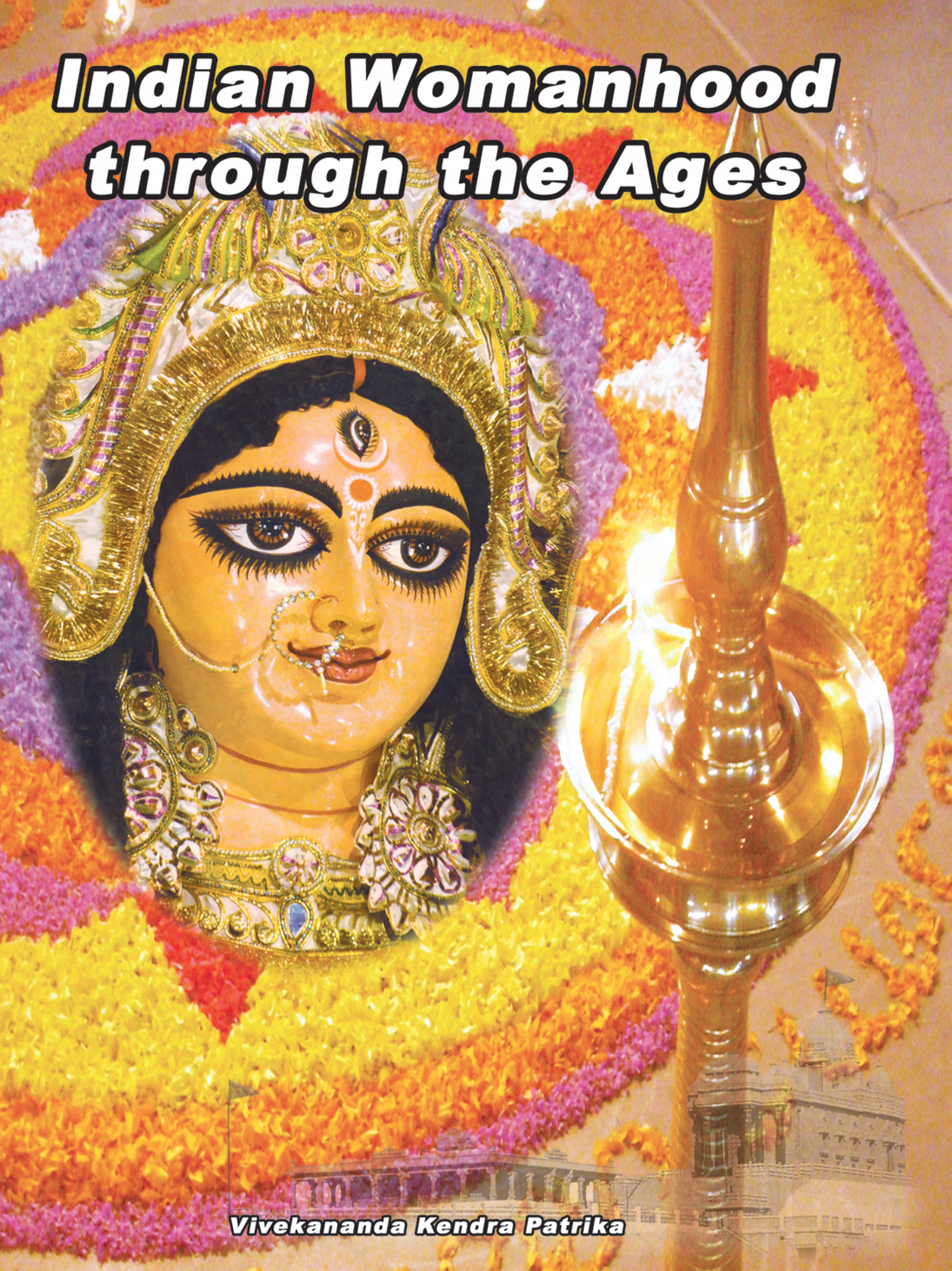


Indian Womanhood through the Ages



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INDIAN WOMANHOOD
THROUGH THE AGES

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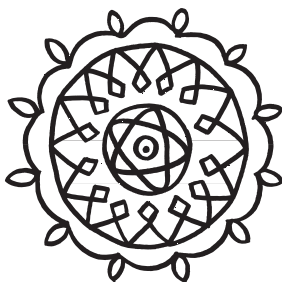
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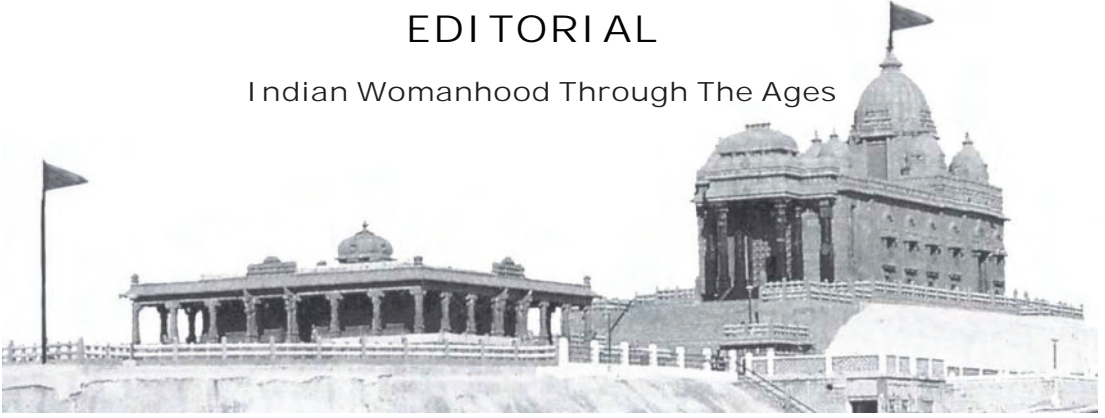
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EDITORIAL

Indian Womanhood Through The Ages



THE CONCEPTION OF WOMANHOOD EAST AND WEST

The conclusions of modern scientific research have established, among other things, the fact that many an old-world myth is an allegorical or symbolic presentation of the laws of nature which are basic to all creation. A significant case in point is that all nature is androgynous. In the inanimate sphere it has been explored through matter, force, and power down to the positive and negative elements imbedded in energy. Biologically, we have its analogue in the distinction between male and female. But the remarkable feature about this differentiation is that the component parts are not separate or disparate or mutually exclusive, but that each runs into the other interminably and inextricably. This is the androgynous property of all creation as a logical corollary of which we have arrived at that point where, theoretically, male can be transformed into female and *vice versa*, partly through natural processes and partly with the aid of surgery. Such sex-transformations are now a common place of modern biological experiments.

The earliest formulation of this scientific truth is to be found in the concluding lines of the *Purusha Sukta* hymn, held in great veneration by all inheritors of Vedic tradition. Prajapati, having created the worlds out of Himself, broods over all, partaking of both male and female, properties and yet transcending them as well. He has for his spouses *Shri* and *Lakshmi*, and shines resplendent through day and night with stars and suns surrounding him, '*Shrischate lakshmischa patnyau, ahoratre parsve, nakshatrani rupam, asvinau vyaktam.*'

An indistinct, if not confused, echo of it may be detected in the Biblical version of Creation. According to it, God first created Adam and then, finding that he lacked companionship, took out a rib from his body as he lay asleep, and fashioned out of it woman to be his companion, complement and consummation. Mankind's generation was still a far cry, and, to account for it, Adam had to disobey God, commit sin and, as punishment for it, had to be expelled from paradise. This is the myth of the *Fall of Man* from a state of pristine innocence, and it is attributed to the frailty of woman his wife Eve ! Here may be detected the

germ of the idea of the superiority of man over woman, and it has been a decisive factor in, the shaping of Western civilisation synchronously with the origins and spread of Christianity. It has crystallised a major attitude to life itself which is almost exclusive to the West, and to which may be referred the confused evolution of European culture. '*Cherchez La femme*' is still the unalterable fixation of the Western man to his counterpart, -Woman.

The primitive Christian Church assiduously fostered this attitude, and to it we owe the twin phenomena of monasticism in its most extreme and bizarre forms, as well as a detestation of woman as the *fans et origo* of all human ills. So we may say, without inaccuracy, that man not only exploited



woman for his most imperious needs but, at the same time, gave her a bad name to preserve his own dominance inviolate! What is now known as the age of chivalry' was a breakthrough from such odious obscurantism to the opposite extreme of idealising her into a goddess on earth, to act as a curb on man's predatory and libidinous instincts and impulses. What has uniformly eluded the grasp of the Western mind is the unalterable truth of their separate incompleteness. This is where our own (Hindu) concept of woman as maid, mistress and mother gives the picture in its totality a true and inspiring view of creation.

A great deal of modern political and

economic speculation is obsessed with the idea of inequality of the sexes with a reciprocal proneness for each to blame it all on the other, largely it would seem, to score a debating point here or there. Suppression, discrimination, exploitation and similar pejorative terms are handy missiles in this 'battle of the sexes' as waged in our own time. But the issues that are highlighted are, in the last analysis, peripheral and do not, indeed cannot, touch, much less change, the stubborn facts of nature. Chief of them is the obligation to motherhood which is squarely laid on the woman and woman alone. It is not difficult to show how the driving spirit underlying the Women's Lib movement is a revolt against motherhood and the

ineluctable corollary of it, namely, the rearing of a family. This is the heart of the matter, as we may infer from the fact that the word 'culture' which we bandy about so freely and unthinkingly, stems from the root idea of 'kula' which is the bed-rock of home and family. It is not an accident that wherever you find this militant movement gaining ground, there you invariably find the slow decay or actual break-up of the family and the consequent dissolution of a whole structure of civilised living. The ancient Hebrew moralists stressed again and again how 'Righteousness alone exalteth nations'. To it we have to add the logical conclusion that such righteousness can flourish only in a well-

regulated family. That is an imperfectly grasped truth underlying the continuing vitality and stability of the Hindu ethos. Taking this for our clue, we may trace how it has operated in our own social, philosophic and cultural milieu through the ages. The concept of *Ardhanariswara* informs the cult of Shakti which is the ever-lasting spouse of Siva, while seemingly functioning all the time with sovereign independence. In none of our ancient records can we find any specific relegation or demotion of woman below man. She is the object of uniform reverence whether as child or maid or wife or mother. In fact it is her crowning glory to be hailed and worshipped as *Mother*. The Western idea of patriotism is foreign if not repugnant to us. In our own case it is Matriotism - worship of the mother wherefore we have made the earth itself our Mother and worship her in-protean ways. It has become intertwined with our religious susceptibilities as we may easily conclude from the decisive role this sentiment had played in our modern renaissance as well as in the national struggle for freedom. A detailed survey of our national history from ancient times would conclusively show that woman *qua* woman was never discriminated against. Rather she always rules whoever may reign. In all the annals of myth and legend, romance and recorded history, the unageing charm and varied appeal of Woman and Womanhood have nowhere found such puissant expression as in the heritage of India. Woman has played every part that man can, and has beaten him in her unique power to mother heroes. In Sita, we have the paragon of womanhood for the entire world and for all time. She is 'of

the earth', but transcends both earth and heaven and stands as a symbol of vicarious sacrifice without ignoring or falsifying nature. She has inspired all the heroic women of our history in modern times, and her role has been to save our culture as often as it faced a threat to its vitality. Though frail as the trembling leaf and yielding like water, she is also *Durga*, the destroyer of all weaknesses and evils of life. She is also the creature of a new order out of the burnt-out ashes of the old, and thus renews life in perpetuity.

To those who remember woman in a fit of absent-mindedness or uneasy conscience, a ritual tribute to her for one year might seem an appropriate amends. We have no such uneasy obligation cast on us because we celebrate her manifold powers in thought, word and deed all the time - consciously and unconsciously. It is the modern Indian man who is proving recreant to his trust, and poses a threat to our social and spiritual stability; and only our women can redeem him from his prodigal ways. 'Women's Lib', in our midst can only *demote* her from her regal throne to a level of equality with man which would profit neither, but would hasten the disintegration of her unique Integrity. Both of us-men and women-have been rendered backward by the tragedies and ironies of our modern history; but even so, it is the restraining hand and indomitable will of our women that have helped us realise our frailties and follies. Her task today is to rediscover *her* Golden age in a modern context, and our duty is to create the conditions of her resurgence as the custodian of our culture.



The Vedic Pageant

Childhood and Education

ONE of the best ways to understand the spirit of a civilisation and to appreciate its excellences and realise its limitations is to study the history of the position and status of men in it. No class of similar importance and extent as that of women was placed in infancy of society in a position of such solute dependence upon men, and the degree in which that dependence has been voluntarily modified and relaxed naturally serves as a rough test of the sense of justice and fair-play developed in a community. The marriage laws and customs (in particular) able us to realise whether men regarded women merely as market commodities or war prizes, or whether they had realised that there is after all her husband's valued partner, whose cooperation was indispensable for happiness and success in family life. The rules about sex morality enable us to know the ethical tone of the society and ascertain how far men were prepared to be themselves judged by the standard they had set for women.

The Touchstone

The sense of sympathy that is developed in a community can very well be tested by the treatment it metes out to the widow. The genuineness of its appreciation of the value of education can be ascertained by finding out whether its benefits were

extended to the fairer sex. The progress in fine arts like music and dancing depends a good deal on the facilities given to women for specialising in them. A study of their dress and ornaments gives us an idea of the wealth of a community and enables us to obtain a glimpse of its progress in trade, mining and metallurgy and the skill in in-laying, tailoring and embroidery.

The degree of freedom given to women to move about in society and to take part in its public life gives a good idea of the nature of its administration and enables us to know how far it had realised the difficult truth that women too have a contribution of their own to make to its development and progress. How far a religion stands for justice and fair-play and how far it has succeeded in exploding prejudices and shibboleths of a primitive age can be seen from the position it assigns to women in its ritual and theology. The nature of its philosophy can well be ascertained from the observations of its philosophers about the nature and worth of the fairer sex.

The history of the position and status of women is therefore of vital importance to the student of Hindu Civilisation.

In ancient times in all patriarchal societies the birth of a girl was generally an unwelcome event. Almost everywhere the son was valued more than the daughter. He was a permanent economic asset of the family. He lived with his aged parents and did not migrate like the daughter to another family after marriage.

Daughter too, a pride of the family

The available evidence shows that in India too in early times the daughter was not as

welcome as the son. The same was the case in Vedic period. The Atharva Veda contains charms and rituals to ensure the birth of a son in preference to that of a daughter (III, 23 ; VI, II). The latter's birth, however, was not a source of consternation to the family in Vedic and Upanishadic ages. Nay, we find one of the early Upanishads recommending a certain ritual to a householder for ensuring the birth of a scholarly daughter. In cultured circles such a daughter was regarded as the pride of the family. In lower sections of society where the custom of the bride-price prevailed, the birth of a daughter must have been a welcome event; however, no literature is preserved reflecting their views.

The reasons why daughters were relatively less unpopular in ancient India during the early centuries are not difficult to understand. They could be initiated in Vedic studies and were entitled to offer sacrifices to Gods ; the son was not absolutely necessary for this purpose. The marriage of the daughter was not a difficult problem; it was often solved by the daughter herself. The dread of a possible widowhood did not very much weigh upon the minds of parents; for, as will be shown later, levirate and re-marriage, were allowed by society and were fairly common.

Affectionate treatment to daughters

Once the temporary feeling of disappointment was over, the family took as keen an interest in the daughter as it did in the son. On his return from a journey, the father used to recite a prayer (mantra) for the welfare of his daughter just with the same solicitude as he did for the

happiness of his son (Ap. G.S., XV, 12-3). Stories in Sanskrit dramas and novels show that daughters received from their parents and other relations the same affectionate treatment as sons. Nay, some of them like Devayani were too much fondled and became spoilt children. The Goddess of Fortune was regarded as residing in the person of the unmarried daughter.

Till about the beginning of the Christian era Upanayana or the ceremonial initiation into Vedic studies was as common in the case of girls as it was in the case of boys. The initiation ceremony was followed by a period of discipline and education, which was regarded as very essential to secure a suitable match. The Atharva Veda observes that a maiden can succeed in her marriage only if she has been properly trained during the period of studentship (Brahmacharya).

That women are, like Sudras, ineligible for Vedic studies is the view of a later age ; in pre-historic times lady poets themselves were composing hymns, some of which were destined to be included even in the Vedic Samhitas. According to the orthodox tradition itself as recorded in the Sarvanukramanika, there are as many as twenty women among the 'seers' or authors of Rig Veda. Some of these may have been mythical personages; but internal evidence shows that Lopamudra, Visvavara, Sikata Nivavari and Ghosha, the authors of Rig Veda I.179, V.28, VIII.91, IX.81.11-20, and X.39 and 40 respectively, were women in flesh and blood, who once lived in Hindu society. The authors of X.145 and 159 are undoubtedly ladies, though it may be doubted whether their real names were Indrani and Sachi, as recorded by tradition.

Among the authors and scholars to whose memory a daily tribute of respect is enjoined to be paid at the time of Brahma Yajna, a few ladies are also seen to figure; they are Sulabha, Maitreyi, Vadava Prathiteyi, and Gargi Vachaknavi (As. G.S., III, 4,4). These ladies must have made real contributions to the advance of scholarship; otherwise their names would not have been recommended for daily remembrance by posterity for all time to come. It is a great pity that we should know nothing about these lady scholars except their names; their works have been all lost, probably forever.

Women Students

Women students were divided into two classes, Brahnavadinis and Sadyovahas. The former were life-long students of theology and philosophy: the latter used to prosecute their studies till their marriage at the age of 15 or 6. During the eight or nine years that were thus available to them for study, they used to learn by heart the Vedic hymns prescribed or the daily and periodical prayers and for those rituals and sacraments in which they had to take an active part after their marriage there is ample evidence to show that, like men, women also used to offer regularly their Vedic prayers both morning and evening.

Brahnavadinis

Brahnavadinis used to aim at the very high excellence in scholarship. Down to about the 4th century B.C. Vedic and philosophical studies attracted the main attention of society. We therefore find ladies also

naturally cultivating these subjects with great devotion and enthusiasm. Besides studying the Vedas, many of them used to specialise in Purva- Mimamsa which discussed the diverse problems connected with Vedic sacrifices. This science is a very dry and difficult one, perhaps even more abstruse than mathematics; but still a very large number of ladies used to take deep interest in it. A theologian named Kasakritsni had composed the work on Mimamsa called *Kasakritsni*; lady scholars, who used to specialise in it, were designated as Kasakritsnas (Mahabhashya, IV, I, 14; 3, J 15). If lady scholars in such a technical branch of study were so numerous as to necessitate the coining of a special term to designate them, is it not reasonable to conclude that the number of women, who used to receive general education, must have been fairly large?

Lady Scholars

When the reaction against the Vedic sacrificial religion gave a stimulus to philosophical speculations at about 800 B.C., lady scholars did not lag behind in taking an active interest in the new movement. Yajnavalkya's wife Maitreyi belonged to this class. She was more interested in finding out the way to immortality than in setting new fashions in dress and ornaments. In the philosophical tournament held under the auspices of King Janaka of Videha, the subtlest philosophical questions were initiated for discussion by the lady philosopher Gargi, who had the honour to be the spokesman of the distinguished philosophers at the court. She launched her attack on Yajnavalkya,

the newly arrived philosopher, with an admirable coolness and confidence. 'Just as an experienced archer', says she, 'would get ready to attack his enemy with two piercing arrows kept at hand, so I assail you with two test questions. Answer them if you can.' The topics of her enquiry were so abstruse and esoteric in character that Yajnavalkya declined to discuss them in public. The searching cross-examination of Yajnavalkya by Gargi shows that she was a dialectician and a philosopher of a high order. (Br. Up. III, 6 and 8). Maitreyi was another lady student of Vedanta; she was reading under the sages Valmiki and Agastya. Some of these lady philosophers used to remain unmarried throughout the life in order to carry on their spiritual experiments unhampered.

Marriage in the Vedic Age

Marriage was well established in the Vedic Age, but it was also regarded as a social and religious duty and necessity. This was the case even in the Indo-Iranian period. According to the Avesta oblations offered unto Gods or ancestors by a maiden or a bachelor are unacceptable to them (Ashi Yashta, c. X. 54). A Vedic passage says that a person, who is unmarried, is unholy. From the religious point of view he remains incomplete and is not fully eligible to participate in sacraments. This continues to be the view of the society even now; the modern practice of keeping betel nut by one's side in the absence of the wife or the older one of having her image to indicate her symbolical presence at the time of a sacrament are both due to the same belief. Marriage opened a new period of

holy life which was to be led at the altar of truth and duty. The couple was to take particular care in properly performing the rituals connected with the Garhapatya fire kindled at the time of their marriage. Prescribed sacrifices to gods and manes were to be regularly offered. And finally the couple was to perpetuate the race by raising and training a numerous progeny, so that oblations may forever continue to be offered to gods and ancestors. A later age, which had developed the system of the four Ashramas, pointed out that the whole society depends upon the householder for its maintenance; the Brahmachari, the Vanaprastha and the Sannyasi can hardly exist without active help from a zealous and conscientious class of householders. The householder is as necessary for society as the breath is for the body.

The Spinster

Such being the views of society about marriage since very early times, it was naturally regarded as normally necessary and desirable for all. Vedic literature often refers to the spinster; Amajuh one who grows old in one's parent's house, is the significant expression used to denote an old maid. The usual cause that compelled maidens to remain unmarried was some serious physical defect or disease. Such, for instance, was the case of Ghosha, who could not marry till she was cured of her skin disease by the favour of gods-Asvins. In the age of the Upanishads hundreds of youths began to enter the monastery without caring to marry, and some maidens like Sulabha began to follow their example with a view to achieve spiritual salvation.

Age of Marriage

Girls were married at a fairly advanced age in the Vedic period. The precise age is not stated, but from the Avesta we learn that maidens were usually wedded at the age of 15 or 16 in ancient Persia (Vendidad, 14, 15) The very term for marriage, Udvaha carrying away (of the bride) pre-supposes a post-puberty marriage, for it shows that immediately after her marriage, the bride went to her husband's house to live as his wife. A perusal of the marriage hymn (X. 85) shows that the bride was fully mature and quite grown up at the time of the marriage; she is expressly described as blooming with youth and pining for a husband. A hope is expressed that the bride would forthwith take over the reins of the household from her parents-in-law. This would have been possible only in the case of grown up brides, at least 16 to 18 years of age.

Unmarried Girls

In the Vedic literature there are several references to unmarried girls growing old in their parents' houses, and the Atharva Veda is full of charms and spells intended for compelling the love of a reluctant man or woman. At least some of these spells must have been used by maidens and bachelors not succeeding in winning the affection of the party desired. There are references to lovers following their beloveds, giving them presents and yearning for mutual company. In one case we have the reference to a maiden pining for a husband approaching a youth anxious for a wife. Under such circumstances,

children of maidens were not unknown to society, and we get references to their occasional exposures as well. Indra is sometimes represented as rescuing them.

Child Marriage

Some other arguments advanced to prove the existence of child marriage in the Vedic age may be briefly considered here. It is true that in two passages of the Rig Veda (1; 51; 13 and 1; 116; 1) the word arbha has been used to denote the bride and the bridegroom. This expression, however, denotes tenderness rather than childhood, for Vimada who has been described as an arbha bridegroom is seen to be defeating his rival in battle and winning his bride. This is possible only in the case of a full-grown youth.

The Vedic marriage mythology referred to Soma, Gandharva and Agni as the earlier divine husbands of the bride; her human husband was the fourth one. Writers of this period began to advocate the view that the different signs of impending puberty manifest themselves at different ages. They pointed out that one should forestall them all by marrying the girl at the age of 8 or 9.

Parental Control

The Vedic literature does not refer to parents controlling the marriages of their sons and daughters, though they must doubtless have played an important part in arranging and financing them. On the other hand we have references to beautiful brides selecting their own husbands. Kshatriya circles in society even conceded

to grown-up brides the exclusive right of selecting their own consorts, as is proved by the custom of *swayamvara* or self-choice.

Sagotra Marriage

The present day rule, which prohibits marriages between persons of the same *gotra*, was unknown to society for a long time. The very conception of *gotra* as a group of persons connected with one another by spiritual blood relationship was unknown in the Vedic age. The prohibition of *sagotra* and *saprawara* marriages does not go back to a period much earlier than c. 600 B.C.

Re-marriage

The Atharva Veda in one place refers to a woman marrying again, very probably in the life-time of her first husband; it lays down a ritual intended to unite her permanently in heaven with her husband. Her second marriage of course presupposed a divorce.

The Wife

Early in the history of our civilisation, brides naturally received affectionate and respectful treatment in their new homes, as they were grown up and educated at the time of marriage. The Vedic marriage hymn lays down that the bride should



immediately take the reins of the household from her elderly relations. The elders of the Vedic age treated the brides with very great consideration, regard and affection. They, on their part, used to observe proper decorum and treat their elders with utmost deference and reverence. They could, even, join them - at the common table, and take part in conversation.

Shared Privileges

More vital for the wife's happiness is the treatment which she receives from her husband. Since Indo-Iranian times the husband and the wife were regarded as the joint-owners of the household. The Vedic word for the couple, *dampati* etymologically means the joint-owners of the house. The Avesta (Yashta, 15, 3) describes the husband and the wife as Manopaiti and *Mana Pathni*, showing thereby that they were equal partners and joint-owners of the common household. Vedic marriage ritual, however, does not enjoin the duty of obedience upon the wife. Both parties take the same vows.

It was well recognised that the wife was the ornament of the house (CR. V. 1; 66; 3); nay, the wife herself was the home. The home management was under her direct charge and ordinarily, her views were to prevail there. It was she who used to rouse the servants and assign them their proper

duties CR. V. 1, 124, 4), and thus arrange for the normal running of the household. Early Indian literature does not recognise, even theoretically, the power of physical correction in the husband. In practice also it was probably very rarely exercised in the Vedic and Epic times.

The normal relations between the husband and the wife were determined by the principle that there should be an absolute identity in their aesthetic, material and moral interests. This principle was recognised in the Vedic age, and is approved by later Dharma Sastra writers, like Manu and Apastamba. It is also emphasised in the marriage vow taken by the couple that they would invariably co-operate with each other in the realisation of their aims and ambitions in the spheres of life, wealth and spirituality. Social conscience was outraged if a couple did not honestly live up to its marriage vow.

The Ideal Couple

The ideal love and harmony between the husband and the wife have been beautifully described by Bhavabhuti. The dearest friend, the essence of all kinship, the fulfilment of all desires, a veritable treasure, the very life itself, all these is a husband to the wife and vice versa. Their love is uniform both in prosperity and adversity, and adjusts itself to the surrounding circumstances ; it affords the best solace to each other's heart; old age does not diminish its flavour; when the veil of reserve drops down in course of time, it develops into an ever abiding affection.

India then needed more and more men and women to develop the country, and so the

ideal was of a large family. The Vedic father was anxious for ten sons; the number was reduced to eight in the Smriti period.

The Family Ideal

A few lines may be conveniently devoted here to the delineation of the family ideal. The words of a Vedic Sage may be quoted in this connection. The husband and the wife are to be of one mind ; the matron is to be noted for the sweetness of speech; brothers and sisters are to be of one accord; sons are to be smart and intelligent so as to carry on and further the work of the father. The Vedic age required the householder to tend three sacred fires, Ahavaniya, Garhapatya and Dakshineya. Social thinkers of a later age pointed out that this can be best done only by showing proper respect to parents, by promoting the welfare and happiness of the wife, children and servants, and by offering willing and effective help to sacrificing public workers.

Polygamy

The Vedic gods are also monogamous. In practice, however, polygamy often prevailed in the rich and ruling sections of society. It was fairly common among kings and nobles, who often found it a useful instrument in strengthening their political power by contracting numerous but judicious matrimonial alliances. The rich probably regarded plurality of wives as a proof of their wealth, reputation and social position. References to polygamy are fairly numerous in Vedic literature. There are some observations in the late Vedic

literature to show that polygamy was well established in certain sections of society. In later times also society thought it to be nothing unusual that men should have several wives; it, however, regarded it as a grievous sin if a woman transgressed her husband and transferred her affection to another person and married him.

The Widow

Let us now attempt a resume of the position of the widow from age to age. We find that down to c. 300 B.C., her position on the whole was fairly satisfactory. The pre-historic custom of Sati having died down, she was not required to immolate herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. If she was disinclined to lead a life of celibacy, she should either contract a second marriage or have recourse to Niyoga, the latter hardly differing from the former in earlier times. The custom of tonsure was absolutely unknown. Her only disability was a proprietary one; where she was not regarded as an heir to her husband's property. This was, however, more or less a theoretical disability. Niyoga and re-marriage being common, it was very rare for a widow not to have a son; so what she could not claim as an heir to her husband, she could get as a guardian of her minor son.

Purda

Considerable discussion has been going on as to whether the Purda system was prevalent in ancient India or not. There is a divergence of opinion on the point. Some held that it was quite unknown in the pre-

Muslim days, others maintain that Hindu ladies used to wear veils even before the advent of the Muhammedans. The available evidence on the point is of a dubious nature, and can be manipulated to support either view. It therefore requires a very careful scrutiny.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the purda was unknown down to c. 100 B.C. In Indo-Iranian times women could move quite freely in society, and manage the family farms if necessary. The same was the case in Vedic age. We have shown already how girls were often educated along with boys.

Nor did the things change after the marriage. Vedic marriage hymn requires the bride to be shown to all the assembled guests at the end of the marriage ritual. The hope was further expressed that the bride should be able to speak with composure in public assemblies down to her old age. The presence of ladies in social and public gatherings was a normal feature in Vedic times. It was quite welcome to society. Whenever anything charming or graceful is to be described, Vedic poets usually think of the gaily attired lady, going out for a function, as the standard object of comparison (R. V., IV, 58, 7 ; X. 168, 2 ; etc.). From the Nirukta, (c. 500 B.C.), we learn that ladies used to go out to courts of law to establish their claims of inheritance (III. 5).

There is no reference to any Purda arrangement being made for their attendance. Nor does Rig Veda I, 167, 3 contain any reference to the Purda system.

Occupation

In the Vedic period the Aryans were mostly occupied in military or semi-military activities, as they were engaged in the task of subjugating the country. They had therefore to rely upon a greater degree of co-operation from women than was necessary in later times. Women used to take an active part in agriculture and in the manufacture of bows, arrows, and other war material. The Samhitas also refer to female workers in dyeing, embroidery and basket-making. It is interesting to note that the Vedic Samhitas have special words to denote Female workers in the above crafts, which have disappeared in later literature. This circumstance would show that women even in higher circles were manufacturing bows and arrows, cloth and baskets in Vedic period, but gave up these plebian professions in later times.

The teaching career was the most common. This is quite clear from the coining of a separate word to distinguish a lady teacher from a teacher's wife. The latter was by courtesy called Acharyani; but if a woman was herself a teacher, she was to be designated 'Acharya'. As we have already shown, some of these lady teachers would specialise even in abstruse and difficult branches like theology and philosophy. Lady teachers teaching grammar, poetry and literature must have been more common. It is not improbable that among their pupils, occasionally there might have been male students as well. Some of the lady teachers were remarkable for their eloquence and depth.

Participation in Administration

Let us now see what part ordinary women took in the administration of the country. There were democratic assemblies in Vedic age. It is thus probable that some ladies used to take an effective part in the public discussions of the democratic assemblies of the age, In the later Vedic period, the state of affairs changed; a text expressly informs us that women no longer went to public assemblies.

Religious Participation

Marriage, and not renunciation, was the ideal recommended to society by Vedic religion. The woman therefore was not an impediment in the path of religion; her presence and co-operation were absolutely necessary in religious rites and ceremonies. This naturally increased her religious value. Man could not become a spiritual whole, unless he was accompanied by his wife; gods do not accept the oblations offered by a bachelor. The husband alone cannot go to heaven; in the symbolical ascent to heaven in the sacrifice he has to call his wife to accompany him on the occasions (S. Br., V, 2, 1, 8). A son was indispensable for spiritual well-being in the life to come, and he could be had only through the wife. She was thus indispensable from the spiritual and religious point of view. This circumstance was responsible for ensuring her a religious status as high as that of her husband.

The wife took an active part in family sacrifices. Like the husband, she too had to perform a special Upanayana on the occasion of some sacrifices. She had her

own hut in the sacrificial compound, and also her own cow to provide her with sacred milk during the sacrifice (S. Br., X, 2, 3, 1 ; XIV, 3, 1, 35). In the early Vedic period, the duty of chanting musically the same songs seems to have been usually performed by the wife, later on it came to be entrusted to a special class of male priests called Udgatris. The wife used to pound the sacrificial rice. She participated with her husband in the preparation of the offering, the consecration of the fire, the offering of the oblations and the concluding ceremonies.

The participation in sacrifices pre-supposed Vedic study. Girls devoted themselves to it during their maidenhood. The initiation ceremony (Upanayana) of girls took place as regularly as that of boys at the normal time. This was the case as early as the Indo-Iranian age. The Parsis have still preserved this custom ; Navjot ritual, which corresponds to Hindu Upanayana, is even now performed by them regularly in the case of girls as well. In India, the initiation of girls used to take place regularly down to the beginning of the Christian era. It will thus be seen from the above discussion how the position of women on the whole was fairly satisfactory. The custom of Sati and Child marriage did not exist to embitter the lot of the woman. How she was properly educated and given the same religious privileges as man, how she could have a voice in the settlement of her marriage and occupy an honoured position in the household, how she could move freely in family and society. Where then did her decadence start?



Women In Rig Veda

B. S. UPADHYAYA

The Zenith of Power

THE Rig Vedic age saw the zenith of power and influence which the Indo-Aryan woman wielded in her household. She figured so much in daily life that the Aryan seers, accustomed to think of a man constantly in company with his wife, could not imagine their gods as lonely.

We find the invocations addressed to a god accompanied by his wife, the goddess. "The spirit", says an authority of repute, "of the religion in India intuitive, brooding, waiting, has much of the essential feminine in it'. Much of the freedom, rights and aspirations of the Indian women of later times were lost to them, but the very goddesses of the Rig Veda embody the dream of India's future womanhood and reflect its aspirations.

Aditi is personified freedom, the eternal mother of all beings, who frees men from all their bondage. " Whatever sin we have committed", says the Rishi, "may Aditi sever us from". Indrani is the imperious mistress of the household whose oblations make Indra, her spouse, strong and great. Vak, the eternal cosmic energy of the universe, is the omniscient, all-pervading counterpart of the Master of the entire creation, and she aids Him in the administration of His unlimited dominion. Saraswathi is the patron of fine arts and learning. And that lovely Usha, the breath and life of all beings, yet the pointer to decay and destruction, is the embodiment of womanhood in all its

stages of the maiden, wife and mother. The Rishi loves her as he loves his wife, adorned with clothes of variegated colours, and he feels attracted by her charming person as one by the winning, intriguing beauty of the female dancer. To her are addressed some of the most impassioned hymns containing the best poetry of the Rig Veda.

The Goddess as a reflection of what was seen actually

The description and imagery of the goddesses were nothing but a reflection of what the seers saw and thought of their own women in their household. It has been said that "among the early Aryans, the paternal and maternal tie and even the whole family bond was intensely strong. If the father was venerated as the food supplier and protector (Pita) the mother was beloved as the meter out (mater) of daily nourishment, the arranger of the household, measuring and ordering its affairs as the moon (also called mata) measured time. To the Aryan family the father and mother were gods manifest."

The Daughter in the Aryan Household

The daughter, who became a curse to the Hindu family of later times, was affectionately caressed and fondled by her parents and brothers who lavished her with presents at the time of her marriage. She was an untiring worker of the Aryan household - plaiting mats, weaving cloth, sewing with unbreakable needles, bringing water in jars, squeezing juice from the Soma plant for the purposes of worship, thrashing

corn, making fire by friction of sticks, milking the cow, preparing curds and clarified butter, and doing other household work of the kind. She inherited her father's property in her own right in the absence of a brother, enjoyed the right of maintenance in her father's family until her marriage or until death if she chose to remain unmarried all her life, wrested her dowry from her paternal possessions, which thus formed her 'stridhana', and could give away her ornaments as largesses to Brahmins on the occasion of her marriage. She was free to choose her husband.

The Aryan Marriage

The maiden was given away in marriage to her freely chosen match when approved by the parents, or by the brother in their absence. At the time of the nuptial ceremony, when the pair took the seven steps together, the bridegroom emphatically addressed his bride: " Become thou my partner, as thou hast paced all the seven steps with me. Apart from thee I cannot live. Apart from me do thou not live. We shall live together, sharing alike all goods and power combined."

The Rig Veda contains no evidence of divorce obtaining in practice. The very idea was almost abominable. Says Margaret E. Cousins, "Neither must marriage be legalised licence, ruinous to body and soul, wrongly enforced as a duty or a necessity. Such things belong to the reign of the human brute. True marriage is sacred, and divorce is against all occult and spiritual law."

In the Aryan marriage both the human and the spiritual elements were properly blended. We must not forget that man,

after all, is a bundle of weaknesses, an embodiment of feelings and sentiments. Here the companionate system of marriage fails to satisfy us. To work it properly the entire class of human institutions, social as well as political, will have to be revolutionized and re-fashioned to the very depth of their foundation. We cannot be too much utilitarian. We cannot act as unconscious limbs of a machine. The process would be too mechanical, the marital bond too frail. Man cannot live alone. He is a dependent being and he must have somebody to care and feel for him particularly in his old age. The Rig Vedic Aryan considered marriage a sanctity. To him every incident of marriage had considerable significance. He felt a kind of responsibility implied in his very being. His existence was a sort of heredity, which, he conceived, he must pass on to the undying line of his posterity.

Polygamy during the Rig Vedic age was only a privilege of the few - the kings, nobles and their priests. Polyandry was not obtaining in the community, although a few references to it in the Rig Veda would show that there did linger a few cases here and there and that the poet could yet think of it and allude to it.

Monogamous marriages were the general rule and the common people, the visas, wedded a single wife.

Motherhood

The Rig Vedic woman was at her greatest in her motherhood. Her strength lay in her children. She was not considered a chattel. Slave girls also on several occasions became wives of influential Aryans and

could be given and taken freely. At times they became mothers of great personages of the Rig Veda. The mother or wife, however, does not seem to have inherited landed property in her own right. She was yet the mistress of her entire household and the omission did not very much offend her. She was brave, noble and virtuous. The desire for the son was earnest both as a military as well as a religious need, and the daughter was considered the very breath of life of the family. Widows were generally remarried soon after the death of their husbands, and the custom of sati had died out as the existence of the widows would show. Inter-marriages between the Brahmins and the Rajanyas as well as between Aryans and the non-Aryans were frequent and common. The Indian woman was never greedy of wealth or power.

Dress and Ornaments

The Rig Vedic woman dressed in woolen and also perhaps in cotton clothes dyed in various colours. There were about four pieces - the upper and the lower garments, the occasional head-dress and the all-covering shawl. The common ornaments that she wore were the necklace, the earrings, the armlets, the wristlets, the anklets, and the like. But the use of the nose-ring is conspicuous by its absence. Women wore long hair, oiled, combed it and knit it in long, broad plaits.

They applied unguent to the eyes, perfumed their person and used several other items of toilet. The several items of their furniture included their boxes and bedsteads. A particular kind of high bed is

associated with them.

Freedom of movement and expression

Indo Aryans gave their women enough liberty of movement. There was no seclusion of women and consequently no purdah and they went unveiled to festive gatherings. A noted fair was the Samana, where the maidens flocked to make merry and find a husband. They even spent their nights there. They had the right of self-expression and could freely

talk of their own marriage. There was rarely any restriction on their free choice of a husband.

Indo Aryans well recognised the truth embodied in the dictum - Ignorance is weakness, knowledge is power, and so they prepared their women for power. They taught them music and dancing, the religious lore and warfare. They had among them great women Rishis like Ghosha, Apala, Lopamudra, Visvavara, Surya, Vasukara's wife, mother of the Gaupayanas, Indrani, Sarparajni, Mamata, Yami and many others. Vispala, the warrior wife of king Khela, and Mudgalani were experts in the art of fighting.

The Rig Vedic society set up a high order of morality and there were hardly any instances of adultery among married women. Non-Aryan women joined the army in large numbers and the Aryans did not consider it bad morality to attack and kill



these amazons.

Women of Athens and Sparta-A Comparison

It has been rightly pointed out by the Langdon-Davies that there was no woman question at Athens because all women were as mere vegetables, and there was no woman question at Sparta because both men and women there were little better than

animals. Moreover, Sparta, the eugenic paradise and the first and only practitioner of the equality of the sexes, has left literally nothing to posterity but a record of implacable attachment to life, like that of a dog which has its teeth fixed immovably in the neck of an enemy ten times its size. It was not so in India. The social adjustment of the sexes was so perfect that we find no complaint on the part of the woman against the authority of the man. At least never did an Aryan woman cry out in distress in the manner of Medea, who said, "Of all things that have life and sense we women are most wretched, for we are compelled to buy with gold a husband who is also worst of all the master of our person. And on his character, good or bad, our whole fate depends." It has been rightly held that the Greek civilization never succeeded in giving redress to the eternal complaint and that married life and its duties were never

the highest Hellenic ideal. Athens, it is aptly pointed out, for all its intellectual grandeur, died out and Sparta for all its eugenics became hopelessly degenerate. All that was good and valuable as human experience passed away by way of Greek literature to later times and younger civilizations. Almost all the ancient civilizations have been effaced from the world; India and China alone have endured the ravages of time and remain alive to this day. India is still living, however weakly, in her continuity and she alone solved her woman problem in the past.

Towards decadence at the close of the period

At the close of the Rig Vedic period there set in bad times in the history of social India and restrictions were gradually imposed on the freedom of women. Men took upon themselves to think and plan for their women, who henceforth sank into a secondary position where they began to play a second fiddle to their men. The idea of purity of blood caught hold of the Aryan mind and it generally dominated all their activities. Purity of blood as an ethnic principle is a fiction and the admixture of races has been a vigorous common truth. The law-givers of India in the post-Rig Vedic period strove and struggled to devise means to keep their blood pure and thus ran after an unrealizable mirage. They prescribed rules for early marriages and banned freedom of women in deed, speech and even thought. They enjoined upon them to identify themselves wholly with their husbands and reduce themselves to nothing in action as well as desires. The

Grihyasutras, the Smritis and such other treatises, all sang the same note and completed the ruin of women. Women themselves bowed to these restrictions and accepted them as their only lot.

The Aryan social system degenerated and it enunciated the suicidal policy of child marriage and seclusion of woman. Child marriage produced widows and seclusions, fear of men on the part of women. This fear, says Mrs. Cousins in her inimitable style, is a miasma. It is the nadir of degradation in social affairs, and remains to this day a slur and a stigma on both sexes. The great Rig Vedic personages like Indrani, Mudgalani and Vak were forgotten and in their place there stepped in the seemingly high-statured women of the epics reflected in the shadow of their glorious husbands. And then these same were followed by an unbroken crop of pigmy women, who could not bear themselves up, could not even lean on the arms of their husbands, but had to be carried. But now this crop is also nearing its reaping time. There is audible the sound of a vigorous re-shuffling under the surface of the Indian society and the stirrings of a new life are discernible. The lame has found legs to tread and the dumb a tongue to express himself. There is a surge of desire for emancipation and an urge for pushing ahead. A mighty wave of freedom has captured the hearts of women all over Asia.



Out of the Mists of Antiquity

Ancient Indian Conception of History

THE ancient Indian conception of history was quite different from the Western conception, so much so that MacDonnell was led to think that "History is the one weak spot in Indian literature. It is, in fact, non-existent. The total lack of historical sense is so characteristic, that the whole course of Sanskrit literature is darkened by the shadow of this defect, suffering as it does from the entire absence of exact chronology."

Indian traditions as well as literature, which

are the storehouse of ancient Indian history, certainly lack in what may be described as chronological sense. But chronology alone is not history. The cultural and social aspect of it which is a true mirror of a people and civilisation have been well maintained in ancient Indian writings and traditions. An eminent scholar, R. C. Dutt remarks " ... There is a difference between the records of the Hindus and the records of other nations.

..... Ancient Hindu works are of a different character. If they are defective in some respects, as they undoubtedly are, they are defective as accounts of dynasties, of wars, and so-called historical incidents. On the other hand they give us a full, connected, and clear account of the advancement of civilization, of the progress of the human mind, such as we shall seek in vain among the records of any other equally ancient nation. The literature of each period is a perfect picture - a photograph, if we may so call it - of the Hindu civilization of that period and the works of successive periods form a complete history of ancient Hindu Civilization for three thousand years, so full, so clear, that he who runs may read it." He continues, "And those who have pursued Hindu literature through different periods of ancient Hindu history, are equally aware that they form a complete and comprehensive story of the progress and gradual modifications of Hindu civilization, thought and religion through three thousand years." All these literary sources, particularly the Epics, which acquaint us with the civilisation of the Hindu people, are mainly based on tradition.



Tradition and History

It is difficult to agree with Pargiter's assertion that the Kshatriya and Brahmana traditions were different, for, in the Epics, Puranas, and Vedas the story of Brahmanas is intermingled with the tales of royal dynasties. The genealogies of the kings and Rishis really existed when the great Epic was written and were well-known to those well-versed in ancient lore. The ancient traditions - tales known as Puranas and narration of facts, which was Itihasa (Iti-Ha-Asa so it actually was) are often quoted in the Epics as old history. Rightly does Pargiter observe, "our knowledge of the most ancient times in India mainly rests on traditions. Almost all the information therefore comes from traditions," and "Tradition is human testimony concerning the long past; hence it is not to be discarded simply because it contained discrepancies."

Preservers of Traditions

These traditions were very well preserved in the hoary past by the Sutra - the Puranika, the Magadha - a genealogist (Vamsa-Samsaka), and the Vadin - an eulogist (Stavaka). The Ramayana and the Mahabharatha mention all these. The Puranavids (such is the epithet of Sumantra in the Ramayana) although never esteemed as much as the Veda-knowing Brahmanas, were greatly respected in the court-circles.



Tradition gradually compiled in History

Now the ancient traditions and ballads variously known as Akhyanas, Itihasa, Purana, Gatha and Nara Samsi, contain glorious deeds of heroes sung by the Sutas and Magadhas and are thus the sources of Epic poetry. Gradually when the art of writing developed these heroic traditions were compiled. This task was done according to Indian tradition

by Vyasa, (which means a compiler) who after compiling the Puranas took up the composition of the great Epic, which he meant to be an Itihasa.

Importance of Tradition and History

The hold of Rama's story on the Hindu mind persists to this day. Valmiki's introduction that he was writing about the most renowned king of his time as well as the dynastic chart of Pargiter would show beyond doubt that Rama's story has a historical background.

Indian tradition refers to the Ramayana as "Adi Kavya." Valmiki was the originator of the ornate style of poetry. The main story of Ramayana consists of Book I to VI, though it is Book II to VI according to some scholars.

The Mahabharata as an Itihasa

The Mahabharata, primarily an Itihasa, puts forward great claims. It is a Samhita,

Purana, Akhyana, Katha, Dharma Sastra, Kama Sastra and Kavya. It is the chief of all the Sastras, greater than all the Vedas, and enables man to attain heaven and emancipation. Originally it was meant to be the history of victory - 'jaya', then it assumed more extended dimensions and came to be known as "Bharatha" - the history of the great Bharatha dynasty. As the ancient Indians saw life as a whole with its various aspects, no Itihasa was complete for them unless it dealt with the manifold aspects of human life, so as to improve and help society.

Date of the composition of the Great Epic

The Ramayana being mainly composed by a single author presents more or less an ideal point of view to be followed. Many different customs of the non-Aryan tribes are described but they clearly show a tendency to adopt similar Aryan ideals. Thus, in adjudging the position of women in Ramayana one is not confronted with contradictions. It is true that as it is a popular human poem - sometimes women as depicted, show human weaknesses. But either they are seen to return to the ideal at once, when advised by someone (as in case of Kausalya when she was reminded of her duty once by Rama and at another time by Dasaratha) or (as in the case of Kaikeyi) the forces of goodness are too powerful for their evil tendencies which are defeated betimes. Women mostly follow the ideals and are respected, but the passages decrying women (although some of them may refer to interpolations due to ascetic influence) are few and can be justified with

reference to the context. Still it must be stated that social ideals were tending towards a condition where women were assigned a comparatively low position in the social set up.

In the Mahabharata, however, one is confronted with numerous contradictions while approaching the subject of the status of women. These are due to the vast time factor as well as to the differences in ideals and practices followed by various races of India. From the immense data at our disposal it will not be an exaggeration to state that this Epic specially deals with the condition of women In India from pre-historic times to the age when neo-Hinduism of the Puranas was finally being evolved i.e. the condition of women of the entire Hindu period.

The women as depicted in the narrative part of the great Epic preserve their independence in thought as well as in action. They mostly speak for themselves. These portions of the Mahabharata present an account of women, who rose to great heights in every field, such as in the domestic, in the service of humanity and in the emancipation of the soul. But the Mahabharata also traces the story of the fall of women in their status in Hindu Society. By the time the didactic portions were written the social and religious status of women had declined. She was denied Vedic education and was married when she had no idea of matrimony. At home, she entirely depended on men-folk. She was no more a real partner in her husband's mundane and spiritual efforts but a mere devotee and follower.



The Epic Women

An impartial effort to interpret the status of women in the Epics will provide the opportunity to correct many erroneous ideas about the status of women in the past. For "history gives us the information about the evolution in the past and is necessary to understand the present" and History by exhibiting to us a great number of different societies, prepares us to understand and tolerate the variety of usages ; by showing us that the societies have often been transformed, it familiarises us with the variation in social forms and cures us of a morbid dread of change. The Epics are historical works ; particularly the Mahabharata is a great history in this respect, as it deals with various types of societies, which show vicissitudes in the status of women.

The race of spirited heroines and great scholars were later transformed into mere shadows of their masters. How this came to pass gradually is a long story.

The Maid, her status and her education

The status of women in a particular society may be judged by the manner in which the birth of a female infant is received. It has been established by the Indian and European scholars that the exposure of the female child in the Samhitas as discussed by some foreign authors was never a fact.

From the Epics it is clear that the doctrine of non-violence was gaining ground. Thus

in society in which foetus-murder was considered to be a crime, there could be no possibility of exposure of the female infant.

Place in the family: Birth of the daughter

Daughter-adoption was frequent enough. Sita, Kunti, Sakuntala and Pramadvara were all adopted daughters. It may be argued that Sita, Sakuntala and Pramadvara, had just fallen to the lot of their adoptive fathers but they could have been easily disposed of to others by them just as king Uparichara gave away Satyavati although she was gifted with beauty and possessed every virtue. The birth of a daughter was sometimes desired as the affection felt for her and the son-in-law was much greater than that felt for the son. The merits of Kanya Dana as well as the worlds attained on a son being born to one's daughter were factors that gave some importance to her birth.

The brother less daughter was known as putrika dharmini which meant that her son was to inherit his maternal grand-father's property and perform his funeral rites. Yayati attained heaven through the grace of his daughter's son, even though he had sons. Some passages do prove that daughters were considered as sons, and that they inherited wealth and kingdoms. Thus from the religious point of view as well as that of inheritance the son was not utterly indispensable. On the contrary, there are examples to prove that some people were eager to have daughters. For it was ordained that by performing Sraddha on the second day of the bright fortnight one got several daughters. According to

one passage the good result of visiting a certain holy place was getting a hundred daughters. As rewards for penances performed, bright and famous daughters were born.

Why the birth of a daughter was a source of anxiety

Surely the daughter in those days, as even now, was a source of anxiety, in as much as she was to be given away in marriage. Her future welfare and happiness depended entirely on the character and ability of her future husband. It was a great worry for the parents to find a suitable husband, obviously a more difficult task in an age when the daughter too may have had a voice in the matter.

Generally, a father only laments the birth of a daughter when he is unable to get an eligible match for her. It was only in these circumstances that she has been declared a source of pity and distress.

An object of affection

The life of daughters and even adopted daughters at their parental homes proves that they were brought up with great care and affection, and were never to be displeased. Some fathers felt equal affection for the sons and daughters. The example of Devayani indicates that sometimes fathers were so fond of their daughters that they even spoil them. Such was the power of Devayani over her father and the tenderness felt by him for her that the Devas instruct Kacha to please her in order to gain the knowledge of Sanjivini from Sukracharya and he acts accordingly.

Maidens considered auspicious

It was the general belief of society that the Goddess of wealth resided in maidens. Chastity was considered to be a perfect ornament of womankind. The maiden, as the personification of chastity was naturally thought to be propitious. Thus their presence was required in auspicious ceremonies like coronations. They went out to welcome and to send off the distinguished guest. When the heroes went to battle, they touched the maiden along with other lucky objects.

Rights and Privileges

(i) Nature of protection given by the society and the family

It was natural that such a symbol of auspiciousness and an object of affection was to be en sufficient protection by the society and family. It was also essential for guarding chastity as well. Of such importance was protection of a maiden that the kings were aimed, despite their multifarious duties, to protect them. Perhaps, this protection which was a social duty of the king was given to those maidens who were orphans. It was, however, the duty enjoined upon a father to protect his daughter. But it appears that they had also great independence in their fathers' homes.

(ii) Legal Rights

Generally after marriage, except in the case of Putrika, the daughter had nothing to do with her parental home and property. A married daughter, however, had the right to inherit her mother's dowry.

(iii) Domestic duties - helping the parents

The duties of the maidens at home were mostly for preparing them for their future career i.e. the domestic life. The greatest duty a house-holder was to entertain the guests. As a practical part of their education, daughters performed this duty at their parental homes. Shakuntala offered a seat, water, and Arghya to Dushyanta while her adoptive father was absent. The daughters of poor people might have helped their fathers in their daily work for Satyavati served her father by plying the boat.

Education

From the accounts of the heroines it appears that the responsibility of educating the daughters was fully realised by the parents. There is corroborative evidence. The epics being hero-lauds present no data of this. However, the fact cannot be denied that Epic heroines were highly educated.

Intellectual and Religious Education

Certain passages in the Epics prove that the maidens were given Vedic education. Women were able to perform sacrifices alone, even without their husbands. In the Ramayana, Kausalya on the eve of Rama's installation offered oblation to fire, reciting 'mantras'. Similarly when Vali was going to fight Sugriva, Tara performed 'swastyayana' with the chanting of 'mantras' and so also Kausalya when Rama was going to the forest.

As the great Epic records many strata of

societies, perhaps this period, in which Vedic, religious and philosophic education is mentioned to have been imparted to women, corresponds roughly with the Upanishad and the Sutra period. These works contain enough evidence of the intellectual activities and educational attainments of women. Draupadi's lively discussions remind one of Gargi and Maitreyi of Brhadaranyaka Upanishad. Aswalayana Grihya-sutra records Samavartana ceremony for the girls.

Traditional Education

In the traditional (ancient) view the aim of education was not limited to mere intellectual attainment. Character building was considered an indispensable function of education. Listening to the stories of Itihasa and Purana, which were handed down from generation to generation, was considered highly conducive to a sound character. Therefore, this item had an important place in the scheme of education. In this way one gained considerable wisdom and sagacity. The girls too had a right to listen to the Itihasa and Puranas.

Military and Physical Education

Although later a Kshatriya woman was given military education, in the Epics themselves there is no evidence that such education was imparted. A few cases, that might be cited in favour of such a presumption would not bear close scrutiny. For instance there is the case of Kaikeyi helping Dasaratha.

Education in Arts:

(1) The Sixty-four Arts

The sixty-four arts mentioned by various Sanskrit writers have been referred to in the Mahabharata also. The slave girls of the kings used to be well versed in these. Vatsyayana recommends these sixty-four arts as arts of women to be taught to the daughters of rich families, princesses and ganikas. These arts include a liberal scheme of education for women, which was suited to their aptitude. Proficiency in these arts meant hard work, required ample leisure and immense expense.

Merits of Home Education

Some Epic women like Gandhari, Lopamudra, Anusuya, Sita, Draupadi and Savitri acted as great educative forces in those times and are still examples of ideal Indian womanhood. It may not be possible to state definitely the system of education then prevalent.

Defects of Home Education

Home education had also its defects. It appears to have developed the virtues of heart but not so much the powers of intellect. Thus the social instinct did develop but at the cost of individuality. In the family atmosphere of love and affection one thinks of giving only. This attitude has certainly great virtue, but it was pushed to the extreme in the ideal of Pativrata. As for the Pativrata there was no God other than her husband, the ideal of Sahadharmini received a great set-back and started losing ground as the ideal of Pativrata

advanced more and more. Thus Gandhari, by bandaging her eyes, blinded herself. She could not help her husband in any way and also denied the care of a mother to the Kaurava princes. It would have been difficult for those under whose charge the princes were committed, to chide and correct them when they went wrong. By virtue of their position as parents, Gandhari and Dhritarashtra could have guided the Kauravas in their impressionable years. But they were both unable to perform this duty on account of their artificial and natural blindness. The wives of the Kauravas weep for Draupadi's fate, but not a single one of them could exert any influence and check her husband from performing inhuman atrocities. Gandhari and these princesses who were not Sahadharminis in the true sense of the term, were also responsible for tragedies that followed after the game of dice and the war.

In the same way Ravana's mother and Mandodari failed to bring him to the right path. But they were better in the sense that they at least made efforts. Sita, when exiled, suffers quietly the unjust treatment meted out to her by Rama. Fiery personalities like Sulabha and Vidula are cited as ancient examples. There are some examples like those of Draupadi and Kunti, who still wielded great influence, but surely the race of heroines like these was dying. Most of the Kshatriya ladies lacked self-confidence and assertive individuality and were incapable of exercising their benevolent influence. In short, that development of personality, which true education promotes by bringing one in contact with the outside world had not taken place in them. A sound academic

education could have developed these qualities of personality, but such a development could not be promoted by the home education, which was necessarily limited in scope and therefore inadequate for the purpose. It was really a great tragedy in the life of a nation where its women-folk could understand the right path but were helpless to pursue it.

Social Status

Although marriage, as means for the fulfilment of a maiden's natural and inevitable goal of life was always desired, she was never sacrificed at the altar of marriage. Her intellectual attainments and physical endurance made her capable of working out her own emancipation, the greatest good to be achieved by all human beings. In marriage she had freedom and possessed independent judgment to select her life partner.

Home was the centre of the activity of women and the wife was assigned the central place in it. In fact the wife was considered synonymous with the home. There she performed her onerous duties through unremitting services and was a partner of her husband in the pursuit of the four Purusharthas, that is, Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Gaining by advice and experience of elders and protection of her husband, she was cherished and respected, for on women depended the prosperity and future progeny of the family. As a mother, woman occupied a place of great honour and prestige. The social code prescribed a conduct of veneration and respect towards her. She was considered the creator, nourisher, educator and the

greatest preceptor of her children and thus of her race and society. The Epic mothers performed all these duties with great care and a sense of social responsibility and were regarded as an integrating force in society. Sons repaid the affection and care of the mother in a humble and respectful manner and protected widowed mothers, whose position was never degraded or neglected in the family by the fact of her widowhood. Exaltation of mothers led to mother-worship and to the custom of addressing sons after the mother's name. And even the ascetic ideal which belittled all other worldly relationship did not affect the superior position of the mother. The social position of the step-mother was similar to that of the mother.

The Widow

No social stigma was attached to widowhood and the widow was not considered as an inauspicious creature. No special life of austerities and fasts was prescribed for her by the composers of the Epics in the form of "Vidhava Dharma" as was done by the later writers of the Puranas. Nevertheless widows born and bred in pativrata ideal thought widowhood as a great calamity and led a life of penance and chastity. Sometimes they even left home for forests to perform penances and austerities of their own accord. In Epic narratives penances were not imposed upon them. Generally they did not sacrifice themselves on the funeral pyre of their husbands.

Thus while the honour of women was well protected by condemning and punishing adulterous men, women were not treated

harshly for similar crimes, as long as the honour of her high caste was not involved. She was considered as "Abala" and therefore most of her failings were attributed to the carelessness of men who should have protected her. Although the husband of a sinning woman had the right to punish her, she was never to be abandoned and was always to be maintained. The attitude was that of hating the sin rather than the sinner.

Fallen Woman

The attitude of society even towards a fallen woman, that is, to a prostitute, in some respects was quite different from the usual one. She was considered auspicious and her presence was required on ceremonial occasions. She was not treated as an out-caste for she appeared with maidens to welcome distinguished guests and heroes.

Inferior Status in Society

The above-mentioned data indicate a place of respect and honour occupied by women in society in whatever position they were placed. But women were gradually losing this honourable position in society as well as in family. This was not due to any sudden revolution but was prompted by certain attitudes towards women from the hoary past as well as due to certain vicissitudes through which society was passing. In certain fields, deterioration in the status of women can even be traced in the Vedas, in the narrative parts of the Great Epic as well as in the Ramayana, which is otherwise full of lofty ideals and noble sentiments.

But in the didactic portion of the Great Epic it is more marked and more rapid. Many indignities and insults are heaped upon women. Woman is mentioned as insatiated with carnal pleasures, lascivious, immoral, heartless, fickle, inconstant and therefore easily seduced, root of sin and evil, greatest illusion created by the Brahman with the help of Atharvan rites for the downfall of men. She was incapable of being guarded and of keeping a secret. It was due to the inferior character assigned to women that they were to be kept under perpetual tutelage throughout their lives and were classed among possessions and property.

Particular Social Vicissitudes

In ancient Indian literature the strange phenomenon is that whereas the status of women in the Vedas and in the narrative parts of the Great Epic is satisfactory, later in the didactic portions it deteriorates. This is due to certain internal changes in society, when the Aryans were fighting deadly wars with the non-Aryans and women were fulfilling all the economic needs of society and managing the family alone. They were to be producers of many heroes for the secular needs of the society. So the custom of Sati was abolished and re-marriage was introduced. As useful members of society the position of a woman was exalted. The religion of sacrifices (Yajnas) was also in her favour, for yajnas could not be performed without a wife. The Aryans appear fully established in North India in the Epics and due to the development of the Dasi system, Aryan women were not fulfilling the economic

needs of society alone as before. Still Draupadi's description of her household management and the religious needs of society indicate that the older traditions and conditions as described in the Vedas prevailed.

The ascetic attitude, which is not found in the Vedas and the Brahmana literature was developing. It was perhaps because of the non-Aryan contact or may be due to any other reason. The idea of impurity attached to woman was taking hold of society. All these conditions are more marked in the didactic portions. Not only was woman ignorant herself but she lost her religious or social status and was ascribed a vile character.

Women Ascetics and Performers of Penances

Religious as well as literary education was not imparted to girls. Women were considered incompetent to perform sacrifices. The wife of a learned preceptor, Deva-Sharma talks in prakrt - a clear indication that women were not given literary education. Ruchi could only speak in Sanskrit when she was hypnotized by Vipula. Many reasons have been advanced by scholars for the fast disappearance of Vedic education from amongst women. One of the reasons was that sacrificial religion was becoming highly specialised, and naturally this as such took years to be completed. The marriageable age for girls, everywhere lower than that of boys, was in the later recensions of the Epics lowered further still. Therefore, they could not be imparted an education which took years to be completed. According to Dr. Altekar,

"the spoken dialect of the age had begun to differ considerably from the language of the Vedic hymns and the theory had found universal acceptance that to commit a single minor mistake in the recitation of the Vedic mantras would produce most disastrous consequences to the reciter. As a natural consequence, society began to insist that those who wanted to undertake Vedic studies must be prepared to devote a fairly long period of about twelve to sixteen years to the task, as a consequence lady Vedic scholars began to be rarer and rarer. Similar reasons may be put forward for the denial of the Vedic education for girls in the Epic recensions".

Causes leading to Child marriage

Being ignorant, a maiden naturally lost her power of judgement. Her freedom in the selection of her future partner sometimes led to unhappy results in married life. This and the vile and fickle character attributed to women firmly established the theory of perpetual tutelage of women. As a consequence the right of selection of the future partner passed to the guardians of maidens. It was rather difficult to find a suitable person in order to ensure the daughter's future happiness. Moreover, the various limitations and restrictions which were being imposed for contracting marriage led to further difficulty in finding out an accomplished bridegroom. The competition in finding out the bridegroom, the denial of education to women, the rigid idea of chastity as an imperative qualification of the bride as well as women led to the custom of child marriage.

Child marriages and other reasons given

above were responsible for the deterioration in the position of the wife. Formerly she used to be a religious partner of her husband in the true sense of the term. But it was natural for the uneducated and child-bride to look up to her educated and mature husband as a preceptor and deity. Thus at home from the position of a partner her position became that of a disciple and a devotee.

Ignorant Mothers

The woman who was once a Sahadharmini in the Vedic rituals, now remained a custodian of customs, superstitions and rites without mantras. As the theological education was the only intellectual education available in those days ; women, denied of the benefit of this education had their intellect completely clogged and unoriented. This was a great calamity for liberal Hindu culture. This led not only to the extinction of the Brahma-Vadinis but to a more pervasive damage to society by making room for the vitiating influence of ignorant mothers. Her individuality, in case she had any, was submerged in that of her Lord. Polygamy further deteriorated woman's position. Woman's position in the family became psychologically insecure and jealousies among co-wives, danger of domination of co-wife's sons in old age further added to her miseries.

The advice given to wives to obey even wrong and unrighteous commands of their husbands indicates that women were not even considered rational beings. Wife was for the enjoyment of the husband or for producing progeny for his line.

Men as described in the Epics could practise

polygamy and keep concubines and prostitutes, but slight faithlessness on a wife's part was at times punished by death sentence. Vigilant watch was always kept on her morals.

After the husband's death, even for virgin widows a life of penances and austerities was recommended in the didactic parts of the Great Epic. Such a life was followed of their own accord by the widows in the narrative part after they had settled their children and performed worldly duties but it was never recommended formerly for widows much less for virgin widows. Remarriage for widows was not practised and the extreme form of pativrata ideal culminated in the custom of Sati, a custom not found in the Ramayana but traceable in the Mahabharata. The group suicide by the widows in the Mahabharata may be due to their social insecurity and the insignificant position they occupied. Because of this insecurity the custom of Sati probably gained further ground.

Freedom of Thought, Movement and Action

Women in earlier portions of the Epics and in the narrative one possessed freedom but gradually they were being denied these by the time the didactic portions were written. Sulabha and Draupadi could discuss deep metaphysical subjects and took part in learned discussions with great ease. Even when faced with great calamity in Kuru Court, Draupadi does not lose her balance of mind and challenges the Kuru elders with her doubts, which they were unable to remove. The great Yudhishtira was many times confounded by her.

Economic Status

The women characters in the Epics are generally spirited wives and mothers, like Draupadi, Kunti, Gandhari, Sumitra and to some extent Sita. Self abnegation and self-sacrifice for righteousness is the dominant note of their character. Theirs was selfless love which requires no reciprocation but which is at the same time not blind to faults inherent even in those who are the objects of their affection. A true Sahadharmini like Draupadi, was considered to be a pativrata first, but the connotation of pativrata gradually changed and she became a slave and blind follower of her master. Draupadi, Kunti and Gandhari acted as guiding and correcting forces of their times. They worked for the cause of righteousness, justice and duty. There is another set composed of Sita, Savitri, Damayanti who were much concerned about their duties and faithfulness and needed no reciprocation for these but they are ideals that have guided Indian womanhood through centuries. The world has a singling of the ideal and the common in every society. So if there were Spartan mothers like Sumitra and Gandhari, there were also others who were just ordinary, like Kausalya, and even below ordinary as Kaikeyi. Simple women or women proud of their beauty like Ahalya forgot their duty, but Ahalya is an example of human failing and yet, realising her cousin she gets rid of those effects through penances and austerities.

Variety

Woman's position deteriorated to such an extent that fathers sometimes ordered sons

to kill her. Although woman was to be honoured and respected in theory, she could be sold, pawned, dragged in court and treated roughly with the utmost disrespect. Privileges accorded to her were sometimes flouted, although it must be said that such cases were rare. Sometimes chivalrous attitude leads to honour and respect of woman.

Conflict and Final Adjustment

In the religious field superstition took hold of her, in the family, man dominated her. She lost her personality and individuality completely. Thus she became a quantity negligible, a vessel to produce progeny, and an article of enjoyment. Occasionally old ideas that woman should be respected and honoured are repeated, but with an ulterior motive for she was socially useful. This was merely lip homage. It may be contended that women felt satisfied for there was no woman's problem in ancient India. But woman as an individual was hardly existing by the time the didactic portions were written. She was merely a piece of property. Thus the race of Brahmavadinis, Sahadharminis and Spartan mothers was sacrificed at the altar of social convenience and was lost for centuries to come. With this the downfall of the country and its people was inevitable, for in her disregard all action was futile as has been well said in the Mahabharata, (XIII. 46.6). - From The Status of Women in The Epics. By Dr. (Miss) Shakambari Jayal.



Sita-The Ideal Woman

Smt. PREMA PANDURANGAN, M.A.

VALMIKI'S epic sets forth the ideal moral values and the way they are integrated in the personality of Sri Rama. One of the contemplated titles of this epic is *Sitayah caritam Mahat* - the great story of Sita. The *Ramayana* is a rich and variegated canvas presenting a splendid variety of characters sensitively portrayed, ranging from the gods to the animal world. His portrayal of women characters is as significant as his presentation of the men. The master-poet Valmiki presents his heroine in as admirable a light as his super-man Rama.

Other Female Characters

Among the women characters, Sita stands out as a thoroughly integrated, full fledged, complete and perfect woman. She emerges as an ideal Hindu woman through all the vicissitudes of her life. Kausalya is an ideal, loving mother. Ahalya errs but recovers from the curses of the sins. Manthara is a manipulator, a time server, a villain of the piece highly vindictive and wreaks vengeance on Rama. Kaikeyi is the unsteady good woman who can be swayed to take any stand by appealing to her self-interest. She is not firm and fundamentally good. Anasuya is an example of a perfect wife. Surpanakha is a passionate, pervert demoness. Sabari is an ideal devotee. Tara is a diplomatic queen, adjusting herself to the moral codes of a para human world. Mandodari is the monument of patience

suffering in the household of an infatuated lord. Trijata is an exception to the demon world.

In contrast to the studies, Valmiki's delineation of Sita is completely analytic and detailed. It takes into account all the aspects of the woman's role in human life. Sita is a paragon of beauty and many a royal prince longed for her hand in marriage. Her father bestowed her as the prize of valour to the unmatched hero who bent the colossal bow of Siva. We hear very little of the twelve years of married life of Sri Rama and Sita in Ayodhya, before their banishment. They must have been happy and an understanding couple.

Sita's Intrepid Courage and Inalienable Love

Adversity is the true test of the character of any individual and more so in the case of women who love security above all things in life. Sita stands out as a glorious exception, vowing to live a life of unity with her husband, determined to sink or sail with him in all circumstances. Sri Rama asks Sita to stay back at home, when he proceeds to the forest to fulfil the vow of his father. The dialogue between the two reveals in depth the strength of Sita's personality. She is not intimidated or fear-stricken by the horrors of the forest and the troubles of a forest life dwelt upon by Sri Rama. She is an ideal wife and she has no life apart from Rama. There is complete identification of herself with his. She is not taken in by all the good sermonisings of Rama. She literally taunts him: "I think of my father. He sought all the worlds for a bride-groom and at last he got you. If he

thought he got hold of the best man for me, he was a fool. What he had got was a woman, a cowardly woman dressed like a man". (11-30-3).² Rama does not take offence at this, and compliments her on her intrepid courage and inalienable love for him. He assures that he will never be separated from her. The great warrior that he was, he answers the taunts by his magnificent single-handed quelling of the 14,000 demons headed by Khara and Dusana, Sita too accepted the answer to her taunts by a non-conformist expression of her love for him by embracing him openly.

Sita's Insight and Power of Reflection

Sita was not only bold but was critical and cautious in her judgment. When the sages in Chitrakuta approached Rama to kill the demons and save their sacrifices from demonic raids, he assured them that he would give them security by destroying the demons. At this juncture, the intelligent Sita gives an insight into her powers of reflection. She questions Rama's propriety in giving assurance to the sages. While doing so, she sums up the *ethical absolutes* of Sri Rama, namely his unswerving adherence to the impeccable loyalty to his wife. She asks him why he should be at war with the demons without provocation. While raising this objection, she is not slow to word it in memorable words :

Vina Vairam ca raudrata.....

*Snehacca Bahumanacca smaraye
tvam na Sikshaye*

"I am not teaching you anything. I remind you of what you already know, out of regard and friendship for you." Sri Rama feels happy at the wise counsel she offers,

though he does not agree to it. The caution compels admiration but not consent. While disagreeing with her opinion, he expresses happiness at her moral companionship. He says: Sita's wailing and Rama's anguish at her separation have received classic utterances in the matchless mellifluous verses of the Kiskinda Kanda. The verses are an eloquent commentary on Sita's nature as an ideal beautiful wife. In the period of banishment Sita's one thought is Sri Rama. The poet in the words of Hanuman observes she did not perceive trees, nor flowers, but only saw Rama, all the time, in her heart." She is sorrow personified.

Her super-human power of endurance

Her powers of endurance are almost superhuman. She knew how to wait and was unconquerably persuaded about Rama as the supreme redeeming power. We have the confirming evidence from Hanuman about her single-minded devotion to Rama. This was reciprocated by Rama.

She could encounter temptation in the face. The dialogue between Ravana and Sita bears this truth. The demon king tries all the viles and art of a super-subtle villain. He utters her, cringes before her, intimidates her, lets a horde of his woman-folk to persuade her, threatens to kill her for a barbarous breakfast. All this is of no avail before this Rock of Ages. She is not impatient. With masterly disdain, yet with a humanity to correct the erring, she "threatens, flatters and advises" him. She laments: "Are there no good people in Lanka. Are there no honest men who care for righteous conduct and would you not

be guided by them? There must be many good people. I suspect that you do not follow them. You do care for good people who are here. Seeing at your mind is bent upon evil courses, I gather that although there are good people to give you proper guidance, you do not listen them."

Her compassion for sinful men

She advises Ravana to delight in his own woman. She terrifies him by recounting the effects of the sin of adultery. She advises him to restore her to Rama and save himself. Sita's counsel discloses her powers of clear linking and compassion for sinful men. She is the embodiment of kindness. Parasara Bhatta describes her as *ajnana nighraha* (innocent of punishment). Valmiki has immortalised it in a celebrated half verse: "There is none who does not err. She says this to Hanuman, when he promises to kill the demonesses who troubled her."

Ordeal through fire

Sita's boldness never fails her in the most distressing situation. After the battle, Sri Rama in unbelievable words declares that his mission is over after killing Ravana and that she can go her way. These words rend her heart like poisonous arrows. Yet she stands all this and accuses Rama of speaking the language of a barbarian. Courage is the badge of her tribe, rectitude its foundation, firm faith is its root. She comes out pure from the fire ordeal. Again she falls under a situation when Rama abandons her on the pretext of a scandal involving his acceptance of her after ten month's stay in Ravana's kingdom. This too

she endures to illuminate and glorify the character of Sri Rama to make it untarnished. Her powers of endurance are marvellous.

Valmiki's portrayal of Sita is not a lifeless model of perfection. He was aware of the failings of a woman in sorrow. We get a peep into this aspect of Sita's character when she suspects needlessly the innocent Lakshmana, of a design to appropriate her. Her stinging words throw him out of the path of duty and the abduction of Sita ensues. That is the beginning of the tragedy. The words of Sita, in this scene, disclose the intensely human nature of a woman who deeply loves her husband. Sita is a perfect woman, "to warn, to command and to comfort". Her cruelty to Lakshmana was not born of hatred for him, but out of her love for Rama. The radiant monk Swami Vivekananda, and the illustrious Right Honourable Sastri alike acclaim her in their lectures. The monk exclaims "Sita is unique, that character was depicted once and for all. There may have been several Ramas, perhaps, but never more than one Sita. She is the very type of the true Indian woman, for all the Indian ideals of a perfected woman have grown out of that one life of Sita. All our mythology may vanish, even our Vedas may depart and our Sanskrit language may vanish forever, but so long as there will be fine Hindus living here, even if only speaking the most vulgar *patois*, there will be the story of Sita present, mark my words. Sita has gone into the very vitals of our race. She is there in the blood of every Hindu man and woman. We are all children of Sita."



Draupadi and Sita

DRAUPADI and Sita are heroines of the two Indian epic poems, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana respectively. Both are daughters of the earth: Sita because she was found during the ploughing for a yajna (sacrifice), and Draupadi because she came out of the yajna fire itself. Both were wed in a Swayamwara and each was given to a man who proved himself the best archer of his time. One was exiled for fourteen years, the other for thirteen, and the lives of both, for one reason or another, were fraught with extreme agonies. But despite these similarities, the overall impact of the two is one of immense contrast, because the entire content and style of the two books are diametrically opposed.

Mahabharata and Ramayana a comparison

Mahabharata is a record of human beings with human weaknesses. The entire Ramayana, on the other hand, is in praise of an ideal man and the Ramayana is principally the story of one man, with the other characters serving as a background to set the hero in relief. Besides Rama stands Sita. She has parents as well as in-laws, but her parents' home is a home in name only. Of her relations with her in-laws we hear a little more, but in this context too the characters remain sketchy. Sita goes into the forest with Rama and is finally swallowed up by the earth, but we do not hear a single protest from her father or

mother. It is as if Sita were an orphan. There is a description of the greatness of her father, a ruler of the Janakas, but this greatness of his is of no help to Sita in her times of need.

A web of kinship

In the Mahabharata story we have an account of over three generations of people tied together with the whole web of kinship. Gandhari, who on her marriage to a blind man (Dhritarashtra) had bound her eyes with a strip of cloth, had her brother Shakuni stay at the Kuru court, intriguing on behalf of his sister's children. Kunti, the widow of Pandu, was guarding her five children with the help of her father's people. Draupadi's parents and brothers were very important allies of the five brothers, Dharma, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. The tale of Arjuna's daughter-in-law Uttara and her brother Uttara forms a lovely sub-story. The great grandfather Shantanu and his son Bhishma have an important role in the development of the story. Thus the background of many individual lives: brothers and step-brothers, older and younger generations, wives of brothers, uncles and nephews, relations by marriage and many others with their intricate rivalries and alliances give Draupadi her many dimensions.

Till the day they married Draupadi, the Pandavas were moving incognito from town to town, They had escaped from a horrible death planned for them by the Kauravas, and were afraid of letting their enemies know that they are alive. In the court of Drupada they sat, under assumed identities, among a group of poor Brahmins.

Arjuna's success in the contest won for the Pandavas not only a beautiful wife but also powerful allies. With these and the Yadavas to back them they could ask for their share of the Hastinapura kingdom. Through their marriage to Draupadi they got a wife, status and a kingdom.

Draupadi a symbol of unity and solidarity

As the daughter of a powerful, and noble family, Draupadi was the living symbol of the Pandava's new position; but more than that as the wife of all five she was the source of their unity and solidarity. The day Arjuna won her and brought her home his mother unwittingly said, 'Whatever you have brought today, share equally with your brothers as always'. Then she saw the lovely young girl ! How could she be divided among the five? Dharma told Arjuna, 'Brother, you won her; you marry her.' Arjuna answered, 'How can I commit the sin of marrying before you and Bhima, my elder brothers? You are the eldest; you marry her.'

Draupadi - the Wife

Arjuna was right. From the Vedas and the Brahmanas onward it was considered not only contrary to good etiquette but sinful for the younger brother to marry before the elder. If he did so, the guilt not only fell on both brothers, but also on the parents who had consented to the marriage. The reasons for this are clear. In ancient times the eldest had the right of succession and inheritance. To be able to perform the shraddha (offerings to the dead) of his

parents and the duties of a householder, he had to be married. Moreover, the younger brothers had access to an elder brother's wife, but over the younger brother's wife an elder had no right. Thus the marriage of the younger brother before the elder deprived the elder of his social, familial and religious rights and for this reason such a marriage was considered a sin. Had Arjuna married Draupadi first, his elder brother could not have married her. On the other hand, Dharma as the elder had the right to marry her though she had been won by Arjuna. In his grand-father's generation, Bhishma had won a girl and given her to his brother. If Dharma alone had married Draupadi all five would have had the right to her, but the text suggests the following reason that this alternative was rejected and she was solemnly married to each. As the discussion about what to do with Draupadi went on, the eyes of the five brothers were fastened on her with unconcealed desire which did not escape the shrewd observation of Kunti. Finally, through her wisdom and a stratagem of Vyasa the dilemma was resolved so that Draupadi became the wife of all five and her marriage to all five thus destroyed any possible seeds of dissension.

Kunti had watched over the Pandavas until the day of their marriage after which Draupadi assumed the responsibility.

Like a boat, she saved the Pandavas

Very soon after her marriage Draupadi saved her husbands from utter ruin. In the dice game Dharma had not only lost his entire kingdom but had staked his own wife. Dragged into the assembly of the Kauravas

she was shamefully dishonoured. Finally, fearing that the indecency had gone too far and would have terrible consequences, Dhritarashtra intervened. To Draupadi he granted three favours. With the first she freed Dharma as the crowned king; with the second she freed the remaining four. Then saying, 'If my husbands are free and armed, that is enough for me'; she refused the third favour. Skillfully asking the favours, without making any demand for herself, she had saved all the Pandavas from degradation. Karna again summed it up as: 'Up till now we have heard of many beautiful women in the world, but no woman has done anything equal to what Draupadi has done here today'. The Pandavas and Kauravas were burning with anger and in that conflagration no one can say what might have happened, but Draupadi has re-established peace. Like a boat she has saved the Pandavas, when they were about to drown in a sea of disgrace! The taunt that they had been saved by a woman infuriated Bhima. But though Karna had said it maliciously, it was true.

Exiled to the forest

The word used for the period spent in the forest is the same in the case of Draupadi and Sita - Vanavasa (leading a forest life) - but there the comparison ends. Draupadi was driven to the forest by her husband's addiction to gambling and the consequent loss of his kingdom. Sita's forest life on the other hand, was the result of her husband's idealism and sense of duty. It was a self-imposed ordeal. The Pandavas, however, were forced into exile.

As Draupadi had the right to share in the splendour and greatness of her husbands, so now she had the responsibility of sharing their suffering and disgrace. The Pandavas' other wives had taken their children and gone to their parents' homes. Draupadi sent her children to her parents - they had to be educated so it would not do to keep them in the forest - but she herself stayed with her husbands. She was not one to suffer in silence, however. She clenched her fists and cursed; she burnt with anger. When her brother Dhrishtadyumna visited her in the forest, she wept continuously and cried with bitter rage, I have neither husbands, nor brothers nor father. If I had, do you think they would have stood for my being insulted like this?"

Life in the forest

When everyone had left she again brought up the subject, trying in vain to persuade Dharma to take revenge against the Kauravas.

Fortunately, however, Draupadi was not free to brood over the past. Even in the forest she could not escape the responsibility of being a daughter, daughter-in-law and wife of the great kings. From morning to night she was busy. She had to make her preparations for the vitally important rites conducted by Dharma and the family priest. Despite the Pandavas' limited means, they could not stint in the performance of the ceremonies. Nor did the Pandavas escape the obligations of hospitality, obligations prescribed by the Kshatriya code and by political considerations as well. Hundreds of guests - Brahmins and others - were continually coming and going, giving

Draupadi even less solitude and leisure than she had in the palace. When she was not working she had to sit and listen to the long-winded tales of the guest rishis. All this time she was reconciled to her fate and dwelt continually on her hope for revenge.

Sita's exile compared to Draupadi

Sita's exile was un-shadowed by hatred and suffering. For more than twelve years she lived in a continual honeymoon. Occasionally there were just enough cruel beasts to give one a few delightful shivers. To Sita herself the memory of her exile was so idyllic that during her pregnancy she craved for only one thing - to go back to the forest.

The story of Rama and Ravana with their armies of monkeys, bears and demons seems more a fantasy than a fact.

Draupadi's troubles were human, brought on by people of this world and particularly by her own husbands.

In almost every episode, insult is piled upon insult, constantly adding fuel to the hatred in her heart. Two words keep recurring in reference to Draupadi - *nathavati anathavat* 'having husbands, but like a widow'. She was the wife of the five but bereft, the daughter of a rich house but like an orphan, she had brave allies but she was alone. This was the pity of her situation. Every time she was dishonoured, her husbands and father-in-law stood watching in silence. They had to; they were powerless. Only twice was she saved; once by a divine miracle, another time secretly by Bhima.

