PADMINI SENGUPTA



Pandita Ramabai Saraswati

HER LIFE AND WORK

Padmini Sengupta presents a vivid and authentic portrayal of the life and times of Pandita Ramabai Saraswati—a life, which was "nothing short of miraculous".

Born (1858) in a Chitpavan Brahmin family of Maharashtra, Ramabai was the true daughter of an unconventional father, who vied against the taboos of his community and preferred a self-imposed exile in the forests of Gangamul. Here Ramabai was imbued with a thirst for learning. The adventures and hazards of her journey with her family on foot from the Western Ghats to the foothills of the Himalayas, during which she lost her parents, the recognition of her erudition by the Calcutta Senate, and her visit to Assam where she was married, soon to become a widow with a daughter, were the beginnings of a life full of imagination and purpose.

On the death of her husband, Ramabai returned to Poona where she met the famous Ranades and established the Arya Mahila Samaj. Later, she went to England where her contacts inspired her to acknowledge Christianity, and from there to America where she was lionised and her lectures highly appreciated. Returning to India, she continued her pioneering efforts for the rehabilitation of Indian women and child-widows and started the Sharada Sadan and Mukti Sadan.

The last years of the Pandita were spent in evangelism and in translating the Bible from the original Greek and Hebrew into Marathi. She died at the age of sixty-four at Mukti.

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Pandita Ramabai Saraswati

PANDITA RAMABAI BIRTH CENTENARY
MEMORIAL VOLUME



PANDITA RAMABAI SARASWATI

(San Francisco: 1887)

Frontispiece

Pandita Ramabai Saraswati

HER LIFE AND WORK

PADMINI SENGUPTA



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Dedicated to
all those who wish to serve Humanity
through Love and Kindness

Foreword

It is an honour to be asked to commend this biography of a noble daughter of India written by a humble admirer eminent in the world of letters. Padmini Sengupta has already laid us in her debt by her former works, especially the life of Sarojini Naidu.

We are fortunate to live today in a more liberated age socially and politically. We need to be reminded of the pioneers who made freedom for women and their higher education a life-long cause; who struggled against prejudice and caste discrimination; who stirred the women of our land to fulfil their destiny and to express themselves in an age which was disproportionately controlled by men. Such a one was Pandita Ramabai whose heroic and dedicated life is brought to us in these pages. As scholar and social reformer, wife and mother, she speaks to the generations which have reaped the harvest of her eager sowing. Is it not appropriate that we should call to memory our benefactors in the past? Here is one who must be honoured all over the land, and by the men as well as the women.

January 15, 1968

Lakdasa De Mel
Bishop of Calcutta & Metropolitan
of India, Pakistan, Ceylon and Burma

Preface

PANDITA RAMABAI is known for her pioneering social work and her role in the uplift of women and their education. She is rightly accepted as one of the greatest women of the world and compared with unreserved praise with Florence Nightingale and Joan of Arc. A woman of rare virtues, she was also a poet, scholar, social reformer, emancipator, and friend of the poor and destitute.

Perhaps no better tribute can be paid to Pandita Ramabai than in the words of Acharya P. K. Atre (editorial in the *Maratha*, Bombay, 21 April 1963): "Ramabai's illuminating and inspiring life, stands like a lighthouse leading and guiding the people of India and is like an immortal, unforgettable novel, conceived and written by God !"

I must record my grateful thanks to Mrs. Padmini Sengupta for this biography of Pandita Ramabai Saraswati which she has written at the request of the Pandita Ramabai Centenary Memorial Committee, Bombay, as a labour of love because of her deep regard for the Pandita.

I am especially indebted to Mary Lucia Bierce Fuller (died November 1965), a close associate and biographer of Pandita Ramabai; Hemendra Nath Das (died October 1966); Vishnu Bhaskar Govande (died September 1967); Rev. Dr. Elizabeth G. K. Hewat (died October 1968), formerly a professor in Wilson College, Bombay, and author of *Christ and Western India*; Dr. Hari Ramchandra Divekar, ex-Principal of Victoria College, Gwalior and Vice-Chancellor of the Women's University, Poona,

who supplied all the quotations in Sanskrit that appear in this biography; G. D. Rege and R. D. Deshpande who assisted in the correction of the Sanskrit proofs; G. L. Chandavarkar; Anand Vithal Shrikhande; A. Noble Rajamani, Editor, *The Christian Focus*; and artist Lem Patole.

I must also express my gratitude to the Metropolitan of Calcutta for the Foreword to this biography and for his encouragement throughout.

April 23, 1970

S. M. Adhav
Hon. Secretary & Treasurer
Pandita Ramabai
Centenary Memorial Committee
Bombay

Acknowledgements

It is not easy to present the life of a saint to the public, but when I was asked by Mr. S. M. Adhav, Hon. Secretary of the Pandita Ramabai Centenary Committee to undertake the task of writing a detailed biography of the Pandita, I did not hesitate. This was because I was anxious, despite feeling hopelessly inadequate to accept such a stupendous and sacred a task, for India's millions to know a little about this pioneer Indian woman reformer, this very humble but dynamic Christian of Maharashtrian stock, whose life, with its many facets, was nothing short of miraculous. Though many have already heard of her, there are others, especially of the younger generation, who do not know about her, and I trust that this book will help to fill this gap.

My thanks are due to the following for their kind help and cooperation: Mr. Hemendra Nath Das of Sylhet, East Pakistan (died: Oct. 28, 1966); Rev. Dr. Miss Elizabeth G. K. Hewat, M.A., B.D., PH.D. of Edinburgh (died: Oct. 19, 1968); Rev. Mother Superior of the Community of St. Mary the Virgin, Wantage; Dr. Vishnu Bhaskar Govande (died: Sept. 6, 1967); Right Rev. Bishop Arthur Luther; Rev. John Sule; Mrs. Manorama Ramkrishnapant Modak (U.S.A.) now in Ahmednagar; Rajkumari Amrit Kaur (died: Feb. 6, 1964); the Manager, Canara Industrial and Banking Syndicate, Karkala (South Kanara); Mrs. Pramila Datar of the National Library, Calcutta; Mr. C. D. Airan; Shriman B. N. Singh Deo, Raja of Deo-

garh, (Sambalpur); Miss Mary Lucia Bierce Fuller (died: Nov. 22, 1965); the Rt. Rev. William Lash, Bishop of Bombay, now retired; the Editor, *Cheltenham Ladies College Magazine*, Cheltenham; and many other well-wishers who so kindly helped me. My profound thanks are more than due to Mr. S. M. Adhav, whose deep research in the life of Pandita Ramabai made it possible for me to write this biography. He is an ardent devotee of the Pandita and has done much to keep her life in the forefront of modern India. My thanks are also due to my daughter, Miss Kamalini Sengupta, who so kindly edited the MS. and helped me a great deal with the typing, and to my husband, Mr. R. N. Sengupta, who carefully read and checked the MS. Finally, my warm thanks are due to the Most Rev. Hiyanirindu Lakdasa Jacob De Mel, D.D., M.A., Metropolitan of the Church of India, Pakistan, Ceylon and Burma and Bishop of Calcutta, who has written the Foreword to this book.

December 13, 1969 PADMINI SENGUPTA

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PART I

1858 - 1882

I

The Young Scholar

1

"We do not feel that you belong to this world since the great Pandits have been dazzled and amazed by your superhuman ability. The very Goddess of Learning "Saraswati" has come down amidst us in human form." Thus did the Pandits of Calcutta address a young girl, Ramabai, at a meeting in 1878, when they had gathered to examine her vast learning and scholarship in the Sanskrit language and find out if she was fit for the title of "Saraswati." She was examined by three great scholars, two of them Englishmen and one a Bengali. All three were renowned educationists of Calcutta University, and the Bengali, Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Maheschandra Nyayaratna (1836-1906) was well known for his deep erudition and knowledge of Sanskrit. He was appointed a Professor at the Calcutta Sanskrit College in 1864 and became its Principal in 1876. He was awarded a C.I.E. in 1881 and the title of Mahamahopadhyaya in 1887. Of the two Englishmen, Professor Toney, C.I.E. (1837-1922) was one of those illustrious foreigners who revealed the wisdom of India to the West. He translated *Uttar Ram Charit* and other famous Sanskrit works into

English. He came to India to join Presidency College as a Professor and later became its Principal. He officiated more than once as Director of Public Instruction. Professor Gough, the other Englishman, was also a Sanskrit scholar and educationist.

It was, therefore, before no insignificant audience that Ramabai appeared, and when she heard these august men speaking to her with such warmth and profound respect Ramabai answered in Sanskrit, *ex tempore* verse, acknowledging the honour given to her: "I do not think I am a Pandita, and, therefore, I feel I hardly deserve the praises bestowed on me. Your action, however, speaks about your qualities of giving due recognition to deserving things. I am only a poor devotee at the Temple of the Goddess of Learning."[1]

Not a little struck by the quick repartee and the clear enunciation, so humbly and appropriately delivered, the Pandits put further tests to the young girl seated before them. She was but a girl of twenty, petite, scarcely five feet tall, delicate and modest, though strong-minded "and bold as a lioness," as Max Mueller described her. She knew Sanskrit "splendidly" and could repeat large books by heart, including 18,000 *slokas* from the *Bhagavat Purana* alone. Though nervous at facing the great ordeal before her, Ramabai regarded the three Pandits with fearless grey eyes, set well apart in a broad, open beautiful face. From where, the Pandits must have wondered, did this girl come? From the heavens in the form of a goddess, or was she merely a wandering pilgrim, unmarried and alone, except for the protection of a frail young man, her brother Shrinivas, himself a renowned Sanskrit scholar?

The oral examination continued, and Ramabai surpassed every question with a quick and learned repartee. Never except in days of yore when Maitreyi and Gargi had argued with the great sage Yagnyavalkya in the concourse of philosophers held by King Janaka, had a woman been regarded as an exponent of the sacred Hindu Scriptures. The Pandits were genuine men of learning. For them only the truth mattered, and they were anxious to be just even though she was a mere woman. Later, at one of her

[1] The original Sanskrit ran as follows:

भवाद्दृश्यानि पुष्पाणि प्रक्षिप्तानि ममोपरि । अहं न तत्पात्रभूता न तथैवास्मि पंडिता ॥
पर्वताकारसदृशा भवद्भिर्ने गुणाः स्मृताः । परमाणुसमास्ते स्युःकिंत्वेदृगगौरवम् ॥
नाहं सरस्वती साक्षात् मन्यध्वे मां न शारदाम् । किंतु तस्याः सभामध्ये एकाहं परिचारिका ॥

public meetings, even though Ramabai always felt bitter about the wrongs meted out to women, she admitted that in her case, a woman had been highly honoured. Ramabai's authoritative learning in her own humble way was strangely reminiscent of her future Master, whom she, at that time, had not come to know. Jesus, at the age of twelve, had similarly astounded the learned Jews. ". . . they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers."[2] Was Christ even then guiding Ramabai's every word? Had He helped and encouraged her?

At last the Pandits felt that Ramabai deserved the title of "Saraswati." Later, at a function organized by Maharaja Jotindra Mohan Tagore, a leader of the Hindu Community in Bengal and a recipient of the K.C.I.E., Ramabai was conferred the title "Pandita." She was the first Indian woman to be so honoured. The occasion was naturally greatly publicized, not only in Calcutta but in all parts of India, especially in Maharashtra, for Ramabai Dongre came from that stout race of dynamic leaders and warriors, the Chitpavan Konkanasth Brahmins. In the month of July 1878, a Bombay newspaper announced that "a Maratha unmarried woman named Ramabai is at present in Calcutta. She came from the Karnatak Province and is on her way to Jaganath, Puri. During her brief halt in the city of Calcutta, she has surprised the learned men. She speaks Sanskrit and composes Sanskrit verses *ex tempore*."

Ramabai's stay in Bengal and Assam was, however, not brief, and she did not proceed to Puri.

Her fame spread to all parts of India, despite the prevalent belief that women should not learn the sacred language. Many were overjoyed that an Indian woman should have surmounted the many difficulties under which women suffered, and that a mere girl should be conferred with the highest of intellectual honours. A Bombay vernacular newspaper wrote: "The patriotic among us ought to feel proud that there is, even in our fallen condition, one such among our sisters who would do credit to the female sex in any country."

It is significant that Ramabai did not trade on the great honours

[2] The Gospel according to St. Luke (Authorized Version), Ch. 2: 46-47

conferred on her. At no time did she seek fame. She could have become one of the greatest of scholars if she had pursued knowledge alone. She could have been hailed as the Goddess of Learning throughout the length and breadth of India if she had been anxious to court publicity; but always she craved for something deeper. Some longing in her for a God who could comfort and soothe her, was ever present. And then again she fretted to serve her country. She chose, therefore, the strait and narrow path of devotion to God and service to her motherland and to the women of India, making little of the honours conferred on her. Later, she suffered one of the cruellest injustices that could have befallen a helpless, lonely woman, when she was accused falsely by some leaders, of seeking a name and fame, merely because her personal belief led her to become a Christian. That she discarded fame for service to God and the women of India, however, was a well-known fact for she was so humble that she did not once refer to the fact that she had been conferred the titles of Saraswati and Pandita in her book *A Testimony*.

Due to her scholarship and wide outlook on life, Ramabai naturally electrified Calcutta society. Among her many reformer friends was Dwarkanath Ganguli. He was one of the foremost agitators for the emancipation and freedom of women. Another great friend of hers was Sasipada Banerjee, who inaugurated a widows' home in Baranagar, near Calcutta, which was said to have inspired Ramabai to start her widows' home. Her friends in Calcutta also, included Keshab Chunder Sen, Maharaja Jotindra Mohan Tagore, Anand Mohan Bose, Kali Charan Banerji, and Krishna Mohan Banerji.

2

Pandita Ramabai's first great love was her devotion to Sanskrit, a language which women in India were forbidden to learn. This craving of a woman to become a scholar in the classical sacred language was something for which her father had sacrificed his life and her mother had devoted all her energy. Her father, Anant Shastri Dongre, though an orthodox Hindu, was nevertheless a reformer in that he fought for the rights of women and those belonging to the shudra caste to be allowed to read and write the sacred Sanskrit language and study sacred Hindu literature. He,

therefore, determined to teach his wife Sanskrit, at the risk of being excommunicated by the Brahmins.

"He thought it better to try the experiment at home instead of preaching to others," says Ramabai. "He found an apt pupil in my mother, who fell in line with his plans, and became an excellent Sanskrit scholar."[3]

But Anant Shastri Dongre had to sacrifice much to achieve his ambition of educating his wife, who in turn helped his daughter to become a great scholar. He had to abandon home and his joint family and seek refuge in a forest, and, finally, he had to appear before a Court of Inquiry to justify his conduct. The trial took place before 400 Pandits, Acharyas, Shastris and Puraniks at Shirur Sode in Mangalore District. The learned Brahmins charged Anant Shastri with the heresy of teaching his wife Sanskrit. But Anant Shastri was fully prepared to meet the challenge. He argued from the *Shriti, Smriti, Sangraha, Puranas, Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* to support his action giving authority that women and those belonging to the shudra caste could be taught the sacred language. Unable to find him guilty, Anant Shastri was then brought before the head priests in Krishnapara and Udipi, the headquarters of the Madhva Vaishnava Sect. Ramabai tells us of her father's trial before the *guru,* and an assembly of Pandits. He gave his reasons for teaching his wife, based on deep learning of the scriptures. At last he succeeded in "convincing the *guru* and Chief Pandits, that it was not wrong for women and shudras to learn Sanskrit and Puranic literature. So they did not put him out of caste, nor was he molested by anyone after this. He became known as an orthodox reformer."[4] He was honoured by some for what he was doing, and others despised him. But he was indifferent to public opinion. He continued to do what he thought was right and educated his wife and children.

In fact, Anant Shastri compiled a small *grantha* (book) championing his stand at the conference which lasted for over two months before he was finally acquitted. He also demanded a signed statement clearing him of the charges levelled against him; but he was, nevertheless, after this trial, ostracized by the orthodox members of the community. This *grantha* together with other

[3] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 2
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 2

precious books belonging to Anant Shastri were left at his village home in Malherambi in Mangalore District, which his relatives never returned to Ramabai, even when she visited her hometown many years later.

It was from her mother Lakshmibai, however, that Ramabai really gained her scholarship, for she says, "When I was about eight years old, my mother began to teach me and continued to do so until I was about fifteen years of age. During these years she succeeded in training my mind so that I might be able to carry on my education with very little aid from others."[5] Ramabai knew of no schools for girls or higher educational institutions existing for women.

One can imagine this forlorn family, at first in their forest home in Gangamul, where Anant Shastri had organized a renowned *Chatuspathi* (Sanskrit School) and later as pilgrims, for ever becoming poorer and poorer, but always with the idea of learning before them, seeking to find God, on the banks of the sacred rivers, by ablutions, prayers, austerities and the recitation of *mantras,* in the courtyards of temples, or on the side-walks and stairs leading up to some sacred abode. Always, there was this atmosphere of learning and culture, of the sacrifice incurred, because Anant Shastri was now an "orthodox reformer," determined at least to have the women of his own family educated. The conversation in the family circle was patterned on the desire to know, to understand, to read, to recite, to delve deep into the sacred lore of India. It is this deep culture, that became so inborn in Ramabai, that it stood her in such good stead later on, when this very quest for God and learning led her to the feet of Jesus, and she gave up her life to serve Him. When she found her joy in Christ, the whole fulfilment of her life reached its culmination; this joy she was able to discover only because of her great learning, for she was converted to Christianity mostly because her intellect led her to this revelation. "She was no longer an Indian or a philanthropist, but a humble servant of Christ, doing His work. This was the consummation of a number of mystic experiences brought on by the constant prayer and ever increasing resignation to her Lord."[6]

[5] *Ibid.,* p. 3

[6] *Great Women of India,* The Holy Mother Birth Centenary Memorial Advaita Ashrama, Almora, p. 407

3

It was appropriate that Ramabai at so young an age should have been given the title "Saraswati"—the Goddess not only of eloquence and learning, but also of speech. One of Goddess Saraswati's names is *Vach,* which means "Word." According to Hindu theory, Saraswati is said to have invented the Sanskrit language and she is worshipped as the very inventor of words. Ramabai was then, entitled to the name of this Goddess *Vach*—the "Word"—and one is reminded of St. John's beautiful opening to his Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God."[7]

Could it have been that Ramabai was to interpret the Word to India's millions, and was it for this purpose that she was given the title unknowingly by the Pandits? True it is that from the beginning Ramabai was chosen to be an instrument of God. Her object when she wrote *The High Caste Hindu Woman* was to "show what great things God will do through one who is consecrated to His service."[8] From earliest childhood it was to learning the Word of God that Ramabai was trained.

Sanskrit is the language of the Scriptures, of the *Shritis* and the *Smritis,* and the young girl, forest-bred and living in the wilds of the jungle, was taught God's language no matter how much the orthodox society of the time condemned such teaching of the scriptures to the weaker sex. We are told: "All the while, as this Marathi priest and his wife and children wandered from one sacred locality to the next, having no certain dwelling place, the early morning lessons were continued, and Ramabai, developing rare talent, became, under the instructions of father and mother, 'a prodigy of erudition'."[9]

Later when the father was about to die, he dedicated his little daughter to God. "Remember, my child, he said, 'you are my youngest, my most beloved child; I have given you into the hands of our God, you are His, and to Him alone you must belong, and serve Him all your life'."[10]

[7] The Gospel according to St. John (Authorized Version) Ch. 1 : 1-2
[8] Pandita Ramabai, *The Widows' Friend,* Australasian Edition, Preface, George Robertson, Melbourne
[9] *Ibid.,* p. 13
[10] *Ibid*

In the pursuit of the "Word," therefore, Ramabai grew strong and certain of her goal—to serve God, Whom she found finally through Christ. "Always deeply religious and well versed in the highest forms of her own faith, her acceptance of Christianity was not without great struggle and anguish of heart. It was the result of intellectual conviction backed by her longing for a higher life. The difference which Ramabai herself saw between the good precepts of the Hindu Scriptures and the teachings of Christ she expressed thus: "While the old scriptures have given us some beautiful precepts of loving, the New Dispensation of Christ has given us the grace to carry these principles into practice; and that makes all the difference in the world. The precepts are like a steam engine on the track, beautiful and with great possibilities; Christ and the Gospel are the steam, the motive that can make the engine move!"[11]

The "Word" was always with her, and all at once, with a joyous recognition, she understood the "Word", and the true light it dispersed.

Right through her life she taught the "Word" to others. At first as a teenage girl, with her brother, she brought before the public the evils prevalent in her country. Then, as a confirmed lecturer in the cause of women, she toured Bengal and Assam, and everywhere she went, her "Speech", the "Words" she uttered, astounded those who heard her. She was a brilliant orator, a woman from whose spiritual depths the Truth poured out. Later in Maharashtra, she travelled about giving lectures and starting branches of the Arya Mahila Samaj. She and Mrs. Ramabai Ranade held weekly readings and discussions. In England she astonished the teachers and pupils of Cheltenham Ladies' College with her "Words," and in America she dumbfounded the new world with her great orations. Back again in India she attended conferences and Congress Sessions. Everywhere she preached the "Word." Like the Goddess of Speech, *Vach,* Ramabai spoke the words of truth, and wrote and interpreted the message of God to the people of the world.

Miss Mary Lucia Fuller, one of her biographers and a close friend of Ramabai, writes: "Ramabai's own speech was famous for its purity, its vigor, its freshness and range. She was fascinating in conversation and a brilliant lecturer—very witty, and yet

[11] *Indian Ladies Magazine,* Vol. I, July 1901, p. 40

with a terrific swathelike earnestness. It is a pity that its originality and very idiom of her Marathi never found expression in her other stereotyped English. Brilliant is a word too much used these days to have much meaning, but Ramabai was really brilliant, and people would leave her lectures, saying, 'Ah, *that* was *Marathi*!' "[12]

4

Whilst in Calcutta, the Pandits requested Ramabai to teach her ignorant sisters something about the Hindu Dharma. She, therefore, started a series of lectures on the emancipation of women. She says: "I had to study the subject well before I could lecture on it; so I bought the books of the Hindu law published in Calcutta. Besides reading them I read other books which would help me in my work."[13]

Ramabai made so great an impression that a gathering of women headed by a Bengali leader, Ananda Mohan Bose, presented the young Pandita with an address which began: "Aryan lady, you are an ornament to this land of Bharata. You have demonstrated by your example, how greatly the minds of women may be adorned by higher learning. Hitherto the only instances we have had of the learning of modern women have been those of foreigners, but now that we have seen you this is no longer the case. . . . We have read and heard of the famous women of old times, and now we have seen in you their great qualities. Although your ability and learning are so outstanding, we see in you no trace of pride. On the contrary you appear to be the very embodiment of modesty, meekness, simplicity and goodness. We earnestly trust that henceforth as a result of the example you have shown of noble qualities and independence of spirit, our fellow countrymen will show a disposition to honour aright the women of this land and to give them respect. We must disabuse the men of our land of the idea that freedom can only be the possession of other lands than ours."[14]

The address was in Bengali and had to be translated into Sanskrit for Ramabai to understand it. She replied to it in Sanskrit:

[12] Mary L. B. Fuller, *The Triumph of an Indian Widow*, p. 58

[13] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 7

[14] D. G. Vaidya, *Pandita Ramabai*, p. 2. Quoted by N. Macnicol in *Pandita Ramabai*, Calcutta Association Press (Y.M.C.A.), pp. 43, 44

"Draupadi used to sit along with her father in full court. She used to urge Yudhishtir not to play dice. Shri Krishna used to sit in public assembly with his mother beside him. Thus it is evident that it was not the custom in those ancient days to seclude women. . . ."[15]

Thus did Pandita Ramabai plead with her sisters to abandon the evil practices of child marriage, to educate themselves and to do away with the wrongs meted out to women; but during Ramabai's earlier crusading campaign this plea was always based on the Scriptures and myths of old, for even the more courageous reformers among the men of the day and for many years to follow, had to refer to the sanctions granted in ancient India in order to advocate reforms in modern India. A fault much indulged in when India went through its transition period and even today was this constant looking back rather than forward. Pandita Ramabai realized she could only make her voice heard—a voice "that broke the silence of a thousand years," by referring back. Because Ramabai was so well versed in the Scriptures, she could aver with authority that in ancient India, evils, such as child marriage, were not practised and that the wrongs which women suffered had come about more with the abuse of time and a misunderstanding of the real spiritual words of ancient India, than because such treatment had ever been meted out to women. Her knowledge and eloquence, her tact and inspiration, always supported by the Hindu Dharma, won her the hearts of all who heard her. Soon, her own native province, Maharashtra, jealous of her learned daughter being recognized first in Bengal, is said to have invited Ramabai to Maharashtra, and it is believed that she consented to leave Bengal. But her plans were changed as she married a Bengali, Bepin Behari Das Medhavi, within two years of her arrival in Bengal.

Women flocked to Ramabai's meetings which she conducted in all parts of Bengal accompanied by her brother who also helped her in her work. She lectured in Sanskrit even though she is reputed to have known seven languages. That she could not have known Bengali at the time, however, is evident, for we are told that the address presented to her in Bengali by Ananda Mohan Bose had to be translated into Sanskrit and that she later answered in Sanskrit which her brother interpreted in Hindi. When Ramabai came to Calcutta therefore, she could not have known

[15] Macnicol, *Pandita Ramabai,* p. 45

Bengali, which she must have learnt later. Rev. Macnicol remarks: "These lectures were, of course, delivered in Sanskrit and the number of those who could listen to them with understanding must have been small. Probably when she spoke to women, her lectures were translated into Bengali."[16]

It must have been about this time that the young lecturers made a great impression in Bengal even among the British, for we come across Sir William Hunter's account of personally hearing one of these lectures in October 1880. He says: "Last October while I was writing these pages, an accomplished Brahmin lady was travelling through Bengal with her brother, holding public meetings on the education and emancipation of women. They were received everywhere with great enthusiasm, says an Indian correspondent, 'by the Hindus who were delighted to hear their holy Sanskrit from a woman's lips.' It seemed to them as if Saraswati (the goddess of eloquence) had come to visit them. Instead of a hot, confined room, we had a long broad terrace open to the sky, and with the Ganges flowing at our feet. The meeting was at half past four in the afternoon, by which time the terrace was shaded from the sun by trees and houses to the westward. At the Eastern end of the terrace was a small marble table, with a glass of flowers on it, and some chairs set, and there, Ramabai stood up, facing the West, and addressed the audience. On her right was the Ganges, covered with large broad-sailed boats of a type which had perhaps lasted two thousand years. There was little or nothing around to remind her or her audience of European civilization. The clear blue sky and the broad river coming sweeping down from the walls of Benaras dominated everything else. It was such a place as Buddha might have chosen for addressing his followers. This young lady is twenty-two years of age, the daughter of a Pandit and public official, slight and girlish looking, with a fair complexion and light grey eyes. She is now engaged to be married to a Bengali pleader, an M.A. of the Calcutta University."[17]

Sir William Hunter begins the above passage by saying: "European ideals are knocking at the door of the Zanana, and we hear confused cries from within, which seem to show that the death-

[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 33

[17] Sir W. W. Hunter, A Lady Lecturer in India, in *England's Work in India*, pp. 50, 51

like monotony of the female intelligence means the loss of one-half of its brain power to the nation."

As far as Ramabai was concerned, however, it is doubtful whether any "European ideas" knocked at her door at that time to champion the cause for Indian women. Her own eyes must have opened her to the terrible state of ignorance and degradation into which her country had fallen, and her father's struggles to educate her mother and sister and the great opposition he had to face must have awakened her to the whole situation, urging her to use her learning to help uplift her countrywomen. There are also two specific incidents before she came to Calcutta which had deeply saddened Ramabai.

One was when Ramabai's sympathies were aroused on behalf of a young wife. A man lived with his mother and his young wife of sixteen, in a part of her father's house when Ramabai herself was a child. The husband often used to beat his young wife and the poor girl's heart-rending cries filled Ramabai with indignation and left a lasting impression on her. This early experience she felt was a call to her to help Indian women.

The second instance also happened long before Ramabai came to Calcutta when she was about thirteen years of age. "I accompanied my mother and sister to a royal harem, where they had been invited to pay a visit. The prince had four wives, three of whom were childless. The eldest having been blessed with two sons, was, of course, the favourite of her husband, and her face beamed with happiness.

"We were shown into the nursery and the royal bed-chamber, where signs of peace and contentment were conspicuous. But oh! what a contrast to this brightness was presented in the apartments of the childless three. Their faces were sad and careworn; there seemed no hope for them in this world, since their lord was displeased with them, on account of their misfortune."[18]

There must have been many instances like the above which had awakened Ramabai early to a consciousness of the degrading position occupied by women. Western influence had done nothing at this time to create so zealous a reformer. Added to her early experiences were the persecutions meted out to her father, the "orthodox reformer," for educating his wife and daughters and of course there was the glaring example of her own elder

[18] Pandita Ramabai, *The Widows' Friend,* pp. 36. 37

sister, Krishnabai, who had met with a tragic fate just because Anant Shastri had conformed to the rules of orthodox Hinduism, and had married her early. We are told that "Anant Shastri failed in the case of Krishnabai and Shrinivas, both of whom were married as Hindu convention required." Krishnabai had not been happy as a child-wife, and Anant Shastri had determined that Ramabai should not be sacrificed on the same altar of dogmatic custom. Ramabai's own words concerning her father who used to warn his orthodox antagonists are revealing: "I am in no way under any obligations to any one. And I shall not tolerate any interference when I do and proclaim what is right and what is wrong. I respect only God and shall not bow down before any one in the community. Those that wish to keep any relations with me, may do so or may not."[19]

Ramabai and her brother Shrinivas were still most orthodox Hindus in all ways, and completely foreign to the precepts of Western influence. They started their lectures even before coming to Calcutta, and continued them in the very stronghold of orthodox learning in Calcutta. They had hitherto never mixed with the modern set, and Ramabai's remarks testify to her own orthodox upbringing.

"We stayed in Calcutta for about a year and became acquainted with the learned Brahmins," she writes. "Here my brother and I were once invited to attend a Christian social gathering. We did not know what it was, for we had never come in contact with either the Hindu reformers or with Christians before that time. We were advised by our Brahmin acquaintances to accept this invitation. So we went to the Christian people's gathering for the first time in our life. We saw many people gathered there who received us very kindly. There were chairs and sofas, tables, lamps, all very new to us. Indian people curiously dressed like English men and women, whose names sounded like those of Brahmins but whose way of dressing showed that they had become 'sahibs' were great curiosities. They ate bread and biscuits and drank tea with the English people and shocked us by asking us to partake of the refreshments. We thought the last age of Kali Yuga, i.e. the age of quarrels, darkness and irreligion had fully established its reign in Calcutta since some of the Brahmins were so irreligious as to eat food with the English."

[19] *Subodh Patrika*, 20 August, 1882

Ramabai and her brother looked on the proceedings with great curiosity, not understanding anything. Some one read the Bible, and then they knelt before their chairs and prayed. Ramabai was surprised that they did not do any *Puja* to idols, and she wondered if they were paying homage to the chairs before which they knelt.

The Christians were very kind to her and her brother and gave them a copy of the Holy Bible in Sanskrit. Two of the august company in which Ramabai found herself had actually translated the Bible. "Grand old men", they were and the fact that Ramabai spent her last years in translating the Bible from Hebrew into Marathi may have had its remote inspiration from meeting these 'grand old' Christians in Bengal. "They must have prayed for my conversion" says Ramabai. "I liked the outward appearance of the Book and tried to read it, but did not understand. The language was so different from the Sanskrit literature of the Hindus, the teachings so different that I thought it quite a waste of time to read that book; but I have never parted from it since then."[20]

Ramabai had little contact, therefore, with Western influence when she started lecturing to justify Sir W. W. Hunter's indirect reference to her progressive ideas being caused by "European ideas knocking at the door of the Zenanas."

Ramabai's earnestness and enthusiasm gained her many admirers, among whom was Dr. W. W. Hunter, prominently connected with the British educational interests of India. He thought Ramabai's career and the good she was doing so well worthy of admiration that he made her the subject of a lecture delivered in Edinburgh.

"When I spoke," says Dr. Hunter, "of a high-caste Indian lady being thus employed, that great English audience rose as one man and applauded the efforts which the Pandita Ramabai was making on behalf of her countrywomen. Henceforth, her name was well-known in England as well as in India, to all who were interested in the social amelioration of the people of Hindusthan."

One is reminded of Christ's reference to a gentle widow who was chosen as an instrument of God: "But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land.

[20] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, pp. 6, 7

"But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow."[21]

5

Pandita Ramabai's desire to serve her country and ameliorate the position of Indian women became nothing short of an obsession. She beseeched women not to fall victims to the evils introduced by an autocratic and orthodox priesthood. Her interest naturally did not stop with lectures. She made a close study of the lives of women in Bengal and moved intimately with them. Their sad conditions greatly moved her. It must be remembered that a century ago, the various reforms for the raising of women's status had not yet come into force. Due to early reformers and to women like Ramabai, conditions improved. When India became free in 1947 the freedom of women also became a *must* and now women's status in India is among the highest in the world.

Ramabai seems also to have studied the customs of Kulin Brahmins[22] in Bengal and their habit of marrying many girls merely, to give a higher status to the family into which they had married.

[21] The Gospel according to St. Luke (Authorized Version), Ch. 4: 25-27

[22] "The Kulin Brahmins of Bengal claim themselves to be one of the purest of the caste. They are believed to have come from Kanauj at the request of Adhisura, King of Bengal, in the 9th century A.D. and settled down in his kingdom. Originally only five families came; these increased and multiplied, and gradually tendencies set in which began to affect the purity and morals of the community. Bellala Sena, therefore, the King of Bengal, (11th century A.D.) made a rigorous selection and declared those in whom he found the nine noble qualities to be Kulins or high born. The nine noble qualities are: 'Observance of Brahmanical *Achara* (duties), meekness, learning, good report, a disposition to visit holy places, devoutness, asceticism, liberality and observance of marriage among equals.' The Kulins being blue-blooded, Brahmins of inferior purity vie with one another in giving their daughters in marriage to a Kulin. The Kulins make a trade of marriage and are willing to marry any Brahmin woman of any sub-caste on payment of a dowry. The wife lives in her parent's house and the husband very rarely visits her, and in some cases never. Education and enlightenment are improving matters. The inferior class of Brahmins do not, at present, consider it, a very great privilege to form connections with the Kulins. The Kulins themselves are now alive to the degradation of the system." P. Thomas, *Hindu Religion, Manners and Customs*, p. 15

Her close study of the prevailing conditions seems to have made Ramabai extremely bitter and perhaps, even a little too harsh. To be born a woman, according to Ramabai, was the result of Karma. There was no redemption for women anywhere, and this aspect she brings out again and again in her later writings and speeches. The only hope of being liberated from Karma with which a woman from her birth is saddled and from its dire consequences for which she had lived through "countless millions of births and deaths and untold suffering, was the worship of her husband. The husband is said to be the woman's god; there is no other god for her. This god may be the worst sinner and a great criminal; still *He is Her God,* and she must worship him. She can have no hope of getting into Svarga, the abode of the gods, without his pleasure, and if she pleases him in all things, she will have the privilege of going to Svarga as his slave. . . ."[23]

An account of a conversation in Sanskrit between Ramabai and the reformer Raja Sir Basudeb Sudbal Deb, K.C.I.E., whom she met many years later is recorded in an Oriya weekly:

Question: The Raja: "The Hindu religion came into existence from the lotus-like mouth of god, the Lord of the Universe and Goddess of Wealth. This religion is like a sea of ambrosia which is full of high works. It gives happiness to human beings. Being born of a famous and noble descent, why did you embrace an apostasy and leave the pure and spotless Hindu religion?"

Answer: Pandita Ramabai: "The religion that I follow is not an apostasy. Truly speaking, the relation of god and the soul is a religion. It is obtained by the study of the Vedas. Women and Sudras are deprived of the right of learning the Vedas. According to the Hindu religion, the husband is regarded as a god for the wife. It engages the woman in a mean work like the worship of a man. Realization of god is impossible by it. Having considered these things it is better to give up the Hindu religion."[24]

[23] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 8

[24] Sambalpur Hitaishina (Patriot) of 9 April, 1890 and also "Sir Basudeb Jibani" p. 137 by Sir Chandi Charan Bandhopadhyay, in Bengali

This interesting conversation took place at the Sharada Sadan when the learned Raja visited Bombay and was anxious to meet "one of the great daughters of India." His son, Mr. B. N. Singh Deo, writes in a letter: "It appears my father had some other talks also, but unfortunately they are not given in his 'Jibani'."[25]

Ramabai seems to have been much troubled with the Hindu belief that women, no matter how virtuous, could not attain *Moksha*. It was this prevalent belief which had led poor young widows to immolate themselves with their husbands on their expiry. This, they were made to believe, gave them a ticket straight to heaven with their husbands. During Ramabai's time this custom had ceased, thanks to Raja Ram Mohan Roy, but the belief prevailed among the orthodox that women could not achieve salvation unless they attained extreme virtue after undergoing many ordeals. Ramabai points out that "no law has ever said so, but the popular belief is that a woman can have no salvation unless she be formally married."[26] She was aware, then, that being unmarried herself, she would probably never attain *Moksha*, but she had overcome her superstition sufficiently to discard this belief.

Ramabai says that though women were allowed to enter a higher existence to a certain extent only; they were not allowed to attain *Moksha* and complete liberation. "She must perform such great religious acts as will obtain for her merit by which she will be re-incarnated as a high caste man, in order to study the Vedas and the Vedanta, and thereby get the knowledge of the true Brahmana and be amalgamated in it."[27] Later, in her books and speeches, Ramabai fully explains the position of women in Hinduism during her time and in comparison with the Hindu scriptures. But in Bengal and Assam, her lectures on the emancipation of women brought out the point of view that the position of women in ancient India was really high, and that it was up to the women of her time to free themselves from the shackles imposed on them by rules drawn up later to protect women against the Moslem invaders who had begun to rule India from the 10th century A.D.

[25] Letter to the author from B. N. Singh Deo dated 11 March, 1962
[26] Pandita Ramabai, *The Widows' Friend*, p. 49
[27] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 8

6

Ramabai's arrival in Calcutta in 1878 caused a tremendous stir because the great-hearted reformers of the time, some of them belonging to the Brahmo-Samaj, known as Theists, and other leaders of the Hindu community, had never before seen so astounding a phenomenon. She was a young unmarried Brahmin girl, beautiful and obsessed with the idea of service. She was brilliant. They were overjoyed to see such a unique person who so well understood the problems of the age. Ramabai's Sanskrit delighted them, but Ramabai herself had not yet broken the rules of orthodox Hinduism to such an extent that she dared read the Vedas or the Shritis. though she had a great knowledge of the Smritis. Like her father she was still only an *orthodox* reformer—a protestant Hindu. But both Anant Shastri and she had broken the law—the former in teaching his wife and daughter Sanskrit, and the latter in remaining unmarried. But beyond this they had not ventured.

One of the first scholar-reformers to take Ramabai under his wing was the great Brahmo Samaj leader and inaugurator of the New Dispensation, or Naba Bidhan, Keshab Chunder Sen. Ramabai and her brother were invited to Keshab Chunder Sen's house. He received them with great courtesy and kindness and introduced her to his family. Ramabai was glad of the friendship of the reformer and says: "He and his family showed great kindness to me, and when parting he gave a copy of one of the Vedas. He asked if I had studied the Vedas. I answered in the negative, and said that women were not fit to read the Vedas and they were not allowed to do so. It would be breaking the rules of the religion if I were to study the Vedas. He could not but smile at my declaration of this Hindu doctrine. He said nothing in reply, but advised me to study the Vedas and Upanishads.

New thoughts now awoke in Ramabai's heart: why should she not study the Vedas and Vedanta? "Soon I persuaded myself into the belief that it was not wrong for a woman to read the Vedas."[28] But the rich religious literature must have awakened in Ramabai the longing for a spiritual life which she could not satisfy.

There is no doubt that the Brahmo Theistic concept of life much appealed to Ramabai at this time. Its justice, its desire to

[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 11

do away with dogmatic ideas and its tolerance towards all teachings of truth and religious attitudes stirred the longing in the young girl to find a suitable religion to satisfy her soul. At the same time, it did not give her the personal god she so greatly needed.

The Brahmo religion and Keshab Chunder Sen's advice enabled Ramabai to study the Vedas. It freed her to a great extent from the shackles to which women had been subjected. This problem had long worried her, for she was a lover of individual freedom and believed in the equality of all human beings. That there was one rule for men, and another for women greatly disturbed her.

At this time Keshab Chunder was himself nearing his end, for he died in 1884; but his teachings must have had their influence in forming Ramabai's character. His belief never to be enslaved was strongly influencing thought in Bengal as also his hatred of "sectional religion" which could not satisfy him. He says: "Detatched sentiments I indulged in at former times. But I have now tied up a great nosegay of all truths in my soul."[29] Strange to say, it was this very nosegay which did not satisfy Ramabai. She says: "I became quite dissatisfied with myself. I wanted something more than the Shastras could give me, but I did not know what it was that I wanted."[30] The Brahmo religion was too broad-based for a woman who yearned for something fundamental, some God to love, and a spiritual idea that she could follow.

Thus, then, even as she moved in the circle of reformers in Bengal and was hailed as the Goddess of Learning by them—even though the head of the tolerant modern community, Maharaja Sir Jotindra Mohan Tagore befriended her, and Ananda Mohan Bose, another Bengali leader belonging to the Shadaran Brahmo Samaj presented her with an address and distinguished scholars honoured her, Ramabai was unhappy. She sought her God—she desired "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding."

Later, long after Ramabai had embraced Christianity, and had written her book *The High Caste Hindu Woman,* while in America, she was classed with the great reformers of the day. The London *Athenaeum* reviewing *The High Caste Hindu Woman* stated: "The new institution (Sharada Sadan, opened 11 March, 1889) has, we understand, received the support of two of the most distin-

[29] Mozoomdar, *Life and Teachings of Keshab Chunder Sen,* pp. 34, 35
[30] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony,* p. 10

guished scholars of India, Ramakrishna Bhandarkar and Kasenath Telang. After all the most telling argument for the scheme is the story of Ramabai's life, spent, as it has been, in the face of severe trials. We are glad to note that at the recent Oriental Congress at Christiana the Pandita's name was selected by Professor Max Mueller in his published address to be placed with those of Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chunder Sen and Nilakant Tagore as representatives of modern Indian progress."[31]

Wherever she went, Ramabai was respected and honoured for her scholarship. As the great educationist Miss Dorothea Beale, Principal of the Ladies College, Cheltenham, said of her in a letter: "Ramabai is very learned and thoughtful, and says how powerless most missionaries are, for want of the knowledge of native philosophy and religion. . . . I thought that the native religions were feeling the higher life, but it seems not now; but the state is much the same as in Greece and Rome just before the Christian era. She spoke much as Plato does in the Republic about the character of the gods in Indian poetry, and felt the wonderful power of the perfect example, and the inward grace to follow it."[32]

On her return from abroad in 1889, one of her countrymen paid her this great tribute: "Pandita Ramabai combines in herself what even in the men of India is a rare combination; a deep knowledge of the Hindu Shastras and an intimate acquaintance with the inner life, thought and speech of the most advanced and civilized nations of the West. For several centuries a lady sanyasi so learned and so devoted to the elevation of her sex has not appeared on the stage of Indian life."[33]

7

Ramabai was imbued with a thirst to delve deeper and deeper into the intricacies of the Sanskrit language from earliest childhood. She is known as *Ashta Pailu* among the Maharashtrians, or the eight-sided diamond which throws its lustre over the world. Among the eight rays of radiant light were the Pandita's desire to

[31] Clementina Butler, *Pandita Ramabai Saraswati,* p. 26

[32] Elizabeth Raikes, *Dorothea Beale of Cheltenham,* 1909 3rd ed., pp. 300-301

[33] Pandita Ramabai, *High Caste Hindu Woman,* New ed., p. 14

make Devanagari the common script for India and Hindi the Rashtra Bhasha. She was long aware that Sanskrit could not be the common language, and like Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak and later Mahatma Gandhi, she advocated Hindi as the common tongue. Sanskrit would only suit the intellectual and the spiritual; but the introduction of the Devanagari script as the common script for all India, if it had been adopted at the time, and her wish to make Hindi the common language had been adopted, the great difficulty of solving the language problem today would not perhaps have arisen. Pandita Ramabai was among the first to declare openly that Hindi should be the Rashtra Bhasha of India.[34] When Ramabai was in Calcutta, and at the time when she was given the title of Saraswati, she was anxious to sponsor the teaching of Sanskrit among the more educated. She felt its study was being sadly neglected. In a beautiful Ode written to the Oriental Congress at Berlin,[35] held in September 1881, Pandita Ramabai says: "O men of knowledge, the Sanskrit language is at the present day like an aged mother shorn of her beauty and bereft of her ornaments. For a long time alas, she has remained unhonoured, and now flees to you well-disposed scholars for protection. In the sharpness of her grief she laments with a heart-rending cry of pain. Listen attentively, that her feeble cry of suffering, may enter your ears." Ramabai goes on to make Sanskrit speak in the first person in her poem. Everything had its ups and downs. Sanskrit was once the favourite wife with many prosperous men, and surpassing all, was the "honoured most beautiful woman in the world." At one time, Sanskrit was honoured by one and all, "And now alas! in my once joyous abode, glittering with the tokens of their unbounded erudition, mere fragments are left scattered as sad examples around me. Where are now these my Sons who were my glory? Where my countless friends?"

