Women, Emancipation and Equality

Pandita Ramabai's Contribution to Women's Cause

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Pandita Ramabai Saraswati's status as a solitary women leader of the movement for women's emancipation in nineteenth century Maharashtra and her contribution to that cause were eclipsed by the storm over her conversion to Christianity and her consequent neglect by contemporary mainstream Hindu society. This essay attempts to assess Ramabai's role within the framework of her own social context.

FROM the vantage point of the late twentieth century, the movement for women's emancipation in nineteenth century Maharashtra (as elsewhere in India) appears highly unusual in that it was orchestrated almost entirely by men. The distinction of Pandita Ramabai Saraswati (1858-1922) lies as much in her status as a solitary woman leader of the women's cause whose equal in stature is yet to emerge in Maharashtra,[1] as in her actual contribution to that cause. This contribution, however, has long been eclipsed by the storm over her conversion to Christianity and her consequent neglect by contemporary mainstream Hindu society which was acutely vulnerable to assaults on its religious identity. Now, after the lapse of almost a century, it should be possible to assess her role with fresh- and secular-eyes. This essay attempts to do so within the framework of Pandita Ramabai's own social context, rooted in patriarchal institutions and ideology, encompassing the condition of the contemporary high-caste women, women's issues identified as in need of reform, and the avowed or assumed goal of women's emancipation—whether temporary amelioration or ultimate equality.

I
Contemporary High-Caste Maharashtrian Women

The arena for Ramabai's activities was the traditional Maharashtrian society which had, by and large, succeeded in perpetuating its social institutions in spite of the first stirrings of change in the wake of British colonial conquest. The upper castes[2] mainly Brahmins, who wielded socio-cultural hegemony over this society and preserved orthodoxy, were both leaders and subjects of the newly-initiated social awakening and reform. It was the women of these castes, whose lives were subject to the most severe constraints, who formed the focus of Ramabai's, and other reformers', activities.

Patriarchy and the Family

The position of the nineteenth century high-caste women needs to be understood within the context of the patriarchal social system. The elements of patriarchy in Indian society a century ago were, as they are today, derived from the ancient sacred texts and hallowed by tradition and custom. The Brahmanical texts emphasised the supremacy of men, and the procreation of male descendants as the most important goal in life, assigning to women a passive role as "a vehicle for the production of sons". This was buttressed by the ideology that the 'seed' had primacy and woman was mere soil' [Dube 1986: 22-44] Women were not only passive but inferior, and needed to be strictly disciplined in order to curb their inherently 'evil' and 'weak' character. According to Manu, the law-giver, a woman must never be independent: in childhood she must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, and in old age, after the death of her husband, to her son. This was necessary because at the time of her creation, the Creator gave her a love of her bed, her seat, and of ornament, and endowed her with impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice, and bad conduct.

Marriage was central to a woman's life as the only sacrament (*sanskara*) that she was entitled to, while men (of the three upper *varnas*) were entitled to many. A woman could acquire spiritual merit only through marriage, and a grown-up woman who died without this sacrament was believed to turn into an evil spirit. Through marriage, a man acquired property rights over his wife: in fact, a man had unlimited property rights concerning his land, houses, cattle, movable property, sons, wives, and slaves. The woman had few property rights: as a daughter she could not inherit ancestral property which had to remain with the family; as a wife she was theoretically the co-owner of her husband's property but in reality could not dispose of it or even of her *stridhana* (ornaments and clothes given by her parents at her marriage) as she pleased. At the same time, she was excluded from the economic process as a whole. Thus the men monopolised economic activity and inherited patrimony jointly with their brothers, leaving out women from the inheritance for fear of fragmentation.

This general view of women as chattel and sex objects (with uncontrollable sexuality of their own) led to their seclusion to the home and exclusion from public life. Only thus could a woman's purity, and that of her descendants, be preserved, and only thus could upper caste women be protected from contact with the lower castes.

As the patriarchal ideology still dominates Indian society today, the woman's life continues to be, by and large, confined to the family. Age and gender defined the hierarchy of the joint family and the structure of authority within it. The rights and duties of individuals and their relationship to each other were determined by the limits prescribed by the joint family authority, particularly that of the male head. Caste and religion took care to sacralise this. "The hierarchical structure of authority in the patriarchal joint family, which is based on the principle of superiority of the male members over the younger and female ones, is the most important instrument of social control". Here the rights and duties of individuals, and their relationships with one another, are "defined within the limits delineated by the family authority, and the male head of the family, legitimised and sacralised by caste and religion".

The normative pattern of role relationships within the patriarchal joint family, as far as the woman is concerned, is influenced by the twin factors of authority and emotions. Within the family of orientation, the mother-daughter relationship is not formal but not very warm; it is coloured by the mother's duty to train her young daughter to be a good dauther-in-law after marriage, a task in which her own reputation is at stake The mother-son bond is very strong and tinged with possessiveness, since the woman's only access to a position of authority is through her son. The wife's relationship with her husband is based on the ideal of "husband-worship' and sacrifice. The daughter's relationship with her father, and the daughter-in-law's with her father-in-law, is that of formal respect and distance, the more so in the latter case. The mother-in-law dominates absolutely over the daughter-in-law who is potentially the future usurper of her own authority.

The essence of a patriarchal and patrilocal system, thus, is that the men are 'insiders' and the women 'outsiders'. A man's loyalty is to other men in his joint family, a woman's loyalty is to her husband alone. Underpinning the system is the patriarchal ideology which sees the woman as an instrument of sex and procreation (preferably of males) and as her husband's property. These two elements of the ideology were translated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Maharashtra into the institutions of child marriage (combined with early consummation), and enforced widowhood (the woman's existence being justified only in terms of her usefulness to her husband), as well as the woman's role as a mere appendage to her husband and therefore undeserving of education or other facilities.

Contemporary Nineteenth Century Accounts

This general pattern is amply substantiated by contemporary nineteenth century writings of the autobiographical and biographical genres[3] which paint a vivid picture of the status of Brahmin women. These writings include the biography of Anandibai Joshi (1865-1887), the first Maharashtrian lady doctor and one who received her medical degree in the USA; which was written in 1912 by Kashibai Kanitkar (1861-1948) who was herself one of the few educated women of the times and the first Marathi wóman novelist. Several autobiographies of the age are available. Ramabai Ranade (1862-1924), wife of justice Mahadeo Govind Ranade (1842-1901) who was also one of the prominent social reformers, wrote her reminiscences in 1910. 'Maharshi' Dhondo Keshav Karve (1858-1962) who opened the women's educational society at Hingne near Pune wrote his autobiography in 1928; his second wife Anandibai Karve (1866-1950) who had been a child widow and a pupil at Pandita Ramabai's widows' home wrote hers in 1944; and her sister Parvatibai Athavale (1870-1955), also a widow and an able assistant at Karve's institution at Hingne, wrote hers in 1928. The memoirs of Laxmibai Tilak (1868-1936), wife of Rev. Narayan Vaman Tilak (1861-1919) known as "the Christian poet of Maharashtra"[4] were first published in 1934-35. In addition to being contemporaries in the second half of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, all these persons belonged to the Chitpavan Brahmin sub-caste and shared a homogeneous culture, but represented an economic cross-section.[5]

These writings are of interest on two counts: as the setting for Ramabai's activities, and as a back-drop against which her own life and personality stand out in contrast.

An upper caste woman's life in nineteenth century Maharashtra was lived out within the confines of the extended family.[6] The extended or joint family, patriarchal in nature, was hierarchically arranged around the core formed by the patriarch and his wife, all their married sons with their families, and all the unmarried sons and daughters. To this core were attached a number of relatives, such as brothers, cousins, widowed and deserted daughters, and others enjoying the family's hospitality or patronage, permanently or temporarily.[7] Each of these persons had an allotted rank within the hierarchy, based on age, sex, degree of relationship, marital and parental status, with its prescribed set of rights and duties. The patriarch, or one of the senior men in the household, shouldered the responsibility of all these dependants. Thus M G Ranade's father had the financial responsibility (which included the expenses for the weddings, other ceremonies, and sons' education) for the families of his three brothers and also male cousins, and had consequently incurred a large debt [R Ranade 1910:43].

The general code of conduct stipulated respect for elders and obedience to their (especially parents') wishes,[8] and the women's total subservience to men. The generation and gender gap was conspicuous in these households, as was the lack of open demonstration of affection. It was considered disrespectful to speak in front of one's elders and for women to appear before, or speak to, men in front of others. Ramabai Ranade mentions that in her parental family, married daughters who were visiting, or girls over the age of eight, were not to show themselves before their father in the front area of the house. He himself did not speak even to the younger children (male or female) in front of his own mother, as long as she was alive [R Ranade 1910:35-36]. Similarly, N V Tilak recalls that "it was thought to be beneath the dignity of a man that he should show himslef to be attached to his wife or children" [cited in L Tilak 1973, Appendices: 54*].[9]

Men and women lived their lives in separate spheres and spent their daytime in separate parts of the house, the outer rooms (and in large houses the upper floor) being reserved for the use of men, and the inner rooms and the kitchen for women. Thus, a woman lived most of her life surrounded by the other women of the household, so that the pressure from the older women to conform to their wishes was very strong. This was a significant consideration in cases where the husband's wishes went contrary to the family women's, the general argument being that: "we have to spend all our time with the women. How much contact do we have with the men?" [R Ranade 1910: 51*].

