

CHAPTER- 3

MAKING WOMEN VISIBLE BY AGENCY OF 'WOMEN' IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

As can be discerned from the previous chapter it is generally believed that it is only men who have written on women and their issues. They have examined women as passive subjects who needed to be spoken for. Perhaps it is true. In the larger narrative, where the history was about victors and victories, women did not figure anywhere. They were nurturers and caretakers and on rare occasions had to step out of the public spaces out of necessity not out of desire. Such women were tagged as heroines and fit right into the paradigm of victors. However, as has been mentioned, such women were rare. The majority of women's historical experience was fairly mundane to be considered worthy enough to be noted by a court scribe or an English servant. *"Though women like men have been actors and agents in history, their experiences and actions are not recorded".*¹ Some women in the nineteenth century also found reading and understanding history to be tiresome because there was nothing in it for them. For instance, while reading Jane Austen's works, Elisabeth Widmark remarks *"Yes, I am fond of history. I wish I were too. I read it a little as a duty, but it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all-it is very tiresome."*²

Nonetheless, to imagine that women were silent in speaking for themselves is a wrong assumption. Going against the general assumption as spelt out by Miriam Schneir is that *'No feminist works emerged from behind the Hindu purdah or out of the Muslim harems; centuries of slavery do not provide a fertile soil for intellectual development or expression.'*³ Schneir's idea of feminism focused on equal rights, opportunities, and responsibilities with those of men. But what if the concept of feminism too is governed by the patriarchal norms, where women's history is expected to compete with that of men's history? Is it apt to say that women will be

¹ Cott, N. (1991). *A Woman Making History: Mary Ritter Beard through her letters*. Yale University Press. London 16

² Widmark, E. (2011). *Catherine Morland in Jane Austen's "Northanger Abbey"*, An Unlikely Gothic Heroine. Unpublished Thesis. University of Gothenburg. 87

³ Schneir, M. ed. (1972). *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*. Vintage. New York. xiv

only considered equal if they get recognition to be accepted in the public spaces on the same level as their male counterparts did? Can women have separate social and historical experience than what was considered to be important by the historical schools of thoughts? Setting aside the questions of feminism, women's historical experiences relate to what was considered as important by women themselves. Women always with few exceptions operated in private spaces therefore winning political battles or taking policy level decisions were less or just not important. What then was more important for women? Virginia Woolf, a nineteenth century radical 'feminist' of her times, writes about what was important for women and what should be accounted for as a women's history. She writes, *"What one wants I thought and why does not some brilliant student supply it is a mass of information at what age did she marry, how many children had she as a rule, what was her house like, did she have a room of herself, did she do the cooking, would she be likely to have servants. All these facts lie somewhere presumably in parish registers, the life of an average Elizabethan woman must be scattered about somewhere. Could one collect it and make a book out of it. It would be an ambition beyond my desire"*.⁴

The idea of women's experience therefore has a central role in framing women's history. Theresa de Lauretis (1988) in some sense discusses that women's 'politics of experience' can be thought of as a rewriting of culture.

Indian women's historical experience differed from caste to caste and from class to class. For lower class women, the battle for survival was almost the same level as that of their men. These marginalized sections had a shared history more or less. Yet, women of these marginalized sections had their special historical experiences than that of men. So far as the middle or the upper classes were concerned, their household became their battleground. To write them back in history it was important to hear what women were concerned with. Were they concerned with their livelihood or did their concerns lay in her children or her family? How much healthcare was important for women? As women became 'literate' and found a 'voice', they were able to express their ideas vis-a-vis that of the society. They naturally could not isolate themselves from the general social expectations as most of the time they were the ones who came across both as perpetrators or victims.

In the non-literate societies, women's social experience was recorded through what can be part of the larger category of folklore. These were collective expressions of common women's

⁴ Woolf, V. (1929). *"A Room of One's Own"*. Hogarth Press. First Edition. London. 338-342.

experiences. It was made clear by women that individual experience did not exist and gave fresh explanations and theories about their societies, their work, sexuality, and their negotiation with their understanding of patriarchy. This meant that women were knowledgeable about their lives, and about society. They were both objects and subjects with agency to express their concerns and experiences.

Women in Western India have not written their own exclusive history, unlike the feminist movement of the West. Instead, they have their space with men in their struggle. Due to the absence of women in historical sources. As quoted by Gerda Lerner “*When I started working on women's history about thirty years ago, the field did not exist. People didn't think that women had a history worth knowing*”.⁵ It made me look for them in the alternative sources in which they have expressed themselves. Hence, in this chapter, an attempt has been made to trace the history of women by their writings and their life experience.

SECTION-I: WRITING WOMEN IN HISTORY THROUGH THE LIVES OF EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN

1.1. KRISHNAGAURI HIRALAL RAWAL

Krishnagauri was the first woman to be honored as a novelist of the Gujarati language. Born in Lunavada tribal village of Panchmahal district in a high caste called Audhichya Sahastra Brahmin. She was married at the age of eleven to Hiralal Vidyaram Raval.⁶ As her mother had died when she was young, she did not receive any formal education. However, due to her husband's love and affection for education, he provided her with education at home. Under the Influence of Anandibai Joshi, she compared her education at a young age to that of her idol. It's not very clear as to how she felt while she received this education. However, she thought that it was a great opportunity that was given to her through the education that she received. Subsequently, after their marriage, Hiralal arranged for her higher education and employment.⁷ She continued her education even after she was married which was a big achievement in the nineteenth century. Later she took a job as a schoolteacher. The role of the husband in her

⁵ Lerner, G. (1986). *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. New York.

⁶ In Search of Past History Women's Movement and Women's Studies. *Indian Association for Women's Studies*. January 2000. 119

⁷ Raval, K. (1897). Sadguni Hemantkumari: Samaj-Sudharani Varta. (Gujarati). Ahmedabad. 7

education cannot be denied.⁸ In the preface of her novel, she mentions the names of many people who helped her, most of them were men, but she did talk about the wife of the Dewan of Lunwada, Shri Horamsji Aadarji, Smt. Doshibai who taught her sewing and tailoring. Besides, Krishnagauri was deeply influenced by Anandibai Joshi.

Krishnagauri's life was greatly shaped by the profound influence of her husband, Hiralal Raval. Since Hiralal was in contact with Indian reformer men like Mahipatram Rooparam and Bholanath Sarabhai, he was able to pass on these ideas to Krishnagauri. Both Krishnagauri and Hiralal taught in Victoria Jubilee Girl's School at Santrampur.⁹ However, Krishnagauri was not satisfied with this as she was ambitious for more. When the English political agent of the Agency of the princely states of Rewakantha, visited Santrampur on the occasion of the inauguration of a school building in the year 1889, he made an announcement from the government that if a woman completed a three-year course at Mahalakshmi Female Training College, she will be promoted as headmistress. Ambitious Krishnagauri did not want to let this opportunity pass. But in the conservative society of that time, the decision of a married woman to leave her husband alone for three years was a big matter. Krishnagauri, who was nineteen years old at that time, had never seen a place in her life other than Lunawada and Santrampur. Undaunted, she decided to move to Ahmedabad with the support of her husband. Krishnagauri stayed in Ahmedabad for three years and joined the Jubilee Girl's School at Santrampur in 1893 as a head mistress. Later on in 1898, she was transferred to Lunawada.¹⁰

According to Krishnagauri, the turning point of her life came when she won the Campbell scholarship for a three-year teacher training course at the Mahalakshmi Female Training College, Ahmedabad.¹¹ She compares her adventure of going to Ahmedabad with that of Anandibai Joshi going to England. She notes that there were very few Hindu women in the college, which was full of Christian girls. She writes about her husband's religion which was *sarvadharmi* (all religious). She was apprehensive amongst these girls but knew had to sail through. Krishnagauri, writes about the problems that she faced in the '*Stree-Shikshan Pathshala*' between the Hindu and Christian women, especially over kitchen rules. She mentions that the incident got coverage in the various newspapers. The Hindu women were

⁸ Mehta, M. (1995) *Krishna Gauri Raval- Gujarat ma so Pratham Mahila Naval Kathakar am Samaj Sudharanu*. Kumar. 1

⁹ Raval, K. (1897). 10

¹⁰ *Budhiprakash*. Vol.56, No. 1. January 1920. 90

¹¹ Raval, K. (1897). 9

reprimanded by the reformers. The women including Krishnagauri faced persecution at the hands of the Lady superintendent when the Hindu women were not allowed to give examinations. She defended her position for siding with the Hindu women and regretted wasting a year then.¹²

Krishnagauri writes about her sister-in-law Prasannabai who was younger than her. Prasannabai showed an inclination to study and was encouraged by her family members. As a result she took admission into the same college as Krishnagauri. However, Prasannabai suffered from illness and Krishnagauri became pregnant and therefore both of them had to leave the college for some time. Krishnagauri gave birth to her son Mukund on 23rd September 1892. Despite this, Krishnagauri was determined to carry onwards with her education. She was able to carry it out with the help of her mentor Kashibai Ranchodlal Gangaram Dave.¹³

Krishnagauri shared fond memories of her days in the college. She encouraged young women to study and be educated even when they did not and could not work. She felt that education is equally useful for benefits at home as much as it is in the public spaces. However, she does talk about the difficulties that Hindu women had faced many difficulties before they came for their training. For instance, she writes about how educated girls were married off to uneducated and illiterate boys or those who even begged or were not in the right professions.¹⁴ At the training school she realized the role that she could play in changing the lives of many women, who had little support from their families. Krishnagauri after discussions with many lady teachers came to a realization that girls were smarter than boys and were fast learners. A fact that has been proven by the school results today. She was saddened by the fact that it was very unfortunate that such girls were forced to marry unsuitable boys and men, which spoils their future. She followed up on that realization and dedicated her life to enabling women to read and write.¹⁵ Krishnagauri did not limit herself to only teaching in school but also started promoting girl's education in the surrounding areas. Due to Krishnagauri's effort many parents started sending their daughters to school.¹⁶

¹² Ibid.11

¹³ Ibid.13

¹⁴ Ibid.14

¹⁵ Raval, K. (1897). 14-15

¹⁶ *Budhiprakash*. Vol.56. No. 1, January 1920.90

Krishnagauri was fond of reading and writing. Her articles were frequently published in magazines like *Buddhiprakash*, *Strihitopadesh*, *Sundari Subodh*. Although she grew up in a backward area like Santrampur, she was aware of the various trends of modern social reform going on in the big cities of Gujarat. She was also member of leading organizations of social reform of that time were Gujarat Vernacular Society, *Prarthana Samaj*, and Child Marriage Prohibition Society, etc. These organizations and magazines promoted a more reformatory mentality in the society.¹⁷

In 1897 she wrote a novel titled as “*Sadguni Hemantkumari: Sansar Sudharni Varta*”. Two years later in 1899 when it was published, three volumes of “*Saraswatichandra*” a famous Literature novel was already published. It was said that this novel of Krishnagauri does not have a symbolic expression required for a literary work or the artistic weaving of a novel. Due to these reasons, various books didn’t note her novel as the first one of its kind of Gujarati literature.

The heroine of her novel was named as Hemantkumari.¹⁸ Her father Tripuranada had progressive thoughts due to extensive traveling. He wanted her daughter to be like a modern English-speaking Parsi woman. Hemantkumari was brilliant in her studies. She won prizes in various elocution and essay contests. Due to Tripuranada’s inability to provide dowry for the marriage of her daughter to an age-appropriate groom, her father was to marry her off to a forty-two-year-old widower. Very soon Hemantkumari became a widow. Hemantkumari was very upset and disappointed with her life. At that time one of her teachers came to her rescue. Hemantkumari got up on her feet and formed a group of like-minded women which was named as ‘*Stree Gyanvardhak Sabha*’. This novel ended with a lesson about the hopeful future of the heroine. This writing of her shows the trouble in the life of the heroine, the author sheds light on the social norms and customs of the time like dowry system, prohibition on widow remarriage. At the end of the novel just like “*Saraswatichandra*,” instead of remarrying the widow, she was involved in the activity of female upliftment.

Krishnagauri was very much like an epitome of a modern woman. She was multitasking and creating a perfect work-life balance. She had seven children, and a family to manage. So, besides writing and teaching, she had to take care of them as well. She was a step ahead of other women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, where although there was an increase

¹⁷ Raval, K. (1897). 15

¹⁸ Ibid.20

in the number of females getting education, there were very few who were able to move to the public spaces or leave their mark for historians in some form or the other. Krishnagauri was performing all her familial duties and did her writing work which was an important source to know the thoughts of women of that time.

1.2. SHARDABEN MEHTA AND VIDYAGAURI NILKANTH

The names of the two eloquent sisters Vidyagauri Nilkanth (1876-1958)¹⁹ and Shardaben Mehta (1882-1970)²⁰ can be found in many articles.²¹ The sisters were fortunate enough to be born in an affluent family in Gujarat.²² The family had a strong legacy of social and religious reform. For instance, their maternal grandfather Bholanath Sarabhai was a renowned figure, who was one of the co-founders of the *Prarthana Samaj* in Ahmedabad. Persuaded and inspired by the family's lineage, Sharadaben, and Vidyaben were the first women graduates of Gujarat. Even the women of the family like their mother and their widowed aunt inspired and motivated them to work toward a better future for their compatriots.

