

## Chapter 3

# Contextualizing Sexuality

The nineteenth century India witnessed the consolidation of British power resulting in a steady change in the social life.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the advent of the British the condition of women was not paid any attention. Placed in a low position the women were kept aloof from the public domain for the millennia the defenders of the Hindu law beginning with Manu had constructed women as wives, mothers and homemakers. Denying them selfhood and subjectivity they were put under strict control. Their presumed heightened sexual desires were sufficient construct to pronounce: 'a woman is not fit for independence'. 'Unguarded woman would bring sorrow upon both families'. 'It is the very nature of women to corrupt men here on earth'.<sup>2</sup> For a Rajput preservation of 'brotherhood' was rated as his foremost duty implying protection of his women and children. Protection was understood in two ways: one in which women was important but 'weak' needing protection and second where women were seen as source of shame as they could lure men of any caste for their carnal fulfilment. The burden of honour of family, clan and religion lied on women. It is this latter definition of protection which Rajputs

---

<sup>1</sup> Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Politics, Medicine, and Historiography*, New Delhi, Chronicle Books, 2005, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Meera Kosambi, *Crossing Thresholds feminist essays in social history*, Ranikhet, Permanent Black, 2007, 129.

followed in connection with women's everyday life.<sup>3</sup> All social customs and conventions followed norms of patriarchy of the high caste Hindus. 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 for which reason the reforms in the initial stages were selective focusing on the upper caste practices. Evil practices of sati, female infanticide, witch-hunting, polygamy, child-marriage, purdah and widowhood attained attention only because these were *Swarna* problems.<sup>4</sup>

Vidyasagar wrote about the evils of polygamy in 1871 highlighting the reasons behind submissive participation of women in the degrading customs:

Women are comparatively weak and due to the tyranny of social custom subordinated to men. Owing to this weakness and domination by men, women have to spend their lives in ignominy and subordination. The dominant males tyrannize over, and exploit them according as they like, and women have helplessly to submit to the same and eke out their existence.<sup>5</sup>

Hutton, the British anthropologist, offers a similar view about dominant male Rajput from Rajputana:

---

<sup>3</sup> Maya Unnithan-Kumar, 'The State, Rajput Identity and Women's Agency in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Rajasthan', *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, January-June, 2000, Sage Publishing, New Delhi, 52.

<sup>4</sup> Uma Narayan, 'Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism', *Hypatia*, Spring 1998, 13, 2; *Platinum Periodicals*, 86.

<sup>5</sup> Geraldine Forbes, op. cit., *Women in Colonial India*, 12.

Rajputana, the most romantic area in the peninsula a land of ruined forts and ancient strongholds famous for its deeds of valour and self-sacrifice crowning rugged heights above old and picturesque towns. Many are the monuments to long and dead warriors, stones carved with a horse-man and his weapons and the heavenly bodies, and still frequent are the stones carved with a single upraised arm indicating the place where a widow burned herself upon her husband's funeral pyre.<sup>6</sup>

The early writings by women on social reforms also followed the map of the male reformers. The issues of these movements covered widow oppression, purdah, growing gender gap in education.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> Meera Kosambi could see working Manu ideology in the women's struggle during the Indian National Movement stating that reformer men accepted the ideology of Manu that is why on behalf of women they themselves decided what women wanted because 'a women's understanding is unreliable'.<sup>9</sup> Women in Rajasthan unlike other women in India were largely invisible in the

---

<sup>6</sup> Maya Unnithan- Kumar, op. cit., *Women's Agency*, 57.

<sup>7</sup> Nivedita Menon, *Gender and Politics in India*, ed., Nivedita Menon, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999, 3

<sup>8</sup> Geraldine Forbes, op. cit., *Women in Colonial India*, 13-14.

<sup>9</sup> Meera Kosambi, op. cit., *Crossing Thresholds*, 25.

nationalist politics and subsequently took much longer time to enter the outside world.<sup>10</sup>

The perception of men towards women and vice-versa is an aspect requiring some serious attention. How women view themselves becomes more important. How over millennia women had internalized the patriarchal views is available in Kashibai's autobiography:

We did not mind this. We believed that our being born girl was a sign that God Himself considered us inferior. The only advantage of this belief was that we never felt envy arising from the distinction between superior and inferior. We merely considered ourselves less fortunate.<sup>11</sup>

This is interesting and needs little extra attention that 'god himself' considered girls to be inferior than boys, which is a highly bias interpretation of gender difference by the 'patriarchs' of the society. It also created a patterned idealizing of women accepted in a particular way, for a typical Hindu woman there are certain materials required to be part of her personality:

*Saris* in use were hung over long pegs attached to the walls; the overflow was kept in chest- rather like the chest of the eighteenth century found in old cottages in Cumberland. The dressing-table was a portable box! There was a (bad) looking-

---

<sup>10</sup> Maya Unnithan-Kumar, op. cit., *Women's Agency*, 59.

