Chapter VI

EMPOWERMENT OF INDIAN WOMEN

All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. Nation which does not respect women has never become great, nor will ever be in future. Manu says, “Where women are respected, there the gods delight; and where they are not, there all works and efforts come to naught”.¹ There is no hope of rise for that family or country where there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness.² Vivekananda favoured gender equality.

Vivekananda firmly believed in the equal rights and opportunities for women in perfect consonance with the Indian view. As a matter of fact, it is one of the strongest phenomena in the history of the mankind, that India, which, since time immemorial had honoured woman as shakti incarnate, the living embodiments of the Universal Supreme Mother, could even think it fit, to deprive them of their legitimate birth rights to education, freedom, property and what not, as bracketed with Shudras (Nari-Sudra).³ But such a strange thing really happened in India and that is why Swami Vivekananda linked the downfall of India with the degradation of condition of woman. However, at that time, there was no feminist movement, but Vivekananda supported their cause declaring that though outwardly there may be difference between men and women, in the real nature, there is none.⁴

Gender is not as straight forward a concept, as many believe. It is distinct from sex, the physical and physiological features that differentiate females and males, on biological differences. The personality traits of ‘masculinity’ or ‘femininity' are also determined on the basis of cultural, psychological and behavioral differences in addition to the biological

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¹ Swami Abhedananda, India and Her People: A Study in The Social, Political, Educational, Cultural and Religious Conditions of India, Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta, 2000, p. 143.
³ Ibid., p. 224.
difference and is largely based on ideology. Gender is a social construction of the specific characteristics, norms and behaviours associated with being female or male in any specific social context. It is based on primarily two factors, genetic and social conditioning. So it can not have a universal application.

Gender is not a social function that exists in a vacuity. Caste, class, ethnicity and race impinge on gender and form a complex matrix. Gender poisonings are crucial in the multidimensional meanings that are attached and formulated to the processes and outcomes of any development project. Gender as a relational dynamic, whereby communities organize themselves, plays itself out as a struggle over resources and labour. It also reconstitutes by its nature, the very axis of power relationships that determine, the social, familial and institutional locations of women and men. Gender tends to reinforce as essentialist, the dichotomous categories of feminine and masculine underlying patriarchy, rather than moving towards a solution within these socialized dichotomies.

R. Delmar has explored another dimension of gender politics. He says, “If the origin of family constituted an achievement, it was this that it asserted women’s oppression as a problem of history, rather than of biology, a problem which is the concern of historical materialism to analyse and revolutionary politics to solve”. Gender is at the heart of all historical, social and cultural negotiations. Central to such negotiation is the figure of woman, which has long served as a powerful and ambivalent patriarchal symbol, heavily over determined as an expression of the male psyche. Feminist cultural history points out that the figure of woman can not be fixed in her function as patriarchal value. New definitions of gender and sexuality

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5 Shoma A. Chatterji, Women In Perspective, Essays On Gender Issues, p. 40. It is natural that degrees and definitions of ‘masculinity’ or ‘femininity’ differ from time to time and from place to place and from group to group.
articulated by the women’s movement contest the value and meaning of the female image, struggling for different, female recognitions and identification.\textsuperscript{10} Theorists have increasingly pointed to terms such as ‘gender’ and ‘woman’ as highly mediated and unstable constructs. These terms, according to Judith Butler, are troublesome because both gain their troubled significations only as relational. She asked whether being female is a natural fact or a cultural performance.\textsuperscript{11} Simone de Beauvoir has made a ground breaking insistence that women ‘become’; they are not born.\textsuperscript{12} So woman is a process of becoming and thus an ongoing, discursive practice that is open to intervention and resignification.\textsuperscript{13}

John Gray points out that Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus, the non-physical differences between men and women vary in degree from person to person. It may be safer to define such characteristics as a personality difference between people, rather than between the sexes. The extent of in-equality and relative position of women and men varies from society to society. Gender hierarchies that privilege men and masculinity over women and femininity can be found to different degrees all over the world. It varies in different geographical, cultural and time settings too. In each nation, man or woman represents an ideal consciously or unconsciously, and the individual is an external expression of this ideal. The collection of such individuals is the nation, which also represents a great ideal; towards that it is moving. And, therefore, it is rightly assumed that to understand a nation you must first understand its ideal, for each nation refuses to be judged by any other standard than its own.\textsuperscript{14}

The word feminist in its simplest political sense is a person (and not necessarily a woman) whose analytical perspective is informed by an understanding of the relationship between power and gender in any historical, social, or cultural context. The argument against using the word feminist is weakened by the fact that terms and theories of equally western provenance-

\begin{itemize}
  \item Shoma A Chatterji, Women In Perspective, Essays on Gender Issues, p. 38.
  \item Judith Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity}, p. 43.
  \item Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume VIII, p. 55.
\end{itemize}
Marxist, socialist, Freudian, or post structuralist— do not arouse similar indignation and are in fact overused as standard frameworks for analysis of Indian society by Indian scholars.\textsuperscript{15} The feminist revolution is the next step in human evolution, the state that will finally propel the human species into another evolutionary curve. It is going to take arm-twisting in the back rooms of legislatures; it is going to take getting out on the streets again; it is going to take arrests; it is going to take its own form of real confrontation. It is after all, a battle about power. But power in all senses of the term and not the way the male left or right settles for power.\textsuperscript{16} Gender is not biologically determined but is learned, meaning that gender roles can be changed. World Bank states that Gender is an issue of development, effectiveness; it is not just a matter of political correctness or kindness to women. Evidence demonstrates that when men and women are relatively equal, economies tend to grow faster.\textsuperscript{17}

The nineteenth century was a time of political, social and scientific upheaval in Europe. The British regarded their domination of the subcontinent as proof of their moral superiority. In arguments over how to best rule the colonial subjects led to the discussions of the ideal relationship between men and women. Among the rude people the women are generally degraded; among civilized people they are exalted. As the societies advance, the condition of the weaker sex gradually improves, until they associate on equal terms with the men, and occupy the place of voluntary and useful copartners. Having learned about Hindu society through reading Halhed’s Code of Gentoo Laws, a translation of the code of Manu, some religious works, and accounts written by travelers and missionaries, James Mill opined, “Nothing can exceed the habitual contempt which the Hindus entertain for their women...They are held, accordingly, in extreme degradation”.\textsuperscript{18}

Reverend E. Storrow came to India in 1848 and pronounced Indian disunity a consequence of the low status of women. Having linked military

\begin{itemize}
\item[16] Shoma A Chatterji, \textit{Women In Perspective, Essays on Gender Issues}, p. 32.
\item[17] \textit{Ibid.}, p. 37.
\end{itemize}
strength with the status of women, the British concluded that domination of India was natural and inevitable.\(^\text{19}\) History affords no warrant for the belief that the enthusiasm of nationality can be kindled in sordid and degenerate surroundings. A society which accepts intellectual inanition and moral stagnation as the natural condition of its womankind can not hope to develop the high qualities of courage, devotion and self-sacrifice which go to the making of nation.\(^\text{20}\) When speaking of different nations, we start with a general idea that there is one code of ethics and the same kind of ideals for all races. When western women denounce the confining of the feet of Chinese ladies, they never seem to think of the corsets which are doing far more injury to the race. This is just one example; for you must know that cramping the feet does not do one-millionth part of the injury to the human form that the corset has done and is doing - when every organ is displaced and the spine is curved like a serpent. To stand against at women of other races, thinking that you are supreme, the very reason that they do not adopt your manners and customs shows that they also stand aghast at you.\(^\text{21}\)

When James Mill wrote in *History of India* in 1818 that the condition of women in a society is an index of that society’s place in civilization, he mentioned women into the project of modernity and modern history-writing in India. In one fell swoop, ‘women,’ ‘modernity,’ and ‘nation’ became essential and inseparable elements in a connected discourse of civilization. For colonial rulers, there were spectacular barbarities in the everyday customs of India, including *sati* (burning widows alive on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands), female infanticide, enforcement of celibate and ascetic widowhood, and the pre-pubertal marriages. Colonial officialdom and missionary rhetoric singled out such practices to characterize the status of Indian women as low and Indian men as exceptionally violent.\(^\text{22}\) The new urban elite, drawn mostly from the upper castes, imbibed the enlightenment philosophy of individualism and humanism. They perceived barbaric

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traditional practices against women as a civilized lapse and as recognizable social evils.

