

HINDU SOCIAL REFORM AND THE WOMEN'S QUESTION: A SOCIOLOGICAL ENQUIRY

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of the Degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

BIKRAM KESHARI MISHRA



**CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI – 110 067
INDIA
2000**



जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI 110 067

Centre for the Study of Social Systems
School of Social Sciences

July 21, 2000

CERTIFICATE


This dissertation entitled "HINDU SOCIAL REFORM AND THE WOMEN'S QUESTION: A SOCIOLOGICAL ENQUIRY" submitted in partial fulfillment for the M. Phil degree of the university has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university and is my original work.


BIKRAM KESHARI MISHRA

(Candidate)

We recommend that the dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


DR. AVIJIT PATHAK
(Supervisor)


PROF. NANDU RAM
(Chairperson)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*Writing a dissertation of this kind is not simply an individual act; in fact, I am indebted to many people who have made significant contribution in the making of this accomplishment. First of all, I remain sincerely grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Avijit Pathak – the director of this act – for his honest and patient guidance and flexible cooperation. Words are too poor to express my heart-felt gratefulness to him whose devotion to learning has always inspired, encouraged and helped me in my academic pursuit. I owe my debt to my revered teacher Dr. Maitrayee Chaudhuri whose stimulating and thought provoking teaching of the course *Women and Society in India* inspired me to think a topic of this kind.*

My family has been the foundation of all my career pursuits that I have undertaken so far. This dissertation could not have been possible without the constant support of my family.

Most important to the evolution of this dissertation are my friends like Deepak, Fakir, Ritu, Tulsi, Ajay, Binay, Susanta, and Bimal whose continual assistance and inspiration boosted my spirit to work sincerely.

Lastly, I remain responsible for all the inadequacies of this dissertation.

New Delhi

21st July 2000

Bikram Keshari Mishra
BIKRAM KESHARI MISHRA

***DEDICATED TO THE
ALMIGHTY, MY PARENTS AND
MY TEACHER....***

CONTENT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

1-5

CHAPTER I: SOCIOLOGY AND THE WOMEN'S QUESTION: A THEORETICAL REVIEW

6-33

SECTION I. UNDERSTANDING FEMINISM

8-11

SECTION II. THEORETICAL INSIGHTS

11-32

SECTION III. WOMEN'S QUESTION AND SOCIAL REALITY IN INDIA

32-33

CHAPTER II: HINDU SOCIAL REFORMERS AND THE NOTION OF WOMANHOOD

34-82

SECTION I. RAJA RAMMOHUN ROY (1772 – 1833)

38-48

SECTION II. ISWARACHANDRA VIDYASAGAR (1820 – 91)

48-55

SECTION III. SWAMI DAYANANDA SARASWATI (1824 – 83)

56-65

SECTION IV. SWAMI VIVEKANANDA (1863 – 1902)

66-72

SECTION V. MAHATMA GANDHI (1869 – 1948)

73-82

CHAPTER III: HINDU SOCIAL REFORMERS AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

83-105

SECTION I. GAP BETWEEN THE IDEAL AND THE REALITY

84-97

SECTION II. NEW CHALLENGES: NEED FOR A CREATIVE AND CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH HINDU SOCIAL REFORMERS

97-105

CONCLUSION

106-110

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

111-115

INTRODUCTION

All arts and science are always engaged in an earnest endeavor to understand lived human experiences. They are engaged in an attempt to explain it by formulating concepts, logical inferences, and theories, and in the process reformulate these constructions in the light of the changing circumstances and exigencies. These constructions and theories have often been vehemently challenged for their inadequate, more particularly, blind attention to women's lived experiences, experiences of their commonsense world and their ethnomethods. Feminist theory brings the added experience/ awareness that the construction of women's experience has never been adequate and argues that it has rarely been a direct debate in theoretical discourse, a whole range and spectrum of human life remains to be explored, depicted and understood. Question arises, what is this feminist theory? To begin with, it is an approach to deal with women's question – their lives: past and present; it is a reaction to the male-stream dominant discourse; it is an assertion of femininity, identity and egalitarianism and finally, it is an answer to their perennial problem of subjugation. Studies of gender not only enrich our understanding of human behavior but also open our mind to a long neglected dimension of social analysis. Gender related practices that are inherent in social institutions have always acted as constraints to the establishment of a gender equal social order. Gender as a social construct or woman as a category is not an entity to be analyzed in itself, rather it has to be visualized, comprehended in relation to family, caste, religion and ideology. These have been the decisive factors in shaping the position of

women in Indian society right from its inception till date. For example, the ideologies of masculinity and femininity are always created in interaction with ideologies of caste, class, nation and religion. Gender, then is a complex phenomenon not amenable to simple analysis. It is socially defined in a variety of ways through cultural practices, symbolic representations and prescriptive work divisions. Hence, the oppression that results from unequal gender practices is inscribed on both the minds and bodies of women. The chapters in this dissertation address the relationship between the Indian civilization and its women, between Hindu religion and its women, between our culture and women, between the Indian State and its women both in pre and post-independence India. More particularly, it explores the rediscovery and redefinition of women as a category that occurred during colonial period – a period of renaissance when Hindu social reformers were engaged in a struggle to revive and restore India's glorious past thereby purging Hinduism as a way of life and constructing an ideal notion of womanhood in the light India's glorious heritage.

There is a need to rethink and reflect upon the question of women particularly the way that the reformers have tried to define her identity because a tremendous shift has taken place in the consciousness / awareness of many women since India's independence and it has produced women like Phoolan Devi, Madhu Kishwar and Kalpana Chawla any many others. In a sense, women are indeed, making themselves visible through their demands and challenges, to the prevailing order. The issues that have surfaced as of particular concern and debate include violence against women, the economic and educational hegemony of men, the patriarchal bases of law that claim to protect women against

discrimination, men's monopoly over political power and state as well as gender related stereo types that prescribes a woman's code of conduct. Concepts that were made a grand terrain of debate – family, work, marriage, motherhood, and religion – during colonial era, have in the last fifty years, been questioned and redefined. The dissertation examines some of the issues in the context of the lives of ordinary women in contemporary India.

The dissertation is broadly divided into three substantial chapters along with its introduction and conclusion. The first chapter entitled *Sociology and the Women's Question: A Theoretical Review* briefly analyses the theoretical insights concerning women's issue. It is a theoretical endeavor to make a sense of women's subordination and exploitation in contemporary era – an approach to explore how women's voice has occupied a space in academic discourse and how sociology as an academic discipline has responded to gender issues in its theoretical plane. More particularly the chapter offers a sociological perspective for an understanding of gender and for a proper comprehension of gender as a sociological discourse. In this chapter we have discussed some of the dominant theories of feminism like the radical feminist explanation, the socialist, the liberal, the Marxist, the psychoanalytic and the post modern feminist explanations in order to understand the way they have analyzed the question and cause of women.

The second chapter entitled *Hindu Social Reformers and the Notion of Womanhood* is an attempt to deal with the Indian notion of womanhood in general and that of the Hindu social reformers in particular that was debated

during the revivalist epoch. Here I have taken five social reformers like Raja Rammohun Roy, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi and have tried to analyze how they have dealt and defined woman's identity, femininity in relation to religion, civilization, cultural heritage in the context of the emerging modernity.

The third chapter entitled *Hindu Social Reformers and Contemporary Challenges* examines the reformers' definition of ideal womanhood in the context of recent feminists' assertions, atrocities on women and the new challenges that appear before them. It examines and cross-examines the notion of ideal woman in the context of real women's issues like domestic violence, dowry death, rape, murder; patriarchal subjugation, patriarchal state laws that have been the issue of debate in twenty-first century.

This dissertation is not based on an empirical research. I have tried my level best to go through the gender related literature of these five social thinkers as stated earlier and have tried to understand and analyze critically the issues raised by the reformers. Hence it is a sort of critical enquiry and exploration into reformers' idealized notion of womanhood and its examination in terms of our twenty first-century gender question and feminist voices.

By going through this dissertation one can make a historical cum sociological sense of woman's question and debate starting from the British colonial regime till date. Despite all these the dissertation has certain limitations. It is confined only with the Hindu notion of womanhood. Moreover in the entire debate over women's question there are many personalities and reformers who

have contributed to this debate. But the researcher has selected only five social thinkers for this study. However the major findings of this dissertation cannot be generalized to that of the India as a whole rather it is a comprehensive analysis of Hindus and their way of life and not of others. Despite all these, this dissertation may not be of help to specialists but it can be read by all those readers interested in the unfinished story of Indian women.

CHAPTER I

SOCIOLOGY AND THE WOMEN'S

QUESTION: A THEORETICAL REVIEW.

SECTION I: - UNDERSTANDING FEMINISM

SECTION II: - THEORETICAL INSIGHTS

**SECTION III: - WOMEN'S QUESTION AND SOCIAL
REALITY IN INDIA**

SOCIOLOGY AND THE WOMEN'S QUESTION: A THEORETICAL REVIEW

It has often been argued that sociology as a formal body of academic knowledge seeks to make sense of social relations. In other words, sociology as we know, is continually reflecting on a set of complex questions – the relationship between individual and society, agency and structure, society and nature. Needless to add, right from its inception, sociology has given birth to divergent approaches perspectives and theories in order to cope with these questions. It has got its functionalist perspective as well as Marxist point of view. There is tension between consensus theory and conflict theory, between positivists and critical theorists.

Despite the richness of the discipline, a question continues to haunt us; is sociology gender neutral? This question assumes at its relevance because in our times feminists are debunking the so called neutrality of knowledge system and arguing that female voices and experiences have often been sidelined and marginalised in the process of representing the world primarily by male scholars. It can be argued that most of the early and classical sociologists including Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim, were all men and possibly could not see the world through the feminine perspective. Even if there is some mention about it, the approach has been uncritical. For example, Talcott Parsons in his book *Essays in Sociological Theory (1954)*, argues that for the family to function effectively, there must be a sexual division of labour

in which adult males and females play different roles. Women whose task is the internal function of the family, supportive of both children and adult males, must be 'expressive,' that is, gentle, nurturant, loving and emotionally open. If men and women become too similar in their family function and orientation, competition between them will disrupt family life weakening the family's vital role in maintaining social stability.¹ Not solely that, these days we are becoming conscious of the relationship between patriarchy and other social institutions like state, family, kinship, education, and religion. It is therefore important, as feminists would argue, to critique the prevalent social institutions from the feminine perspective.

The overwhelming presence of feminism has indeed, made a deep impact on the agenda of sociology. These days gender sociology has become an important branch of inquiry in the discipline. In other words, sociology can no longer escape the women's question. More and more women are joining the discipline as students and as scholars, more and more feminist writings are coming and sociologists are reflecting on social institutions and structures from the women's point of view. In this chapter, our attempt would be to see how the women's question has occupied an important place in the sociological discourse and how a spectrum of the theoretical traditions and approaches have developed in the discipline of sociology in order to cope with the women's question.

¹ Talcott Parsons, *Essays in Sociological Theory* (New York; Free Press: 1954) p-79.

[I]

UNDERSTANDING FEMINISM

Many individuals are reluctant to advocate feminism because they are uncertain regarding the meaning of the term. Some individuals dismiss the term because they do not want to be identified with this glamorous notion. Some individuals fear the word because they think it to be a radical one. But for more scholars, feminism symbolizes an invitation to each woman to decide her destiny, freedom from sex determined role, freedom from society's oppressive restriction, freedom to express her thought fully. As Bell Hooks puts it, *Feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression.*² It is a socio-political perspective that aims at bringing about social, economic and political equality among women as compared to men. Feminism aims at changing women's position in the society thereby producing a better world for them.

Feminist theory is women centered in three ways:

- i. Its central focus of inquiry, beginning of all exploration is the situation(s) and experience(s) of women in society.
- ii. It considers women as the central 'subjects' in the investigative process;
- iii. Feminist theory is critical and activist on behalf of women, seeking to produce a better world for them and thus, for mankind.

² Bell Hooks, 'Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression' in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires'(ed.) *Feminisms* (New York; OUP: 1997) p-25.

Theorizing such a perspective by and large, suffers from its universal openness. This theory differs from many sociological theories in a number of ways and moreover, becomes difficult to formulate one of this kind.

- i. Not only people from interdisciplinary community, that includes scholars from disciplines like Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science, Economics, Psychology, History, Geography, Biology have contributed to it, but also recognized personalities like Musicians, Dancers, Artists, (sex) Novel Writers, Socialites have all offered powerful and sometimes conflicting ideas about women in society and culture.
- ii. Development and organization of such a theory is not the sole preserve of sociologists; they can contribute in part to extend it.
- iii. Strictly speaking, in the development of feminist theory, no basic link has been made between it and the major macro-micro theories of sociology.
- iv. It is more of a social theory than a sociological one.
- v. Ideas and arguments of feminist theorists have always reflected their bias in terms of their race, culture and spatial location.

Associated with the idea of feminism are the concepts like sex, gender, femaleness and femininity. To begin with, femaleness is a matter of biology.

Femininity refers to a set of culturally defined characteristics, in short a cultural construct. As Simone de Beauvoir puts it, women's condition is the 'other'. From the beginning, girls recognize that their bodies are different from those of the boys. They are altogether taught a different set of roles based on their sex. They experience the kind of self (man) -- other (woman) dichotomy right from their childhood.³ This includes the ascriptive and prescriptive roles within the patriarchy. The emphasis is on female modesty and virtues of chastity and virginity.

Sex refers to the biological, natural differences between men and women. It is one of the basic biological drives of human being. Sexuality organizes society into two sexes: man and woman. Gender is nothing but the sexuality socially constructed. Gender is derived from the construction of social relationship based on 'sex', between man and woman. It refers to the differences between males and females caused by the psychological development of the individuals within a society. But these gender relations so far as we have understood them have been relations of domination. That is, they have been defined and imperfectly controlled by one of their interrelated parts - the man. As Jane Flax argues,

These relations of domination have been concealed in a variety of ways including defining women as a 'question' or the 'sex' or the 'other' and

³ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. by H.M.Parshley, (New York; Vintage Books: 1974) p-354.

*men as universal. Although the men appear to be and the wardens, they are governed by the rules of gender.*⁴

Feminism is a theory/ perspective that tries to analyze the spheres and causes of women's subordination/ exploitation/ victimization/ objectification that occur due to imperfectly controlled gender relations and aims at changing this imperfection/ existing unequal relationship between men and women and producing a better world for women.

[II]

THEORETICAL INSIGHTS

As sociologists have increasingly turned their attention to the study of gender issues, a new branch has emerged in the discipline itself called as the 'sociology of gender' or the 'gender studies'. The recent feminist theory constitutes the literature base for the development of any feminist sociological theory. This chapter tries to present an overview of women's question in the context of feminist theory. Basically there are three theoretical orientations which revolve around three concepts such as oppression, inequality and difference: theories of difference are - supported by bio-social explanations and postmodern explanations; the theory of inequality - supported by liberal and Marxist explanations; finally the theory of oppression - supported by psychoanalytic explanations, Radical and socialist explanations.

⁴ Jane Flax, 'Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory' in *Feminism/Postmodernism* (ed.) by Linda J. Nicholson. (New York; Routledge: 1990) p-45.

(a). Theories of Gender Difference

Broadly there are two explanations: the biological explanation and the postmodern explanation.

Biological Explanation:

Central to this explanation is the standpoint that women's inner psychic life is, in its overall configuration, different from that of men. As Alice Rossi argues not only their life experiences are different from men but also they relate differently to their offspring as compared to men.⁵ Indeed, the overall experience of females from infancy to old age is fundamentally different from that of men. This explanation postulates that what distinguishes a woman from the man is the biologic sex. It is this difference that characterizes and accounts for her confinement, depression, experience, function, insecurity, opportunity, powerlessness, childrearing, service and suffering, womanliness etc., which are different from that of the man.

Postmodern Explanations:

Postmodern feminist explanation goes one step ahead to expand the biologic explanation of difference and to give a social cum critical explanation/ interpretation of the term. They celebrate the idea of difference instead of condemning it. Roots of their argument are also found in the work

⁵ Quoted in George Ritzer. *Sociological Theory* (New York; McGraw-Hill Publications: 1988) p-294.

of Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* where she tries to analyze why is women the second sex or why women's condition is the other.⁶ And postmodernism underlines this idea of 'otherness' and emphasizes on positive side of being excluded, unprivileged and marginalised. It challenges the traditional dichotomy of reason/ emotion, self/ other and natural/ rational. Feminists challenge the universal and unified notion of self, the dominant patriarchal order and value (valorize) womanhood as the source of multiplicities, alternatives, power, femininity and the like. Main proponents of these explanations are Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva.

Who Writes on Woman? – Men's writing represents its singular and phallogentric nature and in fact an incomplete one. Helene Cixous opines,

But almost everything is yet to be written by women about femininity; about their sexuality, that is infinite and mobile.... Like female sexuality, feminine writing is open and multiple, varied and rhythmic. Men write the same old things with their little pocket signifier -- the trio of penis/ phallus/ pen. We can escape this dichotomy and we have the capacity to lead the revolt.⁷

Why Women For Men? -- The idea of 'feminine' is not defined by the 'feminine' itself but by the 'masculine' alone; that is, woman as man sees her

⁶ Op.cit., Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex*, p-354.

