CHAPTER VI
NORMATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF FAMILY AND GENDER RELATIONSHIPS

INTRODUCTION

The focus of the present study is not only to analyse the declining trend of the sex ratio in Vadodara city but to examine the underlying causes. From the existing literature on the subject it is apparent that the causes lie within the various structures of the society. While discussing the causes responsible for sex determination (SD) and sex selective abortion (SSA) in India in general and Gujarat in particular it is essential to look at the normative construction of a girl in the society. This requires an examination of the socio-cultural, regional, religious and economic factors. As indicated in several studies, the phenomenon of son-preference and daughter aversion is largely responsible for declining child sex ratio (CSR) and needs to be understood and traced in the cultural context of a given area (Miller, 1981; Mazumdar, 1994; Mutharayappa et al, 1997; Mallik 2003, Visaria, L.2007; Patel, T. 2007; Ravindra, 2007; Bora and Tygai, 2008; Kaur, 2008; Larsen, Hatti and Gooch, 2008; Samaiyar, 2008). These studies indicate that the prevailing structure of patriarchy and the process of gender role socialisation are responsible for the problem.

The primary institution of family in India provides the foundation for the appropriate behavioural standards for members of society. Being the most basic agent of socialisation process, one’s ideas and ideologies are often shaped and influenced by the norms and values acquired from or imposed on by the family. Gender role socialisation is a process of internalising the gender specific roles by men and women. “In India, gender socialisation is inextricably intertwined with the insidious internalization of gender bias through socialisation processes places the girl child in a precarious situation” (Menon and Vijay, 2014: 104). There are studies that provide an overview of socialisation process and its influence on gender roles in India, the focus here is restricted to Gujarat.

The norms of gender roles are often defined and constructed in the institution of family. Normative, as per the Webster’s dictionary is “based on what is considered to be the usual or correct way of doing something, of, relating to, or determining norms or standards” (www.merriam-webster.com). This normative construction of gender roles in India, which is
based on inequality, is the basis on which patriarchy and son-preference emerges, bloom and survive. And these norms and standards of gender relations are the roots for son-preference and daughter aversion in Indian society. Other than family norms in India, several other socio-economic structures determine the son-preference namely, the kinship patterns, marriage patterns, economic activities, religious beliefs etc. The chapter uncovers the correlation between the normative construction of gender, kinship and marriage patterns with the alarming trend of declining CSR. It is argued here that, while the embedded value systems in society contribute to the decline in CSR, the values are exacerbated by a changing economic structure.

6.1. PATRIARCHY AND SON-PREFERENCE

Ethnographers, researchers and social scientists have attempted to locate the phenomenon of son-preference and devaluation of daughters in diverse socio-cultural, religious and economic structures of Indian society. These include kinship and marriage norms, the organization of the agrarian economy, and rules and rituals associated with caste and religion (Pande and Ashton, 2007: 4). All these structures in India are governed by the patriarchal system and norms.

Patriarchy as a system defines and differentiates the roles, rights, qualities, work areas of men and women giving them a totally different social status. Institutions like family, religion, legal system, economy, government, media and education system reinforce the patriarchal norms. Patriarchy not just controls gender relations but also exercise its control over the reproduction and fertility of women. Women often have little say over decisions regarding whether to reproduce, when to conceive, number and sex of the children, right over children and their identity, and use of contraception (Shah, T., 2011: 7).

Demographers often try to understand the gender inequality in terms of sex ratio, CSR, literacy or work participation rates through quantitative data collected by central and state authorities that often fail to reflect the complex web of social structures and normative constructions which causes gender inequality and perseverance of son-preference in society. Persistent son-preference is one of the strongest manifestations of gender inequality in Indian society. Son-preference is most prevalent in countries from East Asia through South Asia to the Middle East and North Africa. Evidences of wide spread son-preference are reported in countries like South Korea, China and especially India.
6.2 RELIGION, RELIGIOUS TEXTS, CASTES AND SON-PREFERENCE

Religious texts especially Hindu scriptures have innumerable references and contexts where this gender inequality and son-preference is manifested directly or indirectly. Although the ancient Hindu scriptures and religious texts label arrival of girl child as blessings of goddess Laxmi (wealth), paradoxically several Hindu texts (like Atharvaveda), prescribe hymns for chanting in order to give birth to a male child. Blessings that followed weddings like “may you be the mother of hundred sons’ or ‘may you give birth to eight sons’ (ashta putravati bhava) reminds the couple (especially the bride) of their primary duty of procreation and that too of giving birth to a son (Bumiller, 1991 and Croll, 2000: 90-92). "May he (pragdpati) elsewhere afford the birth of a female, but here he shall bestow a man!" This hymn (Atharva Veda, Book VII, verse 11, translation by Bloomfield, 1897 cited in Pande and Ashton, 2007) is an ancient Indian chant for women to give birth to sons. Dating to circa 800 B.C.E., it reflects a sentiment that persists in India (Pande and Ashton, op cit: 2). In different regions of the country there are different ceremonies for ‘praying for a son’ held shortly after marriages. Hindu scriptures also insist on a son or a boy from the patriarchal family to light the funeral pyre of the deceased parents. ‘Purush’ is the one who gives salvation to the soul from a hell of ‘Pu’.

Religion plays an important role in defining appropriate social and gender norms, which in turn influence son-preference. Sons have been accorded the unique privilege of performing various rituals and functions including the funeral rites and ancestral rights (shraadh) for deceased parents. In Hinduism, the major religion in India, sons are crucial. Among Hindus, a dead parent's soul can only attain heaven if that person has a son to light the funeral pyre, and salvation can be achieved through sons who offer ancestral worship (Pande and Ashton, 2007: 4). Ravindra (2007) brings in a mythological justification of female infanticide used by Yadavs. Yadavs are a dominant middle caste in northern India and call themselves Lord Krishna’s descendents. Before Krishna’s birth, Kansa, his maternal uncle who was warned of being killed by his sister’s child, killed Krishna’s sister fearing her to be his potential killer. Yadavs justify their act of infanticide based on this and reduces the guilt associated with it (Ravindra, 2007: 122).

Not just Hinduism, the analysis of National Family and Health Survey (NFHS) reports suggest that strong son-preference do prevail amongst Muslims, Sikhs and Jains as well. Several studies prove that son-preference exists even among other religious groups such
as the Sikhs (Das Gupta, 1987) or the Muslims (Murthy, 1996). The degree of the preference might differ keeping in mind the other socio-economic indicators like religious norms and virtues on one side and demographic features like literacy, class, region or work force participation on the other, but they all do exhibit son-preference (Mutharayappa et al, 1997: 25-27).

The general belief that the marginalised caste groups are often the illiterate and ignorant section of society and thus leading to high rate of son-preference does not hold to be true in most of the cases. In fact more son-preference is found in higher caste than lower caste. Purdah and seclusion in higher caste limits women’s mobility and hence her work participation in public domain. Making her a non-productive member of the family and thus considered a liability or a burden. Certain castes and communities are historically daughter deficit due their legacy of female infanticide. Kallar community in Tamil Nadu, Jats in Punjab, Rajputs and Lewa Patels in Gujarat are a few of them who had adopted different strategies to kill their female infants. “Amongst these castes (mentioned above), families at the top of a local hypergamus system were liable to a loss of prestige if they had daughters” (Bhandari, 1991: 5). Caste wise CSR depicted in census data in India and also in Vadodara clearly also breaks the popular myth of lower caste having strong son-preference. The data shows skewed CSR amongst the upper castes. (District census handbook, 2011).