The ideal for a woman's behaviour was never to appear in front of a men, never to talk to them, and when required to sit beside her husband in public at religious ceremonies, never to lift up her head [R Ranade 1910:113].[10] Very few family or social functions enjoyed the joint participation of men and women. The first ever public mixed gathering experienced by Nasik city occurred in the late 1870s, on the occasion of the prize distribution ceremony at the Girls' School [R Ranade 1910:76-77]. In the 1880s Pandita Ramabai made the radical stipulation that the meetings of her Arya Mahila Samaj at Pune could be attended by men only if accompanied by the womenfolk of their families [Kanitkar in Umakant 1925:4]. Gopalrao Joshi's evening walks with his wife Anandibai in Alibag in the Konkan in the 1870s thoroughly scandalised the local population which retaliated with all kinds of harassment [Kanitkar 1912:28].

The lives of men and women were not only 'separate' but also 'unequal'. The wife's duty was to serve her husband with devotion, to look after his creature comforts, and generally subordinate her own interests to, or rather identify them totally with, his. Ramabai Ranade recalls that her mother was convinced that the husband was a woman's god and her *guru*, and had formally become her husband's religious disciple [R Ranade 1910:24]. All women internalised this spirit of subservience, but individual responses, beyond the call of practical duty, varied from a selective or ostensible obedience of the husband's orders and wishes, to the total determination to be guided by his wishes in all things [R Ranade 1910:51,146].

A woman's life revolved around the concept of *saubhagya* or marital blessedness. In effect, a woman's life was her life after marriage, which was mandated to take place before puberty. Girls were married in the cradle or at any time during their childhood, the limit being eight to ten years, the groom being about ten years older. Parents who kept a daughter unmarried until the 'late' age of eleven became targets of severe social censure [Athavale 1928:4]. Marriages were usually arranged by friends or relatives of the families concerned, and the groom's family would personally or through a proxy 'see' and approve the girl. The couple usually saw each other for the first time during the wedding ceremony itself. The girl's parents usually impressed upon her that the key to a happy marriage was to adapt to the in-laws' wishes and to endure everything without complaint; for, not to do so would ruin her own life and descredit her parents [R Ranade 1910:53].

Marriages were consummated soon after the bride's first menstruation (which was an occasion for celebration), and the first pregnancies often occurred early. Anandibai Joshi was thirteen or younger at her first delivery [Kanitkar, 1912:28-29]; and Parvatibai Athavale was fifteen and describes the experience as very painful due to her young age [Athavale 1928:6]: both the infants died almost immediately after birth. From that early age a woman's adult life was spent in childbearing, although many of the children succumbed to a variety of illnesses. Ramabai Ranade was one of the seven surviving children out of the twenty born to her parents [R Ranade 1910:22-23]. Anandibai Karve and her six siblings were the only survivors of their parents' eleven children; her first mother-in-law bore twenty children of whom only five survived childhood [A Karve 1944:1-2,12].

The birth of a son occasioned jubilation, the birth of a daughter was at best a disappointment and at worst a calamity: "In our country the birth of a daughter makes the parents very unhappy... A daughter is greatly disliked. Her arrival makes nobody happy. Nobody looks upon her favourably. ...The general belief is that parents receive happiness from a son, not from a daughter ... The reason for all this is our faulty marriage system" which involves great difficulty in finding a husband for a marriageable girl, payment of large sums of money, pandering to the girl's in-laws, and, in case the girl does not conduct herself suitably in her husband's house, accepting all the blame [Kanitkar 1912:9-10*]. But even daughters

were preferable to being childless which constituted grounds for desertion.

Widowhood, or the loss of *saubhagya* was a dreaded calamity. The high rates of mortality led to widowhood at all ages. Child widows were the most miserable, while older widows with sons suffered relatively less. Widowhood was directly linked to the past sins of the woman, and made her inauspicious to the sight. She had to hide herself from others, subsist on only one simple meal (without *ghee* and spices) a day, sleep without proper bedding, and wear drab clothes of a stipulated colour (usually a dull maroon), all ornaments being strictly forbidden. The most dreaded offshoot of widowhood was the disfigurement through shaving off the widow's hair and the requirement to keep the head clean-shaven throughout her life: it was required that the widow's bangles and hair should go along with the dead husband's body [Athavale 1928: 7]. This custom was sanctioned by the belief that the widow's long hair caused her dead husband to descend into hell [A Karve 1944: 16]. In addition to being a mental torture, it caused a practical hardship, since the local barber (who alone shaved both men and women) was often unwilling to oblige elderly widows whose inauspicious appearance was unmitigated by the attractions of youth [Athavale 1928: 29-33]. The dress and hair restrictions were the most severely imposed: as late as in 1912 a widow in Pune who grew her hair and changed her dress to simple white traditional-style saris created a scandal and aroused much speculation as to the ulterior motive (immediately suspected to be remarriage) for this "change of dress" (*veshantar*) [Athavale 1928:33].

Marriage was a life-time commitment for a woman, but not for a man. Bigamy was sanctioned by scriptures and by tradition, and the remarriage of widowers, at any age at all, was common. [11] Since the bride had to be pre-pubertal in all cases, the age disparity between the couple could be enormous, and the generation gap was considerably distorted. For example, M G Ranade's first marriage, at the age of thirteen, took place at about the same time as his father's second marriage (his first wife having just died during her eighth delivery), both brides being about the same age. When M G Ranade married a second time at the age of thirty-one, his eleven year old bride Ramabai was the same age as his two step brothers [R Ranade 1910:13, 49]. The physical results of this age disparity were discussed by the social leaders of the time,[12] but rarely the psychological repercussions for both the parties concerned, when the widower was old enough to have children and even grandchildren older than his new bride.

Physical violence within the home, that is, against women and children, was routine. Corporal punishment was commonly meted out to boys for failure in studies or misconduct. In the case of girls it was an accepted method of inculcating discipline so essential to survival in the households of their husbands. Anandibai Joshi has recounted how her mother often used the whip on her, followed by stones, sticks, and live charcoal, which could easily have maimed her for life [Kanitkar 1912:88]. N V Tilak often beat his wife, and was, on one occasion, overcome with grief at the sight of her swollen back [L Tilak 1973, I:143]. His father's violence ultimately led to his mother's death [L Tilak 1973, I:23-25].

All women, including widows, were vulnerable to sexual assaults from men within the family or from family friends; and if the woman concerned could not extricate herself quietly and discreetly, her reputation was in shreds [A Karve 1944:63-69]. There were also temptations of the flesh for widows. It was not uncommon for such incidents to result in illicit pregnancies and permanent stigma; the only way out in such cases was suicide, or infanticide and refuge in a temple [D K Karve 1928: 150-52].

Hard work was required of most women, irrespective of socio-economic status. In a prosperous urban household, Ramabai Ranade was kept busy, especially as a young daughter-in-law, with various household tasks such as sweeping the floor, cooking, serving food (which was physically demanding since the diners sat on the floor); and with looking after her husband which included seving him late afternoon refreshments, helping him to dress, massaging his head and feet with *ghee* every night to induce sleep, and tending him when he was sick [R Ranade 1910]. In relatively poor rural households, women had to not only cook, clean, wash and stitch clothes, but also to clean and pound grain, tend and milk cattle, supervise farm work, and weed vegetable plots [A Karve 1944:13-14, 18].

Education of the modern type was a rarity for both boys and girls, since western-style schools were limited in number and confined to the larger cities. But Brahmin boys were required to be literate and to get a Sanskrit education. Girls were often kept illiterate because of the belief that literacy caused widowhood. The only education required of a woman was the ability to manage household tasks: "As soon as we young girls were able to make preparations for the daily ritual, pound rice, clean up after meals, bathe and feed infants, we were considered to have completed our education. Our Matriculation Examination, in those days, was to be able to cook a meal for two. This examination I had passed at the age of eleven" [Athavale 1928:1-2*]. Formal education was suspected to lead to immorality in women by encouraging them to write letters to men outside family, and even to run away with them [Kanitkar 1912:25]. Even if the husband wished to educate his wife, it was considered to be the wife's duty to resist out of respect for the elder women of the family; and learning English was viewed as the height of offensive behaviour [R Ranade 1910:51-52].

The subordination of women was also emphasised in their mode of dress. Certain items, such as shoes and umbrellas, were strictly reserved for the use of men. Both Anandibai Joshi and Anandibai Karve (then Godubai Natu) have recounted the shocked reaction of the people of Girgaum in Bombay to their walking along the streets wearing shoes and carrying umbrellas, in respectively 1879 and 1889. In the former case this reaction was expressed in derogatory comments and gestures as well as stone-throwing [Kanitkar 1912:36-37, 100-1; A Karve 1944:19].

Women's Self-Perceptions

Contemporary women's writings, though limited in number, abound in experiences of hardship and injustice, though expressed with a matter-of-fact acquiescence. Only rarely are voices raised, either in defence or attack of the prevalent system.

The best-known defence of a woman's subservience to her husband, sublimated into the philosophy of dedication, comes from Ramabai Ranade: "A woman's true commitment is to abstain from causing hurt to her husband ever, in any way. This should be her desire unto death, and her policy in all things great and small. This is a woman's true marital blessedness [*saubhagya*] and her sacred commitment" [R Ranade 1910:303 *]. In her own case, this total identification with her husband's interests, and her definition of her own identity in terms of his life, continued even after his death. Characteristically, she interpreted any recognition of her own worth as a case of reflected glory, and in a public address as the chairperson of the first Ladies' Conference in 1904, likened herself to *nirmalya*, a floral offering to a deity which has gone stale but has derived value from contact with the idol [cited in Umakant 1925:97-98].