⁷ Quoted in Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought* (Boulder and San Francisco; Westview Press: 1984) p-225.

within the structures of patriarchal thought. Women are seen not as women, but reflections or images and likeness of men.

Luce Irigaray proposes 3 strategies to valorize female identity:

- i. women need to pay attention to the nature of language;
- ii. one way to unshackle the masculine power is to engage in lesbian and autoerotic practice, for by exploring the multifaceted terrain of the female body they can blow the power of the phallus; and
- iii. if women exist only in men's eyes, as images, women should take these images and reflect them back to men in magnified proportions.⁸

Postmodernism has developed a whole set of feminine characteristics that is, sweetness, modesty, subservience and it is after all postmodernism, not feminism, which has always believed in a true feminism/ feminine nature. French Bulgarian linguist and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva advocates a deconstructive approach to sexual difference. She visualizes women's struggle as three-fold:

- i. women demand equal access to the symbolic order (liberal feminism-equality);
- ii. women reject the male symbolic order in the name of difference (radical feminism extolled); and

⁸ *ibid.*, pp-227-8.

iii. women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical.⁹

Kristeva postulates that the very dichotomy man/ woman is an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to metaphysics. In her words, *What can identity; even sexual identity, mean in a new theoretical and scientific space where the very notion of identity is challenged.*¹⁰

Postmodernism makes us believe that there is such a thing as essence of femaleness called femininity. However, postmodernism feminists, by virtue of their dualistic assertion, their arguments and actions necessarily oscillate between equality and difference as they have claimed that women's difference needs recognition and also that they are equals. As Toril Moi opines, *We still need to claim our place in human society as equals, not as subordinate members, and we still need to emphasize difference between male and female experience of the world.*¹¹ But though women are undoubtedly female, does it guarantee that they will be feminine (which is the exalted extolment of postmodernism feminism)?

⁹ Quoted in Toril Moi 'Feminist, Female, Feminine' in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires (ed.) *Feminisms*. (New York; OUP: 1997) p-249.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p-249.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p-249.

(b). Theories of Gender Inequality

This theory is characterized by four tenets. First, men and women are not only differently situated in society; they are also unequally situated. Women get less material resource, social status, power and opportunities for self-actualization than men. Second, this inequality results from the organization of the society. Third, although there is common individual differences in terms of potentials and traits, no significant pattern of natural variation distinguishes the sexes. Fourth, it is possible to change the situation. This theory is supported by liberal and Marxian explanations.

Liberal Feminist Explanation:

Liberal feminist explanations of gender inequality commence where theory of gender differences leaves off: with an identification of sexual division of labour, the existence of separate public and private spheres of social activity, men's location in the former and women's in the latter, and the socialization of children so that they can move into the spheres/ roles appropriate their gender. Major advocates of this explanation are Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Taylor, John Stuart Mill, Betty Friedan, and Jessie Bernard.

Mary Wollstonecraft in her book *A Vindication of the Right of Women* (1792) argues that if men were confined to the same cages women find locked

in, they would develop the same characters.¹² She strongly opposed Rousseau's position that men should be educated in virtues such as courage, justice, temperance whereas women be educated in virtues such as patience, docility and flexibility and this rational man should be a perfect compliment for the emotional women and vice versa. Wollstonecraft's agenda speaks of two things:

- i. Women must be her own decision-maker;
- ii. Educational parity between men and women so that women can achieve personhood.¹³

Harriet Taylor Mill has pointed out the question of sexual inequality in a more radical manner. In her book, *Enfranchisement of Women* (1851) Mill holds society's customs tradition truly responsible for the prevailing sexual inequality. Her agenda against it is a three fold one:

- i. Equality in educational sphere;
- ii. Equal access and partnership in productive sphere i. e., labour and industry;
- iii. A co-equal share in state's functioning i.e., in legislative, executive and judiciary.¹⁴ She also advocates that if the choice for a woman is

¹² Quoted in Rosemarie Tong's *Feminist Thought*. p-14.

¹³ *ibid.*, pp-14 - 5.

¹⁴ Quoted in Rosemarie Tong *Feminist Thought*. p-18.

between the 'animal function' (marriage and motherhood) on the one hand and a career in arts/ business/ politics on the other, she would choose the latter and reject the former.¹⁵

The analogy between slavery and women's subordination was central to John Stuart Mill. Mill's *The Subjection of Women* is suffused with the comparison between the bondage of slavery and the bondage of womanhood. His better knowledge of the second leads him to regard it in some ways more complete a form of dependence since men demand emotional support from women as well as obedience. For him,

*"I am far from pretending that wives are in general no better treated than slaves, but no slave is a slave to the same lengths and in so full a sense of the word as a wife is."*¹⁶

Civilization for Mill was a key concept, and it meant the possibility of individuals acting together with a common purpose, the development of a collective will and a movement of power from individuals to masses. Dependence, of slaves or of women is a primitive state, an uncivilized one. He emphasized the women's potential for equality.

One of the major landmarks in liberal feminist thought was Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan's analysis of women question goes on to locate women's problem on their confinement to their traditional roles of

¹⁵ Ibid., p-19.

¹⁶ John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*. (Cambridge; MIT Press: 1970) p-57.

wife and mother that has led many to feel empty and miserable. Frustrated and frazzled, bored and beleaguered, she may turn to sex to give her life a sense of palatability perhaps to make life more delectable without being aware of the idea that even the article of sex (for consumption) is not really of her own.¹⁷ Like J.S. Mill and others, Friedan believes that outside employment and self-sufficiency can liberate woman from their confinement.

The cause of inequality has been located in the mega institution of marriage by Jessie Bernard in her book *The Future of Marriage* (1982). Marriage empowers husband with authority, freedom and obligation to move beyond the domestic setting: it prescribes for the wife to be compliant, dependent, confined to the four walls of the kitchen. Wife has got a normative obligation to provide domestic, emotional and sexual service. Marriage as an institution is good for men and bad for women.¹⁸ Bernard proposes that if both men and women feel free enough from the prevailing institutional constraint, then inequality can be challenged.

Critical Evaluation: Liberal feminists point to sexism, an ideology similar to racism, which consists partly of prejudices and discriminatory practices, partly of taken-for-granted beliefs about the 'natural' differences between woman and man. For liberal feminist, the ideal gender arrangement is one in which each individual chooses the life style most suitable to her/ him. Liberal feminists do

¹⁷ Op.cit., Quoted in Rosemarie Tong *Feminist Thought*. p-23.

¹⁸ Op.cit., Quoted in George Ritzer *Sociological Theory*. p-297.

not pose a unified (coherent) explanation, often their explanations appear inconsistent and ambiguous. For example: Friedan does not see motherhood as an opposite of career which other liberal feminists like Taylor, Wollstonecraft does. Moreover, there is a difference between locating the cause of women's oppression in her confinement to motherhood and treating it an animal function. In fact, Harriet Taylor has characterized the function of motherhood as an animal function. But it has to be kept in mind that 'motherhood' is not synonymous to 'mating'. Even in case of animals i.e., dogs, motherhood goes beyond that of their mating and procreation. This explanation appears to have too much appeal to dominate American ethos of individualism, choice, freedom and equality of opportunity.

Marxian Feminist Explanation

The major themes and concerns of this explanation are derived from Marx and Engels. The most important explanation of it is presented in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* written and published by Friedrich Engels.

Marxist feminist brings together Marxian Class analysis and gender inequality. The major arguments of these explanations are stated below:

- i. women's subordination results not from their biology but from the social arrangement they are located in;

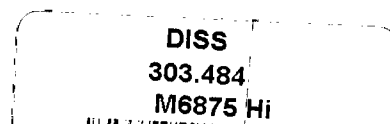
ii. the relational basis and cause of women's subordination lies in the family. It is patrilineal with descent and property passing through the male line; patriarchal, with authority invested in the male household head and monogamous, atleast, and the wife can have sexual relation only with her husband. Within such an institution of family, the women have no job outside the house, in fact, they are the chattels/ possessions of their husbands. To secure their wife's marital fidelity men supposedly seek to impose an institution of compulsory monogamy on women. Ideally husbands should be as monogamous as their wives, but patriarchal society does not necessarily require marital fidelity from its men. Male dominance, first in the form of patrilineage and then in the form of patriarchy, is simply the results of the class division between the propertied men and the propertyless women.¹⁹

iii. The irony is that the society gives an implicit legitimacy to the family system by making a false claim that such an institution is fundamental in all society. But for much of pre history, there was no family structure. Before the family or structured conjugal relations, there existed a primitive state of promiscuous intercourse.²⁰

iv. The factor that destroyed this sort of intercourse was largely economic, especially the replacement of hunting gathering by herding,

¹⁹ Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State*, (New York; International Publishers: 1972) p-128.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p-103.



horticulture and farming economics. Having produced and staked a claim to wealth, man took control of the household, reducing woman to the 'slave' of his carnal desire and a mere instrument for the production of his children. And finally, the overthrow of the mother right constituted 'the world-historic defeat of the female sex'.²¹

v. Agenda: Marxian model of 'womancipation' aims at providing women freedom in all sphere that is, social, economic, political, personal action by eliminating capitalism, class distinction between men and women and thereby making women economically independent of men. For this the first presupposition would be, the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry and second, there has to be proper socialization of housework and child rearing.²²

Critical Evaluation: Although there is some grain of truth in Engel's work, his explanation is purely unimodal, that is, economic. Family is also a place where one can find love, affection, compassion, security, reciprocity and mutuality and finally sex. Engel's explanation to be capitalistic as it tries to suppress all these aspects. However, despite all this, the importance of this explanation can never be undermined.

²¹ *ibid.*, pp-120-21.

²² *ibid.*, pp-137-39.

(c). Theories of Gender Oppression

The major assumption of this theory is that women are not only differentially/ unequally placed but also are oppressed, subordinated, subjugated, used/ misused/ abused by men. With little reservation it can be said that most of the contemporary feminists are oppression theorists and comparatively more intellectual, theoretical, innovative explorations have been made in this area only. There are three major explanations of this theory each having its own distinctive line of argument; they are psychoanalytical, radical and socialist Feminist explanations

Psychoanalytical Explanation:

Basic to the explanation is the idea that men have a deep emotional need to control women and thereby oppress them. The major focus of this explanation is on the childhood practices/ child rearing practices or for that matter, mothering.

Nancy Chodorow and others elucidate how the unconscious awareness of self and gender we develop from earliest infancy continues to shape both our experiences as man and woman and patterns of inequality and difference that permeate in society and culture. The major arguments of this explanation are given below:

- i. women's mothering certainly influence children's psychic life and experiences;

ii. mothering caters a dual socialization - one for boys, that is achievement oriented, self-reliance oriented and other for girls, that is nurturance oriented;

iii. women get trained for partially traditional feminine roles i.e., child rearing, house-keeping, compliance and goodness;²³

iv. at the same time they are taught in school the goals of achievement/success and it is made clear that values of the first order are less valuable, desirable;

v. they are brought up in a feminine world, they later go into a world where masculine virtues are important where males dominant in society and its resources;²⁴

vi. boys are socialized to 'do': that men are artists, creators, executives, risk-takers but women are socialized to 'be'- primary socializer.

Nancy Chodorow with all these arguments tries to show how unconscious inner life of men and women is deeply structured because they have different infant relations to their mothers. She picks up the celebrated Freudian concept of 'unconscious' and explains how the nature of child-rearing practices and home environment wherein women are brought up, moulds them

²³ Nancy Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*. (London; Yale University Press: 1989) p - 42.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p - 42.

to be subjugated tools, comfort-giving, caring nurses for men. That mothering produces a self – other dichotomy in the mind of the female child. She always thinks herself in relation to a male not to her 'self'. Women in most societies are defined relationally; as someone's wife, mother, daughter, daughter-in-law and the like. This way psychoanalytic explanation of feminism tries to examine how men subjugate women by maintaining such practices and how women are conditioned since infancy to fit themselves to the male world and where there is an absence of countervailing energy on the part of women. The solution that the explanation offers to bring to an end to this oppression is by restructuring child-rearing practices.

Critical Evaluation: However, psychoanalytic explanation does a good job of accounting for gendered symbolic relations, but it overpsychologizes male dominance and neglects concrete power relations. But like Talcott Parsons who traces the root cause of any form of deviance to childhood socialization (parental), it also traces the cause of all oppression to the stage of childhood (mothering) thereby juxtaposing female's socialization to that of male.

Radical Feminist Explanation

As the name suggests, this explanation offers a powerful and extreme form of theoretical position to describe women question. Whereas psychoanalytic explanation focuses on childhood socialization and mothering as the root of all inequality and oppression, radical feminism focuses on the system of patriarchy as a whole.

Basic to this paradigm is the position that the source – the root of women's oppression is man. Patriarchy is a system of male conspiracy, which men want to maintain it deliberately in order to make women to serve as to compliant tools. Sexuality is the foundation of male domination. In the opinion of Catharine MacKinnon, it is sexuality that organizes society into two sexes – woman and man and it is the primary social sphere of male power. Women are walking embodiments of men's projected needs and are reduced to attractiveness to men and sexual availability on men's terms.²⁵ Further she maintains that femaleness implies attractiveness to men, which means sexual attractiveness, which means sexual availability on male terms. Gender socialization is the process through which women come to identify themselves as sexual beings, as beings that exists for males. In her words,

What we learn in order to 'have sex', in order to 'become woman'-woman as gender- comes through the experience of, and is a condition for 'having sex'- women as sexual object for men, the use of women's sexuality by men.... a woman is a being... whose sexuality exists for someone else.... Sexuality is the capacity to arouse desire in that someone.²⁶

The slogan of radical explanation has also been raised by Ann Oakley who holds the opinion that the very phenomenon of motherhood is a myth and it is a mistake to believe that all women need to be mothers, all women need

²⁵ Catharine MacKinnon, 'Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: An Agenda for Theory' in Diana Tictjens Meyers *Feminist Social Thought* (New York; Routledge: 1997) pp-64 – 5

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp-71-3.

children, and all children need their mothers. Rather women are culturally induced to be mothers and it is the pathology of patriarchy. One should remember that children do not need their mothers more than their fathers.²⁷

A major attack on motherhood and other sex related practice has been by the most radical feminist named Shulamith Firestone in her book *The Dialectic of Sex*. She makes a feminist interpretation of the entire history and argues that the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of dialectics between two sexes. She considers the relation of reproduction rather than production to be the driving force in history. The major arguments of her book are stated below:

- i. because women's oppressions are biological, their liberation requires a biological revolution as it is economic revolution for Marxist,²⁸
- ii. the joy of giving birth is a patriarchal myth and pregnancy is barbaric;²⁹
- iii. once women no longer have to reproduce, the primary rationale for keeping them at home disappears and one way to end the war between the sexes is to eliminate both the roles (reproductive female and productive male) by developing technology that can replace them. In

²⁷ Ann Oakley, *Women's Work: The Housewife, Past and Present* (New York; Pantheon Books: 1974) pp-186 - 202.

²⁸ Op.cit., Quoted in Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought* p-73.

²⁹ Ibid., pp-75-6.

godlike fashion, technology can ensure that no person needs to bear children in pain and travail and that no person needs to toil to the sweat of the brow in order to live.³⁰

The radical explanation in general puts forth the following tenets:

- It links patriarchy to violence, rape, sexual abuse, incest, prostitution, pornography, female infanticide etc.
- Men create and maintain patriarchy and all sorts of oppression committed against women is a patriarchal conspiracy.
- The root of all oppression is man.

Kate Millett in her book *Sexual Politics* argues that the root of all oppression is patriarchy and its sex/ gender system. Men confine women in the private sphere (home) and control both the public and private sphere.

Millett advocates to destroy this imposition and to create a new society in which both men and women are equal at every level of existence. There should be a unitary standard for sexual freedom for both men and women, unitary standard of parenting for both. It would be an androgynous type - an integration of separate masculine and feminist subcultures.³¹

³⁰ Ibid., p-75.

³¹ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, (New York; Garden City: 1970) p-62.

Radicals hold that the defeat of patriarchy must begin with a basic reworking of women's consciousness and elimination of reproductive role for example; Firestone avers that we must either accept inequality or give up our reproductive biology.³² It is also found in the tone of Nancy Friday who argues that if we blame motherhood we must choose to be either sexual or maternal.³³

Critical Evaluation: On the whole, radical feminists' explanation appears to be more powerful and straightforward. Despite certain variations in emphasis made by some feminists, their focus is almost the same. In other words, all radical feminists are talking about the language of oppression but their grammar is slightly different. For example, while locating the source of oppression, for some it is 'sexuality', for some it is 'mothering' and 'reproductive biology' for others. The problem within this explanation is that it begins with a total devaluation/ condemnation of certain female functions like 'mothering' and 'reproduction'. Moreover, it suffers from the criticism that very often it holds the delusion that technology can replace mothering and reproduction – this is another utopia.

Socialist Feminist Explanation

Socialist feminism represents a mixture of two traditions: Marxian and radical feminist thought. In particular, it goes beyond Marxian and radical explanations respectively. It focuses on both capitalism and patriarchy

³² Quoted in Nancy Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* p-91.

³³ *Ibid.*, p-91.

together responsible for women's oppression. In other words, the term most frequently used by these theorists for the system they describe is 'capitalist patriarchy' (Zillah Eisenstein).³⁴

Socialist explanation focuses both on material and social arrangements in order to understand the real situations of domination. Such feminists go beyond economic dynamics and delineate the conditions that create and sustain human life: the human body, its sexuality, reproduction and its associated unpaid-invisible domestic tasks.

