

CHAPTER- 5

HISTORICIZING THE EVERYDAY LIFE AND ISSUE OF 'ORDINARY' WOMEN

Scholars working on women made efforts to historicize them and, in that process, also attempted to find a conceptual framework that would be appropriately applicable to the female experiences of the past. The task they found to be difficult was to highlight life and issues of ordinary women at a particular time in history. It will be ludicrous to assume that everything that ordinary women did could be penned down. However, to reach a synthesis of male and female histories, it was important to at least obtain a record of 'extraordinary' in the lives of ordinary women.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to uncover and to understand the extraordinary in the lives of ordinary women and to historicize them. Here, 'historicize' means to write women's experiences which might not be considered important by the historians writing male's historical experiences. 'Everyday' means to present a record of events which were considered to be of some significance by women. 'Issues' in this chapter means the problems that the women faced and to discuss the methods that women adopted to resolve them. 'Ordinary women' in this chapter means women from both rural and urban areas irrespective of their class or caste status. The regional focus of this chapter is on Western India.

The chapter delves into the issues considered important by women such as love, beauty, marriage, family, children, health, hygiene, honor, kitchen, maintenance of culture and tradition etc. The research questions that have been explored are: whether there was any change in the issues considered to be of importance by ordinary women from the nineteenth to the twentieth century in Western India? How much did women focus on self? How much did women understand self? An attempt has been made to reproduce the voice of women and as a result folklore and articles written by women have been used. Although the usage of folklore has been seen as a problem by the traditional schools of thought, in order to write women back, especially rural women, folklore becomes a very important medium. It encapsulates the essence of women's life and reproduces itself. It is a well-established fact that women have played a significant role, if not in the inception, at least safeguarding folklore. Thus, folklore became a medium to study women's identities and their experiences. The other source that has been used

in this chapter are the articles written by women in the magazines and books. Unfortunately, even in the magazines which were meant for women, it was the men who wrote most of the articles. These were centered around morality, ethics and duties of women. Nonetheless, these sources cover different aspects of a woman's life such as love and lust, beauty, family, birthing and children, health, hygiene, honor, kitchen, embroidery, culture and traditions.

SECTION-1: LOVE, LUST AND MARRIAGE

The role of women on the status and life of an individual and a family is much greater than was generally believed. Unfortunately, their status was unequal to that of men. It was considered to be a natural state of affairs, as a will of God. The basis of this belief was mostly the biological difference between the two genders. Men were to inseminate and then protect their labor of love and women were to bear children and thrive under that protection. The unequal relationship thus evolved and was able to socialize its members (both men and women) into these roles. These roles were then internalized through the creation of social imagery. However, the roles that women played in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are not merely maternal or restricted to household in servitude. This becomes visible when the oral tradition and folklore is examined. As it has been mentioned earlier that traditional and archival source material means the exclusion of common people (both men and women) from the mainstream historical discourses. Fortunately, folk culture preserved the narrative of the ordinary in the tales and the songs composed by them. It is believed that the institution of marriage is the foundation of patriarchy. This can be seen from the folklore of Western India. On the one hand some of the folk songs celebrate the joy of togetherness and the strong bonds forged through love, compassion, care, and sharing. On the other hand some of the songs also reflect the tensions in the household. Additionally, folklore has touched upon the transformative power of love, showcasing how the husband-and-wife relationship can inspire personal growth and bring about positive change.

A popular folk tale revolved around two central characters: Jesal and Toral of Kutch displays a different hue of patriarchal control.¹ Jesal is believed to have turned into a robber albeit an honorable one, despite being born in an elite family. It is unclear as to the circumstances which forced him to join the band of outlaws, but mostly, it was because of a taunt from his sister-in-law. He heard of a beautiful mare Tori in the possession of one dutiful and equally honorable Seth Sansthiya. He decided to steal the mare and reached the village. It was evening time and

¹ Mehta, R.M.(1998). *Kutchna Nari Ratno*. Aksharbharti. Bhuj.1

that was the time for prayers. The name of the wife of Seth was Toral, who was equally dutiful and was bound to protect the honor of the family. Concealing himself in the stable, he inadvertently startled the horse, causing it to flee with the stake to which it was tethered. The servants managed to capture the horse and secure the stake to the ground, unknowingly nailing Jesal's palm in the process. Despite the excruciating pain, Jesal remained silent, showing immense resilience. Before long, Jesal's presence was discovered. Sansthiya, deeply impressed by Jesal's bravery, approached him with reverence and invited him inside his house. Inquired about his desires, Jesal expressed his longing for Tori. However, Sansthiya misunderstood and thought that he was demanding for his wife Toral.² Sansthiya being a man of honor turned his wife over to the robber. It is not known what her response was. There was a fair chance that she had no choice but to follow Jesal.

Together, Jesal and Seth embarked on a journey towards Kutch. As they sailed across the bay between Kutch and Saurashtra, an unexpected storm emerged, causing the boats to become ensnared within its turbulent grasp. Fear gripped all the passengers including Jesal, Toral on the other hand remained remarkably composed, displaying a serene calm upon her face. Jesal, seeking to draw her attention to the impending danger, turned his gaze towards Toral. Sensing his unease, Toral calmly instructed him to vocalize all the sins he had committed thus far. Jesal said:

Pap Taru Prakash Jadeja
Dharm Taro Sambhar Re
Tari Beladi Ne Budava na Dao
Jadeja Re³

(Focus your sins into light, O! Jadeja !! save your religion!

I'll not let your soul sink, O! Jadeja !!)

As soon as Jesal confessed all his sins, a profound calm settled over the bay. From that moment forward, Jesal transformed into a revered saint, admired for his spiritual greatness. Simultaneously, Toral herself began to be regarded as a divine goddess. Although the lore of Toral and Jesal was hardly a tale of an ordinary woman, the very fact that it became popular showcases how much a society encouraged moral, dutiful behavior in women. It is unclear

² Vaidya, M. (1999). Images of women in the Folklore of Kutchch. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 60, 885–892. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44144160>

³ Mehta, R.M. (1998). *Kutchna Nari Ratno*. Aksharbharti. Bhuj. 6

whether the two married or lived together. However, from then onward Jesal was recognized as a Pir and Toral as a *Sati*. This lore breaks down the notion of women as completely subservient to men. It celebrates the power of women to negotiate through the patriarchal pressures and convert it to their advantage.

The society manifested their control through exerting pressures on women. Since women were supposed to act as a primary caretaker of the house, it was imperative that they be socialized into assuming marriage as an ultimate goal. This is also clear from the previous chapters where marriage was converted into a social system and a very symbol of existence for ordinary women. It is only natural that many folk cultures and traditions revolved around marriage and child bearing. Girls since their childhood were prepared to live a successful married life. As a result there are many festivals and rituals that revolve around marriage rituals. These marriage songs or *lagna geet* (marriage songs) were transcribed in the twentieth century both by women as well as men. For instance, in 1923, a '*Lagna Geetavali*' was published by Jain Mahilaratna Shrimati Magan Behn Bombay on the occasion of marriage of one Savitabehn.⁴ This booklet contained compositions from the beginning of the marriage rituals to the end of it. Another booklet of similar kind was published from Kathiawar. It was titled '*Aapno Lagna Geeto*' and it was written by Dhanishthaben Majmudar, Nirmalaben Bhatt and Shri Devi Buddha.⁵ The women in the twentieth century in the cities were very much involved in the national movement and also so far as women's rights were concerned. However, there was a counter response. This can be seen in the book '*Ben Taramati Lagna Mahotsav*' written by Anonymous which was published in 1920. Amongst the marriage songs, there was a song in English titled as 'Rights of Women'. The song reminds a woman of her duty to her family and her marriage first. The verse begins by asking a question, 'The rights of women, what are they?' and the response is 'The right to labor, love and pray'.....The right to wake when others sleep...The marriage song is a reminder to women of what their duties and responsibilities were.⁶ Many such booklets were written by men but at the instance of some female relatives of theirs.

Modern day Rajasthan or Rajputana Agency under the British was known as the land of kings and kingdoms. It had a rich cultural heritage and women were at the center of during the festival of *Gangour*, which symbolizes marital bonds, there were and still are specific rituals associated

⁴ Maganbahen. (1923). *Lagangitavali*. Gujarat Vidyapith Granthalaya. Ahmedabad

⁵ Majumdar, D., Bhatt, N., Budhh, S. (1943). *Aapno Lagna Geeto*. Gurjar Sahitya Bhandar. Kathiawar.

⁶ Anonymous. (1920). *Ben Taramati Lagan Mahotsav*. Gujarat Vidyapith Granthalaya. Ahmedabad.12

with it. Virgin girls pray for a handsome and long-lived husband, while married women long for the return of their spouses who are away. The women make efforts to persuade their husbands to come back home and bring gifts for them. Once the husbands return, there are further persuasions to keep them by their side for a little longer:

Mara matha na manmand lyay mara anjan marun, Yani revo sa,

*Yani ro pardesh chel yani revo sa, Yani ro gori ka chel yani revo sa*⁷

(Bring an ornament for my forehead, my stranger spouse, please stay right here, stranger-spouse, Stay here, foreign gorgeous man, stay right here, stranger-spouse, Stay here, fair woman's gorgeous man, stay right here, stranger-spouse!)

