

CHAPTER-6

CONCLUSION

The present study aims to provide a comprehensive and representative history of women in western India, going beyond traditional narratives and exploring the diverse experiences that have shaped their lives. This research delves into not only factual details but also the often-overlooked experiences of women that hold historical significance. Various sources, including newspapers, magazines, government records, and literary writings, shed light on the multifaceted roles women have played throughout history.

Through this work it can be said that women in Western India have been seen as active participants in various spheres, making significant contributions in politics, social reform, and culture. This work shed light on women's presence not only as wives, and daughters but also as their roles as revolutionaries and pioneers. As they showcased their agency and determination in driving change. Additionally, women's diverse roles in society during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be seen throughout the research work. Women were visible not only in the private spaces but also in the public spaces. Their presence has been instrumental in shaping the Western Indian region's history and cultural fabric.

During the Nineteenth century through the agency of the English 'Reformer Male' focused on issues that they perceived as problems at their respective levels. Their primarily addressed issues like *Sati* and female infanticide. During nineteenth-century English 'Reformer Men', through laws and legislation tried to reform at their level. Although they were partly successful. As, with the end of the English East India Company's administration in 1858, the focus on these issues diminished as the British refrained from interfering in Indian social customs, leaving the responsibility to Indian 'Reformer Men.' However, the representation of women's voices in these discussions was largely absent, limiting a comprehensive understanding of the issues and hindering inclusive reforms.

In the same period Indian 'Reformer Men' had a broader scope of concerns. They delved into topics such as child marriage, problems with widow remarriage, and various social stigmas attached to women. Their attention was mainly directed towards women from the middle and upper classes, and they often overlooked the plight of lower-class women who might have enjoyed a relatively freer status. The efforts of Indian reformer men such as Karsandas Mulji, Narmad, Durgaram Mehtaji, Behramji Malabari, and many others, in addressing women's

issues, were driven by personal experiences and a dedication to bring about positive changes in society. Despite differences in opinions regarding widow remarriage, these reformers played crucial roles in initiating dialogues and advocating for women's rights, much like their English counterparts. The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act of 1856 aimed to provide legal safeguards for widows, but societal norms posed challenges to its acceptance. Indian reformer men proactively worked to create awareness and promote wider acceptance of the law, challenging rigid customs and advocating for widow remarriage.

During this time women were also seen played essential roles in driving the cause of widow remarriage forward. Such as their conversation with their fellow women or their letter depicting their emotions regarding widow remarriage. Their determination and advocacy compelled Indian reformer men to take more assertive steps, leading to significant changes in societal attitudes and practices surrounding widowhood and remarriage.

While Narmad's writings may reflect the prevailing societal biases of his time, they serve as crucial records in reinstating women's presence in historical narratives. The dialogue between Narmad and Dahigauri highlights women's intellectual prowess and challenges the notion of women being mere subordinates. Despite facing social ostracism, social reformers found support from a few women in their lives, such as Ratnabai, who played pivotal roles in their endeavors. Her experiences as a child widow and her support to Dayaram exemplify the importance of women's contributions to social reform movements.

The nineteenth century can be stated as a transition period in which women were negotiating their spaces with men regarding various issues. In this 'Reformer Men' were the agencies that carried forward the work of reforming the society. Overall, the collective efforts of both men and women played a crucial role in shaping the course of history.

In the nineteenth-century women's account showcased that women often struggled to have their own identity or their own history in the public and private spaces. As it can be seen in their Autobiographies, Biographies or in their writings. During this period, the emergence of women's writings and their life experiences started to shed light on the unique challenges and contributions of women in society.

Women's recognition and acceptance in public spaces on the same level as their male counterparts were crucial for achieving gender equality in the 19th century. In a society dominated by patriarchal norms, women's voices and perspectives were often silenced or dismissed. Advocating for women's presence in public spaces became essential to challenge

the prevailing gender norms and to assert women's agency and equal rights. This can be seen in the account of many extraordinary women such as Krushnagauri Raval, Vidyagauri Mehta, Sharda Mehta, Jamnabai Pandita, Lakshmibai, Harkunwar Sethani.

These extraordinary women did have separate social and historical experiences compared to those highlighted by traditional historical schools of thought. Their account shows that women's lives were deeply intertwined with family and domestic responsibilities, but they also had multifaceted roles beyond their households. Their narrative revealed their struggles, aspirations, and contributions to various aspects of society.

In the case of ordinary women's writing in the 19th century, women's concerns encompassed both their livelihoods and their roles as caretakers of their families. They also wrote about economic challenges, especially if they were widowed or single, and were expected to provide for their families while also fulfilling domestic responsibilities.