Socialist feminists differ from Marxians in two ways:

- i. their object of analysis is not primarily class analysis; and
- ii. they broaden the meaning of material conditions of human life.³⁵

The major themes of this explanation are:

- the family with which a woman associates herself with reproduction, socialization and sexuality serves ideological, bio-social as well as economic functions; patriarchy constitutes the ideological settings and it is deeply ingrained in our psyche (Juliet Mitchell).³⁶

³⁴ Op.cit., in George Ritzer *Sociological Theory*. p-308.

³⁵ Ibid., p-310.

³⁶ Op.cit., in Rosemarie Tong *Feminist Thought*. pp-176-77.

- A Marxist analysis needs to be complimented with a feminist analysis of patriarchy. Patriarchy has a material base that rests in; (a) men's control over women's labour power (b) restricting her access to important economic resources and (c) restricting her control over her own body, that is, female sexuality. This control can be best understood in terms of the imposition of institutions like monogamous heterosexual marriages, female child-bearing/ rearing, female domestic work and their economic dependence on men.³⁷

- Alison Jaggar uses the concept of 'alienation' to describe the idea of oppression. She describes alienation in terms of three parameters that is, of sexuality, motherhood and intellectuality.³⁸ First, sexuality: even her body does not belong to her, it becomes an object/ article of consumption in the hands of men. As like wagers for 'top dollars', she is in competition with other women for male's gaze, approbation and approval; second, motherhood: it is a patriarchal imposition and somebody else not she decides how many children to bear, if needed she is subjected to unwanted abortion or sterilization; third, intellectuality: her terms and conditions of discourse and thoughts are imposed by male stream thought.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid., p-180.

³⁸ Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*.(Sussex; Roman and Littlefield Publishers: 1984) p-353.

³⁹ Ibid., p-309 - 16.

They propose a two-fold strategy for the elimination of women's oppression. First, in order to bring a change in women's lives, it requires a revolution in psyche. Second, to involve all oppressed groups in the process of pursuit of their collective emancipation.

Socialist feminist explanation appears equally powerful as like that of the radical one. But it reduces women to a worker question not one of woman.

[III]

WOMEN'S QUESTION AND SOCIAL REALITY IN INDIA

It is possible to argue that the feminist traditions and approaches we have just talked about are rooted primarily in the Western civilization. As a result one may argue that these approaches need not necessarily be relevant while dealing with the women's question in a civilization like India. While we ought to be careful about the cultural and civilizational differences and the danger of alien categories and concepts, it is equally important to recall that emancipatory ideas transcend the barriers of nations and cultures and do have an impact on almost every part of the globe. No wonder, Indian academics has been deeply affected by the phenomenon called feminism. Perhaps it can be said, Indian social scientists – particularly those who are dealing with gender question – are trying to reconcile the emancipatory ideals of Western feminism and culture by located notions of femininity. As a result, interesting and creative writings have emerged in the field of sociology – the writings that reflect on the women's question. Feminist scholars and writers in India have

been reflecting on divergent issues shaping the destiny of Indian woman – domestic violence, patriarchal subjugation of womanhood, female infanticide, institutionalized religion and communalism, brutality of development and devaluation of women.

What we however seek to establish is that this recent feminist writings have got a history. In fact, it was in the 19th and early 20th century that Hindu social reformers began to intervene in this domain and raised critical questions relating to the nature of ideal society and status of women. It was nobody's contention to argue that Hindu social reformers were ideal feminists. There were many problems, contradictions and paradoxes in their approaches despite their passionate concern for woman's dignity. Many of them could not really challenge the parameters of patriarchal social structure and mind-set. Yet as students of sociology we cannot negate the role they played in their own times, the dynamism they generated and the heritage they created. In fact, the women's question in India cannot be properly comprehended unless we understand how these reformers responded to it – the way they thought of woman's place in the family, the role of woman in the making of a new nation and the interplay between womanhood, religiosity and cultural sanctity. In this dissertation in the process of understanding the contribution of Hindu social reformers, we would be able to analyze and make sense of contemporary challenges that the feminists in our times are experiencing – the lessons they have to learn from the past and the way they have to go beyond a new future.

CHAPTER II

**HINDU SOCIAL REFORMERS AND THE NOTION
OF WOMANHOOD**

SECTION I: - RAJA RAMMOHUN ROY (1772 – 1833)

SECTION II: - ISWARACHANDRA VIDYASAGAR (1820 – 91)

SECTION III: - SWAMI DAYANANDA SARASWATI (1824–83)

SECTION IV: - SWAMI VIVEKANANDA (1863 – 1902)

SECTION V: - MAHATMA GANDHI (1869 – 1948)

HINDU SOCIAL REFORMERS AND THE NOTION OF WOMANHOOD

This chapter tries to understand the ideal of womanhood and the way Hindu social reformers have intervened to explore possibilities for a redefined version of woman - her status in family, community and in nation – within the design of our tradition. A question that is very often posed and still continues to be the subject matter of a perpetual debate, is, why is that the debate over tradition and modernity continues to be an ever-debating, timeless discourse in Indian sociology? Why is it that any discourse on Indian womanhood necessarily presupposes a discourse on our tradition, history and civilization? Is it really impossible for us to analyze the question of woman and our historical tradition as two isolated entities? India has passed through several stages of transformation starting from Indus Valley civilization down to the present. An inquiry into our civilization shows that there is a constitutive interdependence between the ideal of womanhood and that of our civilization or the historical tradition of our country. It is because of this interdependence, that women are treated as symbols of our community, religion and nation at large and whenever there is any shock or pressure on our civilization, it automatically casts its bearing on our women. This has exactly happened in our country during the period of colonial era. In fact, our civilization experienced a renewed discourse when it came in encounter with an alien English subjugation. India as a whole experienced a baneful shadow in her era of subjugation and the most affected of all

pathology was the woman. India had become a fertile field of the operation for imperialism and colonialism. Its political subjugation under the British rule ruined her economy, indigenous industries, agriculture and impoverished its natives. This resulted in economic exploitation, political prostration, social stagnation and cultural decadence. The social conditions were distressing. Christianity and Islam had been making their way through the Hindu society due to its internal weakness, and contradictions.

As Dr. Pathak argues that not surprisingly, the history of colonialism is not just physical, power, and coercion. It created the hierarchy of civilizations and privileged the modern West as the superior civilization. Not surprisingly in the history of colonialism one can see the way it legitimized itself through its civilizing mission. It must enlighten, educate and civilize us!¹ The British inculcated a package of Western ideas, missionary ideals that would emancipate Indians from the bondage of their dust. No wonder, the modern Indian intellectuals were born out of this experience and encounter.

The intellectuals were caught in a paradox to reject the glorious past and accept a new cultural milieu, or to regenerate and reserve the traditional cultural space so that the past is not obliterated. The efforts to reconcile this paradox led to a critical inquiry into both the past tradition and the emerging modernity. As K. N. Panikkar avers, the emergence of modern ideas and the

¹ Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity* (New Delhi; Gyan Publishing: 1998) p. 48

development of social protest and religious dissent in the 19th century have been generally viewed as a consequence of the introduction of European ideas and institutions in India.² As a consequence of the exposure to Western ideas and values, Indian intellectuals developed world view that was critical of traditional cultural and social practices. The emergence of this critical introspection of tradition as well as of modernity was a natural outcome of colonial cultural invasion. Thus it is rightly said that neither the tradition nor the modernity is available to us in an unproblematic sense nor is either necessarily the solution; both tradition and modernity are eminently colonial constructs.³

What were the main programmes of action, efforts to reorganize and rearticulate Indian culture in response to and as a part of this colonialism? The answer lies in the emergence of some notable intellectuals - renaissance men⁴ - starting from Rammohun Roy to Gandhi who revalued traditional Hindu orientation to male and female and coped with the modern notions of rationalism, freedom, and openness. They started questioning the so-called civilizational mission of the British which propagates the view that the mature, civilized, superior, modern, rational, enlightened British have come

² K. N. Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony* (New Delhi; Tulika: 1995) p. 3

³ Kum Kum Sangari & Sudesh Vaid, *Recasting Women* (New Delhi; Kali for Women: 1989) p- 17

⁴ See for example Susobhan Sarkar, *Bengal Renaissance and other Essays* (New Delhi; People's Publishing House: 1970) ch. 1

to rescue and enlighten the immature, ignorant, innocent, inferior Indian infant men and women.⁵

The 19th century reform movement by Hindu social reformers largely directed at making Hindu religion free from all obscurantism, superstition, and evil practices. And reformers traced the source of all ills in Indian society including to the general ignorance of the people. So far as the question of tradition is concerned, woman continued to be treated as the first and the last bastion of Hindu culture. To separate her 'honor,' purity, ideal from that of the cultural tradition was unthinkable. As Lata Mani rightly advocates that woman became sites upon which various versions of scriptures/ traditions/ laws were debated. Tradition was not the ground on which the status of women was being contested, rather the reverse was true: women in fact became the sites on which tradition was debated and reformulated.⁶

It has been seen as Bhikhu Parekh mentions that reformers, - be it Raja Rammohun Roy, Vidyasagar, Dayananda, Vivekananda or Gandhi – despite their difference have relied on either of the following two approaches or both:

⁵ See for instance Ashis Nandy *The Intimate Enemy* (Delhi; Oxford: 1983) ch. 1

⁶ Lata Mani, 'Contentious Traditions' in Kum Kum Sangari's, *Recasting Women*, p- 118

(a). they appealed to the scriptures hospitable to their cause, for example Vidyasagar relied on Parasara Samhita, Raja on Upanishads, Dayananda on Vedas;

(b). because of their rootedness in colonial rule, they examined the relevance of adoption of western ideals, values in order to evolve a synthesized, shining and dynamic version of Hinduism.⁷

The following analysis is an attempt to understand Hindu social reformers' construction of womanhood, the way they have tried to redefine woman's image within the refined and reformed version of Hinduism. In this chapter I have taken five Hindu social reformers namely, Raja Rammohun Roy, Isvarachandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi and have examined their idealized notion of womanhood in relation to their construction of religiosity and their civilizational agenda.

[I]

RAJA RAMMOHUN ROY (1772 – 1833)

If India was to emerge from the sloughs of despondency, then the Hindu religion and practices would have to be reformed, preferably on the basis of the source of Hinduism itself... They have the same capability of improvement as any other civilized people

Raja Rammohun Roy.

⁷ Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform* (New Delhi; Sage Publications: 1989) pp- 17-8

The period when Raja Rammohun Roy emerged on the scene was characterized by the term 'dark age' in Indian history. On the political front people were deprived of their basic right meant for a peaceful existence. Even the British had destroyed the self-sufficiency of our village economy system. More furiously, India's socio-cultural setting was characterized by a gradual degradation the sanctity of Hindu religion. It was associated with a number of evil, superstitious practices for which it was vehemently criticized and even attacked by the opponents. The worst affected of this situation was the woman. Raja Rammohun Roy realized that social tyranny might be more oppressive than political subjugation and it had tremendous impact particularly on him, who played the greatest role in the process of the new awakening of the 19th century. For him, social democracy is more important than political democracy. Nonetheless, Raja Rammohun Roy emerged on the scene, glittered and glorified India with the shining galaxy of "new Enlightenment". He founded "Brahmo Samaj" which played a glorious role and brought up a great many social, religious and political reforms. The Brahmo Samaj was the windowpane through which the light of Enlightenment breakthrough. Raja Rammohun Roy was deeply sensitive to women's problems. According to him, there is a social solution to all women's problems, i.e., to bring forth women's consciousness, their enlightenment.

The deadliest blow he inflicted upon Hindu superstition was his effective agitation against the rite of Suttee, the burning of living widows on

the piles of their deceased husbands. In 1918 he has been a horrified witness of this sacrifice in his elder brother's family. He exposed the hollow pretences of its advocates in elaborate pamphlets both in Bengali and English; pressed the matter in every possible way, till at last the tide of public feeling turned and on 4th December 1829 Lord William Bentick issued a regulation abolishing Suttee.

a.) Raja and his Reform Accomplishments

Brahmo Samaj (1828): the Society of God. Raja Rammohun Roy sought to purge Hinduism of the abuses that had crept into it, condemned idolatry and denounced casteism. Through the light of Brahmo Samaj, he tried to curb these ugly immoral and unethical practices like Suttee, female infanticide, Purdah, casteism, polygamy etc. It brought widow remarriage to some extent. Mrs. Shanti Ojha, a gallant lady, hailing from Bihar was widowed by the fiery bullet of the police. She certainly bolstered up the dogma of widow remarriage and got herself remarried.⁸ The Samaj also encouraged inter-caste marriage.

Suttee: Raja opposed this cruel practice and emphasized that the burning of the widows to the pile was against the Shastras. About the plan that if the women did not perform con cremation, they might go astray, he said that the

⁸ Jogendra Sinha, *Raja Rammohun Roy: A Luminary* (Patna; Vijay Publication: 1994) p- 68

danger of going astray existed also in the life of a husband. The same logic applies to the male also.⁹

To the religious advocates in favor of widow burning, he opposed on religious grounds. That Manu and others say, "Let her emaciate her body by living voluntarily.... Let her continue till death..." Here Manu directs that after the death of her husband the widow should pass the whole life as an ascetic.¹⁰ In Raja's words,

It was every way improper to persuade to self-destruction by citing passages of inadmissible authority. It never was the case that the practice of fastening down widows on the pile was prevalent throughout Hindustan: for it is but of late years that this mode has been followed and that only in Bengal, which is but a small part of Hindustan... female murder, murder of a Brahman, parricide and similar heinous crimes, cannot be reckoned amongst pious acts by alleging the custom of a country in their behalf; by such customs rather the country in which they exist is itself condemned. The practice therefore, of forcibly tying down women to the pile, and burning them to death, is inconsistent with the Sastras, and highly sinful. It is of no consequence to affirm, that this is customary to any particular country- if it were universally practised, the murders would be still criminal.¹¹

⁹ Minni Thakur, *Raja Rammohun Roy* (New Delhi; Deep & Deep: 1987) pp-37-8

¹⁰ Jogendra Chunder Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy* (ed.) (New Delhi; Cosmo Publications: 1982) p- 325

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp- 329-53

He had also made a battle against Purdah, the practise, which penetrated among Hindus during the Delhi Sultanate and after. Hindus (women) were compelled to practice Purdah. Raja was really a votary of liberal and enlightened system of education based on science. He denounced polygamy in which the wife loses her liberty. Arguing in favor of English schools he opines, *to remove darkness of ignorance, gospel of superstitions inter-woven in the ancient social and religious structures of India, the Western liberal education was fundamentally necessary.*¹²

A great Indian reformer and the father of the modern Indian Renaissance, Raja Rammohun Roy stood for the regeneration and upliftment of women, wanted the introduction of new ideas and ideals in order to raise their standing to the height of the civilization. He also fought the heinous practice of infanticide and child marriage and raised the age limit for marriage.¹³

b.) On Women's Rights:

In marriage, the wife is treated as half, but after that they are treated as if inferior to animals. Raja condemned such type of inhuman practices, also persuaded women to take interest in social activities and education for their upliftment. That all the ancient law givers unanimously awarded to a mother an equal share with her son in the property left by her deceased

¹² Op.cit., Sinha, *Raja Rammohun Roy: A Luminary* p- 23

¹³ Ibid., pp- 142-43

husband in order that she would spend her remaining days independently. He quoted different passages from different lawgivers' books of that time. Quoting from Yajnavalkya, he said, "After the death of a father, let a mother also inherit an equal share with her son in the division of the property left by their father".¹⁴ According to Vishnu the legislator, "Mother should be receiver of shares according to the portion allowed to the sons".¹⁵

Quoting from Manu, "To the unmarried daughters let their brothers portion out of their own allotments respectively".¹⁶ He also opposed the judgements of court on the basis of the interpretation of the Pandits and requested the Government not to give judgements on the incorrect interpretation of the Pandits. The system of marriage based on caste was opposed by him on the assumption that inter caste marriage would remove the system of polygamy and their social evil.

He wrote a book entitled, *Brief remarks regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females According to the Hindu Law of Inheritance*, where he opposed any kind of discrimination practised in the name of religion and custom, opposed polygamy, Kulinism and the practice of selling girls in the garb of marriage and also pointed out that Hindu Sastras only prescribed pure and pious life for the widows and no

¹⁴ Op.cit., Minni Thakur, *Raja Rammohun Roy* p- 41

¹⁵ Ibid., p- 41

¹⁶ Ibid., p- 43

Dharmasastra has ever given the sanction for burning of the widows.¹⁷ Among his agenda one was that the option of marriage to be allowed to women in the same way as the men. No girl to be married below 18 or at the earliest 16. No men to be married till he is atleast 20.

c.) The Notion of Womanhood:

Raja Rammohun Roy's theory of womanhood can best be understood in the light of the following propositions.

I. Women in general are inferior to men in bodily strength and energy; consequently the male part of the community, taking advantage of their corporal weakness, have denied to them those excellent merits that they are entitled to by nature, and after words they are apt to say that women are naturally incapable of acquiring those merits.