6.3 REGIONAL DIVIDE AND SON-PREFERENCE

While tracing the factors leading to son-preference in India, Miller (1981) and Dyson and Moore (1983) have divided the Indian society into north and north-west region on one side and south on the other. This distinction is based on the regional differences of kinship patterns, norms of marriage and relations based on such a pattern and female work force participations. They have correlated patrilinial and patrilocal kinship pattern with strong son-preference.

The factors responsible for son-preference in the western and north western parts of the country (where the present study is located) are broadly identified by Mutharayappa et al (1997) and many others as follows:

a) Economic Utility- sons are more likely than daughters to provide family labour on the farm or in family business, earn wages and support their parents during the old age. Upon
marriage a son brings a daughter-in-law who brings rewards in the form of dowry. Dowry is one the most important reason in devaluation of daughters as well.

b) Socio-cultural utility- Having one son, in the Indian patrilinial and patriarchal family system, is imperative for the continuation of the family line and adds status to the family. Continuation of family lineage is often associated with preservation of ancestral property and family name in the society.

c) Religious utility- According to Hindu scriptures, sons are needed to kindle the funeral pyre of their deceased parents and to help in the salvation of their soul.

Kaur (2008) suggests the following reasons, which are all-encompassing for son-preference or why families wanted fewer daughters than sons. “(1) hypergamy – the need/desire to marry daughters into higher status families placed a burden on parents; (2) dowry – similarly needed to acquire desired grooms or to confirm to ‘honorable’ norms of marriage; these two “cultural” culprits have to be understood in relation to marriages as alliance building and ultimately as part of political strategies which may be accompanied by significant economic gains at the local and regional level; (3) women’s lower value in wheat farming systems which require less of their labour or where their labour is less visible than in paddy farming systems; (4) seclusion or lack of participation in productive activities as an extension of the above (prevalent among certain northern high castes); (5) kinship, marriage and descent systems in which men inherit property and women move to unrelated and distant families to live with husbands; (6) Patrilocality – the daughter moves to the husband’s home and does not inherit immovable family property, and hence, is unable to either contribute to her natal family or offer old-age support to her parents which her brother can. (Kaur, 2008: 110). (7) Furthermore, scholars such as Oldenburg (2002) provide a historical reason pointing out that the concentration of proprietary rights in the hands of individual males during the colonial period diluted unstated but customarily recognized female rights in property contributing to their unwantedness [sic]” (Oldenburg, 2002, as cited in Kaur, ibid).

6.4 NORMS OF KINSHIP BUILDING

Kinship pattern play a pivotal role in determining the gender relations in India. Sociologists and social anthropologists have done a great deal of work in the diversities in the kinship and marriage patterns influencing the family and gender relation in different regions of the country. Scholars and researchers have broadly categorised this division into North and south Indian Kinship patterns which follows common principles and exhibit a similar
prototypes respectively. In north, patriline, patrilocality and patriarchy dominate the kinship and marriage patterns. Endogamy and exogamy in the marriages based on kinship determines gender roles in northern and southern India.

In north, marriage is exogamous, after marriage, a girl typically becomes a member of her husband's family and does not have much interaction with her natal kin. Parents of a girl often have to pay all marriage costs and provide a large dowry. Marriage is often dominated by the search for inter-group alliances, and women usually have no choice in the matter. The ‘wife-givers’ are socially and ritually inferior to the ‘wife-takers’, and dowry is the main marriage transaction; at the extreme, marriage transactions may resemble trafficking in females (Dyson and Moore, 1983: 44). There are three key principles of north Indian kinship. “First, spouses must be unrelated in kinship reckoning, and often too by place of birth and/or residence. In other words, marriage rules are exogamic. Second, males tend to cooperate with and receive help from other males to whom they are related by blood, frequently their adult brothers. Third, women generally do not inherit property for their own use, nor do they act as links through which major property rights are transferred to offspring” (Dyson and Moore, op cit: 43). The flow of resources amongst generations (from father to son) and amongst gender (males) creates two types of hierarchies i.e. ‘gender hierarchy’ and ‘generational hierarchy’ in the family (Larsen et al, 2008: 86).

There often exists a distinct female-specific communication network that is inaccessible to adult males. Women exercise social influence largely through ‘gossip’ and similar strategies. And socially approved female formal employment involves interaction only with other women—for example, as a teacher in a girls' school or a nurse in a female ward. For women, family based relationships are a source of support as well as sanction. However, this support often rests on conformity with predetermined norms.

Childbearing, in particular the birth of sons is one such norm and results in support as well as reduced disadvantages for women within the family network (Mallik, 2003: 3). The birth of the daughter, brings negative response as it means she has continue with the child bearing process whereas, early arrival of sons is welcomed as it reduces the need for additional child bearing in order to reach the desired number of sons and accelerates their acceptance into their husband’s family (Croll, 2000: 100). It is with the birth of a son that women get a strong hold in the family. Women find producing girl babies especially after one
to their detriment. “The stigma of sonlessness [sic] is not an abstraction; it is real and very palpable” (Patel, T. 2007: 258).

Women bearing a first-born son are said to grow ‘one fist in height’. And vice-versa ‘shrinks one fist’ if she gives birth to several daughters. With the birth of only daughters, there is a disapproval of husband’s family and a fear of being set aside or abused. The abuse is often against the mother but sometimes also end up against the infant girls. Evidence from field works of ethnographers also brings out the fact that midwives and pundits (priests) involved in delivering and naming ceremony of the girl child respectively are often paid less for their jobs. (Croll, 2000: 101). Patel (2007) also quotes similar stories from her study in Bundelkhand where the saying goes “like ‘beta ho to taaliyaan, beti ho to gaaliyan’ (greet with clapping the birth of a son, and curse when a daughter is born)” (Patel, T. 2007: 255).

In contrast, the southern kinship pattern is characterized by endogamous marriage, that is, marriage between certain types of cousins or within a defined, contiguous geographical area. Women's sexuality and freedom of movement are less curtailed, dowry is not a major marriage transaction, and married daughters are often likely to be on hand to render social and financial help to their parents. Bride wealth is more common, and contributions to the expenses of the marriage ceremony are likely to be more equally shared by the kin groups of the bride and the groom (Miller, 1981).

6.4.1 PATRILINEAL DESCENT

As mentioned earlier, patrilinial households in the north and importance of family lineage reinforces the son-preference. It is that only men constitute the social order, and women are the means whereby men reproduce themselves. Women are the biological reproducers, but it is through the father that a child acquires a social identity and is incorporated into the social order. Since only boys remain in the lineage, the significant social reproduction is that by the father of the son. Through sons, a family can perpetuate the family line and ensure the continuity of the family name. “Nowhere is this more apparent than in a genealogical record or in an ancestor worship hall: one can literally see each generation of men, and the generations of men to whom they gave rise. Women are recorded, if at all, only in the capacity of the wives of the men who gave rise to succeeding generations of men” (Das Gupta et al, 2003: 161). Women’s reproductive labour belongs to another family. i.e. consanguine women cannot reproduce the lineage (Kaur, 2008: 112). Patrilinial descent also
signifies the importance of preserving the ancestral property, may it be land or house, carried out only by sons since daughters once married off have no share in it.