<sup>11</sup> Meera Kosambi, op. cit., *Crossing Thresholds*, 195.

glass in the lid, and there were compartments for the oils the women used for their hair, and for the red powder (*sindur*) with which they painted the parting down the middle of their heads, and with which they put the red dot on their foreheads after *puja*. The line signifies I am a wife: the dot, I am dedicated to my Lord (husband). One woman told me it was to her a daily renewal of her vows of service to her Lord when she placed on her forehead the mark first put there upon her wedding-day... Among the Progressives in these latter days it has lost all meaning, and is only a cosmetic.<sup>12</sup>

Indian women mostly were governed by this notion of being subservient and subordinate to their male counterparts. This 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.

Feminist historiography has questioned the established methodology. Meera Kosambi locates male domination in the socio-cultural domain that subsumes social customs and institutions involving the family, including

---

<sup>12</sup> Antoinette Burton, "The Purdahnashin in Her Setting': Colonial Modernity and the Zenana in Cornelia Sorabji's Memoirs', *Feminist Review*, No. 65, *Reconstructing Femininities: Colonial Intersections of Gender, Race, Religion and Class* (Summer, 2000), 145-158.

marriage, health care, education, literature and related matters.<sup>13</sup> This domain is inhabited by men and women but dominated by the former. Even within the 'private' domain the power resides with the men as women are expected to follow the authority without questioning it.

The British administrator's attitude toward gender was also based on caste and class similar to the patriarchs of Hindu social order. The distinction between the upper caste Hindu women in keeping her secluded as per the 'traditional' norms was also maintained by the European reformers.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> The loyalty of a married woman was judged by her acceptance in mounting the funeral pyre of her husband. The highest in the social hierarchy were the most corrupt and suppressed their women in every possible way.

There were four closely inter related constituents of the patriarchal view of female sexuality. First, women's supposedly uncontrollable sexual desire was assumed to awaken at puberty and had to be harnessed in advance through marriage to a legitimate sphere of sexual activity. Second, a women's consent on the choice of spouse was immaterial. Admittedly because

---

<sup>13</sup> Meera Kosambi, op. cit., *Crossing Thresholds*. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1998, 47.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Colebrooke, 'On Duties of a Faithful Hindu Widow', *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. 4, Calcutta, 1799, 215-225.

marriages were arranged by families, this choice was denied to both spouses, but the husband's polygamous options and extra-marital sexual freedom remained firmly closed to the wife. Third, as the woman was customarily deemed the legitimate object of sexual gratification for the husband, her consent to sexual intercourse was implicit in the act of marriage itself. Fourth, a woman was regarded as an instrument of procreation and this sacred duty was enforced through rules for mandatory sexual intercourse immediately on the wife's attainment of puberty and at every subsequent fertile period in her reproductive cycle.<sup>16</sup> The female world thus remained confined to household especially for upper-caste high-class women. Her roles constituted reproduction, domestic labour and abiding kinship relations aspects visible all over India uniformly.

Table 1:

Percentage of persons at the useful ages by Divisions and States

Divisions and States	% at age 15-60 Males	% at age 15-45 Females
<b>Rajputana</b>	61.69	51.12
<b>WESTERN DIVISION</b>	60.72	47.62
<b>Bikaner</b>	60.93	50.41
<b>Jaisalmer</b>	56.49	46.40
<b>Marwar</b>	60.81	46.82
<b>SOUTHERN DIVISION</b>	66.04	57.14
<b>Mewar</b>	67.23	57.94

<sup>16</sup>Meera Kosambi, op. cit., *Crossing Thresholds*, 240-41.

<b>Banswara and Kushalgarh</b>	64.49	55
<b>Pratabgarh</b>	66.44	58.35
<b>Dungarpur</b>	65.23	59.09
<b>Sirohi</b>	60.16	52.44
<b>EASTERN DIVISION</b>	61	51.10
<b>Jaipur</b>	61.57	50.93
<b>Kishangarh</b>	66.08	56.70
<b>Lawa</b>	65.31	58.07
<b>Alwar</b>	56.64	47.01
<b>Bharatpur</b>	58.58	49.21
<b>Dholpur</b>	58.47	48.81
<b>Karauli</b>	59.84	50.68
<b>Jhalawar</b>	66.10	57.94
<b>Tonk</b>	60.28	53.72
<b>Bundi</b>	66.79	57.77
<b>Kotah</b>	64.22	55.40
<b>Shahpura</b>	67.53	58.56

Source: A.D. Bannerman, *Census of India, Rajputana-I*, Vol. XXV, Lucknow, Nawal Kishore Press, 1902, p. 79.

The useful age means to be the productive age which was kept between 15 years and 60 years for men and 15 years and 40 years for women. The statistics reveal the huge gap between the male and female primarily as the men tend to have much larger time-period of reproductive age than women giving them an idea of being 'superior' to their spouse or women in



general. In almost all the states within Rajputana more or less with similar percentages highest being Marwar and Mewar while lowest being Jhalawar and Tonk.