As to their inferiority in point of understanding, when did you ever afford them a fair opportunity of exhibiting their natural capacity? How then can you accuse them of want of understanding? If, after instruction in knowledge and wisdom, a person cannot comprehend or retain what has been taught to him, we may consider him as deficient; but as you keep women generally void of education and acquirements, you cannot therefore, in justice pronounce on their inferiority. On the contrary, Lilavati, Bhanumati, the wife of the prince of Karnat, and that of Kalidas, are celebrated for their thorough knowledge of all Shastras....

¹⁷ Harihara Das & Sasmita Mahapatra, *The Indian Renaissance and Raja Rammohun Roy* (Jaipur; Pointer Publishers: 1996) p- 97

*Yajnavalkya imparted divine knowledge of the most difficult nature to his wife Maitreyi, who was able to follow and completely attain it.*¹⁸

II. You charge them with want of resolution... in a country where the name of death makes the male shudder, that the female, from her firmness of mind, offers to burn with the corpse of her deceased husband; and you accuse those women of deficiency in point of resolution.¹⁹

III. With regard to their trustworthiness, let us look minutely the conduct of both the sexes. That the number of the deceived women would be found ten times greater than that of the betrayed men.

IV. With respect to their subject to the passion, this may be judged of by the custom of marriage as to the respective sexes; for, one man may marry two or three, sometimes even ten wives and upwards; while a woman who marries but one husband, desires at his death to follow him, forsaking all worldly enjoyments, or to retain leading the austere life of an ascetic.²⁰

Thus, Rammohun Roy's vision of feminism aims at bringing about social, economic, political change for the betterment of women. It challenges the conservative, orthodoxical mindset, which looks at women as something inferior to men in all spheres i.e., in terms of their 'understanding,' 'intellect,' 'resolution,' 'determination,' 'trustworthiness,'

¹⁸ Op.cit., Jogendra Chunder Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy* (ed.) pp- 360-61

¹⁹ Ibid., p- 361

²⁰ Ibid., p-361

'passion'. As regards his religious thought, in his opinion, the Vedas are affirmed to be equal with the creation. Vedanta insinuates that it is absolutely necessary for mankind to acquire knowledge respecting the Supreme Being. He believed in the existence of one supreme God and He is only to be worshipped.

Raja Rammohun Roy was not opposed to Hinduism, he has always tried to purge, purify it and has always tried to show its uniqueness to other religions of the world. Reacting to the criticism made by British rulers, missionaries and also Muslims to our religion Raja opines, "If by the force of argument they can prove the truth of their own religion and the falsity of that of Hindus, many would of course embrace their doctrines and in case they fail to prove this, they should not undergo such useless troubles, nor tease Hindus any longer by their attempts at conversion".²¹ Moreover, it is well known to the whole world, that no people on earth are more tolerant than the Hindus, who believe all men to be equally within the reach of Divine beneficence, which embraces the good of every religious sect, and domination....²²

As a true nationalist he was a pioneer in India to realize the importance of education and the role of women in nation building. For him, all sorts of handicaps, disabilities imposed upon women have to be removed

²¹ Ibid., p-146

²² Ibid., p- 148

in order to bring them into the mainstream of national life. Customs, traditions, usage that caused and maintained divisions among the sections of the people had to be scrapped. In his words,

*Indians must cultivate the national outlook to grow into a nation. That a country need not have one religion, but it must have one State and a common economic and social objective aiming at the welfare of all citizens. It must have political freedom to pursue its objective without interference.*²³

d.) Rootedness and Openness in Rammohun: A Feminist Inquiry

Rammohun introduced the culture of India the values and ideas of an organized religion, that of a sacred text – more particularly, Monotheism. He not only encountered with the Western ideas and values but also critically accepted some important ones and made them as integral parts of India's civilizational mission. As Susobhan Sarkar would call it, Raja's agenda was a perfect synthesis of the best thought of India and that of West.²⁴ And perhaps it is because of this synthesis that he was open to all ideas thereby defending the basic religious principles in all religions.

Raja was deeply influenced by Western rationalism and science – perhaps his idea of rationalism was very selective and partial. He applies it poorly on women's issue. For example, he advocates 'ascetic widowhood'

²³ Op.cit., Minni Thakur, *Raja Rammohun Roy* p- 12

²⁴ See for example Susobhan Sarkar *Bengal Renaissance and other Essays* ch. 1

as an alternative to Sati. It may not be wrong to rely on traditional scriptures to fight an evil. But one should be open and rational enough while giving an alternative. Why he talks about ascetic widowhood and why not widow remarriage? Perhaps his singular dependence on scriptures prevented him to visualize beyond that of ascetic widowhood.

It can be argued that Raja was a modernist but he was not insensitive to our tradition. He was a strong defender of Hinduism at the same time, its critic. Living in a particular tradition does not imply not to criticize it and thus, Raja was no exception. His view of religion is a dynamic changing one that is capable of accepting the best in other traditions, open enough in enriching its own horizon rather than sinking in its own.

[II]

ISWARACHANDRA VIDYASAGAR (1820 – 91)

Dip into the spirit of your Shastras, follow its dictates and you shall be able to remove the foul blot from the face of your country.

Vidyasagar.

Born into a society of subjugation, epoch exploitation, Vidyasagar was deeply moved by the ignorance, illiteracy and superstition that put a black blot in the face of our motherland. It was not alien to his mind that in a country like India deeply rooted its culture and religious tenets, any attempt or approach to bring modification in it has to be necessarily Indian,

more specifically religious in character. He was deeply shocked by the plight of Indian women, more particularly those of the condition of widows and their secluded living. He has made tremendous effort to enforce widow remarriage in this country. For its accomplishments, Vidyasagar adopted very cautious steps:

- For the conviction of the people Shastric sanction in its favor has to be found out. He ransacked vast range of Hindu scriptures, commentaries, literary texts etc., and found irrefutable sanction in Parasara Samhita.
- The support of the nobility, newly wealthy and the English educated community is required in order to make it socially acceptable.
- Success in these two spheres led logically to the third step, the government was to be moved and urged to legalize widow marriage by an act of law. His first tract was published in January 1855, followed by several reprints causing an instant and unprecedented stir. Calcutta in the next few months witnessed veritable battles and books. Vidyasagar's notion of womanhood can be exemplified in the following discussion.

a.) Widow Remarriage – A Shastric Sanction:

Vidyasagar had in mind that the key to success of his campaign was to find out passages supporting widow remarriage. At last he came across a passage in the Parasara Samhita which prescribes remarriage for women under certain conditions, translated into English as follows:

Women are allowed a second husband in five cases of misfortune: when the husband turns insane, dies, turns an ascetic, becomes impotent or an outcaste". "Naste, mrute prabrajite klibe cha patite patong panchostvapastu nareenam patiranyo bidheeyate."²⁵

Vidyasagar quoted such verses from various sources, which sanctioned either remarriage of married women under certain conditions or dissolution of marital ties under certain other conditions. Again from Parasara Samhita which is also held by Manu,

On receiving no tidings of a husband, on his demise, on his turning as ascetic, on his being found impotent, on his degradation- under any one of these five calamities, it is canonical for women to take another husband."²⁶

According to Shastras, in case of widowhood, only two options are left- option of remarrying or of observing Brahmacharya. According to the

²⁵ Hiranmay Banerjee, *Isvar Chandra Vidyasagar* (New Delhi; Sahitya Academy: 1968) p- 44

²⁶ Isvarachandra Vidyasagar, *Marriage of Hindu Widows* (Calcutta; K. P. Bagchi & Company: 1976) p- 7

Samhita, those mantras, that sanctify the first matrimonial connection, shall also sanctify the second.²⁷

Besides, he submitted a representation to Government asking for legislation to validate such marriage. The representation was addressed to *the Honorable Legislative Council of India by the Hindu inhabitants of the Province of Bengal*. It stated that the widow remarriage was prohibited by custom; this custom is cruel and unnatural in itself and highly prejudicial to the interest of morality and otherwise fraught with the most mischievous consequences to society. It did not fail to mention the important fact that, the custom is not in accordance with the Shastras or with true interpretation of Hindu law.²⁸ That such marriages are neither contrary to nature nor prohibited by law or custom in any other country or by any other people in the world. And finally the Bill was passed into Law on 26th January 1856.

b.) The Notion of Womanhood:

His thinking on the subject is clearly expressed in a pamphlet written by him to fight polygamy from which an extract is quoted below:

Women are the weak sex and a faulty social system has placed them completely under the subject of their menfolk. On account of these reasons, they have to pass their days as an underprivileged and downtrodden class. The Strong male community established in a position

²⁷ Ibid., p- 96

²⁸ Ibid., p- 46

of advantage subject them to oppression and acts of injustice as they please; having no remedy against that they have to patiently bear it. The condition of women all over the world is more or less similar. But in this hapless country, the plight of our women brought about by their excess of cruelty, selfishness and thoughtlessness has no parallel elsewhere.²⁹

That the major factors which was responsible for the imposition of the restriction on women was their position of weakness. The best way to fight the evil, therefore, was to attack at its root. Women should be given education so that they could become conscious of their rights and fight for themselves as equal of men. *Female education*, therefore, was assigned the highest priority in his programme. The question of removal of disabilities that prevented them from enjoying the same rights as their menfolk was accorded due importance. In his argument, there should be a ban on the practice of polygamy by male Hindus. Social justice demanded that polygamy should go so that men and women could enjoy equal status in respect of their marital relations.³⁰ There should be a cordial relationship between the partners, the husband and the wife. Quoting from Manu,

Constant prosperity attends the family in which the wife pleases the husband and the husband pleases the wife.³¹

²⁹ Op.cit., Hiranmay Banerjee, *Iswarchandra Vidyasagar* pp-36-7

³⁰ Ibid., pp-37-8

³¹ Op.cit., Isvarachandra Vidyasagar, *Marriage of Hindu Widows* p- 101

Yajnavalkya says,

*The family in which the wife and the husband keep each other pleased, and behave well towards each other, is one in which virtue riches and enjoyment increases.*³²

Again from Manu,

*The Gods remain propitious to the family in which the females are respected.... The family soon goes to destruction in which the females are not respected.*³³

Vidyasagar is of the opinion that unfortunately these salutary rules regarding the treatment of women is scarcely followed. In his words,

Everyone having the senses of sight and hearing, must acknowledge how intolerable are the hardships of our widows, especially of those who have the misfortune to lose their husbands at an early age; and how baneful to society are the effects of the custom which excludes them from the privilege of marrying again.... while forming your decision, you should bear in mind that the customs of our country are not immutable in their nature. No one can assert that they have never undergone any change. One instance will suffice to illustrate the truth of this statement. It was considered a heinous offence in a Shudra if, in ancient times, he durst be seated on the same carpet or mat with a Brahman; but the Brahmans of these days, like menial servants, content themselves with

³² Ibid., p- 101

³³ Ibid., pp- 102-3

*sitting on the carpet or mat, while the Shudra occupies a raised seat upon the same.*³⁴

As a great nationalist, keenly aware of the challenge of the time as well as of the human condition, Vidyasagar tackled the problem from a humanistic perspective. He had treated the problem of widowhood as a national problem and widow remarriage is the highest thing all that he has accomplished, and there is no likelihood of doing anything higher than that. Making a nation-wide appeal he gives a call to all inhabitants, "Countrymen! How long will you suffer yourselves to be led by illusions! Open your eyes for once and see that India, once the land of virtue, is being overflowed the stream of adultery and foeticide".³⁵ The entire mission of Vidyasagar revealed a new attitude towards women, which was alien to medieval obscurantism and is a product of modernism. It is the rediscovery and recognition of human dignity in India's womenfolk.

c.) Contextualizing Woman in Textual Line

It becomes obvious that in the entire experiment on tradition, Vidyasagar tries to evolve a reviviscent Hinduism, Swadeshi in content and modern in spirit. He was trying to build up a nation devoid of all obscurantist practices and exploitation where each man and woman can

³⁴ Ibid., p-106

³⁵ Ibid., p- 108

contribute equally in the process of nation building. His continuous struggle to legalize widow remarriage is the strongest indication of his deep sense of reverence to women in particular and to the value of egalitarianism in general. Though he was not blind to Western influences, he had an inner urge to regenerate glorious past and make it free from all evil practices and criticisms possibly with the help of tradition itself. The similarity between Rammohun and Vidyasagar is that both of them are talking about female education. But the issue at question is that, does Vidyasagar talk about English education, particularly for females? This is a question that has to be seriously thought of. He mainly confines a woman's position within the framework of family. He fails to explore other possibilities for a woman and perhaps it is because of this dependence on traditional scriptures that limited his spectrum of understanding.

An examination of Vidyasagar's discourse on woman makes us believe that he was not an aggressive conservative. In his model of family both husband and wife should live as equal partners. But there are certain issues where Vidyasagar remains silent or has ignored almost completely i.e., issue of purity, chastity, notion of pativrata and motherhood. Hence, his reform campaign on women's question has been absolutely a selective one.

[III]

SWAMI DAYANANDA SARASWATI (1824-83)

The world is fettered by a chain forged by superstition and ignorance. I have come to snap asunder that chain and set slaves at liberty. It is contrary to my mission to have people deprived of their freedom.

Swami Dayananda.

“If the God cannot keep off a creature, how can he protect his devotee”; so vehement was the reaction of child Moolshankar who later became famous by the name ‘Dayananda’, the founder of the ‘Arya Samaj movement’, when he saw a mouse sitting on the deity’s head. The Brahmins had maintained a rigorous control over people’s lives. Caste system with all its rigidity in matters of interdining, marriage had pervaded. Early marriage had become almost universally prevalent among the Hindu society. The result- thousands of young girls became widows before they had ever seen their husbands arrive at physical maturity. Widows are not allowed to marry. Purdah became a striking characteristic of both Hindu and Muslim domestic life. Such was the condition when Dayananda opened his eyes and he became severely opposed to Brahminism and idol worship.

a.) The Man and His Mission:

The source of all knowledge and the solution to all evils lies in the Vedas. He says,

[III]

SWAMI DAYANANDA SARASWATI (1824-83)

The world is fettered by a chain forged by superstition and ignorance. I have come to snap asunder that chain and set slaves at liberty. It is contrary to my mission to have people deprived of their freedom.

Swami Dayananda.

“If the God cannot keep off a creature, how can he protect his devotee”; so vehement was the reaction of child Moolshankar who later became famous by the name ‘Dayananda’, the founder of the ‘Arya Samaj movement’, when he saw a mouse sitting on the deity’s head. The Brahmins had maintained a rigorous control over people’s lives. Caste system with all its rigidity in matters of interdining, marriage had pervaded. Early marriage had become almost universally prevalent among the Hindu society. The result- thousands of young girls became widows before they had ever seen their husbands arrive at physical maturity. Widows are not allowed to marry. Purdah became a striking characteristic of both Hindu and Muslim domestic life. Such was the condition when Dayananda opened his eyes and he became severely opposed to Brahminism and idol worship.

a.) The Man and His Mission:

The source of all knowledge and the solution to all evils lies in the Vedas. He says,

If the Aryan race has to rise once more in the scale of nation, if it is to become the glory of the world once again, it must not only be relieved of the cruel institutions that fetter it to the earth, but its activity be directed into channels that make for righteousness. These channels, to sum up in one word, are the Vedas. The 'Vedas' are neither books nor anything of the kind, which could be taken away or destroyed. They are the laws governing the universe of Matter and Mind and cannot be separated from the world. They constitute the divine law and are hence undying and eternal. The Vedas, being from God are infallible.³⁶

As regards caste division, untouchability, and similar handicaps, he said, between one class and another in this respect (access to temple, Veda) was unwarranted and invidious. All are the sons of God. His fight was against Brahminism. He tried to institute that the Vedas are for all mankind. Starting from Brahmin to Shudras, all are equal. As a result he faced severe opposition from Brahmins. For him, God is one and there is no need for idol worship. Throughout his wanderings, he was aghast to notice that Hinduism was beset with a great deal of sectarianism and superstitions. Temples had turned into dens of corruption, harassment and dissolute practices. Greedy priests exploited gullible worshippers. Religious ceremonies were made complicated and costly, hence leading to a form of social degradation. Dayananda's answer to all these and similar questions was the creation of

³⁶ Bawa Arjun Singha, *Dayananda Saraswati Founder of Arya Samaj* (New Delhi; Ess & Ess: 1979) pp- 56-7

Arya Samaj in 1875. The principles of Arya Samaj make belief in the Vedas obligatory.

The Arya Samaj has many attractions which orthodox Hinduism lacks in it. It doesn't require one to perform costly and cumbersome ceremonies. It dispenses with the tyranny of Hindu priest, simplifies religion and does away with sectarianism, permits widows and whose partners are long absent, to enter into sexual relationships called Niyoga. It does away with the evils of caste system based on birth. Shortly speaking, it is a corrective to the vast maze of Hindu ritual and mythology.

b.) Agenda for Women:

Dayananda did a great deed for improving the lot of women.

- Gave girls the right to choose their partner.
- Expressed strongly against the marriage of minors.
- Women be given equal rights as compared to men and be allowed to study the Vedas and to chant the Gayatri mantra (from both of which they had hitherto been excluded).
- Arya Samaj did a great deal in furthering women's education; on his educational principles and ideals, many schools were established, few of them are Kanya Mahavidyalaya (Jullundur), Kanya Pathshala (DehraDoon), Hansraj Mahila Mahavidyalaya (Jullundur), D. A. V.

