Chapter VII

Reform and Regeneration

From what has been said in the preceding chapters it is clear that the New Hindu Movement was a reform movement and the operative word in this connection was 'activism', which was of the essence of Bankim's exposition of the Gita and Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism. The ethics of 'love for all creation' called for a programme of humanitarian service in the broadest sense - educational as well as political, - not to mention such works of charity as are included within programmes of relief aimed at the distressed and the poor. Before discussing these programmes, which, it must be admitted, were never carried out in their entirety, we intend to take up the question of the New Hindu attitude to 'reform' in general and 'social reform' in particular.

Hostile critics who designate the New Hindu Movement as a revivalist movement, using the term 'revivalism' as a term of derogation, have found the greatest fault with the revivalists' attitude to social reform. In their view, the New Hindu Movement was intended as a counterpoise to the social reform agitations of the Brahmo Samaj and those led by Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. Charles Heismath, taking his cue from Dr. R. C. Majumdar, has summed up this view in the following words:
"Professor R. C. Majumdar and other Indian historians have traced the demise of active social reform in Bengal (since the beginning of the 80's of the last century) to its source in the political, national and cultural revivalist teachings of influential men such as Rajnarain Bose and Bankim Chandra Chatterji and there seems to be no evidence that would cast doubt on that analysis. Reformers and their sympathizers in later 19th century Bengal saw what was happening and were powerless to affect it."¹

For our purpose we may exclude Rajnarain Bose, who was a Brahmo, from the present discussion, and concentrate on the role of Bankim and Vivekananda in bringing about the aforesaid 'demise.'

(A) Social Reform and Bankim:

It cannot be denied that Bankim opposed a certain species of social reform, sometimes with great vehemence. He opposed the agitation against polygamy launched by Vidyasagar, and was probably instrumental in preventing legislation against that practice. He poured ridicule on the school of reformers headed by B. Malabari whose 'Notes' published in 1884, had created a sensation and led to the promulgation of the Age of Consent Act in 1891. Thus Bankim, to all appearances, was as regards social question, as much

1. Charles Heimsath: Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform, p.274. It should be mentioned that Heimsath has used the term revivalist in connection with both Bankim and Vivekananda, but he has not used it as a term of derogation.

2. "Many of us believe that a reformer is an ideal man; and to be an ideal man, Krishna should have been a reformer like Malabari. This evil of child marriage should have been abolished. But we do not recognise Malabari style as the quality of an ideal man. So we do not think it necessary to answer this question." Krishnacharitra: Bankim Rachanavali (Samsad). vol.II, p.503.
an obscurantist as Sasadhar Tarkachandmani whose fulminations against that Act were meant to imply that the Hindu religion was endangered by a piece of legislation which aimed at protecting Hindu wives from enforced sexual intercourse before the age of twelve. These are serious allegations, and if these are found to be true, it is legitimate to infer that the New Hindu Movement was a socially retrograde movement.

To answer this question, we must examine Bankim's criticism of Vidyasagar's social reform movement a bit more closely. Vidyasagar's publication in 1873 of "An Examination of the Question whether Polygamy should be Abolished" was the occasion of a Bangadarsan article, written by Bankim himself, which purported to show that Vidyasagar's style of social reform was wrong in principle and useless in practice. Vidyasagar was trying to mount an agitation against polygamy on the plea that the Shastras had not sanctioned the practice in an unrestricted way; on the strength of that Shastric prohibition Vidyasagar was seeking a legislative measure to abolish it. Bankim pointed out that the Shastras were hardly a dependable guide in social matters; actually they, or rather their social

1. Volume Two.
injunctions, were a cause of India's downfall. 1 Bankim wanted a divorce of social questions from Shastric discussions, and, in consequence, he could not but oppose Vidyasagar's manner of social reform which was going to perpetuate India's dependence on Shastras.

It is clear that far from being the stand of an obscurantist like Sasadhar Tarkachandmani, such a stand on social questions was far ahead of Vidyasagar's own, which was strangely inhibited in its reforming postures by an uncritical acceptance of Shastric injunctions. The whole point of Bankim's attack was to do away with this source of inhibition.

But did Bankim actually plead for uninhibited social reform? Apart from attacking the source of inhibition that prevented a rational treatment of social questions, did he do anything in the way of active social reform? Vidyasagar's manner of social reform might be objectionable; but there was such a thing as 'rational philanthropy', just as there was the gospel of 'utilitarianism', the holders of both the doctrines insisting on reform in antiquated social customs. Did Bankim, who, in political matters as also on certain points of religion was a disciple of J. S. Mill, and thoroughly acquainted with the doctrine of utility, appeal to that doctrine in the cause of social

1. "If these customs get a wide acceptance in any society, then the destiny of that society will become deplorable. In the past some of these customs were prevalent in India, and some of them are prevalent now. This was and is the reason of India's degradation." Vividha Prabandha - Bahu Bibaha.
reform? Did he not rather attack the social reformers as a set of sensation-mongers? Did he not rather suppress his work on "Equality" in mature years, and thereby, give sufficient ground for the later critics' complaint that he died a social reactionary, a Hindu chauvinist, a religious fanatic?

To answer such criticism we need only compare Bankim's reaction to the Age of Consent Act of 1891 with that of Sasadhar and Vidyasagar. But first of all, we must say something about the agitation that led to that Act. We know that this Act had its origin in the sensational publicity given to such consequences of child-marriage as were witnessed in the death of ten year old Phulmoni owing to her thirty-five year old husband's attempt at forcible sexual intercourse with her. The husband whose name was Hari Maiti was acquitted by a court on the ground that the law of rape did not apply to the spouse of a girl who had reached her tenth birthday. The case was tried in 1890, that is to say, only a year before the consent Act was passed. But it is not improbable that the judge's verdict, which might have facilitated the promulgation of the Act, was itself influenced by the propaganda started by B.M. Malabari against infantine marriage and perpetual widowhood prevalent in Hindu society. Malabari, whose "Notes" published in 1884, had created such a sensation, was a Parsi reformer. His "Notes" were directed against

1. "Social reform is nothing but a craze. And craze is a kind of fun." Krishnacharitram, Chapter IV, Sec.IV.
the evils of Hindu society, particularly against perpetual widowhood and child marriage. Malabari was a journalist, and his reforming zeal coupled with his journalistic career, had created a work in which sober judgment was clouded by a wholly admirable, if a little histrionic, solicitude for widows and child-wives, in Hindu society. The "Notes" were a product of sentimentality rather than sober social criticism. Regarding widows he said: "(The sights of mistreated widows) burnt themselves into my brains. It is not only that I know the miseries of widowhood, not merely that I feel them, fell for and with the widow; I am the widow for the moment." 1

It is quite understandable to what lengths of exaggeration the author of so fantastic a statement 2 would go in discussing the fate of child-wives, which was worse than that of the widow by reason of the threat of enforced sexual intercourse hanging over her head from the very day of her marriage. Malabari asserted quite seriously that the majority of child-marrying Hindus were inveterate child molesters. 3 Malabari was not content to publish a work embodying these opinions and leave the matter at that. He organised extensive tours throughout the length and


2. The remark about Malabari's gushing sentimentality is no attribution of ours. Even Heimsath has been forced to comment: 'Malabari did not rely only on considered argument to support his case but allowed his pen to flow freely.'

3. That Malabari was not in possession of a very considerable body of facts to support this extravagant assertion is clear from the following passage of Heimsath's book: "On several important factual questions raised by Malabari opinions varied. No agreement was apparent on whether or not child marriage was followed by premature consummation." (Heimsath, p.154).
breadth of India and rent the Welkin by furious public demonstrations of his solicitude for widows and child-wives. Quite a few members of Hindu society were rash enough to challenge the reformers' opinions. The Government itself was infected with Malabari's enthusiasm, but in face of stiff Hindu-opposition Sir Auckland Colvin, the then Finance Minister of India had nothing more to offer to the reformers than a modest counsel of patience: "You and I and the widow and the five year old bride must possess ourselves in patience until a humbler and truer conception of its needs and duties breaks in upon the native mind." Malabari was not to be put off by such vague assurance. He started for England. He met Maxmuller and many other gentlemen sincerely interested in India's well-being. He organised meetings and impressed upon the high-minded British public the desperate state of Indian girls in the hands of their child-molesting husbands. In India, too, the course of events began to move rapidly. Malabari's campaign had started in 1884. In 1890, was tried the case of Hari Maiti, and the child-molester was acquitted on grounds already noted. Malabari's disciple Dayaram Gidumal proposed the Age of Consent Bill as the least that could immediately be done to save the lives of ten or eleven year old child-wives. The Bill was passed in 1891.

