

II

INDIAN WOMEN
AND WESTERN WOMEN

In my opinion, a race must first cultivate a great respect for motherhood, through the sanctification and inviolability of marriage, before it can attain to the ideal of perfect chastity. The Roman Catholics and the Hindus, holding marriage sacred and inviolate, have produced great chaste men and women of immense power. To the Arab, marriage is a contract or a forceful possession, to be dissolved at will, and we do not find there the development of the idea of the virgin or the Brahmacharin. Modern Buddhism—having fallen among races who had not yet come up to the evolution of marriage—has made a travesty of monasticism. . . . As you have come to see that the glory of life is chastity, so my eyes also have been opened to

the necessity of this great sanctification for the vast majority, in order that a few lifelong chaste powers may be produced.⁴

I have never seen women elsewhere as cultured and educated as they are here (in America). Well-educated men there are in our country, but you will scarcely find anywhere women like those here. It is indeed true that 'the Goddess Herself lives in the houses of virtuous men as Lakshmi'. I have seen thousands of women here whose hearts are as pure and stainless as snow. Oh, how free they are! It is they who control social and civic duties. Schools and colleges are full of women, and in our country women cannot be safely allowed to walk in the streets! Their kindness to me is immeasurable. Since I came here I have been welcomed by them to their houses. They are providing me with food, arranging for my lectures, taking me to market, and doing every-thing for my comfort and convenience. I shall never be able to repay in the least the deep debt of gratitude I owe to them.

Do you know who is the real 'Shakti-worshipper'? It is he who knows that God is the Omnipresent Force in the universe, and sees in women the manifestation of that Force.

Many men here look upon their women in this light. Manu, again, has said that gods bless those families where women are happy and well-treated. Here men treat their women as well as can be desired, and hence they are so prosperous, so learned, so free, and so energetic. But why is that we are slavish, miserable, and dead? The answer is obvious.

And how pure and chaste are they here! Few women are married before twenty or twenty-five, and they are as free as the birds in the air. They go to market, school, and college, earn money, and do all kinds of work. Those who are well-to-do devote themselves to doing good to the poor. And what are we doing? We are very regular in marrying our girls at eleven years of age lest they should become corrupt and immoral. What does our Manu enjoin? Daughters should be supported and educated with as much care and attention as the sons. As sons should be married after observing Brahmacharya up to the thirtieth year, so daughters also must observe Brahmacharya and be educated by their parents. But what are we actually doing? Can you better the condition of your women? Then there will be hope for your well-being. Otherwise you

will remain as backward as you are now.⁵

Every American woman has far better education than can be conceived of by the majority of Hindu women. Why cannot we have the same education? We must.⁶

I should very much like our women to have your intellectuality, but not if it must be at the cost of purity. I admire you for all that you know, but I dislike the way that you cover what is bad with roses and call it good. Intellectuality is not the highest good. Morality and spirituality are the things for which we strive. Our women are not so learned, but they are more pure. To all women every man save her husband should be as her son.

To all men every woman save his own wife should be as his mother. When I look about me and see what you call gallantry, my soul is filled with disgust. Not until you learn to ignore the question of sex and to meet on a ground of common humanity will your women really develop. Until then they are playthings, nothing more. All this is the cause of divorce. Your men bow low and offer a chair, but in another breath they offer compliments. They say, "Oh, madam, how beautiful are your eyes!" What right have they to do this? How

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dare a man venture so far, and how can you women permit it? Such things develop the less noble side of humanity. They do not tend to nobler ideals.

'We should not think that we are men and women, but only that we are human beings, born to cherish and to help one another. No sooner are a young man and a young woman left alone than he pays compliments to her, and perhaps before he takes a wife, he has courted two hundred women. Bah! If I belonged to the marrying set I could find a woman to love without all that!

'When I was in India and saw these things from the outside, I was told it is all right, it is mere pleasantry, and I believed it. But I have travelled since then, and I know it is not right. It is wrong, only you of the West shut your eyes and call it good. The trouble with the nations of the West is that they are young, foolish, fickle, and wealthy. What mischief can come of one of these qualities, but when all three, all four, are combined, beware!'