Furthermore, the war in Mahabharata was a real war, bringing grief to victor and vanquished alike.

Draupadi's full-grown children were dead, her father's clan nearly destroyed. As the dying Duryodhana had said, she and Dharma would reign over a kingdom of widows.

The end of a Yuga

The end of the Mahabharata is not merely the end of Draupadi. or the end of the Pandavas or of their clan. It is the end of a yuga. Each agony of that dying yuga Draupadi suffered in her own person. When her sons were treacherously killed, she wept and complained for the last time. From then on we hear her voice no more.

In Rama's war against Ravana it is true that Sita was the one and only cause. But that Draupadi was the cause of the war in the Mahabharata - at least the main cause is definitely not true. The seeds of war had been planted on the day Dhritarashtra was denied the throne because of his blindness, and Pandu was made king.

Draupadi the faithful wife

How little Draupadi mattered can be seen in Krishna's offer to give her and a share of the kingdom to Karna, if he would join the Pandavas. Fortunately, Draupadi had no inkling of this contemptible bargain. In the opinion of some, it is true, such an arrangement would have been to Draupadi's liking; for they claim she loved Karna. However, this opinion too is entirely unwarranted. The Mahabharata makes no attempt to idealize its characters ; in every character it brings out the good and the

bad. If the thought of anyone other than that of the Pandavas ever entered Draupadi's mind, we can be sure that the Mahabharata would have mentioned it. She had never so much as looked at Karna. According to the critical edition, Karna didn't even attempt to win her in the Swayamvara. In the whole of Mahabharata, Draupadi and Karna had nothing to do with one another. The notion that she loved him came in a later Jain Purana, not in the Mahabharata itself. The Draupadi of the Mahabharata stormed and raged, but to the last moment she remained a faithful wife. There is not a single incident in her life that casts the slightest suspicion on her.

The account of Sita's suffering should have been in the kavya tradition; suspicion of heroine, the clearing of her name, and finally, reconciliation - the structure exemplified in Kalidasa's Shakuntala.

Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, and other great poets have felt that the abandonment of Sita was unjust. In short, that one event is a blot on the ideal portrait of Rama; but in that very event Sita was transformed from being a shadow of her husband to a person in her own right, with her own sorrows, her own humiliation and the opportunity to face them entirely on her own.

Draupadi's life has nothing comparable to this event. Her sorrows, her humiliations are realistic; they are not merely brought in to embellish the poetry; and their resolutions take place on the level of the real world.

The daughters of the earth

Sita was a daughter of the earth because she came out of the earth; Draupadi was a true daughter of the earth because her feet were firmly planted on the ground, her heart was in the world defined by her marriage and the family, within the boundaries of her father's house, father-in-law's house, her own palace. Her sensitive pride, her willingness to sacrifice herself and her faithfulness to her husbands were the qualities appropriate to her country, time and clan. She was extraordinary, but this very extraordinariness was born out of the ordinary values of her time.

When Dharma lost the dice game and Duryodhana sent a slave to bring her into the assembly, she sent the slave back, saying, "Go into the assembly and ask if Dharmaraja has become a slave before he staked me". Duryodhana replied, "Come into the assembly, you will get your answer!" When she refused to come, Duhshasana dragged her into the hall.

There she stood weeping, but with fury she asked the question again.

The question Draupadi asked rested on a - difficult and complicated legal point. Even Bhishma, who had often taken the part of the Pandavas in quarrels with Dhritarashtra and Duryodhana, was unable to give an answer, perhaps for fear of compromising Draupadi.

If Bhishma told her that her husband's rights over her did not cease, that even though he became a slave, she was in her power and he had the right to stake her, her slavery would have been confirmed. If Bhishma had argued that because of his

slavery her husband had no more rights over her, then her plight would have been truly pitiable.

The Dilemma

Draupadi's question had put all of them in a dilemma. Bhishma hung his head. Dharma was ready to die of shame. Draupadi was standing there arguing about legal technicalities like a lady pandit when what was happening to her was so hideous that she should only have cried out for decency and pity in the name of the Kshatriya code. Draupadi at that moment called on neither man nor god, but from the way garment after garment kept appearing to replace the one Duhshasana tore away, it seemed as if the power of the universe itself had awakened to protect her. Still she kept insisting on the question of Dharma's right to stake her. Finally Duryodhana said, "Ask your husband this question. We trust Dharmaraja's wisdom and judgment so much that we will abide by his decision." Draupadi's question and Duryodhana's cunning answer cut Dharma to the quick.

Obtains Freedom

The hall filled with ominous threatening noises, the evil had reached its climax. Duhshasana, exhausted and ashamed, turned away. Vidura arose, greatly troubled, and said to Dhritarashtra, "These deeds will bear terrible consequences; intervene now and save the clan." Frightened at all that had happened, Dhritarashtra freed Draupadi and granted her three favours and with them she obtained the freedom of her husbands.

Draupadi's first mistake

Nevertheless no one had liked her pretensions to wisdom and Dharma never forgot it for the rest of his life. In the forest, too, Draupadi sometimes tried to show off her learning before him, but defeating Dharma in learning was impossible; each time he quickly silenced her. She had made many mistakes in her life that were forgivable but by putting on airs in front of the whole assembly, she had put Dharma into a dilemma and unwittingly insulted him. The fact that the insult was unintentional did not make it forgivable. Though she was only a young bride of the house, she had spoken in the assembly of men something she should have known she must not do. Beyond that, to pretend that she could understand questions that baffled her elders - that was inexcusable arrogance. These two things wounded Dharma and did nothing to add to her good name. In the Aranyaparva, Dharma called her a 'lady pundit' - hardly a complimentary epithet in the eyes of the Kshatriyas of the Mahabharata. Gandhari and Kunti could give advice to their sons because they were older, experienced women. For a young bride to show off her intelligence in the presence of her elders was a grave mistake. This mistake Draupadi apparently never understood and Dharma never made her aware of it. What she had done was the result of her earthly, violent, but basically simple nature.

The other mistake

There was, however, another mistake that Dharma revealed so openly that even Draupadi could not fail to understand it.

They settled their affairs and set out on the last pilgrimage. Month after month the six walked in single file. Then one day Draupadi suddenly fell down. Bhima stopped. Idiotically he asked, 'Why did she fall?'

'Look, won't you - she's fallen' Bhima said. 'Why did she fall?' 'Bhima, keep going. She fell because she loved Arjuna the most', Dharma answered without looking back. Draupadi fell down. Nakula, Sahadeva, Arjuna and, last of all, Bhima fell down one after the other. Dharma alone went ahead with his dog.

The Great Journey

True Draupadi had fallen, but she had not toppled over dead. A terrible fatigue had overwhelmed her. She could not take a single step more. Lying there she heard Bhima's question and Dharma's answer. This was the Great Journey in which no one waited for anyone else. Putting her hand on her head she lay waiting for death. But she was conscious. Dharma's words stirred memories, and in her last moments scene after scene came before her eyes.



She recognised the hurt in Dharma's words, the contempt too. For the first time in her life she pitied the king from her heart. Often in the forest she had commiserated with him about his position, but each time she

took the opportunity of starting a new discussion, pointing at his wretched condition to awaken the warrior in him, so even her pity was a kind of goading. The king never gave in to her. As mildly as he could, he would try to gloss over what she said. He never told her what he was feeling. Only today in a single sentence he had told what he thought was her one defect, and in so doing had laid bare the life-long wound in his heart.

Draupadi understood Dharma's frustration and for a moment she felt regret. But only for a moment. She smiled to herself and remembered the day of the Swayamvara. After Arjuna had won her she had married all five of them one after the other. Didn't the king realise a

little of the pain she had experienced then? She had to kill her own mind. At least in her actions she had treated all five alike. Perhaps the mind couldn't be killed completely. Actions could be made equal, but could the same amount of love be

measured out of the heart for each of the five? If she had loved Arjuna most, was there anything astonishing about that?

Is love one-sided?

Her mind stopped a moment. What does it mean to have loved? Ulupi, Chitrangada, Subhadra - Arjuna had loved so many women. Or had he? Had Arjuna given his heart to any woman? Women had loved him but he had given his heart to Krishna. She knew how from the beginning from the settling of Indraprastha, Arjuna and Krishna would sit talking by the hour. In their talk there was always some new idea perhaps about building a city; but they talked as friends, each one speaking from his heart and listening to the other. No woman could win Arjuna's heart. Is love always like that? Is it always one-sided? I pine for someone who doesn't return my love, someone else yearns for me. Suddenly, as if shocked, she stopped. The realization pierced like lightning; there was one who had given his whole life for her. She sighed with her new understanding. Again pictures came before her eyes; Bhima along with Arjuna, fighting the enemies outside the Swayamwara pavillion; Bhima ready to burn his brother's dice-playing hands when she was dragged into the assembly; Bhima was so angry he had to be held down by Arjuna; Bhima, comforting her when she was tired; Bhima bringing her fragrant lotuses; Bhima, drinking the blood of Duhshasana; Bhima, plaiting her hair with gory hands. Arjuna could have killed Kichaka, but it was Bhima who did. How many things she remembered - greedy Bhima, rough tempestuous Bhima, always railing at Dhritarashtra and Gandhari.

In the same sense that Draupadi was earthy, so was he. She was a daughter of the earth, he was a son.

Bhima's last effort

Draupadi heard a dragging sound, then a great sigh. Her whole body quivered with fear. She had been waiting quietly for the moment of her death. Was a wild animal coming? A hyena? In all the days of walking on the plateau they had seen no animals. Better that it fastened on her throat at once, without mauling her. She closed her eyes hard. As she lay waiting for the unnamed danger to strike, suddenly a shadow fell over her eyes. A curtain had dropped between her and the sun. A low deep voice called, 'Draupadi'. It was Bhima's voice. It was he who had dragged himself, gasping with effort, over the ten, fifteen feet that separated them. On the way he had seen Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva lying dead and had thought Draupadi must be dead too. When Draupadi, frightened at his approach, had quivered, he had caught with joy this sign of life. 'What can I do for you?' The words came out with difficulty. It was the same question he had asked all his life, but in this situation it was utterly meaningless and incongruous. Draupadi smiled. Bringing Bhima's face close to hers. she said with her last breath, 'In our next birth be the eldest, Bhima; under your shelter we can all live in safety and joy!'



Kaikeyi and Manthara

A drama of human emotions

KAIKEYI, who had looked upon Rama as her own son, was enmeshed in Manthara's arguments and became helpless.

"Indeed, I am afraid," she said. "Tell me what we should do. Am I to be a servant to Kausalya? Never, Bharata must be crowned. You are quite right. And Rama must be sent to the forest. But how shall we get all this done? Tell me. You are clever and know the way".

And she clung to Manthara. In Kaikeyi's eyes at that time Manthara's crooked frame appeared handsome. This is not a joke; it is a subtle psychological phenomenon.

"This is indeed strange, Kaikeyi," said Manthara. "Is it for me to tell you how this could be brought about? Have you really forgotten? Or, are you only pretending? But if you want me to say it, I shall do so. Listen.

"Demand that he should crown Bharata instead of Rama. This will be the first of two gifts the king, Dasaratha, promised. For the second gift, ask that Rama be sent to the forest for fourteen years".

"Do not be frightened. Do not fear to ask. Do not think it sinful to demand this, Do what I tell you. It is only if Rama is sent into the forest that his hold on the people will relax and disappear in course of time, and your son's position will be secure".

"Bound by his promise the King will finally come round. I know how passionately he loves you. He would give up his life for

your sake. To please you he would jump into fire. Do what I tell you. Do not be afraid".

"Unless Rama is sent to the forest. your wish will not be fulfilled. Rama *must* be sent away. Only then the position you get for Bharata will be real and lasting. Remember this. Mind you, do not weaken". Manthara repeated again and again that Rama must be sent to the forest. "Do not delay. What needs to be done, do at once. It is no good strengthening the tank-bund after the waters have been drained out. Remember what I have told you. Everything depends on your firmness. Victory is yours, if you do not yield".

Kaikeyi in her anger believed that Dasaratha had really been treacherous to her. Then and there, stretched on the ground, divesting herself of all ornaments and putting on a face of intense grief and anger, she looked inexpressibly beautiful. So rich and versatile was her beauty.

The sinful thought had found lodgment in her mind and her whole nature was transformed. The fear that she would lead a slave's life, and that even Bharata's life was in peril, had got hold of her. For the first time in her life she cast aside the sense of shame and sin and hardened her heart. Heaving heavy sighs, profusely perspiring, and with eyes closed, Kaikeyi, beautiful like a Naga goddess, with unbraided hair, lay there on the floor, the disheveled tresses sprawling like a bird shot down by a hunter. The flowers and jewels, which once adorned her person, lay scattered in the darkness of the room, like stars on a midnight sky.

Dasaratha entered Kaikeyi's chamber to tell her the happy news and spend in pleasant

talk the whole night preceding the coronation. The junior queen's residence was a beautiful palace with lovely gardens and tanks, birds playing in the water and peacocks dancing with tails spread out and trees resplendent with blossoms. In Dasaratha's happy mood it appeared unusually beautiful that night.

He asked a maid-servant where the Queen was. Folding her hands in reverence, the girl said: "Lord, the Queen is angry. She is in the inner chamber."

The surprised King entered the room. And he saw a sight which amazed and distressed him, for there she lay on the bare floor, with dragged robes and disheveled hair, like one in mortal pain. She seemed too full of anguish even to look at him as he entered.

The poor guileless King, all unconscious of having given any cause for offence, behaved with the doting fondness of an old husband and seating himself by her on the floor, stroked her hair and strove to console her with loving words and caresses: "You know my absolute authority. I can give and I can take as I please. Anywhere, to anyone, I can do what I wish. Ask of me anything and it shall be done at once."

Kaikeyi sat up. And she began: "No one slighted or dishonoured me. But there is something which you can do and you must do it for my sake. Give me your word that you will fulfil my desire. Then I shall tell you what it is."

Hearing this, the unsuspecting old man was filled with joy. Possessing absolute powers, he had no doubt that he could fulfil her wishes whatever they were and so boldly and joyously he said: "Well, Kaikeyi, tell



me your wish. It shall be done. I swear it. I swear it on all that I love most.- on you, the dearest among women, and on Rama, dearest to me among men. I swear in the name of Rama: Whatever you desire, I shall do, I promise you, I swear."

"Do you promise? Very well," she exclaimed. "Swear again in the name of Rama. Whatever you wish I shall do. This is my sworn word."

She stood erect and with folded hands, turning in the four directions, invoked in a solemn voice the heavenly powers to witness and confirm the oath. "Oh ye Gods! You have heard and witnessed the promise

given to me by my husband. Sun, Moon and Planets, you are my holy witnesses: Ye, Five Elements! You have heard the promise.

He who has never broken his word, my husband, has sworn to do my wish. Bear witness to this."

The two boons

Kaikeyi said: "Remember you have made a vow. You have given a pledge. You have sworn in the name of Rama. The gods and the five elements have witnessed your promise. I shall state my wishes. Your ancestors never broke their word. Prove yourself their worthy descendant by being true to the word, you have given. With the preparations now afoot for the coronation, crown my son Bharata, This is my first wish. The second boon that I demand is, send your son Rama to live in the Dandaka forest for fourteen years. Remember your solemn vow which you cannot break. The good name of your great dynasty is in your hands." She spoke the terrible words that would mark a series of unfortunate events - Rama's exile, Sita's abduction, her own widowhood and untold agony and shame for her innocent son.

Kaikeyi had been a loving mother to Rama, all along. Had she been mean and selfish by nature, she would have resented Rama's very birth, and his presence. No-where in the Ramayana, prior to the Pattabhisheka is any evidence of a mean or unkind thought in Kaikeyi's mind towards Rama. Did she not then know that Rama would be the future king? Were she selfish, would she not have wished the honour for Bharata, and schemed for Rama's elimination then

itself? The answers to these questions gleaned from the book undoubtedly erase the evil characteristics from Kaikeyi's nature.

The Play at a weak moment

She was extremely beautiful. And she was a favourite consort. She could have sown the seeds of her selfish desires in his mind and carefully over a long period, persuaded him to nominate Bharata as the future king, and schemed the rest of it all. If she were a scheming woman she would have achieved her end more cunningly; she would not have done it in so clumsy a manner as to be responsible for her husband's death and invite condemnation from all, including her own beloved son.

She might have felt a tinge of jealousy, and disappointment in her mind, as the coronation ceremonies reached their completion. Every mother wishes the best for her child and Kaikeyi's surely would have felt a touch of unhappiness that her son could only have the second best, always. Manthara was waiting for this opportunity. Playing upon Kaikeyi's mind in a psychologically weak moment, Manthara achieved her end.

During the brief spell, when Kaikeyi acts with adamant resolution and brings about her own condemnation, she acts as one possessed; and possessed indeed, she was by the evil mind of Manthara.



Taara

*(An Extract from
Rajaji's writings)*



THESE was panic in Kishkindha when the news came that Vaali had been slain by an archer, and the Vaanaras fled hither and thither in hopeless confusion. Taara, seeing this, laid aside her own grief and like a queen put courage in her husband's subjects saying:

"Till this day you walked before the King to battle! Why then do you flee in fear now? There is no danger for you. Rama killed Vaali only to make Sugreeva king. Your lives are in no danger; you will only have a different ruler; that is all. You need not fly or fear."

When she tried to go to the spot where her husband lay dead, the Vaanaras stopped her saying: "We shall crown Angada king and we shall make safe the fortress. We shall defend the town against Sugreeva and his allies."

But she said: "Now my noble lord is dead, nothing matters." And boldly she went straight to where Rama and Lakshmana were standing.

When she saw her husband lying wounded to death she could not control her sorrow; she sobbed and cried.

"Ah my hero," she wept embracing the wounded Vaali. "How many heroes have you laid low and now you lie low yourself ! And you have left me here!"

Taara rolled on the ground and lamented:

"Leaving dear Angada an orphan and myself a helpless destitute you have gone on the journey from which there is no return. My Lord! My hero!"

"I care for nothing," said Taara. "It is for Sugreeva to perform the obsequies and to look after Angada. What is there for me to do -? Can a thousand Angadas equal in my eyes my husband? With him I shall enter the house of Yama. That alone will please me."

Vaali, unconscious till now, opened his eyes for the

last time and addressing Sugreeva said: "Brother, we two could have been friends and reigned happily over the kingdom ; but it was not given to us to be so wise and happy. I have entrusted to you Angada, my son, dearer than life itself to Taara and me. And be kind to Taara who was not only a blameless and affectionate wife, but also a very wise and far-sighted counsellor." Like a flowering creeper embracing a forest tree felled down by an axe, Taara lay on the ground, clinging to Vaali.

With fear and hesitation, Rama gently approached the weeping Taara. But there

was no sign of anger on her face. The words she addressed to the slayer of her husband were worthy of a hero's queen. "With the weapon with which, O Warrior, you killed my husband, kill me too and enable me to join him. Even in heaven, he will not be happy without me. Do not fear it would not be a sin. It will be a meritorious act to unite husband and wife. This will cleanse your sin, your treacherous slaying of my husband."

Valmiki says that at this stage Taara knew the truth of Rama's incarnation and saw Vishnu in him. The traditional belief is that, like Sumitra, the mother of Lakshmana, Taara, the wife of Vaali was a jnani, a knower of Reality. Though at first she hated Rama for his treachery, yet when she saw him face to face she saw his divinity, so it is said.

Even on a rational basis, Taara comes out as a diplomat, an expert in statesmanship. She had the intelligence to anticipate coming events. What had happened had happened. *By his address and good fortune*, Sugreeva had secured the alliance of Rama; Vaali was no more; Angada's welfare was all that she could care for hereafter. Could Angada afford to antagonise Sugreeva, with Raama and Lakshmana ready to support him bow in hand? Peace, not war, was indicated.

Hence, when she concealed her anger from Raama and put on an appearance of patient submission to events, she was really securing the best interests of Angada and winning for him the compassion and sympathy of all.



Kunti - A Model of Woman's Uprightness

Men acted, Men directed, Women suffered

THE making of some lives is entirely in the hands of others. That was the case of women in the times of Mahabharata. Their happiness, their sorrows were decreed by men to whom they belonged. Men acted, men directed and women suffered. Gandhari, Draupadi, Subhadra were all such women but they were given at least a few years of wealth and well being.

Enter: Kunti

Kunti alone among them seems to have been born to endure only sorrow. A dozen years of happiness were too few to compensate for her long life of sorrow and humiliations. Every man in her life contributed to her unhappiness. She never said anything directly blaming her husband but she did reproach him! father bitterly. 'As a spend-thrift squanders his money unthinking, so did my father give me away when yet a girl to his friend.'

Kunti's father was a Yadava Prince called Shurasena. A very dear friend and cousin called Kunti Bhoja, who hadn't even a daughter, asked his friend Shurasena for the gift of Kunti and Shurasena gave her away.

The magic formulae

The adoptive father employed Kunti to serve and win the favour of a Brahmin sage

called Durvasa, who was famous for his magical powers as well as his bad temper. Service in this context meant personal service: being at the beck and call of the sage, doing all his bidding. The sage was so well served by her that he went away pleased. He promised progeny to the king and gave Kunti some mantras (magic formulae) by which she could compel any God to beget sons upon her. She was full of curiosity and recited one mantra to see what happened. It was the mantra calling the Sun-God, who came, and she conceived a son from him. Kunti's old nurse kept the whole affair a secret and when the baby was born, she put him in a box along with a lot of gold and floated the box on a small river.

Her own father gave her away to a friend. One life-long sorrow was born of this action. Her adoptive father gave her in marriage to a sterile man; and all the rest of her sorrows were a result of this union.

Pandu her husband

Pandu, her husband was the king of Hastinapura. Kunti, therefore, was the queen. What kind of privileges she enjoyed as Queen we do not know. She herself mentions just once, at the very end, what she had when a Queen. Pandu, as became a king, went on a conquering expedition, defeated many a king and brought immense wealth as tribute. He presented it all to his blind elder brother Dhritarashtra and himself went to live in the Himalayan forest with his two queens, Kunti and Madri.

The sage curses Pandu

The Mahabharata says that there he incurred the wrath of a sage and was cursed that union with a woman would prove fatal to him. Pandu must have known this lack in himself. There does not otherwise seem to be any reason for his retiring to a forest with his two Queens in the prime of life. All the Kuru kings were addicted to hunting but that could not have been his reason, for they did not take their Queens with them to the hunts. Pandu had gone to the forest with the intention of living there. Did he intend that some other man should beget children on his Queens? Did he wish to carry out this plan away from the capital so that nobody should know the identity of the fathers of the children? He did get his five sons in this manner. Why did he remain there after getting the sons? Possibly in the hope of getting some more.

The sons are born

Pandu begged Kunti (the senior Queen) to conceive so that she may have some sons. At this request Kunti told him about the gift given to her by the sage Durvasa. This was also an opportunity for her to reveal the existence of Karna. According to the custom of those days, such a child could have become a legitimate son of Pandu, but Kunti at that time had no idea what had happened to her son or whether he lived at all. She, therefore, never said anything about this child. Kunti got three sons from three Gods - Yama, the law giver and God of death, Marut, the God of winds and storms, and Indra, the King of Gods.

Kunti's eldest son, Yudhishtira (called Dharma) was born before Duryodhana, the son of Dhritarashtra. After three sons were born to Kunti, the younger Queen Madri begged Pandu to get a magic formula for her from Kunti as she did not want the stigma of barrenness. Kunti agreed and gave a mantra to Madri. Madri is supposed to have called the heavenly twins, handsomest among Gods, and gave birth to twin sons. When the King asked Kunti for another magic formula for his younger Queen, Kunti gave a characteristic reply, "I was a simpleton to give a mantra to this scheming woman. She was clever enough to get two sons with the use of just one. If I give her another, god knows how many sons she will have. For all I know she might establish her superiority and gain the upper hand. Now we will, neither of us, have any more children."

Kunti was not to become the queen

These words make one feel that if Madri had twins, Pandu might have got more sons. After Kunti's refusal to have any more children, the whole family might have returned to Hastinapura. Pandu was the king and Kunti could have taken her position as the Queen and the sons would have been the heirs to the throne. This was what Kunti had striven and hoped for. But this was not to be.

One day while wandering in the forest Pandu saw Madri unaccompanied by the children or servants. Madri was in the bloom of youth and famous for her beauty. In fact Bhishma had paid an enormous bride-price to secure her as a wife for Pandu. Pandu could not resist the temptation and

in spite of her remonstrances possessed her and died, according to a curse, in the moment of his fulfilment. Just then Madri heard Kunti coming with the children and cried out, "Kunti, hurry and come alone. Keep the children away!" Kunti at once guessed what had happened and came rushing, wringing her hands.

Pandu's death: Kunti's fury

"All is lost, all is lost," she wailed. She saw the dead king lying by the side of Madri. She could not contain her fury. "I protected him all these days. How could you tempt him? Indeed, you are to be congratulated that you looked upon your fulfilment in the face of the king in your arms!" Poor Madri could only murmur, "I tried my best to dissuade him but he would not listen!" Kunti went on unheeding, "I am the senior wife, and it is my duty to follow the dead husband. Get up, take charge of the children."

Madri chooses the only way out

Madri was standing stunned and trembling, but these words brought her *out* of her stupor. In one moment of horrible clarity she saw her futile life stretching before her in unending misery and chose the only way out. She said in a firm but pleading voice, "Kunti, he died because of me. Let me follow him. Let me give him in heaven what he desired here. I could never be impartial between your children and mine. On the other hand I am sure you will look after mine as your own. Take them in your care, Allow me to follow the king."

Rivalry and intrigues

Rivalry and intrigues among co-wives in Kshatriya households had been an important part of the past history of India. Without Kaikeyi and Kausalya there would have been no Ramayana. Draupadi who was the foundation of the Pandavas' greatness had to acquiesce, though none too graciously, in Arjuna's bringing Subhadra as the younger co-wife. A thousand years later Kalidasa depicted his political drama round the rivalry of Dharini, Iravati and Malavika. Still more recently, the whole course of Maratha History was shaped by the competition for power among Shivaji's wives and their sons.

Madri burnt herself on the king's funeral pyre. Madri's lot in choosing death was indeed hard but the life which Kunti was left to drudge alone was equally hard, if not harder.

Kunti comes out as a hard and unjust woman on this occasion. Hard as she always was, she was rarely unjust. In a patriarchal, polygynous society a woman's status depended entirely on the position of the man who was either her father or husband or son. The highest that a Kshatriya woman could hope for, was to be the eldest wife of a crowned king and to give birth to his eldest son. To have more sons than the co-wives was also a means of securing, if not the love of a husband, at least the position of the chief Queen.

Kunti's series of miseries

Kunti did not want the stigma of barrenness to attach to Madri but she was certainly

not going to allow the junior and more beautiful Queen to have more children than herself. She knew the preference of the King for the beautiful Madri and her first outburst was due to spite and jealousy. But her claim that she had guarded the king's life so jealously was *just*. On the life of the king depended the security of her sons, who would have in due time succeeded their father to the throne.

Pandu was the fourth man in her life to contribute to her miseries: her two fathers, father and foster father, Karna and now her husband. When everything had seemed within reach, his one rash act dashed Kunti's hopes. Pandu and Madri escaped, perhaps to enjoy companionship and bliss in heaven, as poor Madri had said. But Kunti had to travel the hard stony path of her life alone.

The young princes

Kunti returned to Hastinapura with the five children.

These years of Kunti's life were comparatively peaceful. Hardly had Kunti heaved a sigh of relief when fresh troubles arose. Though the Pandavas were received as princes, they were not acknowledged as sole heirs to the throne. Dhritarashtra continued to rule though uncrowned and quarrels broke out among the cousins. Kunti's Bhima, a hefty fellow, delighted in frightening his cousins. Apparently they in their turn tried to poison him. Kunti's children proved themselves to be quick in learning the art of weaponry. Her eldest son Yudhishtira was well liked because of his good looks, learning, wisdom and deportment. People already pointed to him

as the heir to the throne. It was against this background that Dhritarashtra planned to remove the Pandavas from the public eye by sending them to Varanavata.

Though fully aware of the plot, Kunti and Pandavas kept Purochana off his guard by pretending to lead normal lives. Kunti, as befitted the mother of princes, kept an open house. Every day Brahmins and hundreds of poor people enjoyed their hospitality.

The escape

The night they escaped, Kunti had to walk for miles. After sometime they all reached a deep forest where even the guidance of the stars failed. All rested under a tree and sent Bhima to bring some water. When Bhima came back and saw his mother sleeping on the ground he lamented the fact that a woman of her status had to leave the palace and sleep on the bare earth. Kunti, however, would not have judged herself to be badly off at all. She had foiled the plot of her son's rivals. As a Kshatriya woman that was enough for her.

The exile

On the day of the wedding Kunti entrusted the care of the sons to Draupadi. She felt that she could now look forward to a quiet life, but as usual, her hope was in vain. Her eldest son gambled away his kingdom. This time, being old and frail, she could not accompany her sons into exile and had to remain in Vidura's house. This position of dependence was harder for her to take than all the other privations she had suffered during her lifetime.

Krishna negotiates

Kunti's suffering and hope during the year of her sons' exile is very well described in Udyogaparva. Draupadi chose to go into exile with her husbands, leaving her children behind. Kunti, though not in exile, suffered greater agonies because she had to live among the enemies and witness their prowess and prosperity. When Krishna went to negotiate a treaty with the Kauravas he called on her. The moment she saw him she fell upon his neck and burst into tears, recalling all the calamities that had befallen her since childhood.

She sent a message with him for her sons. Her words clearly reveal her mortifications, the hopes for the future and her unbending will. In this message she uses a phrase to describe herself which shows that in spite of the laments she had thought her own life worthwhile. She talks of herself as going from one deep pool into another. She was the daughter of a king. She became the eldest wife of another king. When her son became the king of Indraprasta, she became the queen-mother. She was deprived of her right to the queenship by a rash act of her husband. She was deprived of her right to the queen-mother position by a rash act of her son. And not this eldest son, followed by his obedient brothers, was about to propose a disastrous truce which would bring nothing but contempt from the contemporary Kshatriyas.

She sent messages through Krishna to all her sons. She admonished Bhima and Arjuna not to forget their humiliation. She said "Yudhishtira is the very soul of dharma. Tell him, 'by your behaviour you are destroying dharma'. A king who forgets his

dharma goes to hell and drags with him all his subjects. What was yours by the right of inheritance from your father has been lost. Recover it. Make it your own. Your behavior pleases the enemy. No shame is greater than that I should live on other people's charity while you are still alive. Remember the dharma of the Kshatriya. Do not throw your ancestors, younger brothers and yourself into hell."

Her words were like the lash of a whip. Their aim was only one - to spur her eldest son to fight. Doubtless, Kunti's heart too was made of steel.

The humiliating task

The words in which Karna later spurned her were even harsher than these. She need not have gone to Karna. But the idea that weaning Karna away from Duryodhana would foil Duryodhana's plans effectively made her undertake this humiliating task. She told Karna who he was and asked him to join forces with his five brothers. She tried to tempt him by saying that in joining her other sons as their brother he would gain Kshatriyahood.

Throughout Kunti's life we get alternate glimpses of meanness and nobility. One is repulsed by the Kunti who blamed Madri for her husband's death; but the same Kunti showered her love on Madri's orphaned children all her life.

The war was over and the sad and difficult task of identifying the dead bodies and giving them the proper last rites was being performed. Kunti chose this time to reveal to Dharma the fact that Karna was her first son and as such his elder brother.

One wonders how Kunti could undo the wrong she had done to Karna after his death. From her point of view the reason for what she did was obvious. 'You let me grow up without a Kshatriya's sacrament' was Karna's lament at their last meeting. It was Kunti's firm belief that a man could attain heaven if he was cremated according to the rites due to his status. She must have felt that it was the least she could do for Karna.

Whatever the others might have said, Dharma's condemnation of her was sweeping and merciless. Dharma is said to have mourned the loss of his brother bitterly. He even blamed Kunti for the entire Mahabharata War.

Her unbending will

Just before the end Kunti once again showed her unbending will. After living for fifteen years with Dharma, Dhritarashtra and Gandhari decided to spend the remainder of their lives in the forest.

Kunti also made up her mind to go with him. 'I have never served the older people in my family. Let me do so now by waiting upon my old father-in-law'.

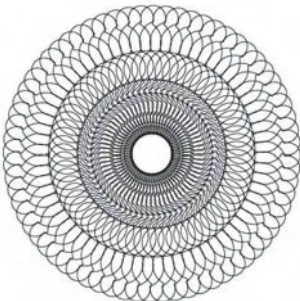
At this the Pandavas broke out into a loud lament. Hearing the lament, Dhritarashtra said to Gandhari, "Tell the daughter-in-law, 'You have suffered much. You should spend your remaining life in comfort with the children'." Kunti would not listen to anyone. The children talked on. Draupadi, weeping, followed Kunti. Kunti walked on for a while in silence. They would not stop following her. She dried her tears and addressed Dharma, using his patronym. "Pandava, all you said is true. When you lay down in

despair, I had to whip you into action. You had gambled away the Kingdom. Happiness had fled from you. Your kin despised you. You were sinking and I pulled you up. I prodded you so that Pandu's house should not become infamous. I had to wake you out of your lethargy so that this daughter-in-law of mine might not be insulted again. Children, as Pandu's wife and queen I enjoyed my kingdom fully. I performed religious sacrifices. I gave large gifts to Brahmins. I drank the sacred soma juice. I sent the message with Vasudeva not because I lacked anything. I have no longer any wish for enjoyment of this life. This is the time for me to practice austerity, serve my parents-in-law and thus attain heaven so as to meet my husband. Don't follow me. Go back!

In the forest Kunti waited on them faithfully. Every day she led them to the river Ganges for their bath and brought them back. The children came once to see them. They all wept again.

Vidura died first. Sometime later there was a great forest fire. Sanjaya, with the three older people, wanted to run to safety. The old people refused to move. They bade Sanjaya to save himself.

Kunti, with her two companions, sat down in a yoga pose, calmly awaiting the fire. She died, as she had lived, without bending.



Manu and His Psychology of Womanhood

Gleanings from " Kamayani" and " Manu Dharma Sastra"

Manu the Man

THE Epic poem by Jaisankar Prasad, 'Kamayani' describes Manu as "a man of complexity, weakness, strength, ambition, loyalty, discontent, passion and fire", an amalgam of characteristics that make him a human being of tossing emotions. His emotions were highly conflicting, yet each equally strong as the other. They seem to have ripped him apart, as it were. His laws reflect his conflict greatly, particularly the ones relating to women and women it would appear from the history of the times, had played no small a part in Manu's life of emotional storms. A man of fiery passions, he had apparently been carried away by the power and vitality of womanhood. Yet, as an individual of strong will, he rebelled against the same power. Deeply and totally involved with women, he had realised with terror the sway that woman exerted over man and rent apart by this passion and fear, he contradicts himself at once by idolising woman and then dashing the idol down at one stroke.

"Women should be honoured and adorned by fathers and brothers, by husbands and also by brother-in-law. Where women are honoured the gods rejoice, but when they are neglected, all rites and ceremonies are fruitless. Where women grieve, that family

quickly perishes. But where women do not grieve, it ever prospers. Houses on which unhonoured women pronounce a curse perish, as if by magic. Woman is the instrument of prosperity, a source of joy to the gods, and she deserves honour from all," says Manu at one point.

Here is, Manu as a man, overwhelmed by his love and desire for woman, exalting her to an altar as only a mad lover could.

"Though destitute of virtue, pleasure-seeking, devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be worshipped by a faithful wife as a god. No sacrifice, no vow, no fast can be performed by a woman without her husband. If she obeys him, she fulfils her part, she will be exalted in heaven. A wife who wants to be with her husband even in death should never displease him; she who controls her thoughts, words and deeds, and does not disgrace her husband, will live with him even in death," he says in yet another place. Here he is Manu the law-giver, setting a rule for the general benefit of society. Knowing woman as he did, recognising her passions and fires within and knowing them to be a power, against which weak men would undoubtedly fail, he sets barriers upon women, in strict social injunctions. By these injunctions, he makes a frantic effort to bury the fiery passions in woman and tame her, that her power may not destroy the social structure.

Manu the Reformer

The conflict of Manu does not stop with this play of emotional involvement with women. He is also totally involved with society as a whole. The ordinary men follow

traditions unquestioningly. It is the emotional kind : artists, poets, etc. who rebel against the norms. Manu, the emotional man was neither an artist nor a poet, but emotional as he was he rebelled against the existing rules, and he turned a reformer.

Men, who want to be reformers are constricted by the scope and limit of the society of their time. Traditions bind them; they cannot go too far, or bring about too drastic a change. Changes that are drastic in nature, even when conceived, have to be reserved for a future date, to be slowly and gradually introduced. So it was in the case of Manu.

He chafed at rigid restraints on women. Better than anyone, he was aware of the woman as a human being, as a being of flesh and blood, her weakness and strength, and tried to adjust the code to this form of woman. Manu's deification of women is not that of a Shakti worshipper's, but that of a man who seeks beauty and art personified in his woman and adores her for it. Hence Manu did not fail to recognise the possible weakness of the human being in her. He expected her to fall from her pedestal, and tried very desparately, with restraint, in tune with the times, to provide for it.

Thus, he stressed, "in the case of her husband's death, the wife should lead a faithful and pure life, of meditation and prayer for his onward journey to the realm of the beyond. She was to live the rest of her life self-controlled, chaste and patient. She was to fulfil the duties prescribed for her as though her husband were living. A wife who remained faithful after the death of her husband would join him in heaven,

even if she had no children." She was warned about the dangers of yielding to desire. " Fidelity was the main virtue of widowhood as it was in married life. A woman who, from the desire to have an offspring, violated her duty towards her deceased husband, brought disgrace on herself. Offspring begotten of another man was unlawful. Nor was a second husband necessary for a virtuous woman. She who forsakes her husband because he belonged to a lower group, was a contemptible woman. By violating her duty towards her husband she lowered herself to the animal stage."

He also said, "however, should a childless widow desire to have a child, she should be allowed to beget one from a relative or her brother-in-law by special permission."

Recognition of the Mother instinct

From this we find that he recognised the force of the mother instinct in a woman, and being sympathetic he tried to make provision for it. Further more while the earlier traditions implicitly felt that a woman should live true to her husband after his death as much as during his lifetime, Manu recognised the human angle overlooked by them. He felt for the emptiness, loneliness and purposelessness of a widow left without even children. He realised that as an ordinary human being, a woman could not go through such a life. A woman lived by her instinct to care for some creature. With her husband gone and with no children, for whom could she care? Without a meaning where would her life steer itself? These questions could have bothered Manu

and he tried for a condition to alleviate this injustice. That is Manu the reformer.

He provides for divorce

He saw the injustice imposed upon women by socially disgracing them, if they were deserted by the husband. He visualised the emotional conflict of human beings living unwillingly together tied down by meaningless religious and traditional restrictions, chafing against them, yet not daring to break away. With remarkable daring he came forward to provide for divorce.

Here he introduced a clause: "A husband should live with his wife for one year even if she hates him. After that they must part. She who disrespects her husband, is passionate, drinks, is of bad conduct, rebellious, diseased, and mischievous, should be superseded by another wife. On the other hand, a woman should not be compelled to live with a mad husband, a mentally defective man, a eunuch, one destitute of manly strength or one afflicted with diseases. She should be allowed to separate from such a husband after receiving her share of property."

Mutual love

"A husband should live with a barren wife or with one whose children die, for ten or eleven years, but must separate from a quarrelsome wife immediately. A sick wife, kind to her husband and virtuous in conduct, may separate if she desires. She should never be disgraced."

Manu strongly felt that marriage was to be based on intelligent understanding

between husband and wife. In short, it was to be mutual love. He felt the necessity for faithfulness in the bond of marriage, but emphasised its importance for both husband and wife. He felt that a man should remain faithful to the thought and memory of his departed wife. It was evident whose cause he was trying to espouse, but he had to do it carefully, lest his words should be totally drowned in the denunciation of the society of the day and their purpose would be lost.

Constantly, he kept close to the human level and considered individual emotions as against generalised rules. So he said, "if desire persists, a man should marry from a lower group. In the case of the woman, she should try and remain pure and controlled. But if desire persists, she should be allowed to beget a child or two in the manner indicated above, and nothing more." Here, again, the broad-mindedness of Manu is evident, when he advocates endogamy. He strongly felt that marriage within one's own group was best. Yet, he recognised that in any region, more than one race of people were bound to live, and as such inter-racial alliances were bound to crop up. He was opposed to social ostracisms, for here again, he permitted a certain amount of race mixture, though with some reservations.

Manu knew too, that like him, there would be men, in future generations who would make a bold attempt to, break away more and more from these rules. He himself had not advocated all the changes he wished to bring about, cribbed in by the society of the times.

We see him fighting all the time against past injunctions, as well as his own

conflicting feelings. Manu is strife personified.

Relevance of Manu in the present society

Manu, the Man, the reformer, is relevant now, and will be relevant always. His recognition of human nature, human emotions and psychology as a basis for formulating a code for social groups is ever relevant. What becomes irrelevant is the Law set by Manu in its application to present times. By breaking away from the injunctions of times earlier to him, Manu sets the example that change is the essence of progress. By adhering to the rules set down by him, we discard Manu in his essence. Manu as a man, in his bold struggle to provide for a society of human beings and not tradition etched idols that could be relevant to all times.



The Age of the Later Samhitas, Brahmanas and Upanishads

THE changes which took place during this period in the position of women were gradual their proprietary rights continued to be unrecognized, the only exception being in favour of marriage gifts of moveable property.

Women Initiates

In the higher sections of society the Sacred initiation (upanayana) of girls was common, and they subsequently used to go through a course of education. Some of them used to attain distinction in the realm of theology and philosophy, and a considerable number of women used to follow the teaching career.

There was, however, a gradual decline in female education as the period advanced. The stem of sending out girls to famous teachers or centres of education came to be discouraged; has laid down that only near relations like the father, the brother or the uncle should teach them at home. Naturally therefore religious and secular training became possible only in the case of the girls of rich and cultured families. As a consequence there arose a tendency to curtail the religious rights and privileges of the average women; many functions in the sacrifice, which formerly could be performed by the wife alone now came to be assigned to male substitutes. Some sacrifices like

Rudrayaga and Sitayaga continued to be performed by women alone, and when the husband was out, the service of the sacrificial fire continued to be entrusted to the wife. In the cultured families, women used to recite their Vedic prayers morning and evening, and perform sacrifices on their husband's behalf, when they were otherwise preoccupied.

Marriage and Equality of Status

The marriage age of the bride continued to be about 16. In practice if not in theory brides had some voice in the selection of their partners in life, and Svayamvara was fairly common in Kshatriya circles. The marriage ideals and the mutual relations and rights of the parties continued to be more or less the same as they were in the earlier age. Divorce was permitted to the wife, though the permission was not extensively availed of. The Sati custom was altogether unknown, and the widow had the option of remarriage either with her brother-in-law or with an outsider. Naturally there was no tonsure of widows. Purda was altogether unknown, but women had ceased to attend public meetings.

How did inequality set in ?

Before we proceed to delineate the picture of the condition of women in the subsequent periods, let us pause a while to consider the causes of the phenomenon of a relatively better condition and status of women in these early centuries, as compared to what it became in subsequent epochs. It is well-known that there took place a continuous and gradual

deterioration in the position of women as a whole during the next two thousand years (c. 500 B.C., to c. 1500 A.D.) How are we to explain this phenomenon? Usually we find that the condition of women improves as society advances to modern times. How is it that there is an exception in the case of the position of women in Hindu Civilisation?

The relatively more satisfactory position of women in the two epochs was due partly to political and partly to religious causes. As a rule, in a community, which is civilised and is moving in search of pastures fresh and new, women occupy an honourable position. Men are mostly engrossed in military or semi-military activities, and they have to rely to a very great degree on the help and co-operation of women in the normal spheres and activities of family life. Under such circumstances, women can clearly and convincingly demonstrate to men that they are not parasites, but useful members of society, whose co-operation is valuable in securing prosperity in peace and victory in war.

Diversities in occupation between men and women

It would appear that the general freedom and better status which women enjoyed in the Vedic age were largely due to men being engrossed in the work of conquest and consolidation. Women used to take an active part in agriculture, and the manufacture of cloth, bows, arrows and other war material. They were thus useful members of society and could not be therefore treated with an air of patronage or contempt. The cheap or forced labour

of the enslaved population was not yet available to the Aryans for the tasks mentioned above.

The Sati custom not revived

The exigencies of the political situation in the Vedic period were responsible for the abolition of the prehistoric Sati custom and the sanctioning of Niyoga and remarriage. Like Hitler and Mussolini, Vedic chiefs were anxious for heroes, more heroes, and still more. The gospel they preached to the householder was not of eight sons of the later days, but of ten. The non-Aryans were probably outnumbering the Aryans, and they were anxious to have as strong and numerous an army as possible. Under these circumstances it would have been a suicidal policy to encourage the revival of the obsolete custom of Sati to prohibit widow remarriage. Society came to the definite conclusion that its vital interests demanded that the custom of Sati should be interdicted and that widows should be allowed and encouraged to marry and multiply the stock.

Participation in Religious Duties

Another factor responsible for the relatively satisfactory position of women was the influence of religion. Asceticism was at a discount in the Vedic age. Maidens and bachelors had no admission to heaven. Gods accepted no oblations *by* the unmarried. It was essential to offer the ordained sacrifices to Gods for procuring happiness and prosperity both here and hereafter and they could be properly

performed by the husband and the wife officiating *together*. Wife was not an impediment but an absolute necessity in the religious service. This circumstance naturally helped to raise her status. To enable her to discharge her religious duties properly, it was necessary to ordain that her *upanayana* should be duly performed; this ensured a proper training and education to girls. It required at least half a dozen years to complete the educational course; that naturally rendered early marriages impracticable. When girls were properly educated and married at the mature age of 16 or 17, a considerable regard had naturally to be shown to their own likes and dislikes at the time of the marriage. Love marriages were also inevitable when girls remained unmarried to that advanced age and were moving freely in society.

It will be thus seen from the above discussion how down about 500 B.C. the custom of Sati and child marriage did not exist to embitter the lot of the woman, how she was properly educated and given the same religious privileges as man, how she could have a voice in the settlement of her marriage and occupy an honoured position in the household, how she could move freely in family and society and take an intelligent part in affairs and how it was possible for her to take to a career, if so urged by inclination or necessity.

Source: The position of Women in Hindu Civilization, by Dr. A. S. Altekar.

Role of the Women in the Religious History of Tamil Nadu

By A. SUBRAMANIAM

WOMAN, "the better-half" is the basic unit of family in a society, has always played a significant role in the cultural life of India. Ever since her birth, a girl is noted for simplicity, quietness and submission to her protector, irrespective of her age and status. In this paper an attempt is made to enquire into the role played by women in the religious history of the land with special reference to Tamil Nadu. Sources for such a discussion are both numerous and varied because every writer from Rig Veda up to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan speaks of the greatness of woman and her unenviable position in the cultural set-up of India that is Bharat.

Woman - her position in Society

According to a Greek myth, human society was originally composed of both man and woman, and some God divided each being into two and these separated halves are continually searching for one another. So it is ideal for the woman to think herself as *ardhangi*.

However, when we go to the earliest literary evidence on the position of women the picture is somewhat confusing. In the entire range of *Rig Veda* no desire is expressed in any context for the birth of a daughter. *Atharva Veda* even deprecates her birth.



There are references to mystic charms for undoing the effect of a female foetus and for changing it into a male one.

During the period of the Upanishads the position gradually changed and certain rituals are prescribed to be performed by the man who wants a learned daughter to be born. Mahabharata says that Goddess Lakshmi resides without fail in a daughter. Ramayana extols the merit of women by mentioning that the unmarried girls were the first to consecrate Rama with holy water during his auspicious bath. Manu, the law-giver, says that a woman does not deserve freedom.

Women due to their constantly changing temperaments should not be called as witnesses. "A woman should not be left unguarded and a man who fails to protect her can be reprimanded."

It is the same Manu, who says that where women are honoured there Gods are pleased to reside. Yajnavalkya extends this dictum further by commenting that those who seek the welfare of the country should always honour women by giving gifts of ornaments, clothes and dainty food on holidays and festivals.

Manu prescribes that a woman should help man to fulfil his religious duties. The discharge of her household duties constitutes her daily worship. Houses on which unhonoured women pronounce a curse perish as if by magic. "To be mothers were women created" .

The reluctance on the part of Manu to give full freedom to women has perhaps to be explained that the contemporary society did not permit it. Moreover his reaction to women's position varies considerably because *Manava Dharma Sastra* was not

the work of a single individual. For instance, Rig Veda speaks of at least four Manus.!

Women in Tamil Literature

Coming to the earliest stratum of Tamil literature, namely those of the Sangam period, only a small part of the collection is religious.

Tirumurugarruppadai (226) speaks of ambalams where women-folk, especially those brought as slaves from the enemy land were engaged in cleaning the shrines with wet cowdung, decorating them with flowers and lighting perpetual lamps.

The anonymous author of the *Periplus* says that women came to Kanyakumari in large numbers to bathe and dwell in celibacy.

Fear born of love, shyness and implicit acceptance and retention of elderly advice without question are the traits ideal to a woman according to Tolkaappiyam. So a woman played more passive role in society. *Purananuru* (II. 85-86) says that housewives talked to a stranger only through a medium, let it be a pillar or even a rafter.

The Sangam society consisted of many types of women such as dutiful house-wife, female ascetics and a separate group of courtesans.

The Sangam Period decayed with the dying of trade with foreign countries like Rome. It was followed by the onslaught of warrior-like people from Central India and Deccan, namely the Kalabhras who themselves were driven from there by the rising power of the Guptas.

Until the rise of the Pallavas of Kanchi, the picture of Tamil Society is bleak. Even the sources belonging to the Pallava period

speak only of the royal pomp and charities endowed on learned groups of Brahmanas by them.

The role of women in high society during the Chola period was varied, important and generally pleasant. The King's palace had 72 departments (niyogas) in theory and a large number of women were attached to the establishment. Women were held in such high esteem that one woman was even appointed as a member of the committee for Justice (nyayathar). However, women belonging to the economically viable section of the community had to undergo great hardships. An inscription from Tiruvottriyur near Madras, records the assignment of five women with their descendants for husking paddy in the temple. There was an acute famine during the period of Kulotunga Chola-III and a *Vellalan* sold himself and his two daughters as slaves to a temple for 110 Kasus.

There was no discrimination in imparting education to women. For example In Batuta (1333-45 A.D.) says there were thirteen schools to provide instructions to women at Hanaur. Sri Appayya Dikshita (1520 to 1592 A.D.) is also believed to have jokingly remarked: 'In our village Achchamma is well known'.

This incident happened when he was once returning to his native village from one of his dialectical tours. The women of the locality were drawing water from the common well. On seeing the palanquin carrying the great man they called out "Here comes the husband of Achchamma". In spite of Dikshita's academic genius he was only "Achchamma's husband" to them. The spirit of independence of women is reflected

even today. We learn that all the members of the Trust managing the Mariamman Temple at Pondicherry are women."

It was once believed that a devout wife should die at the moment her husband breathes his last. This dictum can be slightly amended and put as 'unless circumstances demanded a house-wife must die along with her husband.'

Women of the Sangam age believed that the self-immolation of a Sati would lead her to the world of the Devas (puttelir-ulagu). *Purananuru* says that Perungoppandu, the queen of Bhutappandiyan committed *sati*.

Manimekhalai speaks of an attempted *sati* by Adirai, the queen of Saduvan.

Viramadevi, one of the queens of the Chola Emperor Rajendra-I entered his pyre on his death.

Thus women of the highest ranks in society showed their attachment to their husbands by performing *sati*. However it is not quite clear whether all sections of the society followed the same practice.

Devadasi

Courtesans formed a distinct class of women even from the days of the Rig Veda. They are described as well-versed in all the 64 types of performing arts and their clientele ranged from the ruling monarch to a common man in the street. Law-makers were perturbed by their learning and they put strictures on a house-wife being very learned.

House-wives were always engaged in attending to the day-to-day needs of the household, and they did not have enough time to concentrate on these arts like

music, dance, painting, etc. So a man chose to quench his aesthetic thirst in the company of a courtesan - that is, she gives him what he could not expect from his wife. However, many a household and the economic stability of the family, were brought to shambles by the courtesan, because her only aim was her client's purse. We witness the dedication of eminent dancers to famous temples as Devadasis only from the time of the Cholas. The refined institution of Devadasis had thus a blessed beginning.

The chief duty of the Devadasi was to fan the chief Deity with Chauris, clean the shrines and to dance before the God during festivals.

The Devadasi was married to God and thus she never became a widow. In the marriage ceremonies the God was represented by an icon or even a sword. An old man of her community tied the *tali* for her on behalf of God. Luck and Sanctity were attached to her *mangalasutra*. It was a custom of the day that, whenever a girl was to be married, the Devadasi prepared the *tali* for the would-be bride by placing a bead or two from her own *tali*.

When the Devadasi died, all the services in the temple, to which she was attached, were stopped. Her body was covered by a cloth removed from the image of the presiding deity and flowers from that image were placed on the body. It was also customary that the temple should provide the fire to light her pyre. Usual services in the temple were resumed only after the body had been taken out of the temple for cremation.

Woman - her role in religious life

Religion is a technique for the establishment of a relationship between man, the known and the natural and God, the unknown and the supernatural. Even from pre-historic times man believed in polytheism and most of the divinities were associated with certain natural forces and human instincts. Thus Goddesses were made consorts - embodiments of beauty and fertility.

Tamils of the Sangam age permitted all religions to flourish. They preached ritualistic, supplicatory aspects of religion, as well as the *tapas* of the contemporary type. Tolkappiyam refers to God appropriate for various love - situations (*tinais*). However the religion of this age did not mature into any philosophical system and had no elaborate mythology of its own.

The period immediately posterior to the Sangam Age was the Golden Age of heterodox sects, like Buddhism and Jainism. These sects tried to fill the vacuum created by the absence of popular religion. They did have royal patronage and mass following mainly because they afforded easy religious practices, greater intimacy of the worshipper with the worshipped and above all the religious literature in the language of the common man.

Towards the beginning of sixth century A.D. came a fresh wave of neo-Hinduism popularly called the Bhakti cult. The native religion saw a rejuvenation and resurgence in the untiring efforts of its propagators, namely the Alvars and the Nayanmars. Their sole aim was to re-capture the lost confidence of the common man. They toured every temple in the land, made large

scale renovations of temples and sang the glory of God in simple hymns. Time also favoured their mission which luckily coincided with the gradual degradation in the personal conduct and discipline of monks and bhikkus of the heterodox sects. This movement was carried on in later centuries by great savants like Sankara, Kumarila, Ramanuja, Madhva, and Vedanta Desika. Women did participate in various movements described above and their role can be studied under three of four heads.

Vasuki

Some women thought that service to their husband was service to God. Thus Vasuki, wife of Tiruvalluvar, performed many miracles by her faithful devotion to her husband. Once she was drawing water from the well in their garden. On hearing her husband's call, she ran into the house to attend to him. The bucket with its water remained arrested in that very position till she returned to the well. Tiruvalluvar always kept a conch-shell and a needle by his side while taking his food, to feed the insects with the grains that were strewn around his plate. He did not have the occasion to use them until the death of Vasuki.

Tilakavati (7th century A.D.) took upon herself the weeds of widowhood on hearing that Kalippagai, to whom she had been betrothed, had been killed in the war between the Pallavas and the Chalukyas. More daring is the boldness of a small girl of Srirangam by name Athuloi (11th century A.D.). Her father Periya Nambi was one of the preceptors of Ramanuja, but when he chose to perform the last rites of a low-

born but a true devotee of God, he was immediately excommunicated. Athuloi wanted to prove the righteousness of Periya Nambi's action. When once Lord Ranganatha was being taken in procession through the street she suddenly came out of the house and appealed to God to give the judgment. It is said that Ranganatha approved Periya Nambi's action and he was consequently reinstated at his usual post in the temple." The other type of women were those who were actually involved in the Bhakti movement.

Andal

Andal, "the best exemplar of bridal mysticism," was the daughter of Periyalvar and was a native of Srivilliputtur, a township about eighty kilometers southwest of Madurai. Periyalvar was only an appellation conferred on this pious Vaishnavite, when he "blessed" the Lord with his *Tiruppallandu*. According to tradition Gada - Andal of later times - was born in the 97th year of Kali age (circa seventh century A.D.).

Periyalvar found the child when he was plucking tulsi leaves to prepare garlands for the lord. Gada considered Ranganatha as her consort from her childhood and her passion grew with her age. She got the name of *Sudikkodutta* - Nachiyar as she used to wear the garlands herself to feel satisfied that they were fit for the Lord before sending them on to the temple for decorating the Lord.

One day, the priests of the Srirangam temple were commanded by the Lord to proceed to Srivilliputtur and bring Gada to Srirangam with full temple honours. On

reaching the Ranganatha temple Andal walked to the deity reclining on the Sesa couch, ascended the couch itself and stood by the side of the Lord for some time. She merged into the Divine and disappeared.

Andal identified herself with one of the *Gopis*. Her hymns are included in the First thousand of the collection called *Nalayira Divyaprabandham*.

Two poetic works are attributed to Andal. The first Tiruppavai consisting of thirty hymns is regarded as an offering to Goddess Katyayani to whom the vrata is made in the month of *Margazhi* (December-January) for securing an adorable person as one's husband. The setting of this work is said to have been borrowed from the Bhagavata story.

The other work of Andal is the Nachiyar *Tirumozhi* having fourteen sections of ten hymns each. It is a work reflecting her mind when she imagines and dreams of her marriage with Lord Ranganatha.

Andal's remarkable achievement shows that her becoming the bride of God is "not for seeking forgiveness of the sins of mankind ... but for lightening the burden of the Earth by putting down evil and evil-doers and for bringing triumph to dharma and sukrtas."

Sembian Mahadevi

Sembian Mahadevi was a royal patron of the highest order in the spiritual advancement of the Chola society. She was a queen of Chola Gandaraditya-I (A.D. 950-957). The King had a tragic end in a battle. Sembian Mahadevi placed his brother on the throne and directed Chola administration on spiritual lines during the reign of the next four monarchs. She took

it as her mission in life to change the entire Chola country into an abode of God on Earth. She dedicated everything to God - her riches, times, energy and above all her descendants. To her goes the credit of having converted the dynasty of Chola Emperors into "a dynasty of temple builders and religious socialists."

Other female luminaries of the movement include Mangaiyarkkarasi who fought for Saivism in the land of alien faith, even though her husband - the monarch was a staunch Jain, and Karaikkal Ammaiyar was the only woman to be included in the galaxy of Nayanmars. There were also lay worshippers among women who showed their devotion to God by pious acts.

Alagi

One such woman was Alagi of Tanjore (11th century A.D.). It was the time when the great temple was being built. Every day Alagi went to the temple site and watched the artisans and engineers at work. She also wanted to do her share of work in the monumental project. So she took a few pots of butter milk spiced with ginger, mustard and curry-leaves to the site daily and gave each artisan a cup of cool and refreshing butter milk. The work was nearing completion and Alagi suggested that a block of granite that was lying waste in her garden and be used for carving out the top most block of the vimana in the temple. The artisans were grateful for her refreshing drinks and complied with her request. The Lord was so pleased with her mite that he told the Emperor Rajaraja I, in a dream that He was happy to reside in the abode provided by

Alagi. The Emperor also honoured her by raising a temple-garden in her name. It is said that the present Municipal Office in Tanjore stands on the very site where Alagi's simple hut once stood.

Woman - Her acts of charity

The general dependence of woman on man did not prevent her from making religious endowments in her own name. Royal personages thought God as a human being and provided for the material needs of the temple. Numerous ladies from the chief queen of empires to the casual employee in the palace- kitchen appear as donatrices in many epigraphs. Some women erected new shrines. Thus Pazhiyili Sิริya Nangai, wife of a local chief in Pudukottai area, enlarged the rock cut temple at Narttamalai by adding mukha mandapa, balipitha, and rishabha-mandapa and also made provisions for daily worship and offerings to the God. Perumbidugu Perundevi repaired the Satyagirinatha Perumal temple at Tirumayam and granted a village for its-upkeep. One of the queens of Uttama Chola built the Mahadeva temple at Tiruvallam of stone and provided for maintaining a bower-garden.

Some of the endowments were meant for performing special festivals on auspicious days.

Among the copper-plate charters recording land-gifts the Gunapandyam plates of Queen Charudevi is unique in the sense that she is mentioned as an independent donatrix. The set was obtained from Gunapandyam (Guntur Dt, Andhra Pradesh). It records a gift of four *nivarttanas* of land by her to the temple of Narayana at

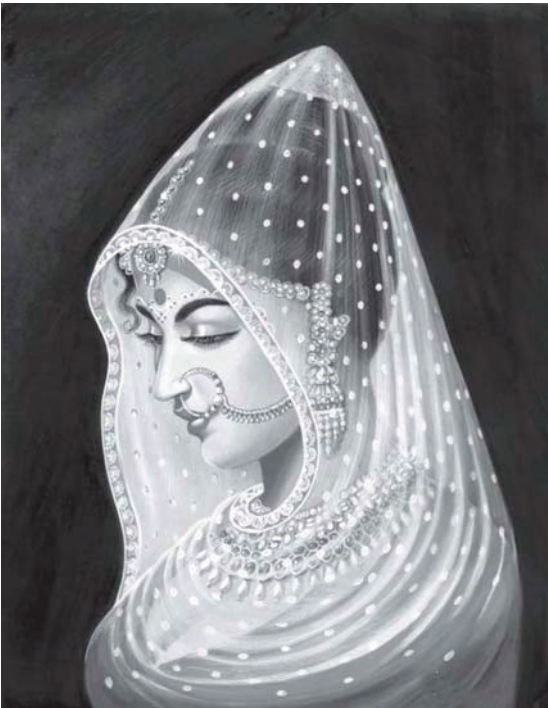
Teluram, a nearby settlement. She was ruling in that part of the Pallava kingdom on behalf of her minor son, Budhyankura. Another set of inscriptions similarly provide a record of gifts of jewels and ornaments. A mistress of the western Chalukya king Vijayaditya, Vinapotigal by name, performed the *hiranyagarbba* at Mahout and presented to the deity a pedestal, set with rubies, with a silver umbrella over it. Kundavai, the elder sister of Rajaraja Chola-I consecrated the metal images of Nataraja, Uma Maheswara and Dakshina Meru - Vitankar in the big temple at Tanjore and gave a number of jewels to the temple. The technical terms occurring in these inscriptions recording the gifts of jewels relate to the methods of setting gems in gold, the different parts of the ornament and details regarding the lac (*arakku*) which sometimes formed the core of the ornaments. The threads (*Saradu*) into which pearls, gold beads and pendants were strung were made of twisted wires. Sockets (*Kevanam*), frames (*Ummachchu* or *Sattam*) and *Pesi* (?) are also referred to. A few records speak of a type of dance-drama (Sakkai Kuttu) in which women took part. An inscription from Dalapatisamudram (Tirunelveli District) says this type of kuttu was enacted by three women in the temple, twice a year during festive days in Chittirai (April-May) and Purattasi (October-November) months. Another record from Kiranur (Thanjavur District) provides for the performance of five angas of this kuttu. An interesting feat of a dancer is described in an epigraph. Uravakki was an expert in performing the *sandhhikuttu* and the contemporary Chola King Raja Raja-III was

so impressed by her performance that he named a village after her as Uravakki Nallur.

Conclusion

From the foregoing account it is clear that the women of Tamil Nadu had always remained an essential and encouraging force in the religious life and upliftment of the society. Without understanding their role some scholars mark them as perpetual minors. This is not correct. Even from the legal point of view, we know that a girl received her share of property in the form of *Stridhana* at the time of her marriage. Further the Dharma Shastras say that a woman could inherit the property of an issueless brother or even a son.

Thus the women of Tamil Nadu have played a remarkable role in the stresses, struggles and successes of the Indian Womanhood through the various ages.



Women In Tamil Sangam Literature

By P. N. APPUSWAMI

The Tamil Land

THE home-land of Tamil, about two thousand five hundred or so years ago, was a territory roughly shaped like an equilateral triangle. Its base lay on the north, and its apex at Kanyakumari in the extreme south of India. It is referred to in old literature as being bounded on the north by Venkatam (Tirupathi Hill), on the south by Kumari, and on either side by the sea. The whole of modern Tamil Nadu and a good part of modern Karnataka and Kerala, were parts of it. The southern section of the Eastern and Western Ghats and their off-'shoots formed its mountain region. On the west a number of small swift rivers ran their rapid course from the Ghats to the Arabian Sea. The relatively broad eastern plain was irrigated by a few bigger rivers, notably the Kaveri and the Vaigai, which flowed into the Bay of Bengal. It was here that the Tamil folk lived, ruled and loved, over two thousand years ago.

This territory had long been known in north India as Dravida, with no specific connotations. This term was applied by the nineteenth century philologist Dr. Caldwell to a group of languages spoken mainly in the south. The ethnologist Risely borrowed the term and applied it to a certain ethnic type. Later ethnologists and anthropologists do not normally use the term in learned publications. In fact, in scientific usage there is no Dravidian race and no

Aryan race, but the two terms are used only in linguistic or perhaps cultural contexts. Politicians may attach other senses to them, but in doing so they have no good scientific basis!

The People

Tamil Nadu has been aptly described as an ethnological museum. Negroid, Proto-Austroloid, Proto-Mediterranean, Alpine, Armenoid and Nordic elements, have gone to make up this racial mixture! So we find in the Tamil country today a tangle of racial types, whose origins date from far-off times. While it is impossible to unravel these, it is well to recognise that such a tangle exists. With the advent of the Aryans in South India, early in the first millennium B.C., there was further inevitable fusion between the races. And none today can distinguish the native warp from the foreign woof! The epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* contain some references to the Tamil people and their three kingdoms, but conservative scholars and cautious historians are inclined to believe that these references are not authentic, and are interpolations of late redactors. Historically the three Tamil kingdoms appear together for the first time in the 3rd century B.C., in the inscriptions of Asoka ... It seems likely that the three Tamil kingdoms were by then in their traditional locations and the context in which they are mentioned shows that they were already receiving elements of Aryan culture, whether Hindu or Buddhist.

The Jains were by this time finding their way to the south also.

The Language and Literature

How and when did Tamil evolve into a highly literary language and a capable medium of expressing the moods and the behaviour of the people? When and how did the Tamil country feel united as one people, though it was under the rule of some major kings and minor chieftains who often warred with each other? These and many similar



questions are clouded by the fog and *mist* of the myths and legends of pre-history. How much were they influenced by their neighbours and how much did they influence them in respect of language, culture, social behaviour and patterns and the arts and crafts of government? It is repeatedly

stated, however that, from time immemorial, the Tamil country consisted of the three kingdoms - Chera, Chola, and Pandya.

Round about the beginning of the Christian era we find that the Tamil people had developed their literature to an amazing degree. The beginnings of that literature are lost in pre-history. Even then there must have been a large body of poetry, since all the early literature of ancient nations are uniformly poetic in form. Much of this 'poetry' must have been poor in quality and has been deservedly lost. But in the course of years, owing to the impacts of several factors, a body of good poetry did spring up and was cherished by an understanding people. How long it took this poetry to grow and mature we have no means of knowing now.

The earliest extant literature of the Tamils perhaps dates from the First and the Second centuries A.D. Some scholars would like to put it in earlier and some would put it later. The later history of the relations of Dravidian and Aryan speakers is one of increasingly closer cultural influence. I know of no evidence of mutual antipathy or of a consciousness of any great difference between northerner and southerner. There was no strong sense of polarity either in the world of politics or in that of religion, between Dravidian speakers and Indo-Aryan speakers, between the north and south. Each recognised the other as a member of the Aryan community and as an inhabitant of the great culture-region known as Bharata Varsha. This is not to say that there were no differences or that these differences were not recognised. But the distinction between north and south

in matters of language, religion, polity and social structure were not thought of as any more fundamental than those between other regions of India in the past the whole genius of Indian civilisation has favoured a wide diversity, political, social and cultural, within the broad frame-work of eternal Aryan Dharma, liberally interpreted which prevailed throughout the sub-continent. And at most periods India has flourished and developed in that diversity.

Sangam Poetry

This great literature of the ancient Tamils must have consisted of thousands of loose poems of various grades of merit. Sometime after the beginning of the Christian era, the best of that poetry was put together by poets of distinction and discrimination at the direction of persons of authority. Nine anthologies were so prepared, eight of short poems and one of ten much longer poems. The shortest of them consists of three lines and the longest of very nearly eight hundred lines!

These constitute what has come to be known as *Sangam Poetry*, from an unconfirmed tradition that all the poets represented in these anthologies were members of an academy at Madurai. Though the words and the syntax of the poems are archaic and the background often unfamiliar, the language is flexible as well as terse, 'adjective packed, participle crowded'! *Most* of the poems are real gems, full of feeling and wrought with care and they combine idealism with realism and classic grace with indigenous energy and strength.' They are 'marked by a directness and human interest rare in later times, and

furnished many vivid pictures of social and economic life, rural and urban! 'In their antiquity and their contemporaneity there is not much else in any Indian literature equal to these quiet and dramatic Tamil poems. In their values and stances, they represent a mature classical poetry; passion is balanced by courtesy, transparency by ironies and nuances of design, impersonality by vivid detail and leanness of line by richness of implication. These are not just the earliest evidence of the Tamil genius. The Tamils in all their 2000 years of literary effort, wrote nothing better! 'The earliest lyrics are first rate, their brevity and tenderness perhaps help raise their quality' says Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri.

The Information

However, apart from the epigraphical evidence of Asoka's edicts just beyond the borders of Tamil country, the few inscriptions, in Jain caves in the interior, and the rather slender foreign notices, we have no matter of fact evidence of how the people lived and what they did, in those far-off days. But the rich and varied and almost detailed information to be found among the 33,000 lines of poetry (actually there should be 36,000 lines, but 3000 have been lost), afford us a detailed though somewhat coloured picture of those times. These pictures by men and women of imagination, yet of clear vision and accurate expression, provide us with some believable material. We get fair enough pictures of the men and women in many classes of society, from kings and queens to slaves and harlots and of all ages, from

childhood to old age; of many occupations, from ambassadors to the lowest grades of working men and women: of men who lived by their cruelty and women by their beauty; of people in all moods of joy and sorrow, of pain and pleasure; of playing children with the world before them; of the sorrowing widow and the grief stricken widower, of both of whom the world seems lost.

The anthologies have included the poems of about five hundred poets and poetesses. About forty of them are women; and one poetess (Avvai), has fifty-nine poems of hers in the anthologies. All the women poets are respected members of the court and we find them moving with equal ease and freedom with the king and the courtiers - a truly remarkable achievement in an early civilisation. We find among the poetesses a queen, a couple of princesses, a noble woman, a demonolatrous priestess, a potter woman, a couple of women belonging to the trading and agricultural classes and hill tribes. They follow different religions, and occupations.

What do these contemporary poems tell us about the women of those days? They tell us that women moved freely everywhere; sang and danced ; praised and scolded (were petted and pampered), drank wine and ate meat and shared both with their kings and patrons; that they dressed well, wore flowers and perfume; and loved and chose their partners in life; rejoiced with' them, pined in their absence; and were on the whole happy as children, wives and mothers and enjoyed life to the full.

These poems of long ago were not meant to give photographic views of: the men

and women of those days and of the social and politically disturbed conditions in which they lived. They were rather the imaginative expressions of the poets' moods set against a somewhat idealised context. Mostly, they relate to kings and chieftains and to the higher middle class society, though now and again we have pictures of the poor and the lowly. Their kings and chieftains are all men of valour and are generous and discriminating patrons of poets and poetesses. In the love poems the men are mostly rich ; or they journey to distant lands, beyond the mountains and the wild uninhabitable regions, - lands in which a different language is spoken, in quest of wealth. And, generally, they come back in a tall chariot of their own, having gathered the desired riches. We are not told where it was exactly that they went to nor what they did to acquire wealth nor anything about the talent they had which was not appreciated at home but valued abroad. But they go forth and come back home to gladden the hearts of waiting spouses who are all beautiful and young. What about the others?

Some Questions

Several other questions arise about that society for which we find no answers or even indications. Did the queens who sat in the royal court, and apparently moved without inhibitions, share the royal throne, or did they *sit* apart as lesser creatures than their male partners? Had the kings more than one Queen? Why did not poets sing in praise of the beauty, grace, goodness and learning of the Queens? Or did they? Were there any queens who ruled

over a kingdom or a principality? Did any of them with all their patriotism and their brave warrior blood, ever command an army? Were they skilled in the arts of war? We find that like the poets, the poetesses too were given gifts of money and elephants. Did they buy, own, or inherit, any immovable property or any houses or lands and make them their own ? As a general rule or custom, were all women trained in the arts of peace, in poetry, music, song, and dance? Some of the women undoubtedly were highly skilled in all these, but what about the others? There are no accurate answers, for the poets have not sung about them. But yet, quite a few facts emerge about them from childhood to old age, both directly and indirectly.

Young Children

Children are longed for, arid women pray for them to the gods, offering their gods both worship and presents. The children's lisp is praised by the poetess Avvai. Another poet praises their pranks as charming. It is regarded as a mother's duty to bear and nurture children, to feed them with her own milk and then with milk and honey (in golden bowls) ; coaxing them to eat and drink by showing them a pet bird, or a young moon; or occasionally threatening them with a monitory finger or stick; or even frightening them by recalling the awful tiger. Nevertheless, little children pout and sulk, and lead their mothers and nannies to many a chase. Parents and children play together with toy rattles. Slightly older girl children romp in the dusty streets, building toy houses, and playing with dolls, and brightly

coloured balls, where boys tease them pulling them by the hair, plucking off their flowers, and destroying their toy houses.

Older children and adolescents

Bevies of slightly older girls play with molucca beans or at hopscotch; and pick flowers, and string them into chaplets and garlands ; or go for a swim in nearby pools or mountain streams or tanks. They braid garments of leaves and flowers and wear them. They sing and dance with gay abandonment. They go out to guard the fields of maturing corn and to drive away parrots and other birds, and smaller beasts, by singing and shouting and sounding many kinds of rattles and other noise-making gadgets. Teenagers and adolescents are often thus sent to the fields by their mothers or nannies ; and some-times they go out on their own.

Thoughts of love in such ideal surroundings enter their hearts. Young men come there by chance or design and are coyly welcomed, when they make their advances. The girls' companions and even nannies, help the courtship. *Love in the Valley* is a fairly long poem describing the origin, course and culmination of such a love. Love's trickery is a little gem. "Where love, dialogue, and human mix", blend.

The Course of Love

Sometimes the lover is bashful or diffident, but the alert little lady keeps the course of love by an innocent little stratagem, as in the poem *The Swing - A Love Gambit*, The lovers have trysts and meet in secret, by day or by night, in the neighbourhood

of their houses or in nearby groves or by the seashore. They sometimes yield to the call of their bodies and become man and wife in all but the wedding ceremony. Sometimes the women are betrayed. Occasionally they elope eluding the careful watch of the parents.

Sometimes the girl does not respond to the young man's love and sometimes also it is the other way round, as when a king or chieftain does not respond to the love of a large number of adolescent girls. Often he does not even know of her existence. Unrequited love of this sort is the theme of a fairly large number of poems in later literature. Sangam Literature has at least one instance recorded in a poem by the daughter of a nobleman whose love for the king is unrequited.

But there is no mention of what happens to the women who love in vain or to those who have been betrayed and lament about it. There is no poem of a girl jilting her lover after she began to love him.

Wedding

The secret lover is urged by the girl and by her companion and nannies, to declare openly his love to her parents and to have marriage duly celebrated. When the parents agree an auspicious wedding day is fixed and celebrated with the beating of wedding drum and tabor. The bride and bridegroom look up are 'Arundhati' the Lady of chastity, with a wish that the bride's constancy should be as great. And the sacred neck ornament indicative of marriage seems to have been worn. There was much feasting and rejoicing on the occasion, and publicity.

House Keeping

The wife cooked with solicitous care, and the newly married husband praised her cooking as delicious and a gentle smile played on her face. The heart of the wife was glad, at her married felicity and she wished everybody well. A list of such wishes is really a revelation of the goodness of her heart. Let the showers fall, let the rice-fields be fertile, may corn increase and milk flow in plenty, let oxen thrive, may hunger be destroyed and disease be swept away, may gold abound and beggars throng (donor's gates), may virtue and good triumph and let vice and evil be overthrown and all fraud wiped out, may the Brahmins chant their hymns and may the king be victorious and prosperous, and may he ever be impartial. This indirect preaching of morality and good conduct is through a double door of woman, ladies and maids. The attendant maids of a noble lady say that these are the wishes expressed by her. There are several poems by Avvaiyar preaching morality and good conduct to kings and others and general exhortations for peace and goodwill. In one poem it is stated 'what we seek is not riches or gold or their enjoyment, but grace, love and virtue.'



Desertion and Widowhood

One of the gifted poetesses Velli Veetiyar was apparently deserted by her husband and makes a futile search for him. What really happened we do not know. But her pitiable condition is referred to by Avvai, We have a poetess who is a queen too, who after the loss of her husband and who after scolding those around her who try to prevent her committing suicide (sati), ends her life on her husband's funeral pyre.

A widow takes off her bangles and her jewels and bewails her

loss. She does not attend to her hair-do and sometimes has her head shaved. She offers oblations (pinda) to her deceased husband; and observes fasts and vows. She eats the poorest food and that too, irregularly. She mortifies her body by lying on pebbles without a mat spread. But there is no mutuality of such sorrow in respect of the sexes. The widower too generally bewails his own condition; it is more self-pity than the suffering of a loss, except perhaps in one instance where a widowed king really laments his loss and asks how it is that his grief had not strength enough to kill him. It is almost comparable to the episode of Ruru and Pramadvara, narrated in the *Mahabharata*.

Dress, Ornaments and Decorations

Men and women all over the world, in all ages and at all times, have desired to look better than they are and they have used art to improve nature. Dress is worn not

so much to hide as to show off and jewellery is mostly an attractive pointer. Dress material and the manner in which the costume is worn and draped, vary from climate to climate, region to region, period to period and almost from person to person. So it was in those far-off days in the southern end of India.

The costume material of those days consisted mostly of cotton. The yarn was spun and often woven too, by the ladies. Spinning was the main occupation of widows, who had ample leisure. Everybody wore a lower garment round the loins and somewhere down below the knee and as far as the ankle. The poorer people and the workers and generally the men wore only one garment. But the richer women and the upper class men wore two pieces, the second one being worn and draped over the left shoulder and generally left hanging in front and behind. The women wore this piece round their torso and also draped it so that it covered the top of the head and part of the face.

The cotton material was both coarse and fine, the finer material being compared to the vapour of milk and the slough of snakes. Silk was used and floral designs were often worked into the garment. These were washed and laundered by a special class of people. Some clothes were dyed in colours. Women spun yarn and this occupation seems to have been a major one with widows. They seem to have worn a sort of brassier or bodice, but not stitched, and we do not know of what material it was. Hunters and their women of highlands wore garments made from skins and hides and some of the richer folk wore

silk. Some dress worn by foreigners mostly was apparently stitched.

Young women sometimes wore garments of plaited leaves and flowers, particularly when they were among themselves, or sporting in the hill glades and tarns. They wore a separate dress for bathing (but we have no more information about this bathing costume).

Men and women wore ornaments of gold and silver. Coral, pearl, rubies, emeralds and diamonds, were the usual gems used and quality blue sapphire which rivalled in beauty fresh and glistening blue lilies. Ornaments were worn on the head, at the ears, around the neck and over the bosom, on the arms, and at the wrists, waists, and ankles. Strings of gold coins are mentioned. The jewellery was kept safely in special caskets. They wore flowers too, on the hair of the head, at the ears, round their necks, arms, and waists, blue and white lilies, jasmine and other flowers, both loose and strung as garlands, chaplets, or girdles. They wore lotuses made of gold.

They used make-up of different sorts. They set beauty marks, on the forehead; tipped their eye-lashes with a salve of collyrium; had designs of various kinds painted on their breasts and shoulders; had their hands manicured; and had their soles and instep painted with red paste. They used mirrors of burnished metal. They wore paste of sandal on the breasts, body and arms and used scented oil for the hair.

They had their hair dried and perfumed with the fragrant smoke, of sandal wood and wore it in plaits according to fancy or had it knotted, as in the paintings at Ajanta (which date from the 2nd century B.C. to the 2nd century A.D.). Umbrellas and

sandals for the feet are mentioned, but we do not know whether women used them.

Dance, Song and Music

There are many references to the love of dance, song and music of the ancient Tamil people. It was, as in all early civilisations, partly a religious ritual and more commonly an expression of their joy of life and gaiety. The girls sang from their perches in the fields and at play; the women sang at home and in the camps of war to allay the pain of the wounded soldiers; they sang to the gods, and at demonolatrous (shrinistic) worship and sooth-saying; professional lady musicians sang in royal courts. The lute, the lyre and the drum - drums of various kinds are mentioned. In one anthology of medium length poems we find that while the words were by a poet, they were set to music by an expert musician both the names are mentioned at the foot of each poem in the anthology known as Paripatal. The royal court patronised dancers as well. The people had their own folk-dances. Several such dances are mentioned by name.

Pastimes

A few indoor and outdoor sports and pastimes are mentioned at which women took part. Some simple games with Molucca-beans and coloured balls; taking strolls in the moonlight, in the courtyard, or terrace; rearing pet dogs and birds; playing with dolls and children; and gossiping; these were some of the pastimes mentioned. Outdoor, they picked

flowers and tender leaves, for ornamentation; played ball; built toy-houses of 'sand or mud'; played in playgrounds; swung high and low on swings; watched bull fights (really, seizing the bulls); chased crabs on the seashore; attended dramas and dances; watched the tight rope dances of men and women acrobats; bathed and swam and dived, in pools and rivers and the sea; watched and participated in festivals; played with each other in the water pelting each other with flowers, sprays of water from syringes particularly in the freshes of rivers; lazily sat on mounds by the sea or on land, counting the boats afloat or the war-chariots or even the carts of the vendors of salt going in caravans.

Occupations

Like the men, the women employed themselves in all kinds of occupations. The most common occupation was housewifery, running the house, doing the cooking and ordinary household chores - with or without help according to wealth and station. They cooked, they spun and wove and bore and brought up children. In girlhood they played without a care and sulked and peevd and were fondled and cherished, fed and disciplined by their mothers, who coaxed and wheedled, scolded and threatened, and helped them dress and look nice and watched them grow up into personable young women, who were made love to and responding, married the men of their choice. This was normal. Some with special talents and inclinations, became dancers, songstresses and players on the harp or the lutes and went from

court to court and were duly rewarded with worthy gifts of ornaments and other presents. Some became priestesses, sibyls, soothsayers and devil-dancers, diviners, and some became poetesses. Some employed themselves in less rewarding occupations, mat-weaving with Palmyra leaves, washing and laundering, spinning and weaving and as governesses and nannies. Whether some of the lowly occupations went by birth (which meant perhaps according to the opportunities easily available) or whether they were taken up for reasons of lack of other skills, or aptitudes or talent, we are not told. Some who lived in the highlands, were huntresses. Others who lived by the sea became fisher women, vendors of salt and fish and dried their nets and mended them. And there their lovers found them on 'the white sands which looked like moonlight spread'.

In the poets' eyes all were beautiful and all smelt sweet and all were equally worthy of being loved and all were loved. In fact the fishy smell of the seashore, with its nets, dead and dried and drying fish and its women with similar odours, are described as if they smelt of lotus and jasmine. That is the best and worst of poetry, a fine excess which makes 'every goose a swan'.

Religion - Beliefs and Practices

The three gods of the Hindu Trinity were known in those days and some minor deities gods and goddesses. Muruga (known as the Red God) and Indra, were also prime favourites, whose festivals were celebrated. Demonolatry (a local form of Shamanism) was a prevalent cult, with its

priestesses (some of whom it is guessed, were exotic women imported into the region) and devil-dancers and diviners. Offering of rice mixed with blood and rich offerings, were made to placate the deities and win their favour. They were prayed to, and gifts and offerings promised and made to them, in order that they may grant them the boom of children. They worshipped the crescent moon. They prayed for rain or for shine. They bathed in rivers and pools in the morning dew of December-January. And as in all the countries of the world, and at all times, women were the more 'faithful'. Some of them became nuns, and were attached to nunneries and places of worship. They were also the upholders of morality. We find women poets admonishing kings about their standards of behaviour.