Both the sisters were remarkable women and were known to express their unreserved opinions and beliefs. They encouraged any form of intellectual activities around them and at times were known to have encouraged their respective spouses to not give up their cause. They received their primary education at *Maganlal Karamchand's Girls School* in Ahmedabad.²³ Vidyagauri studied in this school till class VII and joined the Anglo-Vernacular classes of the *Mahalakshmi Female Training College* in 1887, over here Shardaben followed her sister. They were home tutored by their father and Shardaben also received some tutoring from her brother-in-law. It would be natural to assume that it was the men of the family who were responsible to encourage the daughters at home to accept reformative ways, as was fashionable at the time. However, it was their mother, Balaben, who broke the mold. Instead of pushing for the marriage of her

¹⁹ Basu, A. (1989-90). The Reformed Family, Women Reformers: A Case Study of Vidyagauri Nilkanth. *Samya Shakti: A Journal of Women's Studies IV-V*: 62-82

²⁰ Forbes, G. & Thakkar, U. (2005). Foremothers: Neera Desai (b. 1925). *Gender & History*, 17(2). 492-501

²¹ Basu, A. (1995). Feminism and Nationalism in India, 1917-1947. *Journal of Women's History*, 7(4), 95-107; Menon, S. (2013). An Historical Analysis of the Economic Impact of the Political Empowerment of Women in British India. *International Journal of Afro-Asian Studies*, 4(1); Mahalakshmi, R. Women's Rights movement: The achievements of the last century. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Education and Research*. Volume.4 Issue 5, September 2019; Basu, A. (1995). A Nationalist Feminist: Mridula Sarabhai (1911-1974). *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 2(1), 1-24; Parekh, P. (2022). *A Critical Study of English Translations of Gujarati Fiction by Women Writers* (Doctoral dissertation, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda). India

²² Mehta, S. & Bhatt, P. M. (2008). *Reminiscences: the memoirs of Sharadaben Mehta*. Zuban. New Delhi. 10

²³ Mehta, S. & Bhatt, P. M. (2008). 3

daughters or training them to become excellent housewives, Balabai encouraged her daughters to educate themselves, and if possible be an inspiration to other women in the society. This was not easy for Balaben, she did have to face social ridicule from other families of her caste. Yet, she carried out undeterred and pushed her daughters to cross the threshold.

In 1889, Vidyagauri, at the age of thirteen, was married to Ramanbhai who was twenty-one years old.²⁴ Looking at the present context, some might believe that this was a child marriage. However, this was considered very progressive in the nineteenth century when the girls were often married off when they were infants to much older men or unsuitable grooms. Balaben got her daughter married off at the age of thirteen which was within the range of the Age of Consent Act which was introduced two years later. Balaben, in that sense, was ahead of her times and did not need any government enforcement. The groom that was chosen for Vidyagauri was Ramanbhai, who was the son of Mahipatram Ruparam, one of the leading social reformers of his time. Ramanbhai, a young man, was equally sensitized toward the cause of women's education. Ramanbhai was an educationalist and the principal of the Teachers' Training College. Vidyagauri, as a result, got full support from her husband and in-laws to continue her studies.²⁵

During that period, due to cholera in Porbandar, Mahipatram died. At that time Vidyagauri was just fifteen years old and due to this all the responsibility of the family came on her. But despite this tragedy, along with taking care of the household, Vidyagauri continued her education.²⁶

Vidyagauri passed her Matriculation examination in 1891 standing first in Gujarati in the entire Bombay University. As was always the case with women, their primary duty was towards their family. It is unclear as to how these women felt about frequent pregnancies as perhaps birth control or even any kind of control over their own bodies was never heard of or was considered a taboo. Both the sisters despite their so-called progressive outlook were embroiled in the deep sense of social and marital duties. Like Krishnagauri, Vidyagauri too had to take a break from her education due to frequent pregnancies. Despite this, in 1894 she enrolled herself in the Gujarat College, the first Gujarati woman to do so and took her time to complete her graduation. Many women in her position would have given up but not Vidyagauri. She continued

²⁴ Mehta, S. (1939). *Jivan Sambharana*. Pustakalaya Sahayak Sahkari Mandal, Vadodara. 24-26

²⁵ Mehta, S. (1939). 13

²⁶ Mehta, S. (1939). 16

unabashedly and finally she along with her younger sister Shardaben became the first woman graduates in 1901. It was no mean feat and their names were noted in the history of Gujarat. Vidyagauri did so well in Gujarati during her secondary school exam that she missed the prize by just one mark. As her examiner got to know this news he checked with the other teachers and got to know that during the assessment there has been partiality done between the girl's and boy's answer sheets.²⁷ Vidyagauri wrote several articles, and some of them were published in *Hasyamandir*,²⁸ which is an elaborated essay on Humour caller '*Hasya*'. She also translated Ramesh Chandra work, *The Lake of Palms* as (social novel) *Sudhahasini*.²⁹

The account of Vidyagauri's life might not be comparable to many women in the twentieth century, who made greater contributions in the public spaces. However, it is important to understand that she emerged as one of the notable figures of the late nineteenth century and set up a path for many girls and women to walk in. It took a great amount of courage and perseverance to march on with whatever targets she set out to achieve. She even was an inspiration for her sister Shardaben Mehta, a tall name in the twentieth century.

Shardaben Mehta's life can become an inspiration for many, even in today's times. Despite being known for her social service and service to education for women, Shardaben Mehta is fairly unknown so far as pan-India imagery is concerned. Her diary, which has been translated by Purnima Mehta into English, is an eyewitness account of how an educated woman perceived the world around them in the nineteenth century. Most of the reminiscences are of adult life in the twentieth century, in which she does not hesitate to give a critical assessment of the situation. However, the next section delves into her life during the Nineteenth century.

Shardaben was also deeply influenced by her mother, who had always taught the children the importance of giving. Although Balaben was strict, she was equally loving. Even though Balaben belonged to a wealthy family, her husband Gopilal (Bavabhai) was not so rich. He was a hardworking man with a very low salary. Gopilal's mother was of course equally rich. There was a tussle between the two families i.e. between that of Balaben and her mother-in-law.³⁰ However, it is not clear what sort of a relationship was shared by Balaben and her

²⁷ Ibid.16

²⁸ Katre, S. M., Kulkarni, K. P., Priyolkar, S. T. A., Rajadhyaksha, M. V., Parvate, T. V., Yajnik, M. P. A., & Gai, B. T. B. (1971). *Maharashtra State Gazetteers: Language and Literature*. Bombay. Government Printing Stationery. Bombay. 350

²⁹ *Stree Bodh and A Social Progress in India*. (1908). A Jubilee Memorial. 88-89

³⁰ Mehta.S. (1939).4

mother-in-law because of this conflict. Nonetheless, both women brought up in affluent families had learned how to survive and work around. Shardaben's mother Balaben saw a difficult life when she was sixteen. She used to stay in a joint family, where the burden of work was shared by women of the household. However, when her husband had to move to Bharuch, she was forced to leave this joint household. Balaben, like many of the time, had no choice but to manage the household. It was common at the time to have constant house guests.³¹ These guests were mostly boys or men who either would live with them to complete their education or would stay with them as they would be visiting the town. Sometimes, these men were known relatives and sometimes total strangers. At the time, widow remarriage was not uncommon, but it was still considered a taboo. Most of the women belonging to wealthier families were praying to keep their husband alive. They were willing to live a difficult penniless life but as a married woman not as a widow.³²

Balaben not only managed her house well, but she also taught her children how to read and write. Shardaben reminiscing about her mother writes about what a good cook she was. Interestingly she notes that, although at the time, there were only four members in the family, Balaben used to cook only for her children and her husband.³³ Balaben was adept at cooking and would constantly improve her skills, especially if she would read anything. Balaben had never been taught to cook before she was married. She learnt the skills only after she got married. This was perhaps because the girls were very young when they were married off and therefore it was natural to assume that they would keep away from culinary craft. Balaben became an expert not only on how to make regular meals but also pickles and *murabbas*. She used to cook sweets for everyone's birthday. Balaben followed her husband's ideals and believed in savings and never taking loans. The children were taught to work on their own, despite having servants.³⁴ Shardaben remembers that Balaben was very interested in her children's education. Despite the fact that the children were studying in the school, Balaben took their lessons at home. She encouraged them to score good marks.³⁵

³¹ Ibid.5

³² Ibid.6

³³ Mehta, S. (1939). *Jivan Sambharana*.7

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid.12

In the year 1888, Bavabhai was transferred to Ahmedabad. At that time, she invested a lot of time in the education of her children, which included both boys and girls.³⁶ Unlike other women, Balaben does not seem to be inspired by any particular individual. She appears to have sensed that the times have changed and hence she should change along with the changing times.³⁷ Shardaben says that in the late nineteenth century it was rare for a mother to take such an interest. Usually, the housework would be quite a lot and the mothers would often use the help of their daughters to carry it out. Even if it would be at the cost of their studies. However, Balaben was adamant that her daughters should receive formal education. She never differentiated between a boy and a girl, so far as education was concerned. Shardaben gives full credit to Balaben for her and her sister Vidyagauri's education.³⁸

Shardaben in her autobiography throws a very important light on female education in the nineteenth century. It was not made compulsory by the government, and yet the Nagar Brahmin women received education to a great extent. Shardaben attended *Kanyashala* along with her cousins and elder sisters. Later she joined them in a bigger school where they were taught English.³⁹

Shardaben also writes about the marriage of her sister Vidyaben with Ramanbhai. He was already engaged to a suitable girl from a good family. However, Ramanbhai, instead of focusing on the domestic front, he focused more on reforms. Ramanbhai had also traveled overseas and in those times, such an act, was liable to be punished by excommunication. It is not clear why, but the engagement was broken off (it is also not clear by whom). Vidyaben who by this time had reached marriageable age was thought of as a natural partner to Ramanbhai. The community had suitably warned the family to think again. However, both Bavabhai and Balaben stood firm on their decision. Balaben had to face more wrath from the community. However, she weathered the storm, as she believed her daughter who she had educated, would be happy with Ramanbhai, then with someone who had not broken social laws.

Balaben was not only giving them a proper upbringing, but also, she was teaching them values such as discipline, respect, love, and honesty as she considered this her duty to impart important

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid.9

³⁸ Ibid.12

³⁹ Mehta, S. (1939). *Jivan Sambharana*.13

lessons to her children.⁴⁰ In Shardaben's childhood her grandfather, father, mother and other relatives in her house were involved in religious activities which were imparted in their children also. Moreover, Shardaben recalled attending the speeches of spiritual leaders who used to come from Calcutta.⁴¹ As is the general belief women of the nineteenth century Gujarat (especially of the upper classes) were getting prepared for the changes that they would bring about in their coming years. These women were the harbingers for the change to come. It is however important to note that this was the case only with a few families. In general, the condition of women in Gujarat did not seem to have changed much.

In her memoir, Shardaben observes that the family used to mingle with Parsi and other Anglo-Indian women. The women of these communities were 'modern' in their outlook. This impacted her extended family. They started wearing Western-style clothing, and it also had an influence on their lifestyle. This amalgamation of culture with time started to weaken the bonds between the members of the family. She mentions that "*It was a challenging phase to navigate, and even though people were physically staying together, but emotionally they drifted apart.*"⁴² Although she did write, her family was not affected by it as their values were so deeply rooted.⁴³

Shardaben does write about her struggle with their studies. They were supposed to pass their matriculation exam which also had English as a subject. It was very difficult as English was introduced only in the VI class. However, she and the other girls in the family did not shy away from the challenge and worked extremely hard to pass that subject. Apparently, because it was very difficult for other women to do so, most of the girls did not appear in the university exam. At that time Shardaben had the support of her family, especially her mother. Since she was a bright girl, she could do multiple things together. Shardaben continued her high school education alongside her training at Mahalaxmi Training College, where girl's high school classes were also conducted. Besides the English language, she was also learning Mathematics, Science, and Gujarati. To prepare her for subjects like Mathematics, Science, and Gujarati, private tutors were arranged. Shardaben put in a lot of hard work to excel in those subjects. There were three girls who appeared in the matriculation exam: her sister Vidyaben, Yashodabai Thakar, and another Parsi girl. They were the first batch to prepare for the

⁴⁰ Ibid.9

⁴¹ Ibid.12

⁴² Mehta, S. (1939). *Jivan Sambharana*.14

⁴³ Ibid.14

matriculation examination. Unfortunately, only Vidyaben and Yashoda Bai passed the examination.⁴⁴

Shardaben makes a very interesting connection between middle school or secondary education and children's health. She writes that during the time when children enter into their middle school, they also would simultaneously physically grow. This was the time when the families should be focusing on their health but instead of that, the focus is given to their education. This puts a burden on their minds which affects their health adversely. Shardaben especially blames the Western education for the same, especially the English language. Since she really had to work hard at the time to learn the language and then to give the exam, she was hopeful that instead of English, regional languages should be given more importance.

Shardaben talks about the education system during that time, that after V grade, subjects such as Mathematics, Science, History, and Geography were taught and too in English. Due to this, the students focus on not making mistakes in English rather than reasoning or learning actual concepts. As a result, there were hindrances to intellectual development, which acts as a limitation in expressing thoughts or contemplating ideas. Hence, it is crucial to address and give attention to this matter.⁴⁵

The introduction of the English language in the V standard posed a challenge for Shardaben and Gatubhai. They had to put in extra effort to learn this new language. Both siblings were in the V standard and were simultaneously preparing for the matriculation exam, supported by their father.⁴⁶ Shardaben's father even got her a special alarm clock to wake up early, pray, and study.⁴⁷ During their preparation, they also learned Sanskrit under the guidance of Ramanbhai. The study routine focused on spending 75% of their time on English and Mathematics, and the remaining 25% on learning Sanskrit. Although Shardaben didn't pass the matriculation exam on her first attempt, she succeeded in her second attempt. However, after completing her secondary exams, her parents started considering the idea of getting her married.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Ibid.16

⁴⁵ Mehta, S. (1939). *Jivan Sambharana*.19-20

⁴⁶ Ibid.21

⁴⁷ Ibid.22

⁴⁸ Ibid.24

Shardaben's parents patiently waited for the right match and eventually, at the age of fourteen in the year 1897, she got married to Sumant Mehta, who was four years older and a medical college student at the time.⁴⁹ The Mehta family was highly educated, making Shardaben's marriage into a scholarly environment. Shortly after their marriage, Sumant Mehta left for England to pursue his studies, while Shardaben continued her education.⁵⁰ Both Shardaben and Sumant remained actively engaged in their pursuit of knowledge even after marriage.

In her *Reminiscences*, Shardaben Mehta recalls her college experience where she and Gatubhai were in the same class. Despite her strong desire to learn, she faced challenges as male students troubled them by sending secret letters, flipping their chairs, writing disturbing messages on their desks, and even throwing stones at their chairs.⁵¹ However, Shardaben's firm determination to study helped her overcome these obstacles and continue her pursuit of education.