Other women, less happy in their marriage, were nonetheless committed to the ideal of the sacredness of the marriage bond, and of venerating the husband, as clearly seen in the case of Anandibai Joshi. In an eloquent letter to her husband in 1884, she has reviewed his rough treatment of her, such as flinging broken pieces of wood at her when she was ten, throwing books and chairs at her and threatening to leave her when she was twelve, and inflicting other (unnamed) varieties of punishment on her when she was fourteen. But even while admitting the severity of this treatment in view of her tender age and undeveloped state, she remained, at the age of twenty, firm in her devotion to him and dreaded the thought of "hurting your dear heart with these unpleasant memories and causing a rift in our affection" [cited in Kanitkar 1912:188-89*]. Basically, Anandibai Joshi shared Ramabai Ranade's faith in the existing institutional framework of society, or at least defended it publicly, whatever her private experience. Thus, writing to a close friend in 1880, she admitted that her own indifferent health, as that of many well-to-do Indian women, was

probably due to the system of early marriages [Kanitkar 1912:56]; but later in the US she staunchly defended the custom of child marriage in a public address in 1884, to the considerable surprise and disappointment of the audience of American women [Bodley, 1981:ii].

Not all women, however, were willing to defend the system. The opposite stance was adopted by Rakhmabai (later known as Dr Rakhmabai, also the defendant in a divorce case cited below).[13] She vented her grievance in a letter to *The Times of India* in 1885 under the pseudonym of 'A Hindu Lady'. Bitter about the "wicked and... inhuman treatment to which a young daughter-in-law is subjected in the house of her mother-in-law", she detailed the loss of her mental and physical freedom, deliberate oppression, and hard work along with servants ("I don't say like the servants, for they have the option of refusing to work which she has not"). "We [Hindu Women] are treated as worse than beasts. We are regarded as playthings—objects of enjoyment to be unceremoniously thrown away when the temporary use is over. Our law-givers (i e, the writers of shastras) being men have painted themselves ... noble and pure, and have laid every conceivable sin and impurity at our door. If these worthies are to be trusted, we are a set of unclean animals, created by god for the special service and gratification of man who by right divine can treat or maltreat us at his sweet will. Reduced to this state of degradation by the dictum of the shastras, looked down upon for ages by men, we have naturally come to look down upon ourselves. Our condition, therefore, cannot ... improve, unless the practice of early marriages is abolished and higher female education is largely disseminated" [cited in Varde 1982: 191-93].

By far the most militant stance was adopted by Tarabai Shinde[14] in her booklet on the comparison of men and women written in 1882 with the objective of demonstrating that the faults and vices repeatedly attributed to women were, in fact, found on a much larger scale among men. These included witchcraft, suspiciousness, insolence, thoughtlessness, treachery, etc. In this context she also commented on the rules governing women's conduct:

> The prohibition of widow-remarriage had spread like a big epidemic in many places and among many castes. How countless women have suffered and are suffering the unbearable sorrow of widowhood, and what havoc this has caused and is still causing, is beyond imagination. Because the woman's way of life (*dharma*) cannot be preserved merely through self-control in the midst of human society. At least in thought and perception they incur blame. What does it help to shave off their heads and wipe off the *kumkum* mark from their foreheads in order to deprive them of *saubhagya*? Their minds and hearts, and good and bad thoughts, are still with them. ... What is the woman's *dharma*? Eternally to obey her husband's orders, to behave according to his pleasure; and even if he kicks, curses, keeps concubines, drinks, gambles, and, going bankrupt and bawling, steals, kills, betrays, tattles, robs treasures and takes bribes—on his returning home, she has to ...worship him like a god, with a smiling face, and be alert in his service: this is the woman's *dharma* [Shinde 1975:1*].

However, after lashing out at men for their un-restrained behaviour and oppression of women, she concludes: "But it is not implied that women should have unbounded freedom according to their hearts' desires. Although they are uneducated, ignorant, and powerless, they should, by the strength of their firm will, remain always well-behaved, pure as fire, and unblemished internally and externally, and shame men into hanging down their heads". By their good behaviour women should do credit to both their families, honour their husbands, earn the love of all, and surrounded by children, enjoy the blessing of *saubhagya* [Shinde 1975:37*]. The militant protest against injustices to women ends in a reaffirmation of the patriarchal ideal.

II

Biographical Sketch of Pandita Ramabai

Only a broad outline of Pandita Ramabai's life is given below, based on autobiographical material: *A Testimony*, and *Recollections* (reproduced in Adhav 1979); and biographical writings: Adhav 1979, Macnicol 1926, Sathe 1975, Sengupta 1970, D N Tilak 1960.

The influences which were strongest in shaping Ramabai's personality reached back to the early years of the nineteenth century when her father Anant Shastri Dongre, a Chitpavan Brahmin from Karnataka, was a pupil at Pune. During his visits with his teacher to the Peshwa's palace, he was deeply impressed by the Peshwa's wife reciting Sanskrit verses, and vowed to teach his own wife the sacred language.

His conservative family and uninterested wife foiled his attempts. After his wife's death, while on a solitary pilgrimage, he acquired a second wife in a somewhat unusual manner. At the holy town of Paithan he became acquainted with a Brahmin, also on a pilgrimage with his family. So greatly impressed was this Brahmin with the forty-four year old Anant Shastri, that he immediatley offered him his nine year old daughter in marriage, and, on conclusion of the ceremony, continued on his way. Pandita Ramabai herself was to comment in later years on the cavalier attitude of the parties concerned [*High-Caste Hindu Woman: 20*].

With his second wife Laxmibai, Anant Shastri settled down in the forest of Gangamul in Karnataka to a simple life, having earlier enjoyed state patronage at Mysore. But even here orthodoxy followed him, and he had to defend himself for teaching Sanskrit to his wife, which he did with the aid of the sacred texts, to an assembly of learned shastris. He then spent a few peaceful years running a residential school and managing rice fields and orchards. Of the six children born to the couple, three survived, Ramabai being the youngest. All the children were educated in the Sanskrit texts.

From Ramabai's infancy, the family started its extended pilgrimage all over the Indian subcontinent, eking out a meagre living by reciting the *puranas*, until the almost simultaneous deaths of Anant Shastri, Laxmibai, and their eldest daughter in 1876. Ramabai and her brother Srinivas then continued on their own the same life of poverty, hardship, and ritual observances for another two years, until they reached Calcutta in 1878.

This was a landmark in Ramabai's life because she was immediately hailed as a learned woman, and honoured with the titles of 'Pandita' and 'Saraswati'. Contact with the Brahmo Samaj leaders and other eminent persons inspired her to give public lectures on the emancipation of women, drawing her arguments from the ancient Sanskrit texts. Personal tragedy, however, followed her even here. On the sudden death of her brother she married his friend (and her persevering suitor) Bipin Behari Das Medhavi, a Bengali lawyer (described by her as belonging to a shudra caste). After two years he also died suddenly, leaving her all alone, at the age of twenty-two, with an infant daughter.

However, she was not without well-wishers, and on a special invitation from Maharashtra she went to Pune. Friendship with leading personalities, such as Justice Ranade and his wife Ramabai, led to collaboration in social activities, and she established the Arya Mahila Samaj on the foundations of an earlier women's group. The Samaj, aimed at the general uplift of women, took root, and branches were also set up in other major towns of Maharashtra. Ramabai also collaborated closely with the leaders of the Prarthana Samaj, the theistic religious movement modelled on the Brahmo Samaj of Bengal.

About this time, Ramabai was invited to testify before the Hunter Commission on Education, and pleaded for women's educational programme, and especially for the need for training women doctors since they alone could treat women patients in the segregated society of India.

Inspired to study medicine herself, Ramabai planned to travel to England, and in preparation, took English lessons and established contact with the Sisters of the Community of St Mary the Virgin. The Sisters' convent at Wantage in England was to provide accommodation for Ramabai, where she would earn her living by teaching Marathi to the Sisters scheduled to be sent to Maharashtra, and she raised passage money by writing *Stree Dharma Neeti*, a guide book for women on general conduct.

In England, Ramabai's planned medical studies were thwarted by the discovery of her increasing deafness. She enrolled, instead,

at the Cheltenham Women's College to study the natural sciences, mathematics, and English, as a teacher-student giving Sanskrit lessons in return. The studies were financed by the Wantage Sisters.

Soon after her arrival in England, Ramabai had embraced Christianity, together with her two year old daughter Manorama, contrary to all her earlier assurances. The reasons for conversion, as she later explained, included the more convincing truths expounded by Christianity; its message of love and forgiveness; its egalitarian treatment of all people, in contrast to the inferiority assigned by Hinduism to women and shudras (to the extent of denying them salvation); and the Christian orientation towards rehabilitation, as in the case of 'fallen' women, again in contrast to Hinduism which advocated dire punishment.[15]

After four years of studies in England, Ramabai went to the USA to attend the graduation of Anandibai Joshi, a distant relative. For the next two years Ramabai travelled from coast to coast in that country, publicising her plan to open a home for high-caste Hindu widows in India. The campaign resulted in the creation of the Ramabai Association of Boston which pledged financial support for ten years to such an institution, provided several kindergarten schools and vocational training centres for women, and started preparing text-books for her own proposed school. The cost of the illustration for these books was paid for from the sale proceeds of her book *United Stateschi Lokasthiti ani Pravasa-Vritta* (The People of the United States).

On returning to India Ramabai, reunited with Manorama who had arrived from England, settled down in Bombay where the widows' home 'Sharada Sadan' was opened at Chowpatty. All the leading social reformers were associated with the Home, with Justice Ranade and Sir Ramachandra Bhandarkar among the trustees. In 1891 the Home was shifted to Pune for reasons of economy and in order to have direct access to the orthodox Brahmin community. It was here that the first widow to enter the Home, Godubai Natu, was married to D K Karve, with Ramabai playing the surrogate mother, although she never attempted to promote widow remarriage.

