

5.3. Gupta  
I-BA English literature  
Shift I

## OUR WOMEN

I

### THE IDEAL OF OUR WOMANHOOD

(Rama and Sita are the ideals of the Indian nation.) All children, especially girls, worship Sita. The height of a woman's ambition is to be like Sita, the pure, the devoted, the all-suffering! When you study these characters, you can at once find out how different is the ideal in India from that of the West. For the race, (Sita stands as the ideal of suffering.) The West says, 'Do. Show your power by doing.' India says, 'Show your power by suffering.' The West has solved the problem of how much a man can have: India has solved the problem of how little a man can have. The two extremes, you see. (Sita is typical of India—the



idealized India. The question is not whether she ever lived, whether the story is history. There is not, we know that the ideal is there. There is no other Pauranika story that has so permeated the whole nation, so entered into very life, and has so tingled in every drop of blood of the race, as this ideal of Sita. Sita is the name in India for everything that is good, pure, and holy; everything that in woman we call womanly. If a priest has to bless a woman, he says, 'Be Sita!' If he blesses a child, he says, 'Be Sita!' They are all children of Sita, and are struggling to be Sita, the patient, the all-suffering, the ever-faithful, the ever-pure wife. Through all this suffering, she experiences, there is not one harsh word against Rama. She takes it as her own duty, and performs her own part in it. Think of the terrible injustice of her being exiled to the forest! But Sita knows no bitterness. That is, again, the Indian ideal. Says the ancient Buddha: 'When a man hurts you and you turn back to hurt him, that would not cure the first injury; it would only create in the world one more wickedness. Sita was a true Indian by nature; she never returned injury.' You may exhaust the literature of the

world that is past, and I may assure you, that you will have to exhaust the literature of the world of the future, before finding another Sita. Sita is unique; that character was depicted once and for all. There may have been several Ramas, perhaps, but never more than one Sita. She is the very type of the true Indian woman, for all the Indian ideals of a perfect woman have grown out of that one life of Sita; and here she stands these thousands of years, commanding the worship of every man, woman, and child, throughout the length and breadth of the land of Aryavarta. There she will always be, this glorious Sita, purer than purity itself, all patience, and all suffering. She who suffered that life of suffering without a murmur, she the ever-chaste and ever-pure wife, she the ideal of the people, the ideal of the gods, the great Sita, our national God, she must always remain. And every one of us knows her too well to require much delineation. All our mythology may vanish, even our Vedas may depart, and our Sanskrit language may vanish for ever, but so long as there will be five Hindus living here, even if only speaking the most vulgar patois, there will be the story of



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turned to the Tutor

Sita present. Mark my words: Sita has gone into the very vitals of our race. She is there in the blood of every Hindu man and woman; we are all children of Sita. Any attempt to modernize our women, if it tries to take our women away from that ideal of Sita, is immediately a failure, as we see every day. The women of India must grow and develop in the foot-prints of Sita, and that is the only way.<sup>2</sup>

Every girl in India must aspire to be like Savitri, whose love could not be conquered by death, and who through this tremendous love snatched back from even Yama, the soul of her husband.

There was a king called <sup>son of Ashvapati</sup> Ashvapati. The king had a daughter who was so good and beautiful that she was called Savitri, which is the name of a sacred prayer of the Hindus. When Savitri grew old enough, her father asked her to choose a husband for herself. These ancient Indian princesses were very independent, you see, and chose their own princely suitors <sup>excepted</sup> and travelled in distant regions, mounted in a golden chariot, with her guards and aged courtiers to whom her

THE IDEAL OF OUR WOMEN

None were born emerged out

father entrusted her, stopping at different courts, and seeing different princes, but not one of them could win the heart of Savitri. They came at last to a holy hermitage <sup>hermit-ages</sup> of Savitri. Now it happened that there was a king, <sup>king</sup> Dyumatsena, who was defeated by his enemies, and was deprived of his kingdom when he was struck with age and had lost his sight. This poor, old, blind king, with his queen and his son, took refuge in the forest and passed his life in rigid penance. His boy's name was Satyavan.

So Savitri came to this hermitage and saw there Satyavan, the hermit's son, and her heart was conquered. She had escaped all the princes of the palaces and the courts, but here in the forest-refuge of King Dyumatsena, his son, Satyavan, stole her heart.

When Savitri returned to her father's house, he asked her, 'Savitri, dear daughter, speak. Did you see anybody whom you would like to marry?' Then softly with blushes, said Savitri, 'Yes, father. What is the name of the prince?' 'He is no prince but the son of the King Dyumatsena who has lost his kingdom—a prince without a patrimony, who lives a monastic life, the life of a Satmyasin in a forest, living like a hermit.'



collecting roots and herbs, <sup>helping</sup> and feeding his old father and mother, who <sup>live in</sup> a cottage.)