College for women (Yamunanagar), D.A. V. College (Amritsar) and D.A.V. Girls' College (Batala) and others.³⁷

- He phoooh-phooohed the status of second sex.
- In fostering the ancient practice of Niyoga, Swami showed his broad understanding of the natural sex instinct. Instead of letting it corrupt, young widows and women whose husbands had perforce to be away for long, he harnessed it to legitimate sex. It was also a potent instrument for doing away with the stigma attached to women who failed to give birth to a male child.
- Under the inspiration of Dayananda, many women abandoned the veil and began to attend meetings of the Samaj. This prepared them also for taking part in the national struggle.

C.) From Womanhood to Motherhood:

Dayananda looked every woman and girl as personification of creative power and therefore, a mother. He had highest respect for womanhood. Womanhood in his mind was inseparable from motherhood and every woman was therefore, entitled to be treated with respect. She is not an object or a source of pleasure to a man. She is not to be played with. The relationship between a man and woman is a sacred one. He advocated

³⁷ Dhanpati Pandey, *Swami Dayananda Saraswati* (New Delhi; Publications Division: 1985) p- 110

equal rights for men and women in all spheres, in education, in marriage and in matters of property. Citing Manu, in support of his views, he writes: *Yatra naaryaah poojyante ramante tatra devataah Yatryitastu na poojyante sarbaatraaphalaah kriyah*, meaning, where the women are honored, there the deities are pleased; but where dishonored, there all religious rites become useless.³⁸

Marriage is not a means of satisfying eternal craving and physical pleasure: it is a union of man and woman for two purposes, firstly, for procreation, and secondly, for comradeship and mutual assistance in life to fulfil life's duty as its true functions.³⁹ Dayananda enforced Niyoga, which means temporary union of a widow with her deceased husband's younger brother or any widower who is consequently called Devara (or second husband) for the purpose of begetting a child. The child will be regarded as her deceased husband's child and the widow will have nothing to do with the Devara after the child is born. Also, in order that the motherly instinct in a woman should receive satisfaction, even a married woman is allowed, if all hope of having a child, by her married husband is gone, to have a child by Niyoga with another person.⁴⁰ Hence, Dayananda defines the idea of Niyoga in the context of motherhood and for motherhood only and not in the context of wifehood. You can go for a Niyoga only for the sake of

³⁸ Har Bilas Sarda, *Life of Dayananda Saraswati* (Ajmer; Vedic Yantralaya: 1946) p-447

³⁹ Ibid., p- 447

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp- 450-51

sacred motherhood and not for partnership, comradeship or whatever. It symbolizes motherhood only and poorly for wifehood. Marriage can be once only, no remarriage. Since the prime consideration is to continue the family, Niyoga was the contrivance to beget a son. Niyoga is not second marriage. Both the partners do not live together under Niyoga. They keep separate households and come together only for producing child (that means widow did not get loving company or financial securities). Dayananda was deadly opposed to prostitution or weak progeny.⁴¹

Women - the emblem of creative power, representative of motherhood, hence must be treated with respect in married life. Relationship between husband and wife according to Shastras is one of respect and reverence to wife. In Europe, the basic idea of being different, the attitude there is one of love, fondness, passion, amour, and physical attraction, resulting in familiarity. Here the attitude should be one of deference, courtesy, honor and respect. Even in married life, the sexual intercourse is resorted only for producing children. The marriage be considered a sacrament imposing discipline upon the partners restricting them to the physical union only among themselves and for the purpose only of procreation, when both the partners desire and are prepared for it. He who

⁴¹ Krishan Singh Arya, & P. D. Shastri, *Swami Dayananda Saraswati* (Delhi; Manohar: 1987) p- 230

does not want a child need not marry at all. Marriage for the satisfaction of sexual appetite is no marriage.⁴²

As regards Hinduism, the religion of Hindus was practiced in the kitchen. The orthodox Hindu rejected the food if someone trespassed into the kitchen. Dayananda attacked untouchability in the pretext that it threatened to disintegrate Hindu society and the religion of Church- Chauka (kitchen and eating enclosure). God is formless. There is only one God and many functional alternatives. This is the monotheism on Vedas.⁴³ He was in every sense a full- blooded all-round Hindu who fought down all sorts of disruptions.

Swami Dayananda's mission was not simply to emancipate women up to the height of national ethos and values but also to liberate India from the clutches of the foreigners. In his words, "Indians have lost their character, vigor, they are responsible for coming under the foreign yoke. Swaraj is one's birthright. It is a religious duty to come out of Europeans and all the evils".⁴⁴ He attributed India's slavery to idleness, negligence and internal dissension.

Dayananda believed on sex equality. He found India with its woman force effete as a crippled nation. For him, regeneration is possible only

⁴² Op.cit., Har Bilas Sarda, *Life of Dayananda Saraswati* pp- 447-49

⁴³ Op.cit., Krishan Singh Arya, *Swami Dayananda Saraswati* p- 230

⁴⁴ Prem Lata, *Swami Dayananda Saraswati* (New Delhi; Sumit Publications: 1990) p- 292

through education. Owing to different hierarchies, it always led to a constant warfare between Gods and Demons. Women should necessarily learn grammar, Theology, Medicine, Arithmetic and Art.⁴⁵ It was Dayananda who made Indians realize for the first time that they were heirs of a splendid heritage, that they were a great nation in their own right: taught them that they must adhere to their own religion, must be proud of their own hoary culture. He was the first among the leaders to give the concept of Swaraj and the first to proclaim that good government could be no substitute to self- government. This burning patriotism made Indian nationalism more broad- based. Dayananda was not simply confined to religion and cultural regeneration of India. He gave the war cry 'Swaraj is our Birth right'. India should belong to Indians. It is a religious duty to get rid of Europeans and all the evils that attend them.⁴⁶ As Bawa Arjun Singh observes, "He has left a paramount and ineffaceable mark in the moral and religious history of India and his influence has pervaded and permeated all the various ramifications of the society. He was not a destructive reformer, demolishing every institution and leaving behind nothing more than a heap of ashes. No; not at all".⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Op.cit., Dhanpati Pandey, *Swami Dayananda Saraswati* p- 110

⁴⁶ Ibid., p- 122

⁴⁷ Op.cit., Bawa Arjun Singh, *Dayananda Saraswati Founder of Arya Samaj* p- 56

d.) Dayananda's Dilemma of Niyoga vs. Motherhood and The Making of Womanhood:

A thorough inquiry into Dayananda's agenda offers us the picture that he had a vision of the past – past is to be re-created, reworking of tradition is to be conducted through debating the rights and status of women in society. Yet, unlike Rammohun, he did not believe in religious universalism, rather he gives Hinduism the absolute supremacy – asserts its supremacy over all others and assigns Vedas to be the original and only source of knowledge. In terms of his religiosity he was the most radical of his time.

Like Rammohun and Vidyasagar, Dayananda advocates equality of women as compared to men. But the most important thing in his thesis, is his attempt to integrate womanhood with motherhood and asserts that the ideal of womanhood is motherhood – those who do not want children need not marry: marriage only for sex is no marriage and a woman can go even to the extent of Niyoga in order to have a child. This sort of depiction causes several doubts. To begin with it is ideal to celebrate motherhood; but is it always proper to integrate motherhood as the only integral/ inseparable part of woman? Then, how can we describe childless, barren women? Aren't they women? Are they in any way fall short of womanhood? Shall we cease to locate their womanhood?

Moreover, the concept of Niyoga poses several questions. If a widow will not get financial security, comradeship, loving company, and life-long partnership from her Niyoga-partner, then, why should she go for a Niyoga? If she does not get financial security, why should she go for a Niyoga where she has to feed/ support another child? How can she support for child for next twenty years?

Dayananda argues that marriage is for progeny and those who do not want children need not marry. Why does he always insist on a woman to attach herself with a child? Again Hindu marriage is not only for praja/ progeny; it is also more for Dharma and Rati and this Rati constitutes one of the four Purusarthas of Hindu life that is, Kama. Moreover, by prohibiting 'marriage without progeny' and 'marriage for sex', he ignores its abnormal repercussions. Hence, behind the fascinating, celebrated ideal of womanhood, there lies an inherent anti-feminist, oppressive, patriarchal agenda that Dayananda hesitates to disclose.

Despite all these attempts Dayananda's project of womanhood can never be undermined. Perhaps the way he argues, it is due to his inner desire to revive the past glory and his obsession with sacred texts.

[IV]

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA (1863 – 1902)

I do not believe in a religion that cannot wipe out the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth. And I consider the neglect of masses a great national sin and that is one of the causes of our downfall.

Vivekananda.

Vivekananda entered the scene when the colonial culture had made deeper inroads into Indian society. A psychological invasion from west had begun⁴⁸ - and the reformers were critical of the Hindus. Here is a man who is considered to be one of the rare jewels of the soil, here is a mind, adjudged to be one of the few of the soil, here is a Brahmachari thought of to be the one and unique of his time and lastly, here is a travelling speaker valued to be the only Indian speaker having international approbation of his time. A reformer, with a vision of unity for the country, a crusader against social conservatism, Vivekananda was of the view that religion meant the removal of sufferings of humanity and progress of the country. No society could prosper if it neglected its women. He wanted equality in terms of education.

⁴⁸ Op.cit., Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* p- 24

a.) Problematizing Women's Question

As a child, men are educated by a woman, the mother. But, the women in India, the mothers in India were deprived of education. But it does not mean that India did not produced great women. There were women who took up the challenges and tried to solve their problems. Vivekananda maintained that the problem with ordinary women is lack of faith. In his words,

It is wrong, a thousand times wrong if any of you dare to say I will work out the salvation of this woman. I am asked again and again what I think of the widow problem or 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 the 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.⁴⁹

Vivekananda explains that the Hindu women were held in such esteem that they were kept in exclusion. He explained the old custom of women being burnt on the death of their husbands, on the ground that they could not live without the husband. Child marriage caused him much pain and shock. In exasperation he once said that he would not hesitate to murder a man who was trying to give away a child in marriage. Swamiji had a

⁴⁹ M. Sivaram Krishna & Sunita Roy, *Reflections on Swami Vivekananda* (New Delhi; Sterling Publication: 1993) p- 165

humanistic weapon with equality as its cover. For him, we are human beings first before anything else. In his words, *Don't try to be a ruler. He is the best ruler who can serve well. Be brave. Be perfectly unselfish. Have patience, perseverance and purity*⁵⁰.

For him we should not think that we are men and women, but only that we are human beings born to cherish and help one another. Purity, patience and perseverance are three essentials of one's life.

b.) The Ideal of Womanhood

I shall very much like our women to have your intellectuality, but not if it must be at the cost of purity.

Vivekananda in his Chicago address...

Indian woman is more a mother than anything else, be it wife, daughter or whatever. This was the central position in Swamiji's entire views on womanhood. In his speech at Shakespeare Club House in Pasadena, California, on January 1900, he delivered the following passage:

The ideal woman in India is the mother, the mother first and the mother last. The word calls up to the mind of the Hindus motherhood; the God is called mother. In the west, woman is wife.... To the ordinary man in India, the whole force of womanhood is concentrated in motherhood. In the Western home, the wife rules, in the Indian home, the mother rules.... A mother always lives in our homes; the wife must be subordinate to

⁵⁰ Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta; Mayavati Memorial Edition: 1973) vol. 5, p. 61

her.... 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 the body, kept me in her body for nine months, would give me twenty times her life; if I had need, whose love never dies, however wicked, vile I am? But where is she in comparison with her, who goes to the divorce court the moment I treat her little badly? The ideal of womanhood is the motherhood- that marvelous, unselfish, all-suffering, ever-forgiving mother.... Many children have been wicked but there never was a wicked mother... Womanliness in woman is motherhood. 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 do not, your marriage is a lie, your womanhood is a false, your education is superstition, and your children, if they come without prayer, will prove a curse to humanity.... Because our books teach us that it is the pre- natal influence that gives the impetus to the child for good or evil.... She keeps herself as pure as purity can be. Can we say her physical contact with her husband is a joke? Is it a simple nervous satisfaction? Is it a brute enjoyment of the body? No, a thousand times no! Linked with womanhood is wifehood.⁵¹

In Vivekananda's philosophy, she is treated a pure, patient, docile and disciplined being. For example he says;

⁵¹ Swami Lokeshwarananda, *The Perennial Vivekananda: A Selection* (Calcutta; Sahitya Academy: 1988) pp- 200-4

Our women do not eat, talk before elder men except their children or brothers. Where men are highly cultured, there the women are; where the men are not, women are not.⁵²

For Vivekananda, womanhood should be characterized by pre-marital chastity and post-marital fidelity; or in short, by 'purity'. In his words,

There she will always be the glorious Sita, purer than purity itself.... 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.... The women of India must grow and develop in the footprints of Sita, and that is the only way... The one has developed the power of doing; the other, the power of suffering.⁵³

Religion, according to Vivekananda, is realization. It is for self-realization and self-expression. It is not talk, nor doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. Essence of all religions is same. He said:

Each nation has a theme: everything else is secondary. India's theme is religion.... If your work is material here, you die of diabetes.... My mission is to show that religion is everything and in everything. What guarantee have we that this or any civilization will last, unless it is based

⁵² Ibid., p- 216

⁵³ Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta; Mayavati Memorial Edition: 1964) vol. 3, p- 256

*on religion, on the goodness of man? Depend on it, religion goes to the root of the matter if it is right, all is right.*⁵⁴

India's weak points according to Swamiji were poverty, neglect to the masses, caste, denying women their basic rights and a faulty system of education. That India should take full advantage of modern science and technology to fight poverty and unemployment. In Vivekananda's nationalism, there was nothing insular or parochial. He believed in the universal brotherhood of man and was a humanist in true sense of the term. But he emphasized that only a free India could play its rightful role in the comity of nations and that neither material nor spiritual advancement was possible for a people living in slavery. He opines:

*Every nation must save itself; we must not depend upon funds from America for the revival of Hinduism, for that is a delusion.*⁵⁵

c.) Woman: A Sita-Sacrifice Construction

A through examination of the above discourse takes one to believe that like Rammohun, Vivekananda has been able to draw a synthesis of both traditional and Western values- a mixture of opposites- at the same time giving greater emphasis on regenerating glorious past and reviving a reformed version of Hinduism by making it free from all superstitions and evil practices. Unlike Dayananda, Vivekananda's religiosity was

⁵⁴ Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta; Mayavati Memorial Edition: 1973) vol. 8, pp- 202-10

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p- 61

characterized by religious universalism- that religions are neither antagonistic nor contradictory.

But a feminist review of his ideas on womanhood leads us to maintain that Vivekananda offers a package of ideals for an Indian woman that makes her pure, patient and ever-chaste. In a sense, it appears as a bane in disguise for the simple reason that it prevents a woman to talk before elder men. It is a bane in the sense that he wants woman to be docile, submissive and an ever-sacrificing mother. Perhaps it is because of this ever-sacrificing tendency that puts her identity in question and gives her the status of *Second Sex*. Is this *Second Sex* status the cost that she has to pay for this *Sacrificial Logic*?

Moreover, Vivekananda argues that where men are highly cultured, there the women are, where men are not women are not. The question remains, on the one hand our scriptures, religious texts celebrate and give high priority to women, on the other Vivekananda gives priority to men - that women's condition of being cultured is contingent upon and requires that men have to be cultured first. But it has to be kept in mind, the earliest and first encounter of a child is always with its mother – that is, necessarily with a woman. Woman is the first and foremost socializer of a child. Even Vivekananda himself must have been cultured and socialized by his mother more than his father. Hence, to say that if men are cultured women are cultured, will be absolutely a male-chauvinist assertion.

[V]

MAHATMA GANDHI (1869 – 1948)

It is good to swim in the waters of tradition but to sink in them is suicide.

Mahatma

Gandhi.

Gandhi's political philosophy is feminist in the sense that it addresses to gender equity. His agenda was to create a society free of exploitation and to create equality- social, economic, and political - which will not discriminate against human beings on the basis of birth, color, sex or nation. The basis of society would be love, cooperation, care, sympathy; all these virtues with which women are associated against coercion, selfishness or brute force. This kind of society would be congenial for providing a place for women they have been denied so far. It would be a kind of Sarvodaya- awakening for all including women.

Woman has been suppressed under custom and law for which man was responsible and in the shaping of which she had no hand. The rules of social conduct must be framed by mutual cooperation and consultation. He opposed Sati, child marriage, Purdah and husband's domination, dowry and supported widow remarriage and women education. There is a strong sense of gender sensitivity in Gandhi's man-woman relationship, marriage and sexuality.

(i) **Relationship:** For Gandhi, woman is a companion of man gifted with equal mental capacity, has the right to participate in minute activity; has the freedom and liberty to enjoy the supreme place in her own sphere of activity as man is in his.

(ii) **Marriage:** Although it confers equal rights and status to both partners, she suffers from domestic slavery. This domestic slavery is a symbol of barbarism only. It is high time that our womankind be freed from incubus.