6.4.2 PATRILOCAL RESIDENCE AND MARRIAGE NORMS

The location of marital home is determining factor in deciding the role of women in the family. A complete separation of natal family from marital family with secondary status to the former in comparison to latter reinstate the preference for son who is in a better position in a patrilocal system.

According to cultural norms in north India especially Punjab, married women cannot do anything for their natal family. “They cannot alter the basic societal patterns of allocation to divert resources to their natal kin, even if the latter are in need. This rule is rarely broken. The flow of resources is always supposed to be from the men of the woman's household of birth to her husband's household. The dowry given at the time of marriage is only one part of this resource flow. Throughout a woman's life her father or brothers provide her with clothes and gifts for her in-laws on specified occasions (at the time of marriage, childbirth, children's marriages, annual festivals, and when she visits her home). This lack of reciprocity is symbolized by the custom, widespread among many castes in North India, that a woman's father and brothers do not accept food or water in her husband's home” (Das Gupta, 1987: 92). These norms are reflected even in other northern and north-western states in India.

Indian society in general is patriarchal, such that parents benefit more from having sons than daughters. Sudha and Rajan argue (1999) that exogamous marriage makes women vulnerable by separating them from their natal families and at the same time placing them amongst marital families who are virtual strangers. In such situations of extreme vulnerability one of the ways to gain acceptance and prove themselves as ‘good’ daughters-in-law is to give birth to sons (Sudha and Rajan, 1999: 587). “Because women are so marginalized, brothers and sons are of greater value than sisters or daughters, for every individual. All these considerations result in strong and mutually reinforcing incentives for parents to successfully rear sons rather than daughters” (Das Gupta, 1987: 96). In an ethnographic account by woman in Maharashtra, they revealed a constant fear of being abandoned if they did not give a son to the family. “The Husband might pack them off to their parental home and marry second time” (Deshpande, 2007: 100). Similar responses from north were documented by Kaur (2008), where it is not just the married wives who did not give heirs to the family were
in danger to be sent back or supplemented with co-wife, even the widowed who did not have son were either married of to the deceased husband’s brother or sent back to their natal home (Kaur, 2008: 112).

Women are taught to subordinate her own interest to that of a family, and often women see their own interest as indistinguishable from the family’s interests. The joint family system in India further devalues the worth of women in decision making including those of reproduction and family composition. Decision making power of women in extended joint family is limited. And hence decisions regarding size and sex composition of the family are often made and imposed by elders in the family. Irrespective of the type of the family the husband in nuclear family and in-laws in joint or extended family are the real decision makers.

6.5 ECONOMIC UTILITY OF A SON

There is a strong belief in the economic utility of a son. Sons, it is believed, are more likely than daughters to provide family labour on the farm or in a family business earn wages and support their parents during old age. In addition, they can attract a substantial dowry during marriage.

- Shift from labour-intensive to mechanised agriculture as a factor that has contributed to further marginalise women within the household (Miller, 1981).
- Sons are associated with prestige in the community and social power. Furthermore, any land given to a son will most likely remain within the family. In agrarian societies, sons are desirable as hands to work the field, and small towns value sons as an asset in the fight against the ‘encroaching urban society’ (Inchani and Lai, 2008: 70). In Maharashtra, in a study conducted by Deshpande (2007), women from landowning community expressed a strong desire to have a son because if the family did not have son, their land will most likely to be lost to their kith and kin.
- Difference in cultivation pattern- Researchers have argued that the higher demand for women's agricultural labour in rice areas (particularly in south) makes girls and women more valuable than in wheat areas (north), thus contributing to less discrimination against girls in rice-growing regions where her work participation in threshing weeding etc is high. Ownership of land is often denied to women making her powerless as a member of society as
well. Protection of land is a violent affair and falls entirely in a male domain. In the north the saying is “jitney ladke utne lath, jitney lath utna kabza” (the more the number sons more the capacity to hold sticks, the more the sticks more control over land) (Kishwar, 1999: 91).

- An old age security- It is through the son that parents can anticipate a relaxed old age to look after them and run the household. Sons are important to take care of not just aging parents but also of their married and unmarried sisters (Patel, T. 2007: 250). Most north Indian families express view that a brother is necessary to facilitate the marriages of sisters (Kaur, R. 2008: 113).

6.6 DEVALUATION OF DAUGHTERS

Most girls start their lives with the disadvantage of being less welcome than boys. Each successive girl in the family is less welcome than the earlier one. The root of the problem of discriminatory treatment being meted out to girls lies in the status of women in the society and their expected roles (Karkal, 1991: 7). Girls are widely said to ‘come without being invited’. Reactions to the birth of a daughter range from vocal or muted welcome to open indifference, disappointment or despair (Croll, 2000: 94).

Consequently, anything of value given to a daughter is seen as a loss to her family once she joins her husband. This view is aptly described in the traditional Hindu proverb that states, ‘Raising a daughter is like watering your neighbour’s flowerpot’. In small communities, many families base their honour upon the moral purity of any and all daughters; thus, families must take care to shelter females from unsavoury sources (Inchani and Lai, 2008: 70). There are numerous studies that attempts to give rationale to why daughters are viewed as an encumbrance, the most common being moral and financial disincentives.

The desirability of having sons and undesirability of having more daughters is made explicit, often by outsiders; "Four daughters? Each one will take thousands of rupees and walk out of the house. Bringing up a daughter is like pouring water in sand" Parents who have only daughters are pitied. Their future is bleak for they will have no support or succour in old age (Dube, 1988: 11). Elders bless young girls and women by wishing that they have a large number of sons (and just one daughter). The notion of the greater value of sons is further strengthened by the existence, with regional variations, of special worships and vratas (fasts and observances) that are performed by women to have sons and to ensure a long life.
for sons already born. A son born after the daughter is often described as the fruit of penance and vows undertaken by the mother (Dube, op cit: 12). Kishwar (1999) delineates certain reasons for why women dread having daughters. For her the sufferings those women go through during their life, their own downgraded status in the family, being vulnerable to abuse, their insecure place in the family are experiences which women do not want their daughters to go through. They do not see a better life for their daughters than themselves. All these factors lead to aversion to daughters (Kishwar, op cit: 87).

