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The Indian society has always been predominated by men which placed the women at second and lower rank. All classes of society in India suffer from many customs and traditions that undermine women’s position. Many social and religious nuisances i.e. child marriage, prohibition of widow remarriage, dowry system, purdah system, sati system etc. were common in British Indian society. Law and religion did not recognize the equality and equal rights of man and woman. This is also visible in some of Hindu texts as well. Manu had summed up the status of woman in the following words;

“Duteous girl obeys her father; husband sways the duteous wife, son controls the widowed mother, never free is a woman’s life”.¹

Society favoured man to have rights and freedom from which woman was excluded. Desai (1959) stresses that different standards were adopted to judge the individual and social conduct of man and woman. According to him, it was only during the British period that big movements were organized to destroy the social and legal injustice from which they suffered from centuries.²

British conquest inaugurated a new economic and legal system in India and

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brought her in contact with the modern democratic influences of the western countries. The social reform movement, which arose out of the new conditions of social existence, set itself the task of removing the social and legal injustice and inequalities from which the Indian women suffered.

The status of women in India had changed from time to time. Their position in it has been variously estimated and diametrically opposite views are current regarding her place in different stages of civilization. On one hand she is considered little better than a slave or beast of burden, condemned to drudgery, bought as a chattle and treated as such. On the other hand, those who had anything to do with tribes reckoning descent from the mother are likely to view a woman as the undisputed mistress of the family if not of community life as well. Both concept are “as far as the vast majority of the people are concerned, bound to be far away from the actual state of affairs”. There is so much variability in the relation of women to society that any general statement must be taken with caution. Categorically, her utility, resourcefulness in domestic life, refreshing company and affectionate care of children have always proved a great asset to her partner in life and have to a considerable extent determined her status at different stages of civilization. An analysis of the evolution of human society reveals that women occupied a very important place in our society. In primitive societies women were accorded superior

status in comparison to men. The women used to look after both household and food production activities while men roamed in the forest in quest of game. The social relationship gradually changed with the emergences of new productive forces. In the process, the concept of private property emerged creating the two new social classes. This in turn resulted in creation of demand for labour as a factor of production. In due course of time man took leading part and women were driven to the secondary position, confining them to household work and child rearing roles. According to A.S. Atlekar before the advent of the Muslims, the status of women in India was certainly better. There were many factors directly and indirectly responsible for the continuous deterioration in the status of Indian women in medieval times. Early marriage became a rule-to safeguard the honour and chastity of girls. The Hindu law gave unequal and indifferent treatment to women. They were discriminated against in marriage, marital status, divorce, widowhood and inheritance.

The subjection of the Indian women in the pre-British period was rooted in the social and economic structure of the society of the period. Birth determined the status of an individual in that society. The disabilities of a woman arose from the fact that she was born a woman. This inferior status of

6 Under Islamic law on estate, on the death of owner, property is divided among different sharers, including females, each of whom is entitled to absolute ownership of his or her share. Women do not lose their rights by marrying into another family as in the case with Hindu. See Tara Ali Baig (ed.) Women of India, Publication Division, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1958, p.21.
woman in society was further made sacrosanct by religious ordinances. Very few women in the 1850s received education. Literacy reached such low ebb after 1857 that after 1857 there was hardly one woman in a hundred who could read and write. This was so only because of the evil socio-religious practices, sinister customs, irrational religious and inhuman superstitions and ceremonies, unknown in the ancient period. In this period Indian women were in a perpetually depression state. It is not difficult to assess the general condition of women when there existed in human, cruel and barbarous socio-religious practices in the society. The social structure allowed men greater freedom and liberty. Indian women suffered because of their ignorance, early marriage, their infant motherhood, enforced widowhood and abject dependence on men. Perhaps the worst aspect of this social degeneration was the terrible sufferings and social falling of women that is why the cause of emancipation of women and her education engaged the attention of almost all social reformers. The rigid caste system and the joint family (three or more generations sharing a common home, hearth and property) further contributed towards lowering women's position in the society. They were virtually slaves, having lost even their urge for freedom and their awareness of possessing an independent personality. In the words of Pandita Ramabai, "she was forbidden to read the sacred strictures; she had no right to pronounce a single syllable out of them."