The secularism of the Sadan was suspected by critics from the beginning, and in 1891 a storm broke out over allegations of proselytisation led by newspapers, such as the *Kesari*.. The board of trustees resigned, and most guardians withdrew their girls from the Sadan. The Ramabai Association sent investigators to assess the matter and found the charges to be unfounded. The breach with the Hindu social reformers, however, was not healed.

On the heels of all this, Ramabai became actively engaged in helping famine victims in the Central provinces and Gujarat. Hundreds of them were accommodated at Kedgaon where Ramabai opened a new and Christian institution, 'Mukti Sadan' in 1896 and where Sharada Sadan was also shifted. The neutral religious policy was given up after the first ten years, and the Kedgaon establishment became openly Christian, with a church, regular missionary activity, and also practices such as the Holy Ghost revivals.

About this time, Ramabai also travelled to North India on a rescue mission. Disguised as a pilgrim, she visited Brindaban and other holy places where hundreds of homeless widows were driven to take shelter in temples and were exploited by priests. She witnessed great misery, but was able to rescue very few widows.

With Ramabai's shift to Kedgaon, and with the greater emphasis on lower caste famine victims rather than upper caste widows, her activities became peripheral to Maharashtrian society. Here she spent the rest of her life in relative isolation, though in incessant activity, setting up educational classes and vocational training (which included teaching, nursing, tailoring, embroidery, weaving of cloth and carpets, operating a printing press, gardening, etc) for the inmates, making a new Marathi translation of the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek, and tending fields and orchards. In 1919 she was awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal, in 1921 Manorama died, and the following year Ramabai herself passed away.

Views on the Condition of Indian Women

Scattered through her writings are found Ramabai's descriptions of the low status of women in both the philosophy and the practice of Hinduism, and her insistence on the need for women's education as a means of reinstating them to their proper position. These are reproduced here in her own words.

In her book *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* written in 1887, Ramabai reviewed the treatment given to Hindu women throughout their life.

In childhood a girl is made conscious of her inferior status *vis-a-vis* her brothers, and also feels despised. "Although it is necessary for the continuance of the race that some girls should be born into the world, it is desirable that their number by no means should exceed that of the boys." "Subjected to . . . humiliation, most girls become sullen, morbid and dull" (pp 8,11).

The custom of child marriage puts an early stop to childhood, "It is not easy to determine when the childhood of a Hindu girl ends and the married life begins". "She [the child bride] does not enter her husband's house to be the head of a new home, but rather enters the house of the father-in-law to become the lowest of its members, and to occupy the humblest position in the family. Breaking the young wife's spirit is an essential part of the discipline of the new abode". "[T]he marriage is concluded without the consent of either party, and after it the bride is not allowed to speak or be acquainted with the husband until after the second [consummation] ceremony, and even then the young couple must never betray any sign of their mutual attachment before a third party. Under such circumstances they seldom meet and talk; it may therefore be easily understood that being cut off from the chief means of forming attachment, the young couple are almost strangers, and in many cases do not like their relationship; and if in the midst of all this, the mother-in-law begins to encourage the young man to torment his wife in various ways, it is not strange that a feeling akin to hatred takes root between them." "In spite, however, of all these drawbacks, there is in India many a happy and loving couple that would be an honour to any nation. Where the conjugal relation is brightened by mutual love, the happy wife has nothing to complain of except the absence of freedom of thought and action; but since wives have never known from the beginning what freedom is, they are generally well content to remain in bondage; there is, however, no such thing as the family having pleasant times together" (pp 16, 23, 24, 25).

A married woman has a dependent and subservient place within the family, as stipulated by religion. "In olden times these [Hindu] laws were enforced by the community; a husband had absolute power over his wife; she could do nothing but submit to his will without uttering a word of protest. Now, under the so-called Christian British rule, the woman is in no better condition than of old. True, the husband cannot as in the golden age, take her wherever she may be found, and drag her to his house, but his absolute power over her person has not suffered in the least. He is now bound to bring a suit against her in the courts of justice to claim his 'marital property'. if she be unwilling to submit to him any other means" (pp 32-33).

Widowhood virtually ends a woman's livable life, being "[T]he worst and the most dreaded period of a high-caste woman's life". "Throughout India, widowhood is regarded as the punishment for a horrible crime or crimes committed by the woman in her former existence upon earth" (p 36).

In *A Testimony* written and published in 1907, Ramabai describes the discrimination against women inherent in the philosophy of Hinduism:

"While reading the Dharma Shashtras I [found] . . .contradictory statements about almost everything. . . . [B]ut there were two things on which all those books, the Dharma Shashtras, the sacred epics, the Puranas and modern poets, the popular preachers of the present day and orthodox high-caste men, were agreed, that women of high and low caste, as a class were bad, very bad, worse than demons, as unholy as untruth; and that they could not get Moksha as men. The only hope of their getting this much-desired liberation from Karma and its results, that is, countless millions of births and deaths and untold suffering, was the worship of

their husbands. The husband is said to be the woman's god; there is no other god for her. This god may be the worst sinner and a great criminal; still HE IS HER GOD, and she must worship him. She can have no hope of getting admission into Svarga, the abode of the gods without his pleasure. . . . The woman is allowed to go into higher existence thus far but to attain Moksha or liberation, she must perform such great religious acts as will obtain for her the merit by which she will be reincarnated as a high caste man, in order to study Vedas and the Vedanta, and thereby get the knowledge of the true Brahma and be amalgamated in it. The extraordinary religious acts which help a woman to get into the way of getting Moksha are utter abandonment of her will to that of her husband. . . . [T]herefore no woman as woman can get liberation, that is Moksha" (pp 18-20).

Education for Women

Ramabai saw a clear causal connection between the condition of women and the state of the nation:

"Those who have done their best to keep women in a state of complete dependence and ignorance, vehemently deny that this has anything to do with the present degradation of the Hindu nation ... The doctrine of 'prenatal influence' can nowhere be more satisfactorily proved than in India. The mother's spirits being depressed, and mind as well as body weakened by the monotony and inactivity of her life, the unborn child cannot escape the evil consequences... The seclusion, complete dependence and the absolute ignorance forced upon the mothers of our nation have been gradually and fatally telling upon the mental and physical health of the men, ... After many years of careful observation and thought, I have come to the conclusion that the chief needs of high-caste Hindu women are: first, Self-Reliance; second, Education, third, Native Women Teachers" [*High-Caste Hindu Woman*: 48-51].

While giving evidence before Hunter's Education Commission at Pune in 1882, Ramabai clarified her position as "the child of a man who had to suffer a great deal on account of advocating Female Education, and who was compelled to discuss the subject, as well as to carry out his own views amidst great opposition". She therefore considered it as a duty "to the very end of my life, to maintain this cause, and to advocate the proper position of women in this land". Her suggestions on the subject included the need for female teachers of "respectable families", "correct in their conduct and methods", and also the need for female inspectresses for girls' schools, because male inspectors would intimidate the women and also magnify faults, since "in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the educated men of this country are opposed to Female Education and the proper position of women". She also made a plea for training women as medical doctors, because Indian women, being reserved, "would rather die than speak of their ailments to a man. The want of lady-doctors is, therefore, the cause of hundreds of thousands of women dying premature deaths" [cited in Bodley 1981:xiii-xiv].

This testimony, given in Marathi, was translated into English by Hunter and publicised in a speech before the parliament. It attracted the attention of the Queen-Empress and was instrumental to the founding of the National Association for Supplying Female Medical Aid to the Women of India, generally known as the Countess of Dufferin Movement, from its president, the wife of the Viceroy of India [Bodley 1981:xiv].

III

Social Reform and Women's Issues

Women's emancipation formed one of the major thrusts of social reform, and included issues such as child-marriage, the plight of widows, and education for women. These issues arose from the pivotal elements of the patriarchal system which measured the woman's usefulness only in terms of her sexual and reproductive functions and dictated her inherently subservient role. The forces of orthodoxy staunchly defended the system, while the reformers attacked it although not necessarily in a united manner. The championship of these issues by reformers, in different parts of India, was both the result and cause of British government policies of opening schools for girls as well as boys, and legislation, especially the laws to abolish the practice of *sati* (1829), to legalise remarriage of upper caste widows (1856), and to raise the minimum age at marriage for girls to thirteen and boys to seventeen (1891).

The issue of enforced widowhood was the oldest to engage attention but the hardest to solve. Already in the late-eighteenth century, one of the Peshwa's prominent *sardars*, Parshuram Bhau Patwardhan, explored the possibility of remarriage for his very young daughter who was widowed before the marriage festivities were over [M G Ranade 1889: 335-6]. Through the Peshwa's intervention, an appeal was made to Sankaracharya, but without success. However, the *Pandits* of Benares, when applied to, sent a letter of assent, in view of Patwardhan's eminence and the merits of the case. Sankaracharya then yielded, but the Pune *pandits*, before following suit, made a last attempt to prevent the outcome by prejudicing Patwardhan's wife This had the desired effect and the matter ended.

In the first few decades of British rule, the debate was resumed principally in the Marathi periodical *Darpan*. This gave rise to the publication of two booklets by unknown but obviously Brahmin authors, providing the earliest elaborate formulations of the issue [Malshe 1977]. The first booklet, dated 1837, offered three alternatives by way of reform: that pre-pubertal virgin widows should be remarried; that girls should be married only after puberty; and that girls should be betrothed in childhood but married after puberty. The author advocated the third alternative, and dismissed as narrow-minded the objection that the practice of widow remarriage would encourage women to kill the husbands they disliked and marry other men. The second booklet, dated 1841, analysed the evils attached to the ban on remarriage of Brahmin widows, namely the death-like existence of widows, adultery, abortion and infanticide, constant pain to parents, and the bad influence of adulterous widows on other women. These evils were curable by permitting remarriage. The author supported the abolition of child marriage, the remarriage of child widows and also of adult widows, and the education of women; and proposed a scheme for training adult Brahmin widows as teachers, with the support of the British government.

