

PANDITA RAMABAI THROUGH
HER OWN WORDS:
SELECTED WORKS



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TRANSLATIONS, BY*

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Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922)

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INTRODUCTION

In the mystic's spirit of seeing the world in a grain of sand, one may find Pandita Ramabai's whole life (1858–1922) encapsulated in a photograph of her during her last years, head bowed over her Marathi translation of the Bible. In this cultural narrative of conflated contradictions lie embedded several simultaneous readings. The photograph shows an Indian woman sitting on the floor in a pose mandatory for upper caste Maharashtrian women of the time, although the rest of her unconventional appearance—a plain white five-yard sari, a Western-style high-necked, long-sleeved blouse, and short hair—suggests a Bengali Brahmo widow, except for her typically Maharashtrian (and also south Indian) way of modestly covering her right shoulder with the sari.¹ The showcasing of her act of writing serves to privilege her over her contemporaries who did not have access to education and could nurture no literary ambitions. Further exoticizing this unusual blend of customs, cultures and creeds is the intrusive presence of the 'Western' photographer, suggested by the potted palm ubiquitous in contemporary posed portraits. To all these spontaneous readings can be added the fact that the translation of the Bible, Ramabai's magnum opus, marked the apogee of her religious divergence from her orthodox Brahmin origins, via a series of intermediate stages landmarked by her earlier writings. The aim

of this book is to present this entire spectrum, which allows us to reconstruct and plot Pandita Ramabai's complex religious, feminist and personal evolution.

The recent resurgence of national and also international academic interest in Pandita Ramabai stands foregrounded against her elision during the last few decades from the mainstream record of Maharashtra's social history.² So far this resurgence has left untouched the complex and problematic niche Ramabai occupies in Maharashtra's collective psyche in which pride in her extraordinary learning and fame remains stifled by a sense of betrayal at her conversion to Christianity and subsequent proselytization, as if these were recent occurrences and their wounds still fresh. It is now time for a healing, for a sensitive, unblinkered exploration of her writings and activities from today's secular vantage point.

In a sense this book is a more organized replication of my own journey into Ramabai's fascinating world, which began as an exploration of the region's social-cultural regeneration that had occurred a century and a half ago. The excitement of rediscovering the region's history and culture which I had absorbed during my formative years and education at Pune—the cultural heartland of Maharashtra—and of re-reading the impassioned eloquence of revered public leaders soon gave way to puzzlement as I stumbled upon the militant feminist rhetoric of Pandita Ramabai. She seemed to have inhabited the same age but not shared the same social space; her thoughts resonated well with late twentieth century thinkers—at least feminist ones—but have been almost erased from mainstream records of history. This enigma paved the way for my gradual retrieval of her obscure—and obscured—writings, in the hope of serving several simultaneous agendas: to reconstruct Ramabai's ideological evolution and transformation in interaction with her changing social milieu in order to assess her contribution, to help to 'engender' the social history of Maharashtra by reinscribing women into it and thus broaden its epistemological base and correct the imbalance in historical discourse, and to reclaim a significant part of our feminist heritage.³

This volume, planned as a comprehensive source-book of Ramabai's writings, includes her internationally known works in English, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* (selection 5) and *A Testimony of Our Inexhaustible Treasure* (selection 11) on which,

together with her published *Letters and Correspondence*, non-Marathi-speaking scholars tend to place sole reliance in their analyses; importantly, it also includes her other, lesser known and painstakingly retrieved English writings. But its *raison d'être* is Ramabai's Marathi works—both the well-known and the obscure, recently recovered ones—which appear here in (my) English translation for the first time. They help us traverse an entirely new and startlingly different experiential world in her company. In fact, her writings plot a trajectory involving a hundred and eighty degrees' turn through three clearly contoured phases of cultural transition, starting with an orthodox Hindu world-view which gradually imbricates with a Christian world-view, only to be completely edged out in a final rupture.

From these collected writings (in the original and in translation) also emerges the key to an understanding of Ramabai—the fact of her being positioned simultaneously as an 'insider' and an 'outsider', both within Maharashtra's turbulent social regeneration, and within the larger international project of Christianization. Ramabai shared the ethos and psyche of her reformist contemporaries, but transgressed the boundaries of space, culture and religion—and even of time—through her vision of a gender-egalitarian society. She presented a graphic picture of oppressed Indian womanhood to her Western readers with a trained ethnographer's eye, but without sacrificing her nationalist pride and right to interrogate colonial rule; and she brought news of exciting social and political reforms in the far-off United States of America to her Marathi readers with an empathetic understanding of the prevailing local conditions. The ease with which she straddled the East and West was unique in the heyday of Empire and Orientalism. Hence the imperative to approach Ramabai through both her Marathi and English writings which represent nearly separate cultural spheres and whose juxtaposition alone can throw adequate light on her complex world-view, mindset and personality.

A LIFE SKETCH

Ramabai's intellectual roots go back to the twilight of the (Brahmin) Peshwa reign, to just before Bajirao II lost political power to the East India Company's Mumbai-based government in 1818.⁴ However, the

multiple Brahmin hegemony, based also on religious, economic and social supremacy, was to survive this event. Ramabai's father, Anant Shastri Dongre, a descendant of Chitpavan Brahmin settlers in Karnataka, was then a promising student at the Peshwa capital Pune. On one of his visits to the Peshwa's palace with his reputed teacher, Anant Shastri was held spellbound by the mellifluous Sanskrit recitation of the Peshwa's wife. He vowed to teach his own wife 'the divine language' from which tradition—and allegedly scriptural injunctions as well—had mandated the exclusion of women and Shudras.

Anant Shastri's attempts were foiled by his uninterested wife, presumably under pressure from his conservative family. Years after her death, he acquired a second wife at the age of forty-four while on a pilgrimage, in a rather cavalier manner (which Ramabai herself marvelled at, though without mentioning names, in her chapter on 'Married Life' in *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*).

Predictably, Anant Shastri's success in teaching his second wife Lakshmibai the Sanskrit language and texts incurred the wrath of his orthodox fellow caste men against whom he defended himself in an assembly of learned *shastris*, citing passages from the sacred texts. He later withdrew to a simple, peaceful life in the forest of Gangamul in Karnataka (having earlier enjoyed patronage from the court of Mysore), ran a residential school and tended rice fields and orchards with his wife's capable help. Of the couple's six children, three survived—Srinivas, Krishnabai, and the youngest Ramabai who was born in 1858.

Launched practically from infancy upon a life of unceasing pilgrimage, Ramabai, along with her family, traversed the length and breadth of the subcontinent visiting holy places and earning a precarious living by reciting the Puranas. Once their frugal needs were met, the surplus money and food received as gifts from devout listeners were offered to holy Brahmins as an obligatory meritorious deed. This life style was punctuated by two unorthodox elements. One, Anant Shastri insisted on giving his daughters a Sanskrit education. In Ramabai's case, this happened through Lakshmibai as he was too old for the exertion. Two, he refused to arrange the customary early marriage for Ramabai, in the aftermath of Krishnabai's unhappy child marriage (an episode described by Ramabai in the chapter 'Woman's Place in Religion and Society'

in *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*, without identifying her sister).

A significant consequence of this unconventional upbringing was that Ramabai managed to escape a rigid gender-specific role, unlike her peers who were locked into wifehood and motherhood at an early age, confined to the domestic sphere, subjected to the pressures of the extended family, and denied education or even literacy. Treated as her brother's equal, educated and trained in public speaking before mixed audiences, Ramabai later entered the public, male arena of social reform without hesitation. Again, from early on, her life was anchored in a deep religiosity, with conscience as the sole arbiter of conduct; this explains her later spiritual quest which was coupled with an intellectual curiosity and defiance of dogma. Finally, a life of physical hardship, often at the very edge of survival, forged in her a strength of character and an intense individualism which was, and still is, rare in Indian society—which has rested on collectivity and conformity—and which led her later on to tread a solitary and difficult path to spiritual salvation and contestation of patriarchy.

Despite enjoyable moments that the close-knit nuclear family experienced, the Dongres ultimately paid a high price for their endless travel and rigorous ritual observances. After years of privation and even starvation, Ramabai's emaciated parents died in 1874, victims of a severe famine in the Madras Presidency. (The painful experience of the indignities of starvation, suffered both by its victims and its survivors, was later described graphically by Ramabai in 'Famine Experiences', selection 8.) Krishnabai died of cholera in late 1875, having just undergone the trauma of a lawsuit for the restitution of conjugal rights. The truncated family, Ramabai and her brother Srinivas Shastri, continued the long travels on foot and the ritual austerities. On one occasion, they combated the Punjab winter, in the absence of warm clothes, by burying themselves up to the neck in dry sand on the bank of the Jhelum, as Ramabai narrates in 'Famine Experiences'.

It was their chance arrival in Calcutta in 1878 that catapulted Ramabai into prominence. Her rare Sanskrit learning was honoured and she was bestowed the titles 'Pandita' and 'Sarasvati' by notable scholars after a public examination. She was also inducted into social reform by Brahmo Samaj leaders and delivered public and private lectures on the emancipation of women, drawing heavily upon Hindu texts and mythology, lectures that soon established her

fame as a champion of women's education and as a public speaker.

But personal tragedy struck again and again. Srinivas Shastri died of cholera in 1880, and Ramabai married his friend (and her own persevering suitor) Bipin Behari Das Medhavi, a Bengali non-Brahmin, Brahmo lawyer. After less than two years of a happy married life in Kochar, Assam, Medhavi also died prematurely of cholera in 1882, leaving the twenty-four year old Ramabai an impecunious widow with an infant daughter, Manorama.

The news of Ramabai's sudden widowhood catalysed the social reformers of Maharashtra into laying claim on their 'native daughter'. She went to Pune (via Madras, to explore briefly the possibility of studying medicine) where she joined the social reform circle of the Prarthana Samaj, which was modelled on the Brahmo Samaj and led by M.G. Ranade. The strength of caste bonds helped Ramabai slide effortlessly into the Chitpavan Brahmin community, as 'one of us' (Ranade 1953: 80).

But a majority of this social stratum also held extremely orthodox religious beliefs and was conservative in its social mores; and desired to keep women under strict control. Its patriarchal ideology positioned woman firmly within the domestic sphere as a wife/mother/housewife—underlining her sexual, reproductive and home-making functions—as mandated somewhat ambiguously by the ancient Hindu *śāstras* and unambiguously by contemporary social custom, two sources of authority whose relative strength continued to be debated. Prepubertal marriages for girls and immediate post-pubertal consummation of marriage was mandatory in order to harness their sexuality, from its inception, to marriage and motherhood. The highest status for a woman was that of a *saubhagyavati* (or 'blessed' woman whose husband was alive), and a mother of sons, rather than daughters who were considered inferior and undesirable. This status was proclaimed by her appearance—wearing a colourful nine-yard sari and a profusion of ornaments. A woman only with daughters, or one without children had a lower status and was in danger of being deserted by her husband. A widow had the lowest status, especially a child widow or one without children, being neither wife nor mother and thus having forfeited her right to a normal existence. Widowhood was also proclaimed through appearance—having to wear a coarse, plain, borderless maroon sari, denied ornaments, and disfigured through a completely shaven head which had

to be carefully covered. Construed as a result of sins in previous lives, widowhood bore the stigma of inauspiciousness; and the widow became a household drudge expected to live on meagre food, sleep on the floor without a bedding, and spend her time in ritual acts, all calculated to underline her superfluity in patriarchal society (Kosambi 1988; forthcoming).

This tragic figure was to become the focus of Ramabai's future career, although the agency which Ramabai claimed as a social reformer was undercut by her own status as a widow, however unconventional. The entry of a woman, moreover an 'inauspicious' widow with a 'sinful' past and a 'polluting' presence, into public life aroused the outrage of the local orthodox Brahmins (Ranade 1953: 81), which festered over the years and ultimately defeated her.

Ramabai moved rapidly into the male- and upper caste-dominated social reform discourse in Maharashtra and attempted to reinscribe women into it as subjects rather than objects. The movements around caste and gender, the twin axes of reform, had taken largely divergent directions; gender issues had become the preoccupation of the upper castes, whose women were the most oppressed. The recent colonial cultural encounter had introduced reformist ideas of women's 'upliftment' through an amelioration of the coercive customs of child marriage and enforced widowhood, and through education, which had been reserved for Brahmin men until the advent of caste- and gender-neutral English education. But these reforms were to be circumscribed strictly within a patriarchal framework and geared towards making women better wives for the English-educated Indian men expecting companionate marriages, and more enlightened mothers of the future generations who would restore India to its former glory and ultimately to political autonomy. 'Emancipation' of women was thus essentially an investment in societal—that is, male—progress, rather than aimed at bringing about gender equality.

The disparate reform initiatives in Maharashtra coalesced around the mid-nineteenth century under the leadership of 'Lokhitavadi' Deshmukh who operated largely within the Brahmin orbit and 'Mahatma' Jotirao Phule who championed the cause of lower castes against oppressive Brahmin hegemony and also struggled for gender-related reforms (although both shared a generally pro-British ideological stance). In the late 1870s, a more liberal generation of reformers, led by M.G. (later Justice) Ranade and Professor (later

Sir) R.G. Bhandarkar, claimed centrestage and sought to introduce social reform through legislation while also mobilizing public opinion. A significant shift occurred in the mid-1880s with the attempt, especially by K.T. (later Justice) Telang, to prioritize political reform at the cost of social concerns (Telang 1886). This was also the thrust of Professor (later 'Lokamanya') B.G. Tilak's politics. Social reform came to be gradually sidelined with Tilak's ascendancy in the national political scene, especially from the 1890s, reinforced by the newspapers under his leadership, the Marathi-language paper *Kesari* and the English-language *Mahratta*. The liberal faction was led by Professor G.G. Agarkar who resigned from this group and started his own weekly in 1888, newspapers being an essential weapon in the battle for social and political reform. Ramabai would initially enjoy the cautious support of even the conservative papers until her own radical activities led to an open split, and it was the acknowledged social reformers who would support her the longest. Significantly, Ranade, Bhandarkar and Agarkar were to later take a tolerant view of Ramabai's conversion to Christianity, while Phule applauded it as a rejection of Hindu bigotry towards women and Shudras and hailed her as their champion (Kosambi 1992a).

Ramabai's reform career in Maharashtra was launched with the Arya Mahila Samaj, established by her on 1 June 1882 in Pune on the rudimentary foundations of an existing women's association. Several branches were opened in the region later. The pioneering venture, intended to mobilize women themselves through 'consciousness-raising' and discussion to demand reform in the oppressive social customs, was supported by the social reformers as a welcome initiative, and opposed by anti-reformers as a threat to male hegemony—the *Kesari* flatly denied women the agency to 'interfere' in the 'men's task of eradicating the evil customs' affecting women (8 August 1882: 5*).⁵ This faction was placated by her Marathi work *Stri Dharma Niti* (or *Morals for Women*, its English title given for the mandatory registration of vernacular books) which was published at the end of June 1882, but it opposed her plea before the Hunter Commission on Education in September 1882 for better facilities for women's general and medical education.

With a renewed ambition to study medicine herself, Ramabai planned to travel to England. She took some English lessons and arranged for her stay with the Sisters of the Community of St. Mary

the Virgin at Wantage where she was to earn her living by teaching Marathi to the Sisters who would be sent to western India, on the clear understanding from her that she would not convert to Christianity. This progression of events and her voyage during April–May 1883, accompanied by her daughter Manorama and a companion of the Maratha caste, Anandibai Bhagat, was described by Ramabai in a long letter which was later published as a booklet entitled *Pandita Ramabai Yancha Englandcha Pravas* (Pandita Ramabai's Voyage to England') (Ramabai 1988).

On reaching England, Ramabai soon met Sir Bartle Frere, former Governor of the Bombay Presidency, in June 1883 and wrote him a long letter entitled 'The Cry of Indian Women' (selection 2). The letter was an appeal on behalf of the Arya Mahila Samaj, intended for circulation and fund-raising for a proposed 'destitute home' for the women victims of multiple oppression in India. It was probably the first such Indian initiative in England.

Unfortunately, a series of disasters followed. Anandibai Bhagat committed suicide by swallowing poison, but was baptised on her deathbed ostensibly to respect her own earlier wish to convert to Christianity. Still in a deep depression (and probably under pressure, as discussed below), Ramabai herself converted to Christianity at the end of September 1883 and was baptised into the Anglican Church as Mary Rama, along with Manorama (Manorama Mary). Her Anglican patrons and guardians, especially her spiritual preceptress Sister Geraldine, had already decided upon a missionary career for Ramabai, although they were to face unexpected challenges from her on many counts (Kosambi 1992a; 1998c). Then in the midst of a protracted theological debate with the Anglican nuns and even with bishops, Ramabai discovered that her incurable deafness would preclude her from pursuing medical studies. Ramabai was then enrolled in December 1883 by the Wantage Community in the Cheltenham Ladies' College as a teacher-student who would study the natural sciences, mathematics and English, and give Sanskrit lessons in return. Miss Dorothea Beale, the founder-principal of Cheltenham Ladies' College and a champion of women's education (Spender 1983: 447–8), provided empathetic and intellectual support, in contrast to Sister Geraldine's dogmatic stance (and self-confessed inability to relate to Ramabai on her own intellectual plane; *The Letters and Correspondence of Pandita Ramabai* [hereafter, *Letters*], edited by A.B. Shah, p. 5).

After almost three years in England, Ramabai went to the USA at the invitation of Dr Rachel Bodley, Dean of the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania, to attend the graduation of a distant relative⁶ Anandibai Joshee, who was to become India's first woman doctor (in vicarious fulfilment of Ramabai's own thwarted ambition). Ramabai was instantly lionized in the USA as an internationally reputed advocate of the Indian women's cause. A glowing account of her life and her speech at a special gathering the day after Anandibai's graduation appeared in the American press. While reproducing it *The Mahratta* of Pune (2 May 1886: 6–7) tried simultaneously to undermine Ramabai through a new and enduring installation of Anandibai (whose conformity to convention had been well-publicized) as the icon of educated Maharashtrian womanhood.

Ramabai was to spend two-and-a-half years (from March 1886 to October 1888) in the USA, studying the educational system in Philadelphia and later (after sending Manorama to England and then to India to await her arrival), travelling from coast to coast in order to publicize her plan to open a home for high-caste Hindu widows in India. In 1887 she published *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* as part of her fund-raising efforts. The campaign resulted in the creation of The Ramabai Association of Boston in December 1887, that would support an unsectarian educational institution for child-widows in India; a number of 'circles' across the country (numbering seventy-five in early 1890 according to the Association's *Second Annual Report*) made annual pledges to the Association. The Association in turn pledged financial support for ten years to a secular widows' home.

The educationist in Ramabai surfaced in other ways. In 1888, while still in the USA, she started writing her Marathi book *United Stateschi Lokasthiti ani Pravasaavritta* which she completed and published in Mumbai in 1889 (registered under the English title *The Peoples of the United States*). Its purpose was to share with her compatriots her experience of a free and progressive democracy, repeatedly contrasted with colonial Britain.

After sailing from San Francisco, via Japan where she delivered a few public lectures, Ramabai reached India in February 1889. She settled down with Manorama in Mumbai and almost immediately, on 11 March 1889, opened a widows' home, the Sharada Sadan (Home of Learning), at Chowpatty. The enormous venture underscored Ramabai's enterprising spirit, organizational capability and

nationalistic credentials and generated excitement in which her conversion was at least temporarily forgotten. All leading social reformers of the Bombay Presidency supported the Sadan; many, such as Ranade, Bhandarkar and Telang, served on its Advisory Board. The general reaction was captured by the *Kesari* (12 February 1889: 3*). It applauded her 'marvellous deed' of collecting funds for the cause of Indian widows in a foreign land, regretted her conversion and the consequent social and emotional distancing, and prophesized that 'if her conduct is straightforward, people will shortly develop a trust in her'.

In November 1890, the Sadan was shifted to Pune for reasons of economy and direct access to the orthodox Brahmin community, a move that sharpened the conservative attack on its secular credentials and for its perceived 'pampering' of widows. In 1891, a storm broke out over allegations of proselytization—a sensitive issue that snowballed rapidly into a regular verbal warfare with all prominent newspapers of the time engaging in 'investigative journalism' by trying to collect information from current or past inmates of the Sadan. In its bitter aftermath, members of the Advisory Board resigned, and most girls were withdrawn from the Sadan by their guardians. The Ramabai Association of Boston sent Mrs Andrews, chairperson of the Executive Committee, to inquire into the matter. Ramabai was exonerated, but the breach between her and mainstream Hindu society—and later, even the social reformers—never healed.

It was mainly outside the orbit of mainstream upper caste society that Ramabai's project of helping widows and deserted women expanded to wider proportions. After a massive rescue operation following a famine in the Central Provinces and Gujarat in 1896, she housed hundreds of the victims in huts at the village of Kedgaon near Pune, on land she had recently bought. Here she opened a new and Christian institution, the Mukti Sadan (Home of Salvation), later expanded into the Mukti Mission. In 1899 she obtained a renewed pledge of support from the reconstituted American Ramabai Association for an unsectarian Sharada Sadan which was later shifted to the overtly Christian Mukti Mission, alongside Kripa Sadan (Home of Mercy, a rescue home for sexually victimized women), a separate section for blind women who were given a general education in Braille and taught useful crafts, and another that looked after aged women.

Ramabai's shift to Kedgaon and focus on lower caste famine victims rather than upper caste widows made her activities peripheral to mainstream society. Her last years were spent in relative isolation, albeit with a gradual *rapprochement* with the numerous Christian denominations that had earlier criticized her policy of religious neutrality. Through incessant activity—running a school and classes to develop income-generating skills of the inmates (which included teaching, nursing, tailoring, embroidery, laundering, weaving of cloth and carpets, gardening, and even operating a printing press), fund-raising and maintaining international networks—Ramabai had built what an impressed Christian visitor described as 'a female kingdom' in which all the tasks 'from top to bottom' were performed by women (*Dnyanodaya*, 28 November 1907: 380*). It had been Ramabai's cherished dream to develop self-reliance in, and provide an alternative shelter for, women whose homes were their 'social universe' but often an oppressive one (Kosambi 1998b). The dream finally came true at Mukti Mission (renamed 'Ramabai Mukti Mission' after her death, and 'Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission' in 1969), but was to remain outside the reach of upper caste widows whom she had tried desperately to reach.

These shifts were paralleled by her religious evolution. In 1891, during the darkest hour of the storm Ramabai had a revelation in the classic Christian tradition; faith superseded intellectual questioning and her earlier freshness and openness on religious issues gradually rigidified into a proselytizing zeal, as she describes in her Christian confessions, *A Testimony* (1907) and in occasional pieces in her newsletter, the *Mukti Prayer Bell*. She also launched her most ambitious work, a new translation of the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek into Marathi, during the course of which she also wrote a Greek grammar in Marathi.

But this newsletter, the *Annual Reports* and other writings show a creeping frustration, resentment, isolation and bitterness. They also reveal the fatal flaw in her reasoning—the conviction that Hindu women would flock to her institutions for shelter and realize that their oppression could be remedied only by conversion to Christianity.

The opening years of the twentieth century found Ramabai beleaguered—Sharada Sadan was marginalized, the Mukti Sadan, that housed hundreds of famine victims, was beset by multiple problems ranging from paucity of funds to imposition of discipline,

the uniqueness of her pro-women interventions was partly overshadowed by Karve's 'Hindu' Widows' Home opened at Pune in 1896 (and later shifted to nearby Hingne), explicitly intended as an alternative to the 'Christian' Sharada Sadan (Kosambi 1995: 164) and by Malabari's Seva Sadan launched at Mumbai in 1908; its Pune branch, under Ramabai Ranade's management, opened in 1909. But already an international icon of Indian Christianity, Ramabai was able to function as the strongest single pivot and conduit for 'international aid' to Indian women through funds and volunteer workers. During the last two decades of her life, she relied for support largely on these wide international networks. Her social contribution was recognized by the British Government, which awarded her the Kaiser-i-Hind gold medal in 1919.

Her last personal tragedy befell Ramabai in 1921 with the death of forty year old Manorama, an able assistant in all her mother's enterprises and active in setting up girls' schools in Hyderabad state. The following year Ramabai herself passed away at the age of sixty-four, having just completed her Marathi translation of the Bible which was being printed at the Kedgaon press by her specially trained girls when she died.

THE SELF IN RELIGIOUS TRANSITION

Ramabai never documented her rich and variegated life in any great detail. Her earliest available autobiographical sketch (1883; selection 3) is a terse narrative written in Marathi on the eve of her conversion in England and translated immediately into English. It presents the bare bones of her already eventful life. The account was fleshed out with the occasional incident of her childhood related in passing in some episodes about her parents and sister in *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* (1887), and the harsh realities of poverty and starvation in 'Famine Experiences' (1897). Her final word on her own life was *A Testimony* (1907)—another terse autobiographical account, though leavened with a wry humour.

Most conspicuous in Ramabai's later writings (after 1900) is a marked transition, a deliberate effort to re-plot her entire past on the meridian of Christianity. This occurs at various levels. One is the attempt to trace the red thread of Christianity running right through her life as a conscious or unconscious guiding force. Not only does

she locate and reconstruct her life entirely within the framework of Christianity in *A Testimony*, she also rediscovers echoes of Christianity in an almost forgotten childhood experience narrated in 'The Word-Seed' (selection 12), in an attempt to lay claim to the Christian core of her personality which had lain dormant under an orthodox Hindu shell.

Although this reconstructed passage to Christianity was imbued with a sense of inevitability, the suddenness of Ramabai's conversion continues to remain a mystery given her public and convincing promise to her Prarthana Samaj supporters before leaving for England not to convert to Christianity. Recent research indicates that 'pressure' to convert, though not necessarily amounting to 'coercion', was exerted on Ramabai (and Anandibai Bhagat) by the Wantage Sisters in the genuine belief that Ramabai was an 'inquirer', who had come to England to make a concentrated study of Christianity away from other distractions prior to actual conversion. This was the basis for their financial and practical support, although Ramabai's understanding of the situation differed significantly (Glover 1995: 71–109). This version is indirectly corroborated by Professor Max Mueller (1899: 127) whom Ramabai visited at Oxford about this time. He found Ramabai in a state of 'nervous prostration' because Anandibai Bhagat had been so frightened by the possibility of forced conversion that she had tried to save Ramabai by attempting to strangle her one night and finally killed herself.

