

CHAPTER ONE

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN LITERATURE BY MALE AND FEMALE WRITERS FROM GUJARAT: MEDIEVAL TO THE CONTEMPORARY TIMES

Through this chapter I intend to survey and analyse the contribution of Gujarati female writers to the spectrum of Gujarati literature. This chapter will look at the emergence of prominent female writers of Gujarat and how they enriched Gujarati literature along with their special feminist inputs that they bring in the representation of women characters in literature will be observed. As my research focuses principally on the representation of women in Gujarati literature, especially in the literature composed by women writers, I have done a detailed analysis of their literature and the changes the literary scene of Gujarat went through in the matters of theme, style, genre and representation of women characters with the emergence of female writers on the forefront. I have also undertaken a comparative study of women's representation in literature by male and female writers and have documented my observations. I have also explored various feminist theories including those of Third World and Postcolonial for commencing this comparative analysis so the chapter also takes note of the rise of feminism, the various stages of its development and its impact in the particular case of India.

I shall begin with a brief comment on the rise and advancement of feminism and its various stages followed by a survey of representations of women in Gujarati literature by prominent male writers during various eras – Narsinh Mehta and Shyamal Bhatt (Bhakti period), Govardhanram Tripathi (Pundit Era), K. M. Munshi, Ramanlal Desai, Jhaverchand Meghani, Pannalal Patel (Gandhian Age), Raghuvir Chaudhari, Manubhai Pancholi 'Darshak', Chandrakant Bakshi and representation of Dalit literature through Joseph Macwan (Modern Era) and Dhruv Bhatt (Post-modern period) etc. Thereafter I shall go on to briefly survey the First and Second generations of women writers of Gujarat and their treatment of women characters in the select representational fiction and then shall conclude with a comparative analysis of the gender images as presented by the writers of both sexes.

1.1 Rise and Development of Feminism

Feminism as a rigorous movement began in the late nineteenth-century and grew in the early twentieth-century with the demand for equal rights for women. At the initial stage

feminism focused on the campaign for female suffrage and demanded equal legal and political rights for both the sexes. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* published in 1792 is one of the earliest documents of modern feminism where she argued that the prescriptive definition of femininity reflects the idea to propagate women's dependent position and insert a sense of inferiority. Virginia Woolf in her treatise *A Room of One's Own* (1928) insisted that women are systematically demoralized and excluded from academics resulting into their financial dependency. She also advocates strategies to recover the writings of women writers and re-evaluate their literature to bring them to limelight and to re-examine the canonical texts from feminist perspectives – examine the representation of women and the stereotyping of gender in literature. J. S. Mill in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) also promotes the similar idea of providing same liberties and economic opportunities to women like men.

After a slumbering for a prolonged period, the feminist movement regenerated with the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) which is considered a pioneering work of feminism where she drew a careful distinction between the concepts of sex and gender. She explained that the gender difference has little to do with biological factors and is the outcome of persistent cultural conditioning. She examined that a woman is forced to take a secondary position in relation to men, she is the 'other' – "He is the subject, he is the absolute—she is the other" (xxii). Another influential text *Sexual Politics* (1969) by Kate Millett exposed the underlying misogyny of chief literary works and writers of twentieth century for propagating an aggressive male sexuality by reducing women to objects of sexual gratification. The goal of feminism was now no more limited to political emancipation of women but their liberation in both public and private spheres.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their book *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979) analysed the condition of the nineteenth-century women writers who on the one hand faced the overt hostilities of the contemporary male writers while on the other hand they struggled with a sense of remorse for breaking stereotype of the gender by taking to writing. Another contemporary writer of the era Elaine Showalter investigated women's position within literary history in her text *A Literature of Their Own* (1977). She has analysed the three stages in women writers' writings namely *feminine*, *feminist* and *female* which signify – imitative, reactive and self-discovery phases respectively. During the first phase (1840-1880) the women writers mostly imitated style, ideas, values and culture prescribed by patriarchy; in the second phase (1880-1920) women writers started to question the patriarchal norms and

exposed the exploitation they had suffered at the hands of patriarchy and in the third stage the women turn to concentrate on themselves without depending upon their opposite sex. The third stage bears the traits of gynocentricism, a term coined by Showalter which she defines as – “the study of women as writers, and its subjects are the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female careers and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition” (242).

Recently a fourth stage or wave has emerged around 2012 which became a movement for women in speak up about their experiences and share their opinions through the multiple online platforms about the sensitive issues of sexual abuse, sexual violence, objectification of female body etc. The internet allowed women across the globe to unite through sharing their personal stories and realize the magnitude of the problem. The fourth-wave emphasised on intersectionality and the social media helped in creating feminist communities. Many hashtag movements started including a famous #MeToo movement on Twitter and internet became an easy tool for self-representation. In India, after the 2012 Nirbhaya Case #Metoo movement caught momentum and a number of cases of sexual abuse came to the limelight through the various internet platforms like facebook, Twitter, Instagram. The major issue with the fourth-wave is that only the privileged women having access to internet and awareness of social media can advocate their rights while the members of the underprivileged section remain outcast who are yet again dependent on the privileged sections to represent (often misrepresent) their issues.

Other feminist critics like Helene Cixous advocated a new way of writing for women which is not limited by the rules of the symbolic order namely language while Luce Irigaray argues that whatever is known about women, including her sexual desire is from a male point of view, a sort of ‘masculine feminine’ while there is a strong possibility of a ‘feminine feminine’.

While the French and the First World Feminism theories developed and flourished on the ideology of gender equality and women’s liberation, they have completely neglected the interests of the black and Third World women which ultimately gave rise to the Third World and Postcolonial feminist theories. Black women have been absent from majority of the feminist theories and they recognized that these feminist work pursued primarily the interest of upper-middle class, educated, white women which did not represent them. Black feminists

have accused Western feminists of reading gender as a monolithic entity, and emphasized the need to consider race and class as issues related to questions of gender. Western feminists have not only failed to read gender issues at the cross sections of race and class, they have also ignored the importance of socio-historical and cultural context in examining the condition of “Third World” women. Many Third World frontline feminists from India like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Jasbir Jain, Mahasweta Devi, Kumkum Sangari have taken a helm to spread their opinions on the situation of the women of the third world countries and have harshly criticised the First World feminists for their negligence of these issues all together.

Chandra Mohanty in her article “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” criticizes hegemonic Western scholarship which consists of producing the “Third World” woman as a singular and monolithic subject. This constitution of the colonial other the White Western feminists are discursively representing themselves as being sexually liberated, free-minded, in control of their own lives while presenting the defining the Third World women as religious, family-oriented, legal minors, illiterate and domestic. As Mohanty argues, “By contrasting the representation of women in the Third World with what I referred to earlier as Western feminisms’ self-presentation in the same context, we see how Western feminists alone become the true ‘subjects’ of this counterhistory. Third World women, in contrast, never rise above the debilitating generality of their ‘object’ status... the application of the notion of women as homogeneous category to women in the Third World colonizes and appropriates the pluralities of the simultaneous location of different groups of women in social class and ethnic framework, in doing so it ultimately robs them of their historical and political agency” (39).

Postcolonial feminist theory is chiefly concerned with the representation of women in once colonized countries and in Diaspora. The postcolonial feminist suffers from, what Linda Hutcheon calls “double colonization” (130) where she struggles to break free from the multiple oppressive binds – a colonial subject, as a woman, misrepresentation in the nationalist discourses and at the hands of the First World feminists.

Postcolonial feminist theory has always concerned itself with the relationship between White feminist and her indigenous counter-part. Western feminists have misrepresented their colonized counterparts by overlooking their racial, cultural, social, historical and political specificities by imposing White feminist models on them and thus have acted as their

potential oppressors. Their presumption that the solutions advocated by White Western women to fight their oppression are universally applicable to all has resulted into the negligence of the issues of race and its interaction with patriarchal system.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak disapproves of the monolithic construct of a 'Third World' as follows, "...in order to learn enough about Third World women and to develop a different readership, the immense heterogeneity of the field must be appreciated and the First World feminist must learn to stop feeling privileged as a woman" (86). Kumkum Sangari points out that the western singular epistemology universalizes the term 'Third World' which, "both signifies and blurs the functioning of the economic, political and imaginary geography able to unite vast and vastly differentiated areas of the world into single 'undeveloped' terrain" (143).

In India, the reconstruction of Indian womanhood through social reform movements helped in building political theorisation not only in the form of feminism but also in the form of nationalism. The social reform movements were initiated by men who considered women as merely the subjects of social reforms and perceived them as passive receptors. During the freedom struggle to prove the superiority of Indian culture Indian womanhood was projected as an essential bearer of Indian cultural heritage. Gandhiji encouraged Indian women to participate in the non-violent civil disobedience movement against the British rule during this period. Indian nationalism attempted to imprison female bodies into stereotype roles where they only symbolize the traditional, untouched domestic spaces. After the independence, the feminist ideology was revived with the rise of a new wave of feminism in the world. They started fighting against gender discrimination, domestic violence, female objectification, patriarchal oppression in both public and private spheres of post-independent India.

Thus, the feminist movement which had initially begun with a motif to achieve legal and political rights for women led to the emergence of various approaches within its broad framework. The diversity of feminist strands which often overlapped one another resulted into complexities at various levels resulting into the emergence of the ideology of post-feminism. Post-feminism term has been inspired by the images of powerful, independent women in media presuming that feminism has achieved its objects of equality between genders and is now unfashionable and unworthy of any serious consideration. But a critic like Susan Faludi has considered this mentality as a backlash, a strategy which "aimed to divide and isolate women at a crucial moment in the struggle for equality, independence and

autonomy” (Joan : xiv). The prefix ‘post’ can be interpreted as a shift in the approach, a process of transformation, an attempt to reconsider and explore newer ways of realigning the margin and evolve newer concepts of freedom and justice for the female self. It focuses on the empowerment individual female entity rather than taking a militant stand for women’s rights.

1.2 Representation of Women in Literature by Male Writers of Gujarat

Women characters have been portrayed in literature since early period of time by both male and female writers of Gujarat. At initial phase the gender construct of both man and woman was on the basis of the expectations of the patriarchal society as essential bearers of socio-political principles. The important point of my research is to examine the discrepancy between the male and female writers in their treatment of women characters and to justify it on the parameter of reality and hence I have conducted a survey of the treatment female characters receive at the hands of male writers during various literary phases. It has been noted that when male writers constructed a female gender in their literature, the bar of morality is raised higher, compared to the portrayal of the opposite gender, with almost unfeasible expectations from them. In the folk literature of Saurashtra, we come across the depiction of women as heroic personalities fighting against the unjust social norms or taking part in battles bravely along with their male counterparts on one hand while on the other hand are women who are melancholy naive creatures bearing exploitation within family or separation from their near and dear ones (especially husbands who have departed for trade to distant land). Women, in the literature composed by male writers, are often portrayed in extreme shades – either ferocious or timid in their disposition and both these images of women as what Virginia Woolf calls ‘The Angel in the House’ (231) or monster are far removed from reality. Dr. L. Thara Bhai notes, “At times she is considered as Goddess Shakthi and at times she is considered as personification of evils. This contradictory nature of the stereotype formation is still perplexing the woman study scientists. In the same culture contradictory stereotypes are available which are the manifestations of attitude of society towards women” (54).

a) Early Images of women in poetry during Bhakti Period:

During Bhakti period in Gujarat, many male poets, taking inspiration from mythology, have depicted women characters from Puranas and classical legends and they reappeared frequently in the literature of this period. The most famous literary figure of the

era Narsinh Mehta has presented two paradoxical images of women (mostly the characters of Radha and gopis) in his verses. On one side we find the figures of lovelorn women and their bold, almost erotic confession of their romance with and desire for Krishna which seem almost chauvinistic in their objectification of the female body. On the other side he insinuates the iconic character of Radha who, through her liberal and ambitious attitude, exhibits the traits of an uninhibited modern woman in his poem *Surata Sangrama* (The Battle of Love) which is an *aakhyan* in form and content. Here Radha is portrayed in an unconventional manner as a ferocious and autonomous character, quite rare for the literature of the period. The poem is about a bet between Krishna and his friends who try to collect their share of curd from Radha and her friends while Radha impedes him from doing any prank. Radha is presented here as a heroic figure, vicious in nature, not ready to surrender easily. She challenges Krishna and his friends for an open battle on the full moon's night. The poet himself plays a character of a messenger in the poem. On the pre-decided night, the two armies march against each other but instead of any physical fight or use of any deadly weapons, weapons of love and romance – kisses, embraces, side-long glances and many other erotic missiles are fearlessly exchanged. The female army seems to overpower the cowherds when Krishna comes to their rescue but he too soon falls prey as Radha shoots the arrow of anxiety and he loses his consciousness. He is carried away by his friends and Radha and her friends rule the conquered territory like lionesses. Radha emerges as a powerful and resilient personality, quite against the socially accepted feminine image.

