INTRODUCTION

‘There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing.

Hence, in the Ramakrishna Incarnation, the acceptance of a woman as the Guru, hence His practising in the woman’s garb and frame of mind, hence too His preaching the Motherhood of women as representations of the Divine mother.’

-Swami Vivekananda

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

In the ancient period women had access to education in India. Gradually, in the medieval period due to social and political changes in the country they lost this right and were confined to the four wall of the house. However, in the British period there was revival of interest in women’s education in India. During this period, various socio religious movements led by eminent persons like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, emphasised on women’s education in India. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Periyar and Baba Saheb Ambedkar were leaders of the lower castes in India who took various initiatives to make education available to the women.
However, women’s education got a fillip after the country got independence in 1947 and the government took various measures to provide education to all Indian women. As a result women’s literacy rate has grown over the three decades and the growth of female literacy has in fact been higher than that of male literacy rate. In 1971 only 22% Indian women were literate, while by the end of 2001 54.16% Indian women were literate. The growth of female literacy rate is 14.87% as compared to 11.72% of that of male literacy rate. But when we compare female literacy rate state wise, Rajasthan is at the bottom of the graph. This low rate of female literacy in Rajasthan is due to widespread practices like child-marriage, female foeticide, female infanticide, dowry system, purdah system etc. Although the government has undertaken many programmes for the development of women, and in spite of the equality of status guaranteed under the Indian Constitution, double standards prevail in every section of the society and in crucial sectors of health, education and social development. Moreover, the social isolation of women contributes to the deterioration of their condition.

In spite of the Indian Government’s efforts to secure justice for women and equal social status, the result is far from satisfactory. Without proper education it is impossible to elevate the status of women in the society.

In spite of the social changes, the society’s patriarchal nature continues to benefit males. Education is not used as a tool to develop the overall personality and capabilities of women. More than acquiring economic and social freedom for women at par with men, the society has viewed education as a requisite for good marital relationship, as a pre-requisite for obtaining a good match and for the better upbringing of children in the modern period. Even in today’s so called highly westernised society, girls are not treated as full persons. There continues to be a resistance against viewing women as successful professional and as economically independent person. The society still wishes to see her as a dutiful wife, daughter in law, mother first, a professional, if at all necessary, in the last. A good number of women are still underprivileged in a tradition bound society of Rajasthan where there is a distinction between lawful legitimacy and general practice.