The Pandita's similes are so drawn that she compared the lost cause of Sanskrit all the time with that of the suffering of the women of her day, with the mourning of widows or the sad pinched faces of child-wives. "And where are those evil-minded ones who of their own accord take counsel together that they may

[34] Pandita Ramabai, "Peoples of the United States"

[35] Pandita Ramabai, *Sanskrit Ode*. This ode was sent by Ramabai from Silchar and translated by Monier Williams

bring me to nothing? Can any other thing be more painful than this?"

She bemoaned the replacement by scholars of Nagari characters by Roman letters. "In former days, the land of Bharata was the producer of noble sons and heroic offspring; like jewels she was exalted above all; her slightest look of displeasure moved the whole globe, her glorious fame illuminated the whole universe; and the three worlds were fascinated by the greatness of those noble children, and thrilled by the glory of their victories, and the universe charmed as it were by the spell of their example, followed in their path like a shadow." She cited Valmiki, Vyasa (Krishna) and others, and also devoted wives like Sita. She compared the India of her day with the glorious lost fame of ancient times and sang: "Now, to her ineffaceable disgrace, she brings forth sons like charcoal, whose actions cast a dark blot upon the Aryan race, who follow the ways of foreigners, and lay the axe to the root of their own tree of knowledge."

In her Ode, Ramabai says: "Such is the piteous cry uttered by the Mother of Learning. Yet alas! how grievous, how disgraceful, how surprising is it that it penetrated not the ears of the Indian people! Why then, should her voice be rendered hoarse with useless lamentation before such a people—a people long ground down by slavery, bereft of power, energy and intellect, and little better than breathing corpses?

"If you noble-minded men assembled this day in Congress, will look with favour on the miserable condition of the Sanskrit language and restore her by your efforts to her former exalted position, the people of India will be ever grateful to you. We will ever sing the praises of your noble qualities, and offer up prayers to the Father of the Universe for your prosperity as long as our hearts throb with life."

That Ramabai even at the early age of twenty-two was a Sanskrit scholar of some eminence is not only established by the Pandits who conferred on her the title of "Saraswati" two years earlier, but also by such an eminent scholar as Professor Monier Williams who, in a note to the Sanskrit Ode, says: "The young lady Ramabai (author of the above Ode) has recently attracted much attention in Indian society. She is described as a slight, girlish-looking woman of fair complexion, about twenty-two years of age. Her family lived in Mysore, and her brother was a Pandit in the ser-

vice of the Gaekwar of Baroda. In the hope of ameliorating the condition of their country-women, the brother and sister travelled together through Bengal and Assam, delivering lectures on female education to crowded audiences. Unfortunately their further co-operation in this good work was cut short by the brother's death. Since the occurrence of that event Ramabai had married a Bengali gentleman—a vakil by profession, and M.A. of Calcutta University. She is said to speak Sanskrit fluently, and to be able to repeat the whole Bhagavata Purana by heart. What has gained her the greatest reputation for learning had been her power of improvising Sanskrit verses. On the third day of the Oriental Congress at Berlin, I received a Sanskrit letter from her enclosing the above metrical address, and asking me to lay it before the Congress. This I did, and the original Sanskrit was read, with the proper metrical intonation by Pandit Shyamaji Krishnavarma,[36] before a large meeting of members of the Aryan section, held in the Hall of the University. Much interest was naturally excited in the minds of those present, by the unusual phenomenon of a lady Pandit capable of writing such good Sanskrit poetry.

"It would be scarcely fair to criticize the young lady's Sanskrit scholarship too severely. Here and there the inadvertencies are obvious, though the greater part of the composition is unexceptionable. In few cases where the exigencies of the metre which is *Vaitaliya* as far as verse 14, and after that Jagati—have prevented my making the necessary corrections. I have indicated the inaccuracies by the word *sic*. Nor will the original bear too literal a translation, the construction being now and then intricate and obscure. Still I trust my version, though free, will in all cases give a fairly correct idea of the meaning.

"After all, the inaccuracies and obscurities are not greater than those in the other two Sanskrit addresses presented to the Congress, and the verses of Ramabai are, in my opinion, by far the best in point of poetical merit."[37]

Sir Monier Williams also mentions Ramabai in an address given by him at the Anniversary meeting of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society, held in Princess' Hall, Piccadilly, on 6 May, 1887. "Quite recently, too, we have had the case of the Lady Pandita Ramabai, a lady remarkable for her Sanskrit learn-

[36] Of Balliol College, Oxford

[37] Note to *A Sanskrit Ode* by Monier Williams, Oxford, 1881

ing and linguistic attainments. The history of her case is instructive as showing that what is wanted in India is not too much learning and over-instruction for her women, but rather co-ordinated education for men and women."[38]

[38] *Holy Bible and the Sacred Books of the East,* 1900

II

Parents

1

ANANT Shastri Dongre, Ramabai's father, was born in 1796,[1] at a time when India was steeped in orthodoxy, when the East India Company apart from striving to rule India did nothing to alleviate the ignorance and superstitions of the people, and when the Brahmins except as intellectual heads and the privileged twice-born race, encouraged ritualistic worship and orthodox dogmatism.

Anant Shastri from earliest years, possessed an insatiable thirst for knowledge, and a devotion to his religion which can only be found in the bhakti school of medieval times. To this school belonged Mira Bai and other great devotees of Krishna. The *Bhakti Marga* is a path of devotion which denies the self completely, and strives for a union with God. This sect of devotees surrendered all their affection to God with passionate adoration. Anant Shastri

[1] In *The Triumph of an Indian Widow* by Mary Lucia Bierce Fuller, the date of Anant Shastri Dongre's birth is given as 1786; but since Miss Fuller herself says later that Anant Shastri died at the age of 78 in 1874, he must have been born in 1796, and perhaps the date 1786 is a misprint

from childhood belonged to this school, comprising generally Madhva Vaishnavites. Most Bhaktas were deeply intellectual, and Anant Shastri wanted to quench his thirst at the fountain of learning. He was well-to-do, and married when only 12 years old to Yamunabai. His thirst for knowledge was so great that he left his home quietly and lived with a guru—a Master of Sanskrit—in Shri Shankaracharya's monastery at Shringeri. Here he became a Sanskrit scholar. He was then, when still quite young, attracted by the fame of Ramachandra Shastri, a distinguished scholar of Poona. Thither Anant Shastri made his way in 1814 from his native village of Malherambi at the foot of the Western Ghats in Mangalore District. Ramachandra Shastri was employed at the time by no less a personage than the reigning Peshwa, Baji Rao II, the last of the Peshwas, who was overthrown in 1818. It was the end of one epoch and the beginning of another. The years 1813 to 1856, however, were ones of progress and reform, even though the East India Company did little for the real advancement of the people. The impressionable years when Anant Shastri drank deep of knowledge were years when William Carey, David Hare and liberal-minded reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy were laying the foundation stones for progressive education in India. Ram Mohan Roy's reform movement and his interest in the uplift of women especially must have reached the ears of the young enthusiastic Brahmin student, Anant Shastri.

When he became Ramachandra Shastri's pupil, he was admitted freely into the royal court of the Peshwas in Poona, and he was astounded to find that his revered *guru* was actually engaged in teaching a woman the sacred language, an unprecedented procedure. Varanasi Bai, Baji Rao's wife, was a talented woman. She was quick to learn Sanskrit and recite *slokams* in her rich young feminine voice which Anant Shastri often listened to with delight. A longing came to him to teach his own young wife Sanskrit and to overcome the existing religious prejudices against women learning the language. He determined not only to become a Sanskrit scholar, but to teach it to his wife. His first wife, Yamunabai, refused to comply with his request, and he was forbidden by his family to attempt such a reform; but Anant Shastri had been deeply influenced by his *guru* and by Varanasi Bai. Here was great scholarship, and here was a woman, a princess learning at the feet of a *guru*. Never had women been encouraged

since ancient times when they had aspired to knowledge and understanding, on a par with the great philosophers of old, to learn so much as the royal princess at the time was imbibing. Addressing a large public meeting held in Bombay to celebrate Pandita Ramabai's birth centenary in 1958, Miss Mary L. B. Fuller rightly remarked that the people of Maharashtra should proudly remember that the foundation of women's education was first laid by Baji Rao II. Pandita Ramabai says in her book *Voyage to England,* that this Baji Rao was her maternal uncle. This same royal family, it is suggested, may have been related to the Rani of Jhansi who, therefore, may have been distantly related to Ramabai.

Anant's student life ended about 1819, when he went home after being bestowed the title of "Shastri" by his revered teacher, Ramachandra Shastri. This break-up of student-teacher relationship actually occurred when the Peshwas were overthrown by the British about 1818, and the Maratha ruler retired to Brahmavarta in North India. The Peshwa was followed by Ramachandra Shastri, and before he departed from Western India, he honoured his pupil Anant with the title of "Shastri."

Anant Shastri now went to his home in Mangalore and very soon left it again to join the learned staff of the Mysore Maharaja on the occasion of the Durbar. Anant Shastri served the Mysore State for about ten years, leaving it in the early thirties, for a further pilgrimage. Earlier the Mysore Maharaja, Krishnaraj Wadiar, had bestowed Rs. 25,000 as a gift on Anant Shastri. When he finally left Mysore he was showered with more bounty from his royal patron, but by now his father had incurred many debts in his village home, and Anant Shastri settled the whole amount, and took his whole family away on a pilgrimage. A rich entourage which accompanied him, consisting of a retinue of about 60 people in all. Those were days of wealth and prodigality, even though the pilgrimage was saddened by the death of Anant Shastri's first wife, Yamunabai. When the pilgrims reached Kashi, Anant Shastri sent his family back and continued to visit sacred places. He wandered far and wide, no longer rich, for he had, by now, spent most of the wealth he had amassed in Mysore. When he reached Nepal, however, he again received the royal patronage of the King, who is said to have presented him with much wealth and elephants. Ramabai even remarks that her father was at one time presented with Rs.

75,000.[2] Anant Shastri was, therefore, by no means a poor man. He was honoured as a great philosopher wherever he travelled, and one is reminded of the court of King Janaka and the concourse of great philosophers as described in the *Chandogya Upanishad*. The picture Anant Shastri presented at this time was that of a man of great learning, a devout Brahmin, but a Hindu protestant and reformer wishing to lead women to the freedom of learning, a Bhakta and a Madhva Vaishnavite. Being a reformer, Anant Shastri must have looked on with sorrow at the many instances of wrongs meted out to women, which he must have come across during his travels. Sad cases of child marriages and even suttee must have met his eye, for it was not till 1829 that the law against immolation of widows was passed by Lord Bentinck due to the efforts made by Raja Ram Mohan Roy to abolish this cruel custom. Even then, due to the agitation against the reform by the orthodox, the Act was not fully implemented for another fifteen or twenty years. In his wanderings by mighty flowing rivers and his sojourns at the courts of kings and scholars, Anant Shastri must have not only seen but discussed deeply with other scholars the sad position of women. And all the time he must have cherished in his mind the desire to inaugurate a reform movement and to raise the standards of women.

Still in the prime of life, he was returning home after a long pilgrimage, when he stopped at Peithan, a sacred place at the time, on the banks of the Godavari. It was here that he met his future wife, the mother of Ramabai.

Lakshmibai was a girl of nine, who with her father and mother and younger sister were on pilgrimage to Kashi. They had camped on the banks of the sacred Godavari river, and Lakshmibai's father noticed a handsome man—he was Anant Shastri—and enquired about his caste and other matters. Lakshmibai was then offered to him as a bride by her father, Madhavrao Abhyankar. Anant Shastri accepted the offer.

The scene is described by Ramabai in *The High Caste Hindu Woman* as follows: "It not unfrequently happens that fathers give away their daughters in marriage to strangers, without exercising care and making inquiries concerning the suitor's character and social position. It is enough to learn from the man's own statement his caste and clan and locality of his home. I know of a

[2] Macnicol, *Pandita Ramabai*, p. 10

most extraordinary marriage that took place in the following manner: The father was on a religious pilgrimage with his family, which consisted of his wife and two daughters, one nine and the other seven years of age, and they had stopped in a town to take rest for a day or two. One morning the father was bathing in the sacred river Godavari, near the town, when he saw a fine looking man coming to bathe there also. After the ablution and the morning prayer was over, the father inquired of the stranger who he was, and whence he came; on learning his caste and clan and dwelling place, also that he was a widower, the father offered him his little daughter of nine in marriage. All things were settled in an hour or so. Next day the marriage was concluded, and the little girl placed in the possession of the stranger, who took her nearly nine hundred miles away from her home. The father left the place the day after the marriage without the daughter, and pursued his pilgrimage with a light heart; fortunately the little girl had fallen in good hands, and was well and tenderly cared far beyond expectation, but the conduct of her father, who cared so little to ascertain his daughter's fate, is none the less censurable."[3]

Though Ramabai did not choose to disclose the names, it is the conduct of her own maternal grandfather which she censured. The disparity in ages never seemed to have occurred to him, who gave away his daughter no older than nine to a widower of over forty. Neither was Lakshmibai consulted. Anant Shastri returned home with his child wife and this time he was determined to educate her, no matter what the opposition.

His immediate task, after his arduous journey was to hand over his bride to his mother but to stipulate with her that he would teach her to read and write and learn the scriptures.

2

It was fortunate that Anant Shastri was a good, just and kind man, imbued with two desires—to serve God and to educate his little wife just as Baji Rao II had instructed Pandit Ramachandra Shastri to teach his young and beautiful wife. Anant Shastri was 44 when he reached his home in the village Malherambi at the foot of the Western Ghats in Mangalore District together with

[3] Pandita Ramabai, *The Widows' Friend*, pp. 51, 52

his little wife. He was determined this time to carry out his great ambition, and he rejoiced that Lakshmibai did not object to being taught Sanskrit. His mother also, seeing possibly the eagerness of her son to educate his child-bride, waived her objections. But a Hindu family does not consist merely of a mother and wife, and Anant Shastri had to overcome the objections of many relations. They were adamant in keeping women away from books. Just as they had exclaimed, "he will be wanting to teach a Primer to the chickens next,"[4] they now raised countless objections; but Anant Shastri was not to be daunted in his wishes. He surprised one and all by suddenly announcing his desire to leave his native home and carry his wife into the solitude of the forest. He seems to have left behind him also his children by his first wife.

And so he ventured forth, a true scholar, determined to pass his fund of philosophical knowledge onto a mere girl. He chose the forest of Gangamul, about 4,000 feet above sea level, as his retreat in the heart of the Western Ghats. It is ten miles from Karkal, the renowned Jain centre in Mysore State, and 30 miles from Mangalore. Gangamul means the origin of a river. Three rivers, the Tunga, the Bhadra and the Netravati, have their source in this forest. The place was considered holy and had always attracted pilgrims.

According to some, Anant Shastri did not come to Gangamul forest till 1851-52 after the birth of his daughter Krishnabai in 1848 and his son Shrinivas in 1850. According to others, Anant Shastri left his village home in Malherambi much earlier, for we are told again and again by biographers that his children were all born in the Gangamul forest. "He was driven forth into the wilderness as Rama had been in ancient days. Taking his wife with him he betook himself to a romantic spot in the Gangamul forest where three rivers had their sources, and there, amidst the loneliness and the beauty of nature, where the prejudices of man could not thwart him, this resolute man made his abode."[5] The forest where three rivers had their sources, and there, amidst the lates that in order to be away from the toil and turmoil of the world, Anant Shastri, though a native of Mangalore, retired to a dense forest on one of the peaks of the Western Ghats in Mysore.

[4] Jennie Chappell, *Pandita Ramabai,* p. 8
[5] Macnicol, *Pandita Ramabai,* pp. 7, 8

Here he built a rustic home and started an educational institution and worshipped God.

His rice fields and coconut plantation supported him, and as the place he had chosen for his home was sacred, many pilgrims sought his hospitality, and he spent his money lavishly on them. He stayed in Gangamul for nearly thirteen years until he lost all his money in serving others. He was a most generous and kind man.

At last he had to leave his forest retreat and become a pilgrim. Ramabai was only six months at this time. She writes that her mother placed her in a big box made of cane, and a man carried it on his head from the mountain top to the valley. "Thus my pilgrim life began when I was a baby. I was the youngest of the family."[6] This makes it 1858 October when they left Gangamul. On the other hand we have the assertion that, "the popularity of the Shastri as teacher, and his sacred locality in the wilderness, had involved him in debt—for guests must be fed, and duties enjoined by religion performed, at whatever pecuniary loss. The half of his landed property in his native village, which was to be the portion of the son by the second wife was, with the son's consent, sold to discharge the debts; and then, the family, homeless, set out upon pilgrimages. It is difficult for the reader, with whom the word home is inseparable from family existence, to realize that this Hindu family was thus employed seven years, Ramabai being nine years of age when they set out."[7]

Biographers of the life of Ramabai may, however, feel that Anant Shastri left Gangamul when Ramabai was still a babe in arms, and started his wanderings, carrying her in a basket.

In all probability, all Anant Shastri's children by Lakshmibai were born in Gangamul for we are told that he took her there very soon after his marriage when Lakshmibai was still a bride. The first night was spent as follows in the forest: "A great tiger came with the darkness and from across a ravine made the night hideous with its cry. The little bride wrapped herself up tight in her *pasodi* (cotton quilt), and lay upon the ground convulsed with terror, while the husband kept watch until day-break, when the hungry beast disappeared. The wild animals of the jungle

[6] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 1
[7] *The Widows' Friend*, pp. 5, 6

were all about them and hourly terrified the lonely little girl."[8] They spent one night in the open, for the next day, Anant Shastri and his little wife constructed a rude hut by breaking off branches from the forest trees, and soon they settled down to form a Sanskrit School and centre of pilgrimage. Anant Shastri also rigorously and freely enjoyed the task of teaching his wife. After some years children were born to the devout couple. Pandita Ramabai herself writes in her own story that during the 12½ years of her father's stay at Gangamul, "six of us, brothers and sisters, were born."[9] Three of them died and three survived. The eldest daughter, Tungabhadra, was later known as Krishnabai. The second son, Narayan alias Shrinivas and Ramabai, the youngest, were the three surviving children.

Anant Shastri therefore settled down in Gangamul forest on a picturesque plateau. About one square mile was cleared of the jungle and cottages sprang up in which the learned Shastri and his disciple-students lived; for he established his hermit school or *Chatuspathi,* and if the place was well-known before his arrival it certainly became far more famous afterwards, and is now renowned as the birth-place of Pandita Ramabai Saraswati. In due course, Anant Shastri's establishment consisted of over a hundred heads of cattle, a number of family members, for his relatives followed him to his retreat, servants and students. Lakshmibai tended a garden in which grew fruits, flowers and vegetables. This settlement could be traced till 1882 according to Pandita Ramabai; but today there is a mere roofless stone house, the relic of Anant Shastri's forest home, with the idol which they worshipped still intact.

3

When Ramabai was born on 23 April, 1858, in the forest, a child came into the earth who later fought through grief, poverty, utter loneliness and the many injustices of this world to find God in Jesus Christ. If ever a woman of India reached a stage of near-perfection, it was Pandita Ramabai. Perhaps, she had ever ringing in her ears the words of Christ, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." She was called "The Goddess of

[8] *Ibid.,* p. 4

[9] *Subodh-Patrika,* 17 September, 1882

Light, an unconscious prophecy of her future life, for truly Ramabai became a light to those who for ages had sat in impenetrable gloom."[10]

In many respects, 1858 was a historic year. In that year British India was reshaped and consolidated. The haphazard Government of the East India Company was replaced by that of the British Crown. With the echoes of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 still ringing in the air, India came directly under the rule of Queen Victoria. The Queen Empress's proclamation on 1 November 1858, declared that the "prosperity" of the people of India will be the strength of the rulers, and their "contentment" and "gratitude" the best reward of the British. Lord Canning, the first Viceroy, had already announced that he "will not govern in anger." "Justice and that as stern, inflexible as law and might can make it, I will deal out," were his words. But the spirit of rebellion, raising in voice of protest against the existing evils did not die even after the Mutiny was crushed, and in 1858 two great protesters against the wrongs of women were born. They were Dhondo Keshav Karve and Ramabai. Both saw the light of day within 5 days of each other, and both lived to devote their days to the amelioration of women. Before the birth of these two reformers great men had already paved the way. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Pandit Vidyasagar and Keshab Chunder Sen had awakened India from the sleep of centuries and during Ramabai's time, the mighty leaders of the Prarthana, Brahmo and Arya Samaj—Gokhale, Ranade, Bhandarkar, Tilak, Chandavarkar, Dayanand Saraswati and countless others—showed India the path of enlightenment. They were the backbone of present-day India, and among them shone, one solitary woman, the pioneer reformer and mother of modern India, as she might rightly be called even as Raja Ram Mohan Roy was, the father.

A remarkable historic event which foreshadowed the coming greatness of women was the leadership of the Rani of Jhansi who met so tragic a death in the defence of her country. Toru Dutt, the young Bengali poetess who wrote exquisite poetry in English was also of the times.

The year 1858 was an important one in the missionary world in Western India—a world in which Pandita Ramabai later played so important a part. In this year Bishop Harding conse-

[10] Jennie Chappell, *Pandita Ramabai*, p. 10

crated the Church at Colaba, and the next year St. Peter's Church in Mazagaon was opened. The Jesuit Fathers recalled to India in 1854 were now actively at work and the Church Missionary Society began the publication of books, and building of churches. Many German, British and American workers came to India. Great missionaries like John Wilson—who inspired Malabari, the renowned Parsi poet and reformer—John Bowen and countless others were live forces in the spread of culture and thinking in Western India. There were also renowned converts to Christianity who strictly adhered to their Indian culture but spread, with their apostolic faith and capacity for suffering, the Gospel of Christ.

Ramabai's birth was, however, in a totally different environment to the Christian world of the times. "It was a far cry from the wilds of Gangamul to the commercial life of Bombay and the intellectual atmosphere of Poona. The day was to come when this waif of the forest, this pilgrim to innumerable shrines would become one of the saints given by God to the Church of Western India, and one of the prized heroic figures of the worldwide Church."[11]

4

The Konkanasth Chitpavan Brahmin stock of Maharashtra to which Anant Shastri belonged, produced many outstanding reformers of the 19th century. Among them may be cited, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Dhondo Keshav Karve, Ramakrishna Bhandarkar, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and others. Among the women were Anandibai Joshi, Ramabai Ranade, and Parvatibai Athavale, to mention but a few, apart from Pandita Ramabai herself. Christianity also claimed a number of converts from this renowned and stalwart caste. Nehemiah Goreh, Hari Ramchandra Khisti, Vishnu Bhaskar Karmarkar, Narayan Seshadri, Rev. Narayan Vaman Tilak, Apaji Bapuji and others were a few of the distinguished Chitpavan Brahmin Christians and reformers.

Chitpavan Brahmins are well-known for their dreams and ambitions that go hand in hand with a shrewd, practical nature. Very often, their dreams come true. They are progressive and go ahead, and at the same time they cling to their traditional attitudes because they are proud of the stock from which

[11] Dr. Elizabeth G. K. Hewat, *Christ and Western India*, p. 185

they spring. A Chinese visitor remarked, "if anyone is kind to them, he can be sure of their gratitude, but if anyone injures them, they will take revenge. They will risk their lives to wipe out dishonour."[12]

The Maharashtra country, as it was during the time of Ramabai, may be described as an irregular triangle. The shore of the Arabian Sea between Daman and Goa formed the base; the apex was a point in the North-Easterly direction, some distance beyond Nagpur. The area was roughly estimated at 110,000 sq. miles. In 1891, the Mahrattas numbered nearly 19,000,000.

In the early part of the 19th century the strength of the Mahrattas had been broken at the Battle of Assai (Assaye) in 1803. The Peshwas were overthrown in 1818. The Brahmins had to obey the same laws as the other castes as no literary work could be found for them. The Mahrattas had to re-adjust their lives to a foreign rule, though they did this with all the pride and dignity which they could muster to themselves at the time. The Chitpavan Brahmin was perhaps, the proudest of this group of people. Anant Shastri Dongre belonged to this illustrious caste.

Anant Shastri was a typical Chitpavan Brahmin, exercising the proud right that every high-born man or woman has to freedom of worship. He had turned from an impersonal creed to become a Bhakta. From the Advaita cult, he changed to a Vaishnavite. Ramabai referred to this fact while in Cheltenham Ladies' College. He could, therefore, be placed among the first in Western India to precede the Prarthana Samaj and the great group of reformers of the latter half of the 19th century. He was among the very first to face persecution for his principles and foreshadowed some of the reforms sponsored by the various new forms of Hindu religion which sprang up in the 19th century.

The Prarthana Samaj was founded in Poona in 1867 and the Arya Samaj in Bombay in 1875. But long before these great religious reform bodies were formulated, individuals, strong and undaunted, like Anant Shastri Dongre, paved the way for reformers to follow.

Despite his protestant nature, like all Bhaktas, Anant Shastri's religion was to a certain extent fanatical. He and his family, as

[12] Dennis Kincaird, *The Grand Rebel,* p. 16, quoted by Dr. E. G. K. Hewat in *Christ and Western India*

Bhaktas, had to suffer untold hardships because of his excessive zeal in serving his God. In fact, there was in Anant Shastri a small core of religious intolerance, as for instance, despite his broad outlook on the emancipation of women, he still insisted on keeping his children from any kind of caste contamination. The children were brought up in strict orthodoxy and hemmed in with traditional rules. These rules had been so imbued in Pandita Ramabai as a child, that even as a Christian in America, she adhered to rigid Hindu customs. Ramabai writes that her parents did not want their children to mix with the world but to adhere to dogmatic religious rules. Sanskrit was the only language they were allowed to learn and all forms of secular education was taboo and would lead to endless punishment in other worlds. Learning English and contact with *Mlenchchas* would lose them their caste, and hope of future happiness. "So all we could or did learn was the Sanskrit grammar and dictionaries with the Puranic modern poetical literature in that language. Most of this, including grammar and dictionaries, had to be committed to memory."[13] And yet Ramabai was well-versed in many Indian Languages even before she reached Calcutta.

Here was, indeed, a form of parental dictatorship; but Anant Shastri's family adored him. Lakshmibai considered herself one of the happiest and most privileged of wives and Ramabai could think no wrong of her father. But, religious tyranny continued. They were allowed no menial work and were made to face starvation rather than appease their hunger by earning their living, which was considered too low for Brahmins.

Ramabai was undoubtedly referring to her father and brother when she wrote in *Stree Dharma Neety* or "Morals for Women" that religious adherents had to learn lessons by heart without making an effort to understand the meaning. She complained about the use of *Mantras* and rituals and remarked that people suffered in many ways by believing only in the recitation of words. She was definitely autobiographical when she wrote of the forlorn belief of very devoted people who gave their all expecting to propitiate the gods and get nothing in return. She surely meant her father when she wrote: "There are thousands of simple people who build castles in the air day and night in the belief that results can be achieved by miracles, by invoking one's ancestors, by cir-

[13] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 3

cumambulation of temples and by doing *hom* (ritual by fire). Some pass day and night undergoing austerities in order to achieve their wishes. It is needless to say that they are becoming objects of ridicule, and suffering by wasting valuable time, money and their own lives. A young man of twenty had money and property worth three to four thousand rupees. He did not do any work or make any effort to educate himself. His mind was filled with useless ideas about achieving success through *mantras*. Being immersed in the thought, in a few days all the money he had was spent. Priests and other selfish people advised him to spend his money to feed Brahmins, to observe rituals and to accomplish things by *mantras*. How many days can money stay if it is spent like water?"

Again, in her *Testimony*, we have a glimpse of the fanaticism of Anant Shastri. Implicit faith was placed in interpreting the scriptures almost *verbatim*. Following the dictates of the priests, fasting and performing penances were insisted upon by the father. If such strict worship was followed, Anant Shastri believed that the gods and goddesses would appear to him and to devout worshippers, and they would get what they desired. "We decided to take this course of meeting our temporal wants." Ramabai writes: "For three years we did nothing but perform these religious acts. At last all the money which we had was spent, but the gods did not help us."[14] Could this early belief have remained dormant in Ramabai's sub-conscious self, influencing her later as a Christian to believe in miracles?

Here was that ardent devotee Anant Shastri, then, a man of queer contradictions, reformer and dogmatist; but greatly devoted to his family, and inspiring untold love and affection from all those who came in contact with him. He was a man of unbounded generosity and hospitality. Imagine this "fine looking man" tender and kind to his family and yet orthodox to almost an unbelievable degree and spending all the money he possessed in distributing alms to Brahmins and believing that a "shower of gold mohurs" would descend upon him in return. But from this great man, who gave away his all, sprang the greatness of his daughter, the one surviving member of a devout family who, in search of God, had travelled the length and breadth of India. Ramabai writes of the time when her father, blind and starved to death,

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 6

held her in his arms and dedicated her to God. "He did not know the only true God, but served the—to him—unknown God with all his heart and strength; and he was very desirous that his children should serve Him to the last. 'Remember, my child,' he said, 'You are my youngest, my most beloved child; I have given you into the hands of our God, you are His and to Him alone must you belong, and serve Him all your life."[15] A great dedication indeed! Ramabai continues: "He could speak no more. My father's prayers for me were, no doubt, heard by the Almighty, the All Merciful Heavenly Father.[16] When she held the dying father in her arms, she only listened to him and could make no positive answer. She was too ignorant and bewildered, and did not understand him. After this, Anant Shastri wanted an hour for himself to meditate, before he died.

In his paper read at the condolence meeting held at Wilson College Hall on 19 April 1922, in memory of Pandita Ramabai, Rao Saheb Govind Mallinath Thenge, B.A., J.P., referred to Anant Shastri as a *protestant father* of a greater *protestant daughter*. Explaining the protestantism of Anant Shastri, Mr. Thenge said: "It must be remembered that the study of Sanskrit was forbidden to high class women. Against this injustice and unfairness, Anant Shastri Dongre, the father of the Pandita, who was a very learned and brave reformer, *protested* and rebelled. He successfully stormed the stronghold of Shastric bigotry and orthodoxy and taught his wife and daughter Sanskrit enduring no less persecution for his conviction that women had the same rights to the higher knowledge that men themselves possessed. Pandita Ramabai imbibed this spirit of protestantism from her father and in her time became even a greater protestant than he and social reformer of the highest type."[17] This great heritage from her father Ramabai always remembered, which was the right to protest and to fight the evils and wrongs of this world. When Ramabai appeared before Sir William Hunter's Education Commission in 1883, she said: "I am the child of a man who had to suffer a great deal on account of advocating female education and who was compelled to carry out his views amidst great opposition. I consider it my duty to the very end of my life to maintain this

[15] Pandita Ramabai, *The Widows' Friend,* p. 9
[16] *Ibid.,* p. 10
[17] *Subodh-Patrika,* Vol. LI.. No. 1, Sunday, 7 May, 1922.

cause and to advocate the proper position of women in this land."[18]

5

It is made out by some Christians that Ramabai was a Christian fundamentalist, believing that no one outside the Christian fold could be "saved." But she possessed no such bigoted views. Though she became an ardent evangelist after 1892, she was broad and tolerant, and recognized goodness when she saw it, no matter what creed these good people practised. She never had any doubt, for instance, of the salvation of her father and mother, for she says: "If anyone wishes to say that my father, so eager to learn of God, and my mother, so tender and sweet, are eternally lost merely because no Christian ever reached them with the glad tidings of Christ, I have only to tell you never to say so in my presence, for I will not bear it and I cannot bear it."[19]

Ramabai's love for her mother Lakshmibai was intense, and the respect she paid this gentle lady, throughout life, was a part of her very existence. Never did she forget her mother, to whom she dedicated her first English book, *The High Caste Hindu Woman* with the words:

To the
Memory of my beloved mother
Lakshmibai Dongre
Whose sweet influence and able instruction
have been
The light and guide of my life,
this little volume
Is most reverently dedicated.

Lakshmibai was the embodiment of all that a true Hindu wife should be. From the time she, a girl of nine, was given on the banks of the Godavari to her husband, who was old enough to be her father, she placed her trust and faith in him. What else could a girl do in those days? If God was kind to her, the husband cherished and loved her—if unkind, she lived a living death on earth.

[18] *Ibid.*
[19] Jennie Chappel, *Pandita Ramabai*, p. 16

But Lakshmibai was fortunate. Anant Shastri started teaching his wife in his ashram in the Gangamul forest.

After making a scholar of his wife, Anant Shastri devoted himself to the education of his son and elder daughter; and also to that of young men, who, as students, sought out the now-famous Brahmin priest. The education of his youngest daughter, Ramabai, therefore, devolved entirely on Lakshmibai. As the fame of the ashram spread, the visiting pilgrims increased. Anant Shastri's old mother and father also followed their son to Gangamul and the duties of Lakshmibai gradually became more and more arduous. The guests had to be fed and cared for, and Lakshmibai filled admirably the role of a guru's wife. Despite many hardships, she managed to create an ideal sacred Hindu home—an ashram in all the old traditional manner. She also planted a garden and trees, and reared and supervised the cattle. "The administration of Buckingham Palace or of the White House would have perplexed her not at all and all her clear-headed foresight, grasp of detail and executive power were her daughter's in an even greater degree."[20] There is a discipline in a Hindu mother, a sense of stern duty which will put up with any hardships, a virtue and chastity which is a special characteristic of this ancient religion. It was this great capacity to suffer, perhaps very often in silence, which caused so many women to be the martyrs in the history and mythology of India; there was a philosophy, a serene contentment, almost the "peace which the world cannot give" which Christ promised, that Hindu women such as Lakshmibai possessed.

But even the most economic and hardworking of wives cannot support a family when the funds are daily dwindling. Finally, husband, wife and children had to leave their forest home and take to a pilgrim's life, earning money or sustenance as readers of the sacred scriptures, known as Puranikas.

Many years later, when Ramabai's daughter, Manorama, was on her way to Australia via Ceylon, they travelled through Raichur, and Ramabai said: "When you go to Raichur think of my mother, and remember that it was there I got my inspiration for famine work."[21]

Lakshmibai also loved reading, and studied well into the night in her forest-home. When she started teaching Ramabai as a little

[20] Mary L. B. Fuller, *The Triumph of an Indian Woman,* p. 13
[21] Pandita Ramabai, *The Widows' Friend,* p. 1

child, she woke her with the early birds in order to instil knowledge into her, for that was the only time she could spare. Ramabai writes: "When I was about eight years old my mother began to teach me and continued to do so until I was about fifteen years of age. During these years she succeeded in training my mind so that I might be able to carry on my own education with very little aid from others. I did not know of any schools for girls and women existing then, where higher education was to be obtained."[22] Lakshmibai knew many thousand Sanskrit shlokas by heart. As books were scarce, especially in Sanskrit, learning by heart, as was the Vedic custom, was still common.

Thus the child Ramabai, who grew into a great scholar, owed almost all her learning to Lakshmibai, her mother. One can imagine this earnest young housewife, in her forest-home, so similar to the ancient hermitages of old, serving her husband and his many guests and pupils and always eager to learn more and more. Ramabai says: "She performed all her home duties, cooked, washed, and did all her household work, took care of her children, attended to guests, and did all that was required of a good religious wife and mother. She devoted many hours of her time in the night, to the regular study of the Puranic literature and was able to store up a great deal of knowledge in her mind. She was a great lady combining all the virtues of a modest, chaste Hindu wife married to a religious pundit, and that of a learned generous-hearted scholar and pundit herself."[23]

Ramabai again and again acknowledged the "sweet influence" of her mother and her "able instruction" which were the "light and guide" of her life. She recalls with emotion the memories of childhood, of being held in her mother's arms after being "lifted from the bed of earth and awakened with many endearments and sweet mother-words; and then, while the birds about them in the forest chirped their morning songs, the lessons were repeated, no other book than the mother's lips being used."[24]

[22] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 3
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 2
[24] Pandita Ramabai, *The Widows' Friend*, p. 5

III

Pilgrims

1

When Anant Shastri had exhausted all his wealth in his zeal for religious generosity, and in satisfying his relations, who exploited him almost to the last penny, he once again had to find the wherewithal to live. None of those who had enjoyed his hospitality now seemed to care for him, and when Ramabai was but six months old they had to set out on pilgrimage. The little family travelled to the sacred rivers, temples and courtyards of holy places, and the Shastri tried to live by reading the Puranas. As the years rolled by, his children also began to read the scriptures to the pilgrims who visited the holy places and helped to earn some money. And thus they survived for a while not by begging but by professing a traditionally honourable profession.

It is tragic to realize that when Ramabai's family left the security of their forest-home and took to a nomadic life, they were five in number; but "when Ramabai emerges before us into clear light she is alone—father, mother, sister and brother have fallen one after another by the way, and only this little woman of the indomitable heart wins through, not hardened or coarsened by the

long discipline through which she passed, but tempered and refined. This school of suffering was Pandita Ramabai's university. She emerged cultured, discerning, self-controlled, with eyes made quiet by the power of sympathy. This is one of the most amazing aspects of Ramabai's whole history—her emergence unscathed from these long years of life as what in other lands would be called a tramp, a beggar—though she never begged—but in India what is called a pilgrim."[1]

For a score of years till she reached Calcutta at the age of twenty in 1878, she was a pilgrim.

The education Ramabai received was not only a scholarly one taught by her mother, but also that taught by nature. In her youth she realized that "one impulse from the vernal wood" could "teach her more of man, of moral virtue and of good, than all the sages can."

Ramabai, drinking deep of the beauty and wisdom of nature, was able to form her own constructions on the wisdom of the sages who surrounded her. Like her father, her mind began early to question the right and wrong of things. The challenges and persecution that he met made a deep impression on the mind of his daughter. This early experience of suffering served her later to meet her critics and accusers; but even before she had become a Christian she had learnt the value of the Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for their's is the kingdom of heaven."[2]

From childhood Ramabai was aware of the evils of caste, the denial of education and salvation for women and shudras, and the tendency of priests and pilgrims to grasp what they could from simple devotees like her father. She realized early that much evil could be propagated in the name of religion.

Rather pathetically Ramabai writes: "Ever since I remember anything, my father and mother were always travelling from one sacred place to another, staying in each place for some months, bathing in the sacred rivers and tanks, visiting temples, worshipping household gods and the images of gods in the temples, and reading the Puranas in temples or some convenient places."[3]

We are not told that the Pandita actually enjoyed her pilgrim-

[1] Macnicol, *Pandita Ramabai,* pp. 12, 13

[2] The Gospel according to St. Mathew, (Authorized Version) Ch. 5: 10

[3] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony,* p. 3

age. It was a hard life, and always it was a matter of giving, of becoming poorer and poorer, but for ever searching for God, for salvation, for some inner comfort which but led only to misery.

2

Religious pilgrims who read and narrated the Puranas are called Puranikas. Pandita Ramabai herself described them as public or popular preachers. They are found in some prominent part of a temple hall or under the trees on the banks of rivers or sacred tanks. They chant the scriptures loudly in order to gather an audience, and finally visitors and pilgrims surround them even though a great part or all ot the text is not understood, as the reading is in Sanskrit. Neither does the Puranika have to explain the text if he does not choose to do so. The listeners eventually move away after giving gifts to the Puranika who keeps on reading.

"When they come, the religious ones among them prostrate themselves before him (the puranika) and worship him and the book, offering flowers, fruits, sweetmeats, garments, money and other things. It is supposed that this act brings a great deal of merit to the giver and the person who receives does not incur any sin."[4] In her own life-story, Pandita Ramabai writes: "People in Karnatak believe that women have no right even to hear the Puranas—not to speak of studying the religious philosophy. In ancient time, people were religious and simple and they liked to hear the Puranas from the Puranikas. But the Puranikas earned little from their men audience. During the course of time, they found that an audience of women was more generous than men. But, as the Shastras prohibited women from listening and men from narrating, the Puranikas devised a novel method of avoiding the sin of narrating to females. The Puranikas used to place a bell hanging before them between the Puranika and his female audience. Then he would say: "Oh Bell, I am narrating the Purana to you and not to the unauthorized class of women"—who were sitting just beyond the bell hanging in between. Thus the priest class used to earn a lot from their women audience.[5] Ramabai's parents, therefore, felt no qualms in being thus fed, though under no circumstances would they beg for even a morsel of food or a pice.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 4

[5] Translated from *Subodh Patrika*, 27 August, 1882

"If a hearer does not give presents to a Puranika, he loses all the merit which he may have earned by good acts. The presents need not be very expensive ones; a handful of rice or other grains, a pice or even a few cowries which are used as exchange for rice (64 cowrie shells equal to one pice) are quite acceptable."[6] Flowers and even petals or leaves were acceptable to the gods. But merit could only be earned according to the generosity of the gift. Hence the Puranika was usually adequately donated with gifts.

Not only Ramabai's father, but her mother, brother and sister and she herself read the Puranas; though they did not translate or explain them. "The reading and hearing of the sacred literature is in itself believed to be productive of great merit or *punya*. We never had to beg or work to earn our livelihood. We used to get all the money and food we needed, and more; what remained over after meeting necessary expenses was spent in performing pilgrimage and giving alms to the Brahmins."[7]

It is strange that the orthodox priests who were so ready to persecute Anant Shastri for teaching his wife Sanskrit, did not object to women reading the Puranas. How were Lakshmibai and her daughters allowed to read the Scriptures in sacred places without offending religious principles?

Ramabai herself told Keshab Chunder Sen in Calcutta, later, that a woman could not read the sacred texts. In her *High Caste Hindu Woman,* she says: "Girls of nine and ten when recently out of school and given in marriage are wholly cut off from reading or writing, because it is a shame for a young woman or girl to hold a paper or book in her hand, or to read in the presence of others in her husband's house. It is a popular belief among high-caste women that their husbands will die if they should read or hold a pen in their fingers. The fear of becoming a widow overcomes their hunger and thirst for knowledge."[8] Anant Shastri must indeed have travelled far in his campaign for the freedom of women if he allowed his wife and daughter to be Puranikas.

When Mahadev Govind Ranade married his 12-year-old child-wife Ramabai, he was 32. Ramabai was illiterate and one of the first tasks Ranade undertook was to educate his little wife,

[6] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony,* p. 4
[7] *Ibid.,* pp. 4, 5
[8] Pandita Ramabai, *op. cit.,* New edition, p. 127

even in the teeth of opposition. "Perhaps the bridegroom was not blind to the look of swift intelligence in Ramabai Ranade's grey eyes, perhaps he remembered how another husband had brought his child-wife to his forest-home and educated her, Anant Shastri and his little Lakshmi, who later became the mother of the famous Pandita Ramabai."[9] Indeed Anant Shastri must have been an inspiration to many a husband in the newly awakening India of the nineteenth century.

