

Chapter 5

IMAGES OF WOMEN

The prevailing images for men and women in the form of ideas, symbols, traditions, values, models, etc. have played quite a decisive role in influencing the social order.¹ Image of a woman is full of contradictions that highlight the disparities existing in the hierarchical division of the social order. In the Indian context kinship and rituals are intricately interwoven. The standards are designed and defined by men of the society. Both kinship and rituals consist of 'symbols and symbolic complexes' attested with meanings as desired by men.² As a result Indian society is full of paradoxes. It is common for a man to ill treat his wife and other women of his family while fearing mightiest of mother goddesses (including sati). Although India might have been ruled by a strongest woman as prime-minister Indira Gandhi or it can claim to have its first women president too Pratibha Patil still women are forced to remain meek and subservient. These paradoxes have shaken and disturbed a natural balance.

Kinship systems are resistant toward change, as identities are deeply rooted in the memories which create some sort of image of family and

¹ Pratibha Jain and Ranjan Mahan, eds. Pratibha Jain and Ranjan Mahan, *Women Images*, Jaipur, Rawat Publication, 1996, 12.

² Abner Cohen, 'Political Anthropology: The Analysis of the Symbolism of Power Relations', *MAN: The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, New Series, Vol. 4, No. I, March 1969, 217.

kinship.³ In the recent past (1987) when an eighteen year old Rajput widow Roop Kanwar was burned alive on the funeral pyre with her dead husband it brought to light the age old prejudices and rites which are 'violently' practiced in India.⁴ After her death, she was projected as the epitome of virtuous womanhood; an ideal 'perfectionist' who lived and died for her husband, a sacrificing soul.⁵ This is the type of an ideal woman which she expects from herself and people want her to become; she is accustomed to unusual psychological pressure of attaining similar type of perfection. The roles reserved for a woman are purely based on such virtues desires and fancies by men.

Rajasthan is known to be a high sect of sati. In the Jaipur State with the death of Maharaja Ishwari Singh in 1750 one *bhagtan* committed sati and few other women drank poison. In 1803 after the death of Sawai Pratap Singh 12 queens and one Rathore queen committed sati while in 1818 after Maharaja Jagat Singh's death one queen committed sati. In the royal family of Udaipur Maharan Arisingh his 8 queens and 12 Paswans committed sati in 1773. Bundi State has evidence of Sati as well in 1773 after the death of Maharao Ajitsingh from his one of the 11 queen Sringar Kanwar and one *Kharwas* committed Sati and in the Kota State when Maharao Bhimsingh died his 2 queens and 5

³ Leela Dube, *Women and Kinship: Perspectives on Gender in South and South-East Asia*, Jaipur, Rawat Publications, 2009, 1.

⁴ Mala Sen, *Death by Fire: Sati, Dowry Death and Female Infanticide in Modern India*, New Delhi, Penguin Books, 2001, x.

⁵ Ibid.

Kharvas committed sati in 1720.⁶ All the deadly deeds, whether forced or voluntary, have been described as a virtuous acts performed by women of honor who have also been hailed as dedicated wives. Sati then is socially in tested with all sorts of power to bestow blessings to her family members. It is in fact sheer fear which makes them to seek forgiveness after treacherously killing an innocent being as well as in some cases it can also be used to gain monetary profits by constructing huge temple in the name of sati.

The vested interests valorized Sati even in the modern times. The news report following the 'murder' of Roop Kanwar in Deorala on 4th September, 1987 is a burning example. *Rashtrdoot* carried out an editorial on 6th September:

By sacrificing her life, eighteen-year-old woman, Roop Kanwar, had re-enacted the spectacle of sati, a tradition written in golden letters in history of virtuous Rajput women devoted to their husbands. Steeped in the glorious Rajput tradition, this brave girl has moved the common people by following Indian cultural tradition of sati even forty years after Independence.⁷

It was portrayed and assumed by the people that sati was a voluntary act, performed with tremendous courage and devotion. Even the learned and educated elite described this heinous act as matter of pride. She was barely

⁶ Santosh Yadav, *Unnisavi aur Beeswi Shatabadi mein Striyon ki Stithi*, Jaipur, Printwell Publishers, 1987, 167.

⁷ Mala Sen, *Death by Fire*, op. cit., 7.

eighteen when she was forced to perform sati under the spell of intoxication, defined as her *Sat* 'purity'. From her example, it is now possible to imagine the situation of a woman in a rigid, conventional society like Rajasthan where in the name of custom heinous and horrendous act was permitted and accepted by all.

In the British India Lord William Bentick had declared Sati as crime in 1829 but the native princely States of Rajasthan did not found it relevant to take stern actions to check it. The Political Agents in Rajasthan tried to suppress the heinous crime of Sati, but did not get success in those bigger and influential states where Sati was committed 'traditionally.' In smaller states of Kota, Bundi and Jhalawar submissive to the British, it became easier for them to check this custom. Jaipur State with the help of the *jagirdars* and other feudal lords this custom of Sati was declared crime by law in 1844. Consequently, Dungarpur, Banswara and Pratapgarh banned it in 1846; in 1848 Jodhpur and Kota and Udaipur declared sati as crime in 1860. Yet, there are stray examples of it after those declarations in Jodhpur a *thakurani* of the Ghanorao *thikana* in 1856, a Charani in Malani in 1861, two wives of *thakur* Gambhirsingh of Jhalawar in 1863, in Tonk a lady committed sati in 1863. The most adamant of the rulers was the Udaipur Maharana who only after many pressures agreed to support the cause. Other states issued a notice to all the feudal lords and patel of the villages to make note that no sati is committed and if anyone found guilty shall be punished for an instance in Kota, the notice read:

*baje gaon tha jiladar patel patwari dase apranchi. Thara talaka ka gaovo mein va thara alakha mein jagirdar udaki hone jyanka gava mein koi agyat mein ladki hoti jeev su mari chh va sati hona dini chh to jyo ya bat karega jihva tika gaon mein hosi uh tatha samal hali saja sarkar su sangeen milegi. Taraj-dehi khedi, panvad, harigarh, motpur, beevgarh, sumar, khandi narayanpuri, rakto, laipal, khandpur, mandavar, barsana ki, kekari tal ke, sarkari mukta gaon, prasana munsipadit khanderao miti kati sudi 12 samvat 1918 ka.*⁸

The British officers insisted the rulers to punish those who were found guilty of participating in the crime. As a result people who either forced the woman to commit sati or were spectators were punished. The forceful eradication of the practice transformed the structure of sati and by the end of the nineteenth century new versions of sati became visible. The prohibition of the custom made the people to force the women to commit sati by inventing their own reasons. For an instance a woman who was staying away from her husband for a long time was forced to commit sati in Alwar 1861 so that she did not seek her share in the property of the dead husband.