Women are perceived as a desired object of sex, everything associated with her is analyzed in relation to it. A newspaper article of *Rajasthan*, dated 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1936 reports about one Brahmin widow Kailash who committed suicide, another Ratan Devi following her suit. Kailash's character was framed, doubted and criticized by the school authorities of Maharani Girls School, Kota in which she was studying in the 4<sup>th</sup> standard. Her participation in cultural activities of dressing like a *jogin* and dancing was raised as a bogey for sanction. It was seen as a source of deviation from the 'ethical code of conduct of widowhood.' A young child widow was expected to behave like an adult woman simply because she was once married and the stringent rules for widows had to be adhered too. These child widows were treated as criminals for behaving like normal children deserving punishment.

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. The writings of men in the nineteenth century on such issues were prescriptive rather than sympathetic toward young child-widows. Sushila Devi wrote about a girl aged 9 who was married to an adult male of 40 years. But soon her husband died. Being a

widow became everyone's concern as how to safeguard the sanctity of the youthful widow. At the backdrop during the mourning other females discussed the lapses and misdeeds of other widows. The mother of this young widow was disheartened and frustrated with all social constraints attached to her young daughter. In desperation she wished her widowed daughter had died when she was born.<sup>17</sup>

The Walterkrit Hitkarini Sabha was formed with the idea of 'reforming' the Rajputs but failed to include women in its agenda. It focused on the lavish expenditure over marriages, but did nothing about banning child marriages, girl education or widow remarriage. Even the marriageable age for boys and girls was amended but that was done with much resistance only after constant pressure by the British government. Though the Sabha discouraged second marriage of men during the life of his first wife but also provided relaxation under the following circumstances:<sup>18</sup>

1. If the first wife suffered from an incurable disease.
2. If, the first wife had no child for six years or there was not a single male child for 12 years.

No widower was permitted to contract a marriage after the age of 45 years if he had a son; a person without a son was allowed to marry till the age of 55.

---

<sup>17</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Rewriting History*, op. cit., 248.

<sup>18</sup> *Walterkrit Hitkarini Sabha*, RSAB, 27.

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.

The 1901 census shows the number of married women higher than married men with exception of Christians and Muslims:<sup>19</sup>

Table 2:  
Proportion of Wives to 1,000 Husbands

Divisions	All Religion	Hindu	Musalman	Jain	Animistic	Christian	Cities	Rural Areas
Rajputana	1,046	1,049	996	1,124	1,047	827	949	1,052
Western	1,101	1,102	995	1,245	1,168	734	1,057	1,103
Southern	1,023	1,030	895	1,033	1,032	721	982	1,025
Eastern	1,029	1,032	1,007	1,025	1,009	940	916	1,037

Source: A.D. Bannerman, *Census of India, Rajputana-I*, Vol. XXV, Lucknow, Nawal Kishore Press, 1902, p.96

There is substantive evidence to show that the Kota State turned the women's issues into revenue generating mechanism. There were taxes like *Chauth*, *Mal Hasil*, *Jati War* on *Nata*, *Kagli*, *Punyarth* in temple and tax on buying and selling of boys and girls through a mediator (*dalal*).<sup>20</sup> The attitude of the state toward its women is reflected in actions were that were taken in crimes against woman. For a rape, the punishment for the rapist was just to

<sup>19</sup> Also see Appendix Table No. 2 Showing the Percentage of Married and Widows in the Various States of Rajasthan, 1921 Census; Table No. 4 Table Showing Age and Marital Status in Bundi district, 1961 Census, Table No. 17 Table showing marital status, Kota district, 1971 Census; Table No. 18 Table showing Marital Status of Rural and Urban Population, Kota district, 1971 Census.

<sup>20</sup> *Kota Basta* No. 1, S. No. 28, V.S. 1882, RSAB.

plough land manually without any external help.<sup>21</sup> One *badhbhuja* was just fined with less than 6 rupees for kidnapping a woman.<sup>22</sup> Men believed that they were born to dominate and women believed they were destined to suffer in silence which made men to take complete authority over women while women reluctantly accepting such suppression.

Men's hold on all resources is such that even women become complicit carriers of the patriarchal constructs. Becoming victims of the male ideas the older women dominate the young girls as men do. These young girls are methodically 'trained' and 'moulded' at homes to fit into the patriarchal construct. It becomes a vicious web of training and perpetuating the patriarchy; both men and women provide a very little scope for 'change'. A popular Hadauti saying *Marad to junjhar banko, khunkh banki sundar*<sup>23</sup> reflect the ascribed gender roles; seeing a man's true worth in the battle-ground and woman's worth in delivering a healthy child. When young children hear this it naturally leaves an impression on their minds. It becomes part of their personality expecting them to behave in the 'prescribed' fashion.