Ramabai's family continued as Puranikas for some years and Ramabai writes: "This sort of life went on till my father became too feeble to stand the exertion, when he was no longer able to direct the reading of the Puranas by us."[10] When Anant Shastri could not direct the reading they could no longer be Puranikas and gradually the gallant little family of pilgrims became poorer and poorer, especially as they were not allowed to demean themselves by working. What little money they had was never spent in education other than religion, despite Anant Shastri's broad views. "The sacred book declared that if people worshipped the gods in particular ways, gave alms to the Brahmins, repeated the names of certain gods, and also some hymns in their honour, with fasting and performance of penance, the gods and goddesses would appear and talk to the worshippers, and give them whatever they desired. We decided to take this course of meeting our temporal wants. For three years we did nothing but perform these religious acts. At last all the money which we had was spent, but the gods did not help us."[11]

A naive simple remark indeed; but with the bitterness of pain and poverty behind. It was no doubt due to their profound suffering and the evils that Ramabai came across in her early religious wanderings, that she often judged Hinduism harshly—at times even too harshly—when she reminisced about her girlhood pilgrimages.

Her experiences during her pilgrim days are best described by Ramabai herself: "In addition to the priests there are what they call *Bairagis* and *Sanyasis*, i.e. religious beggars and mendicants. These are mostly very idle. There are about six million of them in this country. They wander from place to place. Some have

[9] Kamala Satthianadhan, *Great Women of India*, pp. 97, 98
[10] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 5
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 5

very little clothing, some have almost nothing. They besmear their bodies with ashes and mud and various colours, and wear long strings of wooden beads, and have matted hair, and go about begging.

"Their life is a miserable one. They are mostly ignorant and pretend to great sanctity of life. They chew and smoke tobacco, *ganja,* opium and other such drugs. They are very coarse in their speech and their character is not good. There are some exceptions, but they only prove the rule.

"My parents used to remark that these were bad and immoral people, and so were the local priests. And yet they worshipped them, because that was prescribed by their religion and was popular custom. These priests tell any number of lies to deceive the pilgrims. My parents knew all about these lies and laughingly made mention of them. But yet the priests were looked upon as very gods and worshipped accordingly."[12]

3

One of the first places of pilgrimage which Ramabai remembers was Venkatagiri, a mile away from Tirupati in the Chittoor district in South India which they visited when she was four. This district is dry and very hot in the summer and cool in the winter. On the whole the climate is healthy. There are many sacred places in the district. Tirupati has, of course, one of the most holy of Hindu temples in South India—Sri. Venkateswara temple. Its religious devotees have so showered wealth on the gods, that through the Devasthanam funds a University has now been formed in Tirupati, known as the Sri. Venkateswara University. The Venkatagiri Hill is also well known, and because of its holiness it seemed to have greatly attracted Anant Shastri and his family. Anant Shastri again visited the sacred hill before his death, twelve years later. The cult of worship here combines both Shaivism and Vaishnavism. As a staunch Vaishnavite, we are told that Anant Shastri criticized the cult of animal worship.

After Tirupati and Venkatagiri, the next place which is mentioned in Ramabai's travels is the Papanasini falls[13] which the pilgrims visited when Ramabai was still very young. Here they

[12] Macnicol, *Pandita Ramabai,* pp. 18, 19

[13] The Papanasini falls are in the Venkatagiri hills near Tirupati

bathed in the cool waters together with other devotees hoping that their sins would be washed away; but writing many years later, Ramabai rather naively remarks that they "knew in their own hearts that the sins remained where they were as before."

When Ramabai was seven years of age, her family went to another Vaishnava Temple at Dakor in the Kaira District of Gujarat. Here Krishna is worshipped under the name of Ranchor. Ramabai tells us of a discipline that was practised there upon the pilgrims and how they accepted it, though they knew it to be a deception, because it was a means to make men holy. Despite Ramabai's adverse reflections of these pilgrim resorts, the little family retained their purity. There was holiness about them, and no one sullied or insulted them.

When Ramabai was thirteen or fourteen they came to Dwarka. This holy place is not to be confused with Dvaraka in North India, where Krishna spent his childhood, and is said to have built a city or impregnable fortress that "could be defended by women," and from where Krishna fought his enemies and reconquered Mathura.

Dwarka, which Ramabai visited as a girl, is in Kathiawar, where there is a shrine sacred to the Vaishnavas. It is said to have been the capital of Krishna's kingdom. The original Dwarka was lost in the ocean on the death of Krishna and the present holy temple is very near that of the original one. When the Pandavas were exiled by their cousins, the Kauravas, they wandered about India for many years. Duryodhana, the Kaurava prince, thought them dead; but the Pandavas in their search for allies against their wicked cousins, made friends with many influential princes. They came to Dwarka where they met Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Vishnu, and the ruler of Dwarka—king of the Panchalas.

Dwarka is said to be an island city, built with gold and precious stones. Krishna lived there and reigned over his people, the Yadavas, and after he left this earth, the island is said to have sunk in the sea and disappeared.

Pandita Ramabai's family lived in Dwarka for a whole year, lodging by the seashore, bathing in the sacred waters of the sea. Ramabai says: "The sea is the great reservoir of all the sacred waters; and bathing in the waters of the sea on each day of the year brings extraordinary merit to the bather. . . . So to live on the seaside for twelve months is a means of getting all the merit

one can possibly get by bathing in all the sacred waters of the three worlds. Such was the belief which led my parents to stay at Dwarka for about a year"![14]

The great festival of Kapila Shasthi was celebrated at Dwarka when Anant Shastri and his family stayed there. This festival occurs only once in 60 years, and on that day, it is said that Krishna bestows favours on his devotees. A glimpse at the invisible city of Krishna would be shown to all those who worshipped him. His devotees, in order to wash away their sins, would have to bathe in the sea, worship gods and Brahmins and give alms and gifts to the priests. Kapila Shasthi occurs during a certain conjunction of planets and stars which fall into a particular position only once in 60 years. For this conjunction to happen, the day must be a Tuesday and fall in the month of Bhadrapad (middle of August to middle of September), during the dark half of the moon. The sun must be at Hasta, or the thirteenth lunar sign and opposite Ayana, their longitudes adding up to 180 degrees (conjunction Vyatapati). The moon must be at Rohini or the fourth sign and fall on the sixth day of the Puksha. The mythology round the festival of Kapila Shasthi is very strange. The saint Narada is said to have asked Krishna for a wife, but could not find one. Tired after his search he bathed in the Ganges and emerged from the water, only to find himself turned into a woman. A hermit married him and he had sixty sons and growing tired of the dreadful strain of domestic life he prayed to Vishnu to restore him to his former self. The hermit himself was Vishnu and granted the wish. Narada was again happy, but his sixty sons had to be provided for. Each son was given a kingdom by Vishnu to be enjoyed in turn. Thus each sixty years is said to be presided over by one of the sixty sons. The last day of each cycle is Kapila Shasthi when Narada resumed his former self. The last Kapila Shasthi fell on 1 October 1912[15] which means the previous Kapila Shasthi must have fallen in 1852, long before Ramabai was born. It is not easy to understand, therefore, how Ramabai and her family attended this festival in the year 1871 or 1872, for we are told that Ramabai was about thirteen or fourteen when she went to Dwarka.

Ramabai tells us of innumerable pilgrims who went to the festival to see the vision and gain the reward. Princes and the poor,

[14] Macnicol, *Pandita Ramabai,* p. 22

[15] P. Thomas, *Hindu Religious Customs and Manners,* p. 145

intellectuals and the ignorant, of all castes came to Dwarka to bathe in the sea on that sacred day. Anant Shastri and his family were among the most devout pilgrims. Towards evening, having bathed and given alms to Brahmins and repeated sacred texts, they eagerly gazed across the sea for the promised vision of the Golden City. As they gazed, the mist which had enveloped the holy place in the morning cleared and towards evening the sun shone through the clouds lighting up the sky in brilliant gold and scarlet. It was a magnificent sight. One can imagine Anant Shastri and his wife and children, wet no doubt after their bathe in the sea, garments clinging to their bodies, together with thousands of other pilgrims, gazing at the splendour of the western sky.

Another sacred place familiar to Ramabai in her early wanderings was Pandharpur, a very holy place in Maharashtra, which millions visit every year. Ramabai gives a graphic description. "When we came to the bank of the Bhima river on the opposite side of the city, we prostrated ourselves and worshipped the river. We sprinkled its waters on our heads and considered all our sins were washed away. We then drank some of its dirty, muddy water in order to cleanse the inner part of our bodies of all the sin that existed there."[16] It is strange that Ramabai thought these waters were "polluted" when she connected them with the Hindu ceremonies, and yet, years later, led many girls from Mukti to be immersed and baptized in the waters of this very river. Could the old superstition have still persisted, that the Bhima river was sacred, and was it for this reason that Ramabai chartered bullock carts to convey the converts to the river?

After fasting and bathing in the Bhima river, Ramabai's family as Hindu pilgrims visited the temple and took *Darshan* of the God Vithoba and his wife Rukmini.

Anant Shastri and his family stayed at Pandharpur for many days and Ramabai writes in her story: "Father performed certain religious rites in connection with ancestral worship. . . . The gifts were taken by the priests who assured my father that this act of merit was calculated to send all his ancestors to heaven."[17] The pilgrims prayed for wealth, learning and renown.

Despite their scepticism—and one wonders if Anant Shastri and his family were sceptical at the time, or whether Ramabai reflects

[16] Basil Miller, *Pandita Ramabai, India's Christian Pilgrim,* p. 13
[17] Basil Miller, *Pandita Ramabai, India's Christian Pilgrim,* p. 3

unconsciously her later attitude towards her earlier reminiscences when she had not yet begun to doubt—they must have gazed open-mouthed at the magnificent sunset, and propitiating the gods and pleasing the priests and Brahmins, they must have parted with what little money they possessed.

Again and again we come across this complaint against Anant Shastri giving away his hard-earned money to the Brahmins, and yet, he himself was a Brahmin! Did no one ever give to him when he was poor and starving with his family? But they never exercised the right by which other Brahmins used so freely to take *Dakshina* from the wealthy.

Brahmins of the higher status, however, seem seldom to have indulged in receiving *Dakshina.* On the contrary, they seem to have, like Anant Shastri, given away their wealth and courted poverty. There is a charming story told of Bharat Ratna Maharshi Dr. D. K. Karve when he was a boy. The representative of the Maharaja of Baroda was said to have gone to Murud when the two Karve brothers, Bhiku and Dhondu (Maharshi Karve), were playing in the courtyard. They saw Brahmins emerging out of the house each flourishing money. Bhiku had just had his *Upanayan*[18] performed and was entitled to receive *Dakshina,* especially as he performed his *Sandhya*[19] daily. He went to his mother and asked her permission to receive the gift and she exclaimed: "Bhiku, my boy, you are born in the highly respected family of the Karves. Your forefathers were highly placed and were renowned for their great wealth. Your father is not rich today, but he was at one time. We are fallen on bad days. We have, however, not lost our family prestige, nor can we ever forget the family pride. Your maternal uncle, who is a *dasha-granthi*[20] Brahmin never stoops to receive *Dakshina.*"[21]

It was obvious that Anant Shastri with his great learning was a *Dasha Granthi,* hence his pride in never begging or even working for a living except as a Puranika.

Some time in the course of their wanderings the little Dongre family seemed to have made a point of visiting Benaras in order to accrue merit by bathing in the sacred Ganges. It was here that

[18] Investiture of the sacred thread

[19] Daily worship performed by Brahmins at dawn, noon and evening

[20] A Brahmin who has studied the 10 great religious treatises

[21] Ganesh L. Chandavarkar, *Maharshi Karve,* p. 4

Ramabai first heard the name of Jesus. She says that her parents avoided coming in contact with "Christians and Mlenchchas (foreigners), but one day in the providence of God, a Christian man came to see my father. I do not remember whether he was an Indian or a European Christian, nor what he said to my father, but I remember two words when I heard him conversing with my father—'Yeshu Krista'—Jesus Christ.

"After he went away I found myself repeating these two words 'Yeshu Krista' which I heard from him. I must have repeated them many times because my sister was alarmed and drew my mother's attention to what I was whispering to myself. She warned me against repeating the name of the God of the foreigners and told me not to bring his name to my lips again. But I never forgot that NAME."[22]

The Word-Seed had, therefore, been sown in Pandita Ramabai when she was still a girl, and there it must have unconsciously sprouted. How abundant were the fruits that the tree bore which was born from that Word-Seed in the midst of the sacred places of India.

4

The tradition that Brahmins of high status should not work or receive charity from others seems to have been the cause of all the troubles which followed Anant Shastri and his family. The great famine of 1876-77 soon overtook Anant Shastri's family. This famine seems to have started many years earlier. "The last great famine of Madras Presidency reached its climax in the years 1876-77," says Ramabai in her *Famine Experiences in India,* but it began at least three years before that time. "I was in my 'teens' then and so thoroughly ignorant of the outside world that I cannot remember observing other people's condition, yet saw enough of distress, in our and a few other families, to realize the hard-heartedness of unchanged human nature.

"High caste and respectable poor families, who are not accustomed to hard labour and pauperism, suffered then, as they do now, more than poorer classes. My own people, among many others, fell victims to the terrible famine. My brother, sister and myself had no secular education to enable us to earn our liveli-

[22] Pandita Ramabai, *The Word-Seed*

hood by better work than manual labour. We had all the sacred learning necessary to lead an honest, religious life, but the pride of caste and superior learning, and vanity of life, prevented our stooping down to acquire some industry whereby we might have saved the precious lives of our parents."[23]

Ramabai later chastized herself for not protesting at the time. She blamed herself and her brother for lack of common sense and for foolishly spending all the money they had "on alms to Brahmins to please the gods." Shrinivas, Ramabai's brother, was then 21 years old; but he had ruined his young stalwart constitution by fasting and rituals. In her *Stree Dharma Neety,* Ramabai tells of a boy who circumambulated the Hanuman temple at Ghatikachalam in order to earn *punya.* This boy must have been her brother.

By now, Anant Shastri's eyesight had failed and he had also lost his sense of hearing. He was about 75—a broken old man.

From Ghatikachalam Anant Shastri and his family seemed again to have reached Tirupati which they had visited when Ramabai was 4 years old. She was 16 now, and twelve years had elapsed since they were there last. The year then must have been 1874. There was now not a grain of rice to eat, and "nothing but death by starvation remained for our portion. Oh, the sorrow, the helplessness and the disgrace of the situation!"[24]

They gathered together, this forlorn derelict family, so knit together by the bonds of love, so religious and pious; but with no one to help them, and they decided to go into the forest and die rather than bear the disgrace of poverty among their own people. That very night, they abandoned the house which sheltered them at Tirupati, and entered a great forest. They were determined to die there, and subsisted eleven days and nights on water and leaves, and a handful of wild grapes. The bodily pain they suffered was intense, and at last, Anant Shastri could bear it no longer. "The tortures of hunger were too much for his poor weak body. He determined to drown himself in a sacred tank nearby, thus to end all his earthly suffering. It was suggested that the rest of us should either drown ourselves, or break the family and go our several ways" says Ramabai; "but drowning ourselves seemed most practicable. To drown oneself in some sacred river or tank is not

[23] Pandita Ramabai, *The Widows' Friend,* pp. 6, 7

[24] *Ibid.,* p. 8

considered suicide by Hindus, so we felt free to put an end to our lives in that way. Father wanted to drown himself first, so he took leave of all the members of the family, one by one."[25]

This form of death is known as *Jal-samadhi*. A sanyasi is permitted to drown himself. Four famous Marathi saints are said to have followed this path when they were rejected by the world. But Shrinivas could not bear to allow his father to seek death without his making some effort to stop this extreme measure, and he volunteered to overcome his prejudices against working. Ramabai writes: "God put a noble thought into the heart of my brother, who said he could not bear to see the sad sight. He would give up all caste pride, and go to work to support our old parents, and, as father was unable to walk, he said he would carry him down the mountain into the nearest village, and then go to work. He made his intention known to father and begged him not to drown himself in the sacred tank. So the question was settled for that time."[26]

The children and Lakshmibai were glad that their father had chosen not to perform the *Jal-samadhi* and they decided to descend the hill to civilization where Shrinivas could find work and thus support the starving family. The process of merely keeping alive had, by this time, become so unbearable that Ramabai says: "We wished very much a tiger, a great snake, or some other wild animal would put an end to our lives. We were too weak to move, and too proud to beg or work to earn a livelihood."[27] Shrinivas had, however, by this time formed his resolution to work and the weary starving family dragged themselves out of the jungle as best they could.

It is said by Christ that the seed must die before it grows into a tree and bears fruit. In all her sufferings this time of Ramabai's life was the hardest. It was, at this time, that her physical body died in order to bear better fruit. The belief in orthodoxy and her faith in it was extinguished by the sufferings of herself and her family. Something within her died and some new inspiration, some great force urging her to fight her sad tragic life and overcome and conquer was born within this young child of sixteen during those nightmarish famine days.

[25] *Ibid., pp.* 8, 9
[26] *Ibid.,* p. 10
[27] *Ibid.,* pp. 10, 11

After two days of painful travelling out of the forest they came to a village at the foot of Venkatagiri. The father was the feeblest. Ramabai writes: "We reached the village with great difficulty and took shelter in a temple, but the Brahmin priests of the Temple would not allow us to stay there. They had no pity for the weak and helpless."[28]

The starving family found their way out of the temple courtyard and even out of the village, until they discovered a deserted old temple inhabited only by wild animals. Here they took shelter for four days, and at last a Brahmin youth took pity on them. But by now Anant Shastri was suffering from fever—his last illness. So tired was he and so craving for nourishment, that he weakly uttered, "Give me some sugar and water." What must have been the anguish of the wife and children when they consoled him only with water, for sugar they had none. He was too weak to eat the food which the kind Brahmin had brought them. The young man returned to this strange dying family once again. On the third day Anant Shastri died. What was the kind Brahmin to do now? How would they dispose of the dead? Ramabai says: "None of the co-villagers would come to carry the dead, he (the Brahmin) could not, for fear of being put out of caste, come to help my brother to carry the remains of my father. But he had the kindness to let some men dig a grave at his own expense, and follow the funeral party as far as the river. Father had entered the order of sanyasa before his death, so his body was to be buried in the ground according to the commands of the Shastras. As there was no one else who would help to carry the dead, my brother tied the body in his dhoti and carried it alone, over two miles, to its last resting place. We sadly followed to the river bank and helped him a little. So we buried our father outside that village, away from all human habitation, and returned with heavy hearts to the ruins of the old temples."[29]

Though Ramabai writes in her very beautiful style of the tragic experience, she, in her matter of fact statements—for she seldom sentimentalized over the stark horror and grief which pursued her all her life—does not mention that possibly the whole village stood by and watched this tragic drama. Shrinivas was himself enfeebled with the famine, and one can imagine this heroic

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 11
[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 12

boy, emaciated, gaunt, and yet, all alone, wrapping the starved remains of his father—so great a scholar and devotee of God—and carrying the body, for two long miles, until they reached the remote corner where the great Brahmin saint could lie, because of the charity of a Brahmin youth.

Thus did Anant Shastri end his gallant life, a forlorn, blind and tragic figure, at the age of 78 in the year 1874.

Incredibly pathetic is the story which continues its heart-rending course. And the cruelty of the people pursued the little forlorn family despite all their sorrows. Ramabai writes: "We had to leave the place; there was no work to be found and no food to be had."[30] Again and again, especially during Ramabai's first twenty years, we come across this relentless pursuit of her family, hounded from place to place after wealth had been exhausted. But kind souls are always to be found, even in the most fanatical circles, and after walking for a while with their mother, some philanthropic people gave them some food and paid for their fare to Raichur.

In all her reminiscences, her *Testimony, Morals for Women, High Caste Hindu Woman* and *Famine Experiences in India,* little or no mention is made of the mode of travel of this family from one corner of India to another.[31] Did they walk, did they hitchhike their way in bullock carts, did they travel by train? It seems that the first two modes were more likely, for in their later pilgrimages they could scarcely have travelled by train when they had no money to buy a morsel of bread or a spoon of sugar to mix with the water their father demanded. Unless some kind person gave them the fare, they could not have travelled by train, One can imagine then, the extremes of hardship they suffered. Footsore, thirsty, bowed down with heat or frozen with cold according to weather conditions, with no roof over their heads, nothing to shelter them from rain or sun. And there were always the ruthless hazards of travel of the time. Dacoits, wild animals and the vagaries of the weather which brought on drought or floods.

[30] *Ibid.,* p. 12

[31] In her own life story which appeared in print for the first time in *Subodh Patrika,* Pandita Ramabai says she intended to publish a book giving a vivid description of her experiences and travels throughout India Perhaps, this was written but it never saw the light of the day.

But the fare to Raichur was paid. Ramabai and her family stayed here for six weeks. Speaking of Raichur which she visited with her friend Miss Abrams on her way to Australia via Colombo at the beginning of the 20th century, Manoramabai, Ramabai's daughter, describes it as a "Mahommaden" city under the dominion of the Nizam of Hyderabad. "The ruins of its great hill-fortress and ancient city walls, encircled by the wide moat, which in years gone by was flooded with the sacred waters of the Krishna; its numerous gates and archways leading into a native part of the city, will speak eloquently of the past when India was governed by her own people, and when the forts, which may be found in almost every part of the Deccan and Southern India, were the scene of battle, siege and conquest."[32]

In this historic city, the poor Dongre family sojourned. By now Lakshmibai was very ill and they could progress no further. Here they starved, with no hope and with no cheering thought of comfort or succour. Shrinivas, though willing to work, was himself now frail and weak. Yet they were too proud to beg. At times kindly people gave them food, but the sufferings of Lakshmibai were intense, far more than that of the children. Ramabai writes: "We too suffered from hunger and weakness, but the sufferings of our mother were more than we could bear to see. Yet we had to keep still through sheer helplessness. Now and then, when delirious, mother would ask for different kinds of food. She could eat but little, yet we were unable to give her the little she wanted."[33]

Lakshmibai's condition soon reached a stage when help had to be sought. Ramabai, unable to bear the pleadings of her mother for food any longer, went to a house to beg for some "bajree" bread. She went there reluctantly for it meant she had to beg; but the lady who received her was kind, and even before Ramabai could open her mouth to utter the hateful pleading for alms, for by now the tears were pouring out of her eyes, bread was given. With this the girl ran to her dying mother, but it was too late. Lakshmibai was unconscious and the end came in a few days. Her funeral was even sadder than Anant Shastri's. Two Brahmins came to help Shrinivas to carry the frail body to the burning ground, about three miles from Raichur town.

[32] Pandita Ramabai, *The Widows' Friend*, pp. 1, 2

[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 13

Manoramabai, while visiting Raichur later, says the city had a peculiar fascination for them. They drove in a carriage through the streets of the town and at last came out into the open country. Here they alighted from their carriage and walked through the burning ghats of the Brahmins. They knew they were in the very place where, twenty-eight years earlier (in 1874), Lakshmibai was cremated.

Lakshmibai was only 47 years of age when she died—a woman in the prime of her life according to modern standards. But Lakshmibai was worn out with fasting, long pilgrimages, poverty, and tireless service to her husband, children and religious devotees. She had also suffered from malaria which had completely shattered her health.

This then, was the sad fate of that great scholar-reformer Anant Shastri Dongre and his brave wife, one of the first women in British India to become a Sanskrit scholar in the teeth of opposition. A true Hindu wife, chaste, devoted and long suffering! An inspiration to her daughter, who was guided by her mother's memory throughout her later years of selfless devotion to her country and God.

5

Krishnabai, Shrinivas and Ramabai were now left alone in the world with no means of survival; no money and no friends. Ramabai, the youngest, who was then sixteen, must have looked up to her brother for protection and guidance; this he always gave as far as his own austere nature permitted. The bond of love between brother and sister was always very strong.

Shrinivas had been married at the age of 18; but little is known of his wife and she certainly did not stay with her husband or wander about with him in his pilgrimages with his parents.

Krishnabai was already married, and Ramabai was the only one of the three who had escaped the fate of child marriage. That she did not suffer a similar fate as her sister, was due to the courage and determination of her father and mother. Krishnabai's marriage had been a complete failure and Anant Shastri was determined to save his youngest beloved daughter from a similar fate. Mr. D. G. Vaidya has mentioned in his admirable biography, written in Marathi, that there was a theory that Ramabai had been dedicated to the God Vithoba at Pandharpur or to

Krishna at Dwarka. But this fantastic idea can be completely abandoned. If Ramabai had been dedicated to a God in a temple, she would scarcely have been allowed to accompany her parents on their pilgrimages. Ramabai herself has refuted this far-fetched rumour as completely false. She averred that Anant Shastri, who had given up superstitions, would never have sacrificed her thus.[34] Mr. Vaidya has further pointed out that the story seems to have arisen from the tender farewell in which Anant Shastri bid his daughter when he was about to perform *Jal-samadhi*. At that time in his great love for his children, unprovided for, alone in the world, he commended Ramabai to God's care. What else could so religious a man have said when he was in the last throes of death? He may even have sensed a prophetic feeling and his prayer may have been heard by God, for was not Ramabai saved from the fate which overtook her whole family? Did she not survive all the great privations, tragedies and diseases to which her poverty-stricken life was exposed and live to serve Christ? Her father's agonized pleading to God to take charge of her was surely a cry from the heart of a dying man calling on God to help him, as indeed God did, for from that time, Ramabai, the girl of sixteen, emerges as an individual with a mission in life. After the death of Anant Shastri and Lakshmibai, Ramabai and her brother devoted their time to lecturing on the emancipation of Indian women.

But first, the elder sister, Krishnabai also died after they had wandered from place to place for a few months. The death of Krishnabai, in a manner of speaking, was welcomed by Ramabai for she felt that if she had lived, especially as she now no longer had the protection of her parents, she would indeed have suffered a more terrible fate than death. Her good-for-nothing husband may have claimed her. Anant Shastri had given her in marriage when she was very young and it turned out to be so tragic that Ramabai cited it in *The High Caste Hindu Woman* as one of the many cases of misery under which women suffered in India. Ramabai tells us of a relative—who was really her own sister, Krishnabai—who was married to a mere boy and it was decided by the parents that he should stay with Anant Shastri and be educated by him. Anant Shastri must have cherished bright visions of keeping his son-in-law with him and teaching him to be kind to his wife and to care for her as a precious human being. "No sooner,

[34] *Subhodh Patrika*, 8 October, 1882

however, had the marriage ceremony been concluded, than they forgot this agreement; the boy was taken to the home of his parents, where he remained to grow up to be worthless, quite, while his wife, through kindness and advanced views of her father, developed into a bright, well-accomplished young woman.

"Thirteen years later, the young man came to claim his wife, but their parents had no heart to send their darling daughter with a beggar, who possessed neither the power nor the sense to make an honest living, and was unable to support and protect his wife." One wonders, however, why Anant Shastri could not have made more careful enquiries as to the kind of man to whom he was so hurriedly giving his daughter in marriage. The story continues in Ramabai's words: "The wife, too, had no wish to go with him since he was a stranger to her; under the circumstances she could neither love nor respect him. A number of orthodox people in the community, who saw no reason why a wife should not follow a husband, even though he be a worthless man, collected funds to enable him to sue her and her parents, in the British Court of Justice. The case was examined with due ceremony, and the verdict was given in the man's favour, according to Hindu law. The wife was doomed to go with him."[35] The fate of Krishnabai would have, therefore, been miserable when she was finally claimed by her husband, and death seemed a good release. Krishnabai did not survive her parents very long. She died of cholera, which was raging at the time in an epidemic form. Ramabai even cynically remarks that often epidemics released women who were "persecuted by social, religious and state laws. Many women put an end to their earthly sufferings by committing suicide. Suits of law between husband and wife are remarkable for their rarity in the British courts in India, owing to the over-submissive conduct of women who suffer silently, knowing that the gods and justice always favour the men."[36]

We are told that Krishnabai's half-sister born to Anant Shastri's first wife was also married early and that her husband also proved unsatisfactory. It is believed that Anant Shastri appointed his two sons-in-law to take care of his property; but they incurred

[35] Pandita Ramabai, *The Widows' Friend*, pp. 68, 69 (According to British Law no interference with the social and religious customs was allowed)

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 69

heavy debts and neglected the property. Ramabai's half-brother also, we are told, quarrelled with his father and divided the property. Anant Shastri's large joint family had helped to ruin the scholarly Shastri. It was not only Anant Shastri's religious prodigality then which had reduced them to poverty but also the "machinations of wily relatives".

Ramabai and Shrinivas were now left alone in the world. Still on the verge of starvation they sought work in a Brahmin's house, where they recited sacred texts to the family. The Brahmins felt that they would be greatly blessed for sheltering and learning from these two young creatures so renowned for their holiness. But, for some reason, the brother and sister were again on the move.

After leaving the shelter of the rich Brahmins, the two forlorn pilgrims journeyed from the north back to the east coast. Their bitterness was such that at this time they began gradually to lose faith in Hinduism. This loss of faith originated, some believe when brother and sister were on the shores of a sacred lake in North India. It was said that the mountains which were floating on the opposite bank to where Ramabai and Shrinivas stood would move towards them if they were sinless. Shrinivas felt determined to investigate this phenomenon, and despite being warned of crocodiles in the lake, he swam towards the mountains. He found the mountains to be mere stone and mud planted with trees and placed on wooden rafts. These could be dragged by a boat skilfully behind the rafts.

Ramabai and Shrinivas covered hundreds of miles on foot, and in later life when friends looked at Ramabai's small dainty feet, they wondered how this frail woman could have walked so many miles. During her last illness, Ramabai one day walked slowly about her room as she was tired of lying in bed, and laughingly she told a friend: "I wonder sometimes if it was really I who used to walk so much!"

They had suffered intensely and were completely disillusioned about the rituals and austerities of their lives. Often Shrinivas found some form of work; but the wages were so low that it hardly amounted even to four rupees a month. Exposed to the cold, they suffered without blankets and woollen garments, and they walked bare-foot, for lack of chappals. This diet was often grass soaked in water with a little salt. They slept under the trees, or wherever they could under bridges and arches. Today it is a

common sight to see the poor stretched out in the open, on the pavements of India's big cities, and out under the trees in rural places, but the sights are impersonal. We say: "How dreadful for these poor beings, without a roof over their heads!" It is difficult to realize that Ramabai and her brother were actually in this tragically low condition—and yet this dauntless little woman lived to give thousands a home and shelter, food and clothing. She used the poignant experience of her own sufferings to save others from undergoing a similar fate. One wonders what Pandita Ramabai would do if she lived now to see the increasing poverty with the growing population. Always active and on the move, would she not have travelled from place to place, nursing the sick, picking up the orphan, leading the blind to the shelter of her homes?

When brother and sister were in Kashmir and on the banks of the Jhelum, they had to spend the nights in the open, but the cold was so intense that they dug themselves two grave-like pits, lay in these, covered themselves with dry sand from the river bank except for their heads and thus tried to blanket out the cold. At times they were so starved that they could only satisfy their hunger "by eating a handful of wild berries, and swallowing the hard stones together with their coarse skins."

But they were strictly caste Hindus. Ceremonial purity played a prominent part in their wanderings. Caste rules were never waived even after father and mother had expired. Food could not be eaten unless after bathing, and the nourishment itself had to be pure according to Hindu rules. No polluting shadow could smirch the little that Ramabai and her brother found to eat. If any form of pollution defiled the food, even if they were starving, it was thrown away. They were also so desperately short of clothes that Ramabai possessed only one sari, and since according to rules, it had to be washed before it was worn after a bath, Ramabai would often wear half, dry and wind it round her, while she washed the other half.

Ramabai says that they lived thus for four years, but they did not suffer as much physical discomfort as their parents, for they were "young and strong." They were thankful that their parents were spared these tremendous trials and that they were taken mercifully before any of their three beloved children died; but the memories of the last days of their parents' life always broke Ramabai's heart.

Of her four years of wandering with her brother Ramabai writes: "I cannot describe all the sufferings of this terrible time. My brother and I survived and wandered about, still visiting sacred places, bathing in rivers, and worshipping the gods and goddesses, in order to get our desire. We had fulfilled all the conditions laid down in the sacred books, and kept all the rules as far as our knowledge went, but the gods were not pleased with us, and did not appear to us. After years of fruitless service, we began to lose our faith in them, and in the books which presented this course, and held out the hope of a great reward to the worshippers of the gods. We still continued to keep caste rules, and worshipped and studied sacred literature as usual."[37]

They had traversed more than 4000 miles on foot without any sort of comfort, finding scarcely any shelter except in *Dharmasalas*. They wandered from the south to the north as far as Kashmir, and then to the East and West to Calcutta on 6 August, 1878.

[37] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, pp. 5, 6

IV

Marriage

1

AND thus the two weary pilgrims found their way to Calcutta, where for a time, Ramabai was to find relief from her troubles. She and her brother, Shrinivas, now known as "Shastri" were much appreciated by the reform groups and Pandits of Bengal, as we have already seen and Ramabai was honoured with the titles of "Saraswati" and "Pandita."

For sometime now both Ramabai and her brother were beginning to feel that the religion they had practised—the austere and ritualistic form of orthodox Hinduism—was gradually beginning to lose its grip on them. Even Shrinivas's fanaticism began to cool off. The fact that the scriptures according to Ramabai's study, held no hope for women and low castes entirely depressed Ramabai.

It must be remembered that at this time, in order to give authority to her lectures Ramabai had made a special study of the Dharma Shastras. She writes: "My eyes were being gradually opened; I was waking up to my own hopeless condition as a woman, and it was becoming clearer and clearer to me that I had no

place anywhere as far as religious consolation was concerned. I became quite dissatisfied with myself. I wanted something more than the Shastras could give me, but I did not know what it was that I wanted."[1]

Ramabai met Keshab Chunder Sen (1838-84), a towering figure in Calcutta at the time and a great influence for good. He also believed greatly in Christ and he started the *Naba Bidhan* cult of the Brahmo Samaj or the New Dispensation. He was most kind to Ramabai and her brother and was instrumental in introducing her to the Calcutta intellectual and reformist group. At his house, Ramabai not only met Keshab Chunder's wife, Jagmohini, but also Sucharu Devi, the late Maharani of Mayurbhanj —a revered figure in Calcutta and a leader of the women's movement until she died in 1961—and Suniti Devi, who married the Maharajah of Cooch Behar, over whose early marriage there had been so much controversy and criticism. At Keshab Chunder's house Ramabai also met Sir J. C. Bose and his wife, the renowned Lady Abala Bose. They often talked about Pandita Ramabai to their friends later, and acknowledged the inspiration the girl Saraswati of twenty had imparted to the women of India. Pandita Ramabai was, in fact, the pioneer who started the women's movement in India which is today the backbone of India's fight for social freedom. She exposed and attacked many of the unhealthy customs prevalent during her time and can surely be called the "Mother of Modern India."

As the Prarthana and Arya Samaj were active in Western India so the Brahmo Samaj was creating a revolution in religion in Bengal. All these modern and religious thought movements began because of the feeling which prevailed in the minds of men regarding the ugly turn orthodox Hinduism had taken in its treatment of women and its establishment of rigid caste rules. A form of chauvinism even may be said to have reigned among men at the time. The reformers were aghast at the treatment meted out to women. They were also essentially nationalists at heart and strove to revive the old Vedic rites and do away with idol worship and all the ills which had crept into Hinduism after the passing of the ancient golden age. The Brahmo Samaj, like the Prarthana Samaj, not only purified the Hindu religion but stalwartly strove to eliminate the wrongs under which women suffered

[1] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 10

at the time. It also brought all religions into its fold and proclaimed that they were merely the various paths which led to the One God. Christ was one of the religious teachers in whom the Brahmos ardently believed though they did not openly acknowledge Him as the Son of God.

One would have thought that the Brahmo religion would have fully satisfied Ramabai and her brother. Here was a cult which freed her from all the dogmas and rituals she had begun so strongly to criticize and dislike. Here was a belief which agreed in every way with her ideals and professed to do away with such customs as child marriage and the cruelties meted out to widows. At the beginning, the Brahmo religion had certainly stirred Ramabai's imagination, for apart from all the hospitality and kindness the Brahmos had extended to Ramabai and Shrinivas, had not Keshab Chunder Sen shattered the misguided delusion under which Ramabai laboured regarding the unfitness of women to read and study the Vedas? He had at last opened up the treasure-house of Vedantic literature to add to her scholarship, she had so far only deeply studied the Shastras and Puranas. "New thoughts were awakening in my heart," writes Ramabai, and she began to question herself. But she wanted something she could not find. Were these questions and the dissatisfaction Ramabai felt at the time due partly to the split in the Brahmo Samaj? Keshab Chunder Sen founded the *Naba Bidhan* or New Dispensation as against the already existing Adi Brahmo Samaj, of which Debendra Nath Tagore was the spokesman. This was the time when Pandita Ramabai was touring Bengal and Assam. A split, therefore, arose in the religion which Raja Ram Mohan Roy had inaugurated. Did this confuse Ramabai? Also, was she disappointed because Keshab Chunder Sen, who had rebelled against child marriages, had allowed the rule to be broken regarding his own daughter? When she remarks about Keshab Chunder Sen's kindness to her, and about his introducing her to his wife and daughters, Ramabai writes that one of his daughters "was just married to the Maharajah of Cooch Behar, and the Brahmos and others were criticizing him for breaking the rule which was laid down for all Brahmos, i.e. not to marry or give girls in marriage under fourteen years of age."[2]

Ramabai, newly come to Calcutta emerging from the super-

[2] *Ibid.*

stitious beliefs of the pilgrim world must have while seizing the Brahmo Samaj as a drowning person might clutch at a wisp of straw, begun to realize that here also, in her new found religion, there was dissatisfaction. The groups and divisions within the Brahmo Samaj troubled her just as later she was deeply disturbed with the schisms of the various denominations of the Christian Church.

Nevertheless, Ramabai was a Theist when she married Bipin Behari Das Medhavi who was himself a Brahmo. Ramabai did, therefore, eschew the Brahmo religion for a time and she was later accused of changing from religion to religion by the Bombay papers when she finally chose Christianity. The *Indu Prakash* commented "Pandita Ramabai was in the first instance a Hindu, then she became a Brahmo (theist), now, she has become a Christian. This shows and proves she is of an unstable mind. We should not be surprised if she becomes a Muslim soon. She has only to meet a Moslim Kazi who will convince her that his religion will give her peace and salvation."[3]

At the time when Ramabai lost faith in the religion of her ancestors, however, it must be remembered she had suffered much and endured more than many human beings could have borne. Always the apostle of Truth, Ramabai began seriously to study the Brahmo cult when she came to Bengal. The new religion was sweeping the old reactionary beliefs aside. "I was desperately in need of some religion," Ramabai writes, "The Hindu religion held no hope for me," but she also comments, "The Brahmo religion was not a very definite one."[4] It was obvious that Ramabai was seeking a personal Saviour, who was God Himself turned Man, and it was only in Christianity that she would fully satisfy this craving. Of the Brahmo religion, Ramabai says, "It is nothing but what a man makes for himself. He chooses and gathers whatever seems good to him from all religions known to him and prepares a sort of religion for his own use. The Brahmo religion had no other foundation than man's own natural light and the sense of right and wrong which he possesses in common with all mankind. It would not and did not satisfy me. Still I liked and believed a good deal of it."[5]

[3] *Indu Prakash,* 19 November, 1883
[4] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony,* p. 12
[5] *Ibid.,* p. 12.

In the meanwhile, Ramabai and Shrinivas lectured widely to wrapt and engrossed audiences in Bengal and Assam.

2

The lectures of the brother and sister, two strange young intellectuals, drew much attention in the press. An interesting event was recorded as follows: "Lectures by a Hindu Lady—at the fourth ordinary meeting for the present session of the Family Literary Club, held yesterday. A Hindu lecture was delivered by Roma Bye Soraswathy, the well-known Maratta lady, on education."[6] The warm welcome was a great contrast to the indifference of the people they had met in their wanderings. The generosity of the Bengalis was unbounded.

The brother and sister travelled and lectured extensively in Bengal and Assam. There is an interesting earlier account in the papers which says: "The *Sulabha Samachar* hears that the well-known Roma Bye is about to be married to an educated Bengali —an M.A. of the Calcutta University in the service of the Dholipore Raj. The accomplished lady has left Calcutta for the purpose. The proposed announcement, if true, is an interesting sign of the times, it being we believe, the first time when a Bengali has succeeded in winning the love of a Marathi lady."[7]

Whether this gentleman was Bipin Behari Das Medhavi, Ramabai's future husband, or but one of the many suitors who wished to marry Ramabai, we do not know. The date seemed to have been too early for her to have met Das Medhavi, and there seems to have been a mistake as to Ramabai setting out to marry him. Neither was it possible that Bipin Behari Das Medhavi worked in the service of the Dholipore Raj. It must have been but a rumour, as a girl of 20, unmarried and so much in the public eye, must have attracted a great deal of rumours. From wherever the *Sulabha Samachar* obtained its information, it certainly seemed to have been false, for Ramabai did not marry for another two years. But she must have attracted the attention not only of the Pandits but of many young men, who were much interested, at a time when women were so helpless, orthodox and uneducated, with this young beautiful goddess of learning who had descended in

[6] *The Statesman and Friend of India,* 18 January, 1879
[7] *Ibid.*, 18 November, 1878

their midst. Ramabai nevertheless thought little of marriage before her brother died and was fully absorbed in her lectures.

Ramabai lectured in Assam in the summer of 1879. A correspondent at Dhubri writes: "The celebrated Mahratta lady, Ramabai, visited Dhubri where she met with a cordial reception from the native and European communities. Her visit was made at the earnest invitation of the leaders of native society. During her stay at Dhubri, which extended for some days, she delivered two lectures, one on March 29 and the other on April 5. The subjects were 'The Rise and Fall of the Aryan Race' and 'Female Emancipation.' The discourses which were in Hindi, made some impression on the hearers. From what she said on the second day it was clear she was averse to that radical reform which is advocated and followed by many of the educated men of our day. A subscription is being raised for the purpose of presenting Ramabai with a purse to enable her to pursue her journey to Gauhati."[8]

Another reference in *The Statesman*, in the form of a letter signed "A Visitor" to the editors from Shillong, dated 21 August, 1879, says: "Sir, the celebrated Ramabai Saraswati, with her brother Srinivas Shastri, is staying here en route to Sylhet from Gowhati. At six-thirty p.m., on Monday, the 18th instant, a public meeting was convened to present her with an address in Sanskrit. The audience was composed of two to three hundred, and represented different religions and nationalities. Amongst others we noticed Miss Baimbridge, Mr. Wilson, the Inspector of Schools, and Rev. Jerman Jones of the Presbyterian Mission Society. The latter gentleman, on the proposal of Baboo Akshoy Cumar Chatterjee, was elected chairman for the evening. All the respectable native gentlemen of the station took a warm interest in the matter of arrangements and every other detail connected with her reception. Ramabai delivered an extempore lecture in Sanskrit and Hindi on 'Female Emancipation' which lasted for about one and a half hours. The clear language, the excellent delivery, the sweet voice, and the modesty with which the lecture was delivered were all very impressive. The present pitiable condition of the Hindoo females was narrated at length and contrasted with the condition of the members of their sex generations before. The apathy of the males to ameliorate the condition of the fair ones, was painted in true colours, with several illustrations. It is supposed that the

[8] *The Statesman*, 22 April, 1879

heart of even the staunchest advocate of the female thraldom beat violently as he listened to the lecture. All credit is due to the members of the Shillong Club and the other gentlemen through whose exertions the meeting was such a success. A subscription list is in circulation and it is hoped that a suitable amount will be raised for the purpose of presenting it to Ramabai. She leaves this place in a fortnight. It is in the contemplation of some gentlemen to request her to deliver another lecture before she leaves of which I may write to you."[9]

This record gives a better idea as to how Ramabai and her brother lived in Bengal and Assam. They were so much in demand for their broad-minded and learned lectures that they were given purses at various meetings to cover their expenses.

In August 1879, when Ramabai and her brother were in Shillong, that delightful hill station in Assam, she read in the Marathi paper, *Indu Prakash,* that a learned lady, Shrimati Anusuyabai known as Annu Akka was honoured at Nasik. Ramabai who was the first Indian woman to be publicly honoured for her learning and the first woman to appear in public as a lecturer was delighted to hear of another woman who was recognized by the learned Pandits, and wrote a letter of appreciation to the *Indu Prakash* which was published on 11 August, 1879. The letter was written in the most scholarly Marathi using Sanskrit words liberally. She pointed out that the future of India depended on the education of women. The *Subodh Patrika,* the mouthpiece of the Prarthana Samaj in Bombay, referred to this letter as follows: "We are proud of Pandita Ramabai, more so because she is a Maharashtrian lady. We shall be delighted if she can come and honour us by paying visits to our towns, like Poona, Bombay, etc. We anticipate that her stay in Maharashtra would be of greater significance and she would give a better lead to the women of this part of the country with her vast learning and intelligence."[10]

An article on Pandita Ramabai published in the Diamond Jubilee Number of the Sylhet Union by Mr. Hemendra Nath Das, the nephew of Bipin Behari Das Medhavi, throws some light on Pandita Ramabai's activities, in Assam and Sylhet in particular. The material for this article was supplied to Mr. Hemendra Nath Das by the Headmaster of the Sylhet District School, Rai Sahib

[9] *The Statesman and Friend of India*, 27 August, 1879

[10] *Subodh Patrika*, 7 September, 1879

Durga Kumar Basu, B.A., while the former was a student of the Entrance Class.