The 'man-made' practices and norms entail disabling effects for women. The status of high caste/class Hindus is evaluated by marrying their girls either in higher class or clan or at least the one who is equal to their status. This gives them restricted choice of groom. Men's perception toward

⁸ Santosh Yadav, *Unnisavi Beesawi Shatabdi*, op. cit., 170, 171, 173 and further reference *Kota Record*, Bhandar No. 18, Basta No. 198/2, RSAB.

social relation pushes the girls to the edge where they have been sacrificed for no fault of theirs. Colonel Tod and even Southerland agreed that 'tyag' as the prime reason for the fear behind murders of little infants. British officers residing in various states of Rajasthan unanimously agreed and declared *tyag* to be the sole reason for infanticide, which no doubt is an exaggeration. Shyamladas does not accept this idea instead believes that '*tika*' and not '*tyag*' was the reason behind murdering their own infant daughters. It was groom's family which started demanding large sums of money in '*tika*' which became a serious problem for all. Ojha believes that it is the pressure of the dowry that forced the people to accept such a heinous act.⁹ Whatever may be the reason, it was the apprehension of the monetary debt that forced the family of the girl to kill her; mans own desire of wealth made females to suffer.

The British first documented the practice of female infanticide in India in the late eighteenth century especially noticed among the upper castes of north India and reported many areas without even a female child.¹⁰ Meera Kosambi's study of women's place in the public sphere is quite instructive. To her the public sphere is the domain of political power, was inhabited and dominated by Indian as well as British men. The socio-cultural domain subsumes social customs and institutions involving the family including

⁹ Santosh Yadav, *Unnisavi Beesawi Shatabdi*, op. cit., 173, 175, 176.

¹⁰ Elisabeth Bumiller, *May you be You be Mother of Hundred Sons: A Journey Among the Women of India*, New Delhi, Penguin Books, 1991, 104 stated few recent examples from newspaper articles In *India Today*, 1986 "Born to Die," revealing an estimate of six thousand female babies were poisoned to death only in Madurai, Tamil Nadu. In October 1988 *India Today* mentioned about a remote village in western Rajasthan, an estimated 150 newborn daughters were put to death, among the area's 10,000 people, there were said to be only 50 young girls.

marriage, as well as health care, education and related matters. This domain though inhabited by men and women but always dominated by the former.¹¹

In the past century laws were enacted to denounce the female infanticide as crime in 1834 in Kota, Bikaner in 1837, Jaipur, Jodhpur and Udaipur between 1839 and 1844 and in Alwar in 1857 female infanticide was made illegal and punishable. Yadav has observed that the British played their politics by making *tyag* the reason behind female infanticide as this made their work easy of taking control over the Khalsa lands and other lands donated to the feudal lords by the rulers of the state. This way they were able to increase their revenues as it also enabled them to dominate the state by proving them illiberal.¹² She accuses the English records of portraying it as epidemic which according to her was not the case. If true there would have been stagnation even in the royal families. The degree to which it was practiced is not important but the fact that it was in vogue raises some serious questions regarding Indian social prejudices. In the 1931 Census report it is clearly mentioned that the reason for the lesser percentage of the female ratio vis-à-vis male is not female infanticide but mal-nourishment.¹³ Even if it was not female infanticide but mal-nourishment the question arises why it was girls and not boys who died in large numbers because of it? This only points to the mindset of Indian people toward their daughters who are ill-treated in

¹¹ Meera Kosambi, *Crossing Thresholds Feminist Essays in Social History*, Ranikhet, Permanent Black, 2007, 7.

¹² Santosh Yadav, *Ummisavi aur Beeswi Shatabadi mein Striyon ki Stithi*, Jaipur, Printwell Publishers, 1987, 176-177.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 177.

comparison to boys. The tendency of suppressing girls for boys and inculcating in them the notions of sacrifice, devotion, submission while boys were fed on with the diet of freedom, bravery and unlimited power. These despicably hostile tendencies later become part of their personalities and become visible in their inter-personal relationships with other family members and then society at large. The highest numbers of crimes against women are reported in India because of this mentality with which both boys and girls are groomed differently in a family.

Table 1

Percentage of total population in Rajasthan, 1881 to 1931

1 State	2 Gender	3 1881	4 1891	5 1901	6 1911	7 1921	8 1931
Alwar	Male	52.77	52.61	52.03	52.25	53.05	52.85
	Female	47.23	47.39	47.75	47.75	46.95	47.15
Banswara	Male	51.44	51.33	49.32	49.42	49.67	49.75
	Female	48.56	48.67	50.68	50.58	50.33	50.75
Bharatpur	Male	54.29	54.32	53.48	54.09	54.86	54.08
	Female	45.71	45.68	46.52	45.91	45.14	45.92
Bikaner	Male	57.69	52.86	52.41	53.00	52.71	53.53
	Female	42.31	47.11	47.59	47.00	47.29	46.47
Bundi	Male	52.26	52.77	51.82	51.76	52.19	52.19
	Female	47.74	47.23	48.18	48.24	47.81	47.81
Dhaulpur	Male	55.41	56.14	54.47	54.80	55.21	55.10
	Female	44.74	43.86	45.53	45.20	44.79	44.90
Dungarpur	Male	52.57	50.22	50.00	49.69	50.32	50.31
	Female	48.43	49.78	50.00	50.31	49.68	49.62
Jaipur	Male	54.02	53.32	52.86	52.56	53.14	52.70
	Female	45.98	46.68	47.14	47.44	46.86	47.30
Jaisalmer	Male	56.52	54.19	53.69	54.92	56.00	55.53
	Female	43.48	45.81	46.31	45.08	44.00	44.47

