

CHAPTER IV

PROBLEMS OF WOMEN IN PATIDAR SOCIETY

History is His Story
To get a complete picture of the World
We also need her History
— Kamla Bhasin in *Understanding Gender*

By now the radical historiography has clearly asserted that women received little or no attention in the traditional history writing. Not only political but even social and economic historians had left out women. Working class has generally meant working men. Women were wives, mother and daughters of working men. Gender discrimination which does not allow a woman to enjoy equal status with men in family and society was all responsible for that. Even in societies like the UK and the USA which have had universal education for a long time and are supposed to be modern, industrialized and egalitarian, show that gender inequalities persist in them. Men are still considered heads of households in spite of the fact that both countries have large numbers of female-headed household. Over 50 percent

women in these societies experience physical violence at the hands of their husbands and there is a high incidence of rape and physical violence.¹

In our efforts to recover and understand the past, we must place women not in isolation but as part of the totality. But women's studies, a novel discipline in the world of education, has comparatively a belated origin. From discussions in chapter I and II on women education and social reforms in India in general and Gujarat in particular it is clear that gender differences was a big problem in Indian social system too and for a long time there were no efforts to document the history of women and it was the cultural encounter between England and India in the late nineteenth century, which was the context for the emergence of nationalist historiography which shaped the focus and the thrust of writing on women in early India.²

In the patriarchal social structure of India problems of women were serious which even resulted to the killing of new born female babies by various means and immolation of young widows on the funeral pyre of their husbands by the process known as 'sati'. Moreover, there were evil customs like child marriage, 'purdah', ban on remarriage of widows, denial of

¹ For details see Kamla Bhasin, *Understanding Gender*, New Delhi, 2000.

² See William Jones, "On the Chronology of the Hindus" in Lord Teignmouth, ed. *The Works of William Jones*, London, 1807; C. H. Phillips, "James Mill, Mount Stuart Elphinstone and the History of India", in C. H. Phillips, ed. *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, London, 1961; James Mill, *The History of British India*, with notes by H. H. Wilson, 5th ed. London, 1840; Among Nationalist Historians mentioned may be made of Pery Chand Mitra, M. C. Deb, Govind Chandra Sen, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, R. C. Dutt, Jadunath Sarkar etc.

education to females etc. which restricted their scope of progress. The above mentioned problems were prevalent throughout India among various communities and groups, but more generally among the high castes of northern and western India.

Therefore gender gap was a curse to the Indian social system since ages. The patriarchal social structure of patidars was also equally affected by this curse of gender discrimination and it was expressed in various ways. The birth of a male child was a matter of great joy for the family while that of a female child was looked upon with disfavour. It can be deduced from various customs existed in the patidar society such as :-

- (i) if a son was born, a barber or a messenger of any caste was sent to give the news to the child's father. The messenger took with him the foot marks of the child impressed on a piece of paper with red powder. The relations and friends of the child's father used to gather on hearing the news. Moreover the barber was feasted and paid from Rs. two to Rs. five. The child's father distributed molasses and sugar to his relations and friends³

³ R. E. Enthoven, *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, Vol. 2, Delhi, 1997 p 136.

- (ii) even midwives⁴ were rewarded differently based on whether the early born was a boy or a girl. If a son was born than she was given Re 1 and in case of a baby girl she received only half of that i.e., eight annas,
- (iii) After the birth of a child the mother used to be considered impure for a quite sometime. In case of male child the impurity continued for thirty five days and for a female child's birth she remained impure for some forty days.⁵
- (iv) if a marriage engagements had broken by the boy's father, the girl's father got back the entire amount he had paid for the engagement. But if the girls' father broke off the engagement none of the betrothal money was returned. As a rule, the amount to be paid to the bridegroom was settled at the time of betrothal. 'The amount varies according to the status of the parties. A bridegroom of high family got a dowry of from Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 2,000 while a *akulia* bridegroom had to pay from Rs. 500 to Rs. 1,000 to the bride.
- (v) Among patidars no women, even the mother of the bridegroom, attend a boy's wedding. And obviously there was no such restrictions imposed for the father of the groom.

⁴ Barber women or other skilled women were involved in the task of delivery.

⁵ In the morning of the thirty fifth or fortieth day she would take bath, worship the sun, the well and the door-post and was therefore considered pure.

- (vi) After marriage if a woman was unhappy with her married life and claimed a divorce she had to pay her husband enough money to meet the cost of his second marriage. But if a husband divorced his wife, no money was paid to her.
- (vii) Among patidars the position of the father of the bridegroom was considered as higher than that of the father of the bride, so when he brought bride for his son he received some money in cash as token for his superior position from the brides father which was called dowry in cash. The dowry amount was fixed after taking into consideration certain factors, such as bridegroom's 'kul' (heritage), status of the family, economic condition and also gol of his village as well as that of the father of the bride. Moreover, the father of the bride had to provide his daughter with the clothes and ornaments of silver and golds, when marrying her. This was technically called 'kariavar', which was considered as 'stridhan' property. If someone was unable to give as per custom prevailing in the community, he had to give it anyhow either by mortgaging or selling his property or by borrowing from money-lenders. There were various other ways to drain money from his pocket. Such as during marriage ceremony, a custom involved catching of mother-in-laws robe by the groom in return of

which he used to receive a handsome present. Moreover, during marriage, for two days the bride's father feasted the bridegroom's relation. Therefore marriage function proved to be very expensive for a bride's father, and hence to give birth to a daughter was almost a curse to the family.⁶

- (viii) Responsibility of a pregnant woman during her delivery was also a burden that used to fall on the shoulder of her father. In the course of seventh or ninth month of her pregnancy the woman went to her father's house to be confined. For four or five months after the birth the woman was sent to her husband's house. Her father, besides making presents of cash, ornaments and clothes to the child and its mother, gave the child a cradle, a small mattress and pillows. Thus the father of a bride was bound to bear the expense of her daughter and his grandchild for a long time.

