CHAPTER - 2

Indigenous System of Education for Women in Pre-Colonial Gujarati Society-1707-1818

Growth of Social Perspective in Education

One of the dominant features of the discourses on education in mid-twentieth century was the growth of the social perspective.\(^4\) For a long time this perspective had been missing in the discussions pertaining to educational studies. The main reasons for this neglect were: one, the late development of education as an independent discipline; second, the inadequate space given to education in sociology and, third, the changes in the aims and nature of education.\(^5\)

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\(^4\) David Jary and Julia Jary(ed), 'Collins internet-linked dictionary of Sociology', 2006, pp.590-591

\(^5\) Chanan Karuna; 'View from the Margins; Sociology of education and Gender'; Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 37, NO. 36, p. 3718
Prior to the development of the discipline of education, economic and history dominated the educational discourse. In economics, it was seen that education was incorporated as one of the aspects of the concept of development. In history, the educational discourse was generally engaged in depicting the major educational systems of the various periods of history. The interpretations given in these were from the economic and political perspective. The social aspect of education was largely neglected. As a result of this neglect the prevailing social disparities and gender disparities in education remained largely unaddressed. Furthermore, the role of social institutions such as of the family and of the community in the educational process also was not addressed.

The need to bring in the social perspective for a comprehensive and dynamic view on education was felt around the mid-twenties. During this period a phenomenal growth in educational institutions around the world took place. There was a substantial increase in

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8 Dr. Sharma, R.N., ‘Philosophy and Sociology of Education’, 2003, p.116
the enrolment of students in these institutions. However, these developments brought into fore the underlying social problems of education. These problems were the teacher and student's relationship, the social environment of the student and change in value systems, the attitudes and skills. These social problems in education gradually drew the attention of scholars from various disciplines to the needs of education. As a result of this the discourse on education began to gain currency.

This was particularly seen in the discipline of sociology and anthropology. There was a useful interchange of ideas and concepts in this discipline in education. Some of these concepts largely applied in education were socialization, social mobility and continuity and discontinuity. This interchange of ideas and concepts resulted in the development of a specialized field of study, which came to be known as the sociology of education.10

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The points of emphasis of the sociology of education were the issues of gender, the subalterns, social institutions and their impact on education. Now these developments brought about a significant change in cognate disciplines. In the discipline of history this helped in exploring the issue of education in a new way. One of the issues that were given considerable importance from the social perspective was the subject of women education. Prior to the social perspective, the issue of women education was largely dealt with economic and political perspective. However, recent findings of scholars, particularly of the likes of Karuna Chnana, Aparna Basu and S. Bhattacharya have asserted the social context in the issue of women education. These scholars have demonstrated the existence of interconnection between formal education of women and the traditional institutions such as family and marriage. The earlier writers had to a great extent overlooked these links and not paid adequate attention to the social context in women education. In sociological and anthropologic studies too the impact of the traditional institutions of

family, kinship and marriage on the formal education of women had not been projected with objectivity.\textsuperscript{12}

However, a valuable critique of previous writings on women education emerged in the feminist discourse. This discourse examined and redefined the conceptual frameworks of anthropological and sociological studies. This resulted in new formulations of significance. One of the formulations developed in feminist discourse and which was subsequently carried forward to the other disciplines including history was the dualities between the male being and the female being. Following table shows these dualities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body</td>
<td>Mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>Reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{12} Gore, M. S.; ‘Family and Rights of the Individuals’, Yogana, 1994, July 15, pp.13-16
The above table shows that the qualities of the left side were considered to be feminine whereas qualities of the right side were masculine. Not only these qualities were ranged polar opposite, but a hierarchy had been developed between them. Mind was supposed to be superior to body, and culture an improvement on and superior to nature. Those who were rational and objective were valued more highly than those who were subjective and emotional. Based on this hypothesis women were considered as bodies, nature; men as minds, thinking, rational, acting beings who work on nature and transform 'it' into culture. Men were therefore superior, over nature; they could do with nature what they pleased. Not only the qualities but even the spaces were gendered. Places such as political institutions, economic institutions and educational institutions were considered as men's places. Similarly the kitchen, the premise of the house, the family and kinship was the woman's space. Hence it is needless to say that the segregation of men's domain of activities and women's domain of activities as according to the predetermined spaces - the public space and the private
In the context of the present study it is important to take into account the dualities of public and private between men and women. As formal education formed a part of the public space, men had easier access to formal system of education than women. Thus, these new formulations opened-up the systematic investigation of the inter-relationship between formal education and informal education systems. The latter i.e. the non-formal education system was largely related to women education in the traditional society.

