

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

The aim of education is not only to prepare persons interested in intellectual and political pursuits but also to create individuals concerned with a reforming society. Education plays a significant role in the transition of women's status in any society. Because women constitute one-half of the population their subjugation can not be expected to be conducive of all-round progress and development of any nation. Moreover, it is the mother by whom the early life of every child is shaped. Thus, women as mothers shape the thoughts and outlook of children who as the future citizens decide the course of their societies. The level of education of the mother has a direct bearing on the thinking of a society. It goes without saying that children are better groomed and better aware of their moral responsibilities to the society when their mothers are better educated. Therefore, educational development and emancipation of women from discriminatory practices can lead to healthy progress of a society or a nation on cultural and economic fronts.

The present study began on a premise that in the social

condition of India overall picture of Indian women was deplorable and for a long time there was no effort to focus on their condition and status. It was the Europeans who first started writing critically about Indian women. There were two groups of writers among them, the Orientalists and the Utilitarians. The Orientalists spoke of certain 'golden age' prevailing in ancient India and suggested a high status of womenfolk in Indian society at that period solely on the basis of descriptions of high social status accorded to some learned women such as Gargi and Maitreyee. But these historians did not furnish any further evidence to justify their contention about the overall status of common women in India. The best representatives among the Orientalists were William Jones, Max Muller, and H. T. Colebrooke. On the contrary, the second group of historians, called the colonialists or Utilitarians were highly critical of existence of any 'golden age' and reported a dismally low status of women in India through ages on account of several discriminatory and oppressive social customs against women etc. Their best representatives were Mill, Grant, and Duff. They highlighted such barbaric anti-woman practices in Hindu society as 'sati' or immolation of the widow at the funeral pyre of her husband, selling of women etc. They criticized Hindu social system for the dependence and humiliation of womenfolk. The study shows that criticism of colonialist writers gave birth to a new group of

writers known as nationalists of Indian origin who reacted strongly to the Utilitarians concept of about status of Indian women. This gave rise to serious arguments regarding perception of the term 'golden age'.

Social reformers all over the country showed their deep concern over all these issues and as a result 'sati' was abolished by an act in 1829. Widow Remarriage was legalised by an Act in 1856. The Age of Consent Act was passed in 1891 by which the minimum age of consent was fixed by the Indian Penal Code at twelve years. The Child Marriage Restraint Act passed in 1929 raised the marriage age for girls to fourteen and for boys to eighteen. The Married Women's Property Act was passed in 1874 and was amended successively in 1929, 1937, 1956 and 1973 by which property laws for women were relaxed. The Special Marriage Act was passed in 1872 and was amended in 1923 which gave wider scope for the choice of a life partner. Thus, attempts were made by the colonial state through legislation to improve the status of women in India.

Gradually women themselves came to realise the need of their own forum which resulted in the formation of various women organizations such as Bharat Mahila Parisad, Arya Mahila Samaj, Stri

Zarathosti Mandal (Parsi Women's Circle), Anjuman-e-Khawatin-e-Islam (Muslim Women's Association) and Bharat Stree Mahamandal, the Women's Indian Association (WIA), the National Council for Women in India (NCWI), All India Women's Conference (AIWC), etc. These played a major role in articulating the women's issues. Among the important women of later nineteenth and early twentieth century mention may be made of Sarala Devi, Bina Mazumdar, Mataji Tapaswini, Pandita Ramabai etc. Women also participated in large number in the freedom struggle of India. Under Gandhiji's influence their participation in the freedom struggle became visible. Under his able leadership women came out of their homes to organise meetings and processions, to sell *khadi*, to spread the message of *swadeshi* and boycott of foreign goods. In the Dandi march though Gandhiji initially denied participation of women but later on permitted them to participate fully and therefore they took active part. Women's participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-32 was more intense. Sucheta Kripalani was the first woman to join Gandhiji's programme of individual *satyagraha*. During Quit India Movement of 1942 when all important leaders were arrested, Aruna Asaf Ali in a public meeting at Bombay unfurled the flag of independent India and went underground. Usha Mehta, with her three colleagues made history by operating the underground radio. Some

