

from the village spring, or by talking to their husbands, brothers and sons when they met at home. Hence they contributed to the political process and decision making, even though they were physically absent from the guest-house.

While men met in the evenings at the guest-house, women were in their own domains: their houses and courtyards. They sat around with their female peers chatting, while preparing food for their menfolk and their visitors.

The two separate domains, were actually in continuous but indirect contact through the movements of close male kin. Normally, the host's son or brother moved between the house and the guest-house carrying food which the women had prepared, or carrying mattresses and pillows to the guest-house. Women knew who the guests were and kept abreast of the village affairs through the movements of these sons or brothers.

The only time when a woman was allowed in the guest-house was when she presented a legal case against someone. In the presence of the sheikh and the council of elders, she was allowed to state her case, after which she would immediately leave the guest-house, whereupon her closest male relative took up her case.

Female visitors were also not permitted in the guest-house. They stayed with the village women, and ate and slept with them. Female children were strictly barred from the guest-house and it was considered improper for male children to go there.

Boys stayed within the women's domain away from the guest-house, unless they were sent for. Only men who had passed the age of puberty were allowed in the guest-house.

#### The Guest-House as the Village Conduit to the Outside World

The guest-house should be seen as conceptually opposed to the house. The guest-house was the only space open to outsiders, as opposed to