It was in this mood of disappointment, depression and even despair that Ramabai was baptised. The reasons she herself offered for her conversion—'recollected in (Christian) tranquility' many years later—therefore appear to be more in the nature of justifications, though they are by no means unconvincing. They cover the progression from her early disillusionment with the gender- and caste-based discrimination of orthodox Hindu faith, acceptance of Brahmo belief, the proof given by the Reverend Nehemiah Goreh (a Brahmin convert himself) that the Brahmo Samaj was derived not from the Hindu Vedas but from Christianity, the Christian promise of universal salvation without discrimination, and the compassionate deeds of Christians such as the kindness of the Wantage Sisters and the Christian concept of redemption rather than punishment for sinners (Kosambi 1992). Ramabai records her visit to a Rescue Home in London where 'fallen' women, shunned by Hindu scriptures and

custom, were being rehabilitated as useful members of society. This was the model for her own Kripa Sadan years later (see selection 10). A hidden but strong dimension of this conversion was loneliness and isolation which increased the appeal of a supportive social structure that she had missed all her life, the need 'to be able to worship together with those whom she loved and who had long been so kind to her' (Max Mueller 1889: 128).

The aftermath of conversion found Ramabai embroiled in a protracted debate with the Wantage Sisters and the Anglican Church. Her primary contestation of the Church rested on issues of theology: her selective acceptance of Christian doctrine and rejection of the miraculous birth and divinity of Christ. The secondary issue was Sister Geraldine's insistence on the need for implicit acceptance of 'the authority of those over her in the Church' (*Letters*: 43), and Canon Butler's that 'to a neophyte in the Faith . . . self-reliance is intensely dangerous' (*Letters*: 76). The third contentious issue was the patriarchal insistence of the Anglicans that as an Indian woman Ramabai could not jeopardize her future chances in India by teaching Indian languages to men. Ramabai contested the authoritarianism of the Anglican Church by insisting that 'I have a conscience, and mind and a judgment of my own. I must myself think and do everything which GOD has given me the power of doing', and claiming that after having 'with great effort freed myself from the yoke of the Indian priestly tribe . . . I am not at present willing to place myself under [a] similar yoke' by obeying the instructions of the Anglican clergy 'as authorized command of the Most High' (*Letters*: 156).

Underneath this friction ran the barely disguised current of racism: the Anglican bishops' generalization about the 'natives' that 'vanity is one of their very faults', and that academic status 'might lead to a little undue self-exaltation' (*Letters*: 43–5); and Sister Geraldine's bitter complaint of Ramabai's 'pride and vanity' which were 'dangerously inflated' (*Letters*: 4), her 'want of candour and sincerity' and her 'deceitfulness' like 'the generality of the Hindoos' (*Letters*: 114–15). Colonial rule formed the core of this problematic relationship, because Christianity was the religion of the conquerors and the Anglican Church itself bore the title The Church of England which, as Sister Geraldine saw, 'would tend to alarm and repel' Ramabai (*Letters*: 406). This is borne out by the opening passages

of Ramabai's chapter on religion 'Religious Denominations' (selection 6) in *United Stateschi*. . . .

The second stage in Ramabai's Christian evolution came after many years, during the dismal days when Sharada Sadan was boycotted and she herself discredited even in the eyes of her former reformist supporters. She now saw the deficiency in her intellectual acceptance of Christ without the emotional support of unquestioning faith. In 1891, during these desperate times, she had a revelation, like a burst of light followed by a sense of great relief. It led to a change in Ramabai's attitude to proselytization, and to intense missionary activity. The shift of the Sharada Sadan to Kedgaon, where Ramabai had bought a farm, was caused fortuitously by a plague epidemic in Pune; it facilitated the establishment of the Mukti Mission where hundreds of famine victims were housed and converted. By 1900, the strength of the Mission was close to two thousand and generated a fresh set of problems. The new inmates were drawn from depressed castes, very different from the disciplined Brahmin widows of the Sharada Sadan, and their needs ranged from creature comforts to character building, secular and spiritual education.

This led to the final phase of uncompromising Christianity that saw closer contacts with the Christian communities within India, while maintaining international Christian networks. Ramabai's touching desire to explain the pure essence of the Vedas to fellow Christians (see 'Indian Religion', selection 4) gave way to a total 'othering' of Hinduism across an ideological divide; her experiential world was now refracted only through the prism of Christianity.

THE EVOLUTION OF A FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS

Ramabai entered the gender reform discourse in Maharashtra through *Stri Dharma Niti* as a surrogate male social reformer by virtue of her unusual Sanskrit education, oratory and leadership qualities, all of which had long been a prerogative of men. A natural extension of her lectures to women in the Bengal and Bombay Presidencies on the need for their education, *Stri Dharma Niti* is a guide on morality and deportment for women, featuring the Hindu mythological models of womanhood. It is also a book of general

knowledge peopled by historical figures such as Shivaji and Napoleon, and set entirely within the parameters of the liberal tradition espoused by reformist newspapers and magazines of the time. Hence *Kesari's* satisfaction that 'the task of championing the women's cause and of speaking or writing on their behalf, which hitherto fell to the lot of men, has now been undertaken by one belonging to the female sex herself' (1 August 1882: 2*).

The jarring notes in *Stri Dharma Niti*, in view of our image of Ramabai as a militant feminist, are her endorsement of the Sita-Savitri model of femininity and her castigation of the average woman as lazy, stupid and obstinate, and therefore culpable not only for her own but for the entire country's subjection and stagnation.

At the same time, *Stri Dharma Niti* also indicates Ramabai's radical divergence from the positions taken by social reformers on two counts: her advocacy of relatively late marriages by mutual choice, and her exposure of the androcentric and misogynist bias of the *dharma-shastras*. The tension between her castigation of women as culpable for their own subjection and her simultaneous exoneration of them as victims conditioned to internalize their subjection, was to be finally resolved in *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*, the product of a cohesive feminist perspective. But a blueprint for this Indian feminist manifesto had already appeared in 'The Cry of Indian Women' (a newly discovered manuscript, published for the first time in this volume). It also details Indian women's oppression through early marriage, marital harassment, desertion by the husband and widowhood, before outlining her proposed 'destitute home' in India.

The mystifying sea-change between *Stri Dharma Niti* (June 1882) and 'The Cry of Indian Women' (June 1883) has no easy explanation. The former was obviously a product of social liberalism advocated by Ramabai's reformist supporters, but at variance with her own reform efforts through the Arya Mahila Samaj which had challenged the patriarchal ideology and practice. It was a development of this incipient feminism, perhaps further reinforced by the early feminist articulations by Tarabai Shinde⁷, Anandibai Joshee and Rakhmabai, which found expression in 'The Cry of Indian Women'. In 1882 Tarabai Shinde (1975) had contested the masculine double standards of morality and unabashed misuse of patriarchal privilege, in February 1883 Anandibai Joshee had protested publicly against the denial of educational opportunities and medical care to women (after having

privately protested against the general subordination, neglect and dispensability of women), and in 1885 Rakhmabai was to write about the misery of child brides and widows of all ages (Kosambi 1994; 1995; 1996a; 1996b). Both Anandibai and Rakhmabai, part of Ramabai's wide informal network, figure in *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*. With Anandibai's premature death and Rakhmabai's self-imposed seclusion from public life and dedication to medical duties, Ramabai was to alone mount a sustained attack on Hindu patriarchy, although the internationally known *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* was to have a minimal impact in Maharashtra, or the rest of India.

But the major influence that shaped the evolution of Ramabai's feminist consciousness, as reflected in *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*, was her exposure to the more progressive and less asymmetrical gender relations that prevailed in England and America. During her later years she stressed what she saw as the gender-egalitarian impulse of Christianity and its compassion to sinners (especially the rehabilitation of 'fallen women'), contrasting these favourably with the discriminatory and less humane Hindu doctrine (see *A Testimony*). But arguably a far greater influence on Ramabai than religion was the women's movement in the West, especially in America. Dr Rachel Bodley and Frances Willard, President of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), were Ramabai's personal friends and office-bearers of the Ramabai Association, and the international WCTU networks were to support Ramabai's reform efforts for the rest of her life. Her chapter on women in the United States 'The Condition of Women' (selection 7) sketches the brave new world she had glimpsed, with only minor flaws. Her description of women in America is a polemical statement of feminist solidarity.

That American society seemed like a utopia to women readers of *United Stateschi* . . . is suggested in the review by Kashibai Kanitkar, the first major female novelist in Marathi and a rarity as a book reviewer, being a woman. Kashibai's review indicates the appeal of the book for both expanding the female readers' horizons and reinforcing their incipient feminism which only needed an outlet for public expression: 'It would be hardly surprising if every one of our countrywomen who reads this book mutters dejectedly that such a golden day will never dawn for us. However, we will have to swallow these words hastily before they reach anybody's ears for fear of

committing "treason against men", just as our men are afraid of committing treason when they discuss the government' (cited in Vaidya 1991: 235–6*). The review itself, which established a vantage point qualitatively different from that of male reviewers, was sufficient proof of the progress in women's education since 1882 when the female readership of *Stri Dharma Niti* was expected to be non-existent—although the progress did not necessarily take the direction anticipated or desired by the (male) reformers.

United Stateschi . . . marks the end of Ramabai's feminist writings (except for a brief spark in *A Testimony*) as her religious preoccupations claimed centre stage. It was also the end of her career as a mainstream writer. *A Testimony* and the Marathi Bible hardly reached the general Marathi readership, and her narratives of women's oppression in several reports were intended for a specific, chiefly Western readership.

TRIADIC ENCOUNTERS

While her upper caste contemporaries remained confined within the home which became their 'social universe' (Kosambi 1998b), Ramabai had not only traversed the Indian subcontinent several times over, but also travelled widely within England and the USA, besides visiting other countries such as Japan. (Only a handful of women—or even men—from Maharashtra travelled abroad before 1900, mainly for higher studies: prominent among them were Anandibai Joshee who lived in the USA from 1883 to 1886, Rakhmabai in England, from 1889 to 1895, and Cornelia Sorabji also in England, from 1889 to 1893.) The formative part of Ramabai's social reform career (the period 1883–8) was shaped by her Anglo-American encounters within the larger context of Christian denominational, ideological, and nationalistic tensions.⁸

The Indo-American connection, relatively slight in the late nineteenth century, was heavily mediated by the British colonial link, and was contingent upon it. The conduit for the American presence in India were the Christian Missions that started operating soon after the East India Company's monopoly of trade with India ended in 1813, which allowed the entry of private commercial and religious interests, a history Ramabai hints at in her chapter on religion in the United States, 'Religious Denominations'. The American Marathi Mission,

which opened the region's first public school and started the Anglo-Marathi weekly *Dnyanodaya*, extended overt support for British rule in India in an article revealingly entitled 'The Destiny of the White Race', claiming:

It is fortunate for India that it is England that rules over her. No other of the white races is so fitted to fulfil her high mission over so great an empire . . . the mission of the white race to be the instrument through which is carried to the world a pure religion . . . (*Dnyanodaya* 1885: 500).

While Anglo-American religious interests coincided in India, where most Westerners were complicit in the Orientalist, Christianizing project in some way, the experience of an Indian visiting the two countries was often agreeably different, more so in the USA than in England. For Ramabai, the persistent religious friction with some Anglicans in England, with their vested interest in her proposed missionary career in India, was replaced by American tolerance of her non-denominational Christianity; it allowed her to forge an instant and effective bond with her audiences. Her maiden speech in the USA, for example, ended on a 'startling' and 'unique' note when 'the earnest little lady' asked 'an American company of educated and refined men and women to join with her in a moment's silent prayer "to the Great Father of all the nations of the earth" in [sic] behalf of the millions of her Hindoo sisters to whose cause she has given her life' (*Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 13 March 1886).

Ramabai was situated radically differently in the two countries. In England, she was always conscious of being a colonial subject—a 'native'. Having objected, in her article on Indian religion in *The Cheltenham Ladies' College Magazine*, to the indiscriminate and derogatory use of the term 'native' to describe all the people of the British colonies, she herself consistently used the term in its original meaning throughout *United Stateschi*. . . . The book amply reflects Ramabai's affinity with the country that had freed itself from the colonial yoke a century earlier—in her glowing description of the American Revolution, her repeated comparisons of America's superior political, economic, cultural and religious situation with England's, and her conspicuous solidarity with both the women's movement in America and American blacks. Across the racial divide her American friends camouflaged their racial awareness of her by a certain exoticization; Ramabai's pale skin and hazel eyes made her

acceptable as almost 'one of us'. The first, and generally representative, reaction of Caroline Dall—a feminist activist and writer, biographer of Anandibai Joshee and a friend who donated the sale proceeds of her biography of Anandibai to Ramabai's cause—was that 'Ramabai is strikingly beautiful' and that, apart from her 'white widow's saree . . . [t]here is nothing else about her to suggest the Hindoo [i.e. Indian]' (Dall 1888: 130–1). The Brahmin mystique (despite her conversion to Christianity), her acute intelligence and English education ensured her entry into the elite circles of Philadelphia and Boston.

If the perception of the 'civilized' West being the donors of benefits such as education to colonized nations like India was common to both countries, Ramabai received a great deal of concrete help in the USA, especially from Dr Bodley. In a tribute to the Dean after her death, a colleague recalled the 'noble aid' she extended to Ramabai (and Anandibai Joshee), adding: 'Their two names will thus be long linked together—shall we not say immortalized—the one representing the needs of the far East, and the other the Christian civilization and benevolence of the West' (Hartshorne 1888: 21.) Undeniably, Ramabai's international career was launched in the USA, through the help of friends like Dr Rachel Bodley and Frances Willard.

The international publicity that pervaded Ramabai's successful fund-raising in America and the opening of the Sharada Sadan compelled Sister Geraldine to alternate between denying the 'false reports that England had given Ramabai the cold shoulder, and she had consequently turned from England to America' (*Letters*: 295), acknowledging that 'America stole Ramabai from England', and insisting that 'England and her colonies have hardly been behind America in the gifts they have sent out to Ramabai; and England would have done still more for her, had she had [the] patience to wait and prove the generosity of the English public' (*Letters*: 423.)

Of considerable interest is Ramabai's ideological location *vis-à-vis* India, the original point of the triad, which she referred to variously in her Marathi writings, from the initial, Sanskritized *Bharatavarsha* in *Stri Dharma Niti*, to the more prevalent *Hindustan* in *United Stateschi*. . . . The contemporary Indian response to the question of her 'nationalism' was dominated by the largely hostile view of her conversion and later, of her missionary activity as anti-Hindu and therefore anti-Indian.

Ramabai's own stance remained largely stable over time: starting with patriotic indignation over a few foreigners having reduced millions of Indians to subjection in *Stri Dharma Niti* (1882); to demanding from Frere (in 1883) and the British government financial aid as a right, almost in compensation for having accumulated their wealth by impoverishing India; to a contestation of colonial power as exploitative, mercenary and patriarchal in discussing the Rakhmabai case in *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* (1887); and finally to an attack on the British policy of returning famine victims to the princely states as equalling the barbarity of those who had earlier pushed the widow onto her husband's funeral pyre, in her account of Mukti Mission (selection 9).

In these triadic encounters, Ramabai occupied a terrain permanently at the intersection of religion, culture and reform: as a high-caste Hindu turned Christian, an Indian straddling Western culture with equal facility and a social reformer aiming to alter the societal core of caste and custom.

OPPRESSED INDIAN WOMANHOOD: TRANSPARENCY, TROPING AND GENDERED SUBALTERNITY

Within this international context, diverse issues are raised by Ramabai's narratives of the oppressed Indian woman—as widow, deserted wife, and sexually exploited woman—which filled her reports of the Sharada Sadan, Mukti Mission and Kripa Sadan, as well as her *Letters*.

For her contemporaries, the most acceptable—or least unacceptable—part of Ramabai's contribution was her attempt to rescue the chaste upper caste widow, the noble symbol of Hindu patriarchal oppression, from her marginalized position within the domestic sphere and to reinstate her in a newly created (but still essentially marginal) space in the public sphere, by educating her and training her in professions such as teaching. But the sufferings of deserted and sexually victimized women, of any caste, revealed the far wider, more unpleasant repercussions of patriarchy and demanded a multi-pronged approach; they also laid bare the basic lack of compassion and will within Hindu society to face and solve these problems. Hence Ramabai's charge, in her account of Mukti Mission,

that Hinduism could be proud of such martyrs, only if they were willing martyrs.

Ramabai herself spelt out her strategy of transparency in her introduction to M.B. Fuller's *The Wrongs of Indian Womanhood*, first published in 1900: to courageously tell the truth as the first step in making women themselves aware of 'the depths of degradation' they suffer, informing reformers about the real condition of women, and raising public awareness about the scene 'behind the purdah' (Ramabai 1984). But transparency was discredited as a dubious, anti-nationalist strategy in a social climate in which the existence of women's oppression within the family, or 'domestic slavery', was vehemently denied (Telang 1886), where the idea of consulting women themselves on issues that concerned them deeply, like the Age of Consent, was considered innovative (Kosambi 1998a), and where a private reformist belief was prudently suppressed by a public conservative stance for 'nationalistic' reasons even by articulate women such as Anandibai Joshee (Kosambi 1996b). Ramabai's exposure and criticism of this defensive nationalist posture as a (sometimes unwitting) attempt at a tacit 'othering' and an occlusion of oppressed women and a stalling of real social reform, was a double-edged sword.

The questions that arise spontaneously but defy easy answers are: Can Ramabai's narratives, whether in her own words or those of the victims, be construed as gendered subaltern articulations? Did she enjoy legitimacy as a representative or mediator of these victims, on the strength of her positionality as a disprivileged widow and a marginalized, converted Christian? Or was such legitimacy undermined by her being simultaneously a privileged, Sanskrit-educated Brahmin and English-educated Christian with an affinity with the hegemonistic Christian community worldwide?

At one level, Ramabai's troping of oppressed Indian womanhood which started with 'The Cry of Indian Women' and continued through the *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* and beyond has still not lost its power because her revolutionary, objective critique of Hindu doctrines and customs (to the extent that they can be homogenized) with a concrete programme to redress women's oppression resonate well with most Indian feminists today. If, lacking today's language of feminism, she couched her analysis in different terms, she still succeeded in 'naming' the problem. At another level, it is easy to

accept her generalized and unambiguous attack on patriarchy—whether described as the caste- and custom-based oppression of Indian women, the authoritarianism of the Anglican Church, or the gender-based subjection of an earlier generation of American women. The questions being raised today would not deny the validity of her attack, they would only expand its parameters in their focus on the persistent gender asymmetry in American society and the prevalent oppression of women—through wife-beating, desertion and sexual victimization—in Christian communities, both in India and abroad.

The obverse side of this troping is an increasing repetitiveness and forced quality as well as Ramabai's self-conscious underscoring of her unique position as a simultaneous insider and outsider and of her Christian affinity with her Western readers—all of which exude the staleness of a formalized, stylized narrative.

But the real problem lies deeper. Over the years, Ramabai's essentialization of the oppressed Indian woman was itself edged out of the western Indian discourse of social reform and became permanently lodged within a Western, Orientalist, Christian discourse. The basic question it raises is how her Christian idiom and emancipatory, missionary rhetoric is distinguishable from outright Orientalist works on Indian women by Western authors. The nature and extent of the service she was able and allowed to render to the cause of Indian women through this international publicity (quite apart from the fund-raising which it aided) still remains unclear because of her acute marginalization. Hence the allegation that her ostensible motive of helping women only disguised and legitimized her Christianizing agenda.

CONTEXTS AND CONTEMPORARY CRITIQUES

Ramabai's very first book was her Marathi *Stri Dharma Niti* published in June 1882, about two months after her arrival in Pune, followed by the second, revised edition within six months owing to heavy patronage by the Directorate of Education.⁹ In her foreword to the third edition, published in 1967, Lilian Doerksen expressed the hope that *Stri Dharma Niti* would be found 'readable and instructive' by readers in the late 1960s because the problems and conditions of India's largely rural women had not changed much since Ramabai's time.

The archaic Marathi of *Stri Dharma Niti* was explained by Doerksen (1967) as being common among the emigrant Maharashtrian Brahmins settled in Karnataka. But it is the heavily Sanskritized style that obtrudes. The Marathi reviewer of the *Native Opinion* complained that 'the authoress, being well-versed in Sanskrit, has filled the book with Sanskrit words which are difficult for the average woman or even man to understand', but conceded that 'the advice given by her to women is worth accepting not only by Hindu women but by Hindu men also' (23 July 1882: 472*). The reviewer for the *Kesari* said less charitably:

We think that even a man learned in Sanskrit would be reduced to helplessness by some passages, what to speak of poor women who are almost drowning in the sea of ignorance! Sanskrit exerts such a powerful effect on this lady's mind that even if she feels favourably disposed towards the chaste Marathi language and decides to employ a simple word, it gets coated at least once with a Sanskrit brush (1 August 1882: 4*).

In the second half of the review, he went further and suggested that 'if Panditabai intends to write more books, she should first make a proper study of the Marathi language' (*Kesari*, 22 August 1882: 5*).

Ramabai's later Marathi work *United Stateschi* . . . shows considerable stylistic improvement. Although she had gained complete mastery over English in the interim and earned praise in the West for the instantly popular *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*, her Marathi style did not quite acquire the ease and fluency of her English, nor the lucidity of her contemporaries' serious (and even ornate) Marathi prose. But the contents were well-received: her 'elegant and heart-stirring' language and 'gripping' descriptions won the approval of the *Kesari* reviewer (7 January 1890: 2*).¹⁰ His reservations were directed at her feminism: 'That Panditabai has given the male sex a lashing is not surprising; it is a bad habit she has formed. Who knows how she is going to achieve her desired goal without men's help!' But the reviewer admitted that Ramabai's 'occasional comments on our present condition', however unpalatable, 'were worthy of serious consideration', that her stated policy of describing only the good qualities of the Americans was sound and should be applied also while 'considering the customs and manners of other countries' (perhaps a reference to her criticism of Indian society), and concluded that there was 'absolutely no doubt that the book is worth acquiring'.

The Indu-Prakash commended the book for its eyewitness accounts and the author's useful and inspiring comments, adding that 'because this book has been written by a person tender-hearted by nature, its language also shows tenderness. Everyone should certainly read it at least once.' It also noted that this was the second book in this genre in Marathi (after Karsandas Mulji's description of England published in Marathi translation) (6 January 1890: 2*).

Remarkably, *United Stateschi Lokasthiti ani Pravasavitta* has been crafted with the language and perception of a Sanskritized, Hindu worldview, half-a-dozen years after Ramabai's conversion to Christianity. It is most conspicuous in the chapter on women, which opens somewhat startlingly by invoking Sita to validate the achievements of American women and views universities such as Harvard as temples of Sarasvati serving an inexhaustible supply of 'the nectar of knowledge'. In fact, the opening paragraph is a masterly statement of authorial location; it manages to fuse nostalgia for a Sanskrit Brahmin childhood (to capture the attention of her inevitably upper caste readers) with a distancing from the same childhood as both a wiser adult and an enlightened Christian who appreciates revered Sanskrit texts as 'ancient literary works' rather than as sacred books, and also with a remarkable knowledge of both popular and obscure Sanskrit works. The invocation of demon-killing goddesses to stress American women's agency also serves to legitimize a similar effort by Indian women by locating it within the existing tradition of empowered female figures.

Given these cultural moorings, the hiatus marked by her later writings shows signs of a painful wrench to uproot some deeply ingrained traits of her personality, in an effort to force it into an entirely different mould. The scars of this cultural and emotional violence are visible. From the time of her conversion, Ramabai had grappled with the complex intertwining of religion and culture, and repeatedly attempted to indigenize Christianity and transform its alien cultural trappings into a more recognizable Indian garb, because she saw its true message as transcending denominational, cultural and racial divides. In this sense, it was a different and somehow alien Ramabai who in her translation of the Bible strove meticulously for a Marathi language shorn of all its Sanskrit words with their inherent Hindu connotations, and who detailed the difficulties in making a faithful translation of Christian ideas into a language 'saturated with

idoltrous thoughts' (Adhav 1979: 206). The 'divine language' which had 'coated' Ramabai's prose in 1882, which she had described as 'the most beautiful and the oldest language of my dear native land' (*Letters*: 28) and which continued to pervade her writings until 1889 had become 'idoltrous' two decades later. Thus her retention of the accepted Marathi word *pavitra shastra*, despite its strong Hindu connotations, for this translation marked the last major contradiction in her writings.

The conflicting demands faced by Ramabai of fidelity to the original and readability of the translation also confront us in translating her: her Sanskritized Marathi is often archaic (sometimes even in her own social context, and invariably in ours). Her texts, each of which traverses cross-cultural and international terrains, from India's ancient Hindu past to the contemporary Anglo-American social scene, contain profuse Sanskrit quotes and allusions to the Christian doctrine and denominations. Even the tone and texture of Ramabai's Marathi show a far wider range than her evenly balanced and lucid English prose. *Stri Dharma Niti*, with its unrelieved didacticism, reads like a sermon and parts of *United Stateschi* . . . like a feminist polemic, but without the compactness of the hard-hitting *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*; both texts are ponderous. An altogether different problem for the translator is posed by Ramabai's feminism—in both its incipient and full-fledged forms—because concepts which have 'a local habitation and a name' today and which slide spontaneously to the tip of the tongue and pen ('gender construction', 'patriarchy', 'empowerment', 'complicity', 'co-option') were couched in different labels a century ago. The task of translating the three pieces proved to be far more challenging and daunting than I anticipated. After juggling with the various concerns outlined above, I arrived at a somewhat complex agenda: to make a readable translation while avoiding anachronisms, to employ some of the vocabulary current in her time and be as faithful to the original as possible in order to retain the flavour of the original, and accommodate the diverse cultural nuances and pre-empt the possibility of an unwittingly distorted analysis of her writings, which might in future be based on these translations.