After completing their education, both Shardaben and Vidyagauri actively engaged in social work. Shardaben took the initiative to start a *Mahila Vidhyalaya*, providing married girls and young widows with an opportunity to continue their education. Additionally, she collaborated with Indulal Yagnik, a prominent businessman, and social reformer, to establish a women's college affiliated with the *Karve Women's University*.⁵² Shardaben also helped Vidyagauri for translating Ramesh Chandra Dutt's *'The Lake of Palms'* into Gujarati.⁵³ Vidyagauri was deeply involved in public activities alongside her husband. After Ramanbhai's passing, Vidyagauri assumed the role of principal office-bearer and organizer in various associations. As pioneers, these sisters not only became the first women graduates in Gujarat but also paved the way for hundreds of women to access higher education in the region.

Certain significant aspects were evident in the life of Shardaben and Vidyagauri. First of all, they received moderate education largely in vernacular schools, and were qualified for the various jobs mainly in teaching the professions. Second, they were from high castes mainly Jains and Nagar Brahmins. Awareness of women's education was high in these castes. Hence, even though women had to face harassment from their families, the community at large did not

⁴⁹ Ibid.26-27

⁵⁰ Ibid.27

⁵¹ Mehta, S. (1939). *Jivan Sambharana*. 31-32

⁵² Ibid.28-48

⁵³ Ibid.88-89

oppose their pursuits of education. Third, for them, early marriage was a major constraint to their education. The discussion on Vidyagauri Nilkanth supports this point. Vidyagauri could complete her graduation only after nine years because of frequent pregnancies. However, this shows for women life became much harder as they became widows at a very early age. Though they showed courage to oppose their family and tradition and availed the legal and educational opportunities for women. Nevertheless, they fought with odds and through education and subsequent employment, they became self-independent. Fourth, through education they get access to public space. education was a sort of gateway through which these women could get access to public institutions and associations. All these women were directly and indirectly involved in public activities largely related to women's education. The education virtually brought the status, the self-respect and the awareness in these women.

1.3. HARKUNWAR SETHANI

Harkunwar Sethani also known as Harkunwar Sethani's Ladka was wife of Gujarati Jain merchant Hathisingh Kersisingh.⁵⁴ Harkunwar was born in Ghogha port, a rural area of Gujarat. Unfortunately, there is no official information available about her childhood. However, according to a source, during a visit by Seth Hathisingh to his firm in Ghogha, a young girl, the daughter of a woman who was cooking there, came to fetch him water. *Gore Maharaj*, who was present, remarked to Seth Hathisingh that despite having two wives, he was childless. He suggested that marrying the girl might enable him to have children.⁵⁵ The same information can be found in another source.⁵⁶ Harkunwar was weaving *chana* (gram) when Seth Hathisingh noticed her feet and considered it a favorable sign, which eventually led to their marriage. This incident sheds light on the cultural importance placed on a woman's physical attributes, such as her feet, as a determining factor for her suitability in marriage. It also reflects the prevailing acceptance of polygamy in the pursuit of having children.

At the tender age of twelve, Harkunwar was married to Seth Hathisingh, who was twenty-four years old, and she became his third wife. Hathisingh's first wife, Rukmini, was the daughter of *Nagarsheth* Himabhai Vakhtchand from Ahmedabad. Tragically, in the year 1846, her husband

⁵⁴ *Gujarat Shala Patra*. March 1867. 70-71

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Prasad, S., Singh, S., Mehta, & S., Doshi, T. (2019). *Gujaratma Narichetna ane Samajik Parivartani Chadvado*. (Gujarati). Mahatma Gandhi Shram Sansthan, Ahmedabad. 131

passed away, and she found herself a widow at the age of twenty-six. During that era, the condition of widows was perceived as low in society. They were subjected to strict control by religious and societal norms, often seen as burdensome to their families. In stark contrast, widowers would quickly prepare for remarriage even before their late wife's funeral.

As mentioned earlier, the life of a widow was marked by deprivation of all worldly pleasures and considered to bring bad luck. Hence, widows were often excluded from social events and confined indoors, hidden from public view. After Hathisinh's demise, his substantial property, valued at lakhs, was to be divided between his wives. Fortunately for Harkunwar, the other wife hailed from a wealthy family and was disinterested in the monetary aspect. Consequently, she chose the smaller inheritance, leaving the major wealth to Harkunwar.

At the time it was unknown for a woman to live alone or to let alone a widow. Harkunwar was wealthy and didn't need anyone to guide her. She showed great grit and determination and instead of crying over her grievances, she took her life in her hands and made her own decisions and moved forward in her life. Ahmedabad-based historian Maganlal Vakhtachand described Harkunwar as "*fearless*".⁵⁷ After her husband's death, she chose to live independently in a large *haveli* instead of living with the peers of Hathisinh's first wife.

Since this all happened in the early nineteenth century, the reforms had not reached middle-class people's houses. People were very reluctant to follow the influences of the social reformer, which itself was in its nascent stage. This was the time when Harkunwar made her debut in public life within the confines of her socio-cultural restricted environment and did philanthropy for the Jain community. It is very unfortunate that the woman of her times, making such a prolific public presence did not find any mention anywhere. For instance, James Burgess in his book on '*The Muhammadan Architecture of Ahmedabad*' does not give any credit to Harkunwar, who actually stood for hours together getting the Jain *derasar* (temple) built.⁵⁸ Harkunwar formed various Jain associations. For instance, *Hansanathji's Derasar* was built in Patashani Pol, and steps were built to reduce the trouble of pilgrims who were climbing the *Shetrunjaya* mountain. Besides these, she also built another Jain temple at Palitana. In the

⁵⁷ Maganlal,V. (1850). *Ahmedabadno Itithas*. (Gujarati). Gujarat Vidya Sabha. Ahmedabad. 150

⁵⁸ Burgess, J. (1885). *Lists of the Antiquarian Remains in the Bombay Presidency*. Bombay: Archaeological Survey of Western India. Government Central Press. Bombay. 125

marriage of Thakur in her village she donated Kg.1600 *ghee*. She was a woman who used her property generously for her society and for the benefit of the people.⁵⁹

In 1855 Harkunwar along with Maganbhai Karamchand's wife Jyotibai together invested twenty thousand for "*Harkunwar and Jyotibai Pathshala*" in Ahmedabad,⁶⁰ in which Harkunwar's share was twelve thousand rupees.⁶¹ Traditional subjects like Sanskrit, *Prakrit*, and Astrology were taught at this institute. It is important to note that despite the cultural tradition of using their husband's names, these women chose to use their own names for this school. The most important aspect of Harkunwar's charitable activities was that she not only did charity to the Jain temples but also carried out charitable activities in fields like education and health. Commenting on the school "*Harkunwar and Jyotibai Pathshala*" in Ahmedabad, Miss Mary Carpenter, (an educationist and social reformer from Britain) said that, "*eighty girls between the age groups of six to eleven were receiving their education in this school. Most of these girls were widows.*"⁶²

Despite being uneducated Harkunwar, was closely associated with the activities of the Gujarat Vernacular Society (GVS), which made significant contributions to the development of education and literature in Gujarat. In the year 1844 *Karunashankar* school was started by GVS. In the 1850s when the school was facing a financial crisis Harkunwar saved the school by taking over the administration of the school. She also donated Rs.14,000 for its development. Since then, the school has been popularly known as '*Harkunwar Sethani's School*'.⁶³

As an administrator Harkunwar was actively involved in the school administration. For instance, Harkunwar regularly visited the schools and reviewed the progress of the schools

⁵⁹ Das Gupta, A. (1979). *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat: c. 1700-1750*. Manohar.; *Buddhi, Prakash* Dec. 1858. 122-123; 79 ; Parekh, H. T. (1932). *Gujarat Vernacular Society no Itihaas* (The History of Gujarat Vernacular Society). Part I. Ahmedabad: Gujarat Vernacular Society.

⁶⁰ *Budhiprakash*. (1858) December. 122-123

⁶¹ *Budhiprakash*. (1856) V. 3. March.161

⁶² Carpenter, M. (1868). '*Six Months in India*', Vol. I. Longmans Green. London. 25

⁶³ Harkunwar Shethani's father Khushalchand Vakhatchand was the Nagarsheth of Ahmedabad. The Nagarsheth served as the leader of the city, a mayor of sorts. He headed the city organization whose members consisted of representatives from all the different Mahajan (merchant guilds) functioning in the city. In Ahmedabad the position of Nagarsheth was hereditary and he came from the Jain community. Harkunwar Shethani's husband was also a powerful man because of his wealth and religious philanthropy among the Jain community. Gillion, Ahmedabad. 55-56

managed by her.⁶⁴ She also took a personal interest in their progress and was known for inviting them over to her house and giving prizes to the brightest students.⁶⁵ It is evident that she intended to appoint the widows as teachers in her school. It was however an uphill task and Harkunwar met with opposition from her colleagues. For instance, Krishnagauri Rawal, who was a teacher, expressed dislike for keeping widows as teachers. Harkunwar, unconcerned with the opposition continued unabashedly. Harkunwar also donated large amounts to colleges in Gujarat. It was a conditional donation, which was mostly to promote higher education amongst females.⁶⁶

Another aspect that Harkunwar focused on was health. She gave regular donations for the construction of hospitals. For instance, in 1855 Harkunwar and *Nagarsheth* Premabhai donated Rs.5,000 and Rs. 3,150 to the government for the construction of Hathisinh and Premabhai hospitals. Lord Elphinstone, the Governor of the Bombay Presidency, was invited to inaugurate it. He praised Harkunwar's charitable activities. The hospital offered free treatment to the poor and many people from villages around Ahmedabad.⁶⁷ Harkunwar was a great philanthropist. During the famine of 1865, she bought thousands of pounds of grain from the market and established cheap grain shops for the poor. She also spent generous money on relief work during the 1868 and 1875 floods. In the government gazette, her achievements were announced as follows: "*In this country, even the kings and queens have not performed generous deeds like Harakhunwarbai, so she is deserving of this honor.*" The Gaekwad government also bestowed upon her the title of "*Chobdar*," along with a canopy, a *shawl*, a torch, and a palanquin.⁶⁸

The significance of Harkunwar Sethani's work in the context of 19th-century social change is that she belonged to a rural area like Ghogha. Although Harkunwar faced the challenge of illiteracy and lacked support from her parents. Being childless and a widow, she confidently made financial decisions that seemed right to her. Instead of revolting against the traditional structures, Harkunwar took advantage of these structures to suit her own freedom, which wasn't easy even for a married woman in those days.-During that period, she actively participated in public life, engaging with the wives of British bureaucrats as well as reformers such as

⁶⁴ *Budhiprakash*. (1856) May. 94

⁶⁵ Carpenter, M. (1868). *Six months in India* (Vol. 1). London, Longmans, Green. 132-133

⁶⁶ *Budhiprakash*. (1856) May. 94

⁶⁷ *Ibid*.

⁶⁸ *Budhiprakash* (1913). *Jain Aitihasik Rasmala*.Rajkot. 263

Mahipatram Rooparam and Gopal Hari Deshmukh. In the days of Harkunwar, it was almost impossible for a widow to remarry and lead a normal life. Under these circumstances, Harkunwar gave a new meaning to life by shifting the loneliness of a widow towards social welfare.

1.4. JAMNABAI PANDITA

Jamnabai Pandita was the first woman in Gujarat to oppose patriarchy in the late 19th century. Her feminist literature attacked the patriarchy and advocated for women's rights. Basic information about Jamnabai's life is not available. But based on her writings, it is speculated that she may have been of the Audhichya Brahmin caste and Vaishnavism, and her lifespan would have been 1860-1908. She was known as Jamnabai Pandit of Jamnagar due to her intelligence and wisdom.

Jamnabai was an expert in subjects like Sanskrit, Gujarati Literature, Philosophy, Economics and Sociology. She even taught some of them in school. She was also in touch with social reformers like Mahipatram Rooparam, Gopalhari Deshmukh, Narasimha Rao Bholanath, Sakarlal Desai. Jamnabai was the first woman to become a member of the Gujarat Vernacular Society. Despite being a female social reformer, Jamnabai concentrated her time in Krishna *bhakti*. As a devotee she wrote many hymns and poems. Despite being devout Vaishnav, Jamnabai's main attention was on working on women and ensuring that they led better lives. Her first book '*Streedharma*' was published in 1891 and had become popular in Jamnagar. The second book '*Streepokar*' (સ્ત્રીપુસ્કર) was published by Gujarat Vernacular Society from Ahmedabad in 1907. Mithibahen Mulji⁶⁹ donated two thousand rupees for spreading the idea of this book in the society.

'*Streedharma*' is dedicated by Jamnabai to her husband. It is an insight into the married life of Jamnabai. '*Streedharma*' represents the Brahmin culture in its entirety. The book is a list of

⁶⁹ Mithibai Mulji was an Indian social reformer and philanthropist. She was born in the city of Jamnagar in Gujarat, India, in 1865. Mithibai Mulji was known for her dedication to social causes and her contributions to education and women's empowerment. Mithibai Mulji played a significant role in promoting education for girls during a time when female education was not widely encouraged. She established the Mithibai Girls' School in Jamnagar, which aimed to provide education and empower young girls in the region. The school continues to operate today and is named in her honor as "Mithibai College." Mithibai Mulji also actively participated in various social and philanthropic activities, working towards uplifting women, improving healthcare, and supporting underprivileged sections of society. Her contributions to society have left a lasting impact, especially in the field of education and women's empowerment. Mithibai Mulji's philanthropic work and dedication to social causes have made her a respected figure in the history of Jamnagar and Gujarat. Her legacy continues to inspire generations, and her contributions are recognized and remembered with gratitude.

instructions given to both the educated young girls and the non-educated young girls who were getting married. Jannabai through her book instructs the girls regarding their responsibilities to their husband and their families. She portrayed her belief that in order to have a happy married life, women should sacrifice their own happiness, if the need arises. This would bring about lasting peace in the families in specific and the community in general. Despite expecting young girls to sacrifice their own happiness, Jannabai was opposed to practices such as dowry, *Sati*, female infanticide (*dudhpiti*) and polygamy. Moreover, basing the argument on the sacred scriptures, Jannabai also opposed enforced widowhood. She, like her contemporary male social reformers was in favor of widow remarriage.