Writings by women on healthcare was of utmost importance in the 19th century, as they faced various health challenges throughout their lives, including childbirth, maternal health, and general well-being. These issues were some things which were overlooked by men; hence it was these women who took the step to come forward and discussed them. They also highlighted that access to healthcare was often limited, particularly for women in rural or marginalized communities. Hence to improve women's access to healthcare became a significant aspect of their life during that period. For instance, an account of Dr. Motiben Kapadia provides many valuable insights into the subject.

Women in the 19th century were both objects and subjects with agency. They were often objectified, defined by societal norms and expectations, and faced constraints imposed by the patriarchal society. Yet, women also exhibited agency by expressing their concerns and experiences through their writings in magazines such as *Stri Mitra* and *Stri Bodh*. Which depicted their struggle in various stage of their life or the issues which they considered to be important for them. Through this they played pivotal roles in advocating for social reforms, education, and women's rights, contributing to the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Overall, the nineteenth century was shaped by a different historical discourse through the agency of women. Which was done in This research work by encompassing the women's experiences through their writings and life stories. This new perspective challenged conventional historical narratives and highlighted the vital role of women in shaping women's

history. Moreover, women were not merely passive objects but also active subjects with agency, expressing their concerns and experiences. Acknowledging this agency played a crucial role in breaking the stereotypes that often-limited women's roles and potential in society. By recognizing their agency, they challenged traditional norms and started to participate in public spaces.

By the twentieth century, women in India began asserting themselves and carving out their own public spaces. These women were from diverse backgrounds, and they hailed from various social strata, including royal families, upper castes, and middle-class. Before the Gandhian era, women such as Pandita Ramabai, Vidyagauri Nilkant, and Shardaben Mehta joined political organizations like the Indian National Congress (INC) and worked alongside male leaders to advance the cause of freedom. Despite the challenges and societal barriers, they faced, women in the pre-Gandhian era of India's freedom movement demonstrated immense courage, resilience, and determination. Their courage, resilience, and determination in the pre-Gandhian era laid the foundation for greater women's participation in subsequent stages of the freedom struggle, positioning them as leaders, organizers, writers, and reformers. This period marked a significant shift in recognizing and appreciating women's contributions to the nation-building process. came to the public spaces during this period.

During the Freedom Movement, women like Kasturba Gandhi, Ansuyaben, Avantikabai, Goshiben, Vidyagauri Shardaben, Induamti Chimanlal and many more played essential roles in inspiring and mobilizing rural women. *Satyagraha* technique hinged on three essential qualities: self-sacrifice, non-violence, and sincerity, all of which were seen in the women in abundance. Women became natural carriers of these virtues. Further, Women utilized their leisure time to promote the nationalist agenda and raised consciousness among their fellow women.

Avantikabai, Goshiben Captain, Perinben Captain, Induamti Chimanlal gave their active participation in public spaces. They stood side by side with men in the freedom struggle. It marked a significant shift in the recognition and appreciation of women's contributions to the nation-building process. Outside the influence of greater political leaders, women on their own began to join together and participate in the non-freedom struggles as well. They not only inspired other women to join the struggle, but they also inspired Gandhi.

In between the freedom struggle, women's participation in the Bardoli movement, Mulshi *Satyagraha* was particularly transformative, establishing a cadre of women leaders and

volunteers. During this period lower-class women also agitated and participated in public spaces. Through this, they contributed significantly to social and political changes. These movements united women from diverse social backgrounds, fostering a more inclusive and cohesive struggle for justice and empowerment.

Women's participation in public affairs during this period was not perceived as a direct violation of traditional gender roles; rather, it represented an opportunity to challenge and reshape the rigid societal norms that confined women's lives. Acting as guardians of the nation, women found empowerment in the public sphere, where they could assert their agency, voice their concerns, and actively contribute to social and political transformations. A new generation of women emerged, characterized by heightened articulation, political awareness, and a strong consciousness of their rights. These women boldly expressed their thoughts and opinions, showing a deeper understanding of political issues and a firm belief in their entitlement to equality and fundamental rights. Their active engagement in public life marked a significant shift, paving the way for greater gender equality and societal progress.

Between 1890 and 1950, there was a gradual increase in the number of women stepping into public spaces and actively participating in various spheres. In early 1890 to 1910, prominent figures like Shardaben Mehta, Vidyagauri Nilkanth, Pandita Ramabai, Marry Carpenter, A.V Joshi Gangabai, and Parwati Bapat emerged as influential voices. These women mostly hailed from upper-class families. The following decade from 1910 to 1920 witnessed the entry of Yashodabai, Avantikabai, Anandibai, Lakshmibai, Anasuya Sarabhai, Indumati Chimnalal, Ramabai, Goshiben Captain, and Kantaben Mehta, who represented both the upper and middle-class families.