To appeal to her uncultivated low kind of desire by giving her ornaments to adorn her person and by giving her daintily food together with an occasional bow which costs nothing (were) the highest honours to which Hindu woman was entitled".  

The consolidation of British rule in India ushered in the need for uniform legislation for both men and women. Inspired by the efforts of several Indian social reformers, the Britishers introduced series of laws which directly affected many aspects of women’s lives. In the nineteenth century, a number of socio-religious reforms movements were initiated to raise the socio-religious status of women in Indian society. These reform movements were further continued by Mahatma Gandhi and independence movement finally led to the emancipation of Indian women, to a great extent in the twentieth century.  

The growing contact with the West and infiltration of new ideas through it into this country have been undoubtedly potent factors in generating forces of reform in society. The spread of education among the members of both the sexes belonging to different sections of the people has also exercised a fruitful influence in stimulating the process of renovation. The ‘Women’s Question’ had become a central issue in most of the reform movements in early and mid-nineteenth century—the period of the so-called renaissance. Swami Vivekananda observed forcefully. “That country and that nation which do not

11 Jain, S., Status and Role Perception of Middle Class Women, Puja Publisher, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 8-9.
respect women have never become great nor will ever be in future. The principal why your race is so much regarded is that you have no respect for these living images of Sakti. If you do not raise the women who are the living embodiments of the Divine Mother, don’t think that you have any other way to rise”.12 During the late nineteenth century education, social reform and women’s associations (although these were confined to a small spheres before the first world war) helped women to a significant extent to come out of the four walls of their homes. The reason for this was the intimate connection between the social reform movement and the political activities of those times. The process of “Modernization” that began in the first half of the nineteenth century because of the penetration of western idea attained a position of stagnation because there was a perceptible decline in the reform movements as “popular attitudes” towards them hardened. The new politics of nationalism “glorified India’s past and tended to defend everything traditional,” all attempts to change customs and lifestyle began to be seen as the aping of the western manners and thereby regarded with suspicion. Therefore, nationalism fostered a distinctly conservative attitude towards social beliefs and practices.13

The two decades between 1920 and 1940 saw a sequence of the processes in the literary and political field that had started in the second half of

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the nineteenth century. In this period, the press had also become a powerful social institution. As Desai, A.R. (1959) explains that the press moulds as well as mirrors all complex processes of modern life. It extricates the exchange of thoughts on a mass scale in the shortest time. The press was an effective weapon in the hands of social reform groups\(^\text{14}\) to expose social evil and inequalities from which women suffered. In actual, various social reform movements were originated in metropolitan cities where the population was predominantly male. So, the outcome of the efforts of these social reforms and the aid that they received from creative writers is visible in the status of women within the family among the urban educated class—the class most exposed to these influences and to whom the movements were directed. The class bias of the reform movements was most pronounced in the field of education. The purpose of educating women according to these reforms was to bridge the mental gap between husbands and wives and mothers-sons. The ideal wife was one who managed the house skillfully even in adversity and it was only in order to fulfill this role that a girl was to be educated. She lived for others and bore hardships smilingly.\(^\text{15}\)

A survey of nineteenth century writings reveals certain trends regarding women. Social evils existed in the society were mainly the concern of upper caste or middle class educated people. However, economic questions were not

even touched upon. Also along with the reformist trend, one can not ignore
the greater conservatism and conformity with age and a tendency in
literature to resent only symbolic change. Though it evoked considerable
humanitarian sympathy for the plight of women, it was usually tempered down
by many restraints. It also sought to keep women confined within the domestic
sphere. That is why, many limitations still remained and while reviewing
women in the nineteenth century, most historians restricted themselves to the
range of issues concerning women’s status taken up by social reformers —
against sati and child marriage and female education. With the coming of the
twentieth century, national movements entered a new phase. Indian nationalist
ideology during the last thirty years of the freedom struggle became
increasingly concerned with the momentous question of the objectives
freedom was expected to serve. Therefore, the works on women’s issues in
twentieth century limited themselves to women’s participation.16

The greatest urge of the period was political freedom, and this urge initiated
all attempts at social reform, all other national activities. It is true that politics
had become the dominating factor. But politics included all phase of nation’s
growth. Literature, social reform, religious reform, philosophy, art-almost
everything that a nation lives by — was included in the term. Hence the scope of