The other book '*Streepokar*'(1907), which was published sixteen years after '*Streedharma*'(1891).⁷⁰ Through this book it can be discerned a change in Jannabai's thought process. It portrays Jannabai as a rebellious woman, as she was suffering from widowhood after a happy marriage. In '*Streedharma*', she made the society the centre of discussion by considering the role of women in society but in '*Streepokar*' she became militant and self-centered. She says that injustice against women is rooted in patriarchal society,⁷¹ where men hold primary power and dominance. This unequal distribution of power leads to limited access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making for women, resulting in poverty, restricted education, and limited political representation. Gender roles and stereotypes further marginalize women, restricting their autonomy and perpetuating discrimination. Gender-based violence, normalized by societal attitudes, violates women's rights and perpetuates fear and trauma. Exclusion from decision-making processes and public discourse amplifies their marginalization. That being said, in this book she has strongly opposed patriarchy. Jannabai was probably the first woman to speak of a woman's identity apart from her parents, husband and children.

Jannabai accepts the natural distinction between men and women in '*Streepokar*' but does not accept the distinction raised by religion, society, state or culture. To make her presentation more effective, Jannabai introduces a dialogue between Shukadev and Saraswati Devi in '*Streepokar*'. Here Shukadev is the symbol of patriarchy while Saraswati Devi is the symbol of

⁷⁰ Prasad, S., Singh, S., Mehta, S., Doshi, T. (2019).151

⁷¹ Ibid.

femininity. Through Saraswati Devi, Jamnabai finally becomes victorious by replying to every argument of the patriarchal society.

Thus, '*Streepokar*' is the first book written in the late 19th century which has a feminist approach. Jamnabai, who advocates Aryan women, challenges patriarchy through feminism by becoming militant and rebellious after the bitter experiences of widowhood. Thus, as a writer in the late 19th century, Jamnabai has shown the courage to challenge patriarchy. Tried to establish a distinctive identity of the woman herself.

It was not only the women from Gujarat who women acted as agents, but also from Maharashtra in the nineteenth century. The modern state of Maharashtra of the southern division of Bombay Presidency had always been volatile. It was so whether seen from nationalist perspective or from the reformative one. Hence, it is only natural to assume that women would not be left far behind. The examples of women more active in writing their understanding of women and their issues are ample. The domain for women's writing and activities was around the traditional society, which in spite of the first shifts of change because of the Western influences, had not changed much. The leaders and subjects of the social issues revolving around women were still Brahmin men and women. It was however, the women of these castes, whose lives were subject to severe restrictions, who formed the focus of many of women's writings in the nineteenth century.

1.5. PANDITA RAMABAI SARASWATI

The tallest name that focused on women's issues in the nineteenth century is that of Pandita Ramabai Saraswati. Fortunately, the name Pandita Ramabai Saraswati has become well known due to the efforts of many scholars.⁷² She even has been called as the first voice on women's emancipation.⁷³ Hence, while writing on the contributions of women in the nineteenth century,

⁷² Butler, C. (1922). *Pandita Ramabai Saraswati*. Flaming H Revell Company, New York; Chakravarti, U. (2014). *Rewriting history: The life and times of Pandita Ramabai*. Zubaan.; Kosambi, M. (1992). Indian Response to Christianity, Church and Colonialism: Case of Pandita Ramabai. *Economic and Political Weekly*, WS61-WS71.; Burton, A. (1995). Colonial encounters in late-Victorian England: Pandita Ramabai at Cheltenham and Wantage 1883-6. *Feminist Review*, 49(1), 29-49.; Saraswati, R. (2003). *Pandita Ramabai's American encounter: the peoples of the United States (1889)*. Indiana University Press.; Mudgal, A. (2013). Pandita Ramabai. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 347-356.; Kosambi, M. (2016). *Pandita Ramabai: Life and landmark writings*. Routledge.; Midgley, C. (2016). Indian feminist Pandita Ramabai and Transnational liberal Religious Networks in the Nineteenth-Century World. In *Women in Transnational History* (pp. 13-32). Routledge; Kaur, A. (2021). Pandita Ramabai. In *Revisiting Modern Indian Thought* (pp. 81-95). Routledge India.

⁷³ Kosambi, M. (1988). Women, Emancipation and equality: Pandita Ramabai's Contribution to Women's Cause. *Economic and political weekly*. WS47

one has to mention Ramabai's writing and understanding of the problem. Her greatest contribution was to make people hear her voice. It was the voice of a woman amongst many strong male voices. This was a time when a dialogue had started on enforced widowhood. Ramabai, however, focused on multiple other issues which were important for women, mostly as problems. For instance, Ramabai's focus on women's health was a fresh insight into deeper problems. Ramabai wrote that although women had started speaking up, their voices were incoherent. Being a high caste Hindu woman Ramabai wrote strongly and without any fear in her book *"The High Caste Hindu Woman,"* Pandita Ramabai discussed personal experiences that shed light on the struggles, challenges, and resilience of high-caste Hindu women. It was not that the people were not aware of what the women were feeling. Yet, to hear a woman narrate the woes really hit hard. Here are some of the personal experiences that Ramabai writes about in her book: *"In this country, women are often reserved and hesitant to discuss their ailments with men, to the point where they would rather suffer in silence than seek help. This lack of access to female doctors has resulted in the premature deaths of hundreds of thousands of women. Therefore, I passionately implore our government to take measures to facilitate the study of medicine by women, as it will significantly contribute to saving countless lives. The absence of female doctors is a profound flaw in the education of women in this country, and addressing this issue is of utmost importance."* (My translation)⁷⁴

One of the very important things that Ramabai focused was on women's health. She unabashedly wrote that neither the state nor the civil society (which included families) were concerned about women's health. Mostly she was talking about the modern Western allopathic treatment that was never designed for Indians in the first place and certainly not for Indian women. There was a traditional healing system that was in place but that certainly could not treat graver and more serious ailments which the women suffered from. The solution to this also was offered by Ramabai, which was to implore the state to train Indian women doctors.

Further she says that the chief reason for fewer women than men in India (census report 1880-81 over 5 million difference) after female infanticide is *'the imperfect treatment of the diseases of women in all parts of Hindustan, together with lack of proper hygienic care and medical attendance.'*⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Sarasvati, R. (1888). *The high-caste Hindu woman*. Jas. B. Rogers Printing Co., Philadelphia. xvii

⁷⁵ Ibid.28

Ramabai was deeply concerned about the prevailing societal bias towards giving more importance to sons. This is a problem which persists even till today. Being married was not enough for a woman, she had to bear sons. It is now well known that it is out of the control of women to choose the sex of their child but in the nineteenth century, women were constantly blamed and ridiculed if they gave birth to girls. Ramabai does state that female infants were allowed to be born (i.e. female infanticide was not practiced commonly) but the condition of both the mother and the daughter was pathetic. Such women were persecuted and since polygamy was practiced, husbands were forced to marry again. One with daughters often got relegated to a lower status.

Ramabai, despite being brought up in an Indian household often was appalled at its treatment of women. She for some reason was unable to naturalize or normalize the degraded lower status of women. Ramabai does describe that, according to the ancient tradition, women were allowed to choose their husbands. She specifically mentions the practice of *Swayamvar* (swayam-own var-husband), where women could choose her own husband by offering a challenge to young men. Whosoever fulfilled the challenge, the woman would marry him.⁷⁶ While talking about *Swayamvar* she also tells that it is not uncommon for fathers to marry off their daughters to unfamiliar individuals without taking sufficient care to inquire about the character and social standing of the suitor. She witnessed an extraordinary marriage where, during a religious pilgrimage, a father encountered a widowed man at the river and offered his nine-year-old daughter in marriage. The marriage was quickly arranged, and the girl was taken far from home. While the girl was fortunate to be well cared for. However, the behavior of her father, who showed such little concern in determining his daughter's future, is equally deserving of criticism⁷⁷

Although Ramabai challenges the concept of marriage in the Hindu family, she was very much under the influence of her Western counterparts. It is difficult to ascertain whether she really believed in this or was her writing merely mirroring the ideas of her contemporaries. A married woman with sons was considered very powerful. There is no denying the fact that marriage in Hindu families was considered sacrosanct and once a girl was married she belonged to the family and the husband. Ramabai believed that once a girl was married, she sacrificed her being to keep the moral fabric of the family as well as the society intact. Unfortunately, in all of this

⁷⁶ Sarasvati, R. (1888). *The high-caste Hindu woman*. Philadelphia.31

⁷⁷ Ibid.37-38

she lost her identity. Ramabai wanted women to mean more than just child bearing entities. Ramabai was specifically against child marriage. As such little girls were prepared to marry and therefore instead of receiving training in different subjects, they were trained to cook and clean. They were to assist their mothers, so that when their time came to go to their *sasari*, they were fully prepared. As a child bride a girl was to endure difficult household tasks without much appreciation. They were scolded and beaten for their mistakes and often compromised with the situation.⁷⁸ Such girls when they grew up became bitter and turned against their own peers.

Ramabai did not want women to find solace in a happy married life. She felt that women should expect more from their own selves and from other women. They should teach their daughters and daughter-in-laws to be independent at least in their thought process. She was the first true modern feminist. Ramabai believed that it was unfortunate that most women did not even know that they were subjugated.

Ramabai's major concern was on enforced widowhood. Writing on enforced widowhood she concerned such a life as dreadful. She was totally against considering such a life as a punishment for past-life sins like disobedience, disloyalty, or even murder of the husband.⁷⁹ She was completely against referring to widows as "inauspicious" and more so when they were ascribed the status of a "rand," (prostitute) which her contemporary male social reformers were fairly fond of using. Ramabai not only wrote about how women should take matters into their own hands and be responsible for their lives, but also acted upon it. As a widow, she shifted to Poona and opened institutions to help women like her. As expected, she was not spared and had to face—constant judgment and name-calling from her late husband's relatives and neighbors.⁸⁰ She openly wrote her opinion about how the young widows suffered for no fault of theirs. They were treated with suspicion and kept under close surveillance by her family members. There was always this fear that a widow had uncontrollable desires and they would bring shame to their families. The problem was not with the widow but with male members of the family and outside, who might find the unprotected woman desirable. It was their own countenance that men would be attracted to them. In order to prevent such illicit relationships, the widow had to be disfigured. Her lovely tresses had to be cut and should be colorless.

⁷⁸ Sarasvati, R. (1888).48

⁷⁹ Ibid.6

⁸⁰ Ibid.83

Ramabai was against the harsh restrictions that were placed on the widow's diet and other restrictions that were placed on their social interactions. There was nothing that a woman as a widow could look forward to. A widow could not be educated as she did not have any social support. There was always a fear that if the widow would be educated then she could stand on her two feet.⁸¹

Ramabai was not really in favor of widow remarriage as it was not plausible. She stated that few reformers think that the solution for enforced widowhood was widow remarriage. There were a number of problems with this solution. First, widow remarriage would not be easily accepted in the higher caste.⁸² Secondly, there were not many men who would be brave enough to marry a widow. She writes that she had witnessed the efforts of Indian social reformer men promoting widow remarriage, but the actual number of widow remarriage was very disappointing.⁸³ So then what was the solution? According to Ramabai the solutions were three fold- Self Reliance, Education and Economic Independence.⁸⁴ Her assessment was based on the data as per the census of 1881, according to which the number of widows existing in India were 78,976 were under the age of 0-9 years; 2,07,388 widows were between the age bracket of 10-14; and 2,07,388 widows were between the bracket of 15-19 years.⁸⁵ Ramabai hoped that if both the state and the society became actively involved in ensuring the three fold solution, then only the condition of widows would improve considerably without disturbing the social and moral fabric. Besides these three, Ramabai recommended a number of other ways to improve the condition of the widows.⁸⁶

1. Creating safe houses for high-caste child-widows where they have freedom of action and religious beliefs were respected.
2. Providing education and training in various professions such as teaching, nursing, and housekeeping to enable them to live independently and with dignity.
3. Establishing safe houses for widows under the guidance of influential Hindu individuals or Lady who are committed to creating a nurturing environment.

⁸¹ Sarasvati, R. (1888).85

⁸² Ibid.91

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.100

⁸⁵ Ibid.109

⁸⁶ Ibid137-138

4. Seeking the assistance of qualified American women to inspire a blend of Eastern and Western education and expertise.
5. Setting up libraries with a wide range of literature to enrich the knowledge and opportunities for both the residents and neighboring women.

Pandita Ramabai achieved remarkable accomplishments in her lifetime. She dedicated herself to empowering women in India. Moreover she advocated for social reforms, fighting against child marriage and advocating for women's education. Engaging in philanthropy and humanitarian work, Ramabai provided aid to the needy, particularly widows and orphaned children. Pandita Ramabai's lasting legacy lies in her significant contributions to women's empowerment, education, social reforms, and humanitarian causes.