It is against this background that we must compare Bankim's attitude towards the Act with that of Vidyasagar and Sasadhar. Neither Vidyasagar nor Sasadhar supported the Act, as we saw in Chapter-I, the latter actually raised
a hue and cry against it. Vidyasagar who had been instrumental in giving shape to the original version of the Act (promulgated in 1860, and stipulating that sexual intercourse with a girl below the age of ten be an act of rape) wanted to rephrase the new version in a manner that would make it virtually inoperative. He sought to delete the mention of any specific age-limit for consummation of marriage and insert instead the 'phrase 'the time of the first menses.'

The meaning of this objection was clear—the Shastras made sexual intercourse compulsory at the time of the 'first menses' and preached damnation for parents who did not marry their daughters before that time. Also Indian girls often attained that condition before the age of twelve. Thus Vidyasagar by his obedience to the Shastras was inadvertently led to the countenancing of child marriage in Hindu society and, what was worse, to the countenancing of sexual intercourse with a girl of eleven, if and when she attained puberty at that age. Vidyasagar believed that "as the majority of girls do not exhibit that symptom before they are thirteen, fourteen or fifteen, the measure I suggest would give larger more real and more extensive protection than the Bill." ¹

But there is no getting round the fact that his devotion to the Shastras precluded his adopting any truly rational measure against the evil of child-marriage; his own amendment to the Consent Bill only put his seal of approval to the custom.

Very dissimilar was Bankim's reaction to the Act. To understand why Bankim maintained absolute silence about the Act itself, but attacked Malabari with such ferocity after the Act was passed, we must remember two things. Bankim knew that Sasadhar's opposition against the Act was he obscurantist in the extreme. But neither could/countenance $\S$ Vidyasagar's manner of reform. He was acutely conscious of the danger involved in the sort of reform which, while trying to get rid of wicked social customs, appealed to Shastric injunctions, which in this particular case were worse than the custom itself. $^1$ At the same time he was perfectly aware of the disastrous consequences of toeing the line of 'liberal' reformers like Malabari whose attacks against Hindu social customs ended in an Act which had the effect of representing all Hindus as rapists and child-molesters. The controversy about the Age of Consent Bill was obscure in the extreme. Mr. Heimsath has quoted Tilak's summing up of the controversy in these words:

1. Vidyasagar while agitating for legislation against Kulin polygamy, had objected to the marriage prevalent amongst Kulin women on the ground that such late marriage was condemned by the Shastras. He had quoted with approval such verses as:

"Piturgeha ēa Yā Kanyā rajah paśyatyasamskrta
Bhrūnahatyā pitustasyāh sa Kanyā vṛsanismirātā."

("The maid who attains puberty (lit. sees her first menses) at her father's house brings into him the sin of abortion and herself becomes as good as a Vrsani.")

Vidyasagar Rachana Sangraha, vol.I, p.188. Vidyasagar quoted many other verses to that effect.
"We have been mischievously and shamelessly represented as a nation of savages and the Sudharaks (reformers) have shamelessly testified to it. Let these Sudharaks therefore form a separate nationality. We fought no longer to allow to be amongst us those of our fellow-countrymen who are really our enemies but who pose as our friends." 1

Bankim's language, aiming not at the Act but at its father, was similar:

"The other day, a Parsi named Malabari, in his eagerness to attain the sort of fame or notoriety (open to the class of people who aim at revolution of society by appeal to Shastras or by enacting legislation) raised a terrible hue and cry." 2

The meaning of this is clear enough: Bankim's attack was directed not so much at the reform itself as at reformers of the school of Malabari, who scarcely shrank from painting the society, for the good of which they were agitating in the blackest colour possible. Also it was directed at the manner of reform that would call in the aid of Shastras which themselves treated social customs as something static with laws prescribed at the dawn of creation and some of them positively scandalous. The sort of social reform desired by Bankim would, therefore, have to proceed on a line different from that pursued by the School of VIDYASAGAR 3 as well as the School of Malabari.

2. Preface to Bibidha Prabandha. vol.II. Published in 1892.
We shall see in a moment what that line was. But before describing that line we must take note of Vivekananda's attack on social reformers which was similar in spirit to Tilak's attack on Sudharsaks and Bankim's attack on Malabari and Vidyasagar. As in religious thought, so in the question of social reform Vivekananda's ideas followed those of Bankim closely enough to define a new line of social reform, that could aptly be designated as the New Hindu line.

(B) Vivekananda and Social Reform:

Vivekananda's attack on social reformers occurred in 1897 — just five years after Bankim's attack on Malabari. It was occasioned by an act typical of the social reformers. Vivekananda's triumphant preaching of Hinduism in America and his complete silence about such questions as widow-marriage had led these reformers to spread calumny against him. When he returned to India in 1897, they suddenly began to clamour that being a Sudra by birth, he had no right to pose as a Sannyasin, as the garb of a Sannyasin was allowed to Brahmins alone. In their anxiety to lower Vivekananda's credibility in the eyes of the orthodox, the reformers were only making themselves ridiculous, for of all people they were certainly the last from whom an aspersion against Vivekananda's caste status could be expected. Social reformers fastidious about the Brahminhood of a

1. "I read in the organ of the social reformers that I am called a Shudra and one challenged as to what right a Shudra has to become a Sannyasin." (My Plan of Campaign, C.W.III.).
Sannyasin could hardly be said to be true to their own creed. But in this case the reformers had their own reason for this apparently self-defeating move. They were trying to intimidate Vivekananda into joining their own set, so that the great prestige of Vivekananda's name could be harnessed to the cause of reform. The Swami's answer when it came, was one of the masterpieces of his oratorical career. In a Madras hall crowded to capacity, he unfolded what he called his 'plan of campaign'. It is not necessary for our purpose to give here a summary of the whole speech which was one of the noblest he ever uttered, but his attitude to the social reform movement was revealed in it with the best possible clarity. He roundly called the reform societies "condemning societies" and asked:

"What good has been done (by a hundred years of reform movement) except the creation of a most vituperative, a most condemnatory literature? ... They have criticised, condemned abused the orthodox, until the orthodox have caught their tone and paid them back in their own coin; and the result is the creation of a literature in every vernacular which is the shame of the race, the shame of the country. Is this reform? Is this leading the nation to glory?"

It is reasonable to suppose that Vivekananda, in this extract was referring to the obscene controversy surrounding the Age of Consent Bill, as much as to the 'literature'.

1. "Some of these societies, I am afraid, try to intimidate me join them." (Ibid).
2. Ibid.
created against his own character. This seems all the more probable because the reference to the orthodox community paying back the reformers in their own coin cannot be understood except in that context. Whether this supposition be true or not, Vivekananda's attitude to social reformers in general is identical with Bankim's attitude to the reformers of the school of Malabari. Both of them condemned the contemporary social reform movement on the same ground: that movement was striking at the very root of the society they were trying to reform.

(C) Reform and Regeneration

This is the background against which we must examine the reform programmes of Bankim and Vivekananda. Neither of them was interested in the social reform programmes of the day not because they wished to preserve the existing Hindu society with all its abuses and evils - as Sasadhar Tarkachudamoni and other leaders of orthodoxy did - but because in their eyes the reformers were putting the cart before the horse. The ideal social leader, according to Bankim, was Krishna who did nothing to eradicate so evil a custom

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1. Vivekananda's attitude to the Vidyasagar school of reformers is no less emphatic. "The question of widow marriage would not touch seventy percent of the Indian women."

Ibid. Also see later.
as "marriage by abduction", but actually made use of it in marrying his sister Subhadra to Arjuna. Instead of taking up the work of social reform, Krishna dedicated his whole life to the cause of spreading true religion and founding a "Commonwealth of Righteousness". In Bankim's words: "What Krishna aimed at was the moral and political regeneration of the land; propagation of religion and the founding of a kingdom of righteousness. If and when these ends are achieved, reform of society follows automatically; if not, social reformation remains an impossibility. Krishna, the ideal man knew this. He knew that in horticulture as in social reformation watering a (dead) branch is not the best way to secure the most plentiful fruitage..... This was why the ideal man did not strive to become a Malabari."