Now the ideal woman, in India, is the mother, the mother first, and the mother last. The word woman calls up to the mind of the Hindu, motherhood; and God is called

Mother. As children, every day, when we are boys, we have to go early in the morning with a little cup of water and place it before the mother, and mother dips her toe into it and we drink.

In the West, the woman is wife. The idea of womanhood is concentrated there—as the wife. To the ordinary man in India, the whole force of womanhood is concentrated in motherhood. In the Western home, the wife rules. In an Indian home, the mother rules. If a mother comes into a Western home, she has to be subordinate to the wife; to the wife belongs the home. A mother always lives in our homes: the wife must be subordinate to her. See all the difference of ideas.

Now, I only suggest comparisons; I would state facts so that we may compare the two sides. Make this comparison. If you ask, 'What is an Indian woman as wife?' the Indian asks, 'Where is the American woman as mother? What is she, the all-glorious, who gave me this body? What is she who kept me in her body for nine months? Where is she who would give me twenty times her life if I had need? Where is she whose love never dies, however wicked, however vile I am? Where is

she, in comparison with her who goes to the divorce court the moment I treat her a little badly? Oh, American women, where is she? I will not find her in your country. I have not found the son who thinks mother is first. When we die, even then, we do not want our wives and our children to take her place. Our mother! —we want to die with our head on her lap once more, if we die before her. Where is she? Is woman a name to be coupled with the physical body only? Ay! The Hindu mind fears all those ideals which say that the flesh must cling unto the flesh. No, no! Woman! Thou shalt not be coupled with anything connected with flesh. Thy name has been called holy once and for ever, for what name is there which no lust can ever approach, no carnality ever come near, than the one word mother? That is the ideal in India.⁸

There she is—the Hindu mother. The son's wife comes in as her daughter; just as the mother's own daughter married and went out, so her son married and brought in another daughter; and she has to fall in line under the government of the queen of queens, of my mother. Even I, who never married, belonging to an Order that never marries, would be

disgusted if my wife, supposing I had married, dared to displease my mother. I would be disgusted. Why? Don't I worship my mother? Why should not her daughter-in-law? Whom I worship, why not she? Who is she, then, that would try to ride over my head and govern my mother? She has to wait till her womanhood is fulfilled; and the one thing that fulfils womanhood, that is womanliness in woman, is motherhood. Wait till she becomes a mother; then she will have the same right. That, according to the Hindu mind, is the great mission of woman—to become a mother. But oh, how different! Oh, how different! My father and mother fasted and prayed for years and years, so that I would be born. They pray for every child before he is born. Says our great law-giver, Manu, giving the definition of an Aryan: 'He is the Aryan, who is born through prayer.' Every child not born through prayer is illegitimate, according to the great law-giver. The child must be prayed for. Those children that come with curses, that slip into the world just in a moment of inadvertence, because that could not be prevented—what can we expect of such progeny? Mothers of America, think of that! Think, in the heart of your hearts, are you

ready to be women? Not any question of race or country, or that false sentiment of national pride. Who dares to be proud in this mortal life of ours, in this world of woes and miseries? What are we before this infinite force of God? But I ask you the question tonight: 'Do you all pray for the children to come? Are you thankful to be mothers, or not? Do you think that you are sanctified by motherhood or not? Ask that of your minds. If you don't your marriage is a lie, your womanhood is false, your education is superstition, and your children, if they come without prayer, will prove a curse to humanity.

See the different ideals now coming before us. From motherhood comes tremendous responsibility. There is the basis, start from that. Well, why is mother to be worshipped so much? Because our books teach that it is the pre-natal influence that gives the impetus to the child for good or evil. Go to a hundred thousand colleges, read a million books, associate with all the learned men of the world—better off you are when born with the right stamp. You are born for good or evil. The child is a born god or a born demon: that is what the books say. Education and all these things come afterwards—are a mere bagatelle.

You are what you are born. Born unhealthful, how many drug stores, swallowed wholesale, will keep you well all through your life? How many people of good, healthy lives were born of weak parents, were born of sickly, blood-poisoned parents? How many? None—none. We come with a tremendous impetus for good or evil—born demons or born gods. Education or other things are a bagatelle.