Ramabai and her brother Shrinivas reached Sylhet after having travelled through many of the towns of Assam where they gave lectures on the emancipation of women.

The Sylhet District School was, at the time, situated on the Mona Ray Hill, and here a Reception Committee was formed to give Pandita Ramabai a cordial welcome. Its President was Bipin Behari Das Medhavi, M.A. As Pandita Ramabai reached Chandni Ghat in Sylhet, she and her brother were warmly received by the distinguished men of the town, and they were taken in a procession to Khadanchi House where arrangements had been made for their stay. Here the young scholars met many learned visitors who came to meet the Pandita and pay their respects to her.

A public meeting was arranged in the spacious hall of the Sylhet residence of the Manipur Rajas which was presided over by Mr. Luttman Johnson, Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet. A congratulatory address was given to her written in Sanskrit and was read out by Kalikinkar Sarma, the head Pandit of the Sylhet District School. Pandita Ramabai was also presented with a purse and Bipin Behari Das delivered a short speech in which he related the life history of the Pandita and said that Ramabai was both the daughter and sister of learned men, and that she might become the wife of a learned man. Whether Bipin Behari Das had any idea that he would be the future husband of Ramabai at the time is not known; but this remark was significant and prophetic.

The teachers and students of Sylhet District School invited Ramabai to the school. "When she entered the premises we presented her with an ivory fan and a gold ring made in Sylhet," says Rai Sahib Durga Kumar Basu, and goes into delightful details. "The making charge of the fan was over Rs. 25 at that time. We took permission from Mr. Luttman Johnson for the meeting to be held in the school." Pandita Ramabai answered various questions at this meeting in Sanskrit. Every one was most astounded by her extraordinary gift of speaking fluently in this classical language.

"As far as my memory goes," says Rai Sahib Durga Kumar Basu, "Pandita Ramabai delivered a long speech in Sanskrit at the Manipur Palace after which Rai Bahadur Sita Mohan Das read a congratulatory address on behalf of the 'Sylhet Associa-

tion' of Calcutta." This address was possibly written by Dr. Sundari Mohan Das.

Another meeting was held at the Girish School to welcome Pandita Ramabai, where the Deputy Commissioner, a doctor and his wife, and Mr. Ratch, the Superintendent of Police and other officers were present. The meeting was well-conducted and a beautifully decorated gate with the welcome words: "Rama kindly come to our school," written on the arch, graced the occasion. All the arrangements were made by Rai Bahadur Sita Mohan Das and Rai Bahadur Baikuthanath Chakrabarti and others. From the many meetings Ramabai attended, the frequent lectures she gave, the eagerness with which she was received by the officials, British and Indian, the intellectual and reformist leaders, the Pandits of the orthodox Hindu community, and students, it was evident that Ramabai was welcomed, respected and loved by one and all.

Many intellectual men were eager to marry Ramabai as they felt it would be a great honour to have so learned a lady as wife. When Ramabai was at Sylhet, Shripad Babaji Thakur[11] of Bombay came all the way to Sylhet to seek the hand of Ramabai. He was a very learned man and a meeting was arranged for him, presided over by Shrinivas Shastri and delivered his speech in Sanskrit. At another meeting, arranged the next day on behalf of the Students' Union, Shripad Babaji spoke in English. Durga Kumar Basu and Bipin Chandra Pal also spoke. Shripad Babaji Thakur stayed a few days in Sylhet and got to know Ramabai directly when he lived there. But despite his great admiration and love for Ramabai, he found that his affection was not returned and that he had no chance of his proposal being accepted. He, therefore, returned to Bombay from Sylhet.

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Ramabai and Shrinivas went on to Dacca from Sylhet where they stayed some months as the guests of Shri Abhoy Charan Das, Personal Assistant to the Commissioner there. But here Shrinivas

[11] Mr. Shripad Babaji Thakur (1847-89), a Brahmin, was born in Bombay. After graduating, he went to England in 1868. He returned as a Barrister and an I.C.S. in 1872 and held responsible positions in the Government Service. He was very judicious and straightforward and had an extraordinary memory and knew fifteen languages.

died on 15 May, 1880, and Ramabai was now left all alone in the world.

Ramabai was so devoted to her brother and so certain of his protection that she never felt the need to marry. There was a highly educated Kayastha gentlemen, however, who wanted to marry her when she was in Sylhet, in Assam. Ramabai says many offers came to her from "rich and learned men. . . . I cared nought when my brother lived; so I rejected all offers. About a year before my brother's death, we were invited to come and stay in a town where we lived for ten months. There lived my dearly beloved late husband, Babu Bepin Behari, M.A., B.L., a very learned humble kindly gentleman. He became an intimate friend of my brother. I too became very much attached to him. After sometime, Mr. Bepin, as it usually happens, wrote a letter to me and asked my consent for marriage with him. I did not answer. After that he asked me again four or five times. 'It would be possible if my brother is agreeable to the proposition,' I said. After a few days we were invited to visit Dacca. Before proceeding there Mr. Bepin made me promise that I would not give my consent to marry anyone else, and that I would marry him if my brother gave his consent."[12]

Bepin Behari was head master of the Gauhati Normal School. He wrote a book entitled an *Introduction to Chemistry* in Bengali. This book was the first of its kind. Bepin Behari was born in the village of Morjatkandi (Cachar, Assam) and it is interesting that in order to perpetuate Ramabai's memory, a committee has been formed in the birth place of Bepin Behari, and an Institution has been inaugurated called Ramabai Seva Sadan, established by Sasindra Kumar Roy. The objects of this Institution are to serve the sick and organize charitable projects. It is called Bepin Bhavan.

When Ramabai left Assam for Dacca with Shrinivas, she little anticipated that her brother would fall fatally ill. Bipin Behari had attracted Ramabai when she was in Sylhet. He was handsome and talented and Shrinivas when he fell ill, kept harping on the fate which would overtake his beloved sister. Obviously he was wanting her to marry his friend.

Ramabai writes: "His great thought during his illness was for me; and what would become of me left alone in the world. When

[12] *Subodh Patrika*, 17 November, 1882

he spoke of his anxiety, I answered, 'There is no one but God to care for you and me,' to which he answered, 'Ah, if God cares for us I am afraid of nothing.' Indeed in my loneliness it seemed as if God was near me. What I felt in these circumstances, I, so ignorant of the world and with no one I could call my own, the reader can conceive." Shrinivas died on 8 May, 1880. "I just have no words to describe how grieved I was then," says Ramabai. "I leave it for you to imagine my condition." Three months after her brother's death Bipin Behari went to Calcutta to meet Ramabai, and her well-wishers advised her to get married. Shripad Babaji Thakur had been trying for a year to marry her. Friends and leaders in Calcutta tried to persuade her to marry him, but Ramabai had given her word to Bipin Behari. She decided to marry Bipin Behari at last. It was quite obvious that of all her suitors Ramabai was most attracted by him.

She was now invited by *Subodh Patrika* of Bombay to go to Maharashtra to teach in a girls' Institute, but she had no inclination to leave Eastern India just then and said she belonged to all India and not only to Maharashtra.

Six weeks after her brother's death she married Bipin Behari on 13 November, 1880. The marriage took place at Bankipur in a Court according to the Civil Marriage Act (Act III of 1872, which legalized Brahmo marriages). We are told that Mr. and Mrs. Beverieze (Beveridge?) were present at the wedding and helped in all possible ways. As a result of this marriage, Bipin Behari was ex-communicated by his society and relatives.[13]

Ramabai writes simply: "We neither of us believed in Hinduism or Christianity, and so we were married with the civil marriage rites."

A biographer suggests that Bipin Behari was an orthodox Hindu.[14] If this was true, Bipin Behari would certainly not have married Ramabai of a different caste; neither would the marriage have been according to civil marriage rites. It is obvious that Bipin Behari had strong leanings towards the Brahmo faith though he may have had othodox Hindu friends and relations of his community. Hence the objections raised in connection with his marriage.

[13] Pandita Ramabai—a pamphlet published by Bipin Bhavan, Morjatkandi (Cachar), p. 2

[14] D. N. Tilak, *Pandita Ramabai*, p. 66

Bipin Behari was a Kayasth whom Ramabai herself considered a shudra for she says: "I married a Bengali gentleman of the shudra caste." Ramabai was a Brahmin, and though she thought nothing of marrying a non-Brahmin, society—always anxious to interfere and destroy god-given happiness in the name of God—once again began its harassment and its nagging pin-pricks and criticisms.

Some evil tongues wagged so unkindly as to suggest that Ramabai in her loneliness was forced to marry a man of a lower caste and a different province because no Chitpavan Brahmin would have her; but this we know is not true, for many high caste Brahmins had desired to marry her. Ramabai herself denies this accusation and avers that she married of her own choice. Bipin Behari Das had been a good friend to her and Shrinivas. She honoured, loved and eventually married him. What reason had anyone, therefore to criticize or condemn either her or Bipin Behari? A simple love marriage had taken place irrespective of caste and religion. This romantic phenomenon was far too difficult for society to understand or even tolerate.

The objections naturally were not all from the Brahmin Maharashtrian community. The Kayasthas of Bengal and Assam, in their turn, objected that one of their most cultured young men should marry a strange woman who was unmarried even at twenty-two, and who so boldly lectured in public. Such inter-caste, inter-provincial marriages should not be encouraged, they felt. The local newspapers criticized the young couple mercilessly until Bipin Behari was at last almost boycotted by his own society. His cousin, Krishnapriya Chaudhurani, the first woman writer of Sylhet, tried to take Bipin Behari's part and bring him back into their social group; but her efforts were in vain. Rajani Nath Nandi, the translator of *Stree Dharma Neety* into Bangali, in his introduction to the book, says that he personally knew Bipin Behari who was one of the most respected men of his community and that it was strange that so much criticism was levelled at him and Ramabai for their marriage. Poor Bipin Behari was even accused of seeking a wealthy wife of a higher caste, but Ramabai could scarcely have been termed "rich" seeing that she was extremely poor and was managing to live only by means of earning some money through her lectures. Neither was it caste which attracted Bipin Behari for Kayasthas can well be proud of their own good caste;

but the mere charm and intellectual genius of a young girl. Was society bereft of all traces of romance? The marriage was condemned by Kayasthas in Bengal and Assam and by the Chitpavans of Maharashtra. Writing about the objections to this marriage, a pamphlet[15] remarks that Hindu society has now advanced and that such a marriage would have been something to boast about today. But Bipin Behari underwent various sufferings, though his action was something to be admired by future generations. At the time, Bipin Behari had to leave Sylhet for Silchar where he practised law. According to Ramabai, "His income was all right and quite good enough. But he incurred some debt on account of his studies and a house that was recently built." He was in debt till the end of his life. When Bipin Behari died on 4 February, 1882, Ramabai received a letter written to Bipin Behari asking him to repay Rs. 250 which he had borrowed. Ramabai had not even a penny to her name; but she sent word saying it would be repaid as soon as possible. Later she sent Rs. 170 by money order. For the balance of Rs. 80, books worth that amount, were handed over to Madhav Charan Choudhury, husband of Krishnapriya Chaudhurani. Ramabai's letter to Mr. Choudhury says: "Kindly oblige me by acknowledging the amount and forwarding a receipt. I depend upon your natural goodness to excuse me for the guilt of having kept you waiting for this small amount for such a long time. It was a pleasure to learn from Mahendra Nath's letter about your advancement."

Mr. Choudhury replied saying it was hardly Ramabai's duty to repay her husband's debt and that "what she had done had only added to her stature."

Ramabai writes about her marriage thus: "According to the accepted version of the Hindu religion, my husband was a shudra while I was a Chitpavan Brahmin. I became subject to severe criticism; they objected to inter-caste, inter-provincial marriages and also to my age. They said I married a shudra because no one else would have me. People talked like this and I know I should not have heeded these criticisms. But I felt embarrassed all the same. My husband lost his parents when quite young. He struggled and worked hard and got his degree. He was thirty years of age when he died."[16]

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 3

[16] *Subodh Patrika*, 17 November, 1882

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Despite objections from orthodox Hindus and from the family of Bipin Behari Das, Ramabai lived happily with her husband in Silchar for nineteen months. During this time a daughter—Manorama (Heart's delight)—was born to the young couple. Bipin Behari practised as a pleader in Silchar. We are further told by a biographer who knew Ramabai personally that Bipin Behari was a member of the Brahmo Samaj, a reformed Hindu Society founded by Keshab Chunder Sen, who showered great kindness when Ramabai was in Calcutta and had given her both the Vedas and Upanishads to read. Her marriage, of course, put her out of caste, and from the caste point of view almost irredeemably defiled her. She was, however, very happy for nineteen months.[17] The house in which they lived was later converted into a charitable dispensary.

In spite of this testimony of a personal friend of Ramabai's, a controversy now exists as to whether Pandita Ramabai was happy in her short married life with Bipin Behari. The trouble seems to have been Ramabai's growing interest in Christianity. She tells us of her first introduction to the Bible. There was a copy of the Gospel of St. Luke in Bengali in Bipin Behari's house. Though Ramabai had been given the Sanskrit Bible by the leading Christians of Calcutta, the book had not appealed to her much, as the language was different from the Sanskrit of the Hindu literature she had been accustomed to. The Gospel of St. Luke in Bengali, however, attracted her strongly. By this time Ramabai had learnt Bengali. Ramabai asked her husband, however, to explain the story more fully and Bipin Behari was pleased and so encouraged her that he even called Mr. Allen, a Baptist Missionary in Silchar, to interpret St. Luke to her. The study of the Bible then began and according to Ramabai: "There lived a Baptist Missionary, Mr. Allen, at Silchar. He occasionally paid visits to me and preached the Gospel. He explained the first chapter of the book of Genesis to me. The story of the creation of the world was so very unlike all the stories which I read in the Puranas and Shastras that I became greatly interested in it. It struck me as being a true story, but I could not give any reason for thinking so or believing in it."[18]

[17] Mary L. B. Fuller, *The Triumph of an Indian Widow*, p. 19

[18] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 11

Ramabai continues: "As I had lost all faith in my former religion, and my heart was hungering after something better, I eagerly learnt everything which I could about the Christian religion, and declared my intention to become a Christian, if I were perfectly satisfied with this new religion. My husband, who had studied in a Mission School, was pretty well acquainted with the Bible but did not like to be called a Christian. Much less did he like the idea of his wife being publicly baptized and of joining the despised Christian community. He was very angry and said he would tell Mr. Allen not to come to our house any more. I do not know just what would have happened had he lived much longer."[19]

An interpretation of this account seems simple. The Brahmos believed a great deal in Christianity, especially those who were the followers of Keshab Chunder Sen and belonged to the Naba Bidhan or the New Dispensation. They believed in the unity of the religion and eclecticism. Bipin Behari shared their views. All the sacred books—the Bible, the Zend Avesta and the Koran, not to speak of the Hindu Scriptures, both *Shriti* and *Smriti*—were included in their religious sacred books. "Even more than Ram Mohan, Keshub was influenced by Christianity. Ram Mohan was influenced only by the Monotheism and ethics of Christianity but Keshub after the proclamation of Nava Bidhana introduced in his Church the Christian ceremonies of *Baptism* and the Lord's Supper."[20] Bipin Behari had also, as Ramabai said, studied the Bible at school.

But beyond this study and an interest in Christ as a religious teacher he was not prepared to go. He seems to have been surprised that Ramabai's interest in the Gospel of St. Luke seemed to take her further. We can easily imagine the domestic scene! Ramabai, the Seeker after the Unknown God, suddenly drinking deep of the beautiful story of Jesus as related by St. Luke. Never had Ramabai read such sacred literature. Bipin Behari suddenly realised danger. Would his beloved impressionable wife be converted to Christianity? Such a step must not take place. He suddenly became angry and forbade Mr. Allen from visiting the house, and there the matter ended. Ramabai had no idea at the time, or even later in 1883, when she sailed for England of ever becoming a

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 12

[20] V. P. Varma, *Modern Political Thought*, p. 41

Christian. But the seed sown by St. Luke had taken root. They argued over Ramabai's interest in Christianity, and then Ramabai, after she gave up reading St. Luke with Mr. Allen, returned to her normal life of catering for the needs of her happy home and doing what little social work she could. Apart from temporarily disturbing Bipin Behari and rousing his anger, there is nothing more to this incident, although it has led to the belief among some that Bipin Behari may have been cruel to his wife. There seems to be no reason whatever to come to this uncharitable conclusion. She must have quite casually thought of being converted and this had angered her husband.

Considering the turn events eventually took, what would her husband have said if he had lived to see her being baptized. At the time and for a year and a half later, Ramabai had no thought except for a fleeting wish perhaps in the presence of Mr. Allen, of becoming a Christian.[21]

This innocent episode seems to have been rather unhappily interpreted by Mr. Tilak, one of Ramabai's biographers. He has quoted in his book an interview from the *Daily Inter-Ocean*, Chicago, of 10 December, 1887, said to have been given by Ramabai, in which she is alleged to have said:

> "There is a widow whose husband wished her to be visited and instructed by a Missionary, but when the time came and she was convinced of the truth of Christianity and wished to accept it publicly, the husband commanded her not to do this, and after that the missionary was not allowed to visit the wife and I have seen the wife abused and beaten by the husband and compelled to remain in the home without confessing Christianity."

Under the analogy that Ramabai once told Dean Rachael Bodley that she really meant her sister when she was referring to a relation who had been married early, with disastrous results, in her *High Caste Hindu Woman*, Mr. Tilak comes to the rather startling conclusion that the widow referred to in the *Daily Inter-Ocean* was in fact Ramabai herself. True, the events described are identical with her case with Mr. Allen, but nowhere else, except in the *Daily Inter-Ocean*, Chicago, has it ever been hinted that the wife

[21] D. N. Tilak, *Pandita Ramabai*, pp. 134, 135

was "abused and beaten by the husband and compelled to remain in the house without confessing Christianity." A frank truthful character like Ramabai cannot possibly have made such an important confession to a strange newspaper reporter, while she never once repeated this story anywhere else. She would surely have mentioned it in her Testimony if there had been any truth in it. It is, one feels, only a surmise of Mr. Tilak's that Ramabai's story of the maltreated widow referred to herself. Also, the quotation from the *Daily Inter-Ocean* was from an interview and was not written by Ramabai. Such interviews are often garbled and the reporter may easily have exaggerated or misunderstood Ramabai. Bepin Behari had the reputation of a kind, humble and learned man, who was much loved in Assam. To this day his family revere the memory of Pandita Ramabai.

Dean Rachael Bodley herself cites Ramabai's statement that she was "happily married" and that her "dear husband died of cholera" after nineteen months. "This great grief" drew Ramabai nearer to God. "A few months before the husband's death a little daughter was born in the happy home—a daughter greatly desired by both father and mother before her birth, and hence, she found a beautiful name awaiting her—Manorama (Heart's Joy)."[22]

Ramabai always referred to her husband as "my dear husband" and to her married life as "happy" and to her bereavement as "great grief." Ramabai's inclination towards Christianity had not been so strong at the time, or else she would have surely embraced Christianity when her husband died. On the contrary, she left Silchar first for Madras and some reports have it that she even travelled as far West as Karachi, and then went to Poona, where she held classes in the Puranas in Mrs. Ranade's home, and as already suggested she would not have averred that "nothing would induce me to embrace Christianity."

Ramabai dedicated her first Marathi book, the *Stree Dharma Neety* "To my dearly beloved husband" Also, Manorama, Ramabai's daughter remarks about her mother and father: "As they were about to establish a small school for child-widows in their own home, the husband suddenly died leaving Ramabai, that most helpless of all women, a soulless widow. Drinking again from the cup of sorrow now filled to overflowing, Ramabai felt herself

[22] Dean Rachael Bodley, *The High Caste Hindu Woman*, p. xv

drawn nearer to God. The one sacred tie left to her—mother and child—did but intensify the mother love and tenderness for the millions of child-wives and child-widows who had never tasted the joys of childhood and she consecrated herself to their redemption."[23]

These words and facts speak for themselves. The happiness of Ramabai's short married life cannot be doubted. Mr. Hemendra Nath Das, nephew of Mr. Bipin Behari Das Medhavi, remarks in his article in the *Sylhet Souvenir* for which the material was supplied by his Headmaster, Rai Bahadur Durga Kumar Basu: "Ramabai was overwhelmed with grief after the sudden death of her husband. May this noble gentleman then, rest in peace." The seeds of Christianity sown, so far rather thinly, once in Benaras and later in Calcutta may not have taken so firm a root in the questing mind of Ramabai if her own husband had not encouraged her to read the Gospel of St. Luke and if the Brahmo Samaj itself had not shown so great a leaning towards Christian teaching.

Apart from her studying the Gospel of St. Luke, Ramabai's short married life was spent on the study of Sanskrit, more deeply than before, and writing her famous Sanskrit "Ode to the Berlin Congress" in 1881, her mind must have been greatly relaxed for her to write such profound Sanskrit poetry. She and her husband also wished to start a school, and Jennie Chappell, one of her many intimate biographers, even says: "Ramabai dared to call him by his first or, as we should say, his 'Christian' name."[24] All her biographers—many of them having personally known Ramabai—speak of her happy married life.

A letter about Ramabai from Mrs. Krishnapriya Chaudhurani is enlightening. She was a cousin (mother's sister's daughter) of Bipin Behari Medhavi. After his marriage to Ramabai, Bipin Babu found himself excommunicated but this cousin with a progressive outlook did what she could to make things smooth. She invited him and Ramabai to her house. Here is a short account of the stay as appears from a letter written by Krishnapriya to Mr. Hemendra Nath Das.

"Bipin arrived with his wife in a palanquin and as soon as they got down, I embraced my dear cousin Bipin and my dear Ramabai and took them inside. When Bipin bowed at my feet, Rama

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 13

[24] Jennie Chappell, *Pandita Ramabai*, p. 19

with folded hands did 'Namaskar.' My revered husband had advised me to do 'namaskar' to Ramabai before she did but Rama did not give me the opportunity. She used to call me 'Thakurdidi' and I used to call her 'Badhu Thakurani.' Manorama, their daughter, was a child of seven months then. My husband got a goldsmith to make for Manorama a golden 'kanthi' (necklace), golden bangles, a gold chain (for the waist) and silver anklets and had a separate bed made for her complete with quilt and pillows. He himself offered 'Attar' to Bipin and Ramabai and sprinkled rose-water on them. After she had been received with 'attar' and rose-water, she remarked smilingly: 'we have become rich people it seems'. Next day we went to the tank together for a bath. She taught me to swim. She requested my husband to take a special interest in my education. Women of the locality used to come to my house to see her. The illiterate women had to remain satisfied with a look at her; they did not have the courage to talk. She made them get over their diffidence one day by starting to talk herself. She was very suave in her dealings with them. She advised many on the duties of women. On a particular moon-lit night, she was much struck by the beauty of the tree-studded village which made her immensely happy. She had been to the late Achyut Charan Chaudhary's house on that night. She went inside all the rooms and had a kind word for all the people she met. Seeing a married girl loaded with ornaments, she remarked jestingly, 'A female bird of the forest resents shackles, such as anklets. Like the birds confined in a cage, women are kept within the four walls of their homes which is their cage.' The walls in the villages at the time were bamboo-walls. Ramabai's remarks caused much merriment among those present."

"We had had an extremely delightful time with Ramabai and Bipin Behari and many were the festivities arranged during their stay. Even at this distance of time, I have not forgotten the hour of their leave-taking and the many happy words that were exchanged."[25]

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"My husband died of cholera within two years after our marriage,

[25] Material supplied by Hemendra Nath Das; translated into English by K. N. Ray Chaudhuri.

and I was left alone to face the world with one baby in my arms,"[26] comments Ramabai. Bipin Behari died on 4 February 1882. Ramabai now concentrated all her energies on service and on finding God. She no doubt felt the challenge given by providence to her strongly at this time. All her life she had seen the sufferings of widows, and now, God had made her one. What would she do? Would she, like other widows of the country, succumb to living a mere negative life in mourning and trying to expiate her sin which caused her husband's death, the Karma of the wife in a previous birth? Would she abandon all thoughts of service and her quest for God? Pandita Ramabai took up the challenge. She had no wish to remain in Assam as she was accused by his relatives of being the cause of Bipin Behari's early death. She boldly followed the light which shone before her to free the other widows of her country. She led a life of extreme action and as before once again took up her lecturing.

Ramabai reverted to her former occupation of emancipation of women. She determined to devote the rest of her life to this cause and planned to lecture far and wide. She wished to have the Shastras correctly interpreted and the women of India allotted their rightful status. Soon, Ramabai gained many admirers, among whom was Dr. W. W. Hunter, who had heard her earlier on the banks of the Ganges.

It must have been difficult for Ramabai, nevertheless, again to uproot herself from the short respite she had enjoyed from the trials of this world in her happy home. For nineteen months she had tasted the joys of her home she had never known before. Despite slander and criticism, Ramabai had made for herself a niche in Assam and Bengal, but now what reason had she to stay on, especially as the accusing finger of cruel custom was again being pointed at her? "I told you so," it said and so Ramabai once again shouldered her troubles, and ventured forth into the turbulent world. This time she was not alone. She had a baby to care for—her Heart's Delight—but here was an added anxiety, though the small daughter also afforded her the incentive to make of her another woman who would serve God and the country and be her right hand. Ramabai writes: "By this time all my relatives —in the Karnatak, in Maharashtra and in Assam—had by the will of God been taken from me. There was no reason now why

[26] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 11

I should remain longer in that part of the country. Accordingly I made up my mind to go to Madras and there study the English language. But when I went there and found the language the people spoke was wholly strange to me, I resolved to return to Maharashtra."[27]

She is also said to have visited Karachi at this time, and she may have been searching for a part of India where she could stay without being blamed and harassed for sins she never committed and for the good she always worked for so ardently.

A point which is rather puzzling in the passage quoted above, is that Ramabai chose to go to Madras before returning to Maharashtra. One wonders why she went there to learn English. She could have easily done so in Assam, Bengal or Maharashtra itself. Was this because both in Eastern India and Maharashtra she was accused of being a widow and those who criticized her were too overpowering? That she was the cause of her husband's death was definitely now believed by those orthodox people who had opposed the inter-caste marriage. The orthodox amongst Ramabai's own province also accused her at the time, and hence she went to Madras. Due to language difficulties, however, she decided to return to Maharashtra. But she had already wandered a great deal in the south with her father. One cannot understand, therefore, why Ramabai found the language strange. Possibly Madras had no real welcome for her and Ramabai felt it was best to return to her home province. Also, perhaps the less conservative Maharashtrians were anxious to have her with them.

"From the Maharashtra, to which as a Konkanasth, Ramabai belonged, came urgent calls to come to Poona, the ancient capital of the old Maratha Kingdom and the Athens of all the Marathi-speaking country. She was told that the women of her own province had the first claim on her, but great-hearted Ramabai, who had gone up and down India for twenty years, and could speak five of its modern vernaculars besides Sanskrit, replied that the women of India were all alike dear to her. She knew that wherever she went, however eagerly the reformed societies might welcome and help her, the orthodox element would be bitter in its opposition, and would spare her no more than it had spared her father—far less in fact, for in the first place she was that inauspicious thing, a widow; and further, as the outcaste widow of a

[27] Macnicol, *Pandita Ramabai*, p. 50

shudra, her position was specially ignominious."[28] Miss Fuller says: "Naturally feeling ran higher in Maharashtra and Ramabai dreaded going there, and so she went to Madras, where she had no friends, to learn English and earn her livelihood as best she could —her husband had incurred debts for his education and had left her little; but she was not happy in Madras, and very lonely. She did not know Tamil, which was a Dravidic rather than a Sanskritic base, and made slow headway in learning it, great linguist though she was and so she yielded at last to the urgent entreaties of her friends in Poona and went there."[29]

And so we have the picture of this young widow of twenty-two, with a baby in her arms, forging courageously ahead, despite all her sorrows and loneliness. At first condemned as an unmarried girl, then criticized quite mercilessly for marrying out of her caste, and now outcaste as an inauspicious widow for "her husband's early death was simply a matter of Karma. It was inconceivable that a Brahmin so deeply sinning should be allowed to live in the enjoyment of her wicked lawlessness. It was only surprising that her husband had not died much sooner. It was a marvel he had not, for his own presumptuous impiety as well as for her punishment, been struck down on the marriage day. Had that happened, it would have been very satisfactory; and yet what had happened was for her, perhaps, after all, the greater punishment. There was much satisfaction and heads wagged afresh."[30]

The great reformers, Mahadev Govind Ranade and his wife, Ramabai, were, however, in Poona and immediately took Pandita Ramabai under their protection. Ramabai Ranade, who had already heard of the famous Pandita's arrival in Poona, eulogizes her in her book of reminiscences—*Athvani*. She says that Ramabai was renowned as a Sanskrit scholar, and had learnt the whole of the Shrimat Bhagawat by heart, and had succeeded in defeating so many scholars at Benaras in argument. Ramabai Ranade, therefore, full of excitement at the news of the arrival of this great lady in Poona, went to Mr. Bhide and Mr. Modak for confirmation of the news. They told her that the Pandita was a Konkanasth Brahmin and that according to their request she would stay in a building arranged by them, where Ramabai Ranade could see her.[31]

[28] Fuller, *The Triumph of an Indian Widow*, pp. 19, 20
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 21 [30] *Ibid.*, p. 20 [31] Ramabai Ranade, *Athvani*, p. 82

Ramabai Ranade goes on to relate how the Pandita arrived in Poona with her little daughter and a Bengali gentleman, "who was like her own brother." Her first lecture was given at the Ranade's house and regular meetings were henceforth held there. The two Ramabais soon became great friends and studied English together. Of the lectures, it was announced in the *Indu Prakash* that "only the high class and respectable good ladies would be invited to come and attend this meeting."[32] This magazine was edited by Mahadev Govind Ranade.

Ramabai must have, immediately after her husband's death, had her hair shorn, though not shaved, and thus she remained with short-cropped hair and wearing the white widow's sari and no ornaments all her life. In other provinces red, ochre or orange is the colour of the widow's weed, but in Bengal it is white, and the Brahmo widow also usually wears white silk or cotton without a border. Thus Ramabai dressed in future and did not change her mode of costume even after she became a Christian. She naturally followed the habits of a Brahmin from birth though she could have changed her diet on becoming a Christian and even as a Brahmo. Her personal habits were rigidly orthodox. At no time did she think of remarrying, even though she advocated widow remarriage.

[32] *Indu Prakash*, 11 June, 1883

PART II

1882-1893

I

Poona

1

RAMABAI arrived in Poona, on 30 April, 1882. She was warmly welcomed by the leaders of the reform groups and Prarthana Samaj; but she was well aware of the strong feelings of opposition against her from the orthodox section. In fact, Poona was the seat of high caste Brahmin autocracy, and into this hornet's nest Ramabai descended. Young widows were considered criminals. Their past sins were the cause of their husband's death. They were working out their Karma as ill-fated, almost, offensive creatures on earth. They were to be shunned and despised.

Ramabai, therefore, despite being lionized on the one side, chose not to offend the other, and rented a room and lived quietly there with her daughter. It was into the shelter of these poor lodgings that Ramabai later took in an orphan Brahmin girl, who was cast out. Even at that time, Ramabai realized that it was more in practice than in precept that one would have to live, and she started sheltering the little widow of twelve, Thakubai, who later became one of her most ardent workers in Mukti.

Ramabai loved her independence and was happy in her home,

keeping away from those who harassed her but rejoicing in the friendship of those who appreciated and loved her. That her striking personality drew more admiration than recrimination was very evident from the loud clamour of applause which followed her wherever she appeared. Here was a woman, almost boyish in her close-cropped hair, but draped in her white widow's sari, aged twenty-four, with a baby in her arms, determined to fight for freedom and the raising of the social status of her widow sisters. Was it any wonder that she was almost looked upon with awe?

Even those reactionaries who condemned her were in secret her admirers. There is the story of an old woman who loved Ramabai very much; but people in orthodox circles carried to her many evil rumours about Ramabai. Years later, this lady met Miss Fuller and told her some of these stories. Then she began to weep and prayed for forgiveness for uttering these words which she then considered as sacrilegious.

"She was like God to me," said the woman, "and she was holy. She was kinder to me than my own mother. Never can I repay the debt she put upon me." But when Ramabai first settled in Poona, this very woman had refused to eat the food touched by the Pandita.

Kindness is all, and when coupled with this gentle quality is combined intense learning and the will to serve and sacrifice oneself for one's country, resistance, however strong it may be, must break down. And thus were even the orthodox touched! Ramabai writes: "The leaders of the reform party and the members of the Prarthana Samaj treated me with great kindness and gave me some help. Messrs. Ranade, Modak, Kelkar and Dr. Bhandarkar were among the people who showed great kindness to me."[1] Miss Hurford, a missionary came and taught her the New Testament in Marathi. She had also begun to study English, but she could not write or speak it properly. Miss Hurford taught her lessons from primary readers, but Ramabai "was more interested in the study of the New Testament than in reading books." That great apostle of the nineteenth century, the Rev. Father Goreh was another missionary who used to explain the difference between the Hindu and Christian religions to Ramabai. She says she "profited much by their teaching."

[1] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 12.

2

When such renowned philanthropists and great men as Chief Justice M. G. Ranade, Dr. Sir R. G. Bhandarkar, Mr. Justice K. P. Telang, Sir N. G. Chandavarkar and others belonging to that splendid religious reform group known as the Prarthana Samaj welcomed and befriended Ramabai in Poona, she had not much to fear or want. They were anxious for her to work for the cause of women, and Ramabai herself was eager to return to her campaign, and once again begin her lectures.

Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901) was a colossus in the field of reform and national aspirations. He was the leader of modern thought and with his Anglo-Marathi paper, *Indu Prakash,* which he started in 1862, he became the sponsor of almost all forward thinking groups in Maharashtra. He was born in Nasik and died in Bombay. He founded the Poona *Sarva-Janik Sabha* in 1870. Though national to the core, and eager to revive a reformed form of Hinduism, he was very conscious of the prevalent evils of the time, especially towards women. Ranade was also "influenced by the theistic ideas" and Christianity. Though he did not approve of Christian proselytizing, "Christian influence was as marked on him as on Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Keshab Chunder Sen."

The Prarthana Samaj was founded in Bombay in 1867 under the leadership of Dr. Atmaram Pandurang and other leading Marathi reformers. In 1870, it was joined by Ranade and Bhandarkar, and still later by that other great champion of social reform, Sir N. G. Chandavarkar. Ranade was also a member of the Widow-Marriage Association formed in 1866. Social advancement was essential to him, as otherwise he felt that no political advancement would be successful, and, therefore, he founded the Social Conference movement. These conferences were held annually along with the Indian National Congress Sessions. It was a Socio-patriotic organization and later developed into the organ of the present Indian National Congress. The one was called the Indian National Social Conference and the other the Indian National Congress. The latter's first President was W. C. Bonnerjee, said to be an Indian Christian. It was inaugurated in 1885. The first Indian National Social Conference was held in Madras in 1887 along with the third National Congress Session. In 1889, Pandita

Ramabai was the first Indian woman to lead a delegation and to speak at both the Indian National Congress Session and the Indian National Social Conference held in December in Bombay.

But long before, in 1882, Ramabai came into prominence. She read her first 'Purana' in Ranade's house soon after she arrived in Poona.

Ranade gave a new interpretation to the role of the Marathas and wrote a valuable history of them entitled "The Rise of the Maratha Power" in 1900. The Marathas made and unmade the Moghul Emperors in Delhi for nearly half a century. Ranade was instrumental in awakening Marathi thought which later formed so important a part in India's nation building. Politically, socially, and from a religious point of view, he was a towering figure.

Ranade's marriage with Ramabai, Pandita Ramabai's friend (whom he, as a widower of 32, married as a girl of twelve), was said to be one of the happiest partnerships. His happy life in his own home, the extraordinary influence he had on his wife and the ideal atmosphere he created in his house was an inspiration to men and women of his day.

To turn an ignorant Marathi girl into one of the leading women of India was no small achievement. The emancipation of women always occupied the forefront of Ranade's activities; but unlike so many men who preach but do not practise, he, like Anant Shastri, started the enlightenment in his own house. It was in this congenial home, with a man who so resembled her father in wishing to educate his wife, that Pandita Ramabai was welcomed.

Ramabai Ranade soon became one of the leading women of her time. She gathered a band of women and lectured to them on first aid and social work. Gradually she formulated plans for a Home of Service and finally started the Poona Seva Sadan, with branches all over the Bombay Presidency. Her principal objects in starting the home were to teach and educate women through a course of regular classes; and to widen their range of knowledge by opening libraries and arranging lectures. She came to Poona when Mahadev Govind Ranade was a subordinate judge.

Ramabai Ranade admits that Pandita Ramabai was one of her principal sources of inspiration. When Ramabai Ranade was nineteen years of age she came under the influence of Pandita Ramabai who started the Arya Mahila Samaj and at her house used to conduct *Purans* (narrating versified scriptures) week by week.

Because Ramabai Ranade attended those meetings, she was not allowed to touch the other women of the family or the cooking vessels of the house. But she persisted in improving her mind, and gained so much courage from the example of the Pandita that in 1884 she read an address to the Governor praying that a Girls' High School be established in Poona. In those days it took immense courage for a woman to stand up in public at all, even to read an address composed by her husband.

One can imagine Pandita Ramabai and Ramabai Ranade then —the young widow and the young wife—braving the storms, and with courage and indomitable will, creating a revolution in the world of orthodox Hindus.

We are greatly indebted to the two Ramabais—to the Pandita, the first Indian woman ever to inspire the country to raise the status of womanhood, and Ramabai Ranade, who received a great deal of inspiration from the Pandita.

How quickly have the number of Indian women reformers multiplied since the days of the two great Ramabais and how much happier are our lives today! Surely their spirits still hover over us, inspiring us in our work.

"To what is the Kingdom of God like, and to what will I compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and cast into his garden; and it grew until it became a tree, and the birds of the air found a lodging in its branches."[2]

3

Pandita Ramabai was the first to start Mahila Samitis in Poona and Bombay. With the birth of the Arya Mahila Samaj in Poona on 1 May, 1882, and in Bombay on 30 November, 1882 women's institutions were inaugurated in all other parts of India. She inspired these institutions to be started in Bengal and Dwarkanath Ganguli published an appeal for this Samiti. He gave a great sketch of Pandita Ramabai's life and continued: "Such is the career of a lady who is doing so much for the unfortunate women of India. But she can hardly achieve any success single-handed. It is incumbent on men to set aside their apathy towards females to give them the concessions they have a right to claim, and to support them in their efforts towards progress. If they do not give a

[2] Gospel according to St. Luke, (Authorized Version), Ch. 13: 18-19

helping hand to the so-called feeble sex, a time will come when the members of that sex will form themselves into a strong community and challenge them to open war. It is hoped that our enlightened brethren in different parts of India will lend them aid towards the establishment of branch Associations and induce their female relatives to join this society. The National Indian Association, it is hoped will give its cordial support to this movement."[3]

Ramabai also came in contact at this time with the first home for abandoned babies which had been started in Pandharpur in 1875. This home was organized by the Prarthana Samaj despite opposition at the time to help fallen unmarried women. But so far, except for a few sporadic cases, the reforms concerning women were scanty. The following Acts had been passed: The Suttee Act, 1829, The Widow Re-Marriage Act, 1856, and the Female Infanticide Act, 1870. Such questions as fixing the marriageable age of girls; amending the Act relating to the restitution of conjugal rights; modifying the forfeiture of the property clause in the Widow Re-Marriage Act of 1856; so that a widow, in the event of re-marriage, may be able to retain her civil rights; allowing the flagrant immorality on the part of the husband as grounds for legal separation, and disallowing the Devadasi system had not as yet been attacked. Even the Age of Consent Act was only enforced nine years later in 1891.

Pandita Ramabai's scheme for starting a Mahila Samaj was something quite new at the time. Ramabai opened the Samaj in order to eliminate the evil practices of child-marriage and other wrongs and to improve the conditions of women and promote their education. It was to be the nucleus from which an agitation could be started for the emancipation of women. Sir W. W. Hunter speaking in Edinburgh remarked that Ramabai "went from city to city throughout the Bombay Presidency, establishing branch societies and arousing the people by her eloquent appeals."[4]

The Arya Mahila Samaj met every Saturday. Before Pandita Ramabai started this club Ramabai Ranade had similar meetings which were later held under the auspices of the Samaj. The Pandita's "magic personality" attracted a large number of women.

Ramabai Ranade says in her *Athvani* that Pandita Ramabai's

[3] Prabhat Chandra Ganguli, *The Awakening of Womanhood in Bengal* (Bangler Nari Jagaram)

[4] Manoramabai, Pandita Ramabai: *The Widows' Friend,* p. 17

speech was sweet and musical and that she "presented her subject most admirably."[5] Those who heard her were easily won over, and she created a great impression on young and old who came in large numbers to hear her. But there were always the orthodox, horrified at anything new, at any song of mercy sung to the women of the times who had become the fit slaves of dogmatists.

In one of her lectures at the time, Pandita Ramabai says: "Men look on us women as chattels. We make every effort to deliver ourselves from this situation. But some will say that this is a rebellion against man, and that to do this is sin. To leave men's evil acts unrebuked and remain unmoved before them is a great sin."[6]

Ramabai soon began to feel that, despite the support of such tolerant reformers as Ranade and others of the Prarthana Samaj, she could not carry out her intended task. Now her longing to achieve some outstanding movement for the amelioration of women began passionately to possess her. She realized she must have money and support for her schemes at any cost, and these the people of India were not willing wholeheartedly to give.

On 5 September, 1882, after six months of hard work for women in Maharashtra, Ramabai welcomed the Education Commission in the Town Hall, Poona, as the spokeswoman for 300 high-caste women. The Education Commission had been appointed by Lord Ripon's Government to investigate the important question of the prospects of women's education.

Dr. W. W. Hunter, the President of the Commission, greatly respected Ramabai, stressing her evidence as of untold importance. He had already heard her lecturing at Banaras and had spoken warmly of her to his own countrymen and women. Ramabai's evidence, given in Marathi, was so important, that Dr. Hunter had it translated and separately printed. Ramabai was questioned thus:

Q. 1: "State what opportunities you have had of forming an opinion on the subject of Education in India, and in what province your experience had been gained?"

[5] Ramabai Ranade, *Athvani*, p. 106
[6] *Subodh Patrika*, 4 June, 1882

Here follows in reply, a brief, but remarkably clear, narrative of her parentage, her father's views, those of her brother, also a statement in regard to her husband, and the vicissitudes of her life; all of which, she stated, had afforded her many opportunities of forming an opinion on the subject of Female Education in the different provinces of India. She closes her answer thus:

A. 1: "I am the child of a man who had to suffer a great deal on account of advocating Female Education, and who was compelled to discuss the subject, as well as to carry out his own views, amidst great opposition. . . . I consider it my duty, to the very end of my life, to maintain this cause, and to advocate the proper position of women in this land."

Q. 2: "What is the best method of providing teachers for girls?"

A. 2: "It appears to me evident that the women who are to become teachers of others should have a special training for that work. Besides having a correct knowledge of their own language, they ought to acquire English. Whether those training to be female teachers are married or unmarried, or widows, they ought to be correct in their conduct and morals, and they ought also to be of respectable families. They ought to have higher salaries than those of boys, as they should be of a superior character and position. The students should live in the college compounds, so as to have their manners and habits improved, and there ought to be a large building with every appliance for the comfort of the teachers and students. They ought to have a native lady of good position over them. Mere learning is not enough; the conduct and morals of the students should be attended to."