Jhalawar	Male	54.34	53.20	51.83	51.97	52.32	52.38
	Female	45.66	46.80	48.17	48.03	47.68	47.62
Karauli	Male	54.24	54.00	54.44	54.63	55.07	55.55
	Female	45.76	46.00	45.56	45.37	44.93	44.45
Kishangarh	Male	52.47	51.82	52.19	52.43	52.56	51.89
	Female	47.53	48.18	47.81	47.57	47.44	48.11
Kota	Male	52.48	52.20	51.55	51.69	51.90	51.77
	Female	47.32	47.80	48.45	48.31	48.10	48.23
Marwar	Male	55.36	52.59	52.47	52.26	52.73	52.21
	Female	44.64	47.41	47.53	47.74	47.27	47.79
Mewar	Male	53.54	52.30	52.22	51.85	51.60	51.51
	Female	46.46	47.70	47.78	48.15	48.40	48.49
Pratapgarh	Male	51.85	52.11	50.05	50.61	50.80	56.94
	Female	48.15	47.69	49.95	49.39	49.20	49.06
Sirohi	Male	53.28	52.31	52.35	51.76	51.94	51.58
	Female	46.72	47.69	47.65	48.24	48.06	48.42
Tonk	Male	52.32	52.65	51.51	51.58	51.81	51.80
	Female	47.68	47.35	48.43	48.42	48.19	48.20

Source: Santosh Yadav, *Unnisvi Beesawi Shatabdi mein Striyon ki Stithi*, 1987, 178-79

Table 2

Sex-ratio in Rajasthan from 1881 to 1921

Year	Number of females per 1000 males
1881	852
1891	891
1901	905
1911	909
1921	899

Source: Santosh Yadav, *Unnisvi Beesawi Shatabdi mein Striyon ki Stithi*, Jaipur, 1987, 180

The substantial variation in the sex ratio is an obvious fact of women's ill-treatment in the patriarchal society.

In the colonial India it was the two-layered domination for the women. Ronald Inden has used the framework of agency in the context of colonialism in India to discuss people's capacity to act in various ways. Inden speaks of three categories: 'agents', who act purposively and reflectively; 'instruments' through whom agents fulfill their desires and 'patients' who are the recipients of the acts of others, to variously pacified or punished saved, reformed or developed¹⁴. Women in the native princely states of Rajasthan like the women in the colonial India were the third category 'patients,' who were regularly pacified and dominated by the second and the first categories i.e. the Indian men primarily being the 'instruments' and the British government being the 'agents,' who guided the instruments and dominated their acts to govern the 'patients.'

The feudal rank of a princely state or a *thikana* was the main consideration for matrimonial alliances. For all matrimonial transactions the Rajputs help from their loyal domestic servants called *Golas*. The *Golas* were offered as slaves in dowry by few *jagirdars*. The practice came into vogue as Rajput women were confined into *purdah* and were not allowed to move out from their domestic prisons.¹⁵

¹⁴ Meera Kosambi, *Crossing Thresholds*, op. cit., 16.

¹⁵ K.L. Sharma, 'Feudalism, Caste And Class In Rajasthan', eds. N.K. Singhi and Rajendra Joshi, *Folk, Faith and Feudalism*, Jaipur, Rawat Publications, 1995, 175.

Feudalism also raised the standards of many castes like Brahmins, barbers, drum-beaters, potters etc. by providing them with land-grants, cesses and taxes.¹⁶ Keeping domestic servants became a common practice for those who raised their status crossing that thin line demarcating class and caste. Even within the slaves a sort of hierarchy is visible. Although the family slaves were not traded but there was a custom to supply some slaves as part of the dowry. Quite often the women were bought and sold slaves. The ones good at singing was known as *Patar* or *Khanazad*; the head was known as *Badaran*. Generally the rulers used to keep a slave girl within their *harem* she was then known as *Goli* who technically married to a *Gola* (male-slave). But as long as the *Goli* was in the *harem* she was not allowed to have any kind of relation with him.¹⁷ The one who was a favorite of the ruler could get be elevated to a position next to the second set of queens and was known as *Pad.dayat*. Close association with a ruler could result in her exalted status to wear some gold raising their position within the community of slaves such special slave was known as *Paswans* or *Khawas*. Getting into the elevated position meant following the *purdah* practice. Such a woman would have luxury of having servants and helpers as well as some *jagir* and *khalsa* lands.¹⁸ On their birthdays or marriages they could be given lavishly.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ For further reading, read Acharya Chatursen, (Novel) *Goli*

¹⁸ Santosh Yadav, *Unmisavi beesawi shatabdi*, op. Cit., 181.

Although by mid-nineteenth century the British demanded to put an end to this practice. It was not abandoned by the ruling Rajput chiefs and continued well into the twentieth century. Whenever the British Agents wrote to the rulers of the native states they were given to understand that with the passage of time the definition of this tradition would change. The rulers and feudal lords were not ready to accept 'change'. People's dependence on them and helplessness was used for its continuance. Kota and Bundi States issued a notice declaring the custom of *daroga* non-hereditary in 1920. Jodhpur state declared slave tradition illegal in 1926 but the practice dubiously prevailed till the late twentieth century though under the changed definition.¹⁹ Eventually the new generation of rulers and feudal lords by themselves found this custom to be a burden on their pockets. As the traditional system of feudalism lost its valor the income too became limited putting constraints on the practice.