1. Manu enumerates 8 kinds of marriage: (1) Brahmas, (2) Daiva, (3) Arya, (4) Prajapatya, (5) Asur, (6) Gandharva, (7) Rakshasa, (8) Paishacha. Every varna is not entitled to the above eight kinds of marriage. According to Manu (chapter III), for the Kshatriyas four kinds of marriage are permissible; they are (i) Asura, (ii) Gandharva, (iii) Rakshasa and (iv) Paishacha. Again, Manu opines, two kinds of marriage - (a) Paisacha (b) Asura, are to be discarded by all varnas. (Shloka 25). So, for the Kshatriyas, only two kinds of marriage, (i) Gandharva and (ii) Rakshasa, are proper. Mutual love leading to marriage is known as 'Gandharva' marriage whereas marriage by abduction is called Rakshasa marriage.

Here is a new approach to social question — the approach of "regeneration" as contrasted to that of 'reform.' Vivekananda's attitude was similar. In the Madrass address already referred to he called the reformer's method the method of 'destruction', his own being the method of 'growth.' Bankim clarified the approach further in a letter to Kumar Benoy Krishna Deb of the Sovabazar Raj family, in which he supported the sea-voyage movement sponsored by the latter, but did so from an angle which was quite different from the latter's orthodox approach. Benoy Krishna Deb had started the movement in the manner of Vidyasagar and was looking for Shastric support in favour of sea-voyage amongst Hindus. Bankim's letter was in response to his (Benoy Krishna Deb's) request asking him to expound what in his opinion was the true Hindu attitude to sea-voyage. Bankim argued that Shastric injunctions were quite irrelevant to the matter and that both the Shastric approach to reform as well as reform by means of legislative measures were equally futile.


2. It may be noted incidentally that the popular notion that the orthodox Hindus were always inimical to all types of social reforms is totally belied by the aforesaid movement which was sponsored by the Sovabazar Raj family, the supposed citadel of orthodoxy. According to Heimsath, it was the only Bengali social reform movement of the last quarter of 19th century Bengal. The leadership of the movement came neither from the Brahmos nor from other types of reformers, but from the much vilified Sovabazar family.

According to him, "In the absence of a moral and religious regeneration, of the land, no deep-rooted change could be effected in social customs by merely appealing to certain Shastras." Society in his opinion, was moved by tradition (Deshachar) and not by Shastras, and tradition, however evil, "could not be changed except by changes in religion and morality." He examined the sea voyage question from that angle and showed that sea-voyage being conducive to social well-being was countenanced by the "eternal principle of religion" (Sanatan Dharma) as expounded by Krishna. Shastras in his mind, were subservient to those eternal principles, and "religions and moral regeneration of the land was nothing but a re-assertion of those eternal principles."

Vivekananda's language was almost identical:

"Every (social) improvement in India requires first of all an upheaval in religion. Before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas. The first work that demands our attention is that the most wonderful truths confined in our Upanishads, in our Scriptures, in our Puranas must be brought out from the books, brought out from the monasteries, brought out from the forests, brought out from the possession of selected bodies of people, and scattered broadcast all over the land, so that these truths may run like fire all over the country from north to south and east to west, from the Himalayas to Comorin, from Sindh to the Brahmaputra."  

"My Plan of Campaign."
The New Hindu Programme of Regeneration:

It is clear that, with such a view of social regeneration, New Hindu leaders like Bankim and Vivekananda could hardly be satisfied with laws of marriage of marriage-consummation, by which the reformers of the day set much store. It is clear they would rather look for reforms of a more fundamental kind—reforms, that is to say, that would make for changes of a far more positive nature. Vivekananda's slogan was: "Raising of the Sudras", and we have already seen in what tragic intensity his own character expressed the message in his restless journeys over India and across the seas. That the message was not a matter of mere tragic emotion, but an answer to India's greatest need is made clear from an examination of the practical form in which the Swami expressed it. But, here as elsewhere, he was anticipated by Bankim. (It is relevant here to discuss) the latter's thoughts on raising the Sudras.

In Chapter-II, we referred to Bankim's celebrated essay 'The Peasants of Bengal' published in the early years of Bangadarsan. It was an epoch-making essay, though not the first to bring the plights of the peasantry to public notice. Actually the condition of Bengali peasants was being discussed since the time of Rammohan. But Bankim's essay was epoch-making in the sense that it was the first of its kind to relate the decline of India to the age-old degradation of the Sudras. Even in this analysis, Bankim was extremely original. He did not repeat the hackneyed
missionary (and Brahmo) charges against the manifold evils of casteism but attributed the misery of the Sudras to the strikingly early growth of the Brahmonical intellect—a fact which led to the subservience of the non-intellectual classes from the earliest times. Contrary to popular belief, Bankim showed that this subservience of the non-intellectual classes ultimately led to the decline of the Brahmins themselves and not the other way about. This was tantamount to asking the Brahmins to espouse the cause of the Sudras for their own good—a very different approach to the caste question from that of most reformers who were incessantly preaching the abolition of the Brahmins. Also, according to Bankim, the superstitious excrescences of Hinduism were a result of that decline and not its cause. The Smritis, in particular—those numerous Sudra-baiting Shastras on which the reformers of Vidyasagar's school were basing their reform programmes were also a result of the same decline. Thus, even as early as 1872-73 Bankim had rejected the 'reformers' programmes by looking far ahead of them and bringing to the forefront the raising of the lower classes as the greatest of all social questions in India, and implying that most of the reforms advocated by reformers were included within that one reform which preceded them all and superseded them all.

It was left to Vivekananda to render Bankim's critical insight into the cause of India's decline and his attribution of that decline to the condition of the lower classes in India a supremely powerful social message revealing...
with the fullest possible clarity the futility of the routine social programmes of the various schools of reformers. "Most of the reforms that have been agitated for during the past century have been ornamental." he told his Madras audience. "The question of widow marriage would not touch seventy percent of the Indian women, and all such questions only reach the higher castes of Indian people who are educated at the expense of the masses." Vivekananda pointed out that, in the name of reform, the higher castes were "cleaning their own houses." He refused to call it 'reformation' and remarked that 'the tyranny of the minority' was the worst tyranny of the world. He implied that reformers were a handful of upper-caste busybodies cut off from the mainstream of national life, but nevertheless trying to ram down the throat of the 'nation' their own fads and crotchets with hardly any attempt to understand how the nation really felt or what she desired.

Vivekananda wanted to create a body of religious workers (a) who would carry education to the masses, education in this context including both secular as well as spiritual education; (b) who would serve the poor in all possible ways, especially by taking up works of relief in times of distress, and those of nursing the sick and the disabled throughout the year; (c) and who would set up a traffic of ideas between India and the West, by spreading the spiritual truths of Hinduism in the Western countries, and bringing in return, knowledge and money required to set the poor of India on their feet.

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
It is only necessary to add that Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission with these very aims in view. We intend to stress one aspect of these aims which has not been taken due note of by historians and the general run of critics.

The aspect in question is this: Educating the poor, serving the sick and sending Hindu missionaries to preach spirituality in the West may all be laudable aims in themselves; but one may well ask: why should these things be regarded as intrinsically superior to remarriage of ten-year-old widows or protection of twelve-year-old brides from molestation by their thirty-five year old spouses? Put in this crude manner, the superiority of Vivekananda's (and Bankim's) social programmes is not made immediately evident. It needs to be emphasised that Vivekananda's efforts were guided by the aim of spirituality in comparison to which he held every other consideration as secondary. Giving a widow in marriage was not an act of spirituality even if accompanied by a hundred verses culled from the Shastras; at best it was more than opening to her the gate of those worldly pleasures from which most non-widows were not barred. But serving to the best of one's powers one's "God, the wicked, God the miserable and God the poor of all races", was a spiritual act – it glorified one's existence even in failure. This was the meaning of Bankim's doctrine of 'regeneration' and Vivekananda's doctrine of 'growth'. This distinction must be clearly borne in mind when we set out to draw a balance-sheet of then comparative achievements of the 19th century reformers and 19th century New Hindu thinkers.
But even on a critical historical estimate apart from considerations of intrinsic value, we must pronounce the reformers' achievements negligible in comparison to those of such a man as Vivekananda. It is true that Vivekananda never found the band of religious workers who would carry education to the lower classes, and to this day the vast majority of Indians remain as illiterate and down-trodden as they were in Vivekananda's time. Also, the Mission through which he sought to achieve the deliverance of India's millions from poverty and ignorance can hardly be said to have yet come to serious grips with these basic questions of Indian society. But Vivekananda was unquestionably the first great 'populist' leader in modern India with Bankim as his intellectual forerunner, Mahatma Gandhi following closely in their footsteps though with far greater success in his work in the service of the poor. But Mahatma's programmes of social service closely followed those of Vivekananda, both of them emphasizing the spiritual aspect of service rendered to the poor as distinct from the political or the legislative. No 19th century reformer, not to mention the latter-day leaders in 'populist' politics can be pronounced fit - if we may use a popular phrase - to hold a candle to them.