The first historical account of Indian women dates from the nineteenth century and is a product of the colonial experience. These accounts tell of an ancient time when women were held in high esteem followed by a long period when their status declined. Then the Europeans, according to these narratives, introduced new ideas about women’s roles and capabilities and these ideas were adopted by enlightened Indians. Both European-inspired histories and the Indian texts shared a belief in a unique female nature. All women are seen as sharing a common position derived from their marginalization and exploitation in a patriarchal society.\(^{23}\) Indian texts essentialized woman as devoted and self-sacrificing, yet occasionally rebellious and dangerous. Texts on religion, law, politics and education carried different pronouncements for men depending on caste, class, age and religious sect. In contrast, women’s differences were overshadowed by their biological characteristics and the subordinate, supportive roles they were destined to play. Historians were equally essentialist in their portrayal of Indian women.\(^{24}\) Colonial histories have narrated the civilizing mission of the British as rescuing Indian women from their own culture and society.

In the nineteenth century, the question regarding women loomed large. This was not a question of what do women want. But rather how can they be modernized? The ideas which gained currency among the British rulers of India included humanitarianism, utilitarianism, social Darwinism, and nationalism. Indian rise depended on the introduction of Western ideas and institutions\(^{25}\) which advocated supremacy of reason over faith and new concepts of social justice. Yet few Western critics of Indian society really believed that total regeneration was possible. At any rate, a new gender ideology and modification of the actual treatment of women would be the

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necessary prelude to any positive change. In the higher castes of every country, the statistics show that the number of women is always much larger than the number of men, because in the higher castes, for generation after generation, the women led an easy life. They ‘neither toil nor spin, yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them’. And the poor boys, they die like flies. The girl has a cat's nine lives, they say in India. Conditions are quite opposite in the lower castes. Mark Twain observes, “In spite of all that Western critics have said of Hindu customs, I never saw a woman harnessed to a plough with a cow or to a cart with a dog, as is done in some European countries. I saw no woman or girl at work in the fields in India. On both sides and ahead of the railway train, brown-bodied naked men and boys are ploughing in the fields; but not a woman. In these two hours, I have not seen a woman or a girl working in the fields. In India, even the lowest caste never does any hard work. They generally have an easy lot.”

A number of Indian intellectuals praised their own culture’s treatment of women and comparing the conditions of Indian women with those of European women, concluded that females at both places suffered hardships. The western ideal of womanhood is wife, while the eastern ideal is mother. The very peculiarity of Hindu women, which they have developed and which is the ideal of their life, is that of the mother. The golden age of the Vedic past had been adopted from the Indologists and was useful to refute Mill’s version of India. During this “golden age”, women were educated, married only after they had reached maturity, moved about freely, and participated in the social and political life of that time. For Hindus, the golden age was variously Shastric or Vedic, but certainly pre-Muslim. For Muslims, it was scriptural, prophetic and non-Indic. Hindus and Muslims either revived or created certain norms and boundaries for their communities. Reformers thus

27 Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume VIII, p. 64.
28 Tapan Raychaudhary, Europe Reconsidered, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1988, p. 336.
30 Gail Minault, Gender, Language and Learning Essays In Indo-Muslim Cultural History, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2009, p. 65.
helped to articulate separate identities, to define what it meant to be either a Hindu or a Muslim, for both men and women. Historical traditions played an important role in this factor.\(^{31}\)

The roles women play in society and the images we have from the exigencies of biology and social situations are deeply rooted in myths and legends and the religion of the culture. Myth is the hidden set of rules and conventions through which meanings, which are in reality specific to certain groups, are made to seem universal and given for a whole society.\(^ {32}\) This is especially true of Indian culture for countless centuries. With regard to the status of women in Indian society at large, no nation has held their women in higher esteem than the Hindus.\(^ {33}\) Perhaps, no other literature has presented a more admirable type of woman character than Sita, Maitriya, and Gargi. The Indian civilization has produced great women ranging from Brahmanadinis (lady Rishi)\(^ {34}\) to states woman, from ideal wife to warrior queen. It dates back to thousands of years too.

The earliest religious texts of Hindus show freedom for women. It is clearly stated in the *Rig Veda* that a woman is free to choose her life partner.

\[
\text{Bhadra vadhur bhavati yat supesa} \\
\text{Swayam sa mitram vanute jane cit.}\(^ {35}\)
\]

The wife walked ahead, not behind the husband (*uso yati svasarasya patni*). Female sexuality was neither despised nor reviled as it later was. A woman could make advances towards a man with impunity. Sexual aberrations were openly admitted; illicit lovers of both sexes find frequent mention in ancient literature. But when nomadic tribal values gave way to conservative ethos of settled agriculture, this free and open relationship between men and women became a thing of the past. As a result of racial

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\(^{31}\) R. C. Majumdar (ed), *The History and Culture of The Indian People, British Paramoutncy and Indian Renaissance*, Volume X, p. 330.


\(^{33}\) The term 'status' includes not only personal and proprietary rights but also duties, liabilities and disabilities. The status is a relative term. In sociological expression, it denotes neither rank nor hierarchy but only position. The status of women in society has been issues of debate informed by religion, tradition and culture, feminism.

\(^{34}\) Swami Harshnanda, *An Introduction to Indian Culture, (Ancient and Medieval)*, Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore, 1999, p. 27.

\(^{35}\) *Rig Veda* x: vii:xii.
miscigenation, woman lost her right to ritual initiation or upanayana depriving her right to education because upanayana was mandatory for formal education. Rituals for women from then on were without mantras. Interestingly only the courtesans had the right to formal education. While they were trained in the 64 arts listed by Hinduism, that too at the state’s expense, other women were trained in house work and at the most in music and dancing.\textsuperscript{36}

Swami Vivekananda too strongly held that in ancient India, those alone worship god who worship women as the manifestation of God. In the tenth chapter of the \textit{Rig Veda}, comes a peculiar hymn, for the sage is a woman, and it is dedicated to the one God who is at the background of all these gods. All the previous hymns are spoken in the third person, as if someone were addressing the deities. However, this hymn takes a departure: God (as the \textit{Devi}) is speaking for herself. The pronoun used is ‘I’. ‘I am the Empress of the Universe, the Fulfiller of all prayers.’ This is the first glimpse of women’s work in the \textit{Vedas}, officiating as priests. A good portion of the \textit{Vedic} literature proceeded from the mouths of women. It is recorded with their names and teachings.\textsuperscript{37}

As practically it was not so and perhaps that is why Indians became slaves, miserable and dead. However, \textit{Vedantic} India does not only advocate equality between the sexes but always speaks of the absolute superiority of women as mothers. A mother means the central point of whole worldly life. As our honoured books say, “A mother excels over a thousand fathers in glory”.\textsuperscript{38} Regarding this great doctrine of motherhood, according to Indian view, every woman on earth, high or low, ascetic or householder, married or unmarried, is a mother, an emblem of unselfish love, ungrudging sacrifice, a living symbol of universal mother. So every woman must consider herself as mother and everyman must honour women as mothers. The concept of Mother goddess was also known in many countries like Ancient Greece, Rome, Syria,

\textsuperscript{36} Shoma A Chatterji, \textit{Women In Perspective, Essays on Gender Issues}, p.3.
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume}, Replacement of Numeric Publisher Codes, Calcutta, 1963, p. 402.
Libya and others. In Mesopotamia, the goddess is supreme because the source of all life is seen as female.\textsuperscript{39}

In the later stages when marriage became mandatory for the girls, the entire marriage system was oriented towards the man’s happiness and pleasure with the wife vowing to obey the husband’s wishes without any questions. The marriage system was the key to men’s control over women.\textsuperscript{40} The idea of a model wife was hammered into the minds of girls at an early stage to the effect that becoming a model wife remained the only instigating force in their lives. She could run the household in her husband’s absence but could not give anything away in charity. She had no right to wealth or even to her own body. Her movement was restricted within the four walls of the house. The \textit{Apastamba Dharamsutra} and \textit{Satapatha Brahmana} state that woman is inherently evil and so should not be seen. The \textit{Dharamsutra} even provides a minor expiatory rite prescribed for killing “a blackbird, mongoose, rat, dog, \textit{Shudra} and a woman.”\textsuperscript{41}