Alongside the slave market the flesh trade too got affected. The trading of the girls and boys and women was wide prevalent in the nineteenth century for which even the state used to levy the tax. Commonly the girls and women from the lower castes were brought from Mathura, Agra, Aligarh, Malwa, Gujarat and Kathiawar. In the Jaipur, Tonk and Bharatpur States 75, 11 and 77 girls were between 1860 and 1862 brought from Agra, Mathura and other places respectively. From the Kota State the political agent confirmed

¹⁹ Ibid., 183-184.

the selling of 3 women for prostitution in Ajmer.²⁰ Although this practice was banned in Kota in 1831 the state records note levying of *Chauthan* tax on the trading of slaves till 1862. Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bundi and Sirohi declared flesh trade as illegal respectively in 1844, 1847, 1855 and 1861 but it was only on papers. Other native states too passed orders to the *jagirdars* and police heads to keep a check on such practices for the consumption of British officials. The British allowed the rulers to be able to restart the flesh trade during the time of drought of 1868-69, in 1869 another notice was issued where the ruler of the Kota State ordered the feudal lords and others that without the sanction of the State no one should buy and sell girl, boy or women.²¹

As far as the condition of the women are concerned there is hardly any difference between the British India and the Native India. Indian patriarchy is deep rooted and deep seated in history, religion and society. The ancient law giver Manu has seen women solely as wives, mothers and homemakers. Women's sexuality is reduced only to procreation. Their 'natural' sexual desires have not only been suppressed but dreaded as 'unguarded woman would bring sorrow upon both families. It is the very nature of women to corrupt men here on earth'.²² Meera Kosambi's interpretation in this respect is quite interesting; to her even the reformers thought and believed that women were incapable of deciding what they wanted, because 'a women's

²⁰ Santosh Yadav, *Unnisavi Beesavi Shatabdi*, op. cit. 184.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 185. Also refer to Kota Bhandar No. 1, Samvat 1752, RSAB.

²² Meera Kosambi, *Crossing Thresholds*, 25.

understanding is unreliable'.²³ The man-woman relationship shows that there has been an institutional denial in the free self-expression and empowerment in public sphere. It is not just that women are held back in public sphere but also within the private sphere they are suppressed. This structural and cultural denial of public power eventually became an instrument of exploitation, domestication, suppression and inequality of woman as a gender category. Curbing her creative potential and observing strict codes respecting her gait, gestures, clothing, looks and appearance kept her on a completely different footing than men. Through these mechanism men tried to manage and control women's sexuality.²⁴

When Rakhmabai resisted her child marriage and faced trial in the court in the mid 1880's wrote in 1885 challenging the Shastric image of women.

If these worthies are to be trusted, we are a set of unclean animals, created by god for the special service and gratification of man who by right divine can treat or maltreat us at his sweet will. Reduced to this state of degradation by the dictum of the Sastra looked down upon for ages by men, we have naturally come to look down upon ourselves.²⁵

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ N.K. Singhi, 'Gender Theme: Issues and Perspectives', eds. Pratibha Jain and Rajan Mahajan, *Women Images*, Jaipur, Rawat Publication, 1996, 55-56.

²⁵ Meera Kosambi, *Crossing Thresholds*, op. cit., 25. Also see Sudhir Chandra, *Enslaved Daughters: Colonial Law and Women's Rights*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999.

The observation and understanding of Rakhmabai is quite interesting. Women do not carry their own 'image'; they perceive themselves as what men would want them to look like. A rebel such as Rakhmabai was tough to raise critical questions against such 'man made' norms courageously.²⁶ She went ahead to say that even the 'reformer husbands do not expect their wives to overpower them, their 'sympathy' on the dilapidated condition of womanhood was a foul-cry. The persistent fear was that under western influence Indian women would develop an independent existence instead of submerging their identity in their husbands' that they would become women instead wives. What an exalting observation of transforming wives into women. This has generally been taken as a threat by men to their dominant position which has secured their supremacy over women.

In Hadauti it is difficult to find a Rakhmabai or a Tarabai Shinde the product of fast changing Indian metropolis. Here a popular saying '*Marad to muchhal nain banki sundari*', advocating a true strong man with a moustache and a woman with beautiful eyes. Another saying, '*Marad to junjhar banko, khunkh banki sundari*',²⁷ lionizes a man with a brave warrior and a real woman bearing a healthy child. As if a man without a moustache is incompetent and a woman who is unable to bear a child, probably a son is infertile. Mostly the birth of the girl is not liked but a boy is seen as the carrier of the lineage. The

²⁶ Also see, Sudhir Chandra, *Enslaved Daughters: Colonialism, Law and Women's Right*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998; Rukhmabai: Debate Over Woman's Right to her Person, *Economic and Political Weekly*, November, 2, 1996, 2937-2947.

²⁷ Sivaswaroop, *Hadauti Lok Sahitya ki Sanskritik Chetna*, unpublished thesis, Kota, Rajkiya Mahavidyalaya, 1987, 83.

birth of a girl is taken as matter of embarrassment for the family²⁸. The lady who delivering a girl child is condemned and abused; even her paternal home is not spared from a curse. This makes the concerned woman depressed and starts blaming herself as a criminal who is guilty of an offence. But if she delivers a boy then entire family is over whelmed with joy; she would be greeted warmly, treated like a queen, everyone would cheerfully informed, sweets distributed, songs sung with dances as if it is a great occasion.

A newlywed is always blessed with *dundho nahao, putan phalo*,²⁹ may you bathe in milk and may you bear sons. The fear for women of being called *banjh* (infertile) make her feel miserable about her existence. She is cursed and her presence too is avoided in many social gathering. Such type of woman is also left by her husband. The woman who is abandoned prays to the family goddess: *De na mai ji mhari ek judalyo mhane, ek judlya ke kaaran mharo kant paraya, sej parai...* And the older women of the family would also say, *Beta jadyo such dekh jyo*,³⁰ meaning that more sons more possibility of living peaceful, prosperous and happy old-age. This is precisely what Tarabai Shinde meant when she wrote in her *Stree-Purusha-Tulna* sarcastically describing about stree-dharma:

What is stri-dharma (a woman's moral duty)? Always obeying her husband's order, conducting herself in accordance with his wishes... worshipping him with a smiling face as if he were a

²⁸ Ibid., p. 84 *Aji chhori rand hoi chhe*.

²⁹ Sivaswaroop, *Hadauti Lok Sahitya*, op. cit., 83.

