

Establishment of Good Womanhood: In the Study of *Leelavati Jeevankala*

The research paper attempts to analyze Leelavati's art of living. Tripathi decided to write this biography to commemorate his elder daughter Leelavati because the book shows Leelavati's sacrifice, who died of consumption at the age of 21. Moreover the author Vishnu Prasad Trivedi used the epithet "Maharshi" for Tripathi, because he was a philosopher and well informed writer in Gujarati literature. He was well versed in Sanskrit, English and Gujarati languages" (Trivedi 441). He contributed significantly to Gujarati literature.

During his lifetime, he wrote poems, novel, drama, biography etc. (Trivedi 48). He has given the great novel *Sarasvatichandra*, Which runs into 2000 pages and is divided into four parts, which were published in 1887, 1892, 1898 and 1901 respectively. His other notable works include *Navalram Nu Kavi Jeevan* 1891, *Sneh mudra* 1898, *Madhavram Smarika* 1900, *Leelavati Jeevankala* 1905, *Dayaram No Akshardeh* 1908, *Classical Poets of Gujarat* 1916. Moreover, he wrote in Samalochak and Sadavastu Vichar. His personal diary Scrap Books also got published after his death (Trivedi 48). He also wrote two Dramas like *Sarasvati* and *Maya* and story like *Sati chuni*. Moreover, He published articles dealing with the subjects pertaining to education and literature (Trivedi Vishnu Prasad 48).

His literary repertoire comprises two biographies, *Navalramnu Kavijeevan* 1891 and *Leelavati Jeevankala* 1905. The biography *Navalramnu Kavijeevan* focuses on Navalram's life. B.K. Thakor argues that Navalram was a very brilliant person. He compared him with Coleridge and Mathew Arnold. In this way the whole biography represents the virtues of Navalram (Thakor 292). Similarly, his another biography *Leelavati Jeevankala* represents Leelavati's virtues.

According to Dhiru Parik, *Leelavati Jeevankala* is not a biography, but it is just a story of her life. It is divided into six chapters (Parik Dhiru 405). According to him, each chapter of the book tells Leelavati's story of sacrifice. Further, B.K. Thakor argues that Tripathi's elder daughter Leelavati died on January 8, 1902. After her death, her father Govardhanram Tripathi began to write *Leelavati jeevankala* in 1903 and it was published in 1905. It narrates the story of Leelavati's inner (subtle) life. According to Balvantray Thakor, The main purpose of this book is to show Leelavati's deep and spiritual virtues (Parik 292). In addition, Sundaram in his essay "*Govardhanram and its form of literature*" says that *Leelavati Jeevankala* is a lyric; Where Govardhanram Tripathi gave his hearty tribute to his daughter Leelavati. But before *Leelavati Jeevankala*, Govardhanram Tripathi wrote the novel *Sarasvatichandra*, in which he created "*BhavnaShrusti*" but in *Leelavati Jeevankala* he portrayed picture of "*vatsalya*" (affection) (42). It is to be noted that *Leelavati Jeevankala* has been viewed as a story of the sacrifice made by Leelavati. However, it is important to study how Leelavati

Jeevankala contributed significantly to enhancing the debate on ideal womanhood. It is important to analyse how a model of a new Gujarati woman is introduced through the present biography and how it helps negotiate the colonial modernity. *Leelavati Jeevankala* shows the construction of particular norms to be circulated in contemporary society. In this context, print became instrumental in disseminating the ideas. The following section throws light on the role played by print and public sphere.

Print and Public Sphere in Gujarat

While explaining the nature of colonial public sphere, Neladri Bhattacharya argues that the emergence of public sphere in colonial India provided a space where colonial authorities could build their power, the Indians could debate their past and could question the British rule. The advent of print became instrumental in shaping the colonial public sphere. It was an important medium of disseminating ideas and knowledge. It also came into play in construction of knowledge. Veena Naregal argues that during 19th century especially in South Asia, The establishment of newspaper press played an effective role for local educated people. It contributed a great deal in bringing about the shifts in existing assumptions pertaining to “the distribution of cultural power” (Naregal 4). It became an important medium to highlight the policies of colonial authorities. Further, she discusses the association of education policy, Colonial bilingualism and strategies devised by new intelligentsia and the shifts brought about in the “structures and categories of discursive production” (Naregal 1). According to her, when print media entered South Asia, it gave new definition to colonial educated community. According to Anandita Ghosh, “the coming of the book” shows wisdom of modernized India. She says that print was one of the dominant factors which helped reform 19th century Bengal (Ghosh 2). Print also altered the prevailing assumptions regarding existing literary tradition. Sisir Kumar Das is of the view that the print considerably changed the nature of transmission of the text. The writers, social reformers, revivalists and nationalists started various journals and newspapers and voiced their views and contested their ideologies mainly in prose.