16 These include B.R. Nanda (ed.), Indian Women: From Purdah to Modernity, (New
Delhi, 1976); Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya, Indian Women’s Battle for Freedom,
(New Delhi, 1978); Mannohann Kaur, Women in India’s Freedom Struggle, (1980);
P.Thomas, Indian Women Through the ages, (Asia Publishing House, Bombay,
1964); Pratima Asthana, The Women’s Movement in India, (Vikas, New Delhi,
1974); to name a few.
the journalism of this period was much wider. Newspapers and magazines became the custodian of national aspirations and new thoughts. Various studies examine the political nature of Hindi Journalism. Sujata Rai (1992) reveals that Hindi journal Prabha had become a political magazine but its editors gave importance to social movements also. In spite of a political magazine articles and notes related to social problems were published in Prabha. Among the articles related to women, there was a majority of articles related to women's participation in political field. Similarly studies like Brahmanad (1986), Bhartiya Swatantrata Andolen Aur Uttar Pradesh Ki Hindi Patrakarita, Delhi, & Mira Rani Bal (1994), Rastriya Navjagran Aur Hindi Patrakarita, Vaani Prakashan, Delhi etc. emphasized on the role of Hindi journalism in national struggle. Dr. Meera Kant (1994) also throws some light on the Hindi journalism before independence. It is true that all these studies based on Hindi journalism and tried to correlate social reforms with political reforms. But, in these studies all social problems are investigated to some extent, there is no special investigation for women issues.

It was only in the 1920s that women's voices began appearing in the Hindu Journalism. This undoubtedly was a result of the general expansion of Hindi Journalism and the wide spread participation of people in the nationalist movement after the First World War and the non-cooperation movement. Although, early journals of Hindi were important as early view of political critique of colonialism for setting the agenda for Indian patriotism, but after
first would war, the scope and openness of Hindi literary media allowed bold experimentations. Now, Hindi journalism had become a medium to show the outlook of the Indian society. A major section of Indian society was comprised of women who participated equally in all the activities, but unfortunately this section was oppressed because of various social and religious evils. By the 1920s all mainstream Hindi journals started carrying women’s section usually articles on problems like pardah, child-marriage, widow-remarriage etc.

Hindi journalism in the early twentieth century began the usual task of cultivating woman’s mind and fighting against those customs which imprisoned her mind and body. Hindi journalism had gradually become the centre of women’s movement not only in the Hindi heartland but also for the entire north India. Geographically, the Hindi area extended from the princely states of Rajputana (present Rajasthan) in the west to Bihar in the east, and from Punjab and Garhwal in the north to the central provinces and Berar in the south. The North-Western provinces of Agra and Oudh (later renamed the United Province of Agra and Oudh) and especially the cities of Allahabad and Benaras, were at the centres of ‘Hindi-Heartland’. Media plays a crucial role in functioning and change of any society. By gradually shaping public opinion, personal beliefs and even people’s self perception, media influences the process of socialization and shapes ideology and thinking. Therefore, Hindi

journalism also played an important role in constructing a certain image of women in the time period under review.

During the nineteenth century itself, the 'women's question' had become a vital part of literary discourse. She dominated literary works through the conceptualization of the country itself in her image, or by investing the ideal patriot with her qualities, or with the reconstruction of feminine roles and duties and consequently, of the familial universe, by the nationalist enterprises.\(^{18}\) In such a situation, an important cultural artefact constructed by nationalist ideology was that of the Motherland. The women was essentially seen as a mother figure. The woman's body was the ultimate site of virtue, of stability, the last refuge of freedom. She was the metaphor of the unviolated, chaste, Inver spouse to be protected from any outside invasion. Thus her nurturant capabilities were emphasized.\(^{19}\) Nationalist ideology was most dogmatic about British interference in their beliefs and practices as it violated the cultural sensibilities of the subjected. This generated a process of cultural defense and revitalization. With the emergence of twentieth century there were shifts in the images of women in journalism as well, reflecting the changed mood? However it was as question as to whether it leads to any fundamental change in mentalities and outlook. It cannot be denied that women entered into arena of political and public activities but the metaphor used to draw out


