CHAPTER 4

QUESTION OF SOCIAL REFORM

AND

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The British conquest of India transformed the social setting in India. It released objective and subjective forces, which kindled democratic urges among the people.¹ The British rule in the eighteenth century brought about a degree of political orderliness. Later they tried to effect certain modifications in the existing social structure through legislative measures. But the British govt. was slow and cautious as there was opposition from orthodox Indian groups to any attempt by the alien rulers to change the existing customs and practices.² Yet, there was some people who were educated on western pattern, who favoured the social changes. The British govt. struck a compromise and avoided any enforcement of new ideas; they made it possible for those who favoured change under new social laws. Advantages of these measures were taken only by a small fraction of society in the first instance but the process they initiated was, indeed, significant.³ The social reforms, which arose cut of the new conditions of social existence affected many aspects of human life and existential realities, the most important of them being gender relations and

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condition of women. The debate, initiated primarily by colonial officials, is regarded as signifying the concern for the status of women that emerges in the nineteenth century. Colonial rule, with its moral civilizing claims, is said to have provided the context for a thorough going re-evaluation of Indian 'tradition' along lines more consonant with the modern economy and society believed to have been the consequences of India's incorporation into the capitalist world system. In other words, even the most anti-imperialist amongst us has felt forced to acknowledge the 'positive' consequences of colonial rule for certain aspects of women's lives, if not in terms of actual practice, at least at the level of ideas about 'women's right'.

The subjection of the Indian women in the pre-British period was rooted in the social and economic structure of the society of the period. Birth determined the status of an individual in that society. The disabilities of a woman arose from the fact that she was born a woman. This inferior status of woman in society was further made sacrosanct by religious ordinances. At the advent of the British Empire the status and position of the Indian women in the society were very low. They were inferior to males having no personality, no significance, and from the social point of view they were kept in a state of utter

subjection, denied any right, suppressed and oppressed.6 The customs of polygamy, pardah, the denial of women’s rights over property, child marriage, sati pratha, and denial of remarriage to widows – all these practices in this period resulted in the development of a very weak personality of woman. She was not only considered an inferior by the male members of the society but she in herself became rooted to the idea that she was weak, helpless, subordinate and inferior—a non entity, a slave. Hence women themselves established despotism on them because forcing of the widows to burn or to lead a life of misery and toil, a dominant mother-in-law and subservient daughter in law, all such acts were initiated, perpetuated and committed by the women or in connivance with the women.7

The social reform movements for the removal of evils present in the society were started in the early nineteenth century because of British influence and close contact with western culture, literature and education. However, the question of ‘women emancipation’ was raised by swami Dyanand Saraswati and Ishwar Chandra Vidhyasagar who were follower of Sanskrit and ancient Indian civilization, but this significant social reform movement acquired momentum by the ideals of west.7a The thinkers and leaders of the society realised the importance of women’s participation in the community affairs if

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7 Ibid.
social progress was to be achieved, preached restoration of the former high status of women in the society. It may be noted that unlike in the west the movement for social reforms and women's advancement in India was initiated and led by enlightened male leadership. The first man to speak out publicly against the injustices perpetrated on women in the name of tradition and religion was Raja Ram Mohan Roy who, in 1818, wrote a tract condemning Sati. Ram Mohan Roy holds a privileged place because he undertook a critical examination of Indian heritage, both in his stand against sati and also more generally in his attempts to reformulate Hinduism. He also attacked kulin polygamy and spoke in favour of the property rights of women. Roy vividly described the degenerated state of Indian society and held the abominable condition of women as one of the causes responsible for this. Taking the lead from Roy, social reformers embarked upon the task of improving the condition of women, particularly those from the urban, upper caste families belonging to the middle strata of society. The removal of the disabilities of the Indian women and their freedom from various forms of oppression was a long process. Orthodox India and old social and psychological habits were arrayed against it. However, the movement scored importance successes and daily gathered more and more strength. Ram Mohan Roy's 1828 tract in favour of the abolition of sati and the orthodox community's petition protesting the regulation will

8 Mankekar, Kamla, op.cit., p.8.
9 Mani, Lata. op. cit., p.88.
serve as examples of the progressive and conservative indigenous positions respectively.12

In India during 1858-85, the sphere of social reforms extended due to rise of press, increase in the number of Vernacular newspapers and journals. After 1857 there was a flood of journals of Hindi language. The total number of Hindi newspapers and magazines was increased up to 139 and they reflected the social awakening of India and especially of north India.13 Bhartendu Harishchandra of Benaras was the first to raise women’s issues in the Hindi region. Not only did he focus on these in his own writing but he also brought out a Hindi journal for women called *Bala Bodhini* in 1874.14 He wanted that Indian women should be like English women but follow the Indian traditions. He explained the importance of women education for the prosperity of India and also said “it is not possible to awaken the Indian society without women education. But the women education had a limit because of the intellectual environment of that time. In the context of that time, the views of Bhartendu were revolutionary and it was the rise of national awakening in the Hindi region.15 The women’s movement grew out of the process of male associational politics and because of the impact of the upsurge of movement in Bengal,

12 Mani, Lata, op.cit., p.89.
Maharastra, Madras and Gujarat in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Now women's movement had acquired a national character.

There were symbols of awakening in the Indian women society because of circulation and extent of high education. The desire of equal rights was also roused due to the contacts with western culture.16 But the Indian women's movement, was limited to the big cities, did not expand its region up to the villages. The rural women did not know about the meetings and resolutions passed related to the 'women's emancipation'. They were even unaware totally about the demands presented by women time to time. In this condition, it was necessary to study the situation and attitudes of rural women for the discussion of women issues and social reforms.17 That is why, the women movement in India did not solidify until 35 years after the first publication of Bala Bodhini. The women's movement in Hindi provinces around the time of first world war was significantly different from the nineteenth century reform movements as it was led by women and raised questions relevant to them rather than to men. Another difference was the growth of women's own organizations and groups. Women in this movement wrote sharp criticism of the self centered egotistic behaviour of men, their privileged position in society, their disparaging attitude towards women and their predilection to exploit and rule over them.18 Articles, stories and poems on issues such as purdah, education, child marriage,

16 Madhuri, July 1939, p.704.
17 Saraswati, September 1931, p.329.
18 Talwar, Vir Bharat, op.cit., p.206.
widowhood, miss-matched marriage and general degradation and exploitation, were published in the contemporary newspapers and magazines. Hindi journals like Chand, Stree-Darpan, Sudha, Madhuri etc. aroused an awareness of women's rights and women's desire to realize their potential. Chand in its editorial page of the first issue reflected the position of women in the society. The Indian women society was in a critical situation and injustice was being done with them. The objectives of the journal were stated to be to demolish the nuisance of purdah, to remove ignorance from among women, to eradicate the other bad social customs and to make them ideal housewives by acquainting them with things beneficial for them.

Overall the question of women's emancipation was associated with the freedom from social and religious evils. It had not separate path but it was contiguous in the renaissance with the association of social and cultural struggles where male reformers widened the sphere of women's awakening and welfare. In the guidance and leading efforts of males, the programme of women's awakening moved on the foundation of reform movements. The time period of the early twentieth century was to be understood the era of reforms. The voices of reforms were being listened from everywhere. There was awakening in the country and change was occurred in the people of twenty years ago and of the present time. They realized their ignorance,

19 Chand, November, 1922.
20 Ibid.
weakness and superstition. Women begin to organize and speak for themselves, we find that many of the ambiguities in their own thought and practice have to do with this history of class based and male initiated reforms, for example, in the Hindi speaking belt, women take up the issue of widowers remarrying with far more emotional involvement than that of widow remarriage. Although, some women began attending the first few sessions of the India National Congress, yet the beginning of women’s movement, which organized itself for a share in public life, did not appear till the second decade of the twentieth century. However, the aim of the reformers was to ensure women some dignity and status within the family but they did not conceive of expanding women’s roles outside the home. The Government of India Act of 1919 conferred limited franchise based on education and ownership of property on the wives of men voters. The emphasis on wives as an essential qualification for political rights indicated the limited achievement of women’s cause till date. The British govt. after realizing the threat to its existence, began a policy of alliance with the conservative forces of Indian society, the landed aristocracy, the wealthy and communal elements. The reform measures were blocked by the government to appease communal reaction and laws related to the social reforms were passed after a delay of several years with a series of