There are deliberate strategies used to achieve an ideal composition of family with a preference for son and aversion to daughters. As John and others (John et al, 2009: 17) put forward as a part of their micro level study funded by Action Aid, the strategies that are used as an intervention from early stages of pregnancy and their after are

- Female infanticide- a historically documented phenomenon. (discussed in detail in Chapter-I Introduction)
- Technologies of neglect – The practise in the form of discrimination or neglect in health care, nutrition, type of quality of schooling reinforcing low values given to daughters. In terms of neglect and discrimination of food, there are several studies done at the micro level which suggest that expensive and prestigious food like milk, eggs, meat, butter, fruits are given more to boys than girls (Karkal, 1991: 9, Das Gupta, 1987: 87). Mutharayappa, Croll and several other ethnographers, drawing an analysis for son-preference from NFHS reports and fieldwork, point out this discrimination in health treatment, vaccination and breast feeding in almost all states of the country. Girls are taken to hospitals much less often than boys. Girl’s illnesses and sickness were treated as a routine affair and often ignored. Boys are breast fed for a slightly longer period of time than girl in India as a whole (Mutharayaapa et al, 1997: 12 and Croll, 2000: 104-105).
- Herbal potions and ritual prescriptions- prescriptions by local ‘specialists’, in this context Croll (2000) mentions that their prevails a strong belief particularly in North India that the sex of the foetus is not fixed until third month of pregnancy and taking locally obtainable medicines along with dietary regimes in the second or third month of pregnancy ensures a birth of a son. (Croll, 2000: 93)
- Sex selective abortion- discussed in details in chapter-III.

As a result of all these the undesirability of daughters has turned into daughter aversion. Daughter aversion is an emotion and practise, which has become a common sense
with a life of its own. Along with son-preference the devaluation and unwantedness of daughters give rise to an idea that they can be dispensed with. (John et al, 2009: 18)

6.6.1 DOWRY, BRIDE PRICE AND DAUGHTER AVERSION

Dowry is property given to the bride by her kin, to take with her to her husband's family (and a broader definition may include gifts from her family, to members of her husband's family as well). According to the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 dowry is any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given either directly or indirectly by the party to the marriage or by the parents of the party to a marriage at or before or after the marriage as consideration of marriage by the said parties. Theoretically at least, dowry is stridhan, property which belongs to the woman, and which may be controlled jointly by her husband, who does not have the right to dispose it off. Bride-price is a transmission of goods from the kin of the groom to the kin of the bride in return for which certain rights in the bride are transferred.

Ancient Hindu literature is cognisant of both dowry and bride-price, but ranks the latter as lower. The code of Manu unequivocally states; "No father who knows (the law) must take even the smallest gratuity, for his daughter; for a man who through avarice takes a gratuity, is a seller of his offspring" [Manu III, 51], The recommended act was Kanyadaan or the gift of the virgin daughter, whereas bride-price was seen as the sale of a daughter for profit, and regarded as shameful. Marriage with dowry was considered more prestigious and was recommended for the higher castes (Randeria and Visaria, 1984: 648). Similarly marrying off a daughter is a sacred duty or a sacrifice of a higher value for Hindus. In Bhagwat Gita, Krishna exhorts Arjuna to glow by making sacrifice. A daughter’s parents glow in the sacrifice by making the gift of the virgin daughter to the suitable recipient (kanyadaan) and giving gifts to her forms a part of ‘punya’ (religious merit) for the parents and brother (Patel, T., 2007a: 144).

Both bride-price and dowry involve the transmission of property between the two families linked by marriage. The first exchange of gifts (clothes, ornaments, cash, household goods) takes place at the time of engagement, continues up to the time of marriage (which is the occasion for some of the most spectacular and elaborate gift-giving) and well beyond it at all important life-cycle rituals.
There is the sense of dishonour associated with the payment of dowry vis-a-vis an honour in receiving it. By and large in India dowry is “publicly, ideologically and morally validated and bride price is the degraded and immoral form” (Miller, 1981: 138). Brahminical forms of marriage with a dowry is the most prestigious form, and other lower caste when attempt to upgrade themselves (known as Sanskritisation), often attempt the rituals of this kind of marriage. Within certain communities the dishonour experienced at the hands of the groom’s family is reason enough to not have daughters. Giving dowry during marriage is often used to deny daughters the right to inherit natal property and assets. In reality, dowry payments often take the form of affinal presentations, as a gift to the family, rather than representing any real asset for the newly married woman. These have served to enhance women’s vulnerability within their marital homes and severely restrict their autonomy.

Both bride-price and dowry are paid in a patrilinial system of descent, and a patrilocal system of residence. With the change of residence after marriage, a woman comes under the control of her husband's family and has no rights of inheritance to property in either her natal or conjugal family despite the laws, Irrespective of bride-price or dowry, a woman is seen as only a receiver of periodic gifts and one from whom no gift may be accepted.

The propertied classes do not desire daughters because after marriage, the son-in-law may demand a share in the property. “The property-less classes dispose off daughters to avoid dowry harassment. But they don’t mind accepting dowry for their sons. The birth of a son is perceived as an opportunity for upward mobility while the birth of a daughter is believed to result in downward economic mobility. Though the stronghold of this ideology was the north of India, it is increasingly gaining ground elsewhere too” (Patel, V. 2003: 1). In conditions where the property and in heritance rights are not equally given to the daughter, it becomes a tool to establish herself and create a status for her in her marital home.

Dowry is by no means a higher caste or a middle class phenomenon any more. Sanskritisation and simulation of rituals of the higher caste and class has turned dowry into a tool for upward mobility and raising status. Lower castes and class try to emulate marriage customs including high marriage costs to establish and improve their social status (Patel, T., 2007a: 161-163). What was discussed by Kapadia (1966) five decades ago, it holds true even today that “the amount of the dowry is generally regulated by the social and economic status of the bridegroom’s father, the social prestige of the bridegroom’s family and the educational
qualification of the bridegroom. A girl’s physical beauty or educational qualification may reduce this amount at times, but often this reduction is very meagre” (Kapadia, 1966: 147).

6.6.2 WOMEN’S RIGHT IN PROPERTY

An important justification often given for giving or demanding dowries on both the sides is the absence of women’s share in parental property. In spite of the law of the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 under which the daughters are entitled to equal inheritance rights along with other male siblings, which was not available to them prior to the amendment, women is seldom given her share in the natal family. It is looked down on if she asks for her share. This is evident from the study conducted by Larsen and Kaur (2013) in their qualitative study they observed that both men and women felt that daughters should not inherit natal family property. “A daughter’s demand for parental property is seen as tantamount [sic] to a willingness to break off relations with her natal family, especially with her brothers” (Larsen and Kaur, 2013: 50).

In her study on Delhi neighbourhoods, Basu (2001) discusses the multilayered attitude towards the natal property and women’s property. Here too the most common response to the question on the reason for not asking the share in natal property was “don’t want it to cause rifts with brother/sister-in-law, get dowry/lifelong gifts instead” (Basu, 2001: 120). She further describes the complexities of the relationship between, inheritances, dowry and kinship relation as “the idea of marriedness [sic] as the prime form of women’s property is buttressed by two popular notions of ways in which women get property: the phantom equivalence of dowry with inheritance and the idea that women ‘get’ affinal property...the primary aim of wedding presentations was not o build up a resource fund or streedhan for the women but to strengthen kinship relations and to display the status of both families” (Basu, op cit: 224).