Marriage folklore holds great significance as it serves as a window into the cultural, historical, and social dimensions of the institution of marriage. Numerous folk songs associated with the rituals were and still are performed during marriage ceremonies. Songs such as *Vinayak*, *Badhavo*, *Mayro*, *Bindi*, *Kasthuri*, *Sevro*, *Ghodi*, *Fera*, *Bano*, *Vani*, etc., were connected to various aspects of the *Vivah Samskar* (marriage ceremony). One of these songs reflects women's perspective on the relationship between man and nature. In Indian philosophy, the concept of *prakriti-puruush* (Mother Nature and the universal cosmic male) attributes feminine characteristics to nature. Therefore, women share a kinship with nature. This connection is depicted in a folk song where a lady invites various elements of nature to attend her son's wedding ceremony, just as friends and relatives are invited:

Mhare raja hariyasa dungra ne nuватиya, Mhare raja toran thamb le ghara avatiya

Mhare raja Pechola jasyo sagar nuватиya, Mhare raja neer sanjovan jogo

*Mhare beladiya ghar chaaviyo.*⁸

(I have extended an invitation to the lush green mountains, who shall bring the ceremonial articles of tooran and thamb. Lake Pichola has also been invited, with its ability to provide the essential element of water. The creeping vines have gracefully spread throughout my home)

Fatanas and *Ukhanas*, a traditional form of folk song, held a significant place in ceremonies and gatherings, particularly in the context of weddings in Gujarat and Maharashtra. These

⁷ Gold, A. G. (1997). *Outspoken women: representation of female voices in a Rajasthani Folklore Community*. 111

⁸ Chundawat, K.L.(1985). *Rajasthan ke Sanskritik Lokgeet*. Jaipur: Panchsheel Printers.72

lively songs were typically performed by groups of women, adding joy and entertainment to the celebrations. *Fatanas* are characterized by their simple and repetitive rhythm and relied primarily on vocals rather than accompanying musical instruments like flutes or drums. Their charm lay in their catchy tunes and light-hearted lyrics, often incorporating humor and emphasizing key phrases. Unlike formal musical training, the art of singing *fatanas* was passed down through generations of women within families. Young girls were inspired during wedding events to learn these songs from their grandmothers or aunts.

Although some *fatanas* may have been transcribed into song notebooks, the tradition predominantly relied on oral transmission. Memorization played a crucial role as the songs passed from one person's mouth to another's ear, ensuring their preservation and continuity. This informal and vernacular practice kept the tradition alive and fosters a sense of cultural connection within communities.

After the completion of the wedding ceremony, the sisters of the groom's side playfully tease and mocks the sisters of the bride's side, accompanied by bursts of laughter. *Thai* is known as *Fatana*.

વેવાઈ તારો માંડવડો સંભાળ, રમતિયો રાણો રમી વર્ચા

રમ્યો પોર બે પોર, ટોડા મોર અમીજીતા

જીતા એના વગડાવો ભંગી ઢોલ, ટોડા મોર તમી હાર્યા

હાર્યા એના વગડાવો ઠાલા ઢોલ, ટોડા મોર અમી જીતા.⁹

(bridesmaid take care of your Mandap, as the groom is now married,

Played day and night, todamor is won by us,

Play the bhanghi dhol, as you lost the todamor

In your loss we will play dhala dhol, you lost the todamor)

The sisters of the bride's side also indulge in teasing the groom's side. They respond through songs.

⁹ Jhaverchand,M. (1972). 226

રેલગાડી આવી મુંબઈનો માલ લાવી, જુઓની મારી બહેની આ રેલગાડી આવી.

રેલમાં ભર્યા ચોખા, જાનૈયા બધા બોખા જુઓની મારી બહેની

આ રેલગાડી આવી રેલમાં ભર્યા રીંગણા, નયા બધા ઠીંગણા જુઓની મારી બહેની

આ રેલગાડી આવી¹⁰

(Look, my sister, this train has arrived. The train is filled with bags, everyone is curious, look, my sister, this train has arrived. The train is filled with decorations, everyone is excited, look, my sister, this train has arrived.)

In Gujarat Gir, the Bhavara community has its own written code of conduct, called the "Bhavara Community Code," which is distributed to the community leaders to ensure its implementation. The code covers various aspects, including marriage and engagement.

(1) When a girl reaches the age of marriage, the bride's family is required to give a dowry of Rs. 200 to the bridegroom's family. If the girl is accompanied by a cow during the procession, an additional Rs. 100 is given.¹¹

(2) In case of the bride's absence during the wedding, the bride's mother-in-law has the authority to determine the dowry according to her capability. If the bride arrives alone, the groom's father gives a dowry of Rs. 12 (twelve) to the bride's family. If the bride is accompanied by two people from the groom's family, an additional Rs. 1 is given to each member.¹²

(3) The bride's family is required to offer a gift of Rs. 500 to the groom's family for purchasing ripe bananas, three coconut fruits, and other necessary items for the wedding. Additionally, a pair of khichdo, argho, and lungda should be provided.¹³

¹⁰ Jhaverchand, M. (1972). 226

¹¹ Bharvad Lokoni Jatinodhara.08.08.81

¹² Bharvad Lokoni Jatinodhara.08.08.81

¹³ Ibid.

(4) If the groom's sister accompanies the groom during the wedding, the bride's parents are required to give Rs. 100 as a companion gift. In the case of a joint family wedding, an additional Rs. 200 is given to the groom's family. However, if any other caste performs the wedding without adhering to these customs (excluding cash transactions), the bride's in-laws are responsible for providing clothes and other items to the bride's family. They do not have the right to ask the bride's family about the dowry.¹⁴

This code regulates various aspects of life, including marriage and engagement ceremonies. The analysis of the code reveals certain practices and expectations within the community. For instance, it stipulates that the bride's family must provide a dowry, with specific amounts depending on different circumstances such as the presence of certain individuals during the wedding procession. It also mentions the exchange of gifts and items between the families involved. Overall, this analysis provides insights into the social and cultural norms governing marriage practices within the Bhavara community.

In yet another song, the heartfelt concerns of a mother for her daughter are vividly portrayed as she prepares to leave for her marital home. The mother's worries and anxieties encompass a range of emotions, reflecting her deep love and protective nature. She envisions the challenges her daughter may face in the unfamiliar surroundings and longs for her well-being and happiness.

Lai dzhulya leki, nako mhanu ai;

*Dzatyala paraghara, hoil sapnachi ghai.*¹⁵

(Too many daughters have I!, oh, don't say that, mother!, To a strange house they'll go, and then you'll hasten to dream)

This depiction tells the universal sentiment of mothers, underscoring their unwavering devotion and enduring care for their daughters, even as they embark on a new chapter of life.

There is also concern by a mother is for her daughter as,

Jivala majhya vats, leka sonya lsi salai;

¹⁴ Bharvad Lokoni Jatinodhara.08.08.81

¹⁵ Bhagwat, A.R. (retrieved 2022). *Maharashtrian Folk-Songs on the Grind-Mill* (Songs on the Grid Mill).160

*Dzaila paraghara, lagal unhachi dzhalai.*¹⁶

(In my heart I feel, daughter is a nail of gold; To a stranger's house she'll go, heat of the sun she'll feel).

Over here the mother's heart was heavy with grief, consumed by the fear that her beloved daughter may encounter mistreatment in her new abode. The mere thought of her daughter enduring any form of hardship or injustice filled her with anguish and concern. This profound expression of maternal love magnifies the mother's protective instincts, as she fervently prays for her daughter's safety, happiness, and well-being.

On the other hand, in another song an in different feeling of father is expressed for her daughter,

Bapa mhane leka, madzha gadzaratsa vapha;

*Yedya mayabapa, jalma deuni kaya napha?*¹⁷

(Father says of daughter, she is my farm of carrots; Mother and father the fools, what gained them by giving her birth?)

This reveals intriguing sentiments from the father's perspective. In these compositions, a hint of sadness lingers within the father's thoughts, contemplating that his daughter may be perceived as having little utility to the parents. This subtle emotion reflects the complex dynamics and societal expectations surrounding gender roles, where daughters may be undervalued in certain contexts. This reflects the father's stand for her daughter as being of no use to their parents as she is getting married.

The other aspect of a relationship between a man and a woman is love and lust. This was beyond the institution of marriage and the control of patriarchy. In the urban Gujarat there were numerous instances of illicit relationships developing between men and women. Society called this adultery and often punished women for it. However, in rural society, the illicit relationship did acquire some kind of legitimacy and therefore many folk tales and folk songs were centered around these themes.

¹⁶ Bhagwat, A.R. (retrieved 2022). 160

¹⁷ Ibid.

*'O Mithdi of Deha, look Nathiyo is standing yonder,
 What cloth for you should I bring for your blouse O Mithdi,
 What sari would you like?
 O Mithdi of Deha, tell me what sari you would like?'*

*Runs with speed, does run Nathiyo with speed,
 Runs Nathio eloping with Mithdi of Deha,
 He indeed runs away with speed.¹⁸*

The story of a lover's elopement can be seen in the folklore of women. Over here a couple Mithdi of Deha and Nathio plan about eloping together. Folk songs provide an outlet for the repressed sexual desires of women, which often go unexpressed due to societal constraints. In these songs, the singers boldly and suggestively convey their sexual desires, even towards individuals such as their younger brother-in-law. The lyrics serve as a platform for the singers to explore and express their intimate longings, bypassing the usual restrictions imposed by social norms. Over here sister-in-law shows her sexual desire for her brother-in-law:

*Char char balda ki Jodi dhana maye ubi
 Dheere haankh re devaruya bhabhi paanat me ubi
 Bajra ka khet me paanat karta bhago re kanto
 Meetho lage re devariya thari naad ro santho¹⁹*

(Four pairs of animals stand in the field. Brother-in-law, kindly slow down your pace, as your sister-in-law stands in the field. A thorn pricks while working in the millet fields, but brother-in-law, your graceful movement of the neck is so endearing.)

