Chapter - I

Social Reforms and Women Education in Modern Times

The nineteenth century is known as the century of social reforms in India that gave birth to a kind of 'renaissance'. It started from Bengal and gradually spread to various parts of India. As a result the lower position of the high caste women in Indian society was brought to light and efforts were made by the reformers to change their position and status by passing social legislations and also by giving them education.[1]

The history of social reform movement in India, Gujarat and Baroda State is discussed under the following heads:

1. Problems and issues of women in the Hindu society.
2. Social reforms for women in India.
3. Women's participation in freedom struggle
4. Some prominent women during the period under study

I.1 Problems and issues of Women in Hindu Society:

[1] See- Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, New Delhi, 1998, Also see Kumkum Sangari Sudesh Vaid, *Recasting Women, Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1999; Neera Desai and Usha Thakkar, *Women in Indian Society*, New Delhi, 2001; Inderjeet Kaur, *Status of Hindu Women in India*, Allahabad, 1983; K.B. Parikh, *Female Infanticide in India*, Calcutta, 1970; Lalita Panigrahi, *British Social Policy and Female Infanticide in India*, New Delhi, 1972; and Amrita Shodan and Neera Desai for 19th Century Gujarati Women.

Historical account of Indian women started during the colonial rule by the European writers who can be divided into two groups - Orientalists and Utilitarians. The first group of writers i.e., the Orientalists though spoke of a 'golden age' prevailing in India during the Vedic age, free from suppositious beliefs and practices but they did not focus on the status of women and made only passing reference about certain learned women. The Utilitarians believed that Indian society was full of corrupt practices from the very beginning and that there was no 'golden age', moreover the condition and status of women was inferior from the very beginning.

It is interesting to note that criticism of Indian social system by the Utilitarians gave birth to a new group of writers especially of Indian origin named as nationalists who protested strongly against the Utilitarians criticism of Indian society and argued that Indian society was once free from all corruption and that there was a 'golden age' when women used to enjoy higher status. They kept the example of that 'golden age'[2] to improve the low status of women which in fact needs to be discussed widely.

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[2] See Uma Chakraborty, "Whatever happened to the Vedic Dasi?" in *Recasting Women*, op, cit., P.28. Also see Charles H. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform* (Princeton N.J., Princeton University Press, 1964) PP. 114-15; Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, *Marriage of Hindu Widows* (Calcutta, K.P. Bagchi and Co., 1976), PP. 108-9; S.R. Shastri, *Women in Vedic Age*, Bombay, 1960, P.20. H.T. Colebrooke, "On the Vedas, or Sacred Writings of the Hindus," *Asiatic Researches*, 8 (1805), PP. 377-498. And, William Jones, "On the Chronology of the Hindus," In

In Hindu Society the position of women during the period under study i.e., from 1850 to 1950, was undoubtedly low, inferior and subordinate to men in patriarchal social system. Their life was miserable because of social customs like *'purdah'*, child marriage, 'sati', ban on widow remarriage, their confinement to household activities, their recognition as the producers of progeny particularly sons, denial of education to them etc.[3]

In the patriarchal social structure of India the birth of a male child was considered a bliss incarnation while that of a daughter the root cause of family misery, which in fact gave birth to the practice of female infanticide in order to escape the humiliation of becoming father-in-law. The existence side by side of customs like polygamy and prohibition of widow remarriage especially during the period under study reveals that while marrying more then one wife was permissible among men, the marriage of young widows was regarded as totally out of question.[4] "The

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Lord Teignmouth, ed. *The Works of William Jones*, (London: John Stockdale, Picadilly, and John Walkes, 1807), IV, P.64

[3] See, Mahesh Chundra Deb, "A Sketch of the Conditions of the Hindoo women" (1839), *Awakening in the early Nineteenth Century*, ed. Goutam Chattopadhya (Calcutta, Progressive Publishers, 1965), PP. 89- 105; Neera Desai, *Women in Modern India*, 2nd edn. (Bombay, Vara and Co., 1967); Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the women's question," in *Recasting Women*, op. cit., PP.238 - 39.

[4] While comparing the practice of polygamy and widow remarriage the Maharaja of Baroda Sayajirao III remarked, "the one keeps up an unduly low standard of morality among men, the other demands an impossibly high standard from women. To enforce this standard we suppress our feelings of

widow practically ceases to be a unit of society. She is shorn of her ornaments; she becomes a thing of evil omen; she is the drudge of the house to whom a bare maintenance was allowed."[5]

Moreover, rules were framed to burn herself forcibly with the dead body of her husband with the practice of sati,[6] as it was believed that women existed only because of man, with the end of his life the spirit of his wives life also ended. He could exist independently without her but not her of him. While one kept an unduly low standard of morality among men, the other demanded an impossibly high standard from women.

Under such circumstances education of women was regarded as totally out of question. Social customs like *'purdah'*, child marriage etc. greatly restricted women's activities in domestic sphere and it was almost universally held that since women had not to earn their livelihood there was no need of education for them.

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humanity and affection and inflict severities upon widow in order to keep their vitality low and make them less attractive - A.G Widgery, p. 164.

[5] Rice Stanley, Sayajirao III, *Maharaja of Baroda*, Vol. II, London, 1931, P.217.

[6] See, Lata Mani, "Production of an official Discourse on Sati in Early Nineteenth Century Bengal," *Review of women Studies* in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26, no.17 (26 April, 1986), P.35. Also see, Ronald W. Neufeldt, *Max Muller and the Rig Veda : A study of its Role in his work and Thought* (Calcutta : Minerva, 1980), P.3. Uma Chakraborty and Preeti Gill (ed.) *Shadow lives. Writings on Widowhood*, New Delhi, 2001 for a range of works and writings on Sati from Colonial texts to modern fictions. Uma Chakraborty, "Whatever happened to the Vedic Dasi"? *Recasting Women*, op. cit, pp. 27-44. Kamala Devi Chattopadhya, *Indian Women's Battle for Freedom*, Delhi, Abhinav, 1983, P.54. And V. N. Datta, *Sati: Widow Burning in India*, Delhi, Monohar, 1988, pp.19-70.

The patriarchal values and various social restrictions for girls established some two thousand years ago still persist though in a different way. The reality of subordinate position of women is now indicated through adverse sex ratios of girls, the growing domestic violence, the increasing number of dowry death and rape cases. They still suffer social and economic oppression, confined only to homebound activities, where their responsibilities are limited to only kith and kin and are hardly consulted in any matter of importance.

The bulk of colonial writing in India focused on demonstrating the peculiarities of Hindu Civilization, and the barbaric practices pertaining to women. The circulation of this negative perception was much wider than that of Orientalist scholarship and probably preceded and outlasted the work of the Orientalists in revealing India's 'lost glory' while they were writing and publishing mainly in learned journals. The Anglican writers, especially Christian missionaries, were methodically building up an indictment, also in print, about the hideous state of Indian society.[7]

Together their best representatives, Mill, Grant, and Duff drew up what has been termed as a 'national' account sheet of moral lapses and

[7] C.H. Philips, "James Mill, Mount Stuart Elphinstone & the History of India", in C.H. Philips, ed. *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 218

strong points of Indian and Western Civilization.[8] The best known work of this genre of writing was Mill's monumental account of India and her past; its reach and impact were tremendous because it was the first comprehensive history of India. In sharp contrast to the Orientalists who had suggested that the Hindus were a people of high culture now in a state of decline, Mill deemed Hindu Civilization as crude from its very beginning, and plunged in the lowest depths of immorality and crime.[9]

A major conclusion of Mill's was that the practice of segregating women did not come with the Muslims; rather it was a consequence of the whole spirit of Hindu Society where women must be constantly guarded at all times for fear of their innate tendency towards infidelity. Thus the conquest of Hindustan by Muslim invaders had nothing to do with the general degradation of women which, Mill argued, did not alter the texture of Society. Further Mill was not concerned with taking up specific social practices in demonstrating the degradation of women. He merely made a passing mention of 'sati' in the notes while discussing the indissolubility of the marriage tie that bound wives to their husbands even

[8] The casting of moral balance sheets has been called the characteristic vice of British writers on Indian history. See K.A. Ballhatchart, "Some Aspects of Historical Writing on Indian by Christian Missionaries", *South Asia Seminar*, School of Oriental and African Studies London, 1956.

[9] Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, *Recasting Women, Essays in Colonial History*, Delhi, 1999, p. 34.

in death. The degeneration of Hindu civilization and the object position of Hindu women, requiring the 'protection' and 'intervention' of the colonial State, were two aspects of colonial politics; The third aspect was the 'effeminacy' of the Hindu men who were unfit to rule themselves.[10] On all three counts British rule in India could be justified on grounds of moral superiority.

Apart from the general structure of Hindu Civilization, the condition of women in the past was a key aspect of historical writing in the 1840s. It was not uncommon for Mill to be echoed by other writers particularly by those who had been termed the 'nativist- evangelists'. One such example was the account of women in the past provided by M.C. Dev, a Christian convert and a member of the Young Bengal group. Dev combined elements of Mill with what was then a widely circulating perception about the Muslim interregnum as the dark ages especially in its effects upon women. According to Deb men in India looked upon women as household slaves and treated them with a superciliousness which even the "Sultan of Turkestan does not show towards his meanest serf."[11]

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[10] Mrinalini Sinha, "Colonial Politics and the Ideal of Masculinity", *Indian Association of Women's Studies*, The Third National Conference of Women's Studies, Chandigarh, Oct. 1-4, 1986.

[11] Gautam Chattopadhyaya, *Awakening in Bengal Early 19th Century Selected Documents,* (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1965), I, p. 94.