Ramabai's cultural transition was also reflected in her English writings. Her piece 'Indian Religion' shows her deep attachment for what she perceived as the core of Hinduism and her touchingly keen

desire to convey it to unsympathetic (Christian) English readers. Her perception of Hinduism was to rapidly undergo both a feminist and a Christian transformation visible in *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* published the very next year. Designed as an Indian feminist manifesto, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* tries to balance an incisive criticism of the Indian woman's inferior status in Hindu patriarchal society, with a nationalist defence of India *vis-à-vis* her Western readers. This effort to make the West understand Indian society shows that Ramabai's own understanding of Indian society was facilitated by the American feminist critique of contemporary Western society and her general exposure to the women's movement in the USA, especially through key figures like Dr Rachel Bodley and Frances Willard.

The book had a remarkable international circulation: its 'tenth thousand' was printed within a year of its first publication in June 1887. Newspapers across the ideological spectrum in America carried rave reviews,¹¹ variously labelling the book 'a cry for help', 'a revelation' to most Americans, a vindication of 'the activity of our Woman's Foreign Missionary Society'. A blend of Christianity and feminism, similar to that of Ramabai herself, ran through Frances Willard's review and was echoed across the Atlantic by Frances Power Cobbe. Evidently, Ramabai's book, while serving her agenda of creating a sympathetic understanding of the plight of Hindu women, strengthened the existing Orientalist, Christianizing agenda.

On arriving in India in 1889, Ramabai found herself and her Sharada Sadan initially accepted by Hindu social reformers of Mumbai and Pune. The later attack and the final boycott marks an end of Ramabai's writings other than reports and circular letters connected with her work, such as 'Famine Experiences' in 1897 and her letter to the 'Friends of Mukti School and Mission' in 1900. Had these eyewitness accounts of the gruesome realities of famine been heeded by her critics, she would probably have been spared further attacks, especially by Tilak who discredited her efforts by describing the rescued famine victims as 'widows caught in Ramabai's net during unprecedented opportunity of the famine years' (*Kesari*, 12 January 1904: 2*). The 'Famine' piece is noteworthy also for her autobiographical details and the second for her criticism of the hypocrisy of both the Princes of the native states and the British officials in dealing with the famine.

The small pamphlets that followed were written in the then usual missionary spirit that discredited Hinduism; together with *A Testimony* and 'The Word-Seed' (selection 12), both of which are Christian reconstructions of her life, they mark her complete transition to a Christian worldview and culture. A review of *A Testimony* in *Dnyanodaya* (19 September 1907: 299*) found the book truly remarkable, its truthfulness authenticated by the trust she received from 'Christians and non-Christians alike'. It went on, 'Had any-one else written this testimony, it would in all probability have contained exaggeration . . . We pray that a reading of this testimony may bring light to the non-Christians and enhance the faith of the Christians.' 'The second instalment of the review (26 September 1907: 308*) suggested that Panditabai should write this testimony in Marathi as well so as to assist 'the growth of the spiritual life of many people in Maharashtra'.

* * *

The Maharashtrian psyche still grapples with the dilemma of understanding, and slotting, Pandita Ramabai. The most conservative verdict is an outright condemnation of her for a betrayal of the cause of social reform and of the reformers. It was endorsed by *Kesari's* obituary which blames her overriding personal ambition and impatience which led her to succumb to the 'temptation of the missionaries' before testing 'whether or not her achievements could make an impact on the Hindu society', with the result that 'such an intelligent, determined and enterprising woman's achievements helped not the Hindu society but foreign missionary organizations'. It ends by claiming that gender-related reform in Hindu society could be achieved from within, as Karve's Widows' Home and Seva Sadan under Ramabai Ranade's guidance had shown; and that Pandita Ramabai could also have 'proved her capacity for organizational work while remaining a Hindu. But unfortunately this was not to be' (11 April 1922: 5*).

More liberal verdicts have also bemoaned her conversion as unnecessary, and suggested that Ramabai could have derived emotional and spiritual comfort from the Prarthana Samaj with its *bhakti* tradition, as well as practical support in her reform endeavours. Others have charitably stressed the symbiotic relationship between religious belief and adherence in the pre-secular age which

necessitated her conversion. At the other end of the spectrum is the obituary of *Dnyanodaya* (13 April 1922: 117*) which detects a Christian impulse which propelled her to establish a woman's worth in an inegalitarian society, and predicts (with an unfortunately unjustified faith in the verdict of history): 'If the history of Western India during the last thirty years is to be written, there would be no disagreement that Pandita Ramabai would be given a pride of place'.

But all alike have left untouched the obvious, vexed questions: Did Ramabai, as a Brahmin widow, have the same social acceptance, legitimacy and manoeuvrability (even with male support), the same 'agency' to which a Brahmin man like Karve, or the widow of a nationally revered figure like Ranade, could lay claim? Would the reformers have given her the freedom and support to exercise initiative in opening homes for rescued women, famine victims, the blind and the aged? Most of all, would her basically patriarchal male supporters have validated her vision of self-reliant women? And if the Christianity that provided the only moral and practical support in her struggle also totally alienated her from the society she sought to reform, can one adequately gauge the terrible mutual loss?

This brings us back full circle to the conflated contradictions between Brahmanical, Hindu cultural moorings and Christian belief, an insider's empathy and an outsider's critique, attempts to reform a society but only by recasting its religious base, the urge to contest and the need to be accepted, which inhabited Ramabai's personality with an increasing degree of unease. And to the fact that three-quarters of a century after her death, Maharashtrian society, having yet to produce an individual of her stature engaged in social reform on such a vast and variegated scale, still remains unwilling to remember her and unable to forget.

Meera Kosambi

NOTES

1. The term Maharashtra is used here to indicate the Marathi-speaking region which comprised parts of the Bombay Presidency, Central Provinces and Berar, and Hyderabad state.
2. Prominent among the academic writings on Ramabai are Kosambi (1988; 1992; 1995; 1998c), Burton (1995; 1998) and Glover (1995). Numerous full-length biographies of Ramabai have been written since

her death, mainly by Western and Indian Christian authors, including Macnicol (1926), Dongre and Patterson (1963), Sengupta (1970) and Adhav (1979) in English; and Tilak (1960) in Marathi. Among Ramabai's few non-Christian (and Marathi) biographers are 'Prabodhankar' Thackeray (1950) and Sathe (1975). The biographical introductions to her writings by Bodley (1977) and Shah (1977) are also useful.

The shift among historians in Maharashtra is indicated by Ramabai's earlier exclusion from the list of social reformers (Phadke 1975) to her reinstatement (Phadke 1989; Sunthakar 1993). Professor Y.D. Phadke himself attributes this shift to the year 1975 being designated as the International Year of Women and its effect on the Maharashtra state government, which commissioned both his books (personal communication). The Maharashtra State Board of Literature and Culture has made a significant contribution by helping the republication of *Stri Dharma Niti* (1882) by the Ramabai Mukti Mission in 1967 with a grant (covering 75 per cent of the cost), publishing the *Letters and Correspondence of Pandita Ramabai* in 1977, reprinting the *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* (1887) in 1981, *Englandcha Pravas* (1883; 1922) in 1988 and *United Stateschi Lokasthiti ani Pravasavritta* (1889) in 1996.

3. See Lerner (1992) and Shepherd, *et al.* (1995) for problematizing women's history.
4. This biographical sketch is based on Kosambi (1988; 1992; 1995; 1998c), which utilize the English and Marathi biographies of Ramabai as well as her *Letters and Correspondence*.
5. In my own text, current place names are used, such as Mumbai and Pune instead of Bombay and Poona; the Anglicized names are used in the translated texts.
6. The quotations marked with an asterisk are my own translations from the Marathi.
7. Anandibai Joshee's maternal grandmother was Anant Shastri Dongre's maternal cousin, as explained by Ramabai (*Indu-Prakash*, 5 August 1889: 5).
8. Tarabai Shinde, who hailed from an elite Maratha family from the Vidarbha sub-region of Maharashtra, remained an enigmatic and reclusive figure who produced only one booklet. The credit for retrieving it and reconstructing her sketchy biography goes to Dr S.G. Malshe.
9. Ramabai's 'triadic encounters' were the subject of my lectures at the University of Adelaide and Flinders University in Australia in August 1997, and at the Universities of Cincinnati and Pennsylvania in January 1998. The text of the lecture is currently being revised for publication.
10. The translation included in this volume is made from the third edition, published in 1967 (a reprint of the second edition, with a foreword and introduction by Lilian Doerksen).

10. This review has been obtained from the personal files of Dr S.G. Malshe, as the issue of the *Kesari* is missing from the paper's archives. Interestingly, an extract from *United Stateschi* . . . describing winter in America was included in a school textbook for Marathi during the mid-1940s (personal communication from Dr Pramod Kale).
11. From the archives of the Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission; some details regarding the place and date of publication are missing.

PART I



POONA

Stri Dharma Niti (translation)

(June 1882)



THE CRY OF INDIAN WOMEN ♦

To The Hon'ble Sir Bartle Frere Saheb Bahadoor

Honoured Sir,
While I was in India, I have at various times heard of your renown. The Indian people would never be able to obliterate from their minds the various good deeds done by you while Governor of the Bombay Presidency. I, as an Indian female, am so greatly obliged to you for the acts of kindness done to my country.

I cannot say how much I feel delighted at your kindly granting me an interview today, even though you had an urgent appointment elsewhere. Honoured Sir, I am not much accustomed to the presence of great men, and so was not able to pay you all the respect you deserve. But I hope you will kindly excuse these faults of mine, with that generous mind with which you so kindly granted me the interview.

While in India you must have come in contact with millions of Indians working under you, and I am a poor insignificant being living in a corner of that country. It is quite plain that I could not have had

♦Reproduced from a xerox of the handwritten translation in the Archives of the Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission, Kedgaon, with very minor modifications.

the honour of your acquaintance. It will thus strike you with what audacity I write this letter to you. In answer to this I will try to explain in the best way my narrow intellect can suggest.

It was only today that I heard from yourself that you were in India for fifty years. Is not that dear country of my birth, where you passed half your life, and its people entitled to your friendship? If so, the people, whether rich or poor, bear towards you feelings of friendship. And this right of mine I for my part will not let go. And for this reason only I made myself bold to write this letter. And if in doing it I have been mistaken, you will kindly pardon me.

It is rather ridiculous for a person like myself to give information about Indian matters to you who have lived in India for so many years, and who are older than myself and possess superior knowledge. Yet the object of this letter is not to inform you but to present you the picture of the female community of India, as to their condition, which I beg leave to mention briefly.

The females in India consider it to be a result of sin to be born a female; and I myself endorse this view, because I think that the condition of women in India is not better than that of animals in hell. By this I don't mean to say that all women in India are miserable. Though there are many women in India that are happy, yet considering the entire female population of India, the happy ones are very few. I will try to give you an idea of the life of a Hindoo woman.

To commence with, the Indian people seem to think that no one ought to have a female child born to him. The supposed reason is that there is no use of a female in this life. Though this belief is not universal, yet it is general. If a female child happens to be born to anyone, there is a feeling of sadness. And it is sometimes observed that the parents of female children treat them badly. The reason for it is not that they are wanting in parental affection, but that they follow the general tide of opinion. As the girls grow older, their fathers feel them to be more burdensome. There is a saying that 'it is more difficult to rear up a girl than to keep an elephant'. The meaning of it is that the girl becomes of no use to the father, to rear her up without any corresponding gain being very difficult. It is quite right that no one should like to spend his money and energy without reason; but I fail to understand the reasonableness of the notion that it is difficult to bring up a girl because she does not happen to be of

any use to the parents. One is obliged to keep silent, only thinking how ignorant such people are of the utility of women in a household.

The Indian people do not take the same amount of care for the education of their girls as they do of their boys. Because it is not only considered to be of no use to give education to girls, but it is the general belief that girls rather spoil by education. Those learned men who call themselves 'reformed', and who are well aware of the benefits of female education, even they do not give the same attention to the matter as they ought, through fear of sacrificing their own interests. While delivering public lectures, they deplore the ignorant state of Indian females, and when brought face-to-face to great *Saheb-lokes* (Englishmen) express themselves as to the great want of female education in India; but when the matter comes to be put into practice, they do not act up to their precepts. Learned men, even though they know the great necessity of female education, 'hurl their daughters into the well of ignorance in a cruel way', through fear of being outcasted and laughed at by ignorant people if they were to give a high education to their sisters and daughters.

And thus it is that people rid themselves of their daughters by marrying them [off] at an early age, following the general practice. When a girl has attained the age of ten or eleven, she has to live with her husband's family. For the time they live with their parents they pass a tolerably happy life. But when these girls are married there is a life of misery in store for them in the future. Those that lead happy lives after marriage are very rare, and are considered to be very fortunate. Young children not even able to speak well, are snatched away from the lap of their mothers and thrown into the crush of worldly life.

In our country it is not the custom for a man to live separate[ly] from his family when married. Though it is difficult to decide whether the custom has good or bad effects, yet it will not be improper to say that from the want of it in India, millions of women kill themselves by suicide on account of the ill-treatment by their mothers-in-law. There are very few mothers-in-law that treat their sons' wives as their own daughters. In India a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law hold the same relation towards each other, as there is between a cat and a rat. There is no hope for a girl to receive education when she has gone to her husband's house. A girl, when she has gone to her husband's house, unlearns all she might have learnt while with her

father. There is no occasion offered to girls to receive their education, for while young their lives are spent in [enduring] the cruelty of their mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law; and when they have grown up and live under the control of their husbands, they are engrossed in the cares of their households. Whether young or old, women are given a harsh treatment by their mothers- and sisters-in-law who may themselves have had to undergo a similar treatment. It cannot be said that this is a natural failing with all women. They commit these wrongs because they lack a good education. They cannot well remember the injuries they received in their very young days, but when they have grown up they do not pay much heed to the past wrongs if their husbands behave well towards them.

But in India well-behaved husbands are scarce. Women try their best to please their husbands, because on them depends their entire happiness. They feel and very naturally so, as if they were in heaven, if their husbands were to look with a pleased eye towards them. In our country the choice of a husband or wife rests with the parents, because at the time of marriage the couple, being very young, is not naturally able to make its own selection. When they grow old they do not feel satisfied with the choice made by others; owing to which the husband and wife bear ill-feelings towards each other from very slight causes. And when such is the case, the men instantly supersede the first wife, and marry another, even leaving the first one in the house. One cannot describe the miserable plight into which the first [wife] is thrown. If any man does not feel inclined for a second marriage, he takes to a mistress.

The state of the wives of such men is greatly deplorable. These men treat their wives in the same way as from history we know the Spaniards treated the Indians in America. In India when women are married, their husbands stand to them in the place of their parents, sovereign, and owner. If they treat them badly there is no one in the world to protect them. When it becomes known that a wife is not liked by her husband, the inmates of the house and even the neighbours ill-treat her on various pretexts. She is treated like a female slave that may be purchased. Though it requires no common courage to bear such treatment, there are some women of a patient temperament that put up with this unbearable suffering without grumbling. There is not a single day that passes, without recording that their husbands beat them like animals and call them names.

Some wives, when they feel the treatment [to be] unbearable, live apart from their husbands, or die a suicidal death; and in their great distress they do not find suicide a difficult deed. And there are some ignorant women, who not knowing the boon of this human existence, cling to an immoral life. They do not, by any means, like that greatly sinful life, but in their deplorable state, no other remedy suggests itself to them.

During the lives of their husbands the wives bear all the pain that is inflicted on them. And if through misfortune their husbands die in their lifetime, there is no end to their misery. On [the] one hand the sorrow of the death of their husbands is unbearable, and on the other the ill-treatment they receive at the hands of all is really great. The indignities to which widows are subjected in India is indescribable. All people look on them with disgust. [People] seem to think that it is a fault of theirs because [of which] their husbands have died (as if they themselves had killed their husbands), [and] that it rested with them whether their husbands be dead or living. They believe it to be inauspicious to see the face of a widow. On occasions of pleasure [such] as a marriage ceremony a widow dare not show her face, for it is believed that if the bride were to see the widow on the occasion of her marriage she is likely to become one herself. Some people, while going away to some other part of the country or starting out for some business, stop going if they come across a widow because they believe that some mishap will occur to them. Widows are allowed but one meal a day. It is considered sinful for a widow to eat oftener than once in a day. If there be a widow in a household there is considered to be no need for a servant-girl in it. It is considered to be a widow's duty to be working all day and night like a female slave. A woman if she happens to be a widow in her youth is not allowed to marry again. She is shut up day and night in a dark house. These demons in the shape of human beings don't content themselves with this treatment, but deprive the poor helpless widows of their natural ornament, the hair on their heads. It is believed that if [those] women were to wear hair on their heads, the messengers of death tie their deceased husbands with it. Thus the poor helpless widows, to relieve their deceased husbands from the supposed confinement, have to remove the hair from their heads. Women that become widows soon after their marriage are not aware of this belief and so are reluctant to remove their hair, but they are forced to get their heads shaved by

the people in the house, or others. After doing this cruel act, and feeding them only once a day, those people shut them up in the house, thus trying to enclose every chance of their satisfying their carnal desires.

In times of such difficulty even, there is no subduing of human nature. Though the widows are not considered as human beings yet they are in fact so. Those of a strong mind bear this misery with fortitude and pass the remainder of their lives in devotion to God. But all are not so strong-minded; not being able to bear the distress arising from widowhood, some widows give themselves up to an immoral life, and a great many secretly lead the same sort of life; thus committing great sins [such] as infanticide and abortion. It is just that such women are abhorred by people; but it does not enter the mind of anyone that a great share of this sin rests on the shoulders of men. The whole blame of the matter is thrown on women, even though the men that do it know the common saying that it needs two hands to clap. Howsoever great a sin a man may commit, it is considered that he is pure, but women are considered to be impure in their very nature. It is a common saying that 'a man is a lump of gold and a woman is an earthen pot'. The meaning of it is that even if gold were to fall into a dirty matter, its value is not lessened, but if an earthen pot were to be at an impure place no one would even touch it. Men don't [merely] say this proverb, but act up to it as well. In illustration of this I narrate briefly a story:

Last year a widow was with child in the town of Kolhapur. When this sin of hers came to light, the name of the man that participated in the sin became known as well. If this man's name had come to be known by one or two [persons] only, he should not have had to suffer for it; but as the matter came to be talked about by the whole community, it became evident that he could not be admitted into the caste without doing some penance; and so he was taken [back] into the community as a pure man by the Brahmins on his paying a fine of only twenty rupees! I believe that the man [having been] purified is now living a happy life in his community. What must be the condition of the ill-fated widow? There is no penance for her sin. No one would ever condescend to touch her, not even look at her. Now she has lost forever the happiness of her life and that inestimable boon of this life, viz. her good name, which is more valuable than life itself. Her whole living is now turned useless.

Oh, my dear brethren, are not you and we children of the same Almighty? Do you ever bring into your minds this wretched condition of the ill-fated female community of ours? It is not simply that the condition of these helpless and ignorant females is bad, but that you are to a degree responsible for the sins that they commit in this life. In your country of England, there are various means of protecting these destitute persons from their sins and offering them shelter. In this country your widows can remarry. Males and females can make their own choice of partners and marry according to their own wills. Poor helpless females, instead of resorting to an immoral life for their subsistence, can retire into a home for destitutes. Your people cannot marry a second wife while the first is living; and they do not treat widows in the same disrespectful way as our people do. But alas! what a miserable existence is it of women in India!

Oh, India, owing to thee how many people have become happy? Millions of foreign people have acquired riches through thee, and have become happy; but oh India, there is no shelter for thy daughters! Alas, to whom should we resort for redress? Who would, alas, take the trouble to wipe off the tears from the eyes of the helpless Indian women! In India there are 21,000,000 females, widows and married, and it is likely that the cry of these helpless women will not be vainly spent. One could bear the shock of a thunderbolt falling on the head, but it requires a very hard heart to bear with ease the drops of tears falling down the eyes of the helpless widows. But blessed be my countrymen, who will not feel a jot for these poor widows! Some kind-hearted people have set the practice of re-marrying widows, but owing to the sternness of our caste, their attempts have been rendered futile. In former days there was the practice of Suttee (burning widows), but Government having put a stop to it, has left us in a worsening state of existence. It would have been far better to be burnt once [and] for all, than being scorched gradually in the fire of misery for the whole of our lives; such exclamations of sorrow are frequently heard coming from the mouths of millions of women. Oh you English brethren of ours, since you have saved us from immediate death by the prevention of Suttee (widow-burning), you can as well now render the rest of our existence happy by some means! Is it proper that one of our sex, the great Queen Victoria should be the Sovereign of England and Hindoostan, and that we, women, should be subjected to this unbearable torture? You have conferred

various boons on Hindoostan and in return she has made your country wealthier. You ought not to treat us with contumely. The help that we ask from you ought not to be considered by you as a mere gift. We take you for our brothers and all assistance from you as a matter of right. Some of our countrymen would give us a helping hand, but our country being very poor, we would not be able to procure the required support; and so it is that now we have come with outstretched hands to claim your succour.

Last year I was at Poona and have established there a female association called Arya Mahila Samaj. This Association is working now even and has its branches at Bombay, Ahmedabad and Viramagaum[?]; and it is hoped that in a few years to come branches of this Association will be spread throughout India. The objects of that Association are three—1st, to put a stop to the marriage of children; 2nd, to prevent a man re-marrying while the first wife is living; 3rd, to give help to destitute women; and to encourage female education.

The accomplishment of the first two objects requires the countenance of the Government and the consent of the entire community; and so just now we do not make ourselves anxious about them. The third object is feasible just now, and we try our best to accomplish it as much as possible, and direct our energies to its achievement.

It is our intention to found an extensive home for widowed and helpless women, at Poona. If such a home is established, it will be resorted to by thousands of females. For the maintenance of so many people, and to provide them with clothing and an attached school where they can receive education, and in short to keep going an establishment of the kind would require us to have a capital of 500,000 rupees. We, the members of this Arya Mahila Association are poor, and our countrymen who favour this project of ours are as well without money, and so we are not able to raise the whole required amount. We will try every means to collect some portion of it in India, and it is our earnest desire that our English brethren should contribute four-fifths of the amount and give us a helping hand. If one such 'home for destitutes' is established at any place in India, there is a likelihood of it being followed by many others by way of example. If great men like your own worthy self were to take into your hands the work of collecting the above amount, it can be very easily carried out. We ask

you to give us your assistance by bringing this petition of ours to the notice of our and your sovereign Queen Victoria, our future sovereign the Prince of Wales, Mr Gladstone and other great men of note, so that this deserving object of our Association be accomplished. What you will do for the poor and helpless women of India with one hand, God will return it to you thousand-fold with thousand hands.

Honoured Sir, I am a poor, helpless, ignorant and weak being. I by my own self would not be able to do much good to my sisters in India. But I feel thankful to Almighty God for having offered me the opportunity of enabling the cry of distress of the female sex of India to reach your ears. I have not the power of relieving the poor helpless females of my country from their misery with money, but am prepared to give my powers and life for the object. Is it possible that yourself and fellow-countrymen of yours would not redress the grievances of your Indian sisters? I hope and feel that this adventurous mission of mine of bringing to you this cry of my Indian sisters would not prove useless, having left my own dear country and come to your land after travelling over six-and-a-quarter thousand miles. Is it possible that my hopes would be frustrated at your hands? No, never!

The state of Indian females that I have tried to show in this letter of mine, . . . [has been shown] in a very succinct way. If the distress of those helpless creatures were to be told [even] in a superficial kind of way, it would fill a volume. I think no human being would be able to do justice to their state of misery by describing it. I have travelled a great deal in India and that in a very modest way [i.e. without comforts or conveniences]. I have witnessed with mine own eyes the condition of the females in India. I believe you have as well seen something of the condition of the Indian females, but I don't suppose you have travelled like myself on foot two thousand miles to see the deplorable state of these females in India. If you should be kind enough to relieve the distress of these poor Indian sisters of yours, they will for ever be mindful of your kindness.

In conclusion I beg to take leave of you by wishing you every blessing from God, and that the Almighty may give you the power and will to give us your aid.

Your most obedient servant
Ramabai

Member of the Committee of the Arya Mahila Association

P.S. I hope you will be kind enough to get this letter of mine translated into English and distribute copies of it among your English friends; by doing which I shall feel greatly obliged to you.

I am living just now in St. Mary's Home at Wantage.

[London, 11th June 1883]

3



AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT❖

I was born in Mangalore District, in a forest named Gangamul, on the Western Ghats in April 1858. My father's name was Anant Shastri Dongre. He belonged to the caste of the Chitpavana Brahmins, and was a good scholar in the Sanskrit Shastras. When he was a lad of about sixteen years of age, he went to the teacher of the Peshwa Baji Rao for instruction, [who] was a great learned man named Ramchandra Shastri. In this capacity he had access into the palace of Baji Rao. There he became acquainted with the wife of Baji Rao, Shrimati Varanasibai Sahiba, who was learning Sanskrit with Ramchandra Shastri. This roused my father's attention to the cause of female education. When he came to manhood, he was honoured for his learning in Mysore, and other States, and received the title of Shastri. According to the present custom of our country, he was married in his childhood, so he could not carry out his desires as to female education with his first wife. Many years after her death, he married my mother, when she was nine years of age. Her name was Lakshmibai. From the time of their marriage, my father began to educate my mother. At that time, that is to say fifty years ago, in

❖This piece has been reproduced from *The Letters and Correspondence of Pandita Ramabai*, pp.15-18, with the kind permission of Popular Prakashan, the copyright-holder.

the Mangalore District, there had been nothing done by the English Government for the improvement of the people. All classes were against female education, and the prejudice clings to them still (e.g. I have received a letter last month from my half-brother, disapproving of my coming to England to learn English, etc). When my father began to teach my mother Sanskrit and Dharma Shastras, the people in the neighbourhood disapproved of it, and threatened to put him out of [their] caste but he would not heed them and as he was in no way beholden to them, he pursued his own ways. When they found they could in no way prevail with him to leave off educating my mother, they went to the Dharma-Guru (a spiritual teacher) and brought the matter before him, begging him to enforce the law against my father, because he was a breaker of their sacred laws and customs. So my father was sent for by the Dharma-Guru and was asked his reasons for breaking the law. My father replied by asking the Dharma-Guru: 'What is written in the Dharma Shastras which in any way forbids the education of women?' But the *dharma-guru* could give no satisfactory answer, so my father remained in [his] caste. Several years after, when [he was] at Swade (Soday), a village in Karnataka, where [there] is a monastery of one of the Dharma-Gurus, several Pandits and a Dharma-Guru were assembled to discuss the matter. There my father proved from the Dharma Shastras that women must be educated and learn their own Dharma Shastras. He received from the assembly a statement to this effect with their signatures affixed.