The marriage in the Indian context is not so simple but it had greater and deeper meanings as it evolved not at once but through many centuries. First difficulty was, if a child of a monster character was united with a child of a good character, would they not have a tendency to degenerate each other? Second difficulty was that the laws did not allow marriage within the same clans. Not only one may not marry within his own family, or even one of his cousins, but one must not marry into the clan of his father or even of his mother. Third difficulty was if there had been leprosy or any such incurable disease within six generations of either bride or bridegroom, then there must not be a marriage. Due to this, the \textit{brahmin} says, “If I leave it to the choice of the boy or girl to marry, the boy or girl will be fascinated by a beautiful face. And then very likely all these circumstances will bring ruin to the family”.\textsuperscript{42}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Sen} Bimla Sen, \textit{Role of Women in Nation Building}, p. 64.
\bibitem{Chatterji} Shoma A Chatterji, \textit{Women In Perspective, Essays on Gender Issues}, p. 5.
\bibitem{Vivekananda} \textit{Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda}, Volume IX, p. 194. Swami Vivekananda advocated that prevention is better than cure. He said, “I do not mean to say that this is the best thing to do. Nor do I see that leaving it in their
\end{thebibliography}
In ancient times, the situation worsened when the farming became the main occupation. The bulk of productive labour fell on men and women were pushed further within the confines of their role as mothers and housekeepers. The division between the liberties allotted to men and women was not restricted to their economic and political rights only. While social norms allowed polygamy to men as their inherent right, women were not allowed to practice polyandry.\textsuperscript{43}

The tradition of giving away women as gifts in sacrifices along with other material goods was practiced in India in earlier times. Women were also given away as gifts for entertaining guests and as dowry to priests and kings. Giving away girls to temples as devadasis was considered as a matter of pride.\textsuperscript{44} The \textit{Maitrayani Samhita} repeatedly says that a woman’s body is not her own, hence she cannot prevent herself from being molested. Violence thrives in the victim’s acceptance of the victimizer’s moral right, social superiority and physical power.\textsuperscript{45} When women protested against violence to their person by men, other women, social groups or the machineries of the government, they are once again made victims of violence.

However, still they were honoured in the household and society. This trend continued in the age of Buddhism. Lord Buddha was reluctant to include women into his \textit{sangha}. Vivekananda admitted this fact that in our sacred books there are many passages which condemn women as offering temptation. But there are also passages that glorify women as the power of God. And there are other passages which state that in that house where one drop of a woman’s tear falls, the gods are never pleased and the house go to ruin. Drinking wine, killing a woman and killing a \textit{Brahmin} are the highest hands is at all a perfect solution. I have not found a solution yet in my own mind; nor do I see that any country has one”.\textsuperscript{43}

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\textsuperscript{43} In \textit{Stree Patra} (1914), Tagore interrogated the system of arranged marriages and the entrapment and enslavement of women as wives. In \textit{Aparichita} (1914), Tagore addressed the social evil of dowry, fleshes out the irresolute Bengali male, and frames this by drawing attention to the power of the educated woman. It seems that Tagore was serious about exploring and exposing the abjectness of women and prioritizing transgression as a mode of resistance to the exploitative norms of patriarchy.


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crimes in the Hindu religion. "But here I claim the superiority of these Hindu books, for in the books of other races there is only condemnation and no good word for a woman".  

The bulk of colonial writing in India focused on demonstrating the peculiarities of Hindu civilization and especially, the barbaric practices pertaining to women. The circulation of these negative perceptions was much wider than that of the Orientalist scholarship and probably both preceded and outlasted the work of the Orientalist in revealing India’s lost glory. The Orientalist suggested that Hindus were a people of high culture, now in a state of decline. Scottish historian James Mill strongly countered their statement by insisting that the Hindu civilization was crude from the beginning and belonged to lowest depths of immorality and crime. Primarily basing his judgment on the position Hindu society accorded to women. According to him, Hindu women were in “A state of dependence more strict and humiliating than that which is ordained for the weaker sex... Nothing can exceed the habitual contempt which Hindus entertain for their women... they are held in extreme degradation, excluded from the sacred books, deprived of education and of a share in the paternal property .. that remarkable barbarity, the wife held unworthy to eat with her husband, is prevalent in Hindustan”. Vivekananda further advocated that a girl may bring a million dollars to her husband, but every dollar of that is hers. Nobody has any right to touch one dollar of that. If the husband dies without issue, the whole property of the husband goes to her, even if his father or mother is living. And that has been the law from the past to the present time. That is something which the Hindu woman has had beyond that of the women of other countries.  

Between the nineteenth century manuals and ancient prescriptive texts like the Manusamriti, the first point of difference is that while the ancient texts are based on the injunctions against women, the nineteenth century texts

47 Uma Chakravarty, Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi: Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past, (Kumkum Sanghari and Sudesh Vaid ed), Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial India, Kali for women, New Delhi, 1980, p. 34.
relate more to the unprecedented possibilities in the conditions of women’s existence and less to strategies of control.\textsuperscript{50} In 1839, Mahesh Chandra Deb spoke to the ‘society for the acquisition of general knowledge’ about the daily life of young married women. Suffice is to say that every man who has carefully examined the condition of Hindu women cannot help pitying the benighted and miserable situation in which they were placed. Not withstanding all their kind attention, their pious and dutiful conduct, their submissive behaviour towards their husbands, they frequently meet with severe scolding and are even sometimes cruelly punished from ungrounded jealousy or a tyrannical whim.\textsuperscript{51}

For contemporary women, this perception of the past has led to a narrow and limiting circle in which the image of Indian womanhood has become both a shackle and a rhetorical device that nevertheless functions as a historical truth.\textsuperscript{52} Vivekananda postulated that the idea of marriage in religion is for the weak. They who find themselves complete, what is the use of their marrying? And those that marry, they are given one chance. When that chance is over, both men and women are looked down upon if they marry again; but it is not that they are prohibited. It is nowhere said that a widow is not to marry. The widow and widower who do not marry are considered more spiritual.\textsuperscript{53}

Men, of course, break through this law and go and marry; whereas women--they being of a higher spiritual nature, keep to the law. For instance, our books say that eating meat is bad and sinful, but you may still eat such and such a meat—mutton. But do not judge too harshly of Hindu men. Whenever in India a custom becomes rigid, it is almost impossible to break through it--just as in your country, you will find how hard it is to break through a five day custom of fashion.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{50} Tanika Sarkar, \textit{Hindu Conjugality and Nationalism in Late Nineteenth Century Bengal}, (Jasodhara Bagchi ed), \textit{Indian Women- Myth and Reality}, p. 100.
\textsuperscript{52} Uma Chakarvarti, \textit{Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? in Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History}, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{54} Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume IX, p. 197.
Acceptance of golden age was widespread but explanations of the fall of Indian nation differed widely. Some reformers simply commented on wars, invasions, and political disorder which led to the restrictions on women’s education and mobility. Others located the decline during the time of the Smritis. But most of the reformers blamed Muslim rule. These writers claimed child marriage, prohibition on widow marriage, seclusion, and restrictions on female education were responses to the Muslim threat to women safety.

Colonial officials agreed that religion was central to Indian life, Indian people were slaves to religion, and Sati and many other customs were religious practices. Discourse on Indian military weakness versus British success focused on the topic of gender relations to the exclusion of a range of other issues such as trade patterns, technology innovation, the technology and methods of warfare, and dynastic failure is nothing short of amazing. Yet this is what happened.

The nineteenth century reformers initiated a long tradition of myth making about the ancient Hindu woman as a free, mobile, intellectual person. It is not so much the mythical nature of the construction of the fact that an intelligentsia committed to domesticity for contemporary women, needed to see independence in ancient women as ideal, perfect, if now unattainable qualities. The same ambivalence about one’s professed values is indicated when one recalls that at the time when non-consensual infant marriage system was celebrated almost universally in polemical tracts, poetry and fiction celebrated adult romantic, and even transgressive love.

Swami Vivekananda pointed out two great evils in India - trampling on the women and grinding of the poor. The uplift of the women and the awakening of the masses must come first and then only any real good can be

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55 Ignoring the fact that rulers like Akbar attempted to abolish sati and that Muslim law accorded women a higher status than Hindu law.
about for our country. In India, Hindu religious cults defined the power of the woman through the goddess they worship. The Brahmin priests dropped some of their own male gods and incorporated fertility cults into the worship of Lord Shiva going further on to provide Brahmanical husbands for non-Brahmanical mother goddesses. The same Brahmin priests upheld Manu’s low opinion of women and his ways of treating women. This shows that the Brahmins tried to resolve the contradiction culturally and politically first by acknowledging that women do have power, and then trying to establish and perpetuate theory that the same power must be controlled by men in society lest it should become dangerous. This gradually led to the control of women by men till the time when women became totally powerless at filial, social, cultural, political and economic levels.