(E) New Hindu Programmes of Reform:

Even on the level of reform that could not properly be included within the scope of Bankim's doctrine of 'regeneration' and Vivekananda's doctrine of 'growth', these two thinkers made a current of fresh air blow through the
lifeless ritualism of Hindu customs which had been responsible for much of the pernicious rigidity of orthodox caste regulations. Bankim's and Vivekananda's insistence on separating the question of food from the sphere of religion made light of the revolutionary humbug which was current among most reformers who had discussed this question, and at the same time, rendered a genuine reformation possible in those regulations. It was the school of Derozians who had made beef-eating and liquor drinking the cornerstones of a policy of revolution through which they intended to strike at Hindu orthodoxy. The consequences of that policy were disastrous, for during the 1840s and 1850s the habit of excessive drinking had ruined many educated families of Bengal, and had become a downright menace against which the Brahmo Samaj under Devendranath and Keshub Chandra Sen thought it fit to direct much of their reforming energy. But the Brahmos themselves from Keshub Chandra Sen onwards, had begun insisting on the shedding of the Brahmonical thread and on intercaste dinning - to name only two amongst a host - as compulsory customs attendant on the Brahmo faith. This was of course ridiculous, for, shedding the Brahmonical thread no more contributed to genuine piety than wearing it did. When Bankim refrained from admonishing all Brahmans to shed it, but at the same time denied the Brahmanhood of even one "who wore the most resplendent of sacred threads around his neck, but passed his days in malice and ill-behaviour", he initiated a process which marked the end of the age of thread-shedding revolutionism as well as of the age in which the wearing of the
thread was the easiest passport to the gate of spirituality. When he refused the Hindu name to any one "who neither had nor strove to have any knowledge of the spirit that pervaded all creation, who neither perceived nor strove to perceive his identity with all creation, and who neither was nor strove to be non-discriminating"; when he held up the non-Brahmin Keshub Chandra Sen as every whit a proper spiritual guide for Brahmins; when he proposed the low-born Muslim peasant Kachhimuddi Sheikh as in every particular fitted to cook and serve dishes of chicken to Hindu guests in a Durgapuja gathering ("for true Hinduism preached non-discrimination and forbade looking at this man as Hindu, that man as Mussalman, this man as low born and that man as high born") - Bankim silently and without any flourish of revolutionism initiated an era in which caste and food regulation would no longer be regarded as the essence of Hinduism.

The point of these reform schemes of Bankim was this: Unlike the reformers, Bankim did not propose the elimination of food and caste regulations as indispensable prerequisites for a reformed Hindu society, but sought to eliminate them by appealing to the essence of Hinduism and condemning them only when they came in conflict with that essence. Unlike the reformers Bankim was aware that, just as there were Brahmins who abhorred the food served by a Mussalman as contaminated and left the Mussalman in no doubt about his abhorrence, there were also Brahmins like

1. Dharmatattwa, Chapter-XIX, p.643.  
2. Dharmatattwa, Chapter-X, p.618.  
Bhudev who, while avoiding inter-dinning with Mussalmans, yet were the soul of charity in their personal relations with them. The elimination of the said regulations was thus prescribed where these clashed with that spirit of charity. In other words, with Bankim, the schemes of reform were schemes of 'regeneration' and not ends in themselves.

The distinction is important and needs emphasizing because it is often overlooked in discussions about Vivekananda's reform schemes. It is now generally recognised that Vivekananda's attack on what he called the Untouchability of orthodox Hindu society has been perhaps the most potent force in doing away with those invidious caste regulations which have kept Hindu society divided in past ages and which are by no means extinct as yet. His letters (especially those in Bengali) are veritable arsenals of shame, ridicule and towering indignation directed against food and caste regulations, which, to most Hindus of his time formed the essence of their religion. These letters, indeed, have totally eclipsed Bankim's sober suggestions of reform on much the same lines - and rightly so. For here the Sannyasin's first hand knowledge of Hinduism in practice all over India has given a fiery edge to a voice of thunder, by the side of which the voice of the writer, with much less experience though with a greater mastery over the language, sounds tame and lifeless. Unfortunately, this very effectiveness of Vivekananda's tirade has given rise to an impression that he sought the elimination of caste regulations as an end in itself.
Nothing indeed could be further from the truth. The identity of Vivekananda's views in this matter with those of Bankim is evident to anyone who has gone through his letters carefully. Like Bankim, Vivekananda, whenever he refers to the Hindu practice of caste and class discrimination, invariably contrasts that practice with the Hindu doctrine of non-discrimination; and it is clear that he intends no Malabari-type reform in these regulations. Even on so trumpery a matter as interdinning amongst Brahmans and Sudras Vivekananda took no rigid line except when the customary restriction seemed to militate against the true spirit of Hinduism. The chronicler of "The Dialogue between the Swami and His Disciple" has narrated an incident where Vivekananda persuades the orthodox disciple to take tea with Nivedita, but elsewhere he is reported to have insisted only on interdinning amongst people of the same caste without discriminating as between a Brahman of one part of India and another. It is clear that he was not obstinately bent upon making of the concession he was ready to grant in the case of such a woman as Nivedita a law that would bind the whole of Hindu society. He was not in favour of fanatically eradicating from Hindu society so pernicious an evil as 'untouchability' and would scrupulously respect an orthodox Hindu's inhibitions as long as his inhibitions did not lead to caste-hatred or other abominations. Miss Macleod has narrated an incident which is more revealing. Alasinga Perumal was one of Vivekananda's most devoted disciples. He was a Madrasi Brahman brought up in an atmosphere of
the most rigid orthodoxy and observing the most stringent of 'untouchability' in his personal life. But Vivekananda never asked him to shed a jot or tittle of his orthodoxy. Miss Macleod who had just arrived from America, was not agreeably impressed by Alasinga Perumal's quaint Vaishnavite marks, spread all over his forehead, and she privately made a remark to that effect to Vivekananda. In her own words:

"Instantly Swami turned and said with great sternness, "Hands off! what have you ever done?" I did not know what I had done then. Of course, I never answered. Tears came to my eyes and I waited, I learnt later that Mr. Alasinga Perumal was a young Brahmin teaching philosophy in a college in Madras earning 100 rupees a month, supporting his father, mother, wife and four children, who had gone from door to door to beg money to send Vivekananda to the West. Perhaps without him we never would have met Vivekananda."¹

Obviously with Vivekananda, such a man as Alasinga Perumal, with all his superstitious devotion to the most rigid of caste rules, was worth a hundred reformers who interdinned with all Mlechchas and had no use for ridiculous Vaishnavite marks.

Even on the plane of reform demanded by the Brahmo Samaj and other reforming bodies of the 19th century, Bankim and Vivekananda were not thus merely parroting contemporary progressive opinion, but infusing the doctrine of reform.

with the spirit of regeneration. This is why Vivekananda's attack on 'untouchability' strikes us as so much more convincing than the reformers' fulminations against food and other taboos of orthodox Hindu society. The reformers were no doubt right in holding such opinions, but Vivekananda expressed the horror of the man of religion at the sight of the monstrous irreligion practised against 'untouchables' in the name of that very religion which preached the unity of all creation. To confuse Vivekananda's state of mind with that of the beef-eating, liquor-drinking and thread-shedding reformers would be unfair.