Here, the singer playfully addresses her brother-in-law, urging him to slow down his movement as she is present in the field. She expresses the subtle sweetness of his actions and compares it to the pricking sensation of a thorn while working. The lyrics evoke a sense of flirtation and affectionate teasing, showcasing the dynamics between the singer and her brother-in-law. The song metaphorically portrays a romantic relationship between the singer and her brother-in-

¹⁸ Bhatt, P. M. (2014). *Her space, her story: exploring the stepwells of Gujarat*. Zubaan. New Delhi 104

¹⁹ Singh, J. (1987). *Rajasthani Lok Geetonke Vivid Roop*. New Delhi: Binsar Publication.71

law, indicating an extra-marital affair. The term ‘*meetho* over here (meaning sweet) symbolically alludes to the²⁰ Jagmal Singh aptly observes that this song chronicles the prevalent extramarital relationships in folk society.²¹ Folk songs, in this context, serve a therapeutic purpose by providing a safe outlet for the release of emotions that, if suppressed, could potentially lead to psychological disorders. Bronner, citing Dundes, highlights that the interpretation of symbols embedded within folkloric performances is a direct consequence of folklore serving as a socially approved channel for expressing repressed desires and anxieties.²²

SECTION-2: BEAUTY VS DUTY

In folk songs, various types of clothing adornments are mentioned. There is a special kind of fascination with clothing adornments by women. The allure of ornaments is even more pronounced among women. The fascination with adornments captivates women to a greater extent. In folk songs, gold and silver are not considered valuable. The true beauty lies in *Tiladi* (coloured dot on forehead-*Bindi*).

"Per popatdi panch patola cheer, haathe sonaagari choodi re (2)

Tara chudlano shangar, mara haidamaan laagyo re (2)

Per popatdi panch patola cheer, haathe sonaani choodi re... (2)

Tari kambiyaro shangar, mara haiyamaan laagyo re... (2)

Per popatdi panch patola cheer, haathe sonaani choodi re...

("Five beautifully embroidered parrots on the skirt, with golden bangles in hand, oh dear (2)

The stars on the bangles shine, adorning my wrists, oh dear (2)

Five beautifully embroidered parrots on the skirt, with golden bangles in hand, oh dear...

The beauty of your anklets, adorning my legs, oh dear... (2)

²⁰ Ramanujan, A.K, (et al).(2004). *The Collected Essays of A.K.Ramanujan*. New Delhi: OUP.88-89

²¹ Agrawal, G. (ed). *Rajasthani Lokgeet. Churu: Lok Sanskriti*. Shodh Sansthan Nagarshree Churu Trust, 2013. 71

²² Dundes, A. (ed). *Essays in Folkloristics*. Meerut: *Folklore Institute*, 1978. 54

*Five beautifully embroidered parrots on the skirt, with golden bangles in hand, oh dear...")*²³

‘*Sara Sara Poshako ane Kimti Grehnan Teja Su Streenu Sacho Shringar Che*’ by Dhannabai Ratanji Sunawala in the year 1959. She wrote that it was true that adorning oneself with beautiful clothes and precious ornaments enhanced the external appearance, but she believed that true beauty lay not in the external embellishments but within oneself. The inner beauty was radiated through one's virtues and qualities, which was more valuable. She believed that superficial adornment may appear appealing at first, but it only offered a fleeting charm. True beauty emanated from the core, shining brightly through one's character and inner grace. In this regard, a wise saying suggests that "Your true adornment is not the external decorations of fancy attire or expensive jewelry, but the simplicity and humility that resonates with the divine. Those who held virtues dear in the past adorned themselves in the eyes of God and found true beauty by surrendering to his will."²⁴

Human beauty lays not in external adornments or material possessions, but in the purity and goodness that resides within. Those who prioritize and cultivate inner virtues are truly beautiful, regardless of their outward appearance. Superficial beauty may attract attention momentarily, but it lacks depth and substance. However, true beauty emanates from one's character and ethical conduct. It is said that a great soul is one who possesses qualities like humility and a compassionate nature, qualities that are valued by God. Such individuals find solace in spiritual pursuits rather than seeking validation solely through external beautification. Women understand that true happiness and fulfillment come from nurturing the soul and embracing virtues rather than chasing superficial pleasures. This philosophy suggests that true beauty lies in the pursuit of inner growth and connecting with the divine.²⁵ According to Dhanabai, if a woman possessed these qualities, she was considered to be virtuous. In the ‘*Stree Bodh*’ many other magazines there were advertisements placed for making women more beautiful to be considered as a suitable mate.²⁶ There were many other works which revolved

²³ *Halarni Maldhari Jatina Sarda*, Dr.Sucheta Bhadalvala. 224

²⁴ Ratanji, D.(1959). *Sara Sara Poshako ane Kimti Grehnan Teja Su Streenu Sacho Shringar*. Gujarat Vidyapith Granthalaya.1-2

²⁵ Ratanji, D.(1959). *Sara Sara Poshako ane Kimti Grehnan Teja Su Streenu Sacho Shringar*. Gujarat Vidyapith Granthalaya.Ahmedabad.2-3

²⁶ *Stree Bodh*. (1915). 4

around this theme for instance, ‘*Stree Dharma*’ which was written by Thakar Kalidas Chundias Sidhpurwala in 1916.²⁷

SECTION-3: FAMILY, HEALTH AND KITCHEN

For a woman family was supposed to be the center of her life and existence. There was nothing professional for her. Her work place was her home where she performed multiple roles and forged multiple relationships. It was also her battle ground. A place where she had to fight to survive, manipulate to thrive, connive to control. The struggle for survival was since her birth.

A Kutchi proverb shows submissive role of women in the society, such as, *Beti Tenji Gardan Hethi*²⁸ (The one who has a daughter will always be looked down upon)! This shows that having a daughter may be perceived as inferior or less desirable compared to having a son. It implies that daughters are often undervalued or seen as less important than sons, resulting in a diminished status or respect for those who have daughters. Further this implies the deep-rooted gender biases. *Senth Putraein ke, Dhikaku Dhiren ke.*²⁹ (The son would always be rewarded; the daughter would always be beaten). The proverb reflects a gender-biased view that favors sons over daughters. It suggests that sons are consistently rewarded and given preferential treatment, while daughters face mistreatment or violence, specifically being beaten or subjected to physical harm. This perspective underscores the existence of gender inequality and discrimination within the society.

The deep emotions of a mother parting with daughter are expressed in folk songs. A poignant example is found in the song of the final meal, where a touching scene unfolds as a mother feeds her daughter for the last time. This song captures the beauty of this moment, while remaining grounded in the bittersweet truth of life's transient nature.

*Loyane Khani kacholada, jamje var be var re,
Pachi to jamsho saasre, jamsho uchhisht bhaat re.
Kur jamsho Diwalada, rotli Adityavar re.
Ek te jamsho Baporle, Biju majam raat re.
Dhedhi te chalyan saasre, royi royi bhariyaan talaav re.
Tabshadhe mukh lahoi riya, srovar dhoyaa che paay re.*

²⁷ Thakar Kalidas Chundias Sidhpurwala. ‘*Stree Dharma-I*’, Mumbai.

²⁸ Saha, K. (1989). *Rajasthani Kehvato: A study*. Lal Publications, Jaipur. 17

²⁹ Sharma, G. & Mehta, B. (1991). *Kutch Loksahitya ek Adhyayan*. Gyanlok Prakashan. 31

Dhedhi te chalyan saasre, daado volavane jaay re.

*Dhanu jivo maara daadaji, maata suvasani hoy re.*³⁰

("Here is your plate my darling ! Eat once, eat twice, eat to your heart's content.

"Hereafter you shall dine at your husband's home, where the crumbs will fall to your share.

"Rice you shall get but once in a year on the Divali day, and wheat-bread only on Sundays.

"Two meals day and noi more : one at noon and the other late at midnight

"As the darling goes, her tears fill many a pond.

"She wipes her face with her silken scarf and washes her feet at the lake.

"To the father who sees her off, she blesses — Long long life to my father and long married bliss to my mother).

In the above folk song mother addresses her pain of marrying her young daughter. The folklore reflects the societal norms and expectations placed upon women in terms of their roles and treatment within the marital household. The mother in the folk song highlighted limited food and meager portions that the girl would receive at her husband's home, contrasting it with the abundance and love she had experienced in her parental home. The emotional impact of this transition was emphasized through the girl's tears, which were described as filling ponds. Despite her daughter's sorrow, she appears to accept the situation. The daughter in turn blessed her father for a long life and to her mother for a happy married life.

In the folklore of Kathiawar, it can be seen that child marriage has been a part of the folklore.

Mara te dehma rupe dhana re vani,

Kar rupe dhola safed,

*Balak vani! Kar desh dhola safed.*³¹

(There's plenty of silver in my land, O my Bride! Wherewith I'll die you all over in glittering white, O Baby bride! All over in glittering white.) Over here *Balak Vani* word denoted the young girl who is a child bride.

³⁰ *Marriage Folklore of Kathiyawad-II* (1994). Journal of The Gujarat Research Society. Volume. 6.208

³¹ *Marriage Folklore of Kathiyawad-II* (1994).200

There are many lores in which young girls appeal to their parents or guardians to have mercy on them and not send them off with much older men. They preferred to die rather than marry an older man. In a song from Surat, a girl contemplates suicide. The lyrics evoke a sense of empathy towards her plight, highlighting the struggles faced by young girls in those times. *“Please Uncle, my dear Uncle, I know I know you love me so, at least you'd listen; Do not, please give me away in marriage. How can you bear to see your dear niece ..”*³²

Folklore contains lores around strained relationships and conflicts within the family. Thus, showcasing a diverse range of human experiences within the context of kinship. This reveals the tensions and rivalries that can emerge due to societal practices and power struggles. The most common conflicts are between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. The daughter-in-law urges her mother-in-law:

*Sasu gaal mat kadh parikar de, Parikar de mhane, nyarikar de*³³

(Mother-in-law, please do not scold me, allow me to create a separate home.)

In this line, the speaker, likely a daughter-in-law, addresses her mother-in-law, expressing her desire to have her own separate household. She seeks permission and understanding from her mother-in-law to establish an independent space for herself and her family. This could indicate a longing for autonomy and a need to establish her own identity within the family structure. Over here the daughter-in-law seeks greater independence and a sense of agency. In a folk song, the authoritative figures within the family, such as the *bhuva* (father's sister) and *fufa* (bhuva's husband), are subjected to mockery and ridicule:

*Haando dhovan fufo manga jhadu devan bhuva*³⁴

(The one who cleans cauldrons, the *fufa*, and the one who wipes the floor, the *bhuva*, are being sought after.) Furthermore, discriminatory practices within families have inflicted additional heartbreak upon them. These songs serve as a testament to the enduring strength and resilience of women in the face of societal challenges. A folk song expresses this agony:

Aura ne maa ghapsa ghapsa khan, Mane ae maa chamthi lunki.

