

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

Situating Hadauti women in the context of modernizing women of the nineteenth-twentieth century India required an understanding of the region. The feudalistic Rajasthan essentially was constitutive of the patriarchal social order of the upper caste Hindus keeping their women servile in the confines of domesticity. After the advent of Europeans Hadauti women experienced a new type of exclusion. The relationship between the rulers and the British affected the progress of the people. The attitude of the British to use the princely states as their bait for their longer stay in India proved disastrous for the social awakening among people. Even if Maharao Umed Singh II of Kota was English 'tutored' who studied in Mayo College utterly failed in modernizing the society. In a way he represents other states of Hadauti of sub-regional level as in several respects he is of the Rajasthan as a whole.

The implications of indirect rule of the British in Hadauti were quite paradoxical. A pattern emerges in the role of the British Political Agents as guardians of those states where they ruled as Regents. The British were busy replacing the rulers of native states with minors who were tutored 'modernization' under their supervision. For Kota it was Umed Singh II who has been projected as 'pioneer in modernising Kota'. Completely submissive to the British, without modernising anything he becomes the symbol of modernity. The nationalist struggle began in the British ruled India rather than in the princely India. The fear of earning the displeasure of then masters

always made the native princes follow a stringent method to suppress and exploit of their own people. Even other wise they hated 'change' especially in the social order, because of which women suffered the most.

The way the princely states were took action against those who indulged in sexual crimes such as rape show their insensitivity toward women. In the low castes if there was any crime committed either related to marriage, rape or sexual molestation tax was levied by them in the form of *Natakagli, Chauthan*. There was intervention of the State and Panchayats in almost all the decisions of the people belonging to the low castes. Severe punishment were ensure that these people do try to 'evolve' out from their 'primitive' life thereby and polluting the upper class of the society. Even while sharing the same destiny at the hands of Indian patriarch women of different castes went through different historical experience. Men of all castes found ways in controlling all resources including the labour of women. The Hindu social order even otherwise ensured marginalisation of lower castes and untouchables especially women. Sexuality of women has always been suppressed and controlled so that they do not become the source to 'pollute' the upper strata of the society. The role of the British and Nationalist reformers was dubious as they largely centred on high castes women. Even the Hadauti upper caste Hindu reformers focused on issues raised by the British to legitimize their domination as progressive reformers. The Census Report also reveals that the proportion of female children being less was found in the Brahmins more than in any other religion. All type of

suppression was posed on the women of the upper castes such as *purdah* and social seclusion from the outside world. Rajputs

For a Rajput preservation of 'brotherhood' was rated as his foremost duty implying protection of his women and children. The burden of honour of family, clan and religion lied on women. It is this latter definition of protection which Rajputs followed in connection with women's everyday life. Even the colonizers were influenced to recognize the upper caste worldview applicable even to the lower segments which was an utter falsehood. Women were as per Brahmanical ideas became the reason of reforms in the initial stages. Evil practices of sati, female infanticide, witch-hunting, polygamy, child-marriage, *purdah* and widowhood attained attention only because these were *Swarna* problems. The Elite educated women although posed questions on the elaborated rules which were the main reason for their restricted and bonded life; they were unable to offer a medium of resistance or a coherent vision in order to emancipate women.

The women's struggle during the Indian National Movement was dictated by the reformer men. Women in Rajasthan unlike other women in India were largely invisible in the nationalist politics and subsequently took much longer time to enter the outside world. The distinction between the superior and inferior remains more or less same from one region to the other and keep appearing and reappearing in different forms within the patriarchal construct of the Indian society. History writing is 'gender' biased as it is men who get to write history; inclusion and exclusion of events and facts is

'subjective'; they write about women, with male perception. British administrators faced a dilemma of legitimising their rule as colonizers without contesting the local hegemony. They reinforced norms and rules written in Hindu/ Brahmanical scriptures meant for woman, as a daughter, wife, mother, sister or a widow. Despite few steps taken the plight of widows remain pathetic. Widows were either abandoned by their family members, quite a few committing suicide; some were even accused of leading unethical life further isolating them. The question arises as to why such rules were only meant for women and were 'flexible' for men/widower? If a widower was allowed to remarry even if old in case he did not have a male heir then why not the widow permitted the same? She was expected to maintain 'pious' and 'ethical' character in the face of economic hardships. Sushila Devi wrote about a girl aged 9 who was married to an adult male of 40 years. How the concern of the people around changed after her husband died in protecting the sanctity of the youthful widow. It leaves the reader with load of questions regarding the prevalent prejudices of the upper caste Hindus. There was no provision for a widow to remarry. The rule presumed only women to be infertile. When biologically it is the man who is responsible for the birth of the girl, but the patriarchal construct forcefully credits 'true man' for the birth of a boy. That is why Rajputs and other high castes did not permit their woman to remarry.