Q. 3: "What do you regard as the chief defects, other than any to which you have already referred, that experience had brought to light in the educational system as it has been hitherto administered? What suggestions have you to make for the remedy of such defects?"

A. 3: "There ought to be female inspectresses over female schools. These ought to be of the age of thirty or upwards, and

of a very superior class, and highly educated, whether Native or European. Male inspectors are unsuitable for the following reasons:

(*a*) The women of this country are very timid. If a male inspector goes into a female school, all the women and girls are thrown into confusion, and are unable to speak. The inspector seeing this state of things will write a bad report of the school and teachers, and so in all probability Government will appoint a male teacher for the school, and so the school will not have the advantage of a female teacher. As the education of girls is different from that of boys, female schools ought to be in the hands of female teachers.

(*b*) The second reason is this: In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the educated men of this country are opposed to Female Education and the proper position of women. If they observe the slightest fault, they magnify the grain of mustard-seed into a mountain, and try to ruin the character of a woman; often the poor woman, not being very courageous, and well informed, her character is completely broken. Men being more able to reach the authorities are believed, while women go to the wall. Both should be alike to a parental Government, whose children, male and female, should be treated with equal justice. It is evident that women, being one-half of the people of this country, are oppressed and cruelly treated by the other half. To put a stop to this anomaly is worthy of a good Government. Another suggestion I would make is with regard to lady-doctors. Though in Hindusthan there are numbers of gentleman-doctors, there are no ladies of that profession. The women of this country are much more reserved than in other countries, and most of them would rather die than speak of their ailments to a man. The want of lady-doctors is, therefore, the cause of hundreds of thousands of women dying premature deaths. I would, therefore, earnestly entreat of our Government to make provision for the study of medicine by women, and thus save the lives of those multitudes. The want of lady-doctors is

one very much felt and is a great defect in the Education of the women of this country."[7]

It was the third question, *The Times of India* stated at the time, that drew the attention of Queen Victoria to the problem of women's medical services in India. Thus was created an interest by Ramabai, the intrepid friend of the people of India, which started as "The National Association for Supplying Female Medical Aid to the Women of India," known as the Countess of Dufferin Movement, inaugurated by Lady Dufferin, the wife of the Viceroy of India in 1885.

Some of the aspects of women's education, so boldly suggested by Ramabai at a time when women's education had scarcely been considered in India, are still moot points, such as the appointment of women teachers on higher salaries and the need to increase the number of women teachers so that the girls will feel freer to learn from them and, therefore, attend school more happily. That Ramabai should have noticed these needs as long ago as 1882 goes to show her foresight and prophetic understanding of the problems of the emancipation of women.

Pandita Ramabai's appearance before Sir William Hunter's Education Commission and her wide lecture programmes attracted wide attention, and a daily newspaper of Bombay published the following report:

"The distinction with which Pandita Ramabai Sanskrita was treated at Poona added of course to her fame as a lecturer. She continued her travels through India, her expenses being sometimes defrayed by advanced princes, such as, the Nawab of Jooneghur. When she appealed in Bombay last December (1882) under the auspices of the Hon. Lionel Ashburner, she was enthusiastically welcomed by large audiences. All the natives had grown to be proud of her. The more advanced natives saw in what she taught the possibilities of a regenerated society and a pure theistic religion."[8]

It was, at this time, that Pandita Ramabai began to think of

[7] Pandita Ramabai, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman,* Introduction by Rachel L. Bodley, pp. 16, 17

[8] Quoted in the *Cheltenham Ladies' College Magazine,* September 1884

going to England and learning more about women's education and herself receiving a good training for her work. She also felt she must thoroughly study English. She realized that the help she could obtain in India alone would not be sufficient to fulfil her ambitions regarding women's emancipation. She determined to cross the "black waters," an event which in itself was at the time looked upon with horror by the high caste community. To travel to foreign lands meant that they would be excommunicated from the orthodox Hindu fold, and many a man, who had taken the plunge and gone abroad, had to expiate his sin by undergoing purification ceremonies on his return, if he wished to be accepted once again in his Hindu home.

But Ramabai was determined to go to England and not only educate herself but seek the help needed to formulate her ideas into something practical. The little widow girl whom Ramabai was at the time sheltering was really the inspiration for Ramabai to go abroad. The sad little figure stirred thoughts in the Pandita for doing something concrete for India's many young widows, and gradually the idea of a Home for Widows took shape. For over six months she tried to get help from the leaders to start this project but failed to inspire enough enthusiasm.

Ramabai then felt that if she went abroad and studied medicine, she would be of tremendous help to her countrywomen. With her foreign medical degree and any financial help she might obtain for starting her Home, she could really come to the rescue of Indian widows.

But how was Ramabai to find the wherewithal to travel abroad? She wrote the *Stree Dharma Neety* or "Morals for Women," and with the money collected from the sale of the book she was able to purchase part of her passage abroad. Ramabai's faith in her unknown God was strong. She said that she heard the Voice of God, and decided to cross the seas with her little daughter even though her destiny at the time was unknown.

4

Pandita Ramabai was one of those women for whom the impossible did not exist. Her decision to write the *Stree Dharma Neety* and find the wherewithal to travel abroad was an astound-

ing idea for a woman of the time. This book was not written with the single purpose of collecting Ramabai's passage money. It was also meant as a conduct and guide book for women to live a life of enlightenment instead of being blind slaves to tradition.' This book has been excellently translated into Bengali by Shri Rajani Nath Nundy, B.A., B.L., who himself knew Bipin Behari Das Medhavi. The introduction, as written by this learned Bengali who gives us a clear life story of Pandita Ramabai, is highly instructive.

Ramabai's plea for women's emancipation is most forceful: "The human heart will break into a thousand pieces," she writes, "at the very thought of the shameful position in which women are placed." Women were helpless and illiterate and incapable of looking after themselves. The country was advancing and the status of women had to be raised in order to keep pace with modern times. Many of the educated classes were fast beginning to realize this need.

Ramabai writes: "In a vast country like ours I was surprised to notice that not a single author has dedicated himself to the task of extracting important information from the Sanskrit scriptures and writing a book of knowledge in a simple language for the benefit of the uneducated. I have decided, therefore, to do so myself. As this will be my first attempt to write a book in Marathi I request my readers not to be too harsh in their judgment of any grammatical and other errors which I may have committed. This book consists mainly of my own experiences in life, main points of lectures by learned people, and extracts from the Sanskrit Shastras."

Despite Ramabai's modesty regarding her style, the book written in classical Marathi was highly praised as a scholarly work by eminent critics, who immediately recognized the author's worth as a unique Marathi writer. The book consists of 145 pages and is divided into eight parts. The first deals with the foundations of women's progress, which should be that of self-confidence and self-reliance; the second with the urgent need for women's education; the third with moderation and seriousness being important qualities for women to possess; the fourth with a universal religion consisting of 8 or 10 virtues as embodied in Sanskrit *Subhashitas*; the fifth with the duties of married life; the sixth with a housewife's preoccupations; the seventh with the need for wo-

men to take up nursing and education of children; and the eighth and last with duties in general.

It is worthwhile perusing this early Marathi classic in a little more detail:

Ramabai insists that a home must be strong when it is built. If it is weak, then all the efforts and money would be spent in vain in building it. Unconsciously or consciously, for Ramabai had by now come into close contact with Christianity, she voiced Christ's parable of the wise man who built his house upon a rock "and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not for it was founded upon a rock".[9]

She goes on to cite the condition of widows and that it is the duty of the people to help them. Women should be given knowledge and should be helped to develop themselves. Women are ignorant and weak so they continued to be dependant. "God has given every animal in this world the right to develop itself and above all He has given this power to human beings; but women have been given no opportunities to develop. *Self help is the best help,* and women must not depend on others." This idea of the salvation of women lying in the hands of women themselves was reiterated again and again in Ramabai's lectures. She, being a dynamically independent character must have felt how ignominious it was for women entirely to depend on their men, their dogmas and rituals. The opinion of Manu about woman, that "Her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth, and her sons protect her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence",[10] greatly irked and irritated Ramabai.

Ramabai says in her *Stree Dharma Neety* that God helps those who help themselves. Though dependence on others is needed in order to form a corporate body, independence of thought and action is essential, in order to develop one's own mind and be of use to the world. Women only develop by helping themselves and Ramabai seems to have anticipated Mahatma Gandhi's belief that the salvation of women lay in their own hands. In a message to the Editor of the *Indian Ladies' Magazine*, the Mahatma, years later, felt that unless women gave up their old superstitions and came forward they could not progress. Fifty

[9] Gospel according to St. Mathew, (Authorized Version) 7: 25-27
[10] Manu ix. 2, 3

years earlier Ramabai again and again exhorted women to help their own cause and right their own wrongs.

To be industrious in life is God's gift. A man who is enthusiastic and energetic gains honour and happiness in life, comments Ramabai. Every man and woman should try to do something which would contribute to the welfare of the country. The whole British race who ruled India, made up a small portion of India's population. How did they rule the country? The root of their success lay in their habits of enthusiastic activity and energy. Laziness was foreign to them. They had their drawbacks but their patriotism, unity and enthusiasm carried them forward.

The people of India did not understand what was good for them. One of the reasons was that they were fundamentally lazy. Women and men must work together, for man needs woman's help. If women could be intelligent and educated, they could help men. But women indulged only in domestic duties and always felt they have no time to help men. They also asked the "favour of man" for every little thing they wanted, and Ramabai felt that there could be no happiness for women if they continued in this fashion for long. Woman's first task then, was to educate herself and create a feeling of enthusiasm for herself.

Though material wealth was necessary Ramabai felt that the wealth of learning was never lost. "Education brings light to the dark foolish people of this earth. Without education we are in darkness, no matter how bright the light of the sun. This is external light; internal education gives us inner brightness. Education is the mother of wisdom. Just as children cannot live without their mother, wisdom cannot be acquired without education".

"The mind of a child is steady and unsullied, and it is this time which should be well instructed before shades of the prison house begin to close around it" wrote Ramabai "Childhood is the best time to gather wisdom. Educated men and women possess the serenity of wisdom and it is during childhood that the seeds of this wisdom must be sewn".

Ramabai extolled wisdom and the true search for knowledge as a necessary goal and insisted that education and the acquirement of knowledge should be started from childhood. "If people are not really wise, they think that God has given them special powers. The mere automatic circumambulance of temples and sacred trees can really bring no salvation, neither will wishes be granted by

this mechanical ritual, as people seem to believe. Nor can *Yagnya* and *Hom* be of benefit if they are performed merely to avert evil." Ramabai condemned superstition and says that true education will kill superstition.

One should dress simply, but neatly. There was no point in dressing too richly, for if the mind was diverted to dress and fashion, learning would be neglected. "One is never loved for the wearing of valuable clothes and ornaments. The *Simul* flower is very lovely to look at; but it possesses no scent. Hence it is not a favourite flower. The *Bakul* flower is small and not so beautiful as the *Simul* flower but it is beautifully fragrant and it is liked a great deal. Fragrance emanates from within like wisdom. The outward beauty which one creates by wearing ornaments is valueless. One is beautiful when one is young, but with age the beauty of youth vanishes. Neither can ornaments enhance one's beauty when one is old. But education is imperishable wealth."

One of the main obstacles against learning was idleness. If a steady routine was followed, says Ramabai, then this idleness could be overcome. One must go to bed early at 9 P.M. and rise early at 4 A.M. This was a practice Ramabai continued all her life especially when she established her Homes, the Sharada Sadan and Mukti. Ramabai says that if one could sleep for seven hours daily, diseases would be eradicated and health would not suffer.

Some of Ramabai's aphorisms, written in *Stree Dharma Neety*, are worth mentioning: "Work done in a hurry is never perfect," "Do not be too proud of your qualifications," "It is difficult to earn money; but easy to spend it," "The man who does not know how to spend money in the proper way is unhappy. Money is the cause of danger and destroys everything," "Money attracts us to evil deeds," "Money destroys the fool; but when an intelligent man earns much money he spends it with intelligence." "Education must not be misused." "One must develop a good character and make others happy." "Always respect your teacher."

Ramabai then gives a detailed exposition on education, including comparative religions, cooking, hygiene and the upbringing of children. She also stresses the virtue of a good reputation, chastity and modesty.

Looking back across the years, one of the greatest assets of Ramabai is her spotless reputation. An old friend of hers, writing

to me said: "Pandita Ramabai was hundred per cent pure in character. Even her enemies could not slander her."[11]

Never was there a girl more exposed to the dangers of the whole world as a young girl as Ramabai but always she shone forth as a bright and pure light, a light to guide her sisters.

Later in 1896 when Ramabai herself rescued famine-stricken girls from the danger of becoming victims of "bad men," she says: "My sister, a fine young woman of twenty-five, and myself, a girl of eighteen, would have easily fallen into the cruel hands of the wicked people of such places. There are not many girls who resist the devil in the face of starvation. God be thanked for protecting the virtue of these innocents."[12]

5

Ramabai's concept of religion at this stage of her life in 1882, is interesting, when she was mixing freely with the leaders of the Prarthana Samaj and the reformers, conducting readings of the *Puranas,* lecturing widely on the emancipation of women and running and establishing the Arya Mahila Samaj with its branches all over Maharashtra. Ramabai was also interested in the missionaries of the Panch Howds in Poona and had also met such dynamic men as Rev. Nilkanth Shastri Nehemiah Goreh and others. Ramabai says in her *Stree Dharma Neety*: "Religion is one of the most important things in the world. It is the base and foot of all deeds. Every man in the world, cultured or uncultured, follows some form of religion. The fear which arises from religion influences one's mind. It is the fear of God which prevents us from quarrelling and destroying each other. The main function of religion is to keep quiet and calm and to widen our minds. Religion is our best friend. . . ." "Most people are afraid of death; but religion helps and pacifies the pious. They are never afraid of death. Hinduism, the Moslem religion and Christianity are merely different paths which lead to the same God. All religions are the same; but the rituals and ways of worship are different. Though the various paths of religion are different, they all preach patience, forgiveness, self-command, purity of mind, wisdom, knowledge about God, truthfulness, control of the senses, they all tell one not to

[11] Dr. V. B. Govande

[12] Manoramabai, *Pandita Ramabai, The Widows' Friend,* p. 135.

steal and not to have any ill feeling or anger towards others". These precepts of Ramabai's so well written, simple and sincere, are in themselves worth studying. They teach us to be better men and women, and if they are followed they unconsciously bring the "Kingdom of God" to earth.

Ramabai's personality was imbued with love. She cried to the world to respect high and low and to love one another and to believe in God who will be a sure help in time of trouble.

Ramabai, at the age of twenty-four, writes: "Love one another. Do not walk alone in the world. Choose a friend. Religion is your best friend." Later, Ramabai chose Christ as her Friend, who gave her all the comfort she needed.

II

Christian Beginnings

1

RAMABAI Ranade's and Pandita Ramabai's English teacher in Poona was Miss Hurford, Principal of the Government Female Training School. Miss Hurford, though not a missionary, believed ardently in Christianity and had consented to teach the two Ramabais English only on condition that she could also impart to them the story of the Bible. There was no desire to proselytize here—merely a longing to tell the world the wonderful story of the Lord Jesus. It would have been the same if English women had wished to learn Sanskrit from an ardent Hindu Pandit. He would have naturally, in the teaching of the language, imparted the Hindu Scriptures and in particular, would have cherished the study of the Gita and Upanishads. The two Ramabais quickly began to grasp the simple rules of English grammar, for compared to Sanskrit grammar, which the two women reformers had mastered, English proved comparatively easy. Through Miss Hurford, Pandita Ramabai met the Sisters of the Community of St. Mary the Virgin—an Anglican organization which had been founded in Wantage in England and which had sent out missionaries

called the Wantage Sisters. They worked at *Panch Howds* in Poona.

The history of the spread of Christianity in Western India is interesting. It seemed to have established a firm and lasting hold, though leaders of the reform parties strongly disapproved of any form of proselytizing in spite of their tendency to approve of Christian forms of service. Christianity was always unfortunately coupled with British imperialistic designs and was thus strongly condemned by Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Maharashtra at the time was torn between the moderate reformers like Ranade, Chandavarkar, Bhandarkar, Mama Paramanand, Telang and Agarkar, who condemned conversion to Christianity but encouraged western views of service and uplift of the country, and extremist nationalists like Tilak and purely religious revivalists like Dayanand Saraswati. The Arya Samaj not only tried to revive the pure Vedantic philosophy but was a counter force to the new religious groups such as the Brahmo and Prarthana Samajists, who apart from their desire to do away with idol worship and to purify Hinduism by eliminating the social evils which had sprung up over the years, were strongly influenced by Christian principles of social service. Christian missionary work was beginning to be assessed and appreciated in many ways. "Even the renowned exponent of Brahmoism and social reform, Keshab Chunder Sen, showed Christian influences in his proclamation of the New Dispensation. At such a time Dayanand appeared as the aggressive exponent of Hindu revivalism."[1]

In the census report of 1911, Mr. Blunt comments: "It seems certain that the Arya Samaj do fear the spread of Christianity. There is no question that Dayanand feared it in part because he considered that the adoption of any foreign creed would endanger the national feeling he wished to foster."[2] In fact, there was a strong opposition to Christianity especially during 1864-1883 when the iron rule of British Imperialism was being felt and fought by the rapidly awakening national spirit. "The militance manifested by Dayanand and the Arya Samaj was partly a counterfoil to the domineering attitudes of the two other semitic churches in India—Islam and Christianity."[3]

[1] V. P. Varma, *Modern Indian Political Thought,* p. 58
[2] Quoted by Lala Lajpat Rai, in *Arya Samaj,* p. 168
[3] V. P. Varma, *Modern Indian Political Thought,* p. 59

But the spirit of Christ spread and in Western India, as in other parts of the country, the gradual conversion of educated High Caste Hindus to Christianity, so earnest, so ready to be persecuted for their faith in their new religion, began unconsciously to have its pull in the country. This was more so, as many of the converted Christians were more Indian in their habits, than many Hindus or followers of the reformist religions. An interesting fact, for instance, of Rev. Nilkanth Shastri Nehemiah Goreh, was that "he was not in the least Europeanized. He was an Indian to the letter, and had very little sympathy with those of his fellow countrymen who discarded their old religion with their native dress and habits, without scruple or reason, save that of personal convenience or fashion. After he became a novice in the Society of St. John the Evangelist, he wrote from Bombay on his return to his native land: "Father O'Neill does not wear a collar, and so I am glad to get rid of mine. It is not only against my own inclination to wear a distinctively English dress, but I think it gives unnecessary offence to Hindus, to lead them to think that a man by becoming a Christian becomes an Englishman. It has been my custom always to try and drive away such an idea from their minds."

"As a compromise, Father Goreh, when a novice in the Society of St. John the Evangelist, used to have his white habit tied in the native fashion with tapes, instead of buttoning, and he always wore the ordinary Hindu student's skull cap, sometimes substituting the red 'ear cap' worn by certain classes of religious mendicants."[4]

Pandita Ramabai, when she became a Christian in 1883 also adhered to the strict Hindu costume and diet. In other words, change of faith brought no change whatsoever in her daily life which continued to be the same before her baptism. Apart from habits of living, many Indian Christians and Western missionaries sought a profound knowledge of Sanskrit. The Rev. Dr. John Wilson, the founder of Wilson College of Bombay, for instance, was a great Sanskrit and Marathi scholar as was Dr. Nicol Macnicol. Most Indian Christians of the higher castes had studied Hindu philosophy profoundly, and many were intellectual giants. They also took an active part in the shaping of the national policy. The first Congress President, W. C. Bonnerji, was said to be an Indian Christian. Right through the freedom struggle, Christians

[4] C. E. Gardner, *Life of Father Goreh*, p. 8

fought with other Indians and became political leaders. Many of them were Mahatma Gandhi's right hand men, and they were strong nationalists, striving to channel Christianity away from foreign habits into Indian ways, despite the influence of the missionaries, who often tried to introduce Western customs and ways of living into Indian Christian society. Some of these narrow tenets introduced by foreign missionaries were, by no means, welcomed by Indian Christians themselves who never confused their birthright of being Indians with a religion taught to them by foreigners. In fact they were always conscious of the fact that Christianity had come to India in the first century A.D. and had stayed in the country over the years as one of the many religions practised in the Sub-Continent. Also, Christ was of Eastern origin and His whole attitude towards life and His teachings, fitted in admirably with the spiritual characteristics of the Indian mind.

Dr. Samuel Sathianadhan[5], a leading Indian Christian of South India, made a steady attack against those Christians who were inclined to become too Westernized towards the close of the last century: "One of the most serious dangers to which the well-to-do section of our community is subject is that of denationalization. Some change no doubt in dress, in food in the style of living is rendered necessary at this period of transition, especially to those who live in large cities and towns; but we fear that in several cases, native Christians have shown a needless eagerness to part with all the essential features of their nationality. Have we not had experience of individual Christians who became so completely Westernized as to lose touch with their own kith and kin? Let us, by all means, enjoy the benefits of Western civilization, but let this not blind us to our duties as Indian Christians."[6]

Always the Indian Christian was afraid of and fought against Westernization. No Christians were more aware of this danger than those pioneers such as Nehemiah Goreh, Pandita Ramabai and countless other intellectual Indian Christians in all parts of India. The Indian Christian Community soon made itself felt in the country. The *Pioneer* remarked: "As the community has developed there can be no question that its aspirations in the direction of purity of life and morals have been, to a large extent,

[5] Father of the author

[6] S. Sathianadhan, *Sketches of Indian Christians,* p. xiii (The author's father)

realized. Industry has developed among them, and the modern missionary is much less often the victim of the loafing rogue who is ever ready to barter his faith for a mess of pottage. With the establishment of this community on a self-supporting basis, which is in many places already secured, its progress in self-respect and conception of the duties of citizenship must continue to increase."[7]

2

The first batch of missionaries of Britain and America who arrived in the early part of the nineteenth century were selfless and devout. There were many martyrs among them—men and women who died mostly of sickness; but the missionaries felt they were commanded by God to go out to India and other Eastern countries. While the Serampore missionaries established their mission in Bengal and William Carey and his colleagues worked with their selfless attitude and "all for God" in Eastern India, in the West such men as Gordon Hall and Nott arrived from America and in spite of great trouble from the East India Company they toiled incessantly as evangelists. Hall learnt Marathi, Sanskrit, Greek and Hebrew. Of 24 hours, 16 were spent in work, three of which were in street preaching.

When the Church Missionary Society was opened in Bombay, it took up an elaborate programme of literary work which was enhanced by the Anglicans. The Gospel of St. Mathew was first translated and the importance given to translations became a priority. Pamphlets and Christian books, translated by the missionaries and freely distributed had a tremendous influence in spreading the Gospel of Christ among the higher castes. Pandita Ramabai later realized this importance when she spent so much time in translating the Bible straight from the Greek and Hebrew. A pure translation was much needed in Western India.

The Bombay Tract and Book Society was formed in 1827, and the first India Mission School was established in Bombay in 1815. The Scottish Mission arrived in 1823 and by 1827 it had established 80 schools in South Konkan.

Education was always considered the first privilege of the Brahmins, and it was indeed a unique and unprecedented idea when mission schools were opened to all classes. The American, English and Scottish missions now inaugurated new fields in India;

[7] Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. x

but for many years only men and boys attended the schools. A few girls crept in in 1824 and the American Missionaries tried to start a school for girls. In their report for the years 1825-26, the C.M.S. missionaries wrote: "In Bombay, very little has been done to promote the education of native females", and they hoped that some "pious and zealous female" in England may be inspired "to come to the help of her own sex in this part of the earth".[8] It was a heartfelt plea and many women crossed the seas to come and serve in India. The first Indian woman teacher was appointed about 1830.

The missions did tremendous work in furthering girls' schools, and as early as 1835, an article on the promotion of female education in India was written by a Hindu and published in the *Oriental Christian Spectator*. The Parsis were very anxious to further the education of women and a desire to learn English was created. John Wilson was asked to organize and superintend the first Christian English School in Bombay. There was already an English Boys' School, later known as the Elphinstone High School. The Robert Money School was started in 1835.

In 1831, an Indian Church was established in Wilson's house in Ambroli (Girgaum, Bombay) and the American Marathi Mission was extended and in 1832 the Anglican Church Foundation Stone was laid in Byculla. In 1830, occurred the Suppression of *Suttee* in the whole of British India, due to the valiant efforts of the Father of Modern India, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Lord William Bentinck. It followed the anti-suttee Act which was passed in 1829.

During the decade 1840-49 cholera took a heavy toll of missionaries. They were also openly criticized and a Marathi monthly called *Upadesha Chandrika* was started to condemn their work. Missionaries, therefore, had to be most careful in their interpretation of Christ and teach about Him in an adequate manner. Some marked conversions of Parsis and high caste Brahmins took place and, of course, had its repercussions in setting up a strong opposition. The missionaries were blamed, as was Ramabai later. There were tumults over the conversions, or as it should be more correctly put, the change to Christianity from their original religion, when men and women like Narayan Sheshadri, Hari Ramachandra Khisti, Vishnu Bhaskar Karmarkar, Narayan Vaman

[8] *Ibid*, p. 52

Tilak, Laxmibai Tilak, Bhaskarrao Govande, Gangadhar Gadre, Shahurao Modak, Haripant Kelkar, Baba Padmanji, Pandita Ramabai, Nehemiah Goreh, and Parsis, like Hormazdji Pestonji and Dhanjibhai Naoroji became Christians. Christianity certainly made the people throw off the lethargy and drowsiness which possessed them. The spirit of renaissance in India owes a great deal to the dissemination in the country of Christian human relations.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy's *Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness,* raised a great controversy not only among Hindus but also among Christians; but it helped to teach the precepts of Christ, whatever its theological repercussions were. Indeed, the preaching of Christianity, and its expansion, helped in untold ways to bring in a desire to create a happier world. "The protagonists of Hinduism display in this decade (1840-49) a vitality, an aliveness almost completely absent from the records twenty years earlier. It is no longer only a case of Hinduism versus Christianity, now we see Hinduism versus Hinduism, a forward-looking, reforming point of view opposed to an attitude of unchanging conservatism."[9] "The Hindu pioneers of the forties were working for the same end as the Christian reformers."[10] In 1847, the whole Bible was translated into Marathi, and another translation of this mighty work was accomplished when Pandita Ramabai translated it and had it printed in her own Press, run by girls in her Mukti Sadan.

In 1848, another landmark in Christian history in Western India was sealed when George Bowen arrived in Bombay—an American missionary and "a spiritual athlete." Ten years later Ramabai was born. In the meanwhile, steamboats, railways and telegraphs and modern science were stimulating India. Education increased, but one Christian convert in a missionary school meant the loss of nearly three hundred boys. Nevertheless, more and more thinking Indians, in the face of persecution, chose to become Christians.

3

Among the many high caste Christians who were converted about the middle of the nineteenth century was Pandit Nilakanth

[9] *Ibid.,* p. 125
[10] *Ibid.,* p. 127

Shastri Goreh (1825-95) himself a Konkanasth Chitpavan Brahmin, but belonging more to Banaras than the Maharashtrian country. One wonders whether Ramabai would ever have come to the final decision of abandoning her traditional religion if it had not been for Rev. Goreh who, with his historic letter, later published as a pamphlet in Marathi entitled, "Is there any proof that Christianity is a Divinity-given religion", written to Ramabai when she was with the Wantage Sisters in England in 1883, finally led her to accept Christ.

Nilakanth was born in a village named Kashipura, about 50 miles from Jhansi on 8 February, 1825. He was a scholar-saint, like Ramabai, and at the time, Christianity was needing such intellectual personalities who were well-versed in their own learned scriptures. Even today, the church is in need of "Indians who have imbibed Hindu culture and learning and the spirit of national aspirations, so that when they preach Christ, they do so with an Indian and not a foreign background. Nehemiah Goreh, who became a Christian about the middle of the nineteenth century and preached "Christ" for nearly fifty years, was one such true Indian at heart.

In an ancient Hindu home on the banks of the Ganges in Banaras lived Shivram Shastri Goreh, a widower with his two sons. He was a Sanskrit scholar like Anant Shastri. Nilakanth the eldest son was taught by tutors, while he learnt Sanskrit from his father, including a profound knowledge of the Vedas and other scriptures. When he was twelve he was married to Parvatibai. She died soon after her marriage in her own father's house when Nilakanth was still only a boy. He disliked the idea of marrying again; but when he was 19, he consented to obey his elders and married Lakshmibai, aged 7. It was only after this marriage that his mother died, after which his father built a hut in the garden and became a recluse. Later, Shivram Shastri wandered from place to place in search of God, like Anant Shastri, while his son, born a Shaivite, changed to the worship of Vishnu who appealed to him more than Shiva. His family was perturbed, feeling that he may further change his faith.

Nilakanth, however, though he heard the missionaries preaching in the street, despised the teaching and detected many flaws. His attitude towards Christianity was of undisguised contempt and he desired to use his learning like Saul of Tarsus to destroy

it. He says, "My faith was firm in the religion of our forefathers, and I despised Christianity and thought that it was a religion fitted for the ignorant *mlenchchas* only, but that it could never be compared with our philosophies."[11] He went to Rev. William Smith's house for an argument; but the missionary refused to discuss Christ; instead, he presented him with a copy of the New Testament. Nilakanth forbore from reading it for a long time. He asked Mr. Smith what the causes of human misery were, and whether life was a probation. Mr. Smith lent him Dr. John Muir's *Mataparikshа* or "An Examination of the True Religion." In writing a refutation, Nilakanth had to refer to the Bible and was greatly attracted to it, especially with the Sermon on the Mount. In October 1846, Nilakanth wrote a long paper entitled "Doubts Concerning Christianity," and sent it to the missionary. Answers and discussions followed, and finally, on 5 September, 1847, Nilakanth attended Divine Service, much to the anger of his relatives. The loss of caste and the distress he would cause his father if he accepted Christ greatly troubled Nilakanth at this time. He retired to a friend's house for a month to think over the problem and once again read the Shastras; but the voice of God seemed to pursue him and when he returned to Banaras he determined to become a Christian. Pathetic scenes now followed. His old father actually came and fell at his feet and beseeched him not to abandon his religion. His uncle scolded him and Nilakanth promised to wait before he finally decided on his conversion. No peace, however, could be found for his "whole soul yearned for Christ." One day without farewells, he left his father's house and informed him that he would never return. Nilakanth's inevitable decision was accepted by his family with great sorrow.

Nilakanth was baptized on 14 March, 1848, and took the name of Nehemiah. The furore created by his conversion was tremendous; but great peace descended on Nilakanth. A few years later Maharaj Duleep Singh wished to go to England. Nehemiah Goreh accompanied him as his tutor. He was twenty-nine and his pupil sixteen. The former left for India in November 1855 in the same ship as Dr. Alexander Duff who was returning after his furlough.

Nehemiah Goreh went to Poona after his return and worked with a number of renowned and learned converted Christians. In 1857, he visited Calcutta. He now wrote his famous pamphlet,

[11] Rajaiah D. Paul, *Chosen Vessels,* pp. 221, 222

"Hindu Philosophy examined by a Banaras Pandit." Thereafter he wrote a great deal, always examining the ethics of religions and philosophies as compared to Christianity. He met Keshab Chunder Sen a few years later and came in contact with the Brahmo Samaj which took him back to Calcutta in 1867 and here he wrote: "Letter to the Brahmos, from a converted Brahmin of Benaras." In printing this pamphlet, he himself became penniless. In 1868, Nehemiah was ordained a Deacon.

One of Nehemiah's chief characteristics was his life of simple austerity, as strict and traditional as the Hindu ancestry from which he had descended. As mentioned before, he, like Ramabai, was hundred per cent Indian in his habits—far more so than many who professed Hinduism but adapted western ways of living. Mr. Samuel Gopal, writing in the *Indian Church Quarterly Review* in 1896 remarked: "I well remember his first public preaching in the old market place. People flocked to see him. It was certainly a strange sight—a venerable looking man, clad in a cassock, with a wooden cross slung round his shoulders, so unlike anyone they had ever seen who talked to them in their own language, who seemed to belong to them, and yet so different."[12]

In Chanda where Nehemiah was in charge of a mission he created a sensation. The poor Mahars, especially regarded him as a great *sadhu,* and used to call him *Buwa,* a term used for a religious teacher or *guru.* Nehemiah lived in a small hired house in the bazaar. His diet consisted of *dal-bhat* (rice and pulses), and his austerity and piety soon attracted much attention. He became one of those beloved missionaries whom the people adored.

In the meantime near Oxford, an Anglican Religious Community called the Society of St. John had been formed in 1865 by the Rev. R. M. Benson, "for the cultivation of a life dedicated to God, according to the principles of poverty, chastity and obedience," and for educational and missionary work.[13] Nehemiah Goreh and Bishop Milman of Calcutta both wanted a member of the society to be sent to India and in 1873, Father Page, with Father Benson and others, arrived in Bombay followed by Father O'Neill, who met Nehemiah at Calcutta. The latter resigned his work in Chanda and joined Father O'Neill at Bankipur in 1874. In 1875 Goreh came into close contact with the Society of St.

[12] C. E. Gardner, *Life of Father Goreh,* p. 163
[13] Rajaiah D. Paul, *Chosen Vessels,* p. 238

John the Evangelist (S.S.J.E.) Mission in Bombay, and when he went to England in 1876 he became a novice of S.S.J.E. In May 1882, Nehemiah Goreh came to Poona just about the time Ramabai also reached that city after she became a widow. Here Goreh had his first meeting with Ramabai in September, 1882. She was then a member of the Prarthana Samaj. "Her conversation with Father Goreh led her to see that the position of the Prarthana Samaj was untenable; but she was prejudiced against Christianity and would not take the step of giving herself to Christ."[14] When she left for England that same year, she was still unconvinced. But the two great scholar-saints had much in common and the younger owed her conversion to the older.

4

Ramabai's interest in Christianity grew as she came more and more in contact with the Christians of Poona, especially with the *Panch Howds* missionaries and such saints as Nehemiah Goreh. Her English teacher, Miss Hurford's influence created a new inspiration. Although she was primarily an educationist, she was, as Ramabai herself describes her, "A missionary working in connection with the High Church" and was closely in touch with the Mission of the Wantage Sisters and Cowley Fathers, or the Society of St. John, the Evangelist, at *Panch Howds* in Poona. Miss Hurford came out to India first as a missionary to the *Panch Howds* Mission; but later accepted the post of Superintendent of the Female Training College in Poona.

The Wantage Sisters came to India in 1877. At the same time Father Goreh, who had gone to England for the second and last time in June 1876 for his novitiate at the S.S.J.E. headquarters in Cowley, also returned to India with the Rev. Brother Beale, and Rev. Cecil Stansfield Rivington. There were also a number of Sisters of the Community of St. Mary the Virgin from Wantage. These were the first Sisters belonging to the English Church who ever came to India, and they settled in Poona, where Sisters of Wantage still remain.

Father Goreh was not posted at Poona on his return from England but was sent there in 1879. Here Bishop Mylne "had purchased a large house in the native quarter, called *Panch*

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 242

Howds, from the *five tanks* or cisterns just outside its walls. His desire was to have it worked by a Brotherhood, with which intention some priests lived together. This scheme fell through. After a time the S.S.J.E. took up the work. The Rev. C. S. Rivington, who came to India with Father Goreh (in 1877) on his return, remained on after the change."[15]

The services at *Panch Howds* were well-known for their beautiful singing and Sermons. They were in Marathi with a choir of Indian boys, well-trained, who sat, dressed in cassocks and surplices on mats on the floor. When Father Goreh came to *Panch Howds* in Poona he became greatly interested in the work and remarked to another Father: "Oh, isn't it nice here? Such services! This is what India wants!"[16] He had earlier pleaded for Indian priests to teach Christianity to Indians. Writing on the *Panch Howds* Mission, Father Goreh says: "I have not seen such an excellent institution in Catholic discipline and the Catholic worship which Mr. Rivington has introduced there, and that which he is carrying on there so nicely, prudently, patiently, seems to me excellent, and by God's grace, may bear much fruit."[17]

It was only in 1882 that the new work of the S.S.J.E., where Father Goreh worked, was actually started. The Sisters lived at the other end of Poona according to Father Rivington.

The missionaries were all extremely interested in Ramabai, so beautiful and remarkable. They prayed much for her. They also wrote of her to England, so that she was regularly remembered both at Wantage and Cowley in their prayers.

Gradually, Ramabai realized that she must go to England in order to fit herself better to educate and raise the standards of the women of India. This inspiration came to her from Mrs. Sorabji, a leading Indian Christian, who had settled in Poona in 1876. Mrs. Franscina Sorabji originally belonged to a Hindu family from the Nilgiris. Born in 1834, she lost her mother early and was not treated very kindly by her step-mother. But her innate love for and interest in humanity attracted her to Lady Ford who adopted "the bright-eyed lovely child, Franscina Santaya." From this English home, she extracted the best that the West could offer and combined it judiciously with the richness of her

[15] C. E. Gardner, *Life of Father Goreh,* pp. 244, 245
[16] *Ibid.,* p. 245
[17] *Ibid.,* p. 249

Eastern heritage whose work coincided so greatly with her own ideas for the uplift of women. In fact, it was Franscina Sorabji who made Ramabai realize that a mere education and learning in Sanskrit could not fit her out admirably for a life of service. "If she was going to teach other women, she must know something of the sciences, something of the modern world—geography for instance—something of normal methods. She realized this the more after meeting Mrs. Sorabji—a remarkable Christian woman, Principal of a private school in Poona and well-known as an educator of unusual ability—who took a keen interest in Ramabai and also taught her."[18]

Ramabai's interest in kindergarten also must have started with her contact with the Victoria High School, which was further stimulated when the Pandita reached America and began to study the Froebel system.

When Franscina went to England in connection with the Zenana Bible and Medical Mission work in 1886, Ramabai must have met her and heard her speak. Later, when Ramabai returned to India in 1889 she must again have met her friends the Sorabjis, and we are told that Franscina influenced Ramabai in starting the Sharada Sadan.

Ramabai's stay in Poona during the year 1882 to 1883 was, therefore, fraught with a variety of interests and a tolerant and broad-minded contact with the various activities of the time, with the Prarthana Samaj and the Ranades and other rational and religious reformers; with the Arya Samaj; with lecturing and reading the Puranas; with the Society of St. John the Evangelist and the Cowley Fathers and Wantage Sisters, and with such ardent converts to Christianity as Nehemiah Goreh and the Sorabjis. She herself was lecturing widely and organizing branches of the Arya Mahila Samaj in all parts of Bombay Presidency. This year indeed, was the year that decided Ramabai's future. It was now that she began to realize the parting of the ways, the need to overcome prejudices and cross the waters, the deep desire to find the truth, the doubts and agony of feeling that a new faith was creeping over her orthodox Hindu heritage, the faltering and changing of attitudes which must assail a sincere true spirit before it decides to meet the storm, fight it, and reach the safety and peace of a deep and lasting faith. Ramabai was bewildered and at a loss to know

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 25

what to do, and yet she absorbed deeply all forms of the new spirit enveloping India, and at last decided that she would, without as yet changing her faith, travel abroad and give herself a chance of learning better how to serve the women of her country.

"I felt a restless desire to go to England," exclaims Ramabai. "I could not have done that unless I had felt that my faith in God had become strong; it is such a great step for a Hindu woman to cross the sea."

5

A few extracts, translated from the Marathi paper *Subodh Patrika* of 1882 throw some light on the various activities of Pandita Ramabai before she sailed for England in April 1883. Pandita Ramabai arrived in Ahmednagar on Saturday 7, Oct. 1882 to attend a prize distribution ceremony at the Girls' School. Many Europeans and Indians were present at the function. This was the first event in the town when "native" women attended a public function, which is a sure sign of future female reforms—a very auspicious thing indeed!

Pandita Ramabai distributed the prizes and then made a speech. Her presence attracted a large audience.

The next day Ramabai visited the Prarthana Samaj and gave her *Purana* at the residence of Rao Saheb Nana Shastri Apte where a large gathering of men and women of the town had collected. Only those men who escorted their women were permitted to attend the meeting. Ramabai selected a portion from the *Anushasan Parva* from the *Bharat*. The audience was particularly struck by her personality, the manner of her illustrations and the fluency of her speech. Ramabai established a branch of the Poona Arya Mahila Samaj at Ahmednagar, and elected its office-bearers. She also inspected a number of girls' schools, and though scheduled to return the next day, she extended her stay at the request of the Europeans and Indians of the city and delivered a speech to a large audience in the High School Hall. The function was efficiently organized and only specially invited guests were allowed to attend. A collection was taken and Ramabai was presented with a purse of Rs. 80 for her travelling expenses and her English education.[19]

[19] *Subodh Patrika,* 15 October, 1882. Ramabai's life story appeared in serial form in the *Subodh Patrika,* from 2 August, 1882

A week later we are told that Ahmednagar was still surging with praises, comments and appreciation of Ramabai's speeches. She was called the famous *Pandita Radnimanya Radnishri Ramabai Saraswati*. Her speeches were fluent, pure, beautiful, cultured, creating a lasting impression on the minds of her audience. Ramabai was a rare woman, and it was wondered why it was necessary to have foreign women to educate Indian women, when women of the country, like Ramabai, were available.[20] But Ramabai was the first pioneer Indian woman. There were no others like her, lecturing in public and fighting for the rights of her sisters. In Bengal and Assam previously, and now in the Bombay Presidency, how astounding must have been the presence of this woman !

In November 1882, the Pandita was in Sholapur where she delivered many speeches to the commercial community and in High Schools. She also gave her *Purana* in the temple of Mallikarjun and at the residence of Dinkar Ballal Chakradev. All the functions where Ramabai appeared were crowded to capacity. The subject matter of her speeches centred round the fact that women's education and reforms were the foundation-stones necessary for the building up of a progressive nation. Ramabai was accorded a grand reception, and thanked for her guidance and advice and presented with a purse of Rs. 160.[21] A local citizen, Mallappa Anna Warad, also gave her a purse of Rs. 50 when Ramabai was in Sholapur, together with a *sari* and blouse piece as a brother's gift to a sister. Other purses were also presented to cover her travelling expenses. Ramabai spoke extensively on the Arya Mahila Samaj.[22]

Ramabai then attended the Fifth Anniversary celebrations of the Prarthana Samaj at Pandharpur on invitation. Here, she gave her *Purana* on the third day, reading from the *Shrimad Bhagwat* and the sermon given by Prahlad. In the afternoon session religious discussions took place and in the evening, Ramabai delivered a lecture in which she traced religious traditions and philosophy from Vedic times. She also argued about the differences between the Brahmo Samaj and the Prarthana Samaj and the existing Hindu philosophy. She then went on to stress the need to accept the precepts of the Prarthana Samaj, giving elaborate

[20] *Ibid.*, 5 November, 1882
[21] *Ibid.*, 12 November, 1882
[22] *Ibid.*, 19 November, 1882

reasons for this view. Those who heard her were stunned to realize her great knowledge and research in the Hindu scriptures.

The meetings were so crowded that people had to push and stand outside. Ramabai also examined a few girls in the girls' school and gave a speech on women's education.[23]

A report entitled "Famous Pandita Ramabai" appeared towards the end of November 1882, in the *Subodh Patrika.* It commented on Ramabai's fame having spread not only in India but in all parts of the world. Her renown was due to her parents which was apparent from the story of her life which had recently been published by her. If Ramabai had been an ignorant woman when her husband died, her life would have been ruined, but because of her deep learning, she was able to work for her country-women.

It is interesting to note that stress was laid over and over again on her learning and enlightenment, though later, when Ramabai embraced Christianity, she was actually accused by prominent reform and religious leaders of having changed her religion because she was an "ignorant" woman !

In a *Purana* given at the Prarthana Samaj Mandir one night, about 125 women and 300 men were present and the Pandita chose as her subject the *Prathama-Skandha* of the *Shrimad Bhagwat* when Narad related the story of his early life and explained how he had risen to the position of *Dev-Rishi* through *Niskam Ishwar-Bhakti* (selfless worship and devotion) though he was the son of a *Dasi.* Anyone who was low-born could, therefore, rise through devotion to God.

The *Subodh Patrika* in early December remarks that in spite of having written a great deal of Pandita Ramabai already, more had to be said about her, for she had kept herself busy ever since she had come to Maharashtra, visiting places and lecturing. "She is always busy and engaged in doing some research." She gave an instructive talk at the Prarthana Samaj on the *Shlokas* which dealt with the subject of rising and awakening.