The Indian intelligentsia reacted violently to this grim picture of Hindu Civilization and marshalled arguments against each of his major criticism. Ram Mohan Roy, Pandit Vidyasagar, Swami Dayananda Saraswati and many others who were trained in Hindu classics saw India as recovering from a dark age. There had been a 'golden age', they argued, when women were valued and occupied positions of high status. This view of the Vedic past had been adopted from the Indologists and was useful to refute Mill's version of India.[12]

Among the Orientalists who contributed most substantially to the notion of a 'golden age' were William Jones (1746 - 94) and H.T. Colebrooke. Closely associated with the Asiatic Society, their researches covered a wide range of themes in Sanskrit literature, history and philosophy which were refined and elaborated in later years. It is significant, however, that glossing over certain aspects of the past was a characteristic feature of the work of the Orientalists who did not particularly react to the specific forms of inequality of caste, class and gender prevailing in India.

The women's question, notably, was not one of the themes that were fore grounded in the earliest work of the Asiatic Society. Jones, for example,

[12] "Literature of the Ancient & Medieval Periods: Reading against the Oriental Grain," *Women Writing in India,* vol. I, p. 49

did not pay any attention to 'sati' and made only a passing reference to Gargi, whom he described as "eminent for her piety and learning."[13]

More important than Jones in influencing the actual reconstruction of the past was the work of Colebrooke whose original researches earned for him the admiration of Maxmuller.[14] With Colebrooke the Orientalists came to focus their attention directly upon the women's question by compiling evidence bearing on women from the ancient texts; predictably, the focal starting point was the ritual of 'sati'. One of Colebrooke first pieces of research was "On the Duties of the Faithful Hindu Widow,[15] wherein he presented the textual position on 'sati'.

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[13] William Jones, "On the Chronology of the Hindus", In Lord Teignmouth, ed. *The Work of William Jones*, London : John Stockdale, Piccadilly, and John Walkes, 1807, IV, p. 64.

[14] A product of the German Romantic movement and a sympathetic witness to the 1848 Paris in his student days, Max Muller was initially part of the liberal tendency within Germany. However like other liberals in Germany he grew politically conservative about German nationalism and became a staunch admirer of Bismarck. His initial interest in Sanskrit came as much from a romantic childhood interest in India, as from a pragmatic decision that he would have better career prospects in this area than in the already heavily saturated field of classical European studies; The core of Max Muller's work which he himself valued most was his collation and publication of the full text of the Vedas. According to him it was the only "natural basis of Indian history," which could throw light over the whole historical development of the Indian mind and therefore the task of fixing its age was of paramount significance. Like the earlier Orientalists, Max Muller saw the recovery of the Vedas as bringing to Hindus the truths of their ancient tradition. He believed that the Veda is "the root of their religion, and to show what that root is, I feel sure, the only way of uprooting all that has sprung from it during the last 3,000 years. Since the Veda was also the root of all religion, law, and philosophy, it was to trace the origin of these that one needed to reconstruct the Veda." In praise of Vedic Age he said - "So great an influence has the Vedic age ..... exercised upon all succeeding periods of Indian history, so deeply have the religious and moral ideas of that primitive era taken root in the mind of the Indian nation, so minutely has almost every private and public act of Indian life been regulated by old traditionary precepts that it is impossible to find the right point of view for judging of Indian religion, morals and literature without a knowledge of the literary remains of the Vedic age.

[15] H.T. Colebrooke, "On the Duties of The Faithful Hindu Widow," *Asiatic Researches*, 4 (1895), PP. 205-15.

The focus on the duties of the 'faithful' Hindu widow would most likely have had a great impact on Europeans who were the main readers of the Asiatic Researches. For many decades thereafter a reference to Hindus appears to have evoked the image of a burning woman as recorded by Max Muller almost eighty years later.[16]

Whatever other research Colebrooke engaged himself with in reconstructing the 'glories' of the ancient Hindus, an unintended consequence of his essay on the 'faithful widow' was to add the weight of scholarship to the accounts of travellers and other lay writers whose descriptions of burning women came to represent on integral part of the perception of Indian reality. Colebrooke's account of 'sati' highlighted an 'awesome' aspect of Indian womanhood, carrying both the associations of a barbaric society and of the mystique of the Hindu Woman who 'voluntarily' and 'cheerfully' mounted the pyre of her husband.

Colebrooke's essay on the Vedas[17] was the first piece of work drawing attention to the texts as a major achievement of the ancient Aryans. Of interest to us are the references to Gargi and Maitreyi[18] two of the oft-

[16] Ronald W. Neufeldt, **Max Muller and the Rig Veda: A Study of its Role in his work and Thought**, (Calcutta : Minerva, 1980), P.3.
[17] H.T. Colebrooke, "On the Vedas, or sacred Writings of the Hindus," *Asiatic Researches*, 8 (1805), pp. 377-498
[18] Ibid, pp. 443-48.

quoted examples of the glory of ancient Indian womanhood. It is significant that Colebrooke attributes no particular importance to the account of the conversation between Maitreyi and Yajnavalkya. Gargi too appears merely as one of the contenders, neither more nor less important than the other participants in the debate with Yajnavalkya.

Therefore the perception of the term 'golden age' raised serious argument among historians and more about the actual position of women during the so called 'golden age'. However it can be claimed that at least during the Vedic age (when golden age seemed to have existed) though the birth of a female child was not expected but at least after their birth they were treated on the equal line along with the male issues.

I.2.1 Social Reforms for Women in India

The advent of the British in India had brought not only a new form of government, but also new knowledge, new ideas and new technology. The members of the newly educated class discovered to their distress that the society which had bread them and about which they often boasted was not the ideal one, but ridden with many evils such as discrimination against women.[19]

[19] Desai Neera and Usha Thakkar, *Women in India Society*, New Delhi, 2001. p. 2.

Social reformers all over the country showed their deep concern over women's issues such as 'sati', child marriage, female infanticide, widowhood, *'purdah'*, polygamy, *'devdasi'* and denial of education. When the upper caste Hindu widows in Bengal immolated themselves on the funeral pyre of their husbands, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, in order to stop the custom, referred to various Sanskrit texts to prove that this practice was not prescribed by the religious texts. While preparing the arguments in favour of regulation of 'sati', he also discussed the economic aspect of the question.[20]

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar also took the support of sanskrit texts for his campaign for widow remarriage. Durgaram Mehtaji in Gujarat, like Vidyasagar in Bengal felt that the denial of education to women was responsible for many of their problems. Behramji M. Malabari's crusade to end the sufferings of child widows and to raise the age of consent was noteworthy. D.K. Karve contributed to the field of women's education immensely. M.G. Ranade, Gopal Hari Deshmukh (Lokhitwadi), and Karsandas Mulji were among the notable persons who contributed to the betterment of women's status. In South India, R. Venkata Ratnam Naidu

[20] Ibid, pp 1-2.

opposed the '*devdasi*' system, and Kandukuri Virasalingam Pantulu worked for marriage reform.[21]

While many of the reformers were inspired by the liberal ideas of the West, some preferred to go back to the 'glorious' traditions of ancient India. Revivalists such as Dayanand Saraswati and Vivekanand made efforts to improve the status of women by evoking the ancient Indian norms of purity and duty. Most of the Hindu social reformers sought credibility for their ideas and actions in the ancient Sanskrit texts. An analysis of the Sati tradition shows that women and the scriptures became interlocking grounds for the rearticulating of tradition, and women became emblematic of tradition. The focus was not the specific problem for women, but what constituted the authentic tradition (Manu).[22]

However, some bold voices challenged the set patterns. Jyotirao Phule raised his voice against the tyranny of Brahmanical traditions, and worked for equality and the education of the oppressed classes and women. Gopal Ganesh Agarkar was the foremost among the few who advocated the rights of women on the ground of equality. Pandita Ramabai (we will discuss about her at length later in this chapter) dared

[21] Ibid, p. 2.
[22] Desai Neera & Usha Thakker, op. cit., p. 3.

to challenge age-old traditions which had hindered the development of women.[23]

It was mainly because of the efforts of social reformers and the co-operation of some of the colonial rulers that some progressive legislations such as banning 'sati' (1829), permitting widow remarriage (1856) and determining age of consent (1891) were passed. But as the political atmosphere became surcharged with the nationalist ideas, the British initiative for Social reforms was dampened.[24]

Ram Mohan Roy's first pamphlet on 'sati' was published in 1818, five years after the Colonial administration had authorised a particular version of the practice and three years after systematic data collection on Sati had begun.[25] By this time the main features of official discourse on 'sati' had already taken shape. Between 1818 and his death in 1832, Ram Mohan wrote a great deal on 'sati'.[26]

The case against 'sati' had been argued forcefully even before Ram Mohan Roy by Mritunjay Vidyalankar. Together Ram Mohan and

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[23] Ibid, p. 23
[24] Ibid, p. 38
[25] "Translation of a conference between an Advocate for and an opponent of the practice of burning widow alive," Calcutta, 1818. Two years later, Ram Mohan published "A second conference between an advocate for and an opponent of the practice of burning widow alive," Calcutta, 1820.; See the *English works of Raja Ram Mohan Roy*, Vol.2, ed., J.C. Ghosh, New Delhi, 1982.
[26] Sangari Kumkum and Sudesh Vaid, op. cit., p. 102.

Mritunjay introduced into 'sati' a highly intellectual argument. Mritunjay and then Ram Mohan argued that the ultimate goal of all Hindus was selfless absorption in a divine essence, a union which could not flow from an action like 'sati'. It was in this context, in response to the exigencies of social needs, that Roy imaginatively used the Maitreyi-Yajnavalkya episode to argue[27] against the subjection of women.[28] Ram Mohan Roy carried a vigorous campaign against 'sati' and finally it was abolished by Lord Bentinck by Act VIII of 1829.