Many of these themes were soon echoed by the major social figures. 'Lokahitavadi' (Gopal Hari Deshmukh), writing in the mid-nineteenth century, passionately protested against the plight of widows and stressed the need for remarriage. He also advocated the postponement of marriage till maturity, allowing for free choice for both partners, and education for women to encourage them to flout unjust customs [Lokahitavadi 1977:221, 234-35]. The liberal Marathi periodicals also supported the idea of remarriage. The *Vividha Jnana Vistara,* for example, published an article listing seventeen calamities which entitled a woman to remarry (e g, widowhood in childhood, marriage to a diseased man or a criminal, etc), citing ancient Brahmanical sources [February 1876:33].

However, not all prominent persons supported such reforms or even the need for reform and even social reformers themselves were divided on many issues. 'A Symposium of Hindu Domestic Reformers and Anti-Reformers' organised in 1889 by Dayaram Gidumal (a close friend and associate of the Parsi social reformer Byramji Malabari) represented the whole spectrum of opinion on the subject of enforced widowhood. At one extreme were the expressions of sympathy for the widow by Phule who protested that a widow was "considered lower than a culprit or a mean beast", by Sakharam Arjun (the step-father of Rakhmabai) who advocated widow remarriage "as an efficient safety valve against unchastity and the horrible crime of child murder", and by M G Ranade who considered the "desperate misery" of infant widows as "a scandal and a wrong which is a disgrace to any well-regulated society" At the other extreme was the claim by V N Mandlik that "there is no enforced widowhood in India at present" but only voluntary self-abnegation because a widow can obtain "balm to a soul so wounded" only "by entering into a higher kind of life, abnegating oneself on the altar

of duty, and sacrificing *self* to a higher *self* in a manner recognised by the highest religious sanctions as well as by the sanctions of society" [in Gidumal 1889:149-50, 155-56, 161-62].

The obvious inequality between the sexes, which prohibited widows from remarrying but allowed or even enjoyed widowers to remarry, also evoked different reactions. Phule saw this as "malice towards the female sex" on the part of the selfish and wicked law-givers (i e, Shastra-writers) [in Gidumal 1889:179]. Both Phule and Lokahitavadi strongly advocated widow-remarriage as the only way to redress this injustice. 'Lokamanya' Bal Gangadhar Tilak, on the other hand, advocated a check on the remarriage of widowers instead, claiming that the reformers' cause of equality of the sexes would be far better served by encouraging celibacy in widowers than by encouraging "loose behaviour" in widows [B G Tilak 1976:259].

The issue of child marriage was also very sensitive, especially in the years immediately preceding the Age of Consent Bill of 1890. There were two separate issues involved here: raising the age at marriage, and introducing the change through legislation by a foreign government. The former was complicated by the fact that marriage involved two separate ceremonies: the wedding itself and consummation which occurred after a few years. While stressing the positive effects of early marriage in cementing the bonds of affection and facilitating adjustment between the couple, both Ranade and Bhandarkar deplored early consummation as causing distraction from studies in young men, dwarfing growth, and generating a population of weaklings. However, while Bhandarkar did not favour legislation as a means of preventing the evil, Ranade supported state action, as representing its leaders, in ensuring a gradual raising of the age at marriage and in setting a limit for legal consumption [in Gidumal 1889:13-22, 90-95].

Tilak's position was close to that of Bhandarkar: he claimed that consummation of marriage between a young and immature couple could be easily prevented in a well-managed household; the real danger for young girls was from older husbands who were remarried widowers. The wisdom and self-control necessary to prevent such incidents could not be acquired through legislation [B G Tilak 1976:234-39].

The existing provisions under the Indian Penal Code were as follows: a husband having intercourse with his wife who was under ten years old, with or without her consent, was punishable by transportation for life; if the wife was ten years old, he was not punishable at all; and any person other than the husband having intercourse with a girl who was ten years old, with her consent, was not punishable. In comparison, the English Criminal Law Amendment Act provided punishment with penal servitude for life to anyone having intercourse with a girl under thirteen years of age, with or without her consent; anyone having intercourse with a girl over thirteen and under sixteen years of age, with or without her consent, was punishable with ten years' rigorous imprisonment [Gidumal 1889:281-82].

Education for women was a problem most amenable to reform, the question generally being not whether but to what extent and in what manner to educate women. This was a safer issue than others which interfered with social institutions and aroused profound resistance. Thus, while the issue of widow remarriage, was considered to be a religious issue and was difficult to propagate; widows' education, not being a religious issue, was easier for people to accept [D K Karve 1928:221].

However, the nature and duration of education for women was much debated. Higher education, of the type offered to men, was discouraged for several reasons. The argument against teaching women medicine was based on women's allegedly weak physique and intellect, and the supposedly detrimental effect of the bodily strain of such education on them, such as 'de-sexing' and incapacity to bear children [Pandita Ramabai, *United Sateschi*...: 10-11]. The social reasons were that since women's primary functions in life was to bear and raise children and manage household tasks, formal education for them was unnecessary and wasted. The same debate had been fought and won in favour of women in the west a few decades earlier [Pandita Ramabai, *United Stateschi*...: 225-27]. In support of women's higher education, the *Vividha Jnana Vistara* cited Anandibai Joshi's example: "First and foremost, Anandibai has proved by her achievement that the charges against women as being weak, inferior in intelligence, unable to endure hardships like men, unventuresome, etc, are totally false and a mere prejudice" [January/February 1887:47*].

Opposition to higher education was voiced by Tilak, who criticised the curriculum of the Female High School on the grounds that it was identical with the curriculum for boys (and European in style) and therefore socially unsuitable. Since Indian women were married young and acquired household responsibilities at an early age, they could not spend several years in school; and professional education was wasted on them because they could never practise a profession, barring very rare exceptions like Anandibai Joshi [B G Tilak 1976:210-24]. "In view of the duties of men and women in our society, this kind of education would not particularly benefit [middle class] women, but its imposition by force would have detrimental results on society" [B G Tilak 1976: 212*]. In other words, a *status quo* was to be maintained as far as possible.

Several of these issues came to the forefront and laid bare their patriarchal underpinnings in the controversy surrounding **Rakhmabai**'s court case which traumatised the Maharashtrian society.

RAKHMABAI CASE

Central to the controversy were three issues related to the social system: the wisdom of child marriage as against the value of consent; the extent of conjugal rights and the woman's position as her husband's property; and the advisability of education to women. A subsidiary issue was the advisability of interference by the British government in the social and religious customs and laws of India which they were bound by the proclamation of 1857 to uphold.

The case that shook Maharashtra centred around young Rakhmabai of the Panchkalshi caste of Bombay which had started its career as cultivators and artisans, but which produced a few men who utilised the new education and opportunities to enter Bombay's socio-economic elite. Rakhmabai's family belonged to the latter and her husband's to the former, which aggravated the conflict. The ritual status of the caste was indeterminate but definitely below the Brahmins, and traditionally the community allowed widow-marrriage but drew the line at divorce, the issue at stake in this case. Rakhmabai was married at eleven to Dadaji Bhikaji, but continued to live with her family according to custom, and was educated by her step-father Sakharam Arjun. Dadaji gave up his studies early, and his character and life-style developed divergently from hers. After a few years he demanded that Rakhmabai should come to live with him as his wife, but she refused on the grounds of his poor economy, poor health, and immoral family environment. Instigated by friends, he sent her a lawyer's notice, and then filed a suit against her in 1884. The first judgment, delivered in 1885, was in **Rakhmabai**'s favour on the grounds that the provision for restitution of conjugal rights did not apply in this case: conjugal rights had not been established since the marriage wss never consummated. Also a woman who had been married in childhood without her consent could not be forced to live with her husband whom she found incompatible on reaching adulthood; to do so would be cruel and uncivilised. Dadaji then filed an appeal which was settled in his favour, and Rakhmabai was ordered to go to his house within a month or suffer six months' imprisonment. While the court was dragging its feet in implementing this order, Dadaji sued Rakhmabai and her family for defamation of character; the latter were found not guilty and acquitted. Finally, in 1888 Dadaji accepted the unlikelihood of reconciliation with Rakhmabai, and proposed a compromise that she should share the expenses of the trial and he, in turn, would relinquish his rights over her. This being settled, the marriage was formally ended. Dadaji later remarried, Rakhmabai never did, but left for England the following year to study medicine and practised it in India (though outside Maharashtra) all her life [Varde 1882].

As the centre of the controversy Rakhmabai was projected, on the one hand, as the champion of social reform with the support of reformers in India and well-wishers in England where the case was much publicised. On the other hand, for the general public, she became a target of intense righteous wrath, especially after she was identified as the 'Hindu Lady' who had authored letters, critical of Hindu marriage customs, to *The Times*. She was subjected to censure in newspapers and private letters, and to practical harassment (such as stone throwing) [Vardę 1982]. According to the *Kesari* "Europeans being chivalrous about women, English newspapers sympathised with Rakhmabai, and native newspapers with Dadaji" (May 4, 1886).