1.6. RUKMABAI

Rukmabai's case was one of the important cases of the courageous voices of women in history. She became prominent figure in the late 19th century when she won a legal battle against child marriage and conjugal rights.⁸⁷ Her case was a significant milestone in the fight for women's rights in 19th century Western India. Rukmabai was born in Bombay. At age eleven she was married off to Dadaji Bhikaji, a much older guy.⁸⁸ It was a tradition that a girl lived at her parent's place till she reached puberty. However, she continued to live on with her mother and continued her education. When the time came, she refused to go to her husband's house. This was because he was illiterate and poor. She also refused to cohabit with her husband. Her decision not to live with her husband was considered a violation of traditional Hindu customs and sparked a legal battle which gained attention of various Indian male and female reformers feminist such as Behramji Malabari and Pandita Ramabai Saraswati.⁸⁹

In 1884 Dadaji Bhikaji filed a lawsuit in the Bombay high court, demanding that Rukmabai be compelled to live with him as a wife. This case gained significant attention and started debate over child marriage, women's right and individual autonomy. During the legal process

⁸⁷ This case was over all the newspapers such as Times of India, Amrit Bazar Patrika, Vernacular newspaper; Chandra, S. (1996). Rukhmabai: Debate over a Woman's Right to Her Person. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 2937-2947

⁸⁸ Porter, G. (1891). *The letters of the late father George Porter, S. J.*, Archbishop of Bombay. London: Burns & Oates. New York. Catholic Publication Society. 258

⁸⁹ Rukhmabai: Debate over a Woman's Right to Her Person. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 2937-2947; Saraswati, R. (1888). 64

Rukmabai took a legal stand against Dadaji Bhikaji and refused to go with him on grounds that he was not economically independent so she could not ‘safely’ live with him.⁹⁰

Rukmabai used the English model of law and demanded rights and autonomy of women. She challenged the child marriage and asked for validity of her marriage, as this alliance was done when she was only eleven years old and not old enough to take her life’s decision. So, she implied by this that she didn’t consent for this marriage, and she is not bound to be in this alliance.⁹¹ The court ruled in favor of Dadaji Bhikaji, ordering Rukhmabai to either live with her husband or face imprisonment for contempt of court. Rukhmabai refused to comply with the court's order and chose instead to go to prison.⁹²

She wrote a letter to Pandita Ramabai on March 18, 1887, which stated that “*In a shocking ruling, the judges of the full bench are enforcing ancient, inhumane laws that go against the principles of justice and equality. Despite living under British rule, where equal justice is promised, I am being forced to live with a man against my will and bear the costs of the dispute. This decision reflects the bleak reality for women in India, as it strengthens the oppressive influence of mothers-in-law and discourages any hope for positive change. The British government's adherence to Hindu law leaves no room for protection or justice for women.*”⁹³

Ultimately, the government intervened, passing the Age of Consent Act in 1891, which raised the age of consent for girls from ten to twelve years old, and provided some legal protection for girls in child marriages.⁹⁴ While the ‘Rukhmabai case’ did not result in immediate changes to marriage laws, it played a significant role in raising awareness about women's rights and child marriage in India. It contributed to the broader movement for women's rights and legal reform in the country.

1.7. DR. MOTIBAI KAPADIA

Dr. Motibai belonged to the Parsi community and as soon as she was born, she lost her mother. Her father Rustamji Palanji Kapadia, who was a grain and cloth merchant, encouraged Motibai

⁹⁰ Gidumal, D. (1888). *The Life and Life-work of Behramji M. Malabari: Being a Biographical Sketch, with Selections from His Writings and Speeches on Infant Marriage and Enforced Widowhood: and Also His "Rambles of a Pilgrim Reformer"*. Education Society's Press.244

⁹¹ Rukhmabai: Debate over a Woman's Right to Her Person. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 2937-2947.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Sarasvati, R. (1888).66-67

⁹⁴ Gidumal, D. (1888).245

to study despite the opposition of the society. Her uncle was a Persian scholar who was appointed as an examiner at the Bombay University. She was encouraged by her family. She received her early education at the Alexandria English School in Bombay. She was the first woman to pass out from Grant Medical College with the help of philanthropists like Sir Mangaldas Nathubhai and Jamshedji Jijibhai.⁹⁵

Later, Motibai entered Grant Medical College without much persuasion from anyone.⁹⁶ It was not an easy task for women at the time to study medicine. It was practically unheard of. She faced college-ragging when her male colleagues threw paper at her; or would sometimes put a piece of the body in the pockets of the girls while studying the corpses. Despite this, she continued her studies and obtained the degree of L.M. S. (Licensed in Medicine and Surgery). After this she started getting a monthly fellowship of seventy-five rupees. Later she practiced at Kama Hospital in Bombay with Dr. Ratnabai Malabarwala. Motibai Kapadia switched jobs again. She was trained in Britain and after her training she joined Victoria Jubilee Hospital at Ahmedabad for a salary of Rs.150. She also took charge of the hospital's administration and skillfully managed it for a remarkably long period of thirty years. Under her capable leadership, Victoria Jubilee Hospital gained immense popularity, not just in Ahmedabad, but also in the neighboring regions.⁹⁷

During the 19th century delivery of a child was carried out mostly by the experienced women of the family with the help of traditional midwives, which was due to strong bias towards modern medical science. Most women and their male family members avoided seeking modern medical treatment, even in the most difficult of circumstances. As a result, the death toll among women due to pregnancy was very high. Motibai at that time and in such society explained to females and their relatives the benefits of modern medical science. An anonymous Parsi doctor, who wrote his biography, writes on one occasion that once a female relative was so frightened when she saw Forcep, a chiropractic care used to help reposition the baby, that she ran to beat her older sister with sticks. Under such circumstances, Motibai worked patiently and without

⁹⁵ Prasad, S.,Singh,S.,Mehta,S.,Doshi,T.(2019).152

⁹⁶ Kishor, N. (1912). *Second supplement to who's who in India brought up to 1912*.180
<https://parsikhabar.net/individuals/dr-motibai-kapadia-gujarats-first-lady-doctor-treated-sexism-and-untouchability-too/6393/>

⁹⁷ Ramanna, M. (2008). Women physicians as vital intermediaries in colonial Bombay. *Economic and Political Weekly*.71-78.

any hesitation. Her calm and serene nature made many women take advantage of modern medical treatment.⁹⁸

Motibai did not write articles or give speeches opposing the issues of the time but tried to establish modern ideas through her work. For instance, once a Dalit woman came to Motibai's hospital for delivery.⁹⁹ Seeing the seriousness of the case, she was immediately admitted to the hospital. When the upper-class women patients came to know about this, they evacuated the entire ward for the fear of being polluted. The next day Ranchodlal Chhotalal (the founder of the Victoria Jubilee Hospital, the first woman's hospital in 1865) came to know about the whole incident. With the occurrence of this incident, Motibai suggested building a separate room for Dalit women in the hospital. Thus before the arrival of Gandhiji or Dr. Ambedkar, her efforts opened the door to modern medical treatment for Dalit women.¹⁰⁰

Since most of our literature is composed of men, there is no mention of the sensitivity of society to the physical pain of the woman attached to it and the fear of losing her life, as much as it glorifies the joy of motherhood. Thus, society was insensitive to the serious events of a woman's life like childbirth. Motibai sometimes visited the patient's house in times of serious cases. At such time she felt that the issue of untouchability was so grave that if she asked for a vessel for making medicine the family refused to provide it. Sometimes she had to sit down and perform the operation in a very narrow space when there was no table to perform the operation. Motibai saved the lives of many women by treating them in such adverse circumstances.

The role of a trained nurse with a specialist doctor is also very important in the treatment of obstetrics, especially when the delivery is natural, compared to other physical ailments. As an experienced physician, Motibai understood this very well. That is why she trained as many nurses during her tenure as she could. Since the nursing books were in the English language at that time, it was difficult for women to study. So, Motibai translated these books from English to Gujarati and gave the benefit of her knowledge to the nurses. Motibai felt the need to set up a systematic institute for nursing education. This idea was supported by Mr. Chinubhai Baronet, the grandson of Ranchhodlal. Soon a building called "*Edward the Seventh Training*

⁹⁸ Prasad,S., Singh, S.,Mehta,S., Doshi,T. (2019).151

⁹⁹Dr.MotibaiKapadia.<https://parsiakhabar.net/individuals/dr-motibai-kapadia-gujarats-first-lady-doctor-treated-sexism-and-untouchability-too/6393/>

¹⁰⁰ Prasad,S. ,Singh,S., Mehta, S., Doshi,T. (2019).153

Institute for Nurses" was built in the hospital compound to train nurses. As it came to the notice of the people, more and more people started taking advantage of it. Although modern treatment hospitals were started in other places besides Ahmedabad, this effort of Motibai's besides providing with the necessary human resource also was able to give employment to many women. Thus, Motibai established herself as a successful doctor. At the same time, she played an important role in building other infrastructure facilities associated with medical treatment.

It is said that only a woman can understand a woman's suffering. This statement was true for Motibai as well. As she was deeply saddened by the plight of the widows, rape victims or abuse victims. There were women who were widows and they were sexually abused by men. She also treated women who became pregnant because of their inability to control their natural sexual desires. She was very sympathetic towards them and helped them as much as she could not only physically but also economically. In this way, she saved many women from dying or committing suicide and trained them as nurses.

She was also active in the public spaces of Ahmedabad along with her busy medical practice. As she was one of the founding members of *Gujarat Ladies Club*, which was the first women's organization of Gujarat, established in Ahmedabad in 1888.¹⁰¹ There were many organizations that were working for women's issues in Gujarat, but this was the first organization run by women for this purpose. The first female graduate of Gujarat, Vidyabehn Nilkanth, wives of some English bureaucrats, and the superintendent of Mahalakshmi Training College were also members of this very institution. The women of this club would gather together for discussion. As she was fond of sport she started the badminton court at the Ladies Club. During that time, it was not considered appropriate for the women to participate in physical sports.¹⁰²

In 1902 when there was a famine in Gujarat known as *Chappania* famine she along with the women of *Gujarat Ladies Club* collected donations and delivered clothes, food grains, fodder etc. to the famine-affected areas. Thus, due to the efforts of Motibai, the Gujarat Ladies Club has emerged not only as a fun club but also as an organization expressing its concern towards the society. Apart from the Ladies Club, she was also active in the *Women's Zoroastrian Mandal* of Ahmedabad, which was founded by Dhabhai and Deash Dalal for the development of the Parsi community where she was made the president of this organization. She helped poor Parsis through this organization in a way that it should not hurt their self-esteem. Apart from

¹⁰¹ Mehta, S., & Bhatt, P. M. (2008). 15

¹⁰² Mehta, S., & Bhatt, P. M. (2008).15-16

this, she was also actively associated with the school which imparted religious education to the Parsi girls, and also with the Ahmedabad Female Training College.¹⁰³

Motibai was not only a skilled doctor but also kept abreast of the latest developments in her profession. For this purpose, she went abroad for higher studies in 1899. In her place she entrusted her work to Manekbai who was the daughter of Dadabhai Navroji. In Ireland, she passed the FRCSR exam and became the first woman doctor from Bombay to pass this exam.¹⁰⁴

In Gujarat, there are many examples of charities of businessmen and traders. However, there are very few examples of donations by women. Dr. Motibai donated generously for the welfare of others. She built a Parsi colony near Kakaria in Ahmedabad to provide a cheap rate house for the poor Parsis and donated to build a Hall near Victoria Jubilee Hospital. Moreover, she helped the Parsi school financially. After her death, her house in Bombay which was a bungalow worth Rs 5,000 was donated for the education of poor Parsi boys and girls.

Thus, Motibai developed her own distinctive personality and inspired many women. She enjoyed every moment of her life. The uniqueness of her personality was that she established her identity not as someone's wife, daughter or sister but as an independent woman. Even today, her statue dressed in Parsi costume is there in the courtyard of the Victoria Jubilee Hospital opposite the Kalupur railway station which is reminiscent of her service.

1.7. LAKSHMIBAI TILAK

Lakshmibai Tilak was born in 1868 into a Maharashtrian Brahmin family in a village near Nashik. She wrote her autobiography titled '*Smritichitre*' in Marathi, which was translated into English by Josephine Inkster in the year 1950 titled '*I follow After*'.¹⁰⁵ Her autobiography gives us a glimpse into the world that women lived in during the time.

Lakshmibai was 'given' away to her to her *Atyabai* (father's sister) as her aunt didn't have children. It was fairly common for women to give up their children to a relative who did not have one. As a result, she was brought up by her aunt and was not attached to her own family.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Prasad, S.,Singh, S.,Mehta, S.,Doshi,T. (2019).153

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Tilak, L. (1950). *I Follow After: An Autobiography*. By Lakshmaibai Tilak. Translated. by E. Josephine Inkster. University Press. New Delhi.1

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

In her autobiography, Lakshmibai provides insightful details about her parents, shedding light on their lives before her birth. She recounts the stories and experiences that shaped her father and mother, painting a vivid picture of their backgrounds. While talking about her childhood she wrote that her *Nana* (mostly her father) was a stereotypical father who was detached from her children. He never shared a meal with his children and was strict with them. Since he was a high-caste Brahmin, he did not believe in dining with the lower castes. While talking about her mother whom she refers to as *Aai* she is able to portray a picture of a woman who did not share her husband's idiocracies but was affected by it. *Aai* often was described as lonely and longed for companionship which she could achieve by interacting and intermingling with people from all classes and castes and constantly longed for companionship. This was carried out by sharing a recipe or by treating them. As per Lakshmibai, she did not care much about the caste the women belonged to. *Aai* also treated the women as if they were ill. She used her knowledge of local herbs and medicine to treat women. This indicates that women did not have access to allopathic medicine and therefore often turned to their kitchen for basic illnesses.¹⁰⁷ *Aai* was illiterate but was remarkably talented and composed songs and taught other women and girls.¹⁰⁸

At the age of eleven, Lakshmibai was married off by her uncle Govindrao Khambete to poet Narayan Wamanrao Tilak, who was eighteen years old at that time. Lakshmibai was very observant and wrote about an incident before her marriage, Tilak's grandmother-in-law granted her approval for their marriage by gently pinching the lobe of Lakshmibai's left ear, symbolizing that she could be guided or taken anywhere by anyone who desired to do so.¹⁰⁹ Lakshmibai faced a lot of difficulties in her marital life, moreover her father-in-law was emotionally abusive. Apparently, every Friday, Wamanrao the father-in-law of Lakshmi, would undergo divine possession by a goddess, who would settle any household disputes. This was very strange indeed as mostly women were possessed by a goddess. This would have been alright for Lakshmibai but the goddess in one of the episodes predicted that she was to bring misfortune to the family. As a result, Lakshmibai was stripped of her jewelry and fine clothes

¹⁰⁷ Tilak, L. (1950).4

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.11

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 10

and was left with bare minimum. In this the husband was of no use and mostly he kept it to himself.¹¹⁰