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820 - 1891), the legendary Sanskrit scholar who campaigned for the introduction of a Bill to legalise widow remarriage, based his position on the *sastras*. Using the text of Parasara he argued that the *sastras* had sanctioned widow remarriage in the Kaliyuga, which was the contemporary age. He published a pamphlet in Bengali in January 1855 seeking a larger readership which set off a major debate across India. The opponents of widow remarriage mounted a vigorous campaign against him and also used the *sastras* to back up their position. Vidyasagar's first pamphlet "The Marriage of Hindu Widows" and his 'Rejoinder' to the opponents of his position attracted great

[27] J. C. Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohan Roy*, (Calcutta : Oriental, 1885), p. 43.

[28] He imbued the account with two features (neither of which could be seen in the Jones - Colebrooke' accounts) both of which have survived into the twentieth century upper caste Hindu perception - one was the spiritual potential of women and the second was that in the area of spirituality women were not inferior to men. From this followed the implicit assumption that the status of women in the ancient past had been quite high unlike that of contemporary women.

attention. The rejoinder did not rely solely on the *sastric* sanction for widow remarriage, as the earlier pamphlet had, but also incorporated rationalist - humanist arguments for ending the ban on widow remarriage. In his first tract on widow remarriage (1855) Iswar Chandra claimed that this practice was permissible in 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 3,000 soon sold out, and the third reprint was of 10,000 copies. But he pressed on and urged the British to pass legislation that would enable Hindu Widows to remarry. To support his request Iswar Chandra collected almost 1,000 signatures and sent this petition to the Indian Legislative Council. The Council received thousands of signatures for and against this measure but the members finally decided to support the "enlightened minority." The Hindu Widow Remarriage Act was passed in 1856. Although the value of the Act for improving the lives of woman has been questioned, one cannot doubt Iswar Chandra's desire to create a more humane society.[29]

Iswar Chandra also became an impassioned supporter of female education and an opponent of polygamy. He wrote lengthy tracts substantiating his positions with scriptural citations and historical data. A decline in religion created the environment that allowed contemporary

[29] Alexander Forbes, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

customs to thrive, he wrote. When his opponents protested, he insisted they were misinterpreting scripture and employed a masterful command of Sanskrit to point out their ignorance.[30]

The Remarriage Act did not change the status of widows. Frequently blamed for the husband's death, the high-caste widow was required to relinquish her jewellery and subsist on simple food. Young widows were prayed upon by men who would make them their mistresses or carry them away to urban brothels. In 1818 the court at Surat in Western India tried Vijay Lakshmi, a young brahmin widow, for killing her illegitimate child. At the first trial she was sentenced to hang but on appeal this changed to transportation for life and later reduced to five years. This case so angered Tarabai Shinde (1850-1950) a young Marathi housewife, that she wrote 'Stri- Purusha Tulana' (a comparison between women and men). Vijayalakshmi's case had triggered an intense public discussion about the misfortune of widows and the issue of widow remarriage. For Tarabai, it was clear that this issue was simply a metaphor for the general mistreatment of women. She wrote: "So is it true that only women's bodies are home to all the different kinds of recklessness and vice? Or have men got just the same faults as we find in women?" As for widows: "Once a woman's husband has died, not even a dog would swallow what

[30] Ibid, p. 21

she's got to."[31] Tarabai Shinde's cry for equality went unheeded in a world where reformers wanted to help women, not accord them equal status.[32]

The case of Phulmani Dasi brought to surface the issue of the age of consent and the miseries of child-brides Phulmani Dasi, a child bride of eleven years who had not yet attained puberty, bled to death when her much older husband forced himself on her. The incident evoked unprecedented concern over the fate of the child brides, B. M. Malabari, with the help of other social reformers, launched a crusade to end child marriage and the suffering of widows. The issue of increasing the age of consent raised a storm in various sections of society, the liberals asking for increasing the age of consent by law and traditionalists, supported by extreme nationalists who did not want the alien government to interfere in any social issue of Indian society, arguing for the status quo. Ultimately the age of consent was fixed at 12 in 1891.

However, it was only in 1929 that a decisive legal step was taken to strike a blow at the harmful custom of child-marriage. The Child Marriage

[31] Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Issues of Widowhood: Gender and Resistance in Colonial Western India," *Contesting Power. Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, ed. Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1911) PP. 62-108, quotes from P.93 and P.96.
[32] Alexander Forbes, op. cit., p. 22.

Restraint Act passed in that year raised the marriage age for girls to fourteen and for boys to eighteen.[33]

The rights of Hindu women in matters of inheritance and property also drew the attention of social reformers, therefore to widen their rights in the matter the Married Woman's Property Act was passed in 1874 and was amended in 1929, 1937, 1956 and in 1973 as a result of which property laws for women was relaxed. According to the amended law of 1973, a women were conferred the right to enjoy her husband's share in coparcenary property of the deceased simultaneously.[34]

The Special Marriage Act was passed in 1872.The parties marrying under the Act were required to declare that they did not believe in religion in which they were born. Since most of the people were not prepared to do so, the law was amended in 1923 where in such a statement was not required.

Another Special Marriage Act was passed in 1954 which recognized the marriage of a man over twenty-one years of age and the woman over

[33] Ibid, p. 21.
[34] Sachchidananda Ramesh P. Sinha, *Women's Rights Myth and Reality*, Jaipur, 1984, pp. 28-32.

eighteen if neither has spouse living at the time of marriage. The solemnization does not entail any religious ceremony.[35]

The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 was also passed after Independence according to which neither party has a spouse living at the time of marriage. Thus both polygamy polyandry, practiced under the old laws, were, once for all, abolished as the Bill had over riding effect on all previous laws. The Act also raised the age of marriage for girls to fifteen and for boys to eighteen.[36]

I.2.2 Women's organisations

When the forces of change set in, in the later half of the 19th century, and penetrated the private world of Indian women, it was natural for women to respond to these forces. They started organising women's meetings to discuss their status and ways for betterment. Social reformers and educated men supported, and at times even guided such efforts, so that women could be better companions and mothers and at the same time move with the changing times. The national social conference was formed in 1887 as a platform for raising social issues and formulating strategies to combat social evils.[37]

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[35] Ibid, p. 33
[36] Ibid, p. 34
[37] Desai Neera and Thakkar Usha, op cit., p. 4.

Gradually women realised they needed their own forum, and some organisations came in existence, such as the Bharat Mahila Parisad, Arya Mahila Samaj, Stri Zarthosti Mandal (Parsi women's circle), Anjuman-e-khawatin-e-Islam (Muslim Women's Association) and Bharat Stree Mahamandal. By and large their sphere of work and activities were limited to the social arena. From the first two decades of the 20th century, the articulation of women's issues was based on liberal principles of equality. In this context, three major women's organizations, the Women's Indian Association (WIA), the National Council for Women in India (NCWI) and the All India Women's Conference (AIWC), particularly the AIWC, played a major role in articulating women's issues.[38]

I.2.3 Women's struggle for Assertion of Rights:-

One of the major contributions of women's organisations in pre-Independence times was to raise and articulate women's demand for rights and to struggle continuously to get them. Three issues were important in this context.[39]

(i) Participation of women in Electoral politics:

[38] Ibid, pp. 4-5.
[39] Ibid, p. 6.

The demand for franchise was made as early as the second decade of the 20th century by the elite women, who were conscious of their political rights and were influenced by democratic values and ideals. They got support from the British suffragettes. Dorothy Jinarajadasa, Annie Beasnt, Margaret cousins, Sarojini Naidu, Herabai Tata and other educated women in women's organisations worked actively to generate political consciousness among women. Support for women's franchise was sought in the meetings of the Indian National congress and women's organisations all over India. An all India delegation of prominent women led by Sarojini Naidu met with Edwin Montagu, Secretary of state for India, in Dec, 1917 to demand the right to vote for women.[40]

The British government ignored the arguments for women's franchise presented by Indian women's organisations, the Indian National congress, the Home Rule League, the Muslim League and British women's organisations. The Government of India Act 1919, however, laid down that question of franchise could be settled by the provinces. Bombay and Madras were the first provinces to grant franchise to women in 1921, the United Provinces followed in 1923; Punjab and Bengal in 1926; and Assam, the Central provinces, Bihar and Orissa in 1930.Yet the number of the enfranchised women remained very small. Women were also

[40] Ibid, pp. 5-6.

voicing their demand to be elected to the legislator when she was appointed to the Madras Legislative Council in 1927.[41]

The Government of India Act, 1935 extended franchise to six million women. In the 1937elections, 10 women were elected from general constituencies, 41 from reserved constituencies, and five were nominated to provincial legislative councils. Vijayalaxshmi Pandit became the minister for local self-government and public health in the United provinces. Anasuyabai kale of Central provinces occupied the position of deputy speaker. Hansa Mehta became parliamentary secretary in Bombay.[42]

It is important to note that Major actors in the arena of politics in those days had differant perspectives on women's issues. For the major political party, the Indian National congress, the cause of the nation's independence took priority over women's rights. The British did not want to disturb the status quo on women's issues. Women's organisations, however, continued their struggle for women's rights. The passage of the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 (fixing the minimum age of marriage for girls at 14 for boys at18) and the Hindu women's right to

[41] Ibid, p. 7.
[42] Ibid, p. 8.

property Act of 1937 gave them some satisfaction, but they realised that the task of removing legal disabilities of women was a complex one.[43]

(ii) The Hindu Code Bill:

Women's organisations worked hard to mobilise public opinion in favour of progressive legal enactments. Diversities of customs, the prevalence of different schools of Hindu Law regarding succession, marriage and inheritance, the difficulties of courts in their interpretation of the law, and the changing character of the economy, administration and ideology created the need for a uniformly worded Hindu Law. Accordingly a committee was appointed in 1941, popularly known as Rau committee for the purpose. But the intensity of the struggle for freedom, changes in political atmosphere and the approach of the British Government edged out the much awaited and desired Hindu code Bill, which aimed at bringing about a change in Hindu women's unequal status. After independence, when the Indian parliament took up the issue of codifying the Hindu Law, there was enormous opposition from conservative sections of political parties and people. The pressure from the orthodox elements and the approaching first general elections caused Nehru to postpone the bill. Women's organisations again became painfully aware of the obstacles in the path towards legal equality. After the elections,

[43] Ibid, pp. 8-9.

with the Indian National congress in power, the bill again came up for discussion, and it was decided to split the bill into parts, which were later passed as separate acts.[44]

(iii) Women's subcommittee of the National planning committee:

The Indian National Congress set up the National planning committee in 1938. A sub committee composed of women was asked to submit proposals regarding women's place in a planned economy. Chaired by Lakshmibai Rajwade, the committee included Sarojini Naidu, Begum S. Hamid Ali, Amrit kaur, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, Begum Shahnauj and Sarala Devi.Mridula Sarabhai was the secretary. The recommendations submitted by the committee on issues of political, economic and property rights, education, marriage, family and other matters were progressive and based on a comprehensive analysis of the position of women. The members had demanded equal status and equal opportunities for women, political rights of women in the public sphere, an organised health service, a scheme for child care and social insurance, economic rights of women, protection of children's rights, a uniform civil code and common courses of study for boys and girls. They maintained, "We would like to displace the picture so deeply ingrained upon the racial imagination of men striding forward to conquer new worlds, women following wearily

[44] Ibid, p. 9.

behind with a baby in her arms. The picture which we now envisage is that of a man and women comrades of the road, going forward together, the child joyously shared by both. Such a reality we feel cannot but raise the manhood and womanhood of every nation". While women struggled for assertion of their rights, they participated in the freedom struggle with great zeal and commitment.[45]

I.3 Women's participation in the Freedom struggle:

Women acquired confidence and visibility as they participated actively in the struggle for independence. Though the early sessions of the Indian National Congress were attended by only a few women delegates from educated and progressive families, the feeling persisted that women should be seen and not heard. Most of the women who attended the sessions worked mostly as volunteers; very few participated in the deliberations or rose to high positions, though Annie Besant was the first women to become the president of the congress in 1917 followed by Sarojini Naidu in 1925 and Nellie Sengupta in 1933. This , however, dose not mean that women had no political sensitivity, women had participated in struggles against injustice and were involved in supporting some nationalist activities such as sheltering offenders of the British law,

[45] Ibid, p. 10.

inculcating nationalist ideas in the children, and contributing to the political activities of the male members of the family.

Under Gandhi's influence, their participation in the freedom struggle became visible. The struggle was on an unprecedented, massive scale, Gandhi turned traditional symbols and ideas into sources of inspiration and energy for women, who came out of their homes to organise meeting and processions to sell *khadi*, to spread the massage of *swadeshi*, to give away their jewellery and to picket near the shops of liquor and foreign cloth .Many women emerged as leaders, including Hansa Mehta, Mithaben Petit, Avantikabai Gokhale and Premabai Kantak(from western India) Swarup Rani Nehru, Parvati Devi, Lado Rani Zutshi(and her three daughters, Manmohini, Shyama and Janaki) Satyavati Devi (from Northern India), S.Ambujamal, Rukmani Lakshmipathy, Durgabai (from southern India) Basanti Devi, Urmila Devi, Sarala Devi and Malati Choudhury (from eastern India). Women were active in the princely states too.

Gandhi's Dandi March on 12th March 1930 opened a new chapter in India's history. But his decision not to take women along disappointed women. Many women and the women's Indian Association protested against the exclusion on the ground that in a non-violent struggle, any

discrimination on the ground of sex was unnatural and would work against the awakened consciousness of women. Ultimately, Gandhi had to permit women to participate fully in the salt *satyagraha*. He named Sarojini Naidu as his second successor, after Abbas Tyabji and she carried out her mission with rare distinction. Women's participation in the civil disobedience movement of 1930-32 was more intense than in the early twenties. The entry of women in politics was no longer a debatable issue in India after 1930 and it did not generate any antagonism between men and women as in the western countries, where there were heated arguments on the issue of political rights for women.[46]

The Congress working Committee in 1930 adopted a resolution regarding the "grateful tribute to the women of India for the noble part they are progressively playing in the present struggle for national freedom and the readiness they have increasingly shown to brave assaults, abuses, lathi-charges and imprisonment while carrying on the Congress work".[47]

When Gandhi inaugurated his programme of individual Satyagraha in October 1940, Sucheta Kripalani was one of the first to join it. The Quit India Movement of August 1942 brought new vigour to the freedom

[46] See Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya, The struggle for freedom in India, in Tara Ali Baig, ed., *Women of India*, Govt. of India, New Delhi 1958; Leela Kasturi and Vina Mazumdar (1984), *Women and Indian Nationalism*, New Delhi; Manmohan Kaur, *Role of Woman in the freedom Movement*, 1855-1947, New Delhi, 1968

[47] Ibid, p. 12.

struggle. When all the important leaders were arrested on 9th August, at the public meeting at Gwalior Tank in Mumbai, a spirited young woman Aruna Asaf Ali, unfurled the flag, went underground and earned the admiration of the people. Usha Mehta, with her three colleagues, made history by operating the underground radio..[48]

The upheaval caused by the 1942 movement continued until Independence. Women, young and old, were involved in this great struggle. They went to jail, sometimes with their babies and contributed to the programmes of constructive work. Women's' participation in the freedom struggle changed many perceptions. In a way, Indian women feminised nationalism and in turn the nationalist struggle helped them to liberate themselves from some age-old social taboos and traditional norms. To give an example, in the traditional Indian society, it was considered a bad omen for married women to break their bangles, or not to put the vermilion mark on forehead while their husbands were alive. Still, many married women broke their glass bangles (made of imported glass) and burnt their imported cloths as their contribution to the freedom struggle.[49]

[48] Ibid. p. 12.
[49] Ibid, pp. 12-13

While the nationalist struggle provided women with an opportunity to enter the public sphere and bring about changes in their lives, it could not totally transform the reality. The chains of tradition and conventional thinking could not be broken totally. The basic issue of women's inequality and the traditional role of women were not challenged. Women's issues and movement were submerged in the tidal wave of the nationalist struggle. Gandhi's construction of the Indian Women, self effacing but morally strong was accepted by and large by people and by most women. Under Gandhi's leadership, women found it possible to traverse between the private sphere of home and the public sphere of nationalist struggle.

While women from elite families got more visibility in the struggle and there was some record of this participation, it has to be noted that there were thousands of women, unacknowledged and virtually unknown, who sacrificed everything they had for the nation.[50]

While the majority of women chose to go with Gandhi's non violent struggle, there were some who joined the band of revolutionaries. Their activities included raids on Government Offices, smuggling of weapons, carrying secret messages, sheltering absconding

[50] Ibid, p. 13.

revolutionaries, manufacturing bombs and killing government officers. Bhikaiji Cama, who worked with Shyamiji Krishn Varma and Savarkar's Abhinava Bharat Society, maintained close links with Indian revolutionaries from outside India; she represented India at the International Socialist Congress at Stuttgart in 1907, unfurling the Indian flag and carried on the activities for Swaraj. Kalpana Dutta (Later Joshi), Preetilata Wadedar, Santi Ghosh, Suniti Choudhury and Bina Das displayed rare courage in opposing British rule. Some brave women joined Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army. A Women's regiment, Rani of Jhansi Regiment, was formed under Laxmi Sahgal. Capt. Laxmi, a legend in her life time, and her colleagues form a glorious chapter in the history of India's freedom struggle.[51]

Women's participation in the freedom struggle heralded a new era for the nation as well as for women themselves. And as independence was imminent women felt that they had a role as equal citizens in a free nation. Women members in the constituent assembly did not favour reservation of seats for women. Giving voice to the confidence acquired by the experience of participation in the freedom struggle, Hansa Mehta said in the constituent Assembly on 19 Dec. 1946 that in spite of the low status of Indian women "We have never asked for privileges .What we

[51] Ibid, pp. 13-14.

have asked for is social justice, economic justice and political justice. We have never asked for that equality which can alone be the basis of mutual respects and understanding and without which real cooperation is not possible between man and woman.[52]

I.4 History of Women education in India:-

The women education had been neglected in India for a very long time. Their position and status in Indian society have been subordinate and inferior to men. That had been denied not only education but even the basic rights of better living. Moreover, popular view considered education only as the means of turning out white collard clerks for the new administrative and economic systems introduced by Britain in India and when it was almost universally held that, since women had not to earn their livelihood, there was no need of education for them. In such circumstances naturally the question of women's education was ignored by the Government and despite pressure exerted by missionaries and liberals, was unconcerned with female education. The missionaries were interested in female education and schools for girls because, they argued, women needed to be brought into the fold to make conversions permanent. But since men made the decisions female education was ancillary. Thus prior to the efforts of the government to introduce

[52] Ibid, p. 14.

education for women, the Christian missionaries had, however, worked in that direction in a limited way.[53]

It has been acknowledged by all that, in the earlier phase, women's education in India was pioneered by the Christian missionaries. In Madras the entire foundation of higher education of girls was laid by foreign Christian missions. In 1824, the missionaries started a girl's school in Bombay.[54]

In Bengal the earliest attempt to educate Hindu women was not made by the state, but the entire credit was due to two English women, who in 1819 more than a generation before the Indian Universities were established, first tried to elevate the condition of Indian Women. The names of Lady Amherst and Miss Cook, the two pioneers of female education in India, show what women can do to benefit women belonging to any religion, race and language.