II

The Formal and non-formal Systems of Education in Pre-Colonial India

During the British period there was a phenomenal growth of educational institutions such as schools of various levels, colleges and universities. By setting up educational institutions the British institutionalized the system of education and developed it into a

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13 Pam Morris, ‘Imagining Inclusive Society in 19th Century Novels- The code of sincerity in the public sphere’ 2004, pp.31-33
comprehensive formal system of education. However, prior to this, the indigenous system of education was not completely institutionalized. This was because the indigenous education system comprised of formal and non-formal modes of imparting education. There were a wide-ranging scheme of subjects as the arts, the crafts, the religious studies, and the tradition. The learning of these subjects was done in formal settings such as educational institutions as well as in formal settings such as family and caste. The indigenous education system, therefore, was comprehensive in nature.

We will now discuss in detail the formal and informal modes of instructions in indigenous education system. In the formal setting instructions were imparted in educational institutions. During the pre-colonial period, there existed three types of educational institutions. These were: the institutions of higher learning such as Gurukul and 'Muths', the institutions of secondary learning as 'Pathshalas' and 'Tols' and institutions for elementary learning or

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16 See, Mukherji, R.K., 'Ancient Indian Education: Brahmical and Buddhist', 1947, pp.468-473

17 Ibid, pp.450-55
The village schools.\textsuperscript{18} The institutions of higher learning were largely the centers of religious studies where subjects like philosophy and metaphysics were taught. It is interesting to know that several institutions of secondary learning were largely the centers of learning of trade crafts.\textsuperscript{19} In these institutions, pupils of business community largely received education. However, it was the village schools which formed the backbone of mass-education in pre-colonial period.\textsuperscript{20} These schools prevailed all across the country. Here, elementary knowledge of reading, writing, and speaking was imparted to children of higher caste.

The two significant features of educational institutions of pre-colonial period were that, first, these institutions were meant for higher caste pupils, second, the absence of girls' student in these institutions.\textsuperscript{21} As a result of this a large section of society was kept out of receiving formal education. However, it is to be remembered

\textsuperscript{18} Dharampal; 'The Beautiful Tree', 2000, Volume III, pp. 77-86.

\textsuperscript{19} Mukherji,L., 'Comparative Education', 1975, pp.17-25
\textsuperscript{20} Mukherji,R.K., opt.cit. pp.466-467.

that formal education was one of the modes of receiving education in pre-colonial India. There also prevailed a non-formal sector wherein a large section of society, deprived of formal instruction, received education.\textsuperscript{22} The non-formal mode of instruction was usually imparted through following sources:

- The caste
- The home education
- The socialization process
- The oral tradition.

Through these sources men and particularly women received education in an informal way in pre-colonial period. We will take up the discussion of these sources of non-formal sector in the next aspect of the study.

III

The Indigenous system of education for girls in pre-colonial Gujarat

\textsuperscript{22} W.W.Hunter in his report of the Indian Commission (1882) wrote about the development of women's education in India since ancient times. See W.W.Hunter, Report of the Indian Education Commission, Calcutta, 1884.
Prior to the formal system of education initiated by the British, a thorough investigation of the existing system of education in various provinces was made. In Gujarat too, the British government made the survey of indigenous education system and prepared the reports on the same. These reports revealed the virtual absence of female pupils in the existing schools. Now, this was interpreted as the total absence of women education in the society. However, these reports failed to take cognizance of the other modes of imparting education particularly the home education by which most of the women received education.

However, certain educational reports of the British government, did mention about the existence of indigenous system of women education. One of the noted report was W. W. Hunter's Report on Indian Education of 1882. The following paragraph of the report depicts the picture of prevalence of non formal system of education among women:

'Apart from the Sanskrit tradition of learning and literary merit in pre-historic and medieval times, there can no doubt that when the

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British obtained possession of the country, a section of the female population was educated up to the modest requirements of household life. In certain provinces little girls occasionally attended the indigenous village schools, and learned the same lessons as their brothers. Many women of the upper class had their minds stored with the legends of the *Puranas* and epic poems, which supply impressive lessons in morality and in India, form the substitute for history. Among the lower orders, the keeping of the daily accounts fell, in some households, to the mother or chief female of the family. The arithmetic of the homestead was often conducted by primitive methods, addition and subtraction being performed by means of flowers or any rude counters which came to hand. Among the more actively religious sects and races, girls received an education as a necessary part of their spiritual training.\(^{24}\)

Thus, the extract from the report briefly sums up the existence of education system which was largely informal. It is interesting to

\(^{24}\) W. W. Hunter; *Report of the women’s education* in his review of education in Indian in 1886, pp.113-130.
note that this report has not been fully utilized by the scholars on women education. This report, therefore, forms a very useful reference for the study of indigenous education system of women in pre-colonial society.