My father gave my mother a good education in Sanskrit and taught her the Dharma Shastras. She had six children but three died in childhood. I was the youngest, my elder sister and brother were both educated by my father and mother. As I was a good deal younger than they, I could not learn with them. According to the present custom of the country, my sister was married in her childhood, but as my father intended to keep her and her husband in his own house, her marriage did not hinder her education. She and my brother were both well educated in Sanskrit.

When I was old enough to receive instruction, my father was too infirm to teach me, so I received from my mother all the education I had in my youth. At the age of eight, she began to teach me Sanskrit. My parents found that marriage in childhood was a hindrance to education, so I was not given in marriage when I was a child.

You will ask me here why I did not follow in my sister's footsteps and was not married in my childhood? My father had taken a lad of needy parents to be the husband of my sister, for the reason that he might keep him and educate him with his daughter. Had he given her in marriage to the son of a wealthy and influential Hindu, she would have had to live with her father-in-law and be brought up in ignorance. The boy turned out [to be] dull and would not take to his studies and finally he ran away from my father's house; this marriage ended in a life of unhappiness to my sister. So my father resolved that he would not do the same in my case, and as he would not part with me, I remained unmarried. This was contrary to the present Hindu custom, but though his friends and neighbours constantly reminded him of this, he paid no attention to them. In 1874, I lost both my parents within two months of each other. We were living then in the Madras Presidency. After their death, because of the persecution which was carried on against us on account of my not being married and because he advocated female education, we were obliged to leave our country [region]. After a few months my sister died of cholera, and my brother and I travelled for six years in various parts of India. In our travels we were obliged to go on foot, not having the means to afford ourselves conveyance. In this way we went a distance of 2,000 miles, and thus we had a good opportunity of seeing the sufferings of Hindu women and were much touched by their sorrows. We saw it not only in one part of India, but it was the same in the Madras Presidency, Bombay Presidency, Punjab, the North-West Province, Bengal, Assam, etc. This made us think much of how it was possible to improve the condition of women and raise them out of their degradation. We were able to do nothing directly to help them but in the towns and villages we often addressed large audiences of people and urged upon them the education of the women and children. In order to be able to converse with the different races we were obliged to learn Hindi (as it is a general language in India) and Bengalee. In the year 1880, when we were in Dacca, my brother died, and then I was alone in the world. Six months after, I married a Bengalee gentleman, Bipin Behari Das [Medhavi]. He was a great friend of my brother, and I knew him two years before I married. He was born in the Sylhet District in Assam, and belonged to the caste of Shudras (the fourth of the Hindu castes). He lost both his parents in childhood and was brought up by his uncle until

he was 14 years of age. From that time, he continued his education by his own industry and perseverance. For some time he was Headmaster of the Government Normal School in Assam. After this he entered the Calcutta University [where] he obtained the degree of MA and BL. After this he became a pleader and followed this profession until his death. It was against the Hindu religion for me, being a Brahmin, to marry a Shudra, but neither my husband nor I believed in the Hindu religion, so we were married under the Civil Marriage Act.¹ After our marriage, we lived together in Cachar (Silchar) in Assam, for 16 months. In 1882, my husband died of cholera, leaving me with one little daughter. After his death, I had to pay off his debts; then I went to the Bombay Presidency and lived there for a year. During that time my countrymen helped me and they were willing to maintain me in independence, but my wish was to come to England and thus fit myself for a life of usefulness, in order to benefit my countrywomen. I had not money to pay my passage, so I wrote a book [*Stri Dharma Niti*] and published it. The Government kindly bought 600 copies of it (which was great help to me) and other copies were sold by booksellers. In this way I received sufficient money for my passage, but how to support myself and [my] child in England I knew not. It was my good fortune to become acquainted with the Wantage Sisters working in Poona; so I asked them if they would help me, and they promised to do so. Now I am staying in Wantage with them, and they are kindly supporting and teaching me. I am very grateful for their kindness. If my health allows me to carry out my plans, and it is God's will that I should do so, it is my intention to study medicine in England in order to benefit my countrywomen and with the hope of inducing some of them to follow my example. As I was by birth a Brahmin, my religion was at first Hinduism. Then for a time, I was a Theist, believing that Theism was taught in [the] Vedas. In the last two months, however, I have accepted Christianity and hope shortly to receive Holy Baptism.

NOTES

1. The Civil Marriage Act (III of 1872) legalized marriages performed according to the Brahmo rites, and allowed marriages between persons who did not profess any specific religion or between those of different religions.

4



INDIAN RELIGION ♦

Many of my Christian friends are full of eager desires to be of use to the natives of India, and to bring to them the light of Christian truth. They have often asked me questions regarding missionary work, and the Christianizing of India, which it has been impossible for me to answer in a way intelligible to them, owing to their almost total ignorance of all matters of Hindu thought and religion. Some English have such comprehensive classifications of the human race—they have been known to bring under the same category the skin-clad, flat-headed inhabitant of the North American continent, and the descendant of the ancient Aryan race of Central Asia. Some have even a more comprehensive mind still, and embrace under one term ‘native’ inhabitants of India, America, Africa, Australia, and all the islands of the Pacific. One evil result of this confusion is, that the stories related of one race are often supposed to be true of another—all alike are ‘benighted heathen’ and the same treatment is given to all. Some missionaries

♦Reproduced from *The Cheltenham Ladies' College Magazine*, no. XIII, Spring 1886.

The editor [of *The Cheltenham Ladies' College Magazine*] has in some degree translated the thoughts as well as the language into a more vernacular form. But the article was in the first place written, and after correction finally revised, by the writer.

go out to teach those of whose language and philosophy, and modes of thought, they are utterly ignorant; with whom they have no sympathy, because they cannot feel what are their difficulties. Such was hardly, it seems to me, the method of the apostles. In the first ages of Christianity, St. Paul became to the Jews as a Jew, to the Greeks as a Greek. Christ tells us He came not to destroy, but to fulfil—and God's method of work seems to be ever to build on the old foundations, keeping that which is good, and destroying only that which is evil, decaying, ready to perish.

It grieves me to think how much harm is done, how opponents are encouraged in error, by finding that those who profess to teach are unable to enter into their thoughts, and to answer their questions. They cannot believe that missionaries, who will not take the trouble to understand them, can really care for them, and sincerely desire their good; that contempt which is ever the offspring of ignorance, always alienates and hardens—only sympathy born of understanding, will ever make them open their hearts to light. It seems to me that it has become something of a fashion for kind-hearted young ladies (of gentlemen I will not speak) to think they will easily convert 'the natives'. Imagine for a moment that the relations were reversed—that a Hindu lady, inspired with a desire to convert the English, should at once proceed to London, in utter ignorance of the Christian faith, only firmly convinced of the truth of her own. Would her assertion that the Vedas are inspired books be accepted by any? Would not Christians require her to show them in what respects her faith was superior to theirs? Yet there are lady missionaries who think themselves qualified to teach Hindus, with no more knowledge of their faith than our imaginary Pundit has of Christianity.

Happily some missionaries, though not all, do study that teaching which God has given to us in past ages, through the sacred writings of India, and they are able to help my countrymen to see more of the divine truth. . . .¹

I can quite understand, now that I have become accustomed to Western thought, how repulsive are some of the sacred symbols of Hindu mythology. I can, however, assure Christians that to the pure-minded these are mere abstractions, or if the[ir] origin is thought of, they are merely the expression of the sacredness of all life, of the consecration of the family. . . .

Since I desire that the races, whom God has in His providence

placed in such intimate relations with one another, should understand one another better—believing that it will be for the happiness of both, and that each has something to learn from the other—I, who have adopted the Christian faith, and entered sympathetically into the elevated spiritual teachings of that faith, am anxious that my Christian friends should know, too, what is good and true and beautiful in the teachings of our books, though I would be far from palliating, or attempting to excuse, much of the abominable teachings of Brahmanism, and would acknowledge with gratitude to our Lord, that He is [the] Mediator between God and men, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the Light. . . .

I cannot, of course, in a short article hope to do more than interest my readers so far as to make them desirous to read large works.^{††}

Before beginning my comments, it will be convenient to give a table of the principal books. The Hindu Scriptures are much more voluminous than those of the Christians—they consist of hundreds of books by different authors. . . .

The Vedas	[Rig-veda Yajur-veda Sama-veda Atharva-veda	
	The Brahmanas (the Leviticus of the Hindus)	
	Upanishads (philosophical treatises)	
	The Vedanta and Yoga Sutras Bhagvad-gita, Anugita, etc] later philosophical writings	
	Sutras (early laws) Smritis (later laws)	
	The Ramayana The Mahabharata] Epics	
	Puranas, i.e. old writings] Bible of the later mythological Brahmanism	

^{††}Amongst those specially interesting I may mention the Hibbert Lectures and 'India, What Can It Teach Us?' by Professor Max Mueller, *Religious Life and Thought in India* by Professor Monier Williams, or his smaller book published by the SPCK [Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge]. Those who desire to really

The oldest part of the Hindu Bible is the Rig-veda. Scholars agree in the opinion that its composition began as early as the sixteenth century BC. The doctrine of the Rig-veda is, if we read it superficially, polytheistic, but the underlying thought is monotheistic. It has been clearly shown that the doctrine which the Indo-Aryans held previous to the Vedic age was monotheistic. The Rig-veda, however, speaks of thirty-three gods, of whom Agni (Fire-god), Indra (Rain-god), and Surya (Sun-god), the Vedic Triad, are chief. The Rig-veda is a collection of hymns composed in honour of, and prayers addressed to, these gods. The prayers are generally for prosperity, for increase of cattle, for offspring, for good crops, etc., e.g.

Will you then, O Maruta, grant unto us wealth, durable, rich in men defying all onslaughts—wealth a hundred and a thousand-fold, always increasing?^{††}

But there is one remarkable prayer which, like the 'Hail Mary' of the Roman Catholics, is frequently repeated—at least thirty times daily by the Brahmans; it is addressed to the Sun-god, and runs thus:

Let us meditate on the excellent glory of the Divine vivifying Sun; may he enlighten our understandings. (*Rig-veda* III, 63–10.) . . .

It is true the Vedic people believed in many gods, but the foregoing hymn will show that they believed only one Deity to be the supreme Lord of all gods, but this one Lord was not designated by one particular name only. It depended upon the choice of the worshipper to elect his own god from among the thirty-three, and adore him as the supreme, and worship all others as his servants. This is the chief feature of the religion of the Hindus to this day, and it seems to me that this implies a fundamental belief, that all the gods worshipped under different names are one, and that there is but one God. So I would argue with Hindu polytheists as St. Paul [did] with the Jews, that monotheism is

study the subject can refer to the twenty volumes of *Sacred Books of the East* in the Cheltenham Library. The translation of one of the great epics of the Hindus, the Mahabharata, has been kindly presented to our College by Babu Protap Chunder Roy of Calcutta. A good analysis of the Ramayana is given in Wheeler Talbot's *History of India*. There are translations of Indian poems into English verse by my talented countrywoman, Toru Dutt, also a Christian, and some by Mr Arnold and Mr Griffith. *The Land of the Vedas* is out of print, but there are smaller books published by the SPCK and the Religious Tract Society.

^{††}*Rig-veda*, translated by Professor Max Mueller.

implied in Vedism, as Christianity in the law. I would show that the teaching of Christ is far more one in spirit with that of the ancient Rishis than with that of those who profess to be their disciples, but have overlaid their teaching with a mass of superstition and idolatry. It is quite clear that when hymns in praise are addressed to several divinities, the worshipper thinks of them as different manifestations of the same Omnipresent Spirit. This is a thought surely not incomprehensible to Christians, for whom the glory of the Father shines forth in the person of the Son, and for whom the indwelling Spirit is the indwelling of Christ. This is proved by the following hymn. It is addressed to Agni (Fire-god), but he is identified with two other persons of the Hindu Triad, Indra (the Lightning) and Surya (the Sun-god). . . .

The Hindus were from the first firm believers in immortality. . . . The Vedic worshipper was also conscious of sin, and sought forgiveness. . . . The Rigveda inculcates charity: 'The kind mortal is greater than the great in heaven.'

Of the later teachings of the Brahmans regarding caste, there is almost nothing; nothing of the cruel widow burnings or the exclusion of women from the sunlight. On the contrary, it is taken for granted that they are, as well as men, thinking beings, and even in the later Upanishads we find ladies conversing on equal terms with men on subjects of religion and philosophy. I think this may have something to do with the fact that these works are pronounced by modern Brahmans too sacred for us women to read; it is thought undesirable that the high-caste women of today, who are utterly secluded and forbidden to speak to any men except to very near relations, should read in the Aranyakas [a class of religious and philosophical writings associated with the Brahmanas] of ladies conversing with great sages, such as Yagnavalkya, especially [that they should read] of Gargi, who like the English princess St. Hilda, exercised authority over Brahmans, priests, and monks. I remember, when a child, being forbidden to repeat the sacred texts, which I had picked up by hearing my brother and other pupils of my father repeat them. The Aranyakas are so sacred that not a single text from them is pronounced in the presence of women, even of the Brahman caste, much less in that of a Shudra.

We find traces in the Vedas of the later Vedanta philosophy, which is pantheistic. The pantheistic teaching has undergone many changes of form, but began to manifest itself in the thought of the Hindus in very early times. . . . When the poetical expression was represented

by a symbolic form and worshipped, we can easily see that a pantheon would be developed out of pantheism. Indeed, idolatry has developed to gigantic proportions, as one might see it would from such a doctrine; the Upanishads were written as a protest against it. Christians find great difficulty in understanding Hindu thought, and even the Christian Scriptures may, to those who have not the same spiritual conceptions, seem to fall in with their own ideas, and therefore justify their own conclusions, because they are unable to conceive [of] the Christian doctrine of transcendency and creation. If missionaries quote such words as 'God is above all, through all, and in all', a Hindu will say, 'Then we may certainly worship all, the Mountain, the River, the Tree, much more the living creature, e.g. the cow, and any image of God, which we have consecrated by prayer.' It seems a great step from the poetical, nominalistic pantheism of the Vedas to the coarse idolatrous realisms of modern Hinduism, yet the latter is only the degenerate offspring of the former.

Though the authors of the Rig-veda believed in thirty-three principal and many other gods, and sacrificed and addressed hymns to them, there is no trace of idol worship. I may perhaps explain the growth of idolatry thus—The worshippers in the exuberance of the religious imagination, seem to have become dissatisfied with the worship of an abstract conception, and even of One who seemed afar off. They could not even rest in the worship of the Omnipresent Spirit, through the three visible objects of the Great Triad, the Fire, the Light [Lightning], the Sun. So a symbolic image was made. . . . Thus, to express almighty power, a figure was made with many hands; or, to express omniscience, a five-faced figure was made looking every way; or strength was expressed by a lion-headed man. These symbolic forms soon became to the worshipper realised conceptions, so that they thought of the God as having such a body. Since the sun is visible, and his worshippers can address their prayers to him, standing as it were face to face, one can hardly feel the necessity for making a picture or statue of him; but the worshipper's mind was not satisfied by looking, or by prostrating himself before the sun. He felt he was not doing the Lord as much service as he might.

But how could he express his gratitude and make his god, so far above him, partake of his goods? He wanted the god to dwell in some form on the earth, and he wanted to show his devotion by offering him everything he felt to be good, e.g. a comfortable bed, rich garments,

precious jewels; the devoted servant must offer the best he has to his god. Hence the necessity for making a statue of the god. He then can wash the statue, dress, adorn, put [it] to sleep, and offer meals to it, and wait upon it, as a servant waits upon his master. This, of course, is all done to the idol, as being the representative of the sun; all the while the worshipper thinks that he is doing service to the sun in the sky, and that this service, imperfect as it is, is yet acceptable to the sun. Again, seeing that the sun bestows on him in various seasons, various gifts, he begins to worship the sun in twelve different manifestations, for there are twelve months in the year, and the devoted servant would give him twelve names, significant of twelve benevolent characters. He would do all in his power to show his love to the god. He would keep feasts in his honour, make processions, give him a ride in the great chariot, etc. All this seems so natural to him that he has never once thought he can be doing wrong. And if we enter into his spirit it would not seem wrong to us either.

Why, then, he asks, should idolatry be considered wrong? We answer, because such devotion, instead of elevating the worshipper's mind, only helps to degrade it. For the symbols do become to him real things, and the worshipper gets to think the god needs the daily meals, washing, clothing, etc. Even the Hebrew prophets had to correct the foolish thought of those who offered sacrifice, imagining that God needed anything from man, instead of graciously accepting worship as a part of His child's education. Of course, as soon as idolatrous rites are introduced, the spiritual conception is degraded, and becomes a false one, God is made 'like unto some corruptible thing', and this plainly is sinning against God.

When worship was extended to every visible thing, a vast mythology grew up, such as we find in the later religious institutions, and this led the Hindus to what may be called universal idolatry, since everything in the universe is the manifestation of God. Thence arose three forms of the religion which Professor Monier Williams calls the Mythological, Ritualistic, and Nomistic Brahmanisms. Time and space alike do not permit me to dwell upon these forms now.

NOTES

1. Long quotations from Reverend Peter Percival of the Society for the Promotion of the Gospel, Professor Monier Williams and Professor Max Mueller have been omitted.

PART III



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The High-Caste Hindu Woman

(1887)

Religious Denominations and Charities in the USA

(1889)

The Condition of Women in the USA

(1889)



THE HIGH-CASTE HINDU WOMAN❖

To the
memory of my beloved mother
Lakshmibai Dongre
whose influence and able instruction
have been
the light and guide of my life
this little volume
is most reverently dedicated

❖The text of this book has been reproduced *verbatim*, but a very few minor changes have been inevitable. The original chapters are treated here as sections, because the whole book has become a chapter in the present volume; and the list of contents has been omitted.

instead, we imitated their good qualities and customs with eagerness, how greatly it would benefit us and our country!

NOTES

1. In the earlier part of the book Ramabai gives a glowing account of the American republic and the people's power, contrasting it with the English monarchy. This contrast runs like a red thread through the book.
2. Ramabai wrote most of the book in 1888 while she was in the USA; hence the reference to the Americans as the people 'here'.
3. Here, and in some other places, Ramabai quotes figures in lakhs and crores (sometimes in words), which are converted in the translation into numbers and presented in the Western style for the sake of universality. The figures that follow show that one dollar was equal to three rupees at the time.
4. Missionary activity was initially forbidden by the English East India Company in Mumbai Island (the only territory under its control in western India), until the Company's monopoly of India trade was ended in 1813. The American Marathi Mission was the first on the scene and opened the very first public school in Mumbai in 1815 (*Gazetteer of Bombay City and Island*, III: 101-5).
5. *Kaikadis*, a caste whose traditional occupation was making twig-baskets, also earned money through acrobatic performances in the streets.
6. The involvement of Agarkar and Tilak, as editors of the *Kesari* and *The Mahratta*, respectively, in the Kolhapur Libel Case stemmed from their support to the young prince against his Diwan who allegedly maltreated him with the connivance of the British Resident. In the court case that followed, Agarkar and Tilak found the documentary evidence in their possession to be forged and their informants unwilling to testify; they were sentenced to prison in July-October 1882. Agarkar's account of prison life, published in 1882 as a booklet, was the first of its kind in Marathi (Agarkar 1986, III: xiii-xix, 1-37).

7



THE CONDITION OF WOMEN IN THE USA

(translated from *United Stateschi
Lokasthiti ani Pravasavritta*)

As a child, I took great delight in listening to marvellous tales, just as other children do. Who does not enjoy the legends, the Mahabharata, Bhagvata [Purana], Ramayana, Adbhuta Ramayana, Jaimini, Ashvamedha, and other such ancient literary works popular in our country? Who would not find them inspiring? And who would not yearn for the strength to perform similar feats? But there would be few children and adults who do not realize, to their disappointment, that such feats are beyond them because of their lack of strength, general ignorance and lack of resourcefulness; and, besides, that the tales themselves are but imaginary. If we are so delighted and eager to read imaginary tales and marvels, why should we not be eager to read accounts of real events? Seven years ago, I had not the slightest inkling that I would really be able to witness goddesses like Sita, endowed with the strength, comparable to that of Haihayarjuna, to block the force of a great river, and able to slay invincible demons like Ravana with their hundred or thousand heads.¹ But, happily, in the course of time I was able to witness such wonderful things and now have the opportunity to present at least a brief account of them to my countrymen and women.

Some months ago I chanced to see the book *Society in America* written by the famous and scholarly Englishwoman Harriet

Martineau. She wrote the book when she returned home after visiting America in 1840 and observing the society here.² While describing the condition of native³ women, she has said: 'They (women in this country) receive no higher education at all; moreover, all avenues of acquiring it are blocked for them. The highest reach of their education consisted of [accomplishments such as] singing, playing musical instruments, a little reading and writing, and needlework. They enjoy no social or political freedom. Should they suffer the misfortune of widowhood or poverty, they have no recourse but to undertake work like sewing, cooking, domestic service or similar lowly work; or to marry or remarry against their will. The laws of this country take no cognizance of women's existence at all. Women are mere prisoners of men, like bought slaves. There is no exception to this in political matters and in the eyes of the law; only in social life might there be an exception, though a very rare one.'⁴ . . . The one sentence, that 'women are mere prisoners of men, like bought slaves', clearly reveals the pitiable and dreadful plight of native women about fifty years ago. The courage, powers of endurance and unceasing effort that enabled these women to lift themselves out of this condition can be adequately described only by a Sarasvati [Goddess of Learning] descended upon our earth; a mortal like me, with her limited intellect, cannot do them justice.

Thus far, kind and philanthropic people have accomplished great deeds (like the abolition of slavery, promotion of the temperance movement, etc.) in the face of terrible adversity; but the emancipation of women was a deed far more difficult than them all. Because, it is obvious that to purchase slaves like livestock, make them work without wages and block their worldly and spiritual progress is very reprehensible and cruel. Also, everyone knows that vices such as drinking cause physical and mental ruin. The harm done by these things is immediately visible to all; but the harm done by the slavery of women is generally not noticed. Like a mysterious heart disease, it remains invisible even as it continues to destroy the heart of human society. Most people think that women are living not in slavery, but in a state natural to them. The belief that women are not oppressed and that their condition need not be any different from the present one, is so deeply entrenched in everybody's mind that it is impossible for anybody to even imagine how evil their condition really is. What is worse, even women themselves believe that their condition is as it

should be. In the past, when African Negroes were slaves in America, many of them held similar beliefs: 'We may be enslaved, but this alone is our source of happiness; we are low and abject compared to everybody else, and we are utterly dependent on our masters, who have the power of life and death over us.' In this belief, they quietly endured even the worst kind of humiliation. This state of mind is the ultimate in slavery. One cannot even begin to imagine how evil is slavery which destroys self-respect and desire for freedom—the two God-given boons to humanity!

How true is the claim of many Western scholars that a civilization should be judged by the condition of its women! Inherently, women are physically weaker than men, and possess innate powers of endurance; men therefore find it very easy to wrest away their natural rights and reduce them to a state that suits them [i.e. men]. But, from a moral point of view, physical might is not real strength, nor does it signify nobility of character to deprive the weak of their rights. Among the barbaric or semi-barbaric people of the past and present, physical strength is seen to be generally supreme. 'Might is right' is their creed. . . . But, as a country advances in knowledge and compassion, brute strength declines in importance, people begin to regard intellectual strength as superior to physical strength and accord a higher status to venerable customs and common wisdom than to the pompous scriptural precepts of 'pretentious fools'. Such people do not consider it right to grasp the property and rights of others just because they are weaker. For them, justice means protecting the weak, forgiving those who harm them instead of retaliating, and being modest rather than arrogant about their natural strength. Thus, as people progress and expand their knowledge, they naturally develop greater innate compassion and morality. For the same reason, the tradition that believes in exercising arbitrary power over women on the grounds of their weakness is considered barbaric; and as men gain wisdom and progress further, they disregard women's lack of strength, honour their good qualities, and elevate them to a high state. Their low opinion of women and of such other matters changes and gives way to respect. Thus, the progress of a country can be accurately assessed from the condition of its women.

According to the natives, the social conditions in England and among the Americans who have immigrated from that country are the very best, because their women are honoured everywhere and

because they regard men and women as equals. And those who profess Christianity claim that women acquired a high status because of the Christian religion, because women receive no respect at all among the people of other religions, and that women of any community begin to progress as soon as it embraces Christianity. Careful consideration shows that both these claims contain a great deal of truth, but also a great deal of falsehood. The condition of women is not identical among all the communities that call themselves Christian. People like the Russians, Italians, Greeks, French, Swiss, Finnish, English, Americans and others are all Christians; but there is a wide difference in the condition of their women. To claim to be the follower of a religion, and to actually practise that religion are two very different things. Almost all the people in this country call themselves Christians, but not all of them practise the teachings of Christ. The doctrine which Christ taught and the practices He propagated did not differentiate at all between men and women; but that egalitarian view is not accepted by everyone here. Through their view of women's worth and their treatment of women, some people prove that they accept the doctrine of Christ, some that of St. Paul, some that of Moses, and some that of Satan; but all of them claim that they accept the Christian doctrine. The doctrine of Christ, and that of St. Paul who adhered to it, states that there is no difference between men and women in Christ, but that all are the children of God; whereas most of the doctrines prevailing in this country consider women to be inferior to men. Women do not have the right to climb onto the pulpit and preach like men, or to conduct religious services and rites; they have to take the vow of obedience to their husbands during the wedding ceremony; (male) preachers maintain that a husband has supremacy over his wife. This falsifies the claim of all self-styled Christians, that their religion is the cause of the freedom, high standing and honour enjoyed by the women of England and of this country. The religion which has led to women's high state should properly be called by these followers of different denominations, not 'our' religion but simply 'the holy doctrine' or 'the doctrine of Christ' (which is not the prevailing form of Christianity). The prevailing form of Christianity continues to change in conformity with popular opinion. From olden times, the religious heads of different denominations have followed the tradition of shaping religion in the manner of kneading a ball of wax and

moulding it into the shapes that appeal to them and to popular opinion. What different shapes these clergymen have given to the Christian religion and how they have changed its essence is clearly seen from the history of the native slaves and women.