Another poet of the same era, Shyamal Bhatt, has also created some intelligent and bold women characters in his verse stories. They come out as equal partners to their male counterparts. For example, Abola Rani in *Sinhasanbatrisi*, Jayvanti in *Vetalpacchisi*, Padmini in *Udhyamkarmasamvad*, Shyamkunvar in *Panchdand* etc. seek equal and clever life partners, take equal share of life and struggle like their husbands, intelligent women who disguise as men to help their husbands or powerful women who help the heroine of the story during tough times. It is important to note that both these poets were much ahead of their time in the matter of conceiving independent and courageous women characters in their literature unlike their contemporaries still we can note that the image of female gender that appears in the literature of this period is mostly drawn out of the expectations of the patriarchal mindset rather than the true feminine self. In words of Adrienne Munich, “...to examine portrayals of female characters in male-authored texts... Finding abundant evidence of misogyny in these characters and in gender characterizations in general, many feminist

critics were persuaded that male authors could not speak truly about women. Consequently, they proposed that whatever one could consider as a female presence in a male-authored text would necessarily be filtered through the complex workings of male desire” (242).

b) Portrayal of women in fiction during Reform and Pundit Age

18th century opened up many new avenues for the writers as new literary genres, particularly the genre of fiction, were developed and experimented giving way to the depiction of the current life, socio-political amendments along with a new found concern for the issues faced by women in society. The genre of novel gained much popularity during this period with the rise in the number of writers experimenting with theme, narrative style and technique as well as character portrayal. *Saasu Vahuni Ladai* (1866) by Mahipatram Nilkanth (1829-1891) is the first social novel of Gujarati which threw light on the power struggle amongst women within family with a moral that the reform of society is possible only with the improvement of women.

One of the most initial memorable character portrayals of woman can be found in the epic novel of Gujarat *Saraswatichandra* (1887-1901) by Govardhanram Tripathi (1855-1907). He has presented a range of women characters and their contemporary issues in minute details. His female protagonist Kumudsundari emerges as an image of exemplary woman bearing all the traits of idealness who poses as role model for many women through her capability to suffer mutely for the sake of well being of family and society at large. Her patience when Saraswatichandra refuses to marry her, her meek acceptance of an ill-assorted marriage with a virtue less man like Pramaddhan, her pain of an early widowhood and her ultimate decision to spend the rest of her life in social service highlight her virtuous and divine traits and she seems like a character from a dream. Although educated, Kumud seems to have no sense of control over her life and she timidly accepts whatever falls into her destiny without any protest. The writer has put her character at the summit of virtue – too high for any woman to achieve. One can surely respect her but cannot attempt to imitate her self-effacing and angelic qualities. Conventional notions of glorified womanhood as ever sacrificing goddesses in her socio-family roles without a tinge of reality have been put in practice here. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid reflect their views on the same trend as, “...we need to see how woman and womanhood are inserted into, and affected by social change, and how change is made to appear as continuity. That is, the ideologies of women as

carriers of tradition often disguise, mitigate, compensate, contest, actual changes taking place. Womanhood is often part of an asserted or desired, not an actual cultural continuity” (17).

It can be noted that an active reformist like Tripathi, who has advocated reform at all levels of society, could not allow his women characters to be independent decision makers or speak against the exploratory social norms to bring positive change in their lives out of social pressure. The same writer, who considers marriage an essential part of social life, could not allow widow remarriage of Kumud due to his own conservative moral and social values. Even her decision to remain a widow and work for social welfare seems to be more inspired by the image of ‘*Arya Nari*’ who does not want to compromise her divinity for the sake of earthly love and happiness. As a staunch reformist like Ambedkar observes, “From the male gaze, women continued to be romanticized as a submissive “Sita” or an exploited “Draupadi” to fit into the *pativrata* image in society...women continued to be exploited through child marriage, Sati, widowhood and “Devdasi”” (127). Tripathi allowed his women characters to develop only up to the limit of social acceptance. But he never considered his characters, especially women characters, from the human point of view and uses the old trick of presenting women in extreme shades of ‘angel’ or ‘monster’. His major women characters are prescriptive as he was trying to set an example of a supreme woman for the society whose only way to contribute to the social welfare is through the exhibition of the qualities like kindness, love and sacrificing nature. Ravindra Parekh states his views in this regard, “The writers living in male-dominated society cannot consent as much space to the women protagonists as to the male ones under the name of principles, values and religion” (my tran.; 45).

In the same novel, we come across two other women characters who reflect some modernistic trends – Kusum and Guman. Kusum is Kumud’s younger sister and although she does possess feminine qualities, her character hints at the traits of an independent woman who could openly express her views and take decisions for herself – her resolution to remain spinster all her life indicates her ability to take full responsibility of her life and autonomous spirit. She also exhibits maturity in altering her decision for the sake of her sister and marries Saraswatichandra at the end which hints at her generous spirit and noble intentions. Kusum is closer to reality as readers could connect to her due to her human traits which are completely missing in her elder sister Kumud. In words of Anila Dalal, “In Kusum we have a profile of a modern woman...Kusum raises her voice, declares her decision not to marry, but to lead a life

of her own aspiration...through her, the author has let float the idea of woman's free decision not to marry, as early as the beginning of the twentieth century" (134).

Another character who is portrayed in darker shade in the novel is Guman, Saraswatichandra's step-mother whose conspiracy against Saraswatichandra makes him forsake the family life and abandon his house and Kumud. Although the writer has portrayed her in a negative way, she emerges as a strong minded woman who can easily manipulate her husband Lakshminandan and her son. Guman's over-powering personality over shadows the otherwise strong and reasonable men folk of the household. Guman lacks any feminine qualities like love, kindness, compassion which according to the norms of the contemporary society is a negative trait. As Mary Anne Ferguson has explained, "...the reader is prevented from accepting the stereotype as being rigidly applicable to personal circumstances and from seeing in every aggressive woman a potential murderer" (12). Her confidence and lack of hesitation while voicing her feelings along with her ability to manipulate the people around are labelled as negative qualities due to her gender. The same qualities would have attracted our respect when found in male characters. The novel portrays Guman in negative light for being who she was just like Kaikayi in the Ramayana whose staunchness forced Ram to take exile in forest and return as Lord Ram after killing Ravana. In the same light, only because of Guman's jealousy and conspiracy the otherwise submissive Saraswatichandra could experience life and ultimately take decisions to work for the betterment of society and he emerges as a stronger person at the end.

c) Representation of women during Gandhian Period

During Gandhian Era, many writers came up with their range of women characters. The age of feminine rebel and self-respect, woman's individuality began with Kanaïyalal Munshi (1887-1971) and his array of heroic and dissident women characters in his novels. Munshi's attitude towards women is essentially different from the earlier projection of archetypal women (*Arya Nari*). Munshi's women characters are brilliant and revolutionary and in this sense he was a pioneer in portraying bold and rebellious women in Gujarati fiction. Minaldevi in *Patanni Prabhuta* (1916) is a brave queen of Patana who strives for power and fights courageously for the sake of the security of her state. Manjari in *Gujaratno Nath* (1917) and in its sequel *Rajadhiraj* (1918) is a learned woman with a sense of pride in the matter of her lineage and learning and she demands equal status in marriage. She even shows willingness to remain spinster in case she is unable to find a suitable companion. Her

marriage with Kak, who is not as learned as her, leads to her initial unwillingness to accept him fully due to her sense of superiority. Munshi's other women characters apart from these like Loma in *Lomharshini* (1945), Kashi in *Kono Vank?* (1915), Tanman in *Verni Vasulat* (1913) etc. look quite promising in changing the image of women in literature and society.

However, if we examine these characters closely, we can realize that the writer has portrayed a chimera of radical female self to impress the readers initially through their bolder way of life but their independence and autonomous spirit is only a matter of time as it only leads them in their search for an equal life partners and once this goal is accomplished, they are shown to accept their conventional roles of dutiful wives and mothers without any hesitation. Their education, knowledge or philanthropic activities are turned into decorative ornaments to help enhance their husbands' status in society and are of no avail to their own upliftment. Their independent selfhood upholds for an initial stage but later when things take serious turn they seem confused and their male counterparts provide them timely support. For example, Minaldevi, a strong and powerful queen of Patana, is depicted as merely a puppet in the hands of Munjal who manipulates her to fulfil his ambition for power. She willingly takes part in this power game for the sake of her love for Munjal but later she gets split into two selves where one self desires love and comfort with Munjal and the other strives for the throne of Patan. After the death of her husband, her condition withers as she becomes victim of political plotting and every time Munjal becomes her saviour by showing her the right path. At the end, she decides to live a pious life by refusing to marry Munjal out of her sense of social and moral duty. She even tries to convince Munjal to marry Som in the sequel *Gujaratno Nath* so that they both can lead a peaceful life without any sense of guilt and can concentrate on their personal goals – for Minal to be Sati (pious woman) and for Munjal to be a brave courtier. Her cleverness, strength and courage give way to conventional role at the end. Just like Minal, Manjari, a scholarly and independent woman of *Gujaratno Nath* merely turns into an ideal wife, full of praise and respect for her husband's adventurous pursuits in the sequel *Rajadhiraj*. Her pride in her lineage and her confident conducts give way to her feminine qualities. Mary Ferguson correctly expresses her views about the identity issues of women as following, "Aggressive women who succeed in male spheres are considered unfeminine and unnatural. When women are considered intelligent, their kind of intelligence, their mysterious intuition, is equated with flightiness and fuzzy thinking : male logicity is the norm few women achieve... Possessiveness in men is associated with protectiveness and responsibility, in women with narrowness and selfishness : self-sacrifice in men is marvelled

at, taken for granted in women... A woman may be less or more desirous of sex than a man; either frigidity or lust in a woman is a negative characteristic because the male appetite is the norm. Because of the conflicts among these images, women are bewildered about their identity; they feel damned if they do and damned if they don't" (7).

One of Munshi's plays *Dr. Madhurika* (1936) requires a special mention here. Originally it was a script for a movie for Sagar Movietone Production Company and later was converted into a drama a year after the release of the film in 1935. The theme of the drama deals with a young, educated and career-oriented lady Dr. Madhurika. She exhibits guts by putting forward two conditions in front of her fiancée Narendra – to continue her medical practice after marriage and not to have any children of her own (she wanted to contribute to the National cause thus). She is portrayed as a modern woman concerned about her professional life and as a result she could not pay much attention to her household duties. She is also a liberal minded woman indulging into easy friendship with her male colleagues. Later during the course of the drama Madhurika realizes her husband's attraction towards his colleague Dr. Gaurish's wife and as a result she forgoes her career aspirations to save her marital life and turns into a dedicated housewife. Like his novels, in this play also Munshi has created a fantasy of a strong modern woman with an ability to stand her ground only to replace the image with the ideal one accepted easily by the society at the end. Just like the majority of male authors, Munshi ultimately prefers tradition over modern, submission over freedom for his women characters. In words of Ravindra Parekh, "...her character is developed to give life to the author's imagination and her development is choked when the author encumbers...the injustice suffered by the 'image' of woman at the hands of male writers is greater than the injustice done to the 'image' of man by female writers" (my tran.; 42).

Munshi's contemporaries Ramanlal Desai (1892-1954) and Jhaverchand Meghani (1896-1947) show a variety in the range of woman characters in their novels. Ramanlal has created a beautiful portrayal of family life, love between couples and he has poured his heart in the depiction of women's chastity and modesty in his novels. His women characters bear traits in line with the social and cultural expectations. They never seem to question the social system where they share inferior status and sacrifice of personal choices for the sake of family harmony seems like their imbibed qualities. For example, Kalyani in *Bharelo Agni* (1935) craves for Gautam's love and sacrifices her wishes for his happiness and progress while Daksha and Jyotsana in the novel *Jayant* (1925) and Ranjana and Pushpa in

Divyachakshu (1932) are resentful towards each other due to their affection for the same man but ultimately their negativity converts into a sense of sacrifice. These women seem to present the typical role as expected by men without even being aware of their subjugation. They emerge as pitiable creatures who are not even conscious of their victimization at the hands of patriarchy. Kate Millett rightly observes, "...‘the internal colonization’ of women by men is ‘sturdier than any form of segregation’ such as class, ‘more uniform, and certainly more enduring’" (24-25). In his most famous novel *Gram Lakshmi* (1932-37) which documents the exploitation suffered by peasant community at the hands of the British and hints at the prospect of Gandhian revolution. The writer, being a Gandhian himself, reflects the similar ideology of sacrifice and obedience for his womenfolk. The national cause, it can be said, restricted the rights of women and cast them in particular straightjackets without any feminist consciousness. Meghani has portrayed women as a force behind peaceful family life but the sphere of his women is limited to house and family only and in this sense he has not done much justice to his women characters. Women characters in his novels – Bhadra and Kanchan in *Tulsikyaro* (1940), Sushila in *Vevishal*, Saryu in *Niranjana* (1936) all are portrayed in the same light where we can respect them only for their sense of self-sacrificing love and humanity even though we do not agree with their philosophy of life.

