INTRODUCTION

The symbiotic relationship between the formal education of women and their social participation in nineteenth and early twentieth century has hardly been explored by the scholars of women education. However, a close examination of the social consequence of formal education for women in India will show that formal education was the major factor in bringing women into the public domain. Prior to the formal education system introduced by the British, women education was primarily home based. Its focus was to train women on their social roles. The knowledge provided in the home-based education system was limited to learning of skills such as embroidery and the learning of household activities. Home-based education, therefore, was limited in scope i.e. limited knowledge of the world and restricted women’s participation outside the houses. The introduction of school based education in late nineteenth and early twentieth century in India obliged women to step out of the private sphere of their house. School as a public domain itself provided a relatively larger exposure to the outside world. The general awareness about happenings and events taking place in the society, and the world at large came from school education. Accessibility to books, journals, and periodicals was furthered through school education. Hence, school education helped in generating a wider awareness and consciousness among women. The formally educated women of this period were not only literate but were aware and conscious of their social situations; this made them critical towards their condition. Awareness and consciousness thus, became the
basis of the formally educated women's participation in social activities in nineteenth and twentieth century. As this social participation of women increased, the women agency, which was hitherto absent, came into existence. Women's problems, their solutions and actions were now taken over by women agency across the country.

The Objective

The present study is primarily an attempt to examine the issue of women education of late nineteenth and twentieth century Gujarat in the social framework. Therefore, the objective of the study is to examine the following issues associated with women education of late nineteenth and twentieth century Gujarat:

1. Social needs and requirements of women education in pre-colonial and colonial periods.
2. Interrelationship between women's social position and education.
3. Interrelationship between women education and social reform movement of late nineteenth and twentieth century.
4. Interrelationship of expansion of formal education for women and their i.e. formally educated women's social participation.
5. Manifestation of social ethos in women education
6. Interrelationship between gender consciousness and women's social participation.
Often, the education system of a society is an outcome of needs and requirements of that society. The social, economic and cultural needs of pre colonial Indian society were incredibly different from those of the colonial Indian society. Most of the social and economic and cultural needs in pre colonial period were fulfilled by respective castes and communities. Caste formed not only a fundamental social sector but a significant economic and cultural unit in pre colonial society. So, it was essential to sustain this type of social, economic and cultural system. The indigenous education system was designed to perpetuate and sustain the social, cultural and economic system of the pre colonial period.

The objectives, ideals and approaches of the indigenous education system were entirely different from that of the British system of education. Attainment of holistic knowledge of an area was the sole objective of indigenous education; hence it was the 'holistic' approach or perspective that governed the indigenous education system. Knowledge, in the indigenous education, comprised of various areas such as elementary learning, arts and crafts, learning of religious scriptures, rituals and ceremonies, and traditional customs and values. Literacy was one of the features of indigenous education. In this way indigenous education was comprehensive in nature. The modes of imparting knowledge in indigenous education system too differed from the British education system. Knowledge was imparted either through formal way or non formal way. In the educational institutions knowledge was imparted through formal way. However, recipients of formal education were people from the upper sections of the society mainly Brahmins, Rajputs and Baniyas. Interestingly, in the indigenous education
set up, the lower sections of society, comprising mainly the artisan communities were also considered knowledgeable and well informed. This was due to the flourishing of the nature of non-formal sectors of learning viz. caste and family within which learning took place through oral tradition. A large section of women population, in the traditional society of India, received education through these non-formal sectors of learning.

Research in indigenous women education system has not received adequate attention from the scholars of history of education. Perhaps, the main reason for its neglect was the emphasis on traditional historiography i.e. the approach and perspectives in traditional historiography were hardly women oriented. Women education was considered as nearly absent in indigenous education system. This was informed to us by the indigenous education survey reports, prepared by the British officials. These survey reports did not take into account the non formal system of education. And hence, what was presented by the survey reports was a one sided picture of the indigenous education system. The education commission of 1882 or Hunter Commission is considered as a crucial source of information on the development of modern education system. This report not only gives a detail description of British government's policy on women education but provides in its introduction the non formal ways through which women received education in Indian society. Surprisingly, this part of information on women education provided in Hunter Commission has hardly received attention by the scholars.
According to social needs and social aspirations women received education albeit through non-formal ways in the traditional society. Socialization process at the family level was one of the ways wherein women were imparted knowledge on household matters, family based arts and crafts, social values and traditions. Altogether, the socialization process consisted of home-based education which was consistent with women's social needs and requirements. The knowledge imparted in home based education was so significant that modern girls' schools had to incorporate it in their curriculum. Another significant mode through which women particularly rural women received ideas and knowledge was folklore. This mode of imparting knowledge was quite popular among the non literate folks. For women, folklore was a medium through which they could express their ideas, aspirations and frustrations. In spite of the absence of formal education for women, knowledgeable women did exist in traditional society of India. These women transmitted their knowledge verbally i.e. the oral method as mentioned above. Their works are still alive in folk literature of India in general and Gujarat in particular; indeed 'oral' evidence archives are preserving and promoting their views in historical reconstruction.

The transition from indigenous to western systems took place with the establishment of British rule in India and in Gujarat in particular. Initially, in the social and cultural matters, and particularly education, the British government was reluctant to bring any changes. Later on, owing to the demands of capitalists and intellectuals at home, the British government in India abandoned the policy of non-interference. Moreover, the financial deficit that the company
faced during this period obliged the British government to withdraw from the policy of non-interference in social and cultural matters. All these factors culminated into the formulation of social policy in which propagation of colonial education formed a significant component. The Charter Act of 1813 was considered as the beginning of the propagation of the western system of education in the India.

With the introduction of English education system the scope of non formal education decreased tremendously because the British institutionalized the whole education system.

It was seen that in contrast to men education, the formal education for women lacked explicit objective. Perhaps, this was the reason the British government did not take direct initiative in propagating western education for women. Nevertheless, private organizations, both secular and non secular, initiated the movement of women education in India, even though the objectives of women education differed relatively among them. Generally, the reinforcement of the movement for women education in British period in India was with the following objectives in view:

1. The improvement of women's familial status on western lines
2. The dissemination of indigenous ideals of womanhood.
3. Addressing the rising demands of formally educated women among the western educated youth.

Now, it was found that access to new education for women was limited to the upper sections of the urban society. For the upper caste women, education
was increasingly becoming a pre requisite for marriage; for, the western educated upwardly mobile males largely aspired for educated wives. The educated wife was a status symbol for these men as well as a modern homemaker. The formally educated women therefore, had privilege over the non-formally educated women. This divide between the formally educated women and the non-formally educated women was largely in line with caste hierarchy in the society. Mostly women from the upper castes were largely formally educated as they had access to modern education system. Women from the lower strata of the society were still dependent on non-formal ways for seeking information and knowledge in this transitory period of education system; their 'world' being relatively smaller, were far less affected by the outside world.

Parallel to the growth of modern education of women was the trend of opposition to issues of child marriage and widow remarriage. These two social customs were hindrance to the growth of modern education for women. Modern education was public education. It was school based where school was a public institution. Traditionally, public participation of women was limited. However, with the advent of school education, it became mandatory for women to move outside houses. Social customs mainly child marriage and widowhood had hindered women to step outside the private sphere of the house. So, for the growth of western education for women eradication of these customs became a necessity. To a large extent, protest against child marriage and widowhood were a factor in bringing to surface various significant women's issues in India.
Western education and reform movements together prepared the ground for the women's movement in India, albeit on a small scale.

Now, gender based curriculum was a significant aspect of education of late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. The nature and content of education, in general, was according to traditional roles of men and women. Men's education was primarily a qualification for government services or private jobs; while women's education was meant to prepare women as modern homemakers on western line and ideal women on Indian line. This was the 'new' woman that kept a balance between the continuity i.e. traditional roles of a women and the change. Regardless of revivalists' resistance for western content in women's education, it was found that the Victorian Ideals were well acknowledged in women's curriculum; for Victorian Ideals were consistent with the Indian Ideals on womanhood. And hence, less or almost no resistance was evident in training women as modern homemakers. Here, one perceives a paradox as women were trained more on western ways and less on indigenous ways of housekeeping, needlework and child rearing.