The above picture shows that during the period under study gender differences were very sharp in patidar society and the overall picture of patidar women was very depressing. The subordination that women used to experience daily regardless of the class, took various forms-discrimination,

⁶ R. E. Enthoven, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-140.

disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression, violence-within the family and also in the society.

The aim of this chapter is to discuss at length the problems of women in patidar society. In the earlier chapter it was brought out that patidar was an agricultural community of Gujarat and the females of lewas and kadwas-who formed the two major groups of the community, is the main focus of my study. As an agricultural community they cared less even about the education of the males in such circumstances the education of girls among them during the period under study was regarded as totally out of question and the problems faced by these two groups of patidar women in general related to the practice of hypergamy i.e. marriage in higher class, excessive dowries, female infanticide, selling of girls, child marriage, denial of education to them etc which I am going to discuss in length below:-

IV.1 Hypergamy

Hypergamy means the practice of marrying girls in families higher in social rank within the caste than that of their parents. This system of marriage was noticed especially among the lewas.⁷ This system forbade women of particular group to marry a man belonging to a lower rank than

⁷ Besides lewa patidars hypergamic marriage system was found to be prevalent among other Hindu castes such as Anavala, Audich and Khedaval Brahmans and the Rajput, Maratha Kshatriyas and Brahmabhat castes. See Census of India, 1931, Baroda State, Vol. XVI, p. 162

her own in social status. Thus, this practice compelled the parents to marry their daughters with the boys belonging to a group equal or superior in rank. N. den Tuinder in his thesis on population and society in Kheda district observed that- the system of hypergamy stimulated a fierce competition amongst the ordinary kanbis for marriages with boys of the high prestige patidars. Dowries became unaffordable for many families which induced them to kill their daughters. Over a period of time a shortage of brides occurred, with the result that many boys faced a prospect of remaining bachelors. Population growth remained limited in the caste which prevented population pressure and fragmentation and loss of land.⁸

Quite often the economic superiority of a particular group within the same caste decided their social status. In Gujarat, the kanbis who stayed in regions north of the river Mahi, were held in high esteem by those who stayed in the south of that river. Due to the fertility of the Charotar region the kanbis of that region were comparatively well off and this economic factor established the superiority of their social status over the rest of the kanbis in Gujarat. Hence the kanbis who resided south of the river Mahi were obliged not only to give their daughter but also the amount of dowry to

⁸ N den Tuinder, *Population and Society in Kheda District (India) 1819-1921 : A Study of the Economic content of Demographic Developments*, Ph. D. Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 1992, p. 5; Earlier Alice Clark argued that the system of hypergamy prevalent amongst the kanbi patidars led to the practice of female infanticide. This created a shortage of women in that caste, which forced many of the kanbi men to remain bachelors. By destroying their demographic potential, the caste managed to limit its numbers. See also Alice Clark, pp. 17-18

the persons who lived in Charotar. This superior group accepted a girl for marriage from an inferior group on the condition of a large amount of dowry from the latter. On the other hand they considered it disgraceful to offer their girls to the inferior groups.⁹

Thus the superior or 'exclusive' family admitted the daughters for their sons but did not reciprocate by giving their own daughters into the families inferior to themselves. The kanbis of Charotar demanded large dowries from those of Jambusar before admitting their families to intermarry with their sons. Similarly the Jambusar kanbis expected dowry from the Bharuch kanbis. Those who resided south of Bharuch had to pay to the Bharuch families for matrimonial alliances. Naturally this created a perpetual tide of female migration from the south to the north of Gujarat.¹⁰

The kanbis of Charotar as representing the fountain of honour intermarried only to a small extent among themselves. They were interested in obtaining wives with large dowries from the inferior groups south of the river Mahi. For this reason they reserved their sons for the "imported" families and suppressed the propagation of their own. This led to an excess of girls over the boys among the Charotar kanbis. These girls they sometimes killed. In the same way the kanbis of inferior rank knowing that

⁹ Makrand Mehta, "*A Study of the practice of Female Infanticide among the Kanbis of Gujarat*", Journal of Gujarat Research Society, 1966, Nos. 1 to 4/109 to 112, p. 58; See also Alice Clark IESHR op. cit., p. 1-25

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 59

every daughter in excess of the number of sons would be a source of expense to them, took a course of killing their female infants.¹¹

Patidars of thirteen villages in the Charotar (7 under Baroda, 5 under Kheda and 1 under Cambay) were considered kulin and were hypergamons to the rest. They did not give their girls in marriage outside these villages, but took as wives girls from any village.¹²

IV.2 Dowry system

Since mid nineteenth century the Patidar elites used to exploit financially the poor patidars by systems known as the 'narva system' – which means, a form of land tenure under which revenue was paid by the village share holders (patidars) rather than by each individual landowner. Narva system was used for exploitation of lower classes. But slowly and gradually this system was controlled by the British Government.¹³

¹¹ Ibid, p. 59

¹² *Census of India*, 1931, Baroda State, p. 448

¹³ The best description of the narva system of Tenure was in correspondence relating to the Introduction of the Revenue Survey Assessment in the Kheda collectorate (Bombay, 1869). (Hereafter Narva Report). This Report was probably incorrect in dating the founding of the narva tenure to the eighteenth century, for according to a strong patidar tradition, the system came into being towards the end of the seventeenth century. See S.S. Patel, *Patidarana Uddhharak Vir Vasandas* (Piplav, 1946) P.. 12-21.

The narva tenure was similar to village share hold systems found in other parts of India. For northern India, Eric Stokes has pointed out the most share hold villagers had pattidari systems with rights in the land based on ancestral shares. Eric Stokes, "Agrarian society and the pax Britannica in Northern India in the Early Nineteenth Century" in *Peasant and the Raj : Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India* (Cambridge, 1978) PP.76-7. The narva system preserved the solidarity of the peasant proprietors of the Charotar against both tax-farmers and the lower classes. The patidars of a village were able to present a united front in their dealings with the outside world within the village, the system acted as an instrument of patidar domination.