On hearing this the father consulted the Sage Narada, who happened to be present there, and he declared it was the most ill-omened choice that was ever made. The king then asked him to explain why it was so. And Narada said, 'Within twelve months from this time the young man will die. Then the king started with terror, and spoke, 'Savitri, this young man is going to die in twelve months, and you will become a widow: think of that! Desist from your choice, my child, you shall never be married to a short-lived and fated bridegroom. (Never mind, father, do not ask me to marry another person and sacrifice the chastity of mind, for I love and have accepted in my mind that good and brave Satyavan only as my husband.) A maiden chooses only once, and she never departs from her troth. When the king found that Savitri was resolute in mind and heart, he complied. Then Savitri married prince Satyavan, and she quietly went from the palace of her father into the forest, to live with her chosen husband and help her husband's

parents. Now though Savitri knew the exact date when Satyavan was to die, she kept it hidden from him. Daily he went into the depths of the forest <sup>to</sup> collect fruits and flowers, gathered <sup>sticks</sup> faggots, and then came back to the cottage, and she cooked the meals and helped the old people. Thus their lives went on until the fatal day came near, and three short days remained only. She took a severe vow of three nights' penance and holy fasts, and kept her hard vigils. Savitri spent sorrowful and sleepless nights with fervent prayers and unseen tears till the dreaded morning dawned. That day Savitri could not bear him out of her sight even for a moment. She begged permission from his parents to accompany her husband when he went to gather the <sup>usual</sup> herbs and fuel, and gaining their <sup>accept</sup> consent she went Suddenly, in faltering accents, he complained to his wife of feeling faint, 'My head is dizzy, and my senses reel, dear Savitri, I feel sleep stealing over me; let me rest beside thee for a while.' In fear and trembling she replied, 'Come, lay your head upon my lap, my dearest lord.' And he laid his burning head in the lap of his wife and ere long sighed and expired. Clasp him to her, her eyes flowing with



tears, there she sat in the lonesome forest until the emissaries of Death approached to take away the soul of Satyavan. But they could not come near to the place where Savitri sat with the dead body of her husband, his head resting in her lap. There was a zone of fire surrounding her, and not one of the emissaries of Death could come within it. They all fled back from it, returned to the King Yama, the God of Death, and told him why they could not obtain the soul of this man.

Then came Yama, the God of Death, the Judge of the dead. He was the first man that died—the first man that died on earth—and he had become the presiding deity over all those that die. He judges whether, after a man has died, he is to be punished or rewarded. So he came himself. Of course he could go inside that charmed circle, as he was a god. When he came to Savitri, he said, 'Daughter, give up this dead body, for know death is the fate of mortals, and I am the first of mortals who died. Since then, every one has had to die. Death is the fate of man.' Thus told, Savitri walked off and Yama drew the soul out. Yama having possessed himself of the soul of the young man proceeded on his way. Before

he had gone far he heard footfalls upon the dry leaves. He turned back. 'Savitri, daughter, why are you following me? This is the fate of all mortals.' 'I am not following thee, Father, replied Savitri, but this is also the fate of woman, she follows where her love takes her, and the Eternal Law separates not loving man and faithful wife. Then said the God of Death: 'Ask for any boon, except the life of your husband.' 'If thou art pleased to grant a boon, O Lord of Death, I ask that my father-in-law may be cured of his blindness and made happy.' 'Let thy pious wish be granted, duteous daughter.' And then the King of Death travelled on with the soul of Satyavan. Again the same footfall was heard from behind. He looked round. 'Savitri, my daughter, you are still following me?' 'Yes, my father; I cannot help doing so; I am trying all the time to go back, but the mind goes after my husband, and the body follows. The soul has already gone, for in that soul is also mine; and when you take the soul, the body follows, does it not?' 'Pleased am I with your words, fair Savitri, ask yet another boon of me, but it must not be the life of your husband.' 'Let my father-in-law regain his lost wealth and



kingdom, Father, if thou art pleased to grant  
 another supplication.' 'Loving daughter; but  
 Yama answered, 'this boon I now cannot go with  
 return home for living mortal cannot go with  
 King Yama. And then Yama pursued, still  
 way. But Savitri, meek and faithful, again  
 followed her departed husband. Yama not in  
 turned back. 'Noble Savitri, follow but follow  
 hopeless woe.' 'I cannot choose but. Then  
 where thou takest my loved one, was a  
 suppose, Savitri, that your husband goes  
 sinner and has to go to hell. In that case goes  
 Savitri with the one she loves?' 'Glad am I to  
 follow where he goes, be it life or death,  
 heaven or hell,' said the loving wife. 'Blessed  
 are your words, my child, pleased am I with  
 you, ask yet another boon, but the dead come  
 not to life again.' 'Since you so permit me,  
 then, let the imperial line of my father-in-law  
 be not destroyed; let his kingdom descend to  
 Satyavan's son.' And then the God of Death  
 smiled. 'My daughter, thou shalt have thy  
 desire now: here is the soul of thy husband, he  
 shall live again. He shall live to be a father,  
 and thy children also shall reign in due  
 course. Return home. Love has conquered  
 Death! Woman never loved like thee, and

thou art the proof that even I, the God of  
 Death, am powerless against the power of the  
 true love that abideth!

Flourishes - ornaments  
AND WESTERN WOMEN  
INDIAN WOMEN

II Marriage is the prime  
important in our society.

In my opinion <sup>great respect</sup> a <sup>great honor</sup> face must first cultivate a <sup>highly respected</sup> great respect for motherhood, through the <sup>highly respected</sup> sanctification and <sup>highly respected</sup> inviolability of marriage, before it can attain to the ideal of perfect chastity. The Roman Catholics and the Hindus, holding marriage sacred and <sup>highly respected</sup> inviolate, have produced great chaste men and women of immense power. To the Arab, <sup>highly respected</sup> 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 chaste powers may be produced.