6.6.3 MODERNISATION, MEDIA AND DEVALUATION OF DAUGHTERS

Modernisation, defined as increased access to education and communication technology, has contributed in the diffusion of technology for SD and SSA. This is perceivable in the role that mass media plays in the spread of upper caste values with its accompanying anti-female bias. “This bias is increasingly adopted by communities and caste groups that have traditionally been more egalitarian towards women but now accept
discriminatory norms like dowry as part of their efforts for upward mobility” (Agnihotri, 2000 as cited in Mallik, 2003). On the other hand studies also show a picture where exposure to media and information results in weaker son-preference (Pande and Malhotra, 2006: 5). These are two contradictory results. However, the results are clearly subjected to the content of the media on which these responses are based. The very media that reinforces higher caste values and stereotypical portrayal of women and the girl child can be used for spreading awareness and campaign messages for empowerment to masses and hence, co-relating son-preference or daughter aversion to media exposure is relative and subjective.

Another aspect of modernisation that has played an important role has been the high rate of female literacy. This has in some instances equipped some women to be able to plan smaller families and at the same time be able to have the desired number of sons by undergoing SD and SSA (Dasgupta, 1987; Oldenburg, 1992). “Through a better ability to manipulate both, their fertility and their children's mortality, educated women are better equipped than others to achieve the family size and sex composition that they desire” (Dasgupta, 1987; 95). Access to information and private health care has made inroads in the rural areas of most developed states, making it easier to opt for SD and SSA.

6.7 SOCIALISATION OF A GIRL CHILD

Socialisation is the process by which individual learns the culture of their society, by means of which society’s values are transmitted from one generation to the next and internalised to form an integrated part of individual’s personality (Harlambos and Holburn, 2000: 1037). Gender role socialisation is a process of internalising the gender specific roles by men and women. Under gender role socialisation, gender inequalities are often explained through social factors rather than the biological one. Children are taught to conform to their feminine or masculine roles as appropriate, through meeting the expectations or norms attached to that role (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2002: 71-72). Oakley (1974) believes that it is “the culture of a society that exerts most influence in the creation of masculine and feminine behaviour” (Oakley, 1974 as cited in Harlambos and Holburn, 2000: 134).

In India, gender socialisation is inextricably intertwined with the insidious internalization of gender bias through socialisation processes that places the girl child in a precarious situation. Gender roles are conceived, enacted and learnt within a complex of relationships. To understand this process it is necessary to keep in mind the implications of
the family structure and the wider context of kinship in which it is embedded. There are two major aspects of the implications of family structure. A family structure, at a given point of time, is not just a function of demography; it also reflects the rules of recruitment and marital residence and the normative and actual patterns of rearrangement of the family in the process of the replacement of the old generation by the new (Dube, op cit: 11).

Discussing the socialisation of girl child Krishna Kumar (2009) argues, “If a broad profile were to be drawn of the common experience of growing up female in Indian society, it would highlight physical restrictions as well as mental or psychological negativity communicated to little girls from birth onwards. A son’s birth is greeted with celebration while a daughter’s birth is at best, endured. The unwantedness of daughters gets conveyed in ways, which are hardly subtle. The idea of life-long dependence and insecurity get communicated in terms of marriage and motherhood being the sole objectives of a woman’s life. The temporary nature of one’s natal home and the anxiety of adjustment in an unknown family form part of the learning that a girl cannot escape during childhood. Transmission of culturally sanctioned attitudes constitutes the gendering process which guides girls into becoming socially acceptable women.” (Kumar K. as cited in Menon and Vijay, 2014: 104). Bias is entrenched in the very fabric of the nation where commerce-driven mind-sets marginalize the girl child as an economic liability. The process of socialisation weaves the thread of gender bias through child-rearing practices, which are then internalized by the girl as the norm of her very being (Menon and Vijay, 2014: 101).

Education of daughters is seen by her family and in patriarchal society as a threat to their dominance. Daughter once educated will have an outside influence and may develop a critical outlook with which she might end up questioning their authority or her subordination. And so, it is preferred that she confines to household chores. “In doing so, daughters are unable to find jobs and contribute monetarily to the family. Her domestic contributions are not valued, and consequently, many families seek to rid themselves of this onus via marriage (Inchani and Lai, 2008: 70). However, marriage also poses a large problem. Most communities in India still practice the custom of dowry in which a daughter's family gives money or property to the family of the groom. In paying this dowry, many families deplete their resources and may have to borrow funds to furnish this offering (Jha et al. 2006). In middle class families with meagre resources daughters are sent to relatively in-expensive regional language schools whereas boys are educated in more expensive English medium
schools. In people's perception the education of a daughter is essentially for her own benefit; it is not an investment so far as the natal family is concerned.

The concept of femininity is also an important attribute in determining the normative construction of a girl child in India. An undue importance is given to the physical appearance of a girl. The value accorded to various components of physical appearance is conveyed not only through lullabies, songs, and sayings but also through open praise or criticism of individual girls within their hearing. A girl's fortune (marriage being its most salient component) is tied up with her appearance; good looks are considered as an important 'qualification' of a female. No wonder that many girls tend to develop an excessive interest in their appearance—often at the cost of other qualifications—and in clothes, jewellery, and cosmetics. Such an interest is interpreted as an expression of femininity and thus 'natural' (Dube, 1988: 16)

The naturalness of the work supposed to be appropriate for girls is conveyed effectively, without necessarily generating a feeling' of discrimination, to little girls by encouraging them in various games which involve 'dolls', 'household', 'kitchen work', 'marriage', 'baby', and 'visiting neighbours'. Beginning with assistance in cooking and other kitchen work, serving of food, caring for younger siblings, preparing for the worship of family deities, and looking after the aged, girls learn to take over some of the responsibilities themselves (Dube, op cit: 17). Socialisation for an unfamiliar setting and an uncertain future imparts a degree of tentativeness and provisionally to the process. “This, I feel affects the development of self-confidence and initiative in girls. Ambiguity also characterises the presence of contradictory values and expectations which essentially reflect the contradictions inherent in the patrilineal, patrilocal kinship system” (Dube, op cit: 18).

In fact, in the process of socialisation of girls there is considerable emphasis on the possible need to bow before the wishes of the husband and his family, and in general, on the submissiveness and obedience, as feminine ideals. Females are socialised to believe that their own wishes and interests are subordinate to those of the family group. They are therefore more likely to sacrifice their own health in repeated child bearing than are females reared in cultures that give greater weight to personal interests (Dyson and Moore, 1983: 48).

“Girls are socialised into docility, blind obedience and total dependence. This condition begins at home and is reinforced by society. The educational system and media
promotes the image. Socialising the girls from their childhood to accept their situation and the ideology of male supremacy assures continuance of the discriminatory treatment”…..
“This makes girls and women socially and ideologically unequipped to resist, or even question, the implicit and explicit injustices to which they are subjected” (Karkal, 1991: 10)

6.7.1 RESTRICTIONS ON WOMEN’S MOBILITY

Restrictions on women’s mobility and access to public places are tools often used to control her freedom of movement, of accessing the outside world or knowledge and also her freedom of choice to select her acquaintances. In northern parts of India, historical norms of female seclusion such as ghunhat (face veil) and purdah are strong even today as women still suffer from restrictions on their physical mobility. One strong indication of restricted mobility is that most women need permission to go to places in their vicinity (to the local health centre, to the homes of relatives or friends in the village, or to the local grocery shop). Restricting a woman’s mobility is an attempt to isolate her from outside influences, and the variable measures the extent to which a household attempts to conserve the traditional as opposed to embracing the new. (Larsen and Kaur, 2013: 49).