The paucity of documented sources on non formal education system has strengthened the politics of formal education system. According to Derida, the politics of the western formal education system came to play an active role during the colonization of tribal and other subaltern societies.25 The later i.e. the tribal or other subaltern groups including women were categorized as illiterates. The latter i.e. illiteracy got associated with uncivilization, non-advancement and powerlessness. The following table illustrates the categories associated with literate society and non-literate society in colonial period.

Table: 1.2 Categorization of literate society and non-literate society.

Thus, literacy in the colonial period came to be associated with progress and advancement. The non-formally educated groups or societies were considered as illiterate and came to be associated with backwardness. A large section of Indian population during colonial period in India was considered as illiterate. This included tribal and women particularly rural women.

We will now turn to women education in pre colonial period. Following is a detailed description of various modes of instruction by which women received education in pre-colonial Gujarat:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literate</th>
<th>Non- Literate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civilized</td>
<td>Non Civilized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophisticated</td>
<td>Unsophisticated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful</td>
<td>Powerless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Backward</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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26 See, the Gazetteers of Bombay Presidency, Vol. 11, III and IV.
Home Education or Domestic Instructions- In this mode of imparting education, the tutors were appointed largely by wealthy families to teach their children at home.\textsuperscript{27} This way of imparting education was largely preferred for girls as the sphere of the house was considered as protective and socialization and mobility of the girls was restricted outside the house. A small section of women largely from the upper castes received education on the subjects like languages, arithmetic, and fine arts.\textsuperscript{28} Training in household activities formed an essential part of women education that was generally given by mother or senior women of the family.\textsuperscript{29}

In Gujarat too, most of the literate women were from the upper castes i.e. the Brahmins, the Rajputs and Banias. In the upper section of these castes the tradition of learning and reading prevailed. Women were a significant part of this tradition. Reading and recitation of scriptures, epics and poetry were the main aspects of the tradition of learning. Women like Gangasati,

\textsuperscript{27} Basu, Aprana, ‘Essays in History of Indian Education’, 1982, pp.10-15
\textsuperscript{28} The Adam Reports on Indigenous Education in 19\textsuperscript{th} century India, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 18-20.
\textsuperscript{29} See, David, G.Mandelbaum, ‘Society in India’, Vol.1 and 2, 1972
Pambai, Toral and Loyal, who were Bhakta Saints of medieval period, were the product of the tradition of learning and reading.\(^{30}\) In the Nagar caste, women were known for their literary works mainly poetry writings.\(^{31}\) Their contribution in the Gujarati folk literature particularly the love songs were remarkable. These songs were categorized into two-the 'Baramasi' and 'Mahina'.\(^{32}\) The 'Baramasi' songs were devoted to the feelings of parted lovers during the various months of the year. While 'Mahina' or months were written and sung by Gujarati women in specific months. These songs occupy a unique place in Gujarati literature even today.\(^{33}\)

**Caste as an Informal Sector for education:** Gujarat was preeminently the land of castes.\(^{34}\) As mentioned earlier, there existed eighteen major castes with numerous divisions and sub-divisions. Here, the caste distinctions were sharper than in any parts of

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\(^{31}\) See, Dave Narmadshankar, 'Nagar Streeoman Gavatan Geet', 1870

\(^{32}\) Meghani, Javerchand, 'Radhiali Rata', Pt. II, 1921, pp.45-64.

\(^{33}\) In Pandya, Navalram L's 'Baal Garbavali', 1877, poems covering a woman's life from the school years through motherhood was aimed at promoting education among women.