Women In Youth and Old Age

From childhood to widowhood the poets and poetesses have dealt with women. What did they do in their old age? What to do in old age must have been a problem even then to the old, but perhaps not to the society in which they lived. The old women were respected members of society and made themselves useful and were not a nuisance. Poetess Avvai who was the most famous of the women poetesses included in the anthologies. She goes from Court to Court; praises her own king and patron; felicitates him on the birth of a son and heir; praises his valour, generosity, and discernment; scolds him when he delays his gifts; soothes him when he lies wounded; taunts his enemies; advises them to seek peace; and now and then tells the

world some of the truths of life - job enough for anyone. Ordinary women, in their old age too, worship their husbands, and show the young how to behave and, when widowed, observe fasts and ceremonies, eat poor food, sparingly and irregularly, as mentioned already.

Patriotism and Valour

As the people lived almost in a near state of war all the time, patriotism was regarded as a prime virtue. Guarding the person of the king on the battlefield, shielding him from harm by giving up his own life, are praised in some poems. One poem says that (an old woman) proudly points to her body as a lair where a tiger lodged for a little while before going for the kill. In another poem, a mother is sure that her son cannot be a deserter and vows that she would cut off her breasts which gave him suck if he had been one and so goes into the field of battle sword in hand and when she finds her son's mutilated body among the foemen slain by him, she feels happier than on the day she gave him birth.

In Brief

Woman had a great deal of freedom, of movement, behaviour and choice of occupation. They moved freely, in all circles, in cities, villages, in the hills and in the plains, as equals of men and of each other. Levels of society or wealth and poverty, did not seem to matter. They freely mixed without any distinction of grades.



The Position of the Women In Karnataka during Chalukyas of Badami

(6th century A.D. to 8th century A.D.)

By Miss B. N. SARVAMANGALA

"THE honour accorded to women in society is a good indication of its refinement and moral elevation." Judged by this standard, Karnataka, in ancient days, may well be proud of its records. The Chalukyas of Badami held sway over extensive regions of the Deccan for about two centuries from the middle of the sixth century to about the middle of the eighth century A.D. This dynasty not only produced many mighty Emperors like Pulakesi II and Vikramaditya II, who distinguished themselves among the Chalukya Emperors as great conquerors, far-sighted administrators and benevolent rulers, but also produced many Queens like Durlabhadevi, Kadamba Mahadevi, Vijaya Bhattarika, Vinayavathi, Lokamahadevi and Trailokya Mahadevi who equally distinguished themselves along with their husbands in war and administration, literature and arts, religion, and arts and architecture. The Chalukyan princesses and queens occupied a significant position in the glorious cultural history of Karnataka. The position of women during this period, was not one of servitude as is sometimes supposed. Women had an honourable status in society. The Queens took a leading part in public activities and even ruled as Sovereigns.

According to the legend preserved in some of the inscriptions, the Chalukya Dynasty wasted by an adventurous princess of Karnataka. Though her name is not known to us she was the Chief Queen of Vijayaditya, who was the earliest ancestor of the Chalukya family. He is said to have been defeated and killed by "Trilochana Pallava". Vijayaditya's wife was pregnant at that time and took refuge at a place called 'Mudivimu'. There she was given shelter and brought up by one Vishnu Bhatta Somayaji. In course of time, She gave birth to a male child, which was named as Vishnu Vardhana. Having learnt of the disaster of his father from his mother, Vishnu Vardhana when he grew up went to a hill called 'Chalukya Giri' and there did penance and invoked the aid of Goddess Nanda Bhagavathi Gowri. Through divine help he obtained his royal insignia back and founded the Chalukya Empire. He took revenge against the Pallavas, who humiliated his father and on the souvenir of victory over them, he married their princess.

"This legend clearly indicates how an adventurous widow of Vijayaditya, brought up her posthumous son in such a heroic manner as to revive the Chalukya powers again.

Durlabhadevi, the princess from Bapura family, played a very important role in the life Pulakesi I (540 to 566 A.D.), who was the real founder of the Chalukyas. He performed Asvamedha, Agnichayana, Agnishtoma, Vajapeya, Bahusuvana, Pundarika and Hiranya Garbha religious rites. Like her husband, Durlabhadevi was a good philanthropist. Though her family deity was Vishnu, she ordered her son

Mangalisa to grant endowments in favour of Mahakuteswara. Even after her husband's death, it seems, she was ruling this province, which includes the villages of Pattadakal, Kendur, Aihole, and other adjoining villages. In this context it is interesting to note that Mahakutesvara group of temples was considered as one of the earliest group of Lakula seat temples of Saivism in Karnataka. Kadamba Mahadevi, who was the chief Queen of the famous Chalukya monarch Pulakesi II, (610-642 A.D.), is described in the inscriptions as possessing such good qualities like Nyaya (political wisdom), vinaya (humility), Dana (charity) and Sadvritta (good conduct) as the famous matrons like Savitri, Suvarchala, Arundhati, Swaha and Sachi.

To please his chief queen Mahadevi, Pulakesi-II, made generous and rich endowments to eleven brahmanas of different gotras, who were all well versed in Veda, Vedanga and eighty branches of Tarka. Ambera the daughter of Pulikesi-II, was a devotee of Shiva and made many endowments.

Vijaya: The veritable double of *Saraswati* Karnataka, under the Chalukyas, witnessed one of its best and most glorious periods of History as much striking in the military sphere as in the cultivation of arts and literature. They gave generous patronage to Sanskrit poets and created a favourable atmosphere in which Sanskrit learning flourished, and stimulated the production of Sanskrit literature.

Vijayabhatarika, who was also called as Bijja, Bijjika and Vijaya, was the Queen of Chandraditya, who was the eldest son of Pulikesi II. She was a good administrator and a great scholar in Sanskrit. She is

mentioned as reigning for sometime after her husband's death. She is well known in Sanskrit literature as the authoress of the famous historical work 'Kaumudi Mahotsava'.

Ganga Mahadevi blazes the trail

Ganga Mahadevi, was the chief Queen of Vikramaditya I, (655-681 AD.), who was the other son of Pulikesi II, revived the Chalukya supremacy after the period of nearly thirteen years.

She was accompanying her husband in his military campaigns and reminding him of his duties of religion and requesting him to grant generous endowments to temples, learned Brahmanas and other religious institutions.

Ganga Mahadevi's daughter-in-law Vinayavathi, the chief queen of Vinayaditya (681-696 AD.) was a great patron of religion and literature. Vinayavathi installed the idols of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara in the capital Badami and gave gift grants to several Brahmanas. It is said that the metropolis of Badami was adorned with several thousands of Brahmanas, who were proficient in fourteen Vidyas. The fourteen Vidyas are :- 4 Vedas, 6 Vedangas, phonetics, prosody, grammar, etymology, astronomy and ritual, purana, logic, mimamsa and law. She was also accompanying her husband in the conquests. Vinayavathi's illustrious daughter Kumkumadevi, who was married to the Alupa ruler Chitra Vahana, kept up the glorious traditions of the Chalukya Queens. She was a great devotee of jina and constructed 'Anesejjiya Basadi' at Rurigere (Modern Lakshrneshvara) and made many endowments in favour of that Basadi.

Lokamahadevi and her sister Trailokyamahadevi, the princesses of Kalachuri family, were married to Vikramaditya II (733-745 AD.) They have patronised the religion and arts, art and architecture in a large scale. Loka-mahadevi built Lokeshvara or Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal, (Pattadakal was the meeting ground of the North Indian and South Indian styles of architecture) to commemorate her husband's victory over Kanchi thrice. This temple displays great unity and coordination. Indeed it is a great monument, and Perry Brown's tribute is amply justified. He says that the amount expended, not only on the whole but on each detail, is incredible and that every one of its grey weather-worn stones, in spite of the passage of centuries, is yet warm with life and feeling. The architects of this temple were Sarvasiddhi Achari Gundan, Bala Devan, Damodaran, Changam and Pallappa. Lokamahadevi honoured the leader of architects, Gundan by awarding the title "Tribhuvana Achari"; the architect renowned in the three worlds.

Lokamahadevi, was also supposed to have given patronage to 'Achalan' who had studied 'Bharata's Natyasashtra' in detail and knew everything about the technique of drama and acting. He was a dancer as well as an actor. He dominated the field of drama in such a way that he was called 'Natyasivya' or one to whom actors paid homage. Perhaps he was the Karnataka's first great actor and dancer.

Trilokyamahadevi, built the temple of Trilokeshwara near Lokeshwara temple, similar in design and construction of the latter one. It contains on some of its pillars sculptures depicting the famous fables of

the monkey and the crocodile and the monkey and the wedge from the Panchatantra.

Courtesans

We have references to courtesans who flourished in society and were held in high esteem. They were renowned for their beauty, wit, and other accomplishments, as well as their wealth and luxury. There is an instance of a courtesan Vinopoti, who called the King Vijayaditya her sweetheart (prana-vallabha). She was rich enough to grant a golden seat, a silver umbrella and land of 800 measures (?) to the temple of Mahakuta. Another Badipoddi, the daughter of Govindapoddi, a courtesan attached to the temple, gave excellent. . . (name lost); she had given a horse chariot, an elephant chariot, land and an 'ubhayamukhi' (cow). Yet another Challabbe got the pillars (of the temple) constructed as the votive offering to God Vijeyesvara. These women did not think that it was beneath their dignity to call themselves courtesans. Vinapoti's mother's and grandmother's names were duly recorded in the plural at the end. Like queens and nobles they made rich gifts to gods and had them inscribed on stone.

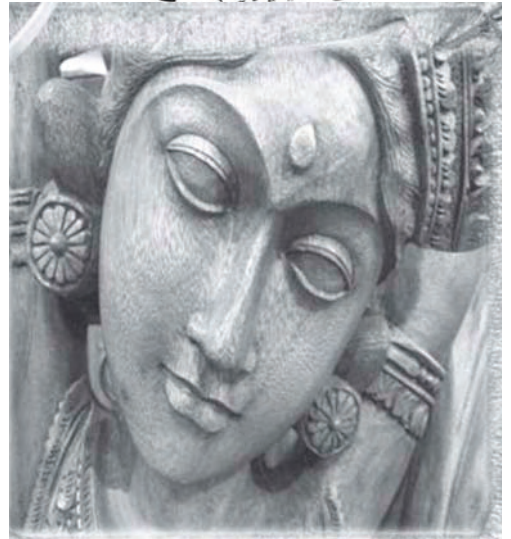
It appears to have been the practice and a matter of social prestige, particularly among the wealthy classes, to have more than one wife.

Not much information is available regarding the other classes of women in society. But it may be surmised that the women in the Chalukya period, followed in this, as in other activities of life, ancient customs and usages and in respect of the upper classes,

in commity, with the laws laid down by ancient law-givers.

Hiuen Tsang's account

No account about the women of the Chalukya can be complete without Hiuentasang's account. According to his account, "the women wore a long robe which covers both shoulders and falls down loose. The hair on the crown of the head is made into a tail, all the rest of the hair hanging down". Hiuentasang's statement about dress and ornaments of women is confirmed by the temple sculptures of Badami and its neighbourhood. The figures, both male and female, in the rock-cut temples, have a variety of ear-rings, necklaces, armllets, bracelets, girdles, rings and elaborate head-dresses and coiffures. The folds of the dress, distinctly a sari among female figures and delicately carved, sometimes finely striped. Belts were common and worn round the waist across the shoulders and the thighs."



The Distilled Wisdom of Ages

MUCH of the wisdom in the world is accumulated from the experiences of those that have seen life in all its diversity. Epics, ballads, folklore and folktales are all bundles of this treasure of wisdom. Wisdom and old age are often coupled together. Intelligence and wisdom can also be the property of younger individuals. But the wisdom that an old person acquires is polished by maturity and experience and from an amalgam of raw- material, the best is sorted out, strained, processed and then handed over to generations to come.

The word "Theri" means 'one who has grown old with knowledge' and Gatha means a 'song'. Hence it is a collection of songs by the Buddhist nuns. Theri-Gatha is included in the Buddhist Canon. It is in the second of the Tripitakas - the Sutta Pitaka. The songs were preserved first orally and it was during the reign of the Mauryan King that they were classified and written down.

The Mother of the sangha

After the death of Lord Buddha's mother Maya Devi, Gautami Devi became the Chief Queen of King Shuddhodana and brought up the motherless child as if he were her own son. When all the members of Buddha's family embraced the religion, she too joined. It was at her request that Buddha established an independent Ashram for the Theris. So Mahapajapati Gautami can be said to be the mother of the Sangha.

The Sangha

Out of the hundreds of women who joined the Sangha, only the composition of 73 Theris have come down to us. These are of varied length, some are limited to one verse, some two, some three and some are longest. These songs give us an insight into the lives of the Theris. It is remarkable that these Theris come from all classes of society - from the palaces of Kings to the quarters of the fallen and the untouchable. Anyone who was genuinely earnest about religious life was accepted by Buddha into the Sangha. They were not of equal age; some joined the Sangha as virgins; some were widows and others were advanced in age. Of these Gathas, the longest one was composed by Sumedha. She was the daughter of the chief queen of the King of Kroncha and was born in the city of Mantavati. Anikarta, the King of Varanavati, wanted to marry her. He himself came to woo her, but she refused and according to her wishes, her parents initiated her into Buddhism.

The Gatha

In the course of her long poem of 75 verses, she describes her birth, parentage and renunciation. She was brought up tenderly and educated well; she was a good orator and devoted to religion. She said to her parents: "There is no happiness in this transient life - I wish to renounce the world and lead the life of a Brahmacharin". Her parents wept and said: "We want to bestow you on King Anikarta; the King of Varanavati, who will be pleased to make you his chief queen. My child, it is difficult

to lead the life of celibacy, young that you are; one is the path of wealth and power, the other is the hard life of a mendicant; think well before you choose." Sumedha replied, "The body is of flesh and blood, subject to death. I would rather choose death than a worldly life." King Anikarta hearing her resolve came to the palace richly dressed in gold and diamond and entreated her with folded hands: "Be the queen of my all and rule over my people and land; bestow gifts with your hands and do not be so averse to worldly life - your parents are grieved." Sumedha said, "I have no attraction for worldly life; one born must die; kings surrounded by wealth have died; wealth and happiness are transitory; they bring sorrow and suffering, it is all like a heated iron. Return to your home, O king. What can you do when fire is burning in my head?" She then saw her parents deeply grieved, but she consoled them reminding them of the transitoriness of earthly life. Anikarta then said: "Bid farewell to Sumedha, for she wants to follow the path of Truth." So with the permission of her parents the princess joined the Sangha and attained Nirvana.

Ishidasi

Next comes Ishidasi or Rishidasi. In her Gatha of 46 verses, she gives an account of her own life. In Pataliputra, called Kusumapura, there were two pious Bhikshunis called Ishidasi and Bodhi. Once they were engaged in conversation. "Beloved Ishidasi, tell me what made you give up your home and embrace this hard life of celibacy in your youth, beautiful and gifted as you are."

Ishidasi replied : 'I was born in the house of Sheshri of Ujjain; I was the only child of my parents and brought up with tender care. A merchant of a high family from Sakera wanted to make me as his daughter-in-law. My father gave me in marriage and I went to my husband's home. I worked with great devotion ; morning and evening, I used to bow to my father-in-law and mother-in-law; I welcomed warmly my husband's sister and brothers; gave food and clothing to all the members of the household; everyone got what he or she wanted. I used to wake up early, finish my household duties and then go to my husband to greet him. With my own hands, I used to dress his hair and decorate him. I used to caress him as a mother would her only child. I cooked with my own hands, washed the utensils and cleaned the kitchen. In fact, I used to work from morning till night like a maid-servant without any rest. Still my Lord did not love me! One day he told his parents 'I shall not live with Ishidasi.' His parents said, 'Ishidasi is cultured, very active; why don't you like her?' My husband replied, 'She did not do me any harm ; I do not like to live with her. Let me go away, I shall never return'.

Becomes a nun

My father-in-law and mother-in-law asked me 'My daughter, tell us the truth, hide not anything - by what fault of yours has this happened ?'

I replied, 'I did not commit any fault, nor did I speak to him harshly - still I don't know why he is averse to me.'

'So at the wish of my husband, I returned to my father's house'.

"My father gave me in marriage a second time to the son of a rich man. After a month, he too, without any fault on my part and in spite of my hard work, sent me away."

"One day a poor young Bhikshu came for alms to father's house, my parents asked him to give up his ascetic life and become their son-in-law. He married me and stayed for a fortnight and then said that he wanted to go back to his old life. So he, too, left me."

"I then begged my parents either to permit me to end my life or to renounce the world and go away from home."

"Soon after this, Bhikshu Jinadatta came to my father's house. I expressed my desire for renunciation. Father and mother remonstrated, but I was firm. With their permission I entered the Sangha and obtained peace of mind."

"Perhaps, it was not in me to love and be loved as a wife. My heart is filled with the love that a mother bears for her children. This I could give to all, and to this end have I taken to this life."

Bhikshuni Subha

Next is Subha Jivakambavanika. She was so named as she fell into the snares of a cunning man called Jivaka.

Once Bhikshuni Subha was roaming all alone in a mango grove of Jivaka. Jivaka came and stood before her obstructing her path. Subha said, "What have I done that you are obstructing my path? Should anyone behave thus with a recluse? Your mind is stained, but mine is pure; so behave not thus."

Jivaka replied : "You are a stainless maid, why have you renounced the world ? Give up your saffron robe and let us enjoy in this picturesque garden. It is spring; the trees are in full bloom; fragrant is the air. If you listen to me, I shall make you the queen of my all. You are like a full blown flower. Why should it wither away by this vow of asceticism?"

Subha replied with disgust: "Why all this talk? This body is the abode of death. Why do you long for it ?"

Jivaka goes on describing her physical beauty, the charm of her eyes and his desire for her. Subha protests and describes the transitoriness of physical beauty and at the end plucking out her eyes from their sockets presents them to him saying "Here are the eyes that you admired so much." The amorous suitor being ashamed of himself begs her pardon. She returns to Buddha and it is said that by His grace she got back her eyesight.

Baddha Kundalakesha

Of the several other Theris, the life-stories of some are, indeed, very touching. One such is that of Baddha Kundalakesha. She was so named because of her long curly hair. She was born at Rajagriha in the family of a rich merchant. She fell in love with the son of their family priest named Sarthaka. Sarthaka was a bad character. One day because of a theft he had committed, was caged like a wild beast and was being led to the execution-ground. Kundalakesha saw him, when he was thus being led and told her father about her love for him. The rich merchant

liberated him by offering a big ransom and gave his daughter in marriage to him.

Sarthaka could not be reformed. He wanted to steal the ornaments of his wife. So one day he told her. "When my life was in danger I made a vow to the deity on the top of this mountain that I shall give an offering if I am saved. So come with me well-dressed with your ornaments on, so that we can both fulfil the vow."

Baddha went accordingly and on climbing the mountain she found out that her husband wanted to kill her and take away her ornaments. So she said, "My lord, this life of mine is yours, these ornaments are yours, then why do you want to kill me and run away with my ornaments?"

The villain was not moved by these words. So in sheer self-defence she thought of a clever ruse and said, "Well, my lord, let me have a last embrace before I die." With these words she led him to the edge of a slippery peak and in the guise of an embrace, she pushed him down the precipice and saved herself by running away, leaving the ornaments behind. To let such a one as he live, who would not be corrected by any force would do endless harm to the whole world. She then joined the Jaina Sangha and later the Buddhist Sangha.

The reforming revelation

Another touching account is that of Theri Utpalavarma. She was so named because of her great beauty. She was the daughter of a merchant at Shravasti. After the birth of a daughter her husband left her. Due to several causes, she had to live away from her baby.

Many years later, the man who married her daughter was attracted by her beauty and married her as well. Utpalavarna and her daughter lived apart from the very beginning, so mother and daughter did not know each other. After this marriage, hearing the life story of her co-wife, she recognised her as her daughter. She shuddered at the revelation and renounced the world and became a Theri.

Ambapali

Among the Theris some came of the courtesan profession. One of these was Ambapali. Ambapali was a famous courtesan of Vesali. She was renowned for her beauty. She was also rich and had a palace with a mango-grove attached to it. Buddha, four or five months prior to his Mahanirvana, came to this grove with his disciples. Ambapali, hearing of his arrival, also came. The young and beautiful courtesan was so captivated by the teachings of the Buddha that a change came over her. She invited the Buddha and his disciples next day to her house. Lord Buddha accepted it to the surprise of all.

The Lichchhavi King of Vesali came to Lord Buddha with a large retinue to invite him. The Lord said 'I have already accepted the invitation of Ambapali'. The Lichchhavi king was surprised and requested Ambapali to cancel her invitation. Ambapali refused. The king offered her a thousand gold pieces. Ambapali was rich but was only one of the women of the king's household. She told her king firmly that she would not go back on her word even if the whole wealth of the treasury was placed at her disposal. The king went away. Next day, Lord Buddha

went to Ambapali's house with his disciples. After dinner, Ambapali placed her palace and her entire wealth at the disposal of Lord Buddha to be used for the Sangha. She then renounced the world and became a Theri. Among the other courtesans who were accepted into the Sangha are Ardhakesi, a rich resident of Kasi, Padmavati, a courtesan of Ujjayini who was the beloved of King Bimbisar and Vimala described as a Ganika.

The others

Besides Mahapajapati Gautami, there were two more members of Buddha's family who became Theris : one of them being Nanda, daughter of Mahapajapati Gautami, step-sister of Buddha and the other, also known as Nanda, who became a widow and joined the Sangha.

Two members of Lichchhavi family also joined the Sangha, namely, (1) Simha, the niece of Commander of Vesali, who joined the Sangha as a virgin, and (2) Jayanti.

Theri Ubbiri was the daughter of a merchant at Shravasti. She was so famous for her beauty that the King of Kosala, a Kshatriya by caste, was charmed by her loveliness and married her. A daughter, named Jiva, was born to them. The king wanted to make her his chief queen. But the death of her child grieved her so much that she used to go daily to the cremation ground to mourn over her dead child. Unable to find peace of mind anywhere else she joined the Sangha, and became a Theri.

Two girls Chitra and Uttama renounced the world in their youth and joined the Sangha. Shyama, the companion of the Queen of Kausambi, also became a Theri. There were



others who renounced the world and joined the Sangha. Punna, Tissa, Dhira, Mitra, Bhadra, Upasama, Mukta, Dhammadinna, Sumana Dhamma Sukta, Soma and others. Some of them were widows, some Brahmins.

It is evident that the Buddhist Sangha admitted women into its order. The women thus accepted were admitted more on the basis of their determination to enter the order and live the life of a Theri, than on account of any material, physical, or social attributes of theirs. Their caste, social status and position and personal character ceased to exist once they entered the order, and thereafter they were just Theris, and lived up to the demands of the life they had taken on.



Women In Silappadikaram and Manimekhalai

By A. SUBRAMANIAN

TAMIL has a very rich literary tradition to its credit and the earliest stratum of literature belongs to the Sangam Period (roughly between 300 B.C. and A.D. 300). Scholars have classified Tamil Literature into a few standard types and five of the well-known compositions belong to the 'epic' types. Silappadikaram of Ilango Adigal and Manimekhalai of Seethalai Sathanar are two of these Perunkappiyams. Here we shall attempt a survey of the women characters in these two compositions. The spotlight is turned on three of their characters, *viz.*, Kannagi, the heroine, Madhavi, the beloved of Kovalan and hero of Silappadikaram and Manimekhalai, the daughter of Kovalan through Madhavi.

Layout of the Epics

Silappadikaram is the earlier of the two works. It consists of three major parts (Kandams) and has thirty chapters (Kadai). It was composed by Ilango Adigal, who was the son of the Pandya King Cheraladan and younger brother of Senguttuvan. It seems the epic was composed after the prince entered the hermit order. The early date of this work is attested by its references in mediaeval works, such as Nachchinarkkiniyar's commentary on Tolkappiyarn, Tanigai Ula (line 526) and Kulottunga Cholan Kovai (line 426). This

work was intended to be a dramatic composition.

Manimekhalai is a sequel to the Silappadikaram. It was composed by a merchant called Sathanar. It consists of thirty cantos with no major classifications as in Silappadikaram. Sathanar was the friend of Ilango Adigal and apparently an eye-witness of the events described in the epic. He was a Buddhist, whereas Ilango was a Jain. In both the epics the earlier scenes are the ancient Chola capital Kaveripumpattinam. That Kaveripumpattinam was a stronghold of Buddhism during the early centuries of the Christian era has been attested by the archaeological findings conducted there by the Archaeological Survey of India.

From Kaveripumpattinam the entire events shift to Madurai. The places mentioned in Silappadikaram are Uraiyur and Malainadu, whereas in Manimekhalai the entire story centres round Manipallavam and Kanchipuram.

Both the epics were edited in modern times by Mahamahopadhyay Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer, for the first time in the year 1892. Dr. Iyer compared about 14 manuscripts from various parts of South India for the critical edition of Silappadikaram and more than manuscripts for editing Manimekhalai.

The Story

Kovalan was born in a family of sea-faring merchants called Perunkudiyar. He was the son of Masathuvan. Kovalan's wife, the virtuous Kannagi, was the daughter of another merchant called Manaykan. The couple set up a home with the able guidance and assistance of Perumanai-

kkilatti, the mother of Kovalan. Kannagi then attended to her household duties of feeding the needy, dispensing charities and being a faithful and affectionate partner in life to Kovalan.

Cosmic Retribution

Once, it is stated, Kovalan took part in the auction of a gold necklace, and this transaction landed him in the house of the famous dancer and courtesan Madhavi. He was obsessed by her beauty, talent and accomplishments in the fine arts. She was the best dancer of the times in the Chola capital. Charmed by her, Kovalan forgot his house and spent the days with Madhavi. Kovalan and Madhavi took part in the Indra festival. Each sang songs, in which the note was suspicion on the part of one for the other. . . . Kovalan then started suspecting Madhavi's fidelity and deserted her. On returning to his home Kovalan found all his wealth exhausted, and so he decided to leave the city and go to Madurai to try his fortune there. The faithful Kannagi followed him. Kavundi Adigal, a Jain ascetic met them on their way to Madurai and accompanied them.

One day Kovalan went to the river side for his early morning ablutions and there happened to meet Kansikan, a Brahmin messenger sent by Madhavi who tried to persuade him to return. He declined to return.

On reaching Madurai, Kavundi Adigal left Kovalan and Kannagi in the care of Madhari, a herdsman. Kovalan now went out and tried to sell the *anklet* of Kannagi to the chief goldsmith of Madurai, and there fell into the trap that had been laid by the

wily goldsmith. He was accused of stealing the queen's anklet and sentenced to death without proper enquiry.

The news of Kovalan's untimely end reached Madhavi at the riverside, where she had gone to bathe. Kannagi fell down unconscious on hearing it. On recovering, she rushed to the place where Kovalan's body was lying and embraced him. Then she burst into the court of the King Nedunchezhan in fury and by breaking her second anklet proved that his hasty judgment had reduced her to widowhood. The shocked king came to an untimely end, soon followed by his consort.

Her grief and fury knew no bounds. In a mad rush she plucked out her left breast and threw it at the city of Madurai pronouncing the terrible curse that the whole city, save the Brahmins, saints, chaste women and children, be consumed by fire. At this stage the deity protecting the city of Madurai appeared before Kannagi and informed that Kovalan, who was called Bharata in his previous birth, had been responsible for the murder of an ignorant merchant and that his wife Nili had cursed that Bharata should also meet the same fate in his next birth. Kannagi then moved to the west and reached a hill called Tiruchchenkunru. There she waited for about fourteen days and was taken to Heaven.

As a result of Kannagi's curse, draught, famine and disease ravaged the whole of Pandya country. It is said that the Pandya King Ilanchelian sacrificed one thousand gold-smiths to Goddess Kannagi to get relief from the famine conditions.

The parents and relatives of Kovalan and Kannagi came to Madurai and learnt about

their sad end. The Pandya King handed over charge of the temple dedicated to Kannagi to Devandi, Kannagi's foster-mother. Ilango Adigal is said to have heard the story of Kannagi from Devandi who was possessed by the spirit of Kannagi.

The scene shifts

The scene is now shifted to Kaverippumpattinam. Madhavi left her mother and the dancing profession on hearing Kovalan's murder. She joined the Buddhist monastery as a disciple of Aravana Adigal with her daughter Manimekhalai. One day Manimekhalai was sent to the garden to fetch flowers for making garlands where she was approached by Udayakumaran who was smitten with love for her. She declined the offer and went to the island of Manipallavam with the help of the spirit Manimekhala. She had a sacred vision there and understood that Udayakumaran was none other than Rahula, her husband in her previous birth. Manimekhalai got the eternal bowl (*Akshaya Pathram*) from the sacred tank called Gomukhi with the help of Dipatilaka. Then she returned to Kaverippumpattinam. Aravana Adigal disclosed to her of how Aputra helped people come out of their poverty by offering food from such a vessel. Manimekhalai started feeding the needy from that vessel. Fearing Udayakumaran's intentions, she took the form of Kayachandika and started feeding the inmates of the state prison. One day Udayakumaran approached Kayachandika taking her to be Manimekhalai, and was murdered by the real Kayachandika's husband. Marankilli, the father of Udayakumaran, put Manimekhalai

in prison. Suspecting her for his son's murder. She was, however, freed with the help of the queen Rajamahadevi. Punyakumara, the king of Nagapura, helped Manimekhalai to reach Manipallavam again. It was at this juncture that Kaverippumpattinam was destroyed and engulfed by the sea. So she went to the Chera capital of Vanji and offered prayers at the temple of Kannagi. The Goddess predicted her future. Masathuvan, the father of Kovalan (and thus her 'grandfather'), who had now joined the monastery, advised her to go to Kanchipuram and serve the brethren there. Manimekhalai thus reached Kanchipuram, stayed there as a disciple of Aravana Adigal till her last days.

TREATMENT OF CHARACTERS:

Kannagi

Kannagi is one of the best depicted heroines in Tamil literature. In *Silappadikaram* her characterisation relegates all others to the background. At times we are compelled to see Kovalan only as Kannagi's husband with no identity of his own.

One of the demerits of *Silappadikaram* is that it has no child-characters. We only get a glimpse of Kannagi as a girl of about twelve in the bridal chamber of Kovalan. It is interesting to note that Kannagi is introduced in the epic before Kovalan".

The character of Kannagi has many facets. We find her as a faithful and loving wife, when she sets up a separate house. Her stead-fastness is admirable; even when Kovalan goes to Madhavi, Kannagi never complains about him to her parents. This is brought out best by the parent's ignorance of Kovalan's love life with

Madhavi followed by his exit to Madurai and ultimate death.

When Kovalan returned to Kannagi after being disgusted with Madhavi's intentions, Kannagi does not utter a single word of reproach at his excesses but is prepared to give the last pair of anklets to redeem them from their forced penury.

The docile wife that she was, she readily obeys him when Kovalan asks her to follow him to Madurai, unmindful of the physical hazards of such a long journey. She was accustomed only to a palace-life in her parental house, but she does not hesitate to live in the simple hut of a herdsman at Madurai.

She is the very embodiment of chastity. We see Kannagi at her best only after the death of Kovalan. She is depicted as the traditional Indian wife, who willfully fades into the background as long as her husband is alive. Though she sees bad omens and dreams at the time Kovalan sets out to sell her anklet to the merchant at Madurai, she does not prevent him from going out. Both Kannagi and Madhavi see bad omens that portended evil. Madhavi tries to mitigate the effect by propitiating Lord Vishnu in a dance.

When Kannagi storms into the King's palace, the Pandyan Queen was narrating to Nedunchezhiyan the bad dream she had the previous night. Then the king sees Kannagi with mud and dirt all over her dress and enquires what ailed her. Kannagi accused the king of having failed in his judgment. She declared that the anklet, for the theft of which Kovalan was falsely accused, was hers and mentioned that it contained rubies. This struck the death-knell of the Pandyan king as Kannagi proved

it by smashing the twin anklet in her possession. The queen's anklet contained only sapphires.

Her fury does not abate even at the death of the Pandyan king and queen. It now assumes great proportions, and she plucks out and throws her bleeding breast with a terrible curse on the city of Madurai."

Kannagi is thereafter depicted as a Goddess. She is regarded as the embodiment of chastity. The Chera monarch sends his forces to the Himalayas to fetch fresh stones for constructing a temple for her. The stones were purified by resprinkling waters of river Ganges. The temple was consecrated in the Chera country.

There are some descriptions in the epic which may look super-natural and difficult to believe. Thus, when a prostitute and her man insult Kovalan and Kannagi on their way to Madurai, Kavundi Adigal converts them into jackals. The spirit guarding the city of Madurai appears before Kannagi to remind her of her previous birth. The spirit of Kannagi herself is said to possess Devandi, who describes the story to Ilango Adigal and above all Kannagi describes the future life of Manimekhalai when the latter visits the temple in Chera country during her sojourns. Another important point in Silappadikaram is the swift movement of events. It has been estimated that Kovalan and Kannagi enter the city of Madurai on a Tuesday at dusk and by the Friday that followed everything was over and the city was reduced to ashes.

Kannagi is a unique heroine ; attempts have been made to compare her with Sita of Ramayana. It is said that the poet Kamban

drew inspiration from Kannagi in depicting his Sita in the Kamba Ramayana.

Madhavi

Madhavi, the beloved of Kovalan, is a dancer of the highest order. She is compelled by contemporary custom to be a courtesan. But when she meets Kovalan, she forms an attachment for him that proves abiding, though she does not get married to him. She remains faithful to him as if she were a wife bound by sacred ceremony. It is, perhaps, her mother who induces Madhavi to get presents and money from Kovalan for patronage; for, left to herself, Madhavi would have offered her all to Kovalan and never demanded anything in return.

She takes the music competition on the sands of Cauvery during the Indra festival in a sporting spirit and Kovalan's misunderstanding shatters her. When she learns that Kovalan had gone to the Pandya Country she sends her messenger with a message entreating him to return to her. The sudden course of events shocks Madhavi and she joins the Buddhist monastery. Later, she is possibly killed when the Chola Capital is destroyed by floods. Madhavi is depicted as a woman accomplished in all types of fine arts. She rejects the type of life followed by other courtesans. She does not aim at making money but gives all possible comforts to Kovalan as long as he was interested in her. Her disgust of worldly life is expressed when she declines to participate in the Indra Festival described in the very first chapter of Manimekhalai, Madhavi is thus an ideal wife of Kovalan, though

contemporary society and its set-up would not permit her to be a partner in Kovalan's household, as she was born in the family of courtesans.

Manimekhalai

Manimekhalai is introduced in the epic as a grown-up girl stringing garlands. Madhavi tells her daughter how her father Kovalan was murdered in Madurai. Manimekhalai's flowing tears pollute the garlands intended for the monastery. Madhavi asks her daughter to string another garland.

Monastic discipline had wiped out all earthly attachments from Manimekhalai's mind. So when Udayakumaran approaches her with the intention of marrying her she evades him. But when he is murdered, it shocks her. This is due to the fact that at that moment she gets insight into his previous birth.

The description of her pilgrimage to Manipallavam, Chera country and Kanchipuram shows her as a mature mendicant, well versed in essential scriptural and practical knowledge of Buddhism.

When she gets a chance of serving humanity, she whole-heartedly plunges into the task. She is even compelled to take various forms invite royal punishment and even danger to her personal safety.

The news of Kaverippumpattinam engulfed by the sea and the numerous lives that were lost or bereaved on account of it, deeply disturbed her. She finds some solace in the advice of Masathuvan and proceeds to Kanchipuram to continue her service to humanity.

Sattanar has taken much pain to portray Manimekhalai as an ideal bhikkuni of that period. Despite her beauty and youth she exhibits remarkable discipline and control. Thus we find the women characters in these epics are depicted as ideals for the society of that period. The authors were both mendicants. The period of the composition was also marked by the popularity of heterodox sects like Buddhism and Jainism. Both the works have all the essential characteristics of an epic.



Basava's Benediction

By DIXIT P. V.

BASAVA the great mystic and social reformer created a new order out of the caste ridden society by establishing Saran Dharma. He worked tirelessly for the emancipation of women and also for the reinstatement of the Untouchables. Before making any assessment of the ideal society envisaged by Basava and Siva Saranas in the 12th century it is necessary to trace the status of women in the earlier period. This will enable us to appreciate Basava's contribution in the right perspective.

From Vedic period to 12th century

There is enough evidence to assume that women had ample freedom in all the activities of life and were participating actively, on par with men, in social, political, religious and economic institutions in the Vedic period.

There are passages in the Rig Veda, which refer to the case where a daughter is the only child of the family. She is designated as Putrika. Yaska quotes one of these to explain the legal position of the only daughter.

According to his interpretation, it means that a brother less maiden (even after she has been given away in marriage) can perform the funeral rites of her father. Not only does this give her right to inherit the property, but it shows that she is legally recognised as equal to the son.

References are there in the Vedas to prove the gaiety and freedom with which men

and women mixed without restraint. The Samana festival was such an occasion when men and women mixed freely. From this the position of a girl in society and the measure of freedom she enjoyed are conceivable. In the description of Goddess Usha we find a reflection of a society where there was freedom for both sexes prior to marriage. Marriage was a union of two persons after maturity. No reference regarding age or its limitation, found in later works can be traced in Rig Veda.

Some of the Vedic hymns are attributed to female Rishis. They are Apaala, Attreyi, Lopamudra, Shashiyasi, the wife of Taranta and Gosha and others.

The sixth Brahmins of Brihadaranyaka Upanishads opens with the queries of Gargi to Yajnavalkya in the court of Janaka. The importance of this discussion lies in the fact that women capable of carrying on religious discussions were admitted into assemblies. The second important dialogue is that of Maitreyi and Yijnavalkya.

Later periods

But in the later periods we find women relegated to a lower position. Even in Atharva Veda, from nuptial hymns it appears that the husband was the absolute master of the wife and appropriated the dowry as well as the earnings of his wife. After Mahabharat War the restrictions on women's free participation in social activities increased. In Mahabharat War, we find the destruction of a generation. Thirty-six lakh men died. More than three million women were rendered homeless. Probably for fear of 'Sankaar' freedom was severely curtailed.

She was declared unfit for freedom (Manu) and was protected properly.

We have a much degraded picture of Indian society, before the birth of Buddha. Buddha full of compassion and humility rose against caste system and other degenerated institutions of Brahminism. Though initially he was not eager to admit women's equality in spiritual matters, later he allowed women, who joined the order of nuns called Theris. After the death of Lord Buddha's mother Maya Devi, Gautami Devi became the chief Queen of King Shuddhodhana and brought up the motherless child as if he were her own son. When all the members of Buddha's family embraced the new religion, she too joined. It was at her request that Buddha established an independent Ashramam for Theris. Theri-Gatha (song of the one who has grown old with knowledge) is a collection of songs by the Buddhist nuns. Theri-Gatha is included in the Buddhist canon and is in the second of the Tripitakas - the Sutta-Pitakajainism allowed women into the religious order of nuns. But the two schools (Svetambaras and Digambaras) differed in their opinion regarding women's right to liberation.

Restriction of women's movements start

But after Alexander's invasion and especially during Muslim conquests in north, our society restricted free participation of women in social, political, economic and religious affairs. She was confined to the house. It has been seen that the victors follow a double policy of ruining the identity of a subjugated society. One is complete annihilation. (Recent example in modern

history being that of Red Indians of America). The second is the destruction of the institution of family by attacking the women. To counteract this, society built up protective barriers or restrictions to safeguard women. The Child marriage, Purdha, Johra (group harakiri) were consequences that followed. It may be said here that the last 'Swayamwara' in this land was that of Samyuktha wife of the last Hindu king of Delhi.

Society at the time of Basava

It was at almost such a stage that the great Saint reformer Basava stepped in to relieve the ills of society. There is much in common between Basava and Buddha. Basava appeared at a time when 'Apadharmas' of protective barriers, had to stay as 'Nitya Dharma.' Hindu society was at its lowest ebb. The social and religious institutions were defunct. The 12th century society in which Basava was born was ridden with blind beliefs and superstitious faiths, where women were treated as slaves. Religious contemporaries with Saran Dharma strictly discriminated between men and women. Women were denied religious rights. Irrespective of their caste they were unceremoniously grouped with the Sudras. Orthodox Hindu sections of the society believed that women as a whole were unfit to receive education, unfit to participate in serious discussions and that no freedom should be allowed to them. To add insult to injury the women were considered to be a hindrance to spiritual progress. A Gruhastha's life became a mockery. Basava strove to redeem the institutions with a missionary zeal and succeeded to a

very great extent though he met with stiff opposition from the orthodox people obviously with vested interests.

A greater heretic than Buddha

Like Buddha, Basava too was full of compassion and preached kindness to all creatures.

What sort of religion can it be,
without compassion?

Compassion needs must be
Towards all living things;
Compassion is the root,
Of religious faith.

Lord Kudal Sangam does not care
For what is not like this.

Basava voiced his protests through the sublime medium of his vacanas. The vacanas literally mean spontaneous utterances which embody the experiences of Basava and his followers. They were composed in simple, chaste and spoken Kannada and were easily understood by the masses. Another step he took towards bridging the immense gap that was built up between man and his own kind was the establishment of the Anubhava Mandap. The founding of the Anubhava Mandap was a mighty leap towards advancement. It was here that Vacanas were recited and philosophical discourses held. Basava declared the spiritual brotherhood of all who would seek the kingdom of God, irrespective of class, caste, sex and status. His was not mere academic prattle. To him precept was wedded to practice. The great organiser that he was, he got together many Followers and established the spiritual academy. Anubhava Mandap was a spiritual parliament.

The illustrious members

Akka Mahadevi a Queen, Kakkaya a cobbler, Machyaya a waterman, Chennaya an out-caste and Basava, himself a Brahmin, formed the illustrious members of this Academy. There is no parallel to this assemblage of persons both high and low, differing in race, creed, colour and sex. All joined for a singular purpose the quest for spiritual knowledge.

They sat side by side at a common table, discussed their individual experiences, shared each other's views, acknowledged their faults if any, being always more ready to learn from others than to teach. It was after such deliberations that they reached the conclusions which now form the work known as 'Sanya Sampadana'. It should be noted here that one of the fundamental principles accepted by aranas of Anubhava Mandap was that, there is no discrimination between man and woman. To Basava men and women 'were equal in the field of spiritual Sadhana. They were equally beloved of God. He poignantly asks of what sex is the soul? A considerable number of women formed around the Anubhava Mandap, notable among them being, Akka Mahadevi, Nilambike, Gangambike, Nagalambike, Aydakki Lakkamma, Muktayakka, Lingamma, Guddeva, Vajjakka, Satyakka and Nimbawa. women took an active part in the discussions. Some of the women saints were married. Basava himself by his example showed that married life was no hindrance to spiritual progress of both husband and wife. He thus stopped the senseless ridicule of Grahastha Dharma. In the assembly, his two wives participated

of their own independently. It should be noted here that contributions in religious experiences from women members were not only heartily welcome but also highly valued.

Lingamma popularly known as Sadyonmukte was married to Hadapada Appanna, who was a barber. He was an able assistant to Basava. Lingamma was the author of a number of vacanas; One of her vacanas indicate her high spiritual attainment. *Equivision* which is the very bed-rock of spiritual eminence is indicated in the vacans where she compares Kailasa (the abode of Shiva) to Mrutya Loka (the region of death). "What is Kailas ? What is Mrutyu Loka (the region of death).

"What is Kailas? What is Mrutyu Loka?

The things that happen there;

The same take place here also

Hence Sivasaranas do not aspire for Kailas but liberation from re-birth."

She defines Sivasaranas as one who has won over desires, anger and other worldly bondages.

Muktayakka's name is synonymous with that of her brother Ajaganna. Ajaganna was noted for his secret devotion (Gupta Bhakti). Muktayakka born at Lakkundi and married in a Shaivite family at Masilikalli had received lessons in Siva Bhakti from her brother. He was her spiritual mentor (Guru). When he passed away, she felt that she had lost everything in the world and her grief knew no bounds. It was at such a time that she met Allum Prabhu. It was like Kisa Gautami meeting Lord Buddha. Allum consoled her. He replied to all her searching questions. His answers cover the true nature of Arman and form an important chapter in Sunya Sampadane. In

Muktayakka we find Gargi's logical dexterity, Mahadevi's austerity, Draupadi's love for Lord Krishna, Maitreyi's aspiration for true knowledge and Ekalavya's Guru Bhakthi all combined in one. She is an outstanding character in the history of Indian Womanhood.

Varadani Guddevva was a Karma Yogini. She was the daughter of Anantarai, a goldsmith. She had taken to Sivayoga from her childhood. Hearing of Basava and other Saranas, Guddevva left her home secretly and reached Kalyan. Basava regarded her as a great Siva yogi and named her as 'Danamma'. She actively participated in the proceedings of the Mantap. She fought the enemies at Kalyan after the assassination of Bijjal and later she and her husband to spread Basava's message travelled throughout India. The credit of popularising Basava's philosophy in Andhra and Tamil Nadu goes to her. She was a true missionary in the modern sense of the term. Moligayya, (a king from Kashmir) and his wife Gangavati (later known as Mahadevi) came to Kalyan renouncing all worldly pleasures and lead a life of austerity. They were an ideal couple, highly advanced in spiritual plane. Basava respected them and held them in high esteem. It is said that Moligayya's straightforwardness did not spare even Basava and Chenna Basava and that Allum also became a butt of his searching scrutiny at some occasion. Gangavari was an ideal wife and there are vacanas which indicate that she enlightened Moligayya on complicated spiritual subjects.

It is evident from the above that Basava had great regard and respect for women for he saw in every woman the 'Mahadevi'

or the Divine Mother. He and other Saranas not only recognised the greatness of Akka Mahadevi but bowed down to her in great reverence.

Akka Mahadevi

Akka Mahadevi was born at Udutadi (Shimoga District) to a Saivite couple; Nirmal and Sumati. Akka Mahadevi was a devotee of Chenna Mallikarjuna from her childhood. He was the sole Lord of her heart. Evidently she had not contemplated marriage with any earthly husband. She would always sing:

"I have fallen in love with the Beautiful
One, who is without any family,
Without any country and
without any peer;
Chenna Mallikarjuna,
the Beautiful, is my husband.

Fling into the Ere the husbands who are
subject to death and decay"

She spent all her time in worshipping Ista linga.

But king Kausika a *Bhavi* was fascinated by her charm and beauty and fell passionately in love with her. When Mahadevi refused to respond, he threatened to put her parents to death. There are two versions regarding Akka's marriage to Kausika. In one (By Harihar) we read that she married Kausika to save her parents on condition that he will vouchsafe full freedom in her spiritual pursuit, which if transgressed thrice, she would leave him. Kausika could not keep his word and offended Sivabhaktas and insulted her in spite of her repeated warnings. She walked out of him and went to the abode of Mallikarjuna, The other

version (By chamaras) denies her marriage with Kausika. It is evident that Kausika wanted to possess her as an ornament. He became a saivite and even followed her to Srisailam, and begged her to come back. She said to the Lord,

'O Lord, your Maya does not give up
when I have given it up.'

He used all the vilcs in his make-up to retain her but was totally unsuccessful.

It was an all consuming urge that had swept her out of her hearth and home. Then she longed to see Basava the great devotee and reformer.

She started for Kalyan singing :

"Kalyan is Kailas the saying IS true
within Kalyan and without also.

Who knows the end . . .

I see thy true saranas,

I have a longing to see your sarana
Basavanna, listen Lord - Chenna
Mallikarjuna."

She lost body consciousness and hence walked with no clothes. Orthodox society sneered and looked at her in contempt. They hurled abuses at her and scattered hurdles in her path. Finding her alone, it seems many made advances. To them she said, ... "Except Chenna Mallikarjuna all men are brothers to me, idiots. Go away. Oh, brother, I am not a woman, My body is not for sale . . . What do you think of me . . . How foolish you are.

She reached Kalyan after many ordeals. A hearty welcome awaited her there. Basava immediately recognised her greatness and introduced her to the assembly as 'enna hetta taye' (my mother). But Allum was not so easily convinced. He stormed at her with searching questions, which Mahadevi calmly replied. This

discussion deals with subtler aspect of metaphysics and is one of the most glorious chapters in the Sunya Sampadane. Allum was not only satisfied with her answers, but joined Basava and other Saranas to say,

"enna bhaktiya saktiyu nine,
enna muktiya saktiyu nine
enna yuktiya saktiyu nine.'

In this we find a unique example in Indian history where highly evolved souls like Basava, Allum, Chenna Basava, not only recognised the greatness and glory of Akka Mahadevi but in honouring her they honoured all womanhood.

Equality of status

Basava endowed on woman the equality of status, an independent outlook and freedom of movement that she had lost. He refused to call her the weaker sex for he knew that she was the spring-head of spiritual strength. To demonstrate his precepts he allowed his wives to help him in the discharge of his political and religious duties. He never interfered with their decisions. When during the last days of his life he left Kalyan for Sangam, both his wives stayed at Kalyan to carry on the torch that he had lit. Gangambika and Nagalambika (Basava's sister) joined the august assembly of Siva Saranas to fight Bijjal and his followers who were indulging in atrocities, in the name of religion. The other wife Nilambika wanted to join her husband, and so she marched towards Kalyan. But on her way to Kalyan at Tavasidi she learnt about her husband's death and immediately did away with her physical body.

Basava condemned child marriage and encouraged widow re-marriage and thereby strengthened the social structure and promoted its orderly growth. His contribution towards the emancipation of women and untouchables is noteworthy and can be equated with that, of Gandhiji in modern times.



The Transition to the Archives of History

Women of the Gupta Age

MARRIAGE was prohibited within certain degrees of relationship and it was preferred within the same caste. Vatsyayana in his Kama Sutra declares that the blessings of (lawful) progeny, fame, and public approval are obtained by a man uniting himself in love according to canonical rites with a virgin of the same Varna. The contrary practice of making love to girls belonging to higher Varnas as well as to other married women was forbidden. Love for women of inferior Varnas, who are sufficiently pure not to have their dishes cast off after meals, like love with harlots and remarried widows, is neither approved nor prohibited, as its object is only pleasure. From this it follows that intermarriages between different Varnas were hedged round with even greater restrictions in the society of Vatsyayana's time than those contemplated by the Smritis. For, according to Vatsyayana, not only is marriage in the pratiloma order absolutely forbidden, but marriage in the anuloma is put on the same low level.

Vatsyayana and the Smritis

Like the Smritis, Vatsyayana contemplates marriage as being normally settled by the parents (or other guardians) of the parties. Vatsyayana, moreover, adds a detailed account of the methods of selection of the bride that were in vogue in his time. The parents and relatives of the

bridegroom, as well as his friends to whom his wishes have been made known, are to move in the matter. Girls suffering from various defects, including defective names, are to be avoided. But according to the sensible view of an old canonical authority, quoted anonymously by Vatsyayana, happiness depends on the choice of a girl, upon whom one's heart and eyes are set and not on any other. Accordingly, the guardians of the girl are recommended to array her in gay clothes when giving her away, and to show her to advantage on occasions of festivals and the like. The ceremony of selection of the bride is to result in one or the other of four forms of marriage known to the Smritis, namely Brahma, Prajapatya, Arsha and Daiva.

Vatsyayana's testimony also shows how a young man could, under special circumstances, apply himself to win the girl of his choice by courtship. The courtship is to take different forms according as the girl is a child or a young woman or a woman of advanced age and wooing, when successful, is to be followed by a gradual winning of the girl's confidence. The account of Vatsyayana is also important as illustrating the Smriti rule allowing the girl in some instances to select her own husband.

Such a maiden is to pay court to a young man, handsome, virtuous and intelligent, with whom she had shared her affections from childhood, or to one whom she knows to be so deeply smitten, with love as to be ready to marry her even against her parent's wishes. The methods of wooing, which show considerable knowledge of human nature, are given in some detail, but they need not be quoted here. In fine,

says the author, the girl should marry one in whom she would find a heaven of happiness and who would be completely devoted to her. It is better to have a husband devoted to herself, though poor or one supporting himself along though without parts, than a husband who, though virtuous, has many to share his affections. Nor marriage desirable with a man of humble birth or who is too old or addicted to vice or with a wife and child and so forth.

Forms of Marriage

Vatsyayana's account of the methods of courtship given above leads naturally to his description (drawn no doubt from life) of the three forms of marriage known to the Smritis, namely, Gandharva, Paisacha and Rakshasa. More details are given of the Gandharva marriage. When the suitor cannot meet his beloved often in secret, he is to engage the services of his nurse's daughter who is to press his claims upon her. When the girl is so prepared, she should meet her lover at some appointed time and place. Then the marriage is to be solemnised by her walking thrice round a sacred fire, brought from a Srotriya and fed with oblations according to Smriti rules. When this is done, the parents are to be informed of the matter, for as the teachers say, marriage performed before a fire as witness can never be annulled. After the consummation of the marriage the relatives are to be informed and made to bestow the girl in the formal fashion under the fear of social obloquy and punishment in law. Unlike the Gandharva marriage, the Paisacha and Rakshasa forms do not require to be confirmed by religious rites and it is enough

to inform the relatives after consummation of the marriage and induce them to give her away. Vatsyayana's view of the relative merits of different forms of marriage is somewhat different from that of most of the Smritis. For in the first place he makes out the Paisacha marriage to be superior to the Rakshasa, no doubt (as the commentator says) on the ground that, the former is accompanied with violence, though they are equally unrighteous. Again, he declares the Gandharva marriage to be the most respected and the best, as it is attended with happiness, is not accompanied by troubles and negotiations, and is the result of mutual desire.

In the Literature of the Gupta Period

The literature of the Gupta Age contains repeated references to Gandharva marriages between the leading characters, but these are concerned in general with ancient kings or heroes or with fictitious characters of princes and nobles. The popular attitude on this point is well expressed in the artful advice given by the wise Kamandaki to the lovelorn heroine in the *Malati Madhava*. She says that generally fathers as well as destiny have authority over the disposal of maidens, the contrary examples of Sakuntala marrying Dushyanta, Urvashi marrying Pururavas, and Vasavadatta marrying Udayana involve rashness and therefore do not deserve to be followed. In the historical example of the Princess Raiyasri of Thaneshwar, her marriage was arranged by her father, King Prabhakara-varadhana, the mother meekly acquiescing in the choice with the observation that ' the father is the judge

in the bestowal of the daughter.' The literary works of the Gupta period themselves contain examples of marriage being arranged in advance by the parents on both sides in anticipation of a son being born to one couple and a daughter to another. Above all they illustrate the strong repugnance of high-born maidens, though themselves deeply smitten with love, to select their husbands by their own free will.

Female Education

We have good grounds to believe that girls of high families had sufficient opportunities for acquiring proficiency in general learning during this time. In Vatsyayana's *Kama Sutra* princesses and daughters of nobles are mentioned among instances of women whose intellect is sharpened by the knowledge of sastras. In particular, Vatsyayana gives us a long list of sixty-four subsidiary branches of knowledge (*anga vidya*) which should be learnt by women. These include solving riddles of words, chanting recitations from books, completing unfinished verses, knowledge of lexicons and meters, and so forth. Vatsyayana's picture of the good wife, again, shows how she was expected to be sufficiently educated to frame annual budget and regulate her expenditure accordingly.

The literary evidence of the Gupta Age proves that girls of high families, as also those living in hermitages, read works of ancient history and legend and were educated sufficiently to understand and even compose verses. What is more, girls of high families, and above all those living

at the royal courts, were usually trained in the arts of singing, dancing and the like. Later evidence seems to suggest that there were regular institutions where girls could receive their training, sometimes in the company of male students. Mention may be made lastly of the fact that the *Amarakosa*, a work of the Gupta Age, refers to words meaning female teachers (upadhyaya and upadhyayi) as well as female instructors of Vedic mantras (acharya).

The Ideal Wife

Vatsyayana draws a picture of the good wife, which carries into greater detail the account in the Smritis and may be taken as usual to be a faithful reflection of real life. The picture exhibits those qualities of service and self-restraint as well as sound household management which have remained the hallmark of Hindu wives down to the present day. Where the woman is the only wife, says the author, she is to devote herself to her husband as though to a deity. She is personally to minister to his comforts at table, on his reaching home and so forth. She shares in her husband's fasts and vows, not brooking a refusal. She attends festivities, social gatherings, sacrifices and religious processions, only with his permission. She engages in sports, approved by him. That the husband might not find fault with her, she avoids the company of disreputable women, shows him no signs of displeasure and does not loiter about at the door-step or in solitary places for a long time. She is not puffed up with prosperity and she does not give charity to anyone without informing her husband.

She honours her husband's friends, as is their due, with gifts of garlands, unguents, and toilet. She serves her father-in-law and mother-in-law and abides by their commands. When in their presence, she speaks few but sweet words and does not laugh aloud. She engages servants in their proper work and honours them on festive occasions. Above all, when her husband is gone abroad she lives a life of ascetic restraint. She gives up wearing all ornaments excepting the marks of her married state, she engages in religious rites and fasts, she acts as bidden by superiors, she does not go out to visit her relations except on occasions of calamities or festivities; when she visits them, she does so only for a short while and in the company of her husband's people. When her husband returns home, she goes forth immediately to meet him in her sober dress, and then she worships the gods and makes gifts.

Apart from attending to her husband and his parents relations, as well as his friends, the wife has complete and comprehensive charge of the household. She keeps the house absolutely clean, adorns it with festoons of flowers and polishes the floor completely smooth. She looks after the worship of the gods at the household shrine and the offering of bali oblations three times a day. In the garden attached to the house she plants beds of various vegetables, herbs, plants and trees. She collects seeds of various vegetables and fruit trees as well as medical herbs and sows them at the proper season. She lays by a store of various provisions in the house. She knows how to spin and weave, how to look after

agriculture, cattle-breeding, and draught-animals, how to take care of her husband's domestic pets, and so forth. She frames an annual budget and makes her expenses accordingly. She keeps daily accounts and makes up the total at the end of the day. During her husband's absence she exerts herself in order that his affairs may not suffer ; she increases the income and diminishes the expenditure to the best of her power. In case the woman has a co-wife she looks upon the latter as a younger sister when she is older in age, and as a mother when she herself is younger.

The older pattern carried over

The rule of life for the virtuous wife sketched above from the Smritis and the Kama Sutra appears to have been generally followed in the Gupta Age. Following in the wake of the older Smritis, Katyayana declares that the wife must never live apart from her husband, she must always be devoted to him. She must worship the domestic fire. She must minister to her husband during his lifetime, and she must observe the vow of chastity after his death. Again according to Katyayana and Veda Vyasa, the wife is to be associated with her husband in the performances of his religious acts, but all acts done by her to secure her spiritual benefit without his consent are useless. In thorough accordance with the old Smriti rules is the direction in the Matsya Purana, to worship the husband as a god, as well as that of Veda-Vyasa requiring a wife, whose husband has gone abroad to emaciate her body and refrain from all personal embellishment. Further, in the admonition

addressed to the king by the sage Kanva's disciple in the Abhijnasakuntalam, we have echoes of the Smriti rules deprecating long residence of the wife with her paternal relatives and admitting the husband's complete authority over her. Kanva's own summary of the duties of a wife, addressed to Sakuntala on the eve of her departure for her husband's place, is based upon the Smriti and Kama Sutra rules quoted above. On the other hand, the wife, says Daksha after Manu and other authorities cited above, must be maintained by the husband, while the Brihat-Samhita repeats Apastamba's penance for the husband's desertion of his faultless wife. In the character of Dhuta, wife of the hero in the Mrichchakatika, we have a typical instance of the good wife described in the Smritis. Belief in the extraordinary powers of the devoted wife (pativrata), which is expressed in the Mahabharata and other works, is reflected in a story of Dasakumara Charitra. The attitude of high-born ladies is illustrated in another story of the same work, where a woman, repudiated by her husband, declares it to be a living death for women of high birth to be hated by their husbands, for the husband alone is the deity of such women. Still another story shows how the qualities of economic house-keeping and absolute devotion to the husband were highly prized among wives.

"The Unchaste Wife!"

As in the preceding period, side by side with ideal pictures of conjugal love and faith we come across numerous references of unhappy and even unchaste wives.

Vatsyayana's evidence confirms that of the Smritis about the prevalence of polyandry. This practice was not confined to kings, but extended also to other people. Indeed, it appears that rich men generally married many wives who were outwardly happy in the enjoyment of affluence but inwardly miserable. A woman suffered the misfortune of getting a co-wife if she was stupid, or incontinent or barren or if she repeatedly bore daughters or if the husband was fickle by temperament. There is a separate branch of Erotic's dealing with illicit love with married women and a number of occasions is mentioned, both in Kama Sutra and Brihat Samhita, as offering opportunities for meeting between unchaste wives and their paramours. But the actual instances of seduction of married women, even in the contemporary literature of stories and fables, are limited in number. According to the Smriti law, adultery ranks among the Lesser Sins (upapatakas) which should be expiated by performances of appropriate penances. The guilty wife, so long as she does not perform penance, is to be treated with studied scorn and neglect and given only a starvation diet. But after she has undergone penance (or according to some authorities passed her monthly period), she becomes pure and is restored to all her rights. Only in extreme cases, as when she commits adultery or attempts to kill her husband is she to be abandoned altogether. The records of the Gupta Age point to the continuance of some of the above ideas and practices. Echoing the liberal view of Vasishtha and Yajnavalkya, Veda-Vyas, Atri and Devala declare that a woman becoming pregnant by connection with a man of another Varna

remains impure till her delivery and next period, when she regains her purity.

The Widow

The Smriti law of the pre-Gupta period requires the widow as a rule to live a life of strict celibacy and self-restraint, though Brihaspati recommends, as an alternative, that she should burn herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. The Smritis of the Gupta Age followed the older law in prescribing a life of vows and fasts as well as of renunciation for the widow and allowing her to inherit her husband's property. But Sankha and Angiras as well as Harita strongly urge her to sacrifice herself on her husband's pyre. In the case of Brahmana widows, self-immolation on the fire was forbidden absolutely or conditionally by Paithinasi, Angiras, Vyaghrapad and Usanas, while Veda-Vyasa recommended it as an alternative course. Literary references show that the custom of sati was extolled by some authors, but strongly condemned by others in the Gupta period. We have, again, a few instances, both in contemporary history and fiction, of actual or attempted self-immolation of women immediately before or after the death of their husbands. But as widespread prevalence of this practice in the Gupta Age is disproved by the complete silence of the observant Chinese travellers on this point and frequent reference to widows in the Smritis and other literature. On the whole we may infer, on general grounds, that widows in the Gupta Age, as in earlier times, usually lived the chaste and austere life prescribed by the Smritis.

But the remarriage of widows and of other women, though gradually coming into disfavour, was not absolutely forbidden. Hiuen Tsang's evidence is definitely against the remarriage of punarbhu (re-married widow) and her husband, but also for a twice-born having a punarbhu as his principal wife. Katyayana refers to the case of widow be-taking her elf to another man regardless of her adult or minor son, and deals, under his law of partition and inheritance, with the share belonging to the son of a woman who has left her impotent husband.

In so far as the punarbhu is concerned, Vatsyayana gives us a somewhat different view of her status. The punarbhu is a widow who, being smitten with love through inability to control her passion, unites herself again with a man seeking pleasure and having excellent qualities. In choosing her mate she follows, above all, the inclinations of her heart. She possesses a degree of independence denied to the wedded wife. She persuades her lover to spend money on drinking parties, garden parties, etc. At her lover's house, she assumes the role of a mistress, being affectionate to his wedded wives, generous to his servants and friendly with his companions. Possessing greater knowledge of the arts of love than the wedded wife, she practises them on her lover in secret. She joins in festive gatherings as well as in drinking and garden parties and other games. The punarbhu's connection, unlike that of the wedded wife, is not a permanent one. If she leaves the house of her own accord, she has to return to her lover all presents except those given out of affection, but if she is driven out, she need

not give back anything. In other passages, the punarbhu's social status is correctly defined by placing her mid-way between the virgin (Kanya) and the fallen woman, and between the queens (devi) and the courtesans (ganika). It follows from the above, that in the society of Vatsyayana's time public opinion permitted a widow to live with the man of her choice, but she never enjoyed the social status of a wedded wife.

The Courtesan (Ganika)

It appears from Vatsyayana's Kama Sutra that because of their graces of form and manners and accomplishments, a class of courtesans enjoyed high social esteem as in the older times. We learn also from other contemporary literature that they were renowned for their beauty, wit and other accomplishments, as well as their wealth and luxury. Occasionally, as in the character of Vasantasena in Mrichchhatika and those of Ragamanjari and Chandra Sena in the Dasakumara charitra, there were courtesans of the better sort, who deliberately gave up their profession and after braving persecution, united themselves with worthy men of their choice. But in general, the courtesans were notorious for their greed and wiles. In the Dasakumara-charita story, to which we have referred above, we have a very vivid account, no doubt drawn from life, of their up-bringing and training with the sale object of qualifying them for squeezing money from their dupes. Allied to the institution of courtesans was that of girls maintained in the great temples for the worship of the gods. Such girls were kept

at the great temple of Mahakala at Ujjayini in Kalidasa's time and at a shrine of the Sun-god in city east of Sindh in the time of Hiuen Tsang.

The General Status of Women

The disabilities and inferior status of the women, introduced in the previous period, continued more or less in the Gupta Age. Among the most striking changes during this period may be mentioned the increased recognition in Katyayana of women's right to her property and the remarkable rule in Atri and Devala allowing women molested by robbers and others to regain their social status. That women in the Gupta Age were not disqualified from the exercise of public rights is proved by the example of Queen Prabhavati Gupta, daughter of Emperor Chandra Gupta II, who ruled the Vakataka Kingdom as regent on behalf of her minor son in the fourth century and that of princess Vijaya Bhartarika who acted as provincial governor under Vikramaditya I of the Chalukya dynasty of Vatapi in the seventh century.

References in the general as well as technical literature of the early centuries before and after Christ seem to indicate that married women in high families did not usually appear in public without veils. This custom was probably continued in the Gupta Age. The silence of Hiuen Tsang and I'tsing, however, indicates that the women did not generally observe the purdah and remain in seclusion.

From "The Classical Age" Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.



Sakuntala

Extracts from Rabindranath Tagore

GOETHE, the master-poet of Europe, has summed up Sakuntala in a single quatrain. He regarded Sakuntala as fine poetry. (But

it is not really so.) His stanza breathes not the exaggeration of rapture, but the deliberate judgment of a true critic. There is a special point in his words. Goethe says expressly that Sakuntala contains the history of a development - the development of flower into fruit, of earth into heaven, of matter into spirit.

This drama was meant not for dealing with particular passion, but for translating the whole subject from one world to another - to elevate love from the sphere of physical beauty to the eternal heaven of moral beauty.

Simplicity of Shakuntala

With the greatest ease, Kalidas has created his junction of earth with heaven. His earth so naturally passes into heaven that we do not mark the boundary-line between the two. In the First Act the poet has not concealed the gross earthiness of the fall of Sakuntala ; he has clearly shown it in the conduct of the hero and heroine alike, show how much desire contributed to that fall. He has fully painted all the blandishments, playfulness and display of the intoxicating sense of youth, the struggle between deep bashfulness and strong self-expression. This is a proof of the simplicity of Sakuntala; she was not

prepared before-hand for the outburst of passion which the occasion of Dushyanta's visit called forth. Hence she had not learned how to restrain herself, how to hide her feelings. The daughter of the hermitage was off her guard, just as the deer there knew no fear.

With equal ease has the poet shown the deeper purity of her character in spite of her fall - her unimpaired innate chastity. This is another proof of her simplicity.

The flower of the forest needs no servant to brush the dust off her petals. She stands bare ; dust settles on her; but in spite of it she easily retains her own beautiful cleanliness. Dust did settle on Sakuntala, but she was not even conscious of it. Like the simple wild deer, like the mountain spring, she stood forth pure in spite of the mud.

Kalidasa has let his hermitage-bred youthful heroine follow the unsuspecting path of Nature; nowhere has he restrained her. And yet he has developed her into the model of a devoted wife, with her reserve, endurance of sorrow and life of rigid spiritual discipline. At the beginning, we see her self-forgetful and obedient to Nature's impulses like the plants and flowers; at the end we see her deeper feminine soul - sober, patient under ill, intent on austerities, strictly regulated by the sacred laws of piety.

With matchless art Kalidas has placed his heroine at the meeting-point of action and calmness, of nature and law, of river and ocean, as it were. Her father was a hermit, but her mother was a nymph. Her birth was the outcome of interrupted austerities, but her nature was in a hermitage, which is just the spot where nature and

austerities, beauty and restraint are harmonised. There is none of the conventional bonds of society there, yet we have the harder regulations of religion. Her *gandharva* marriage, too, was of the same type; it had the wildness of nature joined to the social tie of wedlock. The drama, *Sakuntala*, stands unique and unrivalled in all literature, because it depicts how restraint can be harmonised with freedom. All its joys and sorrows, unions and partings, proceed from the conflict of these two forces.

Sakuntala's simplicity is natural. (The different circumstances under which the two were brought up account for this difference.) Sakuntala's simplicity was not girt round with ignorance. We see in the First Act that Sakuntala's two companions did not let her remain unaware of the fact that she was in the first bloom of youth. She had learnt to be bashful. But all these things are external. Her simplicity, on the other hand, is more deeply seated and so also is her purity. To the very end the poet shows that she had no experience of the outside world. Her simplicity is innate. True, she knew something of the world, because the hermitage did not stand altogether outside society; the rules of home life were observed here too. She was inexperienced though not ignorant of the outside world; but trustfulness was firmly enthroned in her heart. The simplicity which springs from such trustfulness had for a moment caused her fall, but it also redeemed her forever. This trustfulness kept her constant to patience, forgiveness and loving kindness, in spite of the cruelest breach of her confidence.

Desertion

The desertion of Sakuntala by the amorous Dushyanta, which in real life would have happened as the natural consequence of his character, is here brought about by the curse of Durvasa. Otherwise, the desertion would have been so extremely cruel and pathetic as to destroy the beauty and harmony of the whole play. But the poet has left a small dent in the veil through which we can get an idea of the royal sin. It is in the Fifth Act. Just before Sakuntala arrives at court and is repudiated by her husband, the poet momentarily draws aside the curtain on the King's love affairs. A woman's voice is heard singing behind the scene:

"O honey-bee ! Having sucked the mango blossoms in your search for new honey, you have forgotten the recent loving welcome by the lotus !"

This tear-stained song of a stricken heart in the royal household gives us a rude shock, especially as our heart was hitherto filled with Dushyanta's love-passages with Sakuntala. Only in the preceding Act we saw Sakuntala setting out for her husband's home in a very holy, sweet and tender mood, carrying with herself the blessing of the hoary sage Kanwa and the good wishes of the whole forest world. And now a stain falls on the picture we had so hopefully formed of the home of love to which she was going.

When the jester asked, "What means this song?" Dushyanta smiled and said, "We desert our loves after a short spell of love-making, and therefore I have deserved this strong rebuke from Queen Hansapadika."

This indication of the fickleness of royal love is not purposeless at the beginning of the Fifth Act.

In passing from the Fourth Act to the Fifth we suddenly enter a new atmosphere; from the ideal world of the hermitage we go forth to the royal court with its hard hearts, crooked ways of love-making, difficulties of union.

Then comes the repudiation. Sakuntala feels as if she had been suddenly struck with a thunderbolt. Like a deer stricken by a trusted hand, this daughter of the forest looks on in blank surprise, terror and anguish. At one blow she is hurled away from the hermitage, both literal and metaphorical, in which she has so long lived. She loses her connection with the loving friends, the birds, beasts, and plants, and the beauty, peace, and purity of former life. She now stands alone, shelterless. In one moment the music of the first four Acts is stilled!

No longer former self

O the deep silence and loneliness that then surround her! She whose tender heart has made the whole world of hermitage her own folk, to-day stands absolutely alone. She fills this vast vacuity with her mighty sorrow. With rare poetic insight Kalidas has declined to restore Sakuntala to Kanwa's hermitage. After the renunciation by Dushyanta it was impossible for her to live in harmony with that hermitage in the way she had done before She was no longer her former self; her relation with the universe had changed. Had she been placed again amidst her old surroundings, it would only have cruelly exhibited the

utter inconsistency of the whole situation. The picture of Sakuntala in the new hermitage parted from the friends of her girlhood and nursing the grief of separation from her lover. The silence of the poet only deepens our sense of the silence and vacancy which here reigned round Sakuntala. Had the repudiated wife been taken back to Kanwa's home, that hermitage would have spoken. To our imagination its trees and creepers would have wept. The two girl friends would have mourned for Sakuntala, even if the poet had not said a word about it. But in the unfamiliar hermitage of Marichi, all is still and silent to us; only we have before our mind's eye a picture of the world-abandoned Sakuntala's infinite sorrow, disciplined by penance, sedate and resigned-seated like a recluse rapt in meditation.

The best means of winning:
Devotion

Dushyanta is now consumed by remorse. So long as Sakuntala was not won by means of this repentance, there was no glory in winning her. One sudden gust of youthful impulse had in a moment given her up to Dushyanta, but that was not the true, the 'full winning of her'. The best means of winning is by devotion. What is easily gained is easily lost. Therefore, the poet has made the two lovers undergo long austerities that they may gain each other truly eternally. If Dushyanta had accepted Sakuntala when she was first brought to



his court, she would have only occupied a corner of the royal household and passed the rest of her life in neglect, gloom and uselessness.

It was a blessing in disguise for Sakuntala that Dushyanta adjured her with cruel sternness. When afterwards this cruelty reacted on himself, it prevented him from remaining indifferent to Sakuntala. His unceasing and intense grief fused his heart and welded Sakuntala with it. Never before had the King met with such an experience. Never before had he had the occasion and means of truly loving. Kings are unlucky in this respect; their desires are so easily satisfied that they never get what is to be gained by devotion alone. Fate now plunged Dushyanta into deep grief and thus made him worthy of true love - made him renounce the role of a rake.

A moral union

He has made the physical union of Dushyanta and Sakuntala tread the path of sorrow, and thereby chastened and sublimated it into a moral union. Hence did Goethe rightly say that Sakuntala combines the blossoms of Spring with the fruits of Autumn. It combines Heaven and Earth. Truly in Sakuntala there is one Paradise Lost and another Paradise Regained.

The first Act is full of brilliancy and movement. We have there a hermit's daughter in the exuberance of youth, her

two companions running over with playfulness, the newly flowering forest creeper, the bee intoxicated with perfume, the fascinated King peeping from behind the trees. From this Eden of bliss Sakuntala, the mere sweetheart of Dushyanta, is exiled in disgrace. But far different was the aspect of the other hermitage where Sakuntala, the mother of Bharata and the incarnation of goodness took refuge. There no hermit girls water the trees, nor bedew the creepers with their loving sister-like looks, nor feed the young fawn with handfuls of paddy. There a single boy fills the loving bosom of the entire forest-world; he absorbs all the liveliness of the trees, creepers, flowers, and foliage. The matrons of the hermitage, in their loving anxiety, are fully taken up with the unruly boy. When Sakuntala appears, we see her clad in a dusty robe, face pale with austerities, doing the penances of a love-lorn wife, pure-souled. Her long penances have purged her of the evil of her first union with Dushyanta; she is now invested with the dignity of a matron, she is the image of motherhood, tender and good. Who can repudiate her now?

Home life and liberty of the soul

This ancient poet of India refuses to recognise Love as its own highest glory; he proclaims that Goodness is the final goal of Love. He teaches us that the Love of man and woman is not beautiful, not lasting, not fruitful, so long as it is self-centred, so long as it does not beget Goodness, so long as it does not diffuse itself into society over son and daughter, guests and neighbours.

The two peculiar principles of India are the beneficent tie of home life on the one hand, and the liberty of the soul abstracted from the world on the other. In the world India is variously connected with many races and many creeds; she cannot reject any of them. But on the altar of devotion (tapasya) India sits alone. Kalidas has shown, both in Sakuntala and Kumara Sambhava, that there is a harmony between these two principles, an easy transition from the one to the other. In his hermitage a human boy plays with lion cubs, and the hermit spirit is reconciled with the spirit of the householder.

On the foundation of the hermitage of recluses Kalidas has built the home of the householder. He has rescued the relation of the sexes from the sway of lust and enthroned it on the holy and pure seat of asceticism. In the sacred books of the Hindus the ordered relation of the sexes has been defined by strict injunctions and Laws. Kalidas has demonstrated that relation by means of the elements of Beauty. The Beauty that he adores is lit up by grace, modesty, and goodness; in its intensity it is true to one for ever; in its range it embraces the whole universe. It is fulfilled by renunciation, gratified by sorrow, and rendered eternal by religion. In the midst of this beauty, the unruly love of man and woman has restrained itself and attained to profound peace, like a wild torrent merged in the ocean of goodness. Therefore is such love higher and more wonderful than wild and untrained passion.



Redemption of Women In Deval Smriti

HISTORY repeats itself. Problems of humanity recur over and over again with variations in magnitude or in social reactions. Hence it was only natural that from time to time a man of wisdom, having analysed these problems should raise his voice and offer solutions, to save society from being torn asunder by these problems. The recent picture of human misery and suffering in Bangla Desh War still staggers and torments the mind. The entire picture of misery in itself is a deeply effective protest against the destructive power of war. The mind shrinks away in utter sense of shame at the cruelty of human nature, when one bears the cries of the ravaged, destitute women and the unfortunate children conceived in destruction.

The major problem that projects out of this devastating scene is the fate of these unfortunate women and children, abused and unwanted, a fate for which they are in no way responsible. Is this a problem of only the Bangla Desh War? Everywhere in the world from time immemorial, man's lust and greed have resulted in war, leaving in its wake this horrible problem, in addition to death, destruction and hunger. India, the patient mother of seers and sages, had suffered these humiliations in the hands of foreign invaders many a time. Time and again she became the ravaged, destitute mother of unwanted orphaned children crying out piteously, for a home and love. In the 8th century A.D., the sky was rent with cries of despair and terror of countless

women who suffered on account of foreign invasions- in Sindh and Punjab. The women, the patient sufferers of all injustice, took the maximum toll of a brutal war; destitute women who could go nowhere, littered the scene with their piteous countenances mutely demanding 'What have we done? Why was the blow dealt at us?'

Rishi Devala

Their misery shocked a seer of the age- Rishi Devala (c. 800-900). Time healed many a wound. People built up their lives again, as they re-built their ruined houses and fortunes and staggered to their feet. Yet, these women had no hope of re-building their shattered lives. Like used articles they were flung aside by the invader who drank his fill to quench his lustful thirst. With the typical orthodoxy of the Hindu who refuses to touch any soiled article - she was discarded by her own people. Thus a destitute woman had nowhere to go. Hindu orthodoxy did not allot her an inch of space to call her own. She had to exist in the shadow of her protectors and her protectors wrapped the shadow around them tightly and left her out.

Devala's sense of justice revolted against this. To atone for this, he promulgated a new Smriti.

He convened a meeting of Brahmins and Kshatriyas and placed before the assemblage his proposals stressing the gravity of the problem and need for a solution. After the assembled wise men granted that his proposals were proper and reasonable he codified them into his Smriti for the benefit of posterity. Thus Sindh

was saved for two hundred years even after the attack of Quasim. At a time when orthodoxy greatly influenced the minds of people constricting their lives-physical and emotional, Devala's statements upholding the cause of these destitute women appear extremely bold and revolutionary.

The law of rehabilitation

He firmly says that women who have been captured by the invaders and forced to satiate their carnal desires and sometimes even forced to step out of their own religious fold, should be accepted back into their own fold and household with due respect. Even those who have been Fertilized by the seed of these destructive evil forces, must be accepted back after the child is delivered.

Medhathithi (c. 850-950), a noted contemporary commentator also gives a revolutionary analysis of all previous Smritis and Scriptures, especially of Manu Smriti. He upheld the Vedic slogan and professed that enemies should be destroyed in advance. He contended that the ancient scriptures should be discarded where they fail to apply to the changing times and new laws be formulated and adopted.

Tavarikha-I-Sona, a Muslim record of history also indirectly refers to Devala's laws of acceptance of the destitute women and the religious out-castes back into the fold. The available parts of his Smritis, however, refer to the status of children born of these incidences and what could be done for them.

(Based on Savarkar's Saha Soneri Pane)



Women In the Imperial Age of Kanauj

-Extracts

The Background

In the history of the period of Kanauj, the Pratiharas, the Palas and the Rashtrakutas constitute the triangle of forces fighting for supremacy, with the imperial city as the trophy. Incidentally the theory that Harshavardhana was not the empire-builder is further substantiated by the larger and the more stable empire of the Gujarat Pratiharas. The Rashtrakutas emerge in brilliant colours against the background of ancient Deccan. Kabul and Zabul resisted Muslim infiltration.

On the cultural side we see Buddhism and Jainism eddying into regional backwaters, the pure founts of Brahmanism and Buddhism coloured by Tantrikism. At the same time an interpretative phase in the religious and secular spheres is ushered in. In an otherwise dull firmament we notice the stars Sankara and Medhatithi lighting the paths of religion and law. In Visakhadatta and Rajasekhara, the literature of period finds an ornate phase. Udbhata, Vamana and Abhinavagupta are names to conjure with in rhetorics. The *champu* finds its orientation. Indian pathology and *materia medica* find their categorical renunciation in Madhavakara and Dhanvantri. The Nagara and Dravida types of architecture take definite shape. The monolith Kailasa temple at Ellora remains a unique achievement with no parallel in the history of Indian architecture.

Female Education

Long before the present period, the Smritis had denied the right or privilege of Vedic study to women. By progressively sanctioning early marriage of girls, they further destroyed the chances of higher



education of women. How backward was the state of higher studies among girls in general during the present age is proved by the significant omission of all references to women teachers in the contemporary lexicographical works and still more by the testimony of Medhatithi to the general ignorance of the Sanskrit language among women. Nevertheless we have reasons to believe that women, including those not belonging to the higher classes, had some opportunities, as in the preceding Age, for liberal education as well as training in fine arts. Rajasekhara refers, in justification of

women's competence in poetical skill, to examples of princesses, of daughters of higher officials (mahamatra), of courtesans, and of concubines, who were poetesses as well as adepts in sciences (sastra). In Avanti- sundari, the accomplished wife of Rajasekhara, we have a striking illustration of a lady deeply learned in Sanskrit lore. The dramas and prose romances of this Age also illustrate the contemporary state of learning among women. In the plays of Rajasekhara, we find that court-ladies and even the queen's maids-in-waiting are capable of composing excellent Sanskrit and Prakrit verses. Again, we have a number of stories pointing to the skill of princesses in the fine arts, especially those of painting, music and versification.

The Position of Women

In so far as the status of the wife is concerned, the Smriti authorities of the period, like their predecessors, emphasise the duty of absolute obedience and devotion of wives to their husbands. Medhatithi illustrates the wife's duty of personal service towards her husband by saying that she shall shampoo his feet and render him such other service as befits a servant. But this is subject to the all-important condition that the husband follows the righteous path and is free from hatred as well as jealousy towards his wife. For the husband, so runs Medhatithi's memorable dictum, has no dominion (prabhutva) over his wife. The husband and the wife differ only in their bodies but are entirely united in their functions. Equal right of the husband and wife to seek legal remedy against each other as the last

resort is emphasised by Medhatithi. For he says that the wife, very much persecuted by her husband, like the husband very much troubled by his wife, has the remedy of appealing to the king for decision of their disputes. Other passages deal with the wife's right to maintenance by her husband. According to a verse attributed to Manu and quoted by Medhatithi and Vijnanesvara the virtuous wife must be maintained even by committing a hundred bad acts. Similarly, Daksha includes the wife in the list of those whom one is bound to maintain. Even the wife's fault does not make her liable to abandonment or forfeiture of her possessions. As Medhatithi says, the wife, even though guilty of grievous sins, must not be turned out of the house. The punishment of confiscation prescribed by Manu for a wife hating her husband Medhatithi continues, is meant simply as a warning to bring her to her senses and it does not sanction the confiscation of all her belongings. After this, it is not surprising that Medhatithi requires a husband, when going abroad, to make provision for his wife. Indeed, according to him, the husband must not journey abroad leaving his wife behind except for the specific purposes mentioned by Manu.