women even joined the revolutionary movement. Bhikaji Cama maintained close links with Indian revolutionaries from outside India. Mention may also be made of revolutionary women from Bengal such as Kalpana Dutt, Preetilata Wadeddar, Shanti Ghosh, Suniti Choudhury, Bina Das, etc. who participated in armed struggle against the British rule and became martyrs. There were many more who sacrificed the comfort of their homes to espouse the cause of liberating the country from foreign occupation. Many a times they were jailed, sometimes sent there even with their babies and from where they contributed to the programmes of constructive work. Thus, Indian women's contribution to the freedom movement has been substantial and exemplary.

In so far as their education was concerned it is found that women education was neglected in India for a very long time. Before the initiatives taken by British Government, two agencies, viz. the Christian missionaries and the enlightened Indian reformers helped in the spread of female education. Gradually the British government also started taking initiatives for female education. In Wood's Education Dispatch of 1854 for the first time women education was recognised as a branch of the state system of education.

It is seen in the study that after the Uprising of 1857, the state funds were being spent more liberally on women's education. Consequently, girls' education expanded and in 1871 there were 1,700 primary schools and 13 secondary schools for girls in the entire country. In 1916 Lady Hardinge College in Delhi and SNDT Women's University in Bombay were established for women only. In 1917 there were a total of 12 arts colleges, 4 professional colleges and 166 secondary schools for girls in the country. During Congress Ministries of 1937 special attention was paid to the spread of education of adult women.

The Mudaliar Education Commission in 1952 recommended special facilities to be made available for the study of Home Science. Moreover, Durgabai Dehsmakh Committee was appointed to give attention to girls' education at primary and secondary levels. It recommended to regard women education as a major programme and to close the existing gap between education of men and women and to give special attention for women education by providing necessary funds, and also through special policies and programmes.

The study shows that among the social reformers of Gujarat of Dalpatram, Narmad, Mahipatram, Ranchhodlal, Durgaram, Gordhan

Tripathi, Indulal Yagnik, Dr. Sumant Mehta, Ramanbhai Nilkant, Anand Shankar Dhruv and Karsandas tried to improve the status of women in Gujarat by the spread of education and also by removing the outdated and regressive social customs badly affecting women. For the spread of education among females the contribution of Gujarat Vernacular Society (GVS) and the journal *Buddhiprakash* was important. GVS organised debates, lectures, and published special books for the advancement of scientific knowledge among women. Maganbhai Karamchand's financial aid in the matter was also noteworthy. Social reformer Durgaram Mehtaji had established a girls' school in Surat in the first half of the nineteenth century. A mission girls' high school was also established there in 1874. Arrangements were also made there for the spread of English education in Raichand Deepchand Girl's school in 1890. A training college was established at Ahmedabad to provide trained teacher in schools, which was financed by Bechardas Laskari, a patidar.

The study also shows that Maharaja Sayajirao III during his long rule (1875-1939) made sincere efforts for the betterment of women's status by providing them education and also through progressive legislation for female welfare. His keen interest in women education can also be found in his second wife, Maharani Chimnabai

II. He could not educate his first wife due to opposition of his orthodox family members. But he was determined to educate his second wife and made special arrangements. He appointed tutors to teach her English, Hindi, Gujarati and Marathi. In due course of time the Maharani's academic achievements came up to his expectations. After herself receiving education she made up her mind to work with her husband for the emancipation of women of Baroda by encouraging female education and establishing women welfare organizations. Gradually Maharani Chimnabai II emerged as a prominent women leader of India and a great champion of the women's cause in the early twentieth century. For making women education popular in the State, the Maharaja established a female training college in 1882 to provide trained teachers in all girls' schools; in 1885 he announced his resolve to give special attention to women education to equip the girls for their educative role in the society; in 1906, he made primary education compulsory for girls side by side with the boys; for the growth of secondary education among girls Maharani Girls' High School was established in 1917; Zanana classes were established for grown-up girls; besides, the education of backward classes received special attention. Thus, he worked seriously for the spread of women education in Baroda State.