\(^{34}\) Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, Vol. IX, Pt 2, 1889, PP. 5-25
India. One of the reasons pointed out earlier for the numerous castes in Gujarat was the specialization and differentiation of craft and manufacturing industry. This feature was best evident in the artisan caste wherein subdivision was the consequent of the wide verity of specialization in the craft and manufacturing industry.\textsuperscript{35} For example 'Mochis' were the leather workers. However, this craft was highly specialized that there existed numerous sub-divisions of Mochi community. The following were the main sub-divisions of Mochi community: 1 Dhaldar [shield makers]; 2 Chandlagaras [makers of lac spangles]; 3 Chitaras [painters]; 4 Jingaras [saddlers]; 5 Pakhari [makers of ornamental hangings for horses].\textsuperscript{36} The division and sub-division of the communities was, therefore, a way for the adoption of the varied specialized crafts in the pre-modern technologies.

As elsewhere in the continent, the occupations were caste based and hereditary. Although the feature of hereditary occupation had its drawbacks, it was a contributory factor in the development of


craft and manufacturing industry. Caste was an economic unit in itself wherein hereditary occupations were followed. In this respect, caste and family constituted the non formal sector of training of craft skills. Gujarat was renowned for its crafts and textile industry since time immemorial. It is interesting to be noted that women formed a significant workforce in this ancient industry. Craft skills were passed from generation to generation. However, as mentioned above craft trade was caste based and hereditary. Hence, the craft skills were taught or passed only in those castes whose hereditary occupation was craft trades. Here were some of the crafts practiced by women in Gujarat:

1 Spinning and Weaving- The spinning of cloth was a home industry of Gujarat. The spinning of cloth was in full control of women of the family. By engaging in this craft, women not only supplemented the clothing requirement of the family but also of the larger textile industry of Gujarat. It is interesting to note here the

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37 Ghurye, G. S., opt. cit., pp. 160-180
38 Imperial Gazetteer of India, Pt. VIII, P. 324.
perceptional difference between the western countries and India towards spinning of clothes by women. The western countries spinning activity in the medieval Europe was largely related to those women who were unmarried or could not get married. Such type of women were came to be known as spinster as their main engagement was spinning of clothes. \(^\text{41}\) Thereafter, the word spinster came to be associated with unmarried and sober looking women. The following poem of early nineteenth century America titled, 'Hints to a new married sister and it won't be my fault if I die an old maid', reflect the stigma of unmarried women in western society. \(^\text{42}\)

'My mother pretends for a wife I'm too young,

And says that men will deceive me,

But let her look back, she'll soon hold her tongue;

If not, tis no matter, believe me,

Sweet gentlemen, don't be a moment in fear,

\(^\text{42}\) Ibid, p.24
And suffer a damsel to keep singing here,

Remember no thought to a girl is so dread,

As the terrible one — she may die an Old Maid.'

In India spinning was considered as a sacred activity of women, next to cooking food for the family. The spinning wheel was considered as a widow’s best friend and a source of livelihood.

2 Embroidery: Gujarat was known for its unique embroidery craft worldwide. However, the credit for making this craft renowned went to the women of Kutch and Kathiawad, which were the centre of Gujarati embroidery. The special features of Gujarat embroidery were bead work, mirror work, chain stitch and appliqué work. The communities which were largely engaged in embroidery work were Rabari, Kanbi, and Lohanas. Women from these communities, by using various features mentioned above produced embroidered Carno, Caklalo, choli, and Dharavo. (See,

44 The crafts of Gujarat, Shreyas Museum, Ahmedabad; See, Irwin, John and Margaret Hall, ‘Indian Embroideries’, 1972, PP. 75-90.

46 Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, Vol.IX Pt.2, P.177
However, these women from centuries been exploited by the traders of textile industry. Recently, a women organization known as Self Employed Women Associations [SEWA], which was founded in 1972, took up the responsibility of redressing the problems of crafts women and come up with solutions. As a result of SEWA’s efforts, the crafts women of Gujarat have developed independent trade co operations. One of them is known as ‘Banas Craft’. This has enabled these women to be self reliant and no more dependence on the intermediaries.

3 The Tie and Die or ‘Bandhani’- This was a special craft of Gujarat pertaining to its dying industry. Like spinning, this craft was also controlled by women of Kutch and Saurashtra. This was a highly skilled craft as it involved intricate process. The skill of tying and dying was learnt at home of the families that practiced this craft. By using this craft, women produced such as stripped and wavy patterns or Lehario on the clothes.