Medhatithi's summing up

The law on the subject of the wife's maintenance is summed up by Medhatithi in an-other context. Here he says that the faithful wife must not be abandoned, even though she may be disagreeable in look, or harsh in speech and the like. On the other hand, the unfaithful wife may be confined in a room when she has been guilty of a

single act of transgression, but if she repeats the offence, she is to be abandoned. Referring to Yajnavalkya's text allowing mere subsistence to an unfaithful wife, Medhatithi observes that it applies when the husband is able and willing to maintain her but if he is not willing she may be abandoned. The wife, concludes Medhatithi, must be maintained even if she hates her husband, but if she becomes an outcaste she may be abandoned.

As to the husband's right of correcting his wife, Matsya Purana repeats Manu's injunction authorising the husband to beat his erring wife (though not on the head or the back) with a rope or a split bamboo. With more humanity Medhatithi takes Manu to enjoin not the actual beating of the recalcitrant wife, but only a method of putting her on the right path.

From this he draws the corollary that verbal chastisement is also to be inflicted on the wife, while beating may be occasionally resorted to, according to the gravity of the offence. Going a step further Visvarupa says that the guarding of wives consists in being really devoted to them and not in beating them, and he quotes in this connection a saying of those acquainted with worldly ways about the delicacy of Panchala women. That the imposition of money- fine was also one of the methods of correction open to the husband is apparent from Medhatithi. Here we read that the husband, being lord of the wife, may inflict the prescribed fine (of six krishnalas) upon the Kshatriya or other wife, and a heavier fine upon a Brahmana wife, for drinking wine or for visiting shows, when forbidden to do so. Medhatithi justifies Manu's rule of repudiation of a wife

who is barren or who bears only daughters, or whose children die, on the ground that the husband would otherwise violate the injunction about laying of the sacred fire and the be-getting of sons. But he refuses to follow Manu in sanctioning the repudiation of a wife who is harsh of speech. In the same context Medhatithi extends Manu's two conditions of such supersession (viz. that the wife's consent has been obtained and that she is not disgraced) from the case of a devoted and modest but sick wife to those of a barren wife and a wife bearing only daughters.

Wife in separation : alternatives open

On the question of the alternatives open to a wife after she has waited for the prescribed period for her husband's return from abroad, the views of the authorities of this epoch, as we learn from Medhatithi, reflected their different standpoints from one of extreme puritanism to one of considerable latitude. After the prescribed period, the wife, according to one authority, must live by pursuing unobjectionable occupations. Modifying *this* strict view, Medhatithi urges that while she must live by unobjectionable occupations before the expiry of her waiting term, she may live by objectionable pursuits thereafter. Basing his opinion on Parasara's text quoted above in favour of the remarriage of women, a third authority goes so far as to allow the standard wife to deviate from chastity. A fourth author, taking the vital word *pati* in Parasara's text in the sense of protector, recommends her to accept another man's protection in the capacity of toilet-maid and the like. In such a case even if the

wife has entered into six months' or one year's contract, the husband on his return from his travel may take her back immediately. The fifth and the last authority would allow the wife to marry another husband according to the practice of *punarbhū* (remarried women) in which case the husband cannot interfere with her after his return, and she continues to be the wife of the second husband.

The Widow's lot

As regards the status of the widow, the life of strict celibacy and self-restraint enjoined upon her by the old Smritis was sought to be enforced during this period. As long as a widow remains faithful to her husband's memory, says Medhatithi, she deserves to have her property looked after by the king ; but in the contrary case, she is not only to be disqualified for possessing property, but is to be banished (in the sense of being driven out of the main building and provided with a separate dwelling-house as well as separate food and clothing.)

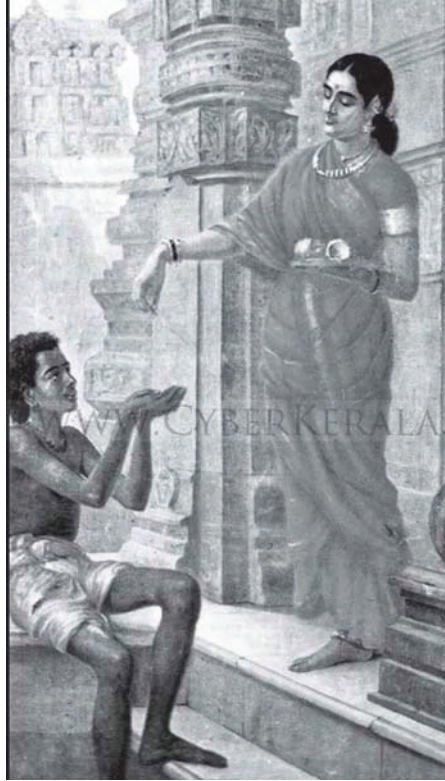
The dread rite of Sati

As in the former period, the dread rite of *sati* at this time was enjoined by some authorities, but condemned by others. According to the Arab writer Suleiman, wives of kings sometimes burnt themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands, but it was for them to exercise their option in the matter. The actual occurrence of this grim rite is testified to by a few historical examples of queens and other ladies of high families thus sacrificing their lives. But the

view, that the custom was mainly confined to royal families and had not yet spread among the masses, is hardly supported by a *kuttanimatam* which recognises it as one of the general virtues of a wife.

The custom of dedicating maidens for service in temples, which may be traced back to older times, was continued in this period. Reference to this class is found in Medhatithi as well as in inscriptions of this period. Abu Zaid also speaks of courtesans attached to Indian temples.

“Fallen women”



Kuttanimatam that we have the fullest notices of the life of a ganika during this period. It relates a story which shows that connection of a Brahmana with a ganika (such as was not disapproved in the times of Bhasa and Sudraka) was now regarded as a disgraceful act. We may also refer to a passage in Kuttanimatam illustrating at any rate the author's view of the very high qualifications, both of body and mind, that a ganika was expected to possess at this period.

The class of 'fallen women', known from early times, existed as a distinct social unit in the present age. Matsya Purana lays down a list of their duties and rights (vesyadharma) as well as the special clauses of law applicable to them. The deliberate settlement of such women in public places is hinted at by an early Arab geographer, while others notice it as a peculiarity of Indians that they held this profession to be lawful. Several passages in the literature of this period deal with the class of accomplished courtesans (ganika) whose virtues and vices are celebrated from the earliest Buddhist times. In two stories of Uparniti-bhavaprapanchakatha we find concrete instances of the better type of ganikas as well as of those of common variety. It is above all in

Conclusion

In general, the position of woman was patterned on the same lines as in the preceding period. Amplifying the old Smriti doctrine of the perpetual tutelage of women, Medhatithi observes that women should have no freedom of action regarding the great object of human existence (viz, virtue, wealth and pleasure), but should obtain permission of their husbands or other male relations before spending money on such acts. Women who are addicted to singing and similar acts, shall be restrained by their male guardians. Arguing that a woman's mind is not under her control and that she lacks the requisite strength, Medhatithi concludes that she shall be guarded by all her male relations at all times.

Turning to the specific disabilities of women, we find Medhatithi justifying their general incapacity for giving evidence as witnesses. As he observes, unlike other qualifications which are acquired and hence liable to lapse through carelessness and so forth, fickleness is inherent in women. But elsewhere he admits that there are women who are as truthful and as steady as the best expounders of the Vedas and they may appear as witnesses.

On the other hand, a more humane view is taken of the husband's authority over his wife. The wife, according to Medhatithi, must not be forsaken unless she becomes an outcaste, and 'forsaking' in this case means not that she is to be deprived of food and clothing, but that she is to be cut off from all intercourse and forbidden to do household work. According to Matsya Purana the mother must never be abandoned, while Medhatithi observes that the mother must not be turned out of the house even for failure of her maternal duties, for, to the son the mother never becomes an outcaste. Medhatithi's view of the law relating to female outcastes in general follows the humane lines indicated above. Referring to Manu's penalty of banishment for outcaste women, he explains it to mean that they shall be provided with a separate dwelling-place as well as food and clothes and they may retain what they have saved. Again he says that female outcastes, not performing the prescribed expiation, are to be allowed food, drink and clothing of an inferior quality and permitted to live in a separate hut close to the main building.



Glimpses Corridors through the of History

By S. C. DUBE

The Historical Setting

THE analysis of the traditional and contemporary roles of men and women in Indian society may be appropriately prefaced by a brief historical survey of the changing position of women. Scanty references scattered in the classical texts form the basis of this account. According to the age of these texts, it will be convenient to consider the changing position of women in four different periods of the evolution of Indian society: the age of the Vedas (2500 to 1500 B.C.), the age of the Brahmanas (1500 to 500 B.C.), the age of *Sutras* and *Epics* (500 B.C. to A.D. 599) and the age of later *Smritis* (A.D. 500 to 1800). It is necessary to point out that the accounts relating to the first two ages refer primarily to the position of women in Indo-Aryan society, rather than to Indian society in general. The later ages refer to the emergent pattern of society in which fusion between Aryans and non-Aryans was taking place at a rapid pace. As many of the contemporary attitudes towards men and women are rooted in the past, this synoptic historical survey is neither irrelevant nor unnecessary.

The Vedic Age

At the dawn of the Vedic age in India women had considerable freedom. Girls were educated like boys and had to pass through a period of brahmacharya (celibate life).

The marriage of girls used to take place at the age of 16 or 17 years. Educated brides of this age had naturally an effective voice in the selection of their partners in life. Occasional love marriages, which eventually enjoyed the blessings of the parents, are also noted. Women moved freely in society, often even in the company of their lovers. In social and religious gatherings they occupied a prominent position. Women had absolute equality with men in the eyes of religion they could perform ritual sacrifices independently and were not regarded as an impediment to religious pursuits. Marriage was a religious necessity to both the man and the woman, since neither could reach heaven without being accompanied by the duly married consort. The position of the wife was an honoured one in the family. There were instances of polygamy, but ordinarily monogamy was the rule. Widow remarriage was permitted, but this was usually within the family. The preference was first for a younger brother of the deceased husband, then for any other eligible member of the family. Actually, this was not a re-marriage, for an actual marriage was allowed only if the woman was a maiden or if marriage was started but not ceremoniously completed. Women could neither hold nor inherit property.

1500 to 500 B. C.

The changes which took place during this period in the position of women were gradual. According to Altekar : "In the higher sections of society the sacred initiation (upanayana) of girls was common, and they subsequently used to go through a course of education. Some attained

distinction in the realm of theology and philosophy, and a considerable number of women used to follow the teaching career. However, in this period the system of sending out girls to famous teachers or centres of education came to be discouraged. It was laid down that only near relations like the father, the brother or uncle should teach them at home. Therefore, religious and secular training became possible only in the case of the girls of rich and cultured families and a tendency arose to curtail the religious rights and privileges of the average woman; many functions in the religious sacrifices, which formerly could be performed by the wife alone, now came to be assigned to male substitutes. Some sacrifices continued to be performed by women alone, and when the husband was out the service of the sacrificial fire continued to be entrusted to the wife. In cultured families women used to recite their Vedic prayers morning and evening and perform sacrifices on their husband's behalf, when they were otherwise preoccupied."

In further describing the customs of this period, Altekar states that the age of marriage for the girls continued to be about 16; in practice, if not in theory, girls had some voice in the selection of their life partners. Ideals of marriage and the mutual relations of the husband and wife continued to be more or less the same as they were in the earlier age. Divorce was permitted to the wife, though the permission was not extensively utilized. Widow re-marriage was still permitted, but women had ceased to attend public meetings.

The relative freedom allowed to women in these two periods can be attributed to

political and religious causes. Altekarkar goes on to say: "The general freedom and better status, which women enjoyed in the Vedic age was largely due to men being engrossed in the work of conquest and consolidation. Women used to take an active part in agriculture and the manufacture of cloth, bows and arrows and other war materials. They were thus useful members of society, and could not be treated with an air of patronage and contempt . . ."

" Asceticism was at a discount in the Vedic age. Maidens and bachelors had no admission to heaven ; gods accepted no oblations offered by the unmarried. It was essential to offer the ordained sacrifices to gods for procuring happiness and prosperity both here and hereafter and they could be properly performed by the husband and wife officiating together.

The wife was not an impediment but an absolute necessity in the religious service. This circumstance helped to raise her status".

In order to enable her to perform these religious rites, proper training and education were considered essential. Such training required at least six years to complete and

as a result early marriages were not practicable. Therefore, the age of marriage remained at 16 or 17, and such young women were permitted to express their likes and dislikes at the time of marriage. Since



they moved freely in society and remained unmarried to such an age, some love marriages were inevitable. Women occupied an honoured position in the household, and so they could move freely in family and society and took an intelligent part in public affairs.

The Age of sutras and epics

The position of women changed considerably in this period. The introduction of the non- Aryan wife into the Aryan household was largely

responsible for this change. Aryan rule had now become established over the greater part of India. The indigenous population was incorporated into the social structure of the conquerors as the fourth (or Sudra) level and provided a huge semi-servile population. In some parts of India, however, where the Aryans could not completely wipe out the indigenous civilization, they merely imposed sovereignty over it. When

the two ethnic groups, proceeded to live together peacefully, inter-marriages became inevitable. In the beginning, there seemed to be no objection to an Aryan marrying a Sudra woman, provided he had another Aryan wife. Later this procedure was interdicted. However, the non-Aryan wife with her ignorance of the Sanskrit language and Hindu religion could not enjoy the same religious privileges as the Aryan consort. Instances where the husband attempted to associate the non-Aryan wife with his religious sacrifices led to the priests declaring that the non-Aryan wife was unfit for such religious rituals. When this rule was defied, the final solution to the problem was to declare all women unfit for Vedic studies and religious duties.

Marriage a substitute

The growing complexity of the rituals connected with the Vedic sacrifices also contributed to the deterioration of women's status. The time involved in learning now meant that their marriages must be delayed until the age of 22 or 24. Certain forces in society began to clamour for early marriages. In the easy and luxurious life after their conquests, the Aryans settled down in a rich and prosperous country and their political supremacy was unquestioned. Now the procreation of a son became a religious rather than a secular necessity ; he alone could discharge certain ritual obligations to the ancestors.

These causes contributed to the lowering of the age of marriage for girls and as a consequence, their education was discontinued and their religious status in the family was lowered. Finally, by about

A.D. 200, it was declared that marriage was the substitute for sacred initiation. (upanayana) in the case girls. Since upanayana was usually performed at about the age of 9 or 10, the same age now came to be regarded as the ideal age for marriage for girls. Such young brides without any education ceased to have any effective voice in the settlement of their marriage. Marriage now became irrevocable as far as the wife was concerned, although the husband could discard his wife for the offence of not being sufficiently submissive. Widow remarriage was opposed and was finally interdicted by about A.D. 500. Eventually the dictum 'the wife ought to revere her husband as a god, even if he were vicious and void of any merit' was accepted as applying to all women.

The Sati

Political reverses, war atrocities and the decline of population and prosperity in this period produced a wave of despondency in society and facilitated the spread of the ideal of renunciation. This affected the position of widows - although the Vedas stipulated that a son was necessary for securing heaven, the childless widow was now forced by custom to seek the higher end, salvation (mukti) and not the lower one, heaven (svarga). This she could attain by burning herself alive on the funeral pyre of her husband. This practice, known as sati, gradually spread and by A.D. 700 had become a religious duty. The practice was voluntary, but instances are cited which indicate that social pressures forced many women to follow it. Many of those who decided upon this course probably did so

out of genuine love and devotion to their husband whom they revered as a god, convinced that this was in the best spiritual interests of both. There are no statistics available, but one writer estimates that possibly only one widow in a thousand went to the pyre with her husband when this custom was commonest. When the custom was made illegal in British India in 1829 through the efforts of Lord William Bentinck, the law was welcomed by enlightened Hindu public opinion, although it was not without opposition from the orthodox.

The one improvement in this period was in the area of property rights. With widow re-marriage discouraged, there began to arise a class of childless widows. Society had to devise an honourable means of enabling them to maintain themselves. Upto and until 300 B.C., the right of the widow to inherit her husband's property was not recognised by any jurist. Now some felt that the widow should be assigned a definite share in the family property; others were inclined to assign to her only the right to maintenance. In time, different regional customs were evolved allowing varying degrees of proprietary rights to women.

The theory of the perpetual tutelage of woman was clearly formulated and expressed during this age. Manu, the supreme law-giver of Hindu society, ordained that the father should protect her while she was a maiden, the husband when she was married and the son when her husband was no more; at no stage was she to be left unprotected. Intended perhaps to afford women additional protection rather than deny them freedom, the practice served to increase further in

women their sense of inferiority. Gradually, it was assumed that a woman deserved no independence; she ought not to do anything on her own responsibility in childhood or youth or even in old age.

The changing position of women

The position of women continued to change in this period. From the theological point of view, women came to be regarded as of the same status as the Sudras. The proper age of marriage for girls was lowered still further. They were now to be married before puberty ; the age of 8 was regarded as ideal. Brides of 8 or 9 could naturally have no choice or voice in the settlement of their marriages. Early marriage was followed by early maternity which increased the mortality among women. Widowers of 25 to 30 were then married to girls of only 9 or 10.

Although widow re-marriage had generally become taboo, child widows were allowed to re-marry up to AD. 500. This permission was then gradually withdrawn. Permissive legislation was passed in 1856, but by this time prejudice against widow re-marriage was so deep-rooted that the legislation had no appreciable effect on the situation for more than half a century.

As by AD. 500 women were totally denied the opportunities of education, a new type of religious literature was prepared to meet their needs. This was the *re-modelled* Puranic literature. It enunciated the principles of Hinduism in story form, in a homely, easy and attractive manner. Pious people made provision for the exposition of these stories to public audiences and women became well grounded in the

traditional culture by habitually listening to this literature. Faith, almost blind faith, was thus developed in women.

Down to the 12th century AD. there existed staunch opposition to the custom of purdah (keeping the whole body, including the face, covered). During this period, however, the influence of the Muslim conquerors began to be felt and their customs and manners were gradually imitated. The custom of purdah began to spread among the higher classes in northern India, but was not followed in southern India. Another reason for the adoption of this custom was the additional protection it offered to the women and there is some evidence that women themselves welcomed the custom at the time.

Many rich and cultured Hindu families were ruined by the Moslem conquest. They could no longer make special arrangements for the education of their daughters, and the number of women who could read and write further dwindled. At the beginning of British rule, female education had practically disappeared from Hindu communities.

Mention was made earlier of the right of a widow to inherit her husband's property when there were no sons. In Bengal, the widow's position was further improved now by conceding her the right even when her husband had not separated from the joint family prior to his death and the scope of "stridhana" was further extended by including in it property acquired even by inheritance and partition.

With these changes in the status of women, it was inevitable that their character and personalities should also be affected. Uneducated, considered on a level with the Sudras, married before their

characters were fully developed, transferred from the loving and sympathetic atmosphere of the parents' house to the house of the parents-in-law, where an atmosphere of awe prevailed, apprehensive of suppression, sometimes forced to drag on a miserable existence in an interminable widowhood, their character suffered from forced repression in some directions and unnatural stimulation in others. They had no status in society none in their own estimation. They were more like puppets, which move when someone else pulls the strings than individual human beings with minds of their own.

During the British rule in India, legislation was used to bring about significant modifications in the structure of society. Most of these measures had the support of progressive opinion in India, although they were viewed by the orthodox as undesirable and unnecessary interference on the part of an alien government. The British were naturally very slow and cautious in respect of these reforms; rather than attempt to force any profound changes upon the whole society, they made it possible for those who wanted change to adopt an alternative way of life within the framework of the new social legislation. Reference has been made to the abolition of sati. Subsequently legislation recognized inter-caste marriages, as also widow re-marriage. The age of marriage was raised, and divorce was permitted under certain condition, special facilities were provided for women to acquire modern education. They were also provided with increasing employment opportunities in certain selected spheres. Advantage of these measures was taken only by a small fraction

of society in the first instance, but the process they initiated was, indeed, significant.

Free India has carried forward the process to a point where legally at least man and woman are equal. Marriage and divorce laws have been modified, ensuring a greater measure of equality to women. Women now have a legal share in ancestral property. Educational and employment opportunities for them have been extended and today they can enter the higher civil services and the professions without any legal discrimination. They have an equal right to vote. Many of them have entered the legislative bodies and some of them even occupy important positions in the government.

Inadequate as the above survey is, it nevertheless gives some idea of the changing position of women in the different epochs of the evolution of Indian society. Many of the present-day attitudes have been influenced by factors of historical development.

Contemporary Attitudes

We may now proceed to consider some of the basic cultural orientations towards men and women in contemporary Indian society. These have been shaped by the authority of classical texts, teachings of religion, factors of historical development and the persistence of regional and local traditions. Contemporary developments have brought about some modifications in them, but the covert forms have not changed to any appreciable extent.

The contradictory attitudes expressed about women in classical texts persist in

contemporary society. On the one hand, they are regarded as the highest embodiment of purity and power - a symbol of religiousness and spirituality; on the other, they are viewed essentially as weak and dependent creatures requiring constant guidance and protection. While the former view occasionally gets overt expression, covert forms defining her actual position are essentially determined by the latter.

Viewed empirically, two themes appear to be basic in the general area of attitudes covering the relative statuses of men and women. They are: (a) the male is more desirable than the female; and (b) the male is qualitatively superior to the female.

While girls are also considered necessary, the birth of a boy has been considered more desirable. Ritual considerations materially add to the desirability of the male. In the additional scheme of Hindu life, the attainment of salvation occupies the place of highest importance. For this it is necessary to complete all the rites and ceremonies of the life cycle prescribed by dharma. In the patrilineal Hindu society only a male can offer water to the spirits of the deceased ancestors; a son alone can perform the essential rites ensuring passage to heaven or attainment of salvation. This makes a male offspring very desirable. Besides, the possession of sons offers many other advantages. Parents can depend upon them for support in old age. They are expected to continue to live with the family, unlike the daughters and are also looked upon as potential builders of family prestige and prosperity. Daughters, on the contrary, are regarded as birds of passage. Their upbringing is all worry and



work for the parents; when they grow up and get married their loyalties are changed. As a popular saying goes : "Bringing up a son is like manuring and watering a plant in your own courtyard, for when it grows up it will give you shade and fruit; but bringing up a daughter is like manuring and watering a plant in someone else's courtyard, for her services and affections are destined for others". While her qualities of affection and tenderness are recognized, a daughter by herself can neither complete a household nor can she effectively take the place of a son. The difficulties and expenses involved in her upbringing and marriage further detract from her desirability. Even today in a large number of Hindu households the birth of a son is

an occasion for rejoicing; the birth of a daughter is a cause for anxiety.

The superiority of the male theme has many latent and manifest dimensions. Woman is regarded as more susceptible to pollution; her defilement is easy, purification is difficult. Man on the contrary is not so easily defiled, and when defiled the removal of his pollution is not as difficult as it is in the case of a woman. In a pollution-purity conscious society, the significance of this view is crucial, indeed. It is, perhaps, at the root of the prevailing double standards of morality; one set of principles governing the male and another governing the female. Because man is relatively pollution-resistant, he is allowed certain freedom which are denied to the woman. Implicit in this conception of the superiority of the male are the assumptions that "Man is strong and woman is weak", or "Man is capable of looking after himself, but the best security for a woman is in dependence". This assumption regarding the strength of the male has built up the ideas of male dominance and female dependence. Outdoor activities and most of the major decision-making roles are thus the domain of man. Under the protection of man and in the security of the home, the sphere of woman has been strictly limited. In the traditionally- oriented groups the stereotype suggesting the desirability of life-long protection to a woman - in childhood by father, in youth by husband and in old age by son - is still seriously believed.



From the Genderless One to the Duality of Man and Woman

Padma-Bhushan V. RAGHAVAI AH

STRUCTURALLY it may not be claimed that the frame and figure of a woman is superior to that of a man. She has been graded down and is still considered as weaker than the male. She is an 'abala' (not strong) to the Hindus. She was not the first born to the Christians. Even Adam did not consider her companionship necessary or indispensable and when Lord Jehova felt the need for him, Adam merely acquiesced with the innovation. No doubt, he parted with a bone from his ribs to serve as a logical basis for further creation though he later found to his cost that she was more a liability than an asset. He had to eat the forbidden fruit and suffer the sin accruing from this act of grave disobedience to his creator.

"The Temptress"

Woman has been the sole cause of wars, not only between two monarchs but also between two different races and countries and Suras and Asuras of the Ramayanic Epic. She was a bone of contention between the Pandavas and Kauravas, the derisive smile which Draupadi hurled against Duryodhana when the latter mistook water for land and vice-versa during his visit to Maya Sabha and had to suffer discomfiture at the hands of a woman. Mainly due to her, the Greeks and Spartans fought to

the last man for claiming Helen. Let alone Puranic times, even in Historic times a Samyuktha provoked a war between her father Jaya Chandra and the last Hindu Emperor of India, Prithviraj, which ended ultimately in the subjugation of this hoary country and its culture to a eight-hundred years' continuous rule of the Afghans and their successors down to the Moghuls. Again it is Padmini's enchanting beauty that provoked a war between Rajput ruler Bhim Singh and Allaudin, the Emperor at Delhi. The poor but bewitching palace maid Anarkali could not escape the brutal entombing at the hands of the benevolent Emperor Akbar, who could not reconcile himself to a Royal wedding between his son, emperor-to-be and a palace maidservant. Humayun could not save her and meekly sacrificed her. Even in the Hindu Epic period, the woman was only an adjunct to the man in the observance of various rituals and essential customary rites for the fulfillment of temporal as well as spiritual purposes. She has been forbidden from taking the lead on all such occasions. Even inheritance to ancestral properties has been barred to her whose sustenance was till recently limited to mere maintenance. Her place in the joint Hindu Family is next to a cook's, and if she happens to be a widow her privileges even in respect of her husband's personal properties if any, are further curtailed, the residue being more of an emotional nature than of real material value.

Commencement Of Women's Slavery

If it is argued that the woman's enslavement commenced with the

acquisition of property, may be in any form, it cannot be dismissed as fantastic. The first men (they could not have been "singular" should have been living each for himself in his own right, as the family or group idea must have been a later conception, when men learnt to live by other means instead of confining to hunting alone. During this remote period each man or woman lived alone in a cave or outside it under a tree, side by side with wild beasts, certainly not afraid of them, even as the normal victims of these beasts live side by side with ferocious animals in sanctuaries and preserves undaunted by the fact that every day they have to supply the food requirements of bigger and more frightful beasts. The laws of Nature have been wonderfully adjusting the relationship between one animal and another, even as such an adjustment is daily taking place between weaker and stronger men in the world, avoiding elimination except in a few rare cases as in the case of the Tasmamans of the Australian continent.

As the early man did, so the early woman also braved the wild beasts, hunted her favourite food, ate it raw or dried up, never bothering about her dependents, guests or guardians. When or where food became scarce owing to competitive hunting or destruction by disease, climatic conditions or acts of God, they quietly shifted and extended their forages to fields afresh and pastures new each in his or her own way. In these early wanderings there could not have been necessarily a leader to lead and a follower to follow. If a man and a woman decided to live together it must have been at random alliance, neither arranged nor

necessitated. It was at that remote time only a food gathering or food collecting stage, finding food on the tree tops, or underground and enough for the day and having no idea at all of preserving, storing and certainly not for selling through bartering could have been a random transaction.

Shoulder to shoulder

The woman performed all the jobs man did, though for biological reasons like periods of conception, child birth and suckling, she should have been incapacitated from taking up hard work including chasing, fighting, climbing for honeycombs and such other highly inconvenient and even perilous occupations and operations. Puranic Satya Bhama is believed to have taken part in war to help her husband on the battle-field. We can also quote a comparatively recent historic event when the Rani of Jhansi fought the British forces in 1857 valiantly and died on the battle-field.

The Valiant Princess

Emperor Asoka whose ambition for fame was not fully satiated with the conquest of kingdoms in North India, descended to the South and slew the ruler of Orissa in battle. Undaunted by the prowess of the conqueror and unmindful that she was only a young girl in teens, the ruler's daughter led the army and faced the Emperor with her drawn sword. A dismayed Asoka reasoned with her that his code of conduct in war would not allow him to fight with a woman, but she refused to relent. Then stunned at the display of her heroism, the

Emperor threw away his sword and offered himself to be slain if that would satisfy her revenge for the death of her father. The young heroine equally moved by Asoka's chivalry yielded and the hostility came to an end. Here again the heroine was let off because Asoka's chivalry in war would not permit fighting a woman. Perhaps this can be classified as a case of pity called chivalry. We cannot fail to note that pity is only a fairer case of hostility. Similarly Bhishma, the great aged warrior of the Mahabharata war, had to allow himself to be killed because Pandavas fought him by placing Sikhandi in their fore-front.

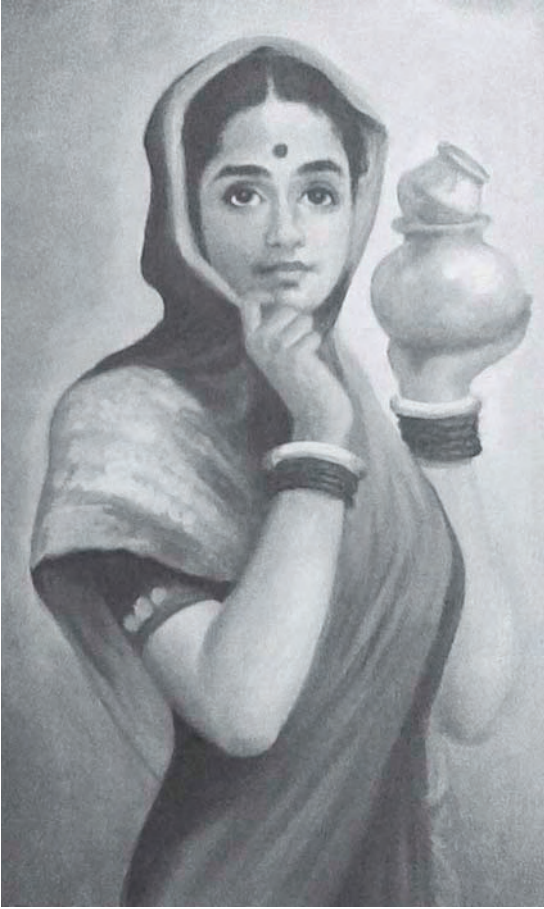
Such instances are however few and far between. On the whole, the woman has been no fighter over the ages. She has been adopting passive pursuits owing mainly to her motherly duties and womanly disabilities. In the village border feuds and head-hunting operations that marred their beautiful land, Assam's tribal women were involved in forming a hind line to exhort their warriors and to pick up and replenish their arrow quivers. The Papuan tribal women of New Guinea and New Nagaland engage themselves in similar occupations, during brief truce intervals at which the highest cannons of chivalry are invariably observed and no shooting will be permitted until the picking was completed. The usual common modern address of "Hello" in telephone calls is no other than the war cry of these war-like people during inter-village fights as signals of the impending struggle to enable women and children to flee and save their lives. No attack among these people should start before sun rise or after sun set so that the weaker sections of the people can escape butchery.

Matriarchal System

The matriarchal system of inheritance still in vogue in Kerala known as Marumakkuthayam and elsewhere in the world is perhaps as natural a pattern of inheritance through the male line i.e. patriarchal system. When in the pre-historic or primitive period of history, the woman was an equally able earner of food, she was the repository like the man of family prestige, family care and family property which centred around her, particularly wherever polyandry prevailed. The matriarchal system of inheritance appears to be quite natural and beneficial too. Later when feuds came to be fought not so much for prestige as it was for property, chiefly immovable, the emphasis shifted to the male mostly due to the inferiority of the female sex when compared to the male in wielding heavy and cumbersome weaponry and the skill needed to handle the same.

Polyandry

While touring the Chakrata group of villages, a few miles away from Dehradun, in Uttar Pradesh, where Khasas, Brahmins and Kshatriyas live, I stumbled on village Baruva, nesting on and around a hill top, adjacent to the Polyandrous Tibetan border. When I questioned Bosayi, a forty-year old common wife of five husbands, the eldest being seventy years old, all living on the Pandava family pattern, how she was managing with so many husbands at a time, she effectively silenced me by counter-questioning to the glee of all her husbands, how in our polygamous families we managed with plural wives. One interesting feature



Polyandry is a hoary custom forced by dire necessity, when groups of people had to flee for life during invasions, during which women could not undertake arduous and long journeys and were left behind as they could not keep pace with their men-folk. Wholesale annihilation of warriors caused by wars, floods and earthquakes also reduced the man-power necessitating polyandrous patterns of family life, disturbing the balance between the number of males and females. Even during such acts of God like natural calamities the woman has been the sufferer and had to be a life-long dependent on the male. Polyandry is justified by some as it prevents fragmentation of immovable property. While polyandry is bad enough, polygamy is worse in that it reduces, (particularly in Asiatic countries, where faithlessness on the part of men is not as seriously treated as it is on the part of women) women to serfdom.

Emergence of Clans and Clan-heads

of polyandrous families is that where great disparity exists among all the maliks (husbands) sometimes even the eldest brother's unfortunate wife will have to share bed with a youngster of half of her age. The younger brothers can however marry separate wives and the eldest brother has no claims on them, as was the case with Yudhishtira the eldest Pandava brother of Kurukshetra fame. Every year for a month at least these wives can stay in their parental villages and any conjugal alliances entered into with others during such periods are not to be questioned by the lawful husbands.

With the emergence of clans and clan-heads, the formation of villages and towns, small kingdoms came into existence, the rulers thereof being generally males due to their superior skill and maneuverability in riding war horses or war elephants which women could not easily master owing to their structural disabilities and emotional exuberances. Even in intellectual achievements the woman was relegated to the background perhaps due to a desire on the part of the male to avoid her rivalry and a claim for equality. Here again we come across cases where a philosopher like sage Yajnavalkya's wife Maitreyi and a scholarly wife of sage Varaha Mihira namely

Bharathi alias Usha or Ghaya, who shed their light on the Indian horizon just a flicker and nothing more, leaving no trail behind even as a pinch of sugar in a sea of salt.

Relegation to the kitchen inexplicable

For reasons that cannot be convincingly explained the woman has been relegated to the kitchen throughout the world as a proof of her weaker status and she has accepted it ungrudgingly everywhere, chiefly in Asiatic countries. Even in sports we have not as yet come across women exhibiting physical strength though they have proved their mettle abundantly in skilled games, circuses and even in taming wild beasts of prey and in training them to present feats of astounding merriment.

How man became the master

The woman as the dominant partner in provoking and stimulating erotic passions for reasons unknown has been asserting herself powerfully in winning the Man's submissiveness, may even his enslavement, to a degree that liberation from which is usually rare and impossible even as the Biblical Eve had exercised over poor helpless Adam, even to the extent of his defiance to his Supreme Maker, though great in itself, has ironically boomeranged against the victor herself, as if in eternal vengeance by man against woman by relegating the latter to a secondary status in the subsequent proliferation of the human species. While with the growth of population, industrial development and agricultural improvement, love for comfort and quest for easy wealth increased by

leaps and bounds, man's adoration for the charms of the fair sex and his insatiable hunger for romance, knew no limitations, the woman's craze for easier life, longer periods of rest and greater taste for costlier living and ever changing fashions in food and raiment also kept pace side by side with the result that these very same desires for happier living on the part of women proved to be her shackles of good and symbol of subjugation. As these shackles became brightest and tighter standards of refinement and norms of behaviour proved more and more deceptive and less and less real. The woman developed aversion for toil, craze for comfort and gradually let go her hold on the basic sources of wealth, becoming thereby a dependent on the actual producer, who always is the male member in the family, whether it is in the philosophical East or the materialistic West: *The man became the earner and the woman his sharer. He became the master, the chooser and the judge, she in turn became the servant, the chosen and the defendant. The crafty man did not halt there. He filled the legislatures and parliaments, was elected to the onerous offices of political power, made laws to strengthen his hegemony, so patent in the Hindu laws of succession. Even after a few significant changes were made in this code of laws, the woman is destined to trail behind the man and claim to be a mere dependent.*

Man's overbearing nature

Parasitic acquisition of material wealth, physical, cultural and artificial refinement, extravagantly bloated cheap sex knowledge and indulgence, its resulting

emotional upheaval bordering upon vulgarity and bestiality, traditional sex science, bequeathed by Kama Sutras, sex-stimulating fare of cheap vulgar novels, have enshrined the woman as a paragon of delicacy, beauty and elegance to the disadvantage of man in the family Republic of which he is effective, real, strong and purse controlling master. With all the above-mentioned assets to bolster her up the women continued to play second fiddle, at best sharing everything with her husband except the purse in Asiatic countries and obliged to be satisfied with her own separate earnings and savings and right to maintenance and divorce from her lawful husband in the more civilised and wealthy countries of Europe and America. Bereft of political power, considered unfit for holding key administrative posts, the woman if she happens to be a President's wife can be at best designated as the first lady of the country to which he belongs and no more. Even a forward country like the Soviet Russia which can boast of several equalities, material and moral, stopped short of entrusting political power to the so-called fairer-sex. Madame Krupskaya, wife of Lenin, the founder of the Soviet Republic, who was appointed as a Minister for Education, was ere long dismissed with impunity by Stalin to the chagrin of his sick bed confined master, preceptor and Father of the Nation was rightly condemned by the latter as a bad cook who was spoiling the broth. Even today the U.S.S.R. does not entertain women for leading Ministerial posts and party leadership roles as Mac's China also does.

True to the kindred points of heaven and home

Puranic stories and references are replete with offerings to brides, female and male slaves (Dasa-Dasi), the number depending upon the status and power of the bride's father and would-be father-in-law, to accompany the bride and slave for her in her new abode as a Chattel. The high priests of Hinduism did not like its sister religions, Christianity or Islam, conceive the Almighty as either a male or a female. Their high sense of meticulous logic did not permit them to allot a gender to the supreme deity though they were too liberal in their imagination not to be content with less than a dozen or two Gods. With a large number of Gods they associated them with a very large number of Goddesses as well to produce Godlings too to catch the imagination of the lower type of worshippers who were too unenlightened to conceive an abstract Almighty not limited to a particular form, particular name and particular abode. They were so perfect in their logic that their conception of the Supreme Being was more negative than positive. For instance, instead of limiting the Divine abode as being a particular spot, owning a particular name and claiming particular powers, the ancient seers described Him as one who is not known by any particular name or form. There is no place where he is not found and no power which he does not possess and nothing which he is not aware of. This naturally did not satisfy the lower type of imperfect devotees who could not concentrate on any abstract conception.

Even big sized apes like the gorilla and intelligent apes like the chimpanzees keep good sized harems the female controlling the entire group, like the Queen bee, often times indulging in petty quarrels goaded by jealousy.

Feeble protests

In recent years feeble voices were heard from some leading women leaders pleading for the effective enforcement in India of the spirit behind the existing legislation for the enfranchisement of women. They plaintively plead that as Mrs. Gujral did (15-1-1975, *Indian Express* Report) that "even the casting of the vote was decided by the father, husband or son." Surely Mrs. Gujral is not asking for encouraging frequent domestic differences in the family circle. The privacy of the ballot is secured in India and every adult citizen, man or woman, is ensured voting freedom. Mrs. Mukul Bannerjee complains that "while women in India had obtained basic human freedom under the Constitution and the Statute books, in actual practice their status was unchanged from the traditional backwardness." It would have been better if the complaint had suggested definite measures for implementing the spirit behind the legislation. Yet another instance where the values between an educated bridegroom and an equally qualified bride, have tilted in favour of the male is due to the pernicious dowry system prevalent throughout India. The Stree Dhana practice by which the jewellery presented to the bride at the marriage function was evidently intended to safeguard the moveable property rights of a woman is now-a-days

fading out as the husband finds it convenient to lay his hands on such property to serve his urgent needs, thus rendering the dependance of the woman over the man complete. Even here, the rights of 'Stree Dhanam' even protected by the Hindu law, are thwarted and the female becomes a willing victim in the hands of her husband and the agnates of the family in case it is a joint family.

The distress of dependants

Even pensions to which the husband or son gets entitled cannot be availed of on the demise of the pensioners concerned. Suitable provision will have to be made to extend at least half of such pensions to the widows and female parents of pensioners to alleviate the dependants' distress. It is well known that owing to dearth of women doctors, many women go unattended for obvious reasons and this in addition to the constant burden of child bearing have sapped the energy of the weaker sex, destroying her self-confidence and with it her dormant ambition to claim equality with the males.

The United Nations is solemnly committed to the goal of equal rights for all men and women as proclaimed in the charter on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in numerous international instruments. All States, Members of the United Nations have pledged to promote universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.

Equality in the eyes of the Law

Recognition in Law of the principle of equal rights to men and women has gained considerable ground throughout the world in this century since 1945 when it was written in the Charter. Article I of the Charter declares that "discriminations against women, denying or limiting as it does their equality of rights with men, is fundamentally unjust and constitutes an offence against human dignity." The article also asserts "that all appropriate measures shall be taken to abolish existing law, customs, regulations and practices which are discriminatory against women and to establish adequate legal protection for equal rights of men and women in particular."

Illiteracy and Poverty

Female illiteracy though not solely by itself has contributed to the secondary role of the woman. Consequent to this, the greater earning capacity of males over females has also accelerated the pace of leadership of men not only at the village level but also in the employment, political and cultural levels bestowing a higher degree of importance, leadership and authority to males over the females. These two factors are common to developing as well as fully developed countries though with difference in the degree of illiteracy. Thus the degrading of Eve could not be traceable to ignorance only as this drawback equally applies to both men and women in developing countries as well as advanced countries.

Poverty, the struggle for earning the daily bread, lack of enlightened heritage, effect of adverse environment, denial by unsocialistic governments which fail to attach special importance to educational facilities like free education, free hostel facilities and other provisions which can attract impoverished children of manual labourers, are also potential obstacles, retarding self-confidence, assertiveness and ambition for living better lives.

Purdah and its consequence

The purdah veil has also contributed substantially in convincing the woman that she is after all a creature to be petted and fondled and treated with care and caution. Though the Purdah had been originally designed to protect the weaker section from the unwelcome gaze of strangers, it gradually became a symbol of delicacy, prestige and privilege, open only to the opulent and not feasible to the have-nots. The practice of complete purdah in South Western Asiatic countries, its partial observance in Upper and North Western India, the insistence on the part of blue blood on meekness, few words and hush-hush silence as being fashionable and best characteristics of noble birth are powerful factors in sealing the lips of majority of well and semi-educated women in fast developing countries like rural India.

An Odious Custom

Yet another feature indicating the woman's inferiority to man is the hoary and inviolable custom of wife-hospitality offered to guests, practised even by great Rishis in

ancient times as referred to by the version of Jabali and Satyakama and the sage Svetakethu of immortal fame. This practice is observed by Eskimos and several tribes in the world.

Divorce of Precept from Practice

Authors of the Hindu Puranas, no doubt, tried to salvage the feminine sex by consciously or unconsciously giving the Goddess the first place while referring to the Divine couples as for instance in Seetha Rama", "Parvathi Parameswara", "Radha Krishna", but the reference did not materialise so far as humans are concerned.

The fiction of the fickle female

One of the unsavoury poetic descriptions that degrade the woman in India is the appellation "Chanchala" which means fickle-minded. If this hesitancy on her part is canvassed to justify this insulting attribute to her, it may be worthwhile to investigate whether in the brain or the nerve content of a woman there is any speciality or peculiarity leading to that defect. There are several historical instances in which the women exhibited unequalled bravery, determination and perseverance outwitting the man like the 'Rani of Jhansi,' princess Samyukta, Seetha, and Rukmini of Puranic fame.

Cultural Eminence and Scholarship not the monopoly of men

Though in scholarship and cultural eminence the woman did not register for herself a notable place, she has to her

credit a place of honour in statesmanship as was eloquently proved by Madam Pompadour and an equally talented lady Madam Maintenon of France and Queen Elizabeth I of Great Britain and coming to modern times, Rani Durga Devi of Maharashtra, the far famed Prime Minister of India, the heroic erstwhile Prime Minister of Israel Golda Meir, Sirimavo, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka and last but not the least the Africa's first woman Premier Mrs. Elizabeth Domintein of Bangui, a Central African Republic. India can feel proud of having been the first country in the world to have had a woman Chief Justice (Kerala), half a dozen State Women Ministers, two women Chief Ministers of Bihar and Orissa, a poetess in English of world standing and repute, Srimathi Sarojini Devi and one Governor (Bengal) Padmaja Naidu, but as already observed, one swallow does not make a summer. The notable example of Madame Curie, the famous chemist and discoverer of Natural Radium and Polonium, and that of her illustrious daughter Juliet Curie, discoverer of artificial Radio activity, both being Nobel Prize award winners, are enough to prove that woman is in no respect inferior to the man.

Global Conspiracy

One important factor that defies a logical conclusion is that throughout the world including the much advanced countries the inferiority of the woman is widely spread, universally respected and sternly practised as if by a global conspiracy hatched and unquestionably accepted simultaneously. Such a conclusion must be too big an absurdity to be easily swallowed.

Need for a deeper study

Can these qualities be traceable to the structural peculiarities in the framework of a female? Is it due to man's greed and woman's inborn contentment? Is it the result of environment? Is this inferiority complex common to the animal world also? If so, is the tigress less ferocious than its male counterpart? Is a cow more subdued than a bull? Is the inferiority complex intuitive?

The above are pertinent questions which deserve to be taken up by scientists for a deeper study and purposeful research. Meanwhile, women all over the world may cry hoarse over women's rights and their denial by their male partners. Normally, there need not be any fear that women may eclipse the men and take to mass revenge against them for past wrongs and present indifference. Though fight that women may be able to launch may not be of great magnitude. According to the Christian faith, the woman is after all one rib of the man's body. The Muslim faith does not at all recognise family raising Gods and Goddesses. The Religion of the Hindus conceives of their Almighty as a genderless power which they pray to as *Parasakthi* i.e. Supreme Power, unrestricted by name, form, locality and origin and all pervading, omniscient and omnipotent. For many more years to come, man may perhaps continue to be a man and woman a woman. If, in this struggle a wonder has to result, the initiative must inevitably be taken by the women unsoiled by anger, hatred or revenge either on an individual or on a mass scale. If a woman has been ordained to be a woman by virtue of basic congenital,

inherited or inviolable, irremedial biological factors and set up, well man cannot cease to be man and woman 'a woman.'

The traditions crack here and there

Even as I am writing this article news comes from the Vatican City dated 24-1-1975 that a 900-year-old tradition was broken when a 27-year-old Ugandan woman, Miss Bernadette Olowo's accreditation was accepted on the presentation of her credentials to Pope Paul, as the first woman Ambassador to the Holy See. Vatican's position all these 900 years has been against the accreditation of women ambassadors - a welcome news to the world women agitators for equality with men.

Another windfall to the British Women's freedom movement and a huge crack in the citadel of the British Conservative Party is the victory of 49-year-old mother of twins, Mrs. Thatcher, who was elected as the leader of the party an unprecedented step indeed in the annals of that party. Mrs. Thatcher was formerly an Education Minister and has University Degrees in Chemistry and Law. On February 4, this year, when the election was held she polled 130 votes to Mr. Heath's 119. Now she is in line to become the first woman head of the Government in the Western world, if the Conservatives win the next election, joining the ranks of the world figures, such as India's Indira Gandhi and Sri Lanka's Sirimavo Bandaranaike and the former Israeli Premier Golda Meir.



The Oriental View of Women

By ANANDA COOMARASWAMY

It has been often assumed, by speakers and writers on the present and past position of a woman in the West, that the Oriental view of a woman is lower than the Western; and statements involving this assumption are often made, as if the assumption were an admitted fact. It must in the first place be observed that there is no "absolute Western" and no "absolute Eastern" points of view. It is a mistake to assume that "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet"; attitudes of reverence, comradeship or contempt towards women find expression at various times in the history of civilisation alike the West and in the East.

Inferiority of women not an Oriental view

It is sometimes suggested that Christianity, an Oriental religion, has imposed upon European women a position of inferiority. But it was certainly not Christ, who was an Oriental, who treated women as inferior beings. It was Paul, a Greek, who was primarily responsible for the low spiritual status of a woman in the Christian Church. From this position she only temporarily emerged in that Oriental period of post-classic European culture when the Church first accepted marriage as a sacrament and men worshipped God in the form of a Woman - as they still do in the East, It is noteworthy that we find in the writings of

some of those Oriental philosophers whose work had so much influence in Europe at that time, pronouncements in favour of the social emancipation of women which are almost verbally identical with those of modern Suffragists. "Our social condition," wrote Ibn-Rushd, "does not permit women to unfold all the resources that are in them; it seems as if they were only meant to bear children and to suckle them. And it is this state of servitude that has destroyed in them the capacity for great things. That is the reason why we seldom find among us, women endowed with any great moral qualities; their lives pass away like those of plants and they are a burden to their husbands. From this cause arises the misery that devours our cities, since there are twice as many women as men and they are unable to procure their means of livelihood by their own industry". It is true that the early Germans honoured women; but the later Germans thought that they knew better. It was the essentially Western materialism of Luther that had the main share in the degradation of a woman accompanying the Reformation. "If a woman becomes weary and at last died from bearing," says Luther, "that matters not. Let her only die from bearing; she is there to do it." And, again, she "must neither begin nor complete anything without the man; where he is, there must she be, and bend before him as before her master, whom she shall fear, and to whom she shall be subject and obedient".

Comparison: a proof

It is not indeed, by contrasting the religious standpoints of the East and the West that

the supposed inferior position of a woman in the East can be demonstrated. At the present day there are millions of Orientals who worship the Divine Life in the image of a woman. A woman is honoured in religious literature and art. Mahadev, addressing Uma, in the Mahabharatha' says: "Thou, O Lady, knowest both the Self and the Not Self. Thou art skilled in every work. Thou art endowed with self-restraint and with perfect same-sightedness in respect of every creature . . . Thy energy and power are equal to my own, and Thou hast not shrunk from the most severe austerities." Again, in the 'Ramayana', when Rama leaves his kingdom to live as a hermit in the forest, Vasishtha, pleading that Sita should not follow him, suggests that she should reign in his stead: "Sita will occupy Rama's seat. Of all those who marry, the wife is the soul. Sita will govern the earth, as she is Rama's self". Sita, however, chooses to follow Rama.

The Law Book of Manu

In the great law book of Manu we find "Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased ; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards." There is, too, the Indian saying; "Thou shalt not strike a woman even with a flower." In Sufi mysticism, the Beloved (feminine) is "all that lives" - God: the Lover (masculine), is "a dead thing" - the individual soul lacking the Divine Life.

One must consider also the representation of Divinity symbolised a feminine Hindu and Buddhist art; there are forms ranging from the dread image of Kali, Destroyer of Time, to the compassionate, tender forms of Uma

and of Tara. We must remember that the gods are shaped by human beings in their own image ; the status of women on earth is reflected in the status of goddesses.

On the other hand one might point out how the whole history of mythology and art in Greece reflects the gradual degradation from an ancient ideal of high companionship (exactly corresponding to the Indian conception of the feminine principle in the cosmos as Sakti) to that of the Hausfrau in a patriarchal community. If we turn from this question of the inner attitude to that of social status, we shall find that the Oriental woman has always enjoyed certain advantages which the Western woman has, at the best, very lately won: e.g. the universal right of Muhammedan women to hold and inherit property in their own names. The Oriental woman has also more real power of control in her own home than most Western women; her word is law even to her grown-up sons. It is very well known that in Burma women are more independent and more happy than in perhaps any other country in the world; and, indeed, one has only to return to London from any Oriental country and contrast the facial expression of most women there with the facial expression of most women in the East to realise that the latter are the happier.

Need for Reform

Both in the East and in the West, the social position of woman needs reformation of a drastic character. When one reflects, however, upon the opposition to woman's advance characteristic of Western universities, legal and medical associations,

and of Parliament and still more the manner than the fact of it, it is difficult to feel that the Western woman is so much to be envied.

It is surely a tragedy that out of all the women in England between the ages of fifteen and fifty scarcely more than half are married. In all that this implies lies the comparative wickedness of modern Western industrial civilisation, which sets a premium on vice by saying, "Seek indulgence, but beware of children". Neither this, nor sweated labour nor its result - street solicitation, are of the East.

I would admit women to absolute equality of opportunity with men in all respects. But I think that the State most fortunate wherein most women between the ages of twenty and forty are primarily concerned with the making of children, beautiful in every sense. To this end, women must obtain economic security, either from individuals or from the State.

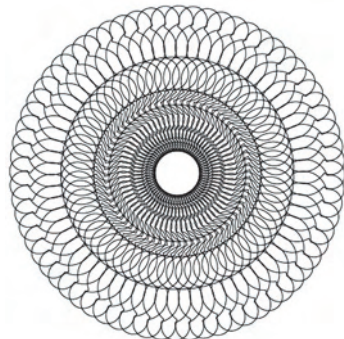
The right to be themselves

There can be no freedom for women which does not include the freedom to have, as well as not to have children. It is ultimately I conceive - at least, I hope - for the right to be themselves, rather than for the right to become more like men, that Suffragettes are, however unconsciously, fighting. There can be no freedom for women till good motherhood is regarded as an intrinsic glory. The East has always recognised the fundamental differences in the psychology of men and women. I do not think that any attempt to minimise or to ignore these differences can be successful. It is because men and women are different that they

need each other. What is needed at present is that women should be allowed to discover for themselves what is their "sphere," rather than that they should continue to occupy perforce the sphere which men (rightly or wrongly) have at various times allowed to them in the patriarchal ages. This necessity is as much a necessity for the West as for the East.

The East and the West

Social status, as I have said, needs reformation both in the East and in the West. But the West far more than the East needs a change of heart. The Western view of sex is degraded in material contrasted with the Eastern. Women are not lightly spoken of; or written of, in the East as they are so often in the West. Sex for the Oriental is a sacrament. For the European it is a pleasure. With the consciousness of this and much more that might be added to it, I feel that the West has at least as much to learn from the East of reverence to women, as the East has to learn from the West. And it is better for reformers, whether in the East or in the West, to work together for a common end than to pride themselves upon their own supposedly superior achievement.



The Burden of My Tale

By SATYA

A MAN waited. He sampled the betel rolls from an ornate silver tray by his side, a blue veil of aromatic smoke obscured the room in half revealing lines. From some remote corner of the apartment the musician's muted notes rose and floated through the air. Then there was a hush! From within came the rustling of garments and tinkling of ankle bells. Tiny feet, etched with filigreed patterns of red, ankles adorned with delicate silver bells pattered across the inner hall and paused - just for a moment before the entrance. The folds of a curtain parted, revealing the chiselled perfection of a beautiful girl. Her raven hair braided with flowers; rows of pearls playing upon her heaving bosom; a smile lighted up her ruby lips as her eyes silently sized up the waiting man. She entered and made a low bow. He was captivated. The beauty started her dance and he looked at her enraptured at the charm and rhythm of her movement. Who was she? A woman or some celestial being? Herein lies the burden of our tale.

In the dim past

It is said that once, long ago, there was a war between the Gods and the demons in which innumerable demons lost their lives. Their women were left powerless and at the mercy of marauders. The king of Gods then asked these harassed maidens to become dancers in King's courts, employ themselves in the service of temples, so that they could have the patronage and



protection of princes and kings. They were asked to serve only those who offered them sulka (fee). These women were also told to please the priests by giving gifts and seek their blessing. They were expected to observe vows, fasts and prayers on Sundays falling on Hasta, Pushya, and Punarvasu asterisms. They were asked to anoint their bodies with perfumed-water and then worship Kama, the god of love. After the worship, perfumes and gifts were to be offered to the priests to invoke their blessings. This was to be

observed for a period of thirteen months, after which they were to bring this period of fasting and prayer to a close by again offering gifts to priests. Gifts were to include clothes, ornaments, bed linen and other articles. This was to be followed by the incantation "Oh Vishnu! I do not see any difference between Kama and Kesava: as you never allow Kamala to leave you likewise, O chief of the Gods I accept this offering of my sanctified body."

The Call of the flesh

This perhaps, is the earliest account of the life of these maidens purport to have been engaged since the time of Devasura war. Though Vedic culture stresses the importance of moral values and metaphysical speculations, it has not ignored the necessity of the material pleasures of life and there is evidence to show that even men of eminence often frequented the haunts of vice. The web of charm that women are apparently said to weave is a universally accepted fact. In Rig Veda, we find references to these girls, when Usha is likened to a young maiden dancing her way through the heavens with a host of admirers at her heels. According to the Atharva Veda, these fair ones are believed to have been possessed by the Gandharvas during village dances and festivals. The term 'Gandharva grahita,' is a practice where a maiden is ceremoniously married to a deity or a woodland spirit.

The Girls

In Epics and Puranas, the institution of dancing girls is found to have a legal status.

The origin of the institution is said to have come from the sixteen thousand Gopis, who, after Krishna's Nirvana, were dishonoured by the Abhiras. Upon their request, the sage Dalbhya enlightened them about the origin of "dancing girls", harking back to the story of the Asura maidens and advised them to go through the rituals and conduct to be observed by such maidens.

In the Epic pattern of society, while the sages and seers performed their penances in the forests for the attainment of the ultimate goal, the people on the towns led a material life in which these maidens played no insignificant part. They were esteemed by all for their training in arts. They were also favoured by kings and so often accompanied Royal marches to the battle-fields or hunting grounds. This practice seems to have continued into the medieval period.

Apart from accompanying Royal Marches, these comely maidens played significant parts in the lives of ordinary people. Their services were essential on festival occasions for entertainments and as also to welcome many a warrior on his victorious march home. In the Mahabharata, the incident quoted is that of Virata, who upon his victorious return from the battle-field, was welcomed by such young maidens.

On Krishna's peace mission to Duryodhana, he was welcomed by these maidens who were engaged specially to attend on Him. The life pattern of these ladies were, however, not dwelt upon in the Vedas and Epics. In the Hari Vamsa Charitra there are many descriptions of the Samajas, Yatras and Ghoshtis in which these ladies played a major role.

Their diverse roles

“ Samaja ” indicates a social gathering with much fun and frolic and abundant music, dance and dramatics in which these maidens played a vital part both as participants and spectators. References to such Samajas arranged by Dhritarashtra and Krishna are found in the Mahabharata and Hari Vamsa Charitra.

In the Yatras, too, these girls played an important part. Hari Vamsa Charitra refers to the yatra and Yadavas undertook to visit the Pindaraka Thirtha, in which large numbers of dancing girls accompanied them. Buddhist literature has abundant examples of these maidens and many are the stories that speak highly of the beauty and character of these women. Ambapali who later became a Buddhist Nun, (the first to be accepted and initiated by Tathagatha) is herself an example of all that is glorious in the dancing girls.

Jain literature also refers to them as highly cultured subjects of the society. The early girls referred to in Jain literature were supposed to have acquired proficiency in all the seventy-two celebrated arts in the tradition of India.

An analysis of the seventy-two arts, however reveals that many of the skills fell to men whereas these young ladies were merely acquainted with a smattering of it. It is clear that these maidens were to hit the high water mark of culture and as such they were highly esteemed for their social graces.

Their Institution

During the Mauryan period, these entertainers formed an institution which

became a source of revenue to the State. Different categories of them contributed their mite to the State by way of taxes. Kautilya uses different terms to differentiate them - ganika, pratiganika, rupajiva, vesya, dasi, devadasi, pumschali, silpa karika, kaurikastri and rupa dasi - to indicate the different categories of whom are unkindly called as courtesans and prostitutes. Their rights and privileges were well protected. In times of war they were called upon to act as spies, for they alone could by their winsome ways, persuade the enemy to yield secrets which would otherwise have been difficult to obtain. According to Kautilya, again, any woman possessing beauty, charm and proficiency in arts could take to the profession of a ganika. The unfortunate ones, in those days, were a class more by their career than by caste or birth. This period also had government-run bars and saloons, where provisions were legally made available to people to gamble, drink and indulge in love-play. It appears that the State during that period had recognised man's thirst for material pleasures and hence eliminated the possibility of exploitation by making them lawfully available.

Kalidasa and his times

The life during the Gupta period can best be glanced from the works of Kalidasa. Artists and poets picked from every-day life the characters they needed for their works, though the theme itself might not be of their own times. The characters of Kalidasa's works are vibrant with life and with the joy of living. To him Indian culture

was an indivisible whole where, philosophy and religion flourished in their divine partnership with arts and material achievements and pleasures. All these elements were essential to life. In Meghaduta women from various walks



of life are described in a language that vividly paints a word picture before the mind's eye. These pen portraits paint the temple dancers.

He says: "The cloud will catch a glimpse of the temple of Mahakala of the temple dancers and their elaborate foot work. The cloud will be able to gaze at the chauri bearers carrying chauris with jewelled handles. These dancing girls wait expectantly for rain drops to come and soothe their aching feet. The glances they cast on the cloud are as bright as the black bees."

In Ritu Samhara again, it is these coy maidens described in an ecstatic flow of words. The life of Kalidasa too gives a glimpse of these maidens whom he himself

cared for, and who were perhaps the guiding stars of his beautiful descriptions. From the literature of this period again it is evident that courtesans were beautiful women of culture and training.

Sometimes, they married one of their many suitors, with whom an emotional bond had been formed. Medieval Sanskrit literature has several accounts of these girls, their characters, the means by which they extracted money from the men who thronged them. The general description of their physical charms and proficiency in dance, music, poetry and other forms of art indicates a continuation of their culture. A story of this institution through the ages reveals another aspect, that of the behavioural pattern of the men who gathered round these women. Material pleasures were then considered to be an essential part of their lives and these they courted with unembarrassed zeal. The State's recognition and protection of 'the institution' raised it to a level of other professions. The very fact that men, high up in the social ladder once sponsored these women, lent the profession a dignity that drew to its fold women of culture, grace and poise.

The modern institution of prostitution shows deep degradation of an already insulting profession. The open recognition has turned into clandestine trysts. Men who visit these women do so slyly, insulting themselves and injuring the women they court.

The Finale

Once again night seeps in through dimly lit lattice works of through the balcony. Muffled laughter and loud music blare out

of the rat-hole tenements of the buildings that line the lanes on either side. In the door-ways stand the time-ravaged forms of women who dumbly speak their sad story through the mute defiance in their eyes. A man huddles through the lane and stumbles into one of these apartments. He is not there caught by the charm and grace of art. He is merely attracted by a marketable piece available for a price! His entrance and exit are as fast as it is furtive . . . Afraid of discovery is he?

The woman he courts is not even the gracious companion of yore, but a piece of flesh for purchase. He has neither admiration nor respect for her, nor has she or the society for him. Together, they are degraded in a hovel. That then is the end of the tale I started, ere I wandered through the dimly lit corridors of time. Look back oh man on something which is after all a sequel of actions of your own making.



The Position of the Women before the Advent of the Moghuls

*Women and Contemporary Politics
(1526 A.D. - 1627 A.D.)*

ON account of the scarcity of any positive information, it is difficult to determine the rights the Turk-Mongol women enjoyed in Politics. The only thing that can be said with some certainty is that among both the Mughals and the Turks, the women did enjoy some political privileges.

The family of Babur allowed their families sufficient political rights and this enabled them to take an active part in politics. In 1914 AD. when Babur was hardly 11 years of age, and was confronted with two powerful armies, he was assisted by his grand-mother Ehsan Daulat Begum. Rani Karmavati, Maham Anaga, Durgagati and Bakhtunnisa Begum were all capable women who exerted the power of their intellect and shrewd political sense in the administration of the days. Another striking personality of this period was Nurjahan Begum, the daughter of Itimad-ud-Daula, who married Jehangir in 1611 AD. She served as a sound adviser to her husband. During the early reign of Shah Jahan his beloved wife, Mumtaj Mahal, wielded political power. She died in 1631 AD. Then came Jahanara Begum, the eldest daughter of Shah Jahan, who took an active part in political life. She played a very important part in peace negotiations. Raushanara Begum, the second daughter of Shah Jahan,

was a partisan of Aurangazeb. The daughter of Aurangazeb also took an active part in the administration of the country. Zebunnisa was an ardent partisan of her rebellion in 1681 AD. Another daughter of Aurangazeb was Zinatunnisa Begum who was entrusted with the care of the Maratha-Captives - the widow of Sambhaji and her son Shahu. It was she who protected them from her father's wrath.

During the reign of Jehangir Shah, Lal Kunwar, a favourite lady of the Emperor, asserted her authority in the management of the Empire. During 1712-1713 AD. Farrukh Siyar's mother played a fairly significant role in politics.

The Old Order Changeth

In the post-Aurangazeb period we come across a set of women different from those of the preceding period. Instead of the Queens, Princesses or the wives of some nobles and State officers belonging either to the Mughal or Rajput families, there came into lime-light women of low origin, who were highly ambitious, scheming and self-centered. They pursued their selfish interests, by taking advantage of the political crisis, social and intellectual deterioration. They spread their ugly tentacles and grasped whatever little Imperial power that was still left over. It also appears that some of the ladies were anxious to bolster up the tottering power of the Emperor. Since they could not do it openly, they did it secretly.

The Economic Sphere

In the economic sphere the husband and wife were the joint owners of household

property. As regards the women of the lower classes they helped their husbands in various spheres. They took an active part in agriculture. They made weapons such as bows and arrows. They also engaged themselves in weaving, embroidery and basket-making. Some of them were employed in palaces as maids.

Apparel

In the early medieval period women had started wearing the Sari and they covered the upper part of their body with *angiya* (bodice). They used a long *dupatta* or *odhani* (scarf) of different types when they went *out*. In northern and western India *Lahanga* (long skirt) was often worn by ladies. Here we can also make reference to *Kanchuk* and *Choli* (blouse) used by women. They changed their dresses according to the changing seasons. In summer they wore light clothes of fine texture. They were particularly fond of coloured and printed dresses.

Ornaments

Ornaments were fairly popular among Indian women. They adorned themselves with flowers and jewels. The ornaments that were commonly used were *shishphul* or *sikhapasa* (worn on forehead), ear rings, bangles, bracelets, rings, waist-belts, *Payal*, etc. nose ring was practically almost unknown during the Hindu period. The ornaments were usually made of gold, silver, and various precious stones. Even poor women used ornaments made generally of ivory, brass and glass.



Besides ornaments the women also attached great importance to their toilet. They used cosmetics and unguents of various kinds such as sandal paste mixed with saffron. They plaited their hair in different styles and used flowers and ornaments to decorate them. Hair was combed in broad plaits or loose tresses. The most popular coiffure amongst women was a large bun at the nape of the neck in which they often used strings of jewels. They applied collyrium to their eyes, vermillion on the forehead and also decorated their face, on lips, on the tips of their fingers, toes and palm, etc. Different types of dyes and ointments were used.

On the whole we see that in the Indian Society of the pre-Turkish period: the position of women was not altogether disappointing. Though the right of freedom and honour enjoyed by women in the ancient period gradually dwindled in the social sphere, yet what remained with them was not altogether insignificant.



The Middle Period

By K. M. PANIKKAR

Borrowed prejudices

IN the Orient, whatever the religious background of the people, there is very little feeling against women as such. Not a few of the existing prejudices and disabilities owe their origin to the West. For instance, the concept that woman is of no use outside her home is not easily acceptable to countries which have had women rulers and women warriors. A remarkable woman plays her part. No public opposition hindered the work of Sarojini Naidu or Rama Bai Ranade. A good cause never failed in India for want of support. While some of our law-givers were harsh on women, religions never laid any restriction on those who sought salvation. The names of Avvaiyar, the Tamil Saint, in the South, and Meera Bai in the North, are great ones honoured by all. Maharani Lakshmi Bai of Travancore and Ahalya Bai Holkar of Indore were noted for their humane and efficient administration.

The Deterioration

The period from the invasion of India by Muhammed of Ghori to the establishment of British authority in the second half of the 18th century witnessed in general a deterioration of the position of women, in India.

Over the whole of the Gangetic Valley social conditions remained unsettled for nearly 300 years - in fact till the time of

the great Moghuls. The breakdown of social institutions, which is unavoidable during periods of continuous invasion, the upsetting of traditional political structures, the vast migrations of people and the economic depression, which follows prolonged unsettlement - all these must have contributed to a general depression of social life, especially among women, during the centuries of conquest. Rigorous seclusion of women became the rule, as a result both of the imitation of the system of purdah which the Muslims enforced and a sense of fear arising from the lack of general security. No longer do we hear of parivrajikas or wandering nuns who had access equally to palaces and huts, a feature of Indian society. With the 15th century the situation underwent a change. The general revival of Hindu life which the period witnessed also led to considerable improvement in the status of women.

Conditions in South India

Conditions in South India were of course different. As society was much more settled and was not subjected to the pressure of continuous invasion, the position of women underwent no serious deterioration. Education was fairly widespread, as the number of women poets both in the regional languages and in Sanskrit clearly proves. Ganga Devi, author of the epic Madhura Vijayam (14th century) who was wife of Vira Kampa Raya and "Tirumalamba Devi, author of Varadambika Parinayam, are but two of the many poets whose names have come down to us. Vajji, the Karnataka poetess, even exclaimed in a verse that the author who described

Sarasvathi, the Goddess of Learning, as being of air colour, did not evidently know that she (Vajji) was dark! While it may be argued that popular devotional poetry in regional languages may not necessarily indicate a high standard of education, it is obvious that works in classical Sanskrit could only be the result of a systematic and sustained study of the classics.

In a 15th century Malayalam work entitled Chandrotsavam there is a passage which gives the general reading of educated women and this includes Sakuntalam, Malavikagnimitram and other Sanskrit dramas. Till the end of our period this tradition continued, for we have at the end of the 18th century the case of Manorama Tharnpurathi of Calicut, who was known by the name of Manorama because of her proficiency in Proudha Manorama, the classical work on Sanskrit grammar. Two generations of Sanskrit scholars in Kerala were her disciples.

A Galaxy of women

In the field of administration Indian women produced some notable figures during this period. There was Kudramba, the Kakateya queen of whom Marco Polo speaks; Rezia Begum (13th century) of whom it was said that her one weakness was that she was a woman; Chandbibi, who appeared on the ramparts of the fort of Ahmednagar dressed in male attire and put heart in the defenders of that town against the powers of Akbar himself; Tara Bai, the Maharata heroine who was the life and soul of Maharata resistance during the last determined onslaught of Aurangazeb; Mangammal, whose benign rule is still a green memory

in the South, and Ahalya Bai Holkar, to whose administrative genius Sir John Malcolm has paid a magnificent tribute.

The Moghul princesses of course played a notable part in the court life of Agra and Delhi. Jehanara, the partisan of Dara Shikoh, Roshanara, the partisan of Aurangazeb, Zebunnissa, the daughter of Aurangazeb, whose poems (under the pen name of Makhfi) have come down to us and others represented the culture of the court.



that such seclusion, at least among Kings and Nobles, was practised even in earlier days. The avarodha women of the court in ancient times had generally been in purdah, at least in the North; but the practice was not widely prevalent. In the Kathasarit Sagara (11th century) there is a remarkable statement about this custom by a princess, Ratna Prabha, which I quote here: "I consider that the strict seclusion of women is a

Jija Bai - True to type

But the general state of Indian womanhood cannot well be judged from the lives of queens and princesses. Jija Bai, the mother of Shivaji, is more typical of Indian womanhood than the bejewelled princesses who wrote poetry, played within the walls of their palaces or administered States. She was a true type of Indian womanhood, a devoted mother, strong-willed and autocratic at home but wholly subordinating herself to the interests of her son.

The Purdah

We may now consider the social conditions of India during the period as they affected Indian women. We have already noted that at least in North India the seclusion of woman had become the rule among the higher classes. There is evidence to show

mere social custom; or rather a folly, produced by jealousy. It is of no use whatever. Women of good family are guarded by their own virtue as by their only chamberlain. Even God himself can scarcely guard the unchaste."

Even after seclusion of women had become more strict among the higher classes, there is no reason to think that the generality of women in the villages observed purdah. Among the cultivating classes especially the system was certainly not in vogue even among the Hindus of North India.

Polygamy was of course legal and permissible, but outside the princely and noble classes and certain very orthodox castes like the Kulin Brahmins of Bengali, it was not a widely prevalent custom.

The Sati question

A more interesting question is that of sati. It is commonly held by European writers

that, before the custom was abolished by law by Lord William Bentick, Indian Women immolated themselves on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands.

In South India the practice of Sati was practically unknown and in North India among the common people there was never any question of sati. How prevalent was it among the princely and noble families during our period? A distinguished English observer, writing in 1808, remarked that though he had lived in India for many years and travelled extensively, he had not come across a single case of sati. Undoubtedly it was practised in royal families and in rare cases among others who considered themselves superior, but the idea that sati was generally practised among Hindu women during this period is altogether: unhistorical.

Child marriage - Popular among a minority

Among what may be called the Brahmanical classes child marriage was the norm; but even here there were notable exceptions. Among the Nambudiri Brahmins of Kerala and among the Kashmiris, the practice of prepuberty marriage was not prevalent at any time. Among the Kshatriya families also it was not considered necessary to have marriages performed before puberty. With the common people, of course, it was never the case. It was therefore only a small section of people who followed this custom which came for some reason to be considered a special characteristic of Hindu life.

The Hindu women's legal position

The legal position of Hindu women especially from the point of view of inheritance - was again, generally speaking, unsatisfactory. Though the doctrine of stridhana (or women's property) was liberally interpreted under some schools of Hindu Law, women were generally excluded from succession to property and this led to their dependence on men. But in estimating the effect of this economic factor the significance of the Hindu joint family has to be kept in mind. In the circumstances of the time, the joint family was a source of great strength to women. It was a woman's realm in many ways, and considerable mitigation of the effects of the system of social seclusion, economic dependence and lack of facilities for school education was provided by this institution. In sum, it can be said that while in the earlier period of Muslim invasions the position of Indian women in Northern India tended to deteriorate, in the period immediately following, there was sufficient social integration which enabled Indian womanhood to retrieve some of the position which it had lost. In the area south of the Vindhyas the evolution of social life was more normal and consequently in almost every field there was no central direction to social thinking and there was no machinery like organised public opinion for giving effect to essential reforms. Social customs therefore undoubtedly tended to stagnate, a factor accelerated by the break-down of settled government with the decline of Moghul power.



Borrowed Customs

M. Mujeeb

It is quite evident that, in spite of the Islamic doctrine of equality of man and woman before God, certain changes crept in when Islam spread outside Arabia. Among Arabs, divorce and remarriage were not considered of much consequence and did not cause much concern. Arab civilisation was, no doubt, masculine in character, but the women were assertive enough not to let the men dominate absolutely. In India, with the large admixture of races that must have taken place and because of the influence of the sentiments with which the environment was permeated, a civilization that was masculine in character became a civilization that was dominated by the male. There was no formal changes in the law regarding the rights and duties of women, but there was considerable change in the attitude towards these laws.

Women and the laws that governed them

Marriage so far as the woman was concerned, gradually assumed a finality that does not seem to have been intended by Islamic doctrine. Shaikh Nizamuddin's mother consulted him about the advisability of asking for Khula or dissolution of the marriage contract of his sister, whose husband was not treating her properly, but finally both decided to wait and see how the relationship developed. There are no



instances for divorce or the remarriage of widows in the chronicles of the sufis, and incompatibility does not seem to have been considered a social problem requiring attention. The duty of a woman to guard herself and her reputation was emphasized. Girls could only meet members of their own family, even grown-up women were expected to avoid talking to or even being seen by strangers.

Secluded Life

Bashari Muquddassi writing in 985 noted that in Multan women did not go out decked

in fine clothes, they were not to be seen in the bazaar, and women did not talk to men in public. Mixed gathering even of members of the same family, apart from occasions of marriage or other family festivities were rare. As the circumstances did not exist in which attachment could develop and find expression in various forms of affection and loyalty before marriage or without marriage, conjugal relationship was governed by a concept of justice. Man and wife were expected to respect and fulfill each other's desire. Other things were by no means incidental or secondary and the husband who did not show proper regard for his wife could not hope to earn social esteem. But women were not generally considered full person whose advice was to be sought and experience relied upon, and conclusions were drawn from this belief by men according to their temperament and culture.

Women's role in Celebration

The main interest of the women was the celebration of marriages, births, the 'aqiquah', the circumcision of boys, their first lesson (bismillah) and the observance of customs in regard to mourning for the dead. The description we have of a marriage by Ibn Battutah already shows considerable Hindu influence. The bride and bridegroom were segregated in their own houses, their hands and feet were dyed with henna. Muslim law only requires four witnesses to a marriage, two signing on behalf of the bride and two on behalf of the bridegroom. This law continued to be observed and the drawing up and witnessing of a marriage contract to which

the bride and bridegroom agreed in the presence of witness or among the Shiahs, through wakils or authorised representatives, remained the chief feature of the marriage ceremony.

The Marriage

It had become the custom by the middle of the fourteenth century for the bride and bridegroom's people to form two opposite parties. When the bridegroom went with his party to the bride's house, he wore garlands of flowers that covered his head and fell to his waist, so that his face became invisible. His party carried short sticks. On their arrival at the entrance to the bride's quarters, they found her party in array, determined to resist their entrance to the bride's quarters. When the bridegroom's party had broken through, he rode up to a pulpit with three steps, on the highest of which the bride was seated, surrounded by women. As the bridegroom approached, they stood up and began to sing and recite the takbir while drums were beaten outside. The bridegroom alighted from his horse and bowed to the ground. Then the bride stood up and offered the groom a pan with her hands. The bridegroom sat down on the pulpit, a step lower than the bride and coins were showered on both. Finally the bridegroom stood up, took his bride's hand and helped her down the pulpit. He led the way out and she followed, getting into her doli as he got on his horse.

Identity with Hindu marriages of women in the Muslim Period

The Indian Muslim marriage ceremony must have had many more features borrowed from the Hindus. Tradition ascribes to Amir Khusrau the composition of the songs known as Babul, which were sung later at the time when the bride left her parent's house. They represent the most un-Islamic feature of the Indian Muslim marriage, because they embody the concept that when the daughter left her parent's house she left it for good, breaking old relationships in order to establish new ones in her husband's house. This concept was not realized in practice. The parents of the girl never considered themselves absolved from their obligations of love and solicitude and cases where the wife left her husband's house because of incompatibility and her refusal to return was supported by her family must have been as frequent earlier as they were later. As the proper marriage was that which took place within the Khufu, that is, within families that possessed the same social status and cultural forms and cousin marriages were preferred, because they kept the girl within the same family, the question of a married daughter breaking off old relationships generally did not arise.

Singers the cause

Marriage was a ceremony in which the women of the family had the decisive voice, and it was through them that practices which might be crudely described as un-Islamic crept in. It was probably because women who were singers by caste were

engaged to sing at all kinds of ceremonies and give advice as to what was generally considered auspicious or proper that un-Islamic customs were adopted. At marriage parties, of course, the women singers provided most of the music and the noise.

The relation between men and women

The social relations between men and women were, in all their aspects the result of compartmentalized thinking, which had become established as a tradition and gave a stereo-typed character to the behaviour of both. The 'free' woman was entitled as a child to a proper upbringing, to affection and such instruction and education as would enable her to maintain the cultural standards of her family; as a girl she would be protected from such influences as were likely to mislead her.

It was her right to have a suitable husband found for her, as to die unmarried was considered a misfortune not only for the young woman but also for her family. It was believed that the law of inheritance and the *mihir* provided her economic security. But even if the law of inheritance was strictly followed, which most probably was not the general rule, women did not have the opportunity of gaining that experience of the world and its affairs which was essential for enabling them to administer their property. *Mihir* was money given to the woman by her husband as a part of the marriage contract.

The Marital Status

It could not serve as a means of subsistence to a woman who was divorced

and in fact merely indicated her status. After marriage, a woman's position was governed by the idea of Justice. A woman could, no doubt, remonstrate with her husband if he wants to marry other women. She could object to his marrying for the second time, and induce her parents and her family to exercise such pressure on her husband as would dissuade or prevent him from taking this step. But there was no legal means of prohibiting a second marriage or a third or a fourth, unless the husband bound himself in the marriage contract not to marry again during the life time of his wife. Suspicion does not form the proper beginning for a relationship in which everything depends on adaptation and adjustment and though there may have been marriage contracts in which obligations other than those in regard to Mihr were included. The general practice must have been to avoid everything that savoured of a formal approach or a legal determination of rights.

The woman - the loser

The women were therefore, the losers whenever marital relations became unpleasant. Opinion, both legal and social, obliged the husband to be 'Just' towards his wife. But the idea of social life was different for both. It was considered proper for women to associate with women, and for men to associate with men. There was no ideal of companionship in married life. The wife, if she wanted friendship, would have had to look for it among women of her own class and status.

The man, if he wanted companionship, would have had to look for it among men

or among such women as were technically classed as courtesans, but were often given an education which was much wider both as regards knowledge as well as experience than that of the 'free' women. They could, if they are in disposition, be friends and companions, because the restrictions which kept the free woman within her house did not apply to the courtesan.

The Other Woman

Courtesans were brought up in a certain way. They were taught to distrust men, to take advantage of all their weakness and use all possible means to accumulate resources in the form of cash or jewellery that would enable them to pass their old age with as much freedom from care as possible. There were courtesans of all types, but whatever the type, they were expected to fulfil the needs of what we understand today by social life. They could converse, they could amuse, in their houses, they could provide men with opportunities of coming together and talking freely. Though because of their profession they were not considered a part of respectable society, the compartmentalized thinking we have mentioned above did not consider it wrong or reprehensible even for respectable men to enjoy the company of courtesans.

Free woman - was not to be talked about

There is hardly any story or anecdote in the literature of this period with love of man and woman as the theme in which the heroine is a 'free' woman. The beauty and

the sentiments of a 'free' woman may have been considered too pure to be the subject of description or discussion in poetry or prose; in any case, a taboo is noticeable. On the other hand, a poet or a writer had complete freedom if his subject was a slave girl, a non-Muslim woman or a mythical person or a fairy. There is a touching story in the *Jawami al Kalim* about the love of a man and a slave girl and obviously the object in relating the story is to show how intense and edifying love can be. But there was a growing tendency to regard woman as a temptation and a snare. This was a reaction against the evil consequences of having a society infested with courtesans and slave girls, which is well illustrated in an anecdote in the *Siyar al-Awliya*, a related by Shaikh Nizamuddin.

The Norms for "Free Woman and free Man"

In the first place, the kind of women classed as singers seems to have moved about freely and it was the look-out of the men concerned to see that they did not get involved in any way. Secondly, it was assumed that a woman could want only one thing from a man. Thirdly, a man was deemed to be incapable of controlling himself and the sight or touch of a woman set in train emotional and physiological processes which could have only one result. It is for this reason that in books of *fiqh* we find endless speculations on the consequences of a man seeing or touching the hands, arms, face, etc., of women who are related to his wife. It followed logically that 'freemen and women' should, even in their own houses, strictly regulate their

behaviour. This tended to heighten susceptibility to an unnatural degree and to prevent the creation of those emotional defences in women which are the guarantees of adult freedom and true morality. The men were not subject to any kind of control. It became important, therefore, to protect 'free' women, to see that they did not find themselves in situations where strangers could take advantage of them or where the exercise of self-control became necessary. They were secluded not only from the company but from the sight of those who were strangers, as well as those among their relations with whom marriage was theoretically possible.

This did not mean, however, that they were confined to their homes. They visited each other, they attended fairs and the celebration of the death anniversaries of saints, they went to recite prayers (*fatihah*) at the tombs of their dead relatives. They used *dolis* of various shapes and sizes for conveyance, but women of Turkish families also rode on horseback.

They were covered from head to foot, with only a slit in front of the eyes to enable them to see the way. But their going about by themselves created law and order problems, specially because they had often to pass through quarters of the city inhabited by women who were forced into bad ways and their being 'free' and respectable women did not make any difference to the type of men that hung around such places. In Delhi, Firuz Tughlaq took the extreme step of prohibiting women from going out unaccompanied.



The Divine Messengers

INDIA is the mother of Sages and Seers, thinkers and philosophers. Her culture has gathered an appeal that arises out of the most glorious of all experiences - devotion. The Lord and His play is the theme of all her art.

Andal

Andal is one of the twelve Alwars or Vaishnava Saints and the only woman saint among them. Her songs express her boundless love for the Lord whom she acknowledged as her master. God-love is the theme of her songs. What is known as bridal mysticism finds its fullest expression in her spontaneous outbursts. Her melodies portraying her dream experience of her union with the Lord is even today sung at the weddings of her earthly counterparts. Andal's words have been a source of joy and comfort to the people of Tamil Nadu for over Twelve Hundred Years.