Besides the missionaries enlightened Indian reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Pandit Iswar Chanddra. Vidyasagar, Keshab Chandra Sen, Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekanand etc. were also responsible for the spread of women education in India.

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[53] Neera Desai, *Women in Modern India*, Bombay, 1957, p.204.
[54] Ibid, p. 108.

Slowly and gradually the British Government began to take interest in female education. Lord Dalhousie, Governor-General of India from 1848 to 1857, declared that no single change was likely to produce more important and beneficial consequences than female education.[55] In 1854, in the Wood's Education Dispatch for the first time women education was recognized as a branch of the state system of education. The despatch read:

> *The importance of female education in India cannot be over rated; and we have observed with pleasure the evidence which is now afforded of an increased desire on the part of many of the natives of India to give a good education to their daughters. But this means a far greater proportional impulse is imparted to the educational and moral tone of the people than by the education of men.*[56]

According to this educational despatch, the total number of girls' school was 256 in Madras, 65 in Bombay, 288 in Bengal and 17 in North Western Provinces. In Punjab the traditional education of women was continued as an indigenous effort and the modern type of girls' schools had just begun to come into existence.[57]

Even then it did not declare that government should assume direct responsibility and run some schools of its own. Hence the development of

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[55] Mathur Y.B., *Women's education in India*, (1813-1966), Bombay, 1973, p. 25.
[56] Nurullah Syed and Naik J.P., *A history of education in India during the British period*, Bombay, 1951, p. 172
[57] Ibid, p. 176.

women's education had been a very slow and difficult process in this country. It was partly due to the states' attitude and partly due to the indifference and hesitation of the people. At the same time, women's education had to face some difficulties which were inherent in the Indian social system itself, viz., the system of 'purdah' and child-marriage, lack of women teachers and girl's schools and absence of a suitable curriculum for girls. In short, owing to a variety of reasons, the progress of women's education had been very slow in India.[58]

After the Mutiny of 1857, the State funds were spent more freely on women's education. This resulted in an expansion of education amongst girls. In 1871 there were 1,700 primary schools and 134 secondary schools for girls in the entire country.[59]

The next great event in the history of women education occurred in 1882 when the Hunter Commission was appointed. It considered the question of women's education in all its aspects of syllabus, teaching staff, women inspectors and others. It recommended that the Government, the District Board must bear the expenses of female education.[60] The Commission did a great service in emphasizing the need of education for girls.

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[58] Ibid, p. 176.
[59] Ibid, p. 176.
[60] Ibid, p. 176.

In the field of higher education also it will be very interesting to study the attitude of the University of 1857 to women's education. These universities considered that University examinations were designed for boys alone and not in the least for girls.[61] Due to the effort of Mr. Hobhouse, the vice-chancellor of Calcutta University, women were allowed to sit at the examinations from 1877. In 1882, two women, Kadambini Bose and Chandramukhi Bose, graduated from the Calcutta University.[62]

In 1883, the University of Bombay also removed the obstacles in the way of women candidates for admission to various examinations. It was during this period that training colleges for teachers were established in Ahmedabad and Poona.

The contribution of various religious organizations was also noteworthy in the spread of female education. Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj, Theosophical Society, Ramkrishna Mission all supported female education and established schools in various parts of India.

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[61] Ibid, p. 176.
[62] N. Desai, *Women in Modern India*, p. 207.

Among the individual social reformers who worked hard for the spread of education among girls the names of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshab Chandra Sen, D.K. Karve, Pandit Ramabai Saraswati, Mataji Tapaswini, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Sister Subbhalakshmi etc. are remembered with gratitude.

By the turn of the century the number of schools for girls and school enrolment had risen dramatically. Parents were gradually realising that the education of their daughters is as much a part of their duty as the education of their sons. The demand for educated wives also developed. The Education Departments also took some active steps and devised new plans for spreading education, viz., separate schools for girls were started arrangements of conveyance for taking girls to schools were made, inspectresses were appointed, liberal prizes were offered to girls and fees were remitted at times, many schools run by local bodies were transferred to Government, favourable grants were given to private girls' schools, teachers of boys schools were rewarded for every girl whose attendance could be secured, steps were taken to attract ladies to the teaching profession, and provincial committees with a fair proportion of lady

members were setup for discussing the problems of girls' education. These steps gave a great encouragement to girls' education.[63]

In 1904 Lord Curzon, in a government resolution on education policy, pointed out that though some advancement has been made in female education, as a whole, it was still in a very backward condition. Therefore he collected more funds for the advancement of education of women. During the same period Mrs. Annie Besant established the Central Hindu Girls' School at Banaras with the object of imparting western education to girls quite separately from boys in a modernized school of Hinduism.

The next important step was the Government Resolution of Educational Policy of 1913 which observed that the total number of girls receiving education though raised from 444, 470 in 1901-02 to 844, 363 in 1910-11 but that remains insignificant in proportion to the female population.

In 1916, the first Medical College, Lady Hardinge College, Delhi, was established for women in the country. The Women's University

[63] Miss. K. N. Lalithamma, *Brief History of Women's Education in Modern India*, in N.B. Sen, *Development of Women's Education in New India*, New Delhi, 1969, p. 58.

(S.N.D.T. University) was also established in the same year. In 1917 there were 12 arts colleges, 4 professional colleges and 166 secondary schools for girls.[64] The enrolment also showed an increase. The majority of girls, however, did not continue their studies in schools for a long period.

The constitutional changes introduced by the Montague Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 made education a comprehensive subject under the charge of an Indian Minister in the different States. By the end of World War I, there were educational institutions for women in all parts of the country, and enrolments tripled at the school level and quintupled in the Universities. And by the end of 1932 of the 24 million literates, 20 million were men and 4 million women. Thus the percentage of women gradually rose but was still unsatisfactory.

The Hartog Committee, appointed in 1928, recommended ways for improving the state of female education and declared that in the interest of the advance of education as a whole, priority should be given to the claims of girls' education in every scheme of expansion.[65] The committee observed great disparity between the education of boys and girls and recommended the appointment of an experienced woman officer of

[64] Basu Aparna, *Essays in the History of Indian Education*, New Delhi, 1982, p. 16.
[65] Desai Neera, *Women in Modern India*, op. cit., p. 210.

higher standing at the head quarters to prepare plans and programmes for the expansion of girls education, representation of women in all local bodies and educational committees and to increase the strength of the inspecting agency for girl schools.

In the phase of the Congress Ministries in various provinces in 1937, efforts were made to tackle the problem of education of adult population which included adult women as well. During this period, as mentioned earlier, numerous institutions run by women themselves for their own welfare were established. Almost all of them included education as one of the items in their programmes. The need for basic education was also recognized by various groups and institutions. Further, educational projects like the Wardha Scheme and others were also conceived and formulated. All these helped to increase the pace of the education of women.

One of the most interesting feature of the period was the springing up of women's societies, such as, the women's Indian Association, founded in 1917 under the guidance of Dr. Annie Besant and Mrs. Margaret Cousins and the National Council of women established in 1925 and many other local women's organizations in various states worked seriously to promote the cause of education among women.

In short, the period from 1917 to 1947 was one of significant developments in India. It includes the economic and social impact of the two world wars, the national awakening in India, progress in economic and social matters, and finally the Independence on August 15, 1947. These factors have contributed a good deal to the growth of girls' education.

TABLE – 1

Girls under instruction, 1921-22 to 1946-47

INSTITUTION	1921-22	1931-32	1941-42	1946-47
Primary Schools	1,087,131	1,944,070	3,123,643	2,715,230
Secondary Schools	124,954	196,170	410,333	442,403
Arts & Science Colleges	1,207	2,685	11,778	16,284
Professional Colleges	266	521	1,725	2,468
Professional Schools	19,570	17,568	40,869	38,375

Source: S.N. Mukerji, Education in India Today and Tomorrow, Udaipur, 1969, p.243

From Table-1 we can see an increase in the enrolment of girls in all types of institutions from 1921-22 to 1946-47.

Female Education during Post Independence period:

After Independence the major thrust of the policy was on the spread of primary education. The principle of free and compulsory primary education for all children up to fourteen years was incorporated in the Directive Principles of state policy in the constitution. There was a tremendous growth in the number of high schools. Secondary Education was made free in Tamil Nadu and Jammu and Kashmir.

In 1952 The Secondary Education Commission under A.L. Mudaliar was set up. It made many useful recommendations such as establishment of multi-purpose schools. Regarding women education it started "While no distinction need to be made between education imparted to boys and girls, special facilities for the study of home science should be made available to all girls."[66]

Moreover, Durgabai Deshmukh Committee was appointed to make a lee-way in women's education of primary and secondary levels. It recommended that education of women was to be regarded as a major programme in education, bold and determined efforts was to be made for closing the existing gap between the education of man and women, necessary funds be made available to run special schemes and programmes to look after women's education and suggested policies,

[66] Arti Bharti G, *A study of perception of Beneficiaries of free Higher Education Policy for girls in Gujarat*, Ph.D. Thesis, Hansa Mehta Library, Baroda, 1995, p. 8.

programmes, targets and priorities for the expansion and improvement of the education of girls.[67]

I.5 Some Prominent Women during the period under study

To fully appreciate the rise of women's consciences, it would be quite instructive to look at the biographical notes of some noted women

Vina Mazumdar:

Vina Mazumdar was one of contemporary India's well-known feminist scholars. She was born in Calcutta, in a middle class family. Her mother's struggle to educate herself through reading was indulged by her father. Her mother bought books and magazines from her household savings, enabling her daughter to become a voracious reader long before she started school in1935 in Diocesan Girls' school. She started her college career in the women's college, Benaras Hindu University. By the middle of 1944 she joined Ashutosh college Calcutta, for her B.A.(Hons).By the middle of 20th century she went to Oxford. Belty Kemp, her college tutor was her first morale builder and taught her about the role of a teacher. She returned in 1950 and in 1951 she joined Patna University as a lecturer in political science to begin her chosen profession.