Excessive dowry system which came out from hypergamic marriage system was another mode of exploitation by the elite Patidars of the poor Patidar peasants. Heavy dowries enriched them and they could maintain some control over the peasants and thus maintain their social reputation.

Thus the dowry system was the natural sequence of the practices of hypergamy. Once the superiority and inferiority of a class or a group on the

Patidars invariably cultivated the best and richest land of their share themselves and rented out the poorer parts to other peasants. They controlled the economy of the village. On paper, they were liable to pay for higher sums of revenue than the subordinate peasantry, for they farmed the richer lands. In practice, they invented a whole range of extra taxes which they imposed on the lower castes. As a result, the lower castes and poor patidars were normally impoverished.

During the 1860's the British made a detailed survey of Kheda District with a view towards implementing a system of closer supervision of revenue collection. They also wanted to abolish the hundreds of local village taxes in favour of standardized taxes. W. G. Pedder was asked to investigate the narva system. He found that it was flourishing, especially in rich patidar villages like Ode, where the government talatis were powerless against the three private talatis employed by the patidars. In poor narva villages, the patidar grimly held on to their positions, and told Pedder that they would lose prestige and would never be able to give their sons and daughters a respectable marriage if the system was abolished. Peddar recommended that the narva system be retained. It was not egalitarian, but represented elites, and the government profited from it, for narva lands paid more revenue than other lands. Peddar's recommendations were accepted and the narva tenure was granted legal status.

The system was, however, modified somewhat. Patidars were no longer to be responsible for collecting revenue. The government decided to collect the revenue from this land themselves. As a result, the patidars could no longer use the narva system for their exploitation of the lower classes and poor patidars.

The Baroda State areas of the Charotar lagged behind the British areas in these respects. Until 1875, the peasants of Baroda State suffered cruel exploitation from tax farmers. In 1868, five hundred Charotar patidars even went so far as to complain to the Gaekwad in Baroda. His answer was to have the leader of his delegation tortured until the peasants agreed to pay their revenue. During the early 1870's the tax-farmers became even more extortionate, and eventually the patidar peasants complained to the British Resident at Baroda. Poorer peasants fled to the British areas and took to banditry. The deteriorating situation in Baroda brought about the appointment of a British commission and the eventual removal of the Gaekwad.

Under the new regime the land revenue was lowered and the principle of private property in land was introduced. As in the British area this reform undermined the internal cohesion of the narva system. Between 1892 and 1907, the Baroda Government tried to impose a narva-style settlement on the Patidars of the Charotar but discovered that such a system was no longer wanted. Many matadars even demanded that ryotwari system be introduced to save them the bother of collecting the revenue. In the end 51 of the 93 villages settled in the Baroda Charotar agreed to be narva. A further settlement in the 1920's led to the number being reduced to 27.

The narva tenure thus became obsolete. The patidar no longer needed it for protection against tax farmers or for their exploitation of the poorer peasantry. The development towards a more individualistic form of land holding might have been expected to have undermined the solidarity of the patidar community. In fact this did not happen, for by the early twentieth century the patidars had undergone a transformation. – David Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat, 1917-1934*, Delhi, 1981, pp. 37-40. Also see, Statements to the Baroda Commission of 1873 IOL. R2 File 339, Box No. 486.

basis of the superior and inferior region was established, it was very difficult to check the evils of dowry system. It is worth keeping in mind that the superiority and inferiority of a particular region and the people had its roots in the economic condition of the people inhabiting the region. Some of the kanbis formed a landed aristocracy and were considered by the other kanbis as the most respectable people of the community. It was considered to be an honour for a Jambusar or Bharuch kanbi to offer his daughter in the kulin families of Charotar. The result was that the inferior families who inhabited south of the region of Charotar had to pay a high price in the form of dowry to the superior families. Even the poorest parents were forced to marry their daughters by paying a dowry with the result that they had to sell their land and house. This brought them almost to the brink of beggary. If a man had one boy and two or three daughters, he could expect to get a dowry by marrying his son with a girl belonging to the "inferior" family or to the family equal in social status. But he had to pay two or three times more to marry his daughters with the boys of the superior families. Thus any excess of the girls to the boys was a source of big expenditure to the parents. If a poor parent had two or three daughters and no sons, he was sure to be ruined. Such circumstances led to a situation when a farmer preferred to kill

a female infant than undergo terrible economic and social hardships. It was easy to kill a newly born infant.¹⁴

IV.3 Female Infanticide:

In Gujarat, infanticide had been related to hypergamy. The closest approximation to true hypergamy in Gujarat was practiced by the Rajputs, who, in their far-flung clan networks, observed a generally fixed hierarchy of status.¹⁵

The infanticide of the kanbis was quite different in nature. The elite lewa patidars of Charotar had derived their status by and large not through conquest but through office holding, as Desais and Amins of parganas under Muslim rule over mainland Gujarat. British rule did not limit their opportunities to extend their lineage, as this was done not by conquest but by economic enterprise, following their profession of agricultural management. While the infanticide of the Jadejas suggests a decapitated and frozen hierarchy of military clans in an age which denied them the opportunity of

¹⁴ Markand Mehta, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

¹⁵ In Gujarat, the Jadejas occupied the top echelons of Rajput hierarchy. They represented that level within Gujarat which could not be the givers of daughters to others. Originally, ousted from Sind, they found their new base in Kachh, although they provided ruling houses for many principalities of Kathiawad through conquest, cut off from their ties with Muslims Sind, deprived of any new source of economic expansion through agricultural enterprise in barren kachh, limited to the archaic profession of warrior rule in Kathiawad, they were locked into a position under colonial peace where the status were undermined if they gave daughters to others. Thus they practiced wholesale female infanticide until they were most rigorously dissuaded. SRBG No. 39 Part II Passim.

war, that of the lewa kanbis suggests a technique for the consolidation of control over a central agricultural region.