Avvaiyar

Avvaiyar or merely "That Dame" has no name. Even her own name is not known. All that is known of her was that she roamed about the country singing and befriending people all over the land. Legend has it that a local chieftain was once divinely endowed with a fruit that would confer longevity on the eater. Knowing that this longevity would be of immense use to the world if Avvai ate it, he passed it on to her. She ate it without knowing the intent

and lived many years to grace and bless the land. As a child she was abandoned by her parents and was later picked up by a wandering minstrel and fostered with love and care. Though revered and courted by the royalty, she always identified herself with the meek and the lowly. Her golden words are even today remembered and adhered to as rules of right living. Once when asked to define the four Purusharthas, she replied "Giving alms is Dharma, the righteous path is Artha, perfect love between man and woman Kama, relinquishing all these with the heart set on God is Moksha".

Mangayarkkarasi

At a time when bigotry and intolerance reigned supreme, the name of queen Mangayarkkarasi stands out. She was not only a queen by birth, her regal stand is further established when her faith was threatened by Jains. The king, her husband was a convert to this faith. With extreme tact and caution she invited the great saint Sambandar and entreated him to win back the king and all his subjects to Shaivism. The result was obvious. The queen won, and we see in Mangayarkkarasi a unique model of Tamil womanhood, political diplomacy, religious freedom and highest dedication to godliness.

Tilakavati

Women have been devoted mothers, devoted wives and daughters. As a devoted sister, the life of saint Tilakavati is a class of itself. Tilakavati was the oldest child of devout parents. As was the custom

of those days Tilakavati was betrothed to a valiant youth when she matured to maidenhood. Fortune's favours took an unprecedented turn. Her parents and the young man she was betrothed to were mowed down at one stroke by the sickle of time leaving her as the sole guardian of her young brother, then a mere child. The care she took in the bringing up of this boy and the ordeals that she had to undergo forms a saga itself. His conversion to Jainism and his return to the faith of his fathers was all the result of Tilakavati's fervent prayers; it is for this that she had been accorded a permanent place in the sacred lore.

Punitavathi

She was born to prosperous parents and later married to a rich merchant - called Paramadatta. After a span of quietude, her wedded life took a peculiar turn which led to her estrangement from her life-partner due to no fault of hers. His recognition of and reverence for her divinity and refusal to acknowledge her as his wedded partner leading to her extreme renunciation is a narration - the parallel of which is not found anywhere. Transformed by the Lord from a raving beauty to a monument of ugliness at her own request, she now turned her entire mind towards the worship of the Lord of Kailas who, it is said, greeted her with the fond words, "MOTHER". From this moment Punitavati came to be known as "Karaikkal Ammaiyaar".

These are some of the lives of such women who lived in the Tamilnadu. God entered their lives and sublimated their most

humdrum activities into supreme acts of service and dedication.

Maharashtra has also been the home of a number of saints, the life of Sakku Bai, Jana Bai, Rajai and Gonai and some others have become the theme of many a legend. Janai born of lowly parents came under the care and protection of Namadev from her early years. She worked as a maid in his house all his life. She called herself Dasi Jani. Damasheti was the father of the Saint Namadev, who was a great devotee of Vittal, on his annual pilgrimage to Pandharpur he took the little girl with him. Many miracles are attributed to this humble maiden. Though unlettered, she is supposed to be the author of about three hundred exquisite verses in chaste Marathi, Gonai and Rajai were the mother and wife of Namadev. These two were saints because of their association with the saintly Namadev. Muktabai was the sister of Jnaneshwar, the saint. Her short life was filled with memorable events. She was rendered a helpless orphan when she was barely four. Muktabai composed a large number of verses at the age of twenty-one.

Other stars that stud the firmament of Maharashtra are Soyarabai, the life companion of the great Maharashtrian saint Chokamela. She accompanied Chokamela to Pandharpur along with his saintly sister Nirmaladevi. Many divine utterances are there to his credit. Kanhopatra's love for Vittal and her refusal to sell herself as a slave to the Moghul emperor is a theme fit for a poet. The very stone of which this image was made melts in love at her touch. Prema Bai, Bahina Bai, Vena Bai also known as Veeraswami Ramdasi, have left a legacy

of rich devotional literature relating their experience in the spiritual path.

Gauribai

She was born at Giripur somewhere round 1759 A.D. She belonged to the Vadnagar Grihasta Community of Gujarat. Giripur was ruled over by Raja Sivasimhji, a righteous and dutiful prince. The Raja heard of the devoted life led by Gauribai and went to her house to have a glimpse of as noble a soul. Gratified by her purity and devotion, the Raja built a beautiful temple in her honour. Gauribai left her home and family life forever and came to reside in the temple. Thereafter Gauribai's sole aim was the care of this shrine. Soon her devotion deepened into samadhi or super consciousness. Many are the supernatural powers attributed to Gauribai. The devotional songs which claim her authorship reveal her deep detachment and devotion.

Madhabi Dasi

In Orissa one of the three most intimate companions of Chaitanya Dev was an Oriya poetess, Madhabi Dasi. These three are always referred to as the two-and-half, the half being Madhabi because she was a woman. Many of her verses have been incorporated in the Vaishnava Devotional Literature. She wrote in Brajbuli.

Muddu Palani (1739-1763)

A courtesan's daughter at the court of Tanjore, was highly educated in Sanskrit and Telugu. She was an expert in dance and music and was a poetess and a veena player par excellence. Her great musical

talents are evident in her *ashtapadi*, a Telugu rendering of Jaya Dev's lyrical work. In recent times we have the brilliant work of Pandita Kshama Rao, who died in 1954. She wrote more than a dozen long poems, retelling, in modern Sanskrit, the lives of Tukaram, Ramadas and Jnaneswara. She also composed stirring national songs. Her stories all have a moral and she was an adept in dealing with pathetic situations.

Tarlagonda Venkamamba

Venkamamba's life was one of utter simplicity and constant devotion to Sri Krishna. She is one of the fairest flowers of Indian spiritual culture. As is usual with most Indian saints, she has not left behind any autobiography and, since not even a proper biography is available, we have to depend upon stray references in her writings and upon tradition for a connected account of the incidents of her life.

She was the daughter of one Krishnayya, an orthodox Brahmin of the Nandavarika sect, who belonged to the family of Kanali and to the line of Vasishtha.

According to the custom of her community she was betrothed at an age when she hardly knew what marriage was. But she remained a devoted wife. At the end of her Bhagavatapurana, an exquisitely beautiful poetical composition, she says that she wrote it keeping in her heart of hearts the hallowed feet of Venkatachalapati, son of Timmayya, of the family of Nunjeti and the line of Srivatsa. Evidently this Venkatachalapati was her husband. Shortly after her betrothal or marriage he died.

Venkamma was a woman of high courage and independent spirit; she refused to bow down to all meaningless customs and traditions. For instance, as a widow she was required to remove her hair, but she stoutly refused to do so.

Venkamma's protest was a protest of womankind, nay, of humanity, against priestcraft. Enraged at her reply, the chief priest called for a barber then and there and by force, got her head shaven. Overcome by devotion rather than shame or sorrow, Venkamma went to a river nearby, offering prayers to her chosen Deity, Sri Krishna, she took a dip in it and lo, when she came out her head was adorned as usual with long beautiful hair. The chief priest and the rest were stupefied at this miraculous turn of events and began to stammer out their apologies to her.

Venkamma's tender heart received a rude shock from the behaviour of the villagers and the abbot. Her passion for God-realisation was fast developing and she managed to obtain spiritual initiation from a renowned guru. In search of a lonely place for her spiritual practices, she went to the temple of Nrisimha in her native village, and at length in a quiet spot behind the image of Hanuman, she took her seat and was absorbed in meditation. One day the priest of the temple saw her and with a shower of abuse, drove her away from the place. As she had already left her home, she now left her native village once for all, and proceeded to Tirupati to take refuge at the feet of the presiding Deity there, Venkateswara, whom she believed to be her chosen Deity.

Reaching there, Venkamma paid homage to the presiding Deity and was soon in

search of a proper place for her spiritual practices. The people and the temple authorities were much impressed with her religious fervour, and she was given a small dwelling place and a daily portion of some rice. Further, she obtained permission to render some special services to the Deity which to this day are continued in her name. Desire for solitude once more arose in her heart and in a valley known as Tumulurukona, amidst picturesque scenery, she found a suitable solitary place where she began to practise divine communion. Here she carried on her spiritual practices for about six years and was blessed with many visions and realizations of a very high order. Thence she proceeded to a small pavilion to the north of the lake called Swami Pushkarini and began to give to the world through her writings the benefits of her realizations.

Venkamma's works, which are mainly poetical, cover different forms of poetry, such as the epic, lyric, ballad, song and drama of various kinds. At the end of her Bhagavatapurana she gives a list of her works; but it seems she wrote a few other books subsequently. Among her books Venkatachalamahatmya, Raja-yoga-sara and Vasishtha- Ramayana - all three based on the Sanskrit originals - have been published.

In the life and writings of Venkamma we find a satisfactory solution to many of the problems of the modern age. Her name is associated with one of Tirupati Venkateswara's annual festive celebrations, the Brahmotsava. Even today there exists a caravanserai on the Tirumalai Hill which perpetuates her saintly memory.

Women devotees of Kerala

Among the women devotees of Kerala who attained God realisation three names stand out. They are: Chankrottu Amma, Vadakkedattu Nangapennu and Karur Amma. Chankrottu Amma had the vision of the Lord in her old age, Nangapennu attained God vision even when she was a maiden. Her anguished heart cried out when she was to be given in marriage. The Lord answered the devotee's call by emerging from His supreme position in the sanctum holding her hands and re-entering it. Even to this day, the memory of this event is kept alive by a festival known as Nangapennu festival. Karur Amma the name that has been mentioned last in this series enjoyed the supreme privilege of the uninterrupted vision of her chosen Deity, the Baby Krishna. She enjoyed the supreme privilege of being able to see the Lord of her heart whenever she desired.

Lalleswari or Lal Didds of Kashmir

Lalleswari, also known as Lalla Yogiswari, Lal Didi or Lal Ded, was a mystic poet of Kashmir who lived in the fourteenth century A.D. Loved by the people of her land, her name continues to be a household word even to this day.

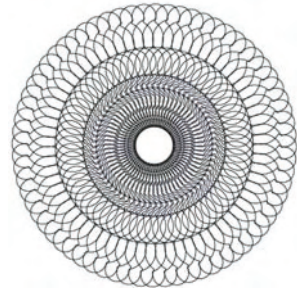
Pandit Anand Kaul of Kashmir has written a booklet entitled "Lalla Yogeswari - Her Life and Sayings", based mostly on folklore and tradition. Besides this scanty information there seems to be little or no literature on so outstanding a personality as Lalla. In spite of this drawback the lamp she has lighted has burnt steadily throughout the centuries and her sayings

have been preserved faithfully from generation to generation. She was born in a Kashmir pandit family at Pandrethan, four miles to the south-east of Srinagar.

It is not quite known when her search for God began. But we imagine that it must have been an inborn tendency and leanings that she may have towards marriage and home life must have been nipped in the bud at an early age by the indifference of her husband and the unkind behaviour of the step- mother-in-law.

Due to her own leanings towards religion and to the harsh treatment of her in-laws, she left home and became a disciple of a well-known Saiva saint called Sed Bayu. Lalla is said to have excelled her guru and often to have beaten him in retort and argument; but the result of his teaching was that she became a Saiva Yogini (mendicant devotee). She roamed about the country singing and dancing in divine ecstasy and innumerable tales that are told of her greatness testify to the love that the Kashmiri bears in his heart for her. She is said to have died at an advanced age at Brijbera, twenty-five miles south-east of Srinagar. She gave up her body and her soul "buoyed up like a flame of light in the air and then disappeared".

Adapted from "Women Saints of East and West".



Kannada Women who made History

By P. V. DIXIT

THE historical sources regarding the position of women in Karnataka in the past, though scanty, are sufficient to show that they were in the forefront and actively participated in public life, especially in the middle ages. The first significant reference points out to a prominent queen well versed in statecraft. She is Ajit Bhartarika of the 5th century. A great critic of Sanskrit Literature, Rajasekhar (9th century) said about Vijayanka, who ruled over Sawantawadi area in the 7th century (and who contributed considerably to Sanskrit poetry) thus:

*Saraswati karnaati vijayaanka jayatya
sau, Ya vaidarbha giraam vaasah
kalidaasaanantaram.*

Bhojaraj of Dharangani in his Shringar Prakash, refers to her contributions with great admiration. Attimabbe who lived in the 10th century, was a lady of high excellence and learning and honoured contemporary poet, Ranna.

Skill in State-Craft

It is in the 11th century that we read about a host of such august rulers. Akka Devi born in the celebrated clan of Kalyan Chalukyas, was married to Jai Singh of Hangal Kadarnbas She took up the reign of Government after the sudden death of her husband first, and then of her son, Mayur Varma. She was an able administrator. The

credit of successfully withstanding the onslaughts of Cholas and establishing a period of peace and prosperity in her kingdom, goes to her. We have in Malal Devi, wife of Kirti Varma (a contemporary of Akka Devi), a personality noted for philanthropy. Her liberality and open handedness extended even to Jain and Vedic educational institutions. She herself started many centres of learning. Chandala Devi, known for her charm and beauty, was married to Chalukya Emperor Vikramaditya. She was widely known for her artistic excellence and graceful dances. She was popularly known as "Gouripadambujaradhike" and was honoured as 'Nriyaya Vidyadhar'. She assisted her husband in managing the affairs of the State. Ingalagi edict refers to another queen of Vikramaditya, namely, Jakala Devi, Vikramaditya was a follower of Vedic tradition, whereas she was a Jain. Difference in faith did not lead to disharmony in married life. She used her good offices to propagate the ideals of Jainism and constructed many Jinalayas.

Difference in Religious belief

Twelfth century ushered in a great revolution in Karnataka. After Basava graced the world a number of women came in to limelight especially in the spiritual field. Akka Mahadevi, Nagalambike, Gangambike, Mutkayakka and Akka Nagamma are some of them. The famous Hoysala Queen, Shantala also of the twelfth century, was famous for her generosity. Some of the most beautiful temples that are found in Halebid and Belur owe their patronage to her. Her husband, Vishnu Vardhana

changed his faith and became a Vaishnava, devotee of Ramanujacharya. But Shantala stood staunchly established in her faith. She remained a Jain to the end of her life. Kant, a talented woman, a contemporary of Nagarjuna Pampa, a Kannada poet in the court of Hoysalas, merits mention. Her fame as a poet and orator had spread far and wide. She is known as Abhinava Vagdevi. Sarala Devi, wife of Soma Deva, a renowned singer and Achiyakka, wife of Chandra Mauli, Minister to Vir Ballal (II), belong to the latter half of the 12th century. Though Achiyakka was a Jain, her husband was an Advaitin and a devotee of Lord Shiva. To her is attributed the construction of Baadi at Shravanbelogala. Even today it is known as Akka Basadi. Suggala Devi whose name appears in the Torgal edict, constructed Suggaleswar temple in the last decade of the twelfth century. Her name has gone down into the annals of Karnataka history as a chaste wife.

Reputed Writers

Ganga Devi, wife of Kampanna, a general in Vijaya Nagar Army, a reputed writer was the author of Madura Vijayam and Vir Kamparaya Charitram. She stands next to Kalidasa in her style. Her writings in Sanskrit cover a wide range of subjects. She belongs to the fourteenth century. Two more important writers who need mention here, are Sanchiya Honnamma and Helvankatte Girijamma.

Sanchiya Honnamma was a woman of lowly birth. Her work, Hadi Badiya Dharma in Kannada, is rated as a standard one. Helvankatte Girijamma was a devotee of

Lord Sri Ranga, who has composed many devotional songs.

Valour

Keladi Chennamma, Belavadi Mallamma, Obavva and Kittur Chennamma find a prominent place in the history of Karnataka. Keladi Chennamma ruled over the kingdom of Keladi for twenty five long years. After the treacherous murder of her husband she took over the reigns of government and crushed the internal revolt and arrested external aggression. She fought and successfully routed the armies of Adil Shah and Chikka Deva Raya of Mysore, It was this brave Queen who gave refuge to Rajaram, the son of Shivaji and safely escorted him to Jinji. This infuriated Alamagir Aurangzeb and the Queen of Keladi had to face the Mughal hordes which she did successfully. She constructed many temples and started educational institutions. An Italian traveller, Pietro Della Valle has rightly remarked that the Queen of Keladi is a lady of much virtue and prudence. He has also given a complete account of Ullal Queen, Abbakka, who defeated the marine might of the Portuguese. Belavadi Mallamma is famous for her bravery and courage. She was the wife of Ishwar Prabhu a chieftain of 360 villages in north Karnataka. Due to some misunderstanding between Maratha armies and soldiers of Ishwar Prabhu, Belvadi fort was attacked by Chhatrapathi Shivaji. Ishwar Prabhu died fighting but the fort could not be captured by Marathas, the fort did not remain unmanned for long as the Queen took the lead and defended the fort. For 27 days, the powerful Maratha

army struggled to conquer Belvadi. Mallamma turned all their efforts futile. But when ammunition and other supplies ran dry she was compelled to enter into open combat. She opened the gates of the fort and fought like a lioness. Even Maratha generals like Dadaji found it extremely difficult to withstand her. In the course of the battle she not only lost her horse but her right hand was also paralysed. This incapacitated her. She was taken captive and brought before Shivaji. Shivaji treated her with utmost reverence and said, 'Mother, I had not seen such bravery. Excuse me for all that has happened. Not that it can be redressed'. He gave back 320 villages that had been captured and proclaimed her Queen. Both Keladi Chennamma and Belvadi Mallamma belong to latter half of the 17th century.

Obavva was the wife of a sentry in the service of Madakarinyak of Chitra Durga. Madakarinyak always defied Hyder. It was Hyder's long cherished dream to annex Chitra Durga to his kingdom. He attempted many times but failed. In one of the sieges on the strong and inaccessible fort of Chitra Durga, his spies, after a long search located the secret passage to the interior. Obavva's husband Kalnayak the sentry, was in charge of guarding the passage. That afternoon while he was dining and she had come out to fetch water, it was then that she sighted the enemies trying to enter the fort through the passage. Without wasting a single minute. She brought her pestle and fought



the enemies single handed as they crawled one by one through the narrow passage. Meanwhile her husband sounded the trumpet. The guards were informed and the fort was saved. She died fighting the soldiers of Hyder Ali. She is popularly known as Pestle Obbavva.

Much earlier to Laxmibai

Kittur is a place in the north of Karnataka. Chennamma's husband ruled over that area in the second decade of the 19th century. He died without a son and the British wanted to annexe his territory. Chennamma refused to oblige. She fought the British army and was successful initially. But treachery within her camps gave her away and she

lost the battle . She was captured and was imprisoned at Bailhongal.

" It is evident from the above account that in the medieval ages women shouldered social responsibilities with as much sincerity as men and it is also clear that they had ample freedom in the pursuit of spiritual matters. Differences in religious belief between husband and wife did not hinder a happy married life. Women ably managed the affairs of the State, supported cultural and educational institutions, wrote outstanding books and even lead the armies."



From the Annals of History

Jija Bai

JIJA BAI, Shivaji's mother, was in great distress during the early years of his life. The Emperor Shah Jahan invaded the Deccan and after a strenuous effort of eight years, subjugated the whole of the old Nizarn Shahi Kingdom of Ahmed Nagar, which Shivaji's father Shahaji had tried his best to save. Hence for the first few years of his life Shivaji was a wanderer with no settled home. From Shivner where he was born, he moved with his mother and occasionally with his father from place to place as safety and convenience required. The marital life of Jija Bai can by no means be called happy. It appears that her wedding itself was a subject of compulsion. The Bhosales and Jadhavs are not known to have then been on very friendly terms. Jija Bai, a truly Kshatriya lady full of varied memories of her royal ancestors of Deogiri and possessing a dauntless spirit of adventure and defiance chastened by years of suffering ever since her marriage, was to young Shivaji a veritable guardian angel. On her part all her future solace centred in his well-being and good fortune. Practically deserted by her husband, what hope could she have in life unless this son grew up to be her sole prop? Her high spirit could never let her accept any compromise on right principles. The father had defied with his small power the might of the Moghuls for seven years. Why may not the son do at least as much, if not more? Man can do what man has done.



The independent charge of his father's jagir at Poona proved of great advantage to Shivaji. In this small jagir all kinds of experiments could be quickly tried in the art of government, and valuable experience gained which could be later utilised on a wider scale when the time came. In Shivaji's helpless situation his mother naturally was his sale guide and mentor. She was a versatile woman, well-trained, according to the notions of those days, in tradition, religion and mythology. The traditions of Ramdeo Yadav, or Hemadri, of Jnaneshwar, possessed for her a peculiar charm on account of the high moral tone and the free atmosphere of independence they breathed: and her capacious mind invested them with a glow of the splendour of the indigenous Aryan culture as contrasted with Muslim vandalism and

iconoclastic methods. The wanton cruelties of Ala-uddin Khilji and Muhammed Tuglak, the barbarities of Tamerlane, the *johars* perpetrated by the Rajput women of Chitod, ever rankled in Jija Bai's heart. Such a lady, we may be sure, taught her dear young son the need of a supreme effort for avenging wrong and achieving national regeneration.

Tara Bai

After the death of Rajaram, Tara Bai's voice became supreme in Maharashtra, as she managed affairs in the name of her son. Unfortunately she had serious differences of policy with the veteran Ramchandra Pant, who, with Dhanaji Jadhav, kept up his contact with Shahu and tried to bring him back as their next Chhatrapati. As this move was violently opposed by Tara Bai, Ramchandra Pant remained a mere pathetic onlooker and ceased to take the same active part in her government that he had done during Rajaram's life. The published papers make hardly any mention of Ramchandra Pant hereafter. Tara Bai, mainly with the support of Parashurarn Triambak, Dhanaji and Shankaraji Narayan, prosecuted the war with singular zeal and success, inflicting terrible hardships upon the Mughals. She deserves all the credit for the Maratha nation's emerging successfully out of the dreadful war with power to control the destinies of India during the eighteenth century. The great ability of Tara Bai is attested to even by Muslim writers. She constantly moved from fort to fort directing operations and inspiring her followers. Girjoji Yadav, the guardian of the fort of Panhala, was her personal

and confidential agent through whom her commands were communicated outside. This Girjoji belonged to the large Yadav family of Karhad. Although Satara was recaptured by the Marathas, in 1704, Tara Bai made Panhala her central station from which she issued her commands in the name of her young son.

Rani Lakshmi Bai (1835-1858)

Rani Lakshmi Bai, the second wife of the ruler of Jhansi, Gangadhar Rao, was born probably at Banaras. When her husband died without issue in 1853 she was not permitted by the British authorities to adopt a successor. Her territory was later annexed under the "right of lapse" and a mere pension was offered to her. She was reported to have declared then: "Meri Jhansi nahi dungii" (I shall not surrender my Jhansi). When the revolt started the spirited Rani was drawn in to the thick of the struggle and she became the authority of her region. She heroically defended Jhansi against Sir Hugh Rose's protracted siege, although ultimately she had to escape. Later Rani Lakshmi Bai joined Tatyja Tope and surprised the British by their capture of Gwalior. When Sir Hugh Rose renewed the British attack on Gwalior Fort, the Rani - fighting valiantly - was killed in action. An estimate of the Rani's heroic personality has thus been made by Sir Hugh Rose himself: ". . . the high descent of the Rani, her unbounded liberality to her troops and retainers and her fortitude which no reserves could shake, rendered her an influential and dangerous adversary."



Ahalyabai Holkar and a Regiment of Women

By Prof. P. MAHADEVAN

AFTER Sivaji, the empire which he founded endured for a century through which it slowly disintegrated and declined. In that twilight period, there arose a great WOMAN who played a notable part in the fortunes of the Holkar dynasty. In standard text-books of which there are but few, her exploits are either ignored or dismissed with tantalising brevity. In a wider perspective, no doubt, her role seems very minor; but in terms of character, calibre and personality, she made a mark in her time which has conferred on her sex a lustre which time cannot dim.

A Village maid - becomes a Queen

It was during the reign of Malhar Rao Holkar that a kindly fate translated her from obscurity to the pomp and splendour of the court as the consort of Khande Rao, the heir of Holkar. It was a romance of real life, for she was the daughter of an obscure Patel of a village, whom, as a maid of eight, Malhar Rao happened to see at worship in a temple. Though not particularly beautiful, there was something in her face which struck him as out of the ordinary. It was so candid, thoughtful and self-possessed as to suggest potentialities of great strength of mind and will. On the spur of the moment, he set about contacting her parents and made his offer to marry her to his son Khande Rao. The prince was somewhat impetuous and seemed likely to get out of hand without

some guiding and restraining force, and he thought he had found it in this maid, Ahalyabai. How right his intuitions were, later events proved in more than one memorable and some spectacular ways.

Young Widow

There were frequent battles and skirmishes among the neighbouring chieftains and Khande Rao plunged into them with unflagging vigour. It became the habit of Ahalyabai to accompany him on such expeditions in one of which, to her speechless shock and grief, he lost his life. Bemoaning her lot over the dead body of her husband, she announced her resolve to commit Sati to fulfil her life's mission. When Malhar Rao heard of her decision, he rushed to her and pleaded with her saying: 'With the fall of my son in battle, I may not live much longer. If you too resolve to follow your husband, the State would surely fall into the hands of our enemies. Your infant son is likely to be abducted or killed and nothing of our kingdom would remain. Was it for this sad end that I chose you as my daughter-in-law? Will you not live for the sake of your son and the kingdom, guard and guide it till he grows old enough to assume the reins? Think not of your own merit, but work for our people and kingdom.'

Call of duty

The appeal did not go unheeded. She gave up her plans for Sati and settled down to administer the affairs of the Durbar under Malhar Rao's counsel and soon independently after his death which

occurred not long after. Her infant son was proclaimed the ruler, and the regency was vested in her. Discarding all ornament, finery, costly robes and marks of ostentation, she assumed the dress of a typical Hindu widow, and soon became a familiar and beloved figure to her subjects. Her administration was marked by justice, purity, efficiency and mercy. More than offering the people clean government, she undertook the renovation of many temples, maths and holy places which had been ravaged by Muslim vandalism, and also built new temples, established pathshalas and seminaries of Sanskrit learning. In undertaking these acts of piety and enlightened philanthropy, it is worthy of record that she showed equal zeal in sanctioning the construction of mosques also for the benefit of her Muslim subjects.

A Regiment of Women and Raghoba's discomfiture

But there seemed no end to her personal sorrows, for her only son Malerao died in youth and left the throne a prize for any future adventurer. Only a daughter survived, and Ahalyabai carried on the tasks of government with an indomitable will. To the outside world, she presented the pathetic spectacle of a lone, helpless widow who could be easily displaced by force or fraud. Peshwa Raghoba thought the kingdom could be grabbed by him without any trouble, and so he advanced with his army against it. Ahalyabai made swift and strong preparations to meet him in battle, and raised *a regiment composed wholly of women* to fight him to the death. When she heard of his arrival on the

outskirts of the city, she sent him a letter in which she said : 'I am ready to meet you in battle. Don't think that because I am a weak woman, success would be yours easily. I have a regiment of women who will fight you to the last. If I lose, the world would rather sympathise with me than reproach me. But if *you* should lose, think of the consequences of it. Could you show your face anywhere as a warrior or a ruler or even as an ordinary man? I advise you to avoid such a shameful fate'.

The Peshwa was discomfited by such a forthright letter. He tried to wriggle out of his plans, and sent a lame reply to the effect that she had misunderstood his intention which was merely to pay a condolence visit to her on the death of her beloved son. Ahalyabai shot back the reply: 'Does a condolence visit need an army to accompany it?' The Peshwa said no more, but beat a hasty retreat. The episode which soon became public property, raised the stock of Ahalyabai so high that, for the rest of her life, she had no trouble from her neighbours and conducted the affairs of State with unwearied zeal for public welfare.

A great wife, a great rider and a great mother

One more example of her public spirit will complete the picture of a great wife, a great ruler and a great mother. Some parts of her kingdom had long been infested with the depredations of dacoits of whom we hear even nowadays. She realised the need for an organized para-military operation to clean out the dacoits' hide-outs, and she felt that none but a courageous soldier and natural leader of men could shoulder

that task successfully. To discover him, she hit upon the idea of holding a durbar at which she announced that if any warrior would come forward and undertake the destruction of the dacoits, she would give him as reward the hand of her daughter Muktabai. There rose up a youth in the Durbar who gave out his name as Yeswant Rao, and he undertook the dangerous assignment. It is also stated that he fulfilled his task and was thereafter privileged to marry the princess, Muktabai.

Ahalyabai's dates are about 1730-1785, and her exploits are worthy of being inscribed in gold in any roster of Hindu Womanhood covering the entire history of our people.



Changing Pattern of Tribal Womanhood In North-East India

By Prof. J. GANCHAUDHURI

Land and People

THE north-eastern corner of the Indian Union mainly consists of Assam, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. According to geological researches the region is not very old. It rose from a sea called Tethys and became habitable for man in the late tertiary age of early quaternary age. The vast land consists of hills and plains, rivers and valleys. The territory is rich in natural flora and fauna. The hills are mainly inhabited by several tribal communities such as Nagas, Kukis, Lusais, Garos, Mizos, Adis, Kacharis, Khasis, Bodos, Tipras, Halams, Riangs, Jamatias, Chakmas and Magas. The tribal people live on gathering, hunting, fishing and a primitive agriculture by the slash-and-burn method. For centuries, the tribal people lived a life of isolation and of mutual feuds. Their ancient agriculture was extensive and migratory. They lived in small groups. Villages are on hill tops and apart from one another. Hills around each village provide the necessary food articles. It is significant to note here that they are now increasingly coming in contact with the people of the plains, taking to plough cultivation, horticulture, domestication of animals, trade, education, service under the government and administration. A remarkable degree of change and acculturation is occurring in the life-ways and thought-ways of all the

hills' people of the area. I propose simply to describe below the changing pattern of womanhood among some of the tribal communities of North-Eastern India. In this respect, I like to confine myself to scientific description and analysis, and to refrain from making any value-judgment. That is to say, I shall not attempt to state whether the position of the woman is low or high, good or bad.

Woman, bade-bone of the Tribal Community

A woman constitutes the economic backbone in each of the tribal communities. The woman is of considerable socio-economic importance. She procures the larger part of food supply. She leads a life of tremendous hardship and exposure. She is very industrious, working equally hard in the field and in the house. All through the day, she is busy with all sorts of laborious work such as cooking, grinding rice, washing utensils, fetching water, cleaning house, nursing children, gathering firewood, collecting wild vegetables, fishing in the streams, sowing, weeding and reaping in the field. All clothes for family use are woven by her. Only basketry and ploughing are taboo for the women. She is neither veiled nor secluded. She goes both to the distant field and to the far-off markets, and has a part to play in trade and business with others.

Love, Marriage and Divorce

It would be well to observe the social life of the tribal woman. Marriage among all these tribes is monogamous. Chiefs and

Kings are sometimes found to keep in addition to the legally married wife, a few concubines. Hardly a girl is given to marriage against her wish. She enjoys considerable freedom in love-making. Unmarried girls are not kept under *strict vigilance*. Marriage is the outcome of love. Except the Khasis and the Garos who are matrilineal and matrilocal, all the tribes are patrilineal and patrilocal. To obtain the wife, a bridegroom has to serve a period of, say, three years in his father-in-law's house, or if he is rich, he can dispense with this drudgery by paying one, two or three hundred rupees down. Marriage is just a civil contract, and divorce is easy to obtain. Both sexes are fond of ornaments, and grow their hair long.

Political and Religious life

Another major angle from which the position of a woman in a particular society can be assessed is her participation in public administration. It is to be admitted that the woman has no voice in the administration of village affairs. The public affairs of each village are looked after and managed by a Council of elders. Each village constitutes its own Council. The members are selected men. Women are allowed neither to select the Council Members nor to seek selection as a Council Member. Women cannot inherit property. The Khasi, the Garo and the Jaintia women, however, stand in exception.

They inherit and manage property. As the woman has no voice in administration, so she does not have any role in rituals and religious affairs. Almost all the priestly activities are performed by man. A woman

is a mere on-looker. The above generalisation can be authenticated by referring to the remarks and observations already made by scholars and researchers.

Lushai woman and her daily duties

The Lushai woman has to rise early, fill her basket with empty bamboo tubes, and trudge off before day-light down to the spring, which is generally some way down the hill, and supply of water is frequently so scanty that it takes her sometime to fill her bamboos. The necessary amount of unhusked rice has been dried the previous day on the shelf over the hearth, and this she now proceeds to pound in a mortar in the front verandah, and by the time it is ready for her husband to awake. After the meal the real work of the day begins.

Women of Tripura

In Tripura a number of tribes live, such as the Tipres, Riangs, Jamatias, Noatias, Kukis, Halams, Mogs and Chakmas. Lot and life of the women in each of these tribes are almost analogous to that of Lushai, Kuki, Naga, Mizo, Lakher women. The tribal women in Tripura like the counterparts in Naga, Mizo, Lakher, Lushai society, lead a life of excessive hardship and exposure. She is to cook food, nurse children, fetch wood and water, collect wild vegetables and roots, sow, weed, reap crops, weave clothes and fish in the streams. She has no voice in village administration and takes little part in the performance of religious rites and rituals.

Social change

No society remains completely static. Social change results from the interaction of a number of factors, and social change shows chain-reaction sequences. The life pattern of the tribal community in North-East India is in a state of rapid transition. Nevertheless, in a state of dissolving social perspectives and shifting values, the symptoms of this changing process are quite apparent in the increasing tendency of the tribal communities to adopt and absorb the urban ways of life within the periphery of the old set up. The differences between the hill people and the plain people are being gradually narrowed down. The horizon of the tribal mind is sharply expanding. Rate of literacy and education is increasing. They are taking to white collar jobs. The number of school or college going boys and girls is increasing. Bright and energetic young people are anxious to leave fields and farms, and to settle down in urban areas. Amenities of urban life - better working conditions, surety of remuneration, better housing conditions, scope for recreation and upward mobility which are almost lacking in rural areas are the motivating factors for their preference for urban settlement. All these amenities are attracting and alluring the boys first. Village girls are less benefited than boys so more of the girls and less of the boys are relegated to the jobs of field hand. Under the emergent conditions and unequal progress between the tribal boys and the tribal girls, it is interesting to study the relations between man and woman.

And its many-sided impact on the tribal life

Marriage by elopement or by service or by paying bride-price is fast becoming a thing of the past. The young man is becoming reluctant to serve the family of the bride for years together before or after marriage. Instead, he pays money. In cases where the boy is literate and at the same time a government employee, the parents of the bride not only give up the claim of bride price, they feel proud of getting such a groom and offer him substantial presentations consisting of, say, bicycle, scooter, transistor, wrist-watch, pen, furniture, utensils, ornaments, dress and sometimes landed property too. What were formerly just presentations of the rich "parents to their daughters and son-in-law are becoming the general demands of the groom. The problem of the parents of a boy in the past was to find out a mate for their son. Today it is the problem of the parents of a girl to give their daughter in marriage. Ideals were quite different in the days of yore. A father having a number of daughters had a feeling of pride and complacency. Previously when the society was mostly agricultural, the parents of the bride had the upper hand in determining the terms and conditions of bride-price. In the present context of the socio-economic conditions, the daughters are becoming the burdens of their parents. The bride's skill in weaving or the groom's skill in basketry is losing its importance as one of the qualifications in marriage. Instead, education and white collar jobs are emerging as new qualifications both of bride and of groom. Thus, in the socio-economic

sphere the change and progress of tribal women are not uniform. A considerable number of women, who are now literate, employed in government offices and living in urban areas are, in general, happy and well-to-do. In prestige and position, taste and temperament, they are quite modern and resemble the modern women of India and of the West. But the vast majority who are still living in the old set up are facing a deteriorating socio-economic position.

In the fields of politics and religion, the position of tribal women has much improved. The principles of universal and adult franchise incorporated in the new constitution of free India, have reached the interior villages also. In the eyes of law she is equal to man. She can cast votes and contest in elections to the Indian Parliament or Provincial Legislative Assemblies or Gaon Panchayats. She is now becoming politically conscious. Her political consciousness now includes the loyalty to the Indian Union. In the religious affairs also, the tribal women are now taking an active part. washing and cleaning the *Devasthanam*, fasting, preparation of oblations, gathering of flowers are gradually coming into the hands of women.

In fine, it is to be admitted that the condition of the tribal Women of North-East India is not uniform throughout the region. Their position now varies from locality to locality. Even within a single community all the women do not enjoy the same social position.



Swami Vivekananda Speaks

I BELONG to an order of people who never marry; so my knowledge of women in all their relations, as mother, as wife, as daughter and sister, must necessarily not be so complete as it may be with other men.

Although I have more opportunity than many other men to know women in general, from my position and my occupation as a preacher, continuously travelling from one place to another, and coming into contact with all grades of society - (and women, even in northern India, where they do not appear before men, in many places would break this law for religion and would come to hear us preach and talk to us) - still, it would be hazardous on my part to assert that I know everything about the women of India. So I will try to place before you the ideal.

The Ideal of Motherhood

Now, the ideal woman in India is the mother first and the mother last. The word woman calls up to the mind of Hindu, motherhood; and God is called Mother. As children, everyday, when we are boys, we have to go early in the morning with a little cup of water and place it before the mother, and mother dips her toe into it and we drink it. In the West, the woman is wife. The idea of womanhood is concentrated there - as the wife. To the ordinary man in India, the whole force of womanhood is concentrated in motherhood. In the Western home, the

wife rules. In an Indian home, the mother rules. If a mother comes into a Western home, she has to be subordinate to the wife; to the wife belongs the home. A mother always lives in our homes. The wife must be subordinate to her. See all the difference of ideas.



Comparison

Now, I only suggest comparisons: I would state facts so that we may compare the two sides. Make this comparison. If you ask, "What is an Indian woman as wife?" the Indian asks, "Where is the American woman as mother? Who is she, the all-glorious, who gave me this body? Who is she who kept me in her body for nine months? Where is she who would give me

twenty times her life, if I had need? Where is she whose love never dies, however wicked, however vile I am? Where is she, in comparison with her, who goes to the divorce court the moment I treat her a little badly? Oh! American woman, where is she?" I will not find her in your country. I have not found the son who thinks mother is first. When we die, even then, we do not want our wives and our children to take her place. Our mother! - we want to die with our head, on her lap, if we die before her. Where is she? Is woman a name to be coupled with the physical body only? Ay! the Hindu mind fears all those ideals which say that the flesh must cling unto the flesh. No, no! Women! thou shalt not be coupled with anything connected with the flesh. The name has been called holy once and forever, for what name is there which no lust can ever approach, no carnality ever come near, than the one word mother. That is the ideal in India.

The ideal of womanhood in India is motherhood that marvellous unselfish, all-suffering, ever-forgiving mother. The wife walks behind - the shadow. She must imitate the life of the mother; that is her duty. But the mother is the ideal of love; she rules the family, she possesses the family. It is the father in India who thrashes the child and spanks when there is something done by the child. You see it is just the opposite here. You never hear of a mother cursing the child; she is forgiving, always forgiving. Instead of "Our Father in Heaven", we say "Mother" all the time; that idea and that word are ever associated in the Hindu mind with infinite love, the mother's love being the nearest approach to God's love in this mortal world

of ours. "Mother, O Mother, be merciful; I am wicked! Many children have been wicked, but there never was a wicked mother;" so says the great Saint Ramprasad.

The fulfilment of womanhood

There she is - the Hindu mother. The son's wife comes in as her daughter; just as the mother's own daughter married and went out, so her son married and brought in another daughter, and she has to fall in line under the government of the queen of queens, of his mother. Even I, who never married, belonging to an Order that never marries, would be disgusted if my wife, supposing I had married, dared to displease my mother. I would be disgusted. Why? Don't I worship my mother? Why should her daughter-in-law not worship her whom I worship? Who is she, then, that try to ride over my head and govern my mother? She has to wait till her womanhood is fulfilled; and the one thing that fulfils womanhood, that is womanliness in woman, is motherhood. Wait till she becomes a mother; then she will have the same right, That, according to the Hindu mind, is the great mission of a woman - to become a mother. But oh, how different; Oh, how different! My father and mother fasted and prayed, for years and years, so that I would be born. Do you all pray for children to be born? Are you thankful to be mothers, or not? Do you think that you are sanctified by motherhood, or not. Ask that to your minds. If you don't, your marriage, is a lie, your womanhood is false, your education is superstition, and your children, if they

came without a prayer, will prove a curse to humanity.

The fruition of vows and prayers

Thus say our books direct the pre-natal influence. Why should mother be worshipped? Because she made herself pure. She underwent harsh penances sometimes to keep herself as pure as purity can be. For, mind you, no woman in India thinks of giving up her body to any man ; it is her own. The English, as a reform have introduced at present what they call "restitution of conjugal rights", but no Indian would take advantage of it. When a man comes into physical contact with his wife, the circumstances she controls, through what prayers and through what vows! For that which brings forth the child is the holiest symbol of God himself. It is the greatest prayer between man and wife, the prayer that is going to bring into the world another soul fraught with a tremendous power for good or for evil. Is it a joke? Is it a simple nervous satisfaction? Is it a brute enjoyment of the body? Says the Hindu : no, a thousand times, no!

She was a saint to bring me into the world

The idea we started with was that the ideal is the love for the mother - herself all suffering, all forbearing. The worship that is accorded to the mother has its fountain-head there. She was a saint to bring me into the world; she kept her body pure, her mind pure, her food pure, her clothes pure, and imagination pure, for years, because I would be born. Because she did

that she deserves worship. And what follows? Linked with motherhood is wife-hood.

In defence of early marriage

We are married sometimes when we are children. Why? Because the caste says: if they have to be married anyway without



their consent, it is better that they are married very early, before they have developed this love; if they are allowed to grow up apart, the boy may like some other girl, and the girl some other boy, and then something evil will happen; and so, says the caste, stop it there. I don't care whether my sister is deformed, or good-looking, or bad-looking ; she is my sister and that is enough ; he is my brother, and that is all I need to know. So, they will love each other. You may say, "Oh, they lose a great deal of enjoyment - those exquisite emotions of falling in love with a

woman and a woman falling in love with a man. This is a sort of tame thing, loving each other like brothers and sisters, as though they have to." So be it; but the Hindu says, "We are *socialistic*. For the sake of one man's or woman's exquisite pleasure we don't want to load misery on hundreds of others."

She waits for her turn

There they are married. The wife comes home with her husband; that is called the second marriage. Marriage at an early age is considered the first marriage and they grow up separately with their parents. When they are grown there is a second ceremony performed, called a second marriage. And they live together, but under the same roof with his mother and father. When she becomes a mother, she takes her place in turn as queen of the family group.

Widows

Relative to such questions as to widows not marrying; among the first two castes, the number of women is disproportionately large, and here is a dilemma. Either you have a non-marriageable widow problem and misery, or the non-husband-getting a young lady problem. To face the widow problem or the old maid problem? There you are; either of the two. Now, go back again to the idea that the Indian mind is socialistic. It says, "Now look here! We take the widow problem as the lesser one." Why? "Because they have had their chance; they have been married; if they have lost their chance, at any rate they have

had one. Sit down, be quiet, and consider these poor girls - they have not had one chance of marriage." Lord bless you! I remember once in Oxford Street, it was after ten o'clock, and all those ladies coming there, hundreds and thousands of them shopping; and some man, an American, looks around and he says, "My Lord! how many of them will ever get husbands, I wonder!" So the Indian mind said to the widows, "Well you have had your chance, and now we are very, very sorry that such mishaps have come to you, but we cannot help it; others are waiting."

The Daughter

Next, we come to woman as daughter. The great difficulty in the Indian household is the daughter. The daughter and caste combined to ruin the poor Hindu, because, you see she must marry in the same caste, and even inside the caste exactly in the same order; and so the poor man sometimes has to make himself a beggar to get his daughter married. The father of the boy demands a very high price for his son, and this poor man sometimes has to sell everything just to have a husband for his daughter. *The* great difficulty of a Hindu's life is the daughter. And, curiously enough the word daughter in Sanskrit is "duhita". The real derivation is that, in ancient times, the daughter of the family was accustomed to milk the cows, and so the word "duhita" comes from "duh", to milk, and the word "daughter" really means a milk-maid. Later on, they found a new meaning to that word, "duhita", the milk-maid - she who milks away all the milk of the family. That is the second meaning.

As I have told you, the mother is the greatest in position, the wife is next, and the daughter comes after them. It is a most intricate and complicated series of gradation. No foreigner can understand it, even if he lives there for years.



The norms of propriety

Thus we see the most complicated meshwork in the social life of our men and our women and in our degrees of relationship. We don't speak to our wives before our elders ; it is only when we are alone or when inferiors are present. If I were married, I would speak to my wife before my younger sister, my nephews or nieces ; but not before my elder sister or parents. I cannot talk to my sisters about their husbands at all. The idea is, we are a monastic race. The whole social organisation has that one idea before it. Marriage is thought of as something impure, something lower. Therefore, the subject of

love would never be talked of. I cannot read a novel before my sister, or my brother, or my mother or even before others. I close the book.

Then again, eating and drinking is all in the same category. We do not eat before superiors. Our women never eat before men, except they be the children or inferiors. The wife would die rather than, as she says, " munch " before her husband. Sometimes, for instance, brothers and sisters may eat together; and if I and my sister are eating, and the husband comes to the door, my sister stops, and the poor husband flies out.

Education and Culture

As to education and culture, it all depends upon the man. That is to say, where the men are highly cultured, there the women are; where the men are not, women are not. The old Sanskrit Universities were mainly composed of boys. The girls very rarely go up to these universities; but there were a few exceptions. In these modern days the trend is strong towards women in getting this higher education. It is a strange fact that Oxford and Cambridge are closed to women today, so are Harvard and Yale; but Calcutta University opened its doors to women more than twenty years ago. And our religion does not prevent a woman from being educated at all. In this way the girl should be educated; even thus should she be trained; and in the old books we find that the universities were equally resorted to, by both girls and boys, but later the education of the whole nation was neglected. What can you expect under a foreign rule?



The Paths of Change

Synthesis of Western ideas with Indian notion

Indian interest in the English language began primarily with the expectation of employment under the British authorities. But the consequence of learning the language was more far-reaching than originally anticipated. The Indian intelligentsia, through English education, came face to face with Western universal ideas in a secular setting. They were within the Western point of view and felt embarrassed at the obscurantism and injustice in Indian society. This soon started a process of self-criticism and led to attempts at the synthesis of Western ideas with the traditional Indian notions about religion and society.

The religious trend

The religious trend found expression in the growth and activities of institutions like the Brahmo Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, the Ramakrishna Mission, the Arya Samaj and the Theosophical Society. While the Brahmo Samaj substituted theism for classical monism, the Arya Samaj advocated a return to the Vedas in opposition to idolatry. The Theosophical Society aimed at the revival of India's ancient ideals and institutions. The Prarthana Samaj advocated a national form of worship and the Ramakrishna Mission emphasised the essential oneness of all religions. In a similar way the Rahnumai

Mazdayasman Sabha insisted on the pristine purity of Zoroastrian religion.

The secular trend

The secular trend manifested itself in demands for the cultivation of European ideas, the *re-marriage* of widows, inter-caste marriage, and education for women. The reformers pleaded for the abolition of purdah, child marriage, polygamy and caste distinctions. They urged for the removal of discrimination against the Harijans, the determination of the age of consent and women's right of inheritance. There were moves for social legislation, inter-dining, and temple entry. The reformers functioned through institutions like the Depressed Classes Mission, the Deccan Educational Society, the Servants of India Society, the Institution at Aligarh, the Chief Khalsa Dewan of Amritsar, the Bombay Social Service League, the Indian National Social Conference and the Harijan Sevak Sangh, etc. The drive for reform was further inspired when the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Gandhiji committed itself to the social work.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833)

Ram Mohan Roy, the father of Indian Renaissance and nationalism, was born in Radha Nagar village of Hooghly. Receiving education in Islamic learning at Patna and Upanishadic Literature at Benares, he grew into a non-conformist - contrary to the expectations of his parents. Later he learnt English and joined the Company's service at Rangpur. The ten years of his official career (1804-14) was spent in preparation

for the future. He wrote tracts, translated Vedanta, studied the Tantras and Jain Scriptures and held vigorous religious discussions. In 1814 he left his job, established Atmiya Sabha and settled down in Calcutta in the congenial company of British intellectuals like Wilson and Jones, Colebrook and Adams. He acquired the knowledge of Hebrew and Greek to satisfy his inquiries into original Christian scriptures and produced a series of incisive publications. Then began Ram Mohan's conflict with the dogmas, Hindu and Christian, and his struggle against idolatry and superstition, priesthood and Sati. His denunciation of Sati and the growth of an agitation against the abuse, finally led to its abolition in 1827. Not satisfied with the Indian Women's right to live, he fought for their right of inheritance, education and emancipation. One of the first to plead for the introduction of western education in India, Ram Mohan supported the Christian Missionaries in their educational activities. He was honoured in England where he remained till his death at Bristol. Appearing at a crucial phase of India's connections with the west, the Raja embodied in himself the challenge and response of his times.

Iswar Chandra Vidya Sagar (1820-1891)

Born in a poor family, Iswar Chandra Vidya Sagar struggled hard to complete a brilliant academic career in Sanskrit College, Calcutta. Apart from his encyclopedic knowledge in Sanskrit Literature, Iswar Chandra developed a profound understanding of western liberal philosophy. He accepted the Upanishadic humanism and

discarded the traditional concepts of absolute truth. A great friend of the poor and the needy, Iswar Chandra was anxious to promote education in the country on the ideals of European rationalism. He passionately campaigned for the education of women and battled against an orthodox society and an indifferent Government to establish numerous girls' schools. He also vigorously advocated widow re-marriage and a law was passed in this direction in 1856, mainly through his persistence. Iswar Chandra launched another agitation for the abolition of polygamy among the Hindus, particularly among the Kulin Brahmins of Bengal. The Government, however, was reluctant to support his move. Iswar Chandra will be remembered for the revolt against a heartless social system so courageously waged by one single individual.

Swami Dayananda (1825-1883)

Born in Morvi State, Kathiawar, Dayanand studied Sanskrit and developed a religious disposition. He left home, became a Sannyasi and wandered in search of a Guru till he came in touch with Virjanand of Mathura. An erudite scholar in Sanskrit Literature, Dayanand began a missionary life travelling far and wide, especially in U.P., Rajasthan and Punjab. During his travels he explained what he considered primordial Hinduism based on the Vedas and held disputations with Brahmins, Christians and Muslims. He met Keshab Chandra Sen in Calcutta, who advised him that his teachings, to be more effective, should be in the language of the people, rather than in Sanskrit. Thereafter! he adopted Hindi

and used it as an inter-provincial language. He began his Arya Samaj movement in the early 1870's and by 1883, when he died about one hundred Arya Samajs were established in Punjab, V.P., Rajasthan and Bombay. Dayanand was a prolific, scholarly writer, who discarded idol worship, polytheism, the doctrine of incarnation and other rituals. He condemned child marriage, advocated equal status for women and favoured a system of national education. His emphasis on self-reliance made some of the Arya Samajist institutions almost a challenge to British authority. But the chief achievement of Dayanand was imparting in his followers a passion for reforms.

Jyoti Rao Phooley (1827-1890)

Born at Purandar in Maharashtra, Phooley had his education at Poona. Touched by the fallen condition of his people, he worked hard for the emancipation of women, removal of untouchability and the welfare of the Harijans. A champion of women's education, Phooley established the Low Caste Female School at Poona in 1848. Thereafter he started another school for the Harijans in 1851 and a maternity home for the poor women. For the standard of his time he took an unusual step by

persuading his own wife to take up the work of teaching in the institutions he founded.

An upholder of the principle of social equality and a liberator of Indian women, Phooley pleaded for widow remarriage and wrote several books in support of his ideas. In 1873, he established the Satya Shodak Samaj and founded the Dinbandhu Sarvajanik Sabha in 1884. He opened water tanks near his own house for the use of the Harijans and published a memorandum as a part of his efforts to remove untouchability.



Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884)

Born in the well-known Sen family of Calcutta, Keshab Chandra had a religious bent of mind from his childhood. As a student he was influenced by the writings of Rajanarayan Bose and later joined the Brahmo Samaj in 1857. Thereafter he popularised the Brahmo movement and visited various places in India to propagate the new faith. The founder of many organisations like the Goodwill Fraternity Society, Brahmo Bandhu Samaj and Brahmo Vidyalaya, Keshab Chandra constantly educated the public on the need for social reform. He pleaded for the removal of purdah, the introduction of widow remarriage and inter-caste marriage. He was

an advocate of the education of women and he strongly urged for the abolition of early marriage of girls and practice of polygamy. In 1860 he organised the Sangat Sabha and campaigned against the segregation of the Harijans. Keshab Chandra, on his return, set up the Indian Reform Association, night schools and the prohibition sabhas. In 1878 he broke away from the Brahmo Samaj of India on theological grounds and on the controversial question of his fourteen-year-old daughter's marriage with the Hindu Maharaja of Cooch-Bihar. In January 1880 he established the Nava Vidhan Brahmo Samaj and was engaged in preaching the ideal of the harmony of religions.

Mahadeo Govind Ranade (1842-1901)

An eminent social reformer, a distinguished scholar and an educationist, Ranade was born in a Brahmin family at Nasik. He studied in Elphinstone College, Bombay, and had developed an insatiable desire for knowledge. Serving as a Marathi translator, a professor of English and an administrator and judge in the Indian States, he joined the judicial service and was called upon to supervise the working of the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act in 1881.

He was appointed the Law Member of the Bombay Legislative Council in 1885 and became a member of the Finance Committee at the Centre in 1886. In 1893 Ranade was appointed Judge of the Bombay High Court. He was one of the eminent participants in the founding of the Indian National Congress.

A prolific writer on economic and social subjects in the Sarvajanic Sabha journal,

Ranade, was a follower of the reformed religion, the Prarthana Samaj, since 1867. Influenced by Gopal Hari Deshmukh and Vishnu Parashuram Pandit he strongly supported the concept of re-marriage and the welfare of the widows. He organised the Indian National Social Conference in Madras in 1887 to discuss the burning social questions. He favoured the raising of the age of marriage, the re-marriage of widows and protection of child widows. He denounced polygamy and dowry system and supported the education of women. In 1882, Ranade with the aid of friends started the Female High School at Poona. He also gave his valued support to Sharada Sadan - an institution to provide a home and school for the widows. He was convinced that western education would play a vital role in the transformation of the country. To promote western education Ranade, with others, sponsored the Deccan Education Society for starting a college and Fergusson College was eventually established.

Kandukuri Viresalingam (1848-1919)

Born at Rajamundhry in Andhra Pradesh, Viresalingam studied Telugu and English and took up teaching as his profession. Earning a name for himself as an ideal teacher, he served different schools as Headmaster and then joined the Government Arts College at Rajahmundry.

Viresalingam, a product of the synthesis of western and Indian thought and culture, stood between the old and the new ages of Telugu literature and contributed enormously to its branch. A versatile and prolific writer, he also forcefully spoke

against the castes and superstitions. A dynamic personality in the field of social reforms, he condemned child marriage, supported widow re-marriage, carried out an intensive campaign for the rehabilitation of widows, worked for the abolition of nautch practices and battled against corruption and dishonesty. To help the needy women and children, he established widows' homes, orphanages and schools, and founded the Hitakarini Trust at Rajahmundry - which managed the various institutions he started.

Mahatma Hansraj (1864-1930)

One of the makers of modern Punjab, Mahatma Hansraj was born in Haryana and educated at Lahore. He came under the influence of Swami Dayanand in 1877 and became the editor of the Arya Samajist organ, the "Regeneration of Aryavarta." A decade later he became the Headmaster of the D.A.V. School and developed it into a famous college. He also established an Ayurvedic College on modern lines and a technical institute for training the unemployed.

After retirement in 1911, he served as the President of the D.A.V. School Managing Committee and was involved in religious and humanitarian activities. He worked remorselessly at the time of the plague epidemic in Multan and Rawalpindi, the earth-quake in Kangra, and the famine in Garhwal. A social reformer, Hansraj supported widow remarriage and launched an anti-untouchability movement in Punjab. He also started orphanages and established homes for widows



Women and the Freedom Movement

By S. AMBUJAMMAL

EVERY living being in this world is bound by certain laws of nature, which the philosophers call the Laws of Karma. To free itself from this bondage is the eternal aspiration of humanity. It is said that freedom is the birth-right of man. But how can an individual be free when his whole nation is in bondage? This was the poser that set afoot the Freedom Movement in India at the beginning of the present century.

The Non-Co-operation Movement

The usually dormant patriotism of the Indian masses was deeply roused by the non-co-operation movement of Mahatma Gandhi. His philosophies of non-violence and Satyagraha, together with his fasts for self-purification, imparted a new sublimity even to such common-place features as picketing and non-payment of taxes. His advocacy of Khadi, Prohibition and Removal of Untouchability, together with his concepts of National Language and Basic Education, provided vast scope for national, social and cultural renaissance, in which not only the men-folk, but also the women-folk came forward in large numbers to take part with enthusiasm.

Their name was legion

In the North, Kasturba Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, Swarup Rani Nehru, Kamala Nehru, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, Aruna Asaf

Ali and Sucheta Kripalani were the great ladies who adorned the vanguard of the women's wing of India's freedom fighters. Likewise in the South, Dr. Rukmini Lakshmi pathi, Durga Bai Deshmukh, Ammu Swaminathan, Janammal, Smt. Subbarayan, Mrs. Cousins, Manjubhashini, S. Ambujammal, Angachi Amma, Kamala Devi Arya, Vai. Mu. Kodai Nayaki Ammal, Rukmini Amma, Lakshmi Sanakara Iyer, Padmavathi Asher, Kamala Bai Sharma, Subri Kamala, Auditor Shivabhogam, Dr. Sakuntala, M. S. Kamala, M.S. Padma, Saraswathi Pandurangan, Smt. Subburaman, Smt. Vaidyanathan, Smt. Sundara Raman, Lakshmi Kanthammal, Kalyani Shastri, Dr. Srimathi Pichumani, Kulandai Ammal, Anjani Ammal, Rajarn Bharathi, Seethalakshmi Kumaraswami, Dr. Sakuntala propagating aims of the Prohibition Bai, Tripurasundari, Neelavathi, Matilda, Kuttimmalu Ammal, Madhavi Menon, Kathyayini, Ammu Nerhiyar, Lakshmi Bai, Kooda Kanakamma, Bharathi Ranga, Karnakshi Amma, M. S. Balammal and a host of others jumped into the fray at the call of Gandhiji and courted imprisonment.

Gathering Momentum

These were all women from leading families, and their example inspired thousands of women-folk all over the South to dedicate themselves to the cause of freedom and join the army of Congress volunteers. The

soul-stirring national songs admirably rendered by K. B. Sundarambal, D. K. Pattammal and other women singers served as an impetus to all and prepared entire South India for any sacrifice for the cause of Independence.

Spoke with one voice

The great and the small, the rich and the poor, the learned and the illiterate, the old and the young, all forgot their differences, and felt themselves as members of one and the same family during the fight for freedom. The Hindus and the Muslims, the Christians and the Zoroastrians, all felt themselves as belonging to one and the same fraternity, namely, patriotism, and spoke with one voice. Such was the unifying power of nationalism in the early decades of the Twentieth century.



Women's Swadeshi League

The then Madras State comprised not only the present districts of Tamil Nadu, but also large parts of the present Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Karnataka States. Women belonging to all these linguistic back-grounds joined together and organized institutions at

the Metropolis. "Women's Swadeshi League" was one such organisation.

Boycotting foreign clothes and Khadi was one of the chief "Women's Swadeshi League." and the removal of Caste feeling and untouchability were adopted as equally

important goals. To achieve these, exhibitions, processions and picketings were being regularly conducted.

Imprisonment

The young men of the Congress Organisation formed a "Youth League" with Dr. Rukmini Lakshmi Pathy as their President, she participated in the famous Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha of Rajaji, and was therefore sentenced to one year's imprisonment. "Udayavanam" was an organisation of volunteers. Among them was Smt. Durga Bai Deshmukh. She participated in the Madras Salt Satyagraha under the leadership of Bulusu Samba Murthy. She also was awarded one year's imprisonment for this. Her speeches were so fiery that the British Government put her in solitary confinement in the Madura Central Jail. Angachi Amma and Kamala Devi Arya were sentenced to imprisonment along with their husbands for taking part in the famous Neel Satyagraha.

It will not be an exaggeration to say that the Vellore Jail overflowed with women Satyagrahis during 1930-32. In the 1936 elections Smt. Lakshmi Shankar Iyer of Kallidaikurichi defeated Sri Easwaran Pillai, a big-wig of the Justice Party in Tirunelveli. In 1942, during the days of one-man Satyagraha, Ammu Swaminathan, Radha Bai Subbarayan, Manju Bhashini and M. S. Balammal courted arrest and were sentenced to three months imprisonment. Mrs. Cousins, a chief disciple of Dr. Annie Besant, was one of the note-worthy figures who partook in the Satyagraha movement. She was awarded one year's imprisonment.

They also served

There were many other women who, without courting arrest and being imprisoned, engaged themselves wholeheartedly in such constructive activities as propagating Khadi and prohibition, and working for the removal of untouchability. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy and Sister Subbulakshmi were the most important among them.

Mention may be made here of Krishna Bai Nimbkar and her mother Smt. Lakshman Rao. They and the members of the famous Madhava Rao family have done signal service to the Gandhian programmes of national reconstruction. Kameswari, a student of the Queen Mary's College, was one among the remarkable youngsters who took part in such constructive activities with immense zeal and vigour.

A place of pride

The women of the Bhaktavatsalam family, especially Smt. Sarojini Varadappan and her mother Gnana Soundari Ammal, deserve a place of pride in the annals of the Gandhian Movements. They even conducted bhajans and processions for propagating khadi. The examples of such dedicated women inspired confidence in the hearts of one and all, and commanded the admiration of even the British Officials.

It is well to remember that this marked elevation in the status of the modern Indian woman has been achieved only through the untold sacrifices of the women of India of the last two generations.



Women Patriots of India

THEY lived underground, made and threw bombs, shot British Governors and spent the best years of their youth in prison. They constituted the violent wing of the freedom struggle. Who were these brave and reckless women who thought nothing of giving their lives for the cause? What was their contribution to the independence movement? Has an ungrateful nation forgotten their sacrifices? As early as 1857 Mata Tapaswini along with her aunt, Maharani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, fought in the 1857 revolt. She escaped to Nepal along with Nana Saheb. She was one of the fore-runners of the revolutionary movement in Bengal.

Sarla Devi Choudhuri

She was initiated into the revolutionary movement of Bengal under Aurobindo Ghosh and became one of its prominent leaders. Later, she organised the movement in Punjab and the Frontier Province. She edited the journal "Hindustan" in Urdu and English. She vigorously opposed the Rowlatt Act. She sang in chorus an inspiring nationalist song at the 17th Session of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta. Along with Ajit Singh she was busy delivering fiery speeches which were later printed and distributed.

Madame Cama

Madame Cama came under the influence of Dadabhai Naoroji. She went to England in 1902 and for her revolutionary activities

earned the epithet "Mother of the Revolution". She designed the national flag. In 1907, she attended the International Socialist Conference at Stuttgart, Germany and delivered her most memorable speech on India's inalienable right to independence.

Suhasni (Putaudi)

She was given revolutionary training by Rasiklal Das. She was detained in 1930 in Calcutta for aiding the revolutionaries. On her release in 1938 she became a Communist sympathiser.

Shanti Ghosh

She, along with Suniti Choudhary, shot and killed the District Magistrate of Cornilla in 1931. She got life imprisonment but was released in 1939. Shanti and Suniti established their own organisation 'Chhatri Sangh', in 1931. They learnt dagger-play and revolver shooting practice was done on Mainamati Hill.

Bina Das

Born in 1911, made her debut into the political arena in the boycott of the all white Simon's Commission in 1928. In the same year she came into contact with two revolutionary class mates Suhasini Dutta and Shanti Das Gupta. Her own small revolutionary group was almost smashed after the Dalhousie Square Bomb outrage. At the convocation on February 6, 1932 when the Governor stood up to read out his address, she made her attempt to shoot him but the bullets missed the target. She was sentenced to nine years of rigorous

imprisonment and was released in 1939. Between 1946 and 1951 she was a Member of the Legislative Assembly. Later she was heard of in Noakhali after the riots, helping and consoling the victims and the distressed. Refugee rehabilitation was her other field of work.

Kalpana Datta

She worked with the Chittagong group. She used to collect materials for the manufacture of bombs from Calcutta and take it to Chittagong where she made explosives in her own home. In 1943, she married P. C. Joshi, the well-known Communist.

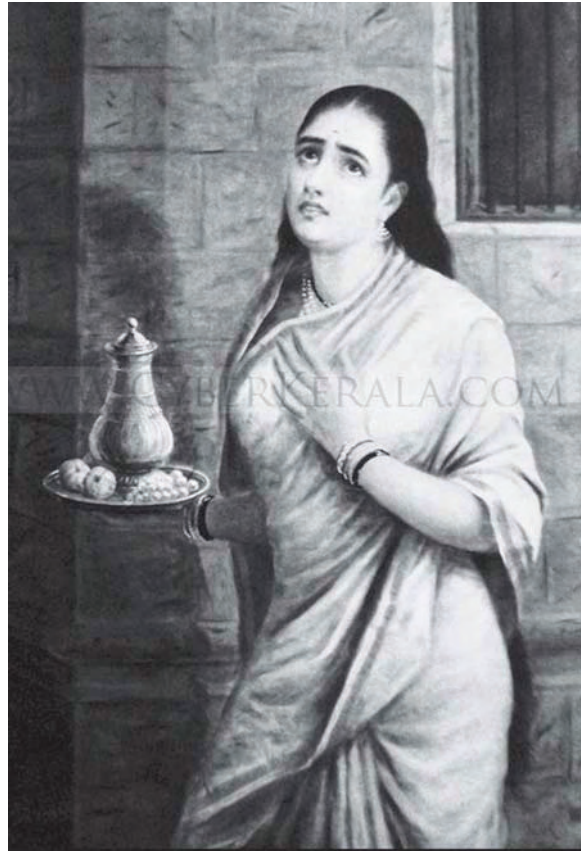
Ujjwala

She was born in 1914 at Dacca. Her father was a zamindar connected with the revolutionary movement. When the girl was merely fourteen her father used to make her carry arms from place to place. She with her companions Bhawani and Rabi planned to shoot the Governor at Darjeeling. Their duty was over when the first two (Bhavani and Rabi) took their seats, their target within range. As a result of that Bhawani and Rabi were sentenced to death while she got life imprisonment. She was released in 1939, and in the latter part of her life she became a social worker and established a welfare institution, Palli Niketan. She also helped the victims of Noakhali after the terrible riot that had taken place.

Aruna Ganguli

She was the heroine of the Quit India Movement. She carried out a personal revolution against the laws of Indian society by marrying Asaf Ali, an eminent nationalist leader, in 1924. She was in the fore-front of the campaign against the British; she fasted, went to Jail, braved bullets and even carried a price of Rs. 5,000 on her head. Along with Lohia, she edited a monthly paper called *Inquilab*. She now runs *Link* and *Patriot*.

From: The Illustrated Weekly.



Women's Liberation: An Episode In Bengal

By BASUDHA CHAKRAVARTY

TWO incidents rocked public mind in Bengal in the beginning of this century. One was the suicide of a young girl, Snehalata by name, because of the inability of her parents to find money for a dowry for her marriage and their consequent humiliation and distress. The other was more significant. Chapala Devi, a thirteen-year old girl of Dacca district of what is now Bangla Desh, had been married to a man who had involved himself in litigation and had to absent himself frequently from home to attend court at the sub-divisional town. Left alone the girl-wife was the target of anti-socials in the village. But she had been trained not to be daunted by evil and kept herself prepared for self-defence. One night as one of the rowdies entered her room and tried to take advantage of her, she struck him with a 'dao' (an iron blade attached to a rod) and the man succumbed to his injuries. Chapala was arrested but the incident created a sensation throughout the province. Public opinion was aroused. The story of the girl's courage and her photograph appeared in all the papers and a public meeting at Calcutta demanded her release. Acharya P. C. Roy, the great scientist and social reformer, who presided, called her "Heroine of East Bengal" and declared that hers was an example for all women to emulate. The case went up before the Sessions Court

but the trying judge acquitted her with the remark that she had acted in self defence of her honour and was therefore not guilty.

Public opinion was aroused but such was the conservatism of those days that because the girl had come into lime-light and contact with the social leaders of the period, she was no longer adaptable to the rigorous seclusions of her husband's home. Her father had in the meantime died and only the help of one of his friends enabled her to study for Matriculation which she passed in a few years with a scholarship. Being technically married, she was debarred from staying at women's students' hostels. The Brahma community in Calcutta came to her rescue and she was admitted as the only female student at City College. She was allotted a separate waiting room and used to be escorted to her classes and back by the professors. That was the beginning of co-education in Calcutta, she stayed in a small room near her college with her younger brother, carrying on with great difficulty and giving tuitions to meet her expenses. Thus she went up to M. A. and being a student of philosophy, came in close contact with Doctor S. Radhakrishnan who held the chair of philosophy at Calcutta University, and also became close to his family. She was for a time an Inspectress of the Juvenile Court and then found employment as a teacher at a school for Muslim women students run under strict purdah. As the result of life-long struggle her health broke down and she died at the early age of forty-two of epidemic dropsy. She had been admitted to hospital but died at a lone hour when no friend or relative was near her. On being

informed of her death Dr. Radhakrishnan wrote to her younger brother, the present writer: "Life was cruel to her death has been equally cruel." In spite of all her experiences Chapala Devi remained a strict Hindu in attitude and behaviour, and made it a point of retaining the surname "Bhattacharya" which she had acquired through her marriage.

A Struggle

These two incidents illustrate the feudal social environment in which the women of Bengal and for the matter of that, the whole country had and still have to struggle. During the decades, no doubt, the work of social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Iswar Chandra Vidya Sagar, spread of English education and other political and social factors have generated winds of change in the social structure and condition of women. Girls are receiving education in schools and colleges by the thousands; they are working in educational institutions, offices and many occupations. That has had a liberating effect but that is also limited. Even the earning girl cannot live or act on her own j even she is made an object of bargain in the marriage market. Also the percentage of educated women is small j the vast mass of women in the lower middle class and peasant families, particularly in the villages, are still denied human rights. Only in affluent families they have some equality of status j but there also girl-widows, for example, are more tolerated than respected. It is well known that women in princely families and families of big land-lords have had, generally speaking, a subdued existence. "We live in

a golden cage" one such lady who, after abolition of landlordism, fought the elections and became a Minister, used to say, "all the same it is a cage." Pockets of oppression on and injustice to women, persist. Senior women members of the family have of course a say in the conduct of household affairs j but junior members have a low status and often suffer more at the hands of senior women than of men. Under-nutrition, under-development, neglect and disdain are mostly their lot.

The winds of change blow strong

Yet the winds of change have been blowing strong enough. The Swadeshi movement in Bengal and the subsequent non-cooperation movement gave a fillip to women's liberation as well. Women took part in these movements and established their right to equality in a vital field of national endeavour. Participation of women in the a11- India movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi had far-reaching social results for them. Women courted jail and other forms of suffering for the national cause. It was probably a Marwari lady, Smt. Indumati Goenka, who was the first among women in Calcutta to go to jail as a Satyagrahi. The arrest of Smt. Basanti Devi, wife of Deshbandhu C. R. Das, Urmila Devi, his sister, and Suniti Devi, a close relative, electrified the political atmosphere. Thousands of women joined the ranks of freedom-fighters in the non-cooperation movement, and the Civil Disobedience movements at the close of the twenties. A considerable number of women joined the revolutionary movement m Bengal, took part in action and some of them sacrificed

their lives. Women protested when Mahatma Gandhi did not include any of them in the Quit India Movement of 1942 and the Azad Hind Fouz formed by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose were a further assertion of their rights. Women had steadily established their right to equality with men. There were phases where political activities having flagged due to the foreign Government's repressive measures, women took upon themselves to carry on those activities and face the consequences. Women's Satyagraha Committees were fulfilling a positive role in this regard. The wide participation of women in the national movement paved the way for automatic recognition of equality of status of women in the Constitution of Free India though such equality had not been achieved even in advanced western countries without a long struggle.

The Partition - a cause for women's assertion

Partition of the country in the wake of independence paradoxically created conditions conducive to women's self assertion. The struggle for existence into which the lakhs of migrants from Pakistan were thrown, proved to be both a test and an opportunity for women. The sudden transition from the comparative security of a home of generations and land enough to meet family needs, to the uncertainties of the wide world, had a revolutionary impact on the lives of women, particularly the young among them. Many well-placed families from East Bengal had over the decades come over to Calcutta and other

parts of the country for education, service and in the case of the rich land-lords, just for living in the city. But they had retained their home-steads and maintained their connection with it. The partition, however, threw the bulk of the Hindu families out of their home-steads, and girls of the families who would not have perhaps dreamt of getting anything like higher education had they lived on in their native homes, took their own places in the struggle and equipped themselves as best as they could, to fight the family's battle for existence. Thousands were admitted, with the aid of refugee scholarships, into educational institutions and prepared themselves, equally with their brothers, to share the family burden. There have been many instances of a daughter, being the eldest child of the family, working as a sales-girl at a Government milk depot or some such job to help bring up her younger brothers and sisters, foregoing marriage and continuing as an earning member of the family. Women students and working women, by thousands, braved daily the hazards of travelling by over-crowded buses, trams and trains in order to attend their classes or jobs. Such first-hand living develops in them a personality and a sense of self-respect which would have been beyond their imagination had they continued to live in the back-woods of villages in East Bengal. Partition and the resultant migration have had the dialectical effect of working out a social revolution in the direction of throwing women into the responsibility of the struggle for existence, and thus placing them on the road to liberation. Modern conditions of co-education, of men and women working

together in office and institutions and of their joint participation in social and cultural activities like dramatic groups have a spontaneous liberating influence. They have also personal and social consequences like love affairs and love marriages, in which also women now assert their individualities.



These too are in a sense spheres of liberation.

Yet it would not be possible to claim that liberation is wide in its scope or anything near total. For one thing, the so-called liberation is not the same as emancipation. Liberation means freedom from outer restraints while the basic entity remains what it was. In liberation, the woman continues to regard herself as a woman -

albeit a free woman. An emancipated woman regards herself as a human being without such inhibitions as appertain to a woman as such. An emancipated woman would not refuse to fulfil the roles of a wife, daughter, sister and mother to which she may be called, but she would not be subdued by those roles. She would have no sex complex. A merely liberated woman has such complex in an inverted form : she is rather over-conscious of being a woman and proud of the fact that she has liberated herself. The so-called society lady who goes about with painted lips, is not necessarily emancipated. Even so, the area of liberation is still limited - even in advanced countries. Otherwise there would have been no need for an International Women's Year. Areas of darkness persist even in educated circles. They have been well portrayed in Bengali in the novels of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee. The dowry system, at whose altar Snehalata sacrificed herself over half a century ago, still flourishes. Even educated girls have to be presented before the bridegroom's people as merchandise and provided with a dowry as a condition of marriage. Hence mere education is no social passport to liberation. Even the earning capacity of a working woman is but an additional qualification for marriage, not an asset in itself. Education or capacity to earn does not in itself constitute liberation. In poor families of course the situation is even worse. The women and particularly those who are not major members of the family have to slave to earn their morsel of food. The case of girl-widows is worse still. So the entire problem of women's liberation has still to be tackled at the roots. Spread of



education and increasing participation of women in working life will of course help. But the basic remedy lies in the social attitudes. World movements such as the International Women's Year must help. But they are most useful in focussing attention on the state of things as they are, the retrospect and the prospect for the future. Hard is the way of women's liberation. The processes of their subjugation and suppression work mostly in secret; the processes of redemption are somewhat intangible. Woman's ignorance is the greatest obstacle to her liberation. It is from the ignorance and prejudices of other women that a woman suffers most. Women also labour under a biological difficulty in attaining equality with men.



Sr. Nivedita- The Dedicated

A Great Offering

JUST below the Darjeeling railway station is the Hindu cremation ground. In it stands a memorial built of brick. There is a tablet there with the word :

" HERE REPOSE THE ASHES
OF SISTER NIVEDITA
OF THE RAMAKRISHNA- VIVEKANANDA
WHO GAVE HER ALL TO INDIA"

The Name Nivedita means 'the dedicated one'.

The great poet, Rabindranath Tagore answers for us : "Whoever has seen what reality there was in her (Nivedita's) love of the people, has surely understood that we - while giving perhaps our time, our money, even our life - have not been able to give them our heart." Sister Nivedita had no money to give - for she was poor herself. But she gave her life.

This great offering, giving her life for Mother India, is like a song of love. Love is blind for it sees not the faults of the beloved, and Nivedita never found fault with India. Indeed, she was hard on those who even talked of her slightly.

Ancestry and Parents

Sister Nivedita's original name was *Margaret Elizabeth Noble*. She was born on October 28, 1867 at Dungannon, Co. Tyrone, in far-off Ireland. She came from a family called Noble who were of Scottish descent but had been settled in Ireland for about five

centuries. She completed her education at the age of seventeen. Then in 1884, she went to England and became a teacher in a school at Keswick.

A Teacher by Instinct

Margaret liked teaching. She became interested in the new method of teaching which was discovered by a Swiss teacher called Pestalozzi. Margaret spent ten years as a teacher from 1884 to 1894.

Religious Beliefs

As a child, Christian religious doctrines had been instilled into her. She loved Jesus with her whole heart. How willingly he had undergone so much sacrifice! But by the time Margaret was eighteen she came to understand that religion did not mean belief in this doctrine or that; it meant search for Divine Light and Eternal Truth. At this time she happened to read the life of the Buddha. She liked him immensely. The Buddha too had undergone so many sacrifices for the good of the world! For three years Margaret studied his teachings with reverence. But it was not enough to dispel all her doubts and give her peace. She still sought Light and Truth. Then something happened that was to change her whole life. A 'Hindu Yogi' arrived in London. He was a *Sannyasi*, a Hindu monk, and his name was Swami Vivekananda.

The Meeting

Lady Isabel Margesson was a talented and influential lady. She was a great friend of Margaret's too. She knew of Margaret's

interest in religion. One day she invited Swami Vivekananda to her house, and she also invited Margaret.

It was a cold Sunday afternoon in November. Fifteen or sixteen people had assembled at Lady Margesson's home to meet the Swami. They were all seated in the drawing room on the floor in a semicircular form facing the Swami. Margaret did not miss any of his lectures or classes. She learnt much from him. Yet she could not accept all his views. She argued with him, and fought with him but she admired him for his lofty ideals and his noble soul.

The Call

One day during the question-answer-class, the Swami suddenly rose and thundered: "What the world wants today is twenty men and women who can dare to stand in the street yonder, and say that they possess nothing but God ... Who will go?" He wrote in a letter to Margaret: "The earth's bravest and best will have to sacrifice themselves for the welfare of all. Buddhas by the hundred are necessary with eternal love and pity. Who would join his army and work for his mission? Another day he was talking about the women of his country. They never went to school. He wanted them to be educated. He turned to Margaret and said: 'I have plans for the women of my own country in which you, I think, could be of great help to me.'

These words had a strange effect on her. She felt that it was a call, the call for which she had been waiting all these years. She had to accept that call. A ray

of light and hope penetrated the darkness and gloom that had enveloped her for so long. Her mind was made up. She would join His army. She would go to India and serve the people of India. This was a very important decision. It changed 'her *life*. London lost a worker, but it gave to India one of the greatest friends the country has ever had.

Invitation

The Swami left England in December 1896. He *did* not take Margaret with him then. He believed that she was sincere, pure, and determined. He had faith that she would have a great future in the work for India. But he was very kind and considerate. India is a tropical country where the weather is extremely hot most of the year. Would she be able to stand the climate? Ways of life in India were so different from those *in* West. Could she do without European comforts? The English in India would hate her for befriending Indians. Would she have the courage to face them? And the Indians would doubt her good intentions. Would she be able to tolerate their suspicions? He made all this clear to her in a letter. And then he made her a promise : 'I will stand by you unto death whether you work for India or not, whether you give up Vedanta or remain in it. The tusks of the elephant come out but never go back so arc the words of a man never retracted.'

Arrival

On an extremely cold and foggy winter morning Margaret left England. She arrived

in Calcutta on January 28, 1898. The Swami was at the dock to receive her. She was very happy to see him because in this vast, unknown land He was the only person she knew.

Three Important Events

The month of March was very eventful for Margaret. She had not come merely to visit India and to be with the Master, as the other ladies had. She had come to work. But she was unknown to the people. So the first thing the Swami did was to arrange a public meeting to introduce her to the people of Calcutta. The meeting was held on March 11. The Swami presided and introduced her thus: "Already England has given us some of her great intellects to help us in our mission ... And now England has sent us another gift in Miss Margaret Noble, from whom we expect much". She spoke at the meeting on 'The Influence of the Spiritual Thought of India on England'. Her eloquence touched all listeners.

The second important event took place on March 17. It was one of the most memorable days of her life. In her diary she called it 'a day of days '. On that day she met Sri Saradamani Devi who was Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual consort. The devotees called her the Holy Mother. On the way to see Her Margaret felt very excited. She was going to meet one who was worshipped by all in the Order as the Mother of the Universe. The American friends were also with her. Mother greeted them affectionately and called them 'my daughters'. Margaret wrote to a friend in

London afterwards: 'She is the very soul of sweetness, so gentle and loving.'

The third and most important event took place on March 25. It was a Friday. On that day her life was consecrated to the service of God. Her Master gave her the beautiful name, Nivedita " meaning one who is dedicated or offered to God. She thus became the ' chosen' of God when she was thirty years old.

Travels in the Himalayas

In the summer of that year the Swami, Nivedita, and others left for Almora in the Himalayas. On the journey and during their stay there the Swami continued to instruct them.

Recollecting all these experiences, she wrote later: 'As I look back on this wonderful summer, I wonder how I have come to heights so rare. We have been living and breathing in the sunshine of the great religious ideals, all these months, and God has been more real to us than the common men.'

A True Disciple

On her way back to Calcutta Nivedita visited Lahore, Delhi, Agra, and Banaras, She had travelled a great deal in the last few months and had seen a large part of India. But during her travels all her time was not spent in seeing places. She was training herself for the life she was going to lead. Swamiji told her to remember that she had come to serve, and not to uplift or teach. She should never let people think that she had more knowledge than they had. She should first study the world in which she

was to work and not try to impose her western ideas on them.

Nivedita reached this ideal so perfectly that our great nationalist leader Bepin Chandra Pal wrote of her later: 'Nivedita came to us, as no European has yet come, not as an adept, but as a novice : not as a teacher, but as a learner. She did not pose before us as a prophetess but always stood in sincere love and reverence as a worshipper.'

A new Home and School

In the house at 16, Bose Para Lane she decided to start a school for girls. It opened on November 13, 1898, which was the auspicious day of Kali Puja. She was delighted when Mother herself came and performed the opening ceremony. The Swami and other members of the Ramakrishna Order were also present. At the end, the Mother gave a whispered blessing which was spoken aloud for her by a companion. She prayed that the blessings of the Divine Mother might be upon the School, and that the girls it trained should be ideal girls.

I cannot imagine a grander omen than Her blessing, spoken over the educated Hindu womanhood of the future: Nivedita wrote later. She started her work earnestly. She taught the little girls reading and writing, and introduced painting, clay-work, and sewing. The children loved their Sister's school, and Nivedita herself was overjoyed.

The Plague

The following March bubonic plague raged in Calcutta. All the people who could leave

the city were doing so, and the rest were too frightened to know what to do. Swami Vivekananda immediately 'set his monks and followers to work. They formed a plague service, and Nivedita was in charge of it. She organized a band of young men to care for the sick and to help clean the city. Disease breeds in filth and rubbish so the streets must be cleaned. Some monks of the Mission also worked with her.

The great reward that Sister Nivedita received for her selfless noble work was the love and respect of the people with whom and for whom she worked. The District Medical Officer wrote in his report: 'During this calamity the compassionate figure of Sister Nivedita was seen in every slum of the Bag bazaar locality. She helped others with money without giving a thought to her own condition, At one time when her own diet consisted only of milk and fruits, she gave up milk to meet the medical expenses of a patient.'