Rakhmabai's own bitterness and despair while the case was in progress, are reflected in her letter (dated March 18, 1887) to Pandita Ramabai: "Are we not living under the impartial British government, which boasts of giving equal justice to all, and are we not ruled by the Queen-Empress Victoria, herself a woman? ... There is no hope for women in India, whether they be under Hindu rule or British rule; some are of the opinion that my case so cruelly decided, may bring about a better condition for woman by turning public opinion in her favour, but I fear it will be otherwise. The hard-headed mothers-in-law will now be greatly strengthened, and will induce their sons, who have for some reason or other, been slow to enforce the conjugal rights to sue their wives in the British courts, since they are now fully assured that under no circumstances can the British government act adversely to the Hindu law" [cited in Pandita Ramabai, *High-Caste Hindu Woman*:34-35]. Pandita Ramabai herself commented on this with scathing criticism of the British government: "We cannot blame the English government for not defending a helpless woman; it is only fulfilling its agreement made with the male population of India ... Should England serve God by protecting a helpless woman against the powers and principalities of ancient institutions, Mammon would surely be displeased, and British profit and rule in India might be endangered thereby. Let us wish it success, no matter if that success be achieved at the sacrifice of the rights and the comfort of over one hundred million women" [*High-Caste Hindu Woman*:35].

The reformers' stand was that the institution of child marriage must be abolished because it led to dependence and helplessness on the part of women; and it would be dissolved only if a grown-up wife refused to submit to a husband to whom she had been married in childhood without her consent, or if the British government made a law to abolish child marriage [Agarkar 1984:81].

The orthodox opposition to Rakhmabai rested on several issues, pinpointed by the *Kesari*, some of which are also significant in view of the earlier discussion on the nature of patriarchy:

(1) An English judge and the English system of justice was interfering with the social and religious system of the Hindus by deciding the case in contradiction to their 'sacred texts and social customs' [September 29, 1885].

(2) Consent was not required for cementing the marriage bond among Hindus, since the wedding ceremony, with or without consummation, was eternally binding [September 29, 1885].

(3) This case would prejudice public opinion against women's education, since an educated wife was likely to embarrass her husband in court, and since a woman whose aspirations were raised by education was likely to leave her husband if he was unable to fulfil them. In this, the English laws would support her [March 23, 1886].

(4) The upper castes, including Brahmins, were subject to certain religious regulations which prohibited remarriage for women and divorce, and stipulated that a girl should be married before reaching puberty. Other (lower) castes were not bound by these rules and had more freedom. Furthermore, even in communities which allowed late marriages for women, the advice of parents or guardians was strictly necessary: "Because even after attaining majority, a woman in the first flush of youth would be unable to choose a suitable husband because of her youth, innocence, inexperience, lack of restraint born of sexual passion, or immoral conduct instigated by someone". Complete freedom in this respect would lead to dire results, and a court decision in favour of Rakhmabai was likely to bring these about [April 6, 1886, editorial*].

(5) A man had complete rights over his wife according to Hindu religious law. "If a Hindu husband sees his disobedient wife walking along the street or entering someone's house, he may drag her home or enter a stranger's house to bring her out; in neither case is he liavble to a law suit according to the Hindu religion. This behaviour is correct according to the Hindu view of a woman's rights. A man who finds his cow wandering about and puts a rope around her neck and brings her home is not liable to a law suit according to English law. The Hindu religion considers a woman to be on par with property and cattle. The only distinction is that as a human being she is entitled to food and clothing. But English law has changed all this, and that was beginning of [foreign] intervention in religion and custom" [April 13, 1886, editorial*].

(6) Compatibility in terms of education was not a requirement for a workable marriage. "Today thousands of men are happily living with their ignorant wives, but is it not surprising that a learned woman files a suit for divorce in a court of law on the grounds that her husband is not worthy of her?" [March 22, 1887, editorial by Tilak*].

(7) If the consent of both parties is to be considered essential in order to legitimise a marriage, most Hindus born of child marriages would have to be considered illegitimate [March 22, 1887, editorial by Tilak*].

(8) The reformers' claim, that the ancient Hindu texts allotted such disputes to the jurisdiction of the caste and not the king, and that the latter (in this case the British courts) therefore had no right to award a punishment more severe than that allowed by the former, is false. Ancient texts, in fact, did allow the king to judge such matters, and the punishment prescribed for a woman who left her husband and coveted another man was to be thrown to the dogs. However, matters never came to this pass, because the husband's authority over his wife and the caste authority over the husband-wife relationship, were strong enough [April 5, 1887, editorial].

Reformers and Social Pressure

The Rakhmabai case also demonstrated, once again, the force of social pressure against reform. Time and again, reformers had succumbed to social pressures and either backed down or unwillingly perpetuated the same evils which they condemned. Lokahitavadi, after publicly championing widow remarriage, refused to attend such a ceremony because his daughter's in-laws threatened to sever connections with him [Lokahitavadi 1977:41]. Justice Ranade, as a widower of thirty-two, married not a widow but a girl of eleven chosen by his father whose wishes he felt constrained to obey at the cost of his own principles [R Ranade 1910:26-33]. Justice Telang, after criticising the custom of child marriage, married off his own daughter at a young age [Phadke 1975:ix]. Active reformers were relatively few. Bhandarkar was one of the few reformers who practised what he preached, in educating all his children, allowing them to marry when they were old enough to choose partners for themselves, and consenting to the remarriage of his widowed daughter [Phadke 1975:19-20]. D K Karve, as a widower, married the widowed sister of his friend and faced harassment in Pune where he worked, and strict social excommunication in his home town of Murud in the Konkan, which lasted for about ten years [D K Karve 1928:169-73].

IV

Women, Emancipation, and Equality

While social reformers were championing women's issues, the ultimate goal of reform measures remained extremely diffuse. The proposed reforms related to women were a collection of piecemeal measures rather than an attempt at concerted action. The stress was more on 'emancipation from' than on 'attainment of'. Women were to be emancipated from evil and wicked practices such as disfigurement of widows, enforced widowhood, and early consummation of marriage. Limited education was to be given to women. Even on these issues, however, there was a considerable difference of opinion among reformers: equally suprisingly, there was considerable agreement between

the reformers and some of the anti-reformers, especially Tilak. But, by and large, the idea of encouraging women to be self-reliant and independent rational human beings was rarely propounded. What, then, was the connotation of 'emancipation'? Did it mean only amelioration of the worst injustices within the traditional patriarchal societal framework which confirmed women in their subordinate position *vis-a-vis* men, or was the ultimate equality of the sexes visualised as desirable?

A clear position on this issue was rarely taken by the protagonists of social reform themselves. But an attempt is made here to analyse the stated or implicit views of prominent social leaders on two issues: the woman's function in life, and her inherent status *vis-a-vis* the man.

'Separate and Unequal'

The patriarchal image of the ideal woman, as the ideal wife and mother, was generally accepted and propagated even by progressive social reformers.

This is best illustrated in the case of Justice M G Ranade who was associated with most of the causes connected with women's welfare and known for his liberal and progressive stand. He gave his wife Ramabai a Marathi and English education, and encouraged her participation in women's associations and in public speaking, at considerable personal distress (caused by members of his family) to himself and to her. But there is no indication that he encouraged her to think independently or develop a personality of her own. Implicit and willing obedience to his wishes, stated and unstated, was laid down as a guideline [R Ranade 1910:146]. Consequently, she considered total devotion to the husband's interests and service to him to be the justification of a woman's life. At a time when both of them were gravely ill, she wrote: "My life will be worth living only if I can be of use to himself [i e, Justice Ranade] in times of illness and if I can serve Himself" [R Ranade 1910:293*].

The view that the ultimate fulfilment of a woman's life lay in her life-long commitment to her husband's welfare was effectively expressed by Ramabai Ranade, as cited above. As valuable as the wife's role was the role of the mother. This was emphasised by her in an address on the objectives of the Seva Sadan in 1914: "Seva Sadan's chief field of activities is the female community. In this context, let us consider the rights and nature of womanhood. Ideal motherhood or service of others is women's chief right. Creating an awareness of such motherhood and presenting its sublime form before women, as also creating in them the ability to conduct themselves accordingly, is the noble aim of the Seva Sadan. In other words, if the importance of the woman's work is to be briefly described, it can be summarised in the word 'motherhood'. A mother's love is a power which God has created in women. It is very important to develop this power, or mother'slove, in the interest of societal welfare" [cited in Umakant 1925:110-11*].

Ramabai Ranade lived her own life according to these ideals, and was herself generally considered to be the personification of the ideal woman in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Maharashtra. In his foreword to her *Reminiscences*, Gopal Krishna Gokhale wrote:

> At the present time, Vahinibai [literally sister-in-law, i e, Ramabai Ranade] enjoys a high status among our women. After having spent twenty-seven years of her life as the companion and "shadow"of that saintly person, having had her natural lustre enhanced by his teachings and his great company, and having forever been engrossed in her devotion to him, she has now drawn a portrait of Raosaheb's character and life. This is an occasion of pride and satisfaction for the people of Maharashtra. Several elements in the book will make a deep impression on the reader's mind ... In western society, many couples feel a deep love for each other, but their mutual relationship is usually based on equality. That the wife, in spite of deep mutual love, devotes herself completely to the service of her husband, and considers herself blessed in doing so, is a special attribute of eastern, especially Indian, women ... It is very instructive that women like Vahinibai retain their mental attitude in spite of the new education, novel ideas, and changing circumstances, which have provided a new direction to [their] thoughts and way of life [Gokhale in R Ranade 1910:5*].

Feminine endorsement of this ideal, even from progressive quarters, was equally emphatic. Kashibai Kanitkar, for example, echoed the same sentiments:

> Raosaheb Ranade was criticised to the end for having married a young girl instead of an adult widow. He is still criticised on this count. But I am sure that he did the right thing. By marrying a bright, clever young girl like Vahinibai, he was able to mould her into a suitable companion according to his high ideals. Just as ... a sculptor shapes clay according to his wishes, so did Raosaheb shape Vahinibai by forming her mind and conduct after his own and society's wishes. For this accomplishment the female community of Maharashtra will always be grateful to him [Kanitkar in Umakant 1925:12*].