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान् निबोधत ।
क्षुरस्य धारा निशिता दुरत्यया ।
दुर्गं पथस्तत्कवयो वदन्ति ॥

23 *Ibid*

Rise and awake; go and learn from the learned people
The learned people say that the path is difficult
And dangerous like the sharp end of the blade of a knife.[24]

Ramabai stressed on the fact that a man alone was responsible for his own salvation. She cited Lord Buddha and Valmiki as examples and also quoted and discussed other *Shlokas.*

At a women's meeting held in the Prarthana Mandir presided over by Mrs. Gangubai Bhandare with Mrs. Kashibai Kanetkar as Secretary, Ramabai explained the aims and objects of the Arya Mahila Samaj, and on another occasion Ramabai spoke on women's education in the Framji Cowasji Hall with the Hon. Ashburner as president. The meeting was sponsored by a Parsi gentleman.

In the first week of December, Ramabai is said to have given her last sermon in Bombay before her departure to England.

Thus did Ramabai work and toil for the women of India, for which she was much appreciated. In token of this gratitude, it was decided to raise funds for the furtherance of Pandita Ramabai's studies, and leading Hindus and Parsis issued an appeal as follows:

"The people of Bombay had merely heard of Pandita Ramabai by name all these days but for the last fifteen days, we all have seen and heard her, speaking and addressing several meetings at several places in the city, attended by crowded gatherings of men and women. All who have heard her and seen her have returned home fully satisfied and pleased, their hearts being filled with provoking thoughts. Pandita Ramabai surpasses many of our leading women in the country, in that she has displayed superb intellectual ability, wisdom, etc. Not only this, but what is most praise-worthy in her is that in order to improve the lot of her unfortunate sisters, she has announced her intention to devote all her life for this cause. We are indeed proud of this! We are just unable to measure the fine nature and character of this woman. In order to show our appreciation, and in order to enable her to prosecute her further studies for the betterment of her sisters in the country, it is proposed to raise a fund for this purpose."

About thirty people signed this appeal, for all did not agree with what Pandita Ramabai said and did. Those who issued the

[24] Sanskrit Text: *Subodh Patrika,* 3 December, 1882

appeal agreed that opinions were bound to differ for the Pandita Ramabai was not infallible. She too was bound to err. "And it is for this reason that we want to accept all that is good and best in her when she has taken to heart the cause with selfless motives. It is, therefore, but right that all well-wishers should give their active help and encouragement. At this moment, we greatly need some one to bring light amidst the ignorance of darkness prevalent among our sisters. Women like Pandita Ramabai are rarely seen and known and we should honour and respect this rare precious jewel."[25]

Pandita Ramabai's stay in Poona from April 1882 to April 1883, though fraught with diverse interests and activities and extensive travelling in the Bombay Presidency, was a difficult year. Though Ramabai's fame spread everywhere, she also became a target for criticism by the orthodox. Ramabai Ranade was also censured for mixing freely with Pandita Ramabai. The old-fashioned people mocked her. Mrs. Kashibai Kanetkar was also a victim. She lived in Bombay and attended regularly the ladies' meetings which were held at the Bombay Prarthana Samaj every Sunday, and she was criticized for doing this. Ramabai Ranade was actually persecuted for attending Pandita Ramabai's lectures. The Pandita, however, carried on her lectures undismayed, reading from the *Shrimad Bhagwat* in a well-known recitative tune as was the custom of the *Puranikas*.[26]

Ramabai as has been seen was also coming more and more into contact with Christianity, and was at the same time being attracted towards the Prarthana Samaj and the reform movement it was inaugurating in Western India. Her mental and spiritual state just then, must have, therefore, been confused and Ramabai must also have been suffering from the growing pains of a new religion which was dawning on her. What was Ramabai to do? In September 1882, Father Goreh directly influenced Ramabai by convincing her that the Prarthana Samaj would not satisfy her temperament. She definitely gave him the impression that she, through his analysis of the Samaj had realized that it would be untenable. But almost at the same time, Ramabai, when she went to Pandharpur for the anniversary meeting of the Samaj publicly pronounced that nothing would induce her to embrace Christianity.

[25] *Subodh Patrika,* 10 December, 1882

[26] Umakant, *Shrimati Ramabai Ranade,* p. 34 *et. seq.*

Father Goreh was naturally surprised when he heard that Ramabai attacked the very arguments by which he knew he had previously convinced her.

"However, she set sail for England, and after a short time the Mother House of the Wantage Sisterhood became her home. Here she and her child were baptized on Michaelmas Day, 1883." (29 September, 1883).[27]

It was not surprising, therefore, that Ramabai drew a storm of criticism down on herself and was accused of being "inconsistent" and even an opportunist. This last accusation was entirely unjustified, for Ramabai stood to gain nothing by embracing Christianity. On the other hand, she lost her friends, her reputation as a staunch supporter of the Prarthana Samaj, and her caste. By becoming a Christian, she became a derelict, and it was only her love for Christ which induced her to accept this new faith and nothing else.

Ramabai sailed for England on 20 April, 1883. When she left India, she had no idea she would embrace Christianity in six months. Quite simply, Ramabai says: "I went to England early in 1883 in order to study and fit myself for my life work."[28] What exactly was her life work at the time? To rescue, protect and shelter the women, especially the high caste of her country. For this she needed money and support, for the help and sympathy she received in India was wholly inadequate to fulfil her plans. She had to seek this abroad. In order to do this to the best of her ability, Ramabai found she must learn English and more up-to-date methods of education.

At the same time as Ramabai embarked for England, Anandibai Joshi sailed for America. Dean Rachel Bodley says: "The two ladies never met until they greeted each other under my roof, 6 March, 1886; but as kindred spirits, they had corresponded for several years. Strangely enough, each left India without the knowledge of the other, and within the same month, Mrs. Joshi sailed from Calcutta and the Pandita from Bombay. The day that Mrs. Joshi left Liverpool for New York, Ramabai and her little daughter landed in England. The reception of the two ladies in the summer of 1883, one in England and the other in the United States, was most cordial; and, comforted and blessed as neither

[27] C. E. Gardner, *Life of Father Goreh*, pp. 274, 275
[28] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 13

had dared to anticipate before leaving India, each settled down to work with industry and with a degree of intelligence which was a revelation to onlookers."[29]

Here was something quite extraordinary, that two Marathi High Caste women should sail abroad, braving public opinion. Anandibai Joshi at least had the consent of her husband and a home awaited her in America, for that staunch friend, Mrs. B. F. Carpenter had invited her; but Ramabai decided to travel abroad with her daughter and her friend Anandibai Bhagat entirely on her own responsibility. Commenting on Mrs. Carpenter and other high-minded ladies of America and England who longed to help India, the Editor of the *Indian Ladies' Magazine,* Kamala Satthianadhan[30] writes: "We have several English and American ladies, who have devoted their lives to the women of India, but among these Mrs. Carpenter will occupy a prominent place. She it was who was instrumental in the first instance in getting Anandibai Joshi to visit America and undergo a medical course there; and throughout Anandibai's stay in the country Mr. & Mrs. Carpenter were like parents to her, befriending her in every way to fulfil the Mission which she had before her."[31] Anandibai Joshi returned to India as a Hindu! This incident should have proved to Ramabai's critics that there was no need to become a Christian in order to gain the sympathy and help of American and English friends, for some had actually accused Ramabai, when she became a Christian of having done so to please her missionary friends.

Ramabai had no particular destination when she set sail for England though she was bound for the Home of the Wantage Sisters, and with her usual determination, she made friends quickly and settled down happily in her new surroundings in England. Ramabai was only able to earn herself and her daughter a deck passage through the sale of the *Stree Dharma Neety,* and this voyage "was a nightmare."

The money thus earned was not enough and the balance was met by Father Rivington, whom Ramabai repaid later.

In Pandita Ramabai's book, *Voyage to England,* written in

[29] Pandita Ramabai, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman,* Introduction by Rachel L. Bodley, p. viii

[30] Mother of the author Mrs. Padmini Sen Gupta

[31] *Indian Ladies' Magazine,* January 1906

Marathi, Ramabai gives clear reasons why she travelled abroad. She also enumerates all the doubts and difficulties cited by her friends in Poona on the one hand and by the missionaries on the other, and in her own characteristic manner, logically combats all the pros and cons and concludes that one is one's own best judge. She had to satisfy herself, and act as she did.

III

England

1

PANDITA Ramabai's admirable book in Marathi, *Voyage to England* is written in the form of a letter to a friend, Sadashiv Pandurang Kelkar, who, with the author's permission, published it in book form. It was proposed to send the balance left over from the money which the sale of the book would fetch after defraying the costs of publication to Ramabai for meeting her expenses abroad for her education. It was hoped that all well-wishers of the Panditabai would lend their support to this publication. Part I deals with the reasons for Ramabai's voyage to England and an account of her travels. It was written from St. Mary's Home, Wantage, Berkshire, England. Below are a few extracts translated from the book.

"Dear brother,

I received your letter yesterday afternoon, and I am unable to describe the condition of my mind when I read your letter. Only those who, like me, have left their own people behind and have gone away to a distant place will be able to appreciate and under-

stand what I feel. I believe very few will be as happy as I am, and please do not misunderstand me for saying this. Only those who have experienced the adversities which I have undergone will understand the happy life here. I have been unhappy and afflicted all my life and have suffered many hardships and therefore I feel God has given me the power and the strength to enjoy in full the happiness which has come here, even though these moments of joy are few and far between. Like the mother of the Pandavas I feel like saying to God: *Vipadah Santunah shashvat tatra Jagat-pateh*: which means, Oh the father of the world! I beseech that thou always keep me in an afflicted state, wherever I be, for my happiness lies therein.

"You might ask me—Why this preface? It is appended to a drama of life. The first part of this Drama has already appeared in *Subodh Patrika,* and the second is yet to come.[1] I do not think it will be published in the near future.

"A man's life is a drama. Those we see on the stage are false, for reality exists in our own lives. About a year ago I intimated to you that I intended to go to Europe. As you know, I left the shores of Bombay by S.S. *Bukhara* at about four in the evening on 20, April. You felt that I had made a mistake in taking the risk of this adventurous travel and you gave me a number of reasons why I should not go abroad. I do not say you were altogether wrong. But I was pained to notice the many considerations of ill-will placed on my journey by many of my friends. In fact, I almost dropped the idea, not because of criticisms, but because I was not sure where I would stay in England. I learnt that I would not be stranded if I had about Rs. 4,600 in hand plus my return passage. This would last about two years. You know that I am the daughter of Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth and that my name is Rama! So why worry? And besides my brother was Chintamani, the jewel that fulfils any desire! I felt I already possessed the *Akash Pushpa.* But I left no stone unturned. While I was in Poona I had met the Sister Superior of St. Mary's and became very friendly with her, as well as with other English ladies. Many of them discouraged me from going abroad. One said, 'I wish you were a Christian. We could have then arranged for your stay in England.' Another remarked: 'Why not stay here with us and be

[1] An account of Ramabai's travels in India which does not seem to have been published.

an apprentice, and then we shall see.' One lady wrote to me from England advising me to leave my baby daughter behind and suggesting that I stay for six months. If it was conveninent for me to stay on, further plans could be considered, otherwise I could return home. I felt that this suggestion was not very feasible as my daughter was only about two years old, and it would not have been worth my while to go abroad only for six months. After some time, the Sister Superior felt it would be a good idea for me to teach Marathi to the Sisters in England before they came to India, while I learnt English. I could thus maintain myself. A few days ago, a Sister whom I knew well came here from Poona and I suggested to her that I could teach Marathi and learn English in exchange and also earn my keep, provided it incurred no ulterior motive of converting me to Christianity, or any other motive. It was only when they agreed to this, that I made my preparations to come here after fully satisfying myself about their sincerity.

"Now let us consider the reasons why my friends did not wish me to go abroad.

1. "My feeble health and the young child (a very substantial reason).

2. "In my absence, institutions like the Arya Mahila Samaj would be neglected or even extinguished.

3. "I do not know English.

4. "Living in the company of Christians was undesirable.

5. "It was unbecoming for a young woman like me to go to a place like England which was full of temptations and abandonment.

6. "I did not know the country and would, therefore, be in the danger of being taken in by deceitful people.

7. "One gentleman said to me: 'You do not understand English, and what are you going to say to great women like Mrs. Fosset or Miss Manning?'

8. "My eyes would be dazzled by the glory of England and I would abandon my own country and have no love left for it.

9. "Another gentleman remarked, 'You know nothing about England and what will be the use of your merely looking at places of interests. In London there is a monument called 'Cleopatra's needle.' What will you understand about it? First try to learn the history and geography of the place you are going to. You are also very young. If you go after ten years, people will respect you better.'

10. " 'If you intend to take medicine, you will have to do a preliminary course in India at least for four years and pass a couple of examinations. Study first in your country for four years in order to pass your Matric. Besides you must not trust foreign missionary friends more than Indians.'

"I, therefore, felt that none of my friends wanted me to go abroad. I alone wished to go, and though I was not superior to my friends, I felt that one knows best what one should do. I am not superhuman, but I felt I should act as I did."

Ramabai then gave reasons to explain every one of the ten difficulties put forward by her friends and proving she was right in going abroad.

She ended thus: "I have always felt that few people like or love me, because I have been of little use to them, and I have asked myself why I should seek other people's love. People always like to love and be loved, and I am no exception. Blessed are those who love others even though it may never be returned. If there is anything divine, it is this phenomenon which I have always felt. Many people are plunged in sorrow because of this feeling of loneliness."

Relating a little about her journey Ramabai says that her cabin had six berths but it would have been too crowded if there had been six passengers. There were only three. "Myself, my daughter and my friend, Anandibai Bhagat. No other European passengers cared to share our cabin with 'Natives.' I really felt it was a blessing in disguise. For 27 days we were literally half fed or half starved, for, we just could not adjust ourselves to the kind of diet on the ship. But we thanked God that even on the ocean we were provided with food. I had been used to hardships and could adjust myself better than my companion who had not led such a hard life. Also, it was not my first voyage on a ship. I had travelled with my father like this two or three times when I had gone from Mangalore to Bombay and from Bombay to Dwarka. We were only three Indians on board. My Dharma Bandhu Babu Ank Behari Sharma and a young Parsee. That was all. We reached Aden on 21 April, and Suez on 1 May. Here we had to change our ship and we went aboard S.S. *Kaiser-i-Hind* which had arrived from Calcutta. This steamer was much bigger and more crowded and somehow we managed to get accommodation. We were in Gibraltar four days later. Thereafter the sea was very rough and

our steamer tossed so much that we rolled over one another, being thrown from one end of the cabin to the other. Almost all the passengers were sick and remained in their cabins. If we tried to stand we used to bump our heads against the walls. On the 16th of May we reached a port near London and our steamer halted there. Two Sisters from St. Mary's Home came to meet us along with a gentleman who was the brother of my Sister-friend. The gentleman left us and we proceeded to St. Mary's Home where we were well received. Babu Ank Behari Sharma took leave of us at the port. I have not yet found time to go round and see the city of London as I am busy with my studies. But I will write to you again after I have seen and known things."

This, in brief, is the gist of Part I of the remarkable book *Voyage to England* by Pandita Ramabai. Due to lack of space all the crisp detailed descriptions and poetic pictures painted in Ramabai's naive simple style have been omitted. Three characteristics may be noticed from the book. (1) Ramabai's confidence in herself. She had already stressed this need for self-development in her lectures, in Western India, before sailing for England. An individual had to work out his or her own salvation. (2) Her humility when she says that no one loves her because she did nothing for others, when in fact she spent all her young life in serving others. (3) Her love for and trust in God even before she became a Christian, and her sound logic in judging Hinduism and Christianity from a practical and just point of view.

2

Pandita Ramabai and her daughter Manorama reached England on 17 May, 1883. Ramabai writes: "When I first landed in England I was met by the kind Sisters of Wantage; to one of whom I had been introduced by Miss Hurford of St. Mary's Home, Poona. The Sisters took me to their Home, and one of them who became my spiritual mother, began to teach me both secular and religious subjects. I owe an everlasting debt of gratitude to her, and to Miss Beale, the late Lady Principal of Cheltenham Ladies' College. Both of these ladies took great pains with me and taught me the subjects which would help me in my life work. The instruction which I received from them was mostly spiritual. Their motherly kindness and deeply spiritual influence have greatly helped me

in building up my character. I praise and thank God for permitting me to be under the loving Christian care of these ladies."[2]

Sister Geraldine (died in 1918) who had worked in India, gave the Pandita a specially warm welcome. "You should have seen that pathetic little group when they arrived here" she remarked. "But there was such a thrill in my heart as I realized they were from India, a link with the land that I loved." And it was Sister Geraldine who watched over them as their Ajibai, or grandmother, during their stay in England. Ramabai stayed with the Sisters of the Convent of Saint Mary the Virgin at Wantage.

Very soon, Ramabai came in contact with the rescue work which the Sisters carried on in London. She was sent by the Mother Superior to the Homes at Fulham for a change and she came into direct contact with the work. Ramabai says: "I met several of the women who had once been in their Rescue Home, but who had so completely changed, and were so filled with the love of Christ, and compassion for suffering humanity, that they had given their lives for the service of the sick and infirm."[3] Now, with the wonderful rescue work which Ramabai witnessed, there was infinite hope for one who had been misguided.

"After my visit to the Homes of Fulham, where I saw the work of mercy carried on by the Sisters of the Cross, I began to think that there was a real difference between Hinduism and Christianity. I asked the Sisters who instructed me to tell me what it was that made the Christians care for, and reclaim the fallen women. She read the story of Christ meeting the Samaritan woman, and His wonderful discourse of the nature of true worship, and explained it to me. She spoke of the infinite love of Christ for sinners. He did not despise them but came to save them. I had never read or heard anything like this in the religious books of the Hindus. I realized after reading the fourth chapter of St. John's Gospel, that Christ was truly the Divine Saviour He claimed to be, and no one but He could transform and uplift the downtrodden womanhood of India, and of every land."[4] It was from this time onwards that Ramabai began really to feel that Christianity was a religion which treated men and women on the same social and legal status as men.

[2] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 13
[3] *Ibid*
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 14

Ramabai together with her baby daughter continued to stay with the Wantage Sisters for a year. Both were much loved and appreciated by the Community of St. Mary the Virgin. Ramabai learnt English and became more and more fluent in the language. She was also given careful instruction in Christianity. Sister Geraldine whom Ramabai called her "Mother in Christ" taught her lessons of strict discipline, and the value of method and order. This was perhaps what helped Ramabai so much later in her disciplined superintendence of Mukti Mission.

Ramabai's story was, however, not entirely confined to life with the Sisters of Wantage. She seems to have been free to visit friends and contact Sanskrit scholars and those interested in India. It was during this year that she came to know Prof. Max Müller, the great Indologist, and his wife. Max Müller's friendship and admiration for Ramabai, though little commented on by her biographers, form an interesting part of the great Sanskrit scholar's reminiscences and memoirs.

While Ramabai stayed with the Sisters of Wantage, she helped them in their printing press, and it was here that she learned the art of printing to a certain extent, and the technique of setting type. What she learnt here she imparted to her girls in Mukti when she started her own printing press.

3

Ramabai and Friedrich Max Müller, India's great friend and editor of *The Sacred Books of the East,* shared much in common. It is not recorded how they first contacted each other in England; whether she wrote to him first or he to her on hearing of her arrival in the land of Müller's adoption; but she became very friendly and stayed with the Müllers for some time. Max Müller must have already read Ramabai's *Ode to Sanskrit,** which she sent to the Berlin Oriental Congress two years earlier. The account of Ramabai's visit to the Müllers home in Oxford and of their friendship and his regard for her is given in his book, *Auld Lang Syne,* Series II entitled "My Indian Friends," and more briefly in the *Life and Letters of Max Müller,* edited by his wife.

Ramabai visited the home of Max Müller at 7, Northam Gardens, Oxford, about six months after her arrival in England, in October 1883. She had just been baptized on 29 September, 1883;

* Reproduced in Appendix.

but Max Müller still refers to her as a Hindu lady. The event is thus described by Mrs. Max Müller: "It was in October of this year that Max Müller made the acquaintance of Pandita Ramabai, who came to stay at his house. He has given a full account of 'the truly heroic Hindu lady, in appearance small, delicate, and timid, but in reality strong and bold as a tigress,' in his *Auld Lang Syne,* Series II. Max Müller wrote thus to his elder daughter regarding Ramabai's visit:

" 'We had a nice visit from Ramabhai, a Brahmin lady, who knows Sanskrit splendidly. She knows books as large as Homer by heart, from beginning to end; speaks Sanskrit correctly, and writes Sanskrit poetry.'

"Ramabai paid Max Müller, a second visit before she finally left England for America, where she collected sufficient funds to enable her to start a refuge for child-widows in India. She has now 1,950 widows in her different homes. Her *Life of a High Caste Hindu Woman* is well worth reading."[5]

In a letter to Mr. B. M. Malabari, from Oxford on 27 October, 1887, Max Müller says: "I gather from your last letter that you are discouraged, and that is everything. Reforms move very slowly, still they move, and what you have done has already borne good fruit. The first thing now is to help Rukhmabai[6] through her troubles, and to get the paragraph about imprisonment cancelled. After that, try to establish schools and refuges for widows. Here you might combine with Ramabai. I suppose she will soon return to India. She has become a Christian, but she is not narrow-minded, and may be made useful. Your idea of founding a Mission of Social Reform with your friend Dayaram Gidumal is excellent."[7]

Max Müller gives a still more vivid picture of Ramabai in his *Auld Lang Syne.* He starts by decrying the lot of widows in India and connecting Ramabai with them "To be a widow at all is hard enough; but nothing can be more miserable than the lot of a young widow in India, whose life may be said to be over before it has begun. Widows are looked upon in their own homes as beings of

[5] *Life and Letters of Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller,* Edited by his wife, Longman's Green & Co., London 1902, Vol. II, pp. 148-49

[6] The famous case of Rukhmabai had caused a tremendous stir among reformers in India. Ramabai refers to this case in her *The High-Caste Hindu Woman.*

[7] *Life and Letters of Max Müller,* pp. 217-18

evil omen, as having deserved their misfortune by some unknown misdeeds in this or, what is worse, in a former life, and particularly if childless, they are treated no better than servants, whether in the house of their parents-in-law or even in the house of their parents, if they are allowed to return there. They are shunned, excluded from all amusements, obliged to wear coarse garments, deprived of their ornaments, and often condemned to shave their heads, a great indignity in the eyes of every woman."[8] Max Müller goes on to say that widows often committed suicide or took to immoral ways of living if they could not stand the life in their homes. He comments that Ramabai worked for years to ameliorate their lot and remarks: "She is certainly a most courageous woman, not to be turned away from her purpose by any misfortune or any threats."[9]

Max Müller seems to have greatly appreciated Ramabai's stay in his home. He says: "I saw much of her when she stayed with us at Oxford, but the most eventful part of her career belonged to an earlier period. With what she told me then, and what has been published since by Mrs. R. L. Bodley in the introduction to Ramabai's account of the *Life of a High-Caste Hindu Woman* (Philadelphia, 1887) we begin to understand the high aims of this truly heroic Hindu lady. Her life so far as we know it from herself and others, draws away the veil behind which so much that is really of the deepest interest to us, is hidden in the East. Here we see, first of all, from her own case, how carelessly marriages are often arranged in India." Max Müller now gives a full account of Ramabai's mother Lakshmibai and her father's marriage. He also mentions a fact unmentioned by other biographers of Ramabai, that her grandfather was a *Kaushuma* Brahmin, a very learned and rare sect. When Ramabai decided to go abroad to England, the Professor says it "was a bold decision, and required more moral courage than Napoleon's march to Russia. Undeterred by any fears she started with her little daughter and a female friend, and when she arrived in England almost destitute, she fortunately found shelter for a time with the sisterhood at Wantage, some members of whom she had known at Poona. But even there her tragedy was not yet ended. She had declared to the Sisters that,

[8] Max Müller, *Auld Lang Syne,* Series II, "My Indian Friends," 1899, p. 121

[9] *Ibid.,* p. 122

grateful as she felt for their kindness, she would never become a Christian, because, as she often said, a good Brahmin is quite as good as a good Christian. Her friend, however, was frightened by the idea that she and Ramabai would become Christians by force; and to save Ramabai and herself from such a fate, she killed herself. It was after this terrible catastrophe a Wantage that Ramabai came to stay with us at Oxford, and such was her nervous prostration that we had to give her a maid servant to sleep every night in the same room with her. Nor was this all. After all the arrangements had been made to enable her to attend medical lectures at Oxford, her hearing became suddenly so much affected that she had to give up all idea of a medical career. She then determined to study nursing and thus fit herself for useful work in India. Then came an invitation from America. . . ."[10]

In a letter to Mr. Malabari, Prof. Max Müller said: "I quite agree with what you say about Ramabai. There you see what an Indian woman *can* be. Most Indian women can talk about nothing but their trinkets, their clothes and their family affairs. With Ramabai you can talk about anything. And what is more important still, you can perfectly trust her—and what a blessing that is."[11]

When Ramabai devoted herself to start a refuge for widows in 1889, Prof. Müller comments: "This is the work to which at last she has devoted herself, and with great success, her only difficulty being that in the meantime she had, after all, become a Christian and joined her Christian friends; not that she considered her former religion false or mischievous but because, as she told me, she could no longer stand quite alone, she wanted to belong to somebody, and particularly to be able to worship together with those she loved and who had long been so kind to her. Her having become a Christian, no doubt, proved a serious obstacle to her success in her chosen sphere of usefulness in India. Though we may trust her that she never made an attempt at proselytizing

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 128. The friend who travelled with Ramabai to England was Anandibai Bhagat. She received a scholarship to study abroad and took advantage of Ramabai as her travelling companion. In England, Anandibai suddenly swallowed poison and committed suicide. She had voluntarily been baptized a few days earlier and therefore it is to be wondered why Max Müller felt that she was "frightened" by the idea of becoming a Christian.

[11] Resumé by Lady Benson of the Life of Dorothea Beale by Elizabeth Raikes, published in the *Indian Ladies' Magazine*, October 1909.

among the little widows committed to her care, yet, how could it be otherwise than that those to whom the world had been so unkind, and Ramabai so kind, should wish to be what their friend was, Christian! Her goodness was the real power that could not be hidden, but she lost, of course, the support of her friends, and has even now to fight her battles alone, in order to secure that pecuniary assistance necessary to the support of her little army of child widows. She is indeed, a noble and unselfish woman, and deserves every help which those who sympathize with her objects can afford to give her."[12]

Here are some incidents in Ramabai's life of which little is known, i.e. that she took a friend with her to England who committed suicide, that she nearly suffered a nervous breakdown, that she definitely decided to take up a medical career, and even had a seat booked in college and had to abandon the idea because of her health and that she began to lose her hearing at this time. It must have been after this failure to achieve her desire to take up medicine that she decided to go to Cheltenham Ladies' College.

Max Müller was much impressed that she came from *Kaushuma* stock, and writes: "When I once asked her how she knew that she belonged to the famous Brahmin clan of the *Kaushumas,* she replied very simply, 'But who would ever doubt it?' And the same remark applies to all that she had told me of the suffering of her life."[13]

4

The direct contact with the tremendous work of love which Ramabai witnessed when she visited the Rescue Homes at Fulham drew her more forcibly towards Christ. Soon she did not find it difficult to accept the Christian faith as a Unitarian; but she cogitated much on the question of the true teachings of Christ. After a few months she was frank enough to confess that she felt she could never become a Christian, and that she should leave the protection of the Sisters, as otherwise she was putting herself more and more under their obligation, and she did not want to disappoint them in the end. So, Ramabai actually left the shelter of the com-

[12] Max Müller, *Auld Lang Syne,* pp. 127-29.
[13] *Ibid.,* p. 126.

munity which had been so kind to her, much to the sorrow of the Sisters.[14]

Ramabai writes about this and earlier periods of doubt as follows: "I got to know Father Goreh, and he used to come and see me at Poona, and talk to me. I tried to show him that Brahmoism is better than Christianity, but I really knew nothing about Christianity, except a few stories I had heard from the New Testament. I knew nothing of the deep philosophy of the Christian mysteries. Though his words moved me somewhat, I never showed that they did and appeared by no means a hopeful subject. I asked many questions, and as he had not time to argue much, he wrote a book (which I received after I reached England) to answer my questions, and so I got to know the differences between Christianity and the other religions, and it seemed plain, Christianity was the mother of the Theism of India. I had previously argued with missionaries, but they could not answer my questions, because they did not know the Hindoo religion and philosophy. One set of ideas I had in my head, and those had to be removed ere others could enter."[15]

Ramabai promised the Sisters that if she became "convinced of the truth of their teachings," she would become a Christian, and finally when she sincerely wished to be baptized to Christianity after being "intellectually convinced of its truth on reading a book written by Father Goreh", the Sisters were overjoyed and welcomed her back in their fold. Father Goreh being himself a convert from the same caste as Ramabai was able to understand her doubts, fears and difficulties and interpreted Christ to Ramabai in a language which she could understand. Father Goreh's long letter upon the evidences of Christianity which he wrote to her while she was in England, brought about an entire change in Ramabai and she soon decided for Christ. "Father Goreh preached to me from India," she writes, "His humble sweet voice has pierced my heart. I think no one would have had the power of turning my heart from the Brahmin religion but Father Goreh."[16] Ramabai and her daughter were baptized on Michaelmas Day, 29 September, 1883 by Dean William Butler of Oxford, the founder

[14] Mary L. B. Fuller, *The Triumph of an Indian Widow*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
[15] *Cheltenham Ladies' College Magazine*, September 1884.
[16] Rajaiah D. Paul, *Chosen Vessels*, p. 242.

of the Community of St. Mary the Virgin, in the Wantage Parish Church.

The Right Rev. William Q. Lash, Bishop of Bombay writes about Ramabai's baptism as follows:

> "Born: April 23rd 1858
> Baptized: September 29th, 1883
> MARY RAMA"

"This is from an extract in the Register of the Parish Church at Wantage, in England, and has been kindly sent me by the Mother General of the Community of St. Mary the Virgin. I was anxious to discover what links Pandita Ramabai had with the Sisters in Poona, who started their work in 1877. She does not seem to have met them before going to England, but at Wantage a Sister, who had already been in India, welcomes them and watches over her and her little daughter 'Mano' during their stay in England, as *Ajibai* or grandmother. Manorama went to the School in Wantage and was later under the care of the Sisters in Poona, who had started what must have been one of the earliest schools for girls in the medium of English, so that girls of different Provinces could come together for study."[17]

The letter which Father Goreh wrote to Ramabai in England was published as a Marathi Pamphlet, "which was printed at the *Panch Howds* Press. Perhaps that is why Ramabai refers to the letter as a book." In this letter he proved that the reforming party which professed pure theism was greatly influenced by Christianity. After her baptism Ramabai wrote to a friend: "You will be glad to know that I have become a catechumen. Father Goreh preached to me from India. Oh what a mighty power of preaching he has!"[18]

After her conversion, Ramabai writes: "I was comparatively happy, and felt a great joy in finding a new religion, which was better than any other religion I had known before. I knew full well that it would displease my friends and my countrymen very much; but I have never regretted having taken the step. I was

[17] "Bishop's Letter" (of the Bishop of Bombay) Issue No. 4 of April 1958.

[18] C. E. Gardner, *Life of Father Goreh*, p. 275.

hungry for something better than what the Hindu Shastras gave. I found it in the Christian Bible and was satisfied."[19]

But being an intellectual, Ramabai continued her studies. She says: "I studied the religion more thoroughly with the help of various books written on its doctrines. I was much confused by finding so many different teachings of different sects; each one giving the authority of the Bible for holding a special doctrine, and for differing from other sects.

"For five years after my baptism, I studied these different doctrines, and made close observations during my stay in England and in America. Besides meeting people of the most prominent sects, the High Church, Low Church, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Friends, Unitarian, Universalist, Roman Catholic, Jews and others, I met with Spiritualists, Theosophists, Mormans, Christian Scientists, and followers of what they call the occult religion."[20]

Which sect could be right, which belief? Ramabai writes: "No one can have any idea of what my feelings were, at finding such a Babel of religions in Christian countries, and at finding how very different the teaching of each sect was from that of the others. I recognized the *Nastikas* of India in the Theosophists, the polygamous Hindu on the Mormans, the worshippers of ghosts and demons in the spiritualists, and the old *Vedantists* in the Christian scientists. Their teachings were not new to me. I had known them in their old eastern nature as they are in India; and when I met them in America I thought that they had changed their Indian dress, and put on Western garbs, which were more suitable to the climate and conditions of the country."[21]

These doubts and misgivings though accentuated later, assailed her even in England when she first became a Christian.

What was the reaction to Ramabai's conversion in India? When Ramabai went abroad her movements were watched carefully by the people of Maharashtra. The *Indu Prakash* announced: under the heading "Pandita Ramabai" that "the friends and well-wishers of female education in India will be interested to learn that this lady, who left for England on the 20th April last, reached on the 16th May after a safe voyage. She is now lodged in St. Mary's Home at Wantage in Berkshire. What her future course will be

[19] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 14.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

we are not able to say, but it is to be hoped she will not be a member of the convent of the Cowley Mission."[22]

Then when Ramabai was converted, a storm broke out in Poona and Bombay. Again, the *Indu Prakash* writes: "Ah! What a learned woman! We do however hope the news is utterly false. We all were taken with awe and wonder and were struck by her charms of appearance and the fluent tongue wielding the language; her modest and intelligent instinctive speeches, all so sweet and juicy, all now gone and wasted. Oh Pandita Bai! You are after all a woman, whatever your culture and achievements be—you are thus rendered a woman helpless. We however wondered how you could take so many years to become Holy! You have disappointed a number of friends and admirers, be assured!"[23]

This rather hysterical tirade seems to be misplaced in a paper so well known and run by great reformers. It seemed also to deny the freedom for the individual to choose his or her own form of worship and was also a stigma on the great religious tolerance of the Hindu philosophy itself. In fact, Hinduism is one of those few religions in the world which tolerates and admits the wisdom in the philosophy of other religions. This rather undignified peroration from a well-known Marathi paper, therefore, was most surprising, though the prejudice against missionaries who were often considered a part and parcel of British Imperialism could, to a certain extent, be understood. Their proselytizing was dreaded by some high caste Hindus. Many were the sarcastic and angry attacks on Ramabai in the Marathi press after her conversion.

While it is regrettable, on the one hand that the *Indu Prakash* and other papers attacked Ramabai for her conversion and condemned her, on the other, it must be remembered that the times were not as tolerant as they are today. The *Sanatanist* movement was strong, the national revival was just beginning to assert itself, and reformers were working within national ideals to do away with the reactionary traditions; all progress was thought of in patriotic angles. Christianity was looked upon by many minds as an enemy to national progress because its teachings were wrongly confused with British rule. All foreign influences, though welcomed in the fields of education and reform were considered inimical to the ideals of Hinduism, and nationalism. The leaders of

[22] *Indu Prakash,* 11 June, 1883.
[23] *Ibid.,* 22 October, 1883.

the times had forgotten that Christianity had come to India in the first century A.D. and could well be one of the ancient religions of India. It need never have been confused with British Imperialism. But, alas, Christianity was considered the White Man's religion! When Ramabai, therefore, a woman of the highest class, and much appreciated by the reformists suddenly declared her conversion, the people of Maharashtra were shocked. They were afraid that both the ancient religion of the land and nationalism would suffer.

Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak's *Kesari* was another paper which mercilessly criticized Ramabai. That this great national hero was motivated to do so was not surprising. Tilak naturally wanted Ramabai to be a Hindu heroine. He himself was as staunch and true a Hindu as Ramabai a staunch Christian. Just as Ramabai may have regretted losing one of her Christian flock later, when she had established Mukti, Tilak regretted losing a Hindu sister. Perhaps, our national hero has been too unjustly blamed by a few biographers for censuring Ramabai and her conversion.

It was not only those who became Christians who were ostracized and condemned at the time. Even the reformers themselves had to waive their right to individual freedom at times for the sake of religious demands. They had to cater for these conventions to a certain extent at least in order to gain the confidence of the people and become national and social leaders. Theirs was not the creed of "rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." They were out to free their country and were even prepared to sacrifice some of their ideals in order to gain their national freedom. Lokamanya Tilak was a great intellectual, scholar, mathematician and political genius. He was incarcerated in prison for six long years for his nationalism and patriotism. He inspired India with his call to freedom and said: "Freedom is my birth-right and I will attain it." Great man as he was, Lokamanya Tilak (1856-1920) had to concede to the demands of his religion even though he was an extreme nationalist for he was also a *Sanatanist* Hindu. He believed that "Hinduism is an element in nationality" and that its beliefs provided for "a moral as well as a social tie." Tilak wanted the *Sanatan Dharma* to be preached to the whole world just as much if not more perhaps than the missionaries wished to preach Christianity. Tilak was different from the reformists of the time because his main object was political progress and not so much social reform. He edited the *Kesari,* a leading Marathi

paper. He did not like "the attitude of the social reformers with their western education . . ." and "the examples of the growing hostility between the group of Tilak and the party of the social reformers under the leadership of Ranade may be seen in the articles of the *Kesari* of those years."[24] On June 1885, appeared a "bitter sarcastic article against Ranade". Agarkar severed his connection with *Kesari* in 1887, and started a new organ called *Sudharak* in October 1888, which attacked Tilak. A famous controversy took place between *Kesari* and *Sudharak* over the female High School of Poona. Tilak felt girls should be educated but not Westernized.

It was not surprising, therefore, that Tilak was one of the greatest opponents of Ramabai when she was converted. Here was a Brahmin lady who in his eyes was giving up her birthright and following an outside religion. His patriotism, his religious faith were all shocked, and since it seemed a custom of those fiery two decades (1880-1900) of social reform, national aspirations and Hindu Dharma, to carry on bitter controversies in the papers, Tilak, through his paper, became one of Ramabai's greatest critics. Tilak could not understand why Ramabai should have, according to him at least, deserted the Hindu fold. His attacks were at times far too harsh and even unjust. But in actual fact, Ramabai never worked against India for she had an intense love for her country and her strong plea for Christianity was because she really felt this would alone "save" India.

For this reason, Tilak himself took the censures of the Court of *Shankaracharya* mildly and with obedience when he was accused of polluting himself by going to a Missionary tea party. On 4 October, 1890, Tilak, Ranade and Gokhale were invited to tea by the *Panch Howds* missionaries and partook of biscuits. This was scandalous in orthodox eyes and a case was launched in the Court of *Shankaracharya.* But Tilak compromised and gave in to the precepts of his religion.

With regard to other questions also, there was give and take. Tilak wrote later: "If we are prepared to make compromise when Parliament passes the Council's Act 1892, why should we not do so with respect to questions like widow re-marriage? Fanatical opposition might occasionally be successful, but as a rule, in

[24] V. P. Varma, *Modern Indian Political Thought,* p. 296.

political as well as social matters, fanaticism is suicidal."[25] "This adherence to the concept of graduation and compromise made in the eyes of opponents Tilak's attitude to social reform look inconsistent. Tilak was opposed, for example, to child marriage but did not want a bureaucratic law or decree to stop it. He decried the remarriage of widows but also condemned the remarriage of men and wanted that widowers should dedicate themselves to the task of the emancipation of the country. From his own standpoint and from the needs and demands of the time and place amidst which he had to fight against the entrenched ramparts of a foreign bureaucracy, he could not but uphold the views that he did. Moreover we must never forget that he was a Sanatanist Hindu and it is illogical to judge his action from a radically different standpoint."[26]

Tilak and Ranade accepted the verdict of the Court of *Shankaracharya* and were purified of the sin of eating biscuits at *Panch Howds* by paying a fine and undergoing a purification ceremony in atonement. Thus they returned to the Hindu fold.

It was unfortunate that Ramabai was ever censured for changing her religion. Ramabai came by religion the "hard way." There is no other way to give it the validity. "For religion is, first and last, an individual facing upto the astounding heavens, a matter between him and God. It is a matter of individual growth *from within,* and cannot be 'given' by anybody. For religion is a flower which is best grown in a field, and the pot-grown or hot-house variety is apt to be pale-coloured, as well as fragile and friable."[27]

5

In September 1884, Ramabai went to Cheltenham Ladies' College as a student-teacher. While accepting the post of Professor of Sanskrit, she studied natural science, higher mathematics, English literature and Greek.

In Cheltenham, Ramabai was much appreciated by her fellow students and teachers, and became a dear friend of the great educationist and Principal of the College, Miss Dorothea Beale, whose biographer, Elizabeth Raikes, comments: "To read about her will

[25] *Kesari,* 7 June, 1892.

[26] V. P. Varma, *Modern Indian Political Thought,* p. 58.

[27] Lin Yu Tang, *From Pagan to Christian,* Heinemann, 1960, p. 14.

be specially interesting to Indian ladies, as the greatest woman that India has in recent years produced, was a pupil of Dorothea Beale's. Pandita Ramabai was received by her with the utmost warmth and friendship. She made every possible arrangement for her health and protection; she not only put at her disposal every advantage the college could offer, but gave up a large portion of her own valuable time in order to help her personally. She welcomed Ramabai's long letters on religious questions and difficulties, answering them at equal length. Ramabai's 'appetite for philosophy' (to quote Miss Beale) her enthusiasm and unsparing devotion to the cause of her unhappy sisters in India, touched her deeply, and when the 'House for Widows' was established, Miss Beale became a large and regular subscriber to it."[28]

Miss Dorothea Beale (1831-1906) was one of the pioneer and greatest women educators of England. "She valued education for her sex not as a means for training so many teachers to earn livelihoods for themselves, not for the passing of examination and gaining of prizes, but for the light which true education throws on the value and responsibilities of Life, the greater possibilities for help to others which a good education affords, and the deepening of the spiritual life."[29] Her motto was:

"Not many lives but one, only one have we
How sacred should that one life ever be."

Her cry to English women was, "Rise up, ye women, that are at ease." It is no wonder then that she and Ramabai became such fast friends. Ramabai speaks of Miss Beale with great gratitude. Ramabai attended Miss Beale's Saturday Scripture classes, and always sat close to her *Guru,* as she was then a little hard of hearing. Ramabai occupied a high stool beside Miss Beale, and had "her aurophone touching her teeth". She listened with rapt attention to an expounding of the first eight verses of the first chapter of the Gospel of St. John. At the time Ramabai had some doubts; but one day she came "joyfully to Miss Beale to tell her of faith restored after her mind had become clouded with

[28] Elizabeth Raikes, *Life of Dorothea Beale,* pp. 299, 300.

[29] Lady Benson's Review of Elizabeth Raikes' Biography on Dorothea Beale. *Indian Ladies' Magazine,* October 1909.

religious doubt. She had gone away to fight her battle by herself and had returned to announce her victory."[30]

Miss Dorothea Beale was one of a large family. Her home atmosphere was sober and intellectual and Dorothea owed much to her parents. After being educated by governesses and teachers, and reading widely, Miss Beale went to a school in Paris in 1847, where she learned French. Later in life in 1889, she attended the International Congress of Education in Paris and was awarded the honour of being made "officer d'academie." In that same year her Indian counterpart, Ramabai, attended the Fifth Indian National Congress and the Social Conference. In 1848 Miss Beale went to Queen's College which was indeed an "epoch in Women's education." In 1856 she became Headmistress of Casterton, a School for Clergymen's daughters in the north of England and then she came to Cheltenham and wrote a textbook on History and other books. The Ladies' College at Cheltenham grew "quietly and silently" and started with a small number of the residents of Cheltenham.

In 1880 the College Magazine was started and in its pages much has been written about and by Ramabai. Throughout her life, Miss Beale was much interested in Ramabai's work in India; but the three years Ramabai spent in Cheltenham College opened her eyes to the system of English education to which she was much beholden.