This tendency gets a sharp relief amongst upper castes of the social hierarchy where a son is seen as the carrier of the heritage of the family. Men are considered 'pure' unlike women who are associated with 'impurity' of many kinds, because of which according to the *Dharamsastras* they need to be

---

<sup>21</sup> Kota Basta No. 1, S. No. 59, F. No. 33/1, V.S. 1897, Bahi Talika, RSAB.

<sup>22</sup> Bahi Samvat 1912, Badi Kacheri, Basta No. 403, RSAK.

<sup>23</sup> Sivaswaroop, *Hadauti Lok-Sahitya ki Sanskritik Chetna*, unpublished thesis, 1987, Rajkiya Mahavidyalya, Kota, 93

governed and protected or else they might just bring ill-luck to the family. The intention of both the British and the Nationalists as the reformers for the 'emancipation' of Indian women seems contradicting. Charu Gupta discusses policy of the British as colonizers in an attempt to understand the colonized they intensified in the policing of sexuality of the colonized, which in turn worked insidiously to maintain the social order. How the imperial archives largely became a place where information was collected, classified, and preserved for political surveillance and to suppress sedition. They observed and recorded things which Indians would have taken for granted, thus leaving behind the preservation of the everyday. Both the British and Nationalists went their ways to justify the control over the weaker section. British also exercised moral surveillance and used apparently "obscene," lascivious, and sexually promiscuous activities prevalent in Indian society to "justify" their rule and impose in part certain mores of Victorian chastity.<sup>24</sup> While the Nationalists showed their resistance by justifying in legitimizing Hindu social order and culture.

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. For example a newspaper article of *Tarun Rajasthan* dated 19.9.1926 mentions about a case of a child widow of Agrawal community who was re-

---

<sup>24</sup> Charu Gupta, "Writing Sex and Sexuality: Archives of Colonial North India", *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2011, 14-35.

married in the same community. This was objected by some community leaders who sought state intervention. The officers called the girl and the boy and sent the girl to the '*Dasi Khana*'.<sup>25</sup> In another stray newspaper article dated 24<sup>th</sup> July, 1944, Kota, there was a case of a Brahmin widow absconding with a *Chamar* man. This was long after widow remarriage was permitted and she was declared an outcast from the community. Was it because widow remarriage was allowed or because it wasn't permitted that made the couple to take such step? Even if it would have been allowed then too inter-caste marriage was not allowed that too of a Brahmin woman with a *Chamar* man was unimaginable. In some other article in *Rajasthan*, mentions about social activists' Jailal ji and Madhovallabhji, who were thrown out from their castes and were also ordered to leave Bundi, as they had opposed the evil practices of Hindu castes. They in fact, made sure to leave Bundi and go anywhere else, but it is said that the youth was with them supporting their cause.<sup>26</sup> The women being thrown out from the caste for absconding with a *Chamar* man was never taken up as a cause but those two men who raised their voices against the evil practices of Hindu castes got the support from the youth. These two men who were protesting against the evil practices personally would not have supported that Brahmin lady who married a *Chamar* man, for them unmatched marriage, right age of marriage, dowry, girls education etc. would have been the cause. Extreme of women was not supported by the 'real' men talking freedom of speech and education for women. They

---

<sup>25</sup> *Tarun Rajasthan*, 19.9.1926, RSAB.

<sup>26</sup> *Rajasthan*, 29<sup>th</sup> April, 1935, RSAB

expected women to learn to read and write, talk politics but should not practice it completely.

In the newspaper *Raj Kesari*, March 1921 an instance having an 'illegitimate' relationship of the Director of Education with a widow teacher, people were offended by it. Although he was not removed from the post after the inquiry as no proof was found against him, but his landlords asked him to vacate the house.<sup>27</sup> This only shows that people were certainly opposing the idea of widow remarriage. Widows were not treated as humans in fact women were not treated as humans. They should not carry any emotions but a man was free to express his emotions and treat woman likewise and woman should obey him. It clearly shows how the 'change' was unacceptable in the society as even when 'Widow Remarriage Act' had been in force in the British India. In the princely states even while Acts were passed, they were not implemented. But such attitude gave 'birth' to a intellectual section of the society which criticised the conventional mind-set, holding it as a major hindrance in the progress of the society. The *Rajasthan*, dated 18<sup>th</sup> February, 1935, reported about Marriage Act of Kota being flouted by some castes in which 'Nata' was still accepted and children married at the age of 4; Brahmins and Vaishyas marrying their children at tender age.<sup>28</sup>

Child marriage was one of the many evil practices followed simply as part of the tradition; any one contesting was disliked by the defenders of the

---

<sup>27</sup> Mahakama Khas, English office, Basta No. 5, F. No. 4/9-4, *Miscellaneous Education*, RSAK

<sup>28</sup> *Rajasthan*, 18.2.1935, RSAB

culture. Tarabai Shinde in her *Stree-Purusha-Tulna* sarcastically talks about 'stree-dharma':