The custom of dowry among the kanbis led to their inhuman custom of female infanticide which was popularly known as '*dudh peetini chaal*'.¹⁶ The custom involved killing girl babies by plunging them into a pot of milk immediately after birth. Hence the process was known as '*dudh peeti*' or making the child drink milk.¹⁷ The female infants were also killed by deliberate negligence in their upbringing. They were not allowed to have an access to the mother's milk. In an inquiry made by the Government in 1848, the kanbis of Dholka, Jetalpur and Ahmedabad gave the following information: "Some may destroy the infant....But some who do not destroy will take no care to bring up the female child and do not wish the infant to grow up."¹⁸

Once the Revenue Commissioner of Northern Division of Bombay Presidency while enquiring on the issue once asked a village headman how the new born children were killed. In reply the person said, "What labour is there in crushing a flower? Either starvation or placing the child face down words in a pan of milk, is the usual course adopted. In the former case, no

¹⁶ Kunjalta Shah, op. cit., p. 48.

¹⁷ M. N. Srinivas, "*Prospects of Sociological Research in Gujarat*", Journal of M. S. U. of Baroda, Vol. II, No. 1 Baroda 1953, p. 30.

¹⁸ As cited in Makrand Mehta, "*A study of the practice of female Infanticide*", op. cit., p. 60.

evidence of the fact may be derivable from an examination of the body; and in the latter case also, death would probably be attributed to natural causes".¹⁹

The method of killing infants differed in each province in India. In the Punjab, infants were usually killed by drowning them into the water-pots. Afterwards the corpse was buried in the ground.²⁰ In Kathiawad the child died while sucking the breasts on which an opium was carefully applied.²¹

In Kutch female infants were killed by drowning them in the pot filled with milk. In 1804 Jonathan Duncan, Governor of Bombay was informed by Gajarbai , daughter of Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad of Baroda that every infant born in the royal family in Kachh was immediately dropped into a pit filled in with water. After the death of an infant, the pit was covered with dust.²²

British administrators partly willingly and partly deliberately supported female infanticide because

- (i) Female infanticide, by limiting the supply of women belonging to the caste, seemed to have helped the patidars to regulate the distribution of their resources. By bringing about a zero population growth within the

¹⁹ *Baroda State Archive*, General Daftar No. 394; Section 259. File 1 – Act VIII of 1870 – Rules under the – for regulating the marriage expenses of the lewa patidar, p. 68, Also see Alice Clark, op. cit., pp. 1-25.

²⁰ Makrand Mehta, op. cit., p. 59; On Punjab See Gilmanton, Joyce, Prem etc.

²¹ Ibid, p. 60. In answer to Colonel Walker's inquiries Wasanji Ishverji Vakil in the court of the chief of Gondal gave the following statement: "The mother next puts opium on the nipple of the breast, which the child inhales with the milk and dies."

²² Ibid, p. 60

part of the caste which was living in the Charotar between the 1860s (when a new period of agricultural prosperity was beginning) and the 1890s (when large numbers on the land were challenging that prosperity), this practice drastically limited the customary fragmentation of inheritance and thus kept land-holdings stable or even promoted their aggrandizement.

- (ii) It also probably strengthened the substance of alliances made between families by way of marriage, because it made marriage itself scarce and valuable. It seems to have had the effect of increasing the value of the available women and of marriage and the procreation of children, within the upper ranks of the hierarchy, by limiting them to those who could afford them at a higher than mere subsistence level. The other effects of the limitation of Patidar women were obvious. This limitation might be seen as concentrating the wealth transferred in marriage payments, by making the agents of these wealth transfers scarce. Finally, it can be seen as placing a very high premium on the increasing, though never complete, unity and continuity of the caste itself, and upon the enterprise of every family within it, by reinforcing the role of marriage as the hall-mark of family status, not only of ascribed but also of achieved status. While this system did not

produce security for every family,²³ it tended to increase the security of this agrarian caste as compared to others, and of well-formed alliance groups within it. The concept of security should be stressed here as a supplement to the more prevalent notion of prestige.

- (iii) The British administrators saw prestige as the motive force behind the marriage network system, and for the hierarchy which lay behind infanticide; Pocock's work had also emphasized prestige as a factor, neglecting the continuing problem of economic security for family groups.
- (iv) It was difficult to maintain economic security from one generation to another in a densely populated agrarian economy. Concerted organized efforts were required. Population pressure could produce stagnation and involution or, through some form of agrarian management, it could be harnessed for adequate or even surplus productivity. During the British colonial period, the familial style of agrarian management practiced by the dominant castes was the one that prevailed. Among the patidars, hypergamy with infanticide helped to preserve and extend their familial management system.

²³ David F. Pocock, 'The Bases of Faction in Gujarat', *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 8, No. 4, Dec. 1957.

Hence from its inception in central Gujarat, the British administration favoured this form of management as the most efficient and least troublesome. Later administrators found it expedient to maintain it unaltered as far as possible, for to do so require less of them than reorganized forms would have done. While they did not fully understand the economic logic of hypergamy they favoured its maintenance nevertheless, as it played a part in efficiently managing the agrarian system by assisting patidar family groups in consolidating their hold on the land.²⁴

However, the administrative climate was not long to remain favourable to this kind of intervention. The records on suppression of infanticide among the Kanbis, while extremely detailed, on close scrutiny exhibit definite equivocation. This is evident in the avowed satisfaction of the administrator, H. R. Cooke, reviewing the situation in 1873, when only a marginal improvement from a ratio of 72 females to 100 males in 1849 to a 75 to 100 ratio in 1873 had occurred.²⁵ The difference in the level of reform between the sexes among the kanbis was great enough to imply the continuance of the practice.