In September 1884, a long account of Ramabai written in *The Times of India* was republished in the College Magazine. In it Ramabai is quoted as commenting on not being given in marriage as an infant: "They did not throw me into the well of ignorance by giving me in marriage in infancy." *The Times of India* also stated that Ramabai's "reputation was very probably exaggerated, but she was supposed to be ready at any moment to solve the highest problems in Sanskrit literature. The oldest pandits bowed to her decisions. She was unmarried and independent, and, though deeply imbued with the traditions of her forefathers, had had the courage to strike out a line very different from that attempted by any of her country-women. She became what is expressly called 'the rage' with the native community, and the object of a considerable amount of curiosity and sympathy among all the English

[30] Macnicol, *Pandita Ramabai,* p. 65.

people who heard of her."[31] Some notes of the interesting conversations with the Pandita were also published in the magazine.[32]

She explains the Hindu religion and its various sects to her interrogators. She says that her father was a *Vaishnava* and was separated to some degree from his own branch of the Brahmins. "I remember, when quite a child, about seven, being told about the gods, and worshipping my dolls. We did not worship the wood and stone, but believed that as we could not form any conception of God, these symbols were necessary as giving us an objective ideal. This caused me and my brother to think more freely on such subjects than was usual. We were also very carefully instructed by our father. I learned Sanskrit as well as Mahrathi, Hindee, Bengali, Canarese, and got by heart many lines from the *Rig Veda* and other ancient writings."[33] It is strange, however, that Ramabai should say that she had learnt many hymns by heart from the *Rig Veda*. She obviously meant the *Puranas* for she herself told Keshab Chunder Sen in Calcutta in 1878 that women were not permitted to read the *Vedas* and he was the first to introduce Ramabai to *Vedantic* literature.

Ramabai relates her life story in detail in the pages of the College Magazine. She goes on to describe her stay with the Wantage Sisters. She writes: "I gradually learned to feel the truth of Christianity, and to see that it is a philosophy, teaching truths higher than I had ever known in all our system—that it gives not only precepts, but a perfect example—that it does not give us precepts and an example only, but assures us of divine grace, by which we can follow that example. I feel that it satisfies the needs, the moral needs of man, and if there are still some intellectual difficulties, these must be accepted by faith, as necessary for the finite creature in the presence of the infinite.

"One can feel that the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ comes from the All-Father, who loves not one nation, not one class, or one caste, but hears in His heart every creature of His hand, it would be a blessed day for India, if her sons and daughters could see that. He is the revelation of the Father, the bright image of His goodness, which is His glory, that He is able through His spirit

[31] From *The Times of India* printed in the *Cheltenham Ladies' College Magazine,* September 1884.

[32] *Cheltenham Ladies' College Magazine,* Autumn 1884.

[33] *Ibid.,* September 1884.

to lift men up to God, and enable them so to sympathy with sorrow, no trampling upon the feelings of others, no persecution of the unfortunate, no breaking of hearts by unkindness, but true sympathy and love—readiness to suffer, if through suffering we may help others more, above all there is that utter trust in the love of God for ourselves and others, which is the joy of life. I feel sure that those who now go on their way weeping and bearing forth good seed, will one day see a rich harvest waving in the sunshine."[34]

Ramabai's love of God and Christ sought no personal popularity, no national heroism, no fame or leadership. It was an embodiment of pure service to Humanity and Truth.

Notes on her conversation published in the Autumn of 1885 in the *Cheltenham Ladies' College Magazine* describe the life of a Hindoo woman and the wrongs she suffers, very much on the lines of the book, *The High Caste Hindu Woman,* which Ramabai wrote in America a few years later. She attacks the British Government which "ought to do more for women than men, because women have no money and therefore need it absolutely."

At the time the colleges provided by Government were empty because "social opinion would make it impossible for a woman to dispense with what is thought necessary for a lady," except for a few low caste students. Government thought it useless to offer more advantages.

Ramabai felt that the Bethune College in Calcutta and a college in Mysore were doing useful work. Other towns should possess similar institutions. Hindu widows could be trained as teachers. Colleges should be open to all and religious instruction should be given; but "it would not be right, however, to force on them Christianity; but teachers should be provided for those who hold classes for any who are willing to attend. Instruction on the writings of *Manu* and the *Upanishads* would be profitable for all and would in no way hinder them from adopting Christianity hereafter. Religious teachers would generally be glad to teach for nothing if they were allowed."[35]

6

The next we hear about Ramabai in the *Cheltenham Ladies'*

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] *Cheltenham Ladies' College Magazine,* Autumn 1885.

College Magazine is an article she wrote in the Spring of 1886. Here Ramabai shows up the ignorance of the English people of India. Christian friends have asked her many questions about India and shown their desire to help India, but Ramabai is a little annoyed here of their sad ignorance. She must have also been aware that the help many missionaries wished to give India was from the attitude of a superior nation helping an inferior. Ramabai says that she found it difficult to answer their questions due to their lack of understanding of India.

"Some English have such very comprehensive classifications of the human race—they have been known to bring under the same category the skin-clad, flat-headed inhabitant of the North American Continent, and the descendant of the ancient Aryan race of Central Asia. Some have still more comprehensive minds, and embrace under one term 'native' inhabitants of India, America, Africa, Australia and all the islands of the Pacific." Ramabai says that this leads to confusion of races, referring to all alike as "benighted heathen"! She herself later, used the word "heathen" and "pagan" of her own countrymen and women; but at this time she certainly seemed to object to such terms. "Some missionaries go out to teach those of whose language and philosophy, and modes of thought they are utterly ignorant; with whom they have no sympathy because they cannot feel what are their difficulties. Such was hardly, it seems to me, the method of the apostles. In the first ages of Christianity, St. Paul became to the Jews as a Jew, to the Greek as a Greek. Christ tells us he came not to destroy, but to fulfil—and God's method of work seems to be ever to build on the old foundations, keeping that which is good, and destroying only that which is evil, decaying, ready to perish."[36]

It was necessary according to Ramabai for the teacher to enter into the thoughts of her pupils. "They cannot believe that missionaries, who will not take the trouble to understand them, can really care for them, and sincerely desire their good; that contempt which is ever the offspring of ignorance, always alienates and hardens—only sympathy born of understanding, will ever make them open their hearts to light. It seems to me that it has become something of a fashion for kind-hearted young ladies (of gentlemen I will not speak) to think they will easily convert 'the natives.' Imagine for a moment that the relations were reversed

[36] *Ibid.*, Spring, 1886.

—that a Hindu lady, inspired with a desire to convert the English, should at once proceed to London, in utter ignorance of the Christian faith, only firmly convinced of the truth of their own. Would her assertion that the *Vedas* are inspired books be accepted by any? Would not the Christians require her to show them in what respects her faith was superior to theirs? Yet, there are lady missionaries, who think themselves qualified to teach Hindus, with no more knowledge of their faith than our imaginary Pandit has of Christianity."[37]

Ramabai, however, praises some missionaries and says: "Happily some missionaries, though not all, do study that teaching which God has given to us in past ages, through the sacred writings of India, and they are able to help my countrymen to see more of Divine Truth." She quotes the Rev. Peter Percival from his book *Land of the Vedas*. He says: "The Hindus—I write from long acquaintance with the native character, and much intercourse with the learned among them—will not listen respectfully to a man who is ignorant of their system, except to condemn him as a partisan, who if he knew the views of his antagonist might possibly be inclined to embrace them. . . . An acute people like the Hindus will not abandon an ancestral faith of many centuries at the bidding of a foreigner. They must be convinced ere they are converted." Ramabai adds: "It is not enough for a Christian to know the errors of Hinduism; Christians, learning Hinduism only for the sake of finding the errors of that religion, cannot expect either respect or sympathy from the Hindus. Let the missionaries put themselves in the place of the Hindus, and see from their point of view, and then think whether they would like their own Christianity learnt by the Hindus, only for the sake of finding the errors or weak points of it. They must show fairness, a real love of truth, or they will be mistrusted, regarded as mere partisans, they must be ready to acknowledge what is good and true, even as St. Paul when he spoke to the worshippers of the Unknown God."[38]

The next reference we have of Ramabai in the College Magazine is in the Autumn of 1886. It does not contain an article by Ramabai as she left for America in the spring of 1886; but there

[37] *Ibid.*
[38] *Ibid.*

is a reprint of a passage from a Philadelphia paper, for that was Ramabai's next destination.

"There was a scene presented at Association Hall last evening which was in some respects altogether unique. Before a large audience, and surrounded by sixty or seventy of the best women of Philadelphia, stood a Hindu woman of high caste, her slight figure wrapped in the white robe of Indian widowhood out of which looked a face of most picturesque beauty and expression. . . . She has now visited America to witness the graduation of her relative, Dr. Anandibai Joshee, who, with her husband, was present last evening.

"The address delivered by Pandita Ramabai was unwritten. Standing in an easy attitude, with her hands clasped upon the desk before her, and speaking with a voice of the most musical sweetness and distinctness and with the unembarrassed manner of a genuine simplicity, she told the story of Hindu womanhood to her American audience in a fashion that won all hearts and riveted all attention. For three-quarters of an hour this Hindu lady spoke of the conditions and needs of her sex in her native land in a strain of gentle, high-bred earnestness, and with so much nobility of sentiment and maturity of judgment."[39]

Thus did Ramabai leave her sheltered existence in Cheltenham Ladies' College and appear before the New World. Her friendship with her revered Principal, Miss Beale, lasted till the latter's death in 1906. All through the years, the friendship and love between the two great women, one British and one Indian, continued and when Miss Beale passed away, Ramabai wrote: "It is over 21 years since I saw Miss Beale for the last time. But her sacred memory is quite fresh, and I seem to hear her pray and give Bible instruction. Her love and influence, her works of encouragement and her prayers on my behalf, have helped me much in my life and work, and I am thankful to God for giving me the privilege of being under Miss Beale's kind care at Cheltenham."[40]

In the Autumn of 1908 an article appeared in the *Cheltenham Ladies' College Magazine* written by Evelyn Gedge in which, after a preliminary reference to Ramabai's early life, the writer says: "In 1884, she (Ramabai) came to our College. Many who are still with us remember the regularity with which she attended Miss

[39] *Ibid.* Autumn 1886.

[40] Elizabeth Raikes, *Life of Dorothea Beale,* pp. 300, 301.

Beale's lectures, and the intelligent interest she took in all that was new to her in the realms of religion, education and social reform." Evelyn Gedge goes on to describe Ramabai's visit to America and her work in India, and ends her article by saying: "Sure there is in all this something which reminds us of Miss Beale, in whom, despite the difference of colour Ramabai found a friend proving that in noble Christian souls, such as these, the East and West are already met."[41]

The final reference to Ramabai in the *Cheltenham Ladies' College Magazine* is made in the Autumn of 1922 and is an Obituary Notice written by C. L. Laurie.

"Pandita Ramabai, the first, and so far as we know, the only woman to be honoured by the title Pandita, died on 5 April 1922. She always remembered her connection with the College with pleasure, and most gratefully acknowledged the support sent for her educational work. Pandita Ramabai came to College in the Autumn term of 1884 as a teacher of Sanskrit. Those who attended Miss Beale's Saturday Scripture lessons will have a vivid recollection of her, sitting close to the Principal and following with rapt attention, for Miss Beale's philosophical treatment of the Christian mystics specially appealed to her.

"After Cheltenham she went to America and organised the Ramabai Association, which promised help in her educational work for ten years. On her return to India she opened in 1889 at Bombay her Sharada Sadan (Abode of Wisdom) for the education of high caste widows. This was soon moved to Poona. The great famine of 1899-1901 made the Pandita redouble her efforts. She bought fields in Kedgaon and there established a great home and school for women and girls of all castes. Thousands have passed through her hands. She was ably assisted by her daughter, Manoramabai, whom she appointed her successor, but who died the year before her mother.

"Miss N. Lissa Hastie was then appointed by Ramabai and she is continuing the work with the help of a large staff of Indian and European ladies."[42]

[41] *Loc. cit.*, Autumn 1908.

[42] *Cheltenham Ladies College Magazine*, Autumn 1922.

IV

America

1

When Ramabai landed in England, Anandibai Joshi set foot in America. Anandibai was a cousin of Ramabai and a woman of equal courage and enterprise. Both the great Maharashtrian Chitpavan Brahmin women possessed the same zeal to serve their country and ameliorate the sad conditions of Indian women. The tie between the two women was, therefore, "stronger than that of blood."

Anandibai Joshi was born in 1865, seven years later than Ramabai, but unlike her Christian cousin, who first saw the light of day in a forest, Anandibai was born in her ancestral home in Poona. Her father, Ganpatrao Amriteshwar Joshi, was a rich landowner, who married his kinswoman Gangabai Joshi. They named their daughter Yamuna. She showed a "bright and intelligent disposition" from her earliest days. She was a very clever girl and also loved by all and above all adored by her father who objected to the worship of idols. Yamuna also, naturally lost faith in idol worship and when she was young, she had a vision of a Mahratta ancestor who informed her that she alone would inherit his undaunted spirit.

When Yamuna was nine Gopal Vinayak Joshi, of the same caste, a clerk in the Postal Department, married her. He undertook teaching little Yamuna. After three years Gopal Vinayak was transferred to Alibag, and Yamuna lost her teacher. Her mother actually did not want her to study; but her grandmother came to her rescue and took her to Alibag. Her name, according to Mahratta custom, was changed, and she was henceforth known as Anandibai.

Soon after Gopal Vinayak Joshi was transferred to Kolhapur, Bombay and then to Cutch as Postmaster, where Anandibai was not very happy owing to the extremely backward condition of women. Her only child was born in 1878, and lived for a few days. Anandibai was quite heart-broken at losing her child, and felt sure that the baby would have survived if proper medical treatment had been available. From that time, she began to feel the need for women doctors in India, and she determined to study medicine herself and thus alleviate, as much as one person could, the suffering of her sisters. Her husband, a mild good man, entirely fell in with her wishes and Anandibai begged him to send her to America to study medicine. Gopal Vinayak consented and wrote to an American Editor for assistance, but the reply was not encouraging. A copy of Mr. Joshi's letter was, however, published in the Editor's magazine which eventually fell into the hands of Mrs. B. F. Carpenter of Rosella Park, New Jersey, a lady, who longed to help India. She immediately wrote to Anandibai. After a friendly correspondence, Anandibai sailed for America in April 1883—about the same time Ramabai left for England. Anandibai Joshi was the first high caste Indian woman to set sail for America. She travelled *via* England to the New World, all alone, for her husband was unable to accompany her at the time. One of the most beautiful friendships between East and West was established between Mrs. Carpenter and Anandibai. Writing about her, long after Anandibai's death, Mrs. Carpenter said: "I have been drawn into close connection with one, whose nobility of character and high purpose of life should endear her to all of her country-women and cause those of other countries, who knew her well, to cherish in their hearts the well-being of all Indian women for her sake." Her letter to Anandibai originated with Mr. Joshi's letter to the American Editor, which had strangely reached her ears soon after her daughter had had

a dream and had told her mother: "Mama, I dreamed you were writing to someone today in Hindustan."[1]

In the autumn of 1883, Anandibai started her studies at the Women's Medical College, Philadelphia. She worked steadily but the cold climate and the hard work and her strict adherence to caste rules and diet restrictions began to tell on her health. In 1885, her husband arrived, and in March 1886, Anandibai Joshi graduated from the Women's Medical College, Philadelphia. Great was the occasion and many friends and admirers gathered around Anandibai including Ramabai, who had travelled all the way from England to be present on this occasion. Anandibai's prospects seemed most hopeful but her health unfortunately failed. This was due to the fact that she insisted on observing strict caste rules and cooking her own food on an anthracite stove in her room. She tried this manner of living for two weeks but her health declined so rapidly that she accepted Dean Rachel Bodley's invitation to stay with her right through her student days in the Medical College in Philadelphia. She was much loved by her gracious hostess and Principal.

An incident which seemed to have disappointed many American women, however, was that Anandibai, when asked to deliver a speech on child marriages in India, praised the system instead of decrying it. Great astonishment was caused, for the audience naturally expected caustic criticism of the retrograde system still prevailing in India. Dean Bodley commented about her friend's views thus: "If there are any who still cherish the feelings of disappointment and regret engendered that April afternoon (1884), let them turn to Ramabai's chapter on married life in this book (*The High-Caste Hindu Woman,* Chapter III) and learn how absolutely impossible it was for a High Caste Hindu wife to speak otherwise. Let them also discover, in the herculean attempt of the occasion, a clue to the influence which at length overpowered and slew the gentle, grave women."[2]

Anandibai's great ambition to return to India and serve the women as a doctor did not after all materialize, as her health failed her. On completion of her medical degree, though she wished

[1] *Indian Ladies' Magazine,* January 1906.

[2] Pandita Ramabai, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman,* Introduction by Rachel L. Bodley, *op. cit.,* pp. iii, iv.

to study further, she was compelled to return to a warmer climate and accepted the post of Resident Physician to the Women's Ward of the new Albert Edward Hospital at Kolhapur, on a salary of Rs. 300 per month. She felt that if she returned home, her health would definitely improve. Her husband had also resigned his appointment as Postmaster and pecuniary reasons made it necessary that she should earn a livelihood. But before she set sail she fell ill again, and became a victim of that dreaded disease, consumption. It will always remain a matter of regret that Anandibai, so courageous and progressive in every way, should not have relaxed a little the strictures of diet and caste while abroad. The help that Anandibai would have rendered her country would have been invaluable if she had but cared more for her health.

In October 1886 Anandibai Joshi returned to India after a painful sea voyage. A few months later, on 26 February 1887, she passed away in the house in which she had been born in Poona, surrounded by all who were dear to her. Although Anandibai owed all she achieved to American missionaries and kind-hearted ladies she always remained a staunch Hindu. "I will go to America as a Hindu and come back and live among my people as a Hindu," was her resolve.

Ramabai translated many of the obituary notices from the Marathi papers for Dean Bodley, who writes: "Pandita Ramabai, (Anandibai's beloved and trusted kinswoman), still lives to perform, not her identical work, but to prosecute the general disenthralment of Hindu women concerning the ultimate accomplishment of which Dr. Joshi cherished invincible faith. Greatly bereaved, her fond hopes of a congenial supporter and an efficient helper in India suddenly dashed to the ground, Ramabai toils on with a heroic singleness of purpose."[3]

When Anandibai met Ramabai in March 1886 in Philadelphia, the former wrote: "This lady (Ramabai) is delicate and flower-like and for that reason she appears somewhat timid. And yet by her courage she has caused *yogis* to quail before her. It is a great joy that she has confirmed the previous idea that I had of her. I long hoped to have this joy, and now at last we have met."[4]

"Dr. Anandibai Joshi lived a Hindu and died a Hindu, the

[3] *Ibid.*, p. vii.

[4] Macnicol, *Pandita Ramabai*, p. 66.

only exception being made that her ashes were not thrown into the Ganges but were sent to America to be buried there."[5]

Later, in 1891, her husband Gopalrao Joshi became a Christian.

2

Ramabai's stay in Cheltenham afforded her many opportunities for her study of up-to-date methods of education. Her year's sojourn at Wantage also gave her a good foundation in the study of English "which had hitherto been unknown to her." At Cheltenham College while Ramabai taught Sanskrit, she made rapid progress in English, Mathematics, Natural Science and other allied subjects. A possible Government appointment in India began to loom up before her in the near future, when the invitation came from Anandibai Joshi for her visit to America.

To be an eye-witness to the glorious achievement of her "beloved kinswoman," was too much of a temptation, especially as it also included the possibility of travelling extensively in the New World. Ramabai set sail for America on 17 February 1886 but her decision was reached after great and painful thought, and the certainty she felt that she was acting best in the services of her sisters.

And thus Ramabai set out once again on an unknown journey with her daughter, now aged four-and-a-half years. At that time Ramabai expected to return to England and continue her studies, but her fascination for America grew and after attending the ceremony of her cousin's graduation, she decided to stay on in America. In mid-summer of 1886 she wrote: "I am deeply impressed by and interested in the work of Western women, who seem to have one common aim, namely, the good of their fellow-beings. It is my dream, some day to tell my country-women, in their own language, this wonderful story, in the hope that the recital may awaken in their hearts a desire to do likewise."[6]

Gradually, as she inspected more and more organizations Ramabai began to form an idea of founding schools in India which would combine the "training of the hand with that of the head," an idea which is now followed by the basic educational system in India. Ramabai wished to start Indian schools-cum-industrial

[5] *Indian Ladies' Magazine,* February 1934.

[6] Manoramabai, *Pandita Ramabai, The Widows' Friend,* p. 20.

training centres founded for and by Indian women, and not merely concentrate on higher education of women in Government High Schools or Colleges.

She also, at this time, realized the great need in India for Kindergarten schools. In Philadelphia she met Miss Anna Hallowell, a lady connected with the Sub-Primary School Society (free Kindergartens) of the city. The two women became fast friends, and Ramabai took a keen interest in the Kindergarten system.

Ramabai made many friends in America. They included missionaries, educationists, doctors and teachers.

At first, Ramabai's idea was to try once again to become a Doctor and follow the example of Anandibai. Due to her defective hearing she had to abandon this craving when in England, but now, renewed good health and improvement must have perhaps revived her old desire. However, even now she found it difficult to study medicine and in September 1886 she enrolled herself as a student in a Kindergarten Training School for one year. She much admired the Froebel methods and visions rose before her of succouring the child-widows of her country in a home and teaching them right from the Kindergarten classes. Ramabai also hoped to train high caste Hindu widows as teachers in the Kindergarten Schools and to arrange a system of visits to the obscure *purdah* world of India and teach women in their secluded homes.

As Ramabai travelled about with Miss Anna Hallowell visiting the various Nursery schools, her enthusiasm grew and she immediately bought the approved textbooks and began to translate them into Marathi. The illustrations and the quality of paper they were printed on fascinated Ramabai. From July 1886 she ardently worked at her translations and compiled a series of Kindergarten textbooks in Marathi, starting from the Primer to the Sixth Grade. Though she knew that the printing would be delayed till she returned to Bombay, due to the lack of Marathi type-face in America, she was intensely absorbed with "designing to illustrate" the books with wood-cuts. Soon Ramabai found that the cost of printing the books, especially the illustrations would be forbidding and in order to meet the expenses Ramabai, the indomitable, set herself the task of writing *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*. Just as she had found her passage money to travel to England by writing the *Stree Dharma Neety*, she now set herself the stupendous task of defraying the cost of printing illustrated

textbooks from the money which would accrue from the sale of her book, *The High Caste Hindu Woman.* The book when published, electrified American society. Dean Rachel L. Bodley, A.M., M.D., wrote the introduction to the book and when she was about to send her illuminating appraisal, Ramabai was asked if she had a last minute message to give for her readers before the MS went to press. Ramabai remarked: "Remind them that it was 'out of Nazareth' that the blessed Redeemer of Mankind came; and that great reforms have again and again been wrought by instrumentalities that the world despised. Tell them to help me educate the high-caste child widows; for I solemnly believe that this hated and despised class of women, educated and enlightened, are, by God's grace, to redeem India."[7]

Ramabai's life from the years 1886 to 1888 was extremely active. She was studying the Kindergarten methods, translating textbooks, lecturing, travelling widely and keeping in contact with innumerable friends whom she made wherever she went, for like a magnet, she attracted people towards her. "Pandita Ramabai, the high-caste Brahmin woman, the courageous daughter of the forest, educated, refined, rejoicing in the liberty of the Gospel, and yet by preference retaining a Hindu's care as regards a vegetable diet, and the peculiarities of the dress of Hindu widowhood, solemnly consecrated to the work of developing self-help among the women of India, has her school books nearly ready for the printer, her plans for the organisation of the school, such as she describes on page 114 well developed, and two teachers (American ladies, one a graduated Kindergarten) secured. Tickets for herself and teachers might be taken for India at once, and as a result of the strong reaction which the untimely death of Dr. Joshi has set up, Ramabai, outcaste though she is among her own people, might inaugurate under favourable auspices, her work among the child-widows."[8]

3

Ramabai soon began to crystallize her ideas for starting a home for high-caste widows in India. For this she needed the sympathy

[7] Pandita Ramabai, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman,* Introduction by Rachel L. Bodley, p. xxiv.

[8] *Ibid.,* pp. xxi, xxii

of the American people, and she went about this task with a single-hearted purpose. As she lectured from place to place, she began to gather sympathizers and friends, whose faith in her lasted throughout her life. With Ramabai's lectures and the publication of her book, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman,* written with the double purpose of earning money for her textbooks and creating an aura of sympathy for the child widow, Ramabai soon achieved her purpose. "The silence of a thousand years" was at last broken but it was no easy task for Ramabai to write the book. There was always the danger of her being accused of betraying her country, when she so openly exposed the evils existing in India, but Ramabai ever sought the truth and the good she foresaw in writing and lecturing so openly about unwanted customs in her country, outshadowed all other considerations. As she herself admitted, it required courage to face her countrymen, especially after she had been so publicly criticized for becoming a Christian but this she did without hesitation. "The task of preparing *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* has not been for her a congenial one. She is not by nature an iconoclast. She loves her nation with a pure, strong love. But her love reached the height of the skilful surgeon. She dares to inflict pain because she regards pain as affording the only sure means of relief. She is satisfied, moreover, that India cannot arise and take her place among the nations of the earth until the Hindu zenana is transformed into the Hindu home, where the united family can have 'pleasant times together.' "[9]

In her introduction to Mrs. Marcus B. Fuller's comprehensive book on *The Wrongs of Indian Womanhood,* Ramabai says: "I am more than glad that God has put it into Mrs. Fuller's mind to place before the world the woes of India's women in a way that no one before has done. She had taken the greatest pains to find out the truth on every point she has written down. She has neither exaggerated nor kept back what can be said on the most important things connected with Indian women's conditions. All who are interested in and want to do something for the salvation of woman in India will do well to read her book."[10]

Part of Ramabai's task in writing *The High-Caste Hindu*

[9] *Ibid.,* p. viii.

[10] Mrs. Marcus B. Fuller, *The Wrongs of Indian Womanhood,* with an introduction by Ramabai, 1899, Mukti Mission, Kedgaon. pp. 11, 12.



Pandita Ramabai, her daughter Manorama and Anandibai Bhagat in England (1883)



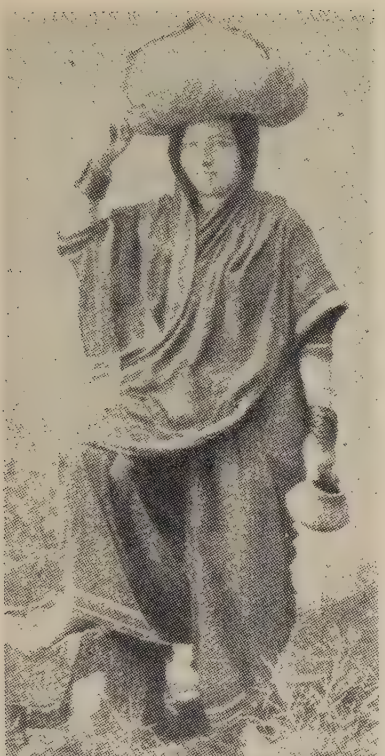
Ladies' College, Cheltenham, England



Pandita Ramabai's godmother, Sister Geraldine of the Community of St. Mary the Virgin, Wantage (England)



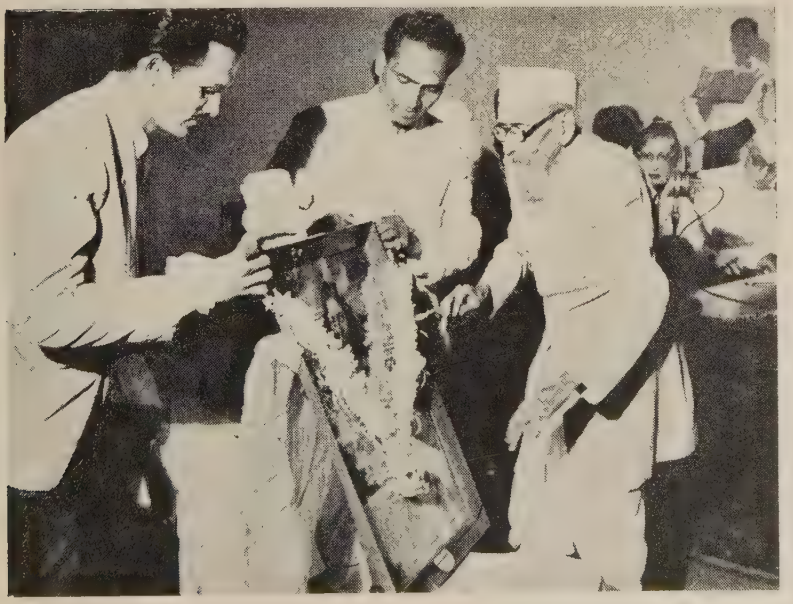
Dr. Dorothea Beale, Principal, Ladies' College, Cheltenham, England



Ramabai disguised as a pilgrim. In this disguise, she went to the city of Brindaban to rescue young widows from the clutches of human vultures (1885)

The Centenarian Dr. D. K. Karve unveiling the portrait of Pandita Ramabai at the Centenary Celebrations, Bombay, 1958. Others from left are artist Mr. Lem Patole, Mr. S. M. Adhav, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Mr. K. M. Munshi

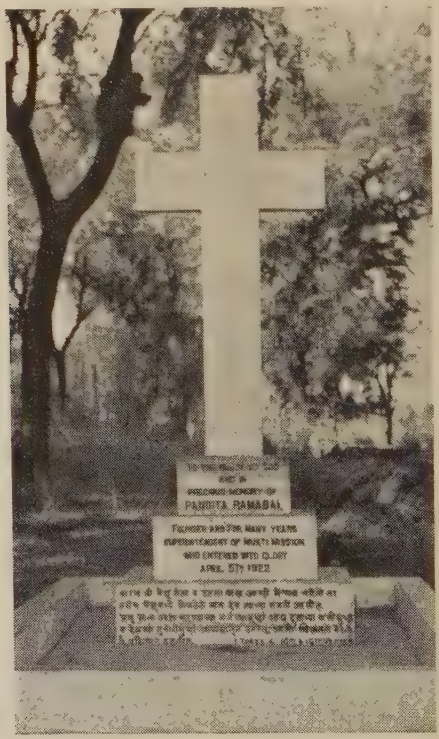
(*Photo*: *Courtesy Films Division, Govt. of India*)





Sharada Sadan (established on March 11, 1889)

L. to R. *Standing*: 3. Motiben Mulgaonkar, 4. Sitabai Deval, 5. Bhagubai Bhogte, 8. Dr. Kashibai Nowrange; *Chair*: 1. Godubai alias Anandibai Karve, 4. Manorama, 5. Pandita Ramabai, 6. Sharada Gadre, 7. Miss Hammelin; *Ground*: 2. Shanta Nowrange alias Manoramabai Gadre



Pandita Ramabai was laid to rest at Kedgaon on April 5, 1922

Woman was to prove that the ancient Hindu customs and laws were by no means adverse to the well-being and happiness of women and children, and that they had been cruelly misused and adapted to suit a system of caste oligarchy. Many later women reformers, including Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Nehru also made this their subject, i.e. the struggle for freedom of women against dogmatic man-made laws and customs, a part of their fight for freedom, both political and social.

Ramabai was anxious to point out to her countrymen that the position of women in ancient India was an honoured one. "The experiment of bringing the existing condition of high caste Hindu women to the test of codes of sacred law, it is believed, was never before attempted. The reader will bear in mind, as she cons the carefully selected texts from the Code of Manu which abound throughout the volume, that these are sentences too sacred for feminine lips to utter, and that few women in India have ever heard them, much less have beheld them with their own eyes. Even Anant Shastri, liberal as he was in his views, concerning the education of women, withheld the sacred texts from his wife and daughters! The Sanskrit literature accessible to them, consisted of poems not associated with the sacred rites and ceremonies."[11]

Pandita Ramabai inaugurated the right for woman to challenge religious orthodoxies on the authority of the scriptures themselves, and once Ramabai set the ball rolling, a great deal of freedom of speech and writing followed over the years.

Ramabai also in her book, criticized boldly some of the ancient systems, as indeed any genuine reformer should, for a nation cannot build its present and future on its past alone. This is a common fault in tradition and custom-bound countries like India, and Ramabai was the first Indian woman to accuse reactionary or unauthenticated customs.

Ramabai had sufficient education and knowledge to be accurate in her statements. "She has exercised great care in securing correctness in her quotations, diligently comparing translations, where more than one were available, and in some cases making the translation herself from the original Sanskrit. The general statements throughout the book may be relied upon for their

[11] Pandita Ramabai, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman,* Introduction by Rachel L. Bodley, p. viii.

accuracy. Should the volume reach India, these statements will undoubtedly be assailed as untruthful and sacrilegious, and possibly there may be persons in the United States who will strive to create this impression; but Ramabai's desire to speak the truth is only equalled by her determination to let in the full blaze of day upon effete custom and perilous usages. She had withheld nothing essential that her wide experience throughout India has revealed to her. She does not print this information for the purpose of reputation or of gain, but because taught, as she believes, by the Divine Spirit, that the revelation will stir the hearts of those who read the story to deeds of rescue and relief."[12]

Before studying *The High Caste Hindu Woman* in further detail it will be fitting to give a short resumé of Ramabai's stay in America. The U.S.A. at that time, was most ignorant of India. Missionaries had ideas that it was a "heathen" barbaric land and that it was upto them to go out and civilize it. Well-wishers looked across the seas with a sense of horror at the things they heard, and it was not till Vivekananda in 1893, interpreted Hindu ways of living to the West that some idea was created of life in India. Swami Vivekananda says:

"The only woman who went over from our country was Ramabai; her knowledge of English, Western science and art was limited; still she surprised all. If anyone like you should go, England will be stirred, what can I say of America? If an Indian woman in Indian dress preaches the religion which fell from the lips of the *Rishis* of India, I see a prophetic vision. There will rise a great wave which will inundate the whole Western world. Will there be no women in the land of *Maitreyi, Khana, Lilavati, Savitri* and *Ubhayabharati,* who will venture to do this? The Lord knows. England we shall conquer, England we shall possess through the power of spirituality."[13]

Vivekananda did not however approve of Ramabai, an Indian woman, popularizing Christianity. He felt also that she was converted to Christianity because she was not a learned woman. Even Shree Ramakrishna felt this and indirectly referred to Ramabai in his conversation with Pratap as follows:

[12] *Ibid.,* pp. viii, ix.

[13] *Selections from Swami Vivekananda,* Advaita Ashrama, Almora, Himalayas, Sec. Ed. 1946, p. 356.

"The conversation next turned to a Mahratta lady. Pratap: some women of our country have been to England. This Mahratta lady who is very scholarly, also visited England. Later, she embraced Christianity. Have you heard of her name, Sir?"

Master: "No, but from what you say, it seems to me she has a desire for name and fame. That kind of egotism and idealism is not good. The feeling 'I am the chosen is the outcome of ignorance.' "[14]

This discourse took place on Sunday 15 June 1884 and obviously referred to Ramabai as she had gone to England and became a Christian. But as Shree Ramakrishna admits he did not know Ramabai, it does not bear much weight. It took two stalwart Indian women to startle the New World. They were Anandibai Joshi and Pandita Ramabai. By their very example, their great culture, their courage, their staunch loyalty to Indian modes of living, they raised in the American mind a high respect for India.

The impression which Ramabai made on America was deep; but the impression the new world made on her, as already described, was even deeper. This can be seen in her Marathi book about the *Peoples of the United States*. "She had come as a representative of one of the oldest civilizations of the world, but of a civilization burdened and weaned from its own antiquity, and she found herself in the midst of a people buoyant and exuberant with the consciousness of youth and of the freedom and the hope of youth. The experience must have reinforced all the eagerness of rebellion that was pent up within her."[15]

Ramabai delivered her first public lecture on 2 March 1886 in the Y.M.C.A. parlour in Philadelphia. She spoke for three quarters of an hour and held the audience spell-bound with her eloquence and impassioned plea for the amelioration of women in India.

Then she travelled to Boston and spoke from the platform in Tremont Temple. Here she made many friends. The Boston audiences, in spite of being used to strange personalities, had never seen so striking a personality. It was no wonder that a year later, the Ramabai Association was started in Boston. In fact, in drawing rooms and lecture halls, as she travelled over thousands of

[14] *Gospel of Shree Ramakrishna*, p. 377.

[15] Dr. Nicol Macnicol, *Pandita Ramabai*, pp. 69, 70.

miles in the States and Canada, Ramabai electrified her audiences and created a new and healthy interest in them to help India. And when her Association was started, help came from all quarters.

One of the first friends Ramabai made in America, apart from Dean Rachel Bodley was Frances Willard who was very impressed by Ramabai and described her as follows: "Ramabai can trace her Brahmin ancestry for a thousand years. The Pandita has dark grey eyes full of light, a straight nose with a tiny tattoo between the brows, mobile lips, close blue-black hair and perfect white teeth. She dressed in grey silk, very simply with boyish turn-down collar and a white *chuddar* (a native shawl) draping her head and shoulders.

"In personal characteristics she is full of archness and repartee, handling our English tongue with a precision attained by but few of us who are to the manner born. Yet in disposition she is incarnate gentleness, combined with celerity of apprehension, swiftness of mental pace and adroitness of logic."[16]

Miss Willard's mother also describes her in her diary as "a marvellous creation. She has a surprisingly comprehensive intellect, as open to perceive truth as a daisy in the sun; with face uplifted she marches straight into its effulgence, caring for nothing so she finds the eternal truth of the eternal God—not anxious what that truth may be.

"Tenderness towards all living creatures is also one of Ramabai's winning traits; even of flowers she thinks we ought to let them grow and to admire them in their bright living beauty rather than to pull them from their stems. The stuffing of birds for ornamental use seems to her a pitiable vulgarity."[17]

An aspect of Ramabai in America should here be stressed. This was her gradual growth of faith in Christianity.

At this time Ramabai was not happy in her religion. Though she had become a Christian, she had not entirely found Christ. The second half of her *Testimony* gives a heart-rending account of all her doubts and her final surrender to Christ and her joy in finding Him later after her return to India. The *Life of Father Goreh* gives a little of these struggles of the Christians of India: "Ramabai went from England to America, and here she was exposed to temptations which she was not prepared to resist," says

[16] Jennie Chappel, *Pandita Ramabai*, pp. 32, 33.
[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 34.

Mr. Gardner, "she found herself in the midst of those who called themselves Christians, each holding various elements of the Christian creed, while a general spirit of indifference led all to laxity of thought, not holding truth as a supreme Divine reality. Many were Agnostics and Unitarians. They regarded her with much esteem because of her bravery in repudiating Hindu superstitions. They applauded her proposed work of charity in establishing a school for Hindu widows. They regarded strictness of Church life and doctrine with scorn. It is not strange that, finding herself thus alone amidst a wild sea of antagonistic opinions, she lost her spiritual footing. In fact, there was no Church influence near at hand to hold her up."[18]

Seeing that Ramabai was losing faith, Father Goreh wrote her another letter which was published in 1887 by the Anglo-Vernacular Press in Bombay entitled "Proofs of the Divinity of Our Lord, stated in a letter to a Friend."

It was a "remarkable treatise" proving that Christianity was not Western, whereas Brahmoism was Western in its various stages of thought, or so Father Goreh felt.

Ramabai, at this time, was "dazed by religious diversities in America," as she herself points out later. Father Goreh was not able to revive her faith, though he remained her staunch friend to the very end. Ramabai was also too absorbed at the time in the formation of her Sharada Sadan, and it was not till 1892, as will be seen from her own *Testimony* that Ramabai became an ardent and single-hearted Christian after coming in contact with the great Evangelist, Dr. Pentecost and others.

In the meanwhile, Ramabai, keeping her doubts about Christianity to herself, threw herself into the task of collecting money for her intended Home in India. She faced countless audiences and pleaded single-heartedly for her cause.

4

The High-Caste Hindu Woman was published in 1887. Before its publication social reformers of the day including Ranade, Gokhale, Bhandarkar in Maharashtra, and Keshab Chunder Sen and other reformers in Bengal, and in various parts of India had

[18] C. E. Gardner, *Life of Father Goreh*, pp. 275, 276.

raised loud voices of protest against the prevalent evils. Earlier, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Vidyasagar had induced laws to be passed to eradicate the ordeals under which women had to suffer.

So far the Acts that had been passed (1) The Abolition of Suttee Act, 1829, sponsored by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and enacted by Lord William Bentinck, (2) The Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, sponsored by Iswar Chander Vidyasagar and (3) The Female Infanticide Act of 1870. The Age of Consent Act of 1891 had not yet come into force when Ramabai wrote her book. Though these Acts had to a certain extent checked the wrongs of women, they were a mere drop in an ocean of injustices. As a Hindu reformer at the time said: "I confess it has always been a puzzle to me how a system so inhuman and cruel has found existence in this country among a class of men who have cultivated their feelings of kindness to such a nicety that they dread to kill an ant, or cut open an egg."[19]

When Ramabai wrote her book she possessed the rare qualification of being able to cull the best from sacred Hindu scriptures and Western modern culture, and her understanding of the reforms required for women were rational and sound. When she returned from England and America in 1889, an Indian remarked: "Pandita Ramabai combines in herself whatever in the men of India is a rare combination, a deep knowledge of the Hindu Shastras and an intimate acquaintance with the inner life, thought and speech of the most advanced and civilized matters of the West. For several centuries a lady Sanyasi so learned and so devoted to the elevation of her sex has not appeared on the stage of Indian life."[20]

What struck Ramabai as a glaring paradox regarding the caste system was that even the followers of the great teachers became caste-ridden and Christians were not exempt. "Over a million Hindu converts to Christianity, members of the Roman Catholic Church, are more or less ruled by caste. The Protestant missionaries, likewise, found it difficult in early days to overcome caste prejudices among their converts, and not many years ago in the Madras Presidency clergymen were compelled to use different

[19] The Hon. P. Chentsalrao, quoted in *Wrongs of Indian Womanhood*, by Mrs. Fuller, pp. 61, 62.

[20] Pandita Ramabai, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*, new edition, 1901, p. 8.

cups for each separate caste when they celebrated the Lord's Supper."[21]

Coming to the treatment of women in Hinduism, Ramabai says that all the Law Givers agreed to the social position of women. It consisted of three stages. Childhood, youth and married life, and widowhood or old age.

Childhood

Pandita Ramabai says that despite Manu's avowal that "a daughter is equal to a son" in the Hindu society of that time, "a son is the most coveted of all blessings" for by the birth of a son, the father is redeemed.

"Women of the poorest as well as of the richest families, are almost invariably subjected to this trial. Many are the sad and heart-rending stories heard from the lips of unhappy women who have lost their husbands' favour by bringing forth daughters only, or by having no children at all."[22] It was also better for the first child to be a son. "After the birth of one or more sons girls are not unwelcome, and under such circumstances, mothers often long to have a daughter."[23]

Girls, as has already been seen, were not educated, and when about six or seven, marriages were arranged strictly according to caste, and a great deal of expense was involved in the ceremony and on dowries. A father was, therefore, often ruined if he had too many daughters. "For it should be remembered, the bread-winner of the house in Hindu society not only has to feed his own wife and children, but also his parents, his brothers unable to work either through ignorance or illness, their families and the nearest widowed relatives, all of whom very often depend upon one man for their support. Besides these there are family priests, religious beggars and others who expect help from him. Thus, fettered hand and foot by barbarously cruel customs which threaten to strip him of everything he has starvation and death staring him in the face."[24] The joint family system then, according to Ramabai, was not very praiseworthy; but in a country where thousands are unemployed, the system has its advantages, for it feeds many hungry souls, even though it may encourage laziness.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 37. [22] *Ibid.*, p. 41.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 45. [24] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Ramabai goes on to deplore the incidence in infanticide which had been prohibited by law. She explains that the Hindu religion of old never sanctioned it. Despite the law, strange incidents seem to have happened. "The Census of 1870 revealed the curious fact that three hundred children were stolen in one year by wolves from within the city Umritzar, all the children being girls, and this under the very nose of the English Government."[25] The practice of infanticide, during Ramabai's time, had however almost disappeared especially after the passing of the Female Infanticide Act 1870. A few strange incidents did occur; but the custom, if it ever had really existed, was almost entirely wiped out in 1887, when Ramabai wrote her book.

Married Life

Ramabai goes on to describe the appallingly early ages in which girls were married and the discrepancies in age between aged husbands and their child-wives. Manu had dictated that 24 years was the age for a boy to marry, but this rule had been forgotten and boys of ten were given in marriage to girls far younger. Boys and girls had no choice of their future partners; but a man's second wife could be chosen. In ancient days, parents, Ramabai felt, chose wisely and unlike the custom in her time were forbidden to "give away girls in marriage unless good suitors were offered them."[26]

"The maiden, though marriageable, should rather stop in the father's house until death, than that he should ever give her to a man destitute of good qualities."[27] But Ramabai says that the law was being defied by custom as parents felt it a slur to have an unmarried daughter in the house.