What is stri-dharma (a woman's moral duty)? Always obeying her husband's order, conducting herself in accordance with his wishes... worshipping him with a smiling face as if he were a god and being alert in his service, even if he kicks and curses her; keeps mistresses or comes home after drinking, gambling, losing all his money, stealing, kicking someone, betraying someone, robbing a treasure and taking a bribe- this is stri-dharma.<sup>29</sup>

Tarabai Shinde's diatribe in *Stree-Purush-Tulna* can be read in a tragic newspaper article of *Rajasthan* of 18<sup>th</sup> March, 1935. It talks about a murder of Laxminarayan, daughter of an ex-*Daroga* of Durbar (Deodi), by her husband Gopal. It is reported that he was ill-mannered and used to physically beat his dutiful, obedient and well-behaved wife. Gopal used to harass her to bring money from her father once he even tried to sell her. Her father came to know of this humiliation got her back to his home, refusing to send her back to Gopal. But, some how Gopal succeeded in convincing Laxminarayan to meet but he killed her with an axe. On arrest he confessed that he wanted to kill his father-in-law as well from a very long time. It is interesting to read that the reporter concludes the article by hoping people to understand the drawback of child-marriage or an unmatched marriage?<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Meera Kosambi, op. cit., *Crossing Thresholds*, 43-44.

<sup>30</sup> *Rajasthan*, 18.2.1937, RSAB



At a very different level was the construction of Dalit female sexuality by the colonizers in their travel records and other narratives. There seems to be contradictions for them with both attractions as well as repulsions. The British compared the high caste women behind veils with the Dalit women who did laborious work without *purdah* 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.<sup>31</sup> Similar discrimination on a different level visible amongst the saints in Rajasthan they preferred their women devotees to be *pativratas*. Being a *pativrata* enable her to attain true path of salvation. For a devoted woman would not accept any one else as her second husband similarly one who is not devoted toward god suffers like a woman who does not get settled with a man.<sup>32</sup>

Maithreyi Krishanraj problematizes the agency seen in the feminist historiography raising a serious question whether things happen only to women or women too make things happen?<sup>33</sup> Time and again feminist scholars need to ask this question whether women are always the victim or

---

<sup>31</sup> Charu Gupta, op. cit., *Writing Sex and Sexuality*, 12-35.

<sup>32</sup> *Pativarta pati su kahe, sun ho kant sujan. Meen neer hoye rahi, bicchdat tanju paran. Charandas ne dukh such ki sahbhagini koapne ghar ka dukh bhala, par ghar ka such char. Aise jaane kulvadhu, so santvanti naar. Saai mera ek hai, dooja sab veer, Ramcharan dooja na karoo, jo ganga ulte neer. Gang jaman bahe, sahe sees sursaan. Dooja saai na karoo, jo paschim ooge bhaarang. Ramcharan vibhicharini, pati ku daive poothh. Aan dharma sanmukh rahe, bhayi jagat ki jhooth. Ek purshi aanand mein, nisdin rahe sukhayal. Ramcharan vibhicharini, ashat jam behaar. Omkar Nath Chaturvedi, Sant Prampara aur Sahitya, Jaipur Publishing House, Jaipur, 1999, p. 264*

<sup>33</sup> Maithreyi Krishanraj, *History through Gender Lens*, eds. Kirit Shah & Meherjyoti Shah, *Historiography Past & Present*, Jaipur, Rawat Publications, 2005, 131.

they can also be party in making other women victim of their suppression and domination. For women too can be the agent of patriarchy without even realising it to be unjust as for them the patriarchal construct is natural and there is no reason to contest it. Feminist scholars identify such women who can be termed as rebel resisting the male domination. Though women from Bhakti movement are seen as rebellious women they too are being criticized to have rebelled 'within the accepted parameters.'<sup>34</sup> Manu and other defenders of Hindu law turned a woman into a 'precious' object requiring to be kept in safe and protected otherwise susceptible to stealth it. The only space provided to her was as a religious ascetic. Her falling in love with God was acceptable as there was no threat of her 'losing' the 'honour'. If not 'ethically codified' there was a fear that she might get wrong ideas to dishonour the family by falling for a real man instead.

One important leap in the reforms was seen in the Bharatpur Reform Act which legalised widow remarriage. The rights and interests on the property of the deceased husband which any widow may have by way of maintenance of by inheritance to him or to his lineal successors or by virtue of any testamentary disposition conferring upon her, and the rights and interests of the widow ceases when she enters into matrimonial alliance and she is determined as dead, then that property goes to next heir of her deceased

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

husband or to whomever the property is entitled to after her death, but in it too there were two provisions:<sup>35</sup>

1) In case of Muafidars, Sirdars and Jagirdars etc., where a widow holding life interest in her late husband's Muafi or drawing *khanpan* remarries with the Durbar's permission, she will continue to enjoy the same and

2) Where a widow is by custom allowed to have a life interest in her husband's estate after *karewa* or remarriage she will continue to enjoy those rights as heretofore but will not be entitled to any rights by way of maintenance or inheritance to any property left by her deceased husband's collaterals.