On this point there was a remarkable convergence between the views of progressive reformers and of the orthodox leaders. Tilak also emphasised that the woman was primarily the home-maker and any education given to her had necessarily to enhance her ability to do so. A woman's goal was to become the ideal housewife:

> Every educated middle class man wants his wife to be literate and well-trained in household duties, to spend her leisure hours in reading religious texts in order to improve her mind, and to help him in domestic duties. Just as a craft is of primary importance to a craftsman and training is secondary, so are household duties generally primary for women and education incidental. ... Before the age of 15-16 a woman should be well-trained in housework, and this training will never be available as much in a school as at home. The husband's home is a work-shop of female education [B G Tilak 1976:219-20*].

At the same time, however, underlying Tilak's thinking can be detected a not very flattering view of women: men are responsible for social uplift and political achievements, while women are at best a help in family life, and at worst a hindrance.

> It is true that the man and the woman are the two wheels of the chariot of family life (*sansara*), and it is also true that a good woman is often a source of help. But, for one thing, good women are rare; and for another, just as a fast one-wheeled vehicle is sometimes better than a two-wheeled cart, so is some type of work possible for a man who is single. And the progress of the nation, society and mankind depend precisely on this kind of work [B G Tilak 1976:266-67*].

Woman as Equal but Oppressed

By and large, the only time the point of equality of the sexes was made was in the context of remarriage. The inequality of treatment of widows and widowers in this regard was too glaring to be ignored.

Lokahitavadi made this point in 1848: "God created men and women as equal, and both have equal rights. Even so, men are enjoined to remarry and women forbidden to do so. What injustice!" [Lokahitavadi 1977:221*], and again in 1849: "Listen to me, and decide that women have rights as men do. ... The best thing is for women to be educated, and for men and women to marry when they are mature. And a widow may remarry if she so desires"[Lokahitavadi 1977:233*].

On the subject of remarriage also Tilak was outspoken and harsh. But, characteristically, instead of advocating remarriage for widows, he advocated restraint on the part of widowers, and a ban on their remarrying after a certain age. His censure of widowers eager to remarry, and of the treatment of women implicit in this action, is sharp:

> People seem to think that in the case of [remarriage of] men, there is a market. When a cow, buffalo, horse, dog, etc, dies or becomes incapacitated, one should buy another; similarly when a wife dies, one should acquire another—this is the common belief. A woman who has been accepted after exchanging marriage vows, who has borne half the share of domestic life, who considered it her duty to participate in her husband's joys and sorrows, and in whose company he has spent many happy years, dies in the natural course of time, or often dies prematurely due to harassment of her husband. Then, to find a second wife within ten days, and to enter matrimony again within a month or two, or probably on the thirteenth day [of her death, when the funeral ceremonies are completed], is a deed of ingratitude, cruelty and inhumanity without a parallel ... These grown-up bride-grooms who consider a wife to be a god-given instrument of sexual release and a servant slaving

in the house, are prepared, as soon as they have disposed of one [wife], to enjoy all festivities with another [B G Tilak 1976:254*].

The general tenor of Tilak's writings suggests approval of humane treatment of women, but also of keeping them to the subordinate position within the home; the idea of equality of the sexes is not broached.

An emphatic and unequivocal statement of women's inherent equality with men, and their moral superiority, was made by Phule in 1891 in his *Sarvajanika Satya Dharma Pustaka* which expounded the true way of life "for the benefit of all persons".

"Of all creatures on this earth, human beings are the most superior and are divided into women and men... Of these two, woman is superior." The reason for this superiority is her capacity to carry a child in her womb for nine months, clean and care for it, teach it to walk and talk; all of which makes it difficult to repay the mother's debt. Further, a woman protects and cherishes her brothers and sisters, and graces her home. A woman is capable of greater love than a man, because a widow endures many calamities but remains single; formerly she even burned herself along with her dead husband. But no man has ever been known to express his grief in a similar fashion at being widowed, besides, he can marry as many times as he likes. All these injustices are inflicted by greedy and venturesome men upon women because they are weak [Phule 1969:258-59*].

In 1887 Phule published a description of the marriage ceremony according to the Satya Shodhak Samaj, in which the bride and the groom directly address each other and exchange vows (reminiscent of the Christian wedding ceremony). The bride demands a promise from the groom that he would grant rights to women, and promises in turn to accept only him, forsaking all other men, and to obey him; the groom agrees to exert himself to establish women's rights, accept her forsaking all other women, and to maintain her [Phule 1969:332-33].

Agarkar was another staunch champion of equality for women. Attacking enforced widowhood, he wrote:

"If it were desirable for a person to die effortlessly for another, or to kill oneself deliberately, or to endure all possible kinds of treatment, then a man would also have ended his life or killed himself or accepted the way of life of a widower after the death of his wife!" Since the instances of a man giving up the good life, depriving himself of all enjoyment, and hiding his face from others for being inauspicious are unheard of, it is difficult to see how this kind of conduct becomes the test of a woman's goodness [Agarkar 1984:76*].

In general, Agarkar, influenced by Mill's writings on the subjection of women, saw the contemporary man-woman relationship as the master-servant relationship practised by Roman patricians towards plebeians. One way to change this was to provide co-education to boys and girls, which would have several benefits, such as the ease of controlling the boys' wild behaviour due to the softening influence of girls, the development of a universally acceptable educational system, and the growth of a natural friendship between the sexes untouched by sexual-romantic feelings. This would also lead to a new division of labour in which men would share the tasks of raising children, washing clothes, rinsing utensils, cooking, etc. The fact of giving birth to children need not chain women to household tasks. Also, as women came to understand their own welfare, they would be able to control the number of children, and men would not be able to force them in this matter. Further, all paid employment and professions would ultimately be linked with brain power and ability, and be available to men and women equally according to these criteria [Agarkar 1984:201-8]. Agarkar firmly believed in the vision of an egalitarian society of the future where "there will be freedom available to men and women to practise the profession of their choice, to acquire as much knowledge as desired, to pass the examinations and obtain the degrees of their liking, and to marry whenever they wish and to run their family life as they wish" [Agarkar 1984:198-99].

The contrast between Agarkar and Tilak becomes explicit when considered in the context of patriarchal values. Tilak, for example, did not attack the institution of child marriage, but suggested minor improvements in related customs, such as stopping the practice of celebrating and parading a girl during her first menstruation [B G Tilak 1976:19-38]; while Agarkar lashed out against early consummation of marriage which was mandated to take place within sixteen days of the first menstruation [Agarkar 1984: 408-29].

All the social reformers of whatever convictions had focused on injustice to women. Ramabai was the first to emphasise that the denial of the right to knowledge to women and opportunities for growth in enfeebling women also emasculated men and hence weakened society. This was a vision far in advance of the times. Today in the west there is concern that stereotyped gender roles reduce human potential for men as much as for women. Pandita Ramabais perspective was thus unusual and refreshing. She presented the theme that a society which oppresses women can never progress. "If anybody asks ... why the people of our unfortunate India today have become unenergetic, weak and dependent, we will give them a clear answer that the reason is the lustreless personality of the women who are reduced to animal-like ignorance, guilelessness and slavery, by the oppression of the selfish, short-sighted men of this country!" She elaborates the argument that men prevent women from acquiring knowledge at all costs, because otherwise the women would put a stop to their unrestrained behaviour and the men would lose their freedom and superior position. In order to promote their objective, the men prepared Dharmashastras which propounded that women had no right to the study of the *shastras*, they should live with their husbands like servants, the service of the husband alone entitles them to salvation, etc, and forced the women to behave accordingly. Similarly men repeatedly write and speak derogatory words describing women as cruel, treacherous, etc, and prevent them from doing anything constructive. Thus they try to attain their selfish ends, but unknowingly jeopardise their own interests, because the future generations born of these women turn out to be weak and unenergetic also, having drawn sustenance and example from incapable mothers [*Stree Dharma Neeti*:110*].

In reality, according to Pandita Ramabai, God has created men and women to be different so that they should co-operate and complement each other; and the love between husband and wife, which is a sharing of joys and sorrows and which is as one life in two bodies, is the ultimate love. This love can be achieved only if men and women can exercise free choice regarding their marriage partners at an adult age (about twenty), and if general suitability as well as mutual respect and love exist between them [*Stree Dharma Neeti*:67-71].

The Hindu woman, according to Pandita Ramabai, had been enjoined by religion "To look upon her husband as a god, to hope for salvation only through him, to be obedient to him in all things, never to covet independence, never to do anything but that which is approved by law and custom", and in order to change this state of affairs, the chief needs were education for women, leading to self-reliance [*High-Caste Hindu Women*:30,50-51].

V

Pandita Ramabai's Contribution

Pandita Ramabai's distinctiveness has to be considered in terms of what she did and what she was, that is, her efforts on behalf of women and her own life. Both can be seen as a challenge to patriarchy.

What She Did

Ramabai's motto, self-reliance for women, was in direct contradiction to the patriarchal system which insisted on women's dependence on men in all things and on their seclusion to the home. Ramabai opened, for the first time in the recent history of Maharashtra, institutions which provided shelter and food for homeless widows and other women so that they were not dependent on families which maltreated them. In addition to practical and emotional support, education, vocational training, and means of economic self-reliance were made available to them.

Ramabai also tried systematically to create an awareness among women towards self-improvement. Attempts were made to reach

traditional women audiences by a variety of means, including *purana* recitals which even traditional women were allowed to attend. These she turned into lectures on morals, general conduct, and advancement of women; and the practice was kept up even after her conversion to Christianity [*Dnyanodaya,* Vol 48, 1889: 237-38]

In encouraging the participation of women in public life also Ramabai took the intitiative. Her Arya Mahila Samaj for women was built on existing foundation laid by Ranade and others, but the scale and scope of the Samaj, with branches all over Maharashtra, was Ramabai's contribution. Here again, innovative methods were used in order to endure the participation of women, the rule being that men could attend only if accompanied by a woman of his household [Kanitkar in Umakant 1925:4]. Women speakers were also encouraged on public occasions. The opening ceremony of Sharada Sadan was presided over by Kashibai Kanitkar [*Dnyanodaya,* Vol 48, 1889:81], and at one of its annual functions Ramabai Ranade was a speaker [*Dnyanodaya,* Vol 51, 1982:262-63].