The Voyage

Nivedita had started her school on new lines only as a small experiment. In about six months she realized that to continue it further she would need more money. She therefore had to return to England to raise funds for it. Swami Vivekananda was also going to visit Europe and America again. So they travelled together. They left India in the middle of June, 1899.

Mornings and evenings he would sit on the deck and talk to Nivedita. She was happy to be with him and learn so much more from him, Though this voyage was not a pilgrimage she felt as if it was. 'Even a journey round the world becomes a

pilgrimage, if one makes it with the Guru: she wrote.

They reached London on July 31. On August 16, the Swami left for America, Nivedita followed a month later.

In London

From America Nivedita went to France and met the Swami and some of his friends in Paris. Then they spent some days in Brittany, where the Swami presented to her the poem, 'A Benediction' in which were condensed all the hopes and good wishes of the Master for his disciple.

With these blessings Nivedita went to London to continue her work of raising money for her school. She gave as many as thirty-five lectures in London, Manchester, and Edinborough in Scotland. In America she had given up her usual European dress and had taken to a graceful but extremely simple gown of white flannel with a girdle fastened at the waist. A rosary of beads always adorned her neck.

The House of Sisters

Nivedita arrived back in India in February 1902. Four years earlier she had landed in India as a foreigner. She was then a little afraid, a little doubtful. This time she experienced the joy of returning to her own motherland. Now she called India 'our country'; she talked of Indians as 'our people'. The best of our countrymen were surprised to see how sincere she was in her love. 'When she uttered the words' our people. The tone of absolute kinship which struck the ear was not heard from any other among us', wrote Rabindranath

Tagore. The house at 17, Bosepara Lane, was her home, her school, and a meeting place of many great people of that time. It was in this house that Nivedita lived till the end of her life. Sometimes, when she was ill, her friends and doctors advised her to leave this house and stay in a more healthy part of the city. Nivedita would stoutly refuse. 'How can I leave the land that first gave me shelter?' she would ask.

The Girls School

As soon as she had settled down she thought of opening her school again. She wrote to the Swami about it. He was in Banaras then. He blessed her work with these words : ' May all powers come unto you! May Mother Herself be your hands and mind! It is immense power - irresistible - that I pray for you, and, if possible, along with it infinite peace.'

The Last Farewell

Swami Vivekananda more than once visited Nivedita's school at 17, Bosepara Lane. His last visit was on June 28, 1902. Nivedita knew that he was not well. On July 2, she went to the Belur Math to meet him. It was a Wednesday and the holy Ekadasi day. The Swami fasted but made her sit near Him and eat. At the end of the meal when she went to wash her hands, he poured the water for her and then dried her hands with a towel. Naturally, she protested. He was her Master; she, His disciple.

'It is I who should do these things for you, Swamiji. Not you for me!' she said humbly. He solemnly replied, 'Jesus washed the feet

of His disciples!' Nivedita was just going to say, '*But that was the last time!*' but she could not utter these words. And yet they proved true. Her Master also thus took His last farewell of her.

All for India

The death of the Swami strengthened Nivedita's resolve to throw herself heart and soul into her work for India.

'He is not dead, He is with us always. I cannot even grieve, I only want to work,' she wrote in a prayerful mood to a friend. Her love for India was the heritage she had received from her Master. She wrote of Him once: . There was one thing however, deep in the Master's nature, that He Himself never knew how to adjust. This was His love of His country and His resentment of her suffering. He was born a lover, and the queen of his adoration was His Motherland.' Nivedita made India the object of her love and worship. Until now she had spent all her energy on her school work. She decided to lend support henceforward to other causes as well--for the national movement for political independence was rapidly growing. For this purpose she resigned from the Ramakrishna Mission which was purely a spiritual organization. With great feelings she wrote: "Let me plough my furrow across India just as deep, deep, deep, to the very centre of things, as it will go. Let it be either as a hidden voice sending out noiseless things from a cell or as a personality, romping and raging through the big cities - I don't care! But the God of my own strong right hand grant that I do not have to waste my effervescence in western futilities. I think that I would rather

commit suicide! India is the starting point and the goal, as far as I am concerned. Let her look after the west if she wishes.

Political Freedom

In the beginning she had hoped that England and India would be friends. But experience later made her believe that India could not become great unless she was free. Nivedita suffered the humiliation of political bondage along with the Indians and often cried in despair, 'I am permanently embittered and disillusioned'. If an unjust law was passed by an Indian Councilor Assembly, she was the first to speak against it. She was not afraid of the British Government and spoke what was in her mind. A great national leader, Rash Behari Ghosh, rightly said in 1912 : 'On one thing I can speak with confidence and that is this. If we are conscious of a budding national life at the present day, it is in no small measure due to the teaching of Sister Nivedita.' While her ideas and thoughts were welcome to all classes of society, they were most welcome to the young men. She was one of those patriots for whom the youth of this country had great respect. They went in large numbers to hear her lectures and were prepared to take her advice. She told them once: 'The good of your country should be your true aim. Don't seek it by literary pursuits or clever writing of articles, or oratory. Think that the whole country is your country and your country needs work. Struggle for knowledge, for strength, for happiness and prosperity. Let all these be your aim in life. By no means be found sleeping when the cry comes for battle.'

National Education

'In India the educational problem is the problem of problems. But unfortunately in India people have no keen feeling about the complexity of the problem. She only ran a small school on national lines. She had not the distinction of founding a big university or an institution for scientific research. But hers was the power of right thought. She inspired many an educationist, artist, and scientist. That is why the great historian Jadunath Sarkar wrote: 'The Nivedita Girls' School became a centre of light and an example to us.' At a time when the singing of Bande Mataram in public was not allowed by the Government, she introduced it in her school's daily prayers. During the swadeshi movement she started using crude swadeshi things herself. She introduced spinning in her school. As a spinning teacher she appointed an old lady, whom the girls called Charkha-Ma, They heard all about Swami Vivekananda from her. And she proudly wrote to a friend of hers: 'All these girls are gaining certain ideas and impulses. They hold themselves under Swami and the Holy Mother. They are something of disciples as well as pupils.'

Indian Women

Ever since she first went to stay in Bagh Bazar Mivedita had been deeply impressed by Indian women. She found them shy and retiring, but gentle, proud, and dignified. She wanted them to have better education. But she also asked the women not to give up their own ideals and practices. She called India the land of great women. She told

them of the ideals for which Sita and Savitri, Uma and Gandhari stood. She praised the purity and faithfulness of the Indian wife and the utter selflessness and loving thoughtfulness of the Mother. She could not help admiring the respectful deference accorded by the young to the old. She reminded the women of the heroic deeds of Ahalyabai and Lakshmibai who served their motherland even to their last breath.

Nivedita believed that when once the women of India awoke the country would be great again. With great hope she wrote: 'It is essential, for the joyous revealing of that great Mother, that She be first surrounded by the mighty circle of these, Her daughters, the Indian women of the days to come. It is they who must consecrate themselves before Her, touching Her feet with their proud heads, and vowing to Her their own, their husbands' and their children's lives. Then and then only will she stand crowned before the world. Her sanctuary today is full of shadows. But when the womanhood of India can perform the great *arati* of nationality, that temple shall be all light, nay, the dawn verily shall be near at hand.

Indian Unity

She believed that India could not be great and powerful unless there was unity. She was never tired of speaking about this. Once she most prayerfully made a suggestion for achieving this sense of unity amongst us. She said: 'If the whole of India could agree to give, say, ten minutes every evening, at the oncoming of darkness to thinking a single thought, "We are one, we

are one, nothing can prevail against us to make us think we are divided. We are one, and all antagonisms amongst us are illusion" - the power that would be generated can hardly be measured.'

Mother's Darling

The greatest attraction for her in Bagh Bazar was the Holy Mother. Since that blessed day in 1899 when she first saw the Holy Mother, her heart was drawn towards her. During her first stay in Bagh Bazar she was under the protecting roof of Mother. And both her rented houses were very close to Mother's house. At intervals Mother went to stay at her country house at Jayrambati. But whenever she returned to Calcutta she paid a visit to Nivedita's school. Nivedita would consider it a festive occasion and decorate the gates with leaves and flowers. She would supervise the cleaning of the rooms and ask the girls to offer flowers at Her feet. Nivedita, too, made it a point to visit Mother whenever possible. Mother addressed her as 'my darling child' and she was Nivedita's 'Beloved Mother'. She became like a child of five when she sat by Mother. Lovingly and longingly she would look at Her to gladden her heart. She liked to render small services to Mother. Joyfully she would spread Mother's carpet for her to sit upon. Mother's concern for Nivedita's health and Her keen interest in her work were always a source of strength and inspiration to her.

Gopaler-Ma

Gopaler-Ma lived with Mother. She was already in her eighties when Nivedita met

her. When Nivedita first went to stay at Mother's house she was shocked. To have a foreigner in the house ! But she gradually came to love Nivedita. She called her 'Noren's daughter'. For she called Swami Vivekananda 'Noren'.

The Bases

Dr. Jagadish Chandra Bose and his wife Abala Bose were amongst the closest friends of Nivedita. Nivedita spent all her holidays with the Bases, either in the West, or in Dum Dum, near Calcutta; or Darjeeling or Almora. In 1910 they went on a long pilgrimage together to Kedar Nath and Badri Narayan in the Himalayas. The following year it was in their home in Darjeeling that she breathed her last.

The Tagores

Sarala Ghoshal was Rabindranath's niece and a friend of Nivedita. She was an educated and accomplished woman. Swami Vivekananda wanted her to help him and go with him to the West, but she could not. She wrote in her biography later: 'Swamiji went away with Nivedita and she became the bearer of His message'.

National Leaders

Nivedita believed that India would have to win political freedom before the country could advance in other ways. So she took great interest in the plans and work of all the leaders holding different political views, and they all knew her. Though she was not a member of any political party, and did not take part in political work, she was

admired by all these leaders. They were all impressed by her great intellect, her brilliant oratory, and above all her love for India.

With the Young

Nivedita was looked upon by the young as friend, philosopher, and guide. Among the young men who later became famous we may mention the Tamil poet Subramania Bharati, the economist Benoy Sarkar, the historians Jadunath Sarkar and Radha Kumud Mukherjee, and the artists Nandalal Bose, Asit Halder, and Surendra Nath Ganguly. She gave every possible help to these young men. Through her writings Nivedita became known to an even wider circle. Besides her books she wrote many articles for newspapers and magazines. This brought her in contact with many veteran Indian and foreign journalists like Motilal Ghosh, G. A. Natesan, Ramananda Chatterjee, William T. Stead, K. Radcliffe, and F. J. Alexander.

Amongst her books the best known is *The Master As I Saw Him*, a book on Swami Vivekananda. *Notes on Some Wanderings with the Swami Vivekananda* tells us more about her travels with him. She wrote about Hindu mythology and the gods and goddesses. The result was the beautiful books called *Kali the Mother*, *Siva and Buddha*, *the Cradle Tales of Hinduism*, and *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists*.

Broken Health

Now and again Nivedita fell ill. The climate of the country, her austere habits, and above all, hard work told upon her health.

In 1905 she was very seriously ill. In 1906, a flood and a famine occurred in East Bengal. As soon as she heard about the distress of the people, she left Calcutta and went to Barisal. There she went on foot from one village to another, wading for miles through knee-deep water. She met the poor and suffering people. She gave them material help and consoled them in their bereavements. No difficulty could prevent her from doing this good work. It was during these days that she came to know the terrible poverty of the villagers. She also discovered how calm and patient they were in their suffering. But the strain of it was too much for her. She had an attack of malaria of a very severe kind. She bore her illness patiently, and gradually she recovered. But her health was never the same again. For the rest of her life she suffered from some tropical malady or other. On October 7, she made her last will. She left all her possessions and writings in the hands of the Trustees of the Belur Math, to be used for her school to give national education to the women of the country. During those days at Darjeeling it was always cloudy ; the sun was hardly seen. But on the morning of October 13, at about seven, the sun suddenly shone brightly. Nivedita said: 'The frail boat is sinking, but I shall yet see the sun rise' and then she died.

The daughter of Mother India went to sleep in her lap for eternity.

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi Swami Pavitrananda

The Final Word in Perfection

THE mere human aspects of Her life were enough to make Her an exemplary character in the eyes of the world. She was indeed the filial word in the perfection of Indian womanhood. Her action always showed the highest dignity and greatest magnanimity. Even through mistake She could not associate Herself with anything small or narrow. Even in Her ordinary dealings She was head and shoulders above all others in refinement and broadness of outlook. Her life was always a model for others to follow, and it was difficult to find the least trace of imperfection in her actions and behaviour. But the most dominant trait in Her character, overshadowing every other feature, was Her motherly love. She might be anything else, but everybody found in Her a mother - only Her love was stronger than that of one's own mother. Many young men who had lost their mothers at an early age and did not know what a mother's love was, had their loss more than compensated when they came in touch with Her. Many, after finding a mother in Her, did not hanker after anything else in this life or in the life to come. Her love was enough to give them security here and salvation hereafter. They did not even care to know of Her spiritual powers. They did not care to see the highest of the Himalayan peaks when they felt themselves sufficiently blessed by





Golap Ma



Sister Nivedita



Holy Mother Sarada devi



Gauri Ma



Yogin Ma

touching the foot of that great mountain. There was something in Her attitude which soon disarmed all fear and awe.

A Mother True

There were instances when She gave Her own clothes or blankets to young disciples for their use. Perhaps these disciples would think it sacrilegious to use things which the Mother had used. But Her spontaneous motherly attitude would at once remove any such feelings. Does a son hesitate to use anything which his mother possesses? At Jayarambati She would cook for the devotees, wash their plates and cleanse the spot where food was taken. Devotees would sometimes come from a distance, and after staying only two or three days with Her would feel so much drawn to Her that they would shed tears while leaving the place, Sometimes as they departed the Mother would watch them, as far as they could be seen, with eyes moistened with the tears of a mother's love. Once a young monk who stayed with Her went out on some business. It was almost evening when he returned, but the Mother would not take Her meal before he came. How could a mother take her food when the son had not had his? When the disciple saw this, he was overwhelmed with emotion. Even one's own mother - is not always so considerate. She was the mother of all. Every soul born of the womb of a woman would find in Her a mother. Her love knew no distinction of caste, creed or geographical boundaries. People from the east and west, from the south and the north would come to Her to receive Her blessings. She might not even be able to

speak their language. But the unspoken language of Her love was more than enough for them - they would feel blessed.

The Open Mind

When Sister Nivedita came to India, Swami Vivekananda was a bit anxious how to make a place for her in Hindu society. But the Holy Mother accommodated her in Her own room. It meant tremendous courage and extreme broad-mindedness on the part of the Mother, for if the news reached Her relations She might have to face social persecution. Even for Herself, was it not remarkable that, although She belonged to an orthodox Brahmin family and lacked modern education, She could allow a European lady to stay with Her? And that, in the last century at a time when Hindu society was uncompromising in its rigidity as regards social rules! Sister Nivedita in turn adored this Mother and this is well expressed in the following letter she wrote to the Mother while she was abroad.

Cambridge, Mass.,
Sunday December 11, 1910.

Beloved Mother,

This morning, early, I went to church - to pray for Sara. All the people there were thinking of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and suddenly I thought of you. Your dear face, and your loving look and your white sari and your bracelets. It was all there, And it seemed to me that yours was the Presence that was to soothe and bless poor S. Sara's sick-room. And - do you know? - I thought I had been very foolish to sit in your room, at the evening service to Sri Ramakrishna, trying to meditate. Why did I not

understand that it was quite enough to be a little child at your dear feet? Dear Mother! You are full of love! And it is not a flushed and violent love, like ours, and like the world's, but a gentle peace that brings good to everyone and wishes ill to none. It is a golden radiance, full of play. What a blessed Sunday that was, a few months ago, when I ran in to you, the last thing before I went on the Ganges - ran back to you for a moment as soon as I came back! I felt such a wonderful freedom in the blessing you gave me, and in your welcome home! Dearest Mother - I wish we could send you a wonderful hymn, or a prayer, but somehow even that would seem too loud, too full of noise! Surely you are the most wonderful thing of God - Sri Ramakrishna's own chalice of His Love for the world, - a token left with His Children, in these lonely days, and we should be very still and quiet before you - except indeed for a little fun! Surely the "wonderful things of God" are all quiet - stealing unnoticed into our lives - the air and the sunlight and the sweetness of gardens and of the Ganges. These are the silent things that are like you I Do send to poor S. Sara the mantle of your peace. Isn't your thought now and then of the high calm that neither loves nor hates? Isn't that a sweet benediction that trembles in God, like the dew-drop on the lotus-leaf, and touches not the world?

Ever, my darling mother, your foolish
Khooki (baby), Nivedita

Though She belonged to an old world, as it were, Hers was an extremely modern mind. Seeing this trait in Her, Sister Nivedita very aptly remarked, 'Is she the last of an Old Order or the beginning of a New? ,j

Many a non-Bengali or non-Indian devotee would go to the Holy Mother, but so great was the breadth of Her innate culture that everyone would feel quite at home with Her. Once while listening to Easter music at the place of Sister Nivedita, She became so absorbed that one wondered how, without knowing the English language, She could enter so much into the spirit of the resurrection hymns. Similarly, when once the English marriage ritual was being described to Her, Her face lit up with joy as She heard the marriage vow - " For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health - till death us do part", and She exclaimed, "Oh the Dharmi words! - the righteous words!

Deep Perception

Her mental penetration was so very keen and Her commonsense so strong that even in things supposedly outside Her sphere She could give a very sound opinion. During the first Great War, a disciple told the Mother how President Wilson was trying to ensure the peace of the whole world and prevent war in future. The Mother's quiet remark was, "They all speak through the lips and not from the heart." Once a disciple was telling Her of the many facilities of life which the British rule has given to India. Her reply, however, was, "But is it not a fact that the poverty of the people is increasing more and more?"

No Barriers

Sometimes people of inferior caste would come to Her at Jayarambati, but Her attitude towards them would be exactly

the same. Only, She would see that they observed the usual caste restrictions in the presence of others, as otherwise there might be a sensation in the village where orthodoxy prevailed.

A coolie woman came to Her one evening with some vegetables sent by a devotee, and had to stop for the night at the house. The woman had fever at night and vomited. Next morning before others woke up, the Holy Mother had cleansed the vomited matter so that the poor woman might not be scolded by anyone.

A Mohammedan, engaged as a labourer, was one day taking a meal in Her house. He sat on the verandah of the house. Nalini, a niece of the Mother, was serving him. Owing to caste prejudices Nalini remained at a distance and began to throw the food on the plate of the man. At this Holy Mother reprimanded Her niece and Herself served the food. After he had finished, the Mother cleansed the spot where he had taken food. Nalini was shocked and exclaimed: "What are you doing? Will you not lose caste by this? "

She felt very intensely the poverty and suffering of people in general. She would take great interest in the social service activities of the Ramakrishna Mission. If a monk came to Her with a complaint that such work interfered with his meditative life, She would pay no attention to him. "These are also the Master's work", She would say. While at Jayarambati She would take a sympathetic interest in the affairs of all the neighbours and was a source of great strength to them.

Kind but Firm

Though kindness itself, She was not slow to show indignation when occasion demanded it. When two young women, one of whom was an expectant mother, were made on political suspicion to walk a long distance by the local police and the news reached the Holy Mother, She got extremely upset. "Is this due to Government orders or the over-zeal of the police officials? Were there no men nearby to rescue the poor girls? " - She said, greatly agitated in mind. Afterwards She was glad to hear that the women were released.

Even persons who had gone astray did not fail to receive Her love and blessings, sometimes even in spite of the silent protestations of other devotees. Once She bluntly said, "If my son rolls in the dust, even then he is my child ". On another occasion She said, "I am much the mother of the good as of the bad." Once a woman who felt guilty of moral turpitude came to see Her in Calcutta It dared not enter her room. The Mother understood the whole thing. She herself took her to the room, caressed her and gave her initiation. "What if you have done anything wrong? When you are repentant, your guilts been washed away," said the Mother to give Her courage and consolation. The life of woman was afterwards transformed.

Forgiving Love but not Permissiveness

Although many erring persons received a mother's love from Her, Her love would not give them the freedom to err. The slightest error in conduct would receive Her notice. She might not always say it, but if it was

needed, the delinquent was sure to get a reprimand from Her. The Sannyasin who developed pride cause of his ochre robe, or the householder who showed scant courtesy to a monk because was much younger in age, would equally t a warning from Her about the danger that ahead. If necessary She could be very stern too. If a person thought that taking shelter under

present and the future life. But how much the Mother had to think for those whose responsibility She had taken 1 Even in Her old age and even in Her illness, She would be und to devote much time to prayer and meditation.

She herself once said to a woman disciple in reply to Her question as to how She should look upon Her, 'It is enough if you think of me even as your mother'.

Sometimes Her motherly heart could not bear that a disciple should undergo much physical suffering in practising hard Tapasya. She would always warn the young aspirant against excess in such things. But at the same time She knew how to rouse to activity an indolent person who had imagined that spiritual progress was compatible with a life of ease.

Fulfilment of Motherhood

Earlier, Saradamani's mother had felt sad that Her daughter had been given in marriage to one who was half mad, as it were, and who did not lead a worldly life, so that Her Sarada would not know what it was to be called 'mother' by Her children. At this Sri Ramakrishna said to her: "Dear



Her love, he could afford to do anything he liked, he was mistaken. Occasion would come when She would even order such person to quit the place forthwith. Of course, such occasions were very rare. A disciple might feel that Her love was a sufficient guarantee against the ills of the

mother-in-law, you need not feel sorry. Your daughter will have so many children that She will afterwards be tired of being called mother". His 'prophetic words came to be so true! We do not know whether the Holy Mother was tired of Her children. But it is a fact that no mother under the sun had

so many children as She had, to address Her as mother. And how great was their affection for Her! A devotee actually said to Her one day, "You have got many sons like me, but I have got no mother like you."

Her last utterances

Five days before Her passing away, She said to a woman devotee who felt disconsolate at the prospect of Her approaching end : Why do you fear? You have seen the Master. Just learn to make the whole world your own. No one is alien. This whole world is your own." This was Her last spiritual utterance. She passed into Mahasamadhi at 1-30 a.m. on July 21, 1920.

The immortal spirit that had for the time been clothed in mortal flesh was gone. But the example of the life the Holy Mother lived and the message She left behind are potent means of transforming many lives and a source of strength and inspiration to a large number of men and women. When one sees how Her influence is spreading like the waters of a flood-tide, one asks oneself whether She lived to continue the work of the Master or to give added strength to His message, whether She was a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna or complementary to Him. One wonders whether She was not an essential part of the same power that descended on earth to show light to the world and to guide humanity to the haven of Peace and Bliss.



Sri Aurobindo's Vision of the Mother

Sri Aurobindo

Adya Shakti

Adya Shakti is the original Shakti, therefore, the highest form of the Mother. Only She manifests in a different way according to the plane on which one sees Her.

The Mother and the Ishwara

The Mother is the consciousness and force of the Divine ... or, it may be said She is the Divine in its consciousness - forces. The Ishwara as Lord of the cosmos comes out of the Mother who takes Her place beside him as the cosmic Shakti - the cosmic Ishwara is one aspect of the Divine. *Faith 'in the Divine shakti and the Isvara* The faith in the divine Shakti must be always at the back of our strength and when She becomes manifest, it must be implicit or grow to completion. There is nothing that is impossible to Her who is the conscious Power and universal Goddess all-creative from eternity and armed with the Spirit's omnipotence. All knowledge, all strengths, all triumph and victory, all skill and works are in Her hands and they are full of the treasures of the spirit and of all perfections and Siddhis.

The Soul and the Divine Mother

It is true of every soul on earth that It is a portion of the divine Mother passing through the experiences of the ignorance in order

to arrive at the truth of its being and be the instrument of a Divine Manifestation and work here.

“Keep yourself open to the Mother and in perfect union with Her. Make yourself entirely plastic to Her touch and let Her mould you swiftly towards perfection “.

If there is a refusal of the psychic new birth, a refusal becomes the child new-born from the Mother, owing to attachment

to intellectual knowledge or mental ideas or to lame vital desire then there will be a failure in the Sadhana.

The stream which you feel coming down on the head and pouring into you is indeed a current of the Mother's Force; it is so that it often felt; it flows into the body in current. and works there to liberate and change the

consciousness. As the consciousness changes and develops, you will begin to understand the meaning and working of these things.

Help of the Mother's Force for Change

It is to be assumed that you are capable of change since you are in the presence and under the protection of the Mother. The pressure and help of the Mother's Force is always there. The rapidity of your progress depends upon your keeping yourself open to it and rejecting calmly, quietly and steadily all suggestions and

invasions of other forces. Especially, the nervous excitement of the vital has to be rejected; a calm and quiet strength in the nervous being and the body is the only basis. It is there for you to receive, if you open yourself to it always.

Do not allow yourself to be troubled or discouraged by any difficulties but quietly and simply open yourself to the Mother's force and allow it to change you.



Mother's love and help will remain with you unchanged as before. The whole difficulty comes from a vital movement which wants to possess matters in the wrong way, by comparison with others, instead of living fully in close relation of your heart and soul with the Mother's.

A Prayer

Mother Divine, grant that today may bring to us a complete consecration to Thy will, a more integral gift of ourselves to Thy work, a more total forgetfulness of self, a greater illumination, a purer love. Grant that in a communion growing ever deeper, more constant and entire, we may be, united always more and more closely to Thee and become Thy Servitors worthy of Thee. Remove from us all egoism, root out all petty vanity, greed and obscurity. May we be all ablaze with Thy Divine love; make us Thy torches in the world.



Pen Portraits of Some Forgotten Flowers

WOMEN all over the world and throughout the ages have at all times been the preservers of a nation's culture and the custodians of a country's artistic heritage. The mother instinct in them is the preserving element in their nature, and while they have inspired men with new ideals, aspirations, fashions, fresh adventures, they have always remained, with rare exceptions, conservative and tradition-bound. This, has helped to preserve some of the beautiful aspects of the national genius of the country. It has been the women of India who have preserved through the ages all that is beautiful in the art of the people and it is the women again who are on the vanguard of the artistic revival of today.

Nalini Turkhud

The sweetest and the most enthusiastic of this small band of pioneers is Nalini Turkhud. The only daughter of Mr. Surendranath Turkhud, of the well-known Turkhud family of Bombay, (her grandfather was a great social reformer and the first Hindu Sheriff of Bombay, Dr. Atmaram Pandurang Turkhud, she came from a rich and cultured Maharatta family.

Nalini was born in Poona in 1911, the only child her parents had. Her deep religious nature, fostered in her childhood, began to grow and develop in later years, and though young and fashionable she was, at heart intensely ascetic and austere,

tending more towards renunciation than towards the gaiety and glamour of life. It was her artistic nature that sought expression in the outer life she led but her inner life craved after things "more enduring and permanent." "I want to grow like a lotus" she often would say, "and I do not care what people think of me."

Refined, sensitive and imaginative, Nalini had all the moods of an artist. Her artistic instincts found outlets not only in her dress and in her general demeanour, but later she was fired with an ambition to train her latent faculties and to give full expression to her hidden genius. It was not long before she made a name for herself as a true artist. "I wish to be a dancer, a painter, a musician and an actress," - she was never tired of repeating these wishes.

A strong desire is half the effort, and where an individual of strong determination and self-will made up her mind to achieve a thing, success is not far off. Miss Turkhud started her life with the ambition to make a hit on the screen, and her attempt had more than justified her.

She joined the films for the sheer joy of giving expression to her talent and as an outlet for her artistic instincts. Her great adoration for Meera Bai, the Divine minstrel her pride in being a Maharatta girl and her admiration for the Great Shivaji, the builder of the Maharatta Empire, her intense love and reverence for the saints and sages of India, marked her mental and moral attributes. She was a good student of Gita, a book she always carried about with her, along with that peerless commentary of jnaneshwar.

She had herself composed little lyrics in Marathi. Her sketches and drawings, simple

and childish, were quite interesting in their own way, and above all, it was her courage— for was she not one of the few educated and cultured Hindu girls to brave public opinion and ridicule by venturing forth to act on the screen in spite of strong opposition? That was the strong point in the character of this tender, fragile dreamy child of Maharashtra.

Lalitha Venkatram

In essence, all oriental music *is* melodious, subjective, psychic and impersonal. Music, to the Orient, is a mood and not a method, an experience and not an experiment. Both folk-tunes and classical melodies reveal this quality.

In India, as elsewhere in the world, music is the language of the soul of the people. The many clashing cultures and conflicting civilisations in this ancient land have considerably enriched her art, heritage, and nowhere so perceptibly as in music.

The Moghul culture, which in itself was an enrichment of Persian and Mongol cultures, gave to Indian music as it gave to Indian architecture and painting, certain undefinable aesthetic qualities which it lacked. And what passes for North Indian music today is only the old Indian music with additional trimmings, filigrees and embellishments.

But the roots of both the Hindustani and the Old Carnatic music are deep in the soil of this country and in the soul of its people. One has only to hear the Kafee singers of Sind and the heart-melting devotional hymns of South India to understand the oneness of Indian music and the soul-throbbing nature of their simple melodies.

Mrs. Venkatram is not unknown to music lovers in this country. Her melodious voice has won her sincere admirers all over India and Ceylon. Her broadcasts from Bombay, Madras and Trichy stations were events to which music enthusiasts looked forward eagerly every month.

She represented the Carnatic music at its sweetest and as a singer her melodious voice has few rivals in India. She was not a professional, nor did she study music in any academy or under any master. Her father, a music-composer himself, taught her the first rudiments of the art, and her own genius did the rest.

Lalitha Venkatram was a singer first and foremost. Her crowning glory was her voice and not mere knowledge and technique. She was an artist, and there was music in her soul as well as at her finger tips. Her theoretical knowledge may not be profound and her singing flawless, but there was music in her melodies and soul in her songs. Lalitha Venkatram's repertoire was rich and varied. Her favourites were of course, the Telugu Kritis of Thyagaraja, the inspired 18th century saint-singer of South India. His kritis have a sweetness all their own, incomparable to any other tongue, and very difficult of being rendered in an easy and free manner.

Shy, gentle and dark-eyed, Lalitha Venkatram was born at Tiruvannamalai as one of the five gifted daughters of Mr. M.V. Ramaswamy Iyer, an engineer in the Madras P.W.D. She spent her childhood days on the lap of Ramana Maharshi receiving, in an abundant measure, his blessings and love.

A devoted wife and a mother of several children, Lalitha Venkatram was an ideal

Hindu wife whose simple unaffected affection and hospitality have endeared herself to all who have contacted her. A sweet singer but a sweeter woman!

Philomena Thumboo Chetty

Some musicians are born. And some take infinite pains to become one. Philomena Thumboo Chetty was a born musician.

When hardly six years old she asked her father for a violin, and at the age of eight she delighted her parents and teachers with her music. To have passed with Honours, at the tender age of thirteen, the Diploma Examinations of F.T.C.L. and L.A.B., is creditable enough for any girl, but to have stormed the portals of the great Paris Conservatory at sixteen is an incredible achievement for an Indian girl.

Few Indians have taken kindly to European music and fewer still have achieved any fame worth the name in the field. Philomena shone like a solitary star in that naked sky. Violin, like Veena, is a delicate and difficult instrument to master, and even where such mastery is achieved by the Indian, it has been at the cost of style and beauty. Technique is all right but it is not all art. Knowledge and skill are necessary but they do not make one a great artist. A great play suffers when badly produced ; a fine piece of music gets lost when it is indifferently performed.

There was a dignity about Philomena when she played her violin, an artistry about her music as delightful as her personality. She created an 'atmosphere' and infused a 'feeling' which were, after all, true tests of a great artist. ' Her modesty was as big an attraction as her mastery and exquisite

playing' observed a fellow musician who had heard her play some of the most difficult pieces with an ease and confidence that astonished him.

Sensitiveness of feeling and refinement of playing, these characterised her violin recitals, and they were no mean achievements for a girl of her age. Philomena was born in Bangalore but her childhood days were mostly spent in Mysore where she was educated in a Convent. ' Rukmalaya' her home, was a modest little bungalow in Mysore, as modest as its owner, Sir Thumboo Chetty, her father. Artists are often snobs. Not so this girl. Wealth, position, influence and even the much coveted honour of being presented at the court as a debutante, while yet a school-going girl, had not touched her head. Several Indian girls have studied European music and shown commendable mastery over the art, both as composers and artists. Mrs. Comalata Dutt, Mrs. Daulat Sethna, Miss Leela Lakshmanan are well-known as gifted composers, but Philomena was the first Indian girl to win a European reputation. And it must be remembered that Western audiences are more critical and harder to please.

And Philomena was lucky to have been a Mysorean. Her father, a trusted friend and adviser of the Maharaja, did not bring up his daughters in luxury or surround their young lives with false pomp and show. They were educated to be simple and to make the best use of their talents. Philomena's love was for music which the fond parents encouraged.

Her six years' stay in Europe was to draw out all her talent and to make a fine musician of her. She had exceptional

opportunities of studying under great masters, of attending some of the famous musical conservatories and of listening to some of the world-renowned artists in Europe. After receiving the approbation and good wishes of her master Georges Enesco, she appeared before appreciative audiences in London and Oxford and charmed them with her personality and performances.

A rebel at heart, she hid the fiery nature of her soul under the mask of a gentle serene face lit by two large, dark, soulful eyes.

Leela Row

Timid and nervous, she was shy of strangers, and little did one realise then that this tiny slip of a girl would, at a very early age, become an All India figure and one of the world's champion tennis players; She had, of course, every advantage that birth, social position and wealth could give. Her father was a prosperous and leading doctor in Bombay who piled up a huge fortune and lived in great style.

Leela Row was very versatile indeed. Tennis was not the only hobby in her life, though, it dominated her young years long. She had often wished that she had taken to the stage, but where was the chance for her in that direction in India? She was a fine violin player, and trained by a master in Paris. She played with feeling, emotion and understanding.

Sensitive, temperamental and eccentric, Leela had an artist's soul, and if she could make up her mind to become an actress or a dancer and perfect herself in that technique, as she had done in tennis, she

would as easily have achieved fame and skill as an artist as she had in the world of sports.

She was India's number one tennis player for years. Miss Row had played in almost all the leading courts in Europe, including the Wembley, and had won the championships of several international tournaments.

A forceful player with a marked style of her own, her drives were hard and well-calculated and her placings were remarkably precise and puzzling. Her services were direct and medium but she was weak with her left hand strokes. She tended to be a little impatient and when a game was prolonged with stout and safe returns she lost all control over herself and thus gave into the opponents. She was not a defensive player and like all great champions she delighted in leading the attack and winning the point by sheer force of drives and placings.

A married woman later, the wife of a civilian, she had other interests to occupy her mind and time, and though an obscure social figure now, India cannot easily forget her sporting daughter who brought credit to her in international arenas.

Ranganayaki

Ranganayaki was a native of Madura, the same Madura that gave to Carnatic Music Pushpavanam Mani. M. S. Pushpavanam was a giant who over-shadowed every great singer of his time in the short span he lived. M. S.'s star had never shone with brighter lustre and added glory than it is today. Ranganayaki's paternal home in Ramnad used to be the meeting place of

the Vidwans of those days. Her own grandfather was a lover of music and a discerning critic. Even her father, a prosaic, postmaster in ordinary life, inherited this love for music. Whoever may *miss* a music recital in Matunga, this strangely silent man never missed one.

And so music ran in the family and was in her blood. Bombay was not an ideal place for getting trained in Carnatic music. Bhagavathars there were, but most of them were of the "Sangeetha Bhushan " level, mere musical robots, Ranganayaki, however, was lucky in her teachers and in her training.

Her first Guru was the veena-voiced singer, Lalitha Venkatram, who created the love for music in her and lovingly led her infant steps in the art. Her own father's watchful guidance was of great help to her growing genius till her teacher, Sesha Iyengar took charge of and moulded her into shape.

Ranganayaki proved an apt pupil, and what was more, she had the natural gifts for becoming a great musician. She had an instinctive love for the art, a keen desire to learn, capacity for hard work and devoted labour. With the sweat of the brow a great art is usually mastered. Inspired genius is rare, and often it is a fraud.

Ranganayaki had this creative imagination in an abundant measure. Her raga alapana was indeed of a very high order and her swara manipulations were astonishing for one of her years and experience. She rendered most complicated pieces with perfect ease and supreme confidence. Her timing was perfect, and she had a good control over the modulation of her voice. She gave full three-hour programmes of classical music with ease, mostly kritis, she

could even keep a raga alapana for an hour or more, delighting the hearers with, and herself enjoying, the subtle shades of the ragas with intelligence and understanding. She was conscious of what she was doing though she might have seemed physically nervous or have given one the impression of being so.

The Travancore Sisters

A dancer's career is like a tropical twilight, brief, brilliant and beautiful. Dancing is an art for the young and not for the middle-aged. Nijinsky and Ruth St. Dennis in the West, Uday Shankar and Bala Saraswathi in India blazed a trail of glory all their own for a short while.

Not that they have ceased to dance, or the fire in them is extinguished, but their best days are long over. Menaka's folly, like that of Isadora Duncan, was that she caricatured her art towards the end of her life by persisting to dance, a poor pathetic figure. Lalitha and Padmini started dancing when they were seven and six, respectively, the proper age according to tradition. They found an ideal teacher in Gopinath, who knew his art and was painstaking in his methods.

They belong to a well-known family in Trivandrum, and on their mother's side they were remotely related to the royal family of Travancore. Their ancestral home was a huge place where they lived and played as children under the fostering care of their aunt, an aristocrat of a woman who lavished affection and care on them. Dancing was the last thing she would have desired for them.

But an understanding mother, seeing their natural aptitude, encouraged them to learn dancing, of course against protests and opposition from the relatives. Even their aunt gave in, on the children's pleading and their mother's persuasion. "Only as an accomplishment and not as a career, mind you" she warned them.

And they joined the Narthakalalayam of Gopinath, who was then at the height of his popularity both as a dancer and teacher. His dance school at Trivandrum was attracting pupils from all over India and Ceylon, and as the palace dancer he was ever in demand to entertain the distinguished visitors to the state.

Their popularity was by no means due to film or press publicity, though they have them in an abundant measure. Their stage shows were infinitely more attractive and lively. There was nothing crude or vulgar about their art of production. They were not anxious for fame or popular applause. they danced because they could not help dancing. They felt it in their blood and wished to share the joy of it with the public. They were liked and admired for what they were. They had a varied repertoire in their programme and in different techniques. Their classical items were as interesting and appealing as their folk dances. They do not over-burden their art with heavy techniques, though well founded in orthodox modes.

The Travancore Sisters are actually three, though Lalitha and Padmini are the more widely known. No less gifted is the third and youngest, Ragini, whose genius for dancing, acting and mimicking is amazing. A big hearted and generous natured mother brooded over these three gifted children,



proud, happy and hopeful. Hers was the strong silent hand that guided them safely past the many pit-falls that beset the show world; and as a designer of their costumes and planner of their programmes she was as much a part of the troop as the girls.

Daulat Sethna

The only daughter of the Bombay Corporation Electrical Engineer, Miss Daulat Mistry, was educated and brought up in the conventional manner of a society girl, to be polite, elegant and charming; to say "How'd you do" in perfect English to strangers and visitors; to smile and be sociable even in trying circumstances; to play the hostess in her father's house and, in short, to be an adornment in drawing rooms and one of the so-called 'smart set'.

One of the persistent dreams she had every night for years was that of herself as a Rajput maid on the steps of a lovely tank in a pink- white city of marble palaces and temples, obviously a memory of a previous life. Jahanara was the pen-name she chose for her writings.

She was a talented compo set', and her psychic nature helped her to bring down some of the unseen patterns and unheard of melodies she was familiar with in her dream-world and which she played skilfully on the piano. A favourite composition of hers was what she called "The Death of the Muhammed", and whenever she played that piece she felt a strong tremor in her body which often brought her down unconscious on the floor.

A girl of wild impulses, she had some strange adventures and while, outwardly, temperamental and sensuous, in her inner nature, she was an ascetic, chaste and self-controlled. The glamour of the senses had no fascination for her, though she gave one the impression of being earthy, but her longings and aspirations were more after the things of the spirit. She was an artist-ascetic and thus had the necessary soil for the seeds of yoga.

She had since flowered into a yogini and made wonderful progress, along the difficult path she has chosen, as the disciple of Sri Aurobindo.

Devika Rani

It was a society show, organised by fashionable ladies ostensibly, for some good cause. A booth resembling a gipsy tent, was attracting crowds. A girl of unusual charm with flashing eyes and nut-meg

complexion, in gipsy kit, was reading the palm and telling the fortune - so she pretended at least!

The "gipsy" was the attraction. Many went in to get a glimpse of her, and the more adventurous went in several times to get a good look at the young charmer. She was the fifteen-year-old Miss Chaudhury later famous as Devika Rani. She was a tremendous success as a "gipsy" in that show; and the gipsy in her has led her along strange and fascinating paths.

The only daughter of a highly placed government official, Lieutenant Colonel Chaudhury, then Acting Surgeon-General to the Government of Madras, her early childhood days were spent in South India. Born rich, educated abroad, brought up in luxury, she was destined to lead a life of ease and comfort, or being buzy with doing nothing. With her beauty and talent she could have been a pillar of society and an ornament of her class.

Destiny made a tapestry of Devika Rani's life and led her to choose the more adventurous life of an artist instead of the humdrum life of an official's wife or the domestic slave of a millionaire.

Devika Rani was, perhaps, the first society girl to join the films in India, and also the only one to contribute anything worthwhile to the film industry in this country. She gave it a dignity, a tone, a cultured atmosphere which it never had, and has not even now. She did to Indian Films what Rukmini Devi did to Indian dancing, gave it a new vision, a new hope and a fresh inspiration.

Here and there a solitary figure was putting up a brave fight to put Indian films on the map of the world. One of them who blazed

a glorious trait of his own was Himansu Rai, an artist of indomitable spirit, daring vision and great capacity for work. He saw the possibilities of revealing India's glorious past and her cultural heritage to the world through this new medium.

It was at this time, when he needed fresh inspiration and sympathy and help, Devika Rani met him and threw in her lot with him, both as wife and business partner, and together they gave a right lead to this industry and achieved something really fine and decent. They founded the Bombay Talkies, slaved night and day to produce artistic pictures, with the result that the best Indian films came out of their studio. Devika Rani's pioneering spirit gave to the industry something it sorely needed ; she gave to it a healthy tone, a clean atmosphere, a moral strength and a cultured touch. Undaunted by the difficulties and dangers that beset her all around, she worked hard and enthusiastically to raise the standard of Indian films and to win for them a universal recognition. Like Himansu Rai, she also dreamt golden dreams.

Her own contributions as an artist, had been no less significant. She set up a high standard of acting, and for an amateur girl actress she revealed unsuspected histrionic talent. Whatever part she played, whether as a gipsy girl or as a dutiful wife or as a wayward child of wild impulses, she did it convincingly and with insight and imagination.

Who that has seen her in "ACHUTHA KANYA" or in "IZZAT" can ever forget the charm of her girlhood personality and the liveliness of her acting? She recreated those characters in her own self but kept them

true to their type. She more than lived the part she was asked to play; she idealised them and presented them as she would like them to be. That is what a real creative artist does, and that is what distinguishes genius from mere talent.

After Himansu Rai's untimely death she had to carry on, single-handed, the burdens of the Bombay Talkies, which, in the meantime, became a hot-bed of treachery, deceit and selfish interests. The noble dreams they dreamt together, and for which they gave whole-heartedly all the best in them, were shaping themselves into hideous night-mares. And Devika Rani was alone. Undismayed, she carried on and she showed to the world that a woman is not such a helpless creature as people imagined her to be and that, given the chance, she is quite capable of managing worldly affairs as capably as a man. With infinite patience, courage, and confidence in her strength and in the cause she espoused, she bravely carried on. But the odds were against her, and she gave up the unequal, and often unhealthy struggle. She did her best.

But if the evil days fell on Indian films in general and on the Bombay Talkies in particular, she had nothing to regret for, or consider her life a failure.

She had other hopes, other ideals and other aspirations now. She does not regret the past. It was useful as a necessary experience in life. She was glad that she was given that opportunity to serve Indian art in her own way. Life is a bigger thing than art or even India.

Now happily married to Svestoslav Roerich, a great Russian painter, who is also a man of rare traits and a real lover of India, she would serve art and her country in a larger

and more useful way. The Roerichs are an ideal pair with common interests, common aspirations and high purpose. They have beautiful dreams, which they hope to realise one day. Devika Rani is still the "gipsy" with flashing eyes red like Mars in the mid-night sky, and with winning smiles as guileless as those of a bride.

Padmavathi

There was a radiant simplicity about her manners that was natural and which made her most welcome in any society she moved in, and the childish innocence of her nature made her trusted and loved by all, young and old, man or woman. She was very popular among her college-mates, and her professors universally regarded her as the brightest pupil and the best girl in the whole institution and a few of them took great delight in inviting her to their rooms and entertaining her to talk and to tea.

Though reserved by nature and reticent in conversation, yet she could rise at times to brilliant heights in thought-provoking discussions either on religion or on literature. The sad smiles playing about her lips and the melancholy expression in her wistful eyes were but the inarticulate indications of the deep sufferings of her soul.

Her life story is shortly told. Born of cultured, middle-class Brahmin parents, she spent her childhood in South Canara, where she was educated as a girl. Being Brahmos, her parents were attracted to the noble and selfless service rendered for the cause of the poor widows in India by that noble soul, Veeresalingam Pantulu, and they

moved on to Rajahmundry to help in his great work.

Her father Mr. Ramachandra Row, was an educationist, a visionary, and a philanthropist. He gave all, property and money, for the cause he championed - the emancipation of the depressed classes. Padmavathi had her high school education there and came to Madras to join the Queen Mary's College in 1918, where she studied till 1920 when she passed her Intermediate with distinction. She married in April 1920, and after ten day's serious illness, passed away on the lap of her mother.

She had courted death from her infancy and the Lord of Death was compassionate to her. Her premature death cast a deep gloom over her friends.

Hers was a short life, but rich with sweet fragrant friendship. The young, tender, lotus-bud (Padma) that blossomed and enlivened us with such grace and beauty is no more with us, but the subtle aroma of her life still lingers with us to chasten and purify our little lives. Great friend, sweet soul, when may we see you again!

In The Turmoil of Politics

The political upheaval of 1930-1931 brought to light many hidden qualities of the Indian people, one of the most striking of them being the phenomenal courage displayed by the younger generation of Indian women, both in the villages and towns, in shattering the social fetters that had hitherto chained them into a form of slavery, in joyously participating in the national struggle for freedom, in braving the lathi blows of the police, in voluntarily

courting imprisonment, in unflinchingly inviting suffering in the performance of their self-imposed tasks and in cheerfully bearing all insults, humiliations and the wrath of the public, the elders and the authorities.

Kamala Devi

Rebels, like artists, are born. In fact, most great artists are rebels. People who have achieved anything worth achieving in this world have ever been rebels. This discontent is neither a biological phenomenon nor a psychological effect but a spiritual factor.

Kamala Devi is a born rebel. Given the choice, she would have preferred a warrior's life. Born a girl, she had to be satisfied with being merely a social rebel. No earthly or heavenly cataclysms signified her birth. She opened her baby-eyes to a world of peace and plenty. Nature too was all smiles. Bright blue sky above, rich red earth below, and shimmering green of sea and land all around.

Revolt was instinctive and inborn, and not a reaction. It may easily be imagined what must have been her girlhood days at home and school! She was naturally a problem to her parents and a puzzle to her playmates.

She neither hid her feelings nor accepted any compromises. She did what she liked and said what she wanted to say. She had a will and had her own way, whatever might be the consequences. And withal, she was gentle and affectionate.

Inter-marriage is not so much a taboo in the community in which she was born as in some orthodox Brahmin communities of India. Their orthodoxy has an elasticity

which is admirable, and though convention-bound and tradition-ridden, like the rest of Hindu India, they are more free to get over caste scruples and are less stupid in their customs and practices.

Kamala Devi was one of the first to break away from all those soul killing machinations of the priestly classes and to assert her individuality not only in the choice of a career for herself but also in the choice of her husband.

She was a young widow, when she decided to marry again a man of her choice, and not all the wrath of the community or the fury of the family could hold her back from her resolve. Later when she decided to go to England to join her husband, much against the wishes of her people, she showed a similar strength of will.

Kamala Devi's rise to fame and popularity is not due to any chance or favour or fortune. She was born, like most national leaders in the country, to comfort, and it would have been easy enough for her, with her talent, beauty and social position, to have settled down to an easy, comfortable, albeit non-descript and a parasitic life. But that would have been a betrayal of all her youthful promise and her best instincts.

"My first love was art," she once said, and how many even among her fellow-workers in the political field now know of her services to the cultural advancement of India? Her pioneering work on the stage, in films, and for the revival of the fine arts, is yet an unwritten chapter.

And was she not a front-rank leader in the women's movement in the country? And did she not give the best years of her youthful life to the cause of Indian women? And to the rapid growth of the All-India

Women's Conference as its first General Secretary for three successive terms?

Her whirl-wind tours on its behalf, her spirited speeches on behalf of the suffering half of the Indian humanity, her indefatigable energy and tireless work in forming hundreds of branches all over the country, are all well-known facts to those who have watched the growth of feminism in India.

Though active political work took her away from the feminist cause for a few years, it was gratifying that she was warmly welcomed to her old field of work and was elected one of the Vice-Presidents of the A.I.W.C.

It was inevitable that this young feminist worker should take her proper place in the bigger struggle for national freedom. It was the next logical and natural step. She did not aim at leadership, either local or provincial. She was content to join the rank and file of the non-violent army of India's freedom and be just an ordinary volunteer in the Indian National Congress.

We see her next as one of the captains of the volunteers and later as the head of the, women's section of it. Her courage, patience and powers of endurance soon made her an exemplary leader of the youth. She was one of the very first among the women to join the Civil Disobedience Movement and thus to bring to the movement the whole weight of her sex, under the Congress banner, to fight the strange non-violent battle.

That the woman of India played a glorious part and wrote history in letters of gold is due not a little to this act of Kamala Devi in making that demand on behalf of her sex, and also to the trust of India's

incomparable leader Gandhi in her and her comrades.

Kamala Nehru

Kamala, like Jawaharlal, was born in the United Provinces, and like the other Kashmiris born outside the Happy Valley showed different characteristics. The women in Kashmir itself are gentle as lambs, timid as a calves, shy as a birds, innocent as children. Gentle yet strong, timid, yet bold, confiding yet independent and shy yet assertive, Kamala Nehru differed considerably in her mental and moral make-up from her sisters in that earthly paradise. Kamala was no mere echo or pale reflection of her great husband. She had a personality of her own. She was as much the idol of her people as Jawaharlal was. She had played no mean part in his life, and as his wife did not desist to share his trials and tribulations, his joys and sorrows, his sufferings and sacrifices. It was bad enough to be a poet's wife but it is infinitely worse to be a politician's. A poet's home has, at least, some compensating features, songs, music, beauty, romance and love; a politician's house is often a bear-garden where there is neither peace of mind nor feast for the soul.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was a live wire, tense and super-charged. He was like a fiery flame, consuming all that it could not enkindle. She had shown her mettle and proved her worth in a hundred ways. Her sacrifices were no less great than his, if anything, more acute she was of a more delicate constitution and less strong nerves.

With a continuously ailing body, with her husband often in prison, her daughter separated from her for the purpose of education, her relatives frequently imprisoned, her home occupied by the authorities and her properties confiscated on the slightest pretext, she displayed a wonderful courage, had played her part nobly and well. revealing an indomitable will and courage.

She was no serious student of literature though familiar with modern progressive thoughts and ideas. She was religious, not in the sense of being pious, going to the temples, worshipping gods and observing ceremonies but in the sense of being good, simple, honest and truthful, so rare in Indian public men and women. Patience, gentleness, sympathy, kindness, devotion, these characterised her. She had no vaulting ambition, no inordinate pride, no unquenchable thirst for publicity, no schemes for national regeneration, no economic palliatives, no political Utopias, though she was genuinely patriotic and intensely practical in her outlook.

Her love and devotion to Jawaharlal were something wonderful. The Pandit, amidst his many cares and responsibilities, did not, it is true, pay much attention to her little wants, but she did not mind. It was not Jawaharlal's fault. He was caught by forces which dragged him away from home, wife, family and comforts, and he was indifferent to the little things of life. Kamala Nehru had the courage and understanding to let him be thus drawn away from his family ties. She played her part in that great adventure and shared his honours.

Kasturba

India mourned, the passing of a woman who by her simple and pure life had earned recognition as the true lineal descendant of the immortal heroines Sita and Savitri. Kasturba was verily the First Lady of our land. Among other peoples and in other lands, the honour of this name usually went to the wife of the head of the State. Though Gandhiji was the uncrowned King of India, she was no more than the unsophisticated wife of a " half- naked fakir" ; but there was no incongruity in her eminence. *For in India the woman of simple faith and heroic courage who are the natural leaders the millions understand and follow.*

Kasturba was much a saint in her way as her husband ; and if suffering, sacrifice, humility and patience are the marks of sainthood she was a more understandable one than the Mahatma. To the modern intellectual woman, especially to the politically-minded Indian woman, she may have appeared an old fossil, a pale reflection of her husband, who bore all his eccentricities and mental cruelties without protest, but in reality she was a strong silent woman who by her strength of character moulded the splendid stature of her rebel husband.

For Gandhiji was not just only a political rebel but a domestic one too and who but she knew what it was to live with him! Gandhian ahimsa is a puzzling thing when analysed too closely, and Kasturba was the one most intimately affected by this novel experiment with truth.



Sarojini Naidu

By Tara Ali Baig

Formative years

BORN on February 13, 1879, Sarojini, the eldest daughter of this scientist pioneer and educationist, had an extraordinary family life. Describing her father to the English critic and writer, Arthur Symons, she wrote: “.. My ancestors have been great dreamers, great scholars, and great ascetics. My father is a dreamer himself, a great man whose life has been a magnificent failure. I suppose in the whole of India there are few men whose learning is greater than his, and I don’t think there are many men more beloved. He has a great white beard and ‘the profile of Homer and a laugh that brings down the roof. He has wasted all his money on two great objects: to help others and on alchemy. But this alchemy, as you know, was only the material counterpart of a poet’s craving for beauty, the eternal beauty”.

The scientific genius who had a desire for beauty

The makers of gold and the makers of verse. They are the twin creators that sway the world’s secret desire for mystery; and what in my father is the genius of curiosity the very essence of all-Scientific genius - in me is the desire for beauty.”

Nothing could have summed up her drive in life more than these words to this man who trimmed and shaped her later poetic gift but what is significant was her

recognition, as a young woman of twenty-five, that her father’s alchemy and her poetry sprung from the same roots. What he did with chemical, making him exclaim to his children one day, as recalled by his youngest daughter, Suhashini, “Eureka, Eureka I’ve found it! (what he had found was gold from base metal).

Sarojini did the something with words.”

Alchemy of one, the secret life-spring of the other

Father and daughter, therefore, were fed with the same fires, but if the father had been a magnificent failure the daughter was one of the most triumphant personalities of India’s revolutionary periods. The alchemy of the one was the secret life-spring of the other. And even if Aghornath Chattopadhyaya did not in fact succeed in turning base metals into gold, his influence upon her early life was to bring the touch of gold that transformed her and, in turn, through her vibrant humanism transformed hundreds of her countrymen who came under her special spell of wit, love and universalism.

In her father’s laugh “that brings down roof” we see another profound influence upon this otherwise deeply serious child. In the court of her parent’s borne thinkers, poets and revolutionaries, ordinary mortals, relatives and friends gathered in constant comings and goings. It was here that her gentle mother presided over a tiny kitchen from which, with limited resources, she produced prodigious meals for the endless hospitality of this home. Sarojini was to see from an early age how potent a force is laughter. Writing to a friend she said, “It

is scarcely two months since I came back from the grave; is it worthwhile to be anything but glad? Of all things that life had given me, I prize the gift of laughters as beyond price”.

Her passionate tranquility of mind

Arthur Symons writes: “I have never known anyone to exist on such large draughts of intellectuals diet as this child of seventeen, to whom one could tell all one’s personal troubles and agitations as to an old wise woman. In the cast, maturity comes early and this child had already lived through all a woman’s life. But there was something else, something hardly personal, something which belonged to a consciousness older than the Christian, which I realised, wondered at and admired, in her passionate tranquillity of mind, before which everything mean and trivial and temporary caught fire and burnt away. Her body was never without suffering or heart without conflict.”

Renunciation was not for her

Symons goes on to say that her desire always was to be a wild free thing of the air, like the birds with a song in my heart” . A spirit of too much fire in too frail a body. Once she wrote to him, “ One black night I stood in the garden with fire-flies in my hair. It gave me a strange sensation, as if I were not human at all but an elfin spirit.” In Italy she watched the faces of the monks, and at one moment longed to attain their peace by renunciation then, to quote her letter to him, “when one comes out again into the hot sun-shine that warms the blood, and sees the eager hurrying

faces of men and women in the street, dramatic faces over which the disturbing experiences of life have passed and left their symbols, one’s heart thrills up into one’s throat. How can one deliberately renounce this coloured, unquiet fiery human life of the earth?”

Creator of a Girls’ College

Both Aghornath and the devoted Varada Sundari Devi had the cause of women’s education, a rather rare phenomenon in that period, very much at heart. It is not surprising, therefore, that in 1878, when he became a teacher in a Hyderabad School with English as the medium of instruction, he should in time become Founder and Principal of the New Hyderabad College, the famous Nizam’s College of later years. Subsequently, with his wife and some friends, he created the Girl’s College affiliated to Osmania University.

Sarojini finishes three-year study in one

In 1891, Women’s education in India was a far cry from what it is today and a girl in school was something of a rarity. Aghornath Chattopadhyaya, however, was a man born before his time and it seemed perfectly normal to him that his twelve-year-old daughter should become a scientist or a mathematician. There had been governesses in the Chattopadhyaya household to teach the children English and French as was customary in many homes in England, and later Persian studies were added, but no high school existed in Hyderabad where Sarojini could take her

matriculation examination. She was consequently sent to Madras where her English teacher was to say later that she was so brilliant that she mastered three years work in one year.

Atmosphere of learning

While it was a tremendous achievement for a girl to have passed her matriculation with a First Class at the age of twelve, her mental age must have been much greater than that of her contemporaries, not only because of her natural intelligence but because an atmosphere of learning had been part of her babyhood and upbringing. By the age of fourteen she had read all the English poets and loved Browning, Shelley and Tennyson in particular. What is more, there could have been no element of excluding children from adult we in their family. In fact, children probably wove in and out of the discussions and disputations that were a normal feature of this household. Philosophy, Science, Botany, Alchemy, Mathematics and Politics would have been such concrete elements of daily life that learning was almost by osmosis and a process infinitely more fascinating and stimulating than routine studies in school. It was probably in the



gathering in her father's house that Sarojini met Dr. Govindarajulu Naidu. That she fell in love with this young man who had just returned from Edinburgh after his medical studies, is brought out in her earliest poems and the precocious love affair must have been of some concern to her parents. It was not because he was a non-Brahmin as some have said but because she was very young and so sensitive that her health was easily and constantly upset. This dogged her all her life leading to a complete breakdown when she was in England in 1896.

A poem came to her suddenly

It was the three years after her matriculation in Madras that she claims were among her happiest years. During this period she was to write of herself :

"I don't think I had any special hankering to write poetry as a little child, though I was of a very fanciful and dreamy nature. My training under my father's eye was of a sternly scientific character. He was determined that I should be a great mathematician or a scientist, but the poetic instinct that I have inherited from him and also from my mother (who wrote

some lovely Bengal Lyrics) proved stronger. One day when I was eleven I was sighing over a sum in Algebra it wouldn't come right; but instead a poem came to me suddenly. I wrote it down. From that day my poetic career began. At thirteen I wrote a long poem 'La Dame Dee lac -' 1,300 lines in six days. At thirteen I wrote a drama of 2,000 lines, a full-fledged passionate thing that had begun at the spur of the moment without fore-thought, just to spite my doctor who had said that I was very ill and must not touch a book. My health broke down permanently about this time and my regular studies being stopped, I read voraciously. I suppose that the greater part of my reading was done between fourteen and sixteen. I wrote a novel, I wrote fat volumes of journals I took myself very seriously in those days".

The fixed contemplation of a Buddha

Symons was perceptive, uncommonly so, perhaps due to his Welsh and Cornish ancestry and had his own kind of hyper-sensitivity that was a tingling awareness of life around him. His introduction to Sarojini's Golden Threshold was unusually sensitive and gives us perhaps the only word picture of her as she was in those days. In one passage he speaks of her as possessing a passionate tranquillity of mind before which everything mean, trivial and temporary caught fire and burnt away in smoke. How well he summed up the very role she was to play in his country's affairs where in the face of meanness, triviality and controversies her wit and wisdom saw to it that differences were "burnt away in smoke". And he added: "The body's

weakness nor the heart's violence could not disturb that fixed contemplation of a Buddha on his lotus throne".

New Horizons

In the early years poetry was the main focus of Sarojini Naidu's intellectual life, the centre of her inner being. This was understandable, living as she did in the heart of the finest Islamic culture for Hyderabad had retained all the glamour and values of princely Persia and its ruling Prince was a poet of great distinction. Her return from England to everything, love, happiness, family, homeland was a key that unlocked the door to her inner self. It was then her rich treasure-house of words led her to write some of the loveliest lyrics. Sarojini adored beautiful jewels and clothes as much as any other woman. In fact, colour permeates all she wrote, but she was herself an equal devotee of colour, loving rich silks and the golden chains, shoulder brooch and bangles so favoured in Bengal.

A born orator

There is no record of all the speeches of Sarojini Naidu. Even if there were, her eldest daughter contends, almost none would really reflect the actuality of her words. The combination of rich language, fiery delivery, wit and pathos that, as a born orator, she would weave into structured form filled with imagery was always more than a mere reporter or listener could absorb.

Something more fruitful than the passing of resolutions

On the subject of "female education", she declaimed, "India, of all places, which at the beginning of the first century was already a great civilisation, had contributed to the world's progress radiant examples of women of the highest genius and widest culture. But by some irony of evolution the paradox stands to our shame. It is time for us to consider how best we can remove such a reproach, how we can achieve something more fruitful than the passing of empty resolutions in favour of female education from year to year."

The spirit of Padmini enshrined in the womanhood of India

At the Calcutta Congress of 1917, presided over by Annie Besant, Sarojini made an impassioned speech. "I am only a woman," she thundered, "I should like to say to you all, when the hour strikes, when you need torch bearers in the darkness to lead you, when you want standard bearers to uphold your banner and when you die for want of faith, the womanhood of India will be with you as the holders of your banner and the sustainers of your strength. And if you die, remember, the spirit of Padmini of Chittor is enshrined in the womanhood of India."



Women In India-Past, Present, Future

By Smt. LOUELLA LOBO PRABHU

THE United Nations proclaimed 1975, as the "International Women's Year", thereby bringing into focus the problems of what is paradoxically a (numerically) dominant, but (socially) depressed section of the world's population. Unfortunately, the Conference sponsored by the United Nations in Mexico, lost track of women's problems, in a preoccupation with political issues, not necessarily relevant to the emancipation of women. Since little of value emerged from the Conference, it may be necessary to consider the position of women in India, not in the light of any new facts emerging from the Conference, but taking into account, only the basic framework of Indian conditions.

Women of Yore

Oddly enough, despite the constitutional guarantees which now exist to protect the equality of women in India, their statuses may not compare favourably with those of women in ancient India, which were one of respect and dignity. Possibly this reflects the recognition accorded by primitive man, to the creative role of women in society. Both in Europe and in Asia, the earliest sculptures found, are those of Mother Goddess, with female attributes enhanced and enlarged - a sub-conscious tribute to her function as a progenitor of the human race. Though little is known of India's pre-historic days, till the period of the Harappa

Mohenjo-Daro City States, the arte-facts of that period include rich jewels, mirrors, and cosmetic cases, which all suggest that women were not beasts of burden in that culture. Elsewhere in Asia, the position of women declined. Under Hammurabi, where the code of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" policy was literally practised, the law states that a man whose wife was murdered, was permitted by the King, to claim the lives of the felon's wife and daughter, in revenge. Obviously, she was regarded not as a person, but as a chattel, or as an inanimate object.

An imported social system

The Aryans, when they came to India, imported a social system in which women found an honoured place. From the Rig Veda and other sacred books of the time, it would appear that girls, like boys, were allowed to run free, without the cloying over-protection which was to be a feature of the Puranic age. They shared in whatever education was available to the community and were an integral part of the ceremonies involved in household worship. Some attained positive intellectual eminence, with their authorship of the most poetic hymns in the Rig Veda and of sublime philosophical discourses attributed to Gargi and Maitreyi. What happened between the age of Rig Veda and that of the Epics? Why did the status of women so steadily decline? It is possible that when the free nomadic life of the Aryans became more sophisticated, it was increasingly dominated by priest-craft and ritual, in which, predictably, the part played by woman was steadily reduced. Judging from

the Epics, it would appear that women were no longer accepted as persons in their own right, but only in as much as they fulfilled the role of wife and mother. Even then, if Draupadi's fate is in any way typical, the fact that she too was bartered away in payment for a gambling debt is a sad reflection on the possible fate of women less highly placed in society.

The Decline of Status Codified

The actual decline in the status of women was given in the sanctity of law in the time of Manu, who evolved some of the most misogynistic concepts ever known. He wrote, "The wife of an arrogant, criminal, leprous or unproductive husband cannot discard him nor can she claim any share in his property." With similar lack of gallantry, Skanda enjoins, that "a woman before going on a pilgrimage should wash her husband's feet and drink the 'washed' water, because her husband is higher than Vishnu or Sankara." Capping these examples of the 'double standard', Skanda Purana enjoins upon a woman "to eat only if her husband has eaten, to sleep only after he sleeps, to rise in the morning, before he does. If he treats her with contempt, she should not retaliate, if he assaults her she should not lose her temper." None of these law-givers condescend to explain the rationale of one law for men and another for women. Fortified by the sanction of the law, virtually every aspect of a woman's life was adversely affected. Polygamy, unknown in Vedic age, became socially acceptable, particularly if the first wife was

barren. Similarly, child marriage also alien to Vedic society, began to gain ground, in the belief that a man who failed to get his daughter married as soon as she matured, was guilty virtually of procuring abortion (a sin deemed to be worse than murder), for every monthly cycle during which she remained unmarried. Widow remarriage, common in Vedic times, made way for Sati, which Manu advocated, with the words, "Nowhere is a second husband permitted to a virtuous woman." Sati rendered the couple eligible for 35 million years of heavenly bliss, though how this particular figure was reached, and why it was only necessary for a woman to immolate herself, were questions which no one asked, and which the law-givers did not attempt to answer.

The Exceptions

No doubt, there were some exceptions to this rule, particularly among the Buddhist and Jain sects which gave women a definite place in the religious hierarchy. Some exceptional women managed to break through the barriers imposed by men. Prabhavati, daughter of Chandra Gupta II, was an ideal regent during the minority of her sons. Sangha Mitra, daughter of Ashoka, was a pioneer who carried Buddhism to Ceylon, and founded an order of Nuns, there. Rajyasri, sister of Harsha, won a place for herself in the male citadel of philosophy. Oddly enough, the kingly class of women who enjoyed freedom and a measure of economic self-sufficiency were the courtesans. As in ancient Greece, where the hetaira was well versed in philosophy and the fine arts, and was often

a moving force behind the evolution of State policy (Aspasia and Pericles), the Kama Sutra also speaks of the 64 different arts, which the courtesans were required to know. Among them were Music, Dancing, Acting, Poetry and even chemistry and Logic. Ambapali was the Indian equivalent of Aspasia. According to the Artha Shastra, the courtesans functioned with the knowledge and consent of the State, which collected a tax on her earnings, while supervising her conditions of work, no doubt an moral, but thoroughly a pragmatic approach to the world's oldest profession.

From gradual decline, a precipitous fall

If there was a fall in the status of women, between the period spanning the Vedas and the Shastras, there was a calamitous descent in the status of women with the establishment of Muslim power, in Delhi. Perhaps the only exception during the Middle Ages, was the three-year reign of Empress Razia, which was the chapter of light in the history of women. No one could claim greater record of constructive achievement in such a short time. Later, during the age of the Mughals, though no woman held power in her own right, one of them, Nur Jehan was the effective ruler of the Country, while another, Mumtaz Mahal, inspired the most famous piece of architecture, the Taj Mahal as a monument to her memory.

A beginning of betterment

The real emancipation of women, from the legal servitude imposed on them by Manu and his tribe, began with Lord Bentick and

Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The former passed legislation abolishing Sati and female infanticide, while the latter was the first of the enlightened Indians who refused to be bound by traditions which has no justifiable rationale. What was started by him, was carried to a climax by Gandhiji. As in the West, the First and Second World Wars forced Society to accept women in non-traditional roles, so also in India, it was the struggle for Independence, which catapulted women from their homes to the wide world outside their domestic doorsteps. With the coming of independence, women won at a single stroke, the right to franchise for which their counterparts in the West had to struggle many long years. Indeed, it was only lately that Swiss women obtained the right to vote. How do Indian women stand, today? If Constitutional status was a reality, they could not wish for a more ideal state of affairs, for the law guarantees them equality in all matters, with the obligation, also, of undertaking special provisions to ensure their welfare. Unfortunately, the reality of their social, educational, economic and political status, does not match up to the promises implicit in the law.



The legacy of double standard

This discrepancy is most marked in the social sphere. The legacy of 'double standard' begins on the day a girl is born. The advent of a boy is welcomed as an event but that of a daughter, merely tolerated, if not deplored. The boy enjoys freedom and a higher priority in the length and quality of his education. In adult years, though the drives which animate men and women are the same, man is permitted to indulge in them, while the woman is conditioned to be as chaste as ice, and as pure as snow. If either partner in a marriage dies, the man is encouraged to marry again, sometimes almost with an indecent haste, while the widow who contemplates remarriage, is mentally branded as a harlot, though no longer burnt at the stake. Perhaps the latter fate would be preferable to the long-drawn-out agony of

the widow's life in an orthodox household, where she is treated as if she has lost her right to live. Nor is the lot of an unmarried girl in a traditional home, much better. Even if she is economically self-sufficient, she is viewed with suspicion and contempt. Economic emancipation has not necessarily helped women, but sometimes increased

the degree of their slavery, for they are expected to undertake without the slightest assistance from their husbands all the chores of the house-bound wife, while carrying a full load of work in the office.

In education, there is a marked difference in the enrollment of boys and girls, at all stages. Among girls only 27.7% reach the middle school and 13.7% the High School, as against 55% and 34% for boys. Doubtless, rural parents do not think it necessary to educate their daughters. Even at the level of higher education, though barriers are being broken all the time, the possibility of a girl's taking up higher studies, is balanced by the fact that tradition requires that she should marry early.

Restricted to Unskilled Labour

At the level of the woman worker, it is iniquitous that women are heavily represented in those jobs which may call for the hardest physical conditions, for instance, in agriculture, plantations, construction work, and mining. Had the advantages of education been available to girls, as well as boys, women need not have been restricted largely to unskilled work. For the few who have managed to make the grades in white collar jobs, and the learned professions, there is the threat - constantly held out by Government that the income of a husband and wife will be clubbed, thereby setting back the pace of women's emancipation, for many years, by taking away the financial incentive for it.

In Politics

In Politics, the fact that India had a lady as a Prime Minister, does not reflect on the political awareness of Indian Women in general. Except perhaps in 1971 and 1972, when women may have been a major factor in creating the Prime Minister's landslide majority, they do not use the political instruments available to them very effectively. As voters, since their literacy is lower than that of their men-folk, they usually tend to vote as their husbands, fathers or brothers decide they should. Few women in Politics have arrived there, entirely on their own merits. Their ability to be given a ticket is directly related to the push given by an influential male connection, whether husband, father, father-in-law or friend, seems to be immaterial. With such qualifications, it is also surprising that the record of women legislators in general, is disappointingly meager.

This, then, is the picture of Indian women today. Can anything be done to better their lot? Much can be done, but the first step must be, that women themselves should be made aware of their wrongs and motivated to have them redressed. After centuries of mental conditioning, they have accepted the myth that they are and should be the patient, suffering sex and oddly enough, are among the first to turn and rend any woman who tries to escape the stereo-type. In the one position where a woman does exercise some power (that of a mother-in-law), she seems to perpetuate the hardships she herself suffered as a daughter-in-law.

To achieve a Break-through

How to break-through the centuries of conditioning? The first way is the use of media to project a new image of women, as they are primarily responsible for keeping the orthodox; image alive. For example, every book, and every film projects the passive virtues of meekness and willingness to suffer. It is time they glorified the kind of woman who has the courage to strike out on her own, to be accepted as a person and not merely a possession or an appendage of man. One play like "The Doll's House," could revolutionise the social attitudes of women in Europe, Why should there not be more books, plays and film like that here? Perhaps the government could encourage literature on the 'new' woman, by offering prizes for creative works which embody this concept.

Compulsory education

Education is the other key to emancipation. Here again, government can help by enforcing penal provisions, if necessary, to ensure that girls are enrolled at primary level and that they do not drop out, till they acquire at least the fundamentals of literacy. It may also be necessary to change the curriculum, so that formal education is more appealing to girls. With some rare exceptions, like Marie Curie, a woman's aptitudes and predilections, are cultural and social, rather than mathematical and scientific. If



aptitudes can be evaluated at Middle School level, those who have mathematical or scientific aptitudes may be encouraged to carry on with the next stage of education, while those who lack them, may be offered a choice of subjects more suited to their interests. Girls who have the good fortune to receive College or technical education, should make use of their training so that their failure to do so, does not become an argument against the higher education of women. It is also in this class, that it should be possible to find women who may be the foci of social change.

If each of them can treat their daughters, as they would treat a son, if they could think in terms of a daughter's education, rather than her dowry, if they can educate their sons in some rudiments of household duties, so that they can carry a fair share of home management in a society which will lack servants for such chores, they will be laying foundations of

social change, at least in the next generation.

In the sphere of work, there will be a natural dividend for women, from education, if education is pursued with vigour. The more constructive things which government can do are drop out all threats of clubbing incomes, and desist from taxation on household appliances, (which it has been regularly levying for the past few years) as these are the indispensable aid for the

working woman, not luxuries calling for penal taxation.

Education and a new orientation of mass media will also improve the quality of women's participation in politics, making them more intelligent voters, on the one hand, and more efficient representatives, on the other. Those who already enjoy representative status should study and project the problems of their sex more diligently than they have done so far. There is today, hardly a single woman M.P., who is known to have spoken for women's rights. More is expected from those who have the power to help their sisters who are mute.

Nothing to lose but 'its chains

What then, is the image of the "New woman"? Certainly, not that of a hairy bra-burning, man-hating female, for that is a concept not only alien to our culture, but alien to human nature itself. Neither men nor women can do without each other, for their roles are meant to be complementary. The new woman should have every feminine attribute in her appearance and manners. She will, however, differ from her predecessors, in possessing a mind and a will, of her own which quietly but firmly makes her take her stand on her basic humanity, as a person and not as a possession of man.

Focus on women's problems should not end with "International Women's Year." It is only the beginning towards the redress of ancient wrongs. May it quicken into action, the suffering sex which has remained in captivity so long and has nothing to lose but its chains.



Liberation of Women In India and its Limits

By KAMALA SPOLIA

A method in the demand for equal terms

A MOVEMENT for women's liberation started in the United States of America not many years back. It soon took on the shape of a crusade on a world-wide scale against the society whose rules and moral codes discriminate heavily against women and favour men in every sphere of life. The long oppressed women made themselves heard even though, in some cases, they resorted to shocking practices. Eyebrows were raised, fingers were wagged and some sagacious heads were shaken in wonderment as to what this world was coming to. But sooner or later people did realise that there was some method and purpose in the apparent madness of the manner of women's fight and their demand for the right to exist on equal terms with men.

That this movement should have started in the West, in a most advanced country of the world with the most advanced of societies, is indicative of the fact that no matter how broad-minded or educated the people might be in a particular area, women still are not on par with men in their own circle.

The disparity in the status of men and women has existed for centuries and has been handed down to us from generation to generation. Why should women in the first place have allowed themselves to be so reduced in their status as to virtually

become chattels in the hands of their menfolk is not difficult to see.

The institution of marriage

Unlike animals and birds, a human child takes a very long time to grow up, to gain knowledge and experience as well as maturity to be able to look after itself independently of its parents. This period may be as long as twenty years or more in some cases, during which time the father and mother must live together to bring up the child. Naturally, in the meantime, they beget more children which almost necessitated a lifelong association between a human pair and brought the institution of marriage into existence. The requirement for man to go out and procure food, while the woman kept the home fires burning made man the bread winner of the house. And in the age when food meant life, the one who went out to procure and bring it home was naturally in a position to dictate terms.

So the very role nature intended woman to play successfully rendered her subservient to man. It did not take men long to decide that women were not only subservient to them but were also inferior mentally as well as physically. Under this misconceived notion women of the world have withstood centuries of oppression and injustice at the hands of those who are supposed to love and cherish them.

Without her, he is incomplete

Against these social compulsions which favoured men and tended women towards a lower status, women of India of old seem

to have held their own. The Hindu way of life gives woman a very high status. As a mother she is worshipped and revered. As a wife she is 'ardhangini', without whom a man is not complete. Nor can he carry out any religious or social rites and functions without his wife, who must participate in full measure in the activities of her husband. As a sister, a Hindu girl rouses the best traits of protector and a warrior in man. Not only her real brothers, but all men of her clan and village would stand for her honour and protect it with their lives. That in the midst of all these high ideals there are examples where Sri Rama had to send Sita into exile against his better judgment and in the days of Mahabharata, Kauravas were allowed to disrobe Draupadi in a full court, because she had been lost in a gamble like a piece of personal property, show that ideals and practice do not always coincide, whatever the age, country or people.

Nevertheless, the Indian woman of pre-muslim era enjoyed considerable amount of personal and social freedom. She was free to choose her husband in a 'Swayamvara' take part in religious discourses and go about without the need to be isolated from men or observe purdah.

The decadence

The advent of Islam and its incursion into India brought in the purdah system and the need for child marriages to secure girls in life against the rampaging ways of the rulers. Women were tightly shut up behind closed doors. This also barred them from whatever education was available. Thus, their minds were conditioned by the narrow

confines of their immediate environment in which they lived. They were taught to regard men as superior beings and husbands as Gods. Men could do no wrong, whereas women were sullied by even an impure thought. Social intercourse between men and women dwindled and almost came to a nought. This state of affairs continued through the British Raj. Except for the significant step in abolishing sati, the British well nigh left the women of India to their fate. And not so strangely women like all unprivileged and subject people, themselves have been the most ardent protagonists of their own inferior status. For about the third decade of the nineteenth century there was talk of widow remarriage by the various reformist movements in India. Efforts to abolish the custom of child marriage were given the impetus culminating in the passage of Sharda Act in this century. The more far-seeing of our political and social leaders campaigned ceaselessly for facilities and opportunities to be provided to the Indian women in the field of education.

Women venture forth

This trend gained moment with the freedom movement under Mahatma Gandhi. Indian women again started to venture out of their shell seclusion to take part in the movement on equal terms with men. With this very small beginning the ranks of women who have come out of their homes have swollen considerably in the recent past. Independence of India in 1947 let fresh air of freedom blow for our women who, naturally, started taking stock of their social and other handicaps. The Constitution of

India granted them equality with men in almost every walk of life. Now it was for them to translate it into action and turn it into reality.

Echoed and re-echoed

Men had been their oppressors for long. Women decided to throw away this yoke of slavery. 'Liberation', 'Freedom from the chauvinistic male', came the war cry from the West that was taken up readily by our women and echoed and re-echoed with increasing vigour. The enthusiasm for the women's lib movement has been overwhelming in so much so that no one has cared to give a thought to its meaning and extent.

Seemingly the aim of women is their liberation from the male dominance, equality in every walk of life, removal of social and political handicaps and to bring about the changes in the moral code, which has existed as the result of age-old biases planted by men against women.

Freedom is not licentiousness

Freedom, however, imposes its own responsibilities. Liberation is not a licence for permissiveness or promiscuity in sexual behaviour. Equality does not mean the negation of all established social laws and customs.

Most young girls when talking of women's lib really think it is synonymous with the freedom to indulge in free love. Recently, the daughter of a well-known film personality, herself a budding actress, wrote in a leading English Weekly, that as a liberated young woman she considered

it her right to move freely with any man she liked. Many think that the first significant sign of a modern girl is that she is free with her favours as well as herself. She considers that religion and its tenets are so much humbug only held up by the old cronies with orthodox views. They are the fetters she'd like to throw away and look men in the eye on equal terms. But they do not stop to think of the consequences. Just because contraceptives give them the freedom from the involvement in free indulgence they feel there is nothing to lose from this attitude and practice.

She is at a loose end

For such girls there'd be any number of men who would readily oblige because after all freedom in this field satisfies men's lust and ego. They lose little and they are under no obligation to the liberated female if she decides to be promiscuous. But men would never bring home a girl of this type as a wife. Thus in a few years when a girl is at the end of her prime of youth and has shot her sexual bolt she finds herself at a loose end with neither a home nor the ability to attract men easily for her escapades. Thus the liberation that she thought was the essence of her life leaves her frustrated and disillusioned.

Expression of mutual love

As a matter of fact sex was never intended by nature to be indulged in for its own sake. It is the prime form of expression of mutual love, regard and consideration between two people who wish to live

together and bring up a family. Sex without love very soon degenerates into animal lust. Moreover, bodily mechanism soon builds up resistance against cheap thrill and excitement as it reaches the level of exhaustion. It stops giving the 'kick' that young people go round in search of. Thus a foundation is laid for perversions, variations and use of narcotics to get out of sexual experiences tile thrill that ever eludes the people who freely indulge in it. Very soon such people though young in age become sexually old, unable to get anything out of it.

Nothing for nothing

Such liberated people forget that nature has a simple rule - you can get nothing from anywhere without paying for it. And the payment in this case can only be made from bodily reserves one is born with. Like the credit in a bank the more heavily you draw on your balances and squander it, the quicker you reach the level of bankruptcy and exhaustion. Thus, one allows oneself to be robbed of a beautiful thing like sex early in life by squandering it freely in the false notion that it is a sign of liberation.

Reaching out for the rainbow

Sex is a very powerful drive, very few at young age know how to handle it. Therefore, from centuries the learned and the experienced have striven hard not to give wind to the fires of sex, that can easily get out of hand and consume the very people who let it rage uncontrolled. And despite all the talk of antibiotics to

eradicate venereal diseases these still exist, rampaging societies that do not exercise discipline in their sexual life. Free sex, therefore, brings disease, disillusionment and frustration. One feels thoroughly cheated and disenchanted as a result. It is like a person who reaches out to catch the rainbow which forever eludes him. What sort of liberation would this be for our women?

The Western woman has gone through all this. Narcotics, free love, hippy way of life, discarding the dictates of her society and religion have not brought her the inner peace, happiness and contentment. Bewildered by all this, men and women from those countries are turning to the East for spiritual solace. Would it, therefore, be sensible for our women to follow the example of the West?

Liberation and tame submission to dowry

Liberation for our women can mean many things other than this senseless type of licence. A girl in an Indian home is considered a liability and a heavy responsibility. She means a big back-breaking dowry for the parents, who may have to give away their life's savings to settle her in marriage. The girl is educated merely with a view to make her value attractive in the marriage market. The girls who talk of liberation allow themselves to be sent away like cows to the houses of their in-laws. There is hardly any protest against this system even from our educated and fairly well-informed girls who should refuse such marriages.

May be the will is there in some cases but fear of the consequences keeps them from taking the necessary step. No one wants to cast the first stone.

Seek freedom from dowry

The basis of this fear in our girls is the uncertainty of their future and lack of security in life. If women could find enough opportunities to work and be economically free, then their dependence on husbands for their livelihood would diminish. Only then they would be in a position to assert their will at the time of their marriage, and refuse a match if they so wished. Yet fear and freedom cannot go together. Those who are afraid cannot safeguard their rights. A beginning has to be made. Some will suffer in the process. But in the basic matter of marriage our girls must assert themselves and seek freedom to choose their life-partners who would demand no dowries.

So, the Indian woman first has to be liberated from the rotten system of dowry and arranged marriages. This is where their fight must start. They must also have equal opportunities for education and employment to be economically free from men. Once this comes about, the other trends are bound to follow.