³⁰ Ibid., 95-96.

god and being alert in his service, even if he kicks and curses her; keeps mistresses or comes home after drinking, gambling, losing all his money, stealing, kicking someone, betraying someone, robbing a treasure and taking a bribe- this is *stri-dharma*.³¹

In the male dominant culture whatever a man does gets easy justification a woman just keeps on trying to be in the good books of her husband. If she would leave her husband it would be she who would be cursed and criticized for being incapable of holding on a relation. This is a clear case of 'blaming the victim'. When a woman is three to four months pregnant, a *punasavan* sanskar is celebrated, the name of the sanskar itself denotes for the birth of a boy (*pu* for *purush*).³² It is during this time the sex of the child inside the womb forms; therefore this *sanskar* is followed in hope that a boy be born. During pregnancy family and society seem to be more worried to make her clear that they wish to see a boy not a girl.

In another ceremony known as '*Sangh*' or '*athava*,' which is celebrated when the expected woman reaches eighth month of her pregnancy. In this women's gathering even the paternal family of the lady are invited who come with loads of presents for the in-laws of their daughter. During this ceremony the women gathered usually sings about the physical and emotional changes of the pregnant lady. In the songs by the nine month she is preparing room

³¹ Meera Kosambi, *Crossing Thresholds*, op. cit., 43-44.

³² Sivaswaroop, *Hadauti Lok Sahitya*, op. cit., 97.

(*ovariyo*) for her delivery and by tenth month she is singing lullaby (*halariya*). All the celebrations is being done that she is going to deliver a baby boy, for which she is treated as a queen.

These songs also manifest the gap between the daughter-in-law and the other family members. The lady in labor pain trusts her mother and not the mother-in-law or sister-in-law. This is the song sung by the wife struggling through her labor cramps and pleading her husband to go and get her mother and *dai* from her paternal home.³³

This reveals her distrust of her in-laws or can also be taken as a way of telling the family of the girl to bear the expense of the delivery. In Rajasthan a median marriage distance is 20.8 miles which is higher than the figure for any other Indian state.³⁴ Farther the distance of a female lesser access and restricted movement from the resources of help and support for her.³⁵ In most of the cases she is denied basic facilities and the distance between her paternal and marital homes act as her additional challenge for her survival.

'*Jacha*' or '*Japa*' as the woman is known who has delivered a child but has not completed her 40 days of seclusion. There are many songs related to

³³ *Thanki to dai kadiyan aave, thanki to mata kadiyan aave, mhara piyriya su jaa r dai lao ji, thhe bega javo ji piya. Lal palang pe peeda gheri gheri aave ji, Chandra badan mhaki surat kumlave ji, thhe javo ji piya. Lal palang pe gairi gairi peeda aave, thhaki bhabhi to piya kadiyan aave, mhake piyriya su jaa r bhavaj ne lavo ji piya thhe jayo ji piya.* Sivaswaroop, *Hadauti Lok Sahitya*, op. cit., 105-06.

³⁴ Janice S. Hyde, 'Women's Village Networks', eds. N.K. Singhi and Rajendra Joshi, *Folk, Faith and Feudalism*, Jaipur, Rawat Publication, 1995, 184-185.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

the labor pain, how a woman feel and how the husband is even unable to understand his wife's pain and the way she is shy to tell her husband the intensity of that pain. After the child is born celebration only takes place when a boy is born women singing *badhai* (congratulatory) songs.³⁶

Numerous customs and rituals are practiced for and by women especially in upper caste society. Even the distances in the marital alliances are based on the caste. The higher status groups tend to marry their daughters at greater distances compared to lower caste groups.³⁷ The farther a woman is married from her natal home it becomes more difficult to visit her maiden home.

This dimension is felt more during the time of a woman's pregnancy at her marital home. Graphically put a wife is about to deliver a baby and is in labor pain; she doesn't trust anyone from her in-laws family barring her husband, so she pleads to him since everyone is busy in their work like her father-in-law is a *chaudhary* of the village, and the mother-in-law manages the finances, sister-in-law is so strict like a thunder bolt and her husband is an outsider, it is only her husband who would worry about her. Therefore, she asks him to open the delivery room but he too says that 'I would help you,

³⁶ Aaj to nobat baje dasrat ke duar pe, aaj to nagada baje dasrat ke duar pe. Bheetar su sasuji bole lalna jhulaye ke, bahar su sasraji bole dasav lutaye ke, aaj to nobat baje dasrat ke duar pe. Bheetar su bhabhiji bolya charkha chadhaye ke bahar su jeth bolya dhan ne lutaye ke, aaj to nobat baje darat ke duar pe. Bheetra su derani bolya palka bichhaye ke, baare su dewar ji bolya baja bajaye ke, aaj to nobat baje dasrat ke duar pe. Bheetar su bai sa bolya sathiya purai ke, baare su nandoi sa bolya meetaiya mangaye ke. Sivaswaroop, *Hadauti Lok Sahitya*, op. cit., 107-108.

³⁷ Janice S. Hyde, *Women's Village Netwoks*, op. cit., 185.

would open the door for you, will praise you, only when you promise to deliver a boy who shall be the carrier of our family name.' The song makes it very clear that what matters is the family name, and women are supposed just to be the deliverer of their 'progeny.'³⁸

The delivery of a child and subsequent celebration is conditional; the birth of a boy becomes a matter of joy and celebrations. When the lady comes home with 'son' merry songs greet her and gifts are showered upon her.³⁹ The victorious lady delivering the baby is ceremoniously escorted by the ladies of the community and village from the *ovary* outside to her marital home. In the song a stereotype popular relation between *nanand-bhabhi* is shown in which the sister-in-law is jealous of her brother's wife; the former while making faces asks the latter 'the toe ring you are wearing, comes from the jeweler or from *mosala* from your home?' These songs effect different relationships within the family and society.