Lakshmibai also wrote about her mother -in -law who although was not alive was not only educated but also a poetess of some sort. There is a fair chance it was she who inspired the son to be a poet. Jankibai was also well-versed in embroidery, sewing, and other such crafts. It was the Christian missionary woman who gave her a '*Book of Proverbs*' from which she read and learnt poetry.¹¹¹ Wamanrao on the other hand didn't like her reading or writing so he burnt the book and her writings. Only two lines were present in records which, Lakshmibai stated, are: "*See this small doll of rags, what dignity her share! Our girls from her childhood learn Mother's care.*"¹¹² These lines express the significance and value of a simple rag doll in teaching young girls about the essence of motherly care and nurturing. The phrase "*what dignity her shares*" suggests that even though the doll may be made of materials like rags, it has a sense of grace and worthiness. Wamanrao also did not have a good relationship with his wife. He was like other men in the nineteenth century who believed troubling women was their right. However, Jankibai was resilient and even helped to earn money by sewing and hence she contributed to the household expenses. She even saved money for her children's education.¹¹³ Jankibai almost represented a modern woman, who was strong and took care of her house, her children and even her husband, even though he emotionally abused her.¹¹⁴

In *Smritichitre*,¹¹⁵ Lakshmibai candidly describes her complex relationship with her husband which is a very rare insight so far into the marriage of a woman. As a poet, Tilak was mostly into a creative mindset and therefore did not bother much about material possessions which quite often left them penniless. This led to constant bickering between the two. She discusses one such incident in her book. Once Tilak came home very late at night, Lakshmibai fell asleep while waiting for him for dinner. Tilak knocked on the doors but couldn't wake her up from her deep sleep. Neighbors also woke up and by using a ladder and a long stick the people woke

¹¹⁰ Ibid.14

¹¹¹ Ibid.16

¹¹² Ibid.15

¹¹³ Tilak, L. (1950).17-18

¹¹⁴ Ibid.19

¹¹⁵ Tilak, L. (2001). *Smriti Chitre*. Bharada Prakashan. Bombay

her up through the window, which made Tilak very angry. Fortunately, Tilak was not a violent man, and he simply threatened her to write about the incident in the newspaper.¹¹⁶

As a whimsical poet, Tilak's whereabouts were not known so more than often Lakshmibai was usually left with her father-in-law. Wamanrao was a disturbingly inquisitive and greedy man and often asked her personal questions. Despite this, he seemed to be fine with women working and earning their living.¹¹⁷ For Lakshmibai, the problems were mundane. She was not a socialite nor a social worker. She was a normal woman who did not have great ambitions, all she wanted was soap or oil for her hair.¹¹⁸

Another problem that Lakshmibai faced was that her husband did not enjoy her cooking. She was well-versed in making Deccan dishes, but Tilak was used to eating Konkan dishes. This earned her a lot of taunts from her husband. Lakshmibai found a way to face the challenge. She sought the help of her tenant Gangabai Joshi to learn the cooking style that her husband liked.¹¹⁹ Tilak would cook only when Lakshmibai was menstruating. It was her time to rest and both the men in the house would work.¹²⁰

When Tilak got a job at Moropant Walvekar's printing press in Bombay, he took Lakshmi with him.¹²¹ After this the couple moved from one place to another. Tilak had a passion for writing poems and therefore she was mostly immersed in it.¹²² The burden of managing finances fell on Lakshmibai. She took care of the financial matters of the house and as she was unhappy with the spending habits of her husband. Lakshimbai naturally felt that Tilak lacked business acumen. Lakshmibai was blessed with four children out of which only one survived. Although Tilak was not interested in educating her, he decided to teach her in any case. What he did not realize was that she was busy with many chores.¹²³ When a girl was born to the couple, Tilak had great hopes for her and had hoped to train her to be like Anandibai but the baby could not

¹¹⁶ Tilak, L. (1950) .29

¹¹⁷ Ibid.31

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Tilak, L. (1950).36

¹²⁰ Ibid.41

¹²¹ Ibid. 47

¹²² Ibid.51

¹²³ Ibid.70

survive.¹²⁴ The only baby that survived was the third one which was given to her sister-in-law to look after. She had a problem with breastfeeding him as she was not well. So, he was fed by Bhagirathibai Mulay and Parvatibai Deshpande.¹²⁵

Lakshmibai faced many challenges in her life, but she faced each challenge with equal strength. One such major challenge was Tilak's lack of interest in the household. He would disappear for months together leaving his wife and child to fend for themselves. At the time, other women around Lakshmibai helped her survive. Women from various caste backgrounds came to help her.¹²⁶

Another challenge that Lakshmibai faced was her ill health and that of children. People, including her husband expected her to follow the traditions even if it meant that she would have to remain hungry after delivering a baby. Lakshmibai on multiple occasions refused to abide by the rules. For this, she had to listen to her husband and other people in the society. Despite the challenges that she faced, Lakshmibai continued to read and write. Tilak was experimenting with his faith and began to show interest in the Christianity. They both argued on various matters. Sometimes these arguments hurt Lakshmibai and she composed poems around them expressing her sorrow:

"I rise and leave thee, saith my lord.

Who then shall I call King and God?

Since thou alone pervade all,

*Say, say at whose feet may I fall?"*¹²⁷

In these lines Lakshmibai shows her emotions of being a wife; she is rising and leaving, as Tilak's her lord commands. She expresses a sense of uncertainty, questioning who she should acknowledge as her ruler and divine authority in the absence of her husband (lord). As Tilak goes out for months without informing her about his whereabouts. Further Lakshmibai

¹²⁴ Ibid.77

¹²⁵ Ibid.89

¹²⁶ Tilak, L. (1950).92-95

¹²⁷ Ibid. 113

acknowledges the omnipresence of a higher power and seeks guidance on whom she should submit to and worship.

In the year 1895, Tilak converted to Christianity which made Lakshmibai heartbroken and sick.¹²⁸ During this she wrote a letter in reply of his letter: "*O friend as cruel as a second wife, My own thoughts make a burden of my life, I have a sister hope and relief to bring, Yet slave anxiety hath words that sting*"¹²⁹ These lines show the inner struggles of Lakshmibai caught between the conflicting emotions of hope and anxiety, while seeking solace from her relatives who may not provide the desired comfort.

The only method that the women of the nineteenth century had at their disposal was 'fasting'. This was a tool which was used by Mahatma Gandhi. When Tilak left, Lakshmibai had to resort to fasting to get him back. This was a form of penance when Tilak converted to Christianity. She refused to live with him. However, one Englishwoman named Miss Harvey invited her to live with Tilak and even offered her money.¹³⁰ After the conversion they lived separately for five years. Eventually Lakshmibai gave in and converted to Christianity. In addition to her role as a devoted wife, Lakshmibai transcended societal expectations and emerged as a celebrated writer, a compassionate humanitarian, and an exceptional orator.

What makes her narrative truly remarkable is the absence of any exaggeration. Unlike many autobiographical accounts that subtly glorify the self, Lakshmibai avoided this pitfall by providing an honest and objective appraisal of her life.

1.8. ANANDIBAI JOSHI

The story of the life of Anandibai Joshi has been made into a biopic in Marathi. Despite this, her life is not too well known by common people. Caroline Dall wrote the biography of Anandibai, which gives us an insight into not only into the personality of Anandibai but also what were the issues that were considered important for women. Anandibai was the sixth of ten children of her parents. Yamuna aka Anandibai was born on 31st March 1865.¹³¹ The

¹²⁸ Ibid.129

¹²⁹ Tilak, L. (1950). 139

¹³⁰ Ibid. 156

¹³¹ *Stree Mitra*. (1892). 214

childhood of Anandibai throws an interesting light on the stereotypical role of her parents. It is usually believed that the fathers are typically strict and distant, in the case of her, it was the mother who was like that. Ganpatrao, her father, was considered to be generally lenient and indulgent, whereas her mother, Gangabai, was not a very loving or affectionate one. No explanations are offered as to why her mother was this way. There is nothing much written about the great difficulties that would have been faced by a woman with ten children. However, Anandibai's maternal grandmother apparently compensated and showed her great love and care.¹³²

Yamuna's relations with her mother were not very cordial. Gangabai often viewed Yamuna's stubbornness and persistence, along with her perception of being an unwanted daughter, as personal frustration that she would frequently express through physical violence.¹³³ This can be seen in one of the letters written by Anandibai in which she mentions that during her punishments, Gangabai would employ not only ropes or straps but also stones, sticks, and burning charcoal, but thankfully, she escaped without any permanent physical scars or disabilities. Due to this, she felt that Gangabai lacked an understanding of the responsibilities of a mother, and as a result, she did not experience the natural love that a child typically feels towards their mother. Therefore, Yamuna did not want to recall her childhood memories as it brought her pain.¹³⁴

In 1870, Gopalrao Vinayak Joshi became a clerk in the Postal Department of Bombay, while Yamuna (Anandibai) was just five years old. Being new to the area, Gopalrao eagerly connected with his family head, i.e., Ganpatrao was Anandibai's father. Ganpatrao arranged for Gopalrao to teach Sanskrit to Yamnua, which continued for three years.¹³⁵

After three years Gopalrao got transferred to Alibag. Anandibai, who was merely eight years old, wanted to follow him there so she could continue her lessons. It is very unclear as to why he agreed to let his daughter follow Gopalrao but apparently, it was because Yamnuna was eight years hence of a marriageable age and Gopalrao was a suitable groom (even though he

¹³² Kosambi, M. (2019). *A Fragmented Feminism: The Life and Letters of Anandibai Joshee*. Taylor & Francis. New York. 11

¹³³ Ibid.12

¹³⁴ Ibid.12-13

¹³⁵ Dall, C. W. H. (1888). *The Life of Dr. Anandabai Joshee: A Kinswoman of Pundita Ramabai*. Roberts Brothers.Boston.26

was a widower). Yamuna on her part was insistent that she wanted to live with Gopalrao.¹³⁶ It is unclear as to what position did her mother take in all this. Caroline Dall's account suggests that she was fine with her daughter living with Gopalrao. Ultimately Anandibai, accompanied by her maternal grandmother, followed Gopalrao. On 31st March 1874, nine-year-old Anandibai was married off to Gopalrao who was seventeen years older than her.¹³⁷ Further, Gopalrao's sole condition for this marriage was that he would be granted the freedom to educate his bride without any interference from her family.¹³⁸

After their marriage Anandibai and Gopalrao lived with Anandibai's parents for some time. It was normal for a bride to stay at her parent's house till she reached puberty. Nonetheless, the women of the house insisted that Anandibai join her husband in their bedroom during the night.¹³⁹ Hence this seems to be an outside pressure on Anandibai. To counter this pressure Anandibai would enter Gopalrao's room but would always find a way to leave. Gopalrao, understanding her hesitation, tried to convince her to stay without using force. Yet, he also felt the need to assert his authority, fearing that if he didn't, Anandibai would dominate him.¹⁴⁰ Anandibai wrote about her feelings for her husband in a letter, in which she described the treatment she received in which she was beaten by him. It wasn't only physical torture it was mental torture for a girl of such a young age.¹⁴¹ However, she had no way out and, in any case, it was the lesser of many evils which faced an abandoned woman. Over time the couple grew to respect each other. Anandibai grew up to be an accomplished lady. She was good at the household chores and was good at her studies. She was also independent and would manage work such as buying a train ticket or boarding a train.¹⁴² Despite this it is mentioned that Gopalrao found mistakes in her work and at times would be harsh with her.¹⁴³

Gopalrao continued to teach Anandibai at home. These lessons included reading, writing and even speaking. Gopalrao used to give Anandibai daily topics for discussion. For this, she had

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Dall, C. W. H. (1888).28

¹³⁸ Kosambi, M. (2019). 14

¹³⁹ Kanitkar, K. (1912). *Doctor Anandibai Joshi Yanche Charitra (Dr Anandibai Joshi's Biography)*. Pune: Sevasadan. Pune. 27

¹⁴⁰ Kosambi, M. (2019). 17

¹⁴¹ Ibid.18

¹⁴² Ibid.26

¹⁴³ Ibid.

to speak for a length of time and if she failed, it resulted in her going without food. During their time in Bhuj, Anandibai further enhanced her English proficiency with the assistance of Mrs. Batty, the wife of Colonel Batty, who also taught her sewing and knitting.¹⁴⁴

Anandibai gave birth to a boy child but unfortunately the baby died only after ten days. She convinced herself that if she had a formal allopathic medical treatment, her baby would have survived. She became determined to do something about it. In this, her husband, a co-sharer of the grief, showed her a path and encouraged her to become a doctor. Anandibai's response to the death of her child was fairly emotional but that of her husband appeared to be more practical or at least was not as expressive as hers. In either case, Gopalrao pushed Anandibai to pursue her education. It is not clear whether Anandibai was enthusiastic or not about her studies. Since Gopalrao was also her teacher, therefore, she had no option but to comply. She and her husband met with many challenges on the way. There was a larger social unacceptability towards women studying. Gopalrao, however, was determined to see that ambition carry through.¹⁴⁵

Anandibai was enrolled in a Government Girls School. Anandibai continued her informal home education with the help of missionary ladies who used to teach her English.¹⁴⁶ She was very bright and soaked up all the knowledge.