Western education was largely responsible for increasing women's public participation in this period. As mentioned above the new education was totally institutional based. School as a public institution provided opportunity to women to participate in public through debates and social works. Apart from emphasis on household work, the thrust in the curriculum was upon social services. Educated women of this period, therefore, carried social works such as relief work and other social activities. Women were more into the professions such as
teaching, nursing and midwifery as these were considered as social services. As the social participation increased, educated women began to found women organizations. This was a significant development. Initially, women organizations were founded and supported by the male reformers. However, from the early twentieth century, women began to establish their own organizations. Consequently, with the rise of women organizations, the women's agency, as a factor of change, came into existence.

**Research Methodology:**

The historical research in the area of women education is usually limited to the examination of educational commissions and committees, implementation of government policies, curricula, funds and expenditure. Such an approach to historical research in education was popularized by Syed Narullah and J.A. Naike (1951) in their monumental study entitled ‘History of education in India during the British period’. Their approach to the history writings in education was chronological, straightforward, and oriented towards expansion of modern education system. Thereafter, this approach became a model for the historical research in education. However, a critique of this approach to historical study in education is seen in the works of Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Karuna Channana, Aparna Basu and others. The approach adopted by these scholars' deviates from the Naike model. The study of Narrullah and Naike on History of education largely considered colonists as the pioneers in shaping the modern educational structure in India. On the contrary, S. Bhattacharya argues that educational
structure in the British period was the outcome of negotiation and interaction between the indigenous intelligentsia and British. The social context of women education, a neglected area in most of the historical writings on education is undertaken by Karuna Channana. In her studies on women education, K.Channana elaborates the interrelationship between the traditional institutions of marriage and family and the formal education system.

The attempt of the present study is to deviate from the chronological description of the educational reports and other documents on education during the British period. Rather, the focus is to examine the interrelationship of formal education for women in Gujarat and its impact on women’s public participation in late nineteenth and twentieth century Gujarati society.

The Chapters

The vast period of nearly hundred years of women education in British Gujarat is covered through seven chapters.

The first chapter titled, ‘Geography, Polity, Society and Women in pre-colonial Gujarat: 1707-1818’, deals largely with research methodology in social history and describes various features of pre colonial Gujarat. Among the features discussed here are geo-cultural areas of Gujarat, pre-colonial polity and society of Gujarat. Gujarat could be broadly divided into three sub geo-cultural areas viz. western Gujarat, mainland Gujarat and eastern Gujarat. The geo-cultural areas of Gujarat played an important role in shaping the socio-cultural positions of Gujarati women. Another significant feature of pre colonial Gujarat
was the disparity in polity in each sub geo-cultural areas of Gujarat. In western Gujarat due to its proximity to sea and the erstwhile state of Rajputana, the polity was semi feudal in nature. This part of Gujarat was largely ruled by semi feudal lords. While the mainland Gujarat was directly under the central authority of Mughals and later Marathas. The eastern Gujarat was inhabited by various ‘tribes’ since centuries. Here, the subjugated population was ruled by Rajputs and Marathas in pre colonial period. Thus, Gujarati society was an amalgamation of various communities which had migrated to Gujarat from the surrounding regions and countries beyond through time in history. The nature of Gujarati society varied in each sub geo-cultural areas in terms of customs and practice. Thus, Gujarati society in pre colonial period was not a homogenous whole in terms of polity and culture.

The second chapter titled, ‘Indigenous System of Education for Women in Pre-Colonial Gujarati Society- 1707-1818’, focuses on non formal modes of imparting knowledge to women in pre colonial Gujarati society. Often, education is understood to be primarily formal education. However, before the advent of the formal system of education brought by the British, there existed in Gujarat and in other parts of the country the non-formal system of education. A large section of society mainly people from lower caste and women received education through non-formal ways. Some of the significant non-formal sectors of learning in pre-colonial Gujarat were family, caste and oral tradition. An attempt has been made in this chapter to explain how customs and traditions followed in family and arts
and crafts practiced in a caste were centers of non-formal learning. Oral tradition was one of the powerful mediums of expression for women in pre-colonial society. With the help of this medium women could express their ideas, aspirations and frustration. It is interesting to know that even though formal education for women was nearly absent, there existed learned women in traditional Gujarati society.

The third chapter titled, 'British Rule and the Emergence of colonial education in Gujarat: 1818-1882', discusses the advent of British rule in Gujarat and the emergence of colonial system of education in British Gujarat. The province of Gujarat was not fully colonized. The areas that came under the direct rule of Gujarat comprised of Surat, Bharuch, Khaira, Ahmedabad and Panchmahal. The rest of Gujarat was divided into princely states. British Gujarat was part and parcel of Bombay Presidency. The impact of any development in the presidency was felt in British Gujarat first. Similarly, the developments taking place in the field of education had an impact in the Gujarat province. The private organizations mainly Christian missionaries and private associations operating in Bombay and its surrounding areas promoted western education in British Gujarat. Later on, the earliest batch of western educated Gujarati men and Bombay government promoted western education in Gujarat. A section of these western educated Gujarati pioneered the social reform movement in Gujarat.
The fourth chapter titled, ‘Emergence of formal system of Education for Women in British Gujarat: 1850-1900’, discusses the institutionalization of women education in Gujarat. The period from 1850-1900 was significant for the institutionalizing of female education. The chief agencies involved in promoting women education in the beginning were the Christian Missionaries and other private organizations such as those founded by social reformers and the British Government. The issue and concern for women education differed among these agencies. The issue of women education was raised first by Christian missionaries whose main objective was proselytization. The British government took up the issue of women education in the context of modernity and progress. Later on, reformists particularly revivalists addressed the issue of women education in the context of identity crisis of educated youths and to counter the increasing westernization in the society.

It was private enterprise that vigorously strived to translate the process of female education into a movement. Rich philanthropists, social reformers and social reform associations integrated the issue of women education into their sphere of activities. Women education was taken as a measure to uplift the familial status of Indian women. However, with the introduction of the principles of local self government in 1882, the government support to female education underwent a change. Now, the bulk of female education came to be established and conducted by Local Government bodies like District school Board in rural areas and Municipalities in Urban areas.
The broader objectives of women education in this period were to improve the familial status and to eradicate customs of child marriage and widowhood which were hindrance to the progress of women education. In this way the scope of women education in this period was limited.

The fifth chapter titled, 'The growth of women education in British Gujarat: 1900-1947', discusses the factors such as national movement and role of Gandhi in not only promoting women education but facilitating the social participation of women. The national movement provided sufficient space for women. Women began to actively participate in social and political organizations. This consequently led to the emergence of women agency, which generally worked for generating nationalist consciousness among women as well as promoting the issue of women education.

The non-enthusiastic support of the British government for women education provided opportunity to Indian leaders such as Gandhi to take initiative in promoting national education, which was becoming an alternative system of education during this period. Women's education became a programme internal to national movement. Gandhi's approach towards women education helped in providing employment to subaltern women. Hence Gandhi added new dimension to women education.

The other factors that helped the growth of women education was the increase in the scope of employment for women and rise in the age of marriage. The Second World War period witnessed the deterioration of economic conditions worldwide.
This led to a change in perspective towards employment of women. Second income or the earnings by women in the family began to be accepted more and more. The raising of the age of marriage during this period helped women to an extent to pursue their education. Thus, factors such as the national movement, the decreasing role of British government, the advent of Gandhi in Indian politics and emergence of women agency were instrumental in the growth of women education during this period.

The sixth chapter titled, 'The Middle Class Educated Women and Women Organizations in Gujarat-1880-1947', focuses on the Gujarati women organizations of late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The movement for women education in late nineteenth century resulted in the emergence of middle class women in India and Gujarat. These women were urban based and belonged to upper section of the society. Interestingly, the formally educated women of late nineteenth century period supported the traditional roles of women in society. Their line of thinking was in accordance with the revivalists' ideas on women reforms. Thus, educated women of late nineteenth century continued to propagate ideas of womanhood being propagated by social reformers. This period witnessed the participation of formally educated women in social activities. The increasing involvement of educated women in social activities led to the emergence of women organizations. Late nineteenth century women organizations faced lot of constrains and limitations. This was because women organizations of this period were run and supported by male social reformers.
During the Gandhian period regional and national level women organizations began to mushroom all over the country. Unlike in the late nineteenth century, women organizations of this period were founded and run by women. Hence, decisions and actions to problems were taken up by women themselves. Women organizations twentieth century emerged as a strong agency. These organizations were capable of influencing the decision making process at the central level.