³² Pal, S. & Narula, S.C. (1998). Some Ballads and Legends: Gujarati Folklore. *Indian Literature*, 42(5 (187)), 172–184. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23338788>

³³ Sharma, Y. (2000). *Rajasthani Lokgeeton ki Sangarachana*. Jaipur: Vivek Publishing House. 20

³⁴ Thakur, R. (1938).(et al). *Rajasthan ke Lokgeet*. Calcutta: Rajasthan Research Society. Lokgeet 45

*Aura ne ae maa pali pali ghee, Mane maa mariyo telko*³⁵

(While others receive a generous handful of sugar from their mother, she offers me a mere pinch of salt. While others are bestowed with ample ghee, I am content with a modest amount of oil.)

In this song, the lyrics shed light on the discriminatory practice of food distribution within the family. The speaker, presumably a female member, highlighted the unequal treatment she received compared to others. While others were given generous portions of sugar and *ghee*, she was given only a meager amount of salt and oil. This disparity in the allocation of food symbolizes the larger issue of women being subjected to substandard diets and inadequate nourishment within Indian society. These types of songs serve as a testament to the prevailing exploitation of women, not only by men but also by other women within the family structure. They shed light on the internal dynamics that perpetuate gender inequality and the mistreatment of women. Through such songs, women have found a means to express their experiences of discrimination and seek redress. It is a reflection of the broader social reality where women have faced marginalization and exploitation, even within their own communities.

Additionally, folklore reveals the vigilance of the in-laws, closely monitoring the movements of their daughter-in-law in public spaces, leaving her devoid of any privacy:

I had gone to a stepwell to fetch water,

The neighbor woman accompanied me.

Sent by my mother-in-law.

*And a thorn of the Khra tree pierced me.*³⁶

The reason why a chaperone was needed was because the mother-in-law was aware of the predators that would circle around a young naive woman. The temptation for the new bride was too many which could lead to unwanted pregnancies or other such problems.

O grandfather! O grandfather! Kindly do not give your daughters, like me,

³⁵ Singh, J.(1987). *Rajasthani Lok Geetonke Vivid Roop*. New Delhi: Binsar Publication. 47

³⁶ Bhatt, P. M. (2014). 112

*In marriage to someone in the Vagada region;
 The quarrelsome mother-in-law of Vagada is difficult to deal with.
 O grandfather! She makes me grind corn during the day, and spin during the night;
 Sends me to fetch water late at night prior to the break of dawn, O grandfather!
 O son's wife! Keep the knitted ring near your pillow, And rope near your feet.
 And your seat you keep on the front verandah, O grandfather!
 The pitcher sinks not, since the rope reaches not the water
 My sun has arisen and set on the bank of the well.
 O flying birds! Take my message to my grandfather!
 That your granddaughter has fallen into the well. O grandfather!³⁷*

Not all songs lament and criticize the in-laws. At times, we glimpse tender emotions towards them. The song "Ekalo" beautifully portrays the affectionate bond between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law:

*My father-in-law is the King Ranamala
 My dear mother-in-law is the breeze from the sea.³⁸*

Over here it shows the relationship between the daughter-in law and mother-in law:

*This wily daughter-in-law has given a push,
 Drowning the mother-in-law, O my equal she-friend.
 The lady has sunk and her upper garment is floating,
 Lest she might turn back, O my equal she-friend.³⁹*

Bearing children was considered to be the primary responsibility of a wife. The general preference was for a son but the folklore showcases that birth of a female child was equally welcome. As a result the folklore around the birth of children holds significant importance as it encapsulates the beliefs, customs, and practices surrounding the miracle of childbirth within a specific culture or community. Birth ceremonies not only reflected the perspectives of women on the various rites and rituals but also delved into the deeper realms of women's minds and

³⁷ Bhatt, P. M. (2014). *Her space, her story: exploring the stepwells of Gujarat*. Zubaan.113

³⁸ Ibid.115

³⁹ Ibid.115

hearts. The songs sung before the postpartum ritual of Sun worship captured the blended sense of pride and power felt by the new mother. During this ritual, the new mother adorned in an auspicious yellow wrap became the center of attention as she held her baby in her lap. However, the joyous anticipation was tempered by the fear of the evil eye, as depicted in the song.⁴⁰ In Gujarat pregnant women, with the intention of ensuring a safe delivery, sometimes made a vow to refrain from consuming ghee until they performed an offering to Kal-Bhairav.

These lines were recited:

भुक्ति मुक्ति दायकं प्रशस्त चारु विग्रहं, भक्तवत्सलं स्थितं समस्त लोक विग्रहम् ।

विनिक्वणन्मनोजहे मकिङ्किणी लसत्कटिं, काशिका पुराधिनाथ कालभैरवं भजे ॥४॥

(I worship Kal-Bhairav, the bestower of nourishment and salvation, whose form is auspicious and beautiful, and who showers kindness upon his devotees)⁴¹

The *Simant* ceremony was performed during the seventh month of pregnancy in Gujarat where the pregnant woman was taken for a bath, either to a dunghill or to a location approximately thirty yards behind the house. After the bath, she was to come back home by walking over sheets of cloth spread along her path. It was during this occasion that barren women eagerly sought the company of the pregnant woman with the intention of secretly tearing off a piece of her upper garment. This act was believed to increase their chances of conceiving. According to a belief, if the barren was able to successfully accomplish this act, she herself would conceive. This certainly did not bore well for the pregnant woman as she could experience a miscarriage as a consequence. There were also those who believe that even a slight pressure exerted by a childless woman on the upper garment of a pregnant woman could bring about the aforementioned result.⁴² Hence, barren women were refrained or frowned upon from attending these ceremonies.

After approximately a month following childbirth, a ceremony known as '*Zarmazaryan*' was performed. During this ritual, the woman was taken to a nearby well or stream to fetch water. In the vicinity of the well, five small mounds of sand were formed and adorned with red *lac*. A

⁴⁰ Gold, A. G. (1997). 114

⁴¹ Enthoven, R. E. (1989). *Folk Lore Notes: Folklore of Gujarat* (Vol. 1). Asian Educational Services. London.97

⁴² Ibid.98

ghee lamp was lit, and seven betel nuts were offered to the water. Additionally, a coconut was broken and thrown into the water as an offering. The consecrated water was collected in a jar, which the woman carried back home. On her way, she would distribute the betel nuts to women experiencing infertility, as it was believed to possess curative properties and aided in conceiving.⁴³ For instance, the *Badhavo* (song of celebration) sung during the occasion of childbirth in Rajasthan, celebrated the empowered identity that a woman attained through her power of procreation and motherhood. It highlighted the significance of motherhood as a source of strength and fulfillment in a woman's life.

Kin ghar gaaven sundar gauri halroji....Moto ji sahar nee nagar aee anjar

Ghar ghar gaaven Maruji haalroji...Laevae sundar gauri mharo naam ae

*Goth bakhane mhare baaproji*⁴⁴

In this dialogue-based song, a husband and his wife are showcased as celebrating the birth of their son. The women in the community sang birth songs in praise of the wife who bore a son. This song emphasizes the idea that motherhood strengthens women's position within the family and society. It also suggests that women are more likely to receive favor from their husbands when they bear children, particularly sons.

In the folktales of Kutch, the birth of a daughter was not welcome, but neither was it rejected.⁴⁵ The desire for a son was strong that women were ready to get into illicit relationships. In Rajasthani and some Marathi folklore, there were songs which showcased a desire for a woman to take a lover so that a son can be born to her. This suggests that maybe the rural women knew that the sex of the fetus in the womb was because of the males rather than females.⁴⁶ A Marathi *Ovi*⁴⁷ folk songs portray, sorrows of a barren woman:

Potichi putraphala, nahi narichya navarasi,

⁴³ Enthoven, R.E. (1989). 289

⁴⁴ Chundawat, R.L.K. (1985). *Rajasthan ke Sanskritik Lokgeet*. Jaipur: Panchsheel Printers. 54

⁴⁵ Vaidya, M. Images of women in Folklore of Kutch. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 1999, Vol. 60, DIAMOND JUBILEE (1999), pp. 885-892

⁴⁶ Gold, A.G. (1994). Sexuality, fertility and erotic imagination in Rajasthani women's songs. *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*, eds. Anne Grodzins Gold and Gloria Goodwin Raheja, 58-60

⁴⁷ The term "Ovi" holds a literal meaning of being "that which is strung," emphasizing the inherent spontaneity and emotional flow that define these songs.

Kaya karila, Devarishi^{48?49}

*(No sons of womb, this woman is fated to have, what could the devarshi (rishi) mendicant
(beggar do?)*

The woman sought solace in the guidance of the *devarishi*, the wise and revered mendicant. With his profound wisdom and spiritual insight, the *devarishi* endeavored to offer a remedy for her plight. It shows that a woman opt for alternative paths and possibilities, aiming to find a resolution for the longing of a child. It says the creator finishes writing a woman's fate, as there is nothing to write as she has no children.

Satavi akshara, barmya lihito ghaighai ;

*Narichya nasibata, lihayala nahi kahi.*⁵⁰

(The Creator writes in haste; Nothing was written, in a woman's fate.)

The practice of preferring male children over female children is universally known. Folklore of Western India contains many such songs, tales and proverbs which reflect this practice.

Potichi putraphala,deva tsalala vatita ;

*Chatura majhi bai,oti pasaravi datita.*⁵¹

(God went giving away, off-spring, male, Spread the corner of your sari, oh, my clever daughter, in the crowd)

Sambhutse pindivara, beta vahila silatadza ;

*Putra maguh? gela zadza.*⁵²

⁴⁸ Devarshi is a popular mendicant who is supposed to possess miraculous powers and to whom resort is often made by ignorant people.