Not just her mobility in the public space but her mobility within household is also controlled by the norms of decent behaviour. Importance is attached to the way in which girl carries herself, the way she sits, standard and talks, and interacts with others. A girl should walk with soft steps: so soft that they are barely audible to others. Taking long strides denotes masculinity. Girls are often rebuked for jumping, running, rushing to a place and hopping. These movements are considered a part of masculine behaviour, unbecoming to a female. (Dube, op cit: 16)

6.8 UNIVERSALITY OF MARRIAGE

A daughter’s appropriate place is in her father’s home only until she marries. Moreover, it is the norm for all girls to marry: there is very little scope for a grown woman to find a socially acceptable role as a resident of her family of birth, except as a visitor. Parents are under much social pressure to ensure that their daughters marry, as evidenced by the negligible proportions of women never-married in their thirties in the censuses of these countries. Daughters must leave and make way for incoming daughters-in-law (Das Gupta et al, op cit: 165).
The message that gets communicated is, however, invariably that of the immutability of the social system and that a daughter's stay in her parental home is short-lived. Moreover, not only is there something unnatural about a delay in or absence of marriage but that such a situation is full of danger and risk to the reputation of the family (Dube, op cit: 12). Even after marriage her stay in the natal family should be short lived. Rituals of Durga pooja in Begal or Gauri-Ganpati in Maharashtra and Karnataka are well known for such a temporary stay in natal home.

Marriage is socially compulsory especially with girls. It implies that daughters are not expected to support their parents materially and certainly not married daughters. Daughters are temporary members and resident of her natal family. The returns for spending on her cannot be care or support in old age. In turn son-preference remains a normative value. The normative denial of support from daughters is held along with the assertion that daughters must only receive. Rising dowry price and rising expectations for elaborate and lavish weddings stimulates daughter aversion (John et al, 2009: 18).

The entire complex of wedding rituals which dramatise the transfer of the bride from one family to another is, in fact, a poignant experience and a revelation to girls in their childhood. Many girls vividly remember the first experience of the wedding of a girl in the family/kin group. This is not surprising since the message of the inescapability of marriage and of separation from the parents as a necessary consequence of marriage is first put across through lullabies and nursery rhymes (Dube, op cit: 12). And later continues as the main theme of regional and folk songs sung at different stages of her life. Songs sung at different ritual of marriage are all highlighting her secondary status in the parental home.

Early marriages also reduce the economic burdens involved in supporting females who will marry out and away, and whose children will contribute neither income nor offspring to their mother's natal group. Since unmarried women are social liabilities, their marriage costs (i.e. dowry requirements) may increase with age, providing another reason to ensure early marriage. Finally, early marriage increases the period over which females can produce male heirs for the groups into which they marry. This consideration is much more important under the northern system than in the south, where rules governing the transmission of property and other rights are more flexible (Dyson and Moore, 1983: 48).
6.9 STATUS OF WOMEN IN GUJARAT

Historically women in Gujarat reflected an identity similar to that of a woman from north and north-west India. Till the turn of 19th century, her literacy levels and work force participation was low (except for agricultural class) and social evils of sati, infanticide, seclusion, ban on widow remarriage, child marriage prevailed in several communities of Gujarat (Desai, 1983: 62).

At the turn of 20th century literacy levels amongst the higher castes like Brahmins, Nagars and Baniyas started rising giving way to several social reform movements in Gujarat. However, widow remarriage still wasn’t permissible and was often opposed by some of the forward and progressive Gujaratis. On the other hand a widower easily remarried and was also permitted to have more than one wife. Even child marriages were prevalent till late 19th century. There are evidence of female infanticide known as dudh piti (discussed in detail in chapter-I, Introduction) amongst the Rajput and Patels of Gujarat. The education given to the women was with a patriarchal purpose. According to the intellectual class (!), women should be educated in order to adjust in the modern world and contribute to her husband’s aspirations, to be able to teach their children, and a widowed woman can take up teaching as a profession to reduce her dependency on the family. The work participation of women except for lower labour class was very low. (less than 20% amongst higher castes) (Shukla, 2002: 23-25).

The general society’s attitude was discriminatory to women. ‘Streebodh’ a monthly published in Gujarati records in 1925 that the number of cases of infanticides (doesn’t clearly say female infanticide) are on rise. For which it blames “the poor, deserted or widow women who has ‘deviated’ from her path in lure of money gets pregnant and then in order to save oneself from society’s criticism kills ones infants. They should be detested in society. We need to think whether this ignorant and deviated mother’s need to be arrested or not” (Streebodh, 1925: 37).

The ideas of ideal women were stereotypical one where “she was the one who adapts to the marital home immediately after marriage forgetting her natal home. She is the agent for reproduction, character building teacher, idol of sacrifice and charity, devoted, obedient to her husband, tolerant, submissive, chaste are some of the charcterisites of ‘adarsh’ (model) women” (Patel, S. 1947: 113-114)
The marginal changes occurred in this scenario during Gandhian era and national movement where for the first time widow and deserted women started participating in public life and actively got involved in freedom struggle. But no major shift was witnessed in terms of dowry, rape, or mortality rates amongst women. Even in post independence era, except for improvement in literacy rate and participation in work force, no other positive change in terms of status of woman has been recorded in Gujarat. Even today, Gujarat ranks in first five of lowest sex ratio and violence against women\(^1\) amongst the states of India (Shukla, 2002: 31).

6.9.1 NORMATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF GIRLS IN GUJARAT

Son-preference in Gujarat is widespread like any other north-western states in the country. For Desai (1983) “the sole purpose of women’s life in Gujarat during pre-British period was to get married and give birth to sons” (Desai, 1983: 67). Ethnographic data collected by several researchers on ideal size and sex composition of family, revealed clearly the pressure to start the family early within a year or two, need for small family with at least one son.

“Amongst Jadeja, Rajputs and Kanbi community in Ahmedabad, other parts of central Gujarat and Saurashtra, ‘dudh piti’ (drowning an infant girl in a vessel full of milk) was a common tradition...One of the most common reason for doing so was rigid caste system and high expenses to be incurred on daughter’s wedding. In spite of efforts by several reformers, female infanticide was never completely eliminated from Gujarat.” (Desai, op cit: 316-318)

“In our area if woman has her child late, the other women in the village will taunt her. She can be humiliated or beaten up by her family too” (Croll, op cit: 92). They also reported that they would like to have two-three children with at least one son. For all women size of the family and gender composition was inextricably linked, with most women still feel vulnerable until they had a son. “Without producing a son, we cannot stay here, we would be driven out, and household will start looking for another wife” (Croll, ibid).