Women intelligentsia of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century continued to emphasize family roles of women as the main objective of women education. However, during the Gandhian period there was a perceptible shift in the objectives of women education was seen among women intelligentsia. Women organizations particularly All India Women Association began to emphasize on social service as the objective of women education. The girls' curriculum of this period emphasize on social service courses. This consequently led to the increasing participation of women in social activities within the frame of the national movement. This emphasis on social service also led to the creation of employment opportunities for educated women in the social service sector.

The seventh chapter is conclusion that incorporates the findings of this study. Some of the major findings of this study are:

1) Women's education in pre-colonial Gujarat was non-formal in nature.

2) The British institutionalized the women's education system.
3) Formal education system facilitated women's social participation in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Gujarat.

Bibliography, appendices of important documents, photographs, illustrations, maps, glossary of non-English words and abbreviations are other components of this study.

Sources of Data Collection

In the course of this research work, I have consulted primary documents both published and unpublished from the institutions such as Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai; B.J.Institute of Research and Learning, Ahmedabad; Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Trombay; Centre for Social Sciences, Surat; Tribal institute of Gujarat, Gujarat Vidyapith; L.D.Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad; Shreyas Museum foundation, Ahmedabad and Gujarat State Archieves, Gandhinagar. Besides this, data was collected from Vikas Gruh, Ahmedabad and Jyotisangh, Ahmedabad which were the pre eminent women organizations of British Gujarat. For secondary sources the libraries of the following institutions were consulted: Hansa Mehta Library, M.S.University, Baroda; Granthalaya- the library of Gujarat University, Ahmedabad; The library of Pune University, Pune; Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad; National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad; The Vikram Sarabhai Library, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and M.J.Library, Ahmedabad.
CHAPTER – 1

Geography, Polity, Society and Women in pre-colonial Gujarat: 1707-1818

Significance of Social History

The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed comprehensive developments in western historiography. Two of the significant developments were, one, the multifarious approaches in history writing, two, the increase in the scope of historical studies. These developments made the discipline dynamic in nature.  

In the preceding century i.e. nineteenth century, various schools of thought had made history writing scientific in nature. Two of the prominent schools of thought of this period which adopted the scientific method were; 1) the Positivists, whose school of thought was founded by Auguste Comte (1798-1857 A.D) and, 2) the Marxists, by Karl Marx

These schools, thereby, endeavoured to discern general laws, governing history of all societies. However, the application of these methods was primarily limited to political and economic history. This was due to the near absence of writings on social history within the domain of history.

The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed a proliferation of various schools of thought that held different views about the nature of history. The three schools of thought that made a significant impact in the history writing process in this period were:

1) Sigmund Freud's Psycho-Analytical approach
2) Elbert Einstein's theory of relativity
3) The Annals school of historical studies.

Under Freudian school of thought developed the 'Psycho-Analytical' approach. In later stages, this approach led to the development of a new technique of historical enquiry known as 'Mentalities'. This stimulated socio-cultural studies in history. The theory of relativity

\[\text{\textsuperscript{2}} \text{ Arthur, Marwick, 'The Nature of History', 2001, P. 55}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{3}} \text{ Gardiner, Juliet, 'What is History Today', 1988, p. 105}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{4}} \text{ Bajaj Satish K., opt. cit. p. 25.}\]
developed by Einstein made a significant impact in the discipline of history. In this approach, the general was correlated with the specific. In the later stages, this initiated the process of regional historical studies.

The notable school of thought that largely revolutionized the history-writing process was the Annals school of historical study in Paris, 1945. This school gave primacy to the factors such as demography, ecology and geography of the region. These factors, according to the Annalists, largely formed the key variables for the historical analysis of a society. In fact, the Annalists were the proponents of what was known as 'Total History Model', that is the study of history in all its various aspects. This model of history writing created the necessity to integrate the studies of other disciplines. In the long run, this exercise gave way to the emergence of interdisciplinary approach to historical studies.

The development of multifarious approaches in history writing eventually widened the scope of historical studies, which largely resulted in

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6 Lewy, Davies, 'The Annalist', 1965, pp. 15-20
7 Ibid, p.14
‘varieties of historical studies’. Some of the significant studies that emerged within the discipline of history were: history of social reform movements, social institutions, history of labor movement, cultural history and later on, the people’s history. It was found that most of these studies were in the context of socio-cultural themes. In due course of time, these studies got organized under a larger field of study known as social history.

Until the beginning of twentieth century, historical studies were primarily located within the sphere of political and economic history. Social or the history of the study of society was considered as an appendix to these studies. The areas outside the realm of political and economic history such as customs, beliefs, manners and other social activities formed the subject matter of social history. Thus, the scope and content of social history was limited. Further, social history was not the integral part of political and economic history. It was considered as ‘History of people with politics left out’.

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9 Gardiner, Juliet, opt. cit., pp. 30-50
By nineteen-fifties the concept and approach of social history began to change significantly. This field of study was considered as a dimension which should be present in every kind of history such as political, economic and cultural.\textsuperscript{11} By the incorporation of social history, new branches of studies with social perspective developed. One of them was sociology of education.\textsuperscript{12} The present work is an attempt in the work frame of being in the study of sociology of education.

Over the years, the sphere of social history proved to be dynamic and comprehensive. This was because every aspect of society formed the theme of social historical studies.\textsuperscript{13} The studies undertaken were largely connected with the contemporary social problems as well as the changes. The field of social history therefore had increasingly widened. New areas of studies such as the subalterns were explored and the earlier writing was reinvestigated in the light of the new methodology.\textsuperscript{14} Hence, the vast area covered under social history made it necessary to relate with the other disciplines. This made the interdisciplinary

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Sarkar Sumit, ‘Writing Social History’, 1997, pp. 1-50.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Dr.Sharma, R.N., ‘Philosophy and Sociology of Education’, 2003, p.116
\item \textsuperscript{13} Sarkar Sumit, opit. cit. pp.15-38
\item \textsuperscript{14} See, Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabary (eds), ‘Subaltern Studies IX- Writing on South Asian History and Society’, 1997.
\end{itemize}
approach inevitable in the field of social history. Amongst the disciplines whose concepts and ideas were incorporated in the social historical studies were the discipline of sociology and anthropology. The incorporation of concepts such as socialization, social mobility and continuity and discontinuity from sociology came to enrich social historical studies.

Indian historiography also reflected similar trends and developments. Until the first half of the twentieth century, social history writings in India were limited to a few set of paradigms. These were the colonial paradigm of progress and modernization and the nationalist paradigm of awakening and consciences. To justify colonial rule in India the colonists through their historical writing applauded the progress and modernization of India under British rule. This was vividly reflected in the S. M. Mill's 'History of British India', Vol. 1 1858. The colonial system of education formed a significant aspect of the paradigm of progress and modernization. In opposition to the colonial paradigm was the

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15 Chanana, Karuna, 'Sociology of Education and Gender' in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XXXVII No. 36., p.189

16 Bhattacharya, S., 'Paradigms Lost', Economic and Political Weekly', April, 1982, p. 692

17 Ibid, p.628
nationalist's national awakening and consciousness.\textsuperscript{18} This paradigm primarily was a critic of western education of colonial education. As an alternative to the western education, the nationalists advocate national education.

II

Women History

The interdisciplinary perspective evolved in social history led to diverse studies. One of them was women's history. This study emerged during the second half of the twentieth century, when gender dimension was integrated with social history.\textsuperscript{19} The outcome of this development was studies on women in the historical perspective. However, these studies were placed primarily within the framework of women studies - an interdisciplinary study on women's issues. This field of study was considered as the 'academic arm of the women's movement'.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{18} Ranajit Guha, 'An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth Century Agenda and its Implication', 1988, pp.30-58

\textsuperscript{19} Mazumdar, V., 'Emergence of Women's Question in India and Role of women's Studies', Occasional Paper, 1985, No. 7, CWDS, New Delhi, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{20} Desai, N and Krishnaraj, M.(eds), 'Women and Society in India', 1990, pp.1-22
studies endeavors to revisit and redefine the conceptual framework of various disciplines,\textsuperscript{21} so that a new set of formulations which accommodate the women’s perspective could be developed. History was one of the disciplines within which the integration of gender dimension as its central theme took place.