⁴⁹ Bhagwat, A.R. (retrieved 2022).151

⁵⁰ The letters of Satvi, Satvi is a witch believed to affect a child's fate at its birth people appease her on the sixth day of the child's birth in order to get rid of any possible curse.

⁵¹ Bhagwat, A.R. (2022).151

⁵² Ibid.52

(On the Linga of Shiva was offered, *Bel* leaves fresh and dried, Having prayed for a son, the king went away.) The word *putra* is used for having a male child. Over many songs the male child birth is mentioned.⁵³ Similarly,

Bandhula dzhala leka, ali sakhar majhya gava,

Mi tsa vatite dzava bava, dira dajiba tumhi dzava;

*Ramchandra nava theva agasi diva lava.*⁵⁴

(Brother begot a son, sugar has come to my village Oh I I'll allot it to sisters-in-law' Brother-in-law, you go! Name the child Ramchandra s, light a lamp on the terrace)

Patalachy nirya ghalate ghaighai;

Bandhuala-dzhala leka, barasala dzate bai.

(The handful folds of my *sari*, I arrange in haste; Brother has begot a son, I go for the naming ceremony)

Sakhara se rani, ghyaga bayano thodi thodi;

*Bandhua majhya dzhala hira, navha hirakani.*⁵⁵

(Take a little sugar and sweets, oh woman! Brother begot a diamond, not an uncut one!) The 'diamond' word denoted a male child. Whereas 'not an uncut' meant a daughter, Hirakani is a piece of diamond (unpolished).

Rajasthan was known as a land of courageous warriors, and the women of the past took immense pride in giving birth to brave sons. The folksongs of Rajasthan not only narrate tales of sacrifice, duty, and chivalry but also shed light on the aspirations of mothers to instill these values in their children. These songs reflect the deep-rooted desire of mothers to raise children who embody the bravery and honor that Rajputana region was known for. For instance, in a lullaby a mother says:

⁵³ Bhagwat, A.R. (retrieved 2022).152

⁵⁴ Bhagwat, A.R. Song 89.152

⁵⁵ Bhagwat, A.R. Song 91.153

बालो गोदी दुधा चूर्णे, दूध चंगावत वाली यू ॥ घोले पय पर धायरता रो वादा दाग मनाए ने॥⁵⁶

(Balo Godhi Dudha Chunge, Dudh Chungawat Vali Yu, Dhole Pay par dhayarta ro Vada
Daag Manaye ne.)

Here, a nurturing mother is nourishing her child through the act of breastfeeding, gently explaining that the precious milk she provides is a gift from her own body. She desired this pure connection and asked her child to always preserve it with bravery and strength.

Haalardā or lullaby also known as *lori*, which expresses a mother's deep affection for her child. Through a lullaby, a mother pours her love and sings to gently lull her child to sleep. Through the lullabies a mother weaves her own aspirations and dreams for the child's future. With each soothing verse, she blesses the child and offers heartfelt prayers for their long and prosperous life. Here is a captivating lullaby from the region of Kutch.

*Allah! Munjho Jandhudho jiye, Jandhudo jiye, Vangad Vado thiye*⁵⁷

The mother, while singing a lullaby, prayed for his long and good life. She believed that if she would feed the baby with butter, he would become strong. She also prayed for the long life of the maternal as well as paternal grandmother of the child. She sang that the maternal grandmother would feed the child with healthy food, while the paternal grandmother would look for a suitable bride for him.⁵⁸ The experience of giving birth to girls has been expressed in folk songs of many regions. In Marathi folk songs it shows the feelings of a mother, although the preference for a male child by prospective parents is undeniable. Folk songs indicate that when a daughter was born, she was not neglected or regarded with disdain. Although there was a recognition of the transformative journey that she would have to undergo and the distinct challenges she might encounter. It was a duty of the mother to prepare her child for the significant role she was to play and the expectations she was to fulfill. This can be discerned from this Marathi lore,

Dzondhalya parasa, jondhla kiti vadhasila turi?

⁵⁶ Singh, J. (1987). *Rajasthani Lok Geetonke Vivid Roop*. New Delhi: Binsar Publication.99

⁵⁷ Karani, D. (1973). *Kutch Vividhlaxi Lok Sahitya*.153

⁵⁸ Karani,D.(1973).*Kutch Vividhlaxi Lok Sahitya*.116

(How much more than Jondhla? will you grow oh *Tur, Abu* my daughter. more than a son she's loved by me)

The woman in the lore rejected the notion that a daughter was in any manner inferior to a son, going as far as to proclaim that her own daughter held a position of utmost significance in her life. Her daughter surpassed the value traditionally assigned to a son. This declaration challenged societal norms and highlighted a bond shared between mother and daughter.

Child-rearing in the urban setting began to change in the twentieth century. Although, this was not a universal feature and was happening only in a few elite households. Nonetheless, a lot of literature was written by women as to how children should be raised. For instance, in a book titled, *Susikshit Stree and Balkona Grahsikhano Uttam Adarsh* in 1919 by Prasangaauri Mukundram Mehta, the author in the preface says that though the world was changing at a faster pace, it was important to imbibe in children a sense of nationalism.

Historically, women have been the primary caretakers of the sick in the family. Hence their contributions in healthcare are noteworthy. This is expressed through the folk tales and folk songs of Western India. They have acted as midwives, given home remedies and even acted as spiritual healers. This knowledge has been passed from one generation to another. An example can be given of the goddess Sitala who held a prominent presence in folktales of Western India. The goddess was and is worshiped to protect against smallpox. Women still observe the vow of '*Sitala-satem*' to ensure the well-being and safeguarding of their children.⁶⁰ Women were responsible for inventing herbal medicines which would safeguard the lives of their loved ones. Unfortunately, it was their own health that they neglected and therefore the survival age for women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was much lower than that of men. Since women were not the bread winners therefore their death was not treated as a grave and devastating effect as that of the men were. Women's health was not the concern of either the state or society. Therefore, women had to take care of each other. They taught their daughters most of their remedies. They discovered natural medicines for conceiving and medication for pregnancy related problems. These have been discussed in articles such as *Garbhajivan*⁶¹,

⁵⁹ Bhagwat, A.R. Song 137.159

⁶⁰ Enthoven, R.E. and Jackson, A.M.T. (1989). Folklore of Gujarat. Gurgaon: Vintage Books.283

⁶¹ *Stree Bodh*. 1925. January.43

*Garbharaksha*⁶² and *Asha* written by women in the journal '*Stree Bodh*'.⁶³ Women in the twentieth century not only worked to help other women but also worked to help others. For instance, in 1911, Gujarat experienced a devastating famine, during which men, women, and children suffered from starvation and death. Many women such as Jamanabehn, Putlibai Sheth, Janakibai Bhatt, Kamalavati Bahen, Kashibai Sodha, and Vijalibahen Thakkar embarked on a journey to the Panchmahal district and villages in Saurashtra for three months. They reached out to the distressed individuals affected by the calamity, expressed their concerns and prepared written documents. The experience of Jamnabehn are documented in '*Jamnabehn Dukando Maro Anubhav*' (experience of Jamnabehn during famine)⁶⁴

Besides these women also were nurturers and took care of what their family ate. In '*Visami Sadi Nu Pakashastra*' Sumanti Patel Nagardas wrote a chapter on what to eat.⁶⁵ According to her, food is interconnected with the elements present in our body. Our body was composed of Earth, Water, Air, Fire, and Ether, and consuming food that aligned with these elements supported the functioning and well-being of our body. Different foods provided the necessary nutrients and elements such as calcium, nitrogen, fats, sugars, starch, minerals, and essential acids. For instance, the body was composed of muscles and tissues, and their cells were generally similar. In their composition, certain elements such as calcium and nitrogen played a significant role. Foods like milk, pistachios, peanuts, lentils, chickpeas, and dairy products were rich in these elements. They contributed to the overall well-being of the body.

Women in the various books and articles spoke of various concepts that are relevant even today. For instance, fat consumption was considered important by women. This has been accepted by many nutritionists and doctors today. Women believed that the fat served the purpose of insulation and was generated from various sources such as *ghee*, oils, and butter. It provides strength and protection to the body. Sugars, jaggery, and sugarcane were also recommended by women which were known to provide warmth to the body. They were to help in maintaining the body's temperature when exposed to cold water or during winters. Additionally, women also recommended foods that were rich in starch or carbohydrates, such as wheat, pearl millet, rice, corn, sorghum, potatoes, and yams, were also considered important. They were believed to provide energy to the body. Women in their kitchen would keep fresh vegetables, fruits, and

⁶² Ibid.1925.January.43

⁶³ Ibid.1947.April.100

⁶⁴ *Sundari Subodh*. December 1912 to March 1913.

⁶⁵ Nagardas, P.S. (1948). *Visami Sadinu Pakashastra*.Gujarat Vidyapith Granthalaya.Ahmedabad.17-18

greens as they were known to contain minerals. They were vital for the body's well-being. These included items like spinach, *bajra*, okra, corn, maize, sorghum, and sweet potatoes. Foods rich in minerals were essential for various bodily functions. Lastly, fresh herbs, spices, and condiments were recommended to provide the body with essential acids. They played a crucial role in digestion and overall health. Mint, coriander, salt, ginger, and magnesium were the examples of such substances.

Women of the times also recommended a balanced diet in which a person was advised to consume five teaspoons of oil, three teaspoons of *ghee*, three teaspoons of sugar or jaggery, and grains like wheat and *bajra*. Pulses also were recommended to be consumed in the quantity of seven teaspoons. This was the recommended guideline for a balanced diet. Further women also discussed the meals for children.⁶⁶ As a head of the household it became a woman's responsibility to ensure that the family was safe from both internal as well external exigencies. This was her domain, her private space and therefore a lot of attention was paid on health and hygiene.