(iii) **sexuality:** Celibacy is the ideal thing. Gandhi's view on sexuality resolves around his advocacy of observing abstinence. Gandhiji considered sexual union between man and woman should be only for procreation. He was a protagonist of control of sexuality of women, but the control is not social or outside control but self-control- observing celibacy. Men should also observe celibacy. He vehemently stood for the rights of women over their own body, which the feminists of today have been crusading for. Men do not have the right to violate a woman. The woman should not by force succumb to men's carnal desire.

a.) **The Man and His Agenda**

Equality of Sexes: Equality of sexes does not imply equality of occupation. There may not be any legal bar opposing a woman for pursuing a job. But she instinctively retreats from a function that belongs to man.

Both sexes have been created as complementary and supplementary to each other.

Purdah: Implies seclusion and veiling of women. It is a barbaric custom. Gandhiji denounced and condemned the Purdah practice. He said, 'chastity is not a hot house growth'.⁵⁶

Child Marriage: Young widows should not be prohibited from finding out their mates. In his words, 'Every girl is not born to marry. I can show many girls, who are dedicating themselves to service, in stead of serving one man'.⁵⁷ Gandhi vehemently attacked child-marriage.

Widowhood: 'Widowhood imposed by custom is an unbearable yoke. It degrades religion'. However Gandhi believed that the Hindu concept of faithful widow who remains chaste and devotes herself to good work in her husband's memory is a worthy ideal for women to strive for.⁵⁸

Birth Control: Gandhi emphasized on self-control. He says, 'It is bad for him to indulge his appetite and then escape the consequences by taking tonics or other medicines. It is still worse for a person to indulge in his animal passions and escape the consequences of his act.... The right education is to teach woman the art of saying no even to her husband and it

⁵⁶ M. K. Gandhi, *India of my Dreams* (Ahmedabad; Navajivan Publishing House: 1947) p- 227

⁵⁷ Barbara Southard, 'The Feminism of Mahatma Gandhi', in Subrata Mukherjee's *Facets of Mahatma Gandhi* (ed.) (New Delhi; Deep & Deep: 1994) p- 318

⁵⁸ Lalita Ramamurty & M. Satyavati, 'Gandhi's Idea of Indian Womanhood and The Present day Realities', in K. Arunachalam & A. Jaya Pragasam's, *Gandhian Techniques for the Liberation of the Weaker Sections* (Madurai; Sarvodaya Ilakiya Pannai: 1987) p- 119

is no part of her duty, to become a mere tool or doll in her husband's hands'.⁵⁹

Dowry: He severely condemned dowry and avers that taking dowry 'means discrediting one's education, country and dishonoring womanhood'.⁶⁰

b.) Gandhi's Idea on Womanhood

Gandhi's position on womanhood bears two fundamental propositions:

- (I) Equality between the sexes and
- (ii) differentiation of their roles.

Equal in the sense that both possess immortal soul and the same intellectual, spiritual potential. Different in the sense that there are important physical, emotional differences. The fact that they bear children and nurse them requires a different social role. He says;

While both are fundamentally one... there is a vital difference between the two. The vocation of the two must also be different. She is passive, he is active. He is the breadwinner, she is the keeper and distributor of bread. She is the caretaker in every sense of the term. The art of bringing up the infants is her special role and prerogative. Without her care, the race must be extinct.... Both should follow different vocations suitable to

⁵⁹ Op.cit., Gandhi, *India of my Dreams* pp- 235-37

⁶⁰ Ibid., p- 227

their different physical and emotional temperaments. It is the natural order of things that woman should tend home and children, while men work outside the home and earn livelihood for the family.⁶¹

Gandhi was of the view that woman is entitled to a supreme space in her sphere of activity as like the men in their own. He observes:

Why is it there all the morbid anxiety about female purity? Have women any say in the matter of male purity? We hear nothing of women's anxiety about men's chastity. Why should men arrogate to themselves the right to regulate female purity? It cannot be superimposed from without. It is a matter of evolution from within and therefore, an individual self-effort.⁶²

As regards women's honor, Gandhi maintains:

It is physically impossible to violate a woman against her will. The outrage takes place only when she gives way to fear or does not realize her moral strength. Her primary duty is self-protection. She is at liberty to employ every method or means that comes to her mind in order to defend her honor. God has given her nails and teeth. She must use them with all her strength and if need be die in the effort.⁶³

Gandhi maintains a dubious position so far as women's higher education is concerned. Moreover, although he speaks of equality of both men and women in spheres of higher education, politics and bureaucratic set

⁶¹ Op.cit., Southard, 'The Feminism of Mahatma Gandhi', in Subrata Mukherjee & Sushila Ramaswamy's *Facets of Mahatma Gandhi* pp- 311-12

⁶² Op.cit., Gandhi, *India of my Dreams* p- 227

⁶³ Ibid., p-230

up, in fact, he treats women as second class citizens in these matters. This is amply clear from the following cynical statements:

*True English is necessary for making a living and for active association in our political movements. I do not believe in women working for a living or undertaking commercial enterprise. The few women who may require or desire to have English education, can very easily have their way by joining the schools. To introduce English education in schools meant for women could only lead to prolongation of our helplessness.*⁶⁴

He emphasizes the reproductive role over other roles, i.e., woman as mother, as keeper of health. He keeps her off from public life. He says:

*Politics and professions were to be, by and large, exclusively male domains... and you sisters, what would you do going to parliament? Do you aspire after the Collectorship, Commissionership or even Viceroyalty? You would not care for the Viceroy has got to order executions and hangings, a thing you would heartily resist.*⁶⁵

Men and women are equal but not identical. The very existence of one except the other cannot even be speculated. Thus, any attempt to impair the dignity and status of either of them will involve the equal ruin of them both.

Gandhi treated Hinduism as the most tolerant of all religions. It enables us to pay respect to other religions. Although non-violence is

⁶⁴ Ibid., p- 232

⁶⁵ Kiran Saxena, 'Gandhi and Women's Emancipation', in N. Radhakrishnan & N. Vasudevan's *Gandhi in the Global Village* (New Delhi; Media Center: 1998) p-300

common to all religions, it has been given its supreme expression in Hinduism itself. Hence, he makes an appeal to his countrymen not to indulge in any kind of violence on women, even in domestic sphere. Each form of irrational restriction, superstition, control is a form of symbolic violence. In his words:

*If India takes up the doctrine of sword she may gain momentary victory.
My life is dedicated to the service of India through the religion of non-violence. I cling to India like a child to its mother's breast, because I feel that she gives me spiritual nourishment I need.*⁶⁶

c.) Spiritualizing Womanhood: A Gandhian Myth

Gandhi's reformist programme was comprehensive than any of his predecessors. While remaining rooted in his own tradition he was quite open to the ideas coming from different directions. To use his metaphor, he was living in a house protected by walls but its windows were open to allow winds from different directions to blow through it and enable him to breathe fresh air.⁶⁷

In general Gandhi's scheme of womanhood appears very fascinating: for example, he proposes equality of sexes, equal partnership between men and women, female education, abolition of purdah and child marriage and releasing her from patriarchal pressures. Behind this there lies

⁶⁶ Op.cit., Gandhi, *India of my Dreams* p-4

⁶⁷ Op.cit., Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform* p- 21

certain hidden agenda that puts question mark on Gandhi's credentials as a great champion of women cause. To begin with, Gandhi maintains that man is active and woman is passive. This is a dangerous position and perhaps not only Gandhi but also the entire patriarchy fabricates such an impression in order to keep the women folk always under control and within the four walls of the kitchen. Secondly, Gandhi emphasizes her reproductive role over all other roles. It has to be kept in mind that she may be a mother but not a passive being as Gandhi dreams in the, *India of my Dreams*. She is capable of many possibilities and Gandhi fails to visualize her power and multiple potentials in his *dream*. Thirdly, Gandhi argues that education should be related to life, needs and aspirations of people. It must be employment oriented. On the other hand, he is against English education for females. Is she really not eligible to learn English? Does the so-called spirituality of feminine Matri-Shakti hesitate to impart her an instruction in English treating it to be of a sub-standard quality? In a way he was not in favor of allowing women entering into gainful employment and politics. Fourthly, he says, people should get married for procreation and after childbirth both the partners should live as brother and sister for the rest of their life as if they were not married.⁶⁸ He sees woman as mother, sister, daughter or a dutiful sexually disinterested wife. Perhaps it is because of his severe obsession with the notion of spirituality that he fails to see sexuality as a relationship, instead he views it only as a mere impulse or passion.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p- 180

Almost all the social reformers that we have discussed in this chapter, have constructed a model of woman that is conducive to our tradition, conducive to our glorious past and in a sense conducive to our male chauvinist set up. There is always an attempt to designate her as mother, *Matri Shakti*, *Ardhangini*, pure and ever chaste. Before criticizing them we have to locate the historical period when this grand discourse on gender has taken place. Partly speaking in an era when Hinduism was struck by a series of superstitions and evil practices and it was on its way to decline; perhaps it was an existential cum colonial compulsion on the part of the social reformers to revive the glorious past and save it from its way of decline and it was natural for them to believe that people on their times can be best convinced on religious/ spiritual lines. For example, Rammohun, Vidyasagar used/ manipulated scriptural sanctions to counter evils like Suttee, widowhood respectively, because they knew people could be best convinced on religious grounds. Apart from this there has always been an emphasis on defining ideals of womanhood and giving women equality and education. Hence, for Hindu social reformers an ideal woman is one who is a mother, docile, submissive being, and pure, patient, ever-sacrificing *Ardhangini* and an equal of man.

But do we find the celebration of these ideals in our times? Or should we expect our women – in our times – to be equipped with all these virtues in order to contribute competently to our nation building? Is there really a perfect match between this ideal construction and the current

empirical reality? Can the woman of reformers' vision really cope with the contemporary challenges and new feminist assertions in our times? The next chapter seeks to have a critical engagement with Hindu social reformers in the context of our contemporary challenges and recent feminists' voices.

CHAPTER III
HINDU SOCIAL REFORMERS AND
CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

SECTION I: - GAP BETWEEN THE IDEAL AND THE REAL

**SECTION II: - NEW CHALLENGES: NEED FOR A CREATIVE
AND CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH HINDU
SOCIAL REFORMERS**

HINDU SOCIAL REFORM AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

It is easier to break an atom than a prejudice.

Einstein.

We have already spoken of in the contribution made by Hindu social reformers. It would not be wrong to say that they were essentially imagining and striving for an alternative notion of womanhood – a woman who is qualitatively different from the one projected in Manusmiriti, a woman who is educated, gentle, courageous, potentially a good mother and capable of contributing to the making of a new nation. They imagine an ideal synthesis of traditional purity and modern egalitarianism. Although as we would state this notion is problematic, it is quite possible to argue that they were certainly imagining a society free from brutality, violence, crude exploitation – in other words, a society in which women could experience reasonable degree of equity, harmony and justice. Even if these reformers could not transcend the structure of patriarchy, they definitely sought to reformulate, reform and restructure the patriarchy. Perhaps, it was a soft, gentle and more accumulative patriarchy.

It is obvious the time has passed, the post-colonial state has emerged and with the advent of development and modernity women have excelled in divergent spheres of social life. The active presence of women, their meaningful voice, their contributions can hardly be overlooked. Yet the fact is that these apparent change notwithstanding the dark age continues to prevail. And even the gentle

patriarchy that Hindu social reformers imagine seems to be a distant dream. The phenomenology of every day exploitation of woman suggests that the exploitation of the 'Second Sex' remains unaltered. In other words, there is a gap between the 'ideal' that the Hindu social reformers constructed and the concrete experience of womanhood in post-colonial Indian society. In order to identify this cleavage or gap we would like to point out the following revealing facts:

[I]

GAP BETWEEN THE IDEAL AND THE REAL

(a). The Son-Stroke Suffering

The worth of a woman continues to be judged by her ability to produce a male child, otherwise consequences may be too hazardous for her precisely because she is confined to the ascriptive and prescriptive role within a patriarchy. In Dhanbad for instance, two girls were swept away in the strong currents of the river Damodar by their own father out of his utter frustration in failing to realize his dream of having a son.¹ In Hyderabad a couple of years ago, the parents of six daughters manipulated the killing of their daughters (although they had a son) and they confessed, they had no money to marry off the girls when they were to come of age.² Many such and other instances go on unreported in India every other day.

¹ Shoma Chatterji, *The Indian Women in Perspective* (Delhi; Ajanta: 1993) p- 23

² Ibid., p- 23-4

(b). Abuse At Home

Institutionalized violence against a girl child starts even before her birth: the tendency to abort a foetus is well known. A daughter-in-law is harassed constantly; if she has a baby-girl she is hated and, if she cannot conceive, she is condemned. If widowed or divorced, she is unwelcome even at the natal household.

Routine domestic violence is found in all societies. But its existence is not recognized. No written documents or pronouncements about it exist. When it takes place it does not invite the attention of the media. It does not even disturb the collective conscience of society. No visible and organized resistance takes place against it. Very often, it does not attract the attention of the law as in the case of murder, rape or physical assault. While men invoke tradition, custom to define concepts like pativrata, ideal wife, ideal family etc, women resort to current conceptualization. This variation is capable of causing violence in every day domestic life. A bruised face, a black eye, raised voices, screams for help... these are not the only signs of abuse at home, most often directed against women. Ironically, domestic violence shadows the victim in ways that do not attract attention. How does it manifest itself? And, how can a person tackle it within the parameters of established social institutions? Prof. T.K.Oommen proposes three logical options:

- (i) accept the status quo, recognize that so long as family exists, there would be inequality among the sexes and therefore domestic violence and this may be called the inevitability thesis which is essentially defeatist;

- (ii) since violence takes place within the confines of the home, the family should be dispensed with as an institution, but the adverse consequences of this measure, particularly on children can be disastrous;
- (iii) to evolve a new family wherein equality, rational distribution of authority, humane division of work co-exist.³

The persistence of dowry in Indian society despite several efforts to combat it, is a solid confirmation of the fact that it is quite easier to enact and amend laws than amending people's attitude. Even love marriages have proved no panacea for dowry. Dowry is related to marriage and love has nothing to do with dowry. It is something, which attaches to itself some perverted sense of status. And no sort of Brahma, Arya Samaj, or constitutional amendments has brought to an end to this evil practice.

(c). Is There A Caste System Operating Against Women?

Caste and religion continue to be the two most powerful apparatus that make an Indian woman powerless in her family and outside world. It is appalling to note that rape, an assertion of male power, as a terrorizing instrument of punishment, is indulged in by the elite, by the guardians of law and order on women from rural areas, women from the scheduled caste and those from minority community. Why is it that;

- rape is frequent among women from rural/tribal areas than those in urban?
- educated women are raped less frequently than illiterate/ignorant women?

³ T. K. Oommen, 'Turning on the Heat' in *The Hindu* (28th November 1999)

- high caste women are raped rarely but low caste/tribal women are raped frequently?
- women from economically poor class are subjected to rape every other day?

Is there a peculiar caste system operating for rape? Shoma A. Chatterji illustrates two examples of custodial death that can help us to articulate our understanding better.

Two stories of rape committed by members of the police force on two women, one, a poor Muslim housewife from Hyderabad, and the other from Gujrat, a tribal housewife from an economically backward class. In the first case, policemen kidnapped Rameeza Bee (who was waiting on a rickshaw for her husband who had gone to answer the call of nature), took her away to Nallikunta and gangraped her. Ahmed Hussain, her husband who came to protest rape and illegal detention of Rameeza Bee, was tortured so severely that he died in police custody. The result – the session Judge Court held that rape story was a myth; Rameeza Bee was a woman of loose moral character and was a prostitute. In the second rape case of Guntaben, an adivasi woman of Gujrat was gangraped by police. The result – same as in the first case – the court ruled that Guntaben was a woman of loose moral character and she had association with several men.⁴

Such type of judgement and conclusion made by our courts create several questions and put question mark on the credibility and impartiality of our independent judiciary.

⁴ Shoma A. Chatterji, *The Indian Women's Search for Identity* (New Delhi; Vikas: 1988) p-73

- How can police, judiciary make any conclusion about the moral character of a woman, without having any knowledge about her life style, save the fact that she is poor, belonging to backward or oppressed community?
- Would they dare accusing such character assassination had the victim been from an influential background (viz. wife of a judge, minister, bureaucrat...)?
- Correctly or incorrectly, is there any instance of a rape victim hailing from a high class/status/powerful background being termed as a woman of loose moral character by any courageous judge?
- What makes them think they are rightful definers and guardians of the morality of the Indian women?
- Even if the two women and others who have been similarly victimized are women of loose morals, what has character got to do with a man's right to rape her?
- Are prostitutes willing to be raped? Do men enjoy raping prostitutes?

The paradoxical nature of our Indian judiciary regarding gender issues is best exemplified by Veena Das. She cites two cases of rape and portrays how the court reacts differently to these two cases.