The period from 1920 to 1930 saw a significant upsurge in women's active participation in the freedom struggle. Women from diverse backgrounds, spanning different classes and castes, were increasingly joining the movement for India's independence. By the 1940s, the number of women actively involved in the freedom struggle had grown exponentially. Their collective efforts, irrespective of their social status, played a pivotal role in shaping the course of the nation's fight for freedom. Women from all walks of life had now become integral contributors to the larger cause, showcasing the diverse and inclusive nature of the freedom movement.

Women were not only actively participating in the public spaces but they were also involved in the various organization. In the twentieth century, various women's organizations such as *Bharat Mahila Parishad*, *Hindu Ladies Social and Literary Club*, *Gujarati Ladies Club*, *Arya*

Mahila Samaj, Stree Zarthosti Mandal, Jyoti Sangh, Vikas Grah etc. emerged which played a crucial role in raising awareness and breaking barriers for women. While in these organizations there were women who might not have directly engaged in public affairs at that time, but they emerged as female intelligentsia and allowed educated women to represent the female sphere in public institutions.

These women's organizations played a crucial role in empowering women and advocating for their rights during the 20th century. At the outset, these organizations served as platforms for women to discuss the issues they faced, such as lack of education, child marriage, and the challenges concerning widows and dowry. These meetings provided a space for women to collectively understand and articulate the pressing concerns that affected their lives. Through these associations, women amplified their voices and presented a unified front to demand their rights and societal recognition.

Hence, in the twentieth century women's organizations became instrumental in formulating strategies for advocating women's education, campaigning against child marriage, and addressing the injustices faced by widows. These organizations not only raised awareness about the need for change but also developed practical tactics to bring about societal transformation. Through the collective strength of these women's organizations, a powerful demand for women's rights emerged, paving the way for significant social reforms and greater gender equality. These groups acted as catalysts, shaping public opinion, challenging societal norms, and advocating for a more inclusive and equitable society.

While extraordinary women, such as prominent writers, activists, and leaders, were widely recognized for their remarkable contributions. The case of ordinary women was no less than that. As this research not only highlighted the extraordinary women but also the ordinary women that is through historicizing ordinary women.

Historicizing the lives of ordinary women unveils a myriad of issues that held immense importance in their daily existence. From matters of love and passion to the complexities of marriage, these women navigated a diverse range of emotions and challenges throughout their lives. Unlike the conventional standards of physical beauty, they recognized the true essence of beauty lying within their values and virtues. For ordinary women, family, health, and the kitchen were central pillars in their lives, each playing a crucial role in their daily routines. The well-being of their family members was their utmost concern, as they shouldered the responsibility of nurturing and caring for their loved ones. From preparing nutritious meals to

ensuring proper hygiene and seeking medical attention when needed, women held a pivotal role in safeguarding the health of their families.

The kitchen, being the heart of the home, provided a space for women to showcase their culinary skills and creativity. Beyond a mere daily necessity, preparing meals for the family became an opportunity for these women to express their love and care through food. With meticulous planning and management, they ensured the kitchen remained a place of warmth and nourishment, providing balanced and wholesome meals for their loved ones. Throughout their daily practices and customs, these ordinary women acted as threads, carrying forward the culture of society in both private and public realms. Their contributions, often overlooked in historical narratives, formed the very fabric of societal traditions and values, leaving a lasting impact on the world they inhabited.

In conclusion, the process of writing women into history during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Western India was a groundbreaking endeavor that challenged traditional historical narratives. Through comprehensive research and examination of various sources, this work brought to light the multifaceted roles and experiences of women that were often overlooked or marginalized. The inclusion of both extraordinary and ordinary women highlighted their diverse contributions to society, shedding light on their agency, resilience, and determination.

The representation of women's voices in historical accounts provided a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges they faced and the pivotal role they played in shaping the course of history. The narratives of ordinary women demonstrated the intricacies of their daily lives, struggles, and the significance they held within their families and communities. Meanwhile, the accounts of extraordinary women showcased their leadership, activism, and pioneering efforts in advocating for social reforms and women's rights. Together, these stories illustrated the collective strength of women in Western India and their impact on society.

Furthermore, the emergence of women's organizations and their active participation in public affairs during the twentieth century marked a transformative period. These organizations became platforms for women to voice their concerns, demand their rights, and challenge societal norms. Their collective efforts laid the groundwork for significant social reforms, advancing gender equality, and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

In essence, the process of writing women into history in Western India during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries not only rectified historical omissions but also enriched our understanding of the region's social, cultural, and political fabric. By acknowledging the

agency and contributions of women, this work illuminated the vital role they played in shaping the course of history, creating a more holistic and inclusive narrative of Western India.