The reasons why the British administrators had proposed that infanticide had existed were partially economic but primarily cultural. Right

²⁴ Alice Clark, "Limitations on Female Life Chances in Rural Central Gujarat", (Journal) *IESHR*, January-March, Vol. XX, No. 1, 1983, pp. 17-18.

²⁵ SRBG NS 147, p. 48

through the reports from Walker to Wilson (the reports which reflected urgency with regard to humanitarian reform), we find a tone of horror at what the writers saw as the purely selfish act of trying to preserve a groups status through infanticide. Walker and Wilson both deplored it particularly since they claimed it was not based on scarcity or fear of famine as in ancient Greece or in contemporary China, but purely on pride. They suggested, for example, that the Jadeja Rajputs be urged to exchange daughters with other Rajput clans, rather than hold themselves superior. Ultimately the Jadejas were forced to do so as they began to preserve their daughters' lives, but many girls remained un-betrothed. This was seen as a problem. In 1873 Cooke warned that it might lead to a reversion to infanticide. The necessity of a proper marriage was accepted throughout as a cultural fact, which could not be altered.²⁶ When it come to the notice of British officers that the Kanbis, too, were practicing infanticide, they applied the same explanations, primarily cultural ones, to them. They alleged that pride was the motivating force, and their expositions of the caste hierarchy were meant to prove this. Charotar Patidars stood at the top of the hierarchy, and other Kanbis vied to arrange marriage alliances with them. All this was seen as a struggle for status and position within the caste which enormously

²⁶ Alice Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 7

increased the amount of dowry being demanded which ruined many parents of girl child. Therefore in order to escape from the extravagant expenditure of becoming father in law they used to kill their female infants.

The first systematic and organized efforts for the suppression of female infanticide among patidars were made by the British Government with the help of social reformers from patidar community, like Bechardas Laskari who took active interest in this problem and tried to check this evil which will be discussed in the chapter V on social reforms among patidars.

IV.4 Bride Price:

The importance of women in the agrarian economy made marriage an acknowledged “economic necessity”. So much so that a man’s inability to pay his revenue dues was put down to his unmarried status, since an “akela Adami” (single man) was not expected to perform well agriculturally; and a widower was considered to be “half paralysed”.

Significantly, the so-called ‘work qualities’ of a prospective bride were looked for at the time of arranging marriages; the acknowledged requirement being, “*hath-paer ki mazboot boni chahiye, take khet-kivar ka kaam thik treh ho sake*” (she should be physically strong, so that agricultural work can be performed well). The emphasis on these ‘work qualities’ also

led them to disregard the girl's age and height etc., with the result that the girl was quite frequently older and sometimes taller than the boy.

The important role played by women in the economy led to a wide acceptance of the prevalent custom of sale and purchase of brides among the economically hard up peasantry. In the nineteenth century, except among a few better-off families, this custom was observed to have been universal among the agriculturist castes as well as the lower castes.

Although looked upon as a "disgraceful custom" and admitted by Jats with a "certain amount of apology and obvious sense of shame", it was a practice that was gaining ground everywhere in the first decade of the twentieth century.²⁷

The practice of bride price came to be prevalent among the kadwas, especially in Baroda, Viramgam Daskoshi, Padra, Patdi, Sanand, Dhragandra and Ahmedabad areas.²⁸ This practice was quite contrary to the custom of excessive dowries during the marriage of daughters prevalent among the lewas as described earlier.

Taking into consideration the conditions of brides' father, it was economic hardships which led them to sell their girls. Poor people found it is

²⁷ Kumkum Sangari, Sudesh Vaid, *Recasting Women, Essays in Colonial History*, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 310-11.

²⁸ The account on this section given below is based on Mangubhai Patel's work on the Kadwa Patidar. Dr. Patel himself comes from the community and possesses an insider view. See his book on '*Patidar Pragti Parivartan*', Ahmedabad, 1993, pp. 86-91.

a source to earn some money. Therefore they found it profitable to let their girls grow up. The greed to get more money sometimes tempted parents to break off their daughters' engagement and then sell them to a second party who could give more prices for her.

Some poor people who had no money to pay for a bride used to exchange one another's daughters, i.e. to get a bride they used to give their own girls as brides (for brides brother) instead of giving money.

In some cases people used to surrender their daughters to their creditors to pay back the loan. This kind of brides were specially liked by those rich people whose family reputation was not good and therefore found it difficult to get brides from reputed families. That led them to happily take bride from poor families who had been indebted to them but were not in a position to payback the loan. Such brides were tortured after marriage as their fathers failed to pay back the loans.

In some cases males from poor families remained unmarried for long and grew old unmarried as they had no money to pay for a bride. Some greedy parents used to give their daughters to such persons who could pay for them sufficiently well even if the person was already married, having wife at home. Getting money for their daughters was all important for them.

Such deals appeared to be legal where formalities of getting authoritative stamp were met with. The parents used to give in writing in the presence of village headman that they were selling their girls; would have no claim over her and the girl belonged absolutely to the person to whom she was sold off. The writing was signed by the parties.

The custom became so vicious that sometimes even the unborn child was sold anticipating it to be a girl child. This was known as '*petu chal*'. Such fathers used to give in writing that if a girl child was born, she would be given to the creditor. In case the girl child died or for some other reason the promise was not kept the fight would ensue. Eventually the village headman would arbitrate the dispute and the responsibility of giving back the money was entrusted to any of the near relatives. In case the transactions still failed the indebted father would sell off their brother's or sister's girl child before their birth without informing such children's parents which resulted in bitter relations among the relatives. Sometimes for generations this kind of promises of giving girls in marriage used to remain unfulfilled. The practice of selling girls for money brought into prominence the problem of mismatches in the caste. Sometimes small girls were married to aged men and a mature lady with a small boy.