A year later she was married. She was blessed with three daughters. In 1960 she again left for Oxford along with her daughters for research work. She finished her thesis and persuaded her guide to arrange for a quick examination and viva so that she could return early. Returning India she was appointed at the University Grants commission (UGC) as Education officer. While working at the said post she realised that the Oxford model which she enjoyed at London could not be applicable everywhere in India. While taking a visiting committee round the interior colleges of Rajasthan and some of the north-eastern states, practically broke her heart-seeing the appalling conditions in which students had to live, study and spend years of their life, those years which should have been a time of growth and stimulation. She broke down while presenting her findings to D.S. Kothari who found her use of a social science approach in examining these institutions to be a noble and a valuable break through, and promptly constituted a standing committee on student affairs, making her its secretary. All the members of that committee were social scientists of eminence.

By the end of the year 1970 she again joined at University, teaching in Berhampur, Orissa, but shortly afterwards she was appointed a Member of the committee on the status of women in India (CSWI) by

the Ministry of Education and social welfare. By Oct. 1973 she found herself member -secretary of the reconstituted CSWI, with a mandate to produce a report within a year.

This assignment was to radically alter the direction of her own and many others' lives. Her findings through pooling of available social science knowledge on varied sections of India's diverse communities/ regions/ class/ traditions; and extensive discussion with over 10,000 women from different backgrounds in most States and cultural regions revealed her own ignorance and shattered her self-image as social scientists/ teachers/ and as "daughters of Independence".

Her report created a stir in the national and international media, a growing section with in the UN ,as well as among international scholars entering the women and development debate. But its impact on her was of a different order. In her own words; "My earlier struggle represented an individual woman's efforts to balance the demands of professional and familial responsibilities. This new struggle was increasingly a collective, ideological one to rediscover the Indian nation, the world, the past, present and future, from the perspective of India's hidden and unacknowledged majority - poor working women in rural and urban

areas".[68] As an academic and an educational planner, she too had contributed to this "intellectual purdah" that excluded the majority of Indian women's lives, labour, dignity and dreams from any public attention. The educational process- her great love and priority-had acquired an inimical demonic face and their idealised democratic state had, at best, to be held guilty of criminal neglect, and at worst, of the oppression and exploitation of that vast majority. This shattering realisation, combined with a disruption in the family over the degree of freedom of convictions and action permissible to her adult daughters resulted in a voluntary separation from their father for nearly six years- to be ended by the same daughter when they brought him back as his health needed care and attention.

Afterwards instead of joining UGC she joined the ICSSR following a report from CSWI, to organise follow-up action publications and needed research on women-identified by the CSWI. She was given an advisory committee of outstanding social scientists, jurists and experts in public policy. The policy papers drafted by her and finalised by the advisory committee adopted an action orientation from the beginning. The objectives were -(a) analysis of data to uncover significant trends in social and economic organisations which affect women's position in the

[68] As told by Vina Majumda to Ritu Menon editor and publisher of *Women who Dared*, Delhi, 2002, p. 37.

long run; to improve polices for socio-economic development; increase public consciousness; and assess programmes for women's development and welfare; (b) develop new perspectives in the social sciences by critiquing basic assumptions, methodological approaches and concepts used in social research- to remedy the neglect and under assessment of women's contribution to society; and (c) to revive the social debate on the women's question initiated during the freedom struggle but since consigned to oblivion.

In ICSSR her task was to interest scholars to take-up the needed studies. She was busy in attending seminars and conferences in India and abroad- to stimulate debates on the interface between the multiple processes of change affecting India and other countries, and the roles and status of women.

A small group from the advisory committee decided to start the centre for women's Development studies (CWDS) as an independent research institute with multi-dimensional objectives which could seek regular support from the ICSSR, which was ultimately started by her in 1980 as the director. She started innovations in research and teaching methodology at the grassroots level organising non-literate, poverty stricken women agricultural workers, bringing back the lessons learnt

there to allies within the government, the growing ranks of women's studies scholars and national women's organisations which had formed a coalition in 1980,to take over the task of battling with the state for women's just share of development resources; against policies that adversely affected women's rights, dignity and autonomy; and eventually for their right to have a voice in the future shape and character of India's democracy.

The CWDS opted for a catalyst role to promote a concern for women among different section of society under her and also achieved a victory in pressurizing the Government of India in 1986 to incorporate the section on Education for women's Equality within the National policy on education adopted by parliament in 1986.

Thus Vina Mazumdar worked hard as a policy maker and also as a research to promote and raise the question of women of Indian society.[69]

Sarala Devi

Sarala Devi was born in 1872 in the privileged Tagore family of Bengal. At the age of twenty three she decided to take up an appointment, despite heavy family opposition, in a girls' school in far away Mysore. In

[69] Ibid, pp. 21-42.

her own words she had wanted to 'flee' the cage or the prison of home and establish her right to an independent livelihood like men.[70] Unfortunately, the experiment ended six months later following an incident when a young man stole into her room at night. The incident was made much of in the press and the 'Bangabasi' wrote in its editorial, "what is the need for a girl from such a family to go off to distant lands for the sake of employment? There is no dearth of work here. This is just an example of blindly aping western civilization''. Her mother, Swarna Kumari Devi, then persuaded her to return in order to serve the larger cause of the nation and handed over to her the editorship of 'Bharati' which she had edited until then. When Sarala Devi came back to Calcutta she was taunted with statements like "Have you satisfied your whim to work; have you satisfied your whim for independence?''. In her own understanding, the whim for independence had grown to include the entire people and the nation, and finally crystallized into a cause.

While returning home to Calcutta by train Sarala Devi noticed that the guards on the train looked very "weak" and was struck by the difference between Bengali weakness and the strength of the Punjabi and Maratha, but she noticed also that they all had one thing in common, and that was fear of the white skin. When she got back she asked the readers

[70] Sarala Debi, *Jibaner Jhara Pata,* 1922, rpt, Calcutta Rupa, 1922, p. 106

of the Bharati to communicate instances in which men had resisted insults by British soldiers of civilians heaped upon wives, sisters, daughters and upon men-folk themselves, and she published these accounts. Sarala Devi went on to become one of the most militantly nationalist women of the period. To counteract the internalized notion of effect-ness by a subject people she launched a vigorous campaign. Initially she began with exhortations to Bengali youth to rouse themselves from their torpor and engage in physical culture which had been a favourite activity of the Hindu Mela held annually by the Tagore family. She did not attempt to become directly involved in the formal political activity of male associations but used instead the symbolic power of local history and legend to create political consciousness and so became one of the most effective proponents of Bengali nationalism.[71]

Sarala Devi's particular contribution broadly lay in the encouragement of a marital, heroic culture in Bengal that would serve the nationalist cause and, within this larger cause, Sarala Devi made imaginative use of folklore and history. Her activities included the conversion of a local king, Paratapadity, into a Bengali hero equal in stature to Shivaji, the publication of a series of children's books on the

[71] Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 340.

lives of Bengali heroes, the composition of patriotic songs, and the organization of classes for increasing physical stamina.

Sarala Devi's harangues, carried in the pages of the Bharati resulted in the formation of a *dal* (group) and in 1902 she moved from writing to action .In the gymnasium that she ran in her father's house training in sword and *lathi*(wooden stick) play were accompanied by pledges made on the map of India that the pledges would be prepared to sacrifice their lives for their country's independence. Each pledge would receive a *rakhi* (taken of brother's protection) from Sarala Devi as a token of the vow." They were also urged to take the Pratapaditya vow in memory of the "Bengali Hindu patriot prince who fought Imperial Muslim power". In 1903 Sarala Devi started a festival on the second day of Durga Puja called Bir Ashtami where Sanskrit verses listing bygone heroes of India were recited. These heroes included Krishna and Rama on the one hand and Rana Pratap, Shivaji, Ranjit Singh, Pratapaditya and Sitaram on the other.

It is significant that it was at one of the Pratapaditya festivals presided over by Sarala Devi in 1905 that an attempt was made to use the words Bande Mararam as a national call, following the staging of

Bamkim's Anandamath.[72] She was also reputed to have become a member of the inner group of revolutionaries[73] and one is struck by the similarities between Sarala Devi's energizing of men before and during the *swadeshi* movement and Bankim's selfless shanti fighting alongside the men in the war of liberation. Whether Sarala Devi was consciously inspired by Bankim's model of womanhood (she was called Devi Choudharani in her own heyday) in moments of crisis or not, it appears that the 'mother-centered rhetoric of Hindu nationalism[74] had by its use of women as political symbols of national awakening, created a political space for women i.e. created the possibilities of a Sarala Devi's involvement in politics. Sarala Devi described in her own memoirs that she had a favourite image of kali placed on a table beneath her own portrait showing her with long open hair. When the Maharaja of Baroda came to tea and was shown the favourite image of kali he remarked "which kali shall I look at; this one or that one?"