For ordinary women hygiene was one of the important concerns. They associate hygiene with the kitchen. One Sumanti Nagardas talks about kitchen and hygiene in her book '*Visami Sadinu Pakshashtra*'.⁶⁷ She believed that it was important to keep the kitchen clean and maintain hygiene while handling different ingredients such as vegetables, lentils, spices, and utensils. Regular cleaning and proper storage of food items like grains, lentils, and spices was necessary to ensure their freshness and prevent spoilage. Paying attention to food handling practices on a daily basis was crucial. It was advisable to store grains properly in airtight containers, separate it from spices or strong-smelling ingredients. Taking care of these aspects helped to maintain the quality of the food that was consumed. Similarly, when cooking leafy vegetables, it was crucial to give them proper attention. It was important to remove any wilted or damaged leaves before cooking and then they were to be washed thoroughly. Some leafy vegetables required additional steps such as blanching or boiling them to ensure they were cooked properly. Sumanti Nagardas also shared knowledge on how to wash spices and store them. This is something that we still see in the kitchens of our households. Women paid attention and took the time out to sort and remove impurities from food items. This made a significant difference to their taste and quality. It was advised that any stones or foreign particles had to be removed

⁶⁶ Nagardas, P.S. (1948). *Visami Sadi Nu Pakashastra*. Gujarat Vidyapith Granthalaya. Ahmedabad. 18-19

⁶⁷ Nagardas, P.S. (1948). 42-26

from grains and lentils before cooking them. Additionally, women also wrote about milk products and suggested methods to handle them. They recommended that milk should not be heated excessively, especially during the morning hours, as it could lead to curdling or spoilage. Keep milk stored properly in a cool place to maintain its freshness. Using spoilt or spoiled milk can be harmful to health.

Besides physical health there were a few articles which focused on mental health. Although not unlike today's medical issues, it talked about depression and emphasised on the importance of cleanliness of body and mind. For instance, in '*Sadguni Hemantkumari*' which was written by Krishnagauri Raval in 1899, body and mind cleanliness was discussed in greater detail.⁶⁸

An article titled as '*Ghar Gatu Rasoi*'⁶⁹ an anonymous writer talked about the main meal in Parsi-Muslim households. Soup was considered as the main meal of the day and night. According to the writer, soup holds great significance. As soup was not just about satisfying hunger but also about experiencing the unique flavors and special delights that come with it. Unlike the elaborate meals prepared in countries like France and Italy, it was not about elaborate dishes or hidden delicacies. It was about simple yet delicious food, a little extra meat, a touch of spices, and warm milk or butter. Heated on a stove and enjoyed by children to nourish them, for the elderly to maintain their health, and for those who have lost their appetite to stimulate their hunger. The writer in the article provided recipes to make two different types of soup such as Vegetable soup and Onion soup.

Books were written by women on cooking such as '*Pakshastra*' was a book written by Lalitagauri Shamrao and Vimalgauri Maganlal.⁷⁰ Another book titled as '*Rambhanu Rasoighar*' was also written by Sumati Patel Nagardas. The book covers various aspects of cooking, including recipes for vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes, as well as separate sections for Hindu, Muslim, and Parsi cuisines. It provides detailed instructions and easy-to-follow steps for preparing a wide range of delectable dishes. This book was appreciated by the Maharanis, Hindu, Muslim and Parsi women.⁷¹ In her another book titled as '*Visami Sadinu Pakshastra*' in 1948 in this she talks about various aspect of cooking such as; what should we

⁶⁸ Raval, K. (1899). *Sadguni Hemantkumari*.⁵¹

⁶⁹ *Stree Bodh*. January 1914.28

⁷⁰ *Stree Bodh*. January.1925.43

⁷¹ Nagardas, P.S. (1948). *Visami Sadinu Pakshastra*'. Gujarat Vidyapith Granthalaya. Ahmedabad.3-4

eat; How to use Chulha, Sigdi and Stove; How to use Cooker, How to arrange Kitchen, How to eat properly, Importance of Pakshastra, usage of various masala, how to make different kind of Chatni, how to make different kind of raita, how to make different kind of kachumbhar, how to make different kind of how to make different kind of papad, papdi, how to make different kind of murabba, athana, how to make different kind of shak, how to make different kind of kadhi, how to make different kind of kathod dal, how to make different kind of bhaji, how to make different kind of farsan, how to make different kind of misthan, how to make different kind of pak, mada manso mate rasoi, how to make different kind of farali and how to make different kind of sharbat.⁷²

Another book which was written by women on cooking was '*Pakshastra Athava Pakvananpothi*' in the year 1923 by Lalitagauri Bhamrao and Vimalgauri Maganlal. According to them, the subject of proper diet is important for human beings as it provides nourishment to the body. It is essential for sustaining life. This subject has many aspects to consider. It is necessary to always maintain discipline in eating and drinking. Food should be consumed according to the country's climate and seasons. Consuming food and drink inappropriately can lead to three types of imbalances in the body. If these three imbalances remain in equilibrium, the body remains healthy and can prevent various diseases. Moreover, the timing and arrangement of meals have a significant impact. Changes in seasons also lead to changes in nature. Different individuals have different natural preferences for food preparation. It is important to have a balanced and natural desire for the food we consume. Daily intake of various types of food enhances the natural flavors and tastes.⁷³

The kitchen was considered to be the inner sanctum of a woman. This was her domain and the men if ever entered except as Maharaj (cook) were lost. Kitchen over the period of time became the workshop of women. They developed new methods to cook, stock and preserve food. If the income of the household was more the kitchen would be bigger but even if it was just sufficient enough women would budget everything out and serve a hot, sumptuous meal. In the kitchen itself they found herbs and its combinations as a cure for any illness. As a result, women's respect and prestige was related to the well-functioning of the kitchen. According to them, a well-maintained kitchen was a matter of pride for the entire family. Therefore, it was essential to teach cooking skills to daughters from an early age so that they would become proficient

⁷² Nagardas, P.S. (1948).4

⁷³ Bhamrao, L. & Maganlal, V. (1923). *Pakshastra Athava Pakvananpothi*. Gujarat Vidyapith Granthalaya. Mumbai.1

and capable in running a household. In the kitchen, attention was paid to cleaning and organizing. Laziness during cooking was not acceptable. It was believed that eating good and well-prepared food led to good digestion. Women also worked out a combination of diverse grains which they believed contributed to the development of various body tissues. Therefore, special attention was paid to selecting ingredients that were not only nutritious but also appealing. Women also felt that the food should be garnished well. It should not only taste good but also look good. There followed the saying that what pleases the eye pleases the mind. If the food didn't appear appetizing, it didn't satisfy the appetite. Women also believed that the kitchen was to be kept clean and well-organized. It was to be free from waste, and cleanliness should be maintained at all points of time. Women taught their daughters to take care to prevent any contamination.⁷⁴ Number of books and articles were written about 'the kitchen' and recipes. For instance, subjects such as Paksanskar, taught women how to test the utility of substance which are important for house, diet, how to make rice in various ways, how to make different type of sweet rice, roti, shak-bhaji, and sweet dishes such as shira, jalebi, barfi, ladu, peda, kheer.

Ordinary women's life was spent in managing the composite elements of private space. This was true for women coming from all social backgrounds whether high class or low class, high caste or lower castes. This mostly left women with little time to think about larger public spaces. The public space for women was not the battlefield but preparing their children and husband for battles. They were ones who perpetrated the notion of honor and tradition amongst the family at least till the mid nineteenth century. There were no battles or warfare after that and therefore women became focused on self.

SECTION-4: HONOR, TRADITION AND SELF

Women have been associated with honor whether their own, their community or their family. They were known to have given their lives for the sake of this honor. The biggest example can be seen of women committing *Sati* or some form of suicides for the sake of this honor. There are several examples of women committing *Sati* in Western India. The custom of practicing *Sati* was prevalent in the region of Kutch. Unfortunately, it was sometimes glorified and justified through various folk sayings. *Sati* Paniya of Kathiawar was mentioned in the '*Stree*

⁷⁴ Bhamrao, L. & Maganlal,V. (1923). *Pakshastra Athava Pakvananpothi*. Gujarat Vidyapith Granthalaya.Mumbai.2

Bodh' magazine.⁷⁵ The tales, songs and acts of bravado celebrated the practice of These sayings, attempted to provide rationalizations for this horrendous act and perpetuated harmful beliefs and traditions. As per this folk saying:

*jo satiyu kanthe na chadhe, badjabari thi sati chita ca chadhe.*⁷⁶

(One becomes *Sati* on her own will, nobody forces her to become so)

This proverb tries to justify the practice of *Sati*, as women cannot be forced to jump into the pyre of her husband, it is the women who wanted to die along with their husbands. However, this sounded more like a forced exercise rather than a voluntary act of the woman. A Rajasthani proverb aptly explains it, *Sati mata thane kai dise* (Mother *Sati*, what do you see?)? The woman says, *Mharo pati mar gyo, me badu, mhara tabaria rulta dise* (My husband is dead, I am burning and I can see my children crying).⁷⁷ It clearly indicates that a woman with children fears that her children will not survive after her death.