The sect known as Quakers, which was founded about two hundred years ago, does not discriminate in this fashion, at least in matters of religion. According to them, God loves men and women equally. God inspires people according to their worth, whether they be men or women; therefore they believe that a man or a woman who feels the divine inspiration should preach. But in other matters, even Quakers considered women to be inferior to men. In 1840, the World Anti-Slavery Convention was held in London and was attended by Lucretia Mott and many other eminent women as delegates of the American Anti-Slavery Society. The meeting, attended by many Quakers, was presided over by one Joseph Sturge, a famous Quaker gentleman. Even in a meeting devoted to such an altruistic cause, he refused to grant the status of delegate to the women who had dedicated themselves totally to the service of the Anti-Slavery Society, sometimes at the risk of their own lives.⁵ The reason advanced was the 'British tradition'.

The other day (in May 1888), there was a Methodist meeting of the clergy and laity in New York city, to which many local Methodist societies had sent their representatives, including five well-known women. But they did not receive due recognition at the meeting, the only reason being that they were women. One thing worth remembering here is that two-thirds of the Methodists are women, and that the livelihood of most of their clergy and the charitable works of the sect depend on their support. The same thing applies to other sects. When it comes to religious and charitable works, the task of collecting money for them falls to the women's lot. After completing their housework or the paid employment they have taken up for earning a livelihood, they do sewing, embroidery and make beautiful things, go from door to door and plead with people, collect money and things for charity and philanthropy through all such means, and get together crores of rupees. But then it is men who decide how to disburse this money, and it is men who are the presidents, vice-presidents and other [office-bearers] of the committees appointed for managing the charitable works. It is women who do secretarial and other routine, tiresome work. This is the

justice of the Methodists—how beautiful it looks in the clear sunlight of the nineteenth century reform! Among the Christian sects, other than the Congregationalists, Quakers, Unitarians, Universalists, and a progressive branch of the Methodists, women lack the freedom to preach in church, the only reason being that they are *women*! In his Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul says in one place, 'Let your women keep silent in the churches.' Therefore women—be they ever so pure, educated, effective speakers, possessed of other excellent qualities, and much more capable than male preachers, but whose only fault is that they are women—are ordered by men to shut their mouths and sit quietly even if they have the divine inspiration to preach.

It is not yet sixty years since the condition of native women started to improve, but even within such a short time they have begun to taste many excellent fruits of their industry and persistent efforts. Even at the time when Harriet Martineau wrote that these women were men's prisoners like bought slaves, and that there was no exception to this rule in political matters and in the eyes of the law, there were one or two women who had already noticed the disrespect shown to their sex and attempted to bring this injustice to the notice of American society. A hundred years ago, the sister of the famous Robert Lee in the State of Virginia, and the wife of John Adams in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts told Government officials clearly that they would not pay taxes because they had no right to vote in political matters. But nobody paid much attention to those things at the time. Later, in 1830, an opinion in favour of abolishing slavery began to be created in this country; since then, the matter of improving the condition of women has also taken shape. In 1832, William Lloyd Garrison first established the Anti-Slavery Society. He, Wendell Phillips and many other eminent speakers gave hundreds and thousands of speeches propounding the injustice of enslaving Negro men and women. The arguments they advanced against the slavery of Africans were also applicable to the slavery of women. With this realization, some brave and adventurous women started delivering speeches in public meetings, espousing the cause of their sex along with that of the Negro slaves.

The year 1832 should be called a golden year, when the slaves' chains received a hard blow and began to break. Similarly, ignorance, the root cause of slavery and the inferior status of women, began to decline. In this good year, a very famous college, known as Oberlin

College, was founded in the town of Oberlin in the State of Ohio. The founders of the College made a rule to generously impart education to all who were interested, without judging their suitability by criteria such as skin colour—whether black, white, yellow or any other—or sex.⁶ Not many years have passed since the condition of native women began to improve, but the Sun of their good fortune has begun to acquire greater brilliance with every passing day. Favourable signs are visible that within a few years, they will obtain all rights that men enjoy and that this nation of the United States will become a full-fledged republic. Every day, women are making great strides in social and political matters. . . .



EDUCATION

The chief cause of progress is education. It has been sixty years since education was made available to native women in a small way. It is almost a hundred years since the Englishwoman, Mary Wollstonecraft, stated publicly that women of England should receive an education. In the year 1789, this woman openly claimed that the lack of education was the biggest obstacle to women's advancement in England at the time, and that it was not proper to prevent women from studying. In 1799, a woman named Hannah More wrote several books to publicly state her opinion that it was proper for women to be educated. In 1809, a gentleman named Sidney Smith presented his favourable opinion of women's education before the people, through his books. The two decades from 1789 to 1809 may be called the preface to the history of Western women's education. During these twenty years, the desire for a wide dissemination of women's education sprouted in the hearts of many men and women, and became stronger day by day.

In 1819, the American woman Emma Willard made the first attempt to make education available to her countrywomen. That year she presented an Address to the Senate of New York State with a request to establish a seminary for women.⁷ The history of American women's higher education can be said to have started

from this date. However, women's higher education itself did not start at this time. Until 1831, almost all the supporters of women's education said that women should get only a general education, because higher education would not only not benefit them, but would destroy their natural modesty, beauty and usefulness to society; and make them arrogant, careless and thoughtless. In 1832, Oberlin College in Ohio made higher education available to women along with men. The founders of Oberlin College set the world an excellent example by dismissing the prevalent, barbaric belief about women's inferiority. The city of Boston, capital of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, is famous as an old centre of learning in the United States; and scholars from Boston are popularly believed to be very superior and pioneers in matters of progress and public welfare. But not a single girls' college had been established in Boston until 1878. It was only a 125 years after the establishment and great development of Harvard University (at Cambridge, Massachusetts), regarded as the jewel in the crown of America's universities, that permission was granted for Boston girls to enter the most inferior colleges. If, keeping this in mind, one analyses the history of native women's education (which started very recently), one is amazed at the feats achieved by women in the academic field in such a short time.

Now, one should not assume that the general progress in female education in the United States, which one sees today, was smooth. As soon as women began to read a new book, or declared their intention to learn a new branch of knowledge, they would immediately be subjected to curses, censure, criticism, wrinkled noses and meaningful glances every where—from newspapers, preachers' pulpits, the mouths of public speakers, declarations of religious meetings, and from the eyes and tongues of neighbours; and this continues even now. Only a cause which was naturally pure and had the support of eternal truth could hope to endure such a shower of stones and thunderbolts, and survive to this day . . .

There is a State called Colorado in the western part of the United States, in which a solid, stony, immovable range of mountains known as the Rockies has spread across the land since time immemorial. It seems impossible to break through it in order to cut a trail and go across. How would a river, [which is] almost a tiny stream, possess the strength to penetrate the mountains? But behold the marvel! The

Arkansas river started quietly to make a way through the Rocky mountains. The sea, the lakes and the rivers of the plains must have felt a sad surprise at its unshakeable resolve, and the sky-high range of the Rockies must have pitied it. The smaller mountains must have deplored and condemned it for this risky venture. But the Arkansas river ignored them all. It was only a small weak rivulet, but its resolve was strong enough to lift even the mountains in its path and fling them away. With persistent effort and strong resolve it defeated even the Rocky mountain. The tiny Arkansas clashed against that impenetrable, unbreakable stone range and carved out a way for itself right through the Rocky mountains! Bravo Arkansas! And bravo American women! Even though weak like this rivulet, lacking the support of scriptures, money, popular opinion or religious tradition, and relying only on the strength of persistent effort and resolve, they clashed against thousands of obstacles a hundred times more difficult, impenetrable and unbreakable than the Rockies, bore tunnels right through them and cut a trail for themselves. I say once again, bravo American women!

The arguments against female education that were advanced and accepted by all, not just twenty-five but even ten years ago, are beginning to fade now. That educated women will become arrogant, neglect housework and child care, be unable to cook; that they lack the necessary physical, mental and spiritual strength to study hard, pass college examinations, and complete their education in good health; that men will have to sit at home if women get educated and enter the professions or get jobs; that men will lose their livelihood; that the world will see an apocalypse—all such objections are now dead, and their corpses are being buried in deep graves. The ghosts of one or two of these objections still appear occasionally before the people and terrify the faint-hearted; but, lacking bones and muscles, brains and life, [these apparitions] soon dissolve into nothingness and disappear!

The foremost among the institutions for women's education in the United States now (in 1888) are the colleges; below them rank the four lower-level arrangements, namely, societies for the promotion of education, lecture series, institutions offering education through correspondence, and the examinations offered by some universities. The details of colleges offering higher and professional education to women in 1886 are as follows:

Colleges established only for women	266
Co-educational colleges	207
Men's engineering and agricultural colleges that admit women	17
Technical colleges	3
Medical colleges	36
<i>Total colleges</i>	529
Women students studying in women's colleges	27,143
Women students in co-educational colleges	8,833
<i>Total women students of higher and technical subjects</i>	35,976

In addition, most schools offering middle-level education admit girls. They include 117 State-run teacher-training colleges and 36 independent (privately established) teacher-training colleges, which have a combined strength of 27,185 female students.

The primary and general public schools as well as most State-run high schools provide a common education for girls and boys combined.^{††} Seventy years ago, primary schools for girls had not

^{††}In the year 1818, primary schools for girls as well as boys were established in the United States. During the seventy years since then, native women have made great strides in the field of education; and now thousands of splendid, intelligent, educated women of this country shine like brilliant gems. But this should not lead anyone to suppose that all women here have the educational facilities that (all) men enjoy, and that women's colleges receive the same degree of generous public support that men's colleges do. The details of men's colleges in 1886 are as follows:

Universities and colleges	346
Technical colleges	90
Religious seminaries	142
Law schools	49
Medical, dental, pharmaceutical colleges etc.	175
<i>Total</i>	802
Total number of male students	78,185

The cost of men's college buildings, their grounds, equipment, etc. is \$ 62,356,638 (or Rs187,069,914), the money invested for the upkeep of these colleges is \$ 57,782,303 (or Rs173,346,909), and their annual earnings are \$ 3,271,991 (or Rs 9,815,973).

A comparison of these figures with the money invested in women's education reveals a wide disparity between the two. The colleges for women's higher education number 529; [the cost of] their buildings, grounds, equipment, etc. amount to \$

been set up, whereas men had free access to education. Men could study not just in primary schools but also get an excellent education and vocational training in high schools, colleges, and technical schools. Today, women of the United States are trying to equal men in education, in spite of popular opposition to female education, and many other obstacles. This is cause for not a little surprise. The census of 1880 shows that in that year, eight per cent of all men (i.e. White American men, excluding Negroes) in the United States were illiterate, while eleven per cent of White American women were unable to read and write. This proves that women are not very far behind men in general education.

A truly large-hearted woman named Mrs Emma Willard had appealed to the legislature of the State of New York for a subsidy to a middle school for women, called the Troy [Female] Seminary, established in 1821; but the Government refused to support this good cause. . . . Today, women are provided with advanced education equal to that of men by many colleges (of which the co-educational ones are indicated by an asterisk): Oberlin College*, Vassar College, Michigan University*, Smith College, Wellesley College, Harvard Annex, Ingham University, Bryn Mawr College, Cornell University*, and many others.⁸ This progress in women's education in the United States was achieved not through empty chatter, wishful thinking and meaningless arguments, nor through lounging on soft beds with feather cushions. This golden age for the native women was ushered in by the women champions of education and some liberal-minded men, by facing unpleasant allegations, enduring endless hardships and making persistent efforts.

. . . Fifty years ago, the United States had barely four or five institutions of higher education for women. Today, it is doubtful whether one can find four or five such institutions of academic excellence in the whole country, which refuse admission to women to study along with men. There was a time when people laboured under the absurd misapprehension that women's education was

9,635,282 (Rs 28,905,846); their investments and properties are valued at \$ 2,376,619 (Rs 7,129,857), and their annual earnings are \$136,801 (Rs 410,403).

In 1886, the local, State and Federal Governments gave \$ 1,690,275 (Rs 5,070,825) as aid to men's higher education, but not even a single penny to promote women's higher education!

dreadful and dangerous, that it would harm society, that it would make women unnatural and arrogant, and that domestic happiness would then disappear from this world. It was then that some far-sighted, non-partisan and perceptive men and women embarked upon the great adventure of . . . rowing against the current [of popular opinion]. . . .

Many avenues of acquiring an excellent education have recently been opened to women. . . . Nobody, except a half-baked and inexperienced person, dares to claim that women's intelligence is not equal to that of men. Of the elite universities in America, Columbia and Johns Hopkins have crossed the old traditional boundaries and allowed women to pass their thresholds and enter their portals. These universities have conferred their very highest degrees on two excellent women graduates—either out of generosity, or lack of choice—and achieved a rare miracle witnessed 'neither in the past, nor in the future'[Skt]. Harvard University at new Cambridge in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts followed the model of old Cambridge^{††} and denied women the nectar of knowledge which was gathered from the inexhaustible vessel of Goddess Sarasvati, and which was served to men all the time. Therefore some industrious women attempted successfully to establish an independent college and obtained the nectar from the same inexhaustible vessel, if not inside Harvard, then outside its portals [at 'Harvard Annex'].

In the eastern States, women have gained entry into the best universities, such as Michigan and Cornell; and women's colleges which vie with them, such as Wellesley, Smith, Vassar, Bryn Mawr, have been and are still being founded. In the western States, almost all the colleges and universities admit women as well as men, so that there is no need to establish separate colleges.

Nowhere does one see evidence of higher education having

^{††}Some years ago, women could not get admission to Cambridge University in England. Now, two women's colleges, Newnham and Girton, have been established at Cambridge, and provide a very good education. Women are now allowed to study as men's equals at Cambridge University and sit for examinations. However, the University authorities still retain a residue of the barbarism of their ancestors. They allow women to study and sit for examinations, but deny degrees to the women who pass the examinations—although they have rightfully earned the degrees after years of hard work! Truly unparalleled is the generosity and culture of progressive English scholars, especially those at Cambridge!

impaired women's health or beauty. Let alone small or middle-level colleges, but even colleges like Cornell, Vassar, Wellesley, Smith and Bryn Mawr have thousands of young women in higher education. I have visited each of these places and spent a few days there to investigate these and other such matters, which has convinced me that women are well able to cope with higher education. It does not impair their beauty, nor does it change their delicate, modest disposition and make them unnatural. Many women graduates of these colleges have married and are managing their domestic life very well. They do not neglect their children or housework because they are educated; nor have the husbands of these educated women suffered or been reduced to dire straits, or their homes ruined! I visited many women graduates of the said colleges, saw their homes and made inquiries with their husbands. I was satisfied when the husbands repeatedly said that women should have a good education.

Two years ago, Miss Alice Freeman was the President of Wellesley College.⁹ Before she took up this position, the whole world believed that a woman would never be able to manage even a small school as its principal, let alone a college. But Alice Freeman accepted the presidency of a large college with 600 young and promising women students and managed her duties extremely well, to the surprise of the whole world. Her learning was suitably honoured by Columbia University which, after duly examining her, awarded her the PhD—the highest of all university degrees. A sceptic was worried that this president of a large college, having spent a lifetime (thirty years) in education, would be lacking in the knowledge of domestic duties and would not find a husband. True, she is able to run a college and organize large meetings, be a good teacher, debate with renowned scholars on scientific subjects—but of what use is all this? If she cannot marry and manage her husband's home, what is the use of her education? But calm down, all ye sceptics! A learned woman like Alice Freeman could and did find a husband who is himself a scholar of no mean repute. Alice Freeman, the great PhD, is now an excellent housewife. She is knowledgeable about big matters related to the college, but also about small domestic matters. There is no doubt whatsoever that she is able to manage her household and a college with 600 women students! . . .



EMPLOYMENT

The history of women's education during the period 1828 to 1888 is quite extraordinary, interesting and instructive. It has been mentioned above that about sixty years ago Mrs Emma Willard had presented an Address to the Senate of New York State for a Government subsidy to women's schools. In it, Mrs Willard had clearly stated, in keeping with the prevalent popular belief, that higher education was not necessary for women, but general education was essential. The learned Senators of New York disapproved of even this moderate request, and refused any encouragement even to the general education of women. . . .

Some people were of the opinion that a study of Mathematics and Law would derange women's brains and make them ill, that a study of the Sciences would make them lose faith in religion, that a knowledge of Greek would destroy their womanliness and make them rowdy, like men. Some said that no matter what else happened, it was certain that when women were educated, men would lose their livelihood; that men would be compelled to sit at home, mind the babies and sing them lullabies, or do the cooking, because educated women would grab their jobs. Other thoughtful men said that there was absolutely no fear that women would grab men's jobs because they simply lacked the brains to acquire scientific knowledge and put it to use. A headache presupposes a head, and fear of an educated woman would arise if she possessed the brains to acquire a good education; but where would they get the brains?^{††} There were other intelligent and experienced men who wondered how women would find the time for studies; and if they did, to what use they would put them.

^{††}Women's education in today's United States is beyond anybody's imagination fifty years ago. It has already been mentioned that a study of Mathematics, Law, the Sciences, Greek and other subjects does not seem to have made women unhealthy, insane or unruly, or transformed their womanliness and destroyed their love of domesticity and children. It is true that educated women have taken up diverse types of employment, but that has not ruined the livelihood of men; on the contrary, the number of occupations in the United States have increased a hundred-fold and flourished during the last fifty years. . . .

There is hardly any point in discussing how far these doubts were real or imaginary. A hundred years ago, women in the United States were not able to work as teachers in Government schools because men believed that women lacked the strength to control rowdy children and discipline them. But in 1789, the male Senators of Massachusetts made a new law allowing women to give general education in the State-run public schools— whether to test women's ability to teach in schools or to get the job done at low salaries, it is difficult to ascertain. At that time women were unable to teach anything other than 'a,b,c' and 'one, two, three', because the kind, thoughtful and learned men had, for fear of women falling ill from studying too hard, taken the precaution of drawing up the 'woman's curriculum'. It is difficult to say whether those who studied this curriculum were able to even write a short letter in a grammatically correct language, let alone prepare children for higher studies or impart higher education themselves. In due course, women expanded their knowledge by studying at home, instead of giving up in fear when confronted by a mountain of obstacles and the Chinese Wall of popular opposition. When the status and influence of women teachers and their usefulness in imparting general education were widely recognized, some wise people favoured giving them an education somewhat higher than the 'woman's curriculum' to help them to perform their job well. Even after women were able to get higher education, the positions of college teachers were not open to them until Michigan University opened the golden gates of its Temple of Sarasvati and invited them, along with men, to worship at her throne. Ever since, women have had the opportunity to occupy the positions they are qualified for, such as teachers, professors, college presidents, and others (which had earlier been reserved for men), to give a good account of themselves and demonstrate the extent of their capability and intellectual strength. Now nobody doubts that women will be able to manage schools and train children properly. The triumvirate of local, State and Federal Governments in the United States is so impressed by women's performance that it has entrusted women with primary and middle education of almost all children. Now women teachers are beginning to handle higher education as well. There are a total of 273,000 teachers in the country's public educational institutions (i.e. higher, middle and lower grade schools and colleges), of whom 154,375 are women. In addition, there are women teachers in many private and public high schools, who teach Mathematics,

Chemistry, Botany, Astronomy, Anatomy, Physics and other difficult scientific and philosophical subjects, performing their duties well. Some are college presidents or vice-presidents, some are chiefs of all city schools, some are headmistresses, some 'deans' and some teachers of Moral Science. Some are engaged in writing instructive books on Politics, Philosophy, History, and other difficult subjects.

Some scholarly women are studying not only in the United States but also in the old universities of Europe, and earning praise from the learned people there. Professor Maria Mitchell, Professor of Astronomy at Vassar College, has gained high proficiency in Astronomy, just like the scholar Caroline Herschell; she has discovered new planets, won praise and an excellent prize from the Government of Russia, and made her name immortal among Western astronomers. Professor Jane M. Bancroft has written a thesis on the politics of France, entitled *The Parliaments of Paris*, which has been adjudged the best book on politics by great scholars at universities such as Johns Hopkins, Cornell, etc. The famous Professor Louisa Reed Stowell of Michigan University has gained such proficiency in Microscopy that she has been made a member of the great Royal Microscopical Society of London. Women scholars gain membership as equals of their male colleagues in all the well-known and influential scientific societies in America today.

If it had been prophesied to the learned but somewhat short-sighted Senators of New York sixty years ago that the following half-century would witness women entering the academic field and achieving great feats, and that half the task of imparting education and moral instruction to the countless sons of the United States would be entrusted to women, it would have seemed utterly impossible (like the horn of a hare) not only to the politicians of New York but also to the whole world. The extent to which educated women have advanced national education in the United States after entering the educational field cannot be described or praised enough. To women goes the credit of making the great effort to start the Kindergarten or 'children's garden' method of education which today benefits thousands of children, and which has put a stop to corporal punishment for the tender ones. Elizabeth Peabody and her students taught the Kindergarten method to thousands of women; and wealthy ladies like Mrs Shaw and Mrs Thompson provided financial assistance to teachers like Elizabeth Peabody and helped them with

the proper means to put this method into practice. When the local Government of Boston refused to grant premises or expenses for Kindergarten education in its Department of Public Education, Mrs Quincy Shaw, a wealthy and philanthropic lady of Boston, resolved to help in propagating Kindergarten education in her city.¹⁰ She established many Kindergarten schools in Boston in a spirit of charity, and has followed the practice of spending \$ 36,000 (about Rs 108,000) on their development every year, for the past twelve years. The Government has now realized the value of this educational method and granted permission to start it in all the public schools. The famous philanthropist of New York, Mrs Elizabeth Thompson, spends up to Rs 200,000 every year on child education and vocational education. She spends most of her income on children's education and lives the simple life of a nun. It is because educated women like Elizabeth Peabody, Mrs Shaw and Mrs Thompson have devoted their energies and money to this noble cause that the system of education in the United States has progressed thus far.

Educated women of the United States serve as teachers in two ways: one is to teach in educational institutions, and the second is to improve people's minds by giving them a moral education through newspapers. Women have taken to the journalistic profession for the last twenty-five years or so. The earlier practice, by and large, was for anybody to write whatever he wanted in the newspapers. There was no special restriction on the use of vulgar language in the newspapers. Educated women did not approve of this, because the papers were read by young boys and even girls; therefore they started to bring all sections of the newspapers, one by one, under their purview. This practice still continues today, and is very beneficial. Every newspaper that has a women's section is very careful to avoid reports unfair to women or articles violating morality. Besides, these newspapers acquire a greater interest because of the sweet language and style used by women. Prominent newspapers such as *The New York Herald*, *The Philadelphia Ledger*, *The Boston Transcript*, *The Boston Herald* and *The Chicago Inter-Ocean* enjoy strong support from women journalists. Every reputed newspaper invariably has a women's section. Nowadays vulgar language is usually not seen in newspapers. Women are able to discuss matters such as their own and their children's needs, what should be done for the benefit of children and society and which customs should be changed, the ideal

school curriculum, the kind of laws necessary for ensuring equal justice for men and women, and so on. From the time of Creation, strong men, in the arrogance of their physical might, had lost their sense of duty and shut women's mouths. But they have opened now, not for the detriment of society but for its good, as people have realized.

Now women are no longer content to run only a section of a large newspaper, but have started independent newspapers themselves. There are hundreds of newspapers run entirely by women. *The Boston Woman's Journal*, *Chicago Justicia*, *The Union Signal*, *Beatrice Women's Tribune*, *Women's Work for Women*, *Children's Work for Children*, *St. Nicholas*, *Women's Magazine*, and many such papers and magazines are doing very useful work in improving social and political matters as well as public education. The weekly paper *The Union Signal* grew in a novel way. It was started about seven years ago by four or five women with a capital of \$2,500. At that time, temperance was not a popular subject—nor is it so today—but this paper was started by the officials of the Woman's Temperance Society, and it was doubtful whether it would run. Even so, it seems to have become popular now. It now has a capital of \$50,000, and over 40,000 subscribers. . . . The future of *The Boston Woman's Journal* was also in doubt, because it supports the view that women should obtain the same political rights as men. Just as the people of the United States opposed women's education thirty years ago, they oppose women's political rights today. But just as women, through ceaseless effort, changed public opinion with regard to education, they are resolved to change it in this regard; and there are signs that their resolve will lead to success. In some places, women are found to be even more suitable in the field of journalism than men. . . .

The greatest benefit arising from women's entry into diverse professions comes from [the rise of] women doctors. Ignorant women are unable to protect their own health or that of their children. This ignorance is very harmful to mankind, which makes it essential for women to possess medical knowledge. But people of the United States used to hold very strange beliefs in this regard. About thirty years ago, when a medical college for women was opened in Philadelphia, people persecuted its founders because they believed that women would be ruined by medical studies, lose their innate delicacy, and

become useless for domestic work. Lack of knowledge breeds strange beliefs. . . . Now, thirty years after the founding of the Woman's Medical College [of Pennsylvania], the people of the United States have realized that women doctors are very useful to society. Today, there are over 1,000 licensed women doctors in the United States; their annual net income ranges from \$100 to \$50,000. Now women doctors are greatly appreciated everywhere, and people are thoroughly convinced that women are more skilful than men in treating patients.

Let me cite an example of the change in public opinion in this regard. . . . Twenty-five years ago, not even one or two well-known medical associations had women members; now there may not be even one or two reputed medical associations which lack women members.