\(^{19}\) Ibid., pp.2011-2013
women in the national movement were also important. They placed significant limitations on women’s liberation, which were even felt today. The emphasis on a stereotype image remained and ensured the perpetuation of conservative norms. The important metaphorical construct was that of the ‘extended family’. The confines of the family were extended to cover the entire community even the whole nation. Thus, women’s public concerns were seen as legitimate extensions of their nurturing roles.20

Colonial Indian history writings, though less extensive and newer than the history writings of many other countries, reflect similar preoccupations and influences. The bulk of it ignored gender for a long time. However, the conjunction between the growing field of social, cultural history with its theory and ideology, along with an active women’s movement, has allowed an entire range of issues to crystallize and given a boost to women’s history writing. The course of writing a new script for the history which would strengthen the process of making India as a nation and display its new socio-cultural and political aspiration became decisive. Women’s issues were the key constituent in the reconstruction of historical consciousness and search for the golden age. The press especially vernacular magazines and newspapers in British India played a distinguished role in this self defined project for the people. The invisibility of women has been hallmark of all kinds of historical analysis even

of those specializing in social and economic history. It was common in national
historiography to write about women, emphasizing on the "The great women of
India". These narrations have promoted to reflect only the images of women
residing in cities. These images of ideal women were meant to have become
models of perfection. Thus, historical analysis’s to interpret the contradictory
situation and precting the ideals Hindu cultural build up stereotyped images of
women in history.

Information on women in modern history descriptions are related to the
women of elite section of society. The lives and conditions of the large
majority of women or their response to changing historical forces have been
unexplored and thus marginalized in history. Apart from few autobiographies
of women leaders, mostly from elite groups, we know little about lives, the
beliefs or the social background of the mass of women. The dominance of elite
appearance is best established by the efforts of most historians to link women’s
participations in the struggles with women’s education or the social reform
movements, ignoring the large number of women from peasantry and working
class took part in the various struggles directly or the thousands of housewives,
mostly mothers and wives who participated indirectly. Texts on religion, law,
politics and education carried different pronouncement for men depending on
caste, class, age and religious sect. In contrast, women’s differences were
overshadowed by their biological characteristics and the subordinate,
supportive roles they were destined to play. Occasionally Indian texts and
historical narratives singled out one woman for special attention but usually this was because her accomplishments were significant by male standards. Topics that were intimately interwoven with women's lives—household and family size, jewellery and clothing, inheritance and property rights, and marriage and divorce were largely overlooked. Writing the history of women in a colonial setting presents additional challenges. Colonial histories have narrated the civilizing mission of the British as rescuing Indian women from their own cultural and society.

The correlation as well as the contradiction between the image and reality of women in the Indian society has attracted both the scholarly community and the common citizenry. An exploration of this phenomenon is being attempted in various studies of women. The images of women are investigated as reflected through epics, literature, and art, classical and folk traditional. The images of women also investigated under the impact of national movement for independence and for social reform movements. In constructing the image of the 'ideal woman', the reformists and the nationalists continually reverted to 'classical' Hindu tradition, to the days when women had been educated, and even had composed hymns and participated in learned debates. As Partha Chatterjee points out, the image of thus constructed was quit the reverse of that of traditional, indigenous common women who were

always portrayed as typically coarse, vulgar, and quarrelsome. Nationalist discourse resolved the "women question" by the end of the nineteenth century. If Gandhi revived the "women question", then nationalist historians have concluded that Gandhi brought women into public life and gave them the tools to solve their own problems. But this is too simplistic and ignores the history of women before Gandhi came on the scene. The studies concludes that both national and social reform movements marched together. R.K. Sharma (1981) examines the impact of the national movement on social reforms and interrelation of the two, with reference to the women of India. He also emphasizes on the participation of women in Non-Cooperation movement and Civil-Disobedience movements under the influence of Gandhi.