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 <sup>in my view</sup> 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 everything 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 why 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.



INDIAN WOMEN  
AND WESTERN WOMEN

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

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Many men here look upon their women in this light. Manu, again, has said that happy and those families where women are well-treated. Here men treat their women as well as can be desired, and hence and slavish, prosperous, so learned, so free, and so erudite. But why is that we are here? miserable, and dead? The answer are they or <sup>in America</sup> And how pure and chaste are they in <sup>in America</sup> 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 <sup>to be better off</sup> 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. 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!

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 <sup>Wife of 100x</sup> 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



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. *Differently*

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

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OUR WOMEN

she, in comparison with her who goes a little divorce court the moment I treat her as badly? Oh, American women, where is not will not find her in your country. I have just found the son who thinks mother is our When we die, even then, we do not want our wives and our children to take her place! on mother! —we want to die with her. Where 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 must not be coupled with anything 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.<sup>8</sup>

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

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Journey to the Interior

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.

New cells

BYGONE WOMEN AND WESTERN WOMEN  
 No health and love glam state part of  
 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 bagatelle nothing important

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 X 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 worshiphead 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

Marriages in India and America



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

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!<sup>11</sup>

I now see it all. Brother, *Yatra nāryastu pūjante ramante tatra devatāḥ*—'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! *Yathāthyato 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 candāla*—'be

off, thou outcaste!' '*Kena eṣā nirmīṭā nārī mohini*' etc.—'Who has made the bewitching woman?'<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup>



III

EDUCATION OF OUR WOMEN

Q.1) Disciple: What sort of education, do you think, is suited to our women?

Swamiji: Religion, arts, science, housekeeping, cooking, sewing, hygiene the simple essential points in these subjects ought to be taught to our women. It is not good to let them touch novels and fiction. The Mahakali Pathashala is to a great extent moving in the right direction. But only teaching rites of worship won't do; their education must be an eye-opener in all matters. Ideal characters must always be presented before the view of the girls to imbue them with a devotion to lofty principles of selflessness. The noble examples of Sita, Savitri, Damayanti, Lilavati, Khana, and Mira should be brought home to their minds, and they should be inspired to mould

Fill with a parallel feeling

their own lives in the light of these.

But know for certain that absolutely nothing can be done to improve the state of things, unless there is spread of education first among the women and the masses. And so I have it in my mind to train up some Brahmacharins and Brahmacharinis, the former of whom will eventually take the vow of Sannyasa and try to carry the light of education among the masses from village to village, throughout the country, while the latter will do the same among women. But the whole work must be done in the style of our own country. Just as centres have to be started for men, so also centres have to be started for teaching women. Brahmacharinis of education should take up the work of teaching at these different centres history and the Puranas, housekeeping and the arts, the duties of home-life and principles that make for the development of an ideal character, for the development of an ideal character, have to be taught with the help of modern science, and the female students must be trained in ethical and spiritual life. We must see to their growing up as ideal matrons of home in time. The children of such mothers will make further progress in the virtues that



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

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 Satvika spirit, looking upon Her as their mother!

I now see it all. Brother, *Yatra nāryastu piyante ramante tatra devatā*—'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', 'gateway to hell', and so forth. Goodness gracious! There is all the difference between heaven and hell! gifts according to the merits of the case. 'Is the Lord to be hoodwinked by idle talk? The Lord has said, *Toam stri, Toam pumān asi, Toam 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

to be a woman

off, thou' outcaste!' '*Kena esa nirmita nari nohimi*' etc.—'Who has made the bewitching woman?'<sup>12</sup>

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 splire! You did not try to bring 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.<sup>13</sup>

removing a text



Entered to the Interior

distinguish the mothers. It is only in the homes of educated and pious mothers that great men are born. And you have reduced your women to something like manufacturing machines, alas, for heaven's sake, is this the outcome of your education? The uplift of the women, the awakening of the masses, must come first, and then only can any real good come about for the country, for India.

My whole ambition in life is to set in motion a machinery which will bring noble ideas to the door of everybody, and then let men and women settle their own fate. Let them know what our forefathers as well as other nations have thought on the most momentous questions of life. Let them see specially what others are doing now, and then

Disciple: Sir, history does not tell us of any Maths (numerics) for women in India in ancient times. Only during the Buddhistic period one hears of Maths for women; but from it in course of time many corruptions arose. The whole country was overrun by greavevillpractices.

Swamiji: It is very difficult to understand why in this country so much

Rishis

difference is made between men and women whereas the Vedanta declares that one and the same conscious Self is present in all beings. You always criticize the women, but say, what have you done for their uplift? Writing down Smritis etc. and binding them by hard rules, the men have turned the women into mere manufacturing machines! If you do not raise the women who are the living embodiments of the Divine Mother, don't think that you have any other way to rise.