No songs are sung on a girl's birth. In one song the husband asks her to deliver a boy he would send her to her parents' place with a pack of opium sweets for her to consume and celebrate girl's birth with her maternal

³⁸ Sivaswaroop, *Hadauti Lok Sahitya*, op. cit., 109: *kule oomi kul bau ji vako badan rakho ji kumalye, chyanta mhari kun kare ji. Sasra ji garh ka chaudhary, sasu ji arth bhandari, nandal aaya bijli, nandoi paraya poot. Avera me ovary ji jya mein suta sasu ji ka poot, anghotho marod jagaiya ji, jago nandal ka veer, khali karda ovaro ji, chyanta mhari kun kare ji. Hans hans pech sanwariya ji, vane pulkat bandhi chhe faag, lelo sundar ovaro ji, chyanta thari mhe kara ji. Thhe jo jan davdo ji, dadaji ko bans badhaye, badhai sundar mhe kara ji, chyanta thari mhe kara ji.*

³⁹ *thhal bharya gaj moti leena, upar sakar bajori ji, aage nayan fache parothan beeche aap fadarya ji. Jaye sasu ji ke paglya lagi, nandal muh maskodyo ji, ke mhari bhabhi aap ghadya ke mosala me aaya ji?* Ibid.

family⁴⁰. During pregnancy such songs are sung to put her psychological pressure on woman. This pressure of delivering a boy makes her pray and beg the *Sati mata*. In one song to *Sati* the lady pleads for a son as her husband is ready to get another wife who would give him a son and the entire family would turn against her: *maha mai ji ek jhudalyo dey, ek jhudalyo ke kaaran mharo kant parayo, sej parai, roosyo sab parivar*. Listening to her prayers *Sati mata* blesses her with a son as she says: *ek jhudalyo ka do le gauri, yo le thharo kant, yo le thhari sej, roosyo ghani manaye*.⁴¹

The nineteenth-twentieth century women in the metropolis India were going through a transition where the 'literate' and 'educated' women were able to stand, jot down their thoughts, beliefs and accomplishments in memoirs, autobiographies etc. but in Hadauti none has been found to this date. As Meera Kosambi points out, women never were able to judge themselves objectively. She brings in Estelle Jelink who asserts that men usually project a 'self-confident, one dimensional self image' while women often depict a multi dimensional, fragmented, self image, colored by a sense of inadequacy and alienation, of being outsider or other; they feel the need for an authentication to prove their 'self-worth'.⁴²

⁴⁰ *jo ghar janami davadi ji, thane daanga piyar khandaye, badhai sundar kun kare ji? Thhake amalya ka laadu bandhaye, badhai thanko baap kare ji, jo thha janami davadi ji*. Sivaswaroop, *Hadauti Lok Sahitya*, op. cit., 112.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁴² Meera Kosambi, *Crossing Thresholds*, op. cit., 37.

In the context of this study the above observation about gender differences by Estelle Jelink is interesting as the Hadauti women too have supported their men as wives, but never felt the need to discuss their lives 'separate' as 'individuals.' For them their life without their husbands is incomplete and in fact has been nothing. This mindset was not only confined to the rural Hadauti such mentality of the educated upper class is clearly visible through the conservative Anglo-Marathi Weekly 'Native Opinion'. It outlined the parameters of education for females in 1882:

What sort of education our females want, or more accurately, what sort of education men wanted for women. In educating our females our first care must be to try to make them good housewives and good mothers'. Therefore, 'primary education only was necessary. If we want our girls to be useful they must learn to read and write, to keep accounts, to sew and above all to cook well. All this, we think can be taught at home than at public school.⁴³

If this was the mindset in the urban India one can expect a tough challenge the women of the smaller and under-developed towns and villages faced. In fact, they could not even reach a point to understand the 'transition' which was coming their way. We see 'silence' with which they accept conventional norms and prejudices. Anandibai Joshee's revelation of the male

⁴³ Meera Kosambi, op. cit., 157.

mindset while going to school at the age of fifteen in a relatively progressive city of Mumbai in the late 1870's is awe-inspiring. She writes:

When people saw me going to school with books in my hands, they had the goodness to put their heads out of the windows just to have a look at me. Some stopped their carriages for the purpose. Others walking in the streets stood laughing, and crying out (derisive remarks) so that I could hear (them)... Passers by whenever they saw me going, gathered around me. Some of them made fun and were convulsed with laughter. Others sitting respectably in their verandahs, made ridiculous remarks and did not feel ashamed to throw pebbles at me. The shopkeepers and vendors spat at me, and made gestures too indecent to describe. I leave it to you to imagine what was my condition at such a time, and how I could gladly have burst through the crowd to make home nearer!⁴⁴

The spirit and the courage she had to stand against all odds for the larger cause of Indian women are amazing. Think now of these three women; Beni Gupta, a child widow; Rampyari Shastri, a spinster and Shakuntala, a spinster which have been used as examples of female struggles, working against odds to achieve the success in a male dominant society. All of them never felt the need to write their 'success' stories, instead were satisfied in their lives. Even as child-widow, Beni Gupta helped her niece's family as hers

⁴⁴ Meera Kosambi, *op. cit.*, 160.

and never felt like marrying again. Ram pyari Shastri who was a spinster and died alone in exile in Haridwar her contribution has not been acknowledged in the reforms of Kota and Hadauti. Shakuntla opted to spend rest of her life as spinster, when she was not permitted to marry the man whom she liked.

Shakuntla who faced slurs of society in a very small town of Jhalarapatan where she was born in a Brahmin (pandit) family. She mustered the courage to declare her love for a man but when he could not face the opposition with equal measure and refused to stand by her, she decided to remain single unmarried forever. Shankutla 'Renu', daughter of Pandit Girdhar Sharma 'Navratna' was born in Jhalarapatan on 24th June, 1921. She took her primary education from her uncle *Rajvaidya* Shyamlalji Bhatt, Bharatpur, and completed her higher education under the guidance of her father. She started writing the age of sixteen. She wrote many poems on freedom struggle, bhakti and translated rubai of Hafiz and also wrote on folk songs of Hadauti though unfortunately many of her writings are lost by now. But what has made her case interesting is her strength to stand against her family and society and declare her love for someone and believing him to be her husband and then refusing to marry anyone else. From her writings it appears that there must have been family rejection and she was upset with existing social set up which is expressed in a poem is:⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Shardhha niece of Shakuntla gave information about her as well as shared her personal diary with me. I met her in Jhalarapatan on 29th November, 2011 at her home. The poems in Shakuntala's diary do not carry any dates.

jag jhanjha kaise sahen karoo? Mera jivan jag se nyara jisme asafalta andhiyara! Ghare mujhko bandhan kara! Kya kahte ho uff tak na karoo? Jag jhanjha kaise sahen karoo? Jivanpath ati Durant, ghor! Ekanki chalti lakshya ore! Par, jag aankhe atishey kathor! Yeh bhaarkahan tak vahan karoo? Jag jhanjha kaise sahen karoo? Jag itna nishthurtam kyon? Jag bandhan itne nirmam kyon? Laghu jivan mein gum he gum kyon? Smriti mein yeh- kaise vilag karoo? Jag jhanjha kaise sahen karoo?