In his essay “Towards Hind Swaraj: an Interpretation of the Rise of Prose in Nineteenth-Century Gujarati Literature” Sitanshu Yashaschandra discusses that in Gujarati literature prose emerged as a prominent form of literature (Yashaschandra 42). According to him, prose existed during pre-colonial period in the form of Charitra (Prthvanditra), Charitra, Kathmi (Samyaktvakatha) and the descriptive prose genres varnaka (Yashaschandra 42). Further he points out that this prose was written in comprehensive style and simple language for the ordinary and uneducated people (42). According to him, the verse was prominent in the form of *garba, pada, chhappa, Doha*, etc (Yashaschandra 42). Further he explains that literature of the 19th century is known as an expressive mode of literature (Yashaschandra 43). This kind of phenomenon was accepted by Gujarati Authors, critics and readers of the period with respect and different enthusiasm (Yashaschandra 42). He argues that the prose was received with great enthusiasm and different kind of literary genres emerged in prose during nineteenth century Gujarat such as the publication of the first essay “Mandali Malva thi Thata Labh” (The Advantages of Forums) by Narmadashankar Lalshankar Dave, the first Gujarati novel *Karan Ghelo* by Nandshankar Mehta, the first autobiography *Mari Hakikat* by Narmad (1866), the first diary *Nityanand* by Durgaram Mahetaji (1840s) *Shalapatra* (the journal of the Regional Board of Education which contains the essays on literary criticism and other prose by Navalram Pandya from 1850, the first work on Gujarati prosody *Dalpat Pingal* by Dalpatram (1862). He also talks about publication of the early travelogues published in the second half of the nineteenth century such as *Garet Baritan ni Musafari* (1864). Nimade in his book “The Influence of English on Marathi” argues that during that time the development of new prose was able to grasp philosophical ideas of contemporary period (Dave 5). Moreover, the prose provided new channels for

social communication (Dave 6). Various institutions made use of prose to argue rationally (Dave 13). For instance, Gujarat Vernacular Society was established in the year 1848 by Alexander Forbs with a view to publishing literature and disseminating knowledge and education (Trivedi 8). It carried out various activities such as the publication of the newspapers (weekly initially), establishment of library, collection of words for dictionaries, collections of manuscripts, setting up of schools (co-education), publication of books useful for schools, establishment of forums, announcement of the schemes for creating new books, encouragement to writing essays by holding competitions and so on in order to inculcate morality and rationality among native people (Trivedi 9). The prose proved to be instrumental in carrying out the above mentioned activities. These activities contributed significantly to shaping Gujarati Public Sphere.

Along with Gujarati vernacular society, around 78 printing press and 94 journals were established. Narmadashankar Dev began a pamphlet in Surat known as “Dandiyo”. Dandiyo contained articles on politics and religion. Subjects like morality, scientific inventions, and good womanhood found significant place in Dandiyo. It should be noted that woman’s question caught attention of the most of the magazines and pamphlets.

Woman’s Question

During the period of nineteenth century, woman’s question was addressed in many Gujarati journals. According to Partha Chatterjee, The woman question was proved to be an integral mission of that period. Moreover, Charu Gupta in her introduction to the book “Gendering Colonial India: Reforms, Print, Caste and Communalism” argues that in colonial India, women’s question became an important cite for nationalists, revivalists and reformists to contest their positions (Gupta 3). She points out that the colonisers justified their presence in India by highlighting debased condition of Indian women and in response to this, the nationalists starting preserving the inner domain and therefore, the inner domain became integral to the idea of a new woman [629].

Govardhanram Tripathi was a social reformer, revivalist and a nationalist. He took a voluntary retirement from his work in order to dedicate himself to the service to the nation. His literary works drew upon various social issues and helped him to negotiate the colonial modernity. He through his works made an attempt to establish a modern individuated self which was different from that of a European. It should be noted that woman’s question finds expression in his every literary piece. In addition, he through his literary characters such as Kumud, Kusum, Gunsundari and a real life character Leelavati establishes a new model of an ideal womanhood to be followed by women of his nation. His biography *Leelavati Jeevankala* became integral to invoking his ideas regarding good womanhood. The biography *Leelavati Jeevankala* emerges as an institute, which becomes instrumental in modifying subjectivity of a Gujarati woman. The present biography constructed the new discourse of domesticity in order to preserve the inner domain of the nation. The biography primarily focuses on ideal women’s virtues and their dedication towards family (Tripathi 103). By narrating Leelavati’s life, the book unfolds Leelavati’s inner virtues and purity. The text articulates her subtle, spiritual purity. The author does not give description of Leelavati’s outer body.