The year 1921 was the turning point in the national movement of the country. The struggle for independence in India was spreading from the few to the many with the emergence of Gandhi in Indian politics. This period made it perfectly a mass-movement. The main thrust of this period was political freedom and politics dominated domains such as social and religious movements. Therefore, the area of the journalism was much widen and all the Indian leaders realized the importance of press and took to journalism. Hindi journalism offered wide social and communication space to women and helped to locate at their issues in the main stream outlook of the national struggles for

22 Chatterjee, Partha. op.cit., pp. 238-239.
23 Forbes, Getraldine, op.cit., p.3.
Svarajya. In order to understand the images of women in the Hindi journalism, it shall be helpful to know the social sufferings of women, their point of view and their self-image. The present study may help in understanding the dual role of women as active crusaders for social reform and fighters in national struggle for independence. The study of Hindi journalism also reveals the embarrassing aspects of Indian traditions duplicity of ethical standards and social norms, oppression of women in real life. It is hard to overestimate the centrality journals acquired in Hindi literary life in the two decades between 1920 and 1940. Most of, if not all, the Hindi literature of the time period under review appeared first in journals, and the great majority of Hindi writers were, at least partly and at some time in their lives, professional editors. Already nineteenth-century pioneers of Hindi had grasped the importance of journals as a medium to foster the use of Hindi as a public language, to circulate ideas and initiate discussion on matters of social and cultural reform.25

The total invisibility and neglect of the economic roles played by the “overwhelming majority” of women among the peasantry, in most rural industries and among the poor, are not explained. Women are observed economical inactive and dependent consumers whose basic needs were confined to “education, health and welfare” not employment. The explanation for the wide gap between the reality of poor women’s lives and official and

25 Orini, Francesca, op.cit., p.52.
academic beliefs that women were at the most “supplementary earner” for the family attributed to the class bias of intelligentsia, which projected middle class experience as normal for all women.

The basic attempt in examining the images of women has been to investigate not so much actual women but ideas and constructs about them. In a largely vein, Indian women are placed in an especially paradoxical situation. While Indian men may ill-treat their wives, they also worship, and pay the most object obeisance to goddesses and some of he mightiest deities in the Hindu pantheon are female divinities like Durga and Kali. These conflicting women images appear to be inherent and inevitable in a multi layered society driven by caste-class inequalities, regional disparities.26

**Method and Sources**

If literature published in print media be a reflection of society, it can be claimed that a new set of values was emerging among a section of women during the years of the freedom movement under review. This was especially represented in thoughtful essays published in various Hindi journals. Leaders of Indian women movement used Hindi newspapers and journals as conduits for communicating their thoughts, both political and social. In this study, I have used Hindi newspapers, monthly journals and journal of women’s organizations and also private papers of some women leaders available at

Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Marwari Library and All India Women Conference library in New Delhi. An analysis of Hindi newspapers such as Aaj, Hindi Navjivan, Abhyudaya, Bharat (Allahabad, weekly), Bharat Dharma (Kashi, Weekly), Bharat Mitra (Calcutta) etc. are used in making perspective and usual methods of data collections. Hindi journals used in the process of data collection/analysis are Chand (Allahabad, Monthly), Prabha (Khandwa, monthly), Madhuri (Lucknow), Sudha, Saraswati (Allahabad, monthly), Stree Darpan (Allahabad), Vishal Bharat (Calcutta, monthly). To get some numerical data census reports and records of All India Women Conference are also used.

In addition of these sources some contemporary publications are also used as primary sources e.g. Amrit Kaur, Challenge to Women, Allahabad, 1946; Evelyn C. Gedge, Women in Modern India, Bombay 1929; Maharani of Broda and S.M. Mitra, The Position of Women in Indian Life, Longmen 1912; P.Thomas, Women and Marriage in India 1939; Lakshmi Menon, Position of Women, 1944; K.D. Chattopaddhaya, Status of Women, 1947 etc.

Chapterisation

The study of social reform movement begin with male reformers in nineteenth-century India because our patriarchal system offer women few opportunities until men decide it is time for change. Many educated women defined their own problem. As women’s organizations developed, men focused
their attention on power politics. If the nationalists solved the woman question it was in terms of their own discourse, the women’s discourse about women’s problems was alive and well. The reflection of a linear connection between the social reforms movements and gender equality ignores several critical issues and contradiction within the reform movement. It had hindered adequate analysis of the politically critical role of gender equality within Indian nationalism and also ignores women’s own views; dimension to the multiple struggles that contributed to the anti-imperialist movement. As women began asking for their rights before they were brought into the nationalist agitation. The women involved in the women’s movement justified their new roles with the ideology of social feminism, that is, they tied their arguments about women’s right to women’s obligation to perform traditional roles and serve the needs of the family. Gandhi gave women a blueprint for action. Equally important, Gandhi assured their husbands and fathers, that these politically active women would not rebel against the family. Feminist demands for equality with men were never fully integrated into the nationalist program even though nationalism was feminized. Chapter 2 of the present study looks at the language of nationalism and women lives. In this chapter, light is thrown on the relationship between nationalist ideology and women’s issues in the minds of men and women, how nationalism related the issues of independence to the life of women.