Another famous writer Pannalal Patel brings forth the rural life and rustic characters to the spectrum of Gujarati literature and with his artistic skill and sensitivity make them memorable for the readers. In his well-known novel *Manvini Bhavai* (1947), the central characters Kalu and Raju belong to a lower caste residing in an interior village. But the way the writer has portrayed them, they became eternal in Gujarati literature. Both Kalu and Raju were engaged during their childhood as per the rituals of their community and with age they develop love for each other. But due to Kalu's aunt Malikaki's jealousy and conspiracy, they were separated. Kalu was married to Bhali and Raju was married to Dhadji who is always sick with one or the other ailment. They both bear this blow without uttering a single word of contempt.

In this novel, Raju emerges as an example of an ideal woman who is cultured, honest, loving, kind and dutiful. She is full of compassion and love towards human beings and has the patience to tolerate any amount of pain for the sake of family and community honour. Raju exhibits the qualities of a high caste woman, although she belongs to a lower category. The image of an ideal woman has worked its way here as a low born woman can not earn respect with her natural behaviour or personality unless she exhibits cultured behaviour and

traits like high born. Parth Chatterjee expresses his views on the emergence of 'nationalism' and the politics of image building which moulded and emphasised the image of a 'new' woman who is well cultured, refined with superior moral sense and who is like a counter image of the western woman and such images recur time and again in the literature too as following, "...this other construct is repeatedly emphasised in the literature of the nineteenth century through the host of lower-class female characters who make their appearance in the social milieu of the new middle class – maidservants, washerwomen, barbers, paddlers, procuresses, prostitutes. It was precisely this degenerate condition of women which nationalism claimed it would reform, and it was through these contrasts that the new woman of nationalist ideology was accorded a status of cultural superiority to the westernized women of the wealthy parvenu families spawned by the colonial connection as well as the common women of the lower classes" (244-245).

The writer has chosen ideal over practical for Raju to create an unrealistic stereotype image of a woman – deified, honoured and revered by others without ever considering the point of view of a woman's humanity and her human desires. In the matter of such glorification of women, A. K. Singh has aptly said, "Her glorification as a dutiful wife may lead to her murder in private or as *sati* in public,...for she does not live but exists on the terms of others. These terms become thick layers on herself" (122). On the other hand, Mali (Kalu's aunt) is portrayed in the extreme negative shade as jealous, angry, evil spirited with a sense of revenge. She is considered responsible for the downfall of the entire family including Kalu-Raju's plight. She abuses and blames everyone around all the time. She is self-centred and greedy. Both Raju and Mali's characters are like counter images of each other – one is ideal, virtuous and loving despite endless suffering while the other evil, jealous, full of vices despite no apparent reason. This projects the extreme dehumanisation of the woman's selfhood and humanity.

Once again the traditional outlook has an upper hand over modern, practical point of views as the tendency of male writers to portray their women in two extreme shades has been implemented here. The only difference is that unlike most of the male writers, Pannalal's women characters belong to rural area and mostly from lower categories but the parameter of their depiction is the same. Many male writers of this era have written excessively about women and their situations and have portrayed many remarkable women characters still we can notice that their women, irrespective of their background or education, hardly reflect any real personality traits and mostly mirror the male psychology or expectations.

d) Images of women during Modern Period

20th century witnessed some radical changes in the matter of representation of women characters as modernistic tendencies started to enter and influence literature and we can witness the portrayal of many autonomous, independent and strong women characters in literature. More realistic pictures of women started appearing in the writing of the Gujarati male writers who brought forth the reformist ideology for women in their literature. Although the propensity changed, the mind set remained the same as once again the old trick was implied in a new garb. The best example of this modern tendency is found in a woman-centric novel *Amruta* (1966) by Raghuvir Chaudhary (1938). Amruta is a daughter of an affluent family. She is highly educated, independent person having deep interest in art and who dreams of a life and relationship where she does not have to compromise her identity and freedom. To lead such a life, she has two options of male counterparts in form of Udayan and Aniket. Both are quite different from each other – the former is outspoken, dominating personality who tried to over shadow the other two while the later one is more quiet, sensible and submissive who cannot openly express his feelings. Amruta feels obliged to Udayan for his support and motivation in the matter of her education but secretly she is attracted towards Aniket for his sentimental and supportive nature. She is split between these two and could not decide whom to select as her life partner.

Although Amruta is portrayed as a woman with modern sensibility, she lacks the confidence and courage to make unconventional choice in the novel. Her sense of obligation over powers her feelings and she chooses Udayan over Aniket. Udayan who has behaved quite rudely with her often and used abusive language along with his physical violence with her are all over looked when it came to select him as her husband. Amruta remains a modern woman throughout but in the end her Indian sensibility and sense of gender stereotype do not allow her to take rational decision. She is torn between her concept of freedom and social reality and ultimately she prefers to surrender to social norms over the ideas of freedom. She even decides to move with Udayan who is suffering from cancer to Bhiloda for his better treatment. She has to leave aside her notions of independence and freedom and surrender to the circumstances and end up being an ordinary Indian woman at the end. Perhaps it never occurred to the writer to give a third dimension to his novel where Amruta, despite her obligation and attachment, decides to walk out of these relationships and spends a life with self-respect as an independent woman. She has been depicted as craving for freedom throughout the novel but she could not realize that her very expectation of freedom from her

male counterpart is mistaken as only she is responsible for her own freedom and honour. Aruna Bakshi aptly point out this attitude in the following words, “Independent decision-power manifested by education and the impact of Western culture bestowed women’s existence a new direction, but this altered condition is not acceptable to the male dominated society. Family and society do not approve woman’s intellectual competencies – potencies or her independent personality” (my tran.; 133). Though Amruta’s character seems to be inspired by reality, her plight and ultimate surrender is surely instigated by the traditionally accepted norms regarding women.

Another example of the depiction of modern woman can be seen in a well-known novel by Manubhai Pancholi ‘Darshak’ (1914-2001) *Jher to Pidha Che Jani Jani* (1972) which is a narrative of a life and ordeal of the central woman character Rohini who is educated and mature being, having optimistic views of life. Her dream of a happy marriage with Satyakam gets shattered with the prophecy of her widowhood and her agony is deepened with the false news of Satyakam’s death. But instead of losing her heart, she decides to move on with her involvement in nationalistic activities. Later she marries Hemant but this marriage only adds to her predicament as Hemant is killed within a short period of their marriage. She gets over this unbearable anguish with the help of her strong will power as she turns her pain into her strength. Her sheer courage and deep understanding nature arises reverence for her character in the reader’s heart. Finally her good deeds and positive attitude pay her in form of Satyakam’s return and their happy re-union in form of marriage.

What makes Rohini’s character noteworthy is the fact that for Rohini marriage is not the end of her wishes as even after her marriage, she continues her social activities and emerges as an image of independent person in the true sense. It is essential to note that Rohini is a simple woman just like Kumud of *Saraswatichandra* and she suffers much ordeal in life (even the fate of widowhood similar to that of Kumud) but unlike Kumud who simply accepts her fate and suffers thereafter, Rohini has the guts to move forward and engage in social activities to lessen her pain. This very fact points out towards the changing mind set of the male writers towards their women characters where unlike the earlier times the women are not portrayed as submissive, sacrificing beings but are presented as individuals aspiring for fulfilling life. Rohini sets an example of a futuristic woman, an inspiration to other women due to her unfailing courage and individuality. Also the writer Darshak does not have to face the conventional hurdle of a widow remarriage like Govardhanram due to the changing social mind-set which has loosened its firm grip over certain issues pertaining the

life and issues of women and so he could very easily depict the incident without having any societal pressure or sense of culpability.

Chandrakant Bakshi (1932-2006) is another modernist writer who has approached women and their issues in many of his novels and short-stories from a different perspective depicting the dilemma of women in modern world and he looks promising in altering the gender connotation by presenting an entire range of independent but sensitive and mature women. However, while we analyze his women characters minutely, we could well realize that he has followed the same trend set by his predecessors but in a modern garb. His female protagonists emerge as the counter images of the earlier stereotype women characters who were meek and submissive while here the women are well aware of their rights and power and at times manipulate them to fulfil their self-interests in quite callous manner. They do not care for the society and its norms and openly challenge them by consciously breaking all the rules of social behaviour to advocate the power of their gender. The writer somehow creates a negative image of women whose education and career prospects have converted them into rather selfish demons of modern times. The protagonist Roma in a novel *Roma* (1959) marries an unemployed boy Rajesh Shah going against the wish of her family and later suffers an early widowhood owing to Rajesh's untimely death in an accident. She also has to handle the responsibility of being a single parent to her son. Being an educated and modern lady, she courageously faces all these challenges but at the same time, she is well-aware of her physical desires and gets attracted towards one of her colleagues Rajan Killawalla for the sake the fulfilment of her sexual needs. Later Rajan proposes her for marriage but he is not ready to accept her son and here Roma's maternal emotions and call for duty overpowers her desire of wifehood and she denies the offer with a heavy heart. Roma's dilemma of choosing between the marital bliss and the bliss of motherhood throws light on the narrow mind-set of men of the society who do not mind getting into a relationship with a widow but when it comes to marrying her, they hesitate to accept her fully with her past, in this case, her son. Roma's final decision makes her a respectable character but at the same time arouses readers' sympathy as she earns this respect at the cost of sacrificing her natural human desires. Chandra Talpade Mohanty has rightly observed, "That women mother in a variety of societies is not as significant as the value attached to mothering in these societies. The distinction between the act of mothering and the status attached to it is a very important one – one that needs to be made and analyzed contextually" (340). The writer has put her in a tight spot by making her choose between two options both essential for her fulfilling life.

Keya in another novel *Baki Raat* (1979) is married to a famous artist Abhijeet Dalat and just like Roma, she also faces the fate of an early widowhood. Keya is young and passionate lady who desires to be a mother of a child and as a result she is drawn towards a young research scholar Vikrant and out of her relationship with him, she is successful in conceiving a child. She conceals this fact from Vikrant which results in arising his uncontrollable rage and his attack on Keya. After this incident, he runs away out of fear of being arrested but Keya survives and gives birth to a girl child and later moves to America forever with her child. Keya, no doubt, emerges as a strong personality with uncompromising spirit who can go to any extent to fulfil her heart's desire but at the same time she does an injustice to Vikrant by using him to fulfil her selfish motif of motherhood. Keya while fighting for her individuality falls into the trap of patriarchy by being unfair to the sentiments of the other gender altogether, a kind of role-reversal.

Only through the character of Vagdevi in *Maru Naam Taru Naam* (1995) Bakshi has been successful in portraying a modern woman in the true sense of the term. Tej Shah has been married to Ambika for twenty eight years and they have four children but the couple does not share cordial relationship due to Ambika's egoistic nature and as a result Tej falls for Vagdevi, a modern, independent lady with higher career-aspirations. She also believes in equality of gender and practices it in her relationship with Tej as when they move in together at the end of the novel, the name-plate outside the house bears their individual names – Vagdevi Mehta and Tej Shah indicating their equal share in the house. Although Vagdevi emerges as a woman of substance having modern tendencies, she stands as a sharp contrast to Tej's wife Ambika who is quite archetypal in her behaviour and we can see that once again Bakshi has applied the old trick of portraying women in black and white, of course with different personality traits as per the changing time (here a modern, liberal minded woman selected over an archetypal one), and the man chooses the more convenient option as per his personal and social needs without considering the other woman on the ground of humanity.