She questions people's authority in dictating the lives of individual. Although alone this is her decision to live as she wants. Not allowed her ways makes her saying "*Par, jag aankhe atishey kathor!*" In her writings she emerges as mystic and in poem entitled: *deye hai sansar mujhko* her lost love has become her strength as she writes:

Dekhli jag ki amarta! Sun chuki jag ka madir swar! Naap li jag ki agamta kar chuki anubhav anshwar! Hai na iska moh mujhko, dukhad hai na vichhoh mujhko! Choomati hans-hans adhar re! mrityu-apsari bhet, mujhko! Hai sukhad anchal karuntam vilay re, jisme 'aham,' 'mum' mit jahan par ek hota- vishwa jivan- chir visham sam! Ek pyas mita rahi hai, kintu aas jala rahi hai! Pran sambal hai tumahara, pran! Keval pyar mujhko! Deye hai sansar mujhko!

She transcends into another space, from where the 'materialistic' world appears insignificant to her. But sometimes she blames her destiny as reflected in a poem:

*jal mere ekanki jivan! Shanti shamshan bhar apne mein, chal bav-
vaibhav ke sapne mein, tujhko atmatusshti tapne mein! Ghul mere
ekanki jivan!! Jal! Mere ekanki jivan! Liye Samadhi hridya-asha ki,
pyar, prem ki pratyasha ki, antravedan- abhilasha ki- gal mere ekanki
jivan! Jal, mere ekanki jivan! Jalne ka vardan tujhe re! galne ka arman
tujhe re mitne ka abhiman tujhe re! pryе mere abhishapit jivan! Jal,
mere ekanki jivan!*

Her book 'Manavi' which she began writing on 20th August, 1941 appears to be autobiographical. This story is about Savita who is a daughter of a saint living in an *asharam*. Her mother is very loving and devoted toward her husband and five children. Savita is the middle child, very affectionate and caring. Like mother she too was devoted her '*dharm*' which she learned from her parents. She grew up to be an innocent, loving and lovable woman. One day she found her love, Jayendra who was adamant to leave and devote his life for his country. By soliciting forgiveness from her he left forever. Savita had learnt that the duty of a woman is to fall once for a man who would be her husband and dutifully follow his path no matter what happens. A woman must be devoted for she is the '*ardhangini*' one who shares everything with her husband. For Savita, her world was complete with her love whom she worshipped as her lord; she never questioned his absence but never allowed her or anyone from her family to force her to accept anyone else. Her brother Mahendra even asked her to move on as Jayendra would never come back to her. She refused and said that my Love has crossed all the

worldly desires, it is not physical, it is spiritual, and does not yearn for anything else other than taking care of my love, wherever he is. He never told her that it was Jayendra who through Mahendra asked her to move on with some one who deserves her. Mahendra was perplexed to see the power of her love which was beyond any mortal to grasp. Her desire for motherhood and her aspiration to do something for the society made her to open up a school for girls. Through her motherly care and affection she spread the warmth amongst the girls and taught them to be devoted toward country and family. She was contented with her life as the school was progressing. But one day she saw Mahendra who had brought Jayendra with him. She was glad to see him. Seeing her passion Jayendra called her devi which she refused. She told that she was his wife, that too a disobedient one who was unable to fulfill all the duties. And then suddenly she fell on the lap of Jayendra. Before both the men could understand she died. They made her 'samadhi' in the school, with her statue. This book was published in 1993; it took almost 52 years to publish. She was not even interested in publishing it but was convinced by people around to do so.

This story runs like an auto-biography of Shakuntla. It seems that her father Pandit Girdharlal was a strict man while her mother could be a typical Indian wife- submissive and dedicated. Shakuntla who grew up seeing her parents living and adoring the conventional marital relationship. The turning point came in her life when she wanted to follow the 'ideal' norms with a person of her choice but which was unacceptable in an orthodox patriarchal

family like hers. To resolve the conflict and buy peace for herself she opted to stay spinster all her life.

Savita like Shakuntla comes in the middle of her siblings. Her father also followed strict code of conduct for his family like Shakuntla's father, and her mother too resembled Shakuntla's mother. Shakuntla too loved someone for whom she devoted her entire life without questioning his stand regarding the relationship like Savita who loved Jayendra who left her. Shradha, Shakuntla's niece, confirmed that she had loved someone and had declared him as her husband. Probably being a daughter of a poet who had earned the title of 'Pandit', it was possible for her to exercise her choice in selecting her spouse yet the opposition from other family members would have put those pressures against her choice. She expresses her anger at the attitude of the society in:

*jal rahi hoon mai nirantar viswa ka abhishap le kar! Main sisakti,
vishwa muktathal hans hans lutata! Marambhedini bhrikuti kar apni
vijay par muskurata! Jee rahi hoon aah! Phir bhi, marm par aaghat-
sahkar!! Gal rahi himvat satat main vishwa ka paritaap le kar!! Salaj
aakansha hriday ki, vishwa mein jag-paap kyon hain? Samajh pati
main na, kalushit pyar, paawan raag kyon hain? Chal rahi hoon
shunya antar le -usi aviram- pat par!! Sal rahi hoon main nirantar
prem ka vardaana paa kar.*

And in another poem which is untitled her anger comes bluntly:

main kaise aankhen band karoo? Chhalna kaise bhooloo jag ka? Kaise ur-peeda door karoo? Kuchla haan! Jisne pur pyar, chhati mein kale chhed kiye! Mann me virakti ke bhav bhare, kaise phir usko pyar karoo? Jalti jab prano ki holi aahut jisme jeevan-umang! Ho leen chirantan priyatam mein, kaise vismrit se khel karoo? Chhalna kaise bhooloo jag ka? Kaise ur-peeda ko door karoo?