The issues affecting the women’s movement in India which require careful consideration are the tensions and fractures in the movement, the way these fractures are related to women’s relationship to the nation state, which at least partly follows from women being owned by their families, communities, and even nation, the possibility of managing or transcending differences among women and the significance of women’s agency in gender politics. Women were on the forefront of all the main items on the agenda of the social reform movement.

For reformers, women’s emancipation was a prerequisite to national regeneration and an index of national achievement in the connected discourse of civilization, progress, modernity, and nationalism. One strand in the movement concentrated on legislative remedy. A series of campaigns resulted in the abolition of Sati in 1829 and the enabling of widow remarriage in 1856. Another strand concerned with the female counterpart of the new male

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61 Tagore made a bid to break free from the clichéd stereotype of victimhood of women and tried to prioritize the well-being as opposed to the ill-being of women, the two categories identified by Amartya Sen in his emphasis that the gendered resistance writing is about representation of women as active agents of social change. Sanjukta Dasgupta, Three Modern Women; Tagore’s Transgressive Texts, (Krishna Sen and Tapati Guha ed), Tagore and Modernity, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, 2006, p. 77.
elite, “New Women”, who would share the sensibilities of the men in the family and be able to sustain their new class roles. The chief instrument was formal education but the issue became inextricably linked with the gender segregation and seclusion practiced by the upper castes and classes and, by extension, with a reworking of public-private gender roles.

By the second half of the nineteenth century there were reform groups in all parts of British India. Their activity acted as stimulus and encouraged reform minded individuals in other areas, and gradually reformist organizations with an all-India identity began to emerge. Women’s non-participation in the social and political affairs, their sexual subjugation to their role as man’s plaything, their lack of autonomy in the use of their bodies, and their backward consciousness which made them accept their low social position was now lamented.

The most horrible evil among women was Sati. Though the burning of widow was not sanctioned by the orthodox law givers at that time, the practice was known in the north west, because the Greek writers refer to the widow of an Indian commander who burned herself on the pyre of her husband. ‘Sati’ actually is an ancient Sanskrit term, meaning a chaste woman who thinks of no other man than her husband. It represents the purest form of woman; the purity that has tremendous power. The word ‘Sati’ started as the name of daughter of Raja Daksha, and wife of Lord Shiva. Other famous woman in Hindu literature titled Sati was Savitri, wife of Satyavan. These two women along with other women in Hindu mythology who were exceptionally devoted to their husbands symbolized the truthful Indian wife who would do everything for their husband and they were named Sati. But as women named Sati, in Hindu religious literature, did not commit suicide.

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65 [http://adaniel.tripod.com-Sati-Burning of Hindu Widow](http://adaniel.tripod.com-Sati-Burning of Hindu Widow). Daksha went to attend a ceremonial occasion planned by her father, though uninvited and against the will of her husband, unaware of the fact that the occasion was kept for humiliating Lord Shiva, she went there convincing him that going to her parents was her right. When she found that her husband was getting abused, she became so angry that she jumped into the flame of burning fire praying to be reborn again as the new consort of Shiva, which she became and her name in the new incarnation was Parvati.
on their dead husband's pyre, therefore the custom of burning the widow on her dead husband's pyre probably did not evolve from religious background but from social background that too at a very later stage.

There are different theories about the origins of Sati like; to prevent wives from poisoning their wealthy husbands and marry their real lovers; a jealous queen who heard that dead kings would be welcomed in heaven by hundreds of beautiful women, called Apsaras. Even though Sati is considered an Indian custom or a Hindu custom it was not practiced all over India by all Hindus but only among certain communities of India. This custom was also prevalent among Egyptians, Greeks, Goethe, Scythians and others. Another theory claims that Sati was probably brought to India by the Scythian invaders of India.66

However, this custom gradually became of general use by the age of Guptas and Vardhans especially among the ruling families.67 This would make her Sati. The earlier historical evidence of this practice dates from 510 A.D. when it was commemorated in stone inscription at Eran.68

During the Muslim rule, the socio-economic status of Hindu women were very much lowered and had to depend on the Hindu male in every activity. Another one of the immediate impacts of Islam on the condition of women was the introduction of Purdah system in an elaborate and institutionalized form. Prof. R. C. Mazumdar says Hindus adopted purdah system as a protective measure to save the honour of their women folk and to maintain the purity of social order. Later on it even became compulsion and

67 B. N. Lunia, Life and Culture in Ancient India, Lakshami Narain Aggarwal, Agra, 2005, p.345. This custom is occasionally referred to by Bhasa, Kalidasa and Sudraka in their works. However another view is that this was not a normal practice at that time nor it acquired a religious sanction as it became later on. Bhana in the seventh century A.D. seems to look upon this practice with some disfavour. Examples like Harsha’s own mother who died as Sati and his sister’s dramatic escape from the funeral pyre of her husband are there. A few other historical examples of the queens and other ladies of high families immolating themselves include, among others, queens of Yaskara and his successor Kshemagupta of Kashmir, a lady probably early in the reigns of the Chola king Prantaka I, and the queen of Sundara Chola. Arab writer Suleiman also refers to the wives of the kings sometimes burning themselves on the funeral pyre of their husbands.
proof of their chastity for centuries onwards. Among the Muslims too, the liberals regarded lessening the restrictions of purdah, if not its abolition, as a necessary part of social and educational reform for their women. These various reforms would grant women greater dignity and status within the family and would permit them to perform better traditional roles, and thus in turn would benefit the nation.\(^{69}\) Though efforts were being made by some reformers like Raja Rammohun Rai, Davindra Nath Tagore, Keshab Chander Sen, Vivian Derozio, Ishvar Chandra Vidyasagar etc. to eradicate these evils in the period of Indian Renaissance (the nineteenth century) having its genesis mainly in the importation of western ideas and values and by rediscovering of our own past

Reform, actually a return to the past according to most social reformers, was in harmony with both natural law and dictates of reason. Rammohun Roy wrote of women who were forced upon pyre, bound with ropes so that they would perish with their husbands. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar championed female education and led the campaign to legalize widow remarriage, and D. K. Karve wrote of a caste widow who fell victim to the passion of some brute.\(^{70}\) According to reformers these customs were perverted, twisted, distorted practices born of ignorance and fear and followed without recourse to common sense.\(^{71}\)

The first generation of western educated young men had evoked reason as the touchstone for both ideas and action. These later advocates of social reform combined rationalism with their appeal to revive the golden age. According to Swami Vivekananda, there should be no hesitation in applying the full panoply of Western analytical methods to the science of religion.\(^{72}\) Swami Dayananda made it clear that he would not defend the falsehoods of the Hindu religion but would unveil them just as he had exposed the errors of


\(^{71}\) Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India, Women In Modern India*, p. 17.

other religions.\textsuperscript{73} Rai Salig Ram, also known as Huzur Maharaj, a follower of the Radhasoami faith, advocated female emancipation in his prose volumes, \textit{Prem Patra}.\textsuperscript{74} In South India, R. Venkata Ratnam Naidu opposed the \textit{devdasi} system while Virasalingam Pantulu worked towards the reformation in the opportunities for female marriage. Both of them worked towards opportunities for female education.\textsuperscript{75} Kandukuri Virasalingam Pantulu (1848-1919) made widow remarriage and female education the key points of his program for social change in Madras presidency. In Maharashtra, Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade built an important institution for social reform—the National Social Conference in 1887. Ranade described the society he hoped to see as changing from constraint to freedom, from credulity to faith, from unorganized to organized life, from bigotry to toleration, from blind fatalism to a sense of human destiny. He warned his critics that to stand still or work against change would result in decay and possibly the extinction of Indian society. He suggested four methods of social change; argumentation as the most favourite, moral arguments, legislation and social rebellion.\textsuperscript{76} About social reformers, Sumit Sarkar voices a point of dissent. He argues that these reformers were concerned primarily with modifying relationships within their own families and sought only limited and controlled emancipation of their womenfolk.\textsuperscript{77} Tagore had heard Ramabai saying that women can do anything that man can, except drinking alcohol. He wrote a short essay called \textit{Ramabai-er-Baktritar Upalakhse} (with reference to Ramabai’s lecture). In this he reiterated two long-held myths about the sexual division of labour. First, women are born physically weak and also that women are quick witted but do not have a strong intellect like men. According to him, though most Western women learnt music, none of them had become a Mozart.\textsuperscript{78} Secondly, since nature had shaped women to become mothers, this automatically

\textsuperscript{73} M. K. Haldar, \textit{Renaissance and Reaction In Nineteenth Century Bengal: Bankim Chandra Chatterjee}, South Asia Books, Columbia, 1977, p. 188.
\textsuperscript{74} Shoma A. Chatterji, \textit{Women In Perspective Essays on Gender Issues}, p. 211.
\textsuperscript{75} Geraldine Forbes, \textit{Women In Modern India}, pp. 18-19.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 212.
\textsuperscript{77} Sumit Sarkar, \textit{The Women’s Question in the Nineteenth Century Bengal, Women and Culture}, (Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid ed), Research Centre for Women’s Studies, Bombay, p. 106.
\textsuperscript{78} Nirmala Bannerjee, \textit{Sexual Division of Labour- Myths and Reality in the Indian Context}, (Jasodhara Bagchi ed), \textit{Indian Women: Myth and Reality}, p. 73.
decreed that outside work is beyond their world of work and life. Man is supreme in the outward activities of a married world, and therefore, it is in the fitness of things that he should have a greater knowledge thereof. On the other hand, home life is entirely the sphere of women, and therefore in domestic affairs, in the upbringing of children and their education, women ought to have more knowledge.\(^79\) Gandhi reinforced the sexual division of labour, which led, according to Karl Marx, to inequality between the sexes. In other words the sexual division of labour is merely a reasonable arrangement between consenting adults- man the provider and woman the nurturer.