Besides giving special attention to women education Maharaja Sayajirao III also passed various legislation to remove their social and economic problems. These include the Widow Remarriage Act of 1908 and the Hindu Women's Property Act of 1933. Thus, he made tireless efforts to improve the condition and status of women in Baroda State. However, he could achieve only limited success because of prevailing social, cultural and religious beliefs and practices and not because of his lack of enthusiasm, efforts, or resources.

Therefore problems of women in the patidar society found in this study were not new ones. It was more or less similar to the social problems of women in India in general and Gujarat and Baroda in particular. It is seen that among lewas most of the problems appeared because of too much prestige attached to the term *patidar*. Here I have noticed some major differences between the lewas and kadwas regarding the social position attached to the two terms *kanbi* and *patidar* which was especially noticed before 1931. Among the kadwas, there was no difference between both the terms; all were *patidars* and all were *kanbis*. But among lewas, great prestige was attached to the word '*patidar*'. Among their hierarchy, the patidar came first and then the kanbi. They regarded the patidars as *kulins*

who had superior position in society than the kanbis. Therefore the distinction was related to class in addition to caste.

In Charotar, only the lewa kanbis were known as patidars. According to the superiority in social ranking, patidars used to form their own social circles known as '*gols*'. Among different village *gols* the first and the higher *gol* in status was the six-villages *gol* of Charotar. These six villages were known as *chhagam* and used to enjoy sufficient power and prestige in the patidar society both inside and outside Charotar. Some kanbis in spite of refusal by higher rank lewas used to designate themselves as patidars. Therefore the prestige attached to the word patidar is easily understandable. However, after 1931 the term was dropped altogether and patidar was substituted for kanbi. Therefore all were known as patidars with different surnames like patels (being the commonest), desais, amins etc.

Besides differences in matter of social position depended upon the title of patidar and kanbi, there were other sharp differences among both the groups such as: i) the practice of hypergamy prevailed among the lewas which involved marriage of girls in the higher rank which brought into prominence the practice of excessive dowries leading to the practice of female infanticide. Among kadwas

there was no such complications regarding rank of bride and groom; ii) widows could get married among kadwas by simple *natra* form, but among lewas those who practiced *natra* were known as kanbis and those who did not practice that were known as patidars; iii) among kadwas marriages used to take place once in every nine, ten, eleven or twelve years which was the root cause of prevalent of child marriage among them for a very long period but which was not the case with lewas.

From the above differences I have found that females of both lewas and kadwas had serious problems though different in nature.

One important point should be noted here that according to rules of the patidar society a girl might not marry below her but only on equivalent or superior boy. More interestingly the *kulins* though married their daughters only in their own circle but had no objection to take wives from families of inferior rank, provided they received handsome dowries which ranged from a few hundred to several thousand rupees. This second practice was known as hypergamy, i.e. marriage in families higher in social rank in exchange of excessive dowries.

As rules didn't allow marriage of girls below her social rank, and marriage of girls in higher rank was too much expensive therefore birth of a girl child was a matter of great tension to the poor patidars and in order to get rid of the burden of excessive payment for daughters marriage they used to kill their female infants by various means, thus came into existence the practice of female infanticide among the patidars.

It is found that sanskritization process was itself a social evil as it involved increasing social status by imposing increasing restrictions on women. For an instance, widow marriage which was earlier practiced by the kanbi groups of the lewas came to be banned. Moreover, 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 adjunct to dowry was in full force. As family status rose, 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 as female infanticide was in full swing.