For fairly a long period feminist scholarship struggled to strengthen the position of women history in the field of academics. The arguments advanced by them in favor of women history were broadly based on certain specific prepositions. Some of these were as follows:

1. Women history as a neglected field- It was argued that historians had recorded the actions and experiences of men only ignoring largely that of women.

2. Women were the active agent of society- In the formation of societies of the world women had played an active and central role. Thus, they were active actors and agents in history.

3. Gender disparity- As oppressed section of the society was marginalized in the historical records on the basis of caste and class.

Women were excluded from the historical records on the basis of their sex.

4. Uniqueness of women experiences- In terms of various relationships in the society, women shared unique experience. It was therefore felt that women should receive the due attention.\textsuperscript{22}

The following diagram illustrates the need for developing women history-

Need to incorporate women's action and experiences

Gender Disparity in Historical Scholarship

WOMEN NEED TO WRITE HER STORY

Women were and are active agents of the society.

Roles and relationships of men and women in societies varied

All history is "His story" or Men's History

In view of the shortcomings of the early intellectual trends there arose the necessity for rewriting history in women's perspective. This was achieved by accommodating women's history in the discipline of history.

The main thrust in women's history was to review the role and status of women in the existing social, religious and political institutions of society. This new emphasis was however, partly the result of the influence of the western notion of the 'civilized western society' as opposed to the 'barbaric non western society'. This notion professed correlation between the position of women in the society and the development of a nation. The more ennobled the position of women in a nation was, the highest its civilization. However, owing to the prevailing cultural differences and disparities it was not easy to incorporate the western notion with the Indian context. Nevertheless, certain parameters to analyze and assess the status and significance of women in the traditional societies had been set. These were – education, occupation, decision-making roles, freedom of mobility, and types of restrictions,

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customs and practices and perception of status in the society.\textsuperscript{24} Based on these parameters, the status of women could be analyzed across the wide spectrum of caste, religion, and region through the various periods of history. In the context of the present study it is to be noted that pre-colonial Indian society had distinct characteristics of traditional society such caste system, marriage institution, joint family system and customs and practices. It is important to review these features of pre-colonial Indian society. Such a review would provide those useful insights that are relevant, and indeed, necessary for the present exercise.

\textbf{III}

\textbf{Features of pre-colonial Indian society}

Before taking up the discussion of pre-colonial Indian society, it is important to turn to the composition of this society. An interesting feature of Indian society in all its aspects viz., religion, customs, manners and the likes was its tremendous plurality. Society was composed of various communities. Of these communities the Hindus formed the largest

community followed by the Muslims. The Hindu community however, was not homogenous. There were innumerable sub categories within the Hindu community. 25 In addition to these innumerable sub categories there were relative differences within them in terms of customs, manners, and social organizations. 26 Thus, for an in-depth study of Hindu community these differences need to be taken into account. Then only the true picture of the community's socio-cultural ethos will be evident. The present study focuses on pre-colonial Hindu society of Gujarat. But before that we will turn to pre-colonial Hindu society in general.

The outstanding features of Hindu society in pre-colonial period (1707-1818) were:

1) The caste system
2) The family and kinship pattern
3) The various forms of marital institutions such as the endogamy, the exogamy, and the hypergamy.

Caste system

The distinctive social order of the Hindu society was the caste system. G.S.Ghurye defined caste as 'groups with a well developed life of their own, the membership where of was determined not by selection but by birth.'\textsuperscript{27} This made caste an endogamous group. The social status of an individual was determined largely on the basis of caste.\textsuperscript{28} For instance, a person from a Brahmin caste would have social precedence over rich businessman belonging to Vaishya caste. This was because in the social order, the castes were broadly divided into four hierarchical groups-the Brahmins, the Kshtrias, the Vaishyas, and the Shudras. Over a period of time each category got stratified into numerous groups known as 'Jati'.\textsuperscript{29} These groups or Jatis were organized in a hierarchical order. Thus, the Hindu society was largely shaped in the vertical and horizontal order.

However, there existed a brisk inter and intra economic transaction in these orders. In fact caste in its primitive form was a division of labour. In this, the Brahmins rendered the educational and priestly services. The

\textsuperscript{27} Ghurye, G.S., 'Caste and Race in India', Bombay, 1969, pp. 213-227
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{29} Mandelbaum, G. David, 'Society in India', 1996, P. 10.
kshtrias were predominantly the rulers and warriors. The vaishyas were largely engaged in trading and agriculturists' activities. The manual services were rendered by the shudras. With material advancement, these occupations became increasingly specialized. A distinctive feature of the caste system was the hereditary of occupation. Therefore, we can say that the specialization and hereditary of occupation made caste as an economic unit in itself. In this way caste system was an informal sector of learning of crafts and arts in the pre-colonial period.

Family and kinship pattern

The institution of family and kinship pattern formed an important component of the caste system. Just as caste was fundamental to society, family was to the caste. In pre-colonial Hindu society, the joint family model was largely cherished. However, the division of the family property and recurring family feuds were the primary factors for the slow breaking-up of the joint family system into separate households. It has to be emphasis here that this dissolution process was extremely slow and separate households would have been an aberration and not the normal.

30 Ghurye, G.S., opt. cit., p.6
31 Mandelbaum, G. David, opt. cit., p.33
The ideal largely emphasized in the bonding of family was that of fraternal solidarity especially among the close male-kins.\textsuperscript{32} However, filial fraternity among female kins was less emphasized. This was because of the patrilinial descent system. Except in few matrilineal communities of \textit{Nairs} of Malabar region of Kerala and \textit{Khasis} of north-east India, families in India were pre-dominantly governed by the patrilinial descent system.\textsuperscript{33} In this, the lineage of the family was traced through the male kins. This type of descent system was largely reinforced by Hindu laws of inheritance namely the \textit{Dayabhanga} and the \textit{Mitakshara}. Both these laws entitled male-kins to inherit the landed property of the family. On the other hand women in the status of wife, daughter, or widow were entitled to be maintained by their males. Provision was given to own gifted property known as \textit{Stridhana}.\textsuperscript{34} However, this was availed largely by women of the upper castes. Consequently, these laws invariably created unequal power relation between men and women and system of male dominance known as patriarchy. There was therefore a greater preference for males in the family.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Ibid, p.40
\item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid, p.43
\item \textsuperscript{34} Banerjee, Sir Gooroodas, 'Hindu Law of Marriage and \textit{Stridhana}', 1915, pp. 50-65.
\end{itemize}
The position of women in the family was largely affected by the position held by males in respect of seniority.\textsuperscript{35} Thus, the elder brother’s wife would enjoy higher status and role than the younger brother’s wife. This pattern of hierarchy prevailed both among men folk and women folk of the family. Among men the higher status tended to be of an elder man generally the father; among women it was the mother in law who wielded highest status.\textsuperscript{36}

A distinctive feature of the family was the sharp distinction in the role for men and women.\textsuperscript{37} Looking after the household was central to the activity of women. Women of the family performed this role in their respective status as wife mother and mother in law. Men carried out the activity outside the realm of the house. These activities included working for their livelihood and participation in public activities and looking after the finance and decision-making matters of the family.

\textbf{Marital institutions:}

The institution of marriage of the pre-colonial Hindu society has some peculiarity. This institution was the fundamental basis for caste and


\textsuperscript{36} Mandelbaum, G. David, opt. cit., pp. 55-58

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, pp. 62-68
kinship pattern. Generally, procreation of nurturing formed two fold purpose of Hindu marriage. Marriage meant responsibility and obligation toward family and society.

For women the idea of a married life was to beget children particularly sons and devotion towards husband. Therefore, the Hindu cultural conviction idealized the roles of married women as *pativrata* or devoted to husband alone. It is interesting to note that in western society the emphasis was not on procreation, rather it was the bonding between man and women that was upheld in principle. This distinction is important in the perspective of eastern and western society in general.