Swami Vivekananda did not hesitate in using harsh words against those who called women gateways to Hell. He sprouted forth his wrath, “We are horrible sinners, and our degradation is due to our calling women ‘despicable worms’, ‘gateways to hell,” and so forth. Goodness gracious! There is all the difference between heaven and hell!\(^80\) Countrymen! How long will you suffer yourselves to be led away by illusions! Open your eyes for once and see, that India, once the land of virtue, is being over flooded by the stream of adultery and foeticide. The degradation to which you have sunk is sadly low. Dip into the spirit of your Shastras, follow its dictates, and you shall be able to remove the foul blot from the face of your country.\(^81\)

In his book *The Subjection of Women*, John Stuart Mill had said, “The principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes–the legal subordination of one sex to the other- is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances of human improvement, and it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on one side, nor disability on the other”.The patriarchal system has its material base in male control over women’s productive and reproductive labour through the institution called the family. Socialist feminism analyses the power of men over women in terms of its class origin and patriarchal roots.\(^82\) The *Maitrayani Samhita* repeatedly says that her body is not her own, so she can not prevent herself from being molested. Violence thrives in the victim’s

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\(^82\) Shoma A Chatterji, *Women In Perspective, Essays on Gender Issues*, p. 44.
acceptance of the victimizer’s moral right, social superiority and physical power.\textsuperscript{83} Lata Mani gives an excellent account of the different sources of using and misusing the woman within the frame work of Sati and other social evils.\textsuperscript{84}

The women’s movement in India was built on the nineteenth century social reform movement. While the liberal section of the new elite demanded legal and administrative initiative from the colonial state in their reform project, more conservative Indian opinion resisted colonial intervention into traditional social relations. Both groups were redefining tradition and, therefore, “Indianness.” Women were neither the subject nor the object of this discourse, but merely the site on which the debates were conducted. And even as the recast tradition came to occupy the core of modern Indian identity, gender as the exemplary site became and remains central to political and cultural processes of identity formation.\textsuperscript{85}

Social change, in British terms social reform, became such an important issue that our accounts of Indian women in the early part of the nineteenth century are often imbedded within discussions of Sati, child marriage, widowhood, and prohibitions on education. Debates over social issues construed women as victims or heroines, denying them complex personalities and agency. Tradition was thus not the ground on which the status of women was being contested. Rather the reverse was true: women in fact became the site on which tradition was debated and reformulated.\textsuperscript{86}

Those who accepted the idea that society’s ills could be traced to the oppressed condition of women saw female education and female emancipation as the first steps towards progress. But both these groups –those who extolled gender relations and those convinced of the need for reform-shared an ideology, later linked to the nationalist project that separated home from the world. According to Partha Chatterjee, Indians pursued science, technology, rational economics and western political forms while regarding

\textsuperscript{83} Sukumari Bhattacharji, \textit{Violence To Women}, (Shefali Moitra ed), \textit{Women, Heritage and Violence}, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{84} Lata Mani, \textit{Contentious Traditions- The Debate on Sati in Colonial India}, \textit{Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History}, p. 118.
\textsuperscript{85} Bimla Sen, \textit{Role of Women in Nation Building}, p. 61.
the home as the source of true identity that needed protection and strengthening, not transformation.\textsuperscript{87}

India’s former President K. R. Narayanan in his republic day speech on January 25, 2000 said, “One of the clearest indicators of the development of a society is the position and status women enjoy in that society”. The problem of women in India is symbolic of the problem of inequalities and injustices in our society in general. Without social reform to substantially improve women’s status, regeneration seemed doomed to failure. Indians of nineteenth century were obsessed with the issues of strength and power. They needed an explanation for the weakness and an answer to the question of how to build up their strength.

Swami Vivekananda advocated liberty as the first condition of growth. The worship of the Goddess, reverence for the motherland, and a commitment to female education and improving the status of women became the triple vow of the modern man. Vivekananda regarded most of the contemporary social reform programs as inadequate. Change was essential but not through reliance on Western concepts. It must come from the people, guided and educated by the intelligentsia.\textsuperscript{88} Instead of calling the Hindus ‘heathens’, ‘wretches’, ‘slaves’, say, “So far your work is wonderful, but that is not all. You have much more to do. God bless you that you have developed this side of woman as a mother. Now help the other side--the wife of men”. It is not that the Hindus had not those ideals, but they could not develop them.\textsuperscript{89} ‘It is wrong, a thousands wrong, if anyone of you dares to say ‘I will work out the salvation of this woman or child’. I am asked again and again, what I think of the widow problems and what I think of the women questions. Let me answer once for all. Am I a widow, that you ask me this non-sense question again and again? Who are you to solve women’s problems”?\textsuperscript{90} “Total freedom and independence is the symbol of total womanhood”, Vivekananda believed.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{88} Tapan Raychaudhary, \textit{Europe Reconsidered}, p. 338.
\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda}, Volume IX, pp. 197.
\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda}, Volume III, p. 246.
Vivekananda knew full well that total liberation means physical, mental, social and spiritual freedom. Unless a person, man or woman, learns to cultivate a sense of freedom from the biological demands of the body, the thousand cravings of the mind, and an unobstructed feeling of the essential divinity within, there is no freedom for an individual. He wanted to combine the breadth born of American freedom and the depth and intensity of Indian spirituality for the women of India tomorrow who would be women of towering spirituality, and outstanding achievements, combining the finest and noblest of the old and the new. The definition of the term ‘liberation’ changes from society to society and from time to time. The perspective of looking at liberation of women creates conflicts and contradictions within women themselves, creating a society where a few women are considered to be representative of their respective nations, while millions of others lead oppressive, ignorant and humiliating lives. Indian woman is no exception to that, rather is a classic example of this jarring anomaly.

No doubt women became the arena in which community, caste, and class battles were fought but some women who joined the revolutionary movement transgressed stereotypical gender roles, though they were few and exceptional. Their political achievements were valorized, but society did not consider them respectable or representative. Pritilata Waddedar, the most celebrated female martyr of the freedom movement, asked an impassioned question that could not be answered within the dominant gender ideology of nationalism, “I wonder why there should be any distinction between males and females in a fight for the cause of the country’s freedom. If our brothers can join a fight for the cause of the motherland why can’t the sisters? The pages of history are replete with high admiration for the historic exploits of … distinguished ladies. Then why should we, the modern Indian women, be deprived of joining this noble fight to redeem our country from foreign domination? If sisters can stand side by side with the brothers in Satyagraha movement, why are they not so entitled in a revolutionary movement?

92 Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Admirers, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, 1964, pp. 202-04.
94 Bimla Sen, Role of Women in Nation Building, p. 73.
strong advocate of equality of womankind, Swami Vivekananda recommended even Brahmacharya irrespective of sex though this stage is difficult to follow and exist with it even, in a highly liberal society. But he said that self control is equally needed by all. He further said, “My whole ambition of life is to set in motion machinery which will bring noble ideas to the door of everybody and then let men and women settle their fate”. In this respect, he even criticized Buddha, whom otherwise he holds in highest esteem, who put the Bhikhshuni Sangha under the control of the Bhikshu Sangha. He further said, “When you will realize that all illuminating truth of the atman (Soul), then you will see that the idea of sex discrimination has vanished altogether, then only you will look upon all women as the veritable manifestation of Brahma.