A special mention must be made here of one of his short-stories titled *Kutti* which created much controversy due to its thematic aspect and the depiction of an unusually bold woman protagonist called Titsy and a love triangle of her with two men. The story has many bold scenes where the writer has gone to an extent of portraying the various parts of a female body, especially her breasts and the intercourse of the characters openly. This story was banned by the Government of Gujarat leading to an arrest warrant against the writer who later fought a case against the government with ultimately the withdrawal of all the charges against

him. The woman Titsy, as portrayed in the story, is unlike any of the women depicted in Gujarati literature so far with her personality traits of being quite open-minded in the matter pertaining her relationship with men, her open expression of sexual desires and her unhesitant approval of her nudity in front of her male partners. Later when both her male friends fail to save their jobs and become unemployed, she very confidently reassures them of her capacity to earn enough for the three of them with the help of her young and charming body. All the three characters are quite atypical as they are never seen to over-power the other and they accept their mutual relationship without any hesitation or a sense of social and moral concerns. If we observe the character of Titsy from a human ground, we can notice that she represents the male fantasy more than feminine traits as she is presented in the story as only a beautiful body with rather bolder demeanours unlike a woman (she smokes and consumes alcohol and flirts openly without any coyness) but apart from that her character exhibits no other qualities of independent and intellectual personality. She does look after the needs of the two men in matter of food and providing them support during tough time exhibiting her feminine side to some extent. The title of the story *Kutti* (a bitch) is undoubtedly used with reference to the female protagonist and it clearly hints at her lower moral character. Also the picture of Titsy as emerges out of the story is that of a fallen woman (a prostitute perhaps) and although she exhibits some strong traits like courage and liberal mind-set, she definitely does not earn the reader's respect in this manner. Her boldness is just a garb to hide her insecurity as in her hearts she is well-aware of the risks of leading such life where she is simply valued as an attractive body. Michel Foucault's notion of sexuality has been proved right which, according to her, is solely constructed in culture to serve the dominating group. She puts it thus, "There is nothing outside or before culture, no nature that is not always and already enculturated" (12). Even at the end her decision to help her male friends, though looks courageous, will bring more risks to her at being more vulnerable to other unknown men. The men in the story look helpless and submissive but it is the woman who seems powerless without any choice at her disposal. In words of Kate Millet, "...sexual dominion obtains nevertheless as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power" (25).

e) Women in Dalit literature

Gujarati Dalit literature also bears trait of feminine concerns in form of women characters from this marginalized community. An example of it can be found in a Sahitya Akademy winning novel *Angaliyat* (1986) by Joseph Macwan which is set against the

background of Gujarati rural Dalit community of Charotar District of 1930s. The four central characters of the novel namely Teeha, Valji, Methi and Kanku belonging to Vankar community bore the traits of upper caste modern beings insinuating qualities like courage, morality and loyalty. While the male characters are depicted as brave warriors fighting against injustice for the honour of their community, the female characters also exhibit characteristics like valour, understanding and sensitivity. The two female characters – Kanku and Methi represent beauty and chastity of conduct. In this novel Kanku is married to Valji while Teeha secretly falls for Methi but hesitates to show his feelings. Teeha fights against the upper caste Patidars to save Methi from their humiliation and as a result invites trouble for the entire community. Later with the twist of fortune Methi marries someone else breaking their dream of happy married life. After a while she is forced to abandon her alcoholic wife-beating husband and she tries to commit suicide but Valji comes to her timely rescue. Apparently she moves in with Valji with her son Goka without getting married to him and they both lead separate lives under the same roof. At times he is persuaded to marry her to prevent tongue from wagging about them. But before the marriage could materialize, both Teeha and Valji lose their lives while fighting against the upper caste people for the sake of community honour. Kanku married Dana after the death of her husband to save her honour and chastity.

Macwan's women characters, although different in many ways from the women found in mainstream literature, are somehow portrayed in the same psycho-emotional spaces assigned to women traditionally. Both Kanku and Methi belong to Dalit caste but the standards of morality set for them are in accordance to the higher caste women. Even the tradition of remarriage which is naturally accepted amongst Dalits could not degrade their position of pious women of merits. In case of Kanku, her remarriage with Dana ascribes her more freedom as she only married him out of social compulsion and she need not play a role of his wife in private. While Methi's living with Teeha in the same house without marriage hints at modern tendencies (although such practices have been followed by the people of lower or even tribal communities for centuries) and it was quite bold on the part of the author to depict such relationship through his literature in early nineteenth century. Though both the women exhibit traits of modern women like individuality, head strong approach, spirit of bravery, they ultimately have to surrender to the age old social norms and take decision to remarry to save their honour. Their respect depends on their staying within the pre-decided social and cultural boundaries. Even these women are doubly oppressed (just like their Afro-

American sisters) at the hands of their male counterparts as well as by the males of upper caste. The Western First World homogenous Feminist ideology which completely overlooks the multivalent context of the women in the Third World countries poses much contradiction. As Mohanty rightly pointed out, “Male violence must be theorized and interpreted within specific societies, both in order to understand it better, as well as in order to effectively organize to change it. Sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete, historical and political practice and analysis” (339).

f) Images of women in Post-modern literature:

In Post-modern period Dhruv Bhatt (1947) emerges as a major voice with his advocating the concepts of ecocriticism and ecofeminism through his novels. Bhatt has portrayed some incredible women characters with some unusual traits with their special disquiet about the up till now unpaved areas in Gujarati literature namely – nature and tribal in many of his novels. He deals with women and their issues in a new light of ecofeminism which deals with two burning issues of modern times – feminism and ecology. Nature has constantly been considered as feminine due to the common characteristics of the two in form of fertility, tenderness, ability to nurture and both have been exploited by men giving rise to the theory of ecofeminism. Women and nature are united in their fight against the patriarchal system and their struggle to survive. In words of Greg Gerrard, “Ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppression, arguing that no attempts to liberate women will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature” (132).

In Dhruv Bhatt’s novels we can find a combination of both these concerns in the backdrop of ancient wisdom, geographical descriptions of the tribal and forest areas with its innumerable mysteries and myths along with interconnection with science and literature. The two important characters of *Akoopar* – Aima and Sansai represent the ancient wisdom of the forest Gir and they promote the concepts of harmony between nature and human. Sansai emerges as a power house of courage who always feels protective of Gir forest and the lions as she has noticed the interference of human greed with the nature in form of killing of lions and her beliefs in respecting the freedom of movement of all the natural habitants to protect the nature.

His other novel *Tattvamasi* also has many strong women characters exhibiting both modern and traditional tendencies simultaneously, who know the advances of modern life but at the same time respect the age old wisdom of their culture. Supriya is an educated lady who

has dedicated her life in the service of the tribal of that region by running a Tribal Welfare Centre. Her outlook is mature and she has accepted the life style and tradition of the tribal to be able to work for their welfare by providing modern solutions to their problems (she encourages the tribals for artificial honey cultivation instead of risking their lives in the traditional way). Another character is Puriya who is an illiterate tribal woman yet she has traits of modern, independent woman demanding self-respect. She has abandoned her husband who accuses of being barren while the fact is her husband is impotent and is not ready to accept his fault. Kalewalimaa (who is Supriya's mother) is another woman of substance who is forced to conceal her identity for the sake of her survival (the illiterate and superstitious villagers declared her a witch while actually she was trying to save the protagonist during his childhood) and she now plays the role of the protector of all such women who have been discarded by family or superstitious social system.

Ecofeminism argues that ecological survival is interwoven with the women's struggle for liberation. Ecofeminism is a social and ecological movement but when analyzed closely it has its roots in the androcentrism and environmental destruction. Eco-feminist and environment activist Dr. Vandana Shiva (who has been awarded the prestigious Sydney peace Prize in 2010 for her concerns for environment) along with Maria Mies argues, "We see devastation of the earth and her beings by the corporate warriors, as feminist concerns. It is the same masculine mentality which would deny us our right to our own bodies and our own sexuality, and which depends on multiple systems of dominance and state power to have its way" (14).

Thus, Dhruv Bhatt opens up a world of some atypical women with different sets of concerns regarding the protection and welfare of the neglected people of the tribal areas or the poor people of the forest areas along with the survival of nature and the co-existence of nature and culture. They pose as ideal women due to their head strong approach and fearless attitude along with their selflessness and spirit of humanity towards the downtrodden and their awareness of the ecosystem and its importance for the survival of human race.

1.3 Representation of Women in Literature by Female Writers of Gujarat

The continuum of Gujarati literature has been enriched by the contribution of a number of prolific women writers. Women have been contributing their quota since very early times, though slowly and feebly at initial stage and gradually the flow of their literature increased gaining confidence and maturity. The literature of the region experienced a

revolution in the matter of theme and perception with the arrival of women writers. The emergence of women writers to the literary scene conveyed newer standpoints for gender roles with their portrayal of some brilliant and radical women characters in their literature who aspire for a life of freedom and who are well-aware of their inferior status and subjugation in the patriarchal society. The women writers peep into the psychology of the women characters and bring forth the most formidable and unheard issues and fears faced by women of all strata. Their women characters question, express their opinions without hesitation, take decisions for themselves and they also challenge the pre-decided roles for gender in society and family.

The earlier generation of women writers like Lilavati Munshi, Vinodini Nilkanth, Labhuben Mehta and others have paved the way for later generation of writers by hinting at the changing perceptions of female gender in their fiction while the later generation of writers like Dhiruben Patel, Varsha Adalja, Ila Arab Mehta, Saroj Pathak etc. openly challenged the traditional norms and demanded advance in the status of women. The outlook of the earlier generation writers was more traditional as although educated and active in many social and reform activities, they could hardly step out of the precincts of the domestic and social province. Another reason for this could be the dominant traditional ideology which laid down certain restrictions on women who were expected to play archetypal role in family and society. But the later generation writers broke these cossets and insisted radical change in the status of women in society and family. Their familiarity with the literature and socio-political movements of the West threw open a whole new world and issues to write and experiment about in their works. Majority of the literature composed by the first generation of women writers dealt with the life and struggles of educated middle-class women but in the post-modern era this trend has undergone a transformation with the depiction of the female characters from under-privileged class – Muslim community, sex-workers, Dalits and homosexuals along with the portrayal of their life conditions and exploitation (often they are doubly oppressed – at the hands of the men of their families and men belonging to upper caste).

a) First Generation of Women Writers of Gujarat

To take into consideration the pioneering efforts of Vidyagauri Nilkanth, Lilavati Munshi, Hansa Mehta, Shardagauri Mehta, Vinodini Nilkanth and others, countless newer issues related to women's life and identity started appearing gallantly through their writings

and they demonstrated their literary skills to bring forth the unseen world of women and their issues to the forefront through their literary abilities. The first generation of women writers include Vidyagauri Nilkanth (1876-1958), the first lady graduate of the state was an active social worker and the author of several remarkable essays – *Grihadipika* (1931), *Narikunj* (1956), *Gyansudha* (1957) and biographical sketches of the people who influenced her in a book titled *Foram* (1955) along with writing the biography of *Prof. Dhondo Keshav Karve* (1916). She has also contributed immensely to women's magazines such as *Gunsundari*, *Streebodh* and *Sharada*. She had carried on translation activity along with her sister Sharda Mehta.

Sharda Mehta (1892-1970) was a social worker and has contributed tremendously in the field of emancipation of women. She has the honour to be the first woman graduates of Gujarat along with her sister Vidyagauri Nilkanth. She has written a number of books in Gujarati including a life of Florence Nightingale. She has also been an active translator. Another woman activist and literary figure of the period was Hansa Mehta (1897-1995). She was a multi-faceted personality – a reformist, social activist, educator, feminist and writer. Her special contribution to literature was in form of several children's books, translation of a few chapters of the Ramayana and a few English stories including *Gulliver's Travels* and adaptation of selected plays of Shakespeare. She has also penned a number of essays collected in *Ketlak Lekho* (1978).

The most influential of all female writers was Lilavati Munshi (1892-1978) whose literary contribution was the highest amongst all. She has authored a number of sketches of historical personalities, essays, one-act plays, short novels, stories, letters (about her travels in India and abroad) and diaries. In her literature, she represents the inner world and psychological struggle of the modern woman. Her sketches are collected in *Rekhachitro ane Bija Lekho* (1925). Her short-stories are compiled in *Jivanmathi Jadela* Part I and II (1932) and her miscellaneous writings are found in *Vadhu Rekhachitro and Biju Badhun* (1935). She has composed a few novels like *Jasodano Jivanvikas*, *Anubhav Vinana* and *Vanamalani Diary* etc.

Lilavati Munshi endeavours to portray her women characters with human traits like – self-confidence as well as vulnerability and her focus is on the psychological aspects and conflicts of women in modern times. Her style is simple yet distinctive and her handling of human emotions is impressive. Majority of her fiction illustrates the life and plight of

rebellious woman who later had to bear the consequences of her decisions and take refuge in the conventional mode of life. Although the woman who appears in Munshi's fiction is modern in her stance, she is not yet ready to face the life on her own or take responsibility of her adversity and as a result she returns to her cocoon of traditional role accusing a man or some external element as responsible for her predicament in majority of cases.

Lilavati Munshi has beautifully captured the psychological trauma of women of early nineteenth century in her fiction. For example, Jasoda in *Jasodano Jivanvikas* is a rustic girl, who finds herself in a tight spot while making efforts to adapt to a city culture as she polishes herself to be a modern woman to please her husband Bhagvatprasad but was disappointed ultimately when she could not seek her husband's attention and decides to abandon him for the sake of self-respect. Niranjana, a rich widow, in *Buddhishaliono Akhado* with her grace and independent spirit could attract the intellectuals of the town but later her decision to remarry draws much condemn from the same group of the so called modern people who started accusing her of suspicious character and who talk of the demise of Western culture and how to particularly save the women folks from falling prey to it. The write has made a brilliant use of sarcasm to point out the shallowness of the so called intellectual men who on the one hand pretend to be modern and open minded in their conduct but when it comes to accept any sort of reform in society, especially pertaining women, they close their eyes and oppose it. In the same line the character of Premda in *Ghadpanni Lakdi* who is forced to marry a groom of 50 from a well-to-do family at the tender age of 15 wishes to get rid of the rigid social norms to lead a life of respect but has to bear much humiliation at the hands of her husband, step-children and society for her independent spirit. Premda is a modern woman under the garb of stereotype which is reflected in her decisions to get separated from the tyranny of her husband's family and to start a family of her own, her desire to inherit her husband's fortune after his death to indulge in social welfare activity to earn some respect and to be able to lead a life on her own terms. But her dreams are shattered one after the other due to the discriminating policies of the patriarchal society and her financial dependency. All these women found themselves in a tight spot in their efforts to find equilibrium between their personal ambitions and social expectations in the early nineteenth century.