An educated working woman is sure to develop confidence in herself and establish social contacts with men on a mature footing. Equal pays for equal jobs is the next step.

Liberation from the vice-like grip . . .

This, however, is easier said than done. In a country where there is a vast number of

unemployed men the addition of women seeking similar jobs would make matters extremely difficult for everyone. In the West, shortage of manpower makes it comparatively easy for women to get jobs. But the whole of the East including India is heavily overpopulated.

The standard of living of an average family in our country is well below that of any existing in developed countries. Our literacy rate is shockingly poor. Living at sub-standard levels in almost every sphere of human activity, our first job is to liberate ourselves from the vice-like grip of poverty, backwardness, age-old superstitions that dictate our every action and decision and our blind faith in pseudo-religious gurus and teachers.

The part our women have to play in this national war on want, poverty and backwardness is fairly obvious. As it has been brought out above they must crusade against the senseless customs of marriages and dowries that are eating into the vitals of our society and reduce women to the level of chattels. One's mind would boggle if one sat down and worked out the astronomical figure of national wealth, that is wasted every year on marriages. This money if saved would certainly add to the nation's economic advancement in no small measure.

Women's role in family planning and education

Women again have to play the leading role in family planning and in drastically controlling the spread of population. Then in years to come, perhaps, there would be a higher standard of living and more

employment for men and women, both of which would give our women economic independence. That will give them the right type of independence.

Education up to high school level should be a must for every girl. Those who can afford higher education should choose a vocation rather than go for degrees to secure likely boys for marriage. There are many girls who acquire medical and teaching degrees and let them go waste once they are married.

Once these basic steps are understood and action to implement them is started, the emancipation of our women will start on a sound foundation. It can be seen that freedom and liberation in any form are heavy responsibilities and have to be worked for. Empty slogans and fads may catch the imagination of people for a fleeting period but there is no worthwhile outcome. The celebration of women's international year can only focus the attention of people towards the subordinate status of women in general and the need to do something about it. Yet nothing can come from such drum-beating 'tamashas' till women themselves get down to achieving equality with men or even surpass them by dint of their determined planning and hard work. They must dare to break away from the wasteful customs like dowries and arranged marriages. They should also be free to remarry when divorced or widowed. For this, they have to overcome the resistance born of the deep-rooted and centuries-old biases against women in our society.

Determine to free from shackles

This will not come about easily as nothing worthwhile does. However, a beginning can be made, if women all over the country first resolve to be free of the shackles of the past and work steadily towards the real freedom, which is the ability to function in a most productive and creative manner for the good of the society to which one belongs. Real freedom is the ability to think freely and the right to differ from others and fight against customs that have out-lived their usefulness.

Surely the purpose of liberation for women cannot be just exhibitionism and indulgence in free sex as it is manifesting itself in the West. It may be a revolt by the women and out of sheer cussedness they might think that they can shock men into giving them the kind of freedom they want. But in our society, we have always believed that means are as important as the end. Women must dare to defy the customs that are repugnant to their free status. They must fight for equality of opportunity for jobs, education and advancement. They must work for equipping themselves with the right qualifications of mind and body to stand on an equal footing with men in society. Fortunately, the Indian woman already has the equality in the political field assured to her by our Constitution. We, therefore, need not look to the West for a lead. We must work out our own system of achieving the type of liberation we want.



Lib or no Lib-He cannot Live without them

By D. P. SUDHA

DIM lights, hushed atmosphere, the Radiogram softly playing "Girls watch the boys watch the girls go by" A worthwhile occupation indeed. This is an instance where God Almighty can rest assured that the whole humanity is in agreement in thought, word and deed.

What do the boys watch - inferior, superior or equal of their opposite sex? There is where the hue and the battle cry of the sexes arise. Equal rights! "Female superiority", so on and so forth, declares the women's lib to fall flat on the sniggering looks of the male chauvinist, who wonders what all this squealing is about.

Perfectionist

Actually, I do not see any reason for such "liberation movement". Nothing can be achieved out of them other than arousing the already existing masculine superiority complex. Women are noted for getting their things done in a silent way; so, why all this publicity? They could very well attain whatever they wish for in a willful, silent way.

We all know the way the women hold in their homes "talk of hen-pecked husbands". The past is there gloriously glaring at us with its numerous instances, where the female of the species have come to the limelight to capture and hold the roving eye of the world. These shining examples of the "fairer sex" did not become prominent

or noteworthy due to the liberation movement or any such thing. Each climbed to the summit of her success, because of her personality, her charm, her perseverance and her vitality. She was a separate individual, an entity of her own and on her own, who did those heroic or heroic deeds, not so much to prove to the world the superiority of the female, but to do to perfection what she as an individual had to accomplish.

Joan of Arc stands as a clear example. She would not have cared less for the liberation movement or for the glory of the weaker sex. But her achievements proclaim her desire to save her country and not to elevate her sex.

Live congenially and complementarily

This was the case in all the wonderful past with all the willful women. A donkey *is* a donkey and a zebra is a zebra ... I think it is a pointless and useless argument to make one look like another. They can complement or supplement each other, but cannot be the same. This brings us back to the question, asked earlier - are the women superior, inferior or equal to men? There is no need for this question to arise at all, for each is a separate class with its virtues and vices, strong in some aspects and weak in others thus making it a necessity that each should live, side by side, congenially and complementarily.



Women's Liberation Movement

Nandini Mehta

THE Women's Liberation Movement, which originated about the year 1968-69 in the United States, has been the subject of continuous and lively controversy ever since, hitting the headlines steadily through a series of highly effective, if somewhat ludicrous methods of protest.

Last summer an army of women marched through the streets of New York, placing Freedom Trash Cans at strategic points, into which they threw symbols of "oppression" like brassiers, cosmetics, detergents and false eye-lashes. They picketed city centres all over the country, demanding the abolition of beauty contests and magazines like "Play Boy", which presented women as mere object rather than as thinking, feeling human beings.

Marriage is Legalised

"Marriage is Legalised. . . and Unpaid Labour! - Equal Pay for Equal Work!" they shouted, as they demanded a chance at jobs traditionally reserved for men and Child Care Centres to cut the apron-strings that tied the mothers to domestic servitude. They stormed 'Men Only' bars, demanding that women be allowed into them, and some of them formed societies aimed not only at liberating women but at destroying men, such as SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men) and WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell).

Some of the Liberation groups protested against the convention of giving women's names to destructive hurricanes, and others lobbied for changes in the English language in order to make it more egalitarian. For instance, they demanded that "boycott" be changed to "girl cott"; "history" to "herstory"; and that the two different terms, "Mrs." and "Miss," be substituted by the single "Ms."

Biased Politics

The Women's Liberation Movement was given coherence and an ideology of its own with the appearance of a book by Kate Millett, who is sometimes known as the "Mao Tse-Tung of Suffragism." That book is logically reasoned and impressively argued and documented. It studies the infinite variety of man's exploitation of woman and challenges previous interpretations of the difference between the sexes. In the patriarchal society of the West - it says-as well as of other historical civilisations like India, the relationship between man and woman is a power-structured one, with the male having power and domination over the female; and every avenue of power - military, industrial, technological, scientific, financial, political and administrative - is in male hands.

This is because the patriarchal society has established through the ages certain concepts regarding the temperament, role and status of the sexes which are based on the needs and values of the dominant group. Thus society and culture decree that intelligence, aggression, force and efficacy are characteristics of the male

temperament; while ignorance, passivity, docility and ineffectuality are female. Rising out of the temperamental difference between the sexes is a difference in role, with a separate code of conduct assigned for each. For instance, the role assigned to the female is domestic service and attendance upon children and the rest of human achievement, interest and ambition to the male." Thus the limited role allotted to the female "tends to arrest her at the level of biological experience," Kate Millett observes.

Protagonists of Women's Liberation fiercely attack the generally accepted theory that these differences in role and temperament arise out of inherent biological differences between the male and the female. It is man, and not nature or the process of evolution that has made women inferior to men in terms of stamina, stability and intellect. They point out that there has been no successful attempt to prove that temperamental dominance is inherent in the male nor does his dominance rest on physical strength, for this is no longer a factor in political relations - it has been substituted by weaponry, technology, machinery and other products of industrialisation. They also argue that scientific tests have invariably concluded that there is no difference in the level of intelligence between a man and a woman.

Feudalism?

Kate Millett's book goes on to speak of the economic exploitation of women; though women do work, they get no economic rewards for the work they do. And until house-work and the care of children is

recognised as a job, women will continue to engage in unpaid labour. Under such conditions, marriage becomes a contract whereby sex and service (that is, housework) are provided in return for support which makes it no different, really, from the feudal system in which the lord provided security in return for service.

Discrimination in U.S. and Europe

Discrimination against women in matters of hiring, wages and the law as a whole is another major complaint - and this is indeed true of the situation in many Western countries.

In U.S.A., Germany and Britain, women often earn 20 to 30 percent less than men, for the same jobs. In Britain, the father has legally sole authority on the children's religious up-bringing and education and often the divorced wife has no right to property acquired after marriage.

In France, as in Germany, abortion laws are illiberal and a wife must have her husband's permission before applying for a passport. Until a couple of years ago, women could be jailed for -adultery, while a man received no penalty. In some States of USA, women can be jailed for drunkenness but not men. In most countries, prostitutes are jailed for soliciting but men are not.

The double standard in morality is almost universal: the promiscuous man gets a badge of honour and is admiringly hailed as a Casanova, while the woman is called a tramp. Similarly, virginity is only important in the female.

Such a system, the Liberationists maintain, is destructive towards love between a man



and a woman, because it makes a woman inferior to man; and you cannot have love and respect between two unequals. Real love is only possible between equals and when it is freely given, without being tinged with dependence, economic or otherwise. Here are the aims of the sexual revolution that the Women's Liberation Movement wants to bring about: primarily it wants to end the system of patriarchy with its ideology of male supremacy and the "socialisation" by which it is upheld in matters of temperament, role and status. It wants an end to traditional inhibitions and taboos. The revolution hopes to do away with the double standards that exist and also with prostitution.

Another goal is a re-examination of the traits held as "masculine" and "feminine" with the violence encouraged as "virile" and the passivity defined as "feminine" being rejected as undesirable human qualities; while the intelligence and

efficiency defined as male, the tenderness and consideration associated with the female should be regarded as characteristics desirable for both sexes.

Finally with the revolution would come economic independence for a woman, which would more or less break up the family as it is today, since there would be institutionalised professional care of children and marriage would generally be replaced by voluntary association.

What relevance do the complaints and demands of the Women's Liberation Movement have in India? Certainly, ours is a patriarchal society in which male supremacy is a fact of life accepted by both sexes from earliest childhood. Yet, the lot of Indian women has not always been subservient. In the pre-Aryan days, women enjoyed far more freedom than today's "with it" young girls; the society was matriarchal and they owned property.

Gradual Change

The Aryans, who started coming to India around 3000 B.C. continued this system for a while. In fact the Rig Veda writes of women as equals of men, participating in philosophical debates, religious rituals and the gaiety of social life as well. But soon after came a change in their status. A woman was not allowed to have more than one husband and she became a mere child-bearer. Her status depended largely on whether she produced sons; if she produced daughters she was cast aside. But the greatest anti-feminist of all was Manu, the Law-Giver, "Woman is as foul as falsehood itself", he says. Manu decreed that a woman could own no property; and

he denied her the right to independence or individuality: "By a girl, by a young woman or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house. In childhood a female *must* be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead, to her sons; a woman must never be independent." Manu is a proponent of the double standard too: 'Though destitute of virtue or seeking pleasure elsewhere or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband *must* be worshipped as God by a faithful wife.' Heaven, he says, is only attained through the husband and as a reward for having duly worshipped him as God on earth.

Kalidasa, though he does it more gently, also tells a woman that it is her duty to worship her husband, regardless of his behaviour towards her.

Female infanticide, child marriage, polygamy, sati and jauhar were all accommodated within the fold of the Hindu religion. When the Muslims came to India around the 11th century, Hindu converts to this religion, introduced the doctrine of male prerogative divorce and property. In turn, Hindu society adopted the purdah - the practice of keeping women secluded in harems or zenanas. Widows were cruelly treated; their presence was forbidden at all auspicious events - for the sight of them meant bad luck - and they were made to shave their heads and wear white.

With the coming of the British, things took a turn for the better and Lord Bentinck, with the support of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, brought about a number of reforms. Sati was outlawed; widow re-marriage was legalised in 1856. In 1926 child marriage

was out-lawed, And in the 1920's thousands of women urged and encouraged by Mahatma Gandhi, joined the Freedom Movement.

The Champion of Women

The greatest champion of women's emancipation was Jawaharlal Nehru, who insisted on the provision in the Constitution, which guarantees that the State shall not discriminate in respect of caste, race, religion as well as sex. The Hindu Code Bill in 1955 out-lawed polygamy and restored after 2,000 years, the right of divorce to women. The Special Marriage Act (for civil marriages) treats men and women as equals in matters regarding property and inheritance. Indeed, divorce laws in India are among the most progressive in the world, with provisions for divorce by mutual consent without imputation of misconduct against either party. The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 gave women equal rights to property - a daughter and her children had equal right to succeed, with the son and his children, to all property of the parents. There is plenty of legal protection for working women embodied in the Factories Act, providing for maternity leave and limitations of night work and underground work. The Administrative and Foreign Services of India have been opened to women. In all these matters, Indian women are better off than their sisters in most Western countries.

Private and Public estimation of women

Yet one must acknowledge that there is a large gap between the law and the social

attitudes and beliefs which act as barriers against women's emancipation. Divorce remains at best a theoretical possibility, with the woman's economic dependence on the man in India and the social ostracism that a divorced woman suffers.

A divorcee of my acquaintance says that the neighbours have forbidden their children to play with hers. Another says she is considered fair game for the advances of men. Yet, another, who would like to get a divorce says it is impossible because she cannot support herself, nor can she bring such dishonour to her parents.

Though child marriage has been out-lawed, an estimated 40% of the marriages that take place today are of girls who are minors. In fact the average marriage age of girls in India is 14.5, according to one source. Dowry has been out-lawed, yet it remains a fundamental part of most marriage negotiations even today. Widow remarriage too is in practice extremely rare. A widow, who put in an advertisement in the matrimonial columns, received merely three replies - as compared to the hundreds that others receive - all from men socially, economically and educationally her inferiors. And a recent study by a labour expert has shown that protective legislation for working women is actually beginning to work against women. Because of legal safeguards, such as maternity benefits and limitations on night work, employers are now reluctant to hire women. This has led to a slow but sure decrease in the percentage of women workers in the last few years.

Indeed, the entire question of women's status in India is characterised by paradox and contradiction. On the one hand we

had a woman Prime Minister, women in politics, law, medicine, administration and other professions ; on the other we have widespread illiteracy (87%), purdah and an unshakable belief in the supremacy of the male.

Again, there is a contradiction between the Mother India image, the Mother Cult and Goddess Worship and the other image of the Indian woman: down-trodden, helpless, exploited and worn out to an early death. The lofty ideal of the feminine in Indian culture and the subjugation of women in everyday life is a continuing paradox. As Abbe Dubois, the French Man who travelled all over India in the early 19th century, noted: "Low estimation of women in private life, respect for them in public,"

Still Exploited and Suppressed

There is much then to be said for the view that Indian women are progressive and emancipated and have all the legal rights that men enjoy; but there is more truth in the opposite view: that the Indian woman is thoroughly exploited and suppressed. For while the former only holds true for a tiny minority of Indian women, the latter applies to the overwhelming majority.

With most Indian women, the belief in male supremacy and female subservience is so deeply ingrained and so much a habit of mind that it never occurs to them to question it or to think about their own rights. From early childhood they see the joy with which the birth of a 'son is greeted and the almost apologetic behaviour of the mother when she produces a daughter. And so they grew up well conditioned to a

passive acceptance of their lot ; they don't resent it.

After marriage a woman goes from paternal domination to the role of the subordinate wife whose prime duty in life is to please her husband (and not annoy his mother). She is merely a biological mate to her husband; there *is* little companionship between them' and they seldom go out together. Her security lies not so much in the love of her husband as in his regard for her in her role as efficient mother and housewife. In fact she has no real status as a married woman until she produces a child, especially a male child. As Krishnalal Shridharani writes in his book, *My India, My America*: "It is motherhood more than womanhood that the Hindus glorify An Indian artist will prefer to paint a picture of a woman with a child at her breast The Indian marriage still centres around the progeny."

The Mother-Complex

According to Frieda Das (who has analysed the mother-son relationship in her book on Indian women), the Indian mother, her position being what it is, puts an abnormal amount of love on her son and expects from him "emotional fulfilment; an amplitude of life which should by rights come to her from mate hood only." This often makes it impossible for the son to have a satisfying relationship with his wife. "Never," writes Frieda Das, "has man dug a deeper rut for himself than did the Hindu when he worshipped goddesses and degraded women; when he adored the mother and slighted the wife."

This image of Indian womanhood is clearly reflected in Hindi films and in popular Hindi novels (on which most film plots are based). In film after film the situation is similar: the wife is turned out of the house on the slightest suspicion and she goes away humbly, proves her innocence through all kinds of ordeals and timidly returns to her husband, who magnanimously takes her back. Sita-Like, she braves all - from tyrannical mother-in-law to sirenish girl-friend, with never a word of reproach. Great emphasis is put on the hero's tenderness and devotion to his mother, whose will he will never defy, even if it means hurting his wife. Significantly, the heroine is hardly ever a career girl; if she does work, it is only as a supreme sacrifice to help the family tide over bad days.

The Bombay films also reflect a clear bias against the modern westernised woman. The vamp is almost always an " independent type" with short hair, who dances, drinks and is ready with the quick repartee, in contrast to the heroine, who would never dream of contradicting the hero or injuring the Male ego in any way.

Now to that miniscule minority of Indian women, independent, emancipated and highly educated, who have exerted an influence far out of proportion to their numbers : there are plenty of opportunities here for qualified women to enter practically any profession of their choice and thousands of women take advantage of these opportunities. Yet prejudices against working women are still deeply rooted. even in men who are outwardly westernised and liberal, and often it is after they have secured jobs that women begin to feel the discrimination.

The Single Girl

The single woman in India has the worst of it, because socially too she has to put up with a great deal that is annoying to say the least. She has neither the freedom of the young unmarried girl nor the status of the married woman. Everything she does is misunderstood. She is treated as an object of pity, curiosity, a freak - these are the comments of several single women I spoke to. Said one: "If a woman is single and over thirty, men consider her fair game for any kind of " fun" they might have in mind. They look at you in a way that you cannot mistake, and they think that you are either promiscuous or so frustrated that you will be glad if a man makes a pass at you. . . . If you repel his advances, he will be quick to spread the word around that you are either frigid or a lesbian."

Another remarked: "If you dress up to go out to a party, men there think you have dressed for the kill, that you are on the hunt for a man - and women think you are trying to steal their husbands away." The single woman finds it difficult too to take advantage of the city's cultural life: "If I go alone to a concert or a cinema or a restaurant, I am often approached as though I were a ' pick-up '. And if I have a male escort, the gossip goes around that I am having an 'affair' with him."

In Delhi at least, the single girl, finds it hard to rent a flat, for landlords are prejudiced against her. One girl was ready to sign the lease for a flat when the landlord suddenly realised that she was single and backed out. "I don't like unmarried girls as tenants," he said. "You will have all kinds of boy friends here at all

hours of the night and we won't have any of that - we are respectable people." Others have complained of harassment from neighbours and from goondas on the street who are quick to seek out flats where girls are staying alone.

While many working women say that they are not discriminated against in any way by their male colleagues, an equal number complain that they are not treated as equals. Two women, both brilliant and eminent in their professions, say that they are constantly hearing derogatory remarks about them. Others say they receive vile anonymous letters from men in their office. Yet others complain that they have frequently been by-passed for promotions by men who are junior to them and who do not have a better record.

I.A.S. women have complained that when the question of a posting comes up, the officer concerned says : "You can send me a woman officer only if there are no men available." The hostility and distrust under which some of them have to function is reflected in the request made to the Central Government by Mr. Charan Singh (when he was Chief Minister of (U.P.) to see that no women I.A.S. officers were sent to his state.

Working Girls

A common complaint of working women is that, despite their qualifications, interests and aptitude, they are always given "Women's work" - because men feel women are temperamentally more suited to certain kinds of jobs, such as welfare or public relations. For instance, a woman architect says that clients often ask her to do the

interior decoration of their houses, having asked a male architect to do the designing of the house itself, which is what she really wants to do. And a lawyer says that, at her association's meetings, she is invariably asked to type out the minutes, even though some of her male colleagues can type as well as she does.

Because of pre-conceived (and thoroughly erroneous) ideas about the "feminine temperament," when a woman loses her temper at work, men are quick to attribute it to "typical female instability and moodiness"; when she changes her mind on a particular matter, they say it is "feminine capriciousness." But when a man loses his temper he is a "disciplinarian," when he changes his mind, he is "flexible" - both considered admirable qualities in an executive. Or as Amita Malik once put it: when I write a satirical piece, people say: "What a catty woman." But when the Editor of the WEEKLY writes a satirical article, they say it is witty and one woman summed up the dilemma of the working woman thus : "A working woman is damned if she does and damned if she doesn't. If she is assertive, energetic and competent, she is termed aggressive. And if she is quiet, unassuming and mediocre, they say she won't amount to much - what else did you expect from a woman ?"

The married working woman, on the whole, has an easier time than her counterpart in the West, because she can still get domestic help. But if she cannot, then she shoulders a double burden, for rare indeed is the Indian husband who will help his wife with the housework or with looking after the children.



Women Politicians

The phenomenon of women in politics in India might be regarded as a sign of growing emancipation. Yet Dr. Romila Thapar, the historian, has a different - and a plausible - explanation. She believes it is a hangover from the Freedom Movement, which defeminised women who participated: the plain rough khadi sari and the hair severely pulled back was a sort of uniform for women in the Movement, and many of them were influenced by the Gandhian belief that a relationship between a man and a woman should be like that between a brother and sister. Dr. Thapar's view also applies to other Asian countries such as Indonesia, where women took part in the freedom struggle and today continue to be in politics. On the other hand, in countries like Japan, where there has been no mass movement to change the system of government, women play practically no part in public life.

Today, most of our women politicians are 50-plus. Thus they all either took part in the Freedom Movement or were student leaders then. There is no new generation of women politicians emerging - a sign of which is the fact that the number of women elected to Parliament has dropped sharply this year: from 32 to 21.

Pseudo Modernisation

Dr. Thapar notes that the present generation of women students is less interested in careers and intellectual pursuits than the previous one. This observation is borne out by a survey made in Delhi University (where girls outnumber boys), in which the large majority of girls said that marriage rather than a career was their first priority.

One can visualise these girls whose "modernisation" extends only to sartorial matters - firmly grounded in the belief that no man wants to marry a girl with too much education, as they sit in their chiffon saris at Gaylord, displaying their physical graces and modest conversation, while eligible young men and their parents look them over.

After marriage the girl becomes a decorative object with limited uses - with only "chiffon parties," "Kitty parties" and, of course, coffee parties to bring some excitement into her life. She is frustrated because she wants to take up a job, but she tells herself that she must find fulfilment in being a wife, otherwise she is not "feminine"; and in any case, her husband would not approve. These ideas are reinforced by the women's magazines (to which her reading is confined), whose

cover girls with "beauty and brains" always end off by saying that, though they are talented at writing or physics, their ultimate aim is to devote themselves to being good wives and mothers - for this is the true vocation of every woman.

Indian Women not concerned with rights but with duties

While the Women's Liberation Movement's view, that the care of children should be left to specialised agencies and the family broken up, seems far too heavy and unnecessary a price to pay for women's emancipation (it should be noted that the Soviet Union's experiment in this direction failed and they are once again stressing the importance of the family), there is much to be said for some of their other assertions. Less rigid definitions of what is 'masculine' and what is "feminine" would be all for the better, as would a reexamination of traditional concepts about the temperament and role of the sexes, though there is still not enough scientific evidence for one to believe fully that these have no biological basis.

It seems doubtful, though, if there will ever be a Women's Liberation Movement in India which will have strong support. Most women here seem to be quite unaware of what Women's Lib is about nor can they see any justification for its demands. This is not surprising - for most Indian women accept their subservience and the supremacy of the male without any rancour : Indian women are, by and large, concerned not with rights but with duties.

For the tiny minority of women in India who do rebel against their position and the



traditional belief in male supremacy, the Women's Liberation Movement presents the only serious effort to set the balance right. It remains to be seen if they will band together to demand their rights and the recognition of their true destiny. Perhaps we will have to wait for that until Kate Millett arrives in this country - and that day is not far off, for she has vowed to keep aside some money from the sales of her book to make a trip to India!



Indian Woman-Her Position In Society

Dr. (Mrs.) RADHAKRISHNAMURTHY

VEDIC Literature which is the main source of all cultural manifestations in India present a clear picture of ancient Indian womanhood. Women were then holding an esteemed and honoured position in Society and a deep study of our ancient literature reveal to us that Indian woman was playing a very important role in the home as well as in Society. Even in the days of yore, woman did not lag behind to extend her helping hand to man in carving out an ideal pattern of Society. The ancient Sages envisaged woman as an expression of the indwelling maternity of God. She was regarded as an inseparable companion of man - his auspicious half. Man and woman have been often described as the two wheels of the chariot of life. The age-old concepts of *Prakriti-Purusha*, *Siva-Sakti* and *Ardhanareesvra* clearly prove that the eternal companionship of man and woman was the most cherished in ancient Indian Society.

Culture dependent on the women

The level of culture of a particular society can very well be judged by the position of women in that society. Woman, especially the married one enjoyed a position of respect and authority in the family as well as in society. The married woman was respectfully called *Grihalakshmi*, Goddess of home and woman did play the role of a Goddess with grace and affection looking after the comforts of all the members of

the family, from the master of the house to the servants, including even the domesticated animals and birds. Family, which was the unit of society, played a significant role in the evolution of Indian culture. *Mitrtva*, Motherhood was considered to be the highest dharma of woman. Realising the full significance of this unique attribute of woman, the ancestors fixed her position and duties on that basis. Happiness of the family as well as the character and quality of future generations depend on woman and therefore she has to bear greater and heavier responsibilities than man. It is but proper that the Rishis of the vedic times raised woman to divinity and gave her an honoured position in the family and in society.

The Home

In ancient days the home was the centre of harmony and a cradle of love and affection. Though the family was patriarchal, both father and mother jointly exercised authority in running the household smoothly. A wife was called *sahadharma-charini* because on all occasions of religious and social rituals, she cooperated with her husband by directly participating in them. In fact, a man without wife was denied the right of performing any religious rite. A home was not called a home unless it was graced by the presence of *Grihini*. Wood and stones do not make a home. It is the wife who makes a home. The Hindu view has exalted the state of a householder because of the companionship of his wife. So the wise sages of the past insisted that women should be honoured and also proper

protection should be provided for them from all possible situations.

Thus the happiness and prosperity of a family, which is the foundation of the corporate life of a community depended on the way in which women were treated in the family by men. (Manu 3-55)

Equal rights

In the past women enjoyed equal rights with men. Women like Gargi, Maitreyi, Vachaknavi took part in the intellectual and spiritual life of Society. Women's contribution to the different branches of learning was in no way less significant than that of men. Viswavara, Apala, Lopamudra, Ghosa, Indrani and Sachi are some who are counted among the revered Rishis who are the composers of Vedic hymns. Many women were proficient in fine arts like music, dance and painting. The vedic literature tell us about many women who enjoyed high position in society as seers and sacrificers and at the same time maintained the peace and harmony of their homes with great attention and care. Education was regarded as important to girls as it was to boys. Boys and girls studied together in the hermitages. Our epics mention about girls practising their family profession. We come across skillful horse women, women archers and spear bearers in the army. Thus women proved themselves capable of performing efficiently almost all the work that were assigned to men. Matrimony did not hinder woman from achieving the highest spiritual goal. Leading the life of a wife and mother a woman could become Brahmavadini and practise religion. Wives of many sages led

an ideal family life and achieved their spiritual goal. Domestic harmony coupled with spiritual development was given importance during that time. Even though the ancient thinkers stressed more on family life and did not much approve of a woman taking the path of religion and renunciation, woman had the choice like man to devote herself to family or to lead the life of an ascetic. Though marriage was compulsory for women, there are references of many women who remained spinsters and led a purposeful life. A few of the lady composers of Rig Vedic hymns were unmarried. In the Epic period also we come across devoted women like Dhrtavrata, Srutavati and Sulabha who remained unmarried, practised austerities and achieved the highest goal of spiritual life. Young girls led free lives and had the freedom to select their husbands. Woman was judged with sympathy and she was not subject to any of the merciless laws even when she overstepped the moral code and was found guilty of adultery. Thus in ancient India women, enjoying the privileges bestowed upon them by society shouldered the responsibilities of a *Grihini* with remarkable skill and also achieved the status of Brahmavadini with unflinching courage.

The Decline

In the later period the position of women in India gradually deteriorated. Despite the fact that Hindu religion or Hindu tradition did not discourage education among women, women's education was not wide spread. Most of the women thinkers, poetesses and scholars belonged to the

Brahmin class or to royal and noble families. Woman lost her freedom in many fields. Remaining unmarried for a woman was considered to be a great sin. Marriage became an obligation to woman and she had no voice in choosing her life partner (*Mahabharata I. 114-36*).

Manu who has exalted woman in one place has condemned her as sinful, wicked and impure in another context. (*Manu 9-17*).

Manu and other Smritikaras ruled out the independence of women and have spoken about *their* perpetual dependence on men. (*Manu 9-3*).

In vedic age eventhough the birth of a son was always sought for by the parents, daughters also were given due respect and affection in the family. Educated daughters were considered to be the pride of family. But gradually the birth of a daughter was being looked upon with discontent probably due to the difficulty of securing suitable husbands for them. This led to the early and compulsory marriage of girls on account of which they were deprived of higher education. Daughters were treated as if they never belonged to the family. A daughter was considered to be an ornament held in pawn to be handed over to the *rightful* owners. (*Abhignana Sakuntala 4-22*). Since child marriage became prevalent, number of child widows also increased. Lives of hundreds of young, innocent female children were doomed forever.

The Veil

Added to this calamity, women had no right to find consolation through prayers and pilgrimages. They were not entitled to offer

prayers, to observe penance, to go on pilgrimages, to recite vedic Mantras and even to worship God, on account of periodic foreign invasions and the havoc created by them, Indian women started observing, 'Purdah' and remained within their houses. Women belonging to princely families resorted to the practice of 'Sati' to save their honour and this was followed by other classes of women. Eventhough there is no direct reference to the practice of 'Sati' in the Vedas and only a few instances are mentioned in Mahabharata, the practice of *Sahagamana* became widely prevalent in our country. Thus woman lost her individuality and status in Society. Her existence and happiness depended on that of her husband. She was looked upon as *Bhogya* - a thing of enjoyment rather than as a companion of man. Men forgetting their own weakness started condemning the very nature of women. Woman lost her right of inheritance. The plight of unfortunate widows became untenable, even the sight of them was considered to be inauspicious. Unmarried and childless women were subject to all sorts of criticism and ridicule. Society was deprived of the finest contribution of women in the various fields. When this darker side of Indian womanhood was presented before the world, she was looked down as backward, uneducated, narrow minded and unfit for anything.

Man-made law

Hindu religion is in no way responsible for the deteriorated condition of women in India. It is the law - man-made law which denied women their rights. The law makers



were men who entertained fantastic ideas about the nature of women and tried to establish their own superiority. But the Hindu scriptures have accepted woman as the educator and protector of man. A wife is called *Jaya* because through her a man is again born as his son; (*Manu 9-8*).

A woman's care and love protects man from all evils, her charm and beauty thrills him with immense joy, her sacrifice and surrender shapes his life correctly and her service and tenderness brings prosperity to his life. In India, when it was considered that the door of salvation was closed to women, a galaxy of women saints and seers appeared on the spiritual scene of India. Women saints like *Jana Bai*, *Mukta*, *Meera*, *Akkamahadevi* and others shedding the glow of spiritual experience, led the path of hundreds of women-seekers. It is indeed

gratifying that some of the religious leaders like *Basaveswara* tried to secure social, economic and political rights for women. Even in the dark hour of adversity, the dormant spark in Indian woman's heart kindled up, beamed and blazed spreading radiance all around.

The Mahatma's efforts

During the British regime great leaders like *Rajarammohan Roy*, *Dayananda Saraswathi* and *Mahatma Gandhi* put great efforts for the upliftment of woman and improving her social status. Indian women who were ridiculed as backward, ignorant and unaware of political affairs of the country, took part in large numbers in the political struggle. Thanks to the efforts of the true sons of India like *Mahatmaji*, the spread of women's education and the awakening of thought in them led to their increased participation in almost all fields of work. Active participation of our women in the freedom fight has proved to the world that Indian woman is capable of sacrificing everything for the sake of her nation and is ready to accept any amount of suffering for the cause of mankind. The so called 'weaker sex – woman' - is able to shoulder the responsibilities of a nation with more devotion, dedication and courage than men. The position that women have been occupying in India's political and social life especially after the independence has been a matter of surprise and envy to the outer world. Indian women have made their mark as *Ministers*, *Ambassadors*, *Social workers*, *Engineers*, *Scientists* etc.

Woman - Today

Today legislation has changed many rules concerning women. Women are enjoying equal privileges with men in many fields. In spite of this, modern Indian woman is not contented. In the present situation a woman has to face many new problems which a woman of the Vedic Age could never even have dreamt of. Many educated women lead a mechanical life without realising their true goal. Many qualified women who yearn to contribute their share to society stay behind the curtain of tradition and deny themselves the basic rights which are necessary for a more useful and meaningful life. Even now illiteracy is greater among women. Women are not yet completely free from the social bondage imposed on them by old customs. An educated woman is not contented with her role of just a house wife. She wants an outlet for her talents, a media to express her thoughts in and a field for her creative instincts. Unless she seeks some profession outside her home there is no scope for her personality to unfold itself. In the olden days family was the centre of human life and the work of a woman at home was considered to be as important as any other type of work. But now increasing industrialisation and democratisation of culture are gradually diminishing the significance of family life. The economic condition in India has also forced woman to seek jobs and supplement the family income. Present day tendency is towards greater individual freedom and it is but natural that woman also is seeking economic independence. When a woman is forced to work outside she comes into conflict with her own inner nature. Working women are

not very happy because of the discrimination regarding their wages and other benefits. Even today the attitude of society is governed by the idea that woman is inferior to man. The legislation that is enacted for the welfare of women benefits only a handful of them.

Shattering of Convention

To overcome all these difficulties women should develop progressive attitudes and courage and shatter down old unhealthy conventions like dowry system etc. Nationwide movement should be launched by women to make women aware of their rights and become conscious of their role in society. Women should come forward to share the responsibility of men for the development of Society. It is left to her to assert her rightful place in society and for this is possible only if opportunities are given to her to play her role well. Whether she chooses to be a home-maker or to be a breadwinner, a woman should be made to feel competent and needed. The position of a mother or housewife in society is in no way inferior to that of a minister, doctor or engineer. Looking after a family and keeping a home should also be recognised as vital national service. Efforts should be made to draw forth from women their finest contribution for the foundation of a more beautiful social structure.

Relevance of Lib Movement to India

Influenced by the women's lib movement of the West, Indian women also demand emancipation. Indian women's demands are right and just. But some women are misled

by this movement. Women's lib. in India does not mean that woman should be relieved of her household duties, should have complete freedom to dress as she likes, go about and spend money and time without being restricted in any way. Women should demand meaningful equality with men. As Gandhiji has said, for every right that is to be exercised a corresponding duty has to be accepted. Indian woman should accept her duty as an important citizen of her country. She must first of all equip herself with all the qualities that would make her self-reliant and self-confident. She must try to generate inner strength instead of crying at the doors of men. Becoming conscious of their duties, if women stand firm on their right to freedom they can achieve their ideal aim.

True Liberation

Much is being talked about, discussed and written about the different measures that have to be adopted to remove social and economic injustices to women. Nothing concrete has been done so far. Women must try to liberate themselves from their weakness - like love of ornaments, flashy and costly dresses, gossiping etc. They must re-examine the principles of Hindu life and adopt only those which are applicable in the changed social conditions. They must develop deep faith in religion. Religion has never taught the inferiority of women. Women should never hope that their emancipation would come through a man. True liberation has to be achieved through a woman only. Women who are detached, educated, able to teach, able to create their own scripture and Dharmasastras

should rise upto the occasion to emancipate their sisters, without neglecting the uneducated rustic women toiling in the fields, tribals and backward classes ignorant of their own pathetic life, and the fallen women who are ill-treated for no fault of theirs.

Women should understand that in everything simplicity is the supreme excellence. Women should never hesitate to protest against Indian cinemas, posters and advertisements through which Indian womanhood is humiliated.

Man and woman are complementary to each other. There are certain functions which only a woman can fulfil. Woman who is the giver of joy, inspirer of activity, maker of home and mother of children cannot do her part successfully if she imitates man in every respect. While enjoying all the privileges in society, she should be careful not to misuse her position and transgress her limits. The vast and mighty ocean commands our awe and wonder because it keeps itself within its limits. The greatest role for a woman would be to play a mother like Sharada Devi and shower her affection on suffering humanity. Indian woman should rise to the heights of service and sacrifice like Kasturba Gandhi to wipe the tears of the distressed. Woman must realise the value of motherhood, sanctity of marriage, sacredness of family life and importance of devoted service and contribute their best for the flowering of happier and larger Family - The Nation.



Social Service

Earliest attempts

WHEN we realize that the number of voluntary social welfare agencies and institutions in present day India has been estimated at 10,000 and that the majority of these deal with services directly or indirectly concerned with women and children and the socially, mentally or physically handicapped, we shall see that the harvest of pioneer efforts made on modern lines is a rich one. It is necessary here to stress the phrase "modern lines". Necessary, because in our zeal for social welfare of the new pattern we should not forget that social welfare is as old as the human community itself and that if women today are the most indefatigable social workers, they were, too, if not the initiators, at least the administrators of what amounted to social services in India in ancient, medieval and more recent times.

Dated back in history

From earliest recorded history we have stories of the philanthropy not only of Kings but of Queens, particularly in times of famine or disaster. In particular, a passage in Rajatarangini, Kalhana's ancient history of the King of Kashmir, where a now-forgotten queen is shown working side by side with her husband among the famine-stricken and with him giving the last of her possessions to hold back the flood of hunger. Charity and almsgiving have indeed always been a sign of devotion in India.

From time immemorial, the temples have been filled with the lame and the halt, the blind and the poverty-stricken who could be sure of getting their regular toll of alms from the many women who came to worship. Again, the temples have been a refuge for the homeless and provided the first rudimentary forms of "shelter". In Moghul times, the queens and ladies of the court, from religious motives, took an interest in the orphaned and the destitute. Undoubtedly, the earliest social impulses of this kind were connected with religion and the religious way of life. As ancient as India itself are the concepts of dharma, not only as the natural order of things but in terms of man's sacred duty to fellow man; and of karma, the law of moral as well as physical cause and effect, which brought man inevitably the good and bad results of his good and bad actions. Compassion, karuna for all life was a religious as well as a social virtue. It was inevitable, therefore, that in the Indian context social service should have an intense religious background. Inevitable too, that even to the present day, those who may be regarded as the most dedicated social workers have almost invariably been men and women who practised the religious ideals of self-abnegation, voluntary poverty and often brahmacharya or celibacy.

Family as a Social Service Unit

It is, however, woman, as mother and head of the family, who may be termed a social welfare institution in herself. According to Indian tradition, the joint family, in which members of the family grew up, married and lived under one roof with all their

children, was itself a self-contained unit giving social security to all its members. The physically handicapped were accepted as part of it, whether they could earn or not, and they would never lack food or the emotional satisfaction of being loved or wanted. Where cousin and brother and sister were almost inter-changeable terms (in modern India a cousin is often referred to as cousin-sister or cousin-brother to save her or him the feeling that any discrimination is being made) the loss of a parent, or even both the parents, was a much less serious matter. Unemployment, sickness and the like were not so frightening when the joint kitchen was there to see that all had food. If, in the poorer groups, hardship was involved, particularly for the women, in that a number of non-contributing mouths had to be fed, all would have been ashamed to mention it knowing well that they themselves might have been in the same position or might later have to face the same blows of fate.

The widow - a nature-made Social Worker

It was within the joint family that the widow of Hindu tradition found her shelter. After the death of her husband, sometimes when she was a mere child, she would be subjected to the ugly rituals of shaving her head and putting on the white or red rough cotton sari that would be her uniform for the rest of her life. Separated by her sorrow from the auspicious ceremonies and festivals of the household, she had to make her own place in the family unit.

Much has been said of the tragedy of the life of the Hindu widow and the almost

unbearable asceticisms imposed on her, but less is known of the sometimes remarkable and beautiful characters who have come through this school of suffering to be the guardian angels not only of the sick, the suffering and all the children in the families which brought them up but have shed the light of their devotion on the world outside. The Hindu widow who becomes the servant of society is a very precious off-shoot of Hindu tradition and is still in a very living way making her contribution to Indian society. Pandita Rama Bai is an outstanding 19th century example; her counterparts are Lady Venkata Subba Rao, Smt. Thankamma in Kerala, Smt. Kamala Bai Hospet in Madhya Pradesh and Smt. Sujata Das in Bengal among countless others.

SIDELIGHTS INTO ORGANISED ACTIVITIES - In Bengal

Even in the latter half of 19th century and the first half of 20th century, the seclusion of upper class Bengali women was great and girls over ten years were traditionally prohibited from coming out of their homes or to attend a public gathering, barring perhaps religious or festive occasions.

Keshab Chandra Sen was the first to overcome such over-seclusion in the cause of general uplift and broad education. He formed an association of grown-up women as early as 1865 under his direct religious supervision - the Brahma Samaj in Calcutta. An European lady was deputed to teach them hand-work. The reaction against this novel idea of assembling grown-up women outside their homes was widespread, and the persons connected with it were virtually excommunicated by their Hindu relatives.

Yet the number of members increased day by day.

Appearance of 'Respectable' women at such public functions started also in Bhagalpur, Barisal and Dacca. All these were strongholds of the Brahmo rebels against orthodoxy.

On 14th April 1871 an association by the name of Bama Hitaishini Sabha was formed with Keshab Chandra as its President and Radharani Lahiri, the niece of the saintly Ratanu Lahiri, as Secretary.

Both the Arya Nari Samaj and the Banga Mahila Samaj had their periodical sittings; questions like superiority of men over women, purity of character, freedom of women in ancient Hindu society were discussed by the former; while usefulness of women in the context of modern society and virtues of modern ideals for women were mooted by the latter.

In 1907 Mahila Silpoa Samiti (Ladies Industrial League) was started by a committee of Indian ladies in Calcutta for social and educational work among women with the Maharani of Mayurbhanj in the chair. An Industrial school was opened in the same year at 9 Sibnaran Dass Lane, Calcutta (Off Cornwallis Street). It gave scholastic education as well as handiwork training in weaving, tailoring, painting, embroidery, music, lace work, household duties and needle work to Hindu and even Muslim women to make them self-supporting while working in their own houses.

The organisation and societies started by Bengali women so far were naturally located in Bengal and almost exclusively in the great giant metropolis; but with the spread of higher education and even some

inter-provincial marriages, the activity tended to pass on to the all-India plane.

[From: Condition Of Bengali Women by Usha Chakrabort]

In Colourjui Rajastban

Rajasthan is a state that can boast of a host of legendary women in the centuries gone by. Who has not heard the name of Rani Padmini of Chittor, Panna Bai, Rani Kamawati and Meera Bai and admired their courage and devotion to the cause they espoused!

With independence, regeneration again took place - Rajasthani woman picked up the threads and started coming into her own. She discarded 'purdah' and strove to carve a place for herself in the political, social and educational life of the reorganised state. The Maharani of Jaipur - Shrimati Gayatri Devi - started the first public school for girls - the M. G. D. School. Rajasthan has been adopted as a home by many women of outstanding ability whose contribution in various fields of activity is stupendous. Usha Barkatulla Khan, born in Kanpur and educated in England, made Rajasthan her home and became a well-known social figure as the Director of the Rajasthan Small Industries Corporation, Chairman of the Purchase Committee for Handicrafts in Rajasthan and the Director of the Indian Tourism Corporation-now the India Tourism Development Corporation.

Rani Laxmi Kumari Chundawat, born in a Rajput family in 1916, was referred to as Rani Sahiba. An artist and a writer of no mean repute, Shrimati Laxmi Kumari contributed to the revival of arts and crafts

as a Member of the Advisory Board of the Rajasthan Small Industries Corporation.

Mrs. Sharda Bhargava is well known in the state for the active part she has played in its educational and cultural institutions. Rani Urmila Devi is a prominent social worker, Chairman of the State Social Welfare Board and District Congress Committee. She is an eloquent speaker, having full command over English, Hindi and Gujarati. She has contributed articles to several prominent newspapers and magazines. She has also represented India at the Paris Conference of Social and Moral Hygiene.

Miss Lilian Godfreda Lutter was born in Rangoon, Burma in 1899. All her life, Miss Lutter has been keenly interested in Girl Guide Movement and an efficient Guide herself, she served as Guide Commissioner in Burma and in Rajasthan. Krishna Tarve of Gaya (Bihar) has made Rajasthan her home and has given the best years of her life to the education of women and the moulding of their character.

The native simplicity, boisterousness and colourful dress - the billowing skirts with their shining butis and ornaments lend Rajasthan its splendid colour. Emerging from this traditional state, the women rise to a new standard, of which the state could be proud indeed.

Tamilnadu rises to the challenges

Seven miles south of Dindigul on the trunk road from Madras to Madurai stands Gandhigram, a complex for training field workers for rural areas. An organised effort to train women to work for the welfare of women and children in backward and tribal areas was started by Kasturba Gandhi

National Memorial Trust in 1945. Gandhiji gave his blessings and emphasised that the work should be done by women and for women.

A start was made by training women health workers in the Kasturba Maternity Home, Adyar, in collaboration with Government Hospital for Women and Children, Egmore, Madras in 1945. Six girls with suitable educational qualifications (minimum 7th Standard) were chosen from the rural areas, the main criteria being capacity for leadership, organization, understanding of the work and willingness to take up this challenging work wherever they were posted.

A branch of the Kasturba Sevikaashram has also been started in Sivasailam, Tirunelveli district in 1954 under the name of 'Avvai Ashram'. The Grama Sevika Training given here has been approved as equivalent to that of pre-basic teachers who can be employed to teach in nursery schools as well as 1st to 3rd grades in primary schools.

The Guild of Service (Madras)

The Women's National Air Raid Precaution Corps, founded by the Guild of Service was the fore-runner of the Women's Welfare Department in Tamilnadu. In 1940, at the request of Lady Hope, the Guild of Service organised the Gold and Silver Trinket Fund. Gold and Silver were collected in trinkets and from the money converted from *it*, the Guild of Service donated 8 ambulances and a blood plasma plant for different theatres of war in the Middle East and South East Asian Countries and the border areas of Calcutta and Assam.

It led by Lady Leach in 1941 the Guild started a Salvage Depot for selling scrap such as old papers, bottles and tins. A sum of Rs. 30,000 collected through scrap was sent to the families ravaged by war in Greece and London. The end of the war brought several changes and gave new dimensions to the work of the Guild. The service rendered by Mrs. Clubwallah Jadhav under this banner has spread the Indian Social Service over the international plane and much work has been done for the adoption of orphans by families, in India and abroad by her.

The Guild of Service lays great emphasis on the vital theme of rehabilitation. No child is sent away without properly finding him a home in the society. Today, the Samajam's boys and girls are placed in a variety of fields - different services, business, industries, banks and offices and vocational institutions. Sri Avinashilingam Education Trust was constituted on the 10th of October 1950, starting first, the Sri Avinashilingam High School for Girls. The Mukhya Sevika's Training Unit was started in 1959; the Nursery School in 1960; the Post-Graduate Department in 1961; the Elementary School in 1962; the Applied Nutrition Programme in 1964; the Nutrition Research Division in 1969; and the Sri Avinashilingam Teacher's College was opened in 1968.

In the State of Andhra

Till the emergence of the Central Social Welfare Board in 1953, voluntary effort grappled with the problems under service limitations of funds and guidance. The emergence of the Board with its

counterparts in different states was a recognition of the importance of voluntary effort in social welfare.

For whomsoever they worked, be it the widow, the unmarried mother, the neglected child, the victim of a social disease like leprosy, the illiterate rural mother, the waif or the vagrant who slept on the pavements, they worked with dedication, undying zeal and doggedness.

The Andhra Pradesh State Welfare Advisory Board and the erstwhile Hyderabad State Social Welfare Advisory Board came into existence in July 1954 with Smt. A. C. Krishna Rao and Smt. Vimala Bai Melkote as Chairmen of the respective State Boards. It was the formation of Andhra Pradesh that brought about a change in the existing pattern and finally Andhra Pradesh State Social Welfare Advisory Board was set up in 1957 under the Chairmanship of Smt. A. C. Krishna Rao. It functioned effectively under her able leadership and Smt. Shyamala Devi who took over from her in 1959 worked assiduously for the promotion of the welfare activities with single-minded devotion for a number of years.

The activities of this Department are focused on educative, preventive and protective measures and rehabilitation services for women and children through institutional and non-institutional channels. It is implementing the following schemes : (1) State Homes, (2) Service Homes (3) Vocational Training Centres with attached hostels (4) District Tailoring Centres with attached hostels, (5) Women's Welfare Branches, (6) Children's Homes, (7) Crèches and (8) Balwadis.

The Andhra Pradesh branch of the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene

in India was started in 1951 as Nari Sudhar Society under the dynamic personality of Smt. Vellodi. The very first achievement of the society was to get the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act passed by the Legislative Assembly of Hyderabad State. In 1959 the Society assumed the status of the Andhra Pradesh Branch of the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene India.

Started with four inmates in 1952, Seva Sadan gives shelter to destitute women and children and imparts instructions in social education, basic education, handicrafts, etc.

The Andhra Yuvati Mandali was started in the year 1935 in the erstwhile Hyderabad State by a band of enthusiastic women interested in social welfare activities, particularly in the advancement of women and children. It was registered in 1954 and has grown into a big organisation with about 250 members on the rolls. With the assistance of the Central Social Welfare Board and the Government of Andhra Pradesh, the Mandali is running several activities.

Founded by Sri A. S. Chetti, on 1st July, 1934, *Hindu Stree Punar Vivaha sahaik Sangham* has the object to encourage the remarriage of Hindu widows, to render such of them who wish to remarry all possible help to work and towards the removal of obstacles and prejudices standing in the way of Hindu widows re-marrying.

Andhra Pradesh can pride itself on having produced Smt. Durga Bai Deshmukh, hailed as the "mother of social work" in India by no less a personality than Smt. Indira Gandhi. Her dynamism, iron will, humanism, incessant zeal and supreme organising

capacity have inspired and will continue to inspire social workers in this country. As Chairman of the Central Social Welfare Board she is the architect of many of its schemes. Two Chair Persons of Central Board, Smt. Deshmukh and Smt. Masuma Begum, recipient of Padma Shri, hail from Andhra Pradesh.

In Maharashtra

Historically, Maharashtra has a unique position. It is the meeting ground of various religions.

The first and the only all women university, S.N.D.T. University for women which has no limits on territorial jurisdiction in the state is located in Maharashtra. The First limb-fitting centre at Kirkee is located at Poona. The Family Planning Programme for the first time was introduced by a voluntary organisation in Bombay in 1923. The first school for training professional social workers, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences was opened in 1936 in Bombay. In more recent years, occupational therapy for the first time was introduced in Bombay for which the credit goes to Kamla Bai Nimbkar. The Maharashtra State Women's Council has rendered social welfare service to the under-privileged since 1919 specially to women and children.

The adult literacy and mother-craft classes conducted by the Social Education Committee of the Council as well, as sewing classes help women a great deal. During the last 3 years it helped 170 women to become literate and 210 to manage their homes better and learn to take good care of their children.

Its branch in Poona, the Poona Women's

Council works for the welfare of Jawans and their dependents through its Troops Aid Committee. Its village welfare projects are at Dhankandi and Katra.

The Sita-burdi Maternity Home had come into existence on 8th May 1921. Started with five beds, in a small house in the heart of Sita-burdi, Nagpur, the Maternity Home today is a full fledged hospital for women and children, with 150 beds, and all the ancillary hospital services, such as operation theatre, X-Ray, pathological laboratory, blood bank, premature baby unit, a ward for the invalid aged women, in its own building situated on North Ambazari Road, Nagpur.

The story of the growth of this institution in Nagpur has no parallel in the history of Social institutions of this city. The dynamism, selfless devoted service with missionary zeal of the two ladies - Smt. K. Hospet and Smt. Venutai Nene made a mark on the life of the citizens of Nagpur. Voluntary help from medical practitioners, donations from the rich, sympathy and help from the Government came forward and the enthusiasm of the workers was boundless.

The city of Jabalpur did not lag behind. Smt. Kamia Bai established a branch here in 1941. Yet another branch was opened at Hinganghat in 1944. The year 1945 was crowned with success and four more branches were established in that year at four places : (i) Bilaspur, (ii) Armori in Chandrapur district, (iii) Brahmपुर and (iv) Warora in the same district. In 1947, a branch was established in Saugar.

Besides Maternity Services, Matru Seva Sangh, has been responsible for establishing service activities in the field of education

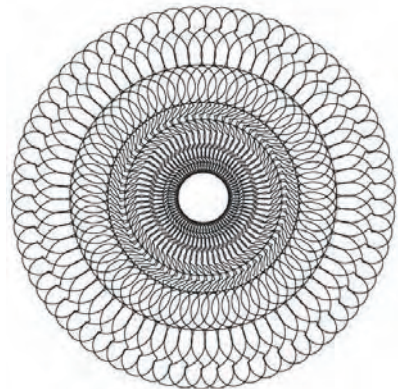
and rehabilitation. There are three Training Centres for the courses of Auxiliary Nurses and Mid wifery at Nagpur and Wardha.

The team of selfless, devoted social workers in Matru Seva Sangh will carry on this great work under the leadership of Padma Shri Kamala Bai Hospet.

The Shraddhanand Mahilashram of Matunga, which started as a Rescue Home with four women in 1928, is today a multi-purpose institution for women and children in distress.

Its recent programme of rehabilitation of abandoned or unwanted babies by giving them in legal adoption to families in India or abroad has made the institution known all over the world. People from various countries now come to India to see the institution and its activities, which include a work centre started in 1954 for women from outside the institution who are given gainful employment.

The institution also serves as a field work training institution for post-graduate students in Social Science and for practical Social Work for students of schools and colleges in the City under recently introduced National Social Service Scheme.



Hingne Stree Shikshan Sanstha, Poona

14th JUNE, 1896 became an auspicious day for an idealist because his keen desire to change the lot of widows gave birth to the *Widows' Home* on that day. In 1893 D. K. Karve married a widow against traditional prejudices and took up social reform and advancement of women as the mission of his life. In 1900 the four-year-old sapling was transferred by the dedicated founder to a small hut on an open plot of land at Hingne Budruk, six kilometres away from Pune City. The village is now called



Karve-Nagar and is a part of the Poona Municipal Corporation.

Karve strove to help the Indian woman to take her rightful place in the home, the society and the nation. The story of the growth of the institution through all these years is an inspiring saga of courage,

sacrifice, dedication and public service. The Widows' Home of 1897 had only one inmate. Now the Hingne Stree Shikshan Sanstha looks after the education of about 4,000 children and women of all castes and communities. The annual budget which was only Rs. 500 at the beginning has now gone up to Rs. 13 lakhs. His charm soothed away her melancholy.

A Place of Pilgrimage

The institution has all along been managed by a band of life-workers pledged to work in a spirit of sacrifice.

The institution is now considered a place of pilgrimage, which attracts many visitors from all over the country and abroad. Everyone who visits Hingne contributes something in his own way.

It has been instrumental in bringing about a great change in the life, attitude and aspirations of the Indian woman through all these years. In the last century she was married before the teens, suppressed by traditional customs, buried under the hard chores of domestic life. She presented a picture of stunted growth and unfulfilled ambition. Today in contrast to that life, she can take any responsible position including that of the Prime Minister and her contribution to the nation-building activities is significant.

The only Women's University

In 1907 Karve launched a school for unmarried girls, which was later amalgamated with the Widows' Home. Out of this union sprouted the Mahilashram High School. It gave birth to the Women's

University. Karve's concept of the role of women in modern society was realistic, though revolutionary. While he believed in equality of status and opportunity for women he realised that without adequate training and preparation they would not properly fulfil their role in the family or in the society. That is why he propounded the idea of a separate university for women in 1916 which was nursed and nourished at Hingne till 1923. The vast expansion of the university which later came to be known as the S. N. D. T. Women's University, has now its headquarters at Bombay. This lone Women's university in India with about ten conducted colleges and an equal number of affiliated colleges in Maharashtra and Gujarat fully vindicates Maharshi Karve's stand and shows his foresight.

Multifarious activities

After the transfer of the Women's University from Hingne, the institution developed its multifarious activities and since 1946 came to be known as the Hingne Stree-Shikshan Sanstha because it dealt with the education of all girls, married and unmarried, along with widows or even separated wives.

Thus at the campus at Karve Nagar, there are more than a thousand girls receiving education. Out of these, nearly 750 reside on the premises in five hostel units. It is a special feature of the Hostel that girls from the age of 5 to 25 years stay together. The pupils present almost a cross-section of the society, from very well-to-do families to the extremely poor. Similarly, girls from advanced and backward classes all stay together. Such a big residential institution



goes a long way in bringing harmonious development in the new generation. In these hostels 150 students depend on the institution for boarding and lodging. About 70 Harijan girls also reside in the hostels along with others.

A working women's hostel called "Mahila Nivas", was established in 1960 in its own building in Poona to supply food and shelter to girls and women who are in need of such facility.

A home for the aged

A Home for the Aged, 'Vanaprasthashram' was recently started on the Hingne Campus and about a dozen women over 55 years stay there as paying inmates. The story of the growth of the Hingne Sanstha is thus a story of the progress of the emancipation of Indian Womanhood.



A Splash of Colour

Of woman are we born, of woman conceived by woman is civilisation continued, it is by woman that order is maintainedwithout woman none would exist."

Festivals reaffirm our faith in religion and revive the sagging spirit of gracious, old traditions. And, above all, these festival days generate a togetherness which has all but disappeared from our lives. It is good to see families praying together, united once again in the bonds of love, respect and affection; the old parents, the executive son, the mod daughter perhaps, the foreign daughter-in-law.

Not all festivals, of course, are so universal as to proclaim Peace on Earth, Goodwill to All men - but our own myths and legends are utterly fascinating and all our festivals, in one way or the other, celebrate the defeat of evil, the victory of good and bring in joyous tidings.

What we feel rather strongly about are the myriad superstitions attached to our festivals - superstitions which, somehow, seem mainly directed against women. On reading through this account, you will find a preponderance of these man-made beliefs which have infiltrated, through the years, to dictate women's role in society. These structures which say, women can't do this, or must do that, must be put to rest for all time. After all, it is the woman who is the pivot of life.

She is Sakti Devi - all things to all men, whether she be given other names like Parvati, Durga, Kali, Sati. It is the woman

who prays and performs puja. There are countless festivals which deal with the veneration and worship of husbands. It is she who keeps the family together, who, come festival time, finds ways and means, in these stringent days, to celebrate without ostentation, yet keeping intact the force and spirit inculcated in us by our forefathers.

Role of Women

India and festivals go together. A country impoverished materially, we would be spiritually arid without these regular forays into joyous areas. Ask our women, for they guard this heritage zealously. The life of the Vedic Aryan revolved around sacrifice (Yajna). As Hinduism developed sacrifice came to be increasingly replaced by worship (Puja). A God is worshipped as an icon (area), which has been sanctified by special rites after which divinity rests in it. The worship of the god is not so much a prayer as much as an act of homage and entertainment. He is fed on delicacies and on major festivals, he is taken out in the village, town or city in a splendid vehicle pulled by his devotees. This is the central theme in most festivals. Generally, however, women have never been encouraged to live lives devoted to religion and asceticism. Their true place has been the home, their divine mission marriage. But while women were not as strictly segregated as among the Muslims, they were certainly not allowed full freedom, specially not a married woman. The south was relatively free in those ancient times of the stringent rules followed by the Aryan North. Amongst Buddhists, any nun was

inferior to the freshest male novice and as for Jainism it accorded to women only a lowly position while the Muslim era ushered in the age of 'purdah'. Mother Goddesses were always worshipped in India. Between the Harappan and Gupta periods, the cult did not attract much attention from the learned and the scholarly. It was during the Middle ages that goddesses came into their own when feminine divinities were increasingly worshipped. The goddess was Shakti, the active and immanent aspect of Shiva. The history of Indian festivals is like everything else about this country a conglomerate of varied practices. Amongst Christians, woman participated equally in festivals, Christmas and Easter are family affairs, where women perform important functions.

Navaratri

Navaratri - nine nights of dancing and music, till the first rays of sun come out to lighten the sky. Practically the whole of Gujarat and Saurashtra and Gujaratis anywhere else - go a little mad during these days, losing themselves in the intoxicating rhythm of Ras and Garba, the lyrics and movements perpetuating the worship of Mother Goddess.

Divali

At eventide, every Indian home, lowly or mighty, mud hut or mansion is alit with the orange glow of twinkling diyas to welcome Divali. Indian women look forward to Divali. For them it is a family festival. Colourful clothes, fragrant flowers, sparkling jewellery, the aroma of delicious food,

rangoli in the threshold of their homes - all promise joy, light and plenty. The spirit of Divali pervades their being, as they worship their favourite goddess, Lakshmi. They pray for the return of Rama's glorious reign, when spiritual darkness will be banished from the world and people step from darkness into light.

Pongalo Pongal

A Tamil composition of the ancient Sangam period (period of the ancient Tamil academies) describes the joy of a love-lorn woman on the return of her man from the wars. Her happiness is likened to the month before Pongal when, with the end of the rains, the 'kaaya' flowers blossom like the sharply etched kajal in a woman's eyes and the tender Konrai flowers shower their golden pollen. For this day, a new pot, Pongapanai, is purchased after the auspicious moment of the birth of the new month, Thai, with which the pooja starts. The neck of the pot is tied with fresh turmeric and fresh ginger saplings, tender green leaves, the turmeric and ginger pods prominently decorating the pot. In the pot is cooked rice, moongdal, milk and jaggery. When this rice mixture comes to boil, everyone shouts out - "Pongalo-Pongal". This bubbling up of the milk signifies prosperity in the coming year. When the pongal dish is cooked and ready, it is offered with sugarcane to the sun as a thanksgiving. The birth of the month Thai on this day is also looked forward to as the start of the marriage season.

Rajasthan's Teej

Teej is celebrated throughout India, though in Rajasthan the festival is one of the most significant ones. On this day the women are up before dawn and the rush is on in the kitchen. Daughters and sisters are given new clothes. The women keeping fast are permitted to take only water throughout the day. Throughout the day children and young girls keep singing and playing on swings, which are colourful. The procession passes through the dense crowd on the main roads of Jaipur and ends in the picturesque surroundings of Cup Lake. Here offerings are made to the deity by the dancing and singing women.

Women make small pond-like ditches in the open ground. This pond is made with cowdung. They pour milk, water and curd in this pond. A diya is burnt and kept on the wall of the pond. Then there is Puja which is usually done by a Pundit or an old woman who sings hymns to Parvati. The other women join in. Then the legend of Parvati narrated and the fast is broken by the women.

Onam

It is the month of Chingam (15th August to 15th September) and Chingam is the month of the great Kerala festival. Onam, Dassera and Shivaratri are all Indian; but Onam is exclusively and characteristically Keralite. The Kerala woman like her counterparts in other provinces is a custodian of tradition. Onam is the festival in which the members of both sexes revel. It is not an exclusively women's festival, like Thiruvathira, which falls in mid-winter.



On Onam day everyone wears new clothes. Kerala is a mosaic of religions. Between them there are political rivalries with communal overtones. On Onam day, however, all communities, Hindus, Christians, Muslims and Jews join to celebrate the festival. One goes to a play or to an Ottamthullal, that unique form of art in which the same man sings, acts and dances or to a Chakyar-koothu, Kathakali which lasts all night. The sun is rising and the old lady of the house asks whether it is not time to go to sleep. She wonders, as she has been wondering for the last twenty-five years, whether she will live to see another Onam.

Durga Puja

Durga, the Goddess or Shakti, is widely worshipped in Bengal. Durga is considered

the daughter of Himavan. She was married to Lord Shiva, the God of Destruction. Sashti, the sixth day of the Puja, is the day of Durga's arrival at her parental home. The ladies of the house spend the days prior to this in planning and shopping. From the dawn of Saptami day starts the chanting of prayers and ladies perform the daily offering of raw vegetables, rice, fruit, flowers, sweets, incense and ganga-jal. Birashtami or Ashtami, as the eighth day is popularly known, was famous for its performance of heroic feats in the past. The women of the house offer traditional Bengali red bordered saris and sindoor to Durga. The Sandhi puja is in the form of a sacrificial offering. The Navami is yet again spent in worship and prayer. Then dawns the day of departure. The Goddess is decked once again in bridal finery and the married women apply sindoor and perform 'Baran'. Durga then sets out on her journey back to her husband's house amidst music, songs and shouts. She then goes to the Ganges for immersion and from there to the home of Lord Shiva.

Punjabi Festivals

The Sikh gurus were men who lived among their people, guiding and teaching them, sharing their fortunes and misfortunes. Gurunanak, the founder of Sikhism was not a conventional individual. Therefore Sikhs do not travel very far to worship. Their places of pilgrimage are in towns and cities rendered holy by the blood of martyrs and gurus. Here the faithful gather and worship. Sikh temples are known as Gurudwaras. The most important places of Sikhism in India are Amritsar, Taran Taran, Anandpur,

Dera Baba Nanak, Kartarpur and Patna. The famous Golden Temple of the Sikhs is in Amritsar. It is known as Hari Mandir and has a golden dome. At Baba Atal nearby, are frescoes depicting scenes from the life of Guru Nanak. In Anandpur, we have a shrine dedicated to GURU GOBIND SINGH. Thus Sikhism, the youngest of Indian religions founded by Gurunanak, has many sacred shrines in this country.

The legends behind all these temples, shrines, mosques, churches and gurudwaras are significant. Through these prayer houses, we glimpse the lives of men and learn about the dreams, faith and aspirations which have sustained the Indian people through the ages.

Baisakhi marks the end of the toiling season and the beginning of the reaping when the first crops are harvested and taken into the barnyards of the nation. A proud moment for the cultivators, a happy one for the owners and celebration is in the air. Baisakhi is as essential a part of Punjabi tradition as the fragrant delicious dishes. Baisakhi starts with the morning bath in the river and ends with the banqueting. For centuries, Punjab has brought forth tough men and women of the soil and nature has been partial to this part of India.

MINOR FESTIVALS

The fundamental unity underlying the diversity of the cultural life of India is reflected best in its festivals, which form an integral part of its traditions. Diwali, Dassera, Ganesh Chaturthi and Janmashtami are only some of the gala festivals that are observed with great eclat,

from Kanyakumari in the south to Kashmir in the north.

Tulsi Puja

Tulsi plant, which adorns the courtyard or garden of almost every traditional home, is the centre of attraction on the feast day. Married women are invited for Haldi Kumkum (literally, offer of turmeric and sindoor). It is said that one gathers punya or merit by offering auspicious articles to married women and girls.

Gandan Puja or Bhimana Amavasya

This is a unique festival of Mysore, where unmarried girls perform a special vrata connected with puja offered to Shiva and Parvathi. An unmarried girl is asked to do this devotedly to get a good husband. Even after marriage the women keep up this puja for the first nine years. Mangala Gowri is one of the important pujas performed every Tuesday in a particular month by married women for years after their marriage to ensure happiness in married life.

Nagapanchami denotes worship of the snake on the fifth lunar day. In Bengal-Manasadevi, in Punjab a figure in black representing the snake-God is drawn to prevent homes from being visited by snakes.

Gauri and Ganesha

On this day, brothers give auspicious gifts to sisters. This worship emphasises the penance (or tapas) performed by Parvathi to secure Lord Shiva as her husband. Kartikai is the real festival of lights for the

South Indians. A famous lamp is lighted on the hills of Tiruvannamalai near Madras, a symbolic elephant is made in clay by the lady of the house and worshipped in Mysore.

Janmashtami and Nagpanchami

This is a time when women vie with one another in turning out a host of edibles, both sweet and savoury. Krishna idol is decked colourfully. This is an occasion for women to be invited and offered pan, supari and fruits.

With the onset of monsoon commences a chain of Hindu festivals each surrounded by their own aura of bizarre beliefs, customs and legends. Nagpanchami marks the inception of this festive season. Falling on the fifth day in the month of Shravan Nagpanchami is sacred and on this day snakes are worshipped every year. Nowhere in India is the festival so looked forward to as it is in Shirala, a village on the Poona-Kolhapur Road. Guru Gorakh granted a boon that no villager in Shirala would be bitten by a cobra. Nagpanchami day here is marked with gaiety and festivities. Delicacies made of milk are seen in each home. A procession of gaily dressed women and children lead the snake charmers. Live cobras are displayed on platforms. These sway to the snake charmer's pipe. The whole day is spent in festivities and at the end of these the snakes are set free with the fervently uttered prayer "forgive me Nag Raja for catching you and excuse me for my mishandling".



Ganesh Chaturti

Occurs on the 4th day of first fortnight of Bhadrapad. Coloured clay images of the God are set on display in bazaars. A day before the worship the images are brought and conveyed home. There is puja on the main day. Gorgeous clothes and expensive jewellery adorn the forms of all ladies. Sweets are prepared in advance for the God. The puja commences with the usual accompaniments of rice, kumkum, haldi, flowers, arati-kapur, agarbati and flowers. This routine is carried on for the entire tenure of the God's stay in the house terminating on the Visarjan or immersion day.

Holi

Reds and oranges, greens and purples, pink and blues and a myriad colours dye the villages of India and the people who live in them, for it is Holi, the festival of spring and the most colourful of all festivals. The building of the bonfire is an elaborate and important feature of this festival. Rang Panchami is the day when coloured powder is thrown on all. At the conclusion of the day's gaiety and revelry everyone bathes in water boiled over the Holi fire. The freedom permitted during this festival is reminiscent of the Roman saturnalia, Raksha Bandhan is the classic name of the festival otherwise known as Rakhi. Its name derived from the principal ceremony of the day, viz, tying of an ornamental cord round the wrist, called Raksha, because it is intended to guard the wearer from all kinds of evil. The varieties of Rakhis on sale in July and August are stunning. On that day, even little boys are given money which is to be presented to their sisters in token of having understood and accepted their responsibility.

Mahavir Jayanti

This Jayanti is observed by the Jains without pomp or splendour, in a quiet manner with prayers and visits to sacred places, as befitting the memory of the great Tirthankaras.



The Gracious Octogenarian

By VISALAKSHI NARAYANASWAMY

MRS. AMMU SWAMINADHAN - How does one get reconciled to her being an octogenarian? We thought of her as one, who, like some of the Goddesses in a Greek fable, imbibed nectar and was endowed with the gift of perpetual youth.

I have known Mrs. Swaminadhan over a period of 43 years. Like the great British Prime Minister, Gladstone, she has lived to become a legend in her own life-time. Throughout this period I have seen her clad only in immaculate Khadi and with a perennial smile. She came under the Gandhian spell when he called up the womanhood of India to participate in the freedom battle. Ammu can look charming in the homeliest and the most unglamorous of wearing apparel, but she has too much esteem for her friends to disregard what she wore or the way she wore them. Her statuesque personality, the total absence of snobbery in her make-up, her wide knowledge of people and her great genius for friendship have endeared thousands of persons to her.

Gilchrist Gardens, in its unfading maroon, set in the green of sprawling gardens, which is as inviting as an eighteenth century French Chateau, has drawn many hundreds of friends to Harrington Road.

Champion of Women's Rights

Over the years Mrs. Swaminadhan has been a robust patriot, a champion of women's

rights, with abiding interest in social work. In the last 25 years, she has been closely associated with Smt. Manjubhashini, the spear-head of Bala Mandir at Thyagaraya Nagar. She is the President of the Family Planning Association of India and takes sustained interest in this just crusade against out-sized families. She has been associated with the All-India Women's Conference as an active member. She has served the Women of India in parliament. Till age and less robust health compelled her to limit her peregrinations and stay at home, she was an inveterate traveller within and without the country. What is perhaps crucially important about Mrs. Swaminadhan is her unfailing generosity and gregariousness.

She loves people and has an uncanny and shrewd assessment of the calibre of people who meet her. Years have not dimmed the sparkle in her eyes nor her zest for conversation and friendly exchanges.

A Great Mother

She has been a great mother and her children have made conspicuous contributions to political, cultural and administrative enrichment of India. Her first daughter Smt. Lakshmi, created for herself a permanent niche in the hall of freedom's heroes, by the part she played in the Indian National Army as an important Lieutenant of Subash Chandra Bose.

Her second daughter, Smt. Mrinalini Sarabhai is an original and energetic exponent of Indian dances in their rich variety. It is difficult to overcome the overpowering effect of a marriage into a



Pioneering Women of Tamil Nadu

THEY dreamt and also made them come true. When did the women of Tamil Nadu start dreaming and seeing visions? Was it yesterday or just five decades ago when our women emerged out into public life or after independence? No, it was from the beginning of times, as Tamil literature shows us. Tamil Nadu's history is replete with stories of women who had distinguished themselves in academics. They were not wanting in charity or compassion. Their valour in a battlefield was a well-known fact. Excellence in arts like music and dance was an established fact. Avvaiyar, the poetess from whose lips cascaded verses preserved in the hearts of all poetry lovers, also acted as an angel of goodwill between the ancient Kings of Tamil Nadu. Rani Mangammal, an able administrator whose valour and prowess in the battlefield were well-known and Manimekhalai, a missionary of charity and compassion, are some of the true fore-runners of women's movement. Stories of these and others were orally handed down from generation to generation in songs, folk-lore and stories, and nuances were added to this as days passed by.

The Dark Period

In spite of these illustrious women of the past the dark period of subjection and slavery brought about by unjust laws held its sway from the 15th century B.C. to the 18th century A.D. throughout the country.

family richly, endowed with wealth and talent.

Mr. G. Swaminadhan, a Barrister and Advocate-General of Tamil Nadu, has shown how to combine professional probity with independence and unobstrusiveness. Thus there is a peculiar relevance in the choice of Mrs. Ammu Swaminadhan as the Mother of the Year and in her being honoured by an Award that India's Prime Minister handed over to her. The women of India are proud and grateful for so fitting recognition.

May Mrs. Swaminadhan live long to hold the lamp and light the path of young and energetic women placed in humbler spheres! May she hit her century and hold the field of humanitarian endeavour!



The only ray of light that lit up this stygian darkness was the advent of the great and compassionate master Buddha who once again brought the blessings of freedom to women. Years rolled on, and time once again ravaged society with internal dissensions paving the way for further subjection that came in the form of the invading hordes. It was this that drove women behind the seclusion of purdah for fear of molestation. This knell tolled the down-fall of women. Illiteracy was the natural outcome of this stagnation. The widening influence of education was strictly restricted. By the middle of the 19th century, women emerged out of this strangle hold, partly due to the humane attempts of a few reformers.

Work of the Missionaries

The barbarous system of sati was abolished through the efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 played its part in the rousing of progressive forces. Slowly a women's movement emerged out of its embryonic stage. The zeal of missionaries like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayananda, etc., acted as a propelling force to this movement. Swami Vivekananda's penetrating observations and his great faith in women expressed in *his* famous sentence, "Women have many grave problems but none that cannot be solved by the magic word "education", acted as a spur to the women's movement throughout the country.

Women's Indian Association

The Women's Indian Association which was formed in 1917 in Adyar, Madras, has been the pioneer organisation for women in India that has done great service to enhance the progress of women's movement. The individual torch-bearers of this association were Mrs. Annie Besant and Mrs. Margaret Cousins, who dedicated themselves to the services of our country and emancipated our women.

Mrs. Annie Besant came to India in 1893, as a Theosophist. The current of the movement swept her into the mainstream as a pioneer among the cultural regenerators of the country. At a time when lethargy had paralysed our senses it was this Irish woman who woke us up from our stupor through her brazen declarations and writings and sounded the clarion call to be true to our heritage. She condemned child marriage, encouraged widow remarriage and promoted the education of girls. She worked for the rightful recognition of women's position in society, recalling the Vedic ideals of equality. She was the very spirit behind the Women's Indian Association and its first President. Due to her efforts, branches of the association spread out all over India. Mrs. Besant took a leading part in demanding franchise for women on the same terms as men.

Mrs. Margaret Cousins devoted herself entirely for the social and political emancipation of women in India. She came to India after proving herself to be a militant suffragette, having undergone jail terms in England and Ireland for agitating for the political rights of women. With this experience to back her, she took up the

question of women's franchise in India. She was instrumental in organising a women's deputation and preparing the memorandum to be given to the Honourable E. S. Montagu, the Secretary of State and it was in Madras City, that the first request for Indian Women suffrage was made. Smt. Sarojini Naidu was the leader and Mrs. Cousins, the Secretary of the deputation. For a number of years, Mrs. Cousins was the editor of "Stri Dharma", the official organ of the Women's Indian Association. She toured the length and breadth of the country meeting women leaders, calling them together at meetings, exhorting them to the need of organising national councils to present their progress to the Government and to act in co-operation for their solution. Her great husband, Dr. J. H. Cousins, helped Margaret at every stage of her activities and inspired her. He played a significant part behind the screen for the cause of women.

A Period of Leap Forward

Thus the women of Tamil Nadu came out of the seclusion of their homes and started expressing themselves in education, politics and public service and this was a process of self-education and self-development. Between 1917 and 1926, the history of the Women's Indian Association in Tamil Nadu was literally the history of the women's movement in the State, several outstanding women blazing the trail in a multitude of fields. There were also small groups of women here and there organising themselves for social and public work. These women undertook women's suffrage intensively and did propaganda for women

to have votes in Municipal Councils and in the local Governments. Numerous classes for adult education for women were started. Promotion of clubs for women's recreation and games was another form of service. Collection for charitable causes like flood, famine, cyclone and earthquakes, were organised. With the advent of Gandhiji on the scene, the Harijan uplift work was taken up in a very large way.

Public campaign in favour of Sarada Child-marriage Restraint Act and campaign to prevent dedication of Devadasis to temples were undertaken and these were responsible for the passing of the Madras Brothels Act. They also undertook maternity work and rural medical aid and community propaganda. Agitation for beggar homes and for leper homes was started.

The founder of the Seva Sadan was Lady Venkata Subba Rao, who worked with Mrs. Cousins and started the Women's Home of Service in the year 1923 on the lines of the Poona Seva Sadan Society for widows, deserted wives and destitute girls. Lady Venkata Subba Rao was the Secretary of this Home and later on she developed it into Madras Seva Sadan which is now a High School for girls with an industrial section, an orphanage, a pupils' hostel and a hostel for working women.

The Avvai Home, an orphanage and a home for destitutes was founded by the great visionary Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, a brilliant Medical Graduate of the Madras University. She gave up her lucrative practice in response to the Women's Indian Association's request and entered the Legislative Council in 1907 as a first woman legislator in British India. She was also

unanimously elected as Deputy President of the Madras Council, the only recipient of that honour among women in the whole world during that period. She was essentially responsible for the agitation for the enforcement of Child Marriage Acts, for the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children in Madras and for the abolition of the Devadasi system in the Hindu temples. She took a leading part in the Women's Indian Association's activities till the very end of her life.

Political Awakening

In the political field there were luminaries like Smt. Rukmini Lakshmipathi, etc., who was the first woman Salt Satyagraha prisoner in 1931. In the struggle for freedom, her motto was, "Instead of asking for mercy women should live with men in suffering for the cause. When it comes to suffering women will always surpass men." She was also the Health Minister of the Government of Madras, (1946-1947).

The name of Smt. Radha Bai Subbaroyan will always be remembered in the political field. Contemporary of Mrs. Cousins, she was the only woman elected to the Senate and Syndicate of the Madras University and served on several such bodies for many



years and was an ardent supporter of the women's movement.

In 1947 she was again elected to the Council of State and was the first woman to be elected to serve on the two Houses of the Central Legislature. She tried to secure support for social reform legislation and moved Bills for prohibition, on polygamy, marriage reform and raising of age of marriage and of consent and codification of Hindu Law to suit modern conditions.

To this tradition belongs Smt. S. Ambujammal, daughter of a great national leader of the South, the late Sri Srinivasa

Iyengar. She came into contact with Mahatma Gandhi and Kasturba as early as 1920 and joined the Swadeshi Satyagraha Movement and courted imprisonment and was inspired for public service.

There were a number of other women who courted imprisonment during the freedom struggle like Smt. Ammu Swaminathan, Smt. Kothai Nayaki Ammal, Smt. Manju Bhashini, Smt. Saraswathi Pandurangam, Smt. Rajam Bharathi and a host of others. This list is by no means short.

In this line comes Dr. (Smt.) Durga Bai Deshmukh, who belonged to the composite State of Madras. She joined the Salt Satyagraha Movement of Gandhiji in 1930 and underwent rigorous imprisonment in Madras jail. A woman of remarkable capacity and resourcefulness, she qualified herself for law. She founded the Andhra Mahila Sabha and several auxiliary welfare institutions. She entered the Constituent Assembly and became a Member of the Planning Commission and was instrumental in the establishment of the Central Social Welfare Board, through which as Chairman, she carried out successfully many schemes, particularly for the welfare of rural women and children.

In the field of arts

In the field of arts and culture, Smt. Rukmini Devi's contribution is original. She purified Bharatha Natyam and revived and raised it to its original eminence, status and dignity. She established Kalakshetra in 1963 to revive Indian art and to train artistes of highest quality. She also was interested in education and established the Besant Theosophical School and the Arundale

Training Centre for Teachers in Adyar. She has done a lot of research in the old Indian dyes and has created a weaving department to produce sarees in traditional Indian patterns.

Another great name is Sister R. S. Subbulakshmi Ammal, the child widow who broke the orthodox convention and became a graduate teacher in the Government College and devoted her whole time and energy to the promotion of education among widows and to their rehabilitation. Her participation in the campaign for the abolition of child marriage and passing of the Sarada Act, the inheritance rights of women and the abolition of the Devadasi system were very remarkable. She founded the Sarada Ladies' Union, the Widows' Home and the Sarada Vidyalaya.

Breaking the Hard Core of Superstition

The Women's Department was formed in 1944, by the untiring efforts of Smt. Parijatham Naidu, the first Woman Commandant of A.R.P. Through this department, welfare branches were started in villages with trained workers who were the forerunners of the Balwadi movement in rural areas.

Tamil Nadu is fortunate to have had the fore-sight and the sacrificing love of this host of witnesses who laboured for the progress of women. They have inspired generations of young women to follow in their footsteps.

Adapted from Tamil Nadu Special Number 01 The Social Welfare



A Veteran Speaks

By KUYI LEE RAJESWARI

SMT. AMBUJAMMAL, daughter of veteran fighter Sri S. Srinivasa Iyengar, herself a freedom fighter of renown from Tamil Nadu, strikes one as a fighter still, at the age of 76. She exudes warmth, with boisterous expression of affection, and strikes the right note in opening a conversation, relaxing the other member completely. No wonder she was a success in the political field during the turbulent days of the British rule.

When she speaks, there is no wavering in her tone, not a hint of doubt. She is firm in her decisions, and convictions, so firm as to convert others to her views, which are always sound, based on a philosophy strained out of the experiences of a lifetime. It was but natural that she became a leader, by her own right, of the women who responded to Gandhiji's call to the Nation.

My interview with her turned out to be a pleasant experience, and I came away with a feeling that I had learnt a lot, and a yearning to learn much more from her.

Wanting to trace back women's fight to emerge from the four walls, I asked, "How did you manage to start your own fight against the restraints that held you and launch out into the turbulence of political life? What was the atmosphere like, then?"