It was a remarkable reform to encourage widow remarriage the mental and physical torture that a widow faced from the family and relatives of her deceased husband because of his property was unfathomable. With the remarriage of the widow the pressure of dividing the property was reduced as she was considered dead as soon as she remarries. And yet the promulgation of this Act was unpopular especially amongst the high caste Hindus who opposed it.

Many cases of exploitation and humiliation of child widows have come to light. *Tarun Rajasthan* reports about Brahmin widows of Kota and Bundi. These widows were criticized for their illegitimate relationships with men of

---

<sup>35</sup> *Bharatpur Reforms Act of 1926*, F. No. 43/14, p. 2, RSAB

other communities. They were also condemned for conceiving and even aborting. Another report in the same newspaper mentions about a daughter-in-law of one Ghasilal Attar getting pregnant because of one Chaturbhuj Oswal who even had a son later.<sup>36</sup> *Tarun Rajasthan* mentions about Kota's child widow of 14 years of age married in Beawar. She narrated to Kota police that she was daughter of Narayan Oswal, married when she was just 8 years old to a man who was then 25 years old. She had an older brother-in-law named Kishanlal but developed a relation with one Mohanlal aka Mohar Singh Oswal and got pregnant. For this her brother-in-law dumped her at her maternal home and embezzled little property that her deceased husband owned. Her father then took her to Kota from where they were to go to Mathura for her delivery. On their way they met an old man named Pandit Shivilal Sharma who agreed to take care of her and the baby.<sup>37</sup> This case shows the dilemma of a young woman who was married to a man twice older becoming widow at a very young age. It was natural for her to get attracted to opposite sex because of which she became pregnant by a man who did not take her responsibility. This led to series of tragic events that made her some kind of object used and thrown by different relatives and eventually abandoned to some stranger by her own father. The story could be equally pathetic of a girl aged 11 who was married to a man aged 25 by her maternal uncle.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> *Tarun Rajasthan*, dated 4.4.1926, RSAB, 9-10.

<sup>37</sup> *Tarun Rajasthan*, dated 13.4.1929, RSAB, 7.

<sup>38</sup> *Rajasthan*, 1935, RSAB

A report in *Navjyoti* mentions about a high number of 72,000 widows in Kota between 17-18 years and living in very poor and inhuman conditions. Forcing them to commit suicide and change their religion to Christianity or Islam.<sup>39</sup> The conversion in Christianity or Islam affirms the practice among the Hindus.

Women have been invaded and sexually violated by the so-called protectors of the social norms. In *Tarun Rajasthan* of 16.5.1921 there is news about a gang kidnapping young women or child widows from Kota, Bundi, Jhalawar and Jodhpur and selling them into British Indian areas.<sup>40</sup> More such news appeared in the newspapers like the *Rajasthan* of 27.5.1935, *Navin Rajasthan* of 25.5.1937, *Tarun Rajasthan* of 16.5.1927 of Kota/Hadauti females sold in the region. *Tarun Rajasthan* of 31.10.1927 reports about a *jagirdar* Gulab Singhji who was an adopted son of Chhagan Singhji Maharaj Kotda, brother of Maharao of Kota. He raped a Gurjari on the tip of his sword. She cried when she was thrown out of his room after the crime.<sup>41</sup> This case was well criticised for a long time by other newspapers the *Rajasthan* dated 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1936, questioned the *jagirdar* Gulab Singh and also the entire feudal system.

The print media played important role in exposing the shady side of society, not even sparing the mighty rulers. Were buried in silence as it could not reach places to people easily but with the print media it became possible

---

<sup>39</sup> *Navjyoti*, 28.1.1937, RSAB

<sup>40</sup> *Tarun Rajasthan*, dated 16.5.1921, RSAB, 10.

<sup>41</sup> *Tarun Rajasthan*, dated 31.10.1927, RSAB, 15.

for everyone to get in touch with the events happening around the world. This became hardly in making people aware of the darker side of society and weak management of the governance. *Tarun Rajasthan* dated 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1925, reported two men and two women who were into flesh trade and fraud, cheating and theft in the Shahabad region; besides there were other 5-7 groups into such criminal activities. An anonymous citizen made an appeal to the ruler of Shahabad Raja Sahab Avdesh Singhji through this newspaper to take some actions against it.<sup>42</sup>

Widows were under constant surveillance as they were always treated with suspicion, accused with one thing or another and were tracked with stern and strict eye as if they were dangerous criminals. *Rajasthan* of 29<sup>th</sup> July, 1935 warned people of a widow in Bundi whose husband had died 2-3 years ago and now was accused of attracting students.<sup>43</sup> This was highly humiliating; just because she became a widow and started living normally after 2-3 years of her husband's death doesn't make her characterless? Another article in *Tarun Rajasthan* of 4<sup>th</sup> April 1926, talked of two Brahmin widows of Bundi who were sexually active aborting many times. One of two was working as cook while other was putting up with a jeweller's family. They were reported to be confident in their 'crimes' and were pulling other women too in their games. They belonged to the Sanadhya Brahmin community and their relatives were the head of a *panchayat* which was seen as the reason behind their confidence. Therefore through *Tarun Rajasthan* an

---

<sup>42</sup> *Tarun Rajasthan*, 26.07.1925, RSAB.