Whether or not women's brains function competently in difficult scientific subjects such as Medicine will become clear from the following anecdote. There is a prestigious medical association in the United States which gives substantial awards to doctors who write excellent essays on a topic specified by it. Once, the association had invited essays on the topic, 'The Question of Rest for Women During Menstruation'.¹¹ One of the essays, among the four or five written by candidates at the time of the examination, was adjudged to be the best, and it was resolved to give an award of \$500 to the author. This author had cleverly signed only with initials rather than the full name. This association was deeply prejudiced against women doctors and had not imagined that women could write such difficult papers. But after the prize was announced, it was discovered that the author was a woman, the famous Dr Mary Putnam Jacobi of New York. After realizing this, the partisan medical association found it very difficult to admit that a woman had written such a good essay and had been awarded the prize. But what could it do? Having already declared its decision, it was compelled to reluctantly give the prize to Dr Jacobi.

The city of New York has a medical college known as the New York Infirmary which is considered to be very prestigious and ranks among the best governmental or independent medical colleges in the United States. Needless to say, its founder is a woman doctor who is counted among the best doctors in the United States. When Elizabeth Blackwell, its founder, returned home in 1850 after studying Medicine and obtaining medical experience in Europe, she saw the

acute need for women's hospitals.¹² In the large public hospitals under the supervision of reputed men doctors, women—who were thought to possess inferior brains—were not allowed to study how to treat patients, perform surgery, etc. In 1857, this industrious lady, together with her sister, founded her famous hospital, with a medical college attached to it. She was assisted by other equally industrious and altruistic women. Her example was followed by the women of Boston who founded the New England Hospital for Women and Children in 1862. Newly graduated women work here as well as in the New York Infirmary [as interns] to gain valuable experience of medical practice, by treating patients, performing surgical operations, etc. and by watching the other doctors. Our dear countrywoman Dr Anandibai Joshee spent some time as an intern at this New England Hospital, after graduating from Philadelphia. Following Boston, the women of Philadelphia established a hospital for women and children, attached to the women's medical college there; it also offers internships to newly graduated women doctors. Similarly there are the Chicago Hospital for Women and Children in Chicago, the Pacific Hospital for Women and Children in San Francisco, the Ohio Hospital in Cincinnati, and the Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis. These seven excellent teaching hospitals in the Northern States, established by women and also run by women, shine with extraordinary brilliance like the seven stars in the constellation of Pleiades in the northern skies, and are a source of great happiness to the men and women who look to them with hope and expectancy. It is good news that the women of England are following the example of the women of the United States in establishing teaching hospitals.

To date, there are thirty-six medical colleges in this country, established only for women. Most of the teaching there is also conducted by women. Many women doctors work as teachers even in co-educational colleges. This proves that the prevalent belief in the United States, that medical education will ruin women, has undergone a change. After women started studying Medicine, medical experts have begun to regard the human body and anatomy as sacred. Before women were admitted as students, anatomy lessons led to vulgar practices which have now ceased altogether, because the modesty and very praiseworthy morals of the women students made the male teachers and students ashamed of their vulgar behaviour. Now the presence of women has improved the teaching style and language

of anatomy to such an extent that people want to teach it even to young children of eight or ten.

Another useful profession undertaken by women is the practice of law. In the year 1868, Washington University in the city of St. Louis agreed to teach women Law. In 1869, Arabella Mansfield became the first registered lawyer and began to practise law; since then, most large universities have allowed women to study Law in their schools. The doubt entertained by many as to women's ability to study a difficult subject like Law has almost vanished now. Their capability has been proven by their clear legal arguments, competence equal to that of famous male lawyers, and most of all, their modest conduct in the courts of law. There are hundreds of registered women lawyers in the United States, who work through small firms as men do; there are twenty-one such firms started by couples, of which both husband and wife are lawyers.

There were many who objected that it would be difficult for women to protect their modesty and decorum in law courts where all kinds of cases, good and bad, would be tried. But the objectors should have realized that court cases involve not only men, but also women. Although the female sex does not produce as many culprits as the male sex (which is indeed praiseworthy and creditable to the female sex), some of the culprits do happen to be women. Their true feelings can be better understood by a lawyer of their own sex than by a man. Every thinking person must realize how difficult it is for a woman to be in a place which is full of men, without a single woman around. Moreover, it should not be difficult for a respectable woman to go where respectable men are present—and men in the position of judges and lawyers are bound to be respectable. The probability of getting due justice for women offenders increases with the advent of women lawyers. Be that as it may, experience shows that women lawyers of the United States have not lost their natural modesty and dignity in any way. All the men in the law courts where women lawyers are present treat them with due respect; moreover, the rules that prohibit smoking, [use of] bad language and improper conduct in the court rooms are being more closely observed since women entered them. Nobody can assess women's proficiency in law without seeing for themselves their work in the Supreme Court and other courts of the United States. Men have been practising law for hundreds of years in the United States, and women obtained the right to pass law

examinations only twenty years ago. Within this short span of time, these brave women have caught up with highly reputed male lawyers. Women have not yet produced famous lawyers like O'Connell, Curran, Webster and Coats; but they may very well do so in the future. Besides, it is not that all men lawyers are so famous.

Since 1868, a monthly legal journal called *Legal News* has been published in Chicago. It is edited by Myra Bradwell¹³, president of the largest publishing house of legal books in the United States. The massive volume known as *Bradwell's Appellate Court Reports*, prepared under this lady's supervision, is very famous and is consulted by most lawyers. Another woman, Caroline White, publishes the fortnightly *Chicago Law Times*, which is also reputed among the legal community for its excellence. In 1886, the women graduates and students of law at Michigan University formed the *Equity Club* with the objective of establishing friendships among women lawyers not only in the United States but in all countries where women have the right to practise law, thus achieving the general advancement of women through mutual help. Although men have been practising law for thousands of years, one has never heard of their having formed a similar association for the common good of the male sex, irrespective of the distinctions of class and nation. This is an excellent example of how women make good use of any power they acquire.

The fourth important profession that women have entered is preaching. During the initial years after the founding of Christianity, Christian women had as much a right to preach as men did. The rule at the time was that only a person—be it a man or a woman—who was chosen by God and endowed with this holy power should preach. The Christian doctrine preached by Christ is simple and its rules apply equally to men and women. The God of Christ imparts His Holy Spirit equally to men and women without distinction of sex. He is not partisan like man and does not entrust the task of preaching only to men. He gives suitable gifts to suitable persons; and distributes such gifts to men and women in many different ways. As regards qualities, like courtesy, artistic skills, intelligence and devotion, it cannot be said that some belong only to men and some to women, as typical of their sex. But when the Christian religion came under the control of the Romans, who regarded women as inferior, they incorporated into it their own beliefs and prejudices. The Roman Catholic bishops and monks regarded women as an enemy, like Satan;

it was they and others like them who deprived women of their right to preach. Until recently, women with a divine urge to preach had to refrain from speaking because of the restriction imposed upon them by partisan men, and listen quietly to what men said. But the light of Reason in this nineteenth century has shown men their mistake. Many non-partisan bishops in most Christian countries have begun to say that women should have the right to preach. In the United States, 165 women of different denominations are registered preachers. The people of this country are beginning to see that on many occasions women are more easily able to evangelize than male preachers. This, and other reasons, have strengthened the public desire for more women preachers.

Stenography, that is shorthand writing, is another occupation taken up by women. They have become so skilful at it that these days great and famous newspaper editors and lawyers in the United States are eager to employ women stenographers in their offices and entrust them with great responsibilities. The women in this occupation earn much more than the average woman school teacher. After learning the system of shorthand writing for a year or so and after completing a short apprenticeship, these women are able to copy down verbatim entire speeches made in law courts and in public meetings. For this work, they earn wages ranging from five to twenty dollars per hour.

When the scholarly Englishwoman Harriet Martineau visited the United States in 1840, the women here were free to engage in seven low-level jobs, namely: (1) Teaching children the alphabet and the mathematical tables (2) Sewing (3) Running boarding houses (4) Domestic service (5) Type-setting in printing presses (6) Folding and stitching pages in book binderies, and (7) Unskilled work in factories. But times have changed. Women have become educated and those who are qualified to do better jobs are no longer content with these. Although they do not receive much help and encouragement from the United States Federal and State Governments, they develop their God-given imagination aided by a sharp intellect, firm resolve and hard work. The census of 1880 shows that the women of the United States were engaged in 300 different occupations. In Massachusetts alone, there were 251,158 women engaged in 284 different occupations, and earning an annual income ranging from 150 to 3,000 dollars.

Some say that women are not imaginative because their brains are smaller, that all the inventions to date are men's. We say that women did not invent things because nobody gave them scope and encouragement to develop their inventiveness, and not because their brains are smaller. It has also happened that women have had new ideas, but, true to their natural generosity, have allowed men to take the credit. For example, the sister of the famous European singer [sic] and musician Beethoven composed many excellent and extraordinarily melodious musical pieces, and allowed them to be made public under her brother's name. They have helped to immortalize Beethoven, but very few know that the compositions were his sister's. Similarly, Caroline Herschell, the sister of the astronomer William Herschell, discovered several planets, and provided able assistance to her brother in his astronomical observations with her extraordinary mathematical abilities. But Caroline Herschell, whose ceaseless efforts and selfless assistance made William Herschell famous, was not credited by the world with a share in her brother's success. One reason why women like Beethoven's sister allowed their own inventions and discoveries to be made public under the names of their male kin or friends was their natural generosity; another reason was the barbaric belief in most countries in the past that it was shameful for women to attract notice either through an invention or any other act. We still hold this belief in our country. In the United States, women's ideas are just beginning to receive a little encouragement. Even in such a short time they have made 1,935 inventions and discoveries which they have patented with the United States Government. They are not minor inventions, but of a kind which clearly display women's deep scientific knowledge. For example, in 1845, a woman invented an underwater telescope, another invented life-jackets and rafts for sea-farers, yet another constructed a steam-making machine. A woman made improvements in the steam engine of the locomotive, another found a solution to reduce the noise of inner city trains, a third thought of a scheme to prevent the loss of standing crops due to flooding, and a fourth made a non-inductive electric cable. Women have made many useful machines for lifting grain on to barges, for winnowing grain, for harvesting fields, etc. Thus there is no room for the charge that women are not inventive.

It must be known to many that in China and in some parts of India, women work as boatmen. It is not customary for women in

the United States to work in this capacity, but they are likely to do so in the future. Of the numerous steamers on the large rivers Hudson and Mississippi, some have women navigators as captains who perform their duties efficiently and systematically. It would be difficult to find many occupations in the United States in which women are not engaged. During the last forty years when they have been allowed into different occupations, their means of earning a livelihood have multiplied. Of all the farmers in the United States, seven per cent are women, who manage their own farms. Sixteen per cent of the artisans are women; over 600,000 women support themselves through handicrafts. In addition, there are 60,000 women who are independent traders or their agents. Thousands of women are telegraphists, railway ticket clerks, and post office workers. About 1,370,000 women work as cooks and domestics.



LEGAL RIGHTS

It is both surprising and regrettable that for all the progress in the United States, women have been granted very few legal rights. The social restrictions prevailing in the United States stem mainly from the ancient English law, which in turn is founded on the Commandments of Moses and on Roman law. By recognizing this, one is able to solve the riddle as to why women are treated as greatly inferior by American law. In the new States in the west, there are several changes in laws pertaining to women; [for example] the law stipulates that the house in which a married man lives with his wife should be treated as hers and not his. But in most of the eastern states a widow is not allowed to stay in her late husband's house without paying rent, for more than forty days after his death! The compassionate and learned men in the State of Maine have taken pity on the grieving widow and allowed her to stay in her deceased husband's house for ninety days! These days, many States have granted married women the right to dispose of their self-earned property as they wish. The law states that they do not have a right to the money earned by doing work at home, such as tailoring, sketching, etc., but only to the money

earned by paid employment outside the home. In several States, women have a full right to the moveable and immoveable property gifted by their father or brother, and married women have a right to a third of their deceased husband's moveable assets. But in many States, they have no right to self-earned assets or those inherited from the father, and no share whatsoever in the husband's property.

In New York and many other States, a mother has no right over her minor children. A father may give guardianship of his children to whomsoever he wishes during his lifetime or through his last will and testament. Thus the husband has the right to give away the children his wife has borne, against her will. Only if he is of unsound mind or dies intestate, does the mother obtain custody of her minor children. The children born to legally wedded couples are the father's children by law; the mother can claim no right to them. Only the children of unmarried women or prostitutes are regarded as the mother's. A couple of years ago, there was a respectable woman whose heartless husband tried to give away her tender babes against her wishes. The poor mother could not endure the separation from her own flesh and blood. In order to get guardianship of her children, she set aside her modesty and took a false oath in the court of law that they were not her husband's children. Only then did she get her children back. See how the laws of so-called civilized countries insult women's modesty, maternal love and God-given natural rights! . . . Only in the three States of Kansas, New Jersey and Iowa can mothers obtain custody of their children.

A few years ago, in Massachusetts and some other States, women did not have the right to be buried beside their husbands' graves; now this law has changed. Immediately after getting married, a woman becomes her husband's prisoner. The priest makes her take a vow of obedience to her husband. The moveable and immoveable property gifted by her father or brother, her jewellery, and such other possessions go into her husband's hands.^{††} A few years ago a woman could not claim a right to the clothes she stood in, but now the law has forbidden

^{††}American society still shows vestiges of its ancient barbaric condition, and it may be said that foremost among them is the excessive dependence of married women [on their husbands]. American men are shameless, just like the men of our country. They say, 'We support our households and feed our wives by our daily toil and the sweat of our brow'. Men work for eight, ten, or at the most twelve hours a day; but women have to slog for sixteen to seventeen hours daily, to serve the menfolk, mind

husbands to sell or pawn their wives' dresses in order to fill their own pockets.

The laws governing marriage and divorce differ widely throughout the United States, which causes a great deal of confusion in the social order. The good people of this country, especially The Woman's Temperance Society and its supporters, have been striving for a long time to insist that laws regarding marriage should be just and uniform throughout the country.

There is a law that entitles citizens of the United States to obtain justice in a court of law through a jury of twelve men who are their peers. But women do not have the right to trial by a jury of their own sex, who are their real peers. Men—even though they be a hundred times more foolish than women, or full of vices—do not allow the legislature to lift a finger without consulting them while enacting Federal or State laws. But women—no matter how learned, intelligent, thoughtful and moral—have no right to vote for the Federal or State legislatures. This makes men far superior to women [and not their equals] in the eyes of the law; therefore, if they, as jurors, try a case involving a woman, it does not mean that the woman defendant is tried by a jury of her peers. Except for the Territory of Wyoming, every other part of the United States has denied women this important right of an ordinary citizen, solely on the ground that they are women. Even so, these diligent women are trying to win political rights, and there are hopeful signs that their efforts will be crowned with success in the course of time.

the children and do household chores. The wives of labourers, farmers and of men in other occupations look after their homes and children first; in addition, they share their husbands' work equally and help them. In spite of all this, a wife has no right to the family income; whenever she needs a little money for her expenses, she has to cajole her husband, supply satisfactory answers to a thousand questions he asks, and beg him for it. If he refuses to give her any money, she cannot claim a right to her hard-earned possessions, either by law or with the support of public opinion. Nor is this all. On the contrary, her husband tells everyone how much she is obliged to him; and society—male society—says, 'Men work hard indeed to earn the money to feed and clothe their wives! Oh, how highly they oblige their wives!' In the absence of a wife in the house, at least two or three servants would need to be employed to do the work that she does singlehandedly; and they would need to be paid wages. Servants are not fed for doing nothing, nor can they be said to be obliged to their master. But a wife, even if she does the work of ten servants, is under an obligation to her husband because he feeds her!



COLLECTIVE EFFORT AND NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

When the democratic republic of the United States was founded, Benjamin Franklin suggested that the national seal be inscribed with the motto 'E pluribus unum' or 'One out of many'. Now, one can see this motto on the national seal everywhere in the United States. Furthermore, we can see, hear and experience it at every step in the actions of these people. The power of the United States lies not in its artillery, cavalry or vast army, but in the people's wisdom and in the truth of the motto 'One out of many'. When women were uneducated and generally inexperienced in worldly matters, they were ignorant of this truth, and therefore did not accomplish great things. With the increase in their education and knowledge, this eternal truth has awakened in their hearts and shines with greater brilliance with every passing day.

Though famous throughout the world for its progressiveness, the United States did not have a single important women's association fifty years ago. Women would just sit at home or gather at a neighbour's house to gossip, or do some sewing in aid of churches, priests or the poor. Nobody even imagined that women were capable of doing anything more important than this. Women themselves, let alone men, had no idea of their real worth, capability and mental powers. Fifty years ago, women supporters of education in England founded an association called The Bluestockings Club, with the aim of promoting general education. It became the laughing stock of the world at the time, and 'bluestockings' became a derogatory word. The self-styled modest women would quake and tremble at the thought of a women's association and of women attending its meetings to discuss educational advancement. Everybody thought it sinful for women to attend public meetings and to address them. But the light of this progressive century has dispelled the darkness of such a belief.

The learned American woman Frances Willard has said that this glorious nineteenth century has seen many wonderful scientific discoveries; but the most wonderful of them all is Woman's discovery

of herself. This is borne out by considering the history of women's collective effort during the last forty years to promote their own welfare and that of their society and country, by forming a number of associations. In 1848, a few courageous, progressive and learned women like Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and others established an important women's society to work for women's equal right to education and employment, as well as for their political rights.¹⁴ Women's collective effort can be said to have started from this date. From that time until 1869, perhaps a couple of small women's societies were established, but there is no record of their having done anything special to achieve national stature. No 'National Convention of Women' had come into existence before 1858, not merely in the United States but anywhere in the world. Until that time nobody imagined that women could establish a national association and manage all its work smoothly.

About 1860, signs of a terrible civil war were visible in the United States. A controversy arose between the northern and southern States over the slavery of Negroes, which flared into hostility. In 1860–61, the southern States declared war against the northern ones, and the terrible war which was fought between the two until 1865 devastated American families everywhere. Initially, the Civil War caused untold misery, poverty and suffering; however, they were immediately followed by great good, just as the deadly poison was followed by nectar and the precious gem [when the legendary ocean was churned by gods and demons, according to the Hindu mythology].

President Lincoln became the leader of the northern States, abolished slavery, and called upon strong, able-bodied American men to volunteer for the army to quell the southern rebellion and protect the country's honour. When the brave northern men went to war, honouring President Lincoln's call, they did not have any uniforms (trousers, jackets, socks, etc.) Nor were there any organizations to supply these and other materials for war. When the war started and news came that the soldiers needed uniforms, the women of almost all the towns in the northern States gathered in churches and started sewing uniforms. Initially they supplied uniforms to last the soldiers for three months. This event showed the women the result of collective effort and its tremendous benefit to society and the nation.

A little later, the American Civil War assumed terrible proportions and the fighting spread everywhere. The northern States established

a committee called the Christian Commission, with the aim of providing spiritual solace to the soldiers by sending clergymen to the battlefield to preach to them and to administer the last rites. The task of collecting money for the expenses of the Commission fell to the women's lot, while men occupied the positions of president, vice-president, and so on. Women worked very hard to collect large sums of money which they delivered to the Commission, and with which the Commission sent hundreds of clergymen to preach to the soldiers. The Commission's intention was undoubtedly very praiseworthy; but the soldiers, wounded on the battlefield, dying of hunger and thirst and suffering agonies, did not have much interest in listening to sermons. On the other hand, the clergymen who had gone there to ensure the soldiers' spiritual welfare did not know how to promote their physical welfare by alleviating the suffering of their 'temporal' bodies. The poor wounded soldier could not be blamed for not tolerating the chatter of the clergymen who started preaching instead of providing physical aid when he [the soldier] was severely wounded in the arm or the leg. This made many people realize that it was necessary to create a separate organization to give physical aid to wounded soldiers, and that it was desirable for this organization to appoint women to nurse and look after them. This led to the establishment of the Sanitary Commission.

The very existence of this Commission and its great achievements were impressive; but what astonished the world even more was the feat of the American women who supported it, supplied it from beginning to end with all the equipment which was required and managed it. The Commission sent not hundreds but thousands of male and female nurses to the battlefield. They made proper arrangements for the regular meals of the wounded soldiers of the allied army (and also of some destitute enemy soldiers), set up hospitals on the battlefield, buried dead soldiers, and gave succour to the poor and the helpless. It was difficult for the Commission to find the large sums of money and supplies needed for these numerous tasks. The Government treasury had no money, and there was not a single person who possessed the wealth to finance the Commission's formidable expenditure, or at least the generosity to donate it. That was when the prominent women in the working sub-committee of the Commission thought of a clever plan. Mary A. Livermore and a couple of other women proposed to put the plan into practice, and

sent an appeal to many people in Illinois and other States informing them of both their aims and plan of action. Shortly, all the newspapers in the northern States published the news that some industrious women of Chicago were proposing to hold a charity bazaar where articles gifted by generous people would be sold at a high price and the proceeds donated to the Sanitary Commission; and that those interested in supporting this admirable enterprise should send whatever they could to the address of a certain lady in Chicago.

The women organizers of the charity bazaar had estimated that, if properly managed, it would yield a profit of at least \$ 25,000. This made learned men and respected newspaper editors laugh. They thought that not only did the women lack sense enough to earn \$ 25,000, but that they were sure to end up ruining the whole charity bazaar. Some sneered contemptuously. . . . After the bazaar was over, people found out that the sale proceeds, after deducting all expenses, yielded a net profit five times higher than the organizers' estimate. The hardworking women of the Sanitary Commission made a profit of about \$ 125,000 (i.e. about Rs 375,000) and dispatched it for the Commission's use. Many such bazaars were held after that in aid of the Sanitary Commission. . . . It was women who thought of the idea of the bazaar, it was they who managed it from beginning to end, and who made all the big and small articles that were sold. This capability, organizational ability, political insight, foresight and perseverance astonished the men who had arrogantly thought that they alone possessed these qualities and who had babbled that women had no capacity for practical work; while the noble people who had recognized women's true worth applauded them.

The Sanitary Commission was a kind of national benevolent association, and it gave women the first opportunity to work alongside men, in positions high and low. The fêtes and bazaars organized in aid of the Commission yielded innumerable benefits and allowed massive tasks to be undertaken and carried through to completion. All this made the women realize the truth that great aims can be achieved if many work together collectively, smoothly and in an organized manner. It also showed the world what mighty deeds women are capable of, when they are given the education, freedom and opportunity to work. The famous English philanthropist Florence Nightingale set aside the English-style seclusion of women, went to [the front in] the Crimean War, nursed wounded soldiers,

made proper arrangements for patients on the battlefield, and set an excellent example to all the compassionate women of the world. How well Miss Nightingale's example was followed by the American women is shown by American history of the years between 1860 and 1866. While the Civil War lasted, women of the northern States managed not only their homes but also the jobs and tasks of men; they collected large sums of money and innumerable things required by charitable associations like the Christian and the Sanitary Commissions; and moreover, thousands of them went to the battlefield and worked day and night, to nurse and serve the tired and weary, wounded and half-dead soldiers. At high noon or in the middle of the night, they went personally to help wherever help was needed, even in the thick of battle, ignoring hunger, thirst and physical discomfort. Hundreds of millionairesses left their wealthy homes and went into self-imposed exile to alleviate the suffering of their countrymen on the battlefield, and risked their lives doing a variety of good deeds; at times they lost their physical strength, moveable and immovable property, and even their invaluable lives! Blessed indeed are these saintly, philanthropic matrons!

Since 1865 to date, a number of women's organizations have been established in the United States, with many more to come. Not only in the United States but also in England, France, Germany, Finland, Norway, Italy, and other countries, local and national organizations have been set up, with a variety of aims. The reason for the existence of these women's national organizations was that women's innate capability was seen by the world through associations like the Civil War Sanitary Commission; and that women recognized their own worth and strength, and realized that enormous tasks could be accomplished if many undertook an enterprise with a single aim and collective effort. . . . The words ['women's organization'] that women were ashamed to utter fifty years ago have become universally acceptable today. Now it would be difficult to find a town of about a thousand inhabitants that does not have at least one women's organization. In every town and city, one finds a variety of women's organizations—for the Promotion of Education, Mutual Improvement, Aid to the Poor, Temperance, . . . Protection of Orphans, Protection of Children, Rehabilitation of Fallen Women, Promotion of Music, Charity, Demand for Legal Rights, Social Progress, Advancement of Women, . . . and so on. . . .

In every country we see that women are the guardians of religion and morality. In all countries and all communities, women are the ones who protect their religion by their pure and pious conduct, charity, devotion to God and total sacrifice in the defence of religion. During the last forty years, these invaluable qualities of women have been discovered in Christian countries, and women have been given the opportunity to conduct religious services independently in the light of their own conscience, which is of great benefit to the world. About twenty-five years ago, the first women's missionary society was founded in this country. Now, most Christian denominations have established their own women's missionary societies. Together these societies have a total of about 1,500,000 women as members; they pay over \$ 2,000,000 (i.e. Rs 6,000,000) annually as membership fees, and utilize this money, through their representatives and presidents, towards evangelical activities and as aid to the destitute. . . . All the work of these societies and meetings is managed by the women themselves. All the office-bearers, such as the president, vice-president, secretaries, superintendents, speakers, preachers, treasurers, editors of newspapers and magazines, are women; and they alone manage all the work. They are not content with doing charitable work themselves, but also take along their sons and daughters, from a very young age, to attend evangelical meetings; often they arrange meetings only for children, in order to inculcate in them a taste for charitable work. . . .

Ever since this large body of missionary women came into existence, women have realized their own worth and strength. In the past, only men preachers went to evangelize in other countries as representatives of missionary societies. Only if they were married could their wives join them, without, however, the permission or leisure to preach. The general belief at the time was that women were not capable of preaching, let alone travelling by themselves to far-off lands to evangelize. The orthodox Christian societies still do not ordain women as clergy; however, hundreds of unmarried or widowed women belonging to these societies, who are educated and devout, are ever ready to travel long distances, even alone, within their own country or abroad. Their aim is to emancipate the women there, both rich and poor, from the clutches of falsehood and ignorance. The domestic societies of missionary women bear the expenses of these evangelical women, finance and manage the boys' and girls' schools started by them, and send them all the necessary supplies and aid.