In his essay “The Difference- Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal” Dipash Chakrabarty argues that during the nineteenth century, the nation and status of women were unstable and hence, domestic movement became active to control the British impact in colonial Bengal (Chakrabarty 2). Moreover, the Bangali Bhadrlok engaged them in making their women like a “*Laxmi*” to

counter the effects of colonial culture (Chakrabarty 6). The discourse of ideal house wife and domesticity both became inseparable part of public sphere and the word “*Laxmi*” was reconstructed and converted in to “*Gruh Laxmi*” (Chakrabarty 9). Similarly, the present text advocates the same ideas regarding women. The word “*Laxmi*” indicates that women must have virtues, purity, dedication and spirit of sacrifice. Leelavati was again and again proved to be an ideal wife, ideal daughter and ideal sister who would like to take care of her family members not only at her husband’s place but at her father’s home also. For instance, the author gives an account of the episode in part 14 where she cried seeing her mother behaving like other worldly women:

“Who speaks like this? My *Baa* – it’s you only who have given me knowledge, who has taught me my duty towards my mother-in-law. How can I handle these words coming out of My *Baa*’s mouth?” Her mother was the source of the river of her emotions and she was the one who seemed abandoning this emotion, and so she couldn’t tolerate it. Seeing the ill will of her mother and in order to remove it she cried” (Tripathi 80).

She could understand the nature of her mother-in-law and devoted herself in her service without any expectation (Tripathi 25). On one occasion, Leelavati’s mother asked:

“Leelavati, where is your sari?”

Leelavati replied smilingly, “*Baa*, you have already given that sari to me, haven’t you?”

“Yes, but where have you kept it?”

“*Baa*, *MotiBaa* said that there is no such norm in our caste to give anything to *Vahevan*. Let it be a tradition from your side of giving, but why should I ask anyone if I give any of my things to you? She hasn’t asked for it but I am fine if she is satisfied! It’s okay for me if I don’t have it” (Tripathi 24).

The above examples testify that Leelavati behaved ideally like a “*Lakshmi*”. She succeeded in preserving her inner domain. She is shown to be curbing her desires through out this biography.

Leelavati was married but her ideal behaviour proved her a “*Brahmchari*”. Tripathi develops the importance of “*brahmacharya*” by celebrating *brahmacharya* in Leelavati’s life. Moreover, the present biography advocates asceticism. It should be noted that Tripathi uses the word “*katha*” for this book and suggests that the present book is different from the form “*biography*”. Thus, by devising the form “*katha*”, Tripathi seems to be narrating Leelavati’s life in the form of a story. And hence, fictitious elements can be found in the narrative. Tripathi experiments his ideas of good womanhood in Leelavati. He instructs *Shastriji* what to be taught and how to be taught to Leelavati. Her education is designed in such a way that leads her to asceticism. Tanika Sarkar in the book *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism* discusses the views of the nationalists, Who attempted to establish ideal nationhood, In which specially Hindu women’s body became medium of the expression of their own culture (Sarkar 228). In her view, women during that period could not articulate their subjectivity. Similarly, the book *Leelavati Jeevankala* attempts to establish the ideals of the upper caste Hindu women.

Leelavati was born in a NaagarBrahmin family. Her virtues and purity exemplified the virtues of an upper caste *Aryan* woman (Shukla 2). When Leelavati was only three years old, She got married to Himmatbhai. At that time he was average student and his family was suffering from financial crisis (Tripathi 16). She was given training in household chores at the age of 13 and was prepared to go to in-law’s house (Tripathi 61).

Conclusion

In this way Leelavati's entire life was a part of good woman hood. For Instance the second chapter provides a discription of Leelavati's husband Himmatbhai. Himmatbhai's family had fallen prey to financial crisis [Tripathi 25]. Apart from that, Himmatbhai and his parents were stricken by a disease when they were residing in Junaghadh, as the disease was rampant in Junagadh. Leelavati devoted herself in the service of her husband Himmatbhai and her in-laws. Then, gradually she became victim of consumption (Tripathi 25). Leelavati did not take care of herself and sacrificed her own health while serving her in-laws Moreover, the entire narrative gives a detailed account of how Leelavati sacrificed all sorts of desires and led an ascetic life.

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