Disciple: Women are a bondage and a snare to men. By their Maya they cover the knowledge and dispassion of men. It is for this I suppose that scriptural writers hint that knowledge and devotion are difficult of attainment to them.

statements that women are not competent for knowledge and devotion? In the period of degradation, when the priests made the other castes incompetent to the study of the Vedas, they deprived the women also of all their rights. Otherwise you will find that in the Vedic or Upanishadic age Maitreyi, Gargi, and other ladies of revered memory have taken the places of Rishis through their skill in

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journey to the Interior

In an assembly of a thousand Brahmanas who were all erudite in the Vedas, Gargi boldly challenged to Jainavalkya in a discussion about Brahman. When such ideal women were entitled to spiritual knowledge then, why shall not women have the same privilege now? What has happened once can certainly happen again. History repeats itself. All nations respect attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future. The principal reason why your race has so much degenerated is that you had no respect for these living images of Shakti. Manu says, 'Where women are respected there the gods delight, and where they are not, there all works and efforts come to naught.' There is no hope to rise for that family or country where there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness. For this reason, they have to be raised first and an ideal Math has to be started for them.

*Disciple:* Sir, when you first returned from the West, in your lecture at the Star Theatre you sharply criticized the Tantras.

Now by your supporting the worship of women as taught in the Tantras, you are contradicting yourself.

*Sannyasi:* I denounced only the present corrupted form of Vamachara of the Tantras. I did not denounce the Mother-worship of the Tantras, or even the real Vamachara. The purport of the Tantras is to worship women in a spirit of Divinity. During the downfall of Buddhism, the Vamachara became very much corrupted, and that corrupted form obtains to the present day. Even now the Tantra literature of India is influenced by those ideas. I denounced only these corrupt and horrible practices—which I do even now. I never objected to the worship of women who are the living embodiments of the Mother, whose external manifestations appealing to the senses have maddened men, but whose internal manifestations such as knowledge, devotion, discrimination, and dispassion make man omniscient, of unfulfilling purpose, and a knower of Brahman. 'Saisā prasannā varadā nriṇām bhavati mukhaye'—'She, when pleased, becomes propitious and the cause of the freedom of man.' Without propitiating the Mother by worship and

we made a dose seedling of sex



obeisance not even Brahma and Vishnu have the power to elude Her grasp and attain to freedom. Therefore for the worship of these family goddesses in order to manifest the Brahman within them I shall establish the women's Math.

*Disciple:* It may be a good idea, but where will you get the women inmates? With the present hard restrictions of society, who will permit the ladies of their household to join your Math?

*Swamiji:* Why so? Even now there are lady-disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. With their help I shall start this Math. The Holy Mother will be their central figure, and the wives and daughters of the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna will be its first inmates. For they will easily appreciate the usefulness of such a Math. After that, following their example, many householders will help in this noble work.

*Disciple:* The devotees of Sri Ramakrishna will certainly join this work. But I don't think the general public will help in this work.

*Swamiji:* No great work has been done in the world without sacrifice. Who on seeing the tiny sprout of the banyan can imagine that

in course of time it will develop into a gigantic banyan tree? At present I shall start the Math in this way. Later on you will see that after a generation or two people of the country will appreciate the worth of this Math. The lady-disciples of mine will lay down their lives for it. Casting off fear and cowardice, you also be helpers in this noble mission and hold this high ideal before all. You will see, it will shed its lustre over the whole country in time.

*Disciple:* Sir, please tell me all about your plan of this Math for women.

*Swamiji:* On the other side of the Ganga a big plot of land would be acquired, where unmarried girls or Brahmacharini widows will live; devout married ladies will also be allowed to stay now and then. Men will have no concern with this Math. The sewing, bathing of the Math will manage the affairs of this Math from a distance. There shall be a girls' school attached to this female Math, in which religious scriptures, literature, Sanskrit, grammar, and even some amount of English should be taught. Other matters such as sewing, culinary art, rules of domestic work, and upbringing of children will also be taught, while japa, worship and meditation etc., shall form



an indispensable part of the teaching. Those who will be able to live here ties, will be renouncing home and family from this provided with food and clothing to do that Math. Those who will not be able to do that will be allowed to study in this math as day-scholars. With the permission of the head of the Math the latter will be allowed even to stay in the Math occasionally, and during such stay will be maintained by the Math. The elder Brahmacharinis will take charge of the training of the girl students in this Math, the five or six years' training in this Math, the guardians of the girls may marry them. If deemed fit for Yoga and religious life, with the permission of their guardians they will be allowed to stay in this Math taking the vow of celibacy. These celibate nuns will in time be the teachers and preachers of the Math. In villages and towns they will open centres and strive for the spread of female education. Through such devout preachers of character there will be the real spread of female education in the country. So long as the students will remain in association with this Math, they must observe Brahmacharya as the basic idea of this Math.

Spirituality, sacrifice, and self-control

will be the motto of the pupils of this Math, and service or Seva-Dharma the vow of their life. In view of such ideal lives, who will not respect and have faith in them? If the life of the women in this country be moulded in such fashion, then only will there be the re-appearance of such ideal characters as Sita, Savitri and Gargi. To what straits the strictures of local usages have reduced the women of this country rendering them lifeless and inert, you could only understand if you visited the Western countries. You alone are responsible for this miserable condition of the women, and it rests with you also to raise them again. Therefore I say, set to work. What will it do to memorize a few religious books like the Vedas and so on?