WOMEN'S CLUBS

After women's missionary societies began to be established in this fashion, many learned and far-sighted women developed a strong desire to start women's clubs. Although societies and clubs are generally similar, there is an important difference between them. A society is an association established with a single chief aim, and only those who subscribe to that aim can join it as members. A club is not established with a sole object; it assembles people of diverse beliefs, so that a single club can undertake different types of activities. Because of this diversity of opinions and of ways of thinking among the members, each member gains wide general knowledge from the numerous views expressed on any topic being discussed. Realizing that women need such wide knowledge, some diligent American women founded the first American women's club twenty years ago, under the name Sorosis.¹⁵ . . . When the Sorosis Club came into being, many expressed reservations about its usefulness, considering that women's missionary societies were already in existence. There was no prior model for this club. Although the founders of the Sorosis Club did not acknowledge a specific aim, they had a grand design in mind. At the time, women did not have practical wisdom like men, nor did women of different views communicate with each other; therefore they remained narrow-minded (like frogs in a pond), and were prejudiced and ready to detect and criticize the faults of others. The founders of Sorosis knew that a familiarity with diverse opinions in large gatherings would dispel the prejudices born of ignorance, and that women would be able to act with a single aim and achieve great things.

The establishment of Sorosis showed everybody the numerous advantages of a club; and it soon assumed a variegated and universal character by promoting knowledge and friendship, undertaking charitable work, helping the destitute, and so on. The Club surveyed the condition of orphaned and abandoned infants as well as of infant asylums in New York city, and published the information. The Club also reformed existing infant asylums and earned credit for founding two new ones. It also surveyed the condition of women factory

workers in New York city, their treatment by the factory owners, and the reforms necessary to better their condition; it presented these findings before the public, thus greatly benefiting the women workers. The Club was the first to petition the management of the University of New York and of Columbia University, to admit women students along with men. Due to lack of space, it is not possible to give a description of the hundreds of important and beneficial undertakings of this Club. Sorosis prohibits a discussion of three topics: religion, politics, and women's political rights. This has been ensured so as to prevent discord among the members while discussing religion and similar topics, because the Club has been established mainly in order to provide knowledge to ladies and to engage in philanthropy. But this does not mean that its members have no interest in these topics. Numerous other clubs, such as New England Woman's Club, New Century Club, etc. which are the 'daughters' of Sorosis, not only discuss these topics but have vowed to propagate progressive ideas by inviting women of diverse opinions to address them and explain their views, without causing any disagreement.

Some useless fellows say that these women's societies and clubs are but an imitation of men's activities; but the women's societies and clubs which I saw in large numbers in the United States had no connection with those of men. Women's missionary and temperance societies and clubs were founded and developed solely by women. Men's clubs are usually established only with the intention of discussing politics, chatting, or amusing themselves by playing ball-games. They are not much inclined towards charity, promoting education, helping the destitute, comforting sufferers, and so on. Because these men's clubs do not allow ladies, they are infested with harmful and bad practices like drinking, using vulgar language, etc. as I have heard many people say. If this be true, I am happy and proud to say that women's clubs show not the least sign of imitating men's clubs.

Soon after the creation of the Sorosis Club, another very important club known as the Woman's Congress was established. It makes strong efforts to promote women's education, and is therefore also known as The Society for the Advancement of Women. Its members include women from many parts of the United States, who are very learned, far-sighted, experienced and interested in education. There are many local branches of this club, and once every year the members meet at an appointed place. On this occasion, scholarly women read their

well-reasoned and thoughtful essays on serious subjects such as politics, social reform, social conditions, education, arts, sciences, poetry and history, and also deliver lectures. This club enjoys great prominence because of the prestige, learning and fame of its members.

There is another famous club known as New England Woman's Club in Boston, which also aims to promote education, as is the case with the Woman's Congress. . . . The New Century Club of Philadelphia is famous for its valuable qualities of progressiveness and philanthropy. Its efforts have led to the formation of The Working Woman's Guild which has over seven hundred working women as its members. Only self-supporting women who work in factories, shops, etc., can become its members. For a couple of hours every evening, classes on different subjects are held in its meeting hall. . . . These days the example of The New Century Club has been followed by respectable, educated women in many other places, who have established organizations like The Working Woman's Guild for the advancement of working women and for the welfare and moral protection of misguided, destitute young women. Nobody will be able to assess the extent of the benefit of such clubs to working women and to society at large. Boston has the Woman's Educational and Industrial Union which is managed by educated, experienced women of good families, who take turns to visit the Union hall and supervise its working. . . .

There are many other societies modelled on this one all over the United States, known as Women's Exchanges. They are all run by women, with the objective of helping poor, destitute women who work for a living, by selling their home-made goods at a fair price. In some places a boarding house is attached to the Exchange, to accomodate women visitors who come from other towns for work. These houses are under the supervision of the respectable, influential women of the town. Its entire management is entrusted to women's societies which are of great help to the working women of the United States.

The Young Women's Christian Association is an excellent philanthropic organization in this country. It has branches in almost all cities, and has hundreds and thousands of young women as members. It has been formed to achieve several praiseworthy and important aims (in which it has been very successful), such as

explaining and propagating Christianity among young women, preaching to ignorant women and leading them on the right path, arranging for good and reasonably priced accomodation for self-supporting women, making education available to anyone who is interested in learning languages or getting scientific or vocational information.

In 1848, several active women held a Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls in the State of New York, as mentioned above. This was the very first association established for protecting women's rights; all other women's societies have come into being after following its example and with its assistance. The whole world ridiculed the Convention when it was held. So-called gentlemen slung mud at the women who spoke on its behalf, and cursed them; the yellow newspapers drew cartoons of them; public leaders and opinion builders denounced and ostracized them; preachers honoured them with epithets, such as 'irreligious', 'immoral', 'heretical', 'evil', 'witches' and 'Satan's messengers'—epithets that served to expose their own breeding. But the women did not abandon their determination even in the face of such adverse circumstances and public opinion. They sacrificed their happiness, devoted their energies and wealth, and even shared the oppression of the women they helped, in order to continue their work for the abolition of women's slavery. The Convention has now become the National Woman Suffrage Association¹⁶ with branches in hundreds of places in the United States, with its headquarters in Boston. It publishes weekly, fortnightly and monthly newspapers as well as books at several places. The American Woman Suffrage Association publishes a famous weekly paper, the *Woman's Journal*, in Boston. Its example is followed by women in England, Canada, Australia, France, Denmark, Finland, and other countries, with the establishment of similar societies.

The efforts of the National Convention for Women's Rights in the United States have led to several changes and improvements in the laws pertaining to the women of this country. In the State of Kansas, women have obtained all important rights of representation in the municipality. In the Territory of Wyoming, women have received all the political rights that men have, with a clearly beneficial effect. (Also, in Canada, England and the English territory in Australia, unmarried and widowed women have obtained rights in the municipality.) The efforts of these societies have succeeded in

large measure, and there are favourable signs that they will be fully successful in the near future. Forty years ago this important Women's Convention founded at Seneca Falls made a small breach in the ramparts of the impenetrable fortress of custom which society had erected around the female community in order to imprison them and block their progress; and it made a small path for women to escape from this terrible fortress. Thousands of women are leaving the fortress in groups in order to reach freedom, and more will continue to do so. This Convention has now become international. At the end of March 1888, women from about ten civilized countries had come to the city of Washington [District of Columbia] at the invitation of the American Woman's Suffrage Association. At that time, the Association called a convention of the International Council of Women and resolved to establish branches in each member country. In some cases this has already been carried out. This International Council of Women has been established not merely in order to obtain political rights for women. It has come into being in order to achieve very important and laudable aims, namely to establish friendly relations among all kinds of women's societies anywhere in the world, to provide mutual help when necessary, to provide mutual encouragement, and to create friendship among women of all nations. . . . There are many other important women's societies in this country, which are not mentioned here because information about all of them will take up considerable space. However, this essay will remain incomplete without at least a little information about the Woman's [Christian] Temperance Union in this country, which I give below.

In November of last year (1887), the National Woman's Temperance Union of the United States held its fourteenth annual convention at the town of Nashville, in the State of Tennessee. The society's president [Frances Willard] had invited me to attend it.¹⁷ I travelled two thousand miles to Nashville to see the great convention and the gathering of eminent women from all the States. For a whole week the city was crowded with women. About three hundred leading women had come there as representatives of the Woman's Temperance Unions of all States in this country. Besides, many men and women had gathered there to see the convention.

The State of Tennessee is situated in the south of the country; and independence, education and diligence are not seen among the women in these parts to the extent seen in the north. Some years

ago, nobody there approved of a woman addressing a meeting, and nobody had even dreamt of the words 'women's societies'. There, the female sex has not advanced as much as it should, nor are the means of higher education available to it. On the way to Nashville, I had occasion to stop in the city of Louisville in the State of Kentucky, and to address a meeting at the insistence of the people there. On that occasion, the minister of the church where I was to speak insisted on my sitting on the dais. It was my desire that if I was to sit on the dais, some of the eminent women of the town should also sit with me on the dais. But the women said, 'We have never done such a thing in our lives, how can we bring ourselves to do so now?' I said, 'Ladies, you have never sat on the dais before, but what is the harm in making a beginning now? Just sit there with me once; if it bothers you in any way, don't do it again.' After much hesitation, five or six women agreed to sit on the dais, and stayed there until I finished my speech. Needless to say, they came to no harm. Although women in the south are not secluded, very few of them seem to possess the necessary independence and confidence in company.

On hearing the news that the annual convention of the Woman's Temperance Union of the United States was to take place at Nashville, many people there made many kinds of speculations about it. Nobody really knew much about what the society was and how it worked. Many thought that it would be some kind of play-acting or spectacle produced by the unimaginative ideas of half-sane and half-insane women. Many clergymen refused them permission to hold meetings in their churches on the grounds that it was an irreligious act and that the women were engaging in unwomanly conduct in contravention of biblical injunctions. At last, it was decided to hold the meetings in the hall of a public library. The local [chapter of the] Woman's Temperance Union of Nashville exerted itself extremely hard to coax the local women to help with the convention. These generous women invited to their homes the women who had come from afar and entertained them very hospitably.

On the morning of 16th November, the marvellous convention began. Seven hundred chairs had been arranged in a semi-circle in the meeting hall; there was no room for more. All the walls of the hall were decorated with the flags of different States and the colourful banners of the Woman's Temperance Unions of each State, embroidered and inscribed with their mottos. The spot where the

president and other prominent women were to sit was decorated with the star-spangled banner of the United States, flower bouquets and green wreaths.

By nine in the morning, the meeting hall was full. The audience also included a number of men. Then the president, Frances E. Willard, called everybody's attention and started the meeting. Some eminent women said excellent, absorbing prayers, sang sweet songs, gave touching advice, and Miss Frances made an absorbing, deeply meaningful and beautiful speech. A great poet should have been present there to do justice to all this.

Before the first day's meeting was concluded, many clergymen in the town changed their minds and sent invitations to this unparalleled Woman's Union, insisting that they should hold meetings in their churches, make speeches, and oblige them. The men in the audience stopped ridiculing the Union and began to show it respect. Then, throughout that week, the prominent women in the Union went to about six different places every morning, noon and night, to make speeches and give advice; even so, the people were not content. During that week, people saw resolutions being passed in the meeting, reports of the previous year's activities being read out, and an efficient manner of conducting the proceedings; the overall beauty and excellent management of all this would have made even the British parliament and the United States Congress envious of this Temperance Union. On that occasion, Miss Frances Willard's talent for public speaking, leadership, managerial skill, organizational capacity, and extraordinary knowledge of the old rules of parliament [were fully displayed]. . . .

On the evening of 24th November, the convention was concluded. On that occasion, while bidding farewell to the women gathered there, prominent men and clergy of Nashville recounted how they had changed their minds about women and how the procedure and excellent organization of the Union, its good advice and benevolent moral philosophy surprised and gladdened them; and, with high praise and great honour, they bade the National Woman's Temperance Union of the United States farewell and invited it to come there again the following year.

The whole convention passed off happily. I had not seen such a marvellous, charming and vast scene ever before in my life, and it made me feel that my life was now fulfilled. This great convention

and Union cannot be compared to any association or convention other than the convention of the International Council of Women held at Washington, at the end of last March.



WOMAN'S CRUSADE

Demoness Liquor and her brother Tobacco had forced their way into people's houses and begun to devastate them. Almost every single man began to give imaginary justifications, such as, 'I am a man, I can do anything with impunity; liquor helps to ease tiredness; chewing and smoking tobacco relaxes the brain; it is scientifically proven that a small drink for medicinal purposes or to help digestion is perfectly harmless;' and began drinking and using intoxicants to his heart's content and squandering money on them. Saloons, which were the gateways to hell and the causes of total ruin, grew everywhere. Their stained glass windows and decorated doorways beckoned men temptingly. Saloon-keepers, who filled their pockets by exploiting others, invented thousands of ways to increase their business by luring the young and the old, the ignorant and the wise, in many different ways. Day by day, more and more men were caught in their noose, lost all they had, and forfeited their happiness, respectability, and sometimes life itself. Because of them, their poor wives and their tender, newborn babes were reduced to a wretched state. Thousands of devoted wives suffered inwardly, as they watched their husbands being totally ruined by the vice. Millions of mothers suffered in their hearts, as they saw their sons, dearer than their own lives, abandoning religion, morality and their happiness in this world and the next, while heading for eternal hell because of their addiction to liquor. Even so, all those poor women endured their agonies in silence. Scriptures and custom—the two arbiters of society—have issued women an injunction to stay at home and put up with everything quietly; in obedience to it, women have endured endless, intolerable agonies and mental suffering without so much as a moan, until today.

But there is a limit to everything in this world. When oppressed too heavily, even a worm turns once in a while and prepares to fight

the enemy in self-defence. It is not very surprising, then, that a time comes when human beings—even women, who are accustomed to enduring oppression patiently—are driven to put up a resistance against oppression when the oppression reaches a limit. Such an occasion arose in the case of women in the State of Ohio, when they dispensed with their seclusion and silence, and resolved to fight the saloon-keepers who had heartlessly caught their husbands and sons in their coils and dragged them away, in order to protect their babes and their dear ones. Hundreds of well-born, forbearing and virtuous women girded themselves and assisted the crusade against saloon-keepers; and vowed not to return from the battlefield until they had defeated the enemy and protected their sons and their homes. In this war, nobody slit another's throat or snatched a morsel of food from another's mouth through deceit; nobody's blood was spilt and nobody's heart was pierced by harsh words; nobody terrified another with deadly weapons like guns, swords or cannons. Even so, its name made the liquor-sellers and their partisans—those irreligious tormentors and plunderers of others' property—tremble; the crusaders' banner of peace made Satan quake; and their sweet, logical exhortations shook the foundations of Satan's citadels until they crumbled and fell. The Crusades^{††} of the eleventh and twelfth centuries pale before the marvellous and unparalleled, peaceful crusade of women in the nineteenth century. There can be no comparison between the two. Men's crusades, during the barbaric times of the past, were aimed at cutting people's throats, sprinkling the whole earth with human blood, and tarnishing the name of religion. The women's crusade of the nineteenth century was aimed at saving people's lives, rescuing them from hell, and establishing happiness, peace and joy in their homes. Men's crusades of the eleventh and twelfth centuries destroyed millions of lives; the women's crusade of the nineteenth century employed the means to pull billions of people out of the jaws of death. Those barbaric crusades sullied the religion of Christ, the Angel of Peace; this modern crusade made that holy religion shine like burnished gold.

^{††}A crusade is a war fought in the name of the Cross. At the close of the eleventh century, Mahommedans conquered Jerusalem and prepared to occupy Christian countries like Spain. The followers of Christianity then fought wars against the Mahommedans in defence of their religion, which are known as the Crusades. These wars continued until the thirteenth century AD.

This marvellous crusade started on 24th December, 1873. A man named Dio Lewis had come to the town of Hillsboro in the State of Ohio to make a speech. On the evening of the 24th, he delivered a lecture on the subject 'Our Girls' for the Lecture Association there, at the Washington Court-House. On that occasion, he described the extent to which the human race was harmed by the use of liquor, other intoxicating drinks, tobacco, etc. and narrated his own experience. His mother, a devout and righteous woman, was deeply grieved at the harm caused in the world by this vice. Dio's father was addicted to liquor and had lost everything. Mrs Lewis, seeing her happiness and family life ruined, decided to save her husband; and she thought of a new solution to cure the townspeople of this vice. Taking some women friends along, she herself visited saloons which sold liquor and other intoxicants, prayed and preached there, and entreated their owners to give up their low and ruinous trade. Her efforts were eventually successful and all the saloon-keepers in the town closed down their saloons. After narrating this story, Dio Lewis said to the women in the audience that if they followed suit, their good efforts would also be successful, and that all the saloons there would be closed down within a week; and that, if the women wanted to undertake the deed, their leaders should indicate their consent. On hearing Lewis' words, about fifty women stood up to show their consent for the undertaking. Then Lewis turned to the men, who opposed drinking, sitting nearby, and asked how many of them would help the women if they undertook the deed, upon which about seventy men stood up. When it was thus decided to undertake this deed, it was resolved to call a meeting on the morning of Christmas Day, that is, 25th December, for this great deed.

On Christmas Day, at ten in the morning, a large gathering met at the Presbyterian Church there, in accordance with the previous night's resolution. After a psalm was sung and the service held, Dio Lewis made an hour-long speech in which he narrated his mother's story, described how much strength women possess to undertake important tasks, and how their tolerance, diligence and affectionate nature are the useful means to accomplish such tasks. All the people gathered there approved highly of Dio Lewis' suggestion and the Woman's [Temperance] Crusade was launched that very morning.

Like other societies, this Crusade also made rules, elected a president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer; needless to say, all

of them were women. One committee from this women's society was sent to war. This was a committee of fifty-two women who took a vow to fight to the finish. A resolution was passed to form a Committee of Visitation to present appeals at hotels and saloons to give up the evil trade and start another respectable business, and also hold prayers and sermons.¹⁸ A group of 'backers' was set up to help the Committee of Visitation, in which thirty-seven men accepted the responsibility of providing financial aid to the women crusaders. After making all these preparations, it was resolved that a sub-committee should be formed to write an appeal to be sent to all saloon-keepers.

The Committee of Visitation made Mrs E. J. Thompson its leader and decided to attack the enemy. Mrs Thompson describes the first battle as follows:¹⁹

On the morning of 25th December 1873, we turned our faces towards the first-class saloon (as it was called) kept by Robert Ward, on High Street, a resort made famous by deeds, the memory of which unnerved the heart and paled the cheek of some among us, as the seventy entered the open door of the . . . [saloon]. Doubtless he had learned of our approach, as he not only propped the heavy door open, but with the most perfect suavity of manner held it until the ladies all passed in; then, closing it, walked to his accustomed stand behind the bar.

Seizing the strange opportunity, the leader [i.e. Mrs Thompson herself] addressed him as follows: 'Well, Mr Ward, this must seem to you a strange audience! I suppose, however, that you understand the object of our visit?' 'Robert' by this time began to perspire freely, and remarked that he would like to have a talk with Dio Lewis. Mrs Thompson said: 'Dr Lewis has nothing whatever to do with the subject of our mission. As you look upon some of the faces before you, and observe the marks of sorrow, caused by the unholy business that you ply, you will find that it is no wonder we are here. We have come, however, not to threaten, not even to upbraid, but in the name of our Divine Friend and Saviour, and in his spirit, to forgive, and to commend you to his pardon, if you will but agree to abandon a business that is so damaging to our hearts and to the peace of our homes!'

The hesitation and embarrassment of the famous saloon-keeper seemed to afford (as the leader thought) an opportunity for prayer; so, casting her eye around upon that never-to-be-forgotten group of earnest faces, she said, *very softly*: 'Let us pray.' Instantly all, even the poor liquor-seller himself, were upon their knees. . . .

The scene that followed, in a most remarkable manner portrayed the spirit of our holy religion. Poor wives and mothers, who the day before would have crossed the street to avoid passing by a place so identified with their heartaches, their woes, and their deepest humiliation, in tearful pathos were now pleading with this deluded brother to accept the world's Redeemer as his own. Surely, 'God is Love'!

The greatness of that other-worldly love and forgiveness cannot be described enough. The prophecy of Dio Lewis came true. Thanks to the unceasing efforts of this marvellous Committee of Visitation, all the saloons in Hillsboro closed down within a week!

On hearing the report of the Hillsboro Crusade, women of many other places in the United States followed their example. But these crusades were not long-lasting; therefore, some far-sighted women decided to make a collective effort. In 1874, some of the successful women crusaders met at a summer camp at Chautauqua and established the Woman's Christian Temperance Union with the purpose of making continuous efforts to eradicate the vice of drinking. Soon it became a national association thanks to the efforts of some good, diligent and upright women; and assumed the name, The National Woman's [Christian] Temperance Union of the United States. . . .

I have no hesitation in saying that this is the best and greatest of all the associations prevalent among all civilized countries. It would be rare to find a good deed that it has not undertaken, difficult to cite any example of its motherly love being denied to anyone, and impossible to imagine that the virtues of bravery, seriousness, courage and forgiveness can have reached perfection anywhere else, except in God. It is not that the women's missionary societies in this and other countries are insignificant; they have spent millions of rupees and have been selflessly engaged in the task of leading foreign people on to the path of the holy religion, for which they cannot be praised enough. But there are denominational differences among these societies, which is why they lack unity, and are unable to perform as many good deeds as the Temperance Union does. Women's Christian societies include only so-called 'evangelical' sects, and do not assist others. All other societies for the promotion of education and philanthropic works may be excellent and beneficial in their own ways, but cannot be compared to the Union, because their numbers are small and aims limited. But the aims of the Woman's Temperance

Union are many and very important. It has no internal differences of opinion; here women of all opinions, classes and kinds work together unitedly. Its successive local, state, national and international levels; its simple but strict rules, which are excellent, acceptable to all and easy for all to observe; its extraordinary management, superior to the administration of any country and holding everything and everybody together—considering all these, one feels that this Union is the crown of all the marvellous miracles on God's earth in the present age. . . .

For many years now, the State Governments of Maine and Iowa have passed temperance laws to prohibit the brewing and sale of liquor; but the Governments are helpless before the wickedness of the liquor-sellers. A clandestine traffic in liquor still goes on there. About two years ago, the women of Kansas won important political rights with regard to the municipality. The first important task for which they exercised their rights was to put a complete stop to the liquor traffic in the State. About half these women were members of the Woman's Temperance Union; they made efforts to prevent the clandestine traffic in liquor. What the men in the State of Maine, lacking the support of women, were unable to achieve in twenty-five years, was accomplished by the people of the State of Kansas almost within two years, on the strength of the united power of men and women. . . .

When the women of Kansas obtained political rights, some mischievous men of a town in the State elected a well-born young housewife as their Mayor, in order to demonstrate that women did not deserve political rights and were not capable of important political work. The very next day the people who had elected her Mayor realized that their assumption, that women were unable to carry on administration and implement laws, was wrong. Immediately upon assuming the office of Mayor, the woman made a search for all the saloons, gambling dens and other places of illegal activities, and closed them down. The good men and women of the town assisted her greatly in locating clandestine places. The townspeople are very happy with her administration, and she manages her duties in a proper and excellent manner. The members of the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union of the United States used to think that women did not need political rights. But, during the past fifteen years, their intensive efforts have not yielded the expected results; and they have realized that the lack of political rights is the sole reason. The

liquor traders are almost all men, and they have invested millions of dollars in this trade. There are also many men who support them. All of them have political rights, and they vote against the women's efforts to introduce temperance laws. The law supports the majority vote. In the matter of making laws, women have no power, and men, especially liquor-sellers and drinkers, enjoy political rights as well as financial advantage. Many men and women have begun to think that unless women obtain some of the political rights, they will not be able to defeat the demon of liquor. Therefore they are making unceasing efforts to obtain political rights for women.

The International Woman's Temperance Union has been established thanks to the vision and organizational ability of Miss Frances E. Willard, the respected president of the National Woman's [Christian] Temperance Union of the United States, and with the help of her friends. Miss Willard had this idea in 1883. . . . And then, in 1884, this International Woman's Temperance Union was established. Mrs Mary Clement Leavitt, an adventurous, brave and resolute woman, became its representative and started on a journey around the world with the intention of establishing temperance unions everywhere. She went first to the island of Hawaii, then to countries like Australia, Japan, China, Ceylon, India, Madagascar, Africa [sic], etc., and established hundreds of temperance unions. Now she intends to visit all the countries of Europe. When this single, unsupported, helpless woman started on this great enterprise, she had neither money nor a companion; but she is accompanied by her God and her strong resolve to do good. Wherever she goes, she receives the assistance she needs. Now Woman's Temperance Unions are being established in most of the civilized countries. The women of England were also inspired by American women's enthusiasm and sense of duty. They have established the national union, called the British Woman's Temperance Association, and it does a lot of good work. Canada also has the National Woman's Temperance Union; it is engaged in intense efforts to prohibit traffic in liquor in that country. Similar unions exist in Australia, the Hawaiian islands, Madagascar and Africa. My Indian sisters, why do you lag behind? Such a national union is essential in our country. The International Woman's Temperance Union proposes to send a strong appeal to all heads of nations, in which women of all nations plan to request them to stop traffic in liquor and intoxicants. All our Indian women must

15. Sorosis was founded in 1868 by Mrs Jennie C. Croly, a recognized journalist who was refused a ticket to the dinner hosted by the New York Press Club in honour of Charles Dickens' visit, because she (like other women journalists) did not belong to the Press Club (Flexner 1975: 182–83).
16. The American Equal Rights Association which was formed out of the Woman's Rights Convention split in 1869 into the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association; their merger began to be negotiated in 1887 and finally took place in 1890 (Flexner 1975: 155, 226).
17. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was formed in 1874. Frances Willard became its president in 1879; she organized WCTU chapters in every State and increased its membership to over 2,00,000 (Deckard 1983: 264).
18. Thompson's account, on which Ramabai has relied heavily in this section, has been liberally used in translating it; see Thompson, *et al.* (1906).
19. Thompson (1906: 75–76).