It would also be relevant here to discuss Bankim's and Vivekananda's attitude to two other reform schemes of contemporary reformers. Bankim supported inter-caste marriage but never agitated for it. Vivekananda was rigidly opposed to the custom of child marriage, but expressly advised his disciples against mounting an agitation to ban the custom. Hostile critics have been quick to raise the outcry of 'revivalism', but they have totally failed to understand why these thinkers did not match profession by expenditious practice.¹

¹ Bankim has been the victim of much progressive indignation due to suppression (by himself) of his work on 'Equality' in the later years of his life. It seems to us that the indignation has been utterly wasted, because, Bankim took care to reprint that part of the essay which dealt with political and economic inequality (in Bangadesher Krisak), thereby indicating that he was dissatisfied only with the part that discussed social reform and toed the contemporary 'progressive' line on that topic. He has veered to the position of 'regeneration' and it was but natural that he would repudiate his earlier assent to 'reform'. Progressive critics have failed to see this.
Bankim says clearly in the commentary on the Gita that to look for strictures against inter-caste marriage in the Gita is futile, because the whole point of Krishna's discourse is to replace Arjuna's pre-occupation with caste purity or caste religion (Kuladharma) by a truer and loftier conception of religion.² Again, commenting on the Gita (3/24), Bankim points out that Krishna's strictures against 'Samkara' has been misunderstood by orthodox commentators. In the first place, Samkara does not mean Varna Samkara, nor does the context justify that interpretation. In Gita (3/24), Krishna is speaking of evils that would follow if he, in his divine self-sufficiency, remained inactive and unconcerned about the fate of the world. He lists 'Samkara' as one of these evils. Bankim says that Krishna in using this word which literally means an improper mixture of contrary and contradictory elements was possibly referring to the general social disorder which would be the outcome of his inaction. He would hardly have used the term in the restricted, and in this context essentially inappropriate, sense of Varna Samkara which, if a consequence of God's inaction at all is but a poor consequence; so ridiculous a consequence of so momentous a thing is hardly credible. Bankim refuses to believe in matchmaking God, the sort of God who takes a personal interest in uniting a male Brahmin with a female Brahmin and a male Kshatriya with a female Kshatriya. Bankim ends the

² Vide Bankim's Commentary on Gita (1/43).
commentary with a 'progressivist' flourish asserting his readiness to prove that "a mixture of castes is wholly beneficial to modern society."¹

One would miss Bankim's point altogether, if, from this one would jump to the conclusion that Bankim ought to have started a campaign in favour of inter-caste marriage in the manner of Keshab Chandra Sen and certain other reforms. Actually, Bankim was more interested in removing the religious taboo against mixture of castes than in opening new ways of marriage. His argument against a match-making God cut both ways: If God could not possibly take the initiative in organising marriage between a male Brahman and a female Brahman, could He, on the other hand, do so in uniting male Brahmans with female Kshatriyas, or vice versa? Thus, here again, Bankim was emphasizing that aspect of Hinduism, which, by denouncing, caste taboos as false religion, sought to be 'regenerative' rather than merely 'reforming'. Bankim was well aware that, beneath the claptrap of progressivism, 'reforming' marriages often concealed a story of infamy and scandal. Thus in some of the widow marriages arranged by Vidyasagar, the bridegrooms were known to have married for money, following it up — not of course, in Vidyasagar's knowledge, far less with his consent — by another marriage contracted with a virgin.² Bankim, with his insistence on the regen-

². Chandicharan Banerjee. 'Vidyasagar.'
ervative aspect of reform, could hardly undertake reforms of this kind, which in the case of intercaste marriages were likely to lead to grosser scandals. Bankim would rather seek to educate Hindus in the true spirit of Hinduism in regard to caste taboos, and leave the matter to individual conscience.

Very similar was Vivekananda's treatment of the question of child marriage, against which custom his language was a thousand times more intemperate than that of the most obstreperous of reformers. In his letters, he repeatedly advises his brethren to pay no heed to public criticism, because, in his opinion, most Indians "had lost their wits by forcing pregnancy on twelve-year-old girls." Yet this same Vivekananda says expressly:

"In the highest reality of Para-Brahman, there is no distinction of sex." "Therefore, do I say, though outwardly there may be difference between men and women, in their real nature, there is none."

The question arises: Why does he do so?

The reason is not far to seek. Like Bankim, Vivekananda's pre-occupation was with the true spirit of Hinduism, in this case, its spirit in relation to women. If, as the Vedantas preached, God pervaded all creation, He was certainly sexless and dwelt as much in women as in men. This was the sheet anchor of Vivekananda's philosophy. With this conviction Vivekananda could not help thinking that the...

wedlock thrust on minor Hindu girls was a monstrous injustice, and, against this custom no language struck him as being too harsh. But this was hardly a reforming matter; it was a matter of education - of preaching to women their Vedantic divinity. Vivekananda's doctrine certainly included the liberal doctrine of 'emancipation of women', but it went far beyond that, for in the Vedantic sense, emancipation was nothing if not going beyond marriage. It was certainly not merely the leaving to women the choice in their marriage or in other pursuits. Vivekananda was far more interested in winning for women their right to celibacy than in promoting the reformers' scheme of adult marriage. He could well say by slightly changing a celebrated saying of Christ: 'In emancipation there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage; ('in that condition women no less than men are as angels in heaven,').

Neither Bankim nor Vivekananda was thus a reformer in the then accepted sense of the term, even though their (especially Vivekananda's) preachings promoted the cause of reform much more steadily than the reformers' own efforts did. They were not reformers because in the first place, they founded no reforming association; in the second place, their reform schemes were educative rather than legislative, and, in the third place, they were quite ready to suffer orthodox people to observe all caste rules meticulously but do so in love and amity towards fellow Hindus, rather than in hatred and ill-will. Reformers on
the other hand made it a matter of principle to shock orthodox conscience by endless demonstrations of unnecessary heterodoxy. In Chapter-I, we quoted a famous Derozian's screaming denunciation of Hindu society which expressed itself in the assertion - "I hate everything Hindu from the bottom of my soul." It is usually forgotten that (not to mention the Hindu-baiting Malabari who glorified in representing Hindus as child molesters) even so sober a reformer as Vidyasagar took pleasure in belittling the Hindu name quite unnecessarily. To those who opposed legislative reform on the ground that it reforming the evils of Hindu society one should avoid seeking the assistance of legislation enacted by an alien Government, Vidyasagar said quite seriously that Hindus were so worthless, that government legislation was essential for any kind of reforming measure. "We are a cowardly degenerate race; and our wretched society is full of the most monstrous evils. Even if the eastern moon suddenly flies to the West, social reform would remain an impossible aim with such men as we are." Such self-abnegation would be unthinkable with Bankim and Vivekananda who were always preaching the glory of the Hindu name even when frankly admitting the contemporary degeneracy. Vivekananda's aggressive Hinduism made an end to this self-abnegating reformism and ushered in an era of regenerative reform. This was the most substantial contribution of Vivekananda to the

reform scene of 19th century India. Bankim's contribution though confined to Bengal, was similar.

(F) New Hindu Attitude to the 'Woman Question':

This examination of Bankim's and Vivekananda's attitude to social reform provides a clue to a clearer understanding of their attitude to the so-called 'woman question.' Here, it must be admitted, Bankim's attitude strikes us as somewhat more orthodox than Vivekananda's. The latter's intense hostility to child marriage is totally absent from Bankim's writings. On the contrary, the violence of his language to the reformers of the school of Malabari, though by no means indicating hostility to reform as such leaves some room for suspicion that he did not consider the custom of compulsory child marriage wholly objectionable. Also his suppression of the work on 'Equality' in the later years of his life and republication of the same in a modified form from which the part dealing with questions of reform in the status of Hindu woman was carefully excluded, strengthens the suspicion that in matters of reform concerning the rights of woman in Hindu society he had gradually veered round to a rigidly orthodox stand. The following extract from 'Dharmatattwa' almost confirms the suspicion.

1. And such a sentence as - "If a Hindu girl is kept unmarried even in an advance age, she will feel attracted towards a particular youth." Krishnacharitra, Chapter-IV, Sec.III.

2. In the reprint of (The Peasants of Bengal).
Disciple : Am I to think, then, that the equality of the sexes sought to be established by Europeans is a sort of social nuisance?

Teacher : How is this equality going to be made possible? Is it possible for a man give birth to and suckle a child? On the other hand, is it possible to start a war with the help of an army constituted of women alone?

It is evident, that in clear repudiation of his own earlier stand on the equality of the sexes, Bankim is here resorting to a species of argument that is wholly sophistical. For surely 'biological inequality' is no valid argument against the desirability of social equality as Bankim himself had pointed out in the earlier work. There is therefore a grain of truth in the modern critics' dig against Bankim on the score of his supposed blindness to the injustice perpetrated by Hindu society on its women from time immemorial.

The charge, whose validity is discussed in the last section of this Chapter, does not apply to Vivekananda whose fierce tirade against child-marriage alone is enough to convince one that Vivekananda needed no reformer's prodding to take arms against the injustice his countrymen had been perpetrating on their women in the name of religion.