**Disciple:** Sir, if the girl students after being trained in this Math marry, how will one find ideal characters in them? Will it not be better if the rule is made that those who will be educated in this Math shall not marry?

**Swamiji:** Can that be brought about all at once? They must be given education and left to themselves. After that they will act as they think best. Even after marriage and entering the world, the girls educated as

He must have some



Alaric  
New System of Education

above will inspire their husbands with noble ideals and be the mothers of heroic sons. But there must be this rule that the Guardians of the students in the female Math must not even think of marrying them before they attain the age of fifteen.

Disciple: Sir, then those girls will not command reputation in society. Nobody would like to marry them.

Swamiji: Why will not they be wanted in marriage? You have not yet understood the trend of society. These learned and accomplished girls will never be in want of bridegrooms. Society nowadays does not follow the text recommending child-marriage nor will it do so in the future. Even now don't

you see?  
Disciple: But there is sure to be a violent opposition against this in the beginning.

Swamiji: Let it be. What is there to be afraid of in that? Opposition to a righteous work initiated with moral courage will only awaken the moral power of the initiators the more. That which meets with no obstruction, no opposition, only takes men to the path of moral death. Struggle is the sign of life.

Disciple: Yes, sir.

Swamiji: In the highest truth of the Para-brahman, there is no distinction of sex. We only notice this in the relative plane. And the more the mind becomes introspective, the more that idea of difference vanishes. Ultimately when the mind is wholly merged in the homogeneous and undifferentiated Brahman, then such ideas as this is a man or that a woman do not remain at all. We have actually seen this in the life of Sri Rama-Krishna. Therefore do I say that though outwardly there may be difference between men and women, in their real nature there is none. Therefore, if a man can be a knower of Brahman, why cannot a woman attain to the same knowledge? Therefore I was saying that if even amongst the vast number of knowers of Brahman, then by the radiance of her personality thousands of women would be inspired and awakened to truth, and great well-being of the country and society would ensue. Do you understand?

Disciple: Sir, your teachings have opened my eyes today.

Swamiji: Not fully yet. When you will realize that all-illuminating truth of the Atman, then you will see that this idea of

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New Criticism

OUR WOMEN

sex-distinction has vanished altogether, then only will you look upon all women as the veritable manifestations of how he had this idea of divine motherhood in every woman, of whatever caste she might be, or whatever might be her worth. It is because I have seen this that I ask you all so earnestly to do likewise and open girls' schools in every village and try to uplift them. If the women are raised, then their children will by their noble actions glorify the name of the country, then will culture, knowledge, power and devotion awaken in the country.

Disciple: But, sir, contrary results appear to have come out of the present female education. With just a smattering of education, they take merely to the Western modes of living, but it is not clear how far they are advancing in the spirit of renunciation, self-control, austerity, Brahmacharya, and other qualities conducive to Brahmajnana (knowledge of Brahman).

Swamiji: In the beginning a few mistakes like that are unavoidable. When a new idea is preached in the country, some failing to grasp it properly, go wrong in that

way. But what matters it to the well-being of society at large? Well, those who are pioneers of the little bit of female education that now obtains in the country, were undoubtedly very great-hearted. But the truth is that some defect or other must creep into that learning or culture which is not founded on a religious basis. But now female education is to be spread with religion as its centre. All other training should be secondary to religion. Religious training, the formation of character, and observance of the vow of celibacy—these should be attended to. In the female education which has obtained up till now in India, it is religion that has been made a secondary concern; hence those defects you were speaking of have crept in. But now we attach therefore to the women. Reformers having proceeded to start female education without being Brahmacharins themselves have stumbled like that. Founders of all good undertakings, before they launch on their desired work, must attain to the knowledge of the Atman through rigorous self-discipline. Otherwise defects are bound to occur in their work.

Disciple: Yes, Sir, it is observed that



many educated women spend their time in reading novels and so on; but in East Bengal, even with education, women have not given up their religious observances. Is it so here in this part?

*Samiji:* In every country, nations have their good and bad sides. Ours is to do good works in our lives and hold an example before others. No work succeeds by condemnation. It only repels people. Let anybody say what he likes, don't contradict him. In this world of Maya, whatever work you will take up will be attended with some defect—'Sartārambhā hi dosevā dhīmmangūrvirivārtāhi'—'All works are covered with defects as fire is with smoke.' Every fire has a chance of being attended with smoke. But will you, on that account, sit inactive? As far as you can, you must go on doing good work.<sup>17</sup>

Educate your women first and leave them to themselves; then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them. In matters concerning them, who are you?<sup>18</sup>

Liberty is the first condition of growth. It is wrong, a thousand times wrong, if any of you dares to say, 'I will work out the

salvation of this woman or child? I am asked again and again, what I think of the woman question. Let me answer once for all—am I a widow that you ask me that nonsense? Am I a woman, that you ask me that question again and again? Who are you to solve women's problems? Are you the Lord God that you should rule over every widow and every woman? Hands off! They will solve their own problems.<sup>19</sup>



New Criticism

New Criticism

Thoughts on the Toleration

THOUGHTS ON MARRIAGE

IV

Questioner: May I ask you, Sir, what is your opinion about early marriage?