In the first case (Kerala) the accused, who was a seventeen years old, committed assault and rape on a two year girl when her mother had left her in the care of her elder brother (seven year old) for a short while. The mother came back and found that her son was standing in the corridor and crying. The door was

locked. Looking through the window she saw the accused, in half naked position, lying on the baby. He was committing sexual assault on the baby. The mother found the girl to be bleeding profusely. Ironically, the court ruled that the offence was of attempted rape and not rape proper and the girl being two years old, penetration appears not easy... accused lay on the girl does not prove penetration though it does prove sexual assault.⁵

In the second example, judges came to an opposite conclusion, viz, that the girl had not sustained any injury, the offence was that of a rape. The accused, a medical officer compelled on eight year old girl to commit fellatio on him and also slightly inserted his penis into her vulva and had an ejaculation. Supreme court held that there was enough evidence that the accused without completely and forcibly penetrating the penis into the vagina of the girl had slightly penetrated within the vulva without rupturing the hymen and thereby satisfied his lust after ejection of semen. This was sufficient to prove it rape and punish accordingly.⁶

The examples cited above are sufficient to hold that even rule maker and courts operate on patriarchal lines. A rape is a rape and it has to be condemned. There has to be no second thought in it. If Einstein were to have been born out of a rape, we must still condemn it. We cannot legitimize it. The incidents of rape,

⁵ Veena Das, 'Sexual Violence, Discursive Formations and the State' in *Economic and Political Weekly* Special No. 1996 p- 2415

⁶ Ibid., p- 2416

murder, and abduction have been the daily news in our dailies and weeklies. The incidents of abducting women from lonely spots in the late or early hours of the day by car-borne criminals have been frequent. Even if the crime is reported to the police/court, not all criminals are booked, those booked not all of them are punished. One of the main pathologies of our Indian modernity is that the growing feminist wave and movement is increasingly being suppressed by an enhanced patriarchal-capitalist nexus. Law is increasingly manipulated by those in the position of power. There are two kinds of justice – one for poor and one for rich. It is in the case of the latter that there operates a capitalist-criminal-power nexus that runs on patriarchal lines. And it is owing to such nexus that victims like Priyadarshini Matto, Jessica Lal, and Anjana Mishra seldom get justice; even if they get, poorly.

Banning the incidents of crime has been absolutely an existential impossibility. Today the crowded city has become a horribly deserted area for a defenseless woman. The public road is becoming a space for unjustified gratification of all sorts. In the words of Ram Ahuja, there are people who believe that magistrate (in court) is a mere umpire and two parties fighting out the game are the victims and the criminal or the two counsels represent prosecution and defense. If the case deals with the poor versus poor, the case is dealt properly. If rich men are involved, it favors them.⁷

⁷ Ram Ahuja, *Violence Against Women* (New Delhi; Rawat: 1998) p- 258

(d). Question of Intra – Gender Oppression

Who commits crime against women? Ram Ahuja in his study shows that in fifty-six percent cases of bride burning/dowry deaths, mothers-in-laws were involved.⁸ Ahuja explains such mothers-in-laws are those:

- who have insatiable desire for money,
- who want money to marry their own daughters,
- who want to get rid of their daughters-in-laws so that they continue to control their sons, and
- who feel cheated having failed to get voiceless, self-effacing 'Bahus' totally subservient to their wishes.⁹

In family setting, the quarrel is invariably between the bride and the mother/sister of the husband. Like wise the atrocities on women are invariably inflicted by women; sometimes male members may be involved. R.Swarup opines that there is no case on record where the heinous crimes or cruelty to women has been inflicted without an active involvement of a woman. Unless the women themselves swear to appreciate the problems of the members of their own gender, no amount of legislative measure would help.¹⁰

To blame women, then for women's oppression is fallacious. It is the patriarchal system which is responsible, which makes man: son, husband (father,

⁸ Ibid., p- 133

⁹ Ibid., p- 134

¹⁰ R. Swarup, 'The Women in India: Inside out' in C. M. Agrawal's (ed.) *Dimensions of Indian Womanhood* (Almora; Shri Almora Book Depot: 1993) p- 27-8

brother) as a symbol of security for which both mother -in-law and daughter-in-law compete¹¹ The fact that a mother-in-law oppresses her daughter-in-law does not certify that women are responsible for their oppression. Rather, they have been conditioned by a cultural ideological conditioning device according to the norms of patriarchy. And it is owing to such conditioning that they continue to be both the agents and victims of their oppression.

To blame women as singularly responsible for their oppression is like a husband blaming his faithful wife to be singularly responsible for her pregnancy.

(e). Ideology of Honor and Sexuality

At the centre of caste, kinship codes stands the female, the control of whose sexuality is crucial to patriarchal forces and their concern with caste-purity and purity of the kin group. We are part of a country where sun set implies a sort of ostracism for girls – that they can not move out of their family after evening not even to their neighbors.

If a female marries or particularly elopes with a low caste boy, this not only pollutes her family but also to her caste and kin groups. Hence the greatest danger to the ideology of izzat comes form the female. The entire family/ clan/ caste and community is dishonored by her shameful conduct. Thus dishonorable conduct on the part of a daughter which ruins the family for ever, leaving the parents unfit to show their faces to the community, justifies in their eyes the extreme step of even killing her.¹²

¹¹ See for example, Indu Prakash Singh, *Indian Women: The Captured Beings* (New Delhi; Intellectual Publishing House: 1990)

¹² Prem Choudhry, 'Enforcing Cultural Codes' in *Economic and Political Weekly* (10th May 1997) p- 1020

This clearly indicates how the concept of honor operates at the expense of human lives and values.

But does an izzat of such type operate in case of boys? Is there any instance of a boy being killed by his own parents for his fault of marrying a low caste girl? The concept of honor is neither accepted nor applied uniformly to boys and girls. Why is that if a girl brings dishonor, it automatically invites violence and not in case of boys?

The concept of honor can be compared with the reformers' concepts of purity chastity and modesty. Starting from Ram Mohun Roy to Gandhi – all have emphasized on the notion of ideal womanhood and purity. That purity, patience and perseverance are the three essentials of life. Perhaps they were blind to see the consequences of this honour when it is polluted. Violence therefore, underlines the existing ideology of honour.

(f). Do They Constitute The (better) Half?

A woman is considered a reproductive machine to bear and rear man's children. She is not considered a person in her own right, she has always to stand in relation to a man as his daughter, wife or mother. Gangrade mentions that in Japan the boys' day is celebrated by declaring a holiday whereas no such holiday is given on a girls' day; in Israel a family is not considered complete without a boy.¹³

¹³ K. D. Gangrade, 'Sex-Discrimination – A Critique' in *Social Change* (September 1988) No. 3 vol- 18 p- 64

Even today women suffer from a number of disabilities. A child widow marries again, but the society looks at with disfavor. No such disapproval is there for widowers who marry. If she commits an act of immorality (infidelity) she is condemned, her child is scorned. But the man responsible for the child goes scot-free. Malladi Subbamma rightly observes that the life of a newly married daughter-in-law in a joint family is tantamount to a circus feat of balancing on a thin wire, which is the husband's affection for her,¹⁴ do men have this experiences? The wearer knows where the shoe pinches.

On the one hand a woman is designated to be the 'Matri Shakti' in public meetings and speeches, on the other she is despised as a parasite by her husband. All men and women are equal before god. But do we come across any woman officiating either as a priest or a person leading the prayers?

'Minority' is an unfortunate word for Indian woman because though they constitute nearly half of the country's population quantitatively, qualitatively everything in family is enjoyed by man i.e., property, lineage, authority etc.

(g). From Sati to Sex-Discrimination Test

The birth of a female does not bring joy and happiness to the Indian families. Even today a female child is killed in the womb. Women have been conditioned to accept patriarchal stereotypes of themselves – their bodies, their sexuality, intellect, emotions, and their entire womanhood - through the eyes of

¹⁴ Malladi Subbamma, *Woman: Tradition and Culture* (New Delhi; Sterling Publishers: 1985) p- 5

men. They have been castrated by patriarchal power; she has become a female eunuch.

The latest advances in modern medical science – the tests of amniocentesis and ultra sonography – are being abused. These tests which were originally designed for the detection of gender related congenital abnormality of the foetus, are now being abused particularly in India and Asian countries primarily to detect the sex of the foetus with the intention of getting it aborted if it is detected to be that of a female – this is violation and denial of girl child's very right to life – to be born.¹⁵ Female infanticide is well established and rampant in India, particularly in Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu and a survey report of women's center in Bombay found that out of 8000 foetus aborted in six city hospitals, 7999 foetus were of girls.¹⁶ Such foetus is considered to be suffering from the very disease of being a 'female foetus'

(h). From Purity to Pageant

In recent years, we find the feminist vision of a new sexuality. Far from sexuality becoming less central, it seems to have become more so. Far from using the greater equality between the sexes to determine their own sexual image, we have seen women reaffirming the notion that what is most important to a woman is her sexual allure. Madonna is often held up as the young women's icon of self-defined female sexuality, but she has done nothing to challenge this

¹⁵ P. Kapur, 'Girl Child Abuse: Violence of her Human Rights' in *Social Change* (June – September 1995) No- 2- 3 vol- 25 p- 6

¹⁶ Ibid., p-6

traditional notion that being sexually desirable is the ultimate source of power for women.

So what is the truth behind the contemporary expression of women's sexuality? Is this desire to be desired the fundamental truth of female sexuality by which women are failing to challenge that traditional exchanges between men and woman? There is a clear indication of the fact that how contemporary popular culture manufactures the erotic image of womanhood for marketizing sexuality.

Take for example the modern phenomenon of beauty pageant. Can we say that it is a show to choose world's most all round talented woman of the year? Again, if we think that it is a show to select world's most beautiful woman, we have to think again. Perhaps it is an unavoidable, inseparable manifestation/repercussion of a new culture of consumerism and post modernism.

Meaning and perception of a thing or phenomenon do not remain static forever. It changes with the passage of time. That is exactly what has happened in our perception regarding some notable women. For example in the new millennium, if a child is asked, why is Indira Gandhi famous? The answer will not be, according to the child, that she was the Prime Minister of India. Rather, The Times of India has ruled that Indira Gandhi is one of the 100 sexiest Indian women of the century. It also rules that just because she was sexy, she was bound to have all other attributes. And sexiness lies in the eyes, in the curve of her waist

or on her lips.¹⁷ All of us like to dwell in a fantasy world, and fantasy and sexuality are more deeply related than we normally admit.

[II]

NEW CHALLENGES: NEED FOR A CREATIVE AND CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH HINDU SOCIAL REFORMERS

It is fairly obvious that the prevalent reality negates the ideal of womanhood as formulated by the Hindu social reformers. It means that the initiative that at a crucial juncture of Indian history Hindu social reformers took, has got its relevance. The struggle must go on and more and more cultural innovations and interventions ought to be made so that gender discrimination and inequality can be combated. It is in this context that one can argue that what Hindu social reformers did in the 19th and early 20th century need not merely be seen as a historical memory. Their contributions have got relevance even in the 21st century when we are seeing a brutal form of patriarchy far from withering away continues to subjugate, control and degrade womanhood.

(a). Reformers' Harmonious Religiosity versus Recent Religious Fanaticism

The meaning of their contributions becomes fairly obvious if we look at the prevalent form of religious fundamentalism. It is true that be it Vivekananda or Gandhi, all of them were deeply engaged with Hindu religious tradition. They used Hindu idioms, derived their inspiration from Hindu spiritual ideals. Yet their negotiation with Hinduism, it has to be realized, was qualitatively different from

¹⁷ 'Meri Eyes Bhi Sexy Mera Pout Bhi Sexy....' in *The Sunday Times of India* (16th January 2000) p-1

the present form of Hindu fanaticism. Because they were experimenting with Hinduism, they were trying to bring about change and find space for woman. Their intention was that of equity, harmony and balance. But then the present form of Hindu fanaticism is terribly violent, it is extremely communal and patriarchal, its ideology is against reciprocity and dialogicity. It is essentially anti-woman. At a time when Hindu fanaticism is polluting the politico-cultural landscape of the country, it is important to derive the appropriate lesson from Hindu social reformers and fight the prevalent trend. It is in this context, that we used to argue that contemporary feminists who wish to fight against the unholy alliance of patriarchy and communalism would be enriched if they keep their eyes open, initiate dialogue with Hindu social reformers, draw appropriate lessons, evolve culturally rooted symbols and overcome the existing darkness.

(b). Need for an Indigenous Intervention

It is important to realize the significance of culture specific symbols. It would not be wrong to say that Indian social science depends heavily on borrowed categories and idioms. For example, as feminism is often imported from the West and icons like Simone de Beauvoir or Julia Kristeva are imposed on Indian minds, it becomes difficult for many to identify with this approach. Feminism as a result appears to be elitist, arrogant, metropolitan and culturally rootless. It is important to rescue feminism from its alienness and make it relevant to the country. No wonder, Indian feminists for example, have begun to initiate a serious debate on the nature of feminist theory. Is it universal or is there a cultural specific connotation? For example, we have been witnessing the assertion of a number of sensitive feminists who have been trying to understand and learn from the contributions of Hindu social reformers. An ideal illustration would be that of Madhu Kishwar the leading feminist thinker and activist who founded the path-breaking women's magazine called 'Manushi'. In her recent

writings Madhu Kishwar has been trying to tap cultural resources for constructing an Indian band of feminist discourse. For example, she is seriously engaged in a dialogue with Gandhi and trying to understand how Gandhian concept of womanhood has got tremendous possibilities.¹⁸ Likewise Vandana Shiva is arguing that Eco-feminism can learn important lessons from the Gandhian worldview – the way Gandhi spoke of harmony with nature rather than conquering nature.¹⁹ The point that we are trying to mention is that some of the culturally cherished ideals have been reformulated and reinterpreted to suit to our contemporary needs. As a result, we would argue that a meaningful dialogue with Hindu social reformers would always be beneficial.

(c). Social Reformers and their Ambiguities: A Feminist Critique

While we do realize the necessity of a creative engagement with Hindu social reformers, we do however, mean that there was no problem with what they pleaded for. In fact, it is important to see and understand some of the ambiguities of Hindu social reformers. For example, look at the following:

- i. Dayananda's Niyoga: Dayananda says that marriage occurs once and there is no question of remarriage. But on the other hand he was a champion of widow remarriage. He prescribes 'Niyoga' on a restricted sense i.e., 'Niyoga' in the context of motherhood and not in the context of wifehood. Niyoga implies a widow can have temporary sexual union with a man for begetting a child and till a child is born. And after a child is born she remains a widow forever. Hence it's quite paradoxical. Moreover, the child born will be referred to as the child of her deceased

¹⁸ See for example, Madhu Kishwar, 'Gandhi on Women' in *Economic and Political Weekly* (5th October 1985) vol. xx issue 40 pp- 1691 -1706

¹⁹ See for example, Vandana Shiva & M. Mies, *Eco-Feminism* (New Delhi; Kali for Woman: 1993)

husband. During the 'Niyoga' period the widow even does not get loving company and financial security from her temporary sexual partner. Moreover Dayananda also talks about purity. Is not this instance a question mark on the notion of purity? Hence, his concept of 'Niyoga' was a patriarchal ideological apparatus to keep and perpetuate the family property within the family line in particular and patriarchal in general.

- ii. Vivekananda says, to a British audience I should very much like out women to have your intellectuality, but not if it must be at the cost of purity.²⁰ The statement appears quite ambiguous. What does purity means exactly? Does it apply to men? It is very difficult to understand what kind of purity he is talking about. It poses more questions than it answers. Is there a possibility of losing one's purity in the context of getting new intellectuality? Perhaps it is only Vivekananda who could dare to say that he needs more purity not intellect. But it should be kept in mind the developed countries like Japan, U.S.A., U.K. etc have attained their highest scale of excellence not by virtue of their purity but by their growing rationalization and intellectualization.
- iii. Gandhi on women in politics: on the one hand he advocates self expression and self assertion and on the other he says, politics and professions were to be, by and large, exclusively male domains... *and you sisters, what would you do going to parliament? Do you aspire after the Collectorship, Commissionership or even viceroyalty? You would not care for the Viceroy has got to order executions and hangings, a thing*

²⁰ Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta; Mayavati Memorial Edition: 1973) p- 412

*you would heartily desist.*²¹ The so-called father of Indian nation has given a step fatherly treatment to our women.

Gandhi's statement is also self refuting on another ground. For example in his note on women's honor, he says that she should not hesitate to die in order to save her honor integrity and life. Here he says that she cannot perform jobs of viceroy, Commissioner as it orders executions. These are two paradoxical positions.

- iv. Gandhiji's view on sexuality; he advocates celibacy, and opines that sexual union between man and woman should be only for procreation. By celibacy he means self-control. Today, out of the three aims of Hindu marriage i.e., Dharma, Praja and Rati, Rati has taken its precedence over the rest. Today sex, like anything is viewed as an article of consumption. Moreover Gandhi does not tell us how to achieve self-control. It can't be forgotten that the restriction on sex is not free from its abnormal manifestations. Again, can a restriction on sex bring an all round control on one's personality? To expect people to maintain this restriction is like asking the fuel to tame the fire.
- v. In his note on birth control Gandhi advocates that education should teach woman the art of saying no even to her husband and it is no part of her duty to become a mere tool or doll in her husband's hands. This is a quite one-sided view. Sexual passion is not the only inseparable part or exclusive possession of man; it also equally exists as an integral part in female body and mind.