The custom of selling girls was bitterly criticized in Gujarati literature and it was argued that by selling girls the mothers used to eat the liver of their girls, father and uncles their head, brothers their hands and legs and the invited persons who were fed in the marriage ceremony did not actually eat food, they ate blood of the girls. Means the society in actual sense used to eat the flesh and blood of girls by this custom.

The custom of selling even wives to the rich men prevailed in the society. If someone's wife was beautiful, the very rich and influential men would forcefully get them from their husbands as wives in exchanges of money. Such husbands were forced to give in writing to that affect in the presence of village headmen and wife's parents. Sometimes husbands were scared to bring to their homes their childhood wives now grown up into beauties.

At times husbands themselves used to sell their wives for money. Men belonging to reputed families used to get other's wives in exchange of money, in case he liked her. Wives were found to be sold by their husbands even after three years of their marriage. If a man did not like his wife he could sell her at a price of Rs. 2000/- and if he found someone good he would buy her. The cost of wives depended on their beauty. Those who were

more beautiful were sold at higher prices. The newly bought wife used to enjoy the same status as the first wife. Thus wives were sold like cattle's.

Among various wives of a person the one who gave birth to a male child for the first time used to be treated in a better way and accorded higher status than the wives who would bear the girl child.

As single man used to get married to two , three wives there was scarcity of girls among the community.³³ Hence the girls were sought from Kathiawad for marriage purpose in exchange of money. During drought years situation would worsen. For an illustration the girls between four and nine years of age from were sold to Gujarat for marriage purpose by their parents.²⁹

In the Baroda State such disposals were not general nor they were found too high to make a legislative measure a necessity. And they occurred only among those who had neither sons nor daughters to exchange.³⁰

IV.5 Status of Widows:

Status of widows in patidar society was similar to that of the status of widows in upper caste Hindu society. They were supposed to remove their

²⁹ Chakdrika Dadakia, *Kadwa Patidar Parishadma Stree Prashna Pratyeno Abhigam*, Ahmedabad, 2001, pp. 62-67.

³⁰ General Dafter No. 394 Section 259, File 2, Act VIII of 1870, Rules framed for regulating the marriage expresses of the kadwa kanbi caste in the districts of Ahmedabad and Kheda, p. 121.

hair and also forced to remove all jewelleries from their bodies. Widows of lewa patidar groups used to wear rusted colour *sarees* and blouses and kadwa patidar widows used to wear blue colour sarees.³¹ For a year they were not allowed to move out of home,³² not allowed to take sweets or to attend any functions. Widows were suppose to stay in their in-laws' houses. Even when tortured by the in-laws, the parents insisted them to bear and stay on. The only escape from the torture was escape to temples and live there the rest of her life worshipping God. While at the temple she was to work in return she was fed by the temple owners.³³

A widow was supposed to lead a celibate and austere life. Her head was shaven and she wore simple clothes. She was considered an ill-omen and she could not participate in any celebrations. Many a times, child widows were sexually abused by the family members and forced an immoral life.³⁴

Remarriage of widows among lewa patidars was strictly prohibited. Among kadwas, widow was permitted a remarriage which was called 'natra' or second marriage that was performed in a very simple way. Among lewa patidars marriages of widows was once allowed. According to David Pocock

³¹ Interview with wife of Kantaben Gordhanbhai's, dated 7-1-2003, Baroda.

³² Interview with Jayben Patel of lewa group, dated 25-11-02, Baroda.

³³ Interview with Padmavati Amin of Lewa group from Baroda, dated 27-11-02

³⁴ Kunjlata N Shah, *Ahmedabad pre-Industrial to Industrial Urban Centre*, (1859-1930), Ph.D. Thesis, SNDT, Bombay, 1990, p. 49

“Widow Remarriage was at one time practiced even by the original patidars”.³⁵ But over a period of time the lewas stopped widow remarriage.³⁶

Among lewa patels those who practiced ‘natra’ came to be known as kanbi and those who didn’t practice ‘natra’ were accorded the higher nomenclature of ‘patidar’.³⁷ Traditionally the widowhood was considered inauspicious. Her offence was that she had outlived her husband and his premature death was considered as the result of her former sins. The widows devoted the rest of their lives to penance by fasting and other mortifications. Such widows would regard any superfluity of food or cost of clothing expended on them as almost sinful. Their sole concern appeared to be to end their lives as expeditiously as possible.”³⁸

Speaking of old days Padmavati Amin, an elderly lewa woman told that under such circumstances, remarriage of widows among lewas was totally out of question. One in ten thousand widows used to get married³⁹ and that was a rare case and the marriage was performed in ‘natra’ form which demoted the widow one step down in the caste, she was no more regarded as patidar and was therefore known as kanbi. All the women interviewed from

³⁵ David Pocock, op.cit., p. 64.

³⁶ S. B. Rajyagor, *Gujarat State Gazetteers*, Ahmedabad District Gazetteer, Ahmedabad, 1984, p. 196.

³⁷ Mangubhai Patel, *Patidar Pragati Parivartan*, Ahmedabad, 1993, p. 72.

³⁸ David Pocock, pp. 12-13.

³⁹ Interview with Padmavati Amin of Lewa Patidar group, dated 27-1-02, Baroda.

lewa patidar group informed that they didn't even hear about marriage of widows and that there was no question of their remarriage.

IV.6 Polygamy:

Polygamy was prevalent among both lewas and kadwas. It was regarded as a symbol of high status, according to Mangubhai Patel, who has done research on the patidar communities, said that his grand father had three wives. It was accorded a high value as each new wife would bring a handsome dowry adding to the riches of the man.⁴⁰ Childlessness or having only female children had been the commonest excuses for extra marriages by the patidar husbands. Contemporary poets as well as folksongs depict the unhappy lot of co-wives.⁴¹

IV.7 Child-Marriage-

The practice of child marriage was specially prevalent among the kadwa patels. The lewas with the progress of education realized the bad effect of the custom and therefore during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had succeeded to rule out this custom. The curious custom of celebrating marriages in the whole caste, in one day, once in every nine,

⁴⁰ *Census of India*, 1931, Baroda, p. 203.