Among the kadwas existed the practice of bride price because

of economic hardships which led the fathers to sell off their daughters and was a profitable income for them. Another despicable practice was the practice of child marriage especially among the kadwas because of their peculiar custom of marriage within the whole caste on a single day once in every nine, ten or eleven years. As another marriage season would appear only after elapse of such a long period, every family would provide all its unmarried members (even if the member is a one month old baby) with suitable matches. Moreover, education of girls was regarded completely irrelevant and hence, out of question. Though coming under the wave of renaissance and also because of the initiatives taken by the reformers of India and Gujarat in general and patidars in particular, lewas started taking interest in the education of their girls, though in a limited way. Because kadwas continued with their practice of child marriage education of girls was almost out of question for them. Therefore women of patidar society were facing various dreadful customs which were ruinous for the overall development.

Social reformers and the British Government on national and State levels tried to address problems of women by various ways. Among the patidars also the social customs of the community such as female infanticide, excessive marriage expenses, selling of girls,

deplorable condition of widows, etc. drew attention of social reformers of the community such as Chhaganbha, Bechharbhai Rajibhai, Jodavarsingh, Gavindbhai Hathibhai Desai, Purushottam Das, Vasudev Gopal Bhandarkar, etc. as well as that of some British officers such as Mr. Hutt, the Judicial Commissioner of Ahmedabad, Mr. Fawcett, G. F. Sheppard, Commissioner of Northern Division, and Mr. Borrodaile. While British officers mainly focused on reducing the marriage expenses and also to put a stop to child marriage by legislation, the social reformers from the community were trying to bring reform by organising meetings, passing resolutions and also through formation of caste associations.

As a result of efforts from various directions, *ekda* system strengthened after realising the ruinous expenditure involved in the system of marrying daughters in higher rank families known as hypergamy. But effectiveness of the system was very limited. The thirteen *kulia* villages continually increased their demands for dowries and as the financial status of this agricultural community improved, competition for alliances with the more 'honourable' villages increased and it became evident that the birth of a daughter in a *akulia* household was again regarded as a calamity for the family.

The role of various newspapers and magazines of the patidar caste was noteworthy in creating awareness among the caste members. The first newspaper of Gujarat *Vartaman Patra* though started by the G.V.S. but indirectly its responsibility was taken by Bajibhai Amirchand Patel - a kadwa patidar. Becharadas Laskari and Bajibhai Amirchand started a bank to meet the expenses of printing newspaper. Another newspaper, *Patidar Mukhpatra* tried to bring to light the bad effects of child marriage as it came in the way of female education. The dreadful effects of excessive dowries and the importance of women education was also highlighted by the newspapers. They also brought to light condition and status of widows, protested against easy divorce, *natra*, *phatana*, selling of girls, polygamy, etc. In 1883 *Swadeshi Hitavardhak* magazine was started by poet Jeshanbhai Trikambdas Patel of Bavla which focused on the practice of female infanticide.

Kadwa Vijay was started by Keshulal Madhavlal and Purushottam Lallobhai which worked to reform the kadwa caste till 1928. In 1937 *Patel Masik* started from Ahmedabad and edited by Maganlal Ranchhodlal Patel focused on polygamy, dowry system, easy divorce, mismatch, *kulinism*, etc. Another paper *Kulinsahi* protested against all social restrictions and useless customs and

appealed for freedom and emancipation of women. Among the lewa patidars *Patel Bandhu* magazine was started after one year of *Kadwa Vijay* in 1907. It was edited by Kubershibhai Mehta. Besides, a newspaper named Patidar also worked hard for reforming society and showed courage to protest against discriminatory customs and restrictions imposed on women.