There prevailed three forms of marriages- 'endogamy', 'exogamy', and 'hypergamy'. The endogamous marriage was restricted within a group. Opposite to this, exogamous marriage forbade marital alliances within one group but encouraged it with the allied groups. Sir Herbert Risley, in his study on 'The people of India', 1915, explained briefly these two forms of marriages. Hypergamy was different from both forms of

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40 Ghurye, G.S., *opt. cit.*, pp. 167-180

41 According to Risley, 'Endogamy restricts intermarriage in one direction by creating a number of artificially small groups within which people must marry. Exogamy brings about
marriages. In this case the female from lower group was married to a person belonging to her group or higher than the group. However, marriages of females lower to their group were forbidden. In its extreme form the hypergamous marriages contributed to the development of practice of the female infanticides among the Rajputs of north and north western part of India. These forms of marriages therefore, reinforced the caste system in society.

Now, the features of society such as the caste system, the institution of marriage and the family system varied from region to region in the subcontinent. The variation could be observed from the deep-seated values of society. An in-depth study of these social institutions of the region would illuminate the subtle but significant variations prevailing at the regional level. A closer examination would enable us to discern the process of continuity and change taking place at the regional level in the historical perspective. Further more, this would enable us to have a

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the same result by artificially enlarging the circle within which they may not marry'. See, Risley, Sir H.H., 'The People of India', 2nd edition, 1915.

42 In Gujarat the practice of female infanticide was confined to Jerejas and Jaitwas of Kutch and Katiawad and in Ahmedabad and Khaira districts the Lewa Kunbis practiced female infanticide. See, Panigrahi, Lalita, 'British Social Policy and Female Infanticide in India', 1972, PP. 1-14. Also refer, Minute by J.Strachey, Member, Governor-General Council, 14th January 1870, on Female Infanticide Bill.
comparative and analytical picture of the politically two distinct periods of History, i.e. the pre-colonial and the colonial.

IV

Geo-Cultural Areas of Gujarat

As the location of the present study is the region of Gujarat situated on the western part of the country, it is useful to turn to some aspects of its geocultural profile. As is known, geography forms an important variable in the historical analysis and hence this discussion. The geography of the region however is known not to be uniform. There are several variations. These variation help mould the cultural features of the region. Thus, a region's culture is punctuated with a variety that can be seen as sub-cultural zone of the region. The same is true of the region taken up for this study.

Gujarat could be categorized into three prominent sub cultural zones in the geocultural context. These are:

1. Peninsular Gujarat
2. Mainland Gujarat

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The following table gives an outline picture of these geocultural sub areas of Gujarat.

Table: 1.1 The sub geo cultural areas of Gujarat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Parts of Gujarat</th>
<th>Physical Features</th>
<th>Towns in Pre-colonial Period</th>
<th>Socio-cultural characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Peninsular Gujarat</td>
<td>i) Rann of Kutch</td>
<td>i) Bhuj</td>
<td>i) Semi-Feudal society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Kutch</td>
<td>ii) Gulf of Cambay</td>
<td>ii) Rajkot</td>
<td>ii) Influence of Rajasthani culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>iv) Junagadh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>v) Bhavnagar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mainland Gujarat</td>
<td>i) Mt. Abu</td>
<td>i) Ahmedabad</td>
<td>i) Centre of trade and commerce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) North</td>
<td>ii) River Mahi</td>
<td>ii) Baroda</td>
<td>ii) Centre of main stream culture of Gujarat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Central</td>
<td>iii) River Tapi</td>
<td>iii) Broach</td>
<td>iii) Influence of Deccani culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) South</td>
<td>iv) River Narmada</td>
<td>iv) Khaira</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>River</td>
<td>v) Surat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Damangan</td>
<td>vi) Cambay</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-ga</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Eastern Gujarat:

- a) Panchmahal
- b) Eastern parts of mainland Gujarat
- i) Part of Malwa Plateau
- ii) Satpura Mts.
- iii) Part of Sahyadri Hills
- i) Godhra
- ii) Dohad
- iii) Chhota Udaipur
- iv) Dang
- i) Semi-Tribal society
- ii) Simple and Hardy people.

Source: Rajyagor, S.B.; 'History of Gujarat', 1982, P. 341
Map showing sub geo-cultural areas of Gujarat:

It is interesting in this context to note the perception of Gujarat by the noted Gujarati poet Narmad Lalshankar (1833-1886). He described the boundaries of Gujarat in the following words.

'In the north Amba mata,

In the east kali mata,

In the south kunteswara mahadeva,

And in the west Somnath and Dwaraka.

These are the four limits of Gujarat.'44

The poet Narmad summarized the boundaries of Gujarat in the cultural context. In the geographical context the western part of Gujarat is referred as peninsular Gujarat. This part comprised Kutch and Saurashtra or kathiawad and was bordered with a long coastline. On account of its proximity to the sea, this part of Gujarat has attracted the mercantile community of the surrounding region and as well as outside the country. It is this factor that has contributed significantly to the varied nature of the society in this region. The outcome of the close assimilation of heterogeneous and diversified mercantile community was the spread of business culture in society. This was the distinct feature of

the Gujarat region. The formation of subculture of peninsular Gujarat was due to the following factors:

1. The relative isolation of this part because of the geography - owing to its distant position, the peninsular Gujarat remains rather secluded from the mainland Gujarat. This kept it relatively out of the direct rule of Mughals and later on Marathas. One of the significant consequences of this isolation was the shaping of distinct political, social and cultural traits.

2. The socio cultural influence of Rajputs - due to its closeness to the erstwhile states of Mewar and Rajputana, there was the influence of Rajput polity and Rajput socio cultural norms in peninsular Gujarat.

Then, there was mainland Gujarat, which stretched from Patan in the North to Vapi in the south. This part could be further divided into North Gujarat, Central Gujarat and South Gujarat. Due to certain factors this part also constituted a significant geocultural area of Gujarat. These factors were:

1. As a centre of trade and commerce - Important ports such as Surat, Bharuch and Cambay fell in this part of Gujarat. This part, therefore, formed the emporia of world trade and commerce.  

2 As a rich granary of Gujarat – the land from central Gujarat to south Gujarat formed a fertile track. Most of the people from this area were agriculturists. The area of kheda was known as the granary of Gujarat. The rich agricultural community Patidar was found here. Owing to its richness and strategic position this part of Gujarat formed a significant part of Mughal and Maratha empires. During the British period this part became a significant province of the British Empire. Hence central Gujarat was the scene of hectic political activity in the pre colonial as well as colonial period.

The eastern Gujarat stood in marked contrast with the peninsular and central Gujarat. Due to the following geographical difference the eastern part generally remained isolated from the rest of Gujarat. These were:

1. Prevalence of hills and forests – such as the Satpura range, which was largely impenetrable.

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48 Majumdar, M.R, opt. cit., pp.235-243
49 Ibid, p.249
50 The Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, Vol. 1, Pt. 1, 1836, p.196
2 Most of the inhabitants of these areas were tribal - The people of eastern Gujarat were largely the low caste Hindus who were subjugated and pushed toward forests by the erstwhile Rajput rulers. Being secluded for a long time, the people of eastern part has retained a certain distintictiveness. After the British occupation of this part, it was referred as a tribal zone in the census compiled by the British government.

V

The Polity of Gujarat in the pre-colonial period

After the Decline of Mughals in the 1707 most of the parts of Gujarat came under the Maratha rule. However the peninsular Gujarat continued to remain under the ruling Rajput chieftains. Prominent among these were the kathi Rajputs from whom peninsular Gujarat acquired the name kathiawad. These Rajputs were constantly fighting over territory and tribute, so the region became a battle ground for the supremacy of the Rajput chiefs. Consequently, Kathiawad got parceled into several states. The biggest of these were the states of Kutch and the state of

53 Enthoven, E. opt. cit. P.40
The two significant implications of the rule of *kathi Rajputs* were:

1. The growth of the semifuedal polity
2. The increasing influence of *Rajput* customs and manners in society.

As the powerful hold of *Mughals* loosened in mainland Gujarat, this part was rapidly brought under the rule of *Maratha sardars*. The *Maratha* rule commenced with the incursion of *Khanderao Dabhade*, a trusted *sardar* of the *Peshwa*. He brought the southern part of Gujarat under his control. In this task he was ably assisted by his lieutenant *Damaji Gaikawad*, whose successors replaced the rule of Maratha sardars and calved out the *Baroda State*. The growing power of *Gaikwads* in Gujarat increased the hostility between them and *Peshwa*. As a consequence of this, three major battles were fought between them in 1731, 1751, and 1761. Despite defeats, Gaikwads emerged as the most powerful force in Gujarat. The following table given below gives the idea of the nature of polity under various ruling communities in pre-colonial Gujarat.