Gopalrao, aware of keenness of Anandibai's mind and learning capabilities, wrote to the Missionaries in the USA to sponsor Anandibai's higher studies.¹⁴⁷ Perchance one Miss. B.F. Carpenter read the letter which was published in the magazine. She sponsored Anandibai's trip, inviting her to the USA for her further studies.¹⁴⁸ There was a series of letter exchanges between them. In one of the letters Anandibai wrote "*I desire to maintain my manners and customs, as long as they do not harm my well-being. Is it possible for me to live in your country while preserving my own culture, and what will be the expenses involved? Reflecting on the hardships endured by women in India throughout history, I eagerly anticipate the arrival of Western influence as a precursor to liberation. Although I struggle to express my thoughts fully, I firmly believe that individuals should not rely on others for their sustenance and basic*

¹⁴⁴ Dall, C. W. H. (1888).26

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 32

¹⁴⁶ Kosambi, M. (2019).21

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.29

¹⁴⁸ Dall, C. W. H. (1888). 36

needs. The cycle of family conflicts and societal decline will persist until each person becomes self-reliant."¹⁴⁹

Gopalrao realized that moving to Calcutta would prepare Anandibai more for a trip to the United States. In the meanwhile, she kept her correspondence with Ms Carpenter alive. Anadibai joined a nearby school whose lady superintendent was an English lady who focused on promoting the conversion of students to Christianity.¹⁵⁰ Anandibai initially found it difficult to adjust due to religious differences. Referring to the school experience in Calcutta Anandibai wrote a letter to Mrs. Carpenter on 26th December 1881 in which she expressed *"that she feels the only school experience she got was from the mission school in Bombay. While appreciating the dedication of the mission ladies, she criticizes their insensitivity to others' feelings. As there was an incident involved in which she was being forced to read the Bible under the threat of expulsion, but her husband persuaded her to return, and she eventually complied with the school rules."* (my translation)¹⁵¹

Calcutta, despite being a colonial city, was also a hub of Bengali Bhadrak. They were of a traditional mindset and therefore could never accept Anandibai and Gopalrao's freer relationship. Some even believed they really were not a couple as she walked along with him on the road or talked and laughed freely with her husband. Anandibai wrote about the hardship she faced during her experience, that passers-by would gather around, some mocking and laughing uncontrollably while others sitting in their verandahs made absurd comments and even threw pebbles at me. Shopkeepers and vendors treated me with disgust, spitting and making lewd gestures. It's hard to imagine the distressing state I found myself in, longing to escape the crowd and be closer to the comfort of home.¹⁵²

Anadibai sold her jewelry to fund further her studies. Soon she left for America to study medicine.¹⁵³ This was a novel, and a lone episode was reported in Frank Leslie's illustrated newspaper as *"In an extraordinary act, Mrs. Anandabai Joshee, a respected Brahmin woman, has caused a stir in India by defying traditional Hindu beliefs and practices. She has bravely expressed her determination to attain the same rights and opportunities enjoyed by women in*

¹⁴⁹ Dall, C. W. H. (1888).36

¹⁵⁰ Kosambi, M. (2019). 23

¹⁵¹ Kosambi, M. (2019). 23; Dall, C. W. H. (1888) .51

¹⁵² Dall, C. W. H. (1888). 86

¹⁵³ Kosambi, M. (2019). 100

Christian nations. Her courageous stance is particularly remarkable considering the strict restrictions imposed on Brahmins, such as prohibition from crossing the ocean, consuming non-Brahmin food, or drinking water touched by Europeans, violations of which carry severe penalties."¹⁵⁴

In America besides studying medicine, she also continued her Sanskrit studies¹⁵⁵ She expressed that living in the US were the most fulfilling moments of her life.¹⁵⁶ She followed her culture and rituals and taught others about Hindu culture. She told people over there that she "*would eat and drink, live or die as a Hindu.*"¹⁵⁷ She had joined Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania for a four-year graduate course, which she completed on 3rd October 1883.

At the college, there were Turkish, Syrian, and Chinese students. However, Anandabai stood out as the first student from a foreign country who arrived wearing her native attire and maintaining her cultural practices.¹⁵⁸ In the year 1884, Anandabai delivered a speech to a Ladie's Missionary Society regarding '*Early Marriages*'. About this she wrote to Gopalrao that, approximately two thousand women gathered, with some unable to enter due to lack of space, she addressed them without a prepared speech. For this, she received a reward of 10 dollars. Despite having to study during the vacation, expressed her willingness to write another lecture on "*Hindu Women*" if time permits. She told him that she is receiving numerous lecture invitations, but she consistently declined them to prioritize her studies. She suggested the establishment of an orphanage to him. Anandabai expressed her willingness to assist in the orphanage project upon her return, emphasizing the need for more schools dedicated to orphans. She conveyed her willingness to sacrifice her life for the betterment of India's orphaned children and prayed for the recipient to make a similar resolution.¹⁵⁹ Caroline Dall wrote that Anandibai was very well versed with English, Sanskrit and Marathi and her English was exquisite.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ Kosambi, M. (2019). 106

¹⁵⁵ Dall, C. W. H. (1888). 95

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 96

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 100

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 102

¹⁵⁹ Kosambi, M. (2019). 156

¹⁶⁰ Dall, C. W. H. (1888). 115

During her stay in America, she also faced many difficulties such as: financial problems, cultural differences or illness (due to cold weather) but these hurdles never stopped her. She faced these problems with great courage and perseverance. In the year 1886 she wrote her graduation thesis on "*Hindu Obstetrics*."¹⁶¹ She was very keen to join the service as soon as she finished her studies. She wrote to Mrs. Carpenter on 31st January 1886 that she had few things to complete before her graduation and she wanted to join New England Hospital the next year. In March 1886 Anadibai completed her graduation.¹⁶²

Anandibai was also in touch with her contemporaries. For instance, when Ramabai's husband died, Anandabai invited her to the United States to pursue her career. She was aware that widows in India had very little opportunity to survive, leave alone pursue a career or work.¹⁶³

Before returning to India, Anandibai had multiple offers. For instance, she was set to join Blockley Hospital but then she received an offer from the Dewan of Kolhapur 'Meherji Kunwarji' to join Albert Edward Hospital in Kolhapur as a Lady Doctor.¹⁶⁴ Dewan wrote a letter mentioning the conditions and certain clauses for the service. Anandibai accepted this offer, but she put up a condition before the Dewan that she would accept fees only from the wealthy and royal people.¹⁶⁵

In late 1886, when eventually Anandibai returned to India, she received a grand welcome. The princely state of Kolhapur appointed her as the physician-in-charge of the female ward of the local Albert Edward Hospital. However, the harsh cold weather and different food and environment in the USA had taken a toll on her health. She was diagnosed with tuberculosis and was admitted to the Woman's Hospital while in Philadelphia itself. Upon her arrival in India, her health grew much worse. She died in early 1887 just before turning twenty-two.¹⁶⁶

Anandibai has a rich legacy and inspired many women to pursue the field of medicine in India and in the United States. However, she did not get to practice medicine as she had hoped for, she paved the way for millions of women after her to pursue medicine. To honor her, The

¹⁶¹ Ibid.125

¹⁶² Ibid.128

¹⁶³ Ibid.130

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.143

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.146

¹⁶⁶ Dall, C. W. H. (1888).185

Institute for Research and Documentation in Social Sciences (IRDS), an NGO in Lucknow still awards the Anandibai Joshi Award for Medicine.

The life and experience of extraordinary women played a central role in framing women's history as they provide insights into the realities of their lives and the barriers they faced. Their concerns encompassed a wide range of aspects, including livelihood, family, and children, as well as healthcare. Understanding the significance of healthcare for women is vital as it impacts their overall well-being and empowerment. These women were not merely passive objects but also active subjects with the agency, expressing their concerns and experiences. Acknowledging this agency is crucial in breaking the stereotypes that often limit women's roles and potential in society. By recognizing their agency, they can also be seen participating in public spaces.

During the nineteenth century, it was not only the extraordinary women whose voices can be seen but also of ordinary women. These ordinary women can be seen in literary sources such as journals, magazines, documents or newspapers.

SECTION-II: MAKING WOMEN VISIBLE IN HISTORY THROUGH COMMON WOMEN'S WRITINGS IN NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

The emergence of women's writings in newspapers and magazines was a groundbreaking step towards making women visible in history. These platforms provided a means for women to engage in public discourse, challenge prevailing norms, and advocate for their rights. As we delve into these writings, we aim to get the narratives shared by common women in newspapers and magazines to reflect not only their struggles but also their resilience, creativity, and determination to shape a more equitable world. The following section focuses on the writing of ordinary women in literary sources.

2.1. WIDOW REMARRIAGE: IN A LETTER FROM A WIDOW TO A WIDOWER IN THE NEWSLETTER '*DANDIYO*'

In '*Dandiyo*' the newspaper started by Narmad, a widow expressed her desire to marry a recent widower. Although she did not sign her name, she hoped for a favorable response. The letter was laced with lure and appeal to a recent widower *seth* (a prosperous merchant). The widow calls herself 'poor', it is difficult to ascertain whether she was referring to poverty or her

circumstances. Nonetheless, she was writing, so she was literate. She shows uncanny familiarity to the *seth*. She refers to the *seth* as '*mara, jwan seth*', she calls him '*paisadar*', or wealthy businessman. In this letter she is intelligent, witty but inarticulate. She begins the letter by paying respects to his dead wife, where she writes that the *sethani* (wife of the *seth*) was humble despite being wealthy. She was not educated or smart but understood *Streedharm*. The language with which the widow writes showcase a lack of articulation. She calls herself younger than the *seth* and therefore not in the position to advise, but she still advises that the *seth* has five children who need tending to. She then flirts with the widower and says that although *seth* is only thirty-two, to her he was fairly young.

In the letter she also warns him of two kinds of women:

1. The one who shows love even if they don't feel it.
2. The other one who is an independent and educated woman.

It is not very clear from the letter as to how old she is but while talking about herself, she reveals that she is a sixteen-year-old young woman. Since she belonged to the upper caste group, being educated meant that she did have an upper hand vis-a-vis other non-literate women or widows of the same caste. She was a thinking individual and therefore understood the perils of widowhood. She understood that her life had to mean more than the jewelry and other comforts. It also meant that she was willing to become a part of the larger canvas and if possible, claim her place. The widow was hoping that she would be a partner to the *seth* in the reforms that he hoped she would. She even taunts him to that effect. She shows a great understanding of the importance of the reforms especially in favor of widow remarriage. She taunts him and says that he would give up reform, but she never would. She points out that despite being a reformer, the *seth* gave gifts to the temple and allowed '*beating of chest*' as mourning at the death of his wife. She counsels that had it been her in his palace she would never have done so.

The widow makes it clear that the reason why she was writing to him, was because he was a reformer. One does not know whether she feigned disinterest in wealth and money or was she serious about it. As a young woman, she was acutely aware of the responsibilities of a wife. She promises that she would look after his children like they were her own. She reiterates the importance of widow remarriage, perhaps by attempting to champion her case. *She says "I will be born to you, many other widows, find life. A new life will end, the sadness in the country."* (My Translation). She not only pleads for her case but for the case of other widows as well.

She ends her letter by once again imploring him that this was an excellent opportunity to correct the wrongs. She urges him to communicate his wishes through ‘*Dandiyo*’, she signs as widow Roop Gunavati.¹⁶⁷

This letter of widow offers a fascinating glimpse into the mindset and struggles of a young widow in the 19th century. Despite her lack of formal education, Roop Gunavati displays a remarkable intellect, wit, and determination to seek a better life for herself and advocate for widow remarriage. Her letter stands as a powerful testament to the agency of common women in a patriarchal society, determined to challenge norms and claim their rightful place in shaping the course of history.

2.2. MANBAI A BHATIA WIDOW: NEWS PUBLISHED IN TIMES OF INDIA

In the daily newspaper, Times of India on 26th April 1882 a case was seen titled as ‘*The police court: Curious Charge of Cheating*’¹⁶⁸ which involved Manbai who was a Bhatia widow. Through this case, her voice and experiences are brought to the forefront as she accuses Asser Purshotum and Premabai of cheating. The case was heard at the Fort Police Court with Mr. Webb presiding over the proceedings.

As a Bhatia widow, Manbai found herself entangled in a complex situation involving Asser Purshotum and his mother, Premabai. Despite societal expectations and the limitations placed upon her as a widow, Manbai actively pursued legal action against them for cheating her out of valuable ornaments and cash.

Manbai's account demonstrates her initial consent to Asser's proposal of arranging her remarriage through his Bania friend. However, she was deceived by false promises and fraudulent statements made by Asser and his mother. They manipulated her and convinced her to deposit her valuable ornaments with them under the pretense of protecting them from her late husband's relatives. Despite being misled, she went forward with Asser. However, soon she realized that the entire story had been fabricated. Even in Nasik, she continued to seek justice by granting Asser a power of attorney to recover a debt owed to her, hoping to regain some control over her situation.

¹⁶⁷ Narmadshankar, L. (1912).383-385

¹⁶⁸ *The Police Court: Curious Charge of Cheating*. The Times of India (1861-2010); Apr 26, 1882; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Times of India.³

She recognized the fraudulent nature of the situation and stood up for her rights, refusing to be further deceived or dependent on Asser. This case sheds light on the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society and highlights Manbai's voice within those limitations. Her decision to pursue legal action against those who wronged her shows her courage and determination to seek justice.

Manbai's actions contribute to the larger narrative of women's voices and their fight against injustice. She was evident in her decision to pursue legal action, her refusal to accept a false sense of security, and her persistence in seeking justice.

2.3. WOMEN'S MAGAZINE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In the late nineteenth century, social reformers in India utilized the medium of newspapers and magazines to raise awareness about various social issues and propagate change. It was during this era, in the sixth decade of the nineteenth century, that Parsi and Hindu social reformers took the initiative to launch a magazine called '*Stree Bodh*.'¹⁶⁹ There are multiple reasons why this magazine is important. This was the time when a generation of Gujaratis and Parsis were trained to the Western ways of thinking. They wanted their wives to be as Western as they were, if not more. Women too were trained at home to read and write and therefore could contribute to the magazine. Hence it is no surprise that the editors were either Parsis or Gujaratis such as, Beheramji Gandhi, Sorabaji Shapurji, Karsandas Mulji, Mangaldas Nathubhoy, and Nanabhai Haridas. This monthly publication continued until 1952. There were more than 1,000 issues which contained articles on various subjects. '*Stree Bodh*' was to educate and inform women across Gujarat. The idea was to provide an opportunity to women to write what was considered as important to them. It has become an important source to understand and rewrite women in the nineteenth century.

Like many things at the time, setting up such a magazine was not an easy task. It was not all that difficult either. Many women with the help of their male relatives were ready to contribute. The difficulties were more logistical due to the lack of printing facilities for such an initiative. The first step was to create some sort of organization that would make women aware of such an opportunity. As a result, '*Stree Bodh Sabha*' (Women's Awareness Society) was launched

¹⁶⁹ Shukla, S. (1991). WS63-WS66

by an all-male team.¹⁷⁰ In the first meeting of the Society, it was decided to publish a monthly magazine in the form of a sample copy and distribute 1,100 copies for free among families, with an estimated annual cost of Rs. 2000.¹⁷¹ This was apparently a success as '*Stree Bodh*' continued to grow.