To be a woman in India means that you are the store house of tradition and culture and, in contrast, a volcano of seething energy, of strength and power that can motivate a whole generation to change its values, its aspirations and its very concept of civilized life. Anthropologists and Sociologists have analysed the extended family in India, its cyclical development and predicted its demise prematurely because the novelists deplored it as a brake on individual development and expression. The extended family may never have been, the predominant living pattern in India, and yet is regarded as the norm because it provides the individual with essential points of reference. If group solidarity limits individual choices, it also holds a number of advantages: effective bonds can be strong; reciprocal obligations are respected, and support is usually available in times of trouble. The extended family provides a number of social services and does so more humanly, and usually more humanely than public institutions.

Women were an important component of the traditional structure. A woman’s traditional role was two fold and normatively ambiguous. She as a wife was under the control of her conjugal family, ideally self-effacing and

obedient. As a mother she was nurturing but also punishing. She could be fearful, and increasingly with age, powerful and self-sufficient. An older woman would have some say in the manner of her sons’ and daughters’ marriages, further cementing alliances with other influential and landed lineages, decisions which had political ramifications.\textsuperscript{99} If Indian men were to claim political rights for themselves, it behooved them to grant greater rights to their women, through increasing their opportunities for education, rising the legal age for their marriage, and reforming inheritance laws.\textsuperscript{100}

In comparison to most cultures, the role of men and women has been socially constructed in India. This means, culture dictates the socially acceptable roles for members of society. In India, \textit{dharma} or the moral order influences the roles of men and women. \textit{Dharma} has come to be understood as “that which is established, customary, or proper” In addition, \textit{dharma} signifies one’s duty, responsibility, or moral responsibility. For example, \textit{Svadharma} is understood as one’s moral obligation as per one’s position in India’s social order. \textit{Rajadharma} is the \textit{dharma} of kings. \textit{Varnadharma} is the \textit{dharma} of one’s caste and \textit{Stridharma} is the \textit{dharma} of women. Under \textit{stridharma}, the \textit{dharma} of women entails devotion to one’s husband. He is essentially her “lord”, for the very word husband (\textit{Pati}) means both husband and lord. Obedience to and dependence upon men characterizes women’s traditional roles in the family. In a conversation between mythological characters Sandili and Sumana, when asked by Sumana how she had attained divinity and was residing in heaven, Sandili replied that it was not through performance of any religious rite or penance but through fidelity and loyalty to her husband that she became a goddess.

Swami Vivekananda differentiated the West and the East on the ground that in the West, every woman other than a mother is a wife. But in India, every woman other than a wife is a mother’. In the western home, the wife rules. In an Indian home, the mother rules. If a mother comes into a Western home, she has to be subordinate to the wife; to the wife belongs the home. A

mother always lives in our homes: the wife must be subordinate to her. If you ask, “What is an Indian woman as wife”? the Indian asks, “Where is the American woman as mother”? There is no country other than India, no society other than the Hindu society that has been more moral. Correlating the whole culture to few occasional incidences, which are criminal acts, would be absolutely wrong, diverting and intentional towards defaming the highest value society of the world.\(^\text{102}\)

Women are the pillars of a house, worshipped in temples and the planet is called ‘Mother Earth’.\(^\text{103}\) Men are stronger, but women are more powerful (In Hindu society, women are called ‘\textit{Shakti Swaroop}’, meaning Goddess of Power). Strength and power are two different aspects. Strength persists in body, while power is a mental attribute. Women are the prestige of any house. Swami Vivekananda glorified motherhood, “The mother is the God in our family. The idea is that the only real love that we see in the world, the most unselfish love is in the mother-always suffering, always loving. And what love can represent the love of God more than the love, which we see in the mother? Thus the mother is the incarnation of God on earth to the Hindu”.\(^\text{104}\)

You never hear of a mother cursing the child, she is always forgiving. Many children have been wicked, but there never was a wicked mother. Every incarnation worshipped Mother in public or in secret, or how could he have got energy?\(^\text{105}\) The Motherhood of God was more in Vivekananda’s mind than Fatherhood. That is why he remarked, when someone in the West asked Vivekananda why he became a monk, “Why should I marry when I see only the Divine Mother in every woman”?\(^\text{106}\)

The writer of ‘\textit{Philokalia}', the well-known scripture of Christianity, belonging to fifteenth century A.D., wrote, “Shall I show you another path to

105 \textit{Letters of Sister Nivedita}, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, p. 221.
106 \textit{Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda}, Volume III, p. 472. To his disciples at Hundred Island Park he told: “The worship of even one spark of Mother in our earthly mother leads to greatness. Worship Her if you want love and wisdom”.


salvation or, rather, to dispassion? Though your entreaties constrain the Creator not to let you fail in your purpose. Constantly bring before him as intercessors all the angelic powers, all the saints, and especially the most pure Mother of God”.

In his Christian glorification of the Motherhood of God, Vivekananda wrote: “Jehovah’, ‘Jesus’ and the Trinity are secondary: the worship is for the mother-She, the mother, with the child Jesus in her arms. The emperor cries ‘Mother’, the field-marshal cries Mother’, the soldier with the flag in hand, cries ‘Mother’,...the seaman at helm cries ‘Mother’, the fisherman in his rags cries ‘Mother’, the beggar in the street cries Mother’,...Everywhere is the cry ‘Ave Maria’; day and night, ‘Ave Maria’, ‘Ave Maria’.”

It is nearly 150 years since Sri Ramakrishna worshipped Mother Kali. Today Kali is equated to the infinite creative power within “every woman. A feminist Judy Graham writes, “Woman can create; that is the power. Man can only control”.

The mid-nineteenth century India saw women, the great mother power, shackled and degenerated to mere ‘child producing machines’, She was denied the power to read the Vedas, the Gita, or recite the Gayatri and even Om! In a Smriti called Dharma Sindhu, occurs a discriminatory verse, which asks the women not to worship Shalagrama and Shivalinga. Women could worship from a distance without touching the Shalagrama and Shivalinga. After the advent of Sri Ramakrishna these traditions have been exploded. Ramakrishna was the first incarnation of God to have a woman as his guru. And he had his first vision of Christ not on the Cross but on the lap of Virgin Mother Mary. Ramakrishna will be remembered as the son of Mother, just as Jesus is remembered as the son of Father.

109 Spretnak Charlene, Politics of Women’s Spirituality, p. 265. Another feminist Barbara Starrett writes “The mind acts its thoughts through intensity. This is creativity, and it is unlimited in its possibilities. It is the eternal intensity of becoming, of expanding, and breaking through boundaries, of the soul's hunger to know, to create, and to transform.....It is the Kali within us”.
111 Christopher Isherwood, Ramakrishna and His Disciples, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, 2001, p. 99.
Sister Christine wrote that for weeks and months, Vivekananda would be buried in thought, creating and recreating the splendid image of the Indian woman of the future. The liberty, the dynamism and efficiency, and even the purity of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi overwhelmed him. At the same time the undying historic images of Sita, Savitri, Damayanti, Ahalyabai and Padmini, fascinated him even more. Would a combination of the western spirit of independence, freedom, and dynamism with Indian austerity, purity and chastity in woman's life be possible? He knew it would be possible.

Swami Vivekananda had a very great respect for Sita of the Ramayana and he was never tired of indicating her as the very ideal of Indian woman. Modern girls may think this ideal of Indian woman, rather old fashioned and unsuitable for the modern age. But really Sita was a very modern girl - firm, courageous, self-dependent and yet she was a typical Indian woman. All the Indian ideals of perfect woman have grown out of that one life of Sita. Swami Vivekananda was of the opinion that every Indian Women should strive hard to be a Sita in the truest sense of the term.

Women in statesmanship, managing territories, governing countries, even making war, have proved themselves equal to men, if not superior. In India, whenever women had the opportunity, they proved that they had as much ability as men. They kept to the moral standard, which was innate in their nature. And thus as governors and rulers of their state, they prove at least in India far superior to men. John Stuart Mill mentions this fact. He had great faith in women. Women are not weak, not ignorant, not immoral, just the contrary. But they lack opportunities, they lack training, give them both. So don't condemn them as helpless, powerless, and inefficient. But give them the fullest chances for self reform and self dependence. Two different races mix and fuse, and out of them raise one strong distinct type.