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Ibid, pp.230-250
Table: 1.2 Polity in pre colonial Gujarat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Parts of Gujarat</th>
<th>Ruling Communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Peninsular Gujarat</td>
<td>Rajputs- Kathi Rajputs, Jadeja Rajputs and other clans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Mainland Gujarat</td>
<td>Marathas- Gaikwads of Baroda State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Eastern Gujarat</td>
<td>Rajputs and Marathas mainly Sindhia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The conflict for supremacy in Gujarat that took place between the Maratha sardars greatly disturbed the existing social and economic condition and caused much chaos. Many historians have described the rule of Maratha in Gujarat as kal rathri or dark period. This was because the Maratha sardars failed to keep in check the growing powers

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58 The anarchic condition during the Maratha rule was aptly described by Krishnaram, a contemporary poet, in one of his Garbas, ‘Kali Kal anun Varnan’, in which he had described the chaos and lawlessness prevailing during the Maratha regime in Gujarat. For detail see, Rawlinson, H.G. (ed), A.F. Forbes ‘Rasmala’, Vol.II, 1945; Kavi, Dalapatram; Dalapat-Kaavya Vol. 1-2; 1879
of local chiefs such as Bils and kolis. These chieftains ceaselessly carried on petty warfare and levied taxes on the lower order of peasantry. The people of the region right from the business communities from the agriculturist suffered from the extortions made by the feudatories and Maratha sardars. The chaotic political condition under the Maratha rule had adverse consequence upon economy and society. Under the kathis in peninsular Gujarat the customs and manners of Rajputs were increasingly adopted. The Rajput custom of seclusion of women adversely affected the social position of women in Gujarat. It is interesting to note that with these new elements of Maratha sardars and Rajputs certain distinct cultural traits were introduced in Gujarat.

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59 The Gazetteer of India, Baroda State, opt. cit. p.160
Society in Pre-Colonial Gujarat

The Gujarati society over a period of time had become a heterogeneous society. It consisted of various groups who had migrated both from surrounding regions and countries beyond. Thus, from time to time there had been an influx of people into Gujarat. The earliest group, which migrated to Gujarat, was from the North West.

Beside this, there were a large number of foreigners such as Persians, Scythians Huns, Arabs, Kushans and Africans, who had come by sea and by the land routes. These people gradually assimilated with the local inhabitants and became a part of Gujarati society. It is to be emphasized here that it is for these reasons that greater heterogeneity can be observed in the society of Gujarat.

As like elsewhere, Gujarati Society had the institution of caste marriage and family. However there prevailed certain features that were at variance with the general picture.

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61 K. M. Munshi, ‘Early Aryans in Gujarat’, 1965, pp.45-68
Caste System:

The caste system presented a unique picture in the region of Gujarat when compared with the traditional caste system in general. As discussed earlier the Hindu society was ranked into four major castes. These were, the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaisyas and the Shudras. The Gujarat caste system in certain category showed variance. Here in addition to the four major castes fourteen other major castes prevailed. 62 These were the artisan caste which was sub divided into two groups namely the Narus or nine, and the Karus or five, thus, totaling to eighteen major castes. 63 These eighteen major castes were known as adhar varna. The following is the brief discussion on each caste of Gujarat

1. The Brahmins: They formed the upper strata of Gujarati society and ranked first in the caste hierarchy. However, there prevailed major and minor divisions in this caste. Among the major division of Brahmins included the Nagar, the Audichya and the Srimali. 64 While, minor divisions of Brahmins included the Modh, the Sarswat, the Sompura, the

63 Ibid, p.124
64 Enthoven, E.; opt. cit. p. 36.
Rajgor, the Aboti and the Pokarana. Of these groups, the Nagar Brahmins were considered as the highest. This group of Brahmins since long was the inhabitants of Vadnagar in North Gujarat. From the oral tradition, it is learnt that they were divided into two main sections namely Nagar Grahastha and Nagar Brahmins. The former had earned the reputation of a highly literate community. They had also distinguished themselves as high profile administrative officers. Nagars thus constituted the highly educated section of the pre-colonial Gujarat society.

2. The Banias: The point of departure or variance of the Gujarati society that merits attention is the second place of importance offered to the business community, i.e. of Bania caste. This was quite unlike the situation of society in general across other parts of the community. The Bania caste in Gujarat over a period of time had overtaken Rajputs in social hierarchy. The main reasons for their ascendancy were:

65 Ibid, p.37
66 Ibid, p.35
68 Majumdar, M.R., opt. cit. p.46.
The first factor of Banias' ascendancy was the economic factor. Banias were the wealthiest section of the society.69 Most of the Bania divisions were engaged in various commercial activities like trading, manufacturing and shop keeping. Thus, commercial activities primarily had contributed to their high status in Gujarat.

The second factor of their ascendancy in social importance was religion. Most of the Bania divisions had adopted Jainism and Vaishnavism.70 Both sects forbade violence and emphasized on communal harmony and charity. Under the impact of these values Banias were considered as largely the peaceful and enterprising people. This was in contrast to Rajputs who were primarily the warrior caste like the kathis of Saurashtra.

The third factor was philanthropy.71 The rich businessmen and merchant of Bania caste in Gujarat were generally known for philanthropic and charity works. They devoted a part of the wealth for relief works. As a result of this they raised high in social esteem. Thus, the material prosperity and religious values made them the affluent section of the Gujarati society after the Brahmin caste.

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69 Ibid, p.47
70 Ibid, pp. 206-221
71 Ibid, p.220

The Banias were subdivided into numerous divisions. The author of *Mirat-e-Ahmedhi* had mentioned eighty-four subdivision of Banias. Important among these were the Bhatias, the Lohnas, the Agarwals, the kapols, the Osvals, the Srimalis, the khadaydas the Lod and the Modhs.\(^{72}\) The Bhatias and Lohnas were the formidable trading community of Gujarat.\(^{73}\) An important feature of the Bania caste groups was that they were fairly urbanized and scattered all over the region of Gujarat. This feature was primarily related to their occupation mainly commercial and trading activities.

3) The Rajputs were the third important caste of Gujarat and they were scattered largely in the kutch and Saurashtra as noted earlier.\(^{74}\) They were predominantly the ruling community of this part of Gujarat. The Rajputs had been a dominant element in shaping the socio cultural life of the peninsular Gujarat. Among the various clans of Gujarat it was the kathis, the chavdas, the chauhans, the Rathod and the Vaghelas who

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enjoyed prominence.\textsuperscript{75} Among these clans the *kathis* had distinguished themselves as the most prominent patrons of arts and crafts.\textsuperscript{76}

4. Gujarat from time immemorial was known for its pasturelands and good live stocks. Needless to say therefore, their pastoral activity was an important activity of the people. It is to be note that the *Rabaris*, the *Bharwas*, the *Charans* and the *Ahirs* were the main pastoral communities of Gujarat.\textsuperscript{77} Of these, *Rabaries* were the largest pastoral community of Gujarat.\textsuperscript{78} *Rabari* women were known for their embroidery skills. Next in importance to the *Rabaris* were the *Charans*. They were popularly known as the bardic community as their traditional occupation comprised of cattle grazing and singing songs of the glory of their patrons. The *Charan* women enjoyed the status of deities and were worshiped by other communities.\textsuperscript{79}

5. The other significant community was the farming community, which included the *kunbis*, the *Mers*, the *Bhansalis*, the *kolis*, the *Ahirs* and

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, p.53

\textsuperscript{76} Nanavati, J., M.P. Vora and M.A. Dhaky (eds), ‘The embroidery and beadworks of *Kutch* and *Saurashtra*’, 1966, Baroda, pp. 115-126.

\textsuperscript{77} Enthoven, E.; opt. cit. p. 116.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, pp.119-125

some Rajputs. Of these, the Kunbis constituted the most important farming community. They were subdivided into five sub categories. These were the Leva kunbis, the kadva, the Anjana, the Uda and the Pirana. In the social hierarchy Lewa Kanbis and kadva Kanbis were considered superior. Both these formed the richest agriculturist class of Gujarat.