In the beginning, the thrust of the magazine was on publishing articles covering different aspects of women's lives. The articles included brief biographies and illustrations of famous women from India and abroad, depicting the examples of the "*Laayekivalee Aurat*" (worthy woman) and the "*Vakhaayalee Aurat*" (renowned woman). These articles aimed to provide women with knowledge beyond their immediate surroundings. They covered various topics such as the history and geography of different countries and included articles like "*Iran Deshni Mukhteser Hakikat*" (Brief Reality of Iran), "*Maharani Victoriaanu Jahernamu*" (Publications of Queen Victoria), "*China no Shahenshah*" (Emperor of China), "*Rusiya Desh*" (Russia), "*Bhugolvigyan*" (Geography), "*Daryai Ghoda*" (Sea Horses), and more.¹⁷²

These articles served as an inspiration for women to broaden their horizons and provided information on social issues. The articles covered a myriad range and were themed around issues such as social reform, "*Sudharelee Aurat*" (Reformed Woman); or articles that focused on education of children, "*Chhokarao ni Kelavani Vishe Mataone be Shabd*" (A Few Words for Mothers on Raising Sons); from educating young women as how to make their marriage successful "*Shadini Shikhaman*" (Marriage Education); to even educating young men in "*Juvaan Purushone Shikhaman*" (Education for Young Men). Since women were mostly taking care of the household, which was mostly living with the extended family, it is only natural to assume that there would be articles related to relationships with the in-laws in the magazine. For example, "*Saasu Vahuna Kajiya - Dukhi Dikarini Fariyad*" (Complaints of a Daughter-in-law to Her Mother-in-law); or "*Sansaarik Dukh*" (Social Sorrows), "*Ek Khara Dostni Vafadari*" (Loyalty of a True Friend), "*Gharena Vina Baedi Kaai Shobe Ke*" (The worth of a wife without jewelry). There were some interesting articles as well such as "*Jo Koi Bhootthi Bihetehne Bhoot Valage*" (If Someone Fears Ghosts, Ghosts Will Haunt Them) and "*Ek Auratno Ajaayab Jeva Hevaal-Bhoot Daakanno Vahem*" (The Strange Condition of a Woman

¹⁷⁰ Mehta, H. ed. (May 2012). *Sāhityika Sāmāyiko : Paramparā ane Prabhāva*. [Literary Magazines: Tradition and Influence] (in Gujarati) (1st ed.). Ahmedabad: Rannade Prakashan. 146–148.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² *Stree Bodh* Monthly Book: 1 to 5. Daftar Ashakara Press. Mumbai.

the Illusion of Seeing Ghosts). Another important aspect of a woman's life was marriage, i.e., the rituals and other matters related to it. This entertaining magazine also covered that. For instance, articles such as "*Laganma Futana Na Gava Vishenu Geet*" (A Song about Singing at Weddings) were based on marriage songs.¹⁷³

Informative articles related to what was considered to be popular in the Western world also were published in the magazine. For instance, translations of Shakespeare's plays such as "*Venice no Sodagar*" (Merchant of Venice) and "*Bhulchukni Hasaahas*" (Comedy of Errors) etc. were published in various issues of the magazine. Women were made aware of scientific developments by articles such as "*Divadandi*" (Lighthouse), "*Sukshmadarshak Yantra*" (Microscope), "*Varal Yantra*" (Steam engine), "*Telegraph*," and others.¹⁷⁴ Additionally women also were informed of the different skill sets that they could acquire, such as knowledge about textiles or creating jewelry etc. There was even an article in 1861, titled "*The Art of Printing and Publishing*" which provided information about printing and publishing.¹⁷⁵

The initial issues of the magazine focused on providing simple and accessible knowledge to women through the medium of the magazine. Initially, the authors of the magazine were exclusively men. At that point the magazine aimed to center around information related to mostly household management and child-rearing. The magazine also published articles addressing the misconceptions and beliefs prevalent in society through knowledge and informative stories. At the end of each issue, there were stories that provided entertainment along with general knowledge, pride, songs, and poetry.

Rast Gofatar Indian social reformers played a vital role in motivating women to write in this magazine. Women like Harkunwarbai started sending their poems to the magazine. Soon more women followed the steps of Harkunwarbai and sent their writings to the magazines. The whole concept of Indian women being illiterate and uniformed gets washed away by the kind of reception that the magazine had. Dr. Ratnabai Rustamji Malabarwala, Dhanabai Nanavati, Sunabai Dinshaw Parekh, Rupabai Dorabji, Pirojbai Kekhushro Jeevanji, Ratnabai Adelji, and

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ *Stree Bodh*. (1861). April.93

Shirin Kabraji, among other female writers, expressed their thoughts on various subjects through their writings in this magazine.

'*Stree Bodh*' from 1863 to 1904 became a prominent platform that showcased the literary works, including stories, articles, plays, and discussions on women's health, the role of women in society, and social reforms. It gained popularity among women readers. Earlier the magazine was edited by men like Kaikushro Kabraji who published his dramas, stories, and articles in the magazine. After him Shirin Kabraji managed the publication of *Stree Bodh* till 1912.¹⁷⁶

There were many other magazines that were started following '*Stree Bodh*' such as '*Stree*', '*Gruhsobha*', '*Sudha*', and '*Shree*'. However, '*Stree Mitra*' became a magazine where only women made contributions. It was started in 1867, by Adhyaru Rustamji Pestonji.¹⁷⁷ The aim was to promote both new and established women writers. Some of the stories that were featured in the magazine were translated from English to be made more accessible to women.

The magazine featured contributions from several Parsi women who covered a wide range of topics related to women's duties, family and familial aspects, loneliness, relationships, education among women, education and morality, education and information, kitchen and cooking, embroidery, and craft, as well as general news. An article titled "*Ghar Kedawani*"¹⁷⁸ discussed methods to raise children at home. For instance, the article advised mothers to use both strictness and leniency with their children. There was a realization in the article that the children were very controlled, and a suggestion was made to have a more comfortable relationship with the children.

Similarly, Dr. Dhanbai Saorabji Master wrote about "*Bacchani Mavzat* (Child Care)".¹⁷⁹ She pointed out that the death rate in children was higher than that of adults. On one hand, the death rate for adults was 20 (2 %) and the mortality rate between the age of one to five was 100 to 110; on the other hand, the infant mortality rate for a one-year-old was 200 (20 %). She also stated the reasons for high mortality rate in children: weaker constitution; continuous

¹⁷⁶ *Stree Bodh* and *Sansar Sudharo*. 1912. 77

¹⁷⁷ Prasad, S., Singh, S., Mehta, S., Doshi, T. (2019). 550

¹⁷⁸ *Stree Mitra*. (1892). 161

¹⁷⁹ *Stree Mitra*. (1892). 90-03

pregnancy; inappropriate; weaker constitution; continuous pregnancy; inappropriate delivery practices; no breastfeeding; and lack of or delayed vaccination etc. The magazine covered articles which consisted of valuable lessons and guidance to women regarding their responsibilities and duties. For instance, it covered topics such as nurturing relationships, managing household affairs, raising children, and maintaining a balanced lifestyle. Pirozbai Izner wrote “*Streeni potana Gharni tatha Ghara Taraphani pharajo*” (Women’s duties towards her maternal home and her own home)¹⁸⁰. Similarly, Mrs. Dawar, in her article, ‘*Stree Jatna Nav Gun*’ described nine qualities that women possessed to meet the challenges.¹⁸¹

In ‘*Stree Mitra*’ articles on various aspects of family life, including the roles and dynamics within the family, parenting, marriage, and intergenerational relationships, advice on building strong family bonds and resolving conflicts were written by women. For instance, Jaiji Kha. Kohla wrote about “*Kutumba ma Samp*”¹⁸² (Understanding in the Family), Miss Banubai Pestalji Navroji Doctor wrote “*Khari Kirtino davo Kone Ghate chhe?*”¹⁸³ (to whom does the unnecessary praise suit?), and Miss Shirin Dutamalji Nanavati wrote “*Streeyo Ne Chhutapan*”¹⁸⁴ (Women’s Liberation), Ruby wrote on “*Paryana Thata Sukhi kem thavu*” (How to live happily after marriage).¹⁸⁵

Loneliness is a common human experience, and the magazine also addressed loneliness amongst women in its various issues. This provided insights on how women could cope with loneliness.—For instance, in “*Ekal Petapadhane Lagti Eksha*” Miss Banubhai Paestanalji Navroji Doctor wrote on methods to handle loneliness.¹⁸⁶

Like other magazines of the time, ‘*Stree Mitra*’ also emphasized on the importance of education for women. It featured articles on promoting education among women; overcoming barriers to education, and highlighting success stories of educated women. For example, Meherbai A

¹⁸⁰ *Stree Mitra*. (1889). 65

¹⁸¹ *Stree Mitra*. (1890). 243

¹⁸² *Stree Mitra*. (1889). 9

¹⁸³ Ibid.17

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.102

¹⁸⁵ *Stree Mitra*. (1894). 142-143

¹⁸⁶ *Stree Mitra*. (1889). 34

Vakil & Ratanbai A Vakil in wrote an article titled, “*Parsiyoma Uchi Stree Kevalani*”;¹⁸⁷ and Alibai Shahpurji wrote on “*Chokra Mathi Stree*” “*Matani Kelavani Badlo*” which described how mother’s education benefitted the children.¹⁸⁸

The articles in ‘*Stree Mitra*’ also explored the relationship between education and morality, discussing how education can contribute to personal growth, ethical values, and social responsibility. It encouraged women to seek education as a means to develop their character and contribute positively to society. Education was also closely linked to access to information, and the magazine emphasized the role education played in expanding women's knowledge and awareness. Besides these, the magazine contained articles giving information on various subjects, current affairs, and emerging trends. Hence, it kept women well-informed and intellectually engaged. As the kitchen was (still is) considered the domain of women, ‘*Stree Mitra*’ dedicated sections on culinary tips and recipes. Women wrote features on recipes, cooking techniques, nutrition advice, and tips for efficient kitchen management. For example, Shirin Pathak in her article ‘*Randhwano Hunnar*’ wrote of the recipes of different cuisines. According to her, parents should teach all their children to cook as it is not taught in school.¹⁸⁹ Nalu talks about how to make Omlet, French Omlet, Cream -a-la- Valva. In ‘*Randhwano Riti*’ Miss Shirinbai Darashah Taraporwala¹⁹⁰ suggested different recipe to make *Hyderabadi fish sauce*; *Coopra nu achar*, *Dudh ma Mardhi*¹⁹¹; *Halwa of milk*, *Sponge cake*, *Nariyal pudding*¹⁹²:

Like the articles in ‘*Stree Bodh*’, there were many articles in ‘*Stree Mitra*’ which focused on skills that women could acquire and could use, should the need arise. The magazine showcased the creative skills of women, including embroidery, craftwork, and other forms of artistic expression. Through their writings, women provided tutorials, patterns, and inspiration for women interested in pursuing such skill sets. Every issue featured at least one article on ‘*Bharva Guthwa Vishe*’ which means how to do different kinds of embroidery. In this Dinbai

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.10

¹⁸⁸ *Stree Mitra*. (1894). 145

¹⁸⁹ *Stree Mitra*. (1889). 18

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.18

¹⁹¹ Ibid.275

¹⁹² Ibid.117

talks about crochet lace, she also talks about how to knit a lace with a strand of thread.¹⁹³ Miss Shirinbai Darashah¹⁹⁴ wrote about knitting a shawl with a single needle.¹⁹⁵

Alongside the specific topics mentioned above, the magazine had articles that covered General news, Subjects, and Updates relevant to women's lives. For example, Awabai Dorabji wrote “*Khubsurati*”¹⁹⁶ (Beauty); and Meherbai Kohola wrote “*Sachai*”¹⁹⁷ (Truth) and “*Daya*” (Kindness).¹⁹⁸ There were articles on famous personalities such as Miss Stanley,¹⁹⁹ Jaine Austin, and Hannah More²⁰⁰ By covering such a wide range of subjects, the magazine aimed to cater to the diverse interests and concerns of its readership, providing them with valuable information, inspiration, and a platform for self-expression. ‘*Stree Mitra*’ had become a vital step towards representation and empowerment.

By having women writers contribute to ‘*Stree Mitra*’, the voices of women were heard and were represented. This created a space where women saw themselves as a part of something larger than the household that they were restricted to. It was amazing to note the kind of contributions that were sent to the editors. Their lived experiences enabled them to write with depth and understanding where they established connections with the readers. Additionally, women writers brought diverse perspectives, challenged stereotypes, and showcased the richness of women's lives. By featuring women's voices prominently, women's magazines actively tackled gender inequality and broke down societal norms. Furthermore, women writers benefited personally and professionally, honing their skills and gaining recognition. Ultimately, women writing in ‘*Stree Mitra*’ gave the power to create change, shape cultural norms, advocated for equality, and inspired readers to question and redefine societal expectations.

¹⁹³ *Stree Mitra*. (1889). 59, 249

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. 85

¹⁹⁵ Ibid (1894). 143

¹⁹⁶ *Stree Mitra*. (1889). 97

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 171

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. 285

¹⁹⁹ *Stree Mitra*. (1894). 133

²⁰⁰ *Stree Mitra*. (1889). 22

CONCLUSION

Hence it can be said that in the 19th century, women had their own narrative which was different from the men. While tracing their history through their autobiographies, biographies, and their writings it was seen that women had their own different experiences and issues which were different from the men as seen in the chapter 2. These women, often from diverse backgrounds and facing various challenges, defied societal norms and restrictions to voice their thoughts, experiences, and aspirations.

The extraordinary women, during the 19th century can be seen as an agency negotiating their place in their private and public spaces. They were determined to reshape cultural norms, advocating for equality and education, or redefining societal expectations. Despite facing limitations in education and societal constraints, they showcased remarkable intellect, resilience, and determination to claim their place in shaping history.

Further, the ordinary women through their writings acted as an agency of change. These women expressed themselves through newspapers and magazines and played a pivotal role in making women visible in history. Their writings in '*Stri Bodh*', and '*Stree Mitra*' brought to light the struggles and triumphs of common women. Further, this also highlighted the issues women were concerned about in the 19th century such as Health, Family, Beauty, Morality, Education etc.

Through visualizing their voices and life experiences a more complete historical record is obtained that reflects the diverse experiences of women throughout and reaffirms the importance of making women visible in history. Hence women acted as an agency in shaping the course of history.