'Viswa' and 'Jag' here mean people around and society in general including her own family who did not allow her to be with her love. The man whom she loved is not discussed; the silence obliterated his identity. As long as she was young no one in the family would talk about the affair. In a small way things appeared in whispers. Only after she became old and more after she died. And yet the younger generation does not know the complete story of Shakuntla's life.

We find her questioning society in her poems entitled:

door mujhse tum kab? Pran mere! Hriday dhadkan saath-teri smriti nirantar! Hridaya mein tav murti karunapuran mannhar! Prandayak amar- vedan ka madhur swar! Chetana, ullas deta hriday mein bhar! Pran veena radan karti adrash tera sparsh paa kar! Neel nabh se gunjrit shuchi, subhag, priy!tera karu swar! Pran! Anu-anu mein rache tum! Dudh-paani sa ghule tum! Vishwa phir bhi keh raha haan!tum na mere!! Dur tum mujhse kaho, kab? Pran mere!

After reading Manavi and getting inspired by the book one Ms. Geeta Bajaj opened a Girls' School Bal Vidyamandir with 3 students in Jaipur. Presently it's converted into a B. Ed college. Shakuntla had thanked Ms. Bajaj in the acknowledgement for bringing her thought to the world. She also adopted her brother's son Vivek as her '*manas-putra*'. On his early death she took care of his daughters.

Ram Pyari Shastri⁴⁶ belonged to Payal of Patiala state in Punjab. Payal was their ancestral village where her uncle and father had lived for long. She was born in Gonda of Uttar Pradesh. Her mother died soon after her birth and she lived with her maternal uncles; one of was Police officer while other was GDSP in Punjab. Her father was a Station Master in the Indian Railway who later became a *Sadhu*. She studied from Kanya Mahavidyalya, Jalandhar and graduated from Varanasi (BHU) did her M.A.B.T. and also cleared the exam of *Shastri*. She worked in Kota since 1932 and acquired the domicile in 1935. Apart from being the bonafide resident, she purchased a house and mortgaged a property worth 10,000/-. Her father sold his property and gave the money to her before he died in Kalyan as *Sadhu* in 1941. She was nominated as member and as Vice-Chairman of the Municipal Board, Kota, and was also an active member of the Red Cross society.

She was removed from the post of Head-mistress of the Maharani Girls School, Kota, on suspicion that she had been participating in the Congress

⁴⁶ Kota Confidential 50/Kota, RSAB.

activities. In reaction to her removal there was an agitation in the Prajamandal and asked the Maharao to reinstate her position. She came under suspicion because she had written a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru asking him to guide her so that she may contribute the freedom struggle. This particular letter was intercepted which became the reason enough for her removal, although she was granted permission to enter Kota but was not allowed to get back to her work.

Dr. Beni Gupta was a daughter of Gaurilal Gupta, also known as 'ghadisaj'. He was a watchmaker and was an active member of Praja Mandal and worked for the upliftment of Harijan with Ram Pyari Shastri. Beni was a widow from childhood. She was married at the age of 12 in 1940 and in 1941 she became widow after long illness and death of her husband.⁴⁷ She had to return to her father's home where he encouraged her to continue her studies under the guidance of Dr. Mathuralal Sharma and Ram Pyari Shastri she restarted her studies. Rampyari taught her the skill to fight as she was then the principal of Maharani School where Beni restarted her studies. After clearing her 10th she started teaching classes and by 1946 while teaching she cleared her 12th exams as well.⁴⁸ She completed her M.A. in 1951 from Rajasthan University and getting a scholarship from the state got her B. Ed degree from Vidyabhavan, Udaipur. From 1953-1957 she was working as a teacher at Rajamahar Mahavidyalaya, Jodhpur, where she even used to ride a

⁴⁷ Seema Nagar, *Dr. Beni Gupta ka Vyaktitva evan Kratitva*, Unpublished M. Phil. Thesis, Kota, Kota Government College, 2008-09, 3-4.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 5

bicycle to commute.⁴⁹ She got transferred to Kota where she taught B. Ed students in the Janakidevi Bajaj college from 1957-1970. Meanwhile, she also completed her Doctoral degree in History from the Rajasthan University, Jaipur. She shifted to the Mira Bai Girls College, Udaipur as the Vice-Principal and hostel warden for the girls' hostel in 1970. Working in the Manikya Lal Verma College, Bhilwara as the Principal from 1971-75 she again returned to Kota as the Head of History department at the Government College in 1975 and worked till 1978 when she achieved her D. Lit degree and became the first woman of her times to achieve such an honor in Rajasthan. She returned as the Principal of the Janaki Devi Bajaj Kanya Mahavidyalaya at Kota in 1980 and got retired in 1981.⁵⁰

These three women portrayed example of women's struggle in the male dominating society. Treating women as victims of oppression places them in a male-defined conceptual framework: oppressed and victimized by standards and values established by men. The true history of women is the history of their ongoing functioning in that male-defined world, on their own terms.⁵¹ Women's history presents a challenge to the periodization of traditional history. The periods in which basic changes occur in society and which historians have commonly regarded as turning points for all historical development, are not necessarily the same for men as for women. This is not surprising when we consider that the traditional time frame in history has

⁴⁹ Seema Nagar, *Dr. Beni Gupta*, op. cit., 6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7-8

⁵¹ Gerda Lerner, 'Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges', *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1/2, autumn, 1975, 5-14.

been derived from political history.⁵² Women have been longest excluded from political power and assigned an inferior place in the social order thus raising the bar to re-analyze modernization from women perspective.

⁵² Ibid.