Savarnin: Amongst the educated classes in Bengal, the custom of marrying their boys too early is dying out gradually. The girls are also given in marriage a year or two older than before, but that has been under compulsion—grown pecuniary want. Whatever might be the reason for it, the age of marrying girls should be raised still higher. But what will the poor father do? As soon as the girl grows up a little, every one of the female sex, beginning with the mother down to the relatives and neighbours even, will begin to try out that he must find a bridegroom for her, and will not leave him in peace until he does so! And about your religious hypocrites, the less said the better. In these days no one hears them, but still they

THOUGHTS ON MARRIAGE

will take up the role of leaders themselves. The rulers passed the Age of Consent Bill prohibiting a man, under the threat of penalty, to live with a girl of twelve years, and at once all these so-called leaders of your religion raised a tremendous hue and cry against it, sounding the alarm, 'Alas, our religion is lost!' As if religion consists in making a girl a mother at the age of twelve or thirteen! So the rulers also naturally think, 'Goodness gracious! What a religion is theirs! And these people lead political agitations and demand political rights!'

Questioner: Then, in your opinion, both men and women should be married at an advanced age?

Savarnin: Certainly. But education should be imparted along with it. Otherwise irregularity and corruption will ensue. By education I do not mean the present system, but something in the line of positive teaching. Mere book-learning won't do. We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet.

Questioner: We have to reform our women in many ways.

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Atisha  
New Generation

Tejvir

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Our Women

Savitri: With such an education women will solve their own problems. They have all the time been trained in helplessness, servile dependence on others, and so they are good only to weep their eyes out at the slightest approach of a mishap or danger. Along with other things they should acquire the spirit of valour and heroism. In the present day it has become necessary for them also to learn self-defense. See how grand was the Queen of Fransis!

Questioner: What you advise is quite a new departure, and it will, I am afraid, take a very long time yet to train our women in that way.

Savitri: Anyhow, we have to try our best. We have not only to teach them but to teach ourselves also. Mere begetting children does not make a father, a great many responsibilities have to be taken upon one's shoulders as well. To make a beginning in women's education. Our Hindu women easily understand what chastity means, because it is their heritage. Now, first of all, intensify that ideal within them above everything else, so that they may develop a strong character by the force of which, in every stage of their lives,

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Atisha

Discourse on Marriage

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whether married, or single, if they prefer to remain so, they will not be in the least afraid even to give up their lives rather than flinch an inch from their chastity. Is it little heroism to be able to sacrifice one's life for the sake of one's ideal, whatever that ideal may be? Studying the present needs of the age, it seems imperative to train some of them up in the ideals of renunciation, so that they will take up the vow of lifelong virginity, fired with the strength of that virtue of chastity, which is innate in their life-blood from hoary antiquity. Along with that they should be taught sciences and other things which would be of benefit, not only to them but to others as well, and knowing this they would easily learn these things and feel pleasure in doing so. Our motherland requires for her well getting some of her citizens to become such pure-souled Brahmacharins and Brahmacharinis.

Questioner: In what way will that conduce to her well-being?

Savitri: By their example and through their endeavours to hold the national ideal before the eyes of the people, a revolution in thoughts and aspirations will take place. How do matters stand now?

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Somehow, the parents must dispose of a girl in marriage, if she be nine or ten years of age! And what a rejoicing of the whole family if a child is born to her at the age of thirteen! If the trend of such ideas is reversed, then there is some hope for the ancient Śraddhā (faith) to return. And what to talk of those who will practise Brahmacharya as defined above—think how much Śraddhā and faith in themselves will be theirs! And what a power for good will they be!<sup>20</sup>

[This conversation ended here. On other occasions Swamiji said:]

... It may be argued that early marriage leads to premature child-bearing, which accounts for most of our women dying early; their progeny also, being of low vitality, go to swell the ranks of our country's beggars! For, if the physique of the parents be not strong and healthy, how can strong and healthy children be born at all? Married a little later and bred in culture, our mothers will give birth to children who would be able to achieve real good of the country. The reason why you have so many widows in every home lies here, in this custom of early marriage. If the number of early marriages

declines, that of widows is bound to follow suit.

But everywhere under the sun you find the same blending of the good and the bad. In my opinion, society in every country shapes itself out of its own initiative. So we need not trouble our heads prematurely about such reforms as the abolition of early marriage, the remarriage of widows and so on. Our part of the duty lies in imparting true education to all men and women in society. As an outcome of that education, they will of themselves be able to know what is good for them and what is bad, and will spontaneously eschew the latter. It will not be then necessary to pull down or set up anything in society by coercion.<sup>21</sup>

On one side, new India is saying, we should have full freedom in the selection of husband and wife; because, the marriage in which are involved the happiness and misery of all our future life, we must have the right to determine according to our own free will'. On the other, old India is dictating, 'Marriage is not for sense-enjoyment, but to perpetuate the race. This is the Indian conception of marriage. By the producing of children, you are contributing to, and responsible for, the future good

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Our Women

or evil of the society. Hence society has the right to dictate when you shall marry and whom you shall not. That form of marriage which is necessary which is conducive most to its well-being, do you give up your desire of individual pleasure for the good of the many?