Lilavati's women characters do hint at changing discernment of women towards their own selves and they do exhibit traits of reform. In the fiction by Lilavati Munshi, we can notice that women have not fully come to terms with themselves and although they are gaining confidence gradually, they still hesitate to take responsibility of their lives and to bear

the consequences of their decisions. Their modern guise are misleading as their core is still bound by age old traditional notions of womanhood which they are trying hard to get rid of but have not fully succeeded. However, through her female characters the writer has kindled a hope in the heart of every woman to keep up her courage to fight for her rights and build a life which is truly satisfying and worthy of her selfhood and identity.

Vinodini Nilkanth (1907-1987) was the daughter of the famous writer couple of Gujarat – Ramanlal and Vidyagauri Nilkanth and has contributed to the field of Gujarati literature in form of fiction, essays, columns and children's literature. She also has to her credit the honour to earn her Master's degree from the University of Michigan. She has four volumes of short stories to her credit – *Aarsini Bhitarma* (1942), *Dil Daryavana Moti* (1958), *Angulino Sparsh* (1965), and *Karpaasi ane Biji Vaato* and a novel *Kadlivan* (1946). Along with that she has penned a collection of essays *Nijananda* (1964) and has translated Jane Austin's novel *Pride and Prejudice* and Bertrand Russel's *The Conquest of Happiness* in Gujarati. She had been an active reformist, freedom fighter and a follower of Gandhian philosophy and her reformist ideologies reflect in her literature.

Vinodini Nilkanth deals with the themes of widowhood, extra marital affair, physical abuse and motherhood vividly and the exploitation women have to bear in society is very well captured in her short stories. And just like Munshi, she also advocates patience and endurance on the part of her women characters even during hard times. One of her famous novels *Kadlivan* (1946) requires a special reference due to its theme and treatment of women characters. In *Kadlivan* (1946) Nilkanth has portrayed various shades of female psychology and ideology through her endeavour of presenting a large range of women from various backgrounds having different personality traits. The novel describes the glory and later the downfall of the family at Kadlivan, an estate in Ahmedabad at the backdrop of Gandhian Era. The novel has a number of women characters along with the two central characters of Radha (the daughter of the estate owner's faithful driver) and Swati (the daughter of the owner estate – Mohanlal) and their continual cold war since childhood to prove their superiority and later during their youth to win the love and attention of a man called Soham. Both these women stand as counter images of each other as Radha, although poor, is educated, sensitive, confident, intelligent and she is also involved in many social reform activities. On the other hand Swati belongs to an affluent family and she is bestowed with immense beauty but she is arrogant, immature, impatient and she feels jealous of Radha and her natural leadership quality. Swati suffers a number of setbacks due to her ego and ends up in getting pregnant

with an illegal child while Radha leads her life with confidence due to her mature outlook. The writer has implied an old trick applied often by the male writers to present women characters in black and white however she has been conscious of not to take an extreme point of view and present her women which are closer to reality (as here Swati gains maturity through her experience and Radha and Swati's tussle ultimately converts in their friendship).

Another character in the same novel is that of Yamini, Swati's cousin who represents the true picture of a modern woman, not just in outlook but in her conduct as well. She is an independent spirited lady who does not believe in following rigid social norms blindly and questions them often. She decides to marry a Dalit boy Balakram who happens to be an intellectual and kind person. For the sake of her marriage she takes the risk of eloping from her house to an interior village and returns only when she turns 18 to be able to take hold of her life. She is an aspiring girl with a dream of a bright future and although she loves Balakram and wants to marry him, she does not simply want to end up being his wife and wants to achieve a higher degree to be able to earn some respect for herself. So when Balakram decides to join Cambridge to pursue higher studies to join Civil Service, she also decides to go to Oxford to be able to acquire an equal status. She is an example of a futuristic modern woman who can think and decide for herself without getting into the trap of unjust social system which exploits women in the name of marital and social harmony.

Thus, Nilkanth represents some radical women characters from all walks of life to present the entire picture of the condition of women in society. She has successfully juxtaposed both conventional and modern women in one novel in an objective manner through her narrative skills and has given a hint at the changing gender connotations and social expectations along with the rising awareness of women towards their status, rights and desire for emancipation through her writing.

Labhuben Mehta (1915-1994) is another short story writer with a few collections of stories to her name like *Aabhane Dharti*, *Bindi*, *Shodh ne Ante*, *Monisha* etc. Her narrative style reflects her keen observations of socio-political situation of the contemporary period. In line with her contemporary women authors, Mehta also propagates traditional values over modern outlook. For example, her story *Maatanu Gaurav* celebrates the highest peak of motherhood where Savitri, a widow mother commits suicide to save the honour of motherhood. She lives with her daughter with the support of her husband's family and is an embodiment of an ideal mother. But in a weak moment she surrenders to the advances of a

distant relative and her pain knows no bound when the daughter comes to realize it. She feels culpable for her deed and to save her honour she kills herself by burning. The writer presents a glorified image of motherhood and denies any freedom to Savitri in the matter of sexuality which is traditionally considered sinful (particularly in case of a widow). This traditional notion of female sexuality subjugates women and makes them powerless. We cannot agree more with Angela Carter on the issue of maternal superiority which in her words, "...is one of the most damaging of all consolatory fictions...fertility governs all decisions, choices and relationships" (106).

Along with these major writers, there were other lesser known poetesses and writers like Sumati Trivedi, Vijayalaxmi Trivedi, Savitagauri Pandya (1950-1925), Dipakaba Desai (1881-1955), Jyotsna Shukla (1892-1976) (editor of monthly magazines *Chetana* and *Sudarsana*, penned many essays and poems, translated two Marathi novels in Gujarati), Heera Pathak (1916-1995) (two books of criticism – *Aapnu Vivechan Sahitya* (1939) and *Kavyabhavan* (1961); *Paraloke Patra* (1978), a collection of twelve letters written in verse; *Gavaksha Deep* (1979), collection of articles on Sanskrit poetry) Sumatibeh Mehta (1890-1911) etc. whose contribution must be taken into consideration.

b) Second Generation of Women Writers of Gujarat:

The modern era dawned with a promise to a better life and prospects of education and professional avenues available for both men and women. The rise of Feminism in the West in early twentieth century advocating equal rights and status for women in society helped women become more conscious of their status and they started gaining more confidence with the new found joy of independent existence with excess to public sphere and liberal thinking. The literature reciprocated this changing connotation of gender roles and representation of women in light of new value system. Even before independence, Gandhi's call for freedom struggle and his progressive ideology for women and later Ambedkar's views inspired Indian women to enter public sphere with self-assurance. Ambedkar has also openly debated against the restrictive laws of Manu and how they degraded women's position in society. He argues in favour of educating women in his book *Against the Madness of Manu*,

That at one time woman was entitled to upanayan (thread wearing ceremony) is clear from the Atharva veda where a girl is spoken of as being eligible for marriage having finished her Bhahmacharya...Panini's Ashtadhyayi bears testimony to the fact that

women attended Gurukul (college) and studied the various Shakhas (sections) of the Veda and became expert in Minansa. Patanjali's Maha Bhashya shows that women were teachers and taught Vedas to girl students. The stories of women entering into public discussion with men on most abstruse subjects of religion, philosophy and metaphysics are by no means few. The stories of public disputation between Janaka and Sulabha, between Yajnavalkya and Gargi, between Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi and between Sankracharya and Vidyadhari shows that Indian women in pre-Manu's time could rise to the highest pinnacle of learning and education. (125-126)

Due to all these factors the contemporary feminist ideology evolved in India and female voice started to be heard with special concern in society as well as literature. The arrival of a number of women writers to the fore front of literary milieu of 20th century altered the course of Gujarati literature leading to more realistic portrayal of women characters from all walks of life having modern traits. Himanshi Shelat is of the view that, "...there was a sudden rise in the awareness of women regarding their own identity. The change has begun to take place but the direction is yet not clear" (my tran.; 34).

Dhiruben Patel (1926) emerged a major voice with her tremendous contribution to many genres of Gujarati literature like short-stories, novel, poetry, plays, translation, children's literature etc. Her gamut is broad covering up many themes related to the life of men and women from various socio-cultural backgrounds. Her speciality is her understanding human psychology and she portrays her characters sensitively under the light of their emotional upheavals. Many of her works encompass the theme of the characters' search for self identity and she beautifully depicts their journey in her fiction. Her novels include *Vadavanal* (1963), *Vasno Ankur* (1967), *Shimla Na Phool* (1976), *Andhari Gali* (1983), *Kadambarini Maa* (1988), *Agantuk* (1996) etc. which are widely acclaimed. She has also written short-story collections like *Adhuro Call* (1955), *Ek Lahar* (1957), *Vishrambhakatha* (1966) along with plays like *Pahelun Inam* (1955), *Pankhino Malo* (1956), *Vinashna Panthe* (1961). Her poetry collection is titled *Kitchen Poems* (2011) and she has also contributed widely to children's literature in form of stories, plays and songs.

The shifting circumstances in modern society also posed varied issues for women – to have an individual personality, gaining higher education, stepping out of the impound of

house in search of one's identity, finding balance between personal and professional life, leading a modern life while fulfilling the traditional social and family expectations, to prove one's talent to gain power and position etc. The woman has come to a self realization that she needs to free herself from the faulty notions advocated by the society and religion which were later modified as per the expectations of patriarchy and she needs to be faithful to herself first to stand her ground. Dr. Heena Mehta correctly points out, "The woman first needs to change her perspective about and relationship with herself. The institution of marriage, joint family system, patriarchal society and financial dependency do not allow a woman to live respectfully – having liberal, individual personality is out of question in such situation" (my tran.; 29).

These issues of the modern times found voice in the writings of women writers who subtly and minutely described the emotional upheavals faced by modern women to secure their position in society. The first implication of this changing gender role can be seen in Dhiruben Patel's novel *Shimlana Phool* (1976) which has been narrated around the personality of its female protagonist Ranna and her decision to abandon her house in search of her true self. Ranna expects a perfect harmonious relationship with her husband Vimal who is rather indifference towards her feelings and this fact makes her impatient and forces her to take the tough decision to leave her house. Their relationship has reached a stagnant point where they respect each other and stay as couple only out of their sense of social responsibility. Love and romance has long evaporated from their lives. And for a sensitive person like Ranna this situation is very agonizing. She fears to lose herself while playing the role of an ideal wife. She abandons the house to find her real self, gets various experiences through her encounter with other characters and situations, her stay at Uma's (her best friend) house, her inner struggle and analysis of the authenticity of her decision, the constant flow of her past memories in contrast to her present situation and her ultimate sense of defeat and return to her house only to find someone else's presence in her husband's life, her dilemma at this junction to either turn back or ignore and continue her normal life once again with Vimal – depict the psychological upheavals in the life of a modern woman at the cross roads in life. The writer has portrayed a rational picture in place of an ideal one to indicate the plight of a liberal minded and sensitive woman like Ranna in our society. The dilemma of a modern woman finds a voice here which the sensible writer like Dhiruben has narrated with fine art and delicate style.

Another novel *Kadambarini Ma* (1988) puts forward a newer connotation of relationships between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. It is a story of Kadambari's plight at the hands of her husband and her salvation at the hands of her mother-in-law Vijaya. Kadambari is an obedient and meek woman who is oppressed under the powerful control of her mother. She is married into a wealthy family out of her mother's belief that money is the source of happiness. But Kadambari could not get love and respect from her husband who ill-treats her often. She initially bears it submissively but later loses her patience and decides to leave her husband and go back to her mother's house. But her mother could not console her and give any relief. She returns to her in-law's and finds support in form of her mother-in-law. She opens her heart to Vijaya who offers her comfort and fills her with confidence. Vijaya bears no traits of a typical mother-in-law and she is quite modern and advanced in her outlook. She emerges as a powerful character who wants to set a different example for the society, a different image of a mother-in-law who is kind, supportive and understanding (unlike any we can come across in most of the literature by male writers beginning from the earlier example of the first social novel of Gujarat *Sasu Vahuni Ladai*). Kadambari finds a true mother in Vijaya and their relationship gets stronger. The relationships are analyzed from a different dimension here and a hope is built to reframe the age old concept of this bond in a more positive way. Dhiruben seems to be clearly inspired by Simon de Beauvoir's comments about the women's loyalty towards other women in her famous work *The Second Sex* while making this conscious efforts to present the women in new light of honesty and fidelity towards the same sex, "They live dispersed among men, tied by homes, work, economic interests, and social conditions to certain men – fathers or husbands – more closely than to other women" (29).