Vivekananda took the initiative which not even Buddha dared to do. He saw the weakness of body-consciousness behind Western chivalry. "Why should I help you?" he told a Western woman disciple. "That is chivalry and

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114 Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume IX, p. 201.
don't you see that chivalry is only sex? Don't you see what is behind all these attentions from men to women? To Nivedita, Vivekananda said that if he could conquer India with his ideas, with five hundred monks within fifty years, with five hundred nuns he could conquer the same India within a few weeks. Today his words have proved true. Following the footsteps of Sarada Devi and Sister Nivedita, hundreds of women all over the world are coming forward with a combination of 'the mother's heart and the hero's will,' a combination of the purity of Holy Mother and the dynamism of Rani of Jhansi or Joan of Arc.

Men and women were dependent on each other; but the women had their own world where they were supreme. It was an enclosed and limited world, but one in which their competence was counted. They were dependent upon men economically, but also remarkably self-sufficient. For women, their world was central to life and the outer world peripheral. The men were totally dependent on them for comfort and sustenance. This sense of competence, self-sufficiency, and importance should not be overlooked in assessing the lives of women.

Actually Vivekananda neither favoured the discarding of the ancient customs in toto, nor accepted these customs as such. Every social custom, old or new, is to be judged strictly on merit and merit alone. For him, the reform is self-reform. But, everywhere under the Sun you find the same blending of the good and the bad. So we need not trouble our heads prematurely about such reforms, as the abolition of early marriage, the remarriage of widows and so on. As a matter of fact, so called social reformers and workers ordinarily assume a superior attitude, as if it is they who are really leading the poor, the ignorant masses to salvation. He was against this attitude and took special pains to warn all against it repeatedly in all cases. Women were to be the beneficiaries of the actions of the men, not actors on their own.

116 Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Admirers, p.198.
behalf. Women became symbolic, not only of all that was wrong with cultural and religious life, but also of all that was worth preserving.\textsuperscript{119}

He opposed child marriages. When orthodox Hindus opposed ‘Age of Consent Bill’, he remarked, “And about your religious hypocrites, the less said, the better! As if religion consists in making a girl a mother at the age of twelve or thirteen!”\textsuperscript{120} In the twenty first century, this statement may be looked from the angle that where the modern girl under the garb of freedom and individuality is heading for before marriage. At the same time he cautioned that girls should be educated to avoid the consequences of adult marriages. They should value and consequently hold the vow of chastity, even at the cost of their lives. Swami Vivekananda did not support widow marriages as such as he was in favour of protecting the marriages as sacred bonds. He advocated monogamy for men and women alike. No doubt in ancient India, polygamy, widow marriage even divorce was allowed but the ideal was always monogamy, chastity, fidelity, self-control and self-sacrifice for both men and women alike.\textsuperscript{121} In his first tract on widow remarriage, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar claimed that this practice was permissible in \textit{Kali Yuga} (The Dark Age), the age in which he and his contemporaries lived. Two thousand copies of this book were sold in the first week, a reprint of three thousand soon sold out and the third print was of ten thousand copies.\textsuperscript{122} But not everyone was convinced. On the streets of Calcutta, Vidyasagar found himself insulted, abused, and even threatened with death.\textsuperscript{123}

Modern view considers marriage as an individual affair while earlier it was considered social one. Swami Vivekananda supporting the later version, asserted that so long as you lived in the society, your marriage certainly affects every member of it; and therefore, society has the right to dictate whom you shall marry and whom you shall not.\textsuperscript{124} In this period of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Gail Minault, \textit{Gender, Language, and Learning- Essays in Indo-Muslim Cultural History}, p. 65.
\item \textit{Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda}, Volume V, p. 257.
\item Asok Sen, \textit{Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and His Elusive Milestones}, Riddlu-India, Calcutta, 1977, p. 60.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
globalization, when the revolutionary changes are taking place in the social field, it does not look practically possible to do so. But there are two things involved in it, which make this view of Swami Vivekananda highly modern, legitimate and still introspective. One the rules by which society is being governed socially are the dictates of the society. Secondly, should the basic spirit of happy life behind marriage be discarded? If one method appears to be outdated, should the basic principle be done away with? The basic principle is eternal and must always be there. The method should be new and reformed one.\(^{125}\) Moreover, entirely based on individual approach to marry and divorce as per choice is the institution of marriage more successful in the West than here? Are the free women happier here? Whether the society in the West is more stable, happy and peaceful than in the East? Even in America the condition of women is very disturbing.

Despite the entire cry for 'Women's Lib', the true spirit of liberty never came to western women because they neglected the true freedom, the spiritual freedom. They concentrated only on body-mind complex. The result was slavery and bondage, and the sense of guilt inevitably born of a sensate life. Betty Friedan, after twenty years of her first book The Feminine Mystique, stood disillusioned. Her book ‘The Second Stage’ provoked modern woman to think that the image of 'Superwoman', which they tried to build in unrestricted liberty, would probably end in a wild goose chase.

Charlene Spretnak, a feminist thinker wrote in the introduction of her book on women's liberty ‘The Politics of Women's Spirituality’ “I began life firmly entrenched in the Judeo-Christian tradition, experienced a disappointing emptiness at orientation and finally began making personal discoveries of the spiritual dimensions of the life... The world view inherent in feminist spirituality is, like female mind, holistic and integrative”.\(^{126}\) Joseph Campbell tracing the universality of Great Goddess and Great mother finds in female figurines, 'the first object of worship by the species Homo

\(^{125}\) Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume, p. 411. In America, a woman is beaten in every 18 minute. Women are sold for the sexual pleasure in the jails. Moreover, when the marriage is as per choice then why breaking up so easily.

\(^{126}\) Spretnak Charlene, Politics of Women’s Spirituality, p. 21.
Sapiens. Judy Chicago, another feminist, writes, “As men gained control of social and political forces, the power of the Goddess was diminished or destroyed ...The originally benevolent power of this Goddess began to be viewed as negative, destructive or evil... After the Jewish patriarchs succeeded in destroying Goddess worships, women came to be treated as chattel”. Swami Vivekananda was bold enough to speak the plain truth without any fear of criticism or applause. If you do not give opportunities to one to become a lion, no wonder, that he will become a cunning fox. Women are Shakti or power but that Shakti is being used for bad purposes alone. The reason for that is that men are oppressing them. So, they are like vixen only. But when there will not be any more oppression, then, they will surely become lioness.

Our cultural vocabulary suffers from a serious gender bias. Terms like ‘decency’, ‘modesty’, ‘decorum’, and ‘morality’ assume new meanings when they are assigned to women. If you take a closer look, they are used mostly to refer to women alone, particularly by the westerners regarding Indian women. Swami Vivekananda pointed out this. What is meant by those pictures in the school-books for children where the Hindu mother is painted as throwing her children to the crocodiles in the Ganga? The mother is black, but the baby is painted white, to arouse more sympathy, and get more money. What is meant by the pictures of huge cars crushing over human beings? I have heard one of these gentlemen preach in Memphis that, in every village of India, there is a pond of the bones of little babies... What have the Hindus done to these disciples of Christ that every Christian child is taught to call the Hindus ‘vile’ and ‘wretched’ and the most horrible demons on earth?"

History reveals the gender bias in the moral policing in Indian women’s way of dressing too. Clothing and fashion became a means of social control, legitimizing moral and social distinctions between and among women. On February 9, 2008, on the occasion of launch of a journal,

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‘Supreme Court on Section 13 of the Indian Marriage Act, 1955’, and the release of the monthly newspaper, *Judicial Empire*, the Chief Justice of Karnataka, Cyriac Joseph remarked, “Nowadays, women wear such kind of dresses even in temples and churches that when we go to places of worship, instead of meditating on God, we end up meditating on the person (read woman) before us”. “Provocative dresses that women wear in buses put the men traveling in buses in awkward situations and hence women must dress modestly”.  

The reaction is obvious too. By blaming women for being improperly dressed, men are being permitted to dictate to women what they should or should not wear in public. Then who gives the power to accuse the Taliban for attacking the women who accidentally revealed her exposed arm while driving? Why can not men be taught to control and mind their manners, their language, their body language, their libidos and their attitude to women instead?

No religion in the world has been exception to the superior attitude of the male or this male policing. Christian church has brought out under the supervision or N.C.C. (National Council of Churches) a new version of the *Bible* where the word Lord has been translated without a male-bias as ‘The Sovereign one’, and ‘Father in Heaven’ is written as Our ‘Mother and Father in heaven.’ In April 1976 meeting of Vatican on the subject of the ordinability of women, the seventeen commission members had voted 17 to 0 that the New Testament does not settle in a clearway and once for all whether women can be ordained as priests. Unfortunately the old orthodoxy still lingers. A few years ago when Anglican Church ordained three women as bishops, the Vatican felt that the chances of the union of Roman-Catholics and Anglicans had grown weaker. However, Merlin Stone writes: The

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132 Shoma A Chatterji, *Women In Perspective, Essays on Gender Issues*, p. 79. In the simplest form, power is defined as “a person’s ability to control or change the behaviour of others and the ability to realize his/her will against opposition”.