1. Dharmatattwa. Chapter-XXIII.
2. 'Samya'. Section-V.
However, with Vivekananda as with Bankim, a change in the custom of marriage was far from being of the first consideration as with the social reformers of the time. Both of them sought to redefine the position of woman in Hindu society irrespective of any immediate programme of social reform - apart from education - to give effect to that definition. Both of them categorically rejected the orthodox conception of woman as stated in the Smritis and as implied in the monastic notion of woman as the gate of hell. In its place they shaped a conception which was extremely heterodox and remotely connected to Hindu religious tradition by the thread of Tantrikism. This was in its effects at least, 1

1. The Tantric literature essentially represents a very important part of Indian spiritual lore, so far as its practical aspect is concerned. Some relegate them to the class of black magic, whereas others consider them full of obscenities and unfit for the study of a man of good taste. These contentions, however, do not represent the whole truth. It cannot be denied that in some texts there is what may be called black magic, and there are also a few texts full of obscenities; but these do not form the main bulk of the Tantric literature. They also do not represent the Tantric Sadhana as its best. It is a cultural discipline in a wide sense, and, when used in a more limited sense, it is spiritual knowledge of a technical nature.

Tantras present practical methods of realizing the ultimate truth preached by Vedanta, namely, the essential unity of the devotee’s soul with God. But, unlike the path of knowledge prescribed by monistic Vedanta for realizing this fundamental oneness, the Tantrika method, a marvellous combination of Yoga and Karma, is characterized by rituals. Through contemplation of God, in concrete forms and performances of ceremonial worship, Tantrik Sadhana provides a graded course of tuning up the naive mind of the devotee. He is enjoined to meditate on his oneness with the formless. Absolute and then to think that out of the formless impersonal God emerge both his own self and the distinct and...cont'd/
seemed repugnant to many persons, but in the hands of Bankim and Vivekananda underwent a significant transformation.

The Tantrik conception of woman as the emblem of power was expressly stated by Vivekananda, who derived the notion from Ramakrishna, in whose eyes every woman was the living embodiment of the Divine Mother. This was of course a mystical doctrine not easily translatable in human terms. Bankim paved the way for such a translation by his emphasis on the heroic conception of woman. This is not the place to discuss in detail to what glorious heights he raised this conception in the delineation of the female characters in his novels. In Bankim's novels (Devichaudhurani, Sitaram, etc.) woman preponderates over the man by shedding a lustre in the 'intensity of her vital energy' and in the 'vigour and scope of her mind and character.' But this literary conception was accompanied by a serious re-examination of the conception traditionally accepted by Hindu society in Bankim's essay on "Draupadi," in which he compared the heroic queen of the Pandavas with the self-effacing Sita, the traditional living form of a goddess whom he is to place before him, through imagination, and worship as a divine Mother.

The Tantrika rites place before the devotee objects of sense-enjoyment and then require him to deify these by his thought and gradually to sublimate by this process, his sense-attraction into love for God. For instance, certain rites require the presence of the opposite sex in poses of direct sense-appeal; but the devotee has to curb his carnal desires by looking upon them as sacred manifestations of the Divine Mother. In this way, one is required to conquer one's flesh and prepare one's mind for spiritual realization, not by avoiding temptation, like the jnana-yogin, the spiritual aspirant on the path of knowledge, but by boldly facing and overcoming them.

idol of Hindu women. Bankim did not set out to debunk Sita whose self-effacement in face of the tyranny imposed by a male-dominated society had passed the test of sublimity and given her the status of the Hindu woman par excellence. But he left no room for doubt that in the New Hindu conception, the queen of the Pandavas, in whose making "the harder virtues of the female character" far outshone the softer, was to be accorded a rank at least equal to Sita's. The gigantic display of female pride and female courage in Draupadi's vindication of her honour in the Kaurava Court and her assertion of female independence in regard to the husbands' will when that will clashed with woman's Dharma, was Bankim's answer to social reformers and his own New Hindu Version of the doctrine of woman's emancipation.

But first and foremost it was a Hindu conception in that it sought the fulfilment of the married woman's destiny in marriage and marriage alone tied up the woman's search for religion with her devotion to her husband. Bankim's addition to this traditional conception was this: he sought the traditional emphasis on female devotion to be supplemented by a reciprocal devotion on the husband's part; and he conceived female devotion as a matter of gigantic self-assertion rather than one of kneeling self-effacement.¹

Integral to Bankim's conception of the reciprocal devotion of husband and wife was his emphasis on the woman's role as 'Sahadharmini' - a helper in the husband's spiritual efforts. In the New Hindu novels, 'Devichaudhurani' and 'Anandamath' Bankim illustrates this self-assertion in the characters of 'Prafulla' and 'Santi' who are conceived in the genuine heroic mould but their heroism is shown to be a manifestation of their devotion to their husbands.
And Bankim was poetic enough to redeem this hackneyed notion from triteness by making it resplendent in the careers of his literacy (masterful) heroines, who were portrayed as guides rather than as servile helpmates. Thus Santi in *Anandamath* and Prafulla in *Devichaudhurani* are shown as investing the lives of their husbands - no men of straw themselves - with a meaning that makes their existence glorious by taking radiance from a love, that could be mistaken for compassion but was in fact a species of womanly devotion so sublime as to make it a name for heavenly grace - sanctifying their brief hours of mortality.

It should be clear from all this that Bankim wanted to raise the status of women in Hindu society by raising the conception of womanhood but without violence to traditional laws or time-honoured social customs. His treatment of the "woman question" was very different from that of the reformers, whose position was that these laws were obsolete, and needed thoroughgoing reformation. Vivekananda, however, whilst he held the poorest opinion about legal reformation, met the reformers half way, not actually in joining the legal reform campaign, but in vigorously affirming that the condition of woman in Hindu society was absolutely scandalous.

1. *Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume* edited by Dr. R.C. Majumdar. 'Sociological Views of Swami Vivekananda' by Dr. Roma Chowdhury, p.347-432.
2. Ibid.
3. "In India, there are two great evils: Trampling on the woman and grinding the poor through caste restrictions." Ibid, p.400. "We are horrible sinners and our degradation is due to our calling women 'despicable worms', 'gateways to hell' and so forth." Ibid, p.401.
Like Bankim's, his own answer to the problem lay essentially in raising the conception of womanhood in Hindu society but with a difference. In the first place, he generalised the heroic conception of womanhood in Vedantic-Tantric terms; in the second place, he gave practical effect to the Vedantic equality of man and woman by leaving the ground prepared for starting women on careers that would exclude marriage and thereby give freer and larger scope for the development and expression of their powers.

To take the second point first, Vivekananda was the first Hindu leader to recognise Hindu woman's right to monastic life, so long enjoyed by men alone. This right, allowed, since the earliest times, in Buddhism and Roman Catholicism alike, may not strike one as so very revolutionary after all, but in orthodox Hinduism with its insistence on marriage and devotion to the husband as the only expression of a woman's piety, this was an innovation of the most daring kind. It is true that he did not found women's monasteries towards the implementation of that idea. In fact, the significance of this idea is symbolic. It was the first step towards recognising women's right to any avocation whatsoever, secular or religious. When Vivekananda found fault with the reformers' scheme of emancipating women by changes in marriage laws, he said in effect that their programmes were no more conducive to female freedom in any fundamental sense than the existing laws in Hindu society were. "Liberty is the first condition of growth. It is wrong, a thousand times wrong," if anyone of you dares to say 'I will work out the salvation of this
woman or child. "Educate your women first and leave them to themselves; then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them. In matters concerning them, who are you?" Such words clearly indicate that what Vivekananda was aiming at was women's right to mould their lives according to their own lights without waiting for the lead given by male busybodies. In an age when men were crying themselves hoarse over the fate of widows, and when people could not think of any measure for improving the lot of women except within the fetters of marriage, Vivekananda sounded a most refreshing note.