Ambujammal: We had our own rights and freedom, as women, in our own dominion, the house. We were treated, of course, as the weaker sex, escorted everywhere by a male member. Though my father was

deeply involved in the Swadeshi movement he did not like us womenfolk to go into it. Even when Gandhiji visited our house, we could only have a glimpse of him from behind doors. We would not even be allowed to come into his presence to serve food. But we felt the urge to do something. So we, I mean I and some other ladies with similar interest, met under the pretext of Bhajans and religious discourses. Once the Women's Swadeshi League was formed by us, we drew strength from our unity, and there could no longer be any opposition.

I: What drew you to this movement?
Ambujammal: Gandhiji's call. When the situation required the rising of the entire nation we felt that we too should contribute a little.

I: Was it easy for you to participate this fight?

Ambujammal: Certainly not; ignorance, superstitions, and social restrictions weighed us down with their leaden weight. But people like Subbulakshmi, Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins, Muthulakshmi Reddy were our torch-bearers. We of course had to fight against our own surroundings. But we did it; infact, if there is a strong will it cannot be broken.

I: Coming to the present times, do you think that women in India are really inferior to men?

Ambujammal: Women in reality are *not* inferior to men. But among our people, particularly in the minds of men the idea has taken root that woman is inferior to man, and not fit to undertake certain jobs. This attitude is still very strongly embedded in the minds of people, but times have changed and women's participation in many walks of life is accepted as a matter of

fact. Further changes are also bound to be accepted. Change in attitude can only be gradual.

I: Do you think fight for equality is unnecessary?

Ambujammal: It is not unnecessary. The bias about women's inferiority has to go, and opportunities in all fields must be open to women. Thus far, a united fight is meaningful. But after that, achievement becomes individual.

Women themselves must change, individually, and fight for the recognition of their worth. Smt. Indira Gandhi did not become Prime Minister because of the fighting of an association. She set a goal in life, and fought her own battle in order to be what she is today. The fight for her is the same, as it



would have been for any man, nor was she handicapped because she was a woman. It is determination on the part of each woman to better her lot that will improve the condition of women in general. Associations and formulating resolutions or laws alone will not help:

I: Will this fight for equality bring about any change?

Ambujammal: Fight or no fight, necessity brings about the change. Women are more educated and employed in greater numbers now than they were a few decades ago.

Our present economic need has brought about this change. Further changes will manifest themselves as the years go by. Fight for change may speed up this process, but cannot bring about any radical change. It will definitely come, though gradually, with the changing needs of society.

I: How far do you consider the demand for special recognition and privileges to women justified?

Ambujammal: To start with, when we were coming out of our restrictions special privileges were necessary. But as times change, this demand for special privileges must be given up. If you are fighting for equality with men, you must also fight, along with men, on equal terms, for opportunities. Otherwise, where is

the equality?

I: Is the inferiority of women, their being the weaker sex, a fact or a biased opinion?

Ambujammal: Women are not inferior. In many respects, they have proved to have greater ability than men. By nature, being equipped to bear the strain of motherhood again and again, they deserve to be termed as the "Stronger Sex". All over India, you would find a woman left alone, by desertion, divorce, or widowhood, efficiently bringing up her children and making them successful in life, even by

manual labour, working as cooks and maids women have proved their mettle; whereas if a man is left alone with children, in spite of financial advantage, he would fail in disciplining and bringing up a child.

I: What, in your opinion, are the changes to be insisted upon?

Ambujammal: The custom of parents choosing husbands for girls must cease. Then only will the evil of dowry be eradicated. The training of girls, too, must change. Their training must be career-oriented. Education and employment must become their main aim. Where marriage is not made the sole aim of a woman's life, the necessity to achieve it, or "buy it," at any cost will cease to exist. By mutual understanding, from need for companionship, will arise a new meaning for marriage that will not be humiliating to women.

I: If you say women are, indeed, superior to men, how could it be proved? How do you say they are superior?

Ambujammal: Women are superior. by virtue of their position as mothers. As mothers, they can instill in their children the attitude of respect to all, irrespective of caste, creed, or sex.

By preserving their virtue, women can prove their superiority. Though lapse of virtue in men is not condemned, it makes man in general an object of slight. "Oh, he



will be like that," is both sarcastic as an observation as well as the acceptance of a double standard. Women are far above men in this respect. And men, though grudgingly, give women her place of honour because of this. By sheer determination, she can push aside, any barrier, and do anything she chooses.

I may sound old fashioned, but I do think that chastity - if you would like to term it that way, is still the strongest weapon a woman can wield, against man.

After the interview she took us round her institute, "The Gandhi Nilayam". Originally, spinning, adult education, and pursuing Gandhiji's

ideals of house crafts, were the institute's main functions. Now, there is a "Balwadi" for children, and a press, where women can gainfully spend their time in doing book-binding and such other work. Classes in sewing, painting, doll-making, etc. are conducted to help women to use their leisure hours in doing work that is financially gainful. The atmosphere there is one of genuine service, lacking in the pomp and splendour of social work for mere publicity.



D.K. Pattammal

The Divinely Endowed Minstrel

By KUYI LEE RAJESWARI

D. K. Pattammal- Musician with a Divine Gift

THE three month old baby girl looked at Ramana Bhagavan with bright starry eyes. He smiled benignly on the little one. On an impulse he dipped his finger in honey, rubbed it on the baby's tongue. She gurgled with delight and smacked her tiny lips. "Ah! You like it! Do you?" he said and placed his palm on the baby's forehead in a gesture of blessing. That drop of honey and that sublime moment reshaped the destiny of that little maid. She was in later years to thrill audiences with her honeyed voice. She surely is the famous Pattammal. And there is hardly anyone who would wear that name (and fame) with the dignity, and the grace, that adorn her.

Kancheepuram was her birth place. The year was 1919. Sri Dalam Krishnaswamy Iyer and Rajammal (Kanthimathi) were the proud parents. Sri Dalam Krishnaswamy Iyer, himself a great scholar in Sanskrit, took great pains to see that his little daughter repeated the hymns (stotras) in her honeyed voice. Her perfect intonation and melodious voice won the hearts of all who heard her and soon the little girl was a favoured minstrel at the Sankara Math, where His Holiness would make her repeat Sanskrit Stotras and listen, wrapped in sublime silence.

Thus it was in an atmosphere of blessing and benediction that this favourite child of the Goddess Saraswathi had started flowering. In the minds of those who heard her even then, there could not have been any doubt that this was a voice turned for the praises of God. And for her part, she looked upon the use of it as her sacred duty.

Her early years

Those were days, when the Indian Society was enveloped in the darkness of superstition and orthodoxy. The few stray sparks of art and music here and there, were on the verge of extinction through adverse criticism, if not social ostracism. Battling with such social obstacles was this girl whom destiny had designed to be a great musician. She was striving to develop her divinely endowed talent which could not lie hidden, too long. It seemed as if the Goddess who had designed this choice instrument also saw to its shaping, and opportunities soon sprang up to tide over the initial obstacles. Time and again, in the face of some severe set-back there would be a ray of hope. Like Vasudeva who crossed the flooded waters of Yamuna carrying Krishna to his haven, Pattammal's father tided over the turbulent waters of social prejudices and conveyed his child to her destined goal. Among the many forces that propelled her to the high place, that she now occupies, are her father, Mrs. Ammu Kutty - her headmistress, and Dr. Srinivasan, uncle of the young man, whom Pattammal was to marry. While the former had played an important part in encouraging her to forge forward in those early days,

it was her husband who stood by her side in later years as a pillar of strength to her through thick and thin.

The Dilemma

In 1931, when she was but a child of eleven, she acted in a school drama 'Savitri-Satyavan' as 'Savitri'. Her lovely voice held the audience enthralled and an astonished father found his daughter's photograph published in the papers the next day. On the heels of the photograph, came

the recording company from Madras, placing the father in an embarrassing situation, where there was the pull of love and pride at his daughter's achievement on the one hand and a fear of social criticism on the other. Again it was Dr. Srinivasan who staunchly stood up, for her. Her first record was "Mukti Alikkum Thirumoolasthanam" a song of Nandanar

which received wide appreciation after its release. The recording was soon followed by requests for appearance at concerts. Her destiny had been shaped. The beacon light at the distance was not the lure of fame or fortune, but the aspiration to ascend the peak of Art for Art's sake. And now, there was no turning. Her first concert was a part of variety entertainment at Egmore Mahila Samajam arranged by Smt. Rangamma, followed closely by another at



Rasika Ranjani Sabha, both around the year 1933. She was advised to take the Government examination in music, and when her father brought her over to Madras to appear for it, she faced two veterans, - Tiger Varadachariar and Ambi Dikshitar (grandson of the great Sri Muthuswami Dikshithar). On hearing her rendering of Dikshitar's "Sri Subramanya Namaste", Ambi Dikshitar insisted on the girl's staying at Madras for a further month or so, so that he could personally train her in the Dikshithar trend. Her father could only spare

ten days, and in that short span she absorbed from him as much as she could, and carried away with her the unforgettable impression of a great man, together with invaluable gain of knowledge and two Dikshithar Kritis. "Bala Gopala" and "Kanjadalayatakshi". To this day she reveres the memory of that old gentleman

who became yet another father to her and taught her with a warmth and affection that sprang out of genuine eagerness to shape a gifted artist. Even today, as she thinks of him, tears of gratitude glisten and drop down her cheeks. Success for such a gifted musician did not take long to come. In her one finds a rare mixture of tributes, a golden voice, perfect traditional background of the most glorious culture all

expressed through the vehicle of Devanagari.

Steering her boat across two Oceans

She has been appearing for individual concerts from 1934. In 1940, came yet another event in her life. She was married to Sri Easwaran, and thus was she launched on the voyage of family life. Even today, she remembers the memorable words of her father:

"Family life is an ocean, and so is music. To your lot has fallen the onerous responsibility of swimming through both these seas. I do not know how you are going to do it". For, with her marriage, ended the chapter, of his guidance and advice. It was now solely up to her husband to decide what she should be ; yet again Gods were gracious to her, and in him she found the help-mate who could steer her through the two seas and help her meet the challenges in both with equanimity.

D. K. Pattammal was the first to render into music with her golden voice, the fiery words of Bharathi. To her goes the credit of having first sung in films.

On 15th August, 1947, at mid-night there was a memorable broadcast programme from A.I.R, and to Pattammal goes the honour of having given the first recital in free India. Her husband refused the cheque offered by A.I.R. So it was again on the day when the Father of our Nation expired, that she sang. She speaks with deep feeling whenever she refers to these occasions, filled with pride at her husband's nobility of thought and the compliment and tribute he paid to her own art on those occasions.

A rich harvest of tributes

The Sangeet Natak Academy Award in 1962, "Sangitha Kala Nidhi" in 1970, "Madura Kala Praveena" by the Madurai Sri Satguru Sangeetha Samajam in the same year, "Padma Bhushan" in 1971 and "Isai Peravai " by the Tamil Isai Sangam in 1973 are all tributes paid by the music loving public to her golden voice and rich tradition. Combining a musical career with household duties was no easy task. But accustomed as she was at her father's house to wake up at 3 a.m. and practise her songs in that pre-dawn stillness when the Gods alone would listen to her glorious voice, she continued the same at her in-laws' place, practising at a time when no household duties would demand her time. Undaunted, she continued her dedication to art, while continuing to be the perfect daughter-in-law, wife and mother. Her mother-in-law, husband, two sons and daughter-in-law all were loving her deeply. Her daughter-in-law Lalitha (daughter of the famous Palghat Mani Aiyar of Mridangam fame) accompanies her during concerts. The International Women's Year and the demand for women's rights, have different meanings to different people. Though for a section of the younger generation, career opportunities and equality with man in all spheres would seem essential, the majority of Indian women may yet aspire for just a peaceful life filled with mutual understanding, adjustment and increasing happiness. If such a life was assured, most Indian women would find happiness in submitting to male superiority, in return for the loving protection of a strong male partner in life. To many Indian women,

the life of one' like D. K. Pattammal may serve as an example. Without giving up traditional and cultural values, living as a perfect daughter-in-law, wife and mother as visualised by our ancients, she has also succeeded in setting aside out-molded customs and conventions. While figuring as the modest unassuming Hindu lady of the house, she has also succeeded in asserting her individuality by allowing art to embellish her personality. All this has of course been possible because of the association and encouragement, of an understanding husband. In our country where the individual's life is closely bound to the family life, this could be taken as the ideal. A wife who can sublimate herself, and her whole being without having to lose her individuality, a husband who can retain his superiority, through a loving assertion can raise the status of Indian woman. That then is the message that is to be gleaned from the life of Smt. D.K.Pattammal.



Bihar's Master Craftsman

BINDESHWARI DEVI was the National Award winner for Sikki grass work of Bihar in 1969. She learnt the craft from her mother. She became a widow, when she was barely fourteen. Her in-laws never received her and so she stayed with her parents. Another marriage was unthinkable for in their village community they would be ostracised. Concentrating

on Sikki work, she made many objects of utility and sold them at throwaway prices to the Bihar Government's Handicraft Centre. Sikki, she said, was a kind of reed like grass which grows around the banks of lakes and rivers. One day she saw an elephant walking near her village at Raylarn in Darbhanga dist. She decided to make one of Sikki. She insisted on accompanying her brother to the Manigachi Goods Production Centre to see how it would be received. She was paid Rs. 1.50 per day. Soon she won awards from the State Government and a job in the Institute of Industrial Design at Paena. Having an aesthetic eye, deft fingers and determination she produced many decorative pieces in traditional designs and colours which got her silver medals which had to be sorrowfully sold to make both ends meet. In 1963, she won a first prize at an exhibition organized in connection with the Tenth Handicraft Week celebration. In 1969, she won the coveted National Award given to master craftsmen. She went to the capital and received the Award from Dr. Zakir Hussain. Her award-winning entry was Siva's face amidst lotuses. She taught Sikki craft to a few other girls in Patna centre. Hers is a success story for which she strived and struggled against heavy odds. She is a typical example of a rustic unlettered woman endowed with courage.



Sri Sarada Math-Its Origin and Growth

By PRAVRAJI KA AMALAPRANA

IN India, Monastic life in an organised way, especially for women, is indeed a contribution of the Buddhistic age. Though we hear of many women Rishis, Brahmavadinis in the Vedic age, the pattern of religious life led in those days was not monastic but mainly individualistic. After Lord Buddha, it was Swami Vivekananda with his infinite love and compassion for the suffering humanity who once again tried to organise the spiritual forces of the country for 'Atmano Mokshartham Jagat Hitayacha'.

Like Lord Buddha, Swami Vivekananda too believed that both men and women were equally fit to achieve spiritual greatness. He recognised no distinction of the sex in the realisation of the Truth. "He would never tolerate", says Sister Nivedita, in her masterpiece 'Master as I saw him', "any scheme of life and polity that tended to bind together on mind and soul the fetters of the body. The greater the individual, the more would she transcend the limitations of femininity in mind and character and the more was such transcendence to be expected and admired."

The great vedantist that Swamiji was, his chief exhortation to men as well as women was to rise above, the body consciousness and realize the Self, which is the reality behind both men and women as well as in all the beings. 'True Emancipation', he declared 'could come only through an intensification of one's own spiritual awareness'.

A retreat for women

So when Swamiji thought of establishing a Math to propagate the ideal of Renunciation and Service he wanted it both for men and women. Even before a math for men, he wanted a math for women. In 1894 itself, he wrote to one of his brother disciples, 'We must first build a math for Mother . . . first Mother and her daughters and then Father and his sons. Hence it is that my first endeavour to start a Math for women! 'In another letter to his disciples, he wrote, 'We want fiery young men, intelligent, who would dare to go to the jaws of death. . . Both men and women . . . we want two thousand Sannyasins, ten or even twenty thousand, men and women both ...'

His writings and speeches bear out many practical hints and plans as to how to start this math for women. He wrote 'With the Holy Mother as the centre of inspiration, a math is to be established on the eastern bank of the Ganga. As Brahmacharins and Sadhus will be trained in this Math (Belur Math) so in the other math also Brahmacharinis and Sadhvis will be trained'. This was his vision.

A modest beginning

This wish of Swamiji, however, did not materialise during his Life-time, as the prevailing social conditions were not suitable for it specially the lack of education among the women prevented its immediate realisation. But a modest beginning was made when one of his western disciples Miss Margaret Noble later known as Sister Nivedita, founded a school in Bag Bazaar for Indian women.

The School

This school has, in a way, paved the way for the future monastery for women. For, the school, besides being a boarding school for students, was also an abode for dedicated women workers of the school who would come there to lead a spiritual life. This boarding-cum-spiritual home was later known as Sarada Mandir. The Holy Mother blessed this Sarada Mandir by Her presence by staying here for a short period. She appreciated the idea of women leading a life of renunciation and dedication as far as possible under the then prevailing social conditions. That the Holy Mother recognised herself as the head of monastic movement for women, is evident from a letter which she wrote on 30th August, 1902 to a monk at Mayavathi in which the Mother described Her place of residence as 'Math for women'. Thus this school could be looked upon as the nucleus from which the future monastery for women - Sri Sarada Math - originated.

Gradually many educated women inspired with the ideals of renunciation and service came forward to dedicate their lives for their own spiritual growth and for the upliftment of their sisters. Many of them gave up their hearth and home and joined this Sarada Mandir of Sister Nivedita School. As their number multiplied the need for a Math of their own was very keenly felt. Finally the authorities of Belur Math found that the time was ripe for the cherished idea of Swamiji to take a concrete shape. In the Monk conference of the Belur Math held on 29th May, 1952 the momentous decision of starting a math

for the women on the lines laid down by Swami Vivekananda was taken.

The Sarada Math

As a first tangible step towards the establishment of Sri Sarada Math, on the 100th birthday of Holy Mother which fell on 27th December, 1953, a group of dedicated women workers of the Order were initiated into the vow of Brahmacharya. In 1954 synchronising with the completion of the Centenary Celebration of Holy Mother, the dream of Swami Vivekananda of starting a Math for women was at long last fulfilled. Thus a new era dawned on the religious and cultural history of India opening up a new horizon of life divine for women, at large. The establishment of Sri Sarada Math had far-reaching effects on the rise of women all over the world. And at the same time it is also a part of the tidal wave of spirituality set in motion by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda for the welfare of the entire humanity.

The Novices who became nuns

Thus once established, Sri Sarada Math grew with sure and steady steps. Within five years another significant decision was taken by the Trustees of Belur Math. On the 1st of January, 1959, on the birthday of Holy Mother, eight senior members of Sri Sarada Math were invested with Sannyasa by Srimat Swami Sankarananda, the then President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. This was a preliminary step to the formation of an independent women's organisation. In August, 1959, Sri Sarada

Math was given independent status, and Sannyasinis became its Trustees by virtue of a Deed of Trust executed by the President of Ramakrishna Math.

In May 1960, the Trustees of Sri Sarada Math as advised by the authorities of Belur Math, founded the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Association, which was registered under the Act XXI of 1860, with the object of carrying on ,educational, cultural, charitable and similar activities among women and children looking upon them as veritable manifestations of the Divine, irrespective of caste, creed, colour or nationality.

Though Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna-Sarada Mission with its branches, are distinct institutions, they are closely related as the Governing Body of the Mission is made up of the Trustees of the Math, the main workers of the Mission are Sannyasinis of Sri Sarada Math. Moreover both have their headquarters at Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar.

More and more responsibilities

In course of time, on seeing the efficient management of the Math and Mission by the Sannyasinis, the authorities of Ramakrishna Mission gradually transferred to the Ramakrishna-Sarada Mission all the institutions meant exclusively for women. It has since then been run by the Sannyasinis and Brahmacharinis of Sri Sarada Math. The institutions are the Sister Nivedita's school at Bag Bazaar, the Matri Bhavan, a Maternity Hospital in Tolly Ganj and the women's welfare centre now known as Ramakrishna-Sarada Mission Ashrama at Entally.

New centres have also been opened by Ramakrishna-Sarada Mission; one is Vivekananda Vidya Bhavan at 33, Natya Patty Road, South Dum Dum, a partially residential degree college for women and the other is Shiksha Mandir at 134, Baruipara Lane, Calcutta-35 which conducts a mother training centre, a Pre-Basic and a Junior Basic School. Now, demands came from outside Calcutta to start mission centres. So in 1970 Nivedita Vidya Mandir was started at Haus Khas in New Delhi, It is primarily an English medium Pre-Primary and a Primary School. But essentially it is a centre noted for its spiritual and cultural activities.

Other Centres

At Arunachal Pradesh another Centre was started in February, 1973, to bring about the educational, cultural and spiritual upliftment of the tribal women and children of Arunachal Pradesh. There is a free Primary residential school for the tribal girls. In the same year another branch centre was opened at Trivandrum which is known as Vidyarthini Mandiram, a hostel and a library for the school and college-going students.

In the meantime, Math centres have also expanded outside Calcutta. In 1965 a branch centre of Sri Sarada Math came into existence in Madras. Ever since Swami Vivekananda lit the fire of enthusiasm in Madras, it has been one of the most active centres of work based on the ideals of renunciation and service - so naturally it was at Madras that the need of the Women's Math was very keenly felt and ever since its starting it is flourishing well

as a spiritual and cultural centre serving the women spiritual seekers of Madras and also of the neighbouring places in South India. The next math centre was also in South India, at Trichur in Kerala. The Sarada Mandiram, which was a branch of the local Ramakrishna Ashram was handed over to Sri Sarada Math in June, 1968. Apart from its spiritual and cultural activities it also carries on educational activities and runs a higher secondary school, a nursery school and also a hostel for college students. Recently another Math has been started in Poona and also a Mission centre in Bangalore.

Rapid growth

Thus the Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna-Sarada Mission are making giant strides in the path of progressive expansion. Now it is left to the women of the whole of India as also to the women staying abroad, to come forward and join hands with their sisters of Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna-Sarada Mission in its dissemination of the ideas of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, throughout the whole country, nay throughout the world. In fact, great tidal waves of spirituality have been released by these great Prophets - Will not its divine touch rejuvenate the entire womanhood of India? - Will the women of India not respond to the clarion call of Swamiji? "Rejoice. The flood of spirituality has risen. I see it is rolling over the land restless, boundless, all-absorbing. Every man to the fore, every good will be added to its forces, every hand will smooth its way, and glory be unto the Lord."

The Temples of Learning At Salem

SRI Sarada College for Women, situated in Alagapuram, Salem, bears the hallowed name of Sri Saradamani Devi, the holy consort of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Sri Ramakrishna chose and cut out a novel path by elucidating the confused dogmas of religions in a very simple and lucid exposition, which any lay man or woman could easily understand and practise. Saradamani led a simple, serene life, full of intense religious fervour, imbibing all the teachings and sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. Her holy name is cherished with great ardour and respect in christening this college at Salem after her Holy Self.

Temples of Learning

In 1968, Sri Sarada Training College began to function. This college affords instruction for 105 women graduates every year. The Training College tries to groom good teachers of a high calibre who in their turn will educate children to grow into good and useful citizens of India. Besides the above institution which is purely for women, a Boy's High School has also come into being. Sri Ramakrishna-Sarada High School provides co-education for nearly 2,000 pupils. In the academic line, a number of Sarada institutions at Salem provide a comprehensive pattern of education for girls right from nursery level to post-graduate level. Sri Sarada College Hostel is a real "Home" for about 1,000 students. The college buildings built up with gopurams and

pagodas are really intended to be temples of learning. The unity of all religions is preached to the students of these institutions.

The latest link

The latest link in the chain of Sri Sarada institutions is the recently created wing for job-oriented courses for drop-out girl and boy students from schools. This scheme provides a monthly stipend and is available for girl students in tailoring, type-writing, nursery teachers' course, printing and envelope-making. For drop-out boy students training is given in plumbing, carpentry and electric-wiring. A full-fledged hospital is under construction in the college campus. This is to provide a course of training as Auxiliary Nurse or Mid-wife for 30 persons. The services of a fully qualified whole-time lady Medical Officer and a Staff Nurse to meet the needs of the Sri Sarada Institutions are also provided. A munificent donor, Sri M. A. Palaniappa Chettiar, Managing Director of Jawahar Mills, Salem, has generously come forward to advance financial aid from his own Trust for these job-oriented courses.

All the Sri Sarada Institutions which have now taken root owe their origin to the seed of social service which emanated in the Service Home, "Kamala Nehru Nilayam" the main theme of which is "life should be based on service and sacrifice."

From: " Social Welfare" Magazine.

Women and Social Work

INDIA has a long tradition of 'social work' or 'social service' as an important means of rendering help to the needy and weaker sections of the community. The approach to helping people has varied at different stages of the country's development and interestingly continues to do so even today.

Training the distinguishing criteria

The concept of social work as a profession is, however, a new phenomenon. It is a phenomenon of industrialisation and an urban culture. These features of the profession are significant in terms of the extent of its utilisation in a country like India, where the majority of the population still lives in rural areas.

Certain criteria have been evolved to distinguish professionally trained social workers from others who are also involved in welfare service. Two important criteria are: (i) completion of a two-year full-time post-graduate degree or diploma programme in social work from a recognised school of social work; (ii) knowledge of methods of working with people and techniques acquired through organised training and supervised field work.

The profession has also developed its own philosophy of serving society; its value system and approach to those who need help. This is different from the traditional approach. In order to develop as a profession, it has recognised the need of formal association.



The recognition of the need for some kind of training for those engaged in social work has slowly grown in the last 30 years, but is still not universally accepted by non-professional social workers and those who promote social welfare programmes.

The contribution of the schools of social work towards developing a training programme has been outstanding. Varied views have been expressed as to whether India can provide a large number of jobs in social work to absorb those trained at post-graduate level. This raises other questions: at what level should social workers be trained? What jobs would be available for those who come out of schools of social work after training at post-graduate level? These questions can be answered only when the social education programme has been evaluated. The evaluation of the programme in terms of its objectives, scope, content, methods of training and the utility of specialisation in the Indian situation is an urgent need and must be undertaken immediately.

Need for a group of skilled workers

With the growth of institutions and social welfare services, first, under religious and secular auspices before Independence, and the gradual increase in them under State auspices after Independence, the natural consequence was a growth in demand for a large number of workers to man these organisations. Agencies sometimes feel that our changed times require social welfare service to be rendered by those who are not merely devoted, dedicated, emotionally involved and deeply interested workers. Professionalism demands more. It demands

trained workers. The attitude of traditional untrained social workers towards trained workers is not often conducive to the maintenance of professional standards of work or growth. Service conditions in the agencies and the attitude of those who are responsible for making and implementing these agencies' policies, are sometimes listed as reasons for the dissatisfaction of professionally trained social workers today. With increase in knowledge of the social and behavioural sciences, there is a growing awareness of the need for a group of skilled and competent workers who can help to rehabilitate mal-adjusted clients and return them to society.

While this position may have been passively accepted by those who are not trained academically, the acceptance needs to be emotionally reinforced so as to ensure an effective working relationship between the two groups in the interest of those whom both serve.

Women lead

Social work is a field where leadership was largely assumed by women in India both before and after independence. A small section of well-to-do women considered voluntary social work their special domain. Many have held and continue to hold high positions in welfare organisations. However, the number engaged is small relative to the total number of women in India. The majority of professionally-trained social workers work today in institutions, departments and organisations that are administered by voluntary social workers who have had no professional training. They have also made inroads in progressively

larger numbers in governmental departments and institutions since 1957. The director of one of the first schools of social work in India was a woman. A woman was also responsible for establishing this school.

The programme of social work education for professional training offers equal opportunities to men and women and the employment practice and opportunities (as far as we can see) are, but for the exception mentioned earlier, open equally to professionals of both sexes. Both at the time of admission, and during training in labour welfare, preference is given to men. This preference also prevails in the employment of a professional social worker in labour welfare and in industrial establishments.

Aptitude

The reasons for choosing social work as a profession vary widely. The study of the Indian Council for Social Welfare gives interesting data about why women wish to enter the profession or take professional training in this field. A large number decided to join courses of social work training because they felt they had an aptitude for the subject.

During the pre-independence period, the fields of activity in which professional social workers were engaged were largely labour welfare and treatment and rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents, adult offenders, beggars and prostitutes. Professional social workers had also made a considerable contribution in the organisation and management of children's institutions serving both physically and mentally

handicapped and socially deprived children. The other fields in which professional social workers have been active are medical social work and family and child welfare. In more recent years, social workers have also become involved in community development, rural and urban; tribal welfare; social research; welfare administration and training.

There is a close relationship between women's chosen fields of special interest and their chosen fields of employment. According to the study of social work professionals in India, the largest number of women-professionals was employed in the medical and psychiatric settings, the next largest number in family and child welfare. The academic and research fields combined had the next highest number. The lowest number of women were in the industrial area and working with labour forces.

The problem of unemployment

Social work graduates, like other graduates, face the serious problem of employment after qualifying. Most graduates have to wait after completing their professional training to find suitable work.

The problem of unemployment is more acute for men than women. This is explained by the fact that men regard social work as a long term career and are, therefore, more selective about employment and so wait longer for a position that will help to promote their career-prospects. It is also probable that women who take up the profession from personal inclination, on the basis of aptitude, are likely to be less selective about the type of employment

they go in for. On the subject of employment the Indian Council of Social Welfare study says: "Another possible explanation which needs further examination is that jobs are more easily available in some settings compared to other settings. Hence, men who normally tend to specialise in labour welfare and industrial relations find it more difficult to get jobs in the related setting of industrial establishments. On the contrary, women who normally tend to specialise in the primary social work and community organisation have less difficulty in getting absorbed in the related settings. It should be emphasised that the profession of social work represents a very small minority group in relation to the very large number of persons and groups who have been pioneers and have assumed major responsibility for providing leadership in the organisation and development of welfare services during the past 200 years. Many existing welfare institutions have functioned for a number of years. They came into existence as a result of certain religious and social reform movements and represent the desire on the part of groups and individuals to help the victims of social and religious in quality and injustice the less-privileged and weaker sections of the community.

Voluntary workers

The role of voluntary effort in discharging a social responsibility to those who needed welfare services has been unique in the culture of India. The contribution of women, who have been involved in social welfare activities as voluntary workers was outstanding, particularly during the early

part of the 20th Century and throughout the independence movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. These voluntary workers assumed leadership in the development of institutions for socially and physically handicapped persons .. Those responsible for the establishment, development and management of welfare institutions have been more or less paternalistic. Their attitudes were not unlike those of the privileged who give regularly in charity to the under-privileged.

The profession of social work

The profession of social work as distinct from the tradition of voluntary service is based on the philosophy of humanitarianism and democracy; on a belief in the inherent worth of an individual, capable of making a decision for herself and capable of being changed; but also on the belief that the impulse to serve others is not enough. Knowledge of human behaviour and skills in human relations acquired through training is essential for the professional. The worker functions as a prop helping to bring about social adjustment and rehabilitation of the socially deprived or physically or mentally handicapped. A client is helped by the social worker to decide his own plan of action and to carry it out. The worker must be aware of his own attitude and motivation in helping others. In brief, the profession of social work is concerned with the scientific approach to the analysis of causes of individual and community problems.

New Fields

Independent India has opened up new horizons for social work in many spheres. The Central and State Governments have introduced measures for the welfare of the normal population and provide protection to the physically and mentally challenged, and the socially deprived. The new fields



of community development, family planning programmes and the very new schemes of nutrition for pre-school children and National Social Service for university and

college students are all areas where social workers could, and should, be called upon to make their contributions as part of teams consisting of workers from various disciplines.

Harijan welfare, tribal welfare and women's and children's welfare have received special attention. The emphasis on the introduction of new social legislation and implementing existing statutes, providing services to various socially handicapped persons and particularly, women and children, juvenile delinquents and adult offenders, has brought into existence many new institutional and non-institutional services for care, treatment and rehabilitation of a large number of persons.

Women professionals can make a special contribution in the development and execution of schemes for the welfare of women and children, often in association with family planning programme in rural and urban areas, and the family and child welfare scheme and balwadis in the rural setting.

All this requires a sense of commitment and dedication hitherto unattained, and also dynamic and inspiring leadership to draw young, new entrants who will generate new vitality in the profession. Women professionals have a special role to play, since they have given excellent leadership in this field in the past. The profession of social work will succeed to the extent that it can meet the challenges that confront it today.



The Healing Touch

MAJORITY of the women in India go in for general studies, for the employment resulting *out* of this education can be fitted into their routine and they can carry out the job of both wife and office-worker in a well balanced manner. Professional courses and the employment afterwards demand a higher degree of concentration of effort, straining her both physically and mentally much more than the non- professional type of employment. Two categories of employment seem to draw most working women - i.e. that of teaching and office jobs as clerks, typists, stenographers and secretaries.

Of the professional courses, medical course has a greater attraction for women than any other. The respect this profession gets everywhere in society, better employment opportunities, fame and fortune attached to it, all contribute to this attraction. Besides all this, basically women are equipped for this profession. Nursing the sick with compassion and gentleness is inherent in women and as such her mental make-up equips her well for this profession. The healing touch of the mother and wife becomes better utilised when it is professionally trained.

At the turn of the century, the *purdah* system and the psychology that goes with it had spread to the whole of India from the North, where the vestiges still remain today. There women's reluctance to consult men led to an unnecessary loss of life among women, especially in childbirth. A

unique situation thus arose in India where the only hope of reducing the high mortality among women lay in recruiting women to the medical force.

Dr. Browne started the first medical school for women in 1905 in Ludhiana and the Lady Hardinge Medical College at Delhi followed in 1916. The Countess of Duflerin Fund was instituted to finance a string of hospitals all over the country and these hospitals, together with the Maternity and Child Welfare Centres in the towns were manned by the women medical graduates of the country. These women have contributed in a large measure to the fall in maternal mortality from 20 per thousand births in 1920 to about 2 per thousand births today. In pediatrics too, women have made a significant contribution. Since then, they have branched out into other medical disciplines and today there are women in every field of medicine.

In the last two decades, a new dimension has been added, viz. that of preventive and social medicine, one of the most important aspects of which is family planning and population control. Here the woman doctor can make a special contribution by the personal contact she establishes with fertile couples at the time of wife's pregnancy and confinement; and after the initial motivation she can ensure their continued adherence by giving constant advice and medical attention.

So far, the Indian doctor has been more fortunate than her Western counterpart in securing domestic help. She is often a member of an extended family in which another female member takes over her domestic burdens. Outside help can also be hired as it is usually within her means.

But the situation is changing rapidly with a trend towards smaller family units and the shrinking pool of household servants.

Rights, Responsibilities and Privileges

Equal rights should go with equal responsibilities without any special privileges. In any profession and especially in medicine, responsibility entails an undivided and uninterrupted loyalty to the profession with constant study to keep abreast of advances in theory and techniques.

Can these responsibilities and the claims of motherhood be reconciled? To enable her to fulfil the multiple roles of career woman, wife and mother, certain privileges are inevitable, e.g. the periods of absence from work necessitated by indisposition during pregnancy, confinement, a child's illness and even the break-down of arrangements for domestic help. It is claimed that a professional woman can, and has, learned to apportion her time between her work and her family. This may be true for the office, the studio and even the laboratory, but not for clinic or hospital. What happens when the emergency in the home and in the clinic coincide? How is time to be apportioned and, more important still, how are loyalties to be divided?

To sum up, there is no disputing the fact that for the Indian situation women doctors are, and will continue to be, essential. But the potential is apparently being dissipated by adherence to false values, like emphasis on specialisation, a strong desire to compete with men (even at one's own disadvantage), the constant struggle at the expense of mental peace, physical

hardship and even efficiency, to hold and keep highly paid and demanding jobs.

Fact and Fantasy

The basic weakness of the system as it exists today lies in the motives underlying entry into profession. Women could make a much greater contribution to medicine if they took it up in a spirit of dedication and not as an aggressive and misdirected use of a rightful privilege. To this end, vocational guidance should be provided in schools by arranging talks by members of various profession for the senior girls (Classes X and XI) to enable them to sort out the facts from the fantasies. Later, in medical college, talks by members of various disciplines - especially women can help the students to take a wise decision in selecting a suitable career from among the various alternatives before them.

The immediate problems can be reduced to some extent by a few realistic measures. The few available full-time jobs suitable for women should be rearranged to create more part-time jobs with the necessary readjustment in pay scales. For many women, it is important to be profitably employed in part-time jobs, to which they can give their best efforts without in any way sacrificing their families and distracting from their own enjoyment of family life. The remuneration could be calculated according to the working hours. A beginning has already been made in a small way on these lines in Delhi. A woman in a part-time job should be able to get a transfer to another place for work - be it dispensary, laboratory or hospital - at a convenient distance from her home when she changes

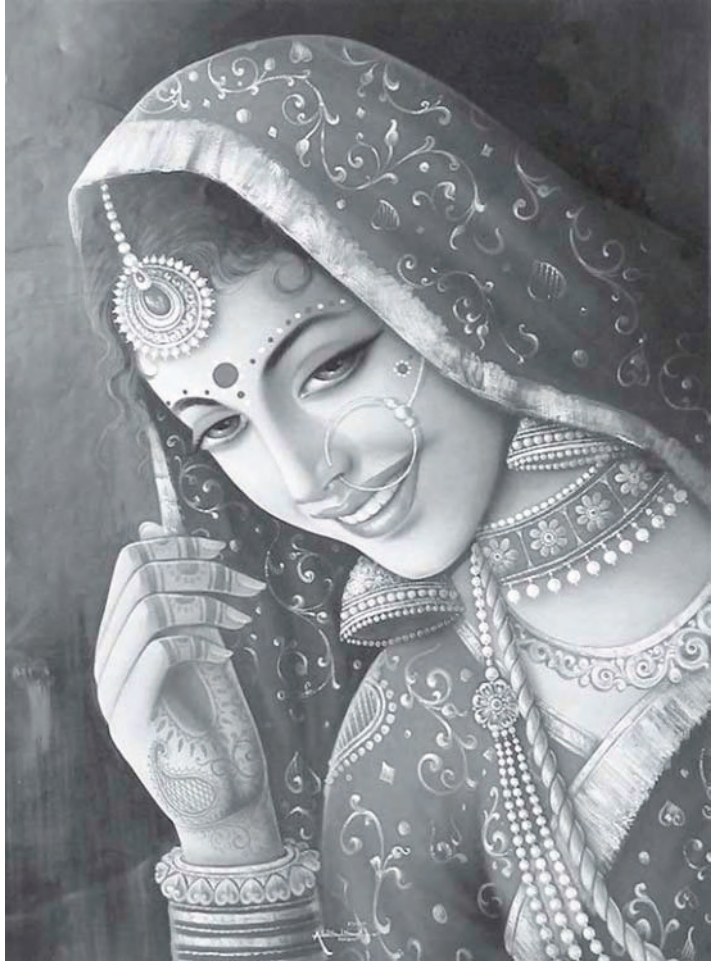
her residence within the same town or outside it.

Another measure which requires careful consideration is whether a discontinuation of service for a few years should be permitted to allow a woman to fulfil the role of mother. For a minimum family of two children, this would require at least 5-6 years without spacing and 6-8 years with a space of 2-3 years between two children, before the youngest child starts school and the mother is free to continue her profession. Can she afford to do this? Advances in theory and technique are so rapid that a 6-8 year gap becomes almost unbridgeable. Or, age-limits could be reduced for those who are returning to their careers after a few years devoted to their families. The present waste of educated woman-power due to unimaginative age-limits for employment, especially among nurses, is unjustified.

For the dedicated career woman, who foregoes marriage in the pursuit of her profession, more security should be provided. At the rate at which the cost of living is rising, by the time she earns what once appeared to be an adequate pension, its value will have decreased very substantially. Part-time jobs should be made available in which she can utilise her experience and training and supplement her income.

To the ardent feminist, some of these suggestions may appear to be retrograde.

That is not the intention with which they are made. The plea is for progress inspired by reason. Let each new aspirant make her choice at the outset. Which will take precedence - family or profession? To spell



out priorities is necessary; only the very fortunate can have the best of both worlds. For those who wish to walk the lonely road to individual fulfilment and have the single-minded purpose and tenacity to follow it, to the exclusion of other conflicting interests, there should be no obstacles created by prejudice, tradition and social pressures. For those who opt for the

security and closeness of marriage and family, numerous attitudinal and interpersonal adjustments and important value-choices will have to be made and adhered to. Either way, the situation is complex and requires to be thought out, so that clear-sighted decisions may be made and the consequences accepted courageously and without recrimination or a sense of grievance.

It may be observed that while nursing and Medical profession belong to the same cadre, one is belittled while the other is heightened, The two are branches of the same profession for which woman is basically well equipped and with the stigma on, and social prejudices against nursing removed this profession would prove to be the ideal one for women, along with teaching. It has to be noted, however, that Medical profession, unlike Nursing is more exacting. While Nursing can be carried on with specific timings, doctors have to be ready to respond to a call at any time. The training of a doctor involves great expense not only on the part of parents of the student but also from the State side. It would be a waste, hence, if a girl, trained at such expense, should have to shelve her degree for the sake of marital adjustment. It becomes the responsibility of the man to see that society is not deprived of the service so badly needed and women entering medical course must make up their minds to use the education for service to the society at any cost.

From: Medicine and Surgery by Perui; Heera.



An Appeal through the Ages

Saris

SARI is an 'Open Sesame' to the enormous vista of women's costume in India which, at one glance, brings into relief the most prized of all costumes - the sari in its diverse textile forms. Indian women may well take pride in the graceful sari that has continued to be the national costume of Indian from time immemorial and enthralled the heart of every Indian woman. Wherever she be, the sari, which is the plaid piece wound round the anatomical form of the body with ingenuity, so that its curves and contours are displayed to advantage, has been the major form of women's dress in India. Its veld, borders and pallav have to harmonize with its style of wear, which changes from time to time. This has resulted in the development of textiles from the point of view not only of fabrics and designs but the suitability of their patterns apart from comfort adaptability and fashion. A definite attitude towards dress is important, and that is perhaps one of the reasons why we, Indian women hold on steadfastly to the sari. It has a natural attraction for us, and we are, in fact, initiated into a respect for it as it were, from a very young age. Lastly whatever be the winds of change, our national costume *is* bound to prevail.

Origin and Growth

Let us look back and try to trace the origin and growth of our lovely textiles. How long

has the sari been in existence? Its beauty and essence as a popular national garment for our women can be summed up in a few words. What did our ancestors consider the requirements of a good and beautiful dress for their womenfolk? First and foremost, it would seem they thought necessary to have a few gathers, as a flare for the dress. It was to be worn gracefully and close to the anatomical form so that the shape of the body was not distorted. To give it a natural grace, parts of the garment has to be flowing, there has to be an over garment either separate or included in the dress itself that would serve the purpose of a wrap or veil to ensure modesty. The sari thus conceived by our ancestors, satisfied all the requirements contemplated by them in a single piece.

A sari, therefore, with its graceful folds has a sheer fall, an upper end that lines the upper portion of the body and after being taken over one's shoulder, trails behind as a pallav together with a small matching blouse, makes the Indian woman's ensemble, with added accessories of jewellery, an ideal costume.

The Sanction

A little later, when the written word came into existence, we find mention of a large number of accessories: the girdle, bodices, blouses, skirts or lower garments, veils and mantles. Hala (A.D. 200), one of the earliest writers in his *Gathasaptasatl*, gives interesting clues to the sari and blouse pieces. He refers to the knot that held the sari in position, while Bhasa, describing *Savitri*, says that she stood by the side of



Brahma, wearing a fine garment made from the bark of the tree that flowed down to her feet. She had as her upper garment a

Kanchuka or choli made of lotus threads, swastika-shaped knot at the centre, her head covered by a white ascetic's scarf that hung diagonally from one shoulder like a sacred thread. One can imagine what a fascinating picture she must have made! The early costume of women appears to have consisted of two plaid pieces. As textiles developed, it was transformed to a single piece dress with a separate blouse, and one end of it was used as an over garment or *pallav*, The KASOTA style of the Maharashtrians is seen in the early sculptures of the North-western region and in the Mathura sculptures, but it does not appear to have spread eastwards. The five or six-metre sari has now emerged as the national costume. A trend towards this began during the Civil Disobedience Movement, when the call for '*Swadeshi*' and '*Khadi*' was given and a large number of women joined the movement. They felt the needs of style that was less cumbersome and simple and the present mode of wear was incepted by women all over India as the most convenient form of the sari.

Our Textiles

There was no time in the history of our country, when we have not had our famous textiles, the fame of the dyed fabrics of India had spread far and wide to other countries. In St. Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible, Job declared wisdom to be even more lasting than the dyes of India. The handloom weaver and the dyer between them extended and enlarged their spheres in addition to the dyeing of fabrics. Block printing, dyeing and

Kalam printing became some of our specialities, to this class of fabrics belong the beautiful cotton and silk block prints, lovely dyed materials in the shape of the *Chunaris* of Rajasthan, dyed and woven *Patolas* of Gujarat the *Ikkats* of Orissa, *Pochampalli* in Hyderabad, *Kalamkari* prints in Masulipatnam.

The dream fabric of every modern bride is a *Varanasi* brocade sari and a *Kinkhab choti* to match. All those who can afford it make it a point to include at least one such sari in the bride's trousseau. In the woven, figured fabrics, the Baluchars, Moonga silks and *amdanis* from East India rank very high. Each type has its own pattern.

Andhra can take pride in its variety of gorgeous saris and the *Pochampallis*. It has also its washable cotton *Gadhwals*, and a number of figured fabrics cheaper than other States. The Paithani of Maharashtra coming from ancient historic centre, Paithan, on the bank of Godavari River, which as far as the 2nd century A.D. had trade relations with Greece, is a sari that combines in itself the styles of Andhra and Maharashtra. Here the *Pallav* is elaborate and the border is a gold band with what is called a *Parespetit* design. Parrots, swans and floral motifs galore are found in the Paithani especially on its pallav with such a wide and varied choice every Indian woman can have a wardrobe of unique character. However beautiful modern fabrics may seem, when it comes to ceremonial occasions, the grace exclusively goes to saris.



The Women's Liberation Movement and its Relevance to India

By MRS. SHASHI DESHPANDE

HERE are, I am certain, very few movements so much talked about and so little understood as the Women's Liberation Movement. That very convenient abbreviation Women's Lib has made it an easy term to use, to toss and bandy about whether disparagingly or otherwise. The fact, however, is that, the wide publicity attending the colourful personalities of the protagonists of the movement, as well as some of their more flamboyant sayings and doings, have done as much to obscure, as to reveal, the true purpose and meaning of the movement.

Liberation, it seems, is the vague word of the moment. One is liberated, not only from the foreign yoke and imperialism, but also, as the "ads" claim, from drudgery, conventions and our own old selves, according to whether the product advertised is washing powders, fabrics or cosmetics. In this context of the over-use of the word, what do women mean when they demand liberation? What do they want to be liberated from?

Simply and succinctly stated, this new feminism is basically a protest by females against male domination, exploitation and oppression. One naturally wonders ... why this awakening to an age old fact now? Explanations offered are varied and convincing, ranging from increased

education and more leisure to the pill. The fact remains that a feminine movement, radical, articulate and more widely supported than generally believed, has come into being in the West.

Voices in the wilderness

The inferior status accorded to women has not always gone unquestioned. There have always been women, and men, who have protested against discrimination, against the disregard of women as intelligent, rational beings, against the belief that women are inferior to men. But these were always small, isolated voices. It was only in England, at the beginning of this century, that women got together in an organised revolt to fight discrimination and injustice, though they concentrated their fervour on one concrete demand, the vote. The Suffragette movement, as this upheaval was called, was a long-drawn-out and bitter struggle. When, finally, the vote was won, women relaxed in their endeavours, especially as the two World Wars gave them, naturally and easily, a place outside their homes.

The National organisation for women

It was a book, "The Feminine Mystique," published in the United States, in 1963 that really ushered in the Women's Liberation Movement, as it is now afoot, in the West. Based on interviews with educated women, the author, Betty Friedan, brought into limelight the discontent and frustration that existed among such women who had failed to find fulfilment and satisfaction in marriage, children and home-making, in

spite of the wide-spread belief that these were the most rewarding occupations for women. Women, Mrs. Friedan declared, needed to fulfill themselves by doing creative work outside the home. Soon after, she formed the N.O.W. (National Organisation for Women) to obtain for women equality of opportunity and status, an admission to "the world of the ulcer and coronary" as Germaine Greer calls it.

Call for drastic change

Germaine Greer and Kate Millet, both Ph.D.'s, with their books, "The Female Eunuch" and "Sexual Politics" gave an intellectual basis to the discontent that had already become a movement after Mrs. Friedan's book. Both these women argued that women have been given a lesser status as a result of a deliberate male conspiracy and that female oppression can be traced back to the patriarchal family, that this continuous process of exploitation and oppression has debased woman in her own self esteem. Calling for a radical change in the status of women, they employed arguments and drew conclusions that were at once varied, revolutionary, undeniable exaggerated and rational. They scorned the idea of any innate female inferiority, physical or intellectual; argued that sexual and behavioural differences, if any, have been culturally imposed upon women, denied passivity as an essential female characteristic and called for a drastic change in male/female relationships. Their ultimate aim is a radical transformation of society which will give a woman her rightful place in humanity. In other words, recognition that a woman is first a person.

In furtherance of this end, the radical feminists have made demands that range from the common place and acceptable to the extreme and extravagant. These include that women cease to regard the home as their main sphere of interest; that women have a valuable contribution to make outside the home; equal pay for equal work; changes in ideas of specific male/female roles; abolition of changes in dress, adornment, behaviour, etc., between the two sexes; that the institutions of marriage and the family cease to exist; that a woman is not bound to have children; that even lesbianism and promiscuity can sometimes be justified. These, then, are the ideas of the Women's Liberation movement as it exists in the West. How far these ideas have reached and been accepted by women, and society in general, is not yet clear. But the issues have been brought out into the open, discussed, debated and kept alive. They also have, to a small extent, been made relevant to everyone's life.

Subjugation, Total and Absolute

But, how far is this movement relevant to India? To what extent can it solve the problems of Indian women? Before discussing this, it is necessary to understand the status of women in India. The first thing to realise is that in India, the subjugation of women is total, absolute and often unquestioned. The role and status of women in society has been defined with a formality and precision that has successfully fenced her in for hundreds of years.

In India, the patriarchal family has persisted in its purest form. Both the joint family with its 'karta' and the State with its King, presented the idea of a powerful father figure to whom the others owed unquestioned obedience. A female in this male-dominated society was not only an inferior, but one without existence. A non-person, in fact. While males justified their existence by the mere fact of being males, women justified their's only by procreating, by providing male heirs. A woman was, above all, an instrument for the propagation of the family and therefore, a woman without children, without male children, had no place in society. She could never exist independently.

Lost individuality

The amorphousness of a woman's identity can be seen from the fact that she was, after marriage, rarely addressed by her name. She was an 'aunt' or 'sister-in-law', etc., within the family. Outside she was "so and so's wife," or "so and so's mother," and so on. The idea that a woman had no existence apart from her husband was carried to the logical extreme in sati. Widowhood was the supreme punishment for a great crime. The other logical corollary of a woman's non-existence was that she had no place in religious rites or sacraments by herself.

In addition, a picture of an ideal woman was built up through literature, mythology, etc. This ideal woman was self-abnegating, self-sacrificing, uncomplaining and selfless. While men were encouraged to seek self-knowledge and self-realisation, women were told that she who was the most

passive, most selfless, was the ideal one. The result was, women forced unknowingly to conform to this image, gloried in a meaningless renunciation, in having no life apart from husband and family, in renouncing all ideas, desires and passions. Side by side with this glorious woman, there existed the mother ideal. As Pandita Rama Bai said, nearly a hundred years ago, in her, "The High Caste Hindu Woman," ... "The honour bestowed upon the mother is without parallel in any country." A mother was idolised, made out to be a superior kind of a being, which led to a kind of unhealthy domination by mothers even of grown up men. This perhaps, accounts for the impression that we have, even now, as a nation, an Oedipus complex.

A Lover of her own bonds

All in all, the idea that a woman was an inferior being was imposed upon her by birth. She was told to be tractable, passive, obedient, given a place subordinate to her brothers, made to conform, adjust, never to think for herself. This kind of training, followed by early marriage, constant child-bearing, cruelty in her husband's home, widowhood, wore down a woman's will and personality, depriving her of the joy of living and made her a wreck of a human being. Kept purposefully in ignorance, she was degraded in her own esteem, afraid of freedom and a lover of her own bonds.

While there were, especially in the 19th century, many social reformers who tried to improve the lot of women, there was scarcely any appreciable change in their status till this century. It was Gandhi who brought women out of their homes to

participate in the Independence Movement. And suddenly women were catapulted from being slaves and submissive dolls into being comrades and freedom fighters.

The Sad Truth

With Independence, the need for social reform gathered momentum and since then many laws have been passed, trying to improve the lot of the Indian woman. The Government has, through legislation dealing with marriage, dowry, divorce, property, etc., tried to bring about a change in the status of women. (A Bill to end discrimination against women in employment will be introduced in Parliament very soon). The pill and other birth control measures have been given a degree of control over her own body that would have been unthinkable 50 years ago. With all this, the sad truth is that the Indian woman is, most often, an animal, unknowing, unthinking, unaware. She lives in darkness, shackled and fettered to a degree Western women cannot comprehend, and worst of all, grown so timorous of freedom, that she cannot live without her bonds. In the West, it was a discontent among women that gave rise to the Liberation movement. As Germaine Greer says in her 'The Female Eunuch,' ... "Women must prize this discontent as the first stirring of the demand of life." Does this discontent exist here?

Moving within a cage

In India, it seems, there is no medium between the vast unspoken misery that is the common lot of the large multitude and

the sickening complacency that characterises the attitude of the lucky few. When we talk of Indian women, we should realise that there are two entirely different species among them, between whom there is almost nothing in common. There is the microscopic minority of the urban, educated woman, often earning, aware of her rights, mistress of her household, to whom liberation is synonymous with wearing trousers and cutting her hair short. On the other hand, there is a vast majority, rural or urban, uneducated, ignorant, moving blindfold within a cage of ritual, routine, tradition and taboos. This is the real exploited class. To these women, liberation in the sense understood by the radical feminists has no meaning. To talk of liberating them would be like opening a cage after the animal has lost its ability to see, to walk.

It is a misconception to imagine that most working women are in the urban areas. In fact, the figures indicate that of the 31 million women workers, only 3 million are in urban areas. Of these, the number of women who are reasonably educated must be even more minute. Those, who belong to this group, to be considered together with those Women with the higher socio-economic, category that will have separately.

A very big but

Educated, aware of their rights, these women are not prevented from taking up any job or entering any profession. We have, therefore, women lawyers, doctors, architects, scientists, executives, besides teachers, nurses, etc. But ... and this is a

very big but ...even to these women, most of them anyway, marriage is still the ultimate goal. Education is a means of passing the time till they get married or a way of enhancing their value in the marriage market. A job, too, is often a stop-gap arrangement and a woman's whole life hinges round the central theme of marriage. These women submit, as girls, to being hawked around to prospective grooms, allow their fathers to get into debt to give them a good dowry and are content to regard marriage and children as the main aim of their lives.

I can remember a girl, studying for her M.A. who when asked whether she was engaged, retorted, "Would I be slogging here if I was? I'd give all this up like a shot!" A revealing statement indeed! The point is that no woman feels complete without a man. She still feels she needs a protector, a man to give her status. First, the father, then the husband, finally, perhaps, a son. While liberated women in the West are adopting the address Ms. to avoid being identified on the basis of their marital status, our women, apart from a change of surname, are content to let their husbands change even their first name during the marriage ceremonies, which only emphasises the formlessness of a woman's own identity.

The non-entity

The widow is still a non-entity, socially. No widow will ever issue invitations for a son's or daughter's wedding in her own name. Any male relative, however distant or indifferent, will do. The unmarried woman is still a freak and either unnatural, immoral or unfortunate. No one stays unmarried out

of choice. Frustration in a woman is linked to marriage and children, nothing else. And, tragically, women have been so imbued with the idea that a husband and children are their main desires in life, that an unmarried woman or a childless one is often scarred by complexes.

The woman who takes up a job does so because of purely economic reasons or to pass her time, rarely for reasons of self-fulfilment. She is ready to give it up the minute she finds a man to support her and provide her with a home to give her occupation. In short, the female personality is in need of emotional crutches. It undergoes a kind of disintegration, deprived of male support, which means that widowhood and abandonment are still the most harrowing tragedies. This kind of emotional bankruptcy is humiliating and in no way contributes to her self-respect.

The masochist sacrifice?

In addition, the image of the ideal woman has lingered on, haunting even the enlightened woman of today, bringing out a masochist streak in her make-up. Self-sacrifice by a woman is extolled, and a woman feels she is bound to sacrifice everything for her husband and children. Enjoyment is always tinged by guilt and the cry that "I have given up everything for you;" addressed to husbands and children by middle-aged women, shows the bitterness that arises from such senseless sacrifice. Even the highly qualified woman will give her job secondary importance, not scrupling to give it up, blinded by the idea of the sanctity of home and children. Forced to regard the home as her main focus of

interest, the working woman is often neurotic, torn between her work and home, guilt-ridden towards her children. There is an emotional out-pouring towards these children as a kind of atonement, often allied to a barren relationship with the husband.

The offending movies

Movies and books have helped to perpetuate the legend of the ideal woman to which women felt bound to conform. Movies are the worst offenders, glorifying the woman who puts up uncomplainingly with all kinds of bestial cruelty from a man, even embracing his feet while he kicks her. The audience applauds, women enjoy a feeling of moral superiority and men go out to resume their ogling of women, which leads us to another aspect of female degradation. While women abroad have protested indignantly against their being treated as sex objects; our women, segregated and secluded, were to some extent protected. Even to their husbands, they were not even sex objects, but female bodies to give the husbands sexual release and children. For pleasure, there were other women. (The idea of a woman getting pleasure out of sex is still unfamiliar here. Girls about to be married, are told by their mothers to 'endure' anything that their husbands might do.

Now our movies have also popularised the other female, the sexy, mindless doll who exhibits her body while shamming modesty. These movies and ads, which are also shamelessly exploiting the female body, have exposed women to a thousand indignities of lecherous males in public. In a city like Bombay, which boasts of the

largest number of working women, women are, in buses, trains and on streets, made the victims of a visual and physical assault that is hard to bear.

Women's work still does not rate high

All this goes to show that the Indian woman is still deeply imbued with the idea of male superiority. Her husband has to be someone she can 'look up to! Any girl will tell you that her future husband has to be someone superior... someone more educated, earning more, more intelligent, belonging preferably, to a higher social status and of course, older.

The same is true of a man who needs a wife not superior in any respect. Intelligence in a woman is derided as unnecessary. She can work and earn money, provided she does not take her job too seriously. Her jobs too are those which call for the feminine touch like typing, nursing, teaching, etc. She should not aspire for any more, though, curiously enough, women doctors are accepted easily. As the editor of a national women's magazine lamented in her editorial, "For most men, no matter how liberated, women's work still doesn't rate very highly, whether it be inside the home or outside" .

Guardians of her moral

When we come to the other kind of woman, the picture is very dark. All talk of liberation is meaningless in the context of the kind of life these women lead. Uneducated, helpless, vulnerable to all kinds of cruelty, she seems to be a doomed creature from birth. Usually one of a large family, she is

not sent to school as her help is needed at home. Education, when provided, is rarely beyond the primary stage. Her parents owe her only one duty, and that is to get her married. All her life in her parents' home is passed in a state of waiting for marriage. Preparation too, for her work at home is a kind of practice for her life after marriage. "You have to please your husband and mother-in-law" is the standard set for her. She is strictly guarded, even younger brothers making themselves guardians of their sister's morals. An unmarried woman, a widow, an abandoned wife is presumed to be the prey of any man if she has no male protection. The idea is that no woman can live by herself and the tragedy is that the woman succumbs to the idea and a man as well.

Not that the married women have it much better. The authority of the husband is almost total. Even working women hand over their earnings to the husband who may spend it, more often than not, on drink. Cases of cruelty and torture are common. A man who has tortured his wife to death may be offered another girl soon after. For parents, to get a girl married is important. What happens afterwards is her own luck.

Ruins of humanity

This kind of a life of ignorance, routine drudgery, endless child-births and joyless marriage has enslaved women's minds degraded them, made them ruins of humanity and deprived them of the thinking power that alone differentiates man from animals. The kind of dumb animal suffering that goes on among a large number of

Indian women defines description and makes nonsense of all the legislative measures that have been passed. Some of these women, reveal in their struggles a kind of innate strength and courage that declare a potential for better purposes than for, as is now, sheer existence and survival. This uncomplaining, futile suffering is often due to a kind of masochist pride in endurance.

And strength to endure comes from the conviction that a woman's lot in life is suffering.

Economic freedom, it is clear, is not the answer. While economic freedom will make emancipation easier, what is more necessary is a radical change of ideas. It is difficult to imagine that the more radical feminist ideas will ever take roots here ... like abolition of marriage and family, sexual promiscuity, etc. Women are still too ingrained with traditional ideas and most of them will continue to look for happiness in marriage and children ... And, frankly, how many women are prepared to abdicate their position of being protected by a man for that abstract thing called freedom? Most women are content with their present status where they are not responsible for themselves. To take up a subsidiary role in life seems an easier alternative to insecurity, which freedom connotes. But no society can be static. Changes are natural, inevitable and necessary. How will this change come.

Not, as we have seen in the last 28 years, through *legislation*. Nor will freedom be gifted by men to women. It is in man's interests to keep women where they are. And many men are content to imagine that women are happy with their lot. If an

educated woman expresses discontent, they find fault with her education, not with the conditions. Among women themselves, indignation finds outlet only in letters to women's magazines. Most working women too, seem unaware of the subtle discriminations and prejudices they have to contend with. The fact that they are rarely considered fit for jobs requiring initiative, authority and intelligence, and confined to monotonous, under-paid, and sub-ordinate jobs, is ignored. A common complaint against working women, and an argument against giving them responsible jobs, is that they neglect their work for the home. This is simple to understand. So long as the home is considered a woman's sole responsibility and men feel that any duty at home is degrading to their status as men, this is bound to happen. If men and women regard the home as their joint responsibility, and work out an arrangement of a reasonably sharing of duties it will go a long way towards liberating women for responsible work outside. All these will be personal adjustments, done not because of any theory, but because the couple, the family, finds life more convenient that way. If in the U.S.A., some couples are fighting out the right of a man to 'maternity leave' (i.e. when the wife decides to go back to work after having a baby, and the husband stays back to look after the! baby, this being more convenient), these are all ordinary couples not caught up in any movement, but making the best of the job of living in today's world.

Actuality and ideology

All this shows that for most women the movement is not relevant. They are more concerned with the actualities than any ideology. But it is through the actualities that liberation will come, if at all. Women, couples, families, learning to adjust to changed situations will find themselves working out the theories of the movement. But ... again a big but. . . before marriage, men and women will have to accept certain ideas:

1. That a woman is, above all, a human being, a person, an individual, which means that a woman has to prepare for emotional independence and self-reliance, ready to work out her own destiny. And believing like Ibsen's Nora that, "I have another duty just as sacred. My duty to myself."

2. Both men and women need to shed all ideas of innate female inferiority. For women, I can do no better than quote Simone de Beauvoir ... "To accept a secondary status in life, that of a merely ancillary being, would have been to degrade my own humanity."

While one may not accept the proposition that all sex differences are due to environment and conditioning, there is no doubt that many of them are. It is time women refused to accept the condition of inferiority.

3. The corollary of this, though one more difficult to accept is that we change our ideas about specific male/female roles, which will open for a woman a wider area of action, with more options open than ever before. Flexibility will mean that while a woman, who finds satisfaction within, a woman will stay at home, a woman who



Vaidik Nari Risi (Vedic Women Saints & Seers)

By DR. ROMA CHAUDHRI

RISHI - What an absolutely exquisite, exhilarating, exalting name - 'Rishi'- one that touches the heart of every Indian to the core, one that fills his mind with deepest reverence and purest love, one that makes his soul expand forth fully in a divine bliss - 'Rishi'! But what does such a small, yet vigorous term mean? A 'Rishi' is ordinarily translated into English as a saint or a seer -and though inadequate, the sweet and sublime term "Seer" has perhaps the nearest approach.

"A Seer" of what? "A Seer" of the Truth - Truth that never fades away in course of time, is never silenced, never cowed down, never held back. And that great and Grand and Glorious Truth is the Eternal Divinity of Humanity in accordance with that most wonderful, most breath-taking, most unbelievable, most astounding, *most* horripilating maxim of the Upanisads - "Sarvam Khal- vidam Brahma " (Chandogya Upanisad, 3. 14. 1), "Brahmedam Sarvam" (Brihadaranyaka Upanisad, 2. 5. 1). "All this, verily, is Brahman; "Brahman is, verily, all this". Here, we have to see Brahman in the Brahmanda, Siva in Jiva, Paramatman in Where the heart can meet the heart, the soul can touch the soul, life can join life. Atman - the Absolute in the Universe, God in the Soul, the Divine in the Human, the Extra-mundane in the mundane. And this alone, is "seeing" - and one who is blessed with this kind of very rare vision,

finds fulfilment in work outside the home, will not feel guilty about seeking it there. And man's ego will not be hurt by work in the home.

4. Marriage will cease to be the final and only destination of a woman. She will feel no loss of self-respect in staying unmarried, in pursuing a career. This may put an end to the odious system of fathers going hunting for grooms, with the bait of a large dowry. There is no doubt that the liberated women needs a liberated man as a companion. A man who looks on a woman as a human being, not just a female body with curves. Who looks upon a wife as a partner and an equal in a joyous relationship, with as much right to a life of her own as he has.



is alone a "Seer", a Seer of Truth - Satya-drasta and Seer of Truth, alone is a "Risi". An equally thrilling synonym of "Risi" is "Brahmavadin", literally "One who speaks of Brahman". For, a Risi, realising his very own Divine nature, can speak of nothing else. Not being a narrow, selfish being; not being a callous, crooked spectator; not being a foolish, frigid person - he can speak of nothing else - only of the one Eternal, Universal Truth - viz., Brahman - the Divine Being; only of the eternal, fundamental divinity of the Universe of Souls and Matter.

So, it goes without saying that such Risis or Brahmavadins or Seers are the highest categories of human beings - human in form, yet divine in realisation - and so, naturally they are very few and far between. But in India the holy and blessed land of numerous saints and sages and incarnations of the Divine Being Himself - can justly be proud of being the most enchanting arena, sanctified by the pollens of the lovely lotus-feet of so many Risis. And this, we think, is one of her greatest assets, sweetest blessings, loveliest boons, a fact to be cherished.

Women Seers

But India has something more, something much more to be still prouder, still more elated, still more thankful - and that is - nurturing quite a few Nari Risis, or Women Seers, right from the Vedic Age, the golden dawn of human civilisation. For example, the Rig-Veda, the earliest and most celebrated of the four renowned Vedas, and by common consent, the oldest literature in the whole world (at least 6,000

B.C., if not earlier) contain Suktas (inspired compositions) of as many as 27 Nari Risis or Women Seers. What an unimaginably wonderful thing is this! Just imagine - when the rest of the world was still plunged in deepest darkness, and slumbering inside closed doors with shutters down - right at the golden dawn of human civilisation, so many women, traditionally and even today, considered to be the "Weaker sex", physically as well as mentally - preached to the world highest truth, greatest values, sweetest maxims! How fortunate are we all!

And their holy names - Ghosa, Bodha, Visvabara, Apala, Juhu, Sister of Agastya, Aditi, Indrani, Sachi, Indra - Mothers, Sarama, Romosa, Urvasi, Lopamudra, Nadi, Yami, Sarparajni, Vac, Sraddha, Daksina, Ratri, Suryya, Sikkandini, wife of Vasukra; Sri, Medha, Sikata, Nivbari.

Sukras what they say

Now, what do these lovely, lovable Suktas or verses of Women seers really stand for? What do these names convey?

In the beginning, one thing has to be confessed quite frankly, viz., that the Suktas or verses of Women Seers, were not, definitely not concerned only, or even mainly, with high, deep, profound philosophical or theological topics, as expected from the names of their authoresses, viz., "Nari Risi" or "Woman Saints and Seers" and "Brahmavadinis or Speakers about Brahman the Absolute". On the contrary, most of these verses, represent very forcefully, very frankly, the very common thoughts and sentiments, hankerings and cravings, aims and objects

of a woman - just an ordinary one - not a scholar, not a philosopher, not a moralist, nor even a poet, soaring high up to the Heavens, on the rainbows of wonderful imagination or fulsome flight of poesy. This may indeed, sound very strange - and after all, what a fall from the holy, pure, perfect laps of the world of the Absolute to the dusts and dins, muds and meddling strains and stresses of the mundane world of ours. But is it really a "fall" - we hasten to correct ourselves - it is not after all, a "fall" - that is, nothing disgraceful, nothing shameful, nothing sinful - but is, rather, normal, natural and very common. And, will it have been better if our Nari Risis, our glorious Women Seers, had totally ignored the same and fixed their eyes and thoughts only on the Heavens, to the exclusion of the earth; only on the tree to the exclusion of the seed; only on the river to the exclusion of the waves. Rather, we have to say that the earth is definitely a stepping stone to the Divine Heavens, or rather the world of Brahman. In exactly the same manner, the huge and beautiful tree depends wholly on a small, ugly seed; the river is nothing but a lovely, lively conglomeration of waves. Hence, these very wise Nari Risis of India - forever a place of Synthesis - with their womanly power of greater intuition, deeper understanding, clearer Perception, sweeter Sympathy and purer Love - have not felt ashamed to own up their very own feminine feelings, right at that very rosy dawn of human civilisation, with fullest force, exhilarating exuberance, and comely candour.

Now let us take a few examples.

1. EXPRESSION OF VERY COMMON WORLDLY SENTIMENTS

Ghosa (Rig Veda, 10. 39-40)

Here an elderly Princess Ghosa, daughter of Kaksivan, stricken with leprosy, prays to two Asvinikumaras, the Heavenly Doctors, for cure of her disease and for a husband and sons, as well as wealth and honour. So, very common feminine are these desires and prayers! Yet, she has been termed a "Nari Risi" - a "Brahmavadin", a Seer, a Saint, a Savant, an inspired soul, and a follower of Brahman the Absolute. That is the whole beauty of our Indian way of life and thought.

Never ignore anything - any part of your life, any part of the world. For, in this kingdom of God, nothing, nothing is contemptible, nothing is open to unreserved condemnation; as pointed out above, nothing, nothing is fit to be totally discarded. And who also knows what may lead to what; who knows, what shining diamonds the dark coal mine may contain; who knows, what lovely lotuses may bloom forth out of the stinking mud of a filthy pond? So, out of the worldly sentiments, may very well shine forth the divine ones - who knows?

Apala (Rig Veda, 8.91)

Here, Apala, daughter of Atri, prays to Indra for cure of her skin-disease, another very common prayer, yet from the mouth of a "Brahmavadini Risi," strange, yet, understandable for, has it not been said by our immortal poet Kalidasa

“Sariramadyam Dharma-Sadhanam” (Kumara Sambhava). The practice of religious rites requires a healthy mind in a healthy body.” May that be not true in the case of these lofty, yet very human, very feminine female Seers?

Indrani (Rig Veda 10. 145)

Here, Indrani, wife of Indra, having many wives, resorts to certain magical rites, for getting rid of her rival co-wives. What a very common - nay, not even that - not even a very common sentiment - for, this is not found prevalent amongst the women of educated upper classes - rather, it is a very lowly, very sinful very selfish, very cruel hankering on the part of a very wicked woman, arrogant, jealous, self-seeking, narrow-minded - yet a “Brahmavadini Rishi”. How very difficult to explain; yet, we may give a try, just a try – “Love and loyalty to husband.” Love cannot be shared, loyalty divided. Hence, naturally, any co-sharer has to be get rid of by hook or crook - for, “the end justifies the means.”

Sachi (Rig Veda, 10. 159)

Sachi, another name for Indrani, daughter of Puloma, expresses the very same sentiments again, with the very same force and frankness.

Surya (Rig Veda 10. 85)

This is a celebrated Sukta or poem, depicting a marriage scene. On the occasion of the marriage of Surya, daughter of Savita, with Soma. Here the high Vaidik (for the matter of that Indian) ideals of

marriage as a union of hearts, as a spiritual vow, as a sacred duty - are fully manifest.

II. EXPRESSION HIGHEST PHILOSOPHICAL KNOWLEDGE VAC - (RIGVEDA 10.125.18)

This is really a superb Sukta or Poem, composed by Vac, daughter of Sage Ambhrina and the only philosophical one, composed by the Nari Risis or Brahmavadinis. But here, we have a most beautiful example as to how women also, in those golden days of the most auspicious dawn of human civilisation, could rise to highest top of Brahma-Jnana, Atma- Jnana, Moksa-Jnana : Knowledge of Brahman, Knowledge of Self, Knowledge leading to Moksa or Salvation. What is that supreme, sublime knowledge? It is the profound knowledge, expressed so beautifully, yet so succinctly in those two great Mantras, of our beloved Upanisads : “Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma” (Chandogya 3.14.1) “Brahmedam Sarvam” (Brihadarnyaka 2.5.1): “All this is, verily Brahman (The Absolute) ; “Brahman is, verily, all this”. Thus according to this view, from whatever standpoint we may consider the matter, we invariably arrive at the very same conclusion - viz., that Brahman and Brahmanda, the Absolute and the Universe are one and the same. Thus, if we proceed from the side of the Monistic Schools of Vedanta led by Samkara, then the only Reality being Brahman, the so-called Universe of souls and matter must also be so. Again, if we proceed from the side of the Monotheistic Schools, led by Ramanuja, then also, Brahman being the Universal Cause, is Himself transformed into the form of the effect, the Universe and the cause

and effect being similar in nature the Universe itself too, must *be* Brahman is nature. Thus, the above two exhilarating Mantras are not mere bombastic scholarly assertions, or mere poetic exuberances, or mere soaring imaginative flights at mere rosy, blissful dreams - but true in the most literal actual, real sense. Hence, according to this most wonderful, unparalleled view - every individual soul or Jiva is identical with every wordly object or Jagat, on the one hand and with Brahman or the Absolute, on the other. And this Doctrine of Absolute Oneness has been brought out most clearly, most simply, most sweetly in this most celebrated "Vak-Sukta", commonly known as "Devi- sukta".

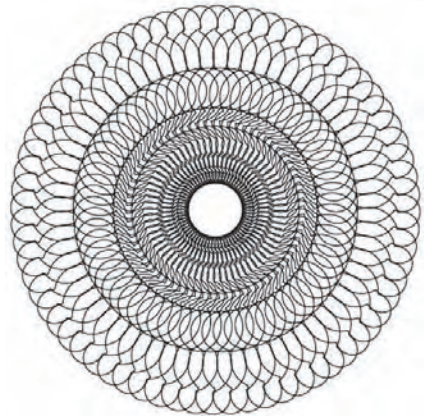
Conclusion

The inspired poems of the Women Vedic Seers, present a most enchanting picture. What we most feel here is the throbbing of "Life" - "Life" with a big capital "L", - Life, that is a very big, very beautiful, very beatific "Adventure" - with a big capital "A"- and "Adventure", if anything, is a mixed whole - a rainbow of many colours, a melody of many tunes, a bouquet of many flowers, a fountain of many streams. But are all these colours equally bright, are all these tunes equally sweet, are all these streams equally vigorous? May be not - for, how can one expect Life to be an unmixed blessing, an unalloyed bliss, an unsullied boon? On the contrary, Life, inevitably, has its ups and downs, sunshines and shadows, summers and winters, smiles and tears, successes and failures - still, after all, it is "Life" - something worth living - in spite of infinite sins and sorrows, pains

and privations, depressions and disappointments, impurities and imperfections.

And our beloved Women Vedic Seers were protagonists of such a " Life" - " Life" that springs from the humblest earth, but soars up the highest Heavens; "Life" with all its numerous ideas and ideals, emotions and sentiments, desires and cravings. Yet, one in its goal, one in its means - the supreme goal of self-realisation and the equally supreme means of self-dedication. If you want to get Life, you will have to give Life; and through this constant process of give and take alone can Life attain its real fullness, real expansion, real perfection.

And our superb Women Vedic Seers dedicated themselves at the altar of this great and grand glorious Life, with cool courage comely calmness, cheerful confidence. That is why, their verses seem to be so very living, so very lovely, so very lovable, touching the innermost chords of our hearts in a most benign, blissful, beautiful manner; and thereby affording a wide, open, common platform - where the heart can meet the heart, the soul can touch the soul, life can join life. What more is needed?



Three Tamil Epic Heroines

By PREMA NANDAKUMAR

HOW well these lines describe the confusion that surrounds us today! India's younger generation is beset by "cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air". On one hand the temptations of modern life; on the other, shackles on its ability to see, think and out new pathways for progress. Stumbling in the "cracked earth" of independent India, the younger generation is fast losing its foothold on sanity. This must not lead to hopeless disaster. Somewhere, somehow, Indian youth should be shown the kindly light. Possessed of a matchless heritage, the light is here. The need of the hour is the need to remember.

We may begin this journey in remembrance at any point. It will only reveal brighter and greater brilliance. For example, the heroism of Indian women. From the time of the Vedas to that of the War of Indian Independence, they have proved themselves flaming cones of self. The sovereign sweetness, the gentle grace The woman's soul and the angel's face.

They were all, no doubt, born to mortals. Yet, they appear to be daughters of the Supreme Divine. Mortals, by birth, they achieved immortality. Their achievement is the beacon light for modern Indian women. For each of us in a particular crisis, there is sure to be an Indian heroine facing an identical context.

The Avenging Angel Kannagi

For example, the character of Kannagi shows the transformation of a sweet, patient housewife into an avenging angel who destroys so that a new and better world may be born. In the opening passages of *Silappadhikaram*, the author Prince Ilango who become a Monk specifically refers to her passive virtue of identifying herself completely with the words and actions of her husband. Kannagi hardly says a word in the early sections of the epic. In the narrative, 'Manayaram Padutha Kathai' which describes the domestic happiness of Kovalan and Kannagi, the latter is a silent listener to the long romantic speech of Kovalan. Kannagi was certainly unhappy when Kovalan went away to the courtesan Madhavi. But she does not give any utterance to her sorrow. Significantly, we hear Kannagi for the first time when she recounts to Devandi her terrible dream ; and a chill stills our hearts. At the same time we also marvel at the structural artistry of Prince Ilango. The descriptions of a bright young Kannagi had first given way to the lonely wife rejected by Kovalan. Now Kovalan has come back but as Kannagi has had this dream, things are never to be the same again. A vague apprehension hovers around her mind as she follows Kovalan to Madurai. But she is passive still. Amidst strangers she is shy, almost naive, and has a charming brevity of speech. Then comes the terrible tragedy. At once Kannagi puts aside the cloak of passive reserve, and gets transformed into something like *Kotravai Deivam - Mahashakti Herself*. The transformation is sudden, yet credible, for



after all we have been listening all along to the praises of others and they have all referred to the innate power and glory of Kannagi's personality. No more human passivity for her, no more bemoaning of the past. Justice must be wrested, at any cost! Her blameless Kovalan, exonerated by the Voice of the Skies, must be vindicated by the King himself. Adharma has taken place and it is now her duty to see that dharma is established again. Kannagi the girl- heroine is metamorphosed into something terrible and divine, a concentration of incalculable power. She

makes of her breast the symbol of life-giving nectar, a weapon of dire destruction. The Pandyan gate-keeper sees in this disheveled girl, a figure of absolute fury. However, having shown the world what the power of her anger can accomplish by destroying Madurai, she puts aside her anger when Goddess Mathurapathi meets her. Afterwards, Kannagi is simply grace incarnate. She takes to the path of pity and kindness when she realises the sway of fate.

The Patient fury of the Mother; Vijayai

Being a mortal heroine in a human situation, Kannagi could not restore her husband to life. But she could see to it that such adharma is not repeated. Hence her purposeful fury against Madurai and King Nedunchezian. This is one aspect of woman's capacity. While Kannagi had no children and could go forth in fury to the Pandiyan court, Vijayai the mother controlled her anger and bided time. In this very act she shines as a beacon of silent and purposeful self-sacrifice. The story of her happy married life, her widowhood, her silent waiting to watch the growth of her son Jeevakan and her final renunciation at the altar of the spirit have been wonderfully etched in *Jeevaka Chintamani*.

As this great Tamil epic opens, we see Vijayai happily married to King Satchandan. Beautiful and good, she is the ideal queen for Emangada. Alas! Her beauty proves to be her undoing. So deep is Satchandan's love for her that he neglects the affairs of the state. His Minister Kattiyangaran usurps the throne by killing Satchandan. Fortunately the King gets his pregnant wife

Vijayai out of the capital before the disaster. Vijayai the beautiful queen, alone in a cremation ground at midnight gives birth to Jeevakan. Her words wring our hearts at this moment.

However, Vijayai is full of common-sense. When told that Jeevakan by her side she would only invite Kattiyangaran's murderous wrath, she willingly effaces herself from the scene. The merchant Kandukkadan and wife Sunandai bring up Jeevakan along with their own son Nandattan. Years later, we see her again as she meets her grown-up son. That very dawn she had dreamt of her boy and here he was! As they meet, it is like "the mingling of two oceans of love." She hugs him as if he were still a little child. "How kind of you to come and see this evil that left her husband dying on the battlefield and abandoned her child in a dreadful cremation ground!" It is a moving scene. Jeevakan consoles his mother.

Such is Vijayai, with a heart that is full of pure love, a grateful heart which knows no narrow limitations. Soon she goes to her brother for soliciting help in the coming war. With his uncle Govindan's help, Jeevakan regains his royal heritage. We are given no breathing space after the splendour of Jeevakan's coronation as the renunciation of Vijayai is projected before us. Born to be queen, Vijayai had been fated to spend the years of Jeevakan's growing-up in a religious retreat. When Jeevakan becomes King, she loses no time



in indicating her gratitude to all those who had helped her in times of need. As the ascetics who had sheltered her in exile need no monetary help, she gives the good spiritual results of her prayers to Mahavira. She builds a temple to the goddess who had shown her the proper way in the cremation ground. At the cremation ground itself, where she had given birth to Jeevakan, she makes arrangements for the daily feeding of five hundred and five children. After having done her duty, she decides to divest herself of the riches that are her portion. She expresses her desire for renunciation in choice words of moral

wisdom, and calls upon Jeevakan to engage himself in deeds of charity. Forgetting charity to spare even a morsel For the needy-their lives are in vain! Tragedy had not warped Vijayai's sense of values. As a mother and head of a royal family, she does her duty in the appropriate way. The last we see of her is as a tapasvini, her tresses shorn and her body covered by a single white dress, engaged in the asceticism of selfless service to the suffering and maimed humanity. Henceforth her life is to be one of severe austerities so that she can free herself from the cycle of birth.

Wife, mother, grand-mother - there is steady progression in Vijayai's emergence as a venerable yogini. In the third great tamil epic *Manimekhalai* we have a young, beautiful, rich girl taking to the path of self-sacrifice and selfless service, thus lighting up yet another aspect of Indian womanhood.

Manimekhalai - The God child

Manimekhalai is compassion incarnate. There is an extraordinary intensity about her faith even in her childhood and girlhood, a will-power that is not shaken by the ardour of the prince, the occult experiences at Mani-pallavam or the rage of the Queen. Manimekhalai is a born healer and child of God. A symbol of total dedication in the ascetic garb, she attains her ideal when she gains the amuda surabhi to feed the hungry millions.

Thus striving to rid humanity from the pangs of hunger against tremendous odds and holding on to the Lamp of Knowledge shown by Saint Aravana, Manimekhalai performs

penance as a Buddhist nun and attains Nirvana.

The Shining Symbols of Righteousness

The Tamil epic genius has placed before us these three shining symbols of 'right action', answering, the need of the hour. Fenced by evils known and unknown, we are as blind persons, the 'hooded hordes' moving in life without aim or capacity. It is not surprising that we suffer because of our own lethargy and stupidity. No wonder there is always a distant "murmur of maternal lamentation." Our present condition national and international - is indeed confusing, dark, a cause for lamentation. Perhaps it is darkest before dawn, hottest before the welcome showers.

When our sufferings become overwhelming, when a sense of purposeless wandering fills our hearts with frustration, then this maternal sorrow decides upon action: to set right things as a Kannagi, to teach the value of patience and love as a Vijayai, to place before us the ideal of healing grace as a Manimekhalai. If we remember what they did and give some thought to their motivation and action, something of their spirit - power, love, grace - is sure to enter our being. And then these great ideals would control our own lives. Mercifully, youth is quick to learn. Once the lessons are absorbed, the sea of life becomes safe to cross. And we could exclaim in triumph.