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47 SEWA Reception, Ahmedabad
48 Imperial Gazetteer of India, opt. cit. p. 187.
4 Interior Decoration and pottery ware: One of the features of Gujarati art and crafts was the traditional houses which were known for its decorum. However, this art of decorating the houses largely existed among the Kathis of Kutch. A traditional Kathi house was renowned of its interior decoration usually done by women.\textsuperscript{50} One of the specialties of interior decorum was cow-dung floors and clay walls.\textsuperscript{51} Kathi women were known for their talent of preparing cow-dung floors and clay walls. These walls were then decorated with mirrors and varied designs patterns.\textsuperscript{52} Another significant craft was pottery ware. Though this craft was usually practiced by men, but in Gujarat, women from the community of Rabari and Kanbi were known for making a kind of pottery wares known as Kothi and Kothal\textsuperscript{53}. These were the large sized jars used for the purpose of storing grains.

In addition to craft skills seen above, the women of Gujarat were known for drawing and painting skills. In almost all houses women drew pictures on the walls during auspicious occasions. These drawings and paintings contributed domestic art the scenes of

\textsuperscript{50} The crafts of Gujarat, Shreyas Museum, Ahmedabad, opt, cit. p.23 
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, p.22 
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, p.24 
\textsuperscript{53} Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, opt.cit. p.197
which were preserved and handed down from mother to daughter. The designs of these paintings included the animal motifs. The most popular motifs were the *Hathivela*, the *Morevela* and the *Phulavela* 54. Some of these motifs were also used in clothes. This gave the printed material of Gujarat world wide fame. Among the high caste women, the paintings of *Sathia* or *Swasthika* and *Rangoli* drawing formed the popular art forms.55

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SOCIALIZATION AS INFORMAL LEARNING

In almost every traditional society, the sex of the person was differentiated by assigning its gender. The initial assigning of gender was done by giving different type of welcome to new born. This was followed by addressing different names to boy and girl, different treatment in the family and teaching different set of behaviors in order to be part of the society. This process was called socialization or gendering. By this process children were taught their gender roles. There were four stages involved in the process of socialization. These were manipulation, canalization, verbal appellation and activity exposure. All four processes are normally differentiated by sex and all are features of the child’s socialization from birth on. The explanations of these processes are given below.

1. By Manipulation or molding is meant the way the child is handled. It has been noted that boys were treated as strong,
autonomous beings right from the beginning in the traditional societies. Whereas, in girls, the feminine qualities were more appreciated than the masculine qualities. These treatments of early childhood helped in shaping the self perception of boys and girl.

2. Canalization involved directing the attention of male and female children to objects or aspects of objects. For example girls were encouraged to play with dolls or pots, while boys were encouraged to play with bows and arrows and horse carts particularly in traditional Indian society. Through these types of differential treatment the interests of girls and boys were canalized differently and they developed different capabilities, attitudes, aspirations, and hopes.

3. Verbal appellations mean references or the language used for boys and girls. Research studies on this aspect have shown that remarks such as ‘beautiful girl’, ‘handsome boy’ helps in constructing the self identity of girls and boys, men and women.

Children learn to think of themselves as male and female so to identify with other males and females.

4 Activity Exposure is the last process of socialization. In this process, both male and female children are exposed to traditional masculine and feminine activities from their very childhood. Girls are asked to help their mothers with household chores, boys to accompany their fathers outside. In communities where the sexes are segregated, girls and boys live in two distinct spaces and are exposed to very different activities.59

It is through these processes that children imbibed the meaning of masculine and feminine; and internalize them almost unconsciously. The following diagram shows how the female identity and male identity was developed by socialization process in the traditional society:

In pre-colonial society, the power-relation between men and women was largely determined by the socialization process. The socialization process, however, took place at various levels, viz., family, caste, and public institutions. At the family level, the notion of men’s role and women’s role was inculcated right from the childhood. This was accomplished by gender based division of

60 David, G. Mandelbaum, opt. cit. Vol.1, pp.31-92
work, gender based toys and plays and rituals and ceremonies. The latter i.e., rituals and ceremonies has received less attention by the scholars and hence attempt been made in this study to highlight its role in developing female identity in the traditional Gujarati society. Through such divisions, girls were indoctrinated with respect to their social roles, their cultural values, their manners and prevailing ideals of womanhood.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Gujarati society was a patriarchal society. Preference was given more to sons than daughters. This attitude was reflected in the way the family members receive the newborns. If the newborn happened to be a boy, it was considered as a good news or 'vadhman'. However, the birth of a girl was considered as inauspicious, 'pathero' or stone. A family with daughters was considered as issueless. This attitude towards girls and boys was further seen in their socialization process.