Thus say our books: direct the pre-natal influence. Why should mother be worshipped? Because she made herself pure. She underwent harsh penances sometimes to keep herself as pure as purity can be. For, mind you, no woman in India thinks of giving up her body to any man; it is her own. The English, as a reform, have introduced at present what they call 'Restitution of conjugal rights'; but no Indian would take advantage of it. When a man comes in physical contact with his wife, the circumstances she controls, through what prayers and through what vows! For that which brings forth the child is the holiest symbol of God himself. It is the greatest prayer between man and wife, the prayer that is going to bring into the world another soul fraught with a tremendous power for good or for evil.

Is it a joke? Is it a simple nervous satisfaction? Is it a brute enjoyment of the body? Says the Hindu: no, a thousand times no!

But then, following that, there comes in another idea. The idea we started with was that the ideal is the love for the mother—herself all-suffering, all-forbearing. The worship that is accorded to the mother has its fountainhead there. She was a saint to bring me into the world; she kept her body pure, her mind pure, her food pure, her clothes pure, her imagination pure, for years, because I would be born. Because she did that, she deserves worship. And what next follows? Linked with motherhood is wifehood.

You Western people are individualistic. I want to do this thing because I like it; I will elbow everyone. Why? Because I like to do. I want my own satisfaction, so I marry this woman. Why? Because I like her. This woman marries me. Why? Because she likes me. There it ends. She and I are the only two persons in the whole, infinite world, and I marry her and she marries me; nobody else is injured, nobody else responsible. Your Johns and your Janes may go into the forest and there they may live their lives; but when they have to live in society,

their marriage means a tremendous amount of good or evil to us. Their children may be veritable demons, burning, murdering, robbing, stealing, drinking, hideous, vile.

The Hindus, to keep up a high standard of chastity in the race, have sanctioned child-marriage, which in the long run has degraded the race. At the same time, I cannot deny that this child-marriage makes the race more chaste. What would you have? If you want the nation to be more chaste, you weaken men and women physically by child-marriage. On the other hand, are you in England any better off? No, because chastity is the life of a nation. Do you not find in history that the first death-sign of a nation has been unchastity? When that has entered, the end of the race is in sight. Where shall we get a solution of these miseries then? If parents select husbands and wives for their children, then this evil is minimized. The daughters of India are more practical than sentimental. But very little of poetry remains in their lives. Again, if people select their own husbands and wives, that does not seem to bring much happiness. The Indian woman is generally very happy; there are not many cases of quarrelling between husband and wife. On

the other hand, in the United States, where the greatest liberty obtains, the number of unhappy homes and marriages is large.¹⁰

Without the grace of Shakti nothing is to be accomplished. What do I find in America and Europe?—the worship of Shakti, the worship of Power. Yet they worship Her ignorantly through sense-gratification. Imagine, then, what a lot of good they will achieve who will worship Her with all purity, in a Sattvika spirit, looking upon Her as their mother!¹¹

I now see it all. Brother, *Yatra nāryastu pūjyante ramante tatra devatāh*—‘The gods are pleased where the women are held in esteem’—says the old Manu. We are horrible sinners, and our degradation is due to our calling women ‘despicable worms’, ‘gateways to hell’, and so forth. Goodness gracious! There is all the difference between heaven and hell! *Yāthātathyato arthān vyadadhāt*—‘He adjudges gifts according to the merits of the case.’ Is the Lord to be hoodwinked by idle talk? The Lord has said, *Tvam strī, Tvam pumān asi, Tvam Kumāra uta vā kumārī*—‘Thou art the woman, Thou art the man, Thou art the boy and the girl as well.’ (*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad.*) And we on our part are crying, *‘Dūram apasara, re caṇḍāla*—‘be

off, thou outcaste!’ *‘Kena eṣā nirmitā nārī mohinī’* etc.—‘Who has made the bewitching woman?’¹²

— Still on this sacred soil of India, this land of Sita and Savitri, among women may be found such character, such spirit of service, such affection, compassion, contentment and reverence, as I could not find anywhere else in the world! In the West, the women did not very often seem to me to be women at all, they appeared to be quite the replicas of men! Driving vehicles, drudging in offices, attending schools, doing professional duties! In India alone the sight of feminine modesty and reserve soothes the eye! With such materials of great promise, you could not, alas, work out their uplift! You did not try to infuse the light of knowledge into them! For if they get the right sort of education, they may well turn out to be the ideal women in the world.¹³