Her most famous novel *Andhari Gali* (1983) is a story of a young woman's expectations out of life and her ultimate disappointment at the hands of cruel fate. Kundan is an unmarried woman who observes Paresh and Shubhangi's romantic married life and her desire of a happy married life is kindled. She expects to lead a life full of romantic thrill but all her dreams shatter when she finds about her father's love affair with another woman. Her guilt of not being able to recognize the true character of her father makes her discard her dream of marriage. Her splintered faith in the institute of marriage and her dilemma are depicted in artistic detail by the author. Kundan is a modern woman in the true sense of the term who does not take any decision out of emotional trails but would like to analyze them rationally before indulging into them. Her fear of getting cheated in relationship does not

allow her to trust and tie a knot with any unknown person out of a sense of cautiousness on her part. The author's minute observation of female psychology is creatively presented here in form of Kundan's character. Sutapa Chaudhri reflects on the way gender is constructed by women writers of Gujarat as following, "Gujarati women writers go beyond the familiar ways of conceptualizing gender. They present a challenge to the dominance of the repressive structures within which both women and men exist...contemporary women writers focus on the changing configurations of gender and family in present day Gujarat. They see both women and men as subjects, but these subjects are posited as ambiguous and fashioned by societal and individual discourses that are constantly shifting. Their writings read almost like palimpsests, as if they are erasing the imposed patriarchal notions of gender, and writing down newer concepts for both men and women" (177-178).

Dhiruben Patel's inventive narrative skill and scrutiny can be witnessed in her short-stories as well where many shades of feminine sensitivity are captured. Her story *Vishrambhkatha* stands apart due to the minute reflection of feminine psychology. It is a tale of a woman who has never been approved of any freedom to express her opinions after her marriage. After many years of leading such oppressive life when she happens to meet a childhood friend, her real personality suddenly emerges and she finds bondless joy as she opens her heart to her friend. The story reflects this burning issue of women who has to wait for years to finally open her heart and find her real self. Another story *Manasvini* is an examination of relationship between two sisters in the trying time. Suvarna, the younger sister happens to be more charming compared to her elder sister Asha who is an average looking girl and she fears that her beauty might hinder her sister's dream of getting a life partner. So Suvarna decides to go away from her house and shift to a hostel on the pretext of continuing her studies for the sake of her sister's happiness. The maturity of a young girl when it comes to the sisterly love despite her mother's disapproval can be seen here. Suvarna's sacrifice and selflessness are commendable. At the same time, it is noteworthy that the writer has projected a different reality of women's relationships with each other as here instead of taking refuge in a false pride of having an upper hand in the matter of beauty, Suvarna exhibits ripeness of thought as she well realizes the fact that even in modern times the only standard of approval for a woman is her physical beauty.

We can note that Dhiruben has beautifully knitted the threads of women's emotions, psychology, desires, standpoints and hope through her fiction and created an optimistic world for them to stand their ground. Through her gripping narrative technique, she has produced

exceptionally dazzling fiction. Her women-centric fiction touches various phases of women's lives and honestly brings forth their dilemmas at different junctions giving newer possibilities of gender roles and human relations through her modern outlook. Her women characters are pragmatic as well as reformist in many ways and through them she creates an image of woman who even with their feminine traits exhibit strong will power and courage to lead life on their own terms.

One of the important writers of this era who made her mark with her rebellious feminist views is Kundanika Kapadia (1927-2020) whose fictional world brought to limelight many derelict areas of society and life. She won prize for her first story *Premna Ansu* and it inspired her to continue her creative journey and she established herself as a promising author with her short-story collections *Premna Ansu* (1954), *Kagalni Hodi* (1978), *Java Daishu Tamane* (1983) and *Manushya Thavu* (1990) etc. Subsequently she penned a few novels like *Parodh Thata Pahela* (1968), *Agan Pipasa* (1972) and her Sahitya Akademi winning novel *Saat Pagala Aakashma* (1984) which brought critical acclamation to her as a writer. She has also written essays and a biography along with attempting a few translations.

Kundanika Kapadia, a major voice in Gujarati literary world, in her famous novel *Saat Pagla Aakashma* (1984), presents the tale of Vasudha, who although a sensitive and obedient person, dares to challenge the social authorities and abandon her sheltered existence in search of selfhood. At one point, she voices her inner most feelings in the following words, "I don't want to die fulfilling others' expectations. I want to live a life that satisfies me. I want to be true to myself, to my thoughts and my feelings. I don't want to be an ideal wife; I want to be a real woman" (3).

The novel also weaves along stories of other female characters like Sumitra, Vasanti, Anna, Lalita and their painstaking efforts to sustain and live with self-respect. Vasudha is the thread which assembles the lives of these different women, their suffering, their expectations, their disappointments, their survival and through them Vasudha self-analyses her life and position.

Kapadia's short-stories also voice against the injustice done to women and how they courageously fight against them. In her short stories *Nyay* a woman chooses self-respect over marital status and decides to discard her marriage due to the dictatorial nature of her husband. This story is an indication of the changing time and attitude of women where the financial independence has made it easier for them to take such bold decisions. Another story by the

same author titled *To?* shows the injustice borne by women during war and riots. A victim of rape who has been impregnated is facing a dilemma regarding the upcoming child – whether to abandon the child or accept the child (in case if it is a baby girl as she desires for the one). The story ends with this question and confusion. It is a beautiful narration of the natural motherly instinct of a woman who is at a cross road where she has to choose between her motherhood on one hand and her self-respect as a woman on the other.

Kundanika Kapadia is more radical in her stand towards the rights of women and her literary efforts bear witness to it. She believes in equal status for women in society and does not shy away in demanding it through the medium of literature. Most of her women characters are well-aware of their exploitation within and outside family and they stand head strong against it at one point or the other. However, the writer seems to get personally attached to these characters and this very fact creates hurdle in their development in the fiction. No doubt, Kapadia must be credited for creating some of the most radical and famous characters in the history of Gujarati literature yet they are stauncher in their attitude towards liberty and equality of women leading to their extreme steps in form of abandoning their families in aspiration to a life of their dreams. Their refuge in forsaking their personal life and close relations in search of their self-identity looks more like a fairy tale without any practical or rational consideration of the actual women of the society for whom such acute decisions may not be feasible. Her views seem to be inspired by the Western / First World feminist ideology without the consciousness of the fact that the strategies advocated by them may not be applicable to the women of the Third World with a completely different socio-cultural backdrop. Still the writer must get her share of credit for creating awareness in the society, especially amongst women towards their rights and status. Majority of her female characters bear traits of futuristic women yet to be accepted and respected by our society.

Varsha Adalja (1940) has left her mark on the literary scene of Gujarat with her multi-dimensional creative ability in form of fiction, drama, essays, TV serial adaptations etc. The scope of her fiction is quite broad in the matters of number as well as theme. Her novels cover up subjects like life in jail, condition of lepers, life in a middle-class society, politics etc. and she does justice to all with the help of her broad vision and artistic skills. She has also penned a few thrillers. Although she does not claim to be a feminist, many of her short-stories and novels like *Pachha Farata* (1991), *Retpankhi* (1974) and *Khari Padelo Tahuko* (1983) etc. depict the plight of women in the changing time. *E* (1979), *Bilipatranu Chothu Paan* (1994), *Ganthe Bandhyu Akash* (1998) are some of her short-story collections.

She has penned many one-act plays as well as essays. She has also done a few TV adaptations (recently the TV adaptation of her sister Ila Mehta's novel *Batris Putlini Vedna* as 'Umbarne Pele Par' for Doordarshan in 2020) and has produced an award-winning film *Ansar* on the topic of the disease of leprosy.

Through her creative ability, sensitive eye and mature outlook, Adalja gives voice to the marginalized women who gradually gain more confidence during the course of their experiences of their quest for individuality. They are poised and well-aware of their strengths as well as weaknesses and this very awareness helps them to lead a fulfilling life. Her novel *Timirna Padchaya* (1969) is a narrative of a wife of a famous judge and her longing for love and warmth in her relationship with him. She also craves for motherhood which has been denied to her. Her life takes a different turn when she gets to know of her husband's illegitimate relationship with their ex-maid who also bore him a child. Confounded and alienated thus by this shocking news, she decides to leave her husband at the end. A woman's strong stand for herself and her rights even at the cost of a comfortable and respectable life of being a wife of a judge can be observed here. Vrunda in *Khari Padelo Tahuko* (1983) makes efforts to find balance in her life at every stage (her life in village before marriage and her culture shift in the city after marriage, her motherhood and her duty as a wife, her dilemma during her second pregnancy especially after she gave birth to a mentally challenged baby girl etc.) and expects her husband's loving support during her trying time. But eventually she is disappointed and seeks reconciliation in her daughter who is although mentally retarded, becomes her biggest strength. While looking after her child and taking her to a special school for differently able children, Vrunda comes in contact with other women who have suffered bigger blows in lives than her and through their stories Vrunda finds solace and encouragement to look at the positive aspects of life. Gaining more confidence out her of life experiences, Vrunda forsakes her husband (who has not whole heartedly accepted the daughter) for the sake of her's and her daughter's self-respect.

Many of Adalja's short-stories depict the changing lives and perspectives of women when they come to self realization and liberate themselves of the orthodox bounds of the social and family ties. In her stories *Ganthe Bandhyu Akash* and *Shanti* the protagonists Rukshmani and Shanti respectively gain confidence to lead a life of their choice after years of fulfilling the wishes of their families dutifully. Both these stories recite the changing mindset of modern woman who is although entangled in family ties could take decisions to lead a life of their choice at the end and demand it openly without any sense of guilt.

Sujata and Nandini in *Saat Varni Hodi* are poles apart from each other. The former is a dutiful wife and meticulous home maker while the later is a liberal minded educated professional who has left her affluent family to get experience of life. Sujata's initial criticism of Nandini converts into covetousness as she craves to enjoy freedom of life just like Nandini. The story is an example of traditional views versus modernism. Sujata's traditional role gives her sense of security and comfort only till her encounter with Nandini who blows away her garb of false sense of security with her adventurous life style and open mindedness to live a more fulfilling life. In another story titled *Tap* Vasant's plight after her husband's vow of celibacy is sensitively expressed. Vasant who is full of life and believes in enjoying every moment is taken by shock when her husband decided to stay away from her in the same house out of his religious notions. On one occasion her husband lost control of his senses resulting into the birth of their second daughter. Krushnakant, Vasant's husband could not accept this fault and blames Vasant and the child for the rest of his life. He maintains distance even from his own daughter who is not at all responsible for this occurrence. Man's inability to understand woman's emotions or even consider her as human and woman's suffering at his hands as a result can be witnessed here. Krushnakant's rigidity and Vasant's sensitivity are put in contrast to each other beautifully to create a narrative impact. Thus, Varsha Adalja's fiction brings forth many unseen aspects of womanhood to life through her delicate narrative style and artistic skill.

Ila Arab Mehta (1938) is a well-known name in the literary world of Gujarat. Her observations and reflections of life and its various junctions are mirrored in her fiction. Her gripping narrative style makes her work memorable for the readers. She has given several novels – *Trikonni Tran Rekha* (1966), *Radha* (1972), *Ek Hata Diwan Bahadur* (1976), *Panch Pagala Prithvi Par* (1995), *Shabne Naam Hotu Nathi* (1981), *Batris Putlini Vedna* (1982) etc. along with a few short-story collections – *Ek Cigarette Ek Dhupsali* (1981), *Viena-Woods* (1989), *Balavo Balvi Balvu* (1998) etc.

A woman's journey of life where she finally comes to term with her life with a self realization that her happiness and identity do not depend on any outer sources but her own self through the central character Anuradha's mature outlook, her education and creative talent is reflected in a famous novel by Ila Arab Mehta titled *Batris Putlini Vedana* (1982) where the protagonist Anuradha has to face contempt and negligence at the hands of her husband Rasik when she tried to establish herself as a writer. The lives of other women around her like Rekha, Vibhavari, Vinodini, Badi Amma etc. inspire her to come to a better

understanding of herself. Her novel *Vaad* (2011) is her attempt to peep into the world of Muslim women through the central character of Fateema Lokhandwala and bright to limelight their troubles, particularly in 21st century, to seek balance between orthodox views and liberal mentality advocated by education and modern life style. Fateema through out the novel struggles to cross various hurdles (fences as per the title) at personal, social and religious levels and could ultimately succeed to establish her identity as a highly educated professional woman through her qualities like secular thinking, patience and courage. She represents the changing gender connotations in modern times and is an inspiration for many marginalized women to look upto.

Her short-story *Vistaar* depicts the narrative of a wife who finds out about her husband's involvement in an extra marital affair. After the initial phase of shock and pain, she regains her stability and sanity and starts thinking about her life. Instead of crying over her personal sorrow, she starts looking around, her consciousness reaching to global level and she finds her own pain quite irrelevant in front of the pain and tragedy spread all across the globe. It is also an indication that being abandoned by a husband is not the end of the world for a modern woman. Another short-story titled *Kunti-Karna* is an interesting re-telling of the saga of Queen Kunti and her dilemma in the Mahabharata while abandoning her son Karna to save her honour as she had conceived him before marriage. She took this decision, which almost looked heartless on her part, due to her aspiration to lead a respectful life as a queen. While in this tale Chitra faces the same dilemma while sending her son Karan to a boarding school due to her husband's unsupportive nature as she is looking forward to a promising career. Both the mothers are well attached to their sons yet they are forced to take their stand in favour of their own better future. Promilla Kapur, a sociologist, analyzes this change as, "With a change in women's personal status and social status has come a change in her way of thinking and feelings and the past half century has witnessed great changes in attitudes towards sex, love and marriage" (4-5).