A sixteenth century Gujarati literary work 'Vasanta Vilas' provides glimpses of the gender based toys and plays and gender based

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62 Desai, Neera, opp. Cit., p.112
The toys of boys and girls were different. Girls were encouraged to play with dolls and other toys such as birds and household vessels made of clay. Both boys and girls played outdoor games such as ‘Akhmicholi’ or hide and seek. This shows that young girls enjoyed outdoor life to some extent. However, the division of work within the house was taught from an early age. Girls were encouraged to learn household activities, whereas boys were sent to school or received training in the family business.

Rituals and ceremonies were the significant aspects of the socialization process. These were the instruments by which the consciousness of the women identity and men identity was formed. Both men and women performed rituals and ceremonies for the welfare of family members and prosperity. Although, the ceremonies followed in Hindu religion were alike. But, performance and significance of rituals within the ceremonies varied region to region. In Gujarat, the ritual performance, to an

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64 Meghani, Javerchand, ‘Killov’, 1930, pp.120-127
extent, varied from the rest of India. Let's examine the various
types of ceremonies and rituals performed by women in Gujarat.

In Gujarat, women, there were ceremonies specific to women. These ceremonies were observed with strict guidelines prescribed in scriptures. Most of the ceremonies observed by women were done with the objective of invoking different types of mother Goddesses namely Gaurimata, Dasamata, Ambemata, Jaya-Parvati and Tulsimata. Each ceremony was associated with a specific mother goddess to obtain specific blessing. Leela Dube, in her studies on rituals and ceremonies has observed that the desires for good husband and a child mainly boy formed the two purpose of observing ceremonies by women.

One of the significant features of women specific ceremonies was the fertility rites. Most of the fasts or ‘vratas’ were observed during the rainy season as the season symbolized love and fertility. In Gujarat, the first prominent ceremony observed during the rainy season was Gauri Puja. In this ceremony the worship of

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goddess Gauri was done for ten days by married and unmarried women. For ten days women keep fast or vratas. A significant ritual observed in this ceremony was the sowing of wheat and barley seeds in earthen pots. This ritual symbolized fertility and prosperity. Hence married women observed this ceremony for the safety of children or desire for the child. While, unmarried women observed vratas or fast for securing suitable husband.\textsuperscript{68} The sequence of the other ceremonies observed by women for the similar purpose is given below: Dasma nu vrata, Vad Pujan, Jayaparvati vrata, Tulsi vrata and Jivantika vrata.\textsuperscript{69}

As noted above, the ceremonies and rituals observed by women were oriented towards the welfare of the family. This was because among all institutions of the society, family was the most significant unit of the society and women were its significant members. Overtly, principles followed in the family were patrilinial. However, in practice, women enjoyed sufficient space in the family. They formed a significant group in influencing the decision making process. A part of the house mainly the kitchen was in full

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid, p.62
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid, pp. 54-65
possession of the women. Cooking food by the women to the members of the family was considered as sacred duty. Hence, woman of the house was called Annapurna or goddess of food.\textsuperscript{70} A house without women was a barren place. A general belief that persisted in traditional Indian family in general and Gujarati family in particular was that the foot print of newly wed woman symbolized the foot print of Laxshmi-the goddess of wealth and prosperity. Women, therefore, were considered as the Gruh Laxshmi or the goddess of the house.

\section*{V}

\textbf{ORAL TRADITION}

Since earliest times, human beings had dependent upon the word of mouth for the transmission of knowledge and culture from one generation to another. In organized communities this process of transmission got crystallized into the oral tradition.\textsuperscript{71} The oral tradition

\textsuperscript{70} For detail, see, Mamudar, M.R.; The Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, Vol.IX; Census of India, Vol.V

\textsuperscript{71} K.R. Sandhya Reddy, ‘Women in Indian Folktales’ in ‘Folklore and Gender’ by Lalita Handoo (ed), p. 33
was an 'ancient and effective means, perhaps much more effective than the written tradition of acquiring, storing and retrieving cultural articulations and a primary source of shared understanding, shared wisdom, shared cognition and shared world view'. This tradition or as it was also called folklore, was the primary means of imparting ideas, and other forms of knowledge to the unlettered people. According to a leading social anthropologist, Mac Edward Leach; 'Folklore is the generic term to designate the customs, beliefs, traditions, tales, magical practice, proverbs, songs, etc.; in short, the accumulated knowledge of a homogenous unsophisticated people, tied together not only by common physical bonds, but also by emotional ones which color their every expression giving it unity and individual distinction.'

