be made to realize that the stereotypes of "masculine" and "feminine" personalities do more harm than good to society as a whole. Therefore efforts need to be made to eliminate sexism from the curriculum and textbooks for the creation of an egalitarian society.

## **1.6 Sexism in Textbooks**

Textbook is the essential tool for curriculum implementation. It is an important tool for teachers and students to depend on. Although nowadays a plethora of teaching aids, such as motion pictures, slides, world books, manuals, etc., are available,

textbooks continue to occupy a pivotal position in education. In fact, textbooks are one of the most potent (important) means of influencing the child's mind, of perpetuating stereotype images of women and promoting anti-feminine prejudices. When textbooks are being prepared, the views, values and assumptions prevailing in the society, regarding women get into them through the language used, stereotyping of roles, and unwritten code of conduct.

### **1.6.1 Through language**

Language which is an agency that helps the perpetuation of education is also found perpetuating sexism. The expositing language used in textbooks can be one of the means through which sexism is expressed. The language used therein depicts a male-oriented view of the world. Several areas of vocabulary, for instance, can be cited to show how sexism prevailing in the society is reflected in the textbooks. One glaring instance of sexism is the absence of a sex neutral third person singular pronoun in English. In its absence, one is left with no alternative but to use 'he' as a generic term even after an indefinite pronoun. This practice of using 'he' to represent either sex is often cited as example of dominance of men over women. Another example of linguistic bias often found in textbooks is the generic use of 'man' in such phrases as "The man in the street", "Stone age man", "man being a mammal breast feeds his young", or "the proper study of mankind is man", etc., which are expressions that convey the dominance of man (Joseph, 1996).

Compounding is yet another instance of linguistic sexism. One uses "male nurse" because the assumption is that a nurse is a female and for parallel reasons, we have the compounds such as "lady doctor", "career woman", "woman athlete", etc. The use of such expressions are so common that if someone says "My cousin is a professor / a doctor", most people would conclude the cousin referred to is a man. For the same reason, if someone says, "My cousin is a nurse", the image called forth is that of a woman.

### **1.6.2 Through sex-role stereotyping**

Sex role stereotyping is yet another way in which sexism finds expression in textbooks. Traditionally, textbooks contain more male characters than female ones and only the male is made to take active part in a greater variety of roles and activities. As Crystal (1987) notes, in the early reading books, it was always the boys who were daring and the girls who were caring. Pictures in science books generally show experiments being conducted by boys, while girls look on. Similarly, in sports demonstrations, boys are shown scoring runs, winning races, while girls are shown with Barbie dolls aping their mothers in the role of homemakers (Joseph, 1996).

Studies from around the world (Claudia Harrey, 1990; Harvey 1990; Pico 1979; King and Morrisey, 1988) reveal sexism in the school textbooks, with male characters more likely to be the focus of stories and female characters portrayed in passive and subordinate roles and their achievements and contributions being ignored. Studies by Thairu (1990) and Callus (1990) conducted in Africa and Malta respectively also show that not only are women underrepresented in the textbooks, the textbooks also fail to show the changing realities of women's lives, their active participation in the economy. Instead women continue to be portrayed in traditional sex roles. Closer to home, studies from Pakistan (Shah, 1996; Pervez, 1988; Anwar 1988) have come up with similar findings. Besides the abysmal state of women's education (Shah, 1996), the women characters in Pakistani school textbooks are portrayed as weak and meek, who can be easily exploited both emotionally and physically, and economically non-productive (Pervez, 1988) and the school textbooks up to grade XII are entirely male-centred and female characters in these textbooks are shown engaged in cooking, cleaning and as domestic help.

Studies from India have come up with similar findings. A study of Marathi textbooks of Marathi medium schools (Kelkar, Tamboli and Pore, 1976); Kalia's (1979) study of sexism in school textbooks in India and a content analysis by Kalia (1993) of English and Hindi textbooks prepared by the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE); the study by Kulashreshtha and colleagues (1984) of sex-bias in

language materials; the study by Surja Kumari and colleagues (1984), which examined sexism in the textbooks of the mother tongue; and the study of primary level textbooks in Gujarat conducted by Shah, Lokhandwala and Pathak (1988), have all come up with the same finding that women are underrepresented in school textbooks the textbooks and their portrayal is largely stereotyped.