During the first half of the twentieth century many caste associations or *samaj* came into existence in patidar society which tried to improve patidar society by abolishing social restrictions related to women. The members of various caste associations of patidars talked against *natra* and divorce, child marriage, polygamy, selling of girls, excessive dowries, exchange marriages, exchange of wives, occasional collective marriages in the kadwas, etc. Even influential women from within the community such as Parvatiben, Laxmiben, Sabitaben, etc through associations spoke of the useless customs mentioned above. During the first half of the twentieth century stirring for reform was noticed in the social atmosphere of Baroda as a result of Sayajirao III's effort to bring changes in women's status by reform. Social changes at first noticed among women belonging to upper castes i.e., brahmins, banias and patidars, and they came forward for the first time to accept and share the great

ambition of the Maharaja.

The patidars were a little late to come under the social reform movement of Gujarat and their participation in social reform activities was due to the prevailing atmosphere of social reform in India and Gujarat. Therefore, it became necessary for the progressive minded members of the community to put a stop to useless social customs, especially those related to women. Thus, they were pushed to the reformist atmosphere of the time and their participation was more or less like that of reluctant soldiers in the battlefield. From the core of their heart they did not favour drastic reforms. Therefore, it was natural that the reform measures met with limited success.

In spite of the efforts of the reformers remarriage of the widows was unthinkable among the lewa patidars. Like the high caste Hindu women they used to lead a celibate and austere life. Among the kadwas remarriage of widows was earlier allowed. But coming under the influence of 'sanskritisation process' the kadwas and lewa kanbis stopped this practice in order to improve their status in the society. Therefore, the aforesaid process itself was a great social disorder, as it involved increasing social position through maximizing social evils. This process made the kadwa widows undergo the same miserable

fate of their higher caste widowed sisters.

Amongst the higher castes child marriage declined. Amongst all the three caste (with the exception of kadwas) rate of literacy had largely increased. The largest proportional increases were among the lewa kanbis. Even the infant marriage prevention act passed by the Maharaja had little effect to stop the periodical marriage system of the kadwas and special concessions were granted to the said community by enactment in the law and in pursuance to representations made by the leaders of the reforming sections, the marriage age of girls had been reduced to six years for girls and eight for boys among the kadwas as special concessions.

It was noted in the Census Report of 1931 that the very large increase in literacy among this group was not followed by any rise in the formal age of marriage among the kadwas. The curious custom which prevailed among the kadwas of 'mass marriages' in the whole caste in a decade all children from the age of one month being married on a single day fixed by the priests under the orders of the *Mata* (Goddess) was serious obstacle to reform. And they followed child marriages in large numbers even in 1943-44. Comparatively the attitude of the Brahmins and Banias showed a slight change.

A move to support widow marriage came into existence. Widow marriage was considered undignified among the lewas. In Baroda State the *kulin* kanbis in imitation of the Brahmin and Banias forbid their widows to remarry. Rise of *kulinism* within castes was a powerful factor against the general marriage of widows. The local Arya Samaj in the second decade of the twentieth century attempted to popularise the idea of remarriage of widows amongst higher castes. A Permissive Act for the remarriage of widows had been in existence for many years and yet very few persons amongst the higher castes have so far taken advantage of it. Condition of widows of lewa patidars was similar to that of the woman of other Hindu castes. There was no question of their second marriage.

However, the initiatives taken by the members of the community as mentioned above is laudable during a time when society was sunk in superstitious beliefs and practices. Even the situation of India as a whole did not present a very rosy picture in spite of efforts of great reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, M. G. Ranade, Dayananda Saraswati, D. K. Karve and others. Even in former Baroda State social reform measures for improving status of widows met with very limited

results and so it did happen in case of reformers of the patidar community. And it happened not because of lack of enthusiasm, interest and efforts of the reformers but because of lack of interest and ignorance of the community. Therefore the efforts of the reformers of the patidar community was not an easy task and whatever they had done for the betterment of the women of the community was more than enough for which names of reformers like Bechchardas Laskari, Chhaganbhai, Jodabar Singh, Govindbhai Hatibhai Desai, Vasudev Gopal Bhandarkar, Bechharbhai Raijibhai and others should be remembered with gratitude by the members of the patidar community in particular and people of India in general.