Women's participation in political life was another of Ramabai's objectives, and in this she was well in advance of her times and of contemporary leaders. At the time of the Second National Congress at Bombay in 1889, Bradlaugh had suggested to Pandita Ramabai and other leading women that women delegates should be inducted from the beginning so that women's participation would be automatically ensured when the Congress developed into India's parliament in the future. Ranade and others did not encourage women's participation, but Ramabai, through great efforts, collected seven or eight women delegates [Kanitkar in Umakant 1925:6].

What She Was

Pandita Ramabai's own life has a 'modern' late twentieth century ring about it. Educated like contemporary boys (in traditional religious texts), made self-reliant by circumstances, able to know her own mind and make her own decisions, she married late and by her own choice a man of a different linguistic community and caste. This was greatly resented by contemporary traditional women in Maharashtra who projected her as having destroyed her husband and her marriage, and contaminated the rest of society through her unorthodox behaviour [R Ranade 1910:102-3]. In addition, she lived her life on equal terms with men, never letting the fact of her being a woman prevent her from doing anything she wanted. This aura of accomplishment and the publicity which surrounded her provoked the hostility of men such as Tilak who expected women to be reticent and self-effacing [Kelkar 1923:331].

She had travelled widely all over the Indian sub-continent and abroad (mainly in England and the US, with a brief visit to Japan), which was more than most of her advanced contemporaries were able to accomplish. She participated in public life, addressed public meetings, and ran large organisations. In the midst of these activities, she also produced a prolific literary output.

The final 'modern' touch in Ramabai's life was her capacity to manage "the woman's two roles": family life and work outside the family. The outline of Ramabai's life is generally known, but the conflict between her two careers, as a social reformer and a mother, is generally not known and is therefore described here in some detail. The conflict was further aggravated by Ramabai's English and Christian connections, which added a nationalist and anti-imperialist dimension to the issue.

Ramabai had brought her daughter Manorama, as a two-year old girl, to England with her in 1883, later left her there in charge of the Wantage Sisters during most of her two-year stay in the US, and had her sent back to India in 1889 to join her. Sister Geraldine, Ramabai's spiritual godmother, and others in the foreign Christian community around her, strongly wished to raise Manorama in England, but Ramabai refused on the grounds that she did not approve the version of the Christian doctrine they taught her, and also that she wanted her daughter "to be one of us, and love our countrypeople as one of them, and not a strange or a superior being... I do not want her to be too proud to acknowledge that she is one of India's daughters" [Pandita Ramabai, *Letters*:199].

The tussle between Ramabai and the Wantage Sisters for charge of Manorama continued, fuelled by others. An American associate of Ramabai wrote to Sister Geraldine in 1890: "I cannot tell you how strongly I wish Mano could have been left under your influence... but Ramabai, with grateful appreciation of all your kindness to her, maintains that Mano is best with her own people." On the subject of Manorama's "total lack of any idea of responsibility", she added "This may be due to Ramabai's method of training or lack of training" [Pandita Ramabai, *Letters*:256]. Sister Geraldine herself was more outspoken in her criticism of Ramabai: "It used to be thought among us that Ramabai was wholly devoid of motherly intuitions... Christian surroundings and Christianity... helped these in a measure to germinate but at her best she was decidedly wanting in virtues of Christian motherhood... Ramabai had her own studies to pursue and she could not give herself to the care and education of her child, and for a time she was glad to have these duties fulfilled by others. They were fulfilled to the utmost of our power, as all who saw the little Mano testified... There is no doubt that Ramabai's conduct towards Mano was often unnatural and generally most unwise; that this was so was known to the teachers and visitors of her school who regretted the sad mismanagement of her child" [Pandita Ramabai, *Letters*:315-16].

It is sufficient to add that, according to all who knew her, Manorama grew up to be a pleasant and intelligent woman who was devoted to her mother and ably assisted her in all her work.

Women of the World

Uniting women of the western world for the cause of Indian women was another of Ramabai's accomplishments. She was probably the first social leader of Maharashtra to obtain foreign support for a domestic cause, at a time when the potential of such direct appeals was just beginning to be realised.

In connection with obtaining British support for social reform in India, Max Muller advised Byramji Malabari in 1886 to approach not the British government in India but the citizens, especially the women, of Britain for "support in the cause of Indian women: Write a short pamphlet, containing nothing but well known and well authenticated facts, and send it to the women of England. They begin to be a power, and they have one splendid quality—they are never beaten... Women, at all events, have courage, and when they see what is hideous, they do not wait for orders from home, before they say what they think" [cited in *Dnyanodaya,* Vol 45, 1886: 756].

In 1887 Pandita Ramabai had already written *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* to describe the plight of Indian women to Americans, and ended it with an impassioned appeal:

> In the name of humanity, in the name of your sacred responsibilities as workers in the cause of humanity, and, above all, in the most holy name of God, I summon you, true women and men of America, to bestow your help quickly, regardless of nation, caste or creed (p.59).

It was the financial and practical support of the Ramabai Association of America which made possible the opening of Sharada Sadan and its functioning for ten years. The

value of 'Christian' support and its repercussions were widely questioned and debated by Ramabai's critics [Kelkar, 1923:319-31], and it seems certain that without Ramabai's status as a co-religionist this support would not have been forthcoming. Nevertheless, the fact remain that it was this support which made Sharada Sadan possible and the idea of women's residential schools practicable, to be emulated by Hindus such as Karve. It was Pandita Ramabai who paved the way for women's emancipation and led to the hope of their eventual equality.

Notes

1 There were other women prominent in public life, such as Savitribai Phule who helped her husband Jyotiba Phule to run a girls' school, and Ramabai Ranade who headed Seva Sadan for women. But their involvement was based upon their husbands' support and encouragement, at least initially, and did not have the quality of leadership. This will become clear in contrast to Ramabai's life and activities.

2 The hierarchical structure of Maharashtrian society was most evident in the caste or *jati* pyramid which was topped by the Brahmin caste cluster and the Prabhus who together formed a small minority, followed by Marathas who formed about half the pupulation (including the minority who claimed Kshatriya descent and the majority who were peasants and considered to be Shudras), in turn followed by artisan and service castes equivalent in status to the lower Marathas, and, at the bottom, the 'untouchable' castes.

3 Contemporary novels are not considered here, although some of them, especially those by Hari Narayan Apte, had great social relevance and echoed the same themes.

4 This is the title of his biography by Winslow, 1923.

5 The economic disparity was at times quite startling: M G Ranade, as a judge at Nasik, was earning Rs 800 per month in 1875 [R Ranade 1910:70]; while Parvatibai Athavale's husband, a clerk in the customs office in Goa in the early 1880s, earned Rs 15 per month for nine months of the year, no salary being paid for the remaining three months [Athavale 1928: 5].

6 In the cases when a man or a couple was required to be away from the extended family because of employment in other parts, it was common for two or more couples or temporarily 'nulear' families to share a house or apartment with a common kitchen. D K Karve describes his "new type of joint family" in Bombay which consisted of himself, his wife and sister-in-law, two other couples with their siblings, and a few resident students from rural areas; this family lasted together for seven years until 1891 and contained an average of 12 to 15 persons [D K Karve 1928:102-4]. Parvatibai Athavale and her husband similarly shared a household with his friend and the friend's wife in Goa in the 1880s [Athavale 1928:6-7]. The pattern of the patriarchal joint family with specified roles was perpetuated in these households.

7 Widowed daughters either came to live with their parents or stayed with the late husband's paraents [Athavale 1928:7]. Among other persons attached to the household were students who came from villages to cities for education [R Ranade 1910:128; D K Karve 1928:104].

8 M G Ranade went to the extent of remarrying within a month after the death of his first wife, totally against his own wishes, only in order to fulfil two strong commitments: never to disobey his father's orders, and never to destroy his father's domestic happiness [R Ranade 1910:26].

9 All quotations marked with an asterisk (*) have been translated by the present author from the Marathi original.

10 A woman was supposed never to utter her husband's first name. In the autobiographies mentioned above, the authoresses have devised various ways of bypassing this restriction: Ramabai Ranade refers to her husband as 'Himself' (in 1910), Parvathibai Athavale uses the respectful plural 'our men' (in 1928), while Laxmibai Tilak (1934-35) and Anandibai Karve (1944) refer to their husbands by their surname.

11 Ramabai Ranade, Anandibai Joshi, Parvathi Athavale, and Anandibai Karve (at her first marriage) were all married to widowers.

12 Tilak blamed remarried widowers for the early consummation of marriage and suggested voluntary restraint [B G Tilak 1976:239]. Both he and Ranade suggested the age of 40 to 45 as the upper limit after which a widower should not marry a young girl [B G Tilak 1976:242-43; M G Ranade in Gidumal, 1889:95].

13 Rakhmabai was not a Brahmin but belonged to the upwardly mobile and 'brahminised' section of Panchkalshi Pathares [Varde 1982].

14 Tarabai Shinde belonged to the Maratha elite of Vidarbha, which strictly observed several Brahmin customs such as prohibition of widow remarriage.

15 A more detailed discussion of Ramabai's conversion and its effects is presented in M Kosambi, 'Pandita Ramabai and Social Reform in Maharashtra'.

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