⁴¹ Kunjlata Shah, op. cit., pp. 50-51.

ten or eleven years was largely responsible for child-marriages. Another period of nine, ten or eleven years must elapse before regular marriages could again take place. Every family would provide all its unmarried members with suitable matches. Children about a month old and ridiculously enough sometimes unborn were married as well. In some cases when no suitable husband could be found for the daughter of a house, some special device was deployed. According to one of these devices the girl was married to a bunch of flowers on the long awaited day of community marriage. The flowers were then thrown into a well or a river. The parents of the bride would bathe and the girl now a widow could be married anytime according to the ceremony of simple 'natra' or second marriage. The other device was to induce some married man for small money present to go through the ceremony of the marriage with the girl and to divorce her as soon as the ceremony was over. The girl could then at any time, be married according to the 'natra' form.⁴² An unmarried woman cannot, however, be given in 'natra'.

It is understandable that this custom of holding periodic marriages on a certain day in a period ranging from nine to twelve years by the community might be due to economy of time and money. The kadwa kanbi

⁴² *Census of India*, 1911, Baroda State, p. 173.

caste was a busy agricultural community periodic marriages would save time, and the custom of having them on the same day in the whole caste would dispense with the necessity of caste-dinners, as in each house there would be marriage, and consequently its own feast.⁴³

IV.8 Sanskritization of the patidars to gain social status:

As the kanbis become patidars, they began to sanskritise their behaviour, corresponding there were shifts in the status of women within the group. Though the custom of purdah did not prevail among the patidars, women's social life was limited. She rarely stirred out of her house. Further her mobility was limited by various restrictions.⁴⁴ According to David Pocock "they are believed to be normally more subject to sexual temptation. For this reason a man who can afford to employ servants will not allow his wife to go out to cut grass for the buffalo in the evening and if she must go she does not go alone. Similarly it is a sign of low status in a caste that its women engage themselves in field labour. The hearth then is at once the strong-hold of the family's status and also its most vulnerable point. Therefore a wealthy man used to keep his womenfolk in the house and

⁴³ Ibid., p. 173.

⁴⁴ Kunjlata Shah, op. cit., p. 49.

employ labourers, If the has a widowed sister-in-law he can maintain her. In a poor family the women must work in the fields".⁴⁵

As the kanbis became patidars, they began to sanskritize their behaviour; correspondingly, there were shifts in the status of women within the group. Sanskritization behaviour was directly related to changes in marriage practices, the kanbis at the elite levels and would be elite levels of their caste hierarchy, began to give up divorce and remarriage of woman. At these levels, hypergamy, with its inevitable adjuvant of dowry, was in full force.⁴⁶

The control exerted at these levels over the survival of female infants had important repercussions on marriage chances for men. Low sex ratios limited the proportion of men who could be married, and a high rate of bachelorhood among the kanbi's was observed.⁴⁷

Kanbi women were increasingly more scheduled and confined not only within their own homes, but behind the high walls of their family compounds, which second to proliferate as Patidar factions grew stronger and more competitive.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ David Pocock, op. cit., pp. 12-65.

⁴⁶ See Pocock's *Kanbi and Patidar*, op. cit.

⁴⁷ SRBG NS 294 & 295.

⁴⁸ Pocock David, 1957, op. cit.

As family status rose, a greater emphasis was placed on the purity of women. The lives of women became increasingly controlled, along the same social spectrum on which female mortality rates grew higher.

The elite kanbi patidars having more sanctions, restrictions and requirements for marriage, and more control over both the supply and the behaviour of females of their group gained greater social power. High-caste kanbi behaviour regarding women and marriage gave them the cultural leverage required to validate their emerging eliteness. The kind of group control of marriage and reproduction practiced by the kanbi patidards was analogous in certain ways of the sexual abstinence required of a *sanyasin*. While the persons whose sexuality was controlled were the women, not the men, patidar marriage practices can be seen as a kind of group sexual control, followed to enhance their power.

Patidars restricted their sexual and reproductive behaviour as a group, making it serve the social function of marriage alliances among men of property. Their doing so enhanced their status and power as managers, in an agrarian system that required vigilant and continued management. In addition, the greater purity and self-control they presented in a cultural sense, through their treatment of women and children, accorded with their

social obligation as patrons to provide for the security of their clients. Thus they enhanced their claim to leadership of the agrarian society.

The leadership role was jealously guarded in many ways. The vigilant maintenance of the patidar men's rights over the distribution of patidar women may be seen in this wider context, as we shall see on examining the agitation against the age of consent act which took place among the Nadiad patidars in 1892. In 1892 a large meeting protesting the passage of the Age of Consent Act was held in Nadiad. In this annual report, the Kheda district collector remarked, "It is working of notice that it was at Nadiad that the first meeting of protest against (what he erroneously called) the infant marriage bill was held in Gujarat. This meeting was attended by the leading and respectable men from all parts of the district.⁴⁹ This meeting was held at Nadiad because the issue was important to the patidars. Nadiad was one of the elite twelve villages of the Patidars, whose leading citizens were of that caste. Some of the richest and most powerful of the patidars families had been based at Nadiad for over two hundred years.

The reason the issue was important to them was because it was directly related to the role that their control of women played in their overall social strategy. Strict control over the lives and destinies of the women of

⁴⁹ *Maharashtra State Archives*, Bombay Revenue Department, Vol. 1892/23, *Kaira Administration Report*, pp. 128-29.

their own caste was part of the male patidar strategy to secure a hold over their resources, including land and other castes in the region. For marriage to be the ritual hall-mark of high status, the bride had to be perfectly pure. It was believed that if she passed puberty before she was married there was the danger of some taint to status. Accompanying the requirement that a woman be pure was the necessity of her seclusion. It was essential, following the belief in the natural wantonness of women, that in families with any claim to high status, brides be taken away and confined to the house before the age when temptation threatened. Among the rural groups in Central Gujarat, these cultural constraints entered into a continuum of social change affecting women. The seclusion of women had earlier tended to be practiced more by warrior groups than by groups of peasant origin. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, correspondingly, the Kolis had tended to seclude women more than the Kanbi's had. Kanbis of both sexes toiled together in the fields until their families could afford the luxury of segregating the women.