6. We will now turn to the artisan community, i.e., the craftsmen castes, who were one of the major castes mentioned earlier. The manufacturing and craft activities formed the major industry of Gujarat. A significant feature of this industry was high amount of specialization. Due to this, there prevailed numerous divisions of craftsmen's groups or associations known as guild. The guild was the outcome of high amount of specialization in craft and manufacturing Industry. Over a period of time various guilds of craftsmen accommodated into the caste hierarchy, where in these guilds were bounded by caste rules of endogamy, exogamy and communal eating. Thus, the artisans occupied a significant position in caste system of Gujarat. Some of the important

81 For detail see, 'Kathiavada Sarvasamgraha', Bombay, 1886; 'Kanbi Ksatriya Utpatti ane itihasa', Ahmedabad, 1912-
83 Ghurye, G.S., opt.cit. p.207
artisans were the Soni (gold smith), the Lohar (blacksmith), the Kansara (utensil makers), the Kumbhar (Poters), the Bhavsars (Diers), the Vankar (weavers), the Mochi (leather workers) and the Mistri (carpenters).  

It is interesting to note that the artisan group was an industry in itself were arts and crafts formed the hereditary occupation.

7. The communities that formed the lowest strata of society were the Dheds, the Bhangis, the Meghvas, the Chamars and the tribals known as Raniparaj and kaliparaj. A significant feature associated with these communities was the worship of mother goddesses.

The uniqueness of Gujarat caste system had been aptly described by the author of Mirat-e-Ahemedi in the following words 'Hindus are divided into various castes and sects. They are Brahmins, Shevras (Jains), Kshtriyas, Banias, Kayastas, Kunbis, Goldsmith, Blacksmith, Pullars, Tanners and Dheds '. Hence, it is apt to say that Gujarat was pre-eminently the land of castes.

The following table illustrates the various castes of Gujarat.

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84 Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, Vol.IX, Pt.1, pp.177-206
86 Enthoven, E., Vol.3, opt. cit, p.150
87 Mirat i-Ahmad (Persian Text), Vol. II, 1927, (G.O. series No. XXXIV)
Table 1.3. Major castes and communities of Gujarat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Traditional Profession</th>
<th>Main Area of Settlement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1)</td>
<td>Brahmins</td>
<td>Nagar, Audicya, Srimali, Modh, Sarasvat, Sompura, Rajgor, Aboti, and Po Karana</td>
<td>Educationalists, Administrators, Medicine, Priesthood</td>
<td>Scattered all over Gujarat. Nagar-Vadnagar in North Gujarat. Audicya-Sidhpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2)</td>
<td>Rajputs and Non Rajput communities</td>
<td>Kathi - Sakhayat division and Avaratiya division Mixture of Rajput Jadeja, Rathod, Jala, Solanki, and Chauhan-Rajput</td>
<td>Rulers mainly chieftains and landlords, and horse riders</td>
<td>Saurashtra and Kutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3)</td>
<td>Agriculturist community</td>
<td>Kanabi-Ceva, Kadava, Anjana, Uda and Piran</td>
<td>Cultivation</td>
<td>South Gujarat and North Gujarat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4)</td>
<td>Pastoral Community</td>
<td>Charan and Rabari</td>
<td>Camel herders, husbandmen, animal rearing, cattle grazing, singing the glory of their patrons, milkmen</td>
<td>Kutch, Saurashtra and N. Gujarat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5) Trading community

| Vania - Bhatia, Lohana, Agraval, Kapol Khadayta, Lad, Osval, Modh, Srimali, Dindu |
| Traders, Bankers, cloth-selling, jewelry, industrialists |
| All over Gujarat |

6) Artisans

| Soni, Luhar, Panchal, Oil makers, Mistri, and Mochi |
| Jwellers, Leather workers, and other manufacturers |
| All over Gujarat |

7) Tribals or Kali Paraj and Rani Paraj

| Koli, Dhed, Bhangi, Baria Meghual, and Chamar |
| Manual services |
| Largely in Eastern part of Gujarat |

The Family system

The joint family system was the prominent feature of Gujarati society. However, separate household prevailed, but these were considered as units of main family. The extent to which the model of joint family system was cherished in the society is evident from the medieval couplet which goes as 'that family from which the brothers have separated, is degraded, and members living separate are disregarded, being crippled. That short sighted person, who strikes at the root of family bonds and separates, loses even the residue by division.'

The main causes for the prevalence strong joint family system in Gujarat were:

1. The *Mitaksara* system of inheritance- In Gujarati society *Mitaksara* law of inheritance prevailed in a large way. According to this law the family property could neither be gifted nor sold, but was parceled to the next generation particularly males. Hence, men inherited the landed property of the family. However, the continuous division and sub-division

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89 Majmudar, M. R., opt. cit. p.190
of the inherited landed property increased the economic burden on the family members and caused family feuds.

2. The prevalence of the family business culture- Except Brahmins, most of the communities in Gujarat was engaged in business and commercial activities. The prominent business communities like Lohanas and Bhatias were engaged in large-scale business activities like export and import. However, the lower and middle strata of Bania and artisan castes were engaged in small-scale family business. Among Banias, jewellery, banking, money lending, and cloth selling formed the prominent family business. This was carried out by the family members mainly men. Among artisan community, it was the crafts and the manufacturing activities, which formed the main family business.


91 Majmūdar, M.R., opt cit. p. 185.

The Institution of marriage

This institution was the fundamental aspect of family and caste. One objective of the marriage institution was to prevent amalgamation of groups. This was done by forbidding marriages outside the group. In caste-based society, caste rules were laid down to prevent amalgamation. Three distinguish forms of marriage which promoted caste-based marriages were endogamy, exogamy, and hypergamy. In Gujarat among the sub-castes of Bania and pastoral community like Rabari and some divisions of Brahmins, the exogamous forms of marriages took place.\textsuperscript{93} As a result of this form of marriage the social base of these communities tended to be broad; for in exogamous marriages marital alliances were made out of the group. The communities that followed endogamous marriages were, Bhatia, Lohana, artisans and Kunbis.\textsuperscript{94} Among these communities there existed standered sub divisions. These were, 'the visas' or full scores, 'the dasas' or half scores, and 'the panchas' or quarter scores.\textsuperscript{95} The marital alliances took placed within these divisions. One of the implications of

\textsuperscript{93} For details see, Enthoven, E., opt cit, Vol.1, 2 and 3.


\textsuperscript{95} Ghurye, G.S .pp.145-150
the existence of such standard marital divisions was early marriages particularly of girls and in extreme cases killing of female infants. The latter practice was largely associated with the hypergamous marriages. This form of marriage prevailed largely among the clans of Rajput mainly the jadajas of Kutch and agriculturist community of Lewa and kadava kunbis. The practice of killing infant girls or female infanticide was significantly attached to these communities. A fuller discussion of this practice would be taken up later.

All the three forms of marriage were instrumental in division and subdivision of caste. This phenomenon therefore points to the fact that caste was not static; rather it was a dynamic social institution.

VII

Women in pre-colonial Gujarati Society

We will now turn attention to the discussion on women and their status in Gujarati society, in respect of the caste system, the institution of family and the institution of marriage. The caste system was an important factor in determining the social status of the individual. The

96 Walker, A., Resident at Baroda, March 15, 1808, 'Selection from the records of the Bombay Government', pp. 333-34
higher the caste, the higher would be the social esteem of the person. In this way, caste perpetuated social disparity. There prevailed, however, another disparity in the society. This was the gender disparity—subordinate status of women in relation to men. Unlike caste-based disparity, the aspect of gender was largely due to the unequal power relation between men and women. Here power could be defined as control over material, human and intellectual resources.\textsuperscript{97} The material resources included physical resources, wealth and access to wealth. Human resources included people; there bodies, labour and skills. The intellectual resources consisted of knowledge, information and ideas.\textsuperscript{98} The control of one or more of these resources became a source of individual power and social power. The latter that is the social power was perpetuated and sustained through social divisions such as caste, ethnicity, race and gender. Further it was perpetuated through family, religion, education and law.