As regards the first, it is necessary first of all to remove a popular misconception regarding Vivekananda's idea of womanhood in the context of the revitalised Hinduism of which he was the apostle. Quite a few writers have been misled by Vivekananda's many admiring references to Sita into a conclusion that he was proposing that symbol of sublime self-effacement as the prototype of future Hindu women as of those of the past. "The women of India must grow and develop in the footprints of Sita, and that is the only way" - such a sentence is certainly apt to strengthen that misconception. But, Vivekananda's references to Sita, worshipful as they are, are completely overshadowed by his numerous references to the women of America, who in their courage, in the complete uninhibitedness of their movement, in their receptivity to new ideas - in a word, in the amenity of the adventurousness that marked their every gesture, created in him a wistfulness:

1. Ibid, op.cit. p.405.
when he compared the lot of India’s woman with those of America, which is the surest indication of the way in which his mind was working in his conception of the Hindu woman of the future. "If I can make a thousand such women in India, I shall die in peace," he wrote to his brethren. The Swami was a hero if ever there was one, and in women as in men, what he valued most was the heroic fibre. But it should be noted in at once that the impulse the heroism he sought in the future women of India he (like Bankim) sought essentially in Hindu sources, even though - unlike the latter - he did not appeal to the Queen of the Pandavas as the idol to inspire the women of his own epoch.

Vivekananda derived the heroic conception of womanhood by combining the doctrine of the sexlessness of the God who pervaded all creation with the Shakti cult of the Tantras. "When you will realise that all illuminating truth of the Atman, then you will see that the idea of sex-discrimination has vanished altogether, then only will you look upon all women as the veritable manifestation of Brahman"; - this was the first half of a conception of which the second half was supplied by the notion of "an all-pervading power of which women were the special manifestation." The first half declared the fundamental equality of men and women and by implication, conceded to women the freedom of self-expression customarily

1. Vivekanander Bani O Rachana: voo.VI.
2. Vivekananda Centenary Volume, vide essay by Dr. Roma Chowdhury, p.402.
It is of course well known that the Vedantas do not recognise Nature as a distinct category but explains 'creation' as unreal - as the work of Maya.

The Divine Soul who as Power pervades all creation.

'She who in honest men's houses shine as Lakshmi in the form of their wives.'

The Brahmos abominated the Tantras.

granted to men alone. The second half went a step further and placed women on a pedestal that was higher yet. It is interesting that Vivekananda was unconsciously making a concession to Dualism by recognising the nature-soul duality preached by the Sankhyas and the Tantras alike, the latter of which systems sought to build a half-way house between the Sankhyas and the Vedantas by glorifying Nature as Power and placidly treating her as one with the Divine Soul without troubling to mitigate the logical gap separating these very distinct categories.

"Yā devī sarvabhūtesu saktirūpena Samsthita",

say the Tantras and in the same breath declare -

"Yā Śrīḥ Swayam Sukritinam bhavanesu",

as though womanhood was a special dispensation of that Shakti. Vivekananda quoted both these verses while praising the women of America and unconsciously betrayed the real reason behind his predilection for the Tantras. Actually, Vivekananda was no more an adherent of the system of the Tantras than Bankim was - or, for the matter of that - than the Brahmos were. "I have preached nothing

1. It is of course well known that the Vedantas do not recognise Nature as a distinct category but explains 'creation' as unreal - as the work of Maya.
2. 'The Divine Soul who as Power pervades all creation'.
3. 'She who in honest men's houses shine as Lakshmi in the form of their wives.'
4. The Brahmos abominated the Tantras.
but the Upanishads and of the Upanishads I have preached nothing but that one-word-Strength" - This was a far closer approximation to Vivekananda's theological stand than his praise for any non-Vedantic system would indicate. But, in seeking scriptural sanction for a heroic conception of womanhood Vivekananda was not content to appeal to the Upanishads, which recognised for woman, her equality (with men) in the Atman, but did so only by implication and nowhere directly sang the glory of womanhood. The Tantras alone, of all Indian systems, recognised and preached Female Power as the root of creation and sang the praise of womanhood with a delight which was totally absent from all other systems of Hindu religious thought. This was why Vivekananda, the Vedantist, appealed to the Tantras; when the point at issue was glory of womanhood, he was certainly the last man to be deterred by any consideration of theological consistency from singing that glory at its loudest.

It was from the Tantras again that Vivekananda derived inspiration when he made the famous distinction between

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1. The worship of Kali, as practised by Vivekananda, the Vedantist, has struck many a commentator as a mystery which failed to be wholly resolved by so worthy a disciple as Nivedita herself. Vivekananda himself refused to be explicit. "That's a secret that will die with me" - he is said to have remarked on one occasion. The fact, however, that the worship of Kali, was no essential part of Neo-Hinduism, the Hinduism he preached in public is made clear from his assertion in a letter to Mary Hale. "Kali worship is my special fad," he wrote in that letter, thereby indicating that it was a private affair of his own. The conception of womanhood as derived from the Tantras was, however, no private revelation. He preached it as an article of the revitalised Hinduism of which he was the apostle.
'wifehood' as glorified by the Western nations and 'motherhood' as glorified by Hinduism. From the viewpoint of traditional Hinduism this was not strictly correct even though the Smritis preached divine status for both the parents inside the family (Manu called the parents - 'Divinities in person'). But even this divine status traditionally applied in the case of father much more effectively than in the case of mother as is proved by the popular verse:

"Pita Svargah, Pita dhannah, Pita hi paramam tapah."

The scriptural verse quoted by Vivekananda in which a mother is said "to excel a thousand fathers in glory." was exceptional; at all events the traditional glorification of motherhood in Hinduism was not effective enough to inspire the greatest poets of India to give literary immortality to a single representative of motherhood, all the well-known heroines of Sanskrit literature - Sita, Damayanti Draupadi, Sakuntala and the like - being great as wives rather than as mothers. It is true that the popular mind in India has, through the ages, been unanimous in sanctifying the names of these heroines as the common mothers of the nation, but neither literature nor the scriptures give sufficient warrant for the assumption made by Vivekananda that the Indian tradition glorifies motherhood at the expense of wifehood. The Tantras alone speak of the Mother-Power as the guiding hand shaping the destinies of men. Vivekananda gave a vital, down-to-earth meaning

to this mystical doctrine and sought the source of power in women in their motherhood. Even in the celibate Nivedita he wanted her 'hero's will' to be combined with a 'mother's heart.' With Vivekananda these two went hand in hand and one was barren without the other.

From motherhood to the conception of 'Sahadharmini' was an easy step, and here again Vivekananda enlarged Bankim's conception by investing the notion (of 'Sahadharmini') with a broader significance. Bankim had explained the notion as that intensity of womanly devotion which sanctified the wife and the husband alike. Vivekananda explained it as the cause of spiritual progeny. According to Vivekananda the glorification of Hinduism, of female chastity stemmed from the desire to ennoble the race by bearing children, who would take up the spiritual seekers' life of celibacy by the sheer impulsion of the mother's chastity. "In my opinion a race must first cultivate a great respect for motherhood, through the sanctification and inviolability of marriage before it can attain to the ideal of perfect chastity" - this was his commentary on the age-old Hindu obsession with wifely devotion, thereby giving to the doctrine of female fidelity a meaning that was as generous as it was stern in upholding the dignity of the wife. "The Roman Catholics and the Hindus, holding marriage sacred and inviolate, have produced great chaste men and women of immense power. To the Arab, marriage is a contract or a forceful possession, to be dissolved at will,

and we do not find there the development of idea of the virgin or the Brahmacharin'; this was how he gave the notion of 'Sahadharmini' a national significance. "Until there is developed in Japan a great and sacred ideal about marriage (apart from mutual attraction and love), I do not see how there can be great monks and nuns." - this was his answer to the reformers of the liberal school who would not recognise marriage as a sacrament and in whose eyes 'mutual attraction and love' were all that was required for a happy union, (to be dissolved at will as soon as 'mutual attraction' faded and 'love' wore thin).

"My eyes have been opened to the necessity of this great sanctification for the vast majority, in order that a few lifelong chaste powers may be produced." - he wrote in answer to the reformers' complaint that treating marriage as a sacrament was little short of subjecting the wives to perpetual bondage. Vivekananda clearly implied no other freedom was worth a millionth part of the intensity of a bondage that led to chaste offspring.

**Conclusions**

Before concluding this section, we must answer the modern critics' persistent assertion that Bankim's and Vivekananda's social ideas had the stamp of 'revivalism' about them, and consequently these thinkers were instrumental in hampering Hindu society's steady progress towards 'modernisation' and enlightenment heralded so
gloriously by the genius of Rammohan Roy and since his
time, assisted largely by the spread of Western learning
in India.