### **1.6.3 Unwritten code of conduct**

Several textbooks also lay down unwritten code of conduct for women to follow. Directly or indirectly, they give instruction to girls and women as to how to behave. The text always seem to give the impression that girls should be meek humble, soft spoken, and submissive while they encourage boys to be daring, courageous, independent and vociferous (Joseph, 1996). Girls are more likely than boys to be repeatedly told, "Don't speak loudly", "Don't ask for things", "Don't play around," "Don't do this and don't do that". Such restrictions and pressures on the girl child can negatively impact on her self-esteem and confidence in her own capabilities. Apart from these, sexism can also find its expression in the language used in transactive curriculum while putting questions, assigning tasks to the students. For instance, asking girls to clean up and boys carry things.

Sexism also finds its expression in several other ways. In many textbooks, women are depicted as either goddesses or as demonic beings. There are instances in which motherhood and submissive wifedom are glorified beyond limit. A classical example of this type of presentation is that of Devi Sita, who merely accepts her rejection by her husband. Her role in this prejudiced and male dominated society has been upheld as an ideal (Joseph, 1996).

Thus sexism that prevails in the society enters the textbooks in several ways. This biased attitude to women can have tremendous impact on the girl child. This can lead them to have a distorted image of women, which can come in the way of their socialisation, their choice of career, their choice of clothes and even priorities of life. Hence a study that highlights sexism in all its forms was found imperative. The present study makes an attempt in this direction. However, looking into the number

of textbooks at each level and the enormity of the tasks involved, the present study was restricted to the study of English textbooks (lower level) at the secondary stage of the state of Gujarat.

A review of related literature on sexism in textbooks revealed that not many studies have been carried out in India on this subject. The few studies that exist (Kelkar, Tamboli and Pore, 1976; Kalia, 1979, 1993; Kulashreshtha et al., 1984; Surja Kumari et al., 1984; Shah, Lokhandwala and Pathak 1988) have shown that sexism exists in Indian textbooks and that the textbooks do not represent women appropriately, and that the image of women that emerges is that of an inferior entity. The review of related literature also showed that particularly very little has been done to find out the sexist elements in the textbooks prepared by the Secondary Education Board of Gujarat state. This, once again, pointed out the need for a study such as the present one.

## **1.7 Rationale of the Study**

The present study was carried out with a view to finding out the sexist elements found in the English textbooks of lower level English at secondary level. The concept sexism as it is generally understood today means discrimination against women. The patriarchal society believes that men as compared with women are much superior. Since women are considered the weak sex, the society dominated by men thinks that women are intellectually and physically weak. This belief led to attitudes and behaviour that are prejudicial to the cause of women. These prejudices and biases that prevail in the society get reflected in the lessons of the textbooks by way of linguistic elements that have bearing on sexism by way of stereotyping of roles and unwritten code of conduct, etc. As the children in the school going age are not that informed as to make out what is proper and what is not, they are likely to imbibe everything. This can cause great repercussions in their future as the image that they have formed at school about girls and women can generate several problems.

Unless the language and contents in the textbooks are analysed, and the sexist elements in them detected, highlighted and brought to the awareness of all concerned, the prejudices and biases would be perpetuated, and this would stand in the way of creation of an egalitarian society that the Constitution of India envisages.

There are possibilities of perpetuation of sexism not only through the contents of the textbooks, but also in the way curriculum is transacted in the classrooms. Depending upon the attitude and beliefs that teachers hold, they may also be instrumental in not only establishing, but also in strengthening the biases against women that prevail in the society. While carrying on instruction, the expository language they use may contain many sexist elements. While putting questions across the class, they may pose questions mostly to the boys, forgetful of the girls. While calling forth examples for illustrations, explaining and even suggesting role models, they may rely mostly on the men at the total exclusion of women. Similarly, while appointing monitors and class representatives or while assigning tasks to be carried out, it may be always boys and not girls. True education demands equal opportunities for both the sexes. Unless observed, located and highlighted, instances of sexism such as these in the transactions of curriculum, they go unnoticed forever causing much harm.