134 Swami Jitatmananda, *Swami Vivekananda Prophet and Pathfinder*, p. 256. The Commission also voted 12-5 that Christ’s plan would not be transgressed by permitting the ordination of women.
supremacy of ‘Father in heaven’ is a mere reflection of the supremacy of ‘Father on earth’.  

No major religious faith in the world except Sikhism required its adherents to observe equal rights between men and women. Sadly, overtime, discrimination against women reached disgraceful levels even amongst the Sikhs. To the point that the most respected places of Sikh worship disallow women the privilege of sitting in certain areas in the august halls of God’s own sacred domain. Even in the Harimandir Sahib this practice is observed.

Of women are we born, of women conceived, to women engaged, to women married, Women we befriend, by women is civilization continued. When woman dies, woman is sought for. It is by woman that order is maintained.

Then why call her evil from which great men are born?
From woman is woman born, And without woman none would exist.
The eternal Lord is the only one, O Nanak, Who depends not on woman.  

Sayyid Mumtaz Ali lists the following arguments as basis for man’s superiority. 1. God gave more physical strength to men. 2. Superior intellectual powers to men, 3. Men are superior in religious matters as there are only male prophets, 4. Verses of Quran are frequently used in support of male domination, like the testimony of two women is equal to that of one man.

135 Rich Adrienne, Of Women Born, p. 115. Carol P. Christ wrote: “Religions centered on the worship of a male God creates 'moods' and 'motivations' that keep women in a state of psychological dependence on men and male authority...” Bachofen wrote: “Matriarchy is necessary to the education of mankind and particularly of men...It is woman's vocation to tame men's primordial strength, to guide it into benign channels”.
137 Gail Minault, Gender, Language, and Learning- Essays in Indo-Muslim Cultural History, p. 65. Mumtaz Ali advocated that greater physical strength does not mean that men are superior because a donkey can carry more weight than a man can do. Man in the sense of human is higher in intellectual capacity than other animals, but men and women are of the same species and thus must be compared to other animals as one. Moreover, with lesser intellect the coming generations will be stupid as intelligence would be transmitted in lesser degree in each succeeding generation. Many prophets have not been recorded in history and there were many women as high as other prophets. The testimony of two
In the late nineteenth century with increased urbanization and the growth of new professions associated with colonial domination, work was increasingly separated from the home. Paralleling this change was the establishment of new educational, religious and social institutions and the erosion of traditional household activity. Some of the girls started attending educational institutions, social gatherings unrelated to family affairs, and new religious ceremonies. These ‘new women’ as they were called, were part of modernizing movement which sought to modify gender relations in the direction of greater equality between men and women.\textsuperscript{138} Regarding solutions to women's problems, Swami Vivekananda said, “Our right of interference is limited entirely to giving education”?\textsuperscript{139} He states very clearly that women must be put in a position to solve their own problems in their own ways and our Indian women are as capable of doing so as any in the world. Sometimes he questioned, “In matters concerning women, who are you? Who are you to solve women's problems? Are you the lord God that you should rule every widow and every woman? Hands off! They can solve their own problems”.\textsuperscript{140}

Swami Vivekananda saw lack of education as the fundamental cause of the downfall of women from the high Vedic tradition. He saw remedy too in education. Education that will give strength and it must include the development of an ideal character.\textsuperscript{141} But what kind of education, especially woman's education? Swami Vivekananda realized that it is the worship of Uma Kumari, the Divine Mother, the embodiment of all power, should be in the girl students. And this education would, in time, bring out the purest and the strongest in all women, her infinite mother.

Sister Christine wrote, “Some of us believe that if Swami Vivekananda's ideas regarding the education of woman are carried out in true spirit, a being will be evolved who will be unique in the history of the world. As the woman of ancient Greece was almost perfect physically, this one will be her complement intellectually and spiritually -a woman, gracious, loving,

\textsuperscript{138} Geraldine Forbes, \textit{Women in Modern India}, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda}, Volume VI, p. 448.
\textsuperscript{140} \textit{Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda}, Volume V, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda}, Volume VI, p. 81.
tender, long-suffering, great in heart and intellect, but greatest of all in spirituality”.

In the material world, you need a male psychology to be one up over others in the market place, to be successful in the rat race. But, in the realm of religion and spirituality, it is just the opposite. Here you have to become natural. Nature is feminine. The powerful Sun comes and knocks at your door and waits patiently outside waiting for you to open the door. Great masters are feminine. Buddha is feminine, Jesus is feminine. It was Friedrich Nietzsche who first pointed out that Buddha and Jesus are feminine. He meant it as criticism though. But it is a compliment of superlative quality. It is the greatest appreciation because from being aggressively masculine they became hosts; they became open and vulnerable to existence.

There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women, said Kofi Annan, former Secretary General, United Nations. Woman empowerment means empowering women to be free in developing their potential according to their ability, which was denied to them in the past just because of their gender Vivekananda believed that following these new ideals of education, a race of 'Supermen' and 'Superwomen' would merge in future who could combine perfect freedom with perfect authority.

Swami Vivekananda desired woman social workers who would work consistently, unselfishly, in full spirit with the doctrine of Karma. He even wished to start Math for women. According to him, such Maths for women will solve a double purpose. First, these training centers will be for Brahamcharnis or dedicated women workers who will live the lives of self-sacrificing nuns, serving all. Secondly, these will also serve as schools for girls, who will be taught the secular and spiritual matters by these dedicated women workers. Then they can, at will leave the Math or stay back. It will

143 Satjit Wadva, Live Like a Woman, in Woman, Many Hues Many Shades, p. 59.
144 Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume VIII, p. 274.
145 Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume, p. 409. Swami Vivekananda had great respect and honour for women. In London when a Christian scholar in a seminar stood up and started saying that womankind has no soul. Swami Vivekananda retorted that I had read the holy Quran twice and no where it is written like that; rather it is written that womankind has same soul as men. After the seminar, someone asked Swami Vivekananda why you interfered as
help them gain courage, confidence and self-respect and will liberate them from the sense of dependency and a life of subservience.

He was very much hopeful that India can shine with her pristine glory only when the women of our land are given good education to enable them to handle modern problems, without discarding our precious heritage. Some position indicators of women's development can be seen in the female literacy rate which increased from 8 per cent in 1947 to 68 per cent in the 2011 census. At the village level and the district levels, nearly one million women are heads and members of the local self-government institutions changing the destiny of their own and also that of others. The modern Indian woman is an object of admiration by people of the rest of the world. For the role, she plays in the country's public life as well as certain qualities that, she seems to possess in greater measure than women of other culture. The woman is the pivot around which the family, the society and humanity itself revolves. In his speech on ‘Women of India’, delivered in America, Vivekananda prophesied that the new civilization of the future will be created by modern women with Hindu spiritual culture. Aryan civilization has been of three types: the Roman, the Greek, and the Hindu. The Roman type is the type of organization, conquest, steadiness but lacking in emotional nature, appreciation of beauty and the higher emotions. Its defect is cruelty. The Greek is essentially enthusiastic for the beautiful, but frivolous and has tendency to become immoral. The Hindu type is essentially metaphysical and religious, but lacking in all the elements of organization and work. The Roman type is now represented by the Anglo-Saxon; the Greek type more by the French than by any other nation; and the old Hindus do not die! Each type has its advantage, the Roman's organization, the power of the Greek's wonderful love for the beautiful, and the Hindu's backbone of religion and

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146. Swami Vivekananda's response on the question of women's role in society. This excerpt is from the book *Equality of Women and the Social Mind Set*.

Emma Calve— a world fame personality of her times, after meeting Swami Vivekananda, wrote in her diary that today I saw a man who walks with God.
love of God. Mix these up together and bring in the new civilization. And let me tell you, this should be done by women”.

Women must find strength from within. They need to discover their power and the truth that they are the Creator’s most beautiful gift to mankind. Education for the female should have religion as its centre. Then only one will look upon women as the veritable manifestation of Brahman. This is how Ramakrishna had this idea of divine motherhood in every woman, of whatever caste she might be, or whatever might be her worth. If the women are raised by opening girls’ schools in every village, then they by their noble actions will glorify the name of the country. Then culture, knowledge, power, and devotion will be awakened. Educated women will instill a fresh light in the family. They will be the prime initiators of awakening of the next generation.