Ila Arab Mehta through her literary efforts has touched the very core of the female self and has successfully taken her consciousness to global level through her works. The women characters found in her fiction are not only educated and mature beings but they exhibit sensibility through their behaviour and decisions to be self-sufficient, taking full responsibilities of their lives and honour. In this sense, the write is truly modern in her outlook and she represents the same through her female characters in her fiction.

Saroj Pathak (1929-1989) appears on the literary spectrum as a salient literary figure with her fresh perspectives and unusual choice of themes and narrative technique (she makes use of stream of consciousness technique in a few of her stories). Her fiction mostly deals with the inner conflicts of her characters showing the darker side of life. Many of her novels and stories deal with the subject of disharmony in married life. Her thrust of expression and her intense creative power have created brilliant narratives. Her novels include *Nightmare* (1969), *Nihshesh* (1979), *Priy Poonam* (1980), *Time Bomb* (1987) etc. and her short-story collections are *Prem Ghata Zuk Aai* (1959), *Virat Tapaku* (1966) etc. Her essays are collected in two books *Sansarika* (1967) and *Arvachina* (1976).

Saroj Pathak depicts the internal confusion and suffering of her characters owing to social injustice done to them. She focuses on the psychological stress faced by women in difficult time with minute details. Her story *Sarika Pinjarastha* is a brilliant example of stream of conscious technique where the central character's quandary of not able to lead a life of her choice and her realization of the societal trap denying her any freedom lead to her mental breakdown. Her story *Chakit-Vyathit-Bhaybhit* is about a teenage girl Bansi who leads a life with a sense of fear and insecurity. She loses her mother at a tender age (her mother committed suicide as she had been abandoned by her husband) and her father shows apathy towards her and he soon remarries to a young and attractive woman. She is at a very delicate stage of life where due to puberty she confronts biological and psychological changes but there is no body with who she could share her confusion and loneliness. Her father and step-mother are busy enjoying their lives and care no more for her as well as her little sister Guddu whose responsibility falls on her. Her father's indifference towards family responsibility exposes her to the many troubles where she becomes a victim of the sexual interest of many people including their neighbours, teachers and her father's friends. She is too young and innocent to understand all these but one thing she is sure of is that she will survive and also take care of her sister despite any number of difficulties. Such detailed description of a young girl's predicament at a tender age with many responsibilities on her are hardly found in our literature and Saroj Pathak's effort shines out bright.

Her women-centric novels *Nightmare* (1969) and *Time Bomb* (1987) are also her efforts to thrust deep into the psychological upheavals of women in modern times. In *Nightmare* Niyati is married to an elder brother of a person she loved and is trapped in a loveless marriage and ordeal of not able to share her feelings with anyone. In *Time Bomb* the central character Vrunda represents an image of an educated, understanding and head strong

person who after being cheated in marriage tries to logically analyze the situation and instead of accusing her husband, shows maturity by accepting to continue her life with him for the sake of her child but will no more fulfil any of her duties as a wife. She liberates him of all obligation of being a husband and continues to lead a life on her own terms. Her courage and open mindedness are praiseworthy as she emerges as strong woman and independent thinker representing the image of modern woman. Another character, in the same novel that attracts our attention is Loveline, Vrunda's husband Swarup's beloved. Her attitude is modern and practical as she does not want to emotionally involve in her relationship with men. She very well realizes that for a woman it is not easy to abandon her household duty and her children and as a result she has to bear much injustice in life at the hands of her husband and so she prefers to remain single and lead a life of her choice with the support of a man only when it comes to the fulfilment of her sexual needs.

Himanshi Shelat (1947) has been an active social worker who has closely observed the life and struggle of the much neglected class of our society namely sex-workers and many of her stories and novels deal with this taboo subject. With her critical ability she has deciphered current social realities into her fiction. Her short-stories are more in number compared to her novels compiled in many of her collections like *Antaral* (1987), *Andhari Galima Safed Tapaka* (1992), *Ae Loko* (1997), *Garbhagatha* (2009), *Dharoke Aa Varta Nathi* (2018) etc. She has written three novels *Aatham Rang* (2001), *Kyarima Aakash Pushpa ane Kala Patangiya* (2006) and *Saptadhara* (2012). She has tried her hand at essay writing, editing, translation and literary criticism – *Paravastavavad* (1987) and *Gujarati Kathasahityama Narichetna* (2000).

Himanshi Shelat brings a new connotation of womanhood and her interest in social activities and concern for marginalized women get mirrored in her fiction. She has worked for the well-fare of sex-workers excessively and her fiction reflects the theme of the life and struggle of this neglected class of society. Her novel *Kada Patangiya* (2006) takes the same theme of the tormented lives of sex-workers but it hints at a positive note as they aspire for better life for their off springs in form of education and career prospects. Many of her short stories like *Kimat*, *Maut*, *Barnu* etc. also deal with this taboo subject of the life and struggles of sex-workers and the society's attitude towards them. She has chosen her female characters from variety of backgrounds and presented their life and struggle through her exceptional narrative style. For example, *Andhari Gali ma Safed Tapka* is a portrayal of the pathetic condition of widow, *Chatrishma Varshe Ghatnani Pratiksha* is a tale of a spinster who awaits

and desires for some interesting incidents to take place in her routine monotonous life. *Saatmo Mahino* is a story narrated in first person depicting the emotional turmoil of a Muslim lady during the seventh month of her pregnancy. Her fear and excitement for motherhood is minutely portrayed here. The breaking of a sudden riot in her area, the dread of death or physical assault, the futile hope of being spared due to her bearing a child are artistically expressed in this heart touching story. Another such story is *Badatrana Beej* which is an account of a mother-daughter relationship. The daughter's realization of her mother's apathy towards her as she being an unwanted child is beautifully depicted. The character of the mother called 'Ba' impresses us with her head strong approach through her unwillingness to accept her secondary position in the family despite her insensitivity towards her children. So we could conclude that with Shelat's literature women characters find new dimensions of reality and vitality as they emerge as true to life and nature.

Bindu Bhatt's (1954) contribution to Gujarati literature is lesser in number but her creative genius with her noteworthy and brilliant exhibition of narrative technique and thematic aspects put her in the forefront. She has created some radical women characters that are bolder in their outlook and autonomous in taking control of their lives. She has given two novels – first novel *Mira Yagnikni Diary* (1992) is in form of a diary and her second novel *Akhepatar* (1999) which brought fame to her as a writer as it has received Sahitya Akademy Award in 2003. She has one short-story collection to her name *Bandhani* (2009) and she is an active translator translating many books from Gujarati into Hindi and vice versa.

Bindu Bhatt comes to the spectrum with two of her women-centric novels *Mira Yagnikni Diary* (1992) and *Akhepatar* (1999) and opens up newer avenues in the matter of representation of women in literature. Her first novel deals with the life journey of a young, aspiring woman Mira Yagnik and her struggle to seek balance in modern world with the help of her education, confidence and sensitivity. The novel also addresses the uptill now neglected aspects of modern life namely lesbianism, rape and the plight of a victim of these ills.

Bhatt's award winning second novel *Akhepatar* (1999) which means 'an inexhaustible container' covers the chronic of the central character Kanchanba's personal and family life with the historical backdrop of pre-Independent India and the tragic even of partition and their impact on her life. Kanchanba's life span since her childhood, adolescence, marriage, motherhood, separation from family, stay at refugee camp, return to her native place at old

age etc. are narrated in detail with focus on her personality. She goes through much pain and trauma in life still at the end she emerges as a woman of substance with her invincibility of spirit.

Along with these well-known writers, there were many more women writers whose works have added to the creative literary talent of Gujarat. Vasuben Bhatt (1924), Anjali Khandwala (1940), Bharati Dalal, Swati Medh, Panna Naik (1933), Tarini Desai (1935), Suvarna, Chandra Shrimali (1950) and others have enriched the field of Gujarati literature with their creative skills.

Many fresh vistas related to the life of women have been presented in the literary efforts of a few minor women writers of Gujarat. Following are a few examples of short-stories penned by a few lesser known women writers to analyze the thematic aspects and the approach of the writers towards women. For example, *Aakdanu Phool* by Sunita Majithia (1964) is a narration of a mature, desirous and independent woman Pratiti who dares to terminate her relationship with her husband Pritesh due to his duplicity and humiliating attitude. Swati Mehd's (1949) story *Chaka Chakini Adhunki Bodhkatha* is a re-telling of famous fable of a he-sparrow and she-sparrow and their efforts to run a smooth married life. The original story depicts the he-sparrow as handling the duties outside the house while the she-sparrow living a happy and contented life as a dutiful wife. In this modern version the she-sparrow is shown as questioning the he-sparrow regarding their conventional roles and also expresses her desire to see the outer world. The he-sparrow scares her by giving a darker picture of the world around but in spite of that the she-sparrow decides to explore the world and finds fulfilment in her new found joy of flying on her own outside the confine of her house. In *Ughada Akash No Ek Tukdo* Suhas Oza (1936) brings forth the physical and psychological range of a woman going through the pain of child birth in a hospital. The entire scale of her emotions from pain to anguish to the final relief after the child is born is meticulously described bringing to light one another perspective of woman's life. Another story by Sarojini Mehta (1898-1977) *Dukh ke Sukh* yet again questions the changing mentality of women towards themselves. It is a narrative of a life of a woman called Savitri, who is presented as a counter image of the famous character of Savitri from Savitri-Satyavan Saga where she happened to challenge Yama, the lord of death for the sake of her husband's life and received a boon of eternal marital bliss in return. The central character of this story bearing the same name gets deserted by her husband and after the initial phase of confusion and frustration, she decides to find a new meaning of her life by establishing a successful

hotel business through much hardship and efforts. Her husband's return after many years to claim his share creates anguish instead of a sense of pleasure. Unlike a conventional attitude of meek submission, the woman voices her anger and discards her husband's claim over the business as well as on her. Savitri's character bears a clear mark of a modern woman with a promise to change the gender connotation as presented in literature. *Dadro* is a tale of a pregnant woman Chandan and her plight due to the apathy of the upper caste landlord towards providing the basic facilities to the people of the Dalit communities (in this case the communities demand to repair the staircase of the building) and her losing her child as a result. The story also bears some biographical traits of the life of the writer Chandra Shrimali (1950) who has undergone the same experience in her life.

In the story *Maun* by Bharati Vaidya (1929) the central character Pami has to suffer negligence and humiliation at the hands of her husband and in-laws due to a disease of leprosy. Her family's surprise at the occasion of her return from the leprosy centre, Pami's realization of her husband's prospect of second marriage with a woman called Sumi and his filing a divorce case makes her feel shattered but after this initial reaction, she could find her ground and handles the situation with maturity. She realises that even if Nandu, her husband allows her to stay in his house, she could never expect love and respect from him again and so she abandons the house the next morning without uttering a single word of contempt as she does not want to compromise with her self-esteem. In another story by Amrapali Desai (1959) titled *Pandar Varsh Pachi* Radha who has been playing a role of a dutiful wife and mother for fifteen years suddenly comes to a realisation that she too has her own desires different from those of her husband Ritesh. Out of her sense of love and duty she has agreed to all his wishes up till now but once when she takes initiative in the matter of expressing her sexual needs her husband could not believe and accept this fact that a woman could so openly convey her physical needs. She feels devastated due to her inability to understand Ritesh even after almost fifteen years of togetherness. As Kate Millet has expressed her views on the politics of sex roles and its direct connection with status in her famous work *Sexual Politics*, "Sexual Politics obtain consent through the "socialization" of both sexes to basic patriarchal politics with regard to temperament, role and status. As a status, a pervasive assent to the prejudice of male superiority guarantees superior status in the male, inferior in the female. The first item, temperament, involves the formation of human personality along stereotyped lines of sex category ("masculine" and "feminine") based on the needs and values of the dominant group and dictated by what its members cherish in themselves and find convenient

in subordinates: aggression, intelligence force, and efficacy in the male; passive, ignorance, docility, “virtue,” and ineffectuality in the female” (26).

The second generation of women writers of Gujarat based their women characters on the parameter of reality and their own observations and experiences rather than depending on the trend of depicting illusionary women based on false ideology propagated for centuries. The women found in their writing are autonomous and rational and their decisions are based on reasoning and practical aspects. They strive for a life of dignity but at the same time, they are well aware of the impasse a woman has to face in changing time and societal attitude. Along with the opportunities for overall development in various fields offered by modern 21st century, it also poses many perils for women’s safety and status in the light of changing role and responsibilities at family level and these women are aware of these binding factors. Amina Amin puts across the similar views as follows, “However, freedom for women also brought in its trace diverse conflicts both at the familial and the social levels. If women had to utilize their education, intelligence, ambition and decision-making capacity in the outside world, they still could not discard their century-long image of self-sacrificing, self-effacing creatures whose sole aim was to keep their family from breaking apart. Again while women’s groups are making concerted efforts to revamp the image and status of woman, mass media both electric and print continue to project her, at one extreme, as an object of beauty to be commodified and at the other as an “adarshnaari” (145-146).