<sup>43</sup> *Rajasthan*, 29.07.1935, RSAB

appeal was made to Sanadhya Brahmins to keep track of their women.<sup>44</sup> It is also not clear whether they were criticized because they were sexually active or because they were financially independent working and earned their livelihood.

The perception of men about women can be gleaned from an article about *Kota Rajya ka Mahila Sansar* written by Chhapan lal Gaur Visharad that appeared *Rajasthan*, 20<sup>th</sup> December, 1935. He divides the women into three parts-

- i. wives of farmers ii. wives of businessmen and iii. wives of Government officers. The wife of a farmer is supportive and capable of doing everything by her self from household chores to farming the fields. Child marriage is not prevalent; so children born are healthy; no *purdah* or *ghoonghat* and simple living. He includes wife of mason in this class, who works hard and earns limited therefore unable to spend on luxurious products. Second are the wives of the businessmen i.e. Vaisyas; more than 50% into child marriage even after the passage of Sharda Act. He criticises them as illiterate but fashionable; would not shy talking to the servants but would do *purdah* in front of men of her own family. They need to show everything and they are negligent towards their kids. And the last are the wives of the government officers who are usually outsiders and few who are from Hadauti are

---

<sup>44</sup> (Newspaper) *Tarun Rajasthan*, 04.04.1926, RSAB.

similar to the wives of the second category. They would be educated in house management etc. but would not be educated intellectually.<sup>45</sup>

What the author of this article is trying to say? Is it that all the women who adapt to change are not intellectually grown? If they are into fashion, are socially active and do not 'support' their husbands financially does the blame should be on the women? Or the author should have questioned the entire patriarchal system which does not mind women becoming child brides or widows. The article finds no problem to burden them to bear the physical and mental strain of producing babies, managing the household chores of husbands and children.

*Rajasthan* of 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1938 reports in its *Kota Rajya ka Samachar* page that even though Sharda Act has been passed still the child marriages, unmatched marriages, and buying and selling of girls are in practice.<sup>46</sup> This testifies that declaration of laws was meaningless without implementation and the feudal lords were hardly concerned.

The governance in the princely states comes under a strong suspicion and scrutiny. There were many unemployed youth in the vicinity of Kota city indulging into crime. Educated men were raising questions to the ruler who was busy paying off to the dancers, singers. It was found objectionable by the citizens of the Kota State that for these 'State' entertainers a separate Mahakmakhas office was maintained and the houses of these dancers and

---

<sup>45</sup> (Newspaper) *Rajasthan*, dated 20.12.1935, RSAB.

<sup>46</sup> (Newspaper) *Rajasthan*, 18.04.1938, RSAB.



singers (prostitutes) were in the common residential areas. The reporter was highlighting an irony where the educated youth was unemployed but the prostitutes were paid. There were two *Khuwaseine* from Kishangarh who had started their business as singers and they were paid more than others as they were also provided with government houses. *Shikram/Shigram* was also provided to them. An appeal was made to remove them.<sup>47</sup> It seems that the State authority was ambiguous as to what was crucial and important; their entertainers or the girls students whom the Maharani Jadeja wanted to provide the *Shigram* which was opposed by the Maharao.<sup>48</sup> The constant hammering from the British forced the native rulers to bring very important and necessary reforms for the society but it was for the British Government and not for the people of the State. One such example is from Kota where a boy was bought and sold for twenty rupees the mediator paid fine of fifteen rupees which was not entertained by the British officer who ordered the child to send back to his parents.<sup>49</sup>

The figures in the census records are the insight of the society, the absence of women in the population census points to the unbalanced sex ratio.<sup>50</sup> The data available through the census records shows more women are

---

<sup>47</sup> (Newspaper) *Rajasthan*, dated 19.04.1938, RSAB.

<sup>48</sup> *Establishment at Her Highnesses expense of a suitable Girls School at Kota*, Basta No. 6, F. No. 4/39, Mahakama Khas- English Office, RSAK.