Till recently the study of folklore in the discipline of history was undertaken for getting useful insights into the understanding of cultures. However, with the expansion of gender studies, the gender perspective was incorporated in folklore for a deeper

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understanding of the actual status of women in society. One reason for incorporation of the gender perspective was that folklore was a major means of expression for the unlettered women in the society. Through this medium women were able to effectively express their feelings, emotions, aspirations and desires.

In traditional society, the oral tradition was a significant mode of imparting collective cultural ideas to women in particular. Often there existed an inter-relationship between cultural ideas on women and women's own views on these ideas. In short, folklore was an independent domain where women had scope for their voices of dissent or acceptance on various matters.

In Gujarat, Kutch and Saurashtra were considered as the centers of the oral tradition. This was due to the existence of traditional bards from the caran community and Bhakti saints. The latter i.e. the Bhakti saints contributed the most in the development of oral tradition of Gujarat. However, the rich folklore of Gujarat that came

75 Meghani, Javerchand; ‘Caaro Ane Caarni Saahitya’, 1943, pp. 15-30.
from Kutch and Saurashtra existed in an unorganized form. As a result of this, for a long period the folk literature of Gujarat remained largely inaccessible in the academic circles. The credit for organizing and popularizing the folk literature of Gujarat has been allotted to Shri Jhaverchand Meghani-1896-1947.\textsuperscript{76} He pioneered the work of collecting and editing the rich oral literature of these parts of Gujarat. However, his extensive study on folk-literature did not cover women poets in details; so a lacuna exists as far as this important aspect of society is concerned.

As mentioned above the Bhakti poets contributed the most in the folk literature of Gujarat. These Bhakti poets included women Bhaktas too. While, a great deal had been written about men Bhakti poets. There is little work on Bhakti poetesses.\textsuperscript{77} Following is an attempt in this direction to highlight some of the prominent Bhakti poetesses of Gujarat in the context of tradition of learning that prevailed among the upper castes of Gujarat.

\textsuperscript{76} Jani Kanubhai, ‘Jhaverchan Meghani- An exclusive bibliography and classification of the Meghani literature’, 1996, p.5

Most of the women Bhakti saints hailed from Shaurashtra and Kutch. These parts of Gujarat, as we have studied earlier, were known for the custom of women seclusion and feudal polity. It is interesting to note that women Bhaktas adopted sainthood to escape from the rigid environment of the family. Mirabai, one of the famous women Bhakti saints of medieval period, who was known for her devotion towards god Krishna, adopted sainthood to get rid of the patriarchal customs and conservative environment of the ruling Rajput family of Mewar. For women, Sainthood was therefore, the only escape from the conservative society. The society too respect and revered the woman who had adopted sainthood. Bhakta women were glorified for their piety and religiosity. It is interesting to note here the comparisons between Indian society and the western society with respect to women’s liberation in the pre-modern period. In traditional Indian society, sainthood was the way to liberate from the conservative society. The society too accepts and respect saint women. However, in west, till the late nineteenth century, the only way left for woman to escape from the constraining environment of the family was

78 Ibid, p.64
prostitution. This is well depicted in one of the famous play of late nineteenth century ‘A Doll’s House’. ⁸⁰

The women Bhakti saints in Gujarat were known as Sati not because that they committed self immolation, but due to their experienced Sat or truth. ⁸¹ Thus, these women were respected for their knowledge and wisdom. Below are given the estimates of some of the selected women saints of Gujārat

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⁸⁰ Henrik Ibsen, ‘A Doll’s House’, 1879. ‘A Doll’s House’ was a highly controversial when first published, as it is sharply critical of Victorian marriage norms.

⁸¹ Shukla, Sonal, opt. cit., p.65
Gangasati or Gangabai

She lived around 16th century AD and was a Rajput woman who had married one Kahlubha. Giving hospitality to saints was central to the lives of this couple. Both of them were devoted to the Bhakti Marg. Gangabai composed a set of Bhajans or devotional songs which she passed on to their daughter in law, Panbai. This is the only case where women respected for her knowledge passed on the same to another woman in a formal way.