Both the European and Nationalist reformers tried to work in prescribed ways in matters associated with men and women. For both uplifting the status of Indian women became the prime reason for

legitimizing their dominance over the weaker sections of the society including women. Even after inter-caste marriage was permitted a Brahmin widow was declared outcaste from her community as she had absconded with a *Chamar* man. Or when a widow tried remarrying with a man from her same community was opposed by the community members, only shows the rigidity of the upper caste Hindus. A high number of 72,000 Hindu widows in Kota between 17-18 years living in very poor and inhuman conditions forced them to commit suicide and change their religion to Christianity or Islam is a proof of the sad states of Hindu women in Hadauti.

Even in the Colonial writings there seems to be contradictions with both attractions as well as repulsions regarding the Dalit female sexuality. The British compared the high caste women behind veils with the Dalit women who did laborious work without *pardah* and lived in open air and ate simple food with good health. And yet there was a section of colonizers who portrayed Dalit women with loose moral character as freely available. The colonial perception was based upon the Brahmanical ideology thus institutionalizing the Dalit female sexuality. They being raped and molested by the *thikanedars* and *thakurs* exposed their perception towards tribal and dalit women.

The concept of *andar* and *bahir* of the Nationalists reformers implying to the distinctions to the inner and outer worlds is also visible amongst the Seharias'. To understand the complex web of gender relations the Seharia tribe of Baran has been selected as a case study. It represents the rural

Hadauti as Seharia women offering all aspects of womanhood. The photographs taken offer visual evidence of present day Seharia living conditions that can be seen as representative of the rural life of two hundred years ago. It also was crucial to see what all works were assigned for men and women, their occupations helped in locating the position of women as subordinates. For the Seharia tribe farming is the basic source of livelihood in which both man and woman are engaged but even for the hard-working tribe the role of woman is 'under-valued'. Men and women do not cross each others' demarcated lines. Despite harmonious living amongst the members of the tribe, gender divide is easily visible. From plastering the home to managing the need of the family members as well as helping the husband in farming is done by the Seharia women. Child marriage now has become a common practice among the Seharis' it was not the case in the past.

The prevailing images for men and women in the form of ideas, symbols, traditions, values, models, etc. have played quite a decisive role in influencing the social order. Quite often the women were bought and sold slaves. They were exploited as domestic helps such as *Chakars* or also were pushed into prostitutions. In the male dominant culture whatever a man does gets easy justification a woman just keeps on trying to be in the good books of her husband. If she would leave her husband it would be she who would be cursed and criticized for being incapable of holding on a relation. This is a clear case of 'blaming the victim'.

The nineteenth-twentieth century women in the metropolis India were going through a transition where the 'literate' and 'educated' women were able to stand, jot down their thoughts, beliefs and accomplishments in memoirs, autobiographies etc. but in Hadauti none has been found to this date. The three stories that discussed of Rampyari Shastri, Shakuntla and Beni Gupta too gets clubbed into this category. They although had the temperament of choosing their own path still could not divulge out from the established patriarchal constraints.

In the Colonial India women were able to make their voices heard much before the women of the native states. Nineteenth century colonial India saw many women revolutionaries but their efforts and messages were blocked by the native rulers. The reason was the dual suppression of the rulers and British hampering women's liberation movement in the princely states. It does not mean that women in the native lands were completely untouched by modernization. Whatever reforms touched the women of the princely states were governed the social legislation of the British. The social legislation was limited to abolition of sati, female infanticide, and unmatched marriages as well as Widow Remarriage Act, hardly any issues of lower caste masses. Women of the weaker sections of the society were out the agenda of reforms totally as if they were not woman. Both the white and brown elite conjoined in the reformist agenda from which the Indian masses were excluded. The subaltern Group of historians critiqued this elitist nexus drawing attention to the neglected history of the people.