Infact Sarala Devi presented a challenge to Bengali males. Beginning from a position when she exhorted young men to start a *dal* for self defence, and the defence of their women from molestation by British soldiers in streets and stations she had ended by appearing to had taken

[72] Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal.* Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973, pp. 304-5.
[73] Ibid, pp. 304-5.
[74] Borthwich, *Changing Roles*, op. cit., p. 340

on the role of a hero herself. Her defiance of the conventional female role did note escape notice and the Rangalay remarked that unlike the wives and mothers of heroes in the Sanskrit literature the "Bengali girl of the day" would be satisfied with nothing less than playing the hero herself.[75] At the height of her active career Sarala Devi, however, lived up not to her expanded self but to the conventional role of a wife, also in keeping with the nationalist construct of womanhood. At the age of thirty three in 1905 she was persuaded, or rather emotionally blackmailed, to marry by her mother who begged her to agree since she did not want to die without seeing her daughter married. The family had chosen for her a widower, Ram Bhuj Choudhari, whom she had never seen before but who was a nationalist, a good speaker, and an Arya Samaji,and was known to the extended family. Sarala Devi moved to Lahore with her husband and despite having been brought up in a strictly monotheistic family she agreed to observe the idolatrous rituals which were customary in her husband's family. It was possible that none of this conflicted with the spirit and demands of nationalism as Sarala Devi understood it. She continued her programme for physical regeneration even after moving to Lahore where she and her husband introduced some of the festivals that she had initiated in Calcutta.

[75] Sarala Debi, *Jibaner*, op. cit., pp. 185-86.

What was significant in the activities and concerns of Sarala Devi was the way in which the women's question never featured as in issue. Everything that Sarala Devi did was in the larger cause of nationalism. It was significant that Sarala Devi's autobiography virtually ends with her marriage. Her subsequent life was put into her book as an epilogue by someone else. Thus, despite her relatively unorthodox career, Sarala Devi was uncontroversial except for some minor criticisms originating from conservative sections or from the Anglo-Indian press. The nationalist construct of womanhood did not conflict with Sarala Devi's militancy and with her efforts at dynamiting the youth of Bengali; indeed it was in keeping with the basic design mapped out for nationalist regeneration. That the nationalist construct of womanhood could be empowering for at least some women is clear from Sarala Devi's life.

Pandita Ramabai

Pandita Ramabai was truly remarkable as a pioneer in women's education and rebel champion of women's rights. Her father supervised her education and allowed her to remain unmarried. When her father and mother died, Ramabai was sixteen years old, unmarried, and able to read Sanskrit. She and her brother travelled through out India lecturing on female education and social reform. The Calcutta elite were enchanted and bestowed on her the name "Saraswati"—the Goddess of learning-

and called her "Pandita" because she seemed as learned as other brahmin Pandits. Other audiences were outraged and they jeered and booed when she attempted to speak.

Ramabai's brother died in Calcutta and she married his close friend, Bipen Behari Das Medhavi (a shudra by caste). The next year, at the age twenty three, Ramabai gave birth to a daughter. Unfortunately her husband died the following year. Returning to Poona, Ramabai, began to work with reformers to educate women through the Arya Mahila Samaj (Aryan's women's society).[76] While in Poona she gave evidence before the Hunter commission and stressed the urgent need for women doctors and teachers. Determined to learn English and study medicine, Ramabai sought help from members of the Anglo Catholic community of St.Mary the Virgin whose mother's house was at Wantage in Oxfordshire, England. They were able to give her some assistance while the balance of her expenses were met through the sale of Stri Dharma Neeti ("morals for women"), her book urging women to take charge of their own lives. Ramabai, her young daughter, and a travelling companion, Anandibai

[76] *The Letters and Correspondence of Pandita Ramabai,* complied by Sister Geraldine, ed. A.B. Shah, Bombay, Maharastra State Board of Literature and Culture, 1977, pp.15-18; Rajas Krishnarao Dongre and Josephine F. Patterson, *Pandita Ramabai: A Life of Faith and Prayer,* Madras, Christian Literature Society, 1969, pp.6-10; Muriel Clark, *Pandita Ramabai,* London, Paternoster Bldg., 1920, pp. 24-5; "Pandita Ramabai," *Men and Women of India* I, no.6 (June, 1905), pp. 316-19 : Meera Kosambi, "Women, Emancipation and Equality: Pandita Rambai's contribution to women's cause," *EPW,* 23, no.44 (October, 29,1988), PP. WS38-WS49; Meera Kosambi, *At the Intersection of Gender Reform and Religions Belief,* Bombay, SNDT, Research Centre for Women's Studies, Gender Series, 1993.

Bhagat, left for England in 1883. Soon after the three of them had settled at Wantage, Ramabai declared she was unwilling to convert to Christianity. Some months later Anandibai committed suicide leaving Ramabai extremely shaken.

Ramabai was only twenty five years of age and had already watched her parents, her brother, her husband and her closest friend died. It was at this time, alone with her small daughter in a strange country that Ramabai decided to accept Baptism.[77] She continued her studies until 1886 when she decided to sail for America to attend the graduation ceremonies of her cousin Anandibai Joshi.

To finance this trip and popularize her cause Ramabai wrote The "High Caste Hindu Women".[78] Ten thousand copies of this book were sold before Ramabai had left America. In 1887 Boston admirers set up a Ramabai Association to support her work in India. She travelled throughout the United States and Canada studying educational, philanthropic, and charitable institutions and lecturing to various groups. By May of 1888, she had collected over $30,000 in the name of her

[77] *Letters and Correspondence*, p. 14.

[78] The book itself was written to raise funds and to propagate the cause of Women's reform. It was widely circulated in America selling 10,000 copies in a short while and enabled her to collect the funds required to setup a widows home in India.

association.[79] In India Pandita Ramabai established Sharda Sadan (Home of Wisdom), a school for widows, in Bombay. This was to be a non-sectarian school where all the caste rules of brahmins were scrupulously observed. It attracted some high caste Hindu widows, among them Godubai (renamed Anandibai after her marriage to D.N. Karve) but generally the Hindu community remained suspicious of Ramabai's motives.

Ramabai attempted to forestall criticism by forming an executive committee composed of reformers who were known as staunch Hindus. This plan did not work and less than one year later Bombay news paper carried articles critical of Ramabai and her school. When financial problems forced her to move the school to Poona, the newspaper Kesari charged her with converting widows to Christianity. Ramabai's admitted crime was allowing widows to attend her personal prayer meetings. By 1893 twenty five girls were withdrawn. But there was no dearth of widows in need of shelter and before long Ramabai had other students. By 1900 the Sharda Sadan had trained eighty women who were able to earn their own living through teaching or nursing.[80]

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[79] *Letters of Correspondence*, pp. XX-XXI
[80] Ibid, p. 47.

Ramabai's second school, Mukti, was established thirty miles outside of Poona at Kedgaon following the famine that began in 1897. She began taking women and children who were victims of famine into Sharda Sadan where she fed and clothed them, and enrolled them in her school. Attempting to control the plague, the government placed restrictions on the movement of people; in Poona the city magistrate placed a limit on the number of inmates in Sharada Sadan. Since she could not keep famine victims in Poona, Ramabai took her charges to Kedgaon where she had purchased 100 acres of land. By 1900 this venture had grown into a major institution housing 2,000 women and children attending school and involved in industrial training and production. Financing for Mukti came from an American committee which willingly approved all her schemes.[81]

Given a free hand, Ramabai urged the inmates of her home to become Christians and developed a unique educational program to suit their needs. Her own version of Christianity was doctrinally eclectic, combining ideas she had learned from the sisters at Wantage, and from Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Indian Christian friends. Ramabai saw caste as the great flaw in Hindu society. It led to false valuing of the intellect

[81] Ibid, pp. 342-416.

and denigration of physical work. Cast associations promoted narrow self-interest inhibited the development of a democratic spirit.

Ramabai designed a remedial curriculum. Literature selected for its emphasis on moral models would engender a spirit of caring; classes in physiology and botany were included to teach students about their own bodies and the physical world, in which they lived. Industrial training was included in printing, carpentry, tailoring, masonry, wood cutting, weaving and needlework as well as training in farming and gardening. All students were required to join "unions" or societies such as the Temperance Union or the Christian Endeavour society in an effort to break down caste barriers and develop new loyalties based on interest. As members of these societies, the children learned simple parliamentary rules and were encouraged to take charge of their own affairs.[82]

Ramabai's educational work impressed contemporaries, but her connection with Christianity has obfuscated her contribution to women's education. An acknowledged Christian when hatred of the ruling power was growing daily, her work angered some of the most powerful men in western India. Ramabai believed the intensity of their anger was related to the fact that many of her pupils came from the higher castes. She

[82] Ibid, p. 412

argued that these men would have remained unconcerned if her work were confined to low-caste women.[83]

There were many issues that provoked Ramabai's sharp and unpopular comments. When she heard about the Rukhmabai case, she exploded in angry denunciations of both the British and Indian men. Rukhmabai, married as a child, had been tried and sentenced to prison because she refused to have a conjugal relationship with her husband. Ramabai wrote:

> *Our only wonder is that a defenceless women like Rukhmabai dared to raise her voice in the face of the powerful Hindu law, the mighty British Government, the 129,000,000 men,the330,000,000 gods of the Hindus; all these have conspired together to crush her into nothingness. We cannot blame the English Government for not defending a helpless woman; it is only fulfilling its agreement made with the male population of India.*[84]

Ramabai's greatest legacy was her effort, the first in India, to educate widows and the pupils she left behind to carry on her work.

Mataji Maharani Tapaswini

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[83] Ibid, p. 257.
[84] Ibid. p. 257; Kosambi, "Women, Emancipation and Equality", pp. WS44-WS45.