²¹ See for example, Chapter II on Gandhi

- vi. All the reformers discussed earlier have emphasized on the virtue of sacrifice as a part of ideal womanhood. But why do we expect somebody to sacrifice for us? Has she voluntarily taken a contract or is she under any obligation to sacrifice or it has been one ideological cultural conditioning imposed upon her to sacrifice? If the latter is true it is not self-sacrifice but an ordered execution.
- vii. Hindu social reformers have talked many impressive speeches that appear quite fascinating in books and journals; they emphasize concepts like purity, patience perseverance, Pativrata, modesty, Matri-Shakti and Ardhangini. And also they talk regarding equality, education for woman. How can it be possible for a woman to be 'Pativrata' and 'Matri Shakti' on the one hand and equal cum Ardhangini on the other? Like Parsons who failed to draw a proper balance between his '*voluntaristic theory of social action*' and '*theory of social system,*' social reformers have failed to integrate these aforesaid two positions properly.
- viii. Is it really possible for us to understand modern phenomena as discussed earlier in the terms of our reformist discourse? Is there a scope for styles, fashion, modeling, beauty pageant, and lesbianism in the reformist discourses on gender? How would reformers like Vivekananda and Gandhi react to Deepa Mehta' film 'Fire'? Lesbianism, far from being viewed as an aberration, appears today as one of the alternatives/ choices to the patriarchal heterosexual practices.

The question that a student of sociology must ask is why Hindu social reformers could not overcome these limitations? One possible reason would be

that they were men and belonged to forward castes. In other words, the social existential determinants suggest that their horizons could not always go beyond the boundaries of a male – dominated caste Hindu society. It may also be argued that they were primarily engaged in the domain of culture and perhaps they did not seriously interrogate the economic basis of woman's exploitation. In other words, in the absence of an alternative an appropriate economic agenda for women as to how they would enter the public sphere, work, become economically independent and challenge the division of labor that characterizes a patriarchal social order. They could not think of a truly emancipatory notion of womanhood.

We therefore argue that contemporary Indian feminists are required to evolve a critical/ creative orientation to the project that, Hindu social reformers once initiated. It would be creative in the sense that the cultural significance of the project ought to be critical in the sense that the limitations and ambiguities of such a project ought to be articulated and new agenda ought to be imagined and evolved.

As we have already discussed in chapter – I, contemporary feminism is pregnant with multiple possibilities. From liberal feminism to post-modern feminism, from radical feminism to Marxist feminism, there are many possibilities and many projects. And contemporary Indian feminists have to examine how despite being culturally rooted, they can learn some important lessons from their women counterparts and come forward with new ideas to cope with the women's question.

In this context, it is also important to realize that feminism is not merely a theoretical academic discourse. It is born of a struggle and part of a struggle. And it is primarily a struggle against the principle of domination. No wonder, feminists have to relate to the other struggle against domination and violence, say, the struggle of the tribals, adivasis and marginalized castes and the environmental movement against the pathology of ruthless technological development.

True, the feminist struggle has got its own space and relative autonomy, but then it is also not isolated. It can enrich itself only by participating in the other struggles. For example, in Indian society, the suffering and exploitation of a Dalit woman can be explained through multiple ways. First, there is the typical patriarchal domestic violence that does not escape even a Dalit household. Second, there is the hierarchical caste system and its implicit violence through which Dalits and particularly Dalit women are often exploited by forward caste landowners. Third, a faulty and elitist model of development often displaces the Dalits and other marginalized groups, makes them migrants and homeless. In other words, to fight against this particular case of suffering, three struggles ought to be united – feminist struggle against patriarchal social order, Dalit movement against upper caste hegemony and environmental movement against elitist model of development.

It needs to be seen how Indian feminists cope with these challenges and evolve a new pattern of thinking and action. At a very crucial juncture of Indian history, Hindu social reformers initiated an important project to cope with the women's question. And now contemporary feminists, while learning from that

great history have to go beyond, face new challenges and construct new agenda for the emancipation of women. Perhaps, in the process sociology as an academic discipline would also be enriched and become more and more capable of dealing with the women's question.

CONCLUSION

The better half of India's population – the women – has always formed a fascinating area of social investigation, academic discourse, political debate and political inquiry. The discourse is in some form or other has been valorized from the period of Raja Rammohun Roy Dayananda and Gandhi till date. Yet it suffers from paradoxical dilemma: the more struggles, debates, inquiries and investigations are devoted to what is called the women's question, the more cases of atrocities are pouring in, thus accentuating the general feeling that women always suffer in male dominated society. Notwithstanding vociferous demand for the social upliftment for the 'second sex', the situation continues to be distressing. Most of us glorify the status of woman, the ideal of motherhood in public place, give lectures in quoting from Manu, Parasara Samhita, Upanishads in order to present an idealized Goffman's 'impressive self' before others but seldom practice in our real life what we say in public. This dissertation is an attempt to see the gap between this ideal (construction of womanhood celebrated by reformers) and real construct of woman in our everyday ethnomethodology. The reformers like Raja Rammohun Roy, Iswarachandra Vidyasagar, Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi put up a tough struggle to construct a model Indian woman and emancipate her from the bondage of oppression and violence by imparting her education and removing evil impositions. Do we find a woman of their kind in our times? Do we really need only an educated ideal mother to keep the light of our civilization glowing and blushing day by day? Reformers have led a campaign for equality for women

with men. Do they stand really equal as compared to men in recent times? How do we account for the recent feminists' challenges and women movements in our times? Perhaps this dissertation has been able to cope with these questions in a meaningful manner. Let us summarize our concluding points:

a). Many theoretical advances in the study of women /gender relations have been formulated in West particularly in NorthWest Europe and the United States. But the limitation of this feminist theory lies in the fact that it symbolizes only its rootedness / biasness of the West and it appears as if we are importing alien concepts, categories to analyze our reality. Hence it has ignored women's voices from other cultures, other civilizations, particularly, it lack its relevance in India.

b). Social reformers starting from Raja Rammohun Roy to Gandhi have brought a revolution in the status of and discourse on women. They are trying to construct ideal woman – a woman who is first a sacrificing mother, a woman who is docile and submissive to her family life, and a woman who is daring and fearless and at the same time a woman who is pure, patient and perseverant one. Broadly they are trying to construct a refined shastric women who can contribute equally for an ideal family and an ideal nation. They are debating the entire issues of woman within the broader framework of religion in particular and India's civilizational glory in general. Perhaps, at a time when British colonial rule cum cultural imperialism was at an alarming spirit, evil superstitions / practices were on the increase and Hinduism was on its way to decline, it was a colonial / existential and finally a civilizational compulsion on reformers' part to revive and restore

India's glorious culture and define almost every issue on that line. On the whole they were trying to evolve a notion of womanhood mostly based on past glory with a limited vision of a futuristic orientation.

c.) Picture of 21st century marks a wide gap between the ideal notion of womanhood and the empirical observations. With the increasing incidents of dowry death, wife battering, rape, murder, sex -discrimination test / female foetus abortion, domestic violence patriarchal operational laws intra-gender oppression, cruel ideology of honor- sexuality, reformers' construction of idealized woman has been a Weberian Ideal Type or a Marxian Utopian in our every day world. Every day or the other a Dalit woman is paraded naked/ raped/gangraped, a woman is killed, a domestic violence has occurred – these have been the news in our national 'dailies'. Feminists have come forward to assert their voices, challenges, demands and root out male hegemony.

d). Several questions crop up out of this perplexing scenario. Can reformers' vision of women, their agenda being the solutions to our problems? How far the feminist models and insights of reformers are really feminine/ feminist in nature? Do they have any alternative for a twenty first-century woman? Reformers have advocated in favor of spread of education in order to emancipate India woman. But a significant proportion of domestic violence, murder, rape, etc., occur among educated classes. Should we conclude that education and female suffering are positively related? Our judiciary offers no end to women's problems. Even there are instances where judiciary has functioned ambiguously in this regard and gone against women's cause. Can we say that banning this violence is

increasingly becoming a distant dream? These are the issues that come to our mind automatically while reflecting upon gender issue in recent times.

This is not only a study of women's issue in particular, it reflects a study of social change – that there has been a shift from traditional - Swadeshi interpretation to that of the emerging modernity, from idealized feminine notions to recent feminist assertions. This study of women can be located at the broader discourse of woman's studies/gender studies. The distinction of such a discourse lies in the fact that it is imbued with an activist spirit rarely found in other academic discourses; gender studies have been regarded as a movement directed at changing woman's status.

Yet there are certain issues that still remain unexplored. For example, recent feminist theorists are believed to be the champion discourse on the cause of women. But question is, how far these theories are sensitive to women's cause? Are they in a position to sensitize our women's problem? Do they have a space in their framework to explain our cultural and civilizational peculiarities? Can we really be beneficial in using their concepts and categories for an effective, judicious and critical analysis on women's problems in India and propose an alternative agenda?

Secondly, no law, no education, no awareness building campaign has brought to an end to women oppression. Do we have any alternative program to this? Is it the case that there is a need to reform institutions like education, law and political structure? Amendments can be done in constitutions (Parliament). How it is to be done in human minds and their ideologies? How do we account

for the anti-feminist repercussions of patriarchal institutions like family, caste and religion? These are the questions that pose another set of focus, area of exploration for further research, which can be done in the higher level of research.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahuja, Ram, *Violence Against Women* (New Delhi; Rawat: 1998)
- Arya, Krishna Singh, & P. D, Shastri, *Swami Dayananda Saraswati* (Delhi; Manohar: 1987)
- Atal, Yogesh, 'The Unequal Music' in *The Times of India* (15 June 2000)
- Banerjee Hiranmay, *Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar* (Calcutta; K. P. Bagchi & Company: 1976)
- Beauvoir, Simone de., *The Second Sex* (New York; Vintage Books: 1974)
- Brydon, Lynne & Sylvia Chant, *Women in the Third World* (Aldershot; Edward Elgar: 1989)
- Chakravarti, Uma, 'Conceptualizing Brahminical Patriarchy in Early India' in *Economic and Political Weekly* (3 April 1993)
- Chatterjee, Partha, 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question' in Kum Kum Sangari & Sudesh Vaid (eds.) *Recasting Women* Op.cit., 1989
- Chatterji, Shoma, A., *The Indian Women's Search for Identity* (New Delhi; Vikas Publishing House: 1988)
- Chatterji, Shoma, A., *The Indian Women in Perspective* (Delhi; Ajanta: 1993)
- Chaudhuri, Maitrayee, *Indian Women's Movement: Reform and Revival* (New Delhi; Radiant Publishers: 1993)
- Chodorow, Nancy, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (London; Yale University Press: 1989)
- Chowdhry, Prem, 'Enforcing Cultural Codes' in *Economic and Political Weekly* 10 May: 1997)
- Das Harihara & Sasmita Mahapatra, *The Indian Renaissance and Raja Rammohun Roy* (Jaipur; Pointer Publishers: 1996)
- Das, Veena, 'Sexual Violence, Discursive Formations and the State' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Special no. 1996

- Davies, M., (ed.) *The Women and Violence* (London; Zed Books Ltd.: 1994)
- De' Souza, A., *Women in Contemporary India* (New Delhi; Manohar: 1975)
- Dubey, M. P. & N. Borah, (eds.) *Social Justice and Women in India* (Delhi; Swaraj Prakashan: 1999)
- Engels, Friedrich, *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State* (New York; International Publishers: 1972)
- Flax, Jane, 'Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory' in Linda J. Nicholson *Feminism/ Postmodernism* (New York; Routledge: 1990)
- Gandhi, M. K., *India of my Dreams* (Ahmedabad; Navajivan Publishing House: 1947)
- Gangrade, K. D. 'Sex-Discrimination – A Critique' in *Social Change* (18 September 1988) vol. 18
- Ghose Jogendra Chunder, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy* (ed.) (New Delhi; Cosmo Publications: 1982)
- Hooks, Bell, 'Feminism: A Movement to end Sexist Oppression' in Sandra Kemp & Judith Squires (eds.) *Feminisms* (New York; Oxford University Press: 1997)
- Indira, R., & D. K. Behera, (eds.) *Gender and Society in India* (New Delhi; Manak: 1999)
- Jaggar, Alison, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex; Roman & Littlefeld Publishers: 1984)
- Jogdand, P. G., *Dalit Women in India* (Pune; Gyan Publishing House: 1995)
- Kapur, Promila, 'Girl Child Abuse: Violation of her Human Rights' in *Social Change* (June – September 1995) vol. 25 no. 2,3
- Kishwar, Madhu, & R. Vanita, (eds.) *In Search of Answers* (London; Zed Books Ltd.: 1984)
- Kishwar, Madhu, 'Gandhi on Women' in *Economic and Political Weekly* (5 October 1985) vol. xx. issue 40
- Krishna, M. Sivaram & Sunita Roy, *Reflections on Swami Vivekananda* (New Delhi; Sterling Publications: 1993)

- Krishnamurthy, J., *Women in Colonial India* (Delhi; Oxford University Press: 1989)
- Lata, Prem, *Swami Dayananda Saraswati* (New Delhi; Sumit Publications: 1990)
- Lokeswarananda, Swami, *The Perennial Vivekananda: A Selection* (Calcutta; Sahitya Academy: 1988)
- MacKinnon, Catharine, 'Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: An Agenda for Theory' in Diana Tictjens Meyers *Feminist Social Thought* (New York; Routledge: 1997)
- Mani, Lata *Contentious Traditions* in Kum Kum Sangari (ed.) *Recasting Women* (New Delhi; Kali for Women: 1989)
- 'Meri Eyes Bhi Sexy Mera Pout Bhi Sexy...' in *The Sunday Times of India* (16 January 2000)
- Mill, J. S., *The Subjection of Women* (Cambridge; MIT Press: 1970)
- Millett, Kate, *Sexual Politics* (New York; Garden City: 1970)
- Moi, Toril, 'Feminist, Female, Feminine' in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires's (eds.) *Feminisms* Op.cit., 1997
- Nandy Ashis, *The Intimate Enemy* (Delhi: Oxford; 1983)
- Oakley, Ann, *Womens Work: The House Wife, Past and Present* (New York; Pantheon Books: 1974)
- Oommen, T. K., 'Turning on the Heat' in *The Hindu* (28 September 1999)
- Pandey, Dhanpati, *Swami Dayananda Saraswati* (New Delhi; Publications Division: 1985)
- Panikkar, K. N. *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony* (New Delhi: Tulika; 1995)
- Parekh Bhikhu, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform* (New Delhi: Sage Publications; 1989)
- Parsons, Talcott, *Essays in Sociological Theory* (New York; Free Press: 1954)
- Pathak Avijit, *Indian Modernity* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing; 1998)

Paul, M. C., *Dowry and Position of Women in India* (New Delhi; Inter India Publication: 1985)

Ramamurty, Lalita & M. Satyavati, 'Gandhi's idea of Indian Womanhood and the Present day Realities' in K. Arunachalam & A. Jaya Pragasam (eds.) *Gandhian Techniques for the Liberation of the Weaker Sections* (Madurai; Sarvodaya Ilakiya Pannai: 1987)

Ritzer, George, *Sociological Theory* (New York; McGraw-Hill Publications: 1988)

Roy, B., & A. Basu, (eds.) *From Independence Towards Freedom* (New Delhi; OUP: 1999)

Sangari Kum Kum & Sudesh Vaid *Recasting Women* (New Delhi: Kali for Women; 1989)

Sangari, Kum Kum, 'Politics of Diversity' in *Economics and Political Weekly* (10 December 1995)

Sarda, Har Bilas, *Life of Dayananda Saraswati* (Ajmer; Vedic Yantralaya: 1946)

Sarkar, Susobhan *Bengal Renaissance and Other Essays* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House; 1970)

Saxena, Kiran, 'Gandhi and Women's Emancipation' in N. Radhakrishnan & N. Vasudevan's (eds.) *Gandhi in the Global Village* (New Delhi; Media Center: 1998)

Shiva, Vandana, & Maria Mies, *EcoFeminism* (New Delhi; Kali for Women: 1985)

Singha Bawa Arjun, *Dayananda Saraswati Founder of Arya Samaj* (New Delhi; Ess & Ess: 1979)

Singh, Indu Prakash, *Indian Women: The Captured Beings* (New Delhi; Intellectual Publishing House: 1990)

Singh, Pragya, 'Female Employment is a Myth' in *The Pioneer* (8, February 2000)

Sinha, Jogendra *Raja Rammohun Roy: A Luminary* (Patna; Vijay Publication: 1994)

Southard, Barbara, 'The Feminism of Mahatma Gandhi' in Subrata Mukherjee, *Facets of Mahatma Gandhi* (ed.) (New Delhi; Deep & Deep: 1994)

Subbamma, Malladi, *Woman: Tradition and Culture* (New Delhi; Sterling Publishers: 1985)

Swarup, R., 'The Women in India: Inside out' in C. M. Agrawal (ed.) *Dimensions of Indian Womanhood* (Almora; Shri Aomori Book Depot: 1993)

Thakur, Minni Raja Rammohun Roy (New Delhi; Deep & Deep: 1987)

Tong, Rosemarie, *Feminist theory* (Boulder & San Francisco; Westview Press: 1984)

Vidyasagar, Isvarachandra, *Marriage of Hindu Widows* (Calcutta; K. P. Bagchi & Company: 1976)

Visvanathan, N., et al *The Women Gender and Development Reader* (London; Zed Books: 1997)

Vivekananda, Swami, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta; Mayavati Memorial Edition: 1973) vol. 5

Vivekananda, Swami, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta; Mayavati Memorial Edition: 1964) vol. 3

Vivekananda, Swami, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta; Mayavati Memorial Edition: 1973) vol. 8

Weir, Allison., *Sacrificial Logic* (London; Routledge: 1996)