Modernizing of the upper caste women was done purposefully to justify British sovereignty over Indians; both the Indian and British reformers used women as bait to demonstrate their 'intellectual morality.' The early feminist writers were able to sense the mockery being done to them by Indian reformers. They knew that the idea of uplifting them was done in order to satisfy the 'chauvinistic' male temperament of the reformers. Beyond focusing on inhuman practices of sati, jauhar, child marriage and female infanticide, popular only in the upper castes neither the British nor the rulers of Hadauti worked seriously on encouraging girls' education. They were least interested in improving lives dalit and tribal communities. Data recorded in Census Reports reveal the sad status of women in education. British by discriminating the authority of the queens of the princely states forced them to adapt to the change. The effect of it was seen in many queens visiting Europe and accepting the western culture and lifestyle by the twentieth century. All those women who were able to mould themselves with the changing time were accepted not just by the British political officers but even by their wives. These women were becoming examples of 'new progressive Indian women'. The women of royalty took it as a matter of pride to adapt to the lifestyle of the British but without extending to other women of the region. The idea of reforms centred around on the upper class/caste women; the women from the lower castes were not even thought about. Elite women were included only because the flow of the time was such which forced the 'patriarchs' to let some 'change' for display. The degree of change anyways was slow for women in India and hardly any for the low caste women.

The condition of the women in the princely states of Rajasthan was much challenging than the rest. Apparently quite a lot was being done by the colonizers and the rulers of the States by establishing number of schools and other institutions but hardly anyone bothered if these developments reached the commoners. With the passage of time the number of schools kept increasing but without spreading education to the mass. The percentage of literate and English educated middle-class Hadauti women is far behind the middle-class educated Bengali women. Unlike largely British administered Bengal Rajasthan was generally a princely region ruled by the feudal Rajputs and hence there was very slow emergence of modern middle class. The middle-class non Rajput women could appear in politics only recently when reservations were made for women especially after 73rd Amendment in the Constitution which guarantees reservations of 33 per cent of seats for women on local councils at all representative levels in the state.

There are ample examples to substantiate the inadequacy on the part of the rulers to provide better resources and mediums to encourage education amongst the common mass. An elite Hadauti woman behaved like a Bengali *Bhadramahila* of the nineteenth century. For a Bengali middle-class woman education inculcated in them ideas of virtue which was needed to run the house as per the need of the changing times, self-discipline, hygiene, cleanliness etc. but a low class woman was away from it. She either could hardly study because she was also an earning member which was more important than her own study. An educated woman was also a status symbol for a man of mid-nineteenth century, a way to exhibit himself as 'modern'.

But the incorporation of education in emancipation of women was absent both by the British as well as Nationalists. There were various kinds of reforms attempted by the people in the form of indigenous community organizations which tried to remove evil practices within their community. But mostly the reforms were related to marriage and heavy expenses incurred by the people in it. The narrow and limited reforms sought were governed by the emerging financial reality. There was nothing more to it. If they had broader social concerns evolved there would have been other provisions like girls' education, ban on purdah, widow remarriage polygamy etc. The rulers Rajputana although organizing the Hitkarini Sabha were not interested in expanding the horizon of reforms.

The untouchable movement did not begin till late nineteenth century in the princely states although there were small movements which could not transform into a large movement as was the case in the Bombay presidency. It is only from 1935 onwards when it got some momentum. Works of the Christian missionaries in Rajputana highlights the fact that change was possible if pursued with compassion and commitment. With sheer determination and consistence the Christian missionaries posed a great challenge to the traditional Hindu social elite. Even though the British tried not to alienate the upper caste Hindus, some untouchables were able to get employment in the Railways and other departments, thanks to the missionary role. It helped them to improve their socio-economic conditions.

Percentage of scheduled castes and tribes is very high compared to the upper castes Hindus pushing the scope of historical research to focus on the marginalised women in Hadauti. There are gaps in the present work because of unavailability of concrete evidence. The present endeavour has opened possibility of pursuing it further with new enthusiasm and rigour. The women of Hadauti to the upper caste women about whom one gets comparatively more data. There is a possibility of incorporating diverse material regarding Dalit and tribal women, understanding women from below with different challenges.