Contrary to these there are accounts showcasing women voluntarily committing *Sati* for the sake of their community. For instance, *Jhuma Sati* was worshiped in the Barner district of modern day Rajasthan. *Jhuma* committed *Sati* to prevent the Baloochi atrocities in her village. It was not at her instance but at the instance of the village community that she was forced to commit *Sati*. As per the folktale the community elders approached the women of the village of Harwa which had a continuous tradition of women committing *Sati*. However, they were rebuffed and sent back as only a woman from their own village could perform the act. To inspire women from their own village they scattered the *mati* (soil) to inspire their women. They were able to identify a woman who was born in the Harwa village and was married into the Mitharu village. She was forced to commit *Sati* and this act was venerated as self-sacrificing. This resembled the burning of witches of the western world. Had *Jhuma Sati* wanted to sacrifice her life, she would have come forward much earlier. Also, the fact that she had two children who needed her attention and care. The fact that she was identified and almost hunted down makes this act less self-sacrificing and more forced.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ *Stree Bodh*.1925. January.39

⁷⁶ Karani, D. (1977). *Kutchi Kehvato*. 84

⁷⁷ Bharucha, R. (2003).150

⁷⁸ Ibid.138-139

There are many such tales of sacrifice of women that prevail in Western India. The tale of Goma *Sati* is that of a woman who sacrificed her life to protect the cows. There was a group of robbers who were stealing cows where they were caught by Goma, a Charan woman. She tried to stop them giving an ultimatum that if they didn't stop, she would cut off her own limbs as an act of self-sacrifice. Unfazed by what they perceive as an empty threat, the robbers dismissed it. Goma follows through on her pledge and takes her own life. Today, she is revered and worshiped as a *Sati* in the regions surrounding Beesoo, Sheo, Barmer, and Jaisalmer, not only by Hindus but also by Muslims. It is believed that *Goma Sati* possesses a remarkable power to prevent fires, which holds significant importance in the desert region. The huts in this area are constructed using various types of grass and mud, with dry thorny plants and creepers forming the surrounding hedges. The slightest spark could potentially engulf an entire village in flames. *Goma Sati's* presence provides a shield of protection against such fires. Interestingly, her influence extends beyond her place of worship.⁷⁹

Similar acts of women committing *Sati* has been recorded in the *paliyas* or hero stones. These can be found in regions of Rajasthan and Gujarat. These were mostly of those women who had sacrificed their lives for various reasons. The *paliya* of Manbai, a Brahmin woman, for instance is located in Nakhatrana taluka of Kutch. Manbai was known to have made a sacrifice for the honor of a Brahmin.⁸⁰ The *paliya* of Jivani from Kanmer was known to have sacrificed her life to protect the honor of her family.⁸¹ Rupadiba's case is known as the last recorded *Sati* in Kutch.⁸² It is impossible to quote the number of women who committed *Sati* in the name of honour. However, it is also important to note that women committing *Sati* was not as common as it was made out to be. The reason why there are records of *Sati* is because the common folk believed that they did something extraordinary and different in the public space.

A huge part of ordinary women's private space was upholding the traditions and passing it down to the next generations. Girls learnt various practices from their grandmothers, mothers and mother-in-laws. Everytime this cycle ends there is something new that gets added to it. A daughter-in-law was bound to bring some new tradition from her mother's home and blend it with her mother-in-law's traditions. This gave genesis to newer shades of customs and

⁷⁹ Bharucha, R. (2003).140

⁸⁰ Vaidya, M. (2013). Paliyas in Kutch: Glimpses of Women in the Past. *International Multidisciplinary Journal of Applied Research*. Vol. 1. Issue 4.July 4.1

⁸¹ Bhatti, N. (1975). *Paliyanu Sarwekshan ek Abhyas in Urminavarachana*.222

⁸² Vaidya, M. (2013) .2

traditions in a household. Western Indian societies experienced different cultural practices based on the location of the region. These got manifested through different mechanisms for instance, fasts and festivals or embroidery. Each festival was deeply rooted in the folk belief system, making them rustic and constant in nature. While their religious importance was not limited to any specific gender, the songs associated with these festivals provide a glimpse into the female psyche and women's experiences across various aspects of life. For instance, during the festival of Holi, the songs sung by women symbolically celebrate the abundance. They depict the richness and warmth of interpersonal relationships. The *Dhamal* and *Rasiya* group of songs, accompanied by the rhythmic beats of instruments like *Chang* and *Dhaf* (membranophone musical instruments), infuse a romantic fervor into the Holi festival. The folk songs sung festivals reflect the cultural and emotional aspects of the celebrations. They capture the essence of these occasions, offering insights into the female perspective and their perceptions of life.

Gauri ra badan pe kun maari pichkari, moy batao.

*Chadta jovan pe kun maari pichkari? Moy batao*⁸³

(Who dared to spray *Gauri's* (beloved) body with a water gun? Pray, reveal the culprit who playfully targeted the blossoming youth with such a watery assault.)

However, amongst the joyous celebrations, folk songs give out a hidden message or a desire. For instance, the following verse showcases an aspiration of the mother to find a son-in-law like Krishna.

Baaya Pujan Poojasyaa Ke Kaae Var Maang Rahi,

*Main to Sasu Jasoda, ek Kisan Var Maang Rahi*⁸⁴

(Engaged in the ritual of left-hand worship, what boon do you seek? As for me, I desire a son-in-law akin to Krishna, a skilled and nurturing farmer.)

Women were often perceived to be the ones to bear the burden of social norms. They were expected to pass it down to the next generation so that the culture and rituals could be reproduced. As a result, they were known to engage in religious practices, observe austerities, and participate in fasting. -Within the realm of folk songs, there are depictions of women's

⁸³ Menaria, L.P. (1954). *Rajasthani Lokgeet*. Chinmay Prakashan. Jaipur. 48

⁸⁴ Thakur, R. (1938). et al. *Rajasthan ke Lokgeet*. Calcutta: Rajasthan Research Society. Lokgeet 44

beliefs in various supernatural phenomena such as demons, ghosts, tantra-mantra (enchantments), omens, dreams, intuitions, and superstitions. One such folk song expresses women's fears of demonic supernatural powers, reflecting their deep-seated anxieties and concerns. Through the medium of song, these fears are given a voice, allowing women to share and express their apprehensions regarding the unseen forces that they believe can impact their lives. Such songs served as a way for women to navigate and understand the complexities of the supernatural realm, acknowledging the existence of these powers and seeking protection from them. The portrayal of these beliefs in folk songs sheds light on their intricate relationship with the mystical and unseen aspects of life. These songs serve as a means for women to communicate their fears, seek solace, and navigate the complexities of the supernatural world within their cultural and social context.

Doy-doy Kaniya Ler Bhanwarji Ger Naachba Chalya,

Ghara Thari Parniyodi Oolambiya Jhara re Dhere Naach,

*Daakaniya Dakray re Dhere Naach*⁸⁵

(The husband revels in the joyous festivities, dancing with exuberance. However, the wife carries a heavy worry within her, fearing that the ogress may target her handsome husband as a victim of her malevolence.)

These fears have a psychological basis. In earlier times, when the origins of various diseases and ailments were not understood by the general population, they attributed them to supernatural forces. As a result, there was a strong belief in the need to appease and placate these powers through rituals, worship, and sacrifices. The songs associated with these beliefs serve to reinforce the common folk notion that illnesses, diseases, and natural disasters stem from divine displeasure, and people seek to alleviate them through acts of worship.

In the traditional folk dance of Gujarat called *Garba*, women from various castes, classes, and regions came together, donning attire that represents their respective backgrounds. Originally associated with Navatri harvest rituals dedicated to the Hindu goddess *Amba*, the *Garba* derives its name from the Sanskrit word "*Garbha*," meaning "womb." During the dance, women form circles around a lamp placed inside an earthen pitcher known as a *Garbi*. This pitcher symbolizes the mother goddess's womb, while the flame represents the seed of creation. Today,

⁸⁵ Singh, J. (1988). *Rajasthan ke Tyohar Geet*. Delhi: Ankur Prakashan. Geet 100

garba dances continue to be performed in certain regions. Girls carry the *Garbi* on their heads, housed within a decorated wooden structure called a *Mandavi*, as they visit different houses. At each home, they place down the *Mandavi* and encircle it while singing *garba* songs accompanied by clapping hands or drumming on dholak drums. Although the *garba* style exhibits subtle variations influenced by regional, tribal, caste, and individual preferences, it remains highly popular in mainstream practice.⁸⁶ For instance, during *Garba* women sing the song in a chorus,

*Where do we have to go? / Where are our Limits? / Come on sisters. / What is our past? /
What are our dreams for the future? / Where does our destiny lie? ...Move with self-
confidence. Let's move...*⁸⁷

During the Navratri festival in Gir, the dairy farmers engaged in the joyous celebration of folk songs. In the villages, they performed the *garba* dance, dedicated to the mother goddess. The women adorned themselves with colorful bangles and engaged in festive decorations made of paper.⁸⁸

The profound faith in the miraculous deeds of *lok devtas* (folk deities) such as *Pabuji*, *Gogaji*, *Panraji*, *Tejaji*, *Ramdevji*, *Jambhoji*, *Karnimata*, *Jeevanmat*, and others has been extensively expressed through folk songs. These deities, throughout their existence, dedicated themselves to the welfare of the public, sacrificed their lives for the emancipation of the poor and marginalized, and protected wildlife, especially cows. The songs dedicated to these local deities portray them as guardians of life who alleviate the hardships faced by people in challenging ecological environments. They bring rain, foster greenery, and ensure the livelihood of the common folk. Women hold a strong belief that whenever they encounter any difficulties, the folk deities will come to their aid.

Ubhi Gujarki de che olambha, Mhara rewar mine kariyo ujar,

Baadh batuni jhadi todh gaya, Le gaya amarya bok,

⁸⁶ Garlough, C.L. (2008). On the Political Uses of Folklore: Performance and Grassroots Feminist Activism in India. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 121(480), 167–191.185

⁸⁷ Sharma, S. (2018). Folklore Through Popular Media – The Representation of the ‘Subaltern.’ *Indian Literature*, 62(4 (306)), 214–219.216

⁸⁸ Yagnik, H. *Lokvidhya Vigyan*. I edition.29-30

*Ji Bheru aavo kyuni kai ghada padhrahya.*⁸⁹

The above verse is a complaint from the Gurjar community named Gujri who lamented the loss of her cattle. Gujri expresses her frustration and calls upon the folk deity Bheruji for assistance, questioning the delay in his arrival. The song reflects the hardships faced by rural communities, highlighting the significance of their livestock and the belief in divine intervention during times of trouble.