The power structure in any society was largely maintained by beliefs and its value system.\textsuperscript{99} In other words ideology played a significant role in

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{98} Ibid, p. 6.
\item \textsuperscript{99} Ibid, p.4
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maintaining the power structure in the society. The caste system survived largely by the ideology of karma. This ideology was indoctrinated into people by education and religion. Further, the political and economic institutions such as market and administrative machinery played a significant role in the dissemination of this ideology. Gender disparity was perpetuated by the ideology of patriarchy i.e. the system of male dominance. In this system the lineage was traced through the male line. The ownership, control and inheritance of all assets particularly land was in the hands of men; and men exercised major decision-making power in the family. Religion, education, political institutions, caste and process of socialization played a significant role in dissemination the ideology of patriarchy. So it could be asserted that the entire ethos of the period was male oriented. Now let's assess the status of Gujarati women in various castes.

Generally the status of Gujarati women was subordinate to men. However, the degree of subordination varied from caste to caste. Women belonging to Brahmin caste groups enjoyed relatively a higher status than the other upper castes. However, Nagar women enjoyed relatively high status in respect to their access to education and social

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mobility. Women from this community formed an educated group among women of Gujarat. The literacy level among them was high when compared with other caste women. Most of them received education at home as schools for girls were largely absent in pre-colonial Gujarat. The prevalence of literacy level among them was evident from their literary works as most of the Nagar women excelled in poetry writings. Writing about the poetic beauty of the songs written by Nagar women, poet Narmad said ‘the music of these songs, the language of these songs, the symbolic meaning, the poetic excellence and the social aspects of these songs clearly reflects the excellence of the Nagar women folk and their typical Nagariness’. Thus, their attainments in literacy made Nagar women aristocratic and stylish in their demeanor.

It is learnt that most of the Nagar women lived solitary lives. This was reflected in the contemporary folk song, which goes as ‘the lady is small, with a pearl ornament in her nose, whose husband is away, she is passing her days by writing letters and waiting for the return of her sweet heart’. It is interesting to make comparison of this status of Nagar women with that of Namboodiri women of Kerala. Like Nagar Brahmins

of Gujarat, the Namboodiries were the highest Brahmins of Kerala. In oral literature of Kerala it is mentioned that the Namboodari women were the most depressed and lonely women of Kerala society as their husbands stayed away from home most of the time.\textsuperscript{102} Similarly the main reason attributed to the loneliness of the Nagar women was that most of the Nagar men were employed in state services far away from their home towns.\textsuperscript{103}

In contrast to the Brahmin women as seen in the case of Nagars, the status of Rajput women was relatively low. This was largely due to the custom of purdah or seclusion of women. Due to this custom, women faced restrictions in their mobility and socialization outside the secure environment of the house.\textsuperscript{104} However, among the non-upper castes women primarily the Dhed women, the Rabari women and the Charan women, the economic compulsions made their mobility flexible outside the house.\textsuperscript{105}

The customs and practices followed by caste groups also affected the position of women. The prominent customs followed in Gujarat were:


\textsuperscript{104} Rawlinson,H.G.,opt.cit. p.338

\textsuperscript{105} Kavi Dalpatram Dayabhai; ‘Gujarati Hinduoni Sthiti’, p.45.
child and infant marriage, widowhood, and female infanticide. The latter i.e. the female infanticide was largely practiced among Jadeja Rajputs of Kutch and Lewa Kunbis of central Gujarat. The main factors that encouraged this practice among these communities were; the heavy expenditure incurred in girls marriage, dowry system, and restricted marriage alliances. The local phrase for this practice was 'Dudh-Piti-ni-chal' as the baby was drowned into a pot of milk immediately after the birth. This practice showed the level of subordinate status of women in these communities.

In contrast to the custom of female infanticide, the custom of child marriage was prevalent among all the caste groups of Gujarat. The chief reason attributed to its prevalence was the restriction on inter and intra caste marriage. As mentioned above there existed standard division in every caste group within which the marital alliances took place. In the community of Banias there prevailed five standard divisions. The marital alliances were made within these divisions. This way restrictions

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were put on inter caste marriages. As a consequence to these children particularly girls were married at a very young age. In the community of *Kadava Kunbis*, the extreme custom of infant marriages prevailed. Very young children and even unborn children were married. There was this unique practice, where in if a suitable husband could not be secured for a girl, she was married to a bunch of flowers.\footnote{Majmudar, M.P.; opt cit, p. 220.} Early marriages were partly responsible for woman's subjugation as the girl child was burdened with house hold activities. She was left with no choice to think about her own life and the world around her.

Another prominent custom that was largely prevalent among the higher castes of Gujarat was restriction on widow’s remarriage or widowhood. This custom had assumed a character of an institution among the castes of *Brahmins, Banias* and *Rajputs*.\footnote{Hargovind Das Dwarkadas Kantawala, opt.cit.pp.118-119} The ban on widow remarriage to a large extent linked with inheritance rights. As mentioned earlier the larger part of western India followed the *mithakshra* law of inheritance. This law acknowledged conditional right of husband's landed property to wife. It has considerable relevance to the gradual lowering of the women's position in the family. Widows were subjected of severe
restriction for the avoidance of transfer of landed properties outside the family. Widowhood had become an enforced institution among the upper caste of Gujarat during the pre-colonial Gujarati society. This was well evident in the Swaminarayan sect—an indigenous socio-religious movement of pre-colonial Gujarat. In a text called Satigita composed by Swami Muktanand (1731-1830), the chief disciple of Sahajanand Swami, the duties of widows were laid out. These were two shave head, give up ornaments one meal in a day and avoid company of males including her father and brother. These rules were similar to the rules followed in other parts of the country.

The custom of sati was inexplicably linked with the practice of enforced widowhood. However, it was not widely prevalent as like in the province of Bengal in the pre-colonial period. Unlike Bengal the custom of Sati was not enforced in Gujarat. Option was given to choose between widowhood and sati. Hence it can be asserted that the Gujarat picture in this respect was in variance to the general all India picture. According to the British missionaries like James Briggs, Alexander Walker and James Cornec, ‘In Gujarat women generally committed self immolation

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112 Kothari, Madhavlal Dalsukhram (ed); ‘Anadi Mukta Sadhantanand Muni Rachitshri Satsangi Jivan Chaturth Prakaranno’, Ahmedabad, 1928, p 123.

in the pyre of her husband to avoid enforced widowhood'. The custom of sati was largely prevalent among the Rajputs of Saurashtra. In this part of Gujarat sati was glorified. Here on the banks of rivers and tanks masonry shrines dedicated to sati was erected. These were known as sati ma no pali. As mentioned earlier, the joint family system was a prominent feature of Gujarati society. However to an extent this system was a cause of women's subordination and family disputes. Women in the family were considered as an economic burden and life long liability. This attitude toward women was largely evident among Rajput and agriculturist communities mainly Leva Kunbis and Kadva Kunbis. The reasons for the subordinence of women in these communities were first, the dowry system and second the custom of purdah or the seclusion of women. Generally the birth of a girl in the family was largely an event of unhappiness and the birth of boy was vadhamani or good news. The following contemporary saying such as 'dikri to saap nu bhariyo che' meaning that the daughter is like a snake clearly reflected the preference for sons in family. Further, the financial powers were largely wielded by men. As a consequence to this

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114 Rawlinson, H.G. opt.cit. p. 427
115 Ibid, p.429
116 Vishwanath, L.S, opt. cit. p.1106
the status of women particularly that of daughter in law and widow was of subservient level. This was evident from an eighteen-century poem named as kalimahima composed by Surabhat in which a vivid picture of the negative attitude toward the daughter in law was depicted.118

VIII

Conclusion
The province of Gujarat could be divided into three sub geo-cultural areas viz. the western Gujarat comprised of Kutch and Saurashtra, the mainland Gujarat and the eastern Gujarat comprised of hills and forest. In pre-colonial Gujarat distinct polity and society existed in each sub geo-cultural areas. The part of western Gujarat was largely under the rule of feudal lords. The polity of this part of Gujarat was semi feudal. While, mainland Gujarat was under the central authority of Mughals and later on, Marathas. The eastern Gujarat was largely inhabited by tribes. Here, the subjugated tribal population was under the rule of Rajputs and Marathas. Gujarati society was an amalgamation of various communities that migrated to Gujarat from surrounding regions and countries. This has resulted in variance in socio-cultural aspects of Gujarat. It could be

118 Majmudar, M. R., opt. cit., p.345

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concluded that variance in sub cultural areas of Gujarat in terms of social customs and practices determined the socio-cultural positions of Gujarati women.