For example, take the prohibition of widow-marriage in our country. Don't think that the Rishis or wicked men introduced the law pertaining to it. Notwithstanding the desire of men to keep women completely under their control, they never could succeed in introducing those laws without betaking themselves to the aid of social necessity of the time. Of this custom two points should be specially observed:

- (a) Widow-marriage takes place among the lower classes.
- (b) Among the higher classes the number of women is greater than that of men.

Now, if it be the rule to marry every girl, it is difficult enough to get one husband apiece; then how to get by and by, two or three for each? Therefore has society put one party under disadvantage, i.e., it does not let her

The Rights of Men

have a second husband, who has lost one if a girl, one man would have to go without a husband. On the other hand widow-marriage entails in communities having a greater number of men than women, as in these cases the objection stated above does not exist. It is becoming more and more difficult in the West, too, for unmarried girls to get husbands.

But let me tell you now that the ideas behind our marriage system are the only ideas through which there can be a real civilization. There cannot be anything else. If a man or a woman were allowed the freedom to take up any woman or man as wife or husband, if individual pleasure, if satisfaction of animal instincts, were to be allowed to run loose in society, the result must be evil. Widow-marriage and remarriage, by men or women, country is, on the one hand, producing these brutal children, and on the other hand, multiplying the police force to keep these brutes down. The question is not how to destroy evil that way, but how to prevent the very birth of evil, and so long as you live in society your marriage certainly affects every member of it, and therefore society has the right to dictate whom you shall marry, and whom you shall



not. And great ideas of this kind have been behind the system of marriage here, what they call the astrological Janai of the bride and bridegroom. And in passing I may remark that according to Manu a child who is born of his father and whose death is according to the rules not an Aryan. The child whose very concept of the Vedas, such as an Aryan. Yes, and less of these Aryan children are being produced in every country, and the result is the mass of evil which we call Kali Yuga, but we have lost all these ideals, it is true we cannot carry all these ideas to the fullest length now, it is perfectly true we have made almost a caricature of some of these great ideas. It is lamentably true that the fathers and mothers are not what they were in our times, neither is society so educated as it used to be, neither has society that love for individuals that it used to have. But however faulty the working out may be, the principle is sound; and if its application has become defective, if one method has failed, take up the principle and work it out better, why kill the principle? . . . The principle is eternal and must be there. Work it out afresh, and make a reformed application.<sup>24</sup>

V

POSITION AND PROSPECTS OF OUR WOMEN

In India there are two great evils, Trampling on the women, and grinding the poor through caste restrictions.<sup>25</sup>

In Malabar . . . the women lead in everything. Exceptional cleanliness is found everywhere. There is the greatest impetus to learning. When I myself was in that country, I met many women who spoke good Sanskrit, while in the rest of India not one woman in million can speak it. Mastery elevates and servitude debases. Malabar has never been conquered either by the Portuguese or by the Mussalmans.

The Dravidians were a non-Aryan race of Central Asia who preceded the Aryans, and those of Southern India were the most

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civilized. Women with them stood higher than men.

Everyone has the power to judge of good and evil, but he is the hero who, undaunted by the waves of Samsara—which is full of errors, delusions, and miseries—with one hand wipes the tears, and with the other, unshaken, shows the path of deliverance. On the one hand, there is the conservative society like a mass of inert matter, on the other, the restless, impatient, fire-darting reformer; the way to good lies between the two. I heard in Japan that it was the belief of the girls of the country that their dolls would be animated if they were loved with all their heart. The Japanese girl never breaks her doll. O you of great fortune, I too believe that India will awake again if anyone could love with all his heart the people of the country—bereft of the grace of affluence, of blasted fortune, their discretion totally lost, downtrodden, ever-starved, quarrelsome, and envious. Then only will India awake, when hundreds of large-hearted men and women giving up all desires of enjoying the luxuries of life will long and exert themselves to their utmost for the well-being of the millions of their countrymen who are

gradually sinking lower and lower in the vortex of destitution and ignorance. I have experienced even in my insignificant life that good motives, sincerity, and infinite love can conquer the world. One single soul possessed of these virtues can destroy the dark designs of millions of hypocrites and brutes.

It was early one Sunday morning, (writes the representative of the Prabhakha Bharata), in a beautiful Himalayan valley, that I was at last able to carry out the order of the Editor, and call on the Swami Vivekananda, to ascertain something of his views on the position and prospects of Indian women.)

'Let us go for a walk,' said the Swami, when I had announced my errand, and we set out at once amongst some of the most lovely scenery in the world.

By sunny and shady ways we went, through quiet villages, amongst playing children and across the golden cornfields. Here the tall trees seemed to pierce the blue above, and there a group of peasant girls stooped, sickle in hand, to cut and carry off the plume-tipped stalks of maize-straw for the winter stores. Now the road led into an apple orchard, where great heaps of crimson

— in 24/5/1900 D

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New Criticism  
New Criticism emerged out of

fruit lay under the trees for sorting, and again we were out in the open, facing the snows that rose in august beauty above the white clouds against the sky.

At last my companion broke the silence. 'The Aryan and Semitic ideals of woman', he said, 'have always been diametrically opposed. Amongst the Semites to devotion, woman is considered dangerous to religion, and she may not perform any religious function, even such as the killing of a bird for food: according to the Aryan a man cannot perform a religious action without a wife.'

'But Swamiji,' said I—startled at an assertion so sweeping and so unexpected—'is Hinduism not an Aryan faith?'