By 1982, however, kanbi patidar families in the increasingly developed commercial agricultural and marketing area of the kheda district around Nadiad had greatly increased their ability to afford this luxury. The Age of Consent Act thus threatened to counter the process of social change in which they had strenuously invested throughout the century.

IV.9 Social Violence and the Use of Women:

Among the different types of crime common among patidars were crimes of violence with women. "Patidars are factions and immoral in their relations with women. There is plenty of evidence furnished by the criminal records to show that Dharala women are often palmed off as Patidar women and Dharala women are sometimes seduced by (Patidars)...many of whom are bachelors".⁵⁰

The patidars, as we have seen, followed a hypergamous marriage hierarchy, with a shortage of females intrinsic to it and maintained by it. They did so, in part, because of the cultural superiority established by having an exclusive, expensive marriage system. Yet they would find relief from its restrictions clandestinely, by seducing koli women or by accepting them as wives under the pretence that they were kanbis. In 1895 the settlement officer establishing the revision survey settlement for Anand taluka took note of the notoriety which Kheda had earned for heinous crime in which women were concerned.⁵¹ Rape and abductions must have been among those being referred to. The crimes probably included murder in revenge for rape, which could have involved numerous persons in continuing feuds between families, groups or villages.

⁵⁰ Ibid pp. 329-49.

⁵¹ SRBG NS 296, para 11.

There were probably even more seductions which never led to criminal violence. Pocock, drawing upon fieldwork done in the 1950s, described the very commonly occurring inter-caste liaisons which took place in the fields, a sort of free zone beyond the sanctities of the home of village centre. Ethnographic literature from the nineteenth century shows that koli girls were good-looking, due to special care taken by their mothers; kanbi girls, on the other hand, were often neglected and were described as less attractive than the koli's.⁵² These characteristics had done nothing to lessen the illegitimate interactions between kanbi men and koli women, and between kanbi and koli men regarding women.

The kanbis, however, maintained the appearance of being more respectable than the kolis. Particularly at the upper levels of the kanbi patidar hierarchy, the demeanour of patidar women helped present an image crucial to patidar social leadership – that of high caste, sanskratic behaviour. The seclusion, submissiveness, and chastity of patidar women were an index of the caste's respectability. It was at these levels, correspondingly, that violence related to females was most covert, taking such forms as inadequate care for infants, neglect of little girls, and brutal sexual appropriation of pubescent women.

⁵² *Bombay Gazetteer*, IX, Gujarat population, Sections on Kanbis and Kolis; R. E. Enthoven, op. cit., Vol. II

Women, then, were related to a social image, the image of superiority. Increased subordination of women within the elite level of the agrarian society grew out of and helped buttress the increased subordination of a majority of the members of that society. Thus, the historical interconnections between sexual and social stratification brought a heavy burden to bear on female human beings, a burden which increased not only their subordination but also their level of mortality in infancy, child-hood, and adulthood.⁵³

IV.10 Lack of Education of Women:

Patidars' was an agricultural community. Majority were living in the villages and used to devote their time in farming and agriculture. Therefore they did not give importance to educational development of even male members of the caste. They were initially not even interested in trade and business as they used to believe in the content of "Uttam kheti, madhyam Vyapar and Kanishtha Naukri" i.e., agriculture is the best, trading or business is the medium and service or job is the worst of all.⁵⁴ Under such circumstances, when education of male members was not a regular feature, education of women was totally out of question. School facilities in villages were not very wide and people of patidar caste did not think it necessary to

⁵³ Alice Clarke, *IESHR*, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

⁵⁴ Mangubhai Patel, *Patidar Pragati*. Op. cit., p. 81.

send their girls to schools. Gujarati was the average level of education of girls. Instead of education, family members preferred to teach them culinary work.

Looking at the above scenario one can easily see the prevalence of various social evils related to women in the patidar society. Practice of hypergamy gave impetus to dowry system and female infanticide. As a result parents preferred to do away with a female child who was a source of heavy expenditure. But it should be noted here that excessive dowry and female infanticide were especially prevalent among lewas as compared to the kadwa female. The later enjoyed more freedom in society. Marriage of widows was allowed in kadwa groups which were again strictly prohibited among the lewas.

The most dreadful practice prevalent among the kadwas was the selling of girls and child-marriages. The lewas with the growth of education realized the ruinous effect of child-marriage, but among kadwas marriages of very young girls continued even during the 30s of twentieth century and that was because of their curious custom of celebrating marriages once in nine, ten or eleven years which was known as *bandha vivaha*.

The practice of polygamy found to be prevalent among both lewas and kadwas because of their greed to secure fat dowries from the second or third marriage.

All these social evil drew the attention of progressive caste members and social reformers such as Sambhuprasad Becharadas Laskari, Purushottamdas Hargovinddas Patel, Pragnadeep Chhaganbha, Jodasingh of Patdi Darbar, Becharbhai Patel, Gordhan Bhai Patel, Motibhai Amin and others. As a result, the process to bring reform in the patidar society started during the end of nineteenth century. The contribution of Sayajirao Gaekwad, the Maharaja of Baroda in bringing reform in patidar society, especially in Baroda State was worthy of his progressive status. He passed various legislations in his State to remove various social evils related to women which had its adverse effect on the patidar community. It is important to see the social reform activities as part of the national agenda. Therefore the next chapter is devoted to social reform activities in India Gujarat and in Baroda State under Sayajirao III.