But, first of all we must be clear about the meaning
of terms. The term 'revivalism' has been explained by
The Oxford Dictionary as "organisation of religious revival",
and the Dictionary interprets the last named term (revival)
to mean either (1) the "revival of learning" as in the
Renaissance, or (2) "reawakening of religious fervour".¹
That dictionary nowhere hints that revivalism is a term
of derogation; indeed, if we follow its lead in including
the great historical phenomenon of the Renaissance in
the lists of so-called movements of revival (hundred of
historians have done so with or without that lead), we are
constrained to say that 'revival' and 'revivalism' are
glorious things, and no people is any the worse for sundry
'revivals' in the course of its history. Viewed in this
light, the assertion that New Hindu thoughts and New Hindu
programmes - in so far as they dealt with social questions -
were 'revivalistic' totally fails to convey the disparage-
ment the critics intend when they are using this term.

What the critics actually have in mind when they
designate the social ideas of the New Hindu thinkers as
'revivalistic' is that those ideas assisted the movement
of 'social action' set afoot by such orthodox leaders as
Sasadhar Tarkachudamoni during the 1880s. Bipin Chandra
Pal, who was a young man at that time, and who certainly

¹. Pocket Oxford Dictionary.
knew the meaning of the terms he was using, used this very term 'reaction' in designating Sasadhar Tarkachudamani's movement and was probably the first in implying that Bankim and his circle were partly instrumental in strengthening that movement. The charge against Vivekananda has been levelled in times nearer our own by Soumyendranath Tagore amongst others. Both Bankim and Vivekananda have been sought to be shown as social reactionaries who set out to cancel the progress of Hindu society towards modernisation and enlightenment achieved since the days of Rammohan.

We have produced enough evidence in this chapter to show that such charges stem from a mistaken conception of reform which would confine the application of that term to measure such as were agitated for by Vidyasagar and Malabari. That conception fails to see that the method of 'regeneration' as pleaded for by Bankim and that of 'growth' as advocated by Vivekananda were no less potent instruments for the ends aimed at by reformers of the earlier generation. Actually they were a better instruments for those ends; if only because they did not strike at the very root of the society they were trying to reform as Vidyasagar's and more disastrously, Malabari's preachings did. But the critics of Bankim and Vivekananda might protest that in opposing legislative reform, they were only replacing the most practical mechanism for reform by a mass of high sounding, if well-intentioned verbiage whose action

was at most educative. Let us examine the force of this argument:

(1) As regards the claim that legislative action is the most practical mechanism for reform we need only consider the fate of Vidyasagar's Widow Remarriage Act, which has remained virtually a dead letter for more than a century since its promulgation. This law was passed amidst a great fanfare. It had the backing of the most enlightened members of the Hindu community. It had as its father a man who bestrode the narrow 19th century world of Bengal like a colossus — a man who in courage and loftiness of character has had few compares in India during the whole course of her history. Yet this law has failed to make the slightest impression on Hindu Society.

(2) As regards the 'caste question', the treatment of Bankim and Vivekananda was again different from that of the reformers who would solve the question by 'interdimning', 'shedding the sacred thread' and 'inter-marriage' the last mentioned item being in the best tradition of what we have called 'matrimonial reform'. We have examined Bankim's and Vivekananda's attitude to these reforms. We have seen that they would gladly accept them without making a fetish of them in the manner of the reformers. ¹ It is not

¹ Vivekananda is silent on intercaste marriage, but we know from (The Dialogue of the Swami with his Disciple) that he did not recognise the three thousand and odd castes prevalent in India, and would have them reduced to the four castes recognised in the Vedas. To the extent that this reduction implies he must have contemplated inter-marriage amongst the Brahmanical castes, the Kshatriyas castes and so forth.
clear whether the critics who accuse Bankim and Vivekananda of being 'revivalists' (meaning 'social reactionaries') have this point in mind. But these critics should remember that many an Englishman in India, who had the greatest contempt for 'Natives', had never had any scruple about interdining with them; also there have been Brahmins like Bhaktaprasad - the hero of Michael's farce "Buro Shaliker Ghare Ro" - who abominated Mussalmans, but nevertheless coveted the embrace of a pretty Muslim girl. Reforms like interdining and intermarriage are in fact double-edged weapons which often accentuate caste-animosity, rather than promote caste amity. Bankim and Vivekananda were therefore right in emphasising the Hindu doctrine of 'non-discrimination' when speaking of these reforms rather than rigidly harping on the mere forms of these reforms.

Far more important was the fact Bankim and Vivekananda treated the caste question as one of which the solution lay in raising the lower castes by education and by working for their economic equality with the upper classes. We have already referred to Bankim's famous essay on the peasants of Bengal where he analysed the causes of India's downfall and sought it not in the gradual degradation of the religion of the Hindus but in the Brahmanical Smritis which shut out from the lower classes all avenues of education and economic and political power. Reformers on the other hand put the emphasis rather on the deprivation of the lower classes as regards marriage (with upper class women), the sacred
thread (which distinguished the upper castes as a class apart) and intercaste dining. In an essay entitled - 'Lokshiksha', Barikim chided the educated community for their indifference to the question of the education of the lower classes. He mentioned Rammohan and the Brahmos by name and pointed out that their reform programmes nowhere dealt with the question of bringing education to the masses. Vivekananda's language was harsher. He accused all the reformers of being busy in putting their own house in order and remaining totally indifferent as to the fate of the masses. It is true that Barikim's and Vivekananda's concern for the masses was never given a practical shape, Vivekananda's dream of constructing a huge monastic organisation from which monks would be sent out to give education to the people being nowhere near fulfilment to this day. But it must be remembered that they were the first thinkers to rouse the national consciousness to a basic problem of India and shake the reformers out of their fond day-dream of setting India on the path of glory and grandeur by marrying widows and arranging huge intercaste dinners after the Puri fashion. If we ignore for a moment the modern critics' clamour against 'revivalism' (by which term they mean 'social reaction') and listen to a contemporary reformer's impression as to the impact on the reform scene of that movement of revival, which, since Vivekananda, swept over the whole of India like a tempest, we get a very different
picture from the one conjured up by the labours of the belittling critics of to-day.  

Charles Heimsath concludes on the basis of his study of contemporary opinions: "The advancement of the lower classes in society called for an enlargement of the 'meaning and scope of social reform', as Chandavarkar expressed it in a message to the Conference of 1919, to include 'such questions as the education of the masses, the sanitation of the country, the housing of the poor, the care of the sick and feeble, the employment of labour ..., and rural education, instead of confining social reform as we have hitherto confined it to female education, widow remarriage, removal of caste restrictions and such other items.' The Conference of that year responded to this new definition of social reform and K. Natarajan introduced a resolution incorporating Chandavarkar's new vision of the social progress of India.

(3) There is, however, another argument, perhaps the strongest one urged by modern critics, which would find fault with the very basis of Bankim's and Vivekananda's social ideas. In the opinion of these critics, the association of religion with social ideas was the most object-

1. K. Natarajan (Editor of the India's Social Reformer) wrote in 1911, in Hindusthan Review, XXIII, 13: 'Revivalism has had a wonderfully steadying effect on the national character. It has made us more deliberate and self-respecting in our progress... and has invested the work of reform with a dignity which does not belong to mere imitation.'
iable feature of Bankim's doctrine of 'regeneration' and Vivekananda's doctrine of 'growth.' According to this view, such questions as the position of woman in society or the raising of the lower classes could as well be met by secular programmes. We shall see in a subsequent chapter that the so-called Hindu Nationalism - the political side of the New Hindu doctrine of regeneration and growth - has, in our times, been subjected to the most violent criticism owing to a belief that the alienation of the Muslims during the national struggle leading to partition and the bitter communal discord that has persisted to our own times, was due to this brand of Nationalism. We shall discuss this criticism in its proper place. Here let us try to answer the criticism in so far as it applies to the purely social teachings of the New Hindu thinkers.

It is notable in this connection is that most of the reform schemes in the 19th century were associated with religion, and in this regard the New Hindu thinkers were merely following in the footsteps of the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj and many other lesser religious organisations. Even Vidyasagar, for all his agnosticism, derived all his reforms from the so-called Dharma-Shastras. B. Malabari, was possibly the only social reformer of any consequence, who agitated for reforms on secular lines. But even this Parsi reformer is said to have appealed to those scriptures whenever a particular verse came in handy.
for this purpose. In fact, India in the 19th century was a much more religious country than she is now, and the demand that she should have consented to reform programmes simply because there were good secular reasons for doing so had as good a chance of success as the demand that Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries should have done likewise.