Parents, principals and teachers are all products of the society. They are born and brought up, socialised, encultured and learned about occupational socialisation in the society which is patriarchal. Being products of the society, they cannot be above the prejudices and biases that it nurtures. They have therefore their own beliefs, attitudes and opinions regarding sexism. People think, feel and act based on their opinions and beliefs. People seldom speak out their opinions unless asked for. Specific attempts need to be made to extract, gather, analyse and make them available so that it can generate greater awareness about the prejudices and biases that prevail in the society. Awareness can lead to avoidance.

In short, it can be seen that sexist books are social poison, especially for young girls who are at an impressionable age. The way ideal womanhood is depicted in many a textbook is based on the norms and expectations of the past, when the notions of democracy and equality were little known. The ideal woman depicted in them provides a traditional background role for women by praising their domestic accomplishments, their timidity of souls, their gentle appearance and manners. The ideal woman is again depicted as dependent, subservient, masochistic in their response to indignities and humiliation, superstitious, blind followers of traditions and mindless beings more concerned with physical beautification. The ideal woman thus fails to convey initiative, enterprise, physical powers and intellect which are great asset to anyone. Women have put up with such unequal treatment for centuries, but women have now become aware of their rights. People need to be sensitised to sexism. It is therefore necessary to highlight sexist overtones and reduce these as much as possible.

Women constitute about 50 percent of Indian population. The Constitution of India has conferred on women equal rights with men. The law has in every sense banned discrimination against women. However, in the literal sense, women do not enjoy equal status. For the most part, they continue to remain in servitude. They need emancipation. Our textbooks and methodology should play vital role in this. As a preliminary step to this, it is necessary to eliminate sexism from the curriculum. The present study was carried out mainly keeping this in mind.

The review of the related literature also revealed that there is hardly any study carried out in this area in the state of Gujarat. Whatever studies carried out elsewhere in India show that sexist elements are rampant in textbooks. This pointed out as to the possibilities of presence of sexist elements in abundance in the textbooks of the Gujarat Board also. Detecting and highlighting such elements for reasons discussed above were found to be the need of the hour. The issue of sexism raises several questions. What linguistic elements of sexism can be found in the English textbooks at the lower level? Do the textbooks contain elements of sexism by way of stereotyping of women, specification of roles, unwritten code of

conduct and sex based curriculum? What sexist expressions and behaviour often crop up while transacting curriculum? To what extent does opinion of teachers, principals, and parents exhibit sexism? The present study was carried out to find answers to such questions. Hence the present study was considered to be highly imperative.

## **1.8 Statement of the Problem**

“An Analysis of Sexist Elements in English Textbooks and their Transaction at Secondary Level.”

## **1.9 Objectives of the Study**

The study was formulated with the following three objectives.

1. To analyse and find out the sexist elements in the present textbooks of lower level English at secondary level.
2. To observe and analyse elements of sexism in classroom transaction of English curriculum.
3. To study the judgment of teachers, principals, parents and students about sexism in textbooks, classroom transaction and their suggestions to reduce sex bias from the secondary schools.

## **1.10 Chapterisation**

This thesis has been presented in five chapters.

**Chapter 2** presents a review of literature related to gender issues in education, in particular on sex role socialization, sexism in curriculum and in school textbooks, and its implications for the present study.

**Chapter 3** describes the methodology followed in the present study; research methods, the sample, sample selection, study tools, data collection procedure and analysis of data.

**Chapter 4** contains the findings that emerged from the content analysis of the sexist elements in the lower level English textbooks at secondary level. It describes the elements of sexism that occur in classroom transaction of the English curriculum. It also presents the views of teachers, principals, parents and students about sexism in textbooks, classroom transaction and their suggestions to reduce sexism from the secondary schools.

**Chapter 5** is a summary of the present study. It presents the major findings of the study and provides suggestions for possible areas of further research allied to the present investigation.