<sup>49</sup> *Kota Basta No. 1, S. N. 39/2, V.s. 1903, Bahi Talika, NSAD.*

<sup>50</sup> See Appendix Table No. 3 Table Showing Registered Births, Deaths and Infant Deaths, Bundi District; Table No. 13 Table Showing the Growth of Population, Kota District from 1901-1971; Table No. 14 Table Showing Tehsil-wise Distribution of Population of Kota district, 1971 Census; Table no. 15 Table Showing Comparison of the Rural and Urban Sex Ratio (tehsil wise), Kota district; 1971 Census; Table No. 28 Table showing total population,

married than men and also more widows than widower.<sup>51</sup> The Census figures of 1951 show that amongst the girls aged 14 or less, 97 per 1,000 were married and amongst boys 31 per 1,000 boys were married aged 14 or under and seven divorced females or widows per 1,000 who had not attained the age of 14.<sup>52</sup>

People in the Hindu society have the attitude of fanning the child through their names in the belief that they too would get the same attribute like the ideal on whose name the new born is usually named. The names of the females are usually taken from the heroines of the mythology like- *Sita*, *Savitri*, *Laxmi*, *Durga* etc. Some times if a man has too many daughters, he names *Shanti* to express his desire to unwelcome her, indicating that he doesn't want any more girls.<sup>53</sup>

In the patriarchal social construction the sexuality of the woman has been the sole reason for all round subjugation she was forced into. It has been observed in various recent studies that it has always been the upper castes that suppressed women the most. The evil patriarchal practices were opposed by feminist in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries paving way for other feminist scholars to pose questions against the conventional thinking. Recent

Jhalawar district, 1961 Census and Table No. 29 Table Showing Tahsil-wise Distribution of the Rural Population, Jhalawar District, 1961 Census.

<sup>51</sup> See Appendix Table no. 2 Table Showing the Percentage of Married and Widows in the Various States of Rajasthan, 1921 Census; Table No. 4 Table Showing Age and Marital Status in Bundi district, 1961 Census; Table No. 17 Table showing marital status, Kota district, 1971 Census; Table no. 18 Table showing Marital Status of Rural and Urban Population, Kota district, 1971 Census.

<sup>52</sup> B.N. Dhoundiyal, *Rajasthan District Gazetteer, Bundi*, Jaipur, Directorate of District Gazetteers, Government of Rajasthan, 1964, 73.

<sup>53</sup> B.N. Dhoundiyal, *Rajasthan District Gazetteer, Jhalawar*, Jaipur, Directorate of District Gazetteer, Rajasthan, 1964, 49.

studies have focused on various other aspects prevalent especially in Rajasthan in context of women. Other than female-infanticide, sati, child-marriages, widowhood, polygamy there was also prevalence of slaves has been examined.<sup>54</sup>

The first wave of feminism died down soon after independence as most of the important leaders were not united in support of women's rights. Sarojini Naidu wrote about the change that was proposed by the new legislation:

The supreme over-lordship of man and particularly that of the husband is strongly questioned. The women seek to have their own free choice in the selection of partners in life, the right to enter the state of Motherhood when and if they desire, to seek divorce if necessity arises. These are some of the problems upon which the movement is working.<sup>55</sup>

But in reality only few could imagine complete equality. Contemporary studies which have open up new horizons in historical, social as well as gender studies tend to focus more about women as subaltern. The need to shift the paradigm of studies from the repetitive way of focusing on

---

<sup>54</sup> Santosh Yadav, *Rajasthan mein Das pratha ka badalta swaroop*, Udaipur session, Rajasthan History Congress, 1977, 74-76; Ram Pande, 'Foreign Travellers on Social conditions in Rajasthan', *Shodhak*, Vol.6, Pt. B, Sr. No. 17, 1977, 80-81; R.P. Vyas, *The Walterkrit Rajputra Hitkarni Sabha and its Impact*, Ajmer Session, Rajasthan History Congress, 1975, 107-08; V.K. Vashishtha, *Evolution of the Social Policy of the British Government in the State of Rajputana during the Nineteenth Century*, Ajmer Session, Rajasthan History Congress, 1975, 95-98; Ira Das, 'Female Infanticide in Rajputana', *Shodhak*, Vol. 18, Pt. A, Sr. No. 52, 1989, 67-69; Ira Das, 'Sati: A Heinous System of Women Oppression', *Shodhak*, Vol.17, Pt. A, Sr. No. 49, 1988, 49-51.

<sup>55</sup> Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Colonial India*, op. cit. 24.

women studies has been felt. That is why recent scholars have highlighted about Dalit women, rewriting sexuality by investigating indigenous writings of colonial period stating about 'obscurity' beyond the prescribed gender relations.<sup>56</sup> The problem which a person from a weaker section faces because of the division in the social order is entirely different from what an upper caste educated person sees. The approach thus also is different when mentioning about Dalit women, their sexuality and their struggles.

---

<sup>56</sup> Sharmila Rege, 'Real Feminism' and Dalit Women: Scripts of Denial and Accusation', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 35, No. 6, (Feb 5-11, 2000), 492-495; Sharmila Rege, 'Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint of View', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, No. 44, (Oct 31- Nov 6, 1998), WS39-WS46; Charu Gupta, 'Writing Sex and Sexuality: Archives of Colonial North India', *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2011, 12-35.