22 Smt. Sukhdadevi Saxena “Bharat Ka Ek Nikkama Anga” Sudha, August 1932, p125.
modification. Therefore, women movement in India required new dimensions, a wider and more radical ideology, and new leadership. This leadership was provided by Gandhi who transformed the reform movement into a revolutionary one by highlighting the role of women in this transformation.25

Condition of Women

After 1920 because of some progress of the women's movement in India, the role of women was not limited to the household works. The Gandhian struggle had, from the early twenties gradually involved women from urban middle class, as well as from peasant and tribal backgrounds in open, mass movements.26 Although the number of educated women was very small but they had started to participate in the new fields. In the contemporary society, because of this new role of women, “what is the position of women in the society?” had become the subject of discussion. In the journals, articles related to, their roles in society, whether they should be limited to home or they could have any role outside the home, were publishing. “Sansar Samasyaon Mein Striyoan Ka Bhag”27, “Stri aur Purush Ki Mastishk Shakti Brabar Hai”28, “Ghar Se Bahar Ki Aor”29 etc. were some comments related to the new role of women, which were published in the Hindi Journals. When examples

25 Ibid., p.55.
27 Prabha, February 1922.
28 Ibid, March 1921, p.179.
29 Sudha, March 1937, p.97.
(related to help provided by men for women's progress) from western countries were quoted in the journals, then many people made allegation that in India few gentlemen were destroying their culture and dignity because of the influence of the western environment. In the protest of this allegation, these people were asked to consider the benefits and reforms happened in the society of the western countries with the help of women.30 Thus, the pressure of creating an Indian dignity, which overbalance the west, was so intense, that they not only projected as poles apart, but also as quite antithetical to each other. In this context, even the seemingly independent status of western women was sought to be described on the lives of corrupt materialistic image of women.31 For example, in an article in Madhuri, it was written that western women used to smoke, drink, and consider their status whereas arrogant men were looking after children at home.32

One thing which was found common in depiction of women's nature in both East and West, was their insecurity to sexual overtures, even though in India, they were sought to be prepared as mother and goddess in the public. The western attitude to give women extreme freedom was taken as a dangerous step in regard to making them sexually corrupt.33 In this sense, the western women were termed as “fashion dolls”. In an article, it was quoted that, those

30 Madhuri, May 1927, p.551.
32 Madhuri, June 1927, p.651, see Article 'Paschim ki Aadhunik Stri'.
33 Kumar, Avinash. op.cit., p.127.
who supported the perfection of the Indian women totally on the lines of western culture were equally wrong as those, who were against their emancipation. Arguing further on the basic differences between men and women as well as Eastern and Western civilization, the education being imparted to women in schools was criticized because it did not stress 'religion and morality'. Thus, the freedom to Indian women as in the western countries was considered very dangerous for the society. The illustration of Indian woman as the portrait of religion and morality differentiated her from the western woman and also bound her in a limited sphere. In the cultural and ideological encounter with the west, in order to situate women, the middle class imported the model of the 'modern' woman from Victorian England, but endowed it with 'traditional' feminine qualities. The colonial rulers had to be impressed but indigenous Indianness was to be preserved. In the entire agenda, therefore, there was a hidden contradiction, and the re-ordering of women into new models was as much social as political. It was further emphasized by the categorization of women as possessing different natural attributes from that of men. Some articles published in Chand and other journals categorized woman as being the repository of tolerance, love, compassion, morality, as well as protector of religion, while the man was termed as possessing greater physical strength, working capacity and more importantly as being more

34 Chand, November 1922, pp. 6-10. See article 'Rastriya Jeevan Mein stri Ka Mahatva'. Also see 'Striyoan Ke Rajnaitik Adhikar', Prabha June 1924, p.437.
intelligent. Though a woman raised questions on the stereotyping of women as being a repository of religion, it still considered her best in terms of performing her ‘natural’ duties of loving and caring.\(^{37}\) In this sense, women’s liberty was bound in the natural attributes.

There was awakening of women through education but it was male dependent. In the context of type of freedom for women, the full freedom for women was considered harmful for society. In the present situation women were not capable to do anything for their own emancipation. Therefore, they should be given education to gain freedom from male society.\(^{38}\) Women had to depend on male members of the family in any form like father, husband or son. In discussions of contemporary society, however, women’s freedom became more problematic.

The existence of purdah, the primacy of wifely dharma and the negative image of the ‘free’ westernized woman made even the ideal of ‘equal partner’ difficult to imagine for urban, respectable north Indian women. Education for women planned out by men in accordance with their roles as mothers and housewives (sugrahini); their place should be at home; and their activities and behaviour should be in keeping with the rules of maryada. A woman’s true dharma was considered *pativrata dharma*, devotion to her husband, education

\(^{37}\) Kumar, Avinash. op.cit, In this context also see ‘Stri aur purush’ in *Chand*, December 1922, pp.88-90 and “Striyon Ki Badti Hui Swatantrata” *Chand*, Dec. 1922, pp.97-100.

\(^{38}\) *Chand*, January 1937, p.301.
should aim at strengthening that role, not at threatening it. Otherwise, people would keep preferring non-educated but modest and dutiful women to those who were educated but overlooked their dharma. Central to this view of role based education was the preoccupation with male control over feminine subjectivity and with the boundaries of the role, which in Hindi is expressed by the powerful concept of maryada, propriety, often visualized as a line or boundary.\footnote{Orisini Francesca, The Hindi Public Sphere: 1920-1940, OUP, 2002, pp.253-254.}

Along with \textit{pativrata dharma}, the main duties of women were to, nourish their children and do household jobs. There would be loss if the management of the house was not proper and in that situation mistress of the house would be responsible. Therefore, women were requested to follow \textit{pativrata dharma} and to do their duties properly.\footnote{\textit{Stri-Kartavaya} in Madhuri, July 1923.} So, it was observed that a large number of men had notion that as, clothes, ornaments were required for the make-up of men, sitar or harmonium was required for entertainment, in the same way a woman was required for, running of home and service. Above this, the position of women was a history according to the notion of men. They even interpreted the Manu’s sentence “\textit{Na stree swatantrayarmahti}” as, the slave or a dog could be given some freedom but a woman not.\footnote{\textit{Stri Ka Sathan} in Madhuri, August, p. 194.} In their vision, a woman had, neither knowledge nor wisdom, neither heart nor desire for self-pleasure. These people did not know that which freedom was incorrect according to Manu and they did
not have any time to think about it. According to Manu, keeping women in a protection was agreeable for guardians. A woman should be in the subjection, of father in childhood, of husband in adolescence, and of son in old age. In other words, to do a work which affects the family and society, a woman should take permission from her guardian father, husband or son.42

In the history of human civilization, duty and right had a mutual relation. Rights were aroused because of duty and the existence of rights also finished in the absence of duty. So, the rights could not be imagined without duties. If the nourishment of children was the duty of woman and for this reason she had to stay at home, then earning of money, supervision of external matters etc. were the duties of man. The division of labour was essential for human as well as society. That’s why duties and rights of men and women were different for hundreds years and it was entirely a natural characteristic.43

It was a false notion that the jobs, of a particular type were of low standard whereas, of other type were of high standard. Because of this notion, a dispute was aroused that not even men, women also acquired the memberships of all organizations and societies like men, and they should do all the works of men. In reality, the work of a woman was so important that the progress of family, society and nation were dependent on it. These works of women, provided, platform for the existence of human society, pleasure and could do the

42 Ibid.
growth of culture.\textsuperscript{44} Therefore it would be a blunder mistake to understand the works of women, of low standard.

From the above discussion it is clear that in spite of social reform movements, conservative forces were still powerful. Further, even among women there were many who believed that “the division of work between husband and wife is not at all equitable. A man has to toil in heat and work hard to earn. A woman gets good comfort and shelter at home. They get more leisure hours than men except the god given labour of maternity”.\textsuperscript{45} However, in spite of the persistence of this tendency, the other tendency was also slowly developing. In a society where the birth of a daughter itself was regarded as calamity, where her only activity was domestic work and child bearing, where she was married at a tender age of ten or eleven, where she was married a stranger in whose selection she had no voice, where she, many a time, became a widow before she outgrown childhood and where her personality was tied to the apron string of somebody; she could naturally have no aim except that of marriage.\textsuperscript{46} But, the same woman who was first granted controlled access to the public sphere took up the critical instruments she had acquired to raise question about herself, her role and the norms of society; and to undertake public activities in a unprecedented ways. It served to emphasize with all the force of mythological inspiration what had in any case

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid. pp246-247.
become a dominant character of femininity in the new women, viz. the spiritual qualities of self-sacrifice, benevolence, devotion, religious etc. This spirituality did not as we have seen, impede the chances of the woman moving out of the physical confines of the home, on the contrary, it facilitated it, making it possible for her to go out into the world under conditions that would not threaten her femininity.\textsuperscript{47} In doing so, she was partly shaped by current symbols and notions of Indian femininity, at the same time they refashioned these symbols in journals, in teaching, or in political activism.\textsuperscript{48}

This progressive trend revealed only in the urban area and it was absolutely absent in the rural areas where most of the Indian population was residing. There were still thousands of families where woman did not enjoy the same freedom as man. The rural women were generally illiterate, so the rays of new civilization were not reached to them. They were busy in their domestic work and there was no need of change in the society according to them.\textsuperscript{49} The women of rural areas were, simple and innocent and free from ostentation but supporter of old traditions. They remained active in the maintenance of customs prevalent in their family or society, either bad or good. In the maintenance of the customs, they did not bear any imperfection. They were not free from these rules and regulations even for their dressing and method of

\textsuperscript{48} Orisini, Francesca, op.cit., p.244.
\textsuperscript{49} Saraswati, September 1931, p.329.
There were different rules and regulations related to daily routine and dresses for vidhwa (widow)—sadhwa (a woman whose husband is alive) in different provinces of India. Most of these rules were not related to religion. Although, the neglect of these rules did not create any imperfection in the society, but the Hindu women especially rural women were remained impatient for the protection of these rules. The contradictory attitudes expressed about women in Hindi journals preserved in contemporary society. On the one hand, they were regarded as the highest embodiment of purity and power—a symbol of religiousness and spirituality, on the other, they were viewed essentially as weak and dependent creatures requiring constant guidance and protection. The invisible forms defining her actual position were essentially determined by the latter.

In spite of the broadening scope of women’s activity from domestic to public life and enhancement of the, their personal dignity and status, the image of their traditional nurturing role still dominated the social psyche. Actually aware of the painfully slow pace of attitudinal change among men as well as women, the male reluctance to accept the intellectual potentialities of the latter, their social and political rights and their freedom of choice as autonomous individuals, the ideologues of the women’s movement

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50 Saraswati, November 1931, p.557.
51 Ibid
campaigned for women's liberation. The rise of social reforms movement at national level increased the speed of efforts to break the feudal traditions and consecrations. It is undeniable that the specific ideological form in which we know the \textit{Sati-Savitri-Sita} construct in the modern literature and arts of India today is wholly a product of the development of a dominant middle class culture coeval with the era of nationalism. It will be correct to discuss the customs and questions related to women one by one during the period under discussion.

\textbf{Purdah and Social Reforms}

The custom of purdah was one of the disabilities that women had to endure for a long period. In actual practice, it is a term "descriptive of the custom by which many women in India live in seclusion at home and if they go out all screened from public by such devices as veiling the fact, or covering the whole person, or hanging curtains over the windows of railways and other carriages, motor cars and planquins. Purdah in nature refers to the practice of seclusion of women from public participation." The imprint of Muslim rule (carrying with it the custom of purdah) could be seen even in the early twentieth century: women constitute a smaller percentage of the labour force in the northern states than in the southern states which remained, by and large

\begin{itemize}
\item 53 Chatterjee, Pratha. op.cit., p.248.
\item 54 Chaudhari, Maitrayee, \textit{Indian Women's Movement (Reform and Revival)}, Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 1993, p.159.
\end{itemize}
on the fringe of Muslim rule. The institution of purdah had several implications for the development of the Indian women’s movement. While it discouraged public participation of women, it made any such participation acceptable within associations for women only. It denoted a complementary division of labour by sex; the two sexes operated in separate worlds which were mutually dependent.\textsuperscript{55} Purdah was different very much in degree of seclusion practiced in various parts of the country. At its best and especially among the poor classes, women could move about on the public road and went about their outdoor work with a veil over their faces. If rich they could use curtained conveyances, and social intercourse of a restricted kind was not denied them. Even under such conditions the system was an infliction on the natural dignity of womanhood, and, on the purely physical side, resulted still in a deplorable lack of air and exercise that would lead to the physical deterioration of the race. On the other hand, purdah was so rigid that a woman among the poor, confined to a small house, practically windowless or with openings high up in the walls and she could not leave the house even to fetch water for household purposes.\textsuperscript{56} The women of all age groups were remained in seclusion continuously. Even girls of ten to eleven years had to live in purdah. It was a huge hindrance for newly married women. The purdah kept away them completely from fresh air, exercises, meetings, conferences,

\textsuperscript{55} Everett, J.M., \textit{Women and Social Change in India}, Heritage publishers, New Delhi, 1985, pp.40-42.

\textsuperscript{56} Evelyn C. Gedge & Mitra Choksi (eds.), \textit{Women in Modern India}, Bombay, 1929, p.145.
roaming, public ceremony etc. To remain in purdah all time created an obstruction in acquiring knowledge of various types.\textsuperscript{57} There was a loss of public life. Along with this, mental weakness, self-confidence, discouragement, traditional narrow mindedness etc., defects were also increased only because of purdah. It is to be noted that there was no purdah in the lower castes.\textsuperscript{58}

The custom of purdah was decreasing in the rich and elite families because of the influence of the education and western thoughts. Although this custom had also relation with Muslim but Turkey exiled the purdah because of Kamalpasha's inspiration and Afghanistan had determined to eradicate it in the leadership of 'Shah Amanulla' and 'Begam Soria'. This indicated that purdah was not essential in Muslim religion.\textsuperscript{59} It was widely believed that purdah was a "Muslim Custom" adopted by Hindus. Some would argued further that it was the threat of political assault on Hindu women from Muslim invaders which led to the spread of this custom. This belief had significant implications for the Indian women's movement. It fitted with the nineteenth century Hindu revivalist interpretation of history and it soon became common place to claim that women had moved freely in ancient India and had begun to practice purdah with the coming in of the Muslims.\textsuperscript{60} What ever, be the historical origins, this did drive a wedge between Hindus and Muslims. Hindu women

\textsuperscript{57} Hukmdevi, "Nari Samaj Mein Kshaya-Rog Ki Vridhi Ka Karan" in Madhuri, September 1930, p.232.
\textsuperscript{58} Madhuri, May 1929, p.530.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Chaudhari, Maitrayee, op.cit., p.160.
found it easier to remove purdah, especially once it was labelled a Muslim custom whereas Muslim women were in a sense forced to defend it as distinctive of their cultural identity. They resented attacks on their religion and many Muslims saw condemnation of purdah as “cultural imperialism”.

From the time they attained puberty, numbers of young girls, Hindu and Mohamedan, often just children in instinct and feeling, retired into seclusion. They saw no men except those of their household and even a small degree of liberty was denied them under the strict purdah conditions. Purdah, the seclusion of girls who had attained puberty was a Mohamedan institution more rigidly enforced in north India. In that part of country, it had been frequently adopted by the Hindu, especially in Rajputana. Unfortunately there was a tendency, for communities that had not originally adopted purdah to do so as a mark of growing social status and prosperity. Purdah turned the zenana into the exclusive dwelling place of women had far-reaching effects. It soon inculcated in their minds the deep conviction that freedom of movement outside the house would lower their standing and place them on a common level with low castes. The women especially in north India were concealed from outside world and become useless for the construction of the nation.

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64 Madhuri, May 1929, p.528.
the richer house, because of the restriction on education, companionship, and
the development of outside interests, women were thrown for companionship
on the society of female servants, and the atmosphere was often clouded with
domestic gossip, jealousy, and intrigue. Undoubtedly numerous instances
were quoted of Moghul and Rajput ladies, cultured in the arts and music,
living within *zenana* walls a free and liberal life. But these instances were not
numerous enough to be considered only real alleviation of the system and
assuredly they were not a justification of it.65

With the advance of time people became gradually conscious that the
institution of purdah was not necessary in the society. It was not a guarantee for
the protection of chastity of women. In the early twentieth century the citadel
of purdah began to be seriously breached. The swadeshi movement, the Home
Rule movement, the Non-Cooperation movement and the Civil-Disobedience
movement gave a great stimulus to the anti-purdah movement in India.66 The
custom of purdah was discussed seriously along with other reforms and there
was many articles published in journals either daily or monthly. People were
expressing their views on the harms of purdah with examples based on their
own experiences.67 The educated women began to hate the age-long and
injurious purdah system and freed themselves from it. The women’s

65 Evelyn C. Gedge and Mitra Choksi (eds.), op.cit., p.146.
66 Sharma, R.K., *Nationalism, Social Reform and Indian Women*, Janaki Prakashan,
1929, p.380.
organizations also made ceaseless efforts against it and did a lot in doing away with it. Meetings of women were held in different regions of India and passed resolutions condemning the custom of enforced seclusion of women and entreated Hindus, Muslims and other communities which observed this custom to take practical steps to educate public opinion towards abolishing this system as soon as possible. Attempts were made to hold mixed meetings and debates, clubs and gatherings to loosen the rigors of the purdah. An article on purdah custom written by an Indian woman, was published in, ‘Britain and India’, a journal, “Now time has reached that there should be extermination of purdah from India”. In September, 1928, a meeting of women was held in prayag. Smt. Uma Nehru was the chairperson of the meeting. In this meeting smt. Tulshi proposed a resolution regarding the eradication of purdah.

"Purdah creates an obstruction in the education of women, therefore, women present in the meeting, boycott purdah themselves and to eradicate this custom entirely try their best by visiting the houses".

On the occasion of congress in Lahore, the session of Arya-Mahila conference was held. By criticizing the purdah custom the chairperson smt. Rukmani Lakshmipati attracted the attention of the people towards the eradication of this custom. She said:

69 Prabha, July 1920, p.47.
70 Bharat, 9 September 1928, p.18.
“There is interruption in the development related to women’s health and education because of purdah. To remove this custom, we should use our whole power. This custom is very horrible. There is no need to decide, whether it’s responsibility is on Hindus or Muslims. The women’s welfare is in the removal of this custom. It is meaningless to know who originated it and in what condition it was circulated”.71

From the various articles published in the Hindi journals, it seems to be that the demand for the removal of purdah was not so popular because only women raised the demand of abolition of it, not men. In many cases it was being retained in even educated household not because the educated men believed in it, but because they would not manfully resist the brutal custom and swept it away at a stroke. The conferences of women passed resolution urging abolition of the purdah system in various region of the north India. They could not do so without encountering a great deal of opposition.72 Some people felt honour to believe the purdah, a pleasing jewel instead of a obligation. Not this, they produced various logics in the favoure of this improper custom and by citing the exaggeration of selected accidents, they expressed it as the only measure of the protection of ‘maryada’. They even told that the day when purdah would be removed from India, the formidable downfall of India

71 Saraswati, February 1930, p.303.
would be started on the same day and the beauty of India would go to hell. In
the praise of this custom, they even called the efforts of civil reforms as the
disorder to be born by western civilization. A female writer advocated the
eradication of purdah for the welfare of women society but not now. According
to her, the speed of the time and society should be observed before its abolition.
There were a lot of adherent of this custom in the 'United Province' and it was
because need of this custom was considered necessary in the society. It was a
mark of respectability and propriety for the upper classes. It distanced women
from the ordinary people. Considerable virtue was attached to the custom. The
purdah for women was not merely a symbol of content but a symbol of proud
also. They did not, regard it as a refuge from the world and shield against its
perils, but as an outward and visible sign of virtue and chastity, as well as a
patent of respectability. In their eyes, giving up purdah would mean going
down in the world and reducing themselves to the level of the lower classes. As
a result, a tendency existed among lower classes to adopt purdah as a process
of 'Sanskritization'. A big meeting of the Muslim women was held in
Bombay under the leadership of Begum Nafis Dulhin Saheba. In this meeting
social reforms were emphasized but the custom of purdah was supported.

73 Mehrotra, Parsuram, “Purda Pratha Aur Sanyukt Prant”, Madhuri, December 1930,
pp.599-600.
74 Bai, Subhadra. “Prada-Nivaran Ke Sambandh Men Kuchh Vichar”, Madhuri, April
1929, p.380.
75 Chaudhari, Maitrayee, op.cit., p.161.
76 Chand, October 1924.
In spite of the presence of the supporters of purdah, the condition of our country had been changed. Changes became visible, though very gradually, from the mid-nineteenth century. The colonial connection, and the contact with western ideas through western education, provided the major motivation for reform, spearheaded by the middle class.\textsuperscript{77} The wave of progress was moving and women were feeling their obligations, even in those regions, where this custom was existing strictly, which were not developed like Bombay, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Konkan, Malabar, Kashmir, north - Punjab and half united province. Although the movement against purdah did not gain momentum initially but after some time, it was disappearing from Lucknow, Kanpur, Kashi, Meerut and Prayag and women were showing courage in this movement.\textsuperscript{78} As a result of movement against purdah women of respectable and aristocratic families began to discard purdah and participate in politics. Durgavati Verma, a Kshatriya woman was the first lady to discard purdah in the midst of her caste men.\textsuperscript{79} The political movement of 1930-32 gave a great shock to the custom of purdah and it did not show any sign of weakening among people in general and educated classes in particular. Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru in a letter to his daughter dated 7th January, 1931 very significantly observed that the purdah was rapidly slinking away to take its rightful place in the shelves of museums where the relic of a by gone age were kept. To him

\textsuperscript{77} Ray, Bharati. op.cit., p.29.
\textsuperscript{78} Madhuri, December 1930, p.600.
\textsuperscript{79} Chand, May 1931, p.39.
the house with women in purdah was like a zoo or a prison and a nation could not go ahead if half of its population was kept hidden away in a kind of prison. But it was very fortunate for India that she was rapidly tearing the purdah away. It was fast disappearing among the Hindus and slowly among the Muslims.80 There was a mass movement against this evil without any plan or programme.

Meetings and demonstrations were held against the purdah and other social evils related to women. In all these meetings resolution was passed to remove purdah for the promotion of education and knowledge among women. In the first session of ‘Srva Bhartiya Stree Mahasabha’, Maharani of Baroda was the chairperson. There, more than two thousands women, were present. In her speech Maharani of Baroda emphasized the removal of purdah for the welfare of women and also for the country.81 The Marwari community was in the front rank in the observing purdah. In the ‘Marwari Women Conference’, the chairperson smt. Janki Devi attracted the attention towards the social evils and said

"Now time has been changed. The huge waves of courage, life, awakening and power, were blowing in the whole world. These waves also influenced India. That is why; the number of such women is increasing day to day who are working with men

80 Quoted in Sharma, R.K., op.cit., p.179.
81 Saraswati, January 1927.
in the field to serve the country. All these symbols are hopeful and full of enthusiasm."  

The provincial portion of the Government of India Act 1935 was induced and in early 1937 election for provincial legislatures was held. Purdah could not avert women from casting their votes and also from standing as candidates. Many women became the member of legislative assemblies. There were 41 seats reserved for women in legislative assemblies according government act. But in the general election of 1937 Congress party nominated women as candidates even on seats for men, therefore, the number of women legislatures was 60 in the provinces of whole British India. Besides legislatures women also became members of the local boards like municipalities, district board etc. The waves of opinion of social reformers was moving towards the abolition of purdah but the speed was slow.

The custom which was observed in the society for hundreds of years, that could not be abolished instantaneously. Some difficulties would come initially but it could be removed by knowledge of duties and intention. It was clear that neither the movement against purdah was not occurring in a hurry nor it was the aim to reform society on the basis of western civilization. Efforts to do away with purdah by social reformers in itself was limited as

82 Vishal Bharat, November 1933.
83 Chand, May 1937.
84 Madhuri, July 1939, p.704.
85 Ibid, May 1929, p.531.
were the efforts of some sections within women's organizations. An important social fact to consider is that the sex-segregated nature of Indian society did not undergo radical change in this period. The women's movement had to accommodate itself to this condition. But the strongest factor in the liquidation of purdah was the political and social movement which had drawn thousands of middle class women into some kind of public activity.\textsuperscript{86}

**Question of Widow – Remarriage**

One of the major contentions of the most recent feminist critique of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century reform movement is that the issues which had been picked up concerned mainly a small section of women. The reform endeavours therefore reflected only the paternalism of the elitist male reformers, concerned exclusively about their own class, and their eagerness to retain their patriarchal control over the private spheres of life. The first premise of this feminist discourse, however, needs to be re-examined, for compulsory widow celibacy, like many other similar customs, were more widely practiced than indicated by the available cultural stereotypes, both old and recent.\textsuperscript{87}

During the period of national awakening in India, the deprived condition of widows attracted the attention in order to discuss the issue of women emancipation. In this period a large number of women, were carrying this

\textsuperscript{86} Chaudhari, Maitrayee, op.cit., pp.162-163.  
menace. Without the solution of this problem, women liberation could not be imagined. An article described the condition of widow as:

"First, widow are facing an astounding calamity from the God, secondly, the broil and alas of family for all time take their lives. Parents are increasing the number of widows by marrying girls in childhood". 88

All Indian widows were condemned to a life of celibacy and self denial for remarriage. The usual procedure at the death of her husband was that widow's hair was cut and her jewellery stripped from her. 89 Henceforth she might wear no other clothing but a plain white sari without the adornment of even the simplest border. She must sleep on the hardest surface, frequently a stone floor, eat but one meal a day of most frugal kind, and twice a month keep a strict 24 hours fast, during which not even water might pass her lips. To add to the sadness of her lot, as her presence was considered unlucky and accursed, she was not permitted to join in any merry making or family celebration. In all cases she remained the unpaid made of all work of the family. She was lucky if her own family took her back, for in the house of her mother-in-law she remained subject to the bitterest taunts and insults. 90 Hence widow was burning to death by slow fire without any elevating effect on the sufferer. The helplessness and commonality of the experience of Hindu

88 Sudha, August 1932, p.126.
89 Hauswirth, Frieda, op.cit., pp.76-77.
90 Ibid., p.77.
widows became a metonymy for the condition of Indian women in general. The pressure to adhere to a life of heavy duties and with no emotional bonds or rewards was particularly heavy on them, especially child widows. With a dramatic reversal of fortunes, in upper caste, affluent households, widow became qualitatively different beings from married women, the *suhagins*. Although, all countries of the world had widows but the conditions of widows in India was critical. The widowhood was making the ‘Arya-Jati’ hollow. They would suffer this cruelty for how much time? Many child widow were observed, who did not know about their marriages. The feeling of disgust against family and society could be observed among the widow women because of their critical position in the society. The widows in Hindu society were categorized in four categories—first, child-widow, second, adolescent widow, third, elderly widow and the last old aged widow. There was a need to consider the position of first two types of widow.

The colonial administrators projected the Brahmanical code as the dominant model, advocating a complete prohibition of widow-remarriage. The sati ideal fitted with their view of India as a ‘primitive society’ directly in the need of being ‘civilized’. Yet even they had to acknowledge the existence of widow-remarriage. According to them, it ‘commonly’ existed but only among

91 Orisini, Francesca, op.cit., p.275.
93 Ibid., p.489.
the 'inferior castes'.\textsuperscript{94} Among the widows who did not immolate themselves on
the funeral pyre, yet had no right to remarry. Only one third of the widows of
India belonged to castes in which strict injunctions against remarriage were in
force. In low castes they had always remarried.\textsuperscript{95} In the nineteenth century, the
social reformer, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, untiringly worked against the
worst possible custom, and he was able to get an Act passed in 1856 whereby
widow re-marriage was legalized. He set a true example by wedding his son to
a widow. But the act did not receive much popularity owing to the outbreak of
1857. However, after 1857, various social reform organizations, associations,
leagues and sabhas came into existence and started their work in this direction
through the press. The press, particularly the native press, crusaded against this
heinous custom. It regularly asked the government to intervene and stop this
custom.\textsuperscript{96} The press tried to mould public opinion by publishing the policies
and resolutions passed by various caste associations.

“In 1915 a section of the Arya Samaj started in Lahore a
‘Vidhva Vivah Sahayak Sabha’, to help widows remarry. It also
branched out in Benaras and Kanpur in the 1920s and ran an

\begin{footnotes}
\item[94] Chowdhary, Prem, “Popular Perceptions of Widow-remarriage in Haryana: Past and Present” in Bharati Ray (ed.), From the Seams of History, OUP, Delhi, 1995, p.39
\item[95] Hauswirth, Frieda, op.cit., p.76.
\end{footnotes}
ashram for widows who wanted to remarry, organized their weddings”. 97

Though conditions had been improving a little, they were not as marked or appreciated as one would with them to be. The existence of about two and a half crores of souls in agony, hardly reflected credits on those who were responsible for the well-being of the people in this country. Truly had some one remarked that the widow was lifted from the pyre but left in the cremation ground. 98 By law widow had the right of remarriage but there was very few such widows who came forward to choose second husband according to law. If they did so, they were seen by the vision of disgust. 99 The marriage couples of a widow-remarriage occupied a lower place in the estimation of their caste fellows and were referred to as Krishna-Paksha (dark fortnight after full moon) while those married in a regular way were described as Sukla-Paksha (bright fortnight after new moon). The very terms ‘dark’ or ‘bright’ indicates the respective values attached by the community to the two forms of marriage. 100 In reality women were, very superstitious, uneducated or ill-educated and not conscious of their rights. They even did not care to understand why they were deprived of the privilege, which was enjoyed by their counter-parts. Widowhood was regarded as a punishment for the misdeeds of the widow’s previous birth. Usually no person liked to marry such as sinful and unfortunate

97 Chand, April 1923, p.532.
98 Chattopadhaya, K.D., Women’s Movement in India, Madras, 1939, p.19.
99 Saraswati, May 1931.
100 Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. op.cit, p.12.
In a ‘letter to the editor’ in Bharat, a daily newspaper from Allahabad, a widow wrote:

“I was married at the age of eleven years. My husband was working in Dehradun and I never met him. I became widow at the age of fifteen years and now I am of thirty five years. Some Arya-Samaji people are advising me to remarry but I requested them that I, have no interest and want to meditate in the feet of my husband. I am happy in this and understand this act as a good duty of a chaste women. There is no doubt that we, widows, have very miserable condition in many ways and it is the duty of our brothers to remove our difficulties”.

Widow celibacy remained a widely practiced custom because of many reasons. The high caste Hindu portrayed it as one of the most authentic symbols of the culture of the respectable. The priesthood also discouraged widow remarriage because it was regarded as a sinful act. A woman was a wife not only in this world but also in other world. So, marriage on the part of a Hindu widow was an act of betrayal against the dead husband. According to ‘Manu’ when there was no reform in first marriage, then how could it be in the second marriage? So, marriage did not provide any advantage to a widow.

102 Bharat, 4 November 1928.
The question of widow-remarriage had become a controversial topic. Some articles were also publishing in the journals to oppose it and the Arya-Samaj. The contentions people became unsteady even from the imagination of widow-remarriage but it was obvious because the traditional thoughts could not be removed instantaneously. Thus, the movement for widow-remarriage was not getting support from the people as expected by the social reformers because of the orthodox and traditional thoughts. That is why, a large number of widows were present in the society. In 1928, the total number of widows were about two crores and out of these one and half crores widows were of less than the age of 25 years. Prohibition of widow-remarriage became a far more widely shared popular custom, while the innovation of widow-remarriage gained wider social legitimacy among the educated section of society. So, the necessity of widow remarriage was felt in the society during the period.

To a certain extent, the acceptance of widow remarriage in the society was the result of a threat of their sexual fallibility and liberty to men to remarry. The management of sexuality was the key to the thorny problem of widow remarriage. Throughout the 19th century the most problematic category of women were widows and reformers were attempting to resolve the problem of what to do with the widow especially since a large proportions of upper

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106 Bharat, 30 September 1928, p.11.
caste women were widowed, often as a consequence of early marriage. Implicit in the whole debate on widow remarriage was the recognition of women as sexual beings and the relationship of female sexuality with prevailing family and property structures. Some of the widows of young age covertly surrendered to their natural urges and often created a notorious situation for their parents. But the remarriage was advocated only for young and beautiful child widow, while widows above 22 years or with children were only sought to be educated so that they could earn their livelihood. The upper class of the some Non-Hindu communities did imitate these norms to a certain extent, but for the majority, the non-elite groups, marriage laws were fairly flexible and permissive. A computation based on the census of 1931 showed that at that date less than 10% Indian sub-continent was affected by the ban on divorce and widow remarriage. The movement for widow remarriage acquired momentum and the press imparted a fillip to the reform consciousness. As a result, some associations like the Vidhva Ashram or widow-remarriage association had been established. Some widow became conscious and realized their agony of fate. Hindi Journals also catalyzed the widow remarriage movement by publishing the reports of widow remarriages in the various parts

110 Bharat Dharma, 5 August 1924, p.11.
111 Mazumdar, Vina, Symbol of Power Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1979, Editor's Note p- XI.
of the country, and the resolutions passed by the women conferences or organizations.

“In May 1932, the annual session of Shree Mathur Chaturvedi Mahasabha was held at Etahwah. The session of the Chaturvedi Mahila Parishad was also held at the same place and at the same time, where resolutions in favour of widow-marriage and against child marriage were passed”.112

Similarly,

“In April 1934, the session of the Agarwal Mahila Parishad was held in Allahabad, where the idea of widow remarriage was supported. The Aggarwals were an orthodox community and even a discussion by their women of such issues was a radical step”.113

The articles related to the conditions of widows and measures to improve their conditions, were also getting space in the journals in the contemporary India.

“Basically, the position of women in Hindu society was very high but their real condition was deplorable in the India. The Hindu in the society, were not accepting the remarriage of

112 Chand, June 1932.
113 Ibid., April 1934.
widows. The excess of Hindu widows was responsible for many defects in the society”.

The Hindi journals also reflected the vision of national leaders towards the problem of women. In an article, “Vidhva-Vivah Aur Mahatma Gandhi” the comments of Mahatma Gandhi (on the number of widows in different provinces) were quoted,

“The person, who read this data, would weep. The impatient reformers would say that the widow-marriage is the best medicine of this disease. There are many widows in my family but I cannot say them to do remarriage. The idea of remarriage will not come in their minds. Its remedy is that men should promise not to do remarriage”

The suggestions given in the editorial notes in Prabha, were practical as compared to Gandhi’s vision. These are worthy of quotation: (1) The child marriage should be stopped completely. (2) There should not be any marriage until husband and wife did not attain a proper age to live with each other. (3) The only virgin widow should be permitted for remarriage and not only this, they should be encouraged for remarriage. They should not be treated as widows. (4) Those widows, who are young or below the age of 15 years,

115 Prabha, July 1920, p.44.
116 Ibid.
should be permitted to do remarriage. (5) Widow is regarded as unlucky but instead of this, they should be respected and regarded as divine. (6) there should be proper arrangements for their education and profession. In fact, these suggestions provided some solutions to the problem but it was a partial solution, not a complete solution. Similar, means were also suggested by Swami Sradhanand, an Arya Samaji, in Widow Marriage Conference in 1925. It was suggested that a widower should marry only a widow and a widow should marry a widower. Although this formula could not be implemented in the contemporary situation but it was good. In actual, the implementation of this principle was very difficult because of the system of ‘Varna-Ashram’. The efforts should be done and the difficulties would be removing slowly. It was noted that there was only a small number of people, who understood the widow remarriage, a defect but the number of people was also small who got married to a widow on getting a chance or maintained social relations with widow. The situation was changing and the news of widow-remarriage was reported in all the journals to mould the opinion of the people.

In 1926, 3172 widow marriages were celebrated in India. Where as in 1927, it was 4206. The province wise figures in 1927 were: Punjab 2013, United Province 813, Bihar and Orissa 57, Bengal and Assam 154, Rajputana 69, Bombay 6, Central Province 21, Madras 9.

117 Ibid., p.45.
118 "Vidhva-Vivah Ka Prashan", Aaj, 17 October 1925.
119 Bharat, 30 September, 1928, p.11
On 25th September, 1929, in Bombay Kesar Bai, a widow of 25 years was married to Mr. Bhatia aged about 34 years, with the help of Bombay Branch of Sir Ganga Ram Trust (Lahore). Ramkali, a widow of Baniya caste, aged about 20 was married to Ganeshi Lal, a Baniya, aged 25. The ceremony took place according to Vedic system at Vidhva Sahayak Sabha in Haridwar. In 1932, according to the report of the Vidhva-Vivah Sahayak Sabha of Lahore, 5493 widow marriages were taken place in India. In the next year, there was an increase in the number of such marriages even in Bengal, the united province and Rajputana also. Thus, widow marriages used to take place in the country and number of such marriages was increasing every year. The supporters of widow-remarriage were increasing and after some time all members of the society would support it.

The battle of widow remarriage was more keenly fought by male writers than women. It lent credence to the uplift perspective of women’s movement at least on this issue, men’s projection of their role as saviours of widows remained dominant even during the period under study when women’s movement was vibrant and the agitation for their rights stridently vocal. The women who were part of the movement were not against widow remarriage but unlike male reformers, they were not violent about demanding it. The articulate

120 Bharat, 14 October, 1929.
121 Ibid.
122 Chand, January 1934, p.427.
123 Aaj, 20 December, 1928.
124 Mohan, Kamlesh, op.cit., p.185.

155
and active women focused more on the need to find ways to keep widows busy or to find other creative outlets to mitigate the loneliness and emptiness of their lives. Although Gandhi and some other national leaders were in favour of remarriage of child widows but did not deem it correct for young widows.\textsuperscript{125}

Such reforms were selective and attempted to remain within a prescribed limit, so as not to endanger the patriarchal form of the society, even though the latter could be readjusted. In this connection, certain issues were given preference over others.\textsuperscript{126} So we can say that, perhaps the most positive thing about the reforms is that though they shape women's entry into the public sphere, the labour market, and their self-constitution, they cannot entirely determine it. The history of reform – whether colonial or indigenous or nationalist-undertaken by men and by women does not seem very inspiring, freighted as it is with many kinds of patriarchal assumptions and involved as it is in recasting women.\textsuperscript{127}

**Mismatched Marriages and Polygamy**

In the Indian society, mismatched or unequal marriages were also celebrated because of many reasons. It was also an evil, which affected the condition of women. In such marriages, generally women of less age were married to men of old age. The custom of dowry and expensive marriages were responsible for these marriages. The girls, whose parents were poor, remained

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{125} Talwar, Vir Bharat, op.cit., pp.214-218.
  \item \textsuperscript{126} Kumar, Avinash. op.cit., p.130.
  \item \textsuperscript{127} Sangari, Kumkum & Vaid, Sudesh. op.cit., p.18.
\end{itemize}
unmarried for a long time or married sometimes to an old age. After these marriages life of women became miserable and pitiable.

The system of mismatched marriages was an embarrassing system. It should be criticized. The existence of such type of marriages in our society indicated that we were uncivilized. In relation to marriages, the proper age was not considered. In our country the circulation of education was less. Therefore, it was very difficult to arrange a marriage between equal educated man and woman. Generally, the educated boys were married to illiterate or less educated girls, or less educated, characterless boys were married to well educated girls. Out of various types of mismatched marriages, the marriage of a young girl with an old man, was worst because of a large difference in their ages. This type of marriages increased the number of widows. Sometimes these marriages became the threat of women’s sexual fallibility. In Chand, a series of cartoon was published to illustrate the outcome of mismatched marriages.

"An old man was married to a young woman. It was natural to arise attraction between the young blooded stepmother and stepson. After some time the old man was died. Now the obstacle was removed, passion over took the two young bereaved (stepson and stepmother), who did not think anything of possible consequences. Soon enough, the stepmother was pregnant and the

son denied any responsibility. Finally, the woman was a
prostitute."^{129}

Some times, such types of mismatched marriages were arranged by
parents in the influence of temptation.

"A Brahmin arranged his daughter’s marriage with a
young man many years ago but now in the temptation of money,
he managed his daughter’s second relation with an old man of
Jodhpur. Bride’s brother denied to marry her sister with an old
man from the point of view of the future of her sister but he was
sent to jail with the help of police. There is no law to stop the
mismatched marriages and it is interesting that social reformers
were sending to jail."^{130}

As there was not any law to check mismatched marriages but due to
influence of education, efforts were made to stop mismatched marriages.
Increase in the age of consent and implementation of various laws related to
child marriage, were also helpful factors in the prevention of many girls from
the cruelty of mismatched marriage.

Lakshman Das of Sholapur took Rs. 7000 from Bhagwan Das of
Ahmednagar who was 50 years old and agreed to marry his ten year old

^{129} Chand, February 1929, pp.501-508.
^{130} Nav-Jeevan, 4 March, 1940, p.8.
daughter to him. But the court was informed by Lakshmandas’s brother, which stopped the celebration of the marriage.131

In April 1931, a fifty-five years old man married a girl who was 14 years old. Attempts to prevent this marriage could not be succeeded but a case was filed and five persons including the groom were sentenced to imprisonment each for six weeks and the mother of girl was fined Rs. five hundreds only.132

Journals were reporting news related to such type of marriages to mould the public opinion against this social evil. Sometimes the solution of widow’s remarriage also became the reason for mismatched-marriages. The child widows did not know anything about the consequences of remarriages because they were not grown to a proper age for marriages. The supporters of remarriages were performing such marriages in the name of widow reforms. In an article, it was said that the reformers understood the woman as a non-living thing who must be bound to a male in the society. They did not understand that the women, capable of taking decisions. Instead of reforming the conditions of widows, such reformers destroyed the conditions.133

The growth of female education and the influence of western culture, prepared the ground for social reforms. The potent fact remains that education widened the mental horizon of women, they began to nourish the dream of

131 Chand, April 1927, p.661.
realizing their self. They started agitation for social reforms and were convinced that the real redemption of women could be attained through the eradication of social evils related to them. So, many other discriminatory norms were also opposed by the women. They realized that the women had to suffer under the double standards of social morality prevalent in society. They raised the issue of polygamy and the husband’s manipulation to marry more than one wife even when the first was alive.\textsuperscript{134} In the conference of \textit{Arya-Mahila} at Lahore, smt. Rukmani Lakshmipati, the chairperson of the conference, said:

“The custom of polygamy is popular among the men. In both religions, Hindu and Muslim, a man can get married second time according to his choice in the presence of the first wife. It is not necessary to take permission, consider the abilities or disabilities of the first wife but it is a sign of brutality to insult an innocent woman because of full freedom to the man.”\textsuperscript{135}

The custom of polygamy was a major cause which worked to lower the status of Indian women. It was mainly prevalent in Bengal, United Province and Punjab. In Bengal it was popular among the upper classes such as \textit{Kulin} Brahmans and is also known as \textit{Kulinism}. Generally a man married again if his first wife could not produce children. A man also took second wife if the first one had only daughters and to have a son was his desire. So he married a second time and if his second wife had a son the status of the first was

\textsuperscript{135} Saraswati, February 1930, p.303.
considerably lowered.\textsuperscript{136} There was difference of opinion regarding the abolition of this social evil. Some reformers wanted a law to check it while others thought that it would end on its own. The national leaders of the Gandhi era were against polygamy and because of widening of the public sphere for women, they realized their own worth. Many women's organizations accordingly raised their voice against polygamy.\textsuperscript{137}

"Women are considered as men's shoes. Men can easily get second wife whereas women are give the advice to follow hard celibacy. Men get married many times".\textsuperscript{138}

Sharda marriage Act had been passed, which was related to the age of consent but people were not considering it properly because of ignorance. Especially Brahmin society and rich Vaisya (business community) were doing child and old age marriages due to their awful knowledge and money. Government was not taking any interest to check such marriages.\textsuperscript{139} So, it can be concluded that protests were made against the social evils but these protests were not supported by men completely. It is apparent, that not only for those who sought reforms within a limited paradigm; but even those who wanted to alter the situation completely, the construction of the ideal Hindu past, worked as a limiting factor. One writer criticized these people saying, "they regard

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Prabha}, April 1922, p.308.
\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Sudha}, September 1932, p.261.
women only as maids and for the purpose of sexual fulfillment. They think that a woman has no consciousness, no brain and neither any desire nor ambitions. 140

**Women's Right to Property and Inheritance**

The property was vested in all the male numbers jointly, the women being were dependent upon father and husbands. The unit of society, as before was the family organized on patriarchal basis and generations lived together under the same roof in strict outward discipline enforced by the head of the family. The laws of property were so devised as to stress the family unit rather than the individual. They gave advantage to men and so did the general code of conduct. Men dominated in the every respect, women holding an inferior position. 141

Women were not given any right of property, therefore, they had no alternative rather than to depend on men in economical matters. 142 In this context the absence of property rights of women were sought to be rationalized on the grounds of the prevalence of joint-family system in Hindu society in which "the householder lives and get protected along with sons and grandsons,

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140 Kumar, Avinash. op.cit., p.137.
142 Madhuri, July 1939, p.704.
while the girls get married and go to other families”.143 The decades 1920-30 witnessed some development of far reaching importance. The most important question that was raised during this period was women’s property right to provide a degree of economic security to a near female relation. And, the partial success was achieved in the form of the Hindu law of inheritance (Amendment Bill) of 1929 which recognized the son’s daughter, daughter’s daughter, sister and sister’s daughter as heirs if it was not contrary to special family or local custom having the force of law. The women’s right to property got further momentum when the Hindu women’s right to property Act of 1937 was passed under which a widow has the interest in the property as her husband had.144

While women’s movement campaigns for property rights achieved success with little opposition. The vastly different reaction could be explained by the religious significance of personal law in India. The demand for a Hindu code reforming areas of personal law such as marriage, divorce and inheritance was initiated by the All India Woman’s Conference in 1934.145 The changes to women’s position embodied in the Hindu code provoked a storm of opposition which highlightened the contradiction amongst nationalist men. They opposed the implementation of the principle of equality in inheritance which threatened


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their own privileges as men in the family. But women had realized that they could be respected only when they would be independent economically also.

"Women should be given the right to be successor of patrimony and other properties. Hindu women is subjected to father in childhood and is subjected to son or other relative on becoming a widow. A woman cannot be the owner of a property of his father or husband unless a will is not written especially for her. She has right only to get expenditure for her livelihood. Women could do progress only when their economic obligations would be removed".

There was a strong movement to equalize the laws of inheritance as relating to women; that the wife and daughter should get some share in the estate of the father in ancestral property. "Beside property inherited by a women there are other kinds of property, such as gifts made to the girl on various occasions at the time of marriage etc. which she possesses and over which she has absolute rights and which she can alienate without the consent of the husband. Such property is called stri-dhan, and on her death it passes to her daughters and sons according to the sources of acquisition of the property. In default of

146 Liddle, Joanna and Joshi, Rama, Daughters of Independence, Gender, Caste and Class in India, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1986, p.36.
148 Bharat, 23 December 1928, p.17.
children it passes in certain cases to her husband and to the father’s family in certain others.”

Regarding economic conditions, Mrs. Hate observed that a definite tendency, on the part of educated women to become independent economically and thus trying to improve their economic condition, was growing amongst the women. After considering the programme of Indian women’s movement it was indicated that Indian women, especially Hindu women, had aim to get equal social, economic and political rights. “If women society would be success in getting all these rights, then there would be a genuine and huge change in the organization of Hindu society.”

Role of Women in the Society

The efforts of the social reformers established some preconditions necessary for the development of the Indian women’s movement, such schools for women were started; members of social reform group tended to be supportive of associational activities of women. The social practices contributed to the development of attempts to improve the status of women. The Hindu revivalist movement placed women in a position of honour, expressed concern over the position of women and enlarged the definition of

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149 Evelyn C. Gedge and Mitra Choksi, op.cit., p.128.
150 Desai, Neera, Women in Modern India, Bombay, 1957, p.239.
151 Madhuri, July 1939, p.705.
religious activities to include social service and reform activities.\textsuperscript{152} Official conception of colonial subjects held the majority to be ignorant of their ‘religion’. Religion was equated with scripture. Knowledge of the scriptures was held to be the monopoly of Brahmin pundits. Their knowledge was, however, believed to be corrupt and self-serving. The civilizing mission of colonization was thus seen to lie in protecting the ‘weak’ against the ‘artful’, in giving back to the natives of the truths of their own “little read and less understand shaster”.\textsuperscript{153} The sphere of activity of women was limited to home for centuries of time. Management of house, cooking etc. were the only ideals of their life till the advent of twentieth century. Their main entertainment was rearing of children. The responsibilities of maternity and wifehood were enough to live a satisfactory life.\textsuperscript{154} Their whole life, was, encircled within the four walls of the house and ended in this small world. Therefore, in spite of unsatisfaction, the women understood the house as their only one work field.\textsuperscript{155}

But at the end of time period under review, vision had been changed. Now home was not so important and husband’s worship was not the only aim of their life. The women were not ready to spend all their power at homes. Their thoughts were changing about their abilities. “If they can obtain degrees by studying with men, then why they cannot do men’s jobs.”\textsuperscript{156} Therefore, they

\textsuperscript{152} Everette, J.M., op.cit., pp38-39.
\textsuperscript{153} Mani, Lata, op.cit., p.89.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
were moving outside and breaking the circle of their limited work place. The thinkers and leaders of society were, also realizing the importance of women’s participation in the community’s affairs if social progress was to be achieved, preached restoration of the former high status of women in society.\textsuperscript{157} The women’s role in the society was recognized by the national leaders under the influence of Gandhi. Gandhi’s greatest contribution to the women’s movement for raising women’s status, however, lay in the revolutionary approach to women’s role in society, and their personal dignity as individual. Without belittling their roles as mothers and wives, he proclaimed at the same time that they had an equal role to play as men in achievement of freedom and social justice. In Gandhi’s opinion, women would be more competent to lead any struggle, since nature had endowed them with greater power to love, endure and suffer, as demonstrated in their motherhood.\textsuperscript{158}

But the conflicts within the role assigning attempts were too many to conform easily. Arguing for the participation of women in public affairs, one contributor argued that “till the time women do not participate in the world affairs, politics, social-reforms etc., and their status will remain low ---- of course, it is necessary that women should be taught house management. Those who think that due to high education and wider work place, the love between the husband and wife will be lost should look at Europe, where it is much more

\textsuperscript{157} Mankekar, Kamla, op.cit., p.8.
\textsuperscript{158} Mazumdar, Vina, op.cit.,(n.24) p.58.
in India”. The conflicts were too many and attempts were also on, to find a kind of middle path which fit both the ideals of modern bourgeois rationality, as well as keeping the ‘Indian identity’ in fact.\textsuperscript{159} The women issues were taken up in order to project a liberated image of the Indian woman and even their moving out was authorized in a limited way, yet their role as ‘working women’ was still disapproved. Talking about the difficulties for women inside the mines, because, “not only working in the mines leads to the physical and moral downfall of women but it also leads to the loss of peace and security of men working there”.\textsuperscript{160} Not only work for women was sought to be restrained on moral basis, but more realistically it had a distinct class base.

The companionate role of women was the result of the changes that were brought into women’s lives as a result of the social reforms. In this context, Smt. Bajaj argued that, “Men and Women are two great powers of the universe and universe is, made up of these two powers and running because of their cooperation. Although the nature has differentiated the structure of their bodies but the internal power is same in both of them. If we realize this thing, then the importance of the cooperation of men and women lives would be signified. The society cannot remain alive without the cooperation of men and women. Therefore, the men and women both should realize the importance of

\textsuperscript{159} Kumar, Avinash. op.cit., p.125.

\textsuperscript{160} Prasad, Umesh and Harishwardutt, “Udyog Dhandhon Mein Bhartiya Striyon Ka Sthan”, \textit{Sudha}, March 1928, pp.161-164.
each other for the welfare of the society." Though reforms do seem to perform a service in a relative homogenizing of the middle class, the question of how many groups were actually touched by 'reform' issues such as sati, widow marriage, child marriage, female education, eradication of *kulin* polygamy, remains. The cultural forms of the lower strata in urban areas scarcely reflect any involvement in these issues. Perhaps negotiating these areas itself becomes a way of being inscribed culturally into the middle class, and that is why they seem to preoccupy upwardly mobile groups as well as the innumerable caste associations, which were formed in the latter part of the century.

The women's movement of the twentieth century was, "a spiritual revolution profoundly affecting the foundations of society of the home, and of the relationship of men and women." A career for women was one of the demands of the women's movement of the twentieth century. The women leaders came to believe that it was the career alone that can get rid them off their parasitic existence. In order to play their role properly in the family or society, women must shed their inferiority complex, which was the result of men's interested teaching, refuge to live in the kingdom of dolls. They must extend their hearts and interests beyond the narrow confines of their homes and family and embrace the whole humanity. This vision of women's

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161 *Vishal-Bharat*, November 1933.
162 Sangari, Kumkum & Vaid, Sudesh. op.cit., p.15.
163 Upadhyay, Neelam and Pandey, Rekha, op.cit., p.38.
role, and personal dignity had nothing in common with the limited aims of the earlier reformers. Women played a vital role not only as wives and mothers but as citizens of the country. They were not queens of the household but also nation-builders. The age-old notion that the women were born for the home and men only for the state became a myth exploded. Women’s activity extended from the home to the city and administration of the state, and that as in management of a household, women were cooperating with men is promoting the well-being of that larger family, nation. Women were entering in different work fields, to choose work field for them selves according to their interests and abilities. In teaching and medicine, they had achieved significant success. At that time there was no business /work where women were not present.

But the companionate role of women also confirmed their stereotypical role inside the home. In Chand an essay argued “despite being completely free, the girls of this country are loyal to their husband and assist them in observing true morals of life. God only had divided the duties of men and women; the women performs the duties of the home well; because she manages the house, is ‘lakshmi’; has the undisputed authority inside the home for the welfare of their husbands and sons, they forget even their existence.”

This was an attempt to divide the roles and works of the family between men and women on the basis of power-sharing as well. Here, the female was

165 Sudha, March 1937, pp.97-98.
shown as wielding authority inside the home, while the man’s domain was outside, thereby the establishment of ‘equal’ relationship between the two. Further, their lives still centered around their husband and sons. In this context, even education for women was meant primarily for the sake of making them eligible to educate their children (mostly sons), the future leaders of the nation.\footnote{167}

It is the fact that even the vibrant movement for social reforms sought to construct a ‘new ‘feminity’ without dismantling (or ‘de-constructing’) the traditional roles of women (as devoted wives, competent house-makers and benevolent mothers) which had been inherited from the past. The movement appears to have been based upon the retrieval of certain dominant ideals of women through the veneration of a glorious past (sanctioned by and reinforced through classical scriptures) which provided legitimacy to the endeavour in a society inextricably linked with ancient tradition.\footnote{168} The new norms for organizing family life and determining the right conduct for women in the conditions of the ‘modern’ world could now be deduced with ease. Adjustments would have to be made in the external world of material activity, and men would bear the brunt of this task. To the extent that the family was itself entangled in wider social relations, it too could not be insulated from the influence of changes in the outside world. Consequently, the organization and

\footnote{167} Kumar, Avinash. \textit{op.cit.}, p.133.  
ways of life at home would also have to be changed. But the crucial requirement was to retain the inner spirituality of indigenous social life.\textsuperscript{169}

As such, the traditional values prescribed for women (like self-sacrifice, tolerance, benevolence, competence) were not substituted by but rather supplemented with the more contemporaneous values of orderliness, thrift, intelligence and an enhanced sense of social responsibility.\textsuperscript{170} The home was the principle site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women must take the main responsibility of protecting and nurturing this quality. No matter what the changes in the external conditions of life for women they must not lose their essentially spiritual (i.e. feminine) virtues, they must not, in other words, become essentially westernized.\textsuperscript{171} The Hindi journals, further regularly published articles on different rituals, facts etc. observed by women for their husbands. Also, there were regular column on knitting music etc. like household things' in which a woman was supposed to excel. \textit{Chand} highlighted the feature of an issue published as, "cookery, character building, entertainment, ayurvedic medicines, child – rearing, tips for the benefit of women, other essays apart from biographies and stories."\textsuperscript{172}

Thus, the modern woman had been confined in a role of educated, housewife or mother.

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\textsuperscript{169} Chatterjee, Pratha. op.cit., p.243. \\
\textsuperscript{170} Jain, Pratibha and Mahan, Rajan. op.cit., p.14. \\
\textsuperscript{171} Chatterjee, Pratha. op.cit., p.243. \\
\textsuperscript{172} Chand, November 1922, p.64.
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