Sati Toral

She was the beloved of Jaisal. This couple acquired fame as legendary lowers as well as saints. Of all the Satis, Toral was the most popular women saint poet. She was a kathi woman and married to Sansatia. Jaisal was a Jadeja Rajput dacoit from Kutch who was known to have acquired Tati, Toli and Toral. Tati was a famous sword, Toli was a famous mare and Toral was a woman famous for her beauty and piety. The story of the love of Jaisal

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82 Ibid,p.66
83 Shusie Tharu and K. Lalita (eds), ‘Women Writings in India’, p.24
84 Meghani, Javerchand, ‘Saurashtra ni Rasdhaar’, Vol 1, 1923, pp.115-119
85 Ibid, pp.120-122
and Toral began when they were traveling in a boat to kutch.\textsuperscript{86}

The legend of Jaisal and Toral forms a significant oral tradition of Gujarat. The songs composed by Toral largely reflected the spiritual pursuits of man.

**Sati Loyal**

She was from the community of Lohars or blacksmiths and lived in the later part of the eighteenth century. Her lover was Lakka, a dacoit.\textsuperscript{87} She adopted sainthood and composed Bhajans depicting the beauty of mystic experience.\textsuperscript{88} Many of her Bhajans have been preserved by traditional Bhajan singers of Gujarat.

Some of the other Bhakti women saint poets were Sati orupa, Sati Dewal and Sati Amarbai.\textsuperscript{89} These women were remembered in oral tradition for their strong personality and spirituality.

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\textsuperscript{87} Shukla, Sonal, opt. cit. p.66
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid, p.66
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid, p.67
Ratanbai

*Ratanbai* was a well known women poet of the medieval Sant poets of Gujarat. Unlike other women poets, *Ratanbai* was from artisan community. She made her living at the spinning wheel.\(^{90}\) Her compositions were not limited to spirituality or devotional songs. Some of *Ratanbai*’s songs reflected women’s social and emotional conditions as well. Following is one such poem composed by *Ratanbai* titled, ‘My Spinning Wheel is dear to me, My Sister.’\(^{91}\)

‘My spinning wheel is dear to me, my sister;

My household depends on it.

My husband married me and departed;

He went abroad to earn a living.

After twelve years he returned,

With a copper coin and a half;

\(^{90}\) Shusie Tharu and K. Lalita, opt.cit. p.26

\(^{91}\) Ibid,27
He went to bathe in the Ganga

Dropped the copper coin and a half

Mother, father, father-in law, mother-in law,

One and all rejected us;

The spinning wheel was our savior;

To it we clung,

I paid off all my husband’s depts.

And over and above

Tying coin after coin in the corner of my Sari

I earned a whole rupee.'

From the above poem we understand that women particularly rural women helped their husbands in livelihood activities in traditional Gujarati society.

The existence of women saint women in Gujarat proves that there existed the tradition of learning among women. This tradition of
learning in the form of *Bhajans*, couplets and riddles were preserved and carried by women in a significant way. *Bhajans* composed by women were sung in various ceremonies.\textsuperscript{92} The songs, particularly of *Jaisal-Toral* were sung by women of various communities and so had a wide social base.

Another important aspect of oral tradition was story telling. This was an age old art of India by which knowledge of literary works was imparted. There existed professional story tellers known as *Purani* and *Katha Karas*.\textsuperscript{93} By using musical instruments, these story tellers narrated the stories from epics such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharat*, *vedic* literature such as *Puranas* and folk stories. Both men and women listened to the stories of story tellers either in public places such as temples or in the premise of the house.

**Conclusion**

Thus, in the indigenous system women received education by formal and non formal means. The formal mode of instruction was received through domestic education due to reasons of limited

\textsuperscript{92} For detail see, Meghani, Javerchand; ‘Saurashtra ni Rasdhaar’, Vol I, 1923.

\textsuperscript{93} Majmudar, M.R. opt. cit. p. 272.
socialization of women outside the family. Knowledge through informal means was imparted through various means viz., the socialization process at home, the learning of art and crafts and the oral tradition.

Hence it could be concluded assertively that this view that there was the lack of evidence of women education in indigenous education system was precisely because of the nature of evidence i.e., oral evidence, which the western intellectuals were unable to see. Today this form of evidence is being increasingly used in the study of women education, such as been attempted here.
Photographs

A traditional Kathi house.
Wall hangings (chaklo)