As per an analysis done by Pande and Ashton of NFHS I reports, Gujarat exhibits a very strong son-preference. Around 50% of them want more sons than daughters (Pande and Ashton, 2007: 9). According to NFHS –II the percentage of couples who want more sons has
gone down from 50% to 33% however it is still higher compared to the percentage of couples who want more daughters- 1.8% (Bora and Tyagi, 2008: 53)

As discussed earlier, culture plays a very important role in shaping the normative construction of a region. Son-preference and devaluation of daughters are often reflected in culture, rituals, literature of Gujarat. In their folk songs, lullabies, sayings and idioms there is a clear prejudices and bias against the girls or women in society. A series of rituals like the other north-western states try to control women and their sexuality. Her life often revolves around a husband and his family, their happiness and well being. Menstruation as well as pregnancy or neo-natal period is seen as an impure period of women’s life and hence, have to undergo a series of restrictions on her diet and mobility.

There are several fasts like *Molaakat or gauri vrat, jaya paarvati* (fasting for five days without intake of salt predominantly with fruits and dairy products alone) done by young unmarried girls, worshipping lord shiva desiring an ideal husband in future. Married women undertake fasts like *Kevada trij, vat saavitri or divaaso* for long and healthy life of their husband (Similar to Karva chauth in Northern India). Since menstruation is an impure period, any mistakes (of participating in any religious ritual) are to be repented by fasting on a particular day in a year. To keep the children protected from diseases like small pox, mother fasts by having a stale food the whole day (*shitala satam*). Girls who have not attained puberty are considered to be pure for auspicious occasions like entering a new home. (*gruhapravesh* with a *kumbh* of prosperity and purity).

Folk songs often depict the pain of endless household work leaving no time for rest or recreation. There are often derogatory remarks from mother-in-law or sister-in-law (*Saasu-nanand*) regarding incompetency of the daughter-in-law to fulfill their demands. Famous songs like *Dada ho dikri* depicts the fears and sorrow of unmarried girls who will be given away by her father to an unknown family as a part of social obligation. Daughters being considered as a liability and her subordinate, indifferent status in the family is portrayed in songs like *Dikri to paarki thapan kehvaay, dikri ne gaay dore tyan jaay’* (Daughters are someone else’s property, she is naive like a cow will follow the path as directed by others). A series of lullaby and rhymes like *Dikro maaro laadkvaayo, tame mara devnaa didhel ehho, Dikro maaro dahyo patle besi nhaayo* addresses the son and his special place in the family. There are very few lullabies in Gujarati addressing the daughters. The social pressure of paying a huge dowry in high castes and ill-treatment by in-laws if failed to fulfil their
demands are portrayed in kunvarbai nu mameru (by Narsinh Mehta). The exceptions of folk stories where girls are portrayed as strong characters (chaaran Kanya by Meghaani) often indicate her belonging to tribal, uncivilised world. Where as in most forms of popular art and literature women in middle or higher class are stereotyped as either the one who follows the model of ‘pativrata aarya naari’ or a vamp destroying the peace of the family or society. The prefixes used like chi./shri for men or sau. for women (saubhagyakankshini- one who aspires for a blissful married state) are also discriminatory to women.

Girls are considered a liability and often depicted with terms like ‘saapno bhaar’ (bundle of serpent), Ukardo (heap of dung or rubbish), or Pathro (stone) or halki maati (heap of low standard mud. Birth of a daughter is cursed upon by idioms like ‘jene gher kanya ene bhagwane dandyaa (birth of a daughter is like a punishment of god), saat dikri no baap vaanjhiyo (father of only daughters is still an impotent). Jhaazi dikarie kul hin (several daughters in the family is a disgrace to it). Son-preference is also reflected in sayings like Dikri e dansh vadhe, dikarae vansh vadhe (birth of daughter spread sting, that of a son expands lineage), pahelu sukh te jaate naryaa, biju sukh te gher dikraa (the first symbol of bliss is health and the second is birth of a son). Being mother of a son is like added feather to her cap making her position strong in the family (vadhakani vahu e dikro janyo). Generally even the sweets distributed (if at all any is distributed) at the time of birth of a girl is of inferior type compared to the one distributed at the time of birth of a son.

Women is often symbolised in these idioms as a dumb or vulnerable character or a source of conflict in the family. Phrases like ‘stree ni buddhi pagni paanie’ (women’s intellect is at the bottom) or sopari vaankadi, baaydi raankdi (beetelnut is crooked and, wife is meek) on one hand is juxtaposed with phrases like ‘jar, jamin ne joru, trane kajiya na chhoru’ (wealth, land and women are source of dispute). Naari narakni khan or naari narak nu dwar (women is a gateway to hell) is one of the frequently used phrase for portraying her in a negative manner. Daughter’s position in the family is often neglected one and devoid of any respect or love. khichadi halaavi bagde, dikari ladaavi bagde (daughters are spoiled with too much of love) Or je gharni kutri nahi paame e gharni dikari paame (Her position is even lower than that of a dog/bitch).

Sayings like ‘doso kunvaaro mare dosi nahi’ (An old man might die remaining unmarried, a woman won’t), dhanini jaar khavaay, pan baapna raajno rotlo na khavaay (women may survive with millet in husband’s house but should not remain at her father’s
place to have a piece of bread), ‘dikari to saasre shobhe ke masaane’ (the right place for girl
is either at her marital home or at the crematorium) or ‘dikri to saasre shobhe ne haathi
darbaare’ (the right place for girl is at her marital home and elephant’s at the palace)
highlights and reinforces the universality and inevitability of marriage for woman. An
unmarried daughter is like stale food (vaasi dhaan), and should not be kept longer. One
should preserve wealth but not daughters (peti rakhaay pan beti nahi) are the general belief.
Unmarried girls in the natal family or married daughter-in-law in her father’s house are both
considered to be source of destruction (dikari ghare ne vahu maavatre kare vinaash).
Importance of virginity for woman are represented in idiom like Stree to maati no ghado, ek
vaar tutyo to sandhaay nahi pan purursh to pittal no loto, melo thaay to maanji ne pachho
hato tevo thayi jay (women are like earthen pot, once broken cannot be retained, Man are like
brass vessel, even if it gets dirty, can be cleaned time and again) (Petit, 1903; Yagnik, 1997
and Shah, A., 1911).

6.9.2 MARRIAGE COST AND DOWRY IN GUJARAT

Gujarat historically has been one of the most prosperous states in the country.
Agriculture and textile industry being the major contributor to the national income, Gujarat
has been on the forefront of economic progress of the nation. Marriages in such a prosperous
state are obviously an important occasion for families to incur huge expenditure. Marriage
costs, more than a compulsion for parents, is a status symbol for Gujarati community, where
in one’s status is often judged by the extravagant expenditure made on one’s child, especially
daughter’s wedding.

Thus in Gujarat, castes like the Rajputs, Leuva Patidars of Kheda and Anavils of
South Gujarat have high dowry linked with hypergamy; castes like Brahmins and Banias
have 'indirect dowry' in addition to dowry proper and lower castes and scheduled castes have
bride-price in addition to dowry. There are a few instances of bride-price, being paid among
the upper castes in Gujarat, as elsewhere in India, in cases where the groom is a widower of
advanced age or has a large number of children from a previous marriage or has a physical or
mental handicap, and is unable to get bride from within his own marriage circle. But such
marriages among Brahmins or Banias are exceptions (Randeria and Visaria, 1984: 647).