27 Forbes, Geraldine, op.cit., p. 7.
28 Ibid.
Gender is neglected till recently by mainstream history writings or being treated in reductionist ways. History has been a record of male experience, written by men from a male perspective. From the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a great emphasis on facts. However, the facts designated as historically significant were those which served the power structure and dominant order. Even the annals historians have fallen into the trap of presenting history from a patriarchal perspective. However, women have also shared with men in preserving collectively memory, which shapes the past into cultural tradition provides the link between generations and connects past and future. But what women have done and experienced has been left unrecorded and neglected and ignored in interpretation.  

In such a situation it is the taste of historians concerned with gender to reconstruct the female experience, the buried and neglected past, to fill in the blank pages and make the silence speak. To write history without reference to gender is to distort vision. With gender history, we know that men are not the center of the world. From the historical discussion of the development of gender and caste hierarchies, and from the empirical evidence of professional women's transition from seclusion to employment, it appears that women's subordination is crucial to men's position in the social hierarchies of both caste and class. The connection between gender and caste has been recognized for

The basic message of the reform movement was – “Women must not be ill-treated”, and must be given some dignity and status, because they are the custodians of the family. In the 4th chapter of the study, the question of social reform and women’s role in the contemporary society is explored. The changes that were brought into women’s lives as a result of the social reform and how did it affect the position of the women in the society, are also explained. The goal of the male reformers was progress. Without social reform to substantially improve women’s status, regeneration seemed doomed to failure. Humiliated by their colonial status, Indians were obsessed with the issue of strength and power. They needed an explanation for the weakness that had led to their defeat and answer to the question of how to build up their strength. The transformation of the nationalist movement in the twentieth century into a mass movement required the support of diverse categories of individuals, classes and

30 Liddle, Joanna and Joshi, Rama, Daughters of Independence, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1986, p.57.
32 Forbes, Geraldine, op.cit., p.30.
social institutions. Women, a category that was as yet undifferentiated in public consciousness, was the sole universal category which cut through social divisions. It could be argued that if one woman was participating then all women were participating. Woman was a category distinct from that of caste or class, hence she could be symbolic of the participation of a united social universe.  

If we collect together the nationalist thoughts of various people articulated through various media, a fascinating image of woman emerges. The new woman was to be educated and brave wife as an appropriate partner of an English-educated nationalist man, able to run an 'efficient' and 'orderly home' like her western counterpart. At this stage it is also important to ask to what extent women's own perceptions and world view were influenced by the valorization of motherhood since the days of social reform movement. When caught up in the mainstream of change and conflict, how did they respond to the new expectations from them? Did they accept the male-defined new ethics or did they question it? In the last two chapters women's own voices and perceptions were explained to throw some light on social reality and women's struggle.

It is not surprising that some Hindi journals and Hindi literature in this period offer a bewildering variety of female characters. To consider such images is essential because they expose to us the tension and issues behind


34 Ray, Bharati, Early Feminists of Colonial India, OUP, Delhi 2002, p.41.
the redefinition of womanly roles. Here by the images of women means, a picture of women as described by the Hindi journalism in this period. From the present study we can know about the actual status of women in the society of northern India. This study also like other areas of social knowledge is a study from below. It does not simply seek information about a depressed section of the society, but also aim to look at the social process from the point of view of that depressed class and Hindi media. The lack of sources available for this discussion has limited the analysis. There is a crying need for more work in this area. But in the absence of or paucity of other sources, literature published in the contemporary Hindi journals also offers deep insights and contributes to gender history by giving a glimpse of wider cultural and historical processes which define the position of women in the given society. An analysis of various sources and gender also teaches important lesson to history that disciplinary boundaries are arbitrary and artificial for a truly integrated approach on all aspects of human life, one has to forget such boundaries.