Modern Hinduism, said the Swami, quietly, 'is largely Pauranika, that is post-Buddhistic in origin. Dayananda Saraswati pointed out that though a wife is absolutely necessary in the Sacrifice of the domestic fire, which is a Vedic rite, she may not touch the Śalagrāma Śilā, or the household idol, because that dates from the later period of the Puranas.'

'And so you consider the inequality of woman amongst us as entirely due to the

influence of Buddhism?' said the

'Where it exists, certainly,' said the Swami, 'but we should not allow the sudden influx of European criticism, and our consequent sense of contrast, to make us acquiescent too readily in this notion of the inequality of our women. Circumstances have forced upon us, for many centuries, the woman's need of protection. This, and not her inferiority, is the true reading of our customs.'

'Are you then entirely satisfied with the position of women amongst us, Swamiji?'

'By no means,' said the Swami, 'but our right of interference is limited entirely to giving education. Women must be put in a position to solve their own problems in their own way. No one can or ought to do this for them. And our Indian women are as capable of doing it as any in the world.'

'How do you account for the evil influence which you attribute to Buddhism?'

'It came only with the decay of the faith,' said the Swami. 'Every movement triumphs by dint of some of unusual characteristic, and when it falls, that point of pride becomes its chief element of weakness. The Lord Buddha—greatest among men—was a



marvellous organizer and carried the world by this means. But his religion was the religion of a monastic order. It had therefore, the evil effect of making the very robe of the monk honoured. He also introduced for the first time the community life of religious houses and thereby necessarily made women inferior to men since the great abbesses could take no important step without the advice of certain abbots. It ensured its immediate object, the solidarity of the faith, you see; only its far-reaching effects are to be deplored.

'But Sannyasa is recognized in the Vedas!'  
 'Of course it is, but without making any distinction between men and women. Do you remember how Yajnavalkya was questioned at the Court of King Janaka? His principal examiner was Vachaknavi, the maiden orator—Brahmavadini, as the word of the day was. "Like two shining arrows in the hand of the skilled archer," she says, "are my questions." Her sex is not even commented upon. Again, could anything be more complete than the equality of boys and girls in old forest universities? Read our Sanskrit dramas—read the story of Shakuntala, and see if Tennyson's "Princess" has anything to teach us!

'You have a wonderful way of revealing the glories of our past. Swamiji!'

'Perhaps, because I have seen both sides of the world,' said the Swami gently, 'and I know that the race that produced Sita—even if it only dreamt of her—has a reverence for woman that is unmatched on the earth. There is many a burden bound with legal tightness on the shoulders of Western women that is utterly unknown to ours. We have our wrongs and our exceptions certainly, but so have they. We must never forget that all over the globe the general effort is to express love and tenderness and uprightness, and that national customs are only the nearest vehicles of this expression. With regard to the domestic virtues I have no hesitation in saying that our Indian methods have in many ways the advantage over all others.'

'Then have our women any problems at all, Swamiji?'

'Of course, they have many and grave problems, but none that are not to be solved by that magic word "Education". The true education, however, is not yet conceived of amongst us.'

'And how would you define that?'



'I never define anything,' said the Swami, smiling. 'Still, it may be described as a development of faculty, not an accumulation of words, or as a training of individuals to will rightly and efficiently. So shall we bring to the need of India great fearless women—women worthy to continue the traditions of Sankhamitta, Lila, Ahalya Bai, and Mira Bai—women fit to be mothers of heroes, because they are pure and selfless, strong with the strength that comes of touching the feet of God.'

'So you consider that there should be a religious element in education, Swamiji?'

'I look upon religion as the innermost core of education,' said the Swami solemnly. 'Mind, I do not mean my own, or anyone else's opinion about religion. I think the teacher should take the pupil's starting-point in this, as in other respects, and enable her to develop along her own line of least resistance.'

'But surely the religious exaltation of Brahmacharya, by taking the highest place from the mother and wife and giving it to those who evade those relations, is a direct blow dealt at woman?'

'You should remember,' said the Swami,

'that if religion exalts Brahmacharya for woman, it does exactly the same for man. Moreover, your question shows a certain confusion in your own mind. Hinduism indicates one duty, only one, for the human soul. It is to seek to realize the permanent amidst the evanescent. No one presumes to point out any one way in which this may be done. Marriage or non-marriage, good or evil, learning or ignorance, any of these is justified, if it leads to the goal. In this respect lies the great contrast between it and Buddhism, for the latter's outstanding direction is to realize the impermanence of the external, which, broadly speaking, can only be done in one way. Do you recall the story of the young Yogi in the Mahabharata who performed a feat on his psychic powers by burning the bodies of a crow and a crane by his intense will, produced by anger? Do you remember that the young saint went into the town and found first a wife nursing her sick husband and then the butcher Dharmavyadha, both of whom had obtained enlightenment in the path of common faithfulness and duty?'

'And so what would you say, Swamiji, to the women of this country?'



'Why, to the women of this country,' said the Swami, 'I would say exactly what I say to the men. Believe in India and in our Indian faith. Be strong and hopeful and unashamed, and remember that with something to take, Hindus have immeasurable more to give than any other people in the world.'<sup>28</sup>

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