PART IV



KEDGAON

Famine Experiences
(1897)

To the Friends of Mukti School and Mission
(1900)

A Short History of Kripa Sadan, or Home of Mercy
(1903)

A Testimony of Our Inexhaustible Treasure
(1907)

The Word-Seed
(1908)



FAMINE EXPERIENCES ♦

I have long been wishing to thank the kind friends who have so generously sent help at this time of our need and now I am glad to be able to write a few lines to express my gratitude. . . .

Several friends have asked me to give an account of my visit to the famine districts, which I do very gladly, and hope that you will find it convenient to give a little space in your columns and publish it. I must, however, preface this account with a few of my recollections of the last famine. Many people who lived and worked in it will remember how millions of poor people were starved to death, and how the great part of Madras Presidency and the Southern Marathi [sic] country were laid waste by the famine of 1876. When I heard of the present famine and its havoc in the Central Provinces, my heart sank within me, and I cried to God for help on behalf of those dear countrypeople of mine.

I feel deeply for these poor dying people, because I have myself known what it is to suffer from hunger and thirst, and have seen my dearest relatives die of starvation. My recollections carry me back to the hard times some twenty-two years ago. The last great famine of

♦Portions of the Letter which deal in detail with the demoralization of the people consequent upon the famine have been omitted, according to the note in the printed pamphlet from which this piece is reproduced.

the Madras Presidency reached its climax in the years 1876-77, but it began at least three years before that time. I was in my teens then and so thoroughly ignorant of the outside world, that I cannot remember observing other people's condition, yet saw enough of distress in our own and a few other families to realize the hard-heartedness of unchanged human nature.

High-caste and respectable poor families who are not accustomed to hard labour and pauperism, suffered then, as they do now, more than the poorer classes. My own people among many others fell victims to the terrible famine. We had known better days. My father was a landholder and an honoured Pandit, and had acquired wealth by his learning. But by and by, when he became old and infirm and blind in the last days of his earthly life, he lost all [his] property in one way or another. My brother, sister, and myself had no secular education to enable us to earn our livelihood by better work than manual labour. We had all the sacred learning necessary to lead an honest, religious life, but the pride of caste and superior learning and vanity of life prevented our stooping down to acquire some industry whereby we might have saved the precious lives of our parents.

In short, we had no common sense, and foolishly spent all the money we had in hand in giving alms to Brahmans to please the gods, who, we thought, would send a shower of gold mohurs upon us and make us rich and happy. We went to several sacred places and temples, to worship different gods and to bathe in sacred rivers and tanks to free ourselves from sin and curse, which brought poverty on us. We prostrated ourselves before the stone and metal images of the gods, and prayed to them day and night; the burden of our prayer being that the gods would be pleased to give us wealth, learning, and renown. My dear brother, a stalwart young fellow of twenty-one, spoilt his health and wasted his fine well-built body by fasting months and months. But nothing came of all this futile effort to please the gods—the stone images remained as hard as ever, and never answered our prayers. . . .

We knew the Vedanta and knew also that we worshipped not the images but some gods whom they represented—still, all our learning and superior knowledge was of no avail. We bowed to the idols as thousands of learned Brahmans do. We expected them to speak to us in wonderful oracles. We went to the astrologers with money and

other presents to know from them the minds of [the] gods concerning us. In this way we spent our precious time, strength and wealth in vain. When no money was left in hand we began to sell the valuable things belonging to us—jewelries [sic], costly garments, silverware, and even the cooking vessels of brass and copper were sold to the last, and the money spent in giving alms to Brahmans till nothing but a few silver and copper coins were left in our possession. We bought coarse rice with them and ate very sparingly, but it did not last long. At last the day came when we had finished eating the last grain of rice—and nothing but death by starvation remained for our portion. Oh the sorrow, the helplessness, and the disgrace of the situation!

We assembled together to consider what we should do next, and after a long discussion, came to the conclusion that it was better to go into the forest and die there rather than bear the disgrace of poverty among our own people. And that very night we left the house in which we were staying at Tirpathy [Tirupati]—a sacred town situated on the top of Venkatghiri [sic]—and entered into the great forest, determined to die there. Eleven days and nights—in which we subsisted on water and leaves and a handful of wild dates—were spent in great bodily and mental pain. At last our dear old father could hold out no longer; the tortures of hunger were too much for his poor, old, weak body. He determined to drown himself in a sacred tank nearby, thus to end all his earthly suffering. It was suggested that the rest of us should either drown [our]selves or break the family and go our several ways. But drowning ourselves seemed most practicable. To drown one's self in some sacred river or tank is *not* considered suicide by the Hindus, so we felt free to put an end to our lives in that way. Father wanted to drown himself first, so he took leave of all the members of the family one by one. I was his youngest child, and my turn came last. I shall never forget his last injunctions to me. His blind eyes could not see my face, but he held me tight in his arms, and stroking my head and cheeks, he told me in a few words broken with emotion, to remember how he loved me, and how he taught me to do right and never depart from the way of righteousness. His last loving command to me was to lead an honourable life if I lived at all, and serve God all my life. He did not know the only true God but served the—to him—unknown God with all his heart and strength; and he was very desirous that his

children should serve Him to the last. 'Remember, my child,' he said, 'you are my youngest, my most beloved child. I have given you into the hands of our God, you are His and to Him alone you must belong and serve all your life.' He could speak no more. My father's prayers for me were, no doubt, heard by the Almighty, the all-merciful Heavenly Father whom the old Hindu did not know. The God of all flesh did not find it impossible to bring me, a great sinner and an unworthy child of His, out of heathen darkness into the saving light of His love and salvation. I can now say to the departed spirit of the loving parent, 'Yes, dear father, I will serve the only true God to the last.' But I could not say so when my father spoke to me for the last time. I listened to him, but was too ignorant, too bewildered to understand him or make an intelligent answer. We were after this dismissed from my father's presence; he wanted an hour for meditation and preparation before death.

While we were placed in such a bewildering situation, the merciful God, who so often prevents His sinful children from rushing headlong into the deep pit of sin, came to our rescue. He kept us from the dreadful act of being witnesses to the suicide of our own loved father. God put a noble thought into the heart of my brother who said he could not bear to see the sad sight. He would give up all caste pride and go to work to support our old parents, and as father was unable to walk, he said he would carry him down the mountain into the nearest village, and then go to work. He made his intentions known to father and begged him not to drown himself in the sacred tank. So the question was settled for that time. Our hearts were gladdened and we prepared to start from the forest. And yet we wished very much that a tiger, a great snake, or some other wild animal would put an end to our lives. We were too weak to move and too proud to beg or work for earning a livelihood. But the resolution was made, and we dragged ourselves through the jungle as best we could.

It took us nearly two days to come out of the forest into a village at the foot of the mountain. Father suffered intensely throughout this time. Weakness caused by starvation and the hardships of the life in the wilderness, hastened his death. We reached the village with great difficulty, and took shelter in a temple, but the Brahman priests of the temple would not let us stay there. They had no pity for the weak and helpless. So we were obliged again to move from that temple and go out of the village into the ruins of an old temple where no one but the

wild animals dwelt in the night. There we stayed for four days. A young Brahman, seeing the helplessness of our situation, gave us some food.

The same day on which we reached that village, my father was attacked by fever from which he did not recover. On the first day, at the beginning of his last illness, he asked for a little sugar and water. We gave him water, but could not give sugar. He could not eat the coarse food, and shortly after he became unconscious and died in the morning of the third day.

The same kind young Brahman who had given us some food, came to our help at that time. He could not do much. He was not sure whether we were Brahmans or not,¹ and as none of his co-villagers would come to carry the dead, he could not, for fear of being put out of caste, come to help my brother to carry the remains of my father. But he had the kindness to let some men dig a grave at his own expense, and follow the funeral party as far as the river. Father had entered the order of a Sannyasin before his death. So his body was to be buried in the ground according to the commands of the Shastras. As there was no one else who could help carry the dead, my brother tied the body in his dhoti like a bundle, and carried it alone over two miles to its last resting place. We sadly followed [him] to the river bank, and helped him a little. So we buried our father outside the village, away from all human habitation, and returned with heavy hearts to the ruins of the old temple where we had taken our abode. That same evening our mother was attacked by fever, and said she would not live much longer. But we had to leave the place; there was no work to be found and no food to be had. We walked with our sick mother for a while, and then some kind-hearted people gave us a little food and money to pay our fare as far as Raichur. There we stayed for some weeks, being quite unable to move from the town owing to the illness of our mother. Our life at Raichur was a continuous story of hopelessness and starvation. Brother was too weak to work, and we could not make up our minds to go to beg. Now and then, kind people gave us some food. Mother suffered intensely from fever and hunger. We too suffered from hunger and weakness, but the sufferings of our mother were more than we could bear to see. Yet we had to keep still through sheer helplessness. Now and then, when delirious, mother would ask for different kinds of food. She could eat but little, yet we were unable to give her the little that she wanted.

Once she suffered so much from hunger that she could bear it no longer, and sent me into a neighbour's house to beg a little piece of coarse *bajree* cake. I went there very reluctantly. The lady spoke kindly to me, but I could on no account open my mouth to beg for that piece of *bajree* bread. With superhuman effort and a firm resolution to keep my feelings from that lady I kept the tears back, but the expression of my face told its own story. The kind Brahman lady, guessing what was on my mind, asked me if I would like to have some food, so I said, 'Yes, I want only a little piece of *bajree* bread.' She gave me what I wanted and I felt very grateful, but could not say a word to express my gratitude. I ran to my mother in great haste and gave it to her. But she could not eat, she was too weak. The fever was on her, she became unconscious and died in a few days after that. Her funeral was as sad as that of my father, with the exception that two Brahmans came to help my brother and me, to carry her body to the burning ground, about three miles from the town.²

I need not lengthen this account with our subsequent experiences. My elder sister also died of starvation, after suffering from illness and hunger. During those few months before our sister died, we three travelled on foot from place to place in search of food and work, but we could not get much of either. My brother and myself continued our sad pilgrimage to the northern boundary of India, and back to the east as far as Calcutta. Brother got work here and there, but most of the time we lived an aimless wanderer's life. Very often we had to go without food for days. Even when my brother had got some work to do, he got so little wages, only four rupees a month, and sometimes much less than that, that we were obliged to live on a handful of grain soaked in water, and a little salt. We had no blankets or thick garments to cover ourselves, and when travelling we had to walk barefoot, without umbrellas, and to rest in the night, either under the trees on the roadside, or the arches of bridges, or lie down on the ground in the open air. Once, on the banks of the Jhelum, a river in the Punjab, we were obliged to rest at night in the open air, and tried to keep off the intense cold by digging two grave-like pits and putting ourselves into them, and covering our bodies—except the heads—with dry sand of the river bank. Sometimes the demands of hunger were so great, that we would satisfy our empty stomachs by eating a handful of wild berries, and swallowing the hard stones together with their coarse skins.

Four long years we suffered from scarcity. We did not mind it much as we were young and strong, we could stand it much better than our poor old parents and weak sister. The Heavenly Father very mercifully removed them from this earth, and that none of their children, whom they loved so much, died or were separated from them in their lifetime, gave us some satisfaction, but the memory of the last days of their life, full of sorrow, almost breaks my heart. I would never have written this account had not the necessity of my present situation obliged me to do so. None of my friends can ever understand what my feelings are for the famine people unless they know that I have had once to go through the same experience as that of the starving thousands of Central India. Yet I must say that suffering alone is not able to produce sympathy for other sufferers. My own experience of the unconverted state of mind³ and the present knowledge of my fellow countrywomen and girls, whom I have ample opportunity to study, shows that suffering in itself has rather a hardening effect on the human heart. It takes away almost all delicate feelings from the soul, making it as hard as a stone. I can quite understand now what God meant when He said to Israel, 'I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.' Unless God changes our hearts through the wonderful regenerating action of His Holy Spirit, we never have true love and sympathy for our fellow men. Later on, I shall give an example of this. But now I must pass on to the chief subject of this article.

A little over four months ago [September 1896], I heard of the distress of the people in Central India, and at once my heart went out to them in sympathy. The human common sense said, 'You had better stop here,' and 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do; do it, here. You have no means and no strength to do what you wish. Your powers are limited and you will not be held responsible for not doing anything to help those famished people. Indeed, what can a weak woman do to help the dying thousands? Besides the Government of India and other benevolent people are doing what they can do to relieve the poor and the needy. There is nothing for you to do.' I tried to quiet my conscience in this manner, but louder and louder spoke the voice of God from within my heart. 'Remember the days of old.' 'Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondsman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee,' and 'Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?'

A missionary lady, Mrs Drynan, of Rajputana, accompanied me part of the way, to gather some children for mission orphanages of Poona. We went to Sohagpur first, and began the work at once. We found out from the good people there that we could not get the orphan children without the permission of the Government. So our first business was to go and see the physician in charge at the Hospital, and the Tahsildar in charge of the Poor House. We went to the Hospital too early, at about 8.30 in the morning. The doctor was not there, but right before that hospital were walking three little famished skeleton-like forms, and this first sight of their distress I shall never forget. The three children, we found out, were of the Chamar caste. Their father had died some time ago, and the mother had died only the day before. The eldest was a girl of about seven, the second a boy of five, and the youngest a baby boy three years of age. The girl was protecting herself from the intense cold with a covering of rags, and the two boys had nothing on their bodies. Their wrinkled faces and the ghastly death-like expression told the story of the terrible suffering they were in.

The agony and dismay I felt at seeing that sight cannot be told in words. I was perfectly powerless, and could do nothing but cry to the Father to help me. As we could do nothing, we had to harden our hearts and turn our step toward the Poor House, where we expected to find the Tahsildar. The memory of the three little ones, especially the youngest child, who I am sure could not have lived many days after that, haunts me to this day. Whenever I think of them my heart is filled with indescribable sorrow. I could neither sleep nor rest for the thought of them for many days. We did not get the children, though we tried our best. It took us such a long time to go and see the officer in charge of the Poor House, and by the time we returned, they had gone somewhere, and no one could tell us where they were. I went again to that place, made a thorough search all over the town, and round about it, but did not find them. Perhaps they fainted on their way to the town in quest of food, and fell down in some ditch on the roadside, and died there of hunger. The Lord have mercy upon us all and give us repentance for not going to help such innocent little sufferers. It will take me too long to describe all that I saw and heard at the Poor Houses and relief camps I visited. So I will say in general what most affected my mind.

The first Poor House we saw was no house at all. It was a grove in

the outskirts of the town. Groups of famished people were seen sitting or lying in ashes on dirty ground. Some had rags to cover their bodies, and some had none. There were old and young men, and women and children, most of them ill, too weak to move about, and many suffering from leprosy and other horrible diseases. Bad men, and women, pure young girls, innocent children and old people, good, bad, and indifferent, were freely mixing and conversing with each other. They slept in the open air or under the trees at night, and ate the scanty and coarse food provided by the Government. The food was nothing but dry flour and some salt. There were several starving orphan children who could not cook for themselves, and had no one to work for them. So they had either to eat the dry flour or depend upon the tender mercies of their fellow sufferers, the older persons, who took as much of their food as they could, with the right of their might.

The poor people seem to have lost all human feeling. They are most unkind toward each other and the little children around them. They do not care even for their own children. Some parents eat all the food they get for themselves and for their little ones, and become quite fat, while their children are starved and look like skeletons, and some are even in a dying state and yet their fathers and mothers feel no affection for them.

Parents can be seen taking their girl children around the country and selling them for a rupee or a few annas, or even for a few seers of grain. The food given to the children is snatched from their hands, and eaten by their stronger neighbours. In some places, the Government officials give two pice or more to each child, or old or sick person [who is] unable to work, but what can a baby of two or three years of age do with two copper pieces in hand? The pice are soon stolen and the little ones left to die of starvation. In other places, food, i.e. wheat or jowari flour, and some kind of pulse, are cooked into *dal* and *roti* and then distributed to the poor.

The Government officials are kind, and are doing what they can to help the poor people at the relief camps and in the Poor Houses. But the means at their disposal make it impossible to meet the demands of the needy ones. What are a few thousand rupees among so many thousands, to be supported for months? Perhaps about eight or ten annas, or at the most, a rupee per month is allowed for each person; and how much and what kind of grain will that sum bring?

Alas! alas! for the poor who are obliged to eat all the food given to them at the Poor Houses. Few of the subordinate officers, such as the Mukadams [overseers] and cooks who have it in their power to give or withhold from the poor the food sent for them, have any heart or conscience. The grain, the very cheapest kind, is bought and ground into flour, without being cleaned of the sand and earth it contains. Then the heartless cooks steal the flour and put a quantity of earth into it, while they cook the *dal* and *roti*—and nobody notices that the food is thus adulterated. The poor people are too afraid of the Mukadams to complain to the higher officials. The flour and pulse so adulterated, then made into *roti* and *dal*, do not look any better than cakes of cowdung.

The people in the Poor Houses are in such a degraded condition, that even the pigs who wander round about our villages do not begin to be compared with them in filthiness. The absolute nakedness of almost all [the] little children, and hundreds of older people covered with dirt, and sometimes with filthy rags, their skeleton-like bodies full of frightful sores, and their sad wrinkled faces wearing a ghastly, death-like expression, and their forlorn condition, are all an indescribably sad sight.

The European and Native officers employed to look after the interests of the dying thousands are hard at work, and try to do as much as they can. But it is impossible for them to find out what goes on behind their backs. The sepoys and Mukadams are the real masters and rulers of these places. Take for instance a Poor House containing over two thousand poor people, and a relief camp where over 15,000 people are working. What can one or two, or half-a-dozen superior officers, do for these thousands? They are obliged to leave the work in the hands of the Mukadams, who can do whatever they like. They use their sticks and tongues freely. They pull and push the working coolies, even women.

This is no good sign at all. Wicked men and women are everywhere on the lookout for young women and girls. They entice them by offering sweetmeats and other kinds of food, clothing, and fair promises to take them to nice places and make them happy. So hundreds of girls, young widows and deserted wives, are waylaid as they go to the relief camps and Poor Houses, in search of food and work, and taken away before they place themselves in the custody of the Government. The wicked are not afraid of the judgment of God,

they are sinning away their lives in the midst of the fearful scenes of famine and pestilence. May the merciful Father help these children!

One of my workers was walking on the road one day, when she saw a little girl of about twelve years sitting on the roadside. She looked sad and hungry. My worker spoke kindly to her and found out that she was an orphan. When the worker asked her if she would like to come to me, the girl said she had an older sister, and would go anywhere with her. In the meanwhile, the sister, who had gone to wash, came back to the place where the child was sitting. From her my worker heard their pathetic story. Their father had died about three weeks ago. They had no one to take care of them, and did not know where to go to get food. They were on their way to the relief camp. Someone had told them that there was a lady near the place, who had come to gather some children to give them a home, so they had come to the Sarai to look for her. From this statement we knew they were looking for me, but I left the Sarai before they came, and so missed seeing them. My worker then asked the older girl, who is about fourteen, if she and her sister would like to come and stay under my care. The girl said she would. She begged of my worker with tears in her eyes, that she should be placed under the care of good people. For she had met with so many bad people after her father's death, and they had tried to tempt her into evil. But she had resolutely refused to go with them. While the conversation was taking place, half-a-dozen or more wicked men had gathered around my worker, and were about to take the girls away, by frightening them out of their wits, but God saved the children from the dreadful fate and they were safely brought to me.

God help the young girls and young women who are obliged to go to the relief camps and Poor Houses. The sight of the pitiable condition of these poor orphan girls brought to my memory the state which I was in some twenty-two years ago. I bless and thank God for not having allowed us to go to the relief camps in the days of our need. My sister, a fine young woman of twenty-five, and myself, a girl of sixteen, would have easily fallen into the cruel hands of the wicked people of such places. The very remembrance of relief camps and Poor Houses and the condition of our sisters there makes me shiver, and I tremble with fear for several thousands of young women and girls, who are being sacrificed to the devil in these hard times.

There are not many girls who will resist the devil in the face of

starvation and death. God be thanked for protecting the virtue of these innocents. But it has been my sad lot to see many little girls ruined for life. Even the little children seemed to have lost all their innocence and were acting like little devils. What lies, what thefts, what indecent language! 'Oh God,' I exclaimed, when I saw them. 'Save us, save our nation from utter destruction.' It seemed as if nothing short of a great flood would be able to wash away all this sin from the face of our country. I wonder at the mercifulness and long suffering of our Father, who is still bearing with us.

It is impossible for the Government officers alone to look after the little children and to protect the virtue of young women and girls. There is a large field of work for you and for me if only we undertake to do it. Old people and middle-aged persons, and delicate women, who are unable to break twelve baskets of stone, and carry it to the appointed place, and who cannot get their wages at the relief camps unless they do so much work every day, need our help. The sad sight of aged men and delicate women stretching forth their sore hands and begging you to help them, pouring out their sorrow into your ears, and lamenting over their hard fate while their tearful eyes look straight into yours to find out if there is a particle of sympathy for them, is altogether too much to bear, for a person having a heart of flesh.

Why do not good Christian people in England and America send money to the missionaries in this country, who are so anxious to help the poor people, and are trying hard to do as much as they can for them, but cannot do more for want of means? The great motherly heart of missionary ladies is yearning for the dying children and other poor of the Central Provinces. Let benevolent people send generous donations to them for feeding and caring for the Lord's little ones. Men can do much, but all godly women must come forward at this time and care for little children and protect young women whom the Government officials are not able to help and care for. It is woman's work and cannot be left to the officers and their subordinates.

My sympathies are excited by the needs of young girl widows especially at this time. To let them go to the relief camps and Poor Houses, or allow them to wander in the streets and on the highways, means their eternal destruction. Ever since I have seen these girls in the famine districts—some fallen into the hands of wicked people; some ruined for life and turned out to die a miserable death in a

hopeless, helpless manner; some in the hospitals only to be taken into the pits of sin there to await a cruel death; some bearing the burdens of sin utterly lost to the sense of shame and humanity—hell has become a horrible reality to me, and my heart is bleeding for those daughters of fond parents who have died leaving them orphans. Who with a mother's heart and a sister's love can rest without doing everything in her power to save at least a few of the girls who can yet be saved from the hands of the evil ones! So, regardless of the trying financial state of my school, I went to work in the Central Provinces to get a few of the helpless young widows.

The Father, who is a very present help in trouble, has enabled me to get some sixty widows, forty-seven of whom will go to school to study, and others will work. Over eight hundred and fifty rupees were spent in fetching them here. Of this amount, about five hundred and twenty five rupees were given me by friends, and I thank them for it. To go to work to get these widows, to fetch them here from Central India and to feed them and clothe them is an awfully expensive business. Harder still is the work of civilising them and teaching them habits of cleanliness. They are no better than brute animals. The filthy habits they have acquired during these years of famine have become second nature with them. It will take a long time to civilise and teach them. We can do all things in the Power of the Lord. The Lord has put it into my mind to save three hundred girls out of the famine district and I shall go to work in His name. The funds sent to me by my friends in America are barely enough to feed and educate fifty girls, and several people are asking me how I am going to support all these girls who may come from Central India. Besides their food and clothing, new dormitories and dining rooms must be built. Our present school-house is not large enough to hold more than one hundred girls, at the most. And how are these emergencies to be met?

I do not know, but the Lord knows what I need. I can say with the Psalmist—'I am poor and needy, but the Lord thinketh upon me' and He has promised that 'Ye shall eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord your God that hath dealt wonderfully with you; and My people will not be ashamed.' My girls and I are quite ready to forego all the comforts, give up luxuries and live as plainly as we can. We shall be quite contented to have only one meal of common coarse food daily if necessary, and so long as we have a

little room or a seer of grain left in this house, we shall try and help our sisters who are starving. It seems a sin to live in this good house and eat plenty of good food and be warmly clothed, while thousands of our fellow creatures are dying of hunger and are without shelter. If all of us do our part faithfully, God is faithful to fulfil His promises and will send us the help we need at this time.

I humbly request you to pray for me and mine that we may be made strong in the Lord, and walk by faith and not by sight.

Believe me yours
In the Lord's service
Ramabai

PS: The good missionaries at Hoshangabad, Itarsi, Narsingpur, Jabalpur and Bina, have been very kind to me and helped me a great deal in my work. Our dear friend Miss Richardson, of Bombay, went to work with me and has aided me by giving passage money for the girls whom I brought here. I thank all these good friends for extending their help and for their goodness to me.

Ramabai

Poona, January 20th, 1897

NOTES

1. It is surprising that the Dongre family's Brahman origins were doubted; ordinarily, recitations from the sacred texts would have immediately proved their bona fides in an age when Sanskrit learning was strictly limited to Brahmans.
2. Ramabai does not mention here another harrowing fact about this event. She had to help carry the bier of her mother (which high-caste women did not do; they did not even accompany the funeral party to the cremation ground and still do not do so). Being the youngest and the shortest, she had to place the end of the wooden pole on her head instead of her shoulder (as is usually done), which was physically much more painful (Vaidya 1988: 51).
3. Ramabai obviously links voluntary famine relief efforts with a Christian ethos.



TO THE FRIENDS OF MUKTI SCHOOL AND MISSION[♦]

Dear Friends,

A year has passed since I wrote the last year's account of Mukti. Several friends have again and again asked me to write more about this School. It is a little over three years since the Lord called me to take up famine relief work. From a small beginning of temporal character, the Mukti School has grown into a permanent and large institution. Three hundred girls rescued from starvation in 1897 have received regular secular and Christian instruction. They are the children of many prayers; much love and labour has been bestowed on them, and now I am able to say, with great joy, that the workers have not laboured in vain. The money which so many friends have sent for them has not been spent in vain. The Lord is very good to let us see the fruit of our labour, and He is giving us abundant joy as we see the girls growing in grace and proving themselves worthy of the love and labour spent on them.

Five hundred and eighty [girls] in the Mukti Sadan and sixty girls in the Kripa Sadan are being trained to lead a useful Christian life. The number of the inmates of these Homes is doubled and will increase as days pass by. God is greatly blessing the work here, and

[♦]Reproduced from a pamphlet in the Archives of the Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission.