CHAPTER – II

AWAKENING OF WOMEN’S CONSCIOUSNESS

Though the social reformers of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, particularly Rammohun Roy and Vidyasagar, as has already been stated in the first chapter, did make efforts to better the lot of women in India, yet “the question of women’s political power or equality between the sexes was not on the reformers’ agenda” and “there was no questioning of women’s traditional familial roles or dependence on others”.\textsuperscript{1} Moreover, the attempts at reform were chiefly motivated by an ideological acceptance of the liberal, rationalist values typical of the West. And in their acceptance of liberal ideas, the reformers were very selective which is evident from the fact that the basic feature of social conservatism were glaringly visible in the reformist movements, namely, discrimination on the basis of caste, adherence to the patriarchal norms within the family and to the injunctions of the scriptures and preference for symbolic rather than meaningful changes in social customs.\textsuperscript{2} However, notwithstanding the limited success of the social reform movement of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, it did make some contribution to the progress made by Indian women in many fields in the short span of a little over half a century.

By the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, women had started showing signs of their determination to fight for their rights and position in society. Many came from

… reformist families and they formed their own organisations and, in fact, the emergence of a rudimentary women’s movement in India can be traced from this time…. Conscious of their political rights and influenced by western democratic values, these women worked actively to generate political consciousness among women during the early decades of this (twentyieth) century.\textsuperscript{3}
The contributions made by some female social reformers to the cause of women's education; the emergence of a number of women's organizations; and the publication of several popular Hindi Journals during the period under reference went a long way in the awakening of women's consciousness. The women became increasingly aware of their low position in Indian society as a result of which they became firm in their resolve to assert for their rights in society.

I

Contributions of Women Social Reformers to

Female Education, 1850-1910

In view of the fact that in the middle of 19th century 98 per cent of school-age girls were not attending schools, the Hunter Commission recommended more liberal grants-in-aid for girls' schools, apart from special scholarships and prizes for girls. As a result of these measures, higher education in India got a big boost which is reflected in the fact that the number of women in Indian universities rose considerably. In 1881 – 82 there were only six women in Indian universities, but by the end of the 19th century the number rose to 264. And during the same period secondary school enrolment rose from 2054 to 41,582.

In this section, we shall examine in detail the contributions made by some women social reformers, particularly those who played a significant role in promoting women's education.
Pandita Ramabai

She was born in an orthodox brahmin family in a forest village of the western ghats in the year 1855. Her father was held in high esteem as a Shastri who by virtue of his links with the family of the Peshwas had started taking interest in women’s education.

After the demise of her parents in 1876, Ramabai was placed in extremely difficult circumstances and was forced to move from place to place with her brother. This sort of nomadic life proved to be a blessing in disguise. She got an opportunity to gain a direct, personal experience of the miserable conditions prevalent in India. To quote her:

We travelled for six years in various parts of India. In our travels we were obliged to go on foot not having the means to afford conveyance. In this way we went a distance of two thousand miles. Thus we had good opportunity of seeing the sufferings of Hindu women. What we saw is not only in one part of India but it was the same in the Madras Presidency, Bombay Presidency, Punjab, the North-West Provinces, Bengal and Assam. This made us think much of how it was possible to improve the conditions of women. We were able to do nothing directly to help them but in the towns and cities we often addressed large audience of people and urged upon them the need for the education of women and children.

In 1878, Ramabai went to Calcutta along with her borther, Shrinivas, where the social reform movements were already in full swing. The heterodox elements greatly appreciated the manner in which she criticized the caste system of the Hindu society. Because of her mastery over the Sanskrit language and her deep knowledge of Sanskrit scriptures, she was honoured with the title of “Pandita”.

39
Ramabai’s brother left for his heavenly abode in 1880 in Dhaka. Subsequently, destiny brought her close to an educated Sudra Bengali gentleman named Bipin Bihari Das Medhavi with whom she ultimately got married. In the process of marrying a Sudra, she set a good example of her magnanimity and open-mindedness. However, her marriage was severely criticized by the orthodox Hindus. But the cruel hands of destiny snatched away her husband barely two years of their marriage, and she was left alone with her little daughter.

After the demise of her husband, Ramabai went to Pune where she came into contact with some social reformers. This association infused in her a spirit to make some substantial contributions to better the lot of women, particularly in the field of education. In Pune, she established the Arya Mahila Samaj, branches of which came to be established throughout the Maratha country.5

While in Poona she gave evidence before the Hunter Commission and stressed the urgent need for women doctors and teachers. Determined to learn English and study medicine, Ramabai sought help from members of the Anglo-Catholic community of St. Mary the Virgin whose mother house was at Wantage in Oxfordshire, England. They were able to give her some assistance while the balance of her expenses were met through the sale of Stri Dharma Neeti (“Morals for Women”), her book urging women to take charge of their own lives.6

Ramabai’s efforts also bore fruit in the form of the starting of a Women’s Medical Movement by Lady Dufferin.7 Unfortunately, however, Ramabai’s non-proficiency in the English language proved to be a big obstacle in her efforts at social reform. This motivated her to learn English and she made friends with Miss Henford who was at the time Superintendent of the Girls School at Pune. This friendship paved her way for going to London where she studied the education system of England and became a Christian.8
In 1886, at the invitation of her cousin Mrs Anandibai Joshi, Ramabai decided to sail to America.

To finance this trip and popularize her cause Ramabai wrote *The High Caste Hindu Woman*. Ten thousand copies of this book were sold before Ramabai had left America. In 1887 her Boston admirers set up a Ramabai association to support her work in India. She traveled throughout the United States and Canada studying educational, philanthropic, and charitable institutions and lecturing to various groups. By May of 1888, she had collected over $30,000 in the name of her association.

On her return to India, she established *Sharda Sadan* in Mumbai. The basic purpose behind the starting of this institution was to provide “an asylum to the ‘destitute high-caste widows’”. Many high caste girls and young widows enrolled themselves in the Sadan to attain education. Anandibai Karve, wife of Prof. D.K. Karve, also became an active member of the Sadan. Though Ramabai had been baptized, but she made it very clear that the “school would not actively preach Christianity or try to make converts”. But

... generally the Hindu community remained suspicious of Ramabai’s motives. Ramabai attempted to forestall criticism by forming an Executive Committee composed of reformers who were known as staunch Hindus. This plan did not work and less than one year later Bombay newspapers carried articles critical of Ramabai and her school. When financial problems forced her to move the school to Poona, the newspaper *Kesari* charged her with converting widows to Christianity. Ramabai’s admitted crime was allowing widows to attend her personal prayer meetings. By 1893 twenty-five girls were withdrawn. But there was no dearth of widows in need of shelter and before long Ramabai had other
students. By 1900 the *Sharada Sadan* had trained eighty women who were able to earn their own living through teaching or nursing.13

Circumstances forced Ramabai to shift the centre of her activities from Bombay to Poona where she established her second school, *Mukti*, at Kedgaon – 30 miles away from Poona. By 1900 *Mukti* had become a big institution housing 2000 women and children attending school. The financial needs of *Mukti* were met by an American Committee which willingly approved all her schemes.14

Ramabai was of the firm conviction that the caste system was one of the negative aspects of the Hindu society which led to false valuing of the intellect and denigration of physical work. Caste affiliations, she felt, encouraged narrow self-interest and was a big impediment to the development of democratic and secular values. This was one reason why she encouraged the residents of her Sadan to embrace Christianity, though not very forcefully. She had evolved a unique educational programme in which due emphasis was given to literature because of its emphasis on moral values which would inculcate in the students a spirit of caring.

Classes in physiology and botany were included to teach students about their own bodies and the physical world in which they lived. Industrial training was included – in printing, carpentry, tailoring, masonry, woodcutting, weaving and needlework – as well as training in farming and gardening. All students were required to join ‘unions’ or societies such as the Temperance Union or the Christian Endeavor Society in an effort to break down caste barriers and develop new loyalties based on interest. As
members of these societies, the children learned simple parliamentary
rules and were encouraged to take charge of their own affairs.15

Contributions made by Ramabai were greatly appreciated by her contemporaries,
but all this good work was relegated into the background in the light of her being a
Christian, particularly at a time when the hatred for the ruling power was growing with
every passing day.

Ramabai was of the opinion that the anger of the people was augmented by the
fact that many of her students came from the higher castes. And had she remained
confined to the low-caste women, people would not have been much bothered.16

Ramabai reacted very strongly when she heard about the Rukhmabai case. She
wrote:

Our only wonder is that a defenseless woman like Rukhmabai dared to
raise her voice in the face of the powerful Hindu law, the mighty British
Government, the 129,000,000 men, the 330,000,000 gods of the Hindus;
all these have conspired together to crush her into nothingness. We cannot
blame the English Government for not defending a helpless woman; it is
only fulfilling its agreement made with the male population of India.17

In 1913, at Gulbarga, Ramabai’s daughter established a branch of Sharda Sadan
with the purpose of training high caste Hindu women. On 5 April 1922, Ramabai passed
away peacefully in her sleep.
Anandibai Karve

Anandibai Karve, wife of Professor M.D. Karve, was just like a daughter to Pandita Ramabai. Though she was not a social reformer in the strict sense of the term, yet the persevering efforts made by her to secure education in the face of extremely adverse circumstances deserve to be commended and highlighted. Besides, the wholehearted support extended by her to Professor Karve in his mission was a big factor behind his success.

We get information about Anandibai Karve from her autobiography written in Marathi titled *Maze Puran* ("My Saga"). Though little known outside Maharashtra, it forms an important part of the personal narratives left by women of Maharashtra who lived in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Efforts are now being made to retrieve these narratives which could serve as an important tool for reconstructing women's history. It appears that the motivating factor behind Anandibai’s writing her autobiography at the age of seventy-five was that both her husband, Prof. Karve, and her younger sister, Parvatibai Athavale, had published their autobiographies titled *Atmajee* (Autobiography) and *Majhi Kahani* (My Story) respectively as early as in 1928. It was Anandibai’s daughter-in-law, Kaveri Karve, who had edited the former’s autobiography which was first published in 1944. The second edition of this was published posthumously in 1951. Kaveri Karve says that Anandibai’s life was “not as ordinary as we would think”. Anandibai was in a sort of dilemma – she was caught in the terrain between pride in her own abilities and periodic alienations from the society around her. Her self-image reflects a sense of dual vulnerability – as a struggling widow, and as an additionally stigmatized remarried widow. Her position in society was quite embarrassing, particularly in the light of the overarching patriarchal framework.

When at the age of six, Anandibai had contacted small-pox which claimed the life of her next younger sister, her grandmother hoped that Anandibai would also die rather than suffer marital agonies like her elder sister did. But she survived, and was married off at the tender age of eight. Her husband, Mr. Natu, was a widower of twenty-eight
who had done his graduation from Bombay and had been awarded a fellowship by his college. Thus both from the points of view of age and education, Anandibai was not suitable for Mr. Natu. After marriage Anandibai got the name Yashoda. At the time of the wedding, however, it was discovered that Anandibai’s grandmother (who had been widowed at a very early age and returned to her parents) had been married in the same Natu family; marrying her grand-daughter into the same family was considered inauspicious. The fear of impending widowhood was soon realized when Mr. Natu died in Mumbai.

Despite the stigma of widowhood attached to Anandibai, her mother-in-law treated her with warmth and affection. But she was required to follow a very heavy routine of housework which included house-cleaning, making elaborate preparations for the daily ritual prayers, and fetching water from the nearby canal at four in the morning. Her brothers-in-law were so pampered that they never volunteered to help her. At times she used to get so much fed up because of overwork, that tears would start rolling from her eyes. But she never grumbled because of the fear that her complaints would reach her parents and bring a bad name to them. 22 Even at the young age of twelve, Anandibai was considered strong enough to handle outside work like supervision of farm work and milking of the cattle and weeding of vegetable plants. This was in addition to the household work which she was already doing. This was her daily routine for the next twelve years, except her one month’s annual visit to her parents on the occasion of Deepavali.

Anandibai soon realized that a child widow was “an unprotected plaything”, who was looked upon by men in the neighbourhood with lustful eyes. 23 All this would make her feel very insecure. In response to her complaints, her mother-in-law advised her that the only protection for a widow was strength of character and firm but quiet resistance. This advice kept Anandibai in good stead in the years to come. 24

The emotional and physical implications of widowhood did not register much impact on Anandibai’s mind: “Having lost my husband in childhood, I had not felt the
pain so much.... I had been conscious that my life lacked something which other married women had, but had no idea how difficult it really was".25

But things took a different turn when she reached the age of twenty-one in 1887. Her mother-in-law’s health had started deteriorating, as a result of which the burden of the ritually important task of cooking fell on her father-in-law. Anandibai was not allowed to do this work, because she had not yet undergone the purificatory ritual of having her head tonsured, as enjoined by the custom of the upper caste Hindus. Such ritual was required to be followed immediately after widowhood in the case of older women, like Anandibai’s sister Parvatibai, because, “the widow’s hair and bangles must accompany the corpse” of her dead husband.26 Now Anandibai was left with no other option but to undergo the ordeal, but she made a request that the ritual should be conducted in the privacy of the home rather than publicly at a holy place as had been planned. She writes: “The true realization of my widowhood state came that day”.27 Anandibai then felt constrained to follow an entirely different lifestyle typical of the widows: she remained confined within the four walls of her room because of her ‘inauspicious’ appearance; was compelled to observe fasts and sacred vows; had to remain content with one meal a day; etc.

After the demise of Narhar Joshi’s (brother of Anandibai) wife, it was decided that Anandibai would stay with him at Mumbai. And soon after Anandibai’s arrival in Mumbai, Pandita Ramabai established her Sharada Sadan in March 1889 – a residential school for high caste widows. Even though Anandibai was three years more than the prescribed age-limit of twenty, she was admitted as the first student of the Sadan. Thus attending the school and simultaneously managing the household affairs proved to be
quite taxing to Anandibai. Pandita Ramabai’s affection and concern for the girls, the dedicated efforts made by her to better the lot of widows deeply influenced Anandibai’s mind. Prof. Karve himself admitted later that,

‘but for the Sharada Sadan my wife’s lot would have been the same as that of her more unhappy sisters’. Among ‘the numerous advantages’ derived from her association with the Sadan, Karve mentioned ‘a keen love of knowledge and a mind enlarged and enlightened’, freedom from ‘many of our degrading superstitions’, confidence and will to ‘render good work for her more unfortunate sisters’, ‘habits of neatness and Order’ – qualities which made her ‘an excellent wife and an excellent companion in life’.28

Ramabai encouraged Anandibai to let her hair grow. It goes to the credit of Anandibai that while efficiently performing the shared household duties, she managed to complete six Marathi and three English standards.

An important feature of the Sadan was that the inmates were free to follow their own religious beliefs. To quote Ramabai :

My idea was to indirectly influence the minds of these girls who would come to me, and enlighten them on many points, and if any of them wished to know anything about the Christian religion, they should have perfect freedom to know it. At the same time I did not wish to hinder them from acquiring knowledge of their ancestral religion if they chose to do so.29

Sometimes, out of sheer curiosity, some of the inmates, including Anandibai, used to sit with Ramabai in her room when she would be deeply absorbed in her prayers. This led Ramabai to believe that Anandibai had started taking interest in Christianity. She then wrote to her Godmother in England in 1889 :

One of the [Brahmin girls], a child-widow .... is much interested in our religion. She sees the difference between a Christian and a Hindoo home. She expressed her wish to become a Christian to our little Mano. The child
was so delighted with it and told me the news with a joyful heart .... The little missionary told the story of our Lord’s life as well as she could. Since that time .... The widow has joined us in our morning prayers every day. I read the Marathi Bible and pray in Marathi, so she understands it all. I have asked a Zenana missionary friend of mine to come here and give Godubai (that is, the widow’s name) religious instruction.30

Anandibai has mentioned in her autobiography that Ramabai used to sympathize with unhappy widows with sweet and soothing words. She was never too persistent in her efforts to convert these unhappy widows into Christianity. But some of them voluntarily accepted Christianity — a religion which did not discriminate against the widows. She also mentions that Ramabai never forced her into converting to Christianity. She merely tried to indirectly gauge her sentiments. And when she found out that Anandibai was not interested in conversion, she gave up.

Subsequently, however, when Ramabai arranged for Bible lessons for the interned girls from the Zenana Mission, the orthodox elements among the Hindus, particularly the upper-caste Hindus, became virulent. This resulted in the Sadan being permanently shifted in the late 1890s to the nearby village of Kedgaon, near Pune. The Sadan then took the shape of Ramabai’s overtly Christian Mukti Mission.

Anandibai’s remarriage on 11 March 1893 radically changed her life. Credit for this goes to her liberal father who did not feel hesitant in approaching Professor D.K. Karve, his son Narhar’s friend. At that time Karve was Professor at the Fergusson College who had recently become a widower. Karve gave his consent to the proposal without any second thoughts. But Narhar — who himself had lost his wife and had decided to marry a somewhat older unmarried girl — did not give his approval. Anandibai, however, was in a dilemma because she yearned for economic independence — which Pandita Ramabai had also stressed — and the idea of remarriage had never occurred to her. But considering that she had already finished her five-year term at the Sadan and there was little hope of her getting a suitable job, remarriage, Anandibai thought, was a better option.
But she had to face a tough time after her marriage. The newly married couple on its first visit to Murud was not well received and was not allowed to stay with the family. Because of the social boycott, the young Karves were not able to visit Murud till the boycott ended ten years later.

The prospect of becoming a mother gave Anandibai immense happiness because of her conviction that “Nature arranges for a tree to flower and a woman to bear children .... A childless woman can be as happy as a hungry man who gets no food but says he has had his fill”.

Karve, however, did not want children and never displayed affection for them. She gave birth to three sons named Shankar, Bhaskar and Dinkar. Anandibai’s motherhood had assumed even more significance because she functioned almost as a single parent, playing a major role in raising her sons during Karve’s frequent absences from home.

All her three sons completed their education at Pune and established themselves well in their chosen fields – Shankar settled down with his wife in Africa where he practised medicine; Dinkar became Principal of Fergusson College and his wife Irawati was an anthropologist of repute; Bhaskar, with his wife Kaveri, worked at the Ashram of Hinge.

Soon after her remarriage, Anandibai started her studies again when she got herself enrolled at the Female High School (also known as Huzur Paga, because the site had earlier housed the Peshwas’ stables). Because of constant flow of visitors at Prof. Karve’s house, which overburdened Anandibai with household work, she could not concentrate on her studies. However, the bubonic plague forced the family to leave Mumbai and go to Amaravati in Vidarbha.

Anandibai had all along desired to seek vocational training. One of the reasons for this was that in the event of any sad eventuality, she wanted to be financially independent. In Nagpur, therefore, she took admission in a diploma course in midwifery
at the Dufferin Hospital. Here also she had to struggle a lot because of the responsibility of bringing up her son Shankar. She somehow managed to complete her one-year course.

Anandibai’s long experience at the Sharada Sadan had inculcated in her the desire to do some social service. She therefore raised a number of destitute children in her large household. But despite her deep inclination for social service, Anandibai regrets that she was not allowed to help her husband, Prof. Karve, in his mission of providing education to women. It may be noted in this connection that in 1896 Prof. Karve had established a home for the widows under the name Hindu Sharada Sadan which was supposed to be an alternative to Ramabai’s discredited school.32 In 1898 Prof. Karve had established Anathabalikashram (a home for destitute girls). This school was shifted to the village of Hingne on the outskirts of Pune during the plague epidemic. When Anandibai shifted to Hingne, her husband started maintaining a distance from her. Prof. Karve had realized that bringing about a social reform in the form of widow remarriage was much more difficult than propagating female education. He therefore focussed his attention on female education and wanted to make sure that there was no conflict of interest considering that he himself had married a widow. He was apprehensive that if he had openly propagated widow remarriage, his Ashram would become very unpopular. Ironically, therefore, Anandibai was treated as a ritually impure widow in her husband’s own school. No respect was shown to her despite her being the wife of the founder of the school. On the contrary, she had to comply with the orthodox stipulations for the widows. She used to take her meals separately and was not allowed to touch the drinking water used by others. She bitterly regretted throughout her life the sort of treatment which was meted out to her by her own husband.

It would be appropriate to point out here that some renowned social reformers of the nineteenth century had failed to live up to the liberal ideas which they had preached through public speeches and published articles. The following examples stand out prominently in this respect: Gopal Hari Deshmukh – though an ardent supporter of widow remarriage – did not attend one in 1869; justice M.G. Ranade, a great supporter of widow remarriage, married a prepubertal girl when he was a widower of 32; justice K.T. Telang married off his eight-year old daughter despite his firm conviction that girls
should marry late. Prof. Karve too was no exception. He too could not gather courage to face the wrath of the public. Therefore instead of working in close cooperation with Anandibai, he chose the option of maintaining distance from her in his own school.

In 1916 Prof. Karve had started a university which was shifted to Mumbai in 1923, thanks to the generous grant given by the Thackersy family. The university was accordingly named Shrimati Nathibai Damodar Thackersy (SNDT) women’s university. Such achievements of Prof. Karve would not have been possible but for the indirect support and cooperation extended by Anandibai. To quote her: There is no reason why people should have honoured you with the title of ‘Maharshi’. It’s easy to be called by such titles. What would you have done had I not managed the entire household for you? You have become so great only because I was behind you.

Maharani Tapasvini

Maharani Tapasvini was the daughter of Narayan Rao, a feudal Lord of the fort of Belur (Arcot – South India). Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi was her aunt. She was involved in the revolt of 1857 and was once taken into custody by the British. After she was set free, she devoted herself to the study of Sanskrit and practice of yoga. Subsequently, in 1893, she opened a Sanskrit Pathshala at Bengal which came to be known as Maha Kali Sanskrit Pathshala (Great Mother Kali School). She took a deep interest in the education of girls and contributed a great deal to the cause of women’s education in Bengal.

The Mahakali Pathshala of Tapasvini was vastly different from the educational institutions of Ramabai which were financially supported from abroad. The Pathshala had many branches and Tapasvini’s effort was a “genuine Indian attempt” to the cause of women’s education in India. Unlike Ramabai’s schools, this Pathshala did not depend upon any financial assistance from abroad and had no foreign teachers. However, the Pathshalas of Maharani Tapasvini were opposed to the idea of co-education and to the use of one syllabus for both boys and girls. Her mission was to promote female
education which was consistent with the basic tenets of the Hindu religion and moral traditions. Her understanding of an ideal education for women was aptly reflected in the syllabus developed by her which laid stress on the following: study of sacred literature and history; study of Hindu mythology and legendary stories which told about the duties of the mother, daughter-in-law, wife, etc.; and, above all, home sciences like cooking and sewing.36 The middle class Hindus were extremely happy with the syllabus because in their opinion the female education which was being imparted in those times had a great demoralizing influence on young Hindu women.37

As a result of the growing popularity of Maharani Tapasvini’s pathshalas, people started coming forward to extend donations to these. The popularity of these institutions can be gauged from the fact that within ten years of their inception, it had 23 branches with as many as 450 students, and that it was placed under the management of a trust with people of eminence as its members, and presided over by the Maharaja of Darbhanga.

Gradually, the original curriculum of this institution underwent a change and it goes to its credit that in 1948 it was considered good enough to be affiliated to the Calcutta University. At that stage even the orthodox Hindus had come to accept the new concept of women’s education.38

Tapasvini was also closely associated with Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

In 1901, Bal Gangadhar Tilak met Tapasvini at Calcutta. It is said that she advised Tilak to establish contacts with the royal house of Nepal. Emissaries were sent by Tilak seemingly with a purpose to open a tile factory there, but inwardly on a mission to set up an ammunition factory in Nepal, with the help of Tapasvini. Tilak’s emissaries were able to get permission to set up the factory and thus, started importing machinery. The British discovered the plot and consequently this plan had to be annulled. Tapasvini continued her work in Calcutta till she died in 1907.39
Ramabai Ranade

Ramabai Ranade was the wife of the eminent social reformer Justice Ranade. She was born in 1862 in the Satara district of Maharashtra. She later on became a reputed social reformer.

Ramabai Ranade was greatly influenced by Pandita Ramabai. She came into contact with the latter in the year 1882. Inspired by her, Ramabai Ranade became an active member of the Arya Mahila Samaj. She was so actively involved that she made her house the meeting point where all the important decisions of the Samaj used to take place.

In the year 1884 she made her mark as an orator when she delivered her first speech in the presence of Sir James Fergusson, the Governor of Mumbai, in the Town Hall in Pune. During the course of her speech she made a fervent plea for the opening of a girls high school in the city. However, the orthodox members of her family deeply resented the speech made by her.

Another notable contribution of hers was the starting of a Hindu Ladies Club, the meetings of which used to be held at her residence. She also made efforts to educate illiterate women and widows by holding regular classes at an informal level. She succeeded in mobilizing women who came to the forefront and rendered service at the time when bubonic plague and famine had ravaged the city of Pune.

She continued to inspire and encourage women by giving lectures on first aid and the importance of rendering selfless service to society. The result of the relentless efforts made by her was that she was able to establish the Poona Seva Sadan with branches all over the Bombay Presidency.40

Mrs. Ranade's principal objects in starting the home were to teach and educate women through regular classes, to widen their range of knowledge with the help of libraries and lectures, to enable women to participate intelligently in all domestic affairs, social and national responsibilities.41
Mrs. Ranade also established the Seva Sadan Nursing and Medical Association in which high caste widows and girls volunteered to work and she was the one who took the first batch of probationers to the Sasoon Hospital, Pune. She was the leader of the agitation for compulsory primary education for girls. Her reputation as writer was established by the production of her book Reminiscences now regarded as a Marathi classic.42

She was an ardent votary of the suffrage movement which is evident from the fact that she presided over meetings demanding for women the right to vote. Sir H. Lawrence, a member of the Executive Council, was also a great supporter in respect of the granting of voting rights to women. To quote him: “There is no council which would not be honoured, graced and helped by the presence of such a woman as one who is known to us all, Mrs. Ramabai Ranade.43

At the request of the Pune Municipality she played a significant role by way of taking care of thousands of women pilgrims and their kids who attended the annual fair at Alandi. Ramabai Ranade, along with a number of social reformers, went to Alandi and served the pilgrims and their infants with utmost devotion.44

Lady Harnam Singh

Hailing from the royal household of the Kapurthala state in Punjab, Lady Harnam Singh is regarded as the pioneer in the area of social reform in Punjab. She was of the firm conviction that unless women got education, they would not be emancipated. To quote her: “India’s greatest need is the proper education of our women”. She further says:

What social reforms can we expect if the women are not educated and enlightened. What good are all the doctors if the mothers and wives are not able to carry out their instructions? What good are all the scientific sanitary
rules if the ladies of our household do not understand the principles of hygiene and the benefits of sanitation? Therefore, something should be done to carry on our girls education even after they are married or put behind purdah.45

Her active involvement in the social reform activities become evident from the fact that she started an Infant Welfare Centre at Jullundhar and also organized sewing and knitting classes for women. She also founded a ladies club at Simla.46

Francina Sorabjee

A great advocate of female education. She decided to establish girls’ schools in the Western parts of India. She attached great importance to the unity of the country and envisaged a plan to organize schools for fostering unity and integrity. She founded three schools at Poona. She was a great friend of Pandita Ramabai, who inspired her to undertake the task of female emancipation. She also founded a teachers’ training school, in 1872. Her main interest was education and she wanted to bring the children of all classes and communities into common schools. She also started social service in villages.47

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain

In the early part of the twentieth century, another woman who made a significant contribution to the cause of women’s education was Begum Hossain. Soon after the demise of her husband she opened an institution for Muslim girls in 1909 in Bhagalpur District, Bihar. She had to face a stiff opposition from her husband’s relatives and was asked to leave her home by her step-daughter. This did not deter the Begum from moving forward in her mission. She moved to Calcutta where in 1911 she opened
another school, Sakhawat Memorial Girls’ School. Basically, this school was organized for those students who followed the practice of purdah. The medium of instruction in this school was Urdu.

To a great extent the success achieved by the Begum owes to her husband, Syed Sakhawat Hossain, a widower who was educated in the West.

He looked to his young wife for companionship and soon after their wedding gave her lessons in English and encouraged her to write essays. At the age of twenty-one, only three years after their marriage, Rokeya was publishing articles about women’s condition. Over the years she wrote a number of articles, short stories, and novels in which she developed her ideas on the need to awaken women to their oppression and the role of education in this process.48

She was of the firm conviction that education would be of great help to women both in their traditional roles at home and at the professional level. Besides, through education women would be able to match their husbands at the intellectual level and consequently prove to be good companions for them. The special feature of the Begum’s school was that due importance was given to “literacy and practical subjects such as handicrafts, home science, and gardening. The curriculum in Begum Rokeya’s school also included physical fitness training. But this was the only deviation from an educational program designed to produce good wives and mothers: companions and helpmates to their husbands and teachers for their children”49
Sister Subbalakshmi

Sister Subbalakshmi was married off at the tender age of eleven. But prior to this she had received formal education for about 4-1/2 years. Shortly after her marriage, her husband left for his heavenly abode. Sister Subbalakshmi was left with no other option but to return to her parents’ home in Rishiyur, Tanjore district. Her parents took the bold step of sending her to school instead of imposing upon her the constraints within which a Hindu widow was supposed to live. Subbalakshmi’s father, Subramania Iyer, however, became an object of severe criticism within his orthodox community which was not amenable to new ideas. He thus decided to leave Rishiyur and go to Madras where he got Subbalakshmi admitted into a convent school. The whole-hearted dedication with which the nuns of the school performed their duties greatly inspired young Subbalakshmi. Their example served as a big motivation as she took the resolution to devote her entire lifetime to the cause of widows’ education. Because of this sincerity and dedication, she began to be affectionately called “Sister Subbalakshmi”.

After completing her matriculation Subbalakshmi took admission to the Presidency College, University of Madras. She happened to be the first Hindu widow to have taken admission into the B.A. course. This evoked an extremely negative reaction from the orthodox elements of the society and they began harassing her in the streets. But Subbalakshmi was so firm in her resolution that all this criticism did not deter her from moving forward in her mission. After completing her B.A. in 1911, she opened her first school in her father’s home in a Madras suburb, which had four brahmin widows as students to start with.

At the time when Sister Subbalakshmi was making efforts to better the lot of the widows, Miss Christina Lynch (later, Mrs. Drysdale) – the Irish Feminist who was appointed as inspectress of female education in Coimbatore – too was working in the same direction. Miss Lynch was faced with the problem of finding appropriate teachers (from upper castes) for the schools. There were in excess of 22,000 widows in Madras
at that time between the ages of five and fifteen, of which the number of brahmins was quite sizable. Miss Lynch informed Subbalakshmi’s father

... that she had worked out a plan whereby the government would support a home for young brahmin widows willing to be trained as teachers. Meanwhile, Sister Subbalakshmi was pursuing the same scheme with her friends and relations. In 1912 the Sarada Ladies Union was formed as a women’s club to provide its members with an opportunity to hear lectures, discuss new ideas, and collect money for a brahmin girls’ school.

In 1912 the government agreed to support a boarding school for training teachers. The government would pay the rent and give scholarships to three girls; the remainder of the operating expenses had to be met through donations and fees. In order to make this plan more acceptable to critics of education for Hindu widows, Miss Lynch proposed shifting the school from a liberal section of the city to the more orthodox Triplicane. This meant Subbalakshmi had to locate a ‘home’ for the widows. After an extensive search she finally settled on the Ice House, the old warehouse along the beach which once used to store ice from Boston. The Ice House was slowly made habitable for the thirty-five girls who by this time had joined Subbalakshmi. As Sister Subbalakshmi commented, ‘There was a lot of gossip and ill-talk’ about the large number of girl widows and female staff who occupied the Ice House without male protection. The presence of so many inauspicious women walking about forced local people to modify their schedules.50

The curriculum of the school was framed by the government. The purpose was to impart training to women as teachers. To start with they were prepared for regular classes, then they completed the syllabus for matriculation, and finally, they were admitted into Queen Mary’s College – the first college for women in Madras which was opened in 1914. Lady Willingdon Training College and Practice School was established in 1922 and sister Subbalakshmi was made the Principal of this institution. This
institution was started with the basic purpose of giving training to teachers. This served as a good opportunity for Sister Subbalakshmi to put her ideas on education into practice. In view of the consideration that the Ice House did not accept widows who were more than 18 years of age, Sister Subbalakshmi opened Sarada Vidyalaya, a high school with boarding facilities for adult widows. Subsequently, she even opened a school for the fisherfolk in the vicinity of the Ice House in total defiance of the caste rules of the orthodox Hindus.

In conclusion of this section we may say that though the educational system of those times was extremely conservative with most of the schools “geographically limited, communally bound, and caste-sensitive”, yet it would be fair to say that education for women had

... unexpected and unanticipated consequences. The first generation of educated women found a voice: they wrote about their lives and about the conditions of women. The second generation acted. They articulated the needs of women, critiqued their society and the foreign rulers, and developed their own institutions. That these institutions were often as conservative as those designed by men should not be taken as a sign that these women wished to preserve the status quo. Rather it should be taken as evidence that they understood their subordinate position very well.51

However, a dynamic process had been set in motion with women becoming increasingly aware of their rights through education. The severe constraints within which education was imparted in the early nineteenth century were no longer visible in the early twentieth century when women had started coming out in the open to fight for their rights and to seek a redefinition of their position in the society.
II

The Emergence of Women’s Organizations

The educational experiments of the late nineteenth century – though very conservative in nature – had the desired impact on women. By the end of the nineteenth century, women had succeeded in shedding their inhibitions to a considerable extent and had started to fight for their rightful place in the male-dominated patriarchal society. Many women representing the elite classes began to form their own organizations. This marked the emergence of a rudimentary women’s movement in India. The role played by the Tagore family too went a long way in the direction of the formation of women’s organizations. Credit goes to Swarnakumari Devi, sister of Rabindranath Tagore, for organizing the Sakhi Samiti in 1882. Subsequently it became a craft centre for widows. The year 1882 also saw the founding of another organization for women – Arya Mahila Samaj – credit for which goes to Pandita Ramabai. She also established the Sharada Sadan with the purpose of providing employment and education to women, widows in particular. Ramabai Ranade, wife of Justice Ranade, established the Seva Sadan. A Gujarati Stree Mandal was started in 1908. Branches of Mahila Seva Samaj were established in Mysore and Pune in the year 1913 and 1916 respectively.

Initially, these associations were confined to a locality or a city. The credit for starting the first all-India women’s organisation, the Bharat Stri Mahamandal (1901) must go to Saraladevi Chaudhurani, the brilliant daughter of Swarnakumari Devi. However, the venture proved shortlived. It was only in 1917 that the Women’s Indian Association (WIA) was started in Madras city by Annie Besant, Dorothy Jinarajadasa and Margaret cousins, together with a group of Indian women. Annie Besant, an Irishwoman who was a well-known socialist, trade unionist and suffragette, was converted to theosophy and came to India in 1893. Margaret Cousins and her husband James came into contact with Annie Besant in India. Dorothy, an Englishwoman, married C. Jinarajadasa, a Sinhalese theosophist.
Women's organizations served as a powerful medium through which "women's opinion" on various issues could be forcefully expressed. These organizations also helped in the development of women's personalities in such a manner that they could gain the necessary confidence to take up leading roles in politics and social institutions.

Those institutions, in turn, played an important role in the construction of the Indian nation. Their model was undoubtedly Western: the view of women and of women's civic responsibility was adopted wholesale. Nevertheless, in the Indian context these organizations developed in harmony with a view of the 'new woman' as a companion and help-mate to man, an ideal mother, and a credit to her country.53

Among the various women's organizations which were established subsequent to World War I, the names of three stand out prominently: the Women's Indian Association (WIA), the National Council of Women in India (NCWI), and the All-India Women's Conference (AIWC). The contribution made by these three organizations are given below.

**Women's Indian Association (WIA)**

The establishment of the WIA in 1917 was the first major attempt to organize women on an all-India basis. By 1921 the organization had established 48 branches and a membership in excess of 2700.54 Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins and Dorothy Jinarajadasa were the founding members of this organization.

Annie Besant had interested herself in the education of Indian women and had attempted to make them conscious of their social and political rights;
and, of course, for a brief period she had been a pre-eminent nationalist leader, becoming the Congress President in 1917. Margaret Cousins was the founding member of the Irish Women’s Franchise League. From 1906 to 1913, she was one of its prominent speakers and campaigners, and had the organising capacity and the patience to initiate an association of women. In the first few months of organising the WIA, she had gone door to door requesting ladies to become its members. She organised a number of meetings and personally encouraged them to come forward to express their opinion on any question relating to women. The women were fearful of criticism from their families and initially showed a lot of reluctance.

Though the WIA was greatly dependent on the Theosophical Society, yet it defined itself

... as an association that included and represented women of all races, cultures, and religions. Each branch was to chart its own course of work in four main areas: religion, education, politics, and philanthropy. The organization defined women as religious ‘by nature’ and encouraged non-sectarian religious activity. But the most important work was educational and the branches were encouraged to set up adult classes for literacy, sewing, and first aid.

The WIA also involved itself in philanthropic activities like feeding the poor, providing shelter to widows, and relief for flood victims.

Another important activity of WIA which deserves a special mention was the publication of a monthly periodical titled Stri Dharma. Though an English journal, it also included articles in Hindi as well as Tamil, and “carried news of events of interest to women, reports from the branches, and articles on women’s condition”.

Margaret Cousins, the Secretary of the WIA, evolved a scheme for mobilizing women from different parts of India to act as representatives of preliminary local conferences. The idea was to prepare a memorandum on educational reforms. A letter
written by Cousins had spelt out this scheme and urged women to organize such conferences. To quote her:

There is undoubtedly a great need for women to express their considered views clearly on the subject of present day education for boys and girls in India and especially for girls. If these opinions are formulated into a memorandum, women will be doing a service to the future and will be helping those who at present control the educational destinies of young India.

The following seems to me the most practical way in which to collect the assistance of women to this end and I write to request you to cooperate with women in all parts of India in bringing the project to success and to write and tell me your opinions on the scheme and whether we may count on your active support.59

In view of the consideration that the problems relating to female education differed from region to region and even from locality to locality, Margaret Cousins was of the opinion that holding of women’s conferences on educational reform was necessary in each province and in clearly defined districts, which would endeavour to find solutions at the local level and at the same time provide a national perspective. She said:

The local conferences should be called and held before the end of October 1926. From each of these conferences, representatives should be elected, who would attend an all India conference which may take place in Poona at the end of December 1926 or in the first week of January 1927. This conference of representatives consisting probably of not more than 40 to 50 women, would have the duty of synthesizing from the proceedings of the preliminary constituent conferences, an authoritative and representative
memorandum by women on educational reform which would be published widely and sent to all Indian educational authorities.60

Right since its inception the WIA was interested in Home Rule and women’s suffrage and rhetoric that was clearly patriotic.61 Women should be given full opportunities to work as civil servants; they should accept their responsibilities as “daughters of India”, and see the importance of their role in “training, guiding and forming the character of the future rulers of India”.62 Even during the troubled times of 1928-29, the WIA was firm about its policy of bringing about reforms through the Legislative Councils.63 The WIA did not think it advisable to associate itself with the Civil Disobedience “for this would have jeopardized the relationship they had so carefully worked out with government to secure for women positions as magistrates and on various councils and committees, and to urge the legislation they thought necessary for the improvement of women’s status”.64

The National Council of Women in India (NCWI)

In 1925, the NCWI was established as a national branch of the International Council of Women. Mehrbai Tata, wife of Sir Dorab Tata, played an important role in the development of NCWI. But even though a woman of the stature of Lady Tata was involved in establishing the ideology of the NCWI, it failed to grow and became a vital national organization; it remained aloof from the struggle for independence. This was because of its elitist nature and its connection with the British.
The fee for annual membership of NCWI was Rs.15, while for life-membership it was Rs.500/-. If one wanted to become its patron, an amount of Rs.1000/- was required to be paid. When the NCWI was first organized it had three life patrons, namely, Dowager Begum Saheb of Bhopal, Maharani Saheb of Baroda, and Lady Dorab Tata. The President was H.H. the Maharani of Baroda.

The Maharani continued to serve the organization as president in 1928, 1930-34, and 1936-37; from 1938 to 1944 the Maharani Setu Parvati Bayi of Travancore was president. Other women who held important positions on the executive committee included Lady Dorab Tata; Miss Cornelia Sorabji, India’s first lady barrister; Mrs. Tarabai Premchand, the wife of a wealthy banker; Mrs. Shafi Tyabji, a member of one of Bombay’s leading Muslim families; and Maharani Sucharu Devi of Mourbhanj, a daughter of Keshub Chandra Sen. These were all women of wealth and position, capable of affording the expensive travel expected of the Council’s leaders and with enough space to house the Council office. Many women simply could not afford to join this organization nor did they feel comfortable in the presence of these affluent and titled women.65

The NCWI was very conservative both politically and socially. It found village work difficult and unhealthy; the villagers distrustful and hostile.66 However, at the advice of Lady Tata, a few members decided to visit the slums and get a first-hand experience of the deplorable conditions prevalent there. The most prominent example in this respect is that of Maniben Kara (1905-1979), a social worker who became a leading trade unionist.67.
The All-India Women’s Conference (AIWC)

Established in 1927, the AIWC has been the most truly Indian of the three organizations. The AIWC first met in Pune in January, 1927, following more than six months of serious work on the part of Margaret Cousins and other women belonging to the WIA.

In 1928, the All-India Women’s Conference on Educational Reforms came to the conclusion that providing education to women could not be helpful unless harmful social customs were also simultaneously eradicated. In the subsequent year the AIWC expanded its area and included social welfare in its agenda. Since then the principal objective of the AIWC has been to elevate the status and increase the legal and constitutional rights of women as well as make systematic efforts to create social awareness among them.

The AIWC played an active role in initiating and campaigning for social legislature that would improve the position of women. It helped in getting the following Acts passed:

The Sarda Act (1929)

The Special Marriage Act, 1954

The Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act, 1955

The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956
The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956

The Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women Act, 1956

It also played an important part in getting various other social reform bills enacted and implemented.

The AIWC founded a number of pioneering institutions, many of which now function as autonomous apex bodies in their respective fields. These include:

* The Lady Irwin College for Home Science, New Delhi (est. 1932) which is now an institution offering graduate and post-graduate courses in a variety of subjects.

* The Family Planning Centre (est. 1937) (now the Family Planning Association of India)

* Save the Children Committee (est. 1943) (now the Indian Council of Child Welfare)

* The Cancer Research Institute (est. 1952), Madras

* The Amrit Kaur Bal Vihar for mentally retarded children (est. 1964), New Delhi, now run by the Mentally Retarded Children’s Society.68

With the passage of time it has diversified its activities, and programmes which include projects for the eradication of illiteracy, for family planning, child welfare, fighting drug addiction, use of non-conventional sources of energy, vocational training for women, free legal aid to women in distress,
medical relief in villages, and other socio-economic measures aimed at the under-privileged sections of society.69

The AIWC is a premier women’s organization that has attracted the most talented and capable Indian women of this century, among them: Sarojini Naidu, Vijaylakshmi Pandit, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Rameshwari Nehru, Dhanvanti Rama Rau, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Charulata Mukherjee, Vidyagauri Neelkanth, Hansa Mehta, and many others. It is equipped to play a crucial role to help women attain economic self-sufficiency and fight gender inequalities.

In the historical context, the AIWC has a three-dimensional significance. First, it symbolizes the transfer of leadership of the women’s movement from men to women. It has revealed women’s early awareness that the responsibility for women’s regeneration belongs to women. In the nineteenth century, the movement for women’s education and uplift was initiated and led by men. In the twentieth century, as women became more educated, they came to form their own associations and occupy leadership positions. The AIWC has been at once the premier and pioneer organization in this arena. It has been a path-breaker.

Secondly, the AIWC was formed at the instance of Western and Western-educated women. In its early phase, naturally, it looked towards Western role-models. The deliberations of the organization indicate that by now the Western stereotype has been totally rejected. The leadership is
fully Indian, the members are drawn from the Indian middle class, the
approach to problems has an indigenous bias, and the models for ideal
womanhood are drawn from great women of ancient India.

Thirdly, the organization has provided women with opportunities to
come out into the world outside the parameters of the home, in order to
contribute something to society at large. Most of the members are
housewives and have exhibited initiative and will in carrying out their
organizational activities. Here is the genesis of woman-bonding and the
building of women’s network. For providing the lead in such a crucial area
of life, the AIWC must be given a place of pride in Indian history.70

III

Role of Popular Hindi Journals and Magazines(1909-1930)

At the time when the British were in the process of establishing their rule in India
on a firm footing, the position of women in Indian society was extremely deplorable.
Social ills like child marriage, female infanticide, purdah, sati, dowry, prohibition of
widow remarriage, etc. had manifested in all their ugliness. The British tried to
capitalize on this pathetic situation by asserting their cultural superiority and thereby
justifying the continuation of their rule in India. The social reformers of the nineteenth
century did make efforts to better the lot of Indian women, but their efforts could not
transcend the constraints imposed by the patriarchal norms of society and women were
continued to be treated as mere objects on whom judgement was to be passed. Moreover, the social reformers of the nineteenth century were under the influence of the Western culture. An urgent need was thus felt to find an amicable solution to the crisis created by the cultural and ideological encounter between India and England, and for writing a new script for the past which would impart strength to the process of making India as a nation and reflect its new social-cultural and political aspirations. Women’s question had to be properly dealt with in the reconstruction of historical consciousness and search for the golden age.

The growing awareness among women in regard to their low position in the male-dominated patriarchal society at different levels motivated them to fight for their rights in the early twentieth century. A qualitative change was seen in the approach to the ongoing search for a new, enlightened woman. As compared to the nineteenth century social reformers, the enlightened women took recourse to the media for highlighting the manner in which they were being victimized with the basic purpose of carving new spaces and roles for women who, like men, had an equally important role to play in society.

It would be important to note in this context that the Indian women’s movement did not derive its inspiration from the West, but from its realization that the women’s dependence upon male ‘charity’, ‘benevolence’, and spiritual concern could not ensure for them autonomy, rights and power. This movement gained its strength from its prolonged and active association with the anti-colonial struggle in India. The main purpose behind the Indian women’s movement was to mobilize under a common platform those women who had been silently suffering in the male-dominated patriarchal society.
There was a remarkable mushrooming of women’s journals in Hindi in the early years of the twentieth century which went a long way in giving visibility and voice to their target group who were being victimized merely by virtue of their being females. These journals focussed on issues like female education, child marriage, mismatched marriage, polygamy, purdah, female backwardness, etc. Stree Darpan was the pioneer in women-oriented journalism, credit for which goes to Rameshwari Nehru,71 who had started this journal in 1909. Kamla Nehru was its manager.72 Daughter of Arya Samajist, Raja Narendranath, Rameshwari Nehru was not particularly impressed by the Arya Samajist ideals of the new woman. It is remarkable that despite her not having any formal education, she undertook the responsibility of editing a woman’s journal independently. Incidentally, in the year 1909 itself, Rameshwari Nehru had established the Prayag Mahila Samiti in Allahabad.

Another important magazine to have been published in 1909 was Grihalakshmi which mainly focussed on the traditional role of women and education and it generally echoed the views of Stree Darpan.73 Arya Mahila was another women’s journal published from Varanasi. Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi commented on the journal: “... it is necessary to start a regular feature called Videshi Stree Mandal so that the views of women from other parts of the world and women’s movements could be evaluated and represented”.74 Saraswati and Madhuri75 were two women-oriented journals which were edited by men. Mahila Sarvasu was another women-oriented journal which was published by a man, namely Pandit Devdutt Sharma, and was mediocre in content.76 Kayastha Mahila Hitaishi was yet another journal for women but its scope was limited to the Kayastha community. One of the better women-oriented journals of those time was
Chand which was first published in 1922 from Allahabad. Its editors were Ramrikh Sehgal and Ramkrishna Mukund Laghate, while Vidyavati Sehgal was its manager.77

It may thus be seen that the editors of most the women’s journals of those times were men who had coopted their wives as editors. In this respect, and also in many other respects, Sree Darpan’s place was unique as it was launched independently by a woman—Rameshwari Nehru—in 1909. The special feature of this journal was that it helped women in gaining proficiency in writing and expressing their feelings. With the purpose of making its readers familiar with the methodology of writing, this journal also published the Hindi translated versions of novels written in Bengali and other languages. The contents of this journal included commentaries, short-stories, poems, articles and book reviews.78

In the words of Mahadevi Verma:

“In our society there are two types of women – one who do not know that they are a member of vast human fellowship and they have got an independent identity – in whose development society would benefit by getting rid of parochialism and biases. The second type sees the world through the eyes of men and to follow their footsteps is the raison d’etre of their lives.79

Rameshwari Nehru had realized that since most of the contributors to the contemporary Hindi journals were men, they were not able to project the points of view of women, the social agony suffered by them and their changing self-image in all their dimensions. Thus through the publication of Sree Darpan Rameshwari Nehru wanted to
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bring about a radical transformation in women’s minds so that they could rise together in their sight against age-old customs which had inhibited their development both at the mental and physical levels. Besides, her constant endeavour was to awaken the purdah-bound women – who had remained confined within the four walls of their homes for centuries – to the modern world of scientific knowledge and enlightenment. Through the medium of Stree Darpan she wanted the orthodox and self-centred men to realize that women were in no way inferior to men, and that it was high time that a proper and healthy environment was created for women so that they could extend their whole-hearted cooperation to men as equals and not as their subordinates. Above all, through the medium of this journal, Rameshwari Nehru wanted to provide communication space to women in order that they could locate them in the mainstream perspective of the national movements for India’s independence.80

Rameshwari Nehru was born and brought up in the traditional environment, but subsequently she got exposed to the liberal, Westernized culture of Anand Bhavan by virtue of her being the daughter-in-law of Motilal Nehru.81 Thus she was very much aware about the wide gap between the two points of view which were opposed to each other: the diehard traditionalists and the liberalized, Western. Through the columns of Stree Darpan she also wanted to initiate a dialogue between the two schools of thought on every issue – social, cultural and political.82 The policy of Stree Darpan was to project the view points of both the groups. As a result of the balanced approach of the editor, the journal started gaining in popularity. A number of other contemporary newspapers and magazines like Pratap, Vanketeshwari and Swarajya greatly appreciated this approach of the editor of Stree Darpan and they started appealing for more subscriptions for it. An
extract from Swarajya (English translation) which was published in the August 1921 issue of Stree Darpan testifies to this:

Rameshwari Nehru and Roop Kumar Wanchu have worked actively among women for a long time. They extend full co-operation to each aspect of our national struggle. Stree Darpan’s main objective is to inculcate qualities of self-respect, self-reliance, love for education and reform among women. We hope that our sisters shall become its subscribers.

Stree Darpan was divided into two sections – for adults, women in particular, and for school-going teenagers and college-going students. The section on adults contained various articles on socio-political issues, patriotic songs, prayers, serialized novels penned by a number of socially aware women. Some of the eminent contributors were: Radha Mohan Gokulji, Satyabhakt, Ramashankar Awasthy, the famous Hindi poet Sridhar Pathak and the journalist Ramrikh Sehgal, Hukma Devi, Abadi Bano, Satyawati, Uma Kumari Nehru, Roop Kumari Nehru and many others. Above all, Mahatma Gandhi’s articles, messages and letters to women figured frequently in Stree Darpan from 1920 onwards. These writers represented different regions like U.P., Bihar, Punjab and Central Provinces (now called Madhya Pradesh), West Bengal and Sindh.

The first issue of Kumari Darpan – which was a part of Stree Darpan – was published in 1916 with Roop Kumari Nehru as its Assistant Editor. The basic purpose behind the publication of Kumari Darpan was to motivate the impressionable teenaged girls to associate them actively with Gandhi’s constructive programmes, particularly
Swadeshi, and mass-based national movements – Non-cooperation, Civil Disobedience and Quit India.

Rameshwari Nehru had remained the editor of this journal from 1909 to 1928. It is highly creditable that despite increase in the price of stationery and printing, she was extremely persevering in her efforts and made sure that neither the journal’s quality nor its size (of over sixty pages) was reduced. And the fact that she managed to publish almost all its issues as per the schedule, with the exception of three months because of certain problems, is highly commendable.

During the period 1911 to 1920, Stree Darpan mainly focussed on the theme of education and the need for opening schools and colleges for women. It was argued that a wide gap had developed between men and women within middle-class urban families mainly because the men had access to Western education. And because of the constant interaction of these men with their English colleagues and bosses, their perceptions had undergone a radical change as a result of which they began looking down upon their tradition-bound and illiterate wives. The Gender specific roles within the family when seen in the light of the new socio-cultural and politico-economic situation tended to widen the gap even more. This in consequence led to the social agony of women and they became victims of constant humiliation at the hands of their Westernized husbands. This is aptly illustrated from the following:

Sabhyata ki poshak ke ander abhi

Bahut se sankiran bhaav ke hriday
Chupe rathe hain jo ki ante karan

Se stri jaati ko paon tale rakhna

Pasand karte hain.85

(Even today, a number of men hide their narrow and reactionary views about women behind their civilized appearance. It is their heartiest desire to keep women under their foot.)

The enlightened women of those times were quick to realize that it was because of lack of education that women’s position in society had become so embarrassing. They thus began to vehemently oppose the prevalent customs like child marriage and purdah which they thought were great obstacles to women’s education. Rameshwari Nehru played a big role in creating awareness among both men and women through the columns of Stri Darpan. She pointed out that just as Japanese women had made immense contributions to each aspect of national life in Japan, in the same way Indian women could also make substantial contributions provided they were given proper education.86 She strongly felt that education would make women’s position better in the balance of power and authority in the family system in which males played a dominant role within the patriarchal framework.

A number of poems and stories which were published in Stree Darpan reflected the Editor’s ceaseless endeavours in demonstrating the deep-rooted social prejudice against women’s education. Braj Rani, in one of the issues of Stree Darpan, tries to infuse in the minds of women the urgent need to secure education on the basis of the
examples of Gargi, Maitreyei and Madalsa. Yadunandan Prasad views with serious concern the apathy towards female education in the twentieth century, in the light of the rapid strides which were taking place throughout the world in the areas of education and modernization. He argued that in the absence of capable and educated mothers India would not be able to move ahead on the path of modernization and industrialization. In an article entitled Stri Shiksha written under anonymity, the author stated that with the help of education women could not only become efficient housewives, but they could also play an important part in the area of social reformation and national reconstruction. Krishna Kumar elaborates this further by saying that education would make women more refined and graceful. Besides, education infused in women self-confidence and skills which also helped them in performing their pativrat dharma (devotion to husband) more efficiently. Rameshwari Nehru in her editorial “Deshi aur Vilayti Nari Shiksha” pointed out that among the various advantages of education, the most important one was that it enabled women to inculcate in them a sense of pride in being Indians.

An important point which attracted the attention of the social reformers was in regard to the nature and context of education to be imparted. Should the education given to women focus exclusively on domestic affairs, or should she also be simultaneously given education in the area of politics? Should the education given to women be based on indigenous modes or Western modes or both? These questions had to be considered in the male-dominated patriarchal society. It would be significant to note that despite the stress laid on expanding the scope of women’s sphere from domestic to public life and on the need to impart education to women, the image of the traditional role played by them as mothers, wives, etc. still dominated the minds of social reformers. This becomes
glaringly evident from the various articles, poems, stories, etc. published in various women's journals like Stree Darpan, Chand, Madhuri, etc. during the period from 1911 to 1930.

However, the result of the publication of so many articles on women's education in Stree Darpan and other women's Journals was that a number of social and religious institutions and women's organizations established girls' schools in the northern part of India, especially Lahore, Jullundher, Benaras, Aligarh, Allahabad, etc. Through the columns of Stree Darpan Rameshwari Nehru kept the readers informed about the opening of new educational institutions, particularly those that had boarding facilities for girls. She also made fervent appeals to people to extend their whole-hearted cooperation by way of generous donations to these institutions.

The Arya Samaj movement in particular made commendable efforts in imparting education to the women. Among the important institutions established by them the name of Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jullundher, stands out prominently. This was founded by Lala Devraj in 1889. During the period 1910 to 1926, a number of articles and editorials had appeared in various women's journals, particularly Stree Darpan, which eulogized the achievements registered by these institutions. Magan Diwedi Gajpuri wrote in Stree Darpan that the role of Kanya Mahavidyalaya was particularly commendable because it was completely self-reliant in financial matters by virtue of which it managed to retain its independence in policy matters and organization. Rameshwari Nehru also praised the contribution of this institution in the field of women's education as a result of which a number of its former students came out in the open to offer their services, prominent among them being Mangla Devi, Anandi Devi, Lajjawati Devi and Savitri Devi.
Lajjawati Devi and Savitri Devi had also served this institution in their capacity as Principal for varying terms.

Two other schools which deserve a special mention are: Girls’ School at Benaras (now known as Besant Kanya Mahavidyalaya) and Crosswaithe High School at Allahabad. The former was opened by Annie Besant who was of the firm belief that without the removal of illiteracy among women the goal of Indian women’s emancipation could not be achieved, and that there was a direct link between women’s education and national reconstruction. In order to infuse a spirit of patriotism among girls, she emphasized that girls should be taught Sanskrit and vernacular literature. This in turn would motivate them to take part in the struggle for India’s independence.92

Crosswaithe Girls High School was also an important centre of nationalist activity. A number of articles published in Stree Darpan, Maryada and Saraswati highlighted the activities of this school. For example, the November 1917 issue of Stree Darpan carried an article which gave details about the contributions made by this school in the area of women’s education. The good reputation commanded by this school drew students from Lahore, Jullundher, Calcutta, Rangoon, etc.

An other important institution which deserves mention is the Aligarh Zenana Madrasa (est 1906). This institution played an important role in encouraging the purdah-bound girls belonging to Sharif Muslim families in India, particularly in Aligarh, to acquire education. It owed its origin to the Mohammedan Educational Conference. It initially started as a primary school but subsequently, as its activities expanded, it got converted into Aligarh Women’s College. The activities of this institution were regularly
reported in Khatun and Tahzeeb-i-Niswan (Aligarh). The subjects taught in this college were Urdu-reading and writing, Arithmetic, needle-work and Qur'an. The husband-wife team of Sheikh Abdullah and Wahid Jahan Begum had contributed a great deal to the management and growth of this institution. However, it is surprising that the contribution of this institution had gone unnoticed in Stree Darpan.

Purdah

An important theme which found wide coverage in Stree Darpan was purdah. Satyavati had pointed out that mere abolition of the custom of purdah would not serve any useful purpose unless it was accompanied by imparting education to women and removal of other social evils affecting women. Satyavati was of the opinion that the custom of purdah was a big stumbling block in the way of women’s education.

Bhagyavati too had strongly condemned the custom of purdah, as can be seen from the following extract:

If India is to recapture its past glory and to progress, women’s potentialities ought to be given full scope for development. In order to achieve this objective, the custom of purdah, the inveterate enemy of woman’s health, has to be discarded for ever.

In an article titled “Purdeh ki Visham Vedana”. Rajdulari emphasized that it was high time that an end was put to gender discrimination and to work out ways and means whereby the code of conduct for men and women framed by the society is reformulated keeping in mind the progressive trend of the world. While impressing upon the society
the urgent need to uproot and demolish pernicious social customs like purdah, child marriage, mis-matched marriages, dowry exchange, etc. She pointed out that women were in no way less than men at the intellectual level and were therefore competent enough to take part in the national welfare activities. She also stressed upon the need to impart vocational training to women, particularly widows, so that they could earn their livelihood and become financially independent.

Kumari Chandravati Gupt, a teenaged girl, also emphasized the need to abolish the custom of purdah. She expressed the opinion that women’s emancipation was closely linked to national progress and urged her sisters to acquire education and fight for their autonomy on an urgent basis, as can be seen from the following extract:

Pyari behno, I vidya grahen karne,
Purdah hatane aur apne adhikaroan
Aur swatantrta laine mein ek minute
Ki bhi deri na karo.96

In an article on purdah, Shakuntala Devi condemned this social ill by saying that if the women remain confined within the four walls of their homes, their health would be adversely affected which in turn would affect future generations. She encouraged young girls to shun this practice, and to work hand in hand with men.97 The result of this anti-purdah campaign was that women in Bihar,98 Jaipur and Agra began coming out in the open against the unhealthy custom of purdah. Under the presidency of Uma Nehru, a resolution was passed at Prayag against this unhealthy custom.101 Another meeting of women was held at Prayag on 23 May 1950 where women assembled in large numbers. This meeting was presided over by Swaruprani who made a passionate appeal to the women to discard the custom of purdah and to be prepared to get imprisoned.102
Child marriage was another social ill which had drawn the attention of social reformers. According to the Census of 1921, as many as 321 girls below the age of five were married in Baroda alone. A woman who wrote under anonymity drew attention to Gandhi’s advice that child marriage should be completely stopped, and there should be no restriction to the remarriage of those widows whose marriage had not consummated. A series of articles was published in Hindi journals in favour of widow remarriage. Yet another woman wrote that young men should not hesitate in marrying pati vihina abala (weak women without husband).

Another social ill which is closely related to widow remarriage was mismatched marriage, where old men married girls who were young enough to be their daughters. This often led to widowhood among young girls which made them feel extremely insecure. This is aptly reflected in the following statement made by a child widow: “As yet my milk teeth have not fallen, how shall I be able to pass my life”.

In Stree Darpan several cases of old people marrying girls of the age of their grand-daughters were published. In one case a greedy man sold his daughter to an elderly man for seven thousand rupees. A cartoon under the caption “Marriage in old Age” was published with these satirical comments: “Everybody ran helter-skelter to see the bridegroom, as soon as the news travelled people began to say between themselves, whether to call him bridegroom or bride’s grandfather”. Gulab Devi Chaturvedi from Kota reported the marriage of a man of 60 years with a girl of 14 and sarcastically commented: “bless them, bless them”.
In yet another case, a widow who had suffered a lot was forced to lead an immoral life by her in-laws. She was bold enough to write that those who were laughing at her misfortune must be aware of the fact that 75 per cent of the widows were forced to undergo abortions. In her opinion widows should lead chaste lives provided they could restrain their biological urges. And in case they could not do so, they should not hesitate to remarry. She did not find anything wrong in this because by adopting this course they could save themselves from the life of vice.109

Another article describes the plight of Bengali Hindu widows who were forced to enter flesh trade in large numbers at the centres of pilgrimage just for the sake of two meals a day. The greedy pandits and priests pocketed all the money. There was total lack of concern on the part of the Hindu society in regard to the fact that such unhealthy practices were taking place at centres of pilgrimage.110

Child widows who had never seen their husbands either fell into the hands of vidhamis or were forced to become prostitutes.111 In many cases widows abandoned their babies at railway platforms or other such crowded places so as to avoid being humiliated in society. It was because of the apathy on the part of the Hindu society that so many widows got converted to other faiths, particularly Christianity.112

At the same time, however, some stories written by women-writers highlighted the traditional image of women as silent sufferers, the glaring examples being “Prem Bindu” and “Aradhana”. 113 The consequence was that people began forming the impression that the issue of widow-remarriage was being taken up by male-writers, and that women did not seem much interested. Thus men’s projection of their role as
saviours of widows remained a prominent feature during the earlier part of the twentieth century even at a time when women’s movements had started agitating for their rights in a big way.

Rameshwari Nehru too tended to express the opinion that ascetic widowhood was a better option for widows. It appears that she had formed this opinion under the influence of Gandhi.

Indian women have always been honoured and given the highest status in society for their sexual chastity and pure life as well as devotion to their husbands.... Those widows who have chosen to inculcate and personify these qualities and to engage themselves in religious duties selflessly, are to be worshipped by the whole world. But the problem arises in the case of those widows who fail to control their sexual desires. Among them are included the teenaged girls and young adults. We can not understand our leaders’ logic when they sanction remarriage for one category and prohibit it for the other. Widows, belonging to both categories, fall in different age-groups but they suffer from the same mental sickness. 114

In fact glorification of widowhood and suppression of sexuality of widows had been a dominant feature of the middle class psyche underlying the process of construction of new woman by Swami Dayanand and Mahatma Gandhi. The former had advocated widow remarriage with the purpose of effecting an improvement in the Hindu race. 115. Gandhi, on the other hand, had recommended remarriage for child widows on compassionate grounds; and for adult widows he advocated remarriage in
order to save them from moral corruption. But he was firm in his opinion that if widows lived a pure life, they could contribute a great deal in the field of social welfare and national reconstruction.

As far as the view point of the growing band of thinking women on the issue as reflected in the columns of Stree Darpan is concerned, it may be noted that the majority of the contributors—young housewives, middle-aged mothers and teenaged daughters, etc.—tried to locate the problem of widows and social resistance to their remarriage in the context of the position of women in Indian society. In this connection it would be important to refer to Hukma Devi’s article titled, “Stree Utnati Kaise Ho” in which she has drawn attention to the low status of women in society which was reflected in the eagerness of widowers to remarry immediately after the death of their wives. 116 In her article titled, “Arachangani Ya Paon Ki Jooti”, Hukma Devi sarcastically used the expression “Paon Ki Jooti” to show the manner in which the women were humiliated in society. 117

Through the publication of poems, articles and stories in its various issues during the period under reference, the Stree Darpan was able to successfully spread the message of gender-discrimination in the society. In an article titled “Ek Vidhwa Ki Jiwa”, an anonymous writer drew a comparison between the privileged position of a widower and the ignominy suffered by a widow in society. She held the male-dominated patriarchal system responsible for this sorry state of affairs. She also vehemently criticized the women for silently suffering at the hands of men, as can be seen below:
In the mistaken perception of Indian society, men seem to be more useful than women. It may be conceded that men have been unjust to women. But the question is why women did not protest against this injustice. Why did they not assert their individuality and rights? Women share more responsibility for their own degradation. 118

Smt. Suryadevi in her poem “Nari Vilap”, presented a true picture of the manner in which educated men looked down upon their submissive and devoted wives.

Pati pass hai B.A., M.A. par ghar mein patni nipat ganwar Aise ghar mein prem kahan hai machta hai nit hahakar Din bhar karti kaam, nahin par babu ka hota santosh Hui zara bhi der kaam mein aa jata jhat unko rosh Bahut log shikshit ho kar bhi yun karte naari satkaar Dosh nahin hum ablaon ka kyon ham rakhi gyai ganwar. 119

(Husband is a B.A., M.A. The wife is utterly illiterate. In such a home, there is no love but bickerings and tensions. Wife toils the whole day, yet the gentleman is unhappy. A little delay in her work rouses his anger. Many educated men honour their women in this way. Why blame women for lapses when they are illiterate?)

The select band of enlightened women made efforts to channelize growing discontent among women into an organized social resistance. Hukma Devi played an important part in this respect by proposing the establishment of an organization of Kanya Hitkarni Sabha (a society for the welfare of young girls) with the basic purpose of preparing a united front for Sakriya Pratirodh (active resistance), and the publication of a news letter – Kumar Aur Kumari. 120 Hukma Devi went to the extent of making a
request to the editor of Stree Darpan to present a representation to the British Government for enacting a legislation against the custom of widower’s remarriage. The publication of proposals suggested by Hukma Devi in Stree Darpan evoked a very positive response from a large number of women who had offered to extend to her their whole-hearted co-operation in the coming years. All this goes to show that the horizon of feminist consciousness was vastly expanding, thanks to the efforts of Hukma Devi. Thus the role of Stree Darpan in raising the level of Indian women’s consciousness and also in strengthening the movement for their social and political rights was highly commendable.

Even though both Rameshwari Nehru and Sarojini Naidu were from different educational backgrounds, yet both of them made substantial contributions to the cause of the uplift of women in India. Their approach was different from that of the nineteenth century social reformers. Both of them were greatly inspired by Gandhi who believed that women were not mute objects on whom judgement was to be passed; in fact they were self-conscious subjects with their individual identity who had the potential for becoming arbiters of their own destiny. However, neither Sarojini Naidu nor Rameshwari Nehru had made efforts in the direction of redefining the patriarchal and hierarchal structure of the society wherein there was open discrimination between the two sexes. They were confident that women could assume the new social, economic and political roles within the existing structures.

_Uma Nehru:_ She was the elder daughter-in-law of Nand Lal Nehru, the elder brother of Motilal Nehru. Her radical views were also given due projection in the columns of Stree Darpan. Though both Uma Nehru and Rameshwari Nehru came from an
aristocratic background and lived in a liberal atmosphere, yet, ironically both viewed the contemporary Indian society, gender-relations, etc. from a completely different perspective. Uma Nehru’s approach was much more radical and Westernized and it goes to the credit of Rameshwari Nehru, the editor, that she never hesitated publishing the views of Uma Nehru in Stree Darpan. Uma Nehru’s article titled “Hamare Samaj Sudharak” serves as a prominent example in this respect. She vehemently criticized the policy of double standards followed by the social reformers. While on the one hand they eulogized the Sita–Savitri ideal and exhorted the Indian women to emulate this, on the other they themselves preferred to acquire English knowledge and to follow the Western life-style. Regarding the social reformers as hypocrites, she wrote:

Sita aur Savitri banane ke liye Ramchandra, Krishna, Bharat aur Yudhishtir ki aavashkta hoti hai. Coat, patloon, aur necktie collar sharier par aur pashchimi aarthik adarshoan ki tarang dil mein lekar aisi stri jati ke uppan karne ki abhilaasha akaashpushp dhundne ke samaan hai. 121

(The task of producing model women like Sita and Savitri seems incongruent with a social situation which does not oblige men to become a Ramchandra, a Krishna, a Bharat or a Yudhishter. Dressed in coat, pant and necktie, and inebriated with the ambition to emulate Western economic ideals, Indian men’s craving for such ideal women is akin to search for the proverbial mythical flower.)

In yet another article titled “Hamare Hriday”, she pointed out that while on the one hand Indian men were greatly concerned about India’s freedom, on the other they
had shown complete apathy to the enslavement of women both at the physical and spiritual levels.

Uma Nehru ridiculed the discriminatory attitude followed in gender-relations in India. She never liked the traditional model where the relationship between men and women was akin to the master–slave relationship. She believed that man–woman relationship should be based on mutual love and respect. The traditional view of Indian men that strenuous mental and physical work spoilt the beauty of women was just not palatable to her. She was particularly critical of the manner in which Indian men tried to suppress women’s sexuality and fertility and exploited her labour by calling her Grihalakshmi. In an article titled “Hamare Samajik Dhanche” she put the blame on Indian society which used three patriarchal models to subjugate Indian women – the ancient Hindu, the Turkish and the modern Western. The institutions of family and marriage made her plight so miserable that she was reduced to the level of a helpless dependent – and all this in the name of stri dharma (women’s duty). Her radical ideas found ample reflection in her view that gender roles should be reversed wherever men desired access to knowledge and power. It may thus be seen that Uma Nehru’s approach to women’s issues was absolutely unconventional. In presenting these views she was greatly influenced by the new socio-economic forces which had been set in motion due to the fast changing material conditions both in India and Europe. Uma Nehru went to the extent of describing social and political rights for women and was in agreement with Sarojini Naidu’s proposal in regard to women’s right to vote.

The question that arises is: how far did the Stree Darpan succeed in its mission of bringing about a change in women’s consciousness vis-à-vis their ideals, aspirations and
perceptions? Did it succeed in generating a favourable public opinion through constant debate in relation to the pathetic position of women in Indian society? Rameshwari Nehru, in her capacity as the editor of the Journal, did succeed to a certain degree in refashioning the notions of Indian womanhood, particularly among the Hindi-speaking people of North India. The opinion of the Hindus in regard to the basic traits of a woman’s personality owed its origin to patriarchal ideology. The feminine traits like tolerance, submissiveness, devotion to husband (even if he is disloyal), purity, obedience, etc. can be attributed to the belief of the Hindu men that women by their inherent nature are fickle-minded, incapable of rational thinking and restraining their sexual desires. The new generation of enlightened women from the urban middle class background believed that men sought to legitimize the above feminine traits through the scriptural authority. It is in this context that the role of Stree Darpan was highly commendable. The editor was persevering in her efforts to dispel age-old notions about women being fickle-minded, irrational, etc. This journal portrayed a very positive image of women and people like Uma Nehru tried to impress upon the women the need to inculcate in them qualities like fortitude, self-confidence, independent thinking, management skills, etc. so that they could match their male counterparts in performing their public roles efficiently. Thus the demarcating line between the feminine traits and male qualities became less prominent. Even ordinary housewives had started becoming increasingly conscious about the importance of women in society. The very idea of looking down upon the birth of female child as a liability sounded repulsive to them. These women, in their articles, were particularly critical of the orthodox men who treated women as “dumb cattle”, “paon ki juti” or beasts of burden. Manohar Prasad Mishar’s article titled
“Striyan par Dabau” published in Stree Darpan 131 evoked a sharp criticism from the editor who argued that women were intelligent enough to draw a distinction between right and wrong, and that they felt responsible enough to discharge their duties with utmost dedication. Both Rameshwari Nehru and Uma Nehru had severely condemned the patriarchal framework within which lots of restrictions were imposed upon women so that they should steadfastly follow the path as enjoined by the religious scriptures. The idea was to suppress female sexuality and to discourage them from becoming independent. The English translation of the extract from the editorial comments made by the Editor in Stree Darpan is given below:

Our Misharji not only favours freedom for women in their domestic activities but also their progress at a slow pace. He wishes to introduce them to good things. Evidently, he regards women as children. The goal of Indian women’s movement is not showing ‘good and nice things’ but to secure their rights. Undoubtedly, they may sometimes make mistakes but nobody has the right to punish them for their lapses.132

Another example of the radical change in the consciousness of women became evident from the example of a young housewife who openly expressed the inhuman treatment given to her by her mother-in-law.133

Through the media of Stree Darpan the women also tried to expose the hypocritical attitude of the Hindu males which was evident from their demand for Home Rule from the British authorities and at the same time showing the slightest of concerns for the autonomy of women within the home. A satirical poem aptly reflects this point:
Parishram nahin karenge, aapas mein khoob larenge, Aisi dasha mein rehkar, kya home ruč loge? Moderates aur extremists, do dal bana kar Parspar virodh karke, kya home rule loge? Vivah jaldi kar ke, vidhwa bahut bana kar, Un par rehm na kha kar, kya home rule loge?134

(You shall not toil but fight with each other and yet you hope to get Home-rule? Live apart as Moderates and Extremists, Live in mutual hostility, And yet you hope to get Home-rule? Marry off little girls, add to the number of widows, Be cruel to them and yet you hope to get Home-rule?)

Madan Mohan Malaviya was totally opposed to the idea of women exercising their franchise on the ground that they were purdahnashin. He expressed his deep resentment when a resolution demanding voting rights for women was brought by the Indian National Congress in its Bombay session held from 26 August 1911 to 31 August 1911. In her editorial titled “Strian aur vote”, Rameshwari Nehru took Malaviya to task for his orthodox views.135

Women no longer felt hesitant to question the continued assumption of public roles by men. In this connection, it would be appropriate to quote Hridaya Mohini who had openly expressed her disagreement with the views expressed by Padam Singh Sharma in an article titled “Stree Shiksha Par Akbar Ke Vichaar” published in Grihalakshami:

Public mein kya zaroor ki ja kar tane raho, Parh likk kar apne ghar hi mein ishwar bane raho, Tum ko bitha ke taak par pooja karenge hum, Bhojo jo ghar mein baith, na latton ko hove gam.136
(Why is it obligatory for you to project yourself as public men? Get knowledge and stay like gods at home. We shall place you as idols in the nook and worship you. If you choose to enjoy the domestic pleasures you will cause no anxiety to Sahebs.)

A large number of housewives who had become victims of undue humiliation, repression and economic dependence both in their husband’s and natal home, had started demanding a better treatment in society based on the principle of equity, fair play and justice and shedding of the discriminatory treatment meted out to them merely because they were females. Above all, they wanted to have their fair share in socio-economic power, property rights and social status.137

Thus as a result of the contributions made by Stree Darpan through the publication of a number of thought-provoking articles, there began to emerge a change in attitudes in traditional families. Definitely, their perspective on gender- relations had undergone a perceptive change. The traditional perception of women as ardhangini which had reduced her to the level of a mere shadow of her husband devoid of any independent thinking began to show a perceptible change. The new woman represented both the traditional image of womanhood capable of performing their household duties efficiently and the modern, enlightened image capable of assuming responsibilities as cultured and intelligent housewives.

This new role-model for women was accepted by the progressive women thinkers of those times because under the new model due recognition was given to women’s independent thinking, their intellectual capabilities and their existence as individuals in their own right.138 The patidharma concept which required women to completely
surrender their individuality to their husbands at every level – mind, body, soul – was put under scrutiny. Women felt that on a reciprocal basis their husbands also should follow the ideal of pativrata dharma and remain totally loyal to their wives. Thus in the new equation of gender-relations, both the husband and wife were to be treated on an equal footing. They could retain their individual identities and personal freedom. The earlier master-slave relationship between husband and wife paved the way for a more dignified relationship based on the spirit of mutual love and respect.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


9. Anandibai was born in 1865. She was the daughter of Ganpatrao Joshi of Kalyan (Mumbai). In 1874 she was married to Gopal Vinayak Joshi, an employee of the Postal Deptt. She went to England and America in 1883 for studying medicine.


15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., p. 49.


18. Anandibai Karve, Maze Puran (in Marathi) (Mumbai, 1951)


20. Dhondo Keshav Karve, Atmavritta (Anathabalikashram, Hingne, 1928); Parvatibai Athavale, Majhi Kahani (Anathabalikashram, Hingne, 1928). The latter has been translated into English by Justin E. Abbott, My Story: The Autobiography of a Hindu Widow (G.P. Putnam’s Sons, New York and London, 1930). Unfortunately, the translation is rather free and not as faithful to the
original as would be desirable, considering the use made of it by scholars as a
source material.


22. Ramabai Ranade, Amachya Ayushyatil Kahi Athavani (in Marathi)
(“Reminiscences of our life”) (Pune, 1910), pp. 42-43; Meera Kosambi,
“Anandibai Joshee : Retrieving in Fragmented Feminist Image”, Economic and


30. Ibid., p. 246.


33. S.N. Karnataki, Namdar Nyayamurti Kashinath Trimbak Telang Yanche Charitra (in Marathi) (Mumbai, 1929), pp.289-90. According to Karnataki, Telang was practically on his deathbed when he married off his two daughters under parental pressure.

34. Maze Puran, op.cit., p.123.

35. G. Forbes, op.cit., p. 49.

36. Quoted from Forbes, ibid., p. 50.


38. Quoted from G. Forbes, op.cit., p. 51.


41. Ibid.

42. Manmohan Kaur, op.cit., p. 86.


44. Ibid.


46. Ibid.
47. Usha Bala, op.cit., p. 70.


49. Ibid., p. 56.

50. Ibid., p. 58.

51. Ibid., p. 61.


54. Indian Year Book, 1923, pp.552-55.


57. Ibid., p. 74.

58. Ibid.


60. Ibid.


63. Ibid.

64. Gail Minault, ed, The Extended Family: Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan (Delhi, 1989), p. 56.

65. Forbes, op.cit., p. 56.


67. Quoted from Forbes, op.cit., p. 78.


69. Ibid., p. 145.

70. Ibid.

71. Rameshwari Nehru (1886-1966) was the wife of Brijlal, a Government official. She had edited the Stree Darpan during the period 1909-25. She had also served the AIWC as President during the years 1940-41. After partition she had worked as Director of Women’s Section, Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation.

72. The issues of this Journal are available in the Marwari Sarvajanik Library (MSL), Old Delhi.

73. Pratap, 15 March 1920 (Kanpur). It reported “the most unparalleled narrative on women’s education”.

74. Ibid., 2 June 1919, quoted in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, ed, Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History (Kali for Women, Delhi, 1989)
75. Available at MSL, Old Delhi, Madhuri’s editor was Shri Dularelal Bhargava.

76. Stree Darpan, January 1919. It commented, “The Journal needs improvement”.

77. MSL, Old Delhi, Chand, 1922.

78. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, op.cit., p.211.

79. Chand, September 1936.

80. Rameshwari Nehru’s editorials published in the issues of Stree Darpan (October 1915; July and December 1916; and December 1919) discuss the aims and objectives of the publication of this Journal.

81. Rameshwari Nehru, Gandhi is my Star : A Selection of Her Writings and Speeches (Patna, 1956), Introduction.

82. Stree Darpan, October 1915, Editorial.

83. Stree Darpan, December 1919.

84. Stree Darpan, July 1916, Editorial. Also see the Editorial of December 1919.


90. Stree Darpan, August 1918.

91. Stree Darpan, September 1910.


95. Stree Darpan, August 1918.

96. Stree Darpan, December 1918.

97. Stree Darpan, July 1923.


100. Chand, September 1928, p.615.


103. Stree Darpan, October 1923.

104. Stree Darpan, January to June, 1920.

105. Stree Darpan, November 1920.

106. Stree Darpan, March 1919.


108. Stree Darpan, February 1918.


110. Chand, March 1928, p.547.

111. Chand, April 1928.

112. Stree Darpan, November 1920.


114. Stree Darpan, June 1919.


116. Stree Darpan, August 1917.
117.  Stree Darpan, March 1918.

118.  Stree Darpan, December 1915.


120.  Stree Darpan, April 1918.

121.  Stree Darpan, March 1918.

122.  Stree Darpan, April 1918.

123.  Stree Darpan, July 1918.

124.  Stree Darpan, April 1918.

125.  “Striyon Ka Adhikar”, Maryada, 1918.

126.  Doranne Jacobson and Susan Wadley, Women in India : Two Perspectives (Delhi, 1977), p. 120. This view found expression in Manohar Prasad Mishar, “Stree Par Dabau”, Stree Darpan, December 1919.


128.  The contributors to Stree Darpan, particularly women, had tried to remove wrong notions about women’s nature. For example, see comment on Yadunandan Prasad, “Stri Shiksha aur Bhavishya Ka Sanskar”, “Pativrata Dharma aur
Swatantarta”, August, 1921. The writer of this article took Prameshwar Dayal, 
Vakil, to task for his contention that women without patriarchal control tended to 
become licentious.

129. Uma Nehru, “Pashchatya Strian” in Stree Darpan, December 1915. Ek Vineed 

130. Kailash Rani Baatal, “Striyon Ka Mahtav Tatha Purushon Ka Kartavya”, Stree 
Darpan, December 1915. Baatal referred to those who treated women no better 
than domestic animals. Hukma Rani, “Ardhangini Ya Paon Ki Jooti”, March 
1918; Kesari Devi, “Ashaant Grih”, July 1921. She accused men of treating 
women as “cattle”.

131. Stree Darpan, August 1919.

132. Ibid.

133. Om Prakash Aggarwal, “Aggarwal Bandhuau Tatha Anya Pathakgan -- Reply to a 
letter”, in Stree Darpan, May 1928.


135. Stree Darpan, September 1918, Editorial.

136. Stree Darpan, June 1917.

137. These ideas are scattered in letters to the Editor, articles and poems, contributed 
by both male and female writers to Stree Darpan, 1911-28. For example, see Sant 
Charan Khanna, “Bharatiya Strian Aur Unke Sudhar”, January 1918. This article


139. Surya Devi, “Nari Vilap”, December 1918; Dharampatni Kalindi Narayanan Verma, “Pativrata Dharm aur Swatantarta”, August 1921. The fact that the author articulated her radical ideas under the name of her husband showed the deep-rooted impact of the social norm of the merger of wife’s identity with that of her husband’s.

140. Smt. Hira Devi, “Stri Vrat”, July 1910. In her articles, Kailash Rani Baatal, a regular contributor to Stree Darpan, often drew attention to the contradiction between the public postures and private behaviour of Indian men who flaunted the liberal ideal of “duties towards women” as rhetoric. Her article “Strion Ka Mahatava Tatha Purushaon Ka Kartavya”, December 1915, was an eloquent articulation of these ideas. Uma Nehru, “Hamara Samajik Dhancha”, April 1918.