The payment at the time of marriage among the upper castes in Gujarat, which is in
the same direction as bride-price, i.e., from the family of the groom, is known as palla. It is
distinguished from the former, however, in that the recipient of the *pallu* is the bride herself, and not her father or family as in the case of bride-price. The *pallu* was usually kept in custody by the girl's father, until such time as her position in her husband's family was secure (i.e. she was the mother of a couple of children, preferably a son). “In north Gujarat, a payment akin so 'bride-price' (known as *dapu*) is customarily made among the lower castes like tailors, oil-pressers, leather-workers, barbers, among ex-nomadic groups like Rabarirs, Vanjaras, Bharvads, among tribals like the Bhils, as also among all the scheduled castes like Vankars (weavers), Chamars (tanners), Bhangis (scavangers), Tir gars (bow and arrow makers), darns (Brahmins of the 'untouchables') and Turis (musicians and geneologists of the 'untouchables'). Among all these groups, bride-price is paid in cash” (Randeria and Visaria, op cit: 648-649).

Both among the upper castes and lower castes, a girl receives gifts of cash, jewellery and household goods (usually only utensils) from her parents and other family members at the time of her marriage. In addition, the girl's family makes certain gifts to the groom's near relatives. The total cost of all that the girl receives from her parents at her wedding easily exceeds the amount of bride-price which her father receives from the groom's father. And the marriage only inaugurates the gift-giving. On every sub-sequent occasion pregnancy ceremony, child birth, especially birth of the first male child, the wedding of her children, the death of her father-in-law or mother-in-law or her husband, etc) the girl's family has to give gifts to the girl as well as to her husband's near relatives.

Moreover, like an exceptional bride-price marriage among the upper castes, an exceptional 'pure gift' marriage also takes place among the lower castes. The latter is known among many of the scheduled castes of north Gujarat as *Kanku-Kayna*. i.e. a marriage where the bride has been given as a gift without her family accepting any money in exchange. Only families of very high standing with a scheduled caste could give away a daughter in this fashion for such a marriage entailed more lavish expenditure as well as more than the usual dowry gifts to the daughter. It was an indication of wealth as well as social status for a family to refuse to accept bride-price for their daughters.

Traditionally, no bride-price was paid in those castes, or in those particular marriage circles of a caste, where a direct exchange of woman known as Satu was the rule, e.g. among the weavers in Bhiloda taluka (Sabarkantha district) who belong to the Pranami Sect, bride-price has to be paid only if the groom's family can-not furnish a girl in exchange. In recent
times several communities (like Rajputs or Patidaars) which are facing the dearth of brides
due to female foeticide and infanticide have taken up this ‘sata’ system of marriage where in
girls can be married off only to a family who can give a girl in return for grooms in their own
family (bride exchange). However this might indicate better survival rate of girls, it does not
guarantee a better status n the family (Randeria and Visaria, op cit: 649).

As observed by Visaria (2003) in her field study in Gujarat to find out the factors
causing the phenomenon of missing girls, “dowry was a strong deterrent to have girls along
with the fear that the daughters might be sent back to parental house if her in laws were not
satisfied with the dowry or for any other reason”. As expressed by a Patel woman from
Gujarat in the same study, “There is trouble for daughters...they may come back home, if
there is economic problem in her in-laws house they will send her back to her parental
home”. Woman there, thus prefer a son “however he may turn out to be, at least he will stay
with us and take care of us” (Visaria, 2003: 29).

The dowry component of the marriage system has increased in value over the last ten
years (silver jewellery being replaced by gold or even diamonds wherever possible, rough
cotton saris by polyester or silk ones, and brass utensils by stainless steel ones, the household
items now include electronic gadgets as well). The lower castes where dowry was not a
menace have now, in order to climb up the social ladder, have started giving huge dowries to
their daughters (TOI, 2003). Economic prosperity has further worsened the problem. Increase
in wealth by no means suggests a better status to the girl child. As put forward by Pande and
Ashton (2007), “Economic factors are not enough to change deeply entrenched about gender
preferences...women and families in wealthier households and communities merely change
the way they implement the son-preference, not the preference itself” (Pande and Ashton,
2007: 26).

Even the government’s efforts to control the problem of dowry indirectly reinforce the
inevitability of dowry and universality of marriages. For e.g Kunverbai nu Mameru scheme
launched by Government of Gujarat almost a decade back makes provision for monitory help
to scheduled caste for their daughter’s marriage. Those who gets an annual income of
Rs.11,000/- can avail Rs.5,000/-for their one daughter’s marriage or Mangalsutra Yojana
where in government helps in organising the wedding of girls from poor families. All these
schemes by and large reinforce the importance of extravagant marriage costs, gifts or dowries
involved in marriages of daughters. These schemes are further discussed in details and analysed its impact in the chapter VII-C on analysis of the field work.

Vadodara located at the centre and being a representative district of Gujarat, exhibits a parallel cultural pattern. The folklores, literature, rituals and rites associated with women and her life cycle are collected from across the state including from Vadodara. Marriage patterns, practices and costs involved are also analogous to that of Gujarat. And hence in this pretext, it can be implied that all these factors are equally responsible for creating a hostile atmosphere for the girl child in Vadodara. Through this study, this implication will be further analysed with a micro level approach.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion above it is clear that the larger social structures like patriarchy operating within the institutions of kinship, family and marriage reinforce the subordinate position of women. The normative construction of girl in India in general and Gujarat in particular shaped through the rituals, practices and other elements of culture like literature create an unwelcoming environment for her. Socialisation of a girl child in such an environment limits her opportunities and possibilities. Different forms of dowry and related expenditure, unwarranted amount of marriage costs further deteriorate her status make her a burden or a liability to her maternal family. Her status in marital home is invariably associated with her being a mother and that too of a son. Religious, economic and social utility of a son further adds to the devaluation and aversion to daughters.

In purview of these presumptions, the study probes into the reasons for son-preference and attitude towards the daughters amongst the population of Vadodara. It attempts to find out the role these attitudes and normative constructions play to determine the survival of the girl child. It critically measures the existence and extent of son-preference in the city along with the reasons responsible for the same. It is also crucial to look into factors like payment of dowry, marriage cost, marriage and kinship norms, claiming of property rights, the importance of virginity and other standards of behaviour imposed on girls in Vadodara that determine her value and endurance in the society. Using research tools like personal interviews and focus group discussions with the population across different stratas of the society, these aspects are investigated by the researcher.
NOTES

1. As per the latest official records the rape cases in Gujarat have increased drastically. From April 2011-march 2013 there were 1440 cases of rapes registered at police stations. Looking at the major cities of Gujarat like Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat and Rajkot, the cases of rape, abduction, kidnap and suicide are on a rise (Mumbai Samachar, 2014: 11).

   **Vadodara (urban) (2011)**
   Cases of Abduction-148,
   Rape- 28,
   Suicide- 193.

   **Increase in rape cases in Gujarat.**
   2010-11: 404
   2011-12: 450
   2012-12: 586

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