The Mahakali Pathshala (Great Mother Kali School) of Bengal stands in sharp contrast to Pandita Ramabai's schools, with their missionary connection and foreign support. Founded in Calcutta in 1893 by her Holiness Mataji Maharani Tapaswini, this school and its many branches has been styled as "genuine Indian attempt" at developing female education.[85] This school received no financial assistance from foreigners and employed no foreign teachers. Founders of the institution accepted the 'school' model for female education, but opposed co-education and the use of one syllabus for both sexes. Their aim was to educate "girls on strictly national lines in the hope that they might regenerate Hindu society''. This was a project consistent with those of nationalist "revivalists," who, in Tanika Sarkar's view, did not automatically oppose reform "in the name of resisting colonial knowledge".[86] Despite their differences with the liberal reformers, they too believed in the relationship between progress and female education and looked to a future where Indian women would play a larger role in the affairs of the country. Gangabai (Mataji Maharani Tapaswini),[87] a brahmin woman of the Deccan who had learned Sanskrit and studied sacred literature, opened her first school with thirty pupils. She had come

[85] Minna S. Cowan, *The Education of the Women of India*, Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1912, p. 113.
[86] Tankika Sarkar, "Rhetoric against the Age of Consent", *EPW*, 28, No. 36 (Sept. 1993), pp. 1869-78.
[87] M. M. Kaur, *The Role of Women in the Freedom Movement (1857-1947)*, (New Delhi, Sterling, 1968), p. 85. Kaur claims that Maharani Tapaswini was a niece of the Rani of Jhansi.

to Calcutta with a mission: to promote female education in harmony with Hindu religious and moral principles. Unlike Pandita Ramabai, Gangabai believed that Hindu society could be regenerated from within. Her notion of an ideal education for women was translated into a syllabus which included knowledge of sacred literature and history; and understanding of the myths and legends that spoke of the duties of the daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, and mother; and practical skills such as cooking and sewing.[88] This syllabus was praised by Hindu gentlemen of the middle class who believed that much of the female education then in existence "demoralized and denationalized" young Hindu women.[89] Cooking lessons were especially popular in light of the prevalent belief that educated girls avoided the kitchen. Financial support for this institution grew rapidly and within ten years there were twenty three branches with 450 students. As the school expanded it published its own Bengali and Sanskrit text books. Gangabai turned more and more to supervision while the actual administration of the school was left in the hands of an illustrious board of trustees presided over by the Maharaja of Darbhanga, Bengal's largest landlord.

This school proved immensely popular. Patrons approved of the emphasis on religious injunctions, domestic skills, and strict *'purdah'*.

[88] Kaur, *The Role of Women*, op. cit., p. 145.
[89] "The Mahakali Pathasala", *The Statesman* (February 3, 1985), p. 7.

Although the original curriculum included very little formal reading and writing, this gradually saw a change. In 1948 the Mahakali Pathshala was affiliated to Calcutta University and by that time all that remained of the original curriculum was the performance of a few *pujas* (religious rituals).[90] In the early years of the twentieth century the existence of this school and its popularity were regarded as indicators that the conservative elements of society, at least in Bengal, had given their approval to the concept of female education.[91]

Sister Subbalakshmi

Another prominent leader during the period under study was Sister Subbalakshmi (1886-1969). She established a school for young high caste widows in Madras. Her concern was society's discarded child widows. Her plan was to transform these unfortunate and inauspicious women into useful and valued members of society.[92]

Prior to her own marriage at age eleven, Subbalakshmi had received four and a half years of formal schooling. Her husband died shortly after their wedding and she returned to her parents' home in

[90] Latika Ghose, "Social and Educational Movements for Women and by Women, 1820-1850", *Bethune Volume, and College Centenary Volume, 1849-1949*, ed. Dr. Kalidas Nag (Calcutta, S. N. Guha Ray, 1950), p. 146; Cowan, *The Education of Women in India*, p. 113; "The Mahakali Pathashala", p. 7.
[91] Geraldine Forbes, op cit., p. 51.
[92] Ibid, p. 57

Rishyiyur, Tanjore District. Her parents decided not to burden her with all the restrictions normally placed on widows and instead arranged to send her to school. Their community reacted so violently that Subramania Iyer, Subbalakshmi's father, decided to move. In Madras, Subramania Iyer taught his daughter English at home and then sent her to a Convent School. The nuns' dedication so impressed the young Subbalakshmi that she revolved to devote her life to educating widows. Although she never became a Christian, she was affectionately known as "Sister Subbalakshmi" in recognition of her dedication to her chosen work.

Subbalakshmi completed her matriculation and enrolled in Presidency College, Madras University. As the first Hindu widow in Madras to study for a B.A., she was threatened with excommunication, harassed in the streets, and ostracized in the classroom. By 1911 she had completed her B.A. degree and was ready to begin her life's work. She set up her first school in her father's home in a Madras suburb and began with a class of four brahmin widows.

Subbalakshmi's interest in helping widows coincided with that of Miss Christina Lynch (later Mrs. Drysdale), the Irish feminist who was appointed inspectress of female education in Coimbatore. Miss Lynch was deeply troubled by the difficulty of finding "suitable" (high-caste)

teachers for the schools. At the same time she was aware that Madras had over 22,000 widows between the ages of five and fifteen, many of them brahmins. Meeting with Subbalakshmi's father, Miss Lynch explained that she had worked out a plan whereby the government would support a home for young brahmin widows willing to be trained as teachers. Meanwhile, Sister Subbalakshmi was pursuing the same scheme with her friends and relations. In 1912 the Sarada Ladies Union was formed as a women's club to provide its members with an opportunity to hear lectures, discuss new ideas, and collect money for brahmin girls' school.

In 1912 the government agreed to support a boarding school for training teachers. The government would pay the rent and give scholarships to three girls; the remainder of the operating expenses had to be met through donation and fees. In order to make this plan more acceptable to critics of education for Hindu widows, Miss Lynch proposed shifting the school from a liberal section of the city to the more orthodox area. This meant Subbalakshmi had to locate a "home" for the widows. After an extensive search she finally settled on the Ice House, the old warehouse along the beach once used to store ice from Boston. The Ice House was slowly made habitable for the thirty-five girls who by this time had joined Subbalakshmi. As sister Subbalskshmi commented, "There was a lot of gossip and ill-take" about the large number of girl

widows and female staff who occupied the Ice House without male protection. The presence of so many inauspicious women walking about forced local people to modify their schedules. The school's curriculum was set by the government. The aim was to train these women as teachers; first, they were prepared for regular classes, then they completed the syllabus for matriculation, and finally, they entered Queen Mary's College (begun in 1914 as the first college for women in Madras). In 1922 the Lady Willingdon Training College and practice school, an institution for teacher training, opened with Sister Subbalakshmi as principal. At this institution sister Subbalakshmi was able to implement some of her ideas on education. The college offered three programmes; post -graduate training for potential high school teachers, secondary training for teaching through the eighth grade, and training for elementary teachers. English was emphasized (because teachers who knew English were in demand), some vocational subjects were required to instil the value of working with the hands, a training course in physical education was available and popular, and Hindu and Christian priests offered moral and religious instruction.

Before long sister Subbalakshmi was compelled to open Sarada Vidyalaya, a high school and boarding school for adult widows. This facility was necessary because the Ice House did not accept widows over

age eighteen even though the age of marriage was gradually shifting upward and the concept of widows working as teachers was gaining acceptance.

The boarding school was run in strict conformity with orthodox Hindu customs. In the early days of the school, Sister Subbalakshmi denounced remarriage. Her widowed aunt, V. S. Valambal Ammal, was described by a visitor to the home as a woman in "disfigured (shorn hair) condition" wearing a white sari and performing a traditional 'puja' (act of worship). Mrs. Drysdale utilized her inspection tours to locate high-caste widows and would often pay the train fare of reluctant fathers who wanted to see for themselves how the institution was run.[93]

Sister Subbalakshmi understood the importance of running the boarding school for widows in accordance with orthodox customs and caste rules. At the same time her own life was one of rebellion against the accepted role for a widow. She defied caste rules by opening a school for the fisher folk in the area of the Ice House. When she was warned that as a government servant she could not join the Women's Indian Association, sister Subbalakshmi continued to attend branch meetings while scrupulously avoiding the more public annual conferences. When the

[93] Ibid.

Women's Indian Association and the All-India women's conference began their campaigns in support of the Child Marriage Restraint Bill, Sister Subbalakshmi lectured against the custom and gave evidence before the Joshi committee about the harmful effects of youthful marriage. Her activities suggest that she was idealistic yet shrewd. She was willing to compromise as long as it served her long range goals.

Spiritually, Sister Subbalakshmi was deeply attracted to Swami Vevekananda and the Ramakrishna Mission. She regarded Ramkrishna and his disciple Vivekananda as the first religious reformers to be deeply concerned with the women question. Although the model of the Catholic nun attracted her in her childhood, as an adult Sister Subbalakshmi drew her spiritual sustenance and philosophy of action from reformed Hinduism. Thus the women of late nineteenth and early twentieth century showed their capabilities as policy makers and also as social reformers. Mention may be made of Vina Mujumdar, who showed her abilities as a lecturer, as an education officer at U.G.C. and also as a researcher at I.C.S.S.R. to raise the status of women from grass root levels; Sarala Devi as a teacher, editor and also as a nationalist who presented a challenge to Bengali males; Pandita Ramabai as a doctor and a social reformer whose book "High Caste Hindu Women in India" gained popularity abroad. Mention may also be made of Mataji Maharani Tapaswini and Sister

Subbalakshmi who worked hard for education of female and also to improve the status of high caste Hindu widows.

However, overall picture of Indian womanhood was very dark and in spite of efforts of social reformers and colonial Government emancipation of women through social legislation and female education did not come out successful because of prevailing social beliefs and practices and whatever progress was noticed was limited to only a few higher class women.