Thus, a radical transform in the character portrayal can be seen in the writings of contemporary women writers and their vision of autonomous, well-balanced and powerful woman characters are not just accepted by readers but are also cherished by them. When observed closely, we can notice a kind of resemblance in the literature composed by women writers in the matter of the formation of female gender and their striving for their identity. Gilbert and Gubar aptly observes it as, “...the striking coherence we noticed in literature by women could be explained by a common, female impulse to struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinition of self, art and society” (xii).

1.4 Comparison between the male and female writers’ representation of women

Gujarati literature has passed through various phases during different centuries and during each phase it has been influenced by diverse concepts and movements of the contemporary period. The thematic aspects, narrative style, character portrayal, writing technique have all gone through tremendous change. Along with these, the most important

issue under scrutiny – that is the treatment of women characters – has also undergone a complete transformation at the hands of both male and female writers.

The initial sources of inspiration for character namely history and mythology has been replaced by sources like real life and writers' own experiences. The stagnant stereotypical style of presenting characters in alignment with social expectations has been altered by creative phenomena of presenting characters that are closer to reality. The trend of selecting characters from aristocrat or upper-class families has changed to selecting the characters from all walks of life including marginalized sections. The idealized image of woman under the dummy of wifehood, and motherhood with a sole duty to satisfy the needs of her family and husband is no more acceptable with the changing connotation of gender role in society and literature. The restrictions lay on women since the time of Manu placing her at a lower position started melting under Western influences and with the spread of education. The reform movements for the emancipation of women and women's own awareness towards their rights demanding equality and justice at all levels were aptly captured by the contemporary Gujarati literature which started reflecting the feminine issues with broader perspectives offering possibilities for improvement.

Women characters were handled differently by male writers in their literature where they tried to explore various features related to their lives and roles in society and family. Most of them could not go beyond the confines of a woman's traditional mould and presented their women characters in a clichéd forms with very little alteration. As observed above, many writers tried to present bolder picture by bringing their women to a realization of their exploitation but most of their women prefer to take refuge in submission to the societal norms and pre-determined roles instead of choosing a path of independent existence. They make their women return to their traditionally expected position after reaching a cross road of self realization with very few options available to them. Even when a woman steps out of the grip of the societal clutch in search of herself, she feels a sense of remorse for doing so. She could never come to terms with herself without the societal and family back drop. Even the earlier society, being more conservative, was not open to the idea of self-sufficient woman and often it is observed that the male writers would give in to the strong societal authority in case of creating an image of woman. A writer places female protagonists in a traditional role; largely in the context of love and marriage. Sharifa Vijdiwala aptly points out this tendency of male writers in the following comment, "The women-centric literature composed by male writers

has not done any justice. The analysis done by male writers talk less of what a woman feels and more of who she is or how she should be” (my trans.; 59).

On the other hand, the women writers presented the social, economical and sexual concerns of their female characters in a subtle yet confident manner. Their women enjoyed an aspirant position even within the traditional roles they played with a preference for an alternative life style. They exhibit modern traits and feel more liberated with a sense of control in their quest for selfhood even though they suffer many setbacks in personal and social life. Since the social, psychological and physical conditions are different for women writers, their writing reciprocate these factors differently than are found in the literature of male writers. In words of Jasbir Jain, “Increasingly it is becoming evident that the specifics of time, place, sex and race are the meaningful aspects of the creative activity as they determine the relationship between experience and art” (29).

One elementary discrepancy between the female characters as found in the literature by the writers of both sexes is that the women found in the literature composed by male authors display characteristics like confusion, anxiety, fear or frustration in trying circumstances awaiting the support of their male counterparts while women depicted in the works of female writers are more confident, mature, stable in their demeanour while dealing with any crisis. They are depicted as being shaken initially after a trauma but sooner or later they find their equilibrium and are ready for any challenge. They are portrayed as self-sufficient and capable of facing any given situation without any external support.

The male writers portrayed women based on their observations done from an exterior view point while a female writer often writes out of their own personal experiences and consciousness. In the preface of *Narichetnani Navlika* Raghuvir and Sunita Chaudhari states, “The nature of women is so profound and mysterious that the container of words created by men will always remain insufficient...a man writes about women out of his observation and imagination while a woman has her own experience. She only has to master the art of narration. It is her true trial...” (my trans.; v)

The narrative notion has not changed completely but the note of hope has crept into it with the emergence of women writers. A reformist like Govardhanram or a rebellious writer like Munshi hesitated in the depiction of widow remarriage while Darshak shows a widow Rohini getting married to a man of her dream in *Jher to Pedha Che Jani Jani* and later many women writers question the futility of the oppressive norms associated with widowhood

(Shelat in *Andhari Galima Safed Tapka*, Anjali Khandwala in *Chandlano Vyap*) Himanshi Shelat notes, “It means the picture has not changed totally still we can see the women are getting more conscious about their existence. The problems, which prevailed in earlier times, still persist but women’s attitude towards them has changed” (my tran.; 9).

Later more sweeping changes can be noted in the portrayal of women with bolder subject matters showing woman gaining more confidence and courage to voice their feelings and stand head strong against injustice done to them. The tradition of praising woman for her beauty, love and ever sacrificing nature has created false and misleading images of women. Even her fortune was dependent on her having husband, children and family while in absence of anything from this list led to her misfortune. Thus a ready formula of meaningful and meaningless life is handed over to her and majority of our literature is inspired by such unjust formula. In the earlier literature, we come across the women characters’ pain, suffering and misfortune often while a conscious woman aware of her talent, capability and real personality was a rare phenomenon. While the literature composed during late 18th and early 19th century started depicting the changing position of women within and outside their families. As women started entering public domain and explored the world, the gamut of their experience broadened making way for more contemporary issues faced by them and their reflection in literature. Even women’s outlook towards themselves has changed where they do not see themselves as meek, submissive victim of circumstances but are capable individuals having full control of their lives.

Another dimension which differentiate the works of male writers from that of female writers is that male authors depict the issues of women at all levels but while finding solutions for them, they prefer to take refuge in the conventional way with a magical turn of the destiny leading to a phenomenon of ‘happy ending’ or by presenting a totally imaginary world where the women can seek an easy refuge. As Ravindra Parekh says,

Many writers from Govardhanram to Raghuvir were required to send their characters to take refuge in some social welfare institute or ashram as if they suspect their capacity to find solution of their problems from society and still the characters could hardly develop naturally on their own in such background. The characters at times feel nervousness and helplessness while taking responsibility of their issues, not their own but those created by the writer. The only benefit

of such attitude is it helps in ending the story smoothly and ideally. It might help to end some of the problems faced by the characters, but it is a matter of deep analysis that how much of such ideal solutions are accepted by the society. (my tran.; 45)

Such strategies are applied by male writers to save themselves from facing the harsh reality of patriarchal injustice. Following the example of prominent male writers, a few women writers also make use of the same old trick – the famous character of Vasudha and her escape to Anandgram after abandoning her so called oppressive family in *Saat Pagla Aakashma* by Kapadia – but in majority of the cases, women writers depict their female characters as taking helm of their lives and decisions while searching for their identity against all odds – Anuradha in *Batris Putlini Vedna* by Ila Arab Mehta who takes full responsibility of her life and decides not to depend on any outer source for fulfilling life.

Gujarati women writers not only project the image of new women, they also try to create an image of men different from those generally found in majority of traditional literature as well as in literature by male writers. Women writers promote a picture of a new man who possess qualities like sensitivity, caring and supportive nature who is an equal partner of women. The traditional portrayal of men as brave, powerful, egoistic, insensitive, exploitative gets dissolved and find new definitions in their writings. They work at building mutual gender relationships in all walks of life through their literary efforts. This enhanced image of men is not recurrently found but still there are some brilliant efforts made by some of the women writers. For example, in *Saat Pagla Aakashma*, Kapadia has presented a few radical male characters like Sarup, Aditya, Agnivesh, Gaganendra, Vinod who come with a completely different mindset of equality and respect, in Adalja's short story *Chandranu Ajwadu* a crippled man gives new hope and direction to the discouraged female protagonist Sushi, Soham and Balakram in *Kadlivan* by Vinodini Nilkanth not just support their female partners – Radha and Yamini respectively but also inspire them to fulfil their dreams of social service in case of Radha and pursuing higher studies for Yamini. These images, although lesser in number, do hint at the changing connotation of gender based on the ideals of mutuality and companionship and they promise towards improvement in role plays by men and women within society and family by creating an optimistic note of improved condition of gender relationships.

Through the analysis of the fiction by Gujarati women writers and their portrayal of women characters, we come to a conclusion that the gender construct of both men and women has multiple dimensions to it unlike the traditional ideological stereotype one proliferated for centuries and newer categories are created with changing time. In words of Sutapa Chaudhuri, “...there is no single truth for women/men, but many truths. As subjects, women/men become the deplorers of alternative discourses who manipulate normative signs, create new spaces, and exercise agency... It accepts a vital dimension of reality – the self-perceived world of women/men contesting the hegemonic construction of women/men – that gives rise to not only literatures of protest and resistance but also to assertion of autonomy through unconventional life style, expressions of freedom through subversive, challenge and opposition” (178).

Thus, we could say that Gujarati literature has passed through a thorough amend at the hands of both male and female writers giving rise to some noteworthy fiction and memorable characters. Women centric fiction has been composed since earlier time but with the changing period such literature has taken a drastic turn by voicing core reality of lives of women – their emotions, their desires, and their view points expressed in a natural way without any layer of traditional expectations. Genuine issues faced by women in real life and images of women based on reality started to appear in literature where a woman is seen on humanitarian ground, having capacity to take hold of her life and take important decisions on her own without any support of men. They are presented as educated, independent, confident beings who desire to lead a life of dignity and freedom on their own terms. Gujarati literature has created a spectrum of women characters from various social and family backgrounds of different castes and classes to indicate different sets of realities of different women.

Even the women from marginalized sections have started finding their voice in literature now. Still there are many more aspects of women’s lives to be uncovered and represented through literature like – from marginalized category only few aspects could find their representation in literature like Dalit, sex-workers, Muslim women or women from labour class to some extent but many areas are yet to be explored like tribal women and their issues (Dhruv Bhatt in contemporary times tries to address some of their issues in his fiction). Other aspects of women’s lives in present time like the life of a woman at the peak of her career in corporate or political field, or the life of a woman in film or modelling industries, a woman working in defence or police force are yet to be addressed. The literature up till now by the writers of both the genders has majorly focused on middle class woman within her

family or a professional woman's struggle to keep balance between her career and personal life. In the changing time when women are reaching new summits of success at different professional levels and entering professional fields earlier prohibited for them, their lives and issues, while facing newer challenges in life and the changing attitude of society towards them, must get reflected in literature. We hope that in future Gujarati literature would add this new dimension of yet another perspective of women's lives as lived and experienced by them.

In the matter of genres as well Gujarati women writers have not experimented much (their major contribution has been in the genre of fiction) along with the recurrent themes to be found in their fiction which mostly revolves round the family and social lives of middle-class people. There are yet many unforeseen thematic areas like comedy, satire, science fiction, thrillers or detective novels (although Varsha Adalja and her sister Ila Arab Mehta have already explored these areas) along with other literary genres like poetry, drama, essays, criticism etc. which do call for their attention and we do hope that in the time to come these areas will surely draw attention of these and many successive female writers of the state.

1.5 Concluding Remarks

To conclude, as Poulain de la Barre warned us, "Everything that men have written about women should be viewed with suspicion, because they are both judge and party..." (qtd. in Beauvoir 30-31) This chapter has examined the contribution of women writers to enrich the Gujarati literature and their efforts to create literature covering up all the aspects of female life, emotions and psyche has been examined in detail with a comparison of female character portrayal done by male writers and female writers. Women writers, although they entered the spectrum almost seven centuries later compared to male writers, have left their mark through their ingenious efforts. They opened up new possibilities through their different perspectives at all levels of life. Their special contribution is in the representation of women characters that mirror the changing societal, political and familial norms. Through their critical eye they not only observed women of diverse background and their life journey but could also honestly present them through their fiction to bring affirmative changes in society and world. With the help of their global perspective they could challenge the age old notions regarding women and create new possibilities of altered life and identity for women. Innumerable women characters have been created at the hands of both male and female writers but where the male writes are more bound by the conventional norms, the women

writers could exhibit guts by challenging the tradition driven misleading stereotype of womanhood and create women characters that are more real and true to life and embraced and represented all the roles played by a woman in society with a promise to lay open more possibilities of progress and self-discovery.

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