In the ever-changing circumstances of life, women often turn to religious vows to fulfill their wishes more readily than men. They believed that the fasts made them more powerful and led to desired results. *Vrats* or (fast) thus as religious observances that were and still are practiced exclusively by women. These were done for fulfillment of their wishes such as happy married life, birth of a son, domestic peace. Some examples of such vows are *Gangigor or Ganagor*, *Vat-Savitri*, *Molakat*, *Goutrat*, *Alavana or Alunda*, *Eva-vrat*, *Tidsi-vrat*, *Uma Masheshvar-vrat*, and *Surya-vrat*.⁹⁰

Vat Savitri fast (*Vrat*) was and is practiced by women of Western India. There is a folk tale related with this *vrat*. In *Puranas* there was a prince named Satyawar who tragically died from a snake bite under the *Vad* or *Vat* tree. His devoted and virtuous wife, Savitri, daughter of King *Ashupati*, pleaded with *Yama*, the God of death, and miraculously obtained the life of her husband. In gratitude for this extraordinary feat, Savitri started a tradition of worshipping the *Vad* tree, believing that it would ensure the longevity of their husbands.⁹¹ Each fast that women do often connects them to the environment that they live in. For instance, in the aforementioned fasting, women performed a ritual of circumambulating either the *tulsi* plant or a banyan tree. During each turn, they carefully would wind a fine cotton thread around the plant or tree. Upon completing the final turn, they offer red *sindur* (a type of vermilion) and rice by sprinkling it over the tree. Additionally, they place a betel nut and a coin, such as a penny or a half-anna pence, as an offering before the plant or tree. It was believed that mother nature would keep their husband safe.⁹²

⁸⁹ Chundawat, R.L.K. (1985). *Rajasthan ke Sanskritik Lokgeet*. Jaipur: Panchsheel Printers.Lokgeet.6

⁹⁰ Desai, K.D & Enthoven, R.E. (1989). *Folk Lore Notes: Folklore of Gujarat* (Vol. 1). Asian Educational Services. Mr. N.M. Dave, Sanka.48

⁹¹ Enthoven, R. E. (1924). *The Folklore of Bombay*. Clarendon Press.120

⁹² Enthoven, R. E. (1989). *Folk Lore Notes: Folklore of Gujarat* (Vol. 1).12

The *Molakat-vrat* was observed in Gujarat by unmarried girls in the month of *Ashadha*.⁹³ Those women who practiced this were believed to bless women with male offspring and ensure longevity for their husbands. Young girls sow seven varieties of grains in an earthen pot on the first day. With devotion and care, they water the seeds daily, singing and praying for their growth. Anticipation fills the air as the seedlings emerge, usually within five days, bringing joy and inspiring prayers of gratitude. During this period, the girls observed a special practice of eating only once in the evening.⁹⁴ Similarly, the *Eva-vrat*, also known as *Jiva-vrat*, observed in Western India which aimed to secure eternal protection against widowhood. This vow was observed on the last day of *Ashadha*, and it required fasting until the evening. The only permissible food during this time was prepared from wheat, consumed at night.⁹⁵

In Western India, women believed that making a vow or *vrat* to the sun could also cure illnesses. This can be observed from a folk tale related with a Rajput woman from *Gomata* in Gondal and a Brahman from Rajkot found a cure for their white leprosy through the power of vows made in reverence to the sun.⁹⁶ The most common desire for women was that a son be born to them. When this desire was fulfilled, as a token of gratitude the child was often named after the sun, such as *Suraj-Ram*, *Bhauu-Shankar*, *Ravi-Shankar*, or *Adit-Ram*. Due to this at the temple of *Mandavraj* in Muli district of Kathiawar Gujarat, it was customary to give cradles as gifts, particularly indicating the fulfillment of the desires of barren women who had made vows to the deity for a son. These toy-cradles symbolize the fulfillment of their vows, and they are offered to the sun as a token of gratitude. In the case of wealthy donors, these cradles were crafted from precious metals. Moreover, *Tili Vrat* was observed by unmarried women in Western India in the tribute of Sun for attaining freedom from widowhood forever (*Akhand Saubhagyavati*).⁹⁷

Chaturmas vrat, which was a vow taken during the monsoon season, women followed a specific ritual. This vow lasts from the eleventh day of the bright half of *Ashadha* (the ninth month) to the eleventh day of the bright half of *Kartik* (the first month). To begin, they

⁹³ Ashadha, also known as Aashaadha or Adi, is a significant month within the Hindu calendar. It aligns with the period of June and July in the Gregorian calendar, when the monsoon starts in India.

⁹⁴ *Asian Folklore Studies*. Volume 37. Nanzan University. 113

⁹⁵ Enthoven, R. E. (1989). 48

⁹⁶ Enthoven, R. E. (1924). 29

⁹⁷ Enthoven, R. E. (1989). 7

worshipped the object or deity around which they took turns. *Panchamrit*, a mixture of milk, curds, sugar, *ghee*, and honey, that was offered during this worship. The number of turns taken might be five, seven, twenty-one, or one hundred eight, depending on their preference. During each turn, a fine cotton thread was intricately entwined while various offerings such as *penda* (a sweet), *hantasa* (a type of betel leaf), almond, coconut, fig, or other fruits were placed before the image, or the object being circumambulated. It should be noted that these offerings were claimed by the supervising priest who oversees the ceremony. When circumambulating a sacred tree, water was poured out at the base of the tree at each turn as an act of reverence.⁹⁸

દડવેથી રાણી રાંદલ ડડયા, ઊતર્યા છે વડલા હેઠે, રજાદે,

અખંડ એવાતા વહુનો ચૂલો રે, અખંડ વીરાજીને મોજ્ય રજાદે⁹⁹

The songs of Randal have also captured the attention of the people. They hold significance in the beliefs of the community. In the songs of Randal, there is often praise for the attainment of a son. After marriage, the tradition of worshiping Randal was prevalent in many castes. During Randal's festival, these songs were sung, which are a form of folk songs from our cultural heritage. These songs have been passed down through generations in our household life. Because these songs contribute to the growth of the community or the prosperity of the lineage, people have embraced the worship and reverence of Randal *Mata*. Even after marriage, the rituals of worship, offerings, installation, and receiving blessings from Randal's *prasad* or the practice of presenting gifts to unmarried girls and the tradition of tying Randal's thread hold great importance, as noted by Prabhshankar Teraiya. Randal is considered to be the wife of the Sun and a bestower of offspring. Randal was like a sister to men and did not hold any special significance for them. The songs of Randal were exclusively sung by women. Only the sons, both elder and younger, of the Gir community perform the ritual of Randal's thread before and

⁹⁸ Enthoven, R. E. (1989). 11-12

⁹⁹ Parmar, B.K. (1979). *Gujarati Lokgito*. Sahitya Akademi. 32

after marriage.¹⁰⁰ The worship of the goddess Randal was also popular among women in Gujarat.

With the changing times, people began to respond to the *vrat* and its practices as superstitious. These customs were called artificial and were believed to have been imposed by a patriarchal society. However, when women tried to defend it they were referred to as "tradition-bound" and faced backlash. Many articles were written on the subject, for instance, in an article of '*Stree Hitopadesh*' titled "Hindu Women's Dance" highlighted the absurdity of such customs. This marked an indication of changing times. Women were urged not to perform rituals which did not sound rational. Thus, the elite groups sang the same tune as their colonial masters who believed the traditional practices as absurd. The focus was now on self. Women were encouraged to undertake formal education and were trained to become rational, thinking individuals. They were encouraged to become economically independent and most importantly to join the national movement. Fortunately, or unfortunately, this had very little impact on a large percentage of women in Western India. Women joined the national movement but on their own terms. Mahatma Gandhi saw strength in traditional practice and used it to encourage women to participate in the national movement. In the twentieth century, women participated overwhelmingly in the Gandhian mass movement.

Despite the resistance, the focus of ordinary women eventually shifted on to 'self'. The exhibitions of women's skills were held in Ahmedabad (1907) and Bharuch (1909) which encouraged women to become economically independent. In an exhibition in Ahmedabad, 125 women from Saurashtra showcased 505 samples of embroidery, sewing, and art.¹⁰¹

'*Stree Bodh*' magazine featured an advertisement for a new book on *Guthankala*, a form of knitting or double-stitched needlework. The book was authored by Kharshodbai Pestanji Navroji Doctor. The advertisement highlighted the continuous demand for such a book, particularly from women, and emphasized its importance and usefulness to them. This innovative book presented a unique style and content, showcasing the knitting and double-stitching processes through a variety of illustrated examples. It included instructions for creating various items such as *Galicha*, Necktie, Socks, *Peti*, Cap, *Galeband*, Borders, Money purses, Collars, and *Doeli*, offering women a valuable resource for expanding their knitting

¹⁰⁰ Parmar. K. (1979). *Gujarati Lokgeet*.32

¹⁰¹ *Sundari Subodh*. June.1910

skills and exploring new designs..¹⁰²In one of the articles published in *Stree Bodh*, titled "*Balkani Topi*," an anonymous author shared a detailed guide on knitting a woolen cap for a four-year-old baby. The article provided a comprehensive explanation of the entire knitting process, offering step-by-step instructions for creating the cap.¹⁰³

CONCLUSION

By Historicizing the lives of women, myriad issues that were considered important for them in their daily lives can be seen. From matters of love and lust to the complexities of marriage, ordinary women navigate a diverse range of emotions and challenges in their life. The concept of beauty for a woman was an abstract beauty that does not lie in the outer world or physical beauty but actually which lies in the values and the virtues which they see in themselves.

For ordinary women, family, health and the kitchen hold immense importance as they play crucial roles in their daily lives. The health and well-being of the family members were of utmost concern for women. They were seen as taking on the responsibility of nurturing and caring for their loved ones. Whether it's preparing nutritious meals, ensuring proper hygiene, or seeking medical attention when needed, women played a central role in safeguarding the health of their family members. On the other hand, the kitchen is the heart of the home, and for women, it is a space where they showcase their culinary skills and creativity. Preparing meals for the family was not only a daily necessity but also an opportunity for women to express their love and care through food. They carefully plan and manage the kitchen and hygiene to ensure that the family receives balanced and wholesome meals. These ordinary women were like a thread who carried forward the culture of the society by practicing various customs which held their own importance in the world whether private or public.

¹⁰² *Stree Bodh*.January 1915.3

¹⁰³ *Stree Bodh*.January.1914.1