Women's Place

A woman was always dependent on a man according to law, in childhood to the father, in youth to the husband and in old age to the son.[27a] A woman could also never be free of a husband, no matter how ill-suited, whereas a man had the right to leave his wife. The woman had to serve her husband as a God, though he may prove to be destitute of virtue. Ramabai points out that

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 84. [26] Manu, ix, 88.
[27] Manu ix, 89. [27a] *Ibid.*, x, 148.

though the woman was entirely in a man's position in ancient India, "now, under the so-called Christian British rule, the woman is in no better condition than of old. Now there was the right to go to court however; but suits of law between the husband and wife were remarkable for their rarity in the British Courts in India, owing to the ever-submissive conduct of women who suffer silently, knowing that the gods and justice always favour the men."[28]

The famous case of Rakhmabai[29] is then cited. She was well-educated and when her father died her husband to whom she had been married as a young girl, brought a suit against her. She defended herself and refused to go to her husband, "on the ground that the marriage that was concluded without her consent could not be legally considered as such." Mr. Justice Pinney, the Judge, refused to force Rakhmabai to go to her husband, but a large body of conservatives denounced her and threatened the British Government with public displeasure if it failed to keep its agreement to force the woman to go to live with her husband according to Hindu law. Large sums were collected for the benefit of this man, Dadaji, to enable him to appeal and the Chief Justice sent back the case to be judged according to Hindu law. Rakhmabai wrote on 18 March 1887 to Ramabai as follows: "The learned and civilized judges of the full bench are determined to enforce, in this enlightened age, the inhuman laws enacted in barbaric times, 4,000 years ago. They have not only commanded me to go to live with the man, but also have obliged me to pay the costs of the dispute. Just think of this extraordinary decision! Are we not living under the imperial British Government, which boasts of giving equal justice to all, and are we not ruled by the Queen Empress Victoria, herself a woman? My dear friend, I shall have been cast into the state prison when this letter reaches you, this is because I do not, and cannot obey the order of Mr. Justice Farran.

"There is no hope for women in India, whether they be under Hindu rule or British rule. Some are of the opinion that my case so cruelly decided, may bring about a better condition for women by turning public opinion in her favour, but I fear it will be other-

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

[29] This case was anxiously followed by Prof. Max Müller, Mr. Malabari and others.

wise. The hard-hearted mother-in-law will now be greatly strengthened, and will induce their sons who have, for some reason or other, been slow to enforce the conjugal rights to sue their wives in the British Courts since they are now fully assured that under no circumstances can the British Government act adversely to the Hindu law."[30]

Ramabai's comments are bitter. "Taught by the experience of the past, we are not at all surprised at this decision of the Bombay Court. Our only wonder is that a defenceless woman like Rakhmabai dared to raise her voice in the face of the powerful Hindu law, the mighty British Government, the one hundred and twenty-nine million gods of the Hindus, all these having comprised together to crush her into nothingness. We cannot blame the English Government for not defending a helpless woman; it is only fulfilling its agreement made with the male population of India. How very true are the words of the Saviour: 'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon'. Should England serve God by protecting a helpless woman against the powers and principalities of ancient institutions, Mammon would surely be displeased, and British profit and rule in India might be endangered thereby. Let us wish it success, no matter if that success be achieved at the sacrifice of the rights and the comfort of over one hundred million women."[31]

Two facts, in this cruel case of Rakhmabai, and many others of the type like that of the death of Phulmani Dasi of Bengal when, as a wife of ten, she was raped by her husband, are evident. The first is the peculiar laissez-faire attitude of the British Government which tried to curry favour with the people by allowing inhuman practices to survive. The second the attitude of conservative Hindus, who were no doubt anxious to preserve their power over the weaker sex and wished to continue to badger and bully them into submission. The flagrant cases, cited by Ramabai, however, were partly instrumental in causing the Age of Consent Bill to be enacted in 1891. Today when the Hindu Code Bill has been passed in various Acts giving freedom to women even to the extent of granting them divorce and equal property rights with men, such customs as prevailed in Ramabai's time seem almost unbelievable and antediluvian.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 92.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 93.

Widowhood

Ramabai's next section deals with the High Caste widows of India and their plight. She attacked the fact that innocent widows were blamed for the death of their husbands due to crimes they had committed in their previous births. Ramabai could not tolerate this superstition, especially as she herself was a victim to it. When her husband Bipin Behari Medhavi died, Ramabai was accused by some of his relatives for his death. In her book, she says that a husband's death "is a crime committed by the woman in her former existence upon earth. The period of punishment may be greater or less, according to the nature of the crime. Disobedience and disloyalty to the husband, or murdering him in an earlier existence are the chief crimes punished in the present birth by widowhood."[32] If a woman begot a son, her plight was not so pitiable, but she was nevertheless a sinner. According to the Vedas, a widow if her husband died before she begot a son could, by appointment, marry her husband's brother, because a son was essential for him to enjoy immortality. In name the woman still remained a widow, but this rule was changed despite the Vedic sanction, in later times, and according to Manu, a widow at her pleasure must emaciate her body by living on pure flowers, roots and fruits and never mention the name of another man. She must, till death, "be patient of hardships, self-controlled, and chaste and strive to fulfil that most excellent duty which is prescribed for wives who have one husband only."[33]

A second husband can never be prescribed and a widow reached heaven if she was chaste.

"The self-immolation of widows on their deceased husband's pyre was evidently a custom invented by the priesthood after the Code of Manu was compiled. The laws taught in the schools of Apastamba, Asvalayana and others older than Manu do not mention it, neither does the Code of Manu. The Code of Vishnu which is comparatively recent, says, that a woman 'after the death of her husband should either lead a virtuous life or ascend the funeral pyre of her husband.' "[34] Manu did not sanction *suttee*. "The priests saw the necessity of producing some text which would

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 95.
[33] Manu v, pp. 157, 158.
[34] Vishnu xxx, 2, p. 99.

overcome the natural fears of the widow as well as silence the critic who should refuse to allow such a horrid rite without strong authority. So the priests said there was a text in the Rig Veda which according to their own rendering reads thus: 'Om! Let these women not be widowed, good wives, adorned with collyrium, holding clarified butter, consign themselves to the fire! Immortal, not childless, not husbandless well-adorned with gems, let them pass into the fire whose original element is water.' "[35]

Ramabai says: "The text quoted from the Vedas was mistranslated, and a part of it forged. . . . The Vedic language is the oldest form of Sanskrit, and greatly differs from the later form. Many know the Vedas by heart and repeat them without a mistake, but few indeed, are those that know the meaning of the texts they repeat. 'The Rig Veda,' says Max Müller, 'so far from enforcing the burning of widows, shows clearly that this custom was not sanctioned during the earliest period of Indian History. According to the hymns of the Rig Veda, and the Vedic ceremonial contained in the Grihya-sutras the wife accompanies the corpse of her husband to the funeral pile, but she is there addressed with a verse taken from the Rig Veda, and ordered to leave her husband and to return to the world of the living.' "[36]

" 'Rise, Woman,' it is said, 'Come to the world of life, thou sleepest nigh unto him whose life is gone. Come to us. Thou hast thus fulfilled the duties of a wife to the husband, who once took thy hand and made thee a mother.' "[37] Ramabai goes on to prove from the following text: "May those women who are not widows, but have good husbands draw near with oil and butter. Those who are mothers may go up first to the altar, without tears, without sorrow, but decked with fine jewels." It was by falsifying a single syllable that the entire meaning of the whole verse was changed. "Those who knew the Sanskrit characters can easily understand that the falsification very likely originated in the carelessness of the transcriber or copyist, but for all that the priests who committed the error are not excusable in the least. Instead of comparing the verse with its context, they translated it as their fancy dictated and thus under the pretext of religion they have been the cause of destroying countless lives for more than two thousand years."[38]

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 144, 145. [36] *Ibid.*, p. 105.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 105. [38] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

Though *suttee* was abolished in the earlier half of the nineteenth century, the Pandita goes on to say: "Throughout India, except in the North-Western Provinces, women are put to the severest trial imaginable after the husband's death." Widows could wear no ornaments, no bright colours. Heads were shaved every fortnight. No ray of hope penetrated their minds.

Ramabai prays for a better fate for widows. "It is our duty to take the matter into serious consideration and to put forth our best endeavours to hasten the glad day for India's daughters, aye, and for her sons also; because in spite of the proud assertions of our brothers that they have not suffered from the degradation of women, their own condition betrays but too plainly the contrary."[39]

Ramabai felt that the chief needs were (*i*) self-reliance, (*ii*) education and (*iii*) more women teachers.

Ramabai cites the noble example of the pioneer women of her day, such as, Chandramukhi Bose, M.A., Principal of Bethune College, Calcutta, and Kudambini B. Ganguli, B.A., M.B., of Calcutta. "The professors of the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania will bear testimony to the ability of the late Dr. Anandibai Joshi. Had her life been spared a little longer she would have shown to the world that the Hindu woman, in spite of all drawbacks equals any woman of civilized countries."[40]

Ramabai cited the recommendations of India's great friend, Miss Mary Carpenter in 1866 for women teachers in zenanas. She wanted the British Government to establish Normal Schools for training women-teachers and scholarships to be awarded to girls. Miss Carpenter's appeal was not fruitless and the Government did found schools for women and a few "Mary Carpenter scholarships." But caste rules, especially for high caste widows prevented the schools from progressing. Widows, however, *could be helped* Ramabai felt (*a*) by having residential homes for high caste child widows where they could take shelter without the fear of losing their caste, or of being disturbed in their religious beliefs, and where they could be given entire freedom to follow their caste rules, such as cooking of food, etc., (*b*) by training them to become teachers, governesses, nurses and housekeepers and other forms of skilled workers. Homes should be supervised by influential Hindu men and women; the services of well-qualified

[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 119, 120. [40] *Ibid.*, p. 132.

American ladies should be chartered as assistants and teachers, so that the homes could combine eastern and western education and culture; libraries should be inaugurated and stocked with best books on history, art, science, religion and literature.

With these ideas Ramabai said she would return home to India and establish at least one institution. She brought her admirable book to an end with an appeal to friends in America to help Indian women. She cried, "In the name of humanity, in the name of your sacred responsibilities as workers in the cause of humanity, and above all, in the most holy name of God, I summon you, true women and men of America, to bestow your help quickly regardless of nation, caste or creed."[41]

5

Pandita Ramabai's efforts to gather enough money and sympathy in America to start her home for high caste widows when she returned to India were met with whole-hearted support. She travelled 30,000 miles in America and criss-crossed the Continent lecturing; finally on 11 November 1888 sailing from San Francisco for India, *via* Japan and Hong Kong. But before she left America the "Ramabai Association" was formed in Boston on 28 May 1887, it was a provisional committee appointed at a public meeting to act as far as possible and to report at a later meeting. This Committee presented a report on 13 December 1887 which was accepted, and a constitution was drawn up and the office-bearers elected. Thus did Ramabai see her long-cherished plan take definite form. That night her joy was too great to permit her to sleep; and she was found sobbing in her room. When asked why she was weeping she exclaimed, "I am crying for joy that my dream of years has become a reality." The following office-bearers were appointed to serve on the Ramabai Association: President: Rev. Dr. Edwards Everett Hale; Vice-Presidents: Rev. Dr. Phillips Brooks, Rev. Dr. Lyman Abbott, Rev. Dr. George A. Gordon, Mrs. Mary Hemenway, Dean Rachael L. Bodley and Miss Frances E. Willard—a rare body of officers—Unitarian, Episcopalean, Orthodox, Baptist and Methodist. The Board of Trustees, consisted of some of the best business and professional men of Boston. The Executive Committee was made up of

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 142.

philanthropic women who were also non-denominational. The Association pledged itself to support a secular school for ten years—"A school in which no religious instruction either Hindu or Christian should be given. The Bible and the Vedas were to stand side by side in the school library, free to all. The caste rules were to be observed, but there were to be no public religious observances of any kind. This was Ramabai's pledge to her own and the American people, which pledge she kept inviolate."[42]

Ramabai had, therefore, no thought whatever of converting Hindus to Christianity when she first started the Sharada Sadan. Whatever conversions took place were entirely voluntary. Even many years later, when Mukti Sadan had been formed and a number of the inmates were Christians, the following editorial note appeared in the *Indian Ladies' Magazine*: "Pandita Ramabai now has 2,000 women and girls under her charge and the little school that she began seventeen years ago for the child-widows of India has grown into a populous village. *No effort has been made to proselytize* the girls and some of the teachers still adhere to the Hindu faith. Ramabai is acknowledged to be the most learned woman of her race and she alone of all the women of India bears the title of Pandita. Dr. Charles Cuthbert Hall calls her a statesman-like server of God and one of the great personages of her generation."[43]

Ramabai's object in life now centred round service to the Association. "From May 1887 to November 1888 this dauntless little woman of thirty, in the midst of a strange people, strange customs and manners, eating neither 'fish, flesh nor fowl,' drinking nothing stronger than water and milk, often cold and hungry, showed a degree of mental and physical endurance that was marvellous even in the eyes of an American."[44]

Ramabai travelled from Canada to the Pacific Coast, lecturing, forming groups, studying educational methods and completely fitting herself to her new task ahead. On the Pacific Coast, Protestants, Catholics, and Jews were struck by this extraordinary oriental woman. An Auxiliary Association entitled "The Ramabai Association of the Pacific Coast" was formed here on 26 August 1888 which contributed 5,000 dollars the first year to the treasury of the American Ramabai Association. When Ramabai was

[42] *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 16. [43] *Indian Ladies' Magazine*, February 1907.
[44] Pandita Ramabai, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*, p. 17.

assured of an income to support fifty pupils for ten years, she decided to return home and commence her experiment. Before sailing, she had, more or less, also established her dream of publishing Marathi textbooks based on the Froebel system and had collected 600 plates for illustrating her books for a primer and five graduated readers, a geography and a natural history textbook. These were the first series of school books ever published for girls in India.

The American Ramabai Association continued to take an interest in Ramabai's work and finance her project despite the turn taken in the original object of maintaining a neutral attitude. The increasing number of Christians in the Home in no way deterred the enthusiasm of the non-denominational American Committee although complaints were sent to the Association accusing Ramabai of converting her pupils—an accusation which was not true, for, never were conversions forced. Eleven years later, the following editorial notice appeared in the *Indian Ladies' Magazine* and was but one of many which praised Ramabai's work and its continued success: "It is known to many of our readers that the good work which Pandita Ramabai is doing in Bombay Presidency is almost entirely financed by a few American sympathisers. But the exact form and volume of support are known perhaps to very few. The sympathisers of the work of Pandita Ramabai have formed themselves into an association named after her. Their number is not many, but they are thoroughly earnest in the support of the good lady's work. The third annual meeting of the Ramabai Association was held in Boston on 18 March. The report of the corresponding Secretary, Miss A. P. Granger showed a decided gain among the Ramabai circles. These are now 66 in number. The gain is attributed to the wider knowledge of the work and confidence in Ramabai's ability, business integrity and absolute concentration. The Treasurer's report shows receipts of $ 6,710.57 for the support of Sharada Sadan, $ 15,161.47 for the Mukti School and $ 2,526.62 for the members of the general fund. It appears that the 66 members of the Ramabai Association have in one year collected or contributed twenty-five thousand dollars, that is to say, something like seventy-five thousand rupees, in aid of Ramabai's work of which they have heard only from a distance. People speak of the relative wealth or poverty of a country. It is not wealth and poverty but the spirit of helpfulness, of

sending one's mite to any good work, which will explain such spectacles as this. The recently closed Barahnagar Hindu Widows' Home was also largely, perhaps mainly being supported by sympathisers in England. It is pitiable to think how many noble institutions of this country are being shrivelled up for want of aid and encouragement. It is not at all creditable to our country to have to appeal to foreign charity for such little local needs."[45]

It was one of Ramabai's great sorrows that her own country could not help her to put her ideas into concrete form, and it cannot be but appreciated that at least foreign help was available for such worthy causes as Ramabai's institutions.

[45] *Loc cit.*, August 1901.

V

Bombay

1

In November 1888, Ramabai sailed from America having received all the encouragement and financial help she could have hoped for in her two years stay in the U.S.A. She embarked from San Francisco as a leader strengthened with the faith of hundreds of people, with a definite programme to follow, and was no longer a helpless widow.

Ramabai had not only deeply stirred America, but this lively nation had also influenced her life and way of thinking. Ramabai had always been a woman of action, never idle for a moment; but now her spirit was fired with a new ardour and zeal to serve her country with all her might. She was indebted to America for the hope, friendship and help she received throughout the rest of her life.

"My religious belief was so vague at the time, that I was not certain whether I would go to heaven or hell after my death. I was not prepared to meet my God then.[1] Ramabai described her feelings when she heard of the earthquake at San Francisco and

[1] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 27.

"the great destruction of human life in the Harbour of Hong Kong not long ago." She thanked God for letting her live so long, and sparing her from those disasters, before she was ready to meet her Maker. Every natural calamity and tragedy meted out to human beings by nature or man affected Ramabai deeply and during the last thirty years of her life, she spent much time and energy alleviating the distress of India's plague and famine victims. She says: "When starting from San Francisco and landing in Bombay, I had resolved in my mind, that although no direct religious instruction was to be given to the inmates of my home, I would daily read the Bible aloud and pray to the only God in the name of Christ; and that my country women seeing and hearing what was going on, might be led to enquire about the true religion, and the way of salvation."[2]

Thus Ramabai returned to India, after a visit to two energetic countries, one old and the other new, and determined to prove the faith placed in her by her friends abroad and in India.

Pandita Ramabai left San Francisco on 11 November 1888 on the "Oceanic" and reached Japan on 19 December 1888. In a letter to Sister Geraldine she said she spent thirteen days in Japan, met "nicest and loveliest" people and saw many things. The Japanese were polite, gentle and kind. She was invited by the Women's Christian Temperance Union of Tokyo to speak, and was very happy at the way the meetings were conducted. She spoke at eight meetings. Most of the audience were men; but treated women with great respect. She "fell in love with her first sight of Mount Fujiyama." While going Eastwards she loved the splendid sunsets and sunrises. Ramabai landed in Calcutta in February 1889 and went straight to Poona. Her parting words before she left her Transatlantic friends and admirers were: "Christ came to give different gifts to different people. Some He made prophets, some He made preachers, some He made teachers. Since I have become a Christian I have thought He has given me the gift of being a sweeper. I want to sweep away some of the old difficulties that lie before the missionaries in their effort to reach our Hindu widows."[3]

Ramabai's fame soon spread in India, not only as an emancipator of women; but as a "sweeper." Stories soon went round of

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Jennie Chappell, *Pandita Ramabai,* p. 38.

the wonderful system she adopted of practising what she preached. One story of her setting an example to high caste widows to sweep and clean the rooms of the Sharada Sadan has served as an example to many social workers and friends of the poor to follow in later life. The story goes that at first the high caste widows refused to touch a broom, as it was against their caste rules to do so; but Ramabai instead of forcing them, herself took the broom and began to sweep the rooms. Her noble example taught the girls the dignity of labour and the pride of keeping one's own house clean instead of depending on other people to sweep and scrub. Henceforth, no work was too low for the girls. Mahatma Gandhi taught his followers to undertake all work, even scavenging; Pandita Ramabai was among the first pioneer women of the higher castes to teach her Brahmin sisters that *sweeping* not only cleans away the dirt but that in the religious sense, it sweeps away all undesirable habits and leads one to God.

2

Pandita Ramabai arrived in Bombay in February 1889, and decided to start her home in the great city. But first she went to Poona, where her little daughter, now nearly eight, awaited her in the homely shelter of the Home of the Sisters of Wantage. A great welcome and reunion awaited her as Manorama happily greeted her mother. Manorama, as a little girl of about four-and-a half, had gone from England to America in 1886; but had been sent back to England with good friends to care for her. She had stayed in England until a short time before her mother left America, when she returned home to India to meet her mother. A friend asked Ramabai why she had not allowed her daughter to finish her education in England and Ramabai answered: "I want her to grow up among her own people, to know them as they are, and to prepare herself for the work there is before her. If I left her in England she would grow up to be an English girl and not one of us."[4] It was always one of Ramabai's great characteristics that she and her workers should identify themselves with India. From this time "The tie between mother and daughter became one of those rare friendships that charm the onlooker. Mano

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

existed only for the joy of helping her mother and to fulfil her plans."[5]

Ramabai, when she arrived in Bombay was a striking figure, Indian in every way, dressed as a widow with cropped head, familiar with seven languages, the author of famous Marathi and English books and with part of the manuscript in Marathi of her book, *Peoples of the United States*. She was now prepared to launch her home, Sharada Sadan, on the turbulent sea of Indian social service.

Ramabai's arrival in Bombay was announced in the following manner in Justice Ranade's paper, the *Indu Prakash*. "In our last issue we have already announced the arrival in India of Pandita Ramabai, a learned, industrious and ambitious woman. She proposed to start a school for orphan women and in order to consider this proposition, and at the instance of Pandita Ramabai, Seth Madhavdas Ragunathdas had convened a meeting at his bungalow with Dr. Atmaram Pandurang as President. Prominent city leaders were present. Pandita Ramabai explained at length what she had so far done in foreign countries and how she had struggled and suffered. She said: 'Almost all the time of my sojourn in the foreign countries, I was constantly busy studying the English language. It was in America that my efforts showed signs of fruit. For the sake of my sisters in India, I addressed, while touring, three hundred meetings and the foreign people were moved with pity. Suffering great hardships and difficulties, I travelled over 30,000 miles and raised Rs. 60,000 for this mission. And, besides this, they have further assured a generous grant of Rs. 15,000 per annum for a period of ten years. A regular organization has been duly established for this purpose at Boston, with sixty-four sub-branches all over the country.' "[6]

The paper went on to say that the school would be housed in rented premises at a rate of Rs. 135 per month, and that the medium of instruction would be four languages, Marathi, Gujerati, English and Sanskrit, and that the institution would be open to boarders and day scholars. High class widows and orphan women would be eligible as boarders and due care would be taken as regards the religious faith of each inmate. "We have no words to praise the sincerity and zeal of Pandita Ramabai and we have

[5] Clementina Butler, *Pandita Ramabai Saraswati*, p. 59.

[6] *Indu Prakash*, 18 February 1889.

no doubt she is the only unique and incomparable intelligent learned woman of this age, unparalleled in history."[7]

The American supporters approved strongly of Rao Bahadur Mahadev Govind Ranade, Dr. Sir Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar and Rao Bahadur Gopal Hari Deshmukh as trustees and advisers on the Board of Management. Dr. Sir Ramakrishna Bhandarkar was the Chairman of the Advisory Board. The school Sharada Sadan was named after Sharada who was the first girl, the Home's first day scholar. This girl was the daughter of Gangadhar Gadre who later worked long with Ramabai at Mukti and became the Pandita's right hand man.

All the opposition Ramabai may have met with in the Marathi newspapers, therefore, when she became a Christian in 1883 in England, seemed to have vanished when she returned once again to her country. Though Ramabai openly avowed her religion, the cordiality with which she was received was enough compensation for all the hard things which may have once been said. The reformers welcomed Ramabai back. Among those who were delighted to see her again were Justice M. G. Ranade and his wife Ramabai, Mr. K. T. Telang, Mr. R. G. Bhandarkar and Sir N. G. Chandavarkar. The *Indu Prakash,* published the following article: "Pandita Ramabai's Sharada Sadan or a school for high caste women, was opened this evening under excellent auspices. It is another of our promising young institutions which have, to our mind, a career of great usefulness. The regulations issued by the Pandita for the conduct of the Home show her earnest spirit in which the work is undertaken. The Pandita is a host in herself. She has throughout evinced admirable courage, perseverance and self-sacrifice. She will make the case of the Home her only occupation and with tact and good sense she can make the Home a true success. The institution starts with three pupils. It is proposed to start this institution as a Girls' School. It will be developed further when it receives sufficient number of applicants for its upkeep. The Pandita is acting under excellent advice and we have no hesitation in warmly recommending her Home to the people."[8]

The next week, the *Indu Prakash* published another panegyric on Ramabai: "The inauguration of the Sharada Sadan founded by the hardworking and ambitious Pandita Ramabai took place

[7] *Ibid* [8] *Ibid.* 11 March, 1889

last Monday at five in the evening at the Chowpatty, in a beautiful building situated immediately behind the new building of the Wilson College. This was indeed a very grand occasion. Pandita Ramabai under her own name had issued invitation cards to all the sympathisers and leading men and women interested in the enterprise. It was a dazzling grand gathering. The place was nicely and beautifully decorated and properly arranged. At the suggestion of Dr. Atmaram Pandurang, Mrs. Kashibai Kanetkar, the wife of the Second Class Sub-Judge of Dahanu, Rao Sahib Govind Vasudev Kanetkar, presided. This was the first instance of an Indian woman presiding over a public function like this. Mrs. Kashibai very gracefully and modestly accepted the Chair and read out her speech which was already prepared. Thereafter, Pandita Ramabai spoke in her fluent, sweet pure language, and explained the need and urgency for starting an institution like this, and said: "Just as we do not have an Indian citizen as our representative in the British Parliament, which naturally is ignorant about the real state and situation in India, likewise we womenfolk have not been given an opportunity to place our representative in the Parliament of India; as a result, you men have no idea of the plight of us women. . . . I always cherished an immortal hope within my heart that I must do something for my sisters and so far I have become successful with God's help as I have full faith in Him. We should be grateful to our foreign friends for the help and assistance they have given us. I was inspired to do all this because of the training that I received from my parents. I am grateful to them both and I am more grateful to my mother."[9]

Ramabai then beseeched her audience to nurture carefully the small tree she was planting, so that under its shade her sisters could enjoy rest and shelter.

Mr. Sadashiv Pandurang Kelkar, the friend to whom she had written about her voyage to England, then read out the names of the Managing Committee of the Sharada Sadan, and its rules of conduct. He mentioned the six textbooks and a few other study books which Ramabai had prepared for the school, and pictures worth Rs. 10,000 for these books. The sale of her book, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman,* had fetched Rs. 50,000. Rs. 25,000 had been spent towards printing charges, and the

[9] *Ibid* 18 March, 1889

remaining was to be used for further printing of books for the school. The Hon'ble Mr. K. T. Telang then summarized the whole proceedings in English and Rao Sahib Waman Abaji Modak thanked the Chairman and Pandita Ramabai. The meeting dispersed after the distribution of garlands and flowers.

The Bombay Educational Record published the following notice: "If the election of Mr. Naoroji to Parliament was a romantic incident, as *The Times* says, what epithet, we wonder, should be applied to the journey to America of an unprotected Hindu widow, to her loving reception by American ladies, to the formation of Ramabai circles, to the return of the wanderer to India, but with links binding her to America, and finally to the installation a few days ago of a Sharada Sadan in a building of its own with an assured income that will enable it to carry on its beneficent work. Romantic is no word for it! It is gratifying to know that all that is best in native society is in hearty sympathy with the work of the gifted and brave Maratha lady. The race which can produce such a woman certainly needs to despair of nothing and the whole pathetic story, so creditable as it is to America, gives one quite a new conception of the possibilities which seem to lie in the future from the increasing recognition of the solidarity of mankind."

3

Manoramabai gives us a vivid description of the opening of the Sharada Sadan on 11 March, 1889 at Chowpatty. Apart from Sharada, the first day scholar, the first inmate was a child-widow, Godubai, who was to be the future wife of Bharat Ratna Maharshi Dr. Dhondo Keshav Karve, the great Social Reformer and champion of the cause of regeneration of widows. Godubai, when she married Karve, was renamed Anandibai.

Though a child, Manoramabai remembered the pleasant March afternoon. When the Sharada Sadan was opened, she says: "The street in Bombay, just behind the Wilson College, was unusually crowded, and at five o'clock a number of carriages might have been seen driving towards a bungalow, bearing the inscription: 'Sharada Sadan (Home of Wisdom).' On arrival, the visitors were invited into the large reception room, and a delightful air of expectancy seemed to pervade the assembly as they sat reading the

little leaflet which had previously been placed upon the chair. . . .

"The room was crowded and after the meeting had been called to order, it was suggested that Mrs. Kashibai Kanetkar, a high caste Hindu lady, should take the chair."

Pandita Ramabai delivered her address already partly quoted. "The meeting closed, the friends dispersed, and Pandita Ramabai, her little daughter and one widow G—, were left as the sole occupants of the house. The name of one other girl was enrolled as a day scholar, and the following day lessons began. G— was not very quick to learn, and much perseverance was required on the part of both teacher and pupil. She had suffered much in her house, and had more than once attempted to commit suicide."[10]

The story of G—or Godubai is interesting. She was the daughter of Balkrishna Keshav Joshi, and sister of Narharpant Joshi. Her grandmother was married at the age of ten to her grandfather, who was fifty, and the wife bore him seven children. "Godubai remembered with pain the story of the unequal marriage to which her poor grandmother had to yield. Her own lot, however, was hardly better. At eight she was married to Mr. Nath after his first wife's death. He was seventeen years older. The marriage took place without any pomp at Makhjan where Mr. Nath's parents lived. After the marriage, Nath returned to Bombay where he worked as a Fellow in a college. Godubai stayed at Makhjan. In about three months, the news of Nath's sudden death after a brief illness came from Bombay. Within three months of her marriage and even before she knew what it was to be a wife, Godu was told that she had become a widow."[11]

Godubai lived with Nath's parents for twelve years and was a great delight to them. She was not treated badly by them and they felt that their son still lived in her. She managed ably the home and the farm—two large undertakings. We are told that "she displayed great ability and skill in doing all this."[12] But when she was twenty-one she had to give herself up to the dictates of custom which prescribed the shaving of her head and the wearing of ochre garments—a fate which all child widows had to undergo and a custom to which Ramabai so strongly objected. Godubai's father-in-law and mother-in-law, had no wish to per-

[10] Manoramabai, *Pandita Ramabai, The Widows' Friend,* pp. 107, 108
[11] Ganesh L. Chandavarkar, *Maharshi Karve,* 1958, p. 60
[12] *Ibid.,* p. 61

secute and humiliate Godubai thus; but they could not resist the dictates of orthodox custom or the so-called requirements. "It was the society that dictated in such circumstances and the individuals who wished to live as respectable members of the society had to submit."[13]

Godubai's widowhood and sad condition were brought forcibly back to her at the age of twenty-one, although she had become a widow twelve years earlier.

She then went to Bombay with her brother Narharpant. The establishment where Godubai stayed consisted of Narharpant, his wife and younger brother, Prof. Karve and four others, making three families, they lived together for 7 years. When she was twenty-four she began to learn the alphabet and arithmetic. "Narharpant himself taught her for sometime, but did not find the task easy."[14] Narharpant then read an announcement in the papers about a school for girls to be started in Bombay by Pandita Ramabai, but only for girls upto twenty-one. Godubai was four years older. Narharpant, was however, determined to have his sister admitted into the Home and went to the Pandita with her. She was very willing to admit Godubai although she was above age. She was the first applicant, and at the time of the opening of the Sharada Sadan, the only day scholar student who later found shelter in the Home as a boarder.

At first "with an umbrella in hand and shoes on her feet, Godubai walked every day from Girgaum to Chowpatty where the Sharada Sadan was housed in a bungalow. A widow with a shaven head wearing shoes was something new and abominable to the eyes of those who saw her."[15]

Also, Godubai had to cook for the whole household consisting of twelve, tend her motherless nephew, and Pandita Ramabai, seeing her pupil's difficulties remarked: "Will you come and stay in the school with me?"

Godubai wished to accept the offer and at first, her brother refused; but after some objections he and her parents agreed and Godubai became an inmate of Sharada Sadan. Here also she had to work, but the work was not very exacting. Her main tasks were to care for Manorama and cook.

Prof. Karve who lodged in the same establishment as Narharpant Joshi tried to teach Godubai. When she went to the Sharada

[13] *Ibid* [14] *Ibid* [15] *Ibid*

Sadan, Prof. Karve often used to visit the establishment with Narharpant and meet Godubai.

Writing in this context, Godubai says: "Bai* coaxed me to grow my hair but I used to take utmost care to hide my head skilfully wearing my sari over my head tightly pinned below the chin. When I went home for the vacation, I avoided appearing in the open and had to wash my hair late in the night so that none could see it. I was the eldest among other immates who came after me and, therefore, was held responsible for everything. Milking the cow, feeding Bai's horse, receiving guests and other such domestic duties were entrusted to me. I hardly found time enough to attend to my studies but somehow I studied up to Marathi sixth and English third standards.

"I can never forget what Bai said and taught: She said to me, 'Just as you have your faith in God, do your duty just as faithfully and show your perseverance. And God will give you strength and success.' Bai always said: 'A woman is the enemy of women. And the women herself must come forward to uplift womanhood.' I tried my best to put this advice into practice in my future life."[15a]

Thus did Ramabai's first widow pupil enter Sharada Sadan, and little did Ramabai know at the time that this same girl would become the founder, together with her renowned husband Dr. D. K. Karve, of the Hindu Widows' Home, Poona, and later the Women's University. Manorama writes simply. "Four years later, Godubai was married to a well-known Professor in Poona, and is now a happy mother, and the founder of a home for widows."[15b]

There is a story about Godubai related by Mrs. Andrews: "Ramabai rises at three o'clock, attends to her own work, gives an hour to correspondence and is ready at five for the girls. Miss Hamlin went to her room one morning a little before the hour. She found her at a table, with a Marathi Bible in her hand, and kneeling before her, sobbing bitterly was Godubai. The night before she had disobeyed Ramabai, and in punishment the good-night kiss had been omitted, which nearly broke her heart. Ramabai explained that the Hindus do not generally caress their children after infancy; and it seems strange and delightful, especially to the poor little widows to receive any show of affection. At

* Pandita Ramabai was known as "Bai" to the girls of her home

[15a] Extracts from "Maze Puran" (My story) by Anandibai Karve

[15b] Manoramabai, *Pandita Ramabai, The Widows' Friend,* p. 109

first she kissed only her own child, then the others seemed to wish it, and now the most orthodox come for the kiss and loving word."[15c]

Maharshi Karve and Narharpant Joshi were good friends and the former says: "Narharpant Joshi was a fine gentleman. He did all he could to educate his brothers and sisters and relatives. His great achievement was that he got his widow-sister Godubai admitted (1889) to the Sharada Sadan, much against the will of his parents and to the great annoyance of the people. Godubai was the first widow-student of the Sharada Sadan. But for what Narharpant did, her whole life would have been ruined and accursed."[16]

Godubai ran the whole joint family until she joined Pandita Ramabai's Sharada Sadan. Her entrance to the Sharada Sadan has already been described. When Ramabai shifted her school to Poona Godubai also accompanied her and became deeply attached to her. Prof. Karve also went to Poona in 1891 to join the Fergusson College. Here Godubai used to visit Prof. Karve with either her father or brother.

Godubai's father, Balkrishnapant, was a kind and understanding man. He often visited Godubai in the Sharada Sadan as did Prof. Karve. He was anxious to see Prof. Karve, who had been a widower for a long time, married again, but Prof. Karve was determined only to marry a widow for his sense of responsibility to them was deep and compassionate. This concern for widows started when Maharshi Karve was a student and when he read a pathetic poem about the widows' plight in the *Kesari* of 12 June, 1883. From that time he took a keen interest in the widow-remarriage movement. "I had had before me the living pathetic example of the sister of Narharpant Joshi, which became instrumental in enhancing my feeling about this subject," says the Maharshi in his autobiography.

"Baba"—as Godubai's father was called, suggested that Karve should marry Godubai and he, therefore, went to the Sharada Sadan and spoke to her. He had often spoken to her about remarrying but she had always replied: "No, Baba, don't ask me to marry again. If widowhood is my lot my second husband might also die and leave me in the same condition. I think I am all right as I am."[17]

[15c] *Ibid.*, p. 112 [17] D. K. Karve, *Looking Back*, p. 66
[16] D. K. Karve, *Atma-Vritta and Charitra*, p. 80

Ramabai had already tried to persuade Godubai to remarry and accept the proposal of a Bengali, but Godubai had refused. Her younger sister, Krishni, was also a widow and was later to become the renowned widows' friend, Parvatibai Athavale, Prof. Karve's right hand. When "Baba" proposed Prof. Karve to his daughter, Godubai confided in Ramabai. The latter first objected as she thought the Professor was not physically a very strong man. She remarked: "Mr. Karve does not look very strong and healthy. He is short and frail. He doesn't earn a good salary at the College. Besides, he has a twelve-year old son."[18] Thus did Ramabai go into details of the men who proposed to marry her widows, for she was always careful about their rehabilitation in the world. Godubai agreed at first with Ramabai and took her advice to wait a year; but Godubai did not wait that long, and accepted the proposal much sooner. She was 27 and she decided that completing her education and finding a job would be difficult.

Maharshi Karve gives an interesting account of his first meetings with Ramabai in his autobiography. He says: "I can well recollect two incidents. Pandita Ramabai had just returned from America (1889) and had opened her Sharada Sadan . . . Joshi very much desired that I should go and meet Panditabai and persuaded me to do so, but I dared not. I felt it an ordeal."[19] Narharpant Joshi tried to take him by force but Prof. Karve escaped. The second time he saw Ramabai was at a wedding ceremony when he sat in a corner and had not the courage to face the couple. This was a widow-remarriage which took place in Madhavdas Raghunathdas' house.

March 11, 1893 was Godubai's last day in the Sadan. "The dawn brought with it mixed feelings of nervousness and delight. Her friends helped her to put on the wedding dress. She had her hair grown after she came to stay at the Sadan. After nearly twenty years she raised her finger for the first time to her forehead to decorate it with the red mark—*kum kum*. Then she went with Pandita Ramabai and her friends to the house of Mr. Annasahib Bhandarkar, whose widowed daughter, Gangubai, was married to Laxman Rao Bhandare in 1874. The wedding was to

[18] *Ibid*
[19] D. K. Karve, *Atma-Vritta and Charitra,* p. 80

take place there in the morning. About forty friends who had responded to an invitation which was signed by Principal G. G. Agarkar of the Fergusson College and Rambhau Joshi, Professor Karve's old friend were present. Vedamoorti Bhikambhatji Vaze, an orthodox priest, volunteered his services to officiate. The marriage rites were performed in the midst of great enthusiasm but without any display or pomp. There was to be no giving away of the bride."[20] If the liberal-minded priest had not volunteered to marry the couple, it is doubtful whether Prof. Karve would have found another priest to perform the ceremony.

Prof. Karve describes the events of the day vividly in his autobiography. He says: "Anandibai was a beloved pupil of Pandita Ramabai and, therefore, Pandita Ramabai spent lavishly for the wedding reception dinner and for various gifts and clothes. She was pleased that her pupil was going to be well-placed in life. Other inmates of the Sharada Sadan too were likewise pleased and happy. The Sharada Sadan was then at its best, growing prosperous, and all leading men on its management were quite satisfied with the Sadan. We proceeded in the evening to the Sharada Sadan a spacious bungalow (which is now occupied by the Director of Education and his Offices) where we were invited by Pandita Ramabai. After the dinner there were a few speeches and a singsong. (A poem is reproduced here in the autobiography, possibly composed by Ramabai.) We were overcome with the moving and affectionate speeches and poems and we became emotional. We both made small speeches in reply before this function was concluded. This was indeed an unprecedented occasion in which there were present about fifty to sixty widows to attend the reception accorded to the newly remarried couple. We felt greatly inspired at this grand reception accorded by the widow-disciples taught and encouraged by Pandita Ramabai entirely responsible for the successful conduct of the Sharada Sadan."[21]

The members, both of Professor Karve's and Godubai's families were absent, and later, the Professor and his wife were to suffer great persecution for his marrying a widow. Even Godubai's father, Baba, did not attend the ceremony, possibly for fear of social ostracism, though he had in reality sponsored the marriage. Godubai was now named Anandibai and later she was known as

[20] D. K. Karve, *Looking Back,* p. 67
[21] D. K. Karve, *Atma-Vritta and Charitra,* p. 117

Baya. The comments in the papers were, however, encouraging, and Prof. Karve was congratulated. Ramabai was also praised. One paper commented: "Female education is now on the increase for there exist jewels like Pandita Ramabai, and women feel that they should have equal rights and privileges with men and, therefore, it is in the fitness of things that such child-widow remarriages should take place."[22]

4

By the end of the first three months, the number of pupils in Sharada Sadan had increased to 22, and for many of them, a new life started with their admission to the Institution. "Already," Ramabai wrote, "I can see a change in the impish natures of my most mischievous girls. They seem to feel their responsibility. We have happy times in the evening, when all the girls come into my room and we sing together as best we can. We have no love songs to sing, no comic bits to say; but we sing hymns and feel quite content. You see, they do not allow women to sing; they think it is a bad thing in a housewife. But we are getting unruly in this school of ours. We are going to turn the tide, and make it a good and honourable task."[23]

That they sang hymns did not mean that Ramabai used this form of music to influence her girls towards Christianity. She introduced later the singing of Christian songs in the Indian style, which were naturally much appreciated though some of the more orthodox Christians objected to this form of singing.

The Sharada Sadan made a deep impression in Hindu circles. A Madras paper wrote: "Pandita Ramabai combines in herself what even in men in India is rare—a deep knowledge of the Hindu Shastras and also an intimate acquaintance with the life, thought and speech of the most advanced nations of the West. For several centuries a lady *sanyasi* so learned and so devoted to the elevation of her sex as Ramabai has not appeared on the stage of Indian life. In spite of her conversion to Christianity the simple and unostentatious life she is at present leading, her earnest eloquence in a sacred cause, and the invincible front she presents to orthodoxy by her citations from the Vedas and Puranas would in any other country but India, in any other age but the present

[22] D. K. Karve, *Looking Back*, p. 76
[23] D. K. Karve, *Atma-Vritta and Charitra*, p. 109

one of extreme selfishness, have sufficed to create a moral and social revolution; but even in the degenerate times in which our lot is cast, we are hopeful that the pleading of the Pandita will remind the uneducated men of their duty to womanhood."

Apart from starting the Sharada Sadan, which in itself was a stupendous task, Pandita Ramabai spent one of the most active years of social work for the people and her country during the year 1889. She became an outstanding personality both in the Congress circle and the Conference of Social Work. She appeared before these two bodies in December 1889 when the respective annual conferences were held that year in Bombay. Though the two conferences were held almost simultaneously in December of each year, the Indian National Congress was a political organization started in 1885, and has developed into the present Indian Congress, while the Indian Social Conference dealt with only social matters. It was in that year also that Ramabai made an ardent appeal for the introduction of Hindi as the common language of India.

The *Indu Prakash* comments: "In May 1889, Pandita Ramabai stressed the need to have one common language for use throughout the whole of India and she said HINDI is the only language which serves the purpose. She has, therefore, recommended this language for acceptance by the Indian National Congress. It is hoped the newspaper editors and the friends of the Indian National Congress will give due consideration to this suggestion of Pandita Ramabai."[24]

Ramabai made her appearance at the Indian National Congress Session held on 26, 27 and 28 December, 1889 in Bombay and spoke before a distinguished gathering of over 2,000 delegates. Ten ladies were present. One was elected by men at a public meeting, the others by various ladies' associations, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Bengal Ladies' Association, and the Arya Mahila Samaj. Pandita Ramabai represented the Union and the Samaj. Mrs. Ghosal and Mrs. Das came from Bengal. Mr. Charles Bradlaugh who was present at the Second National Congress held in Bombay, suggested to Pandita Ramabai that she should do all she could to secure representation on the National Congress and it was as a result of the Pandita's efforts and struggle that she could secure women delegates, in spite of the fact that

[24] *Indu Prakash,* 6-5-1889

Reformists and leaders like Justice Ranade felt that women should not take part in politics. Pandita Ramabai's name is mentioned in the Fifth National Congress Report as follows: "It is sufficient to mention Pandita Ramabai's name which—as well as the good work she is so zealously carrying on—is, we believe, as well known in Europe and America as in India."[25] She began her eloquent speech by saying: "It is not strange, my countrymen, that my voice is small, for you have never given a woman the chance to make her voice strong!" These words have been interpreted by a later biographer in a literal sense, and the writer remarks that Ramabai's voice was never so weak or feeble. It was always strong and powerful.[26]

A few days later Ramabai spoke at the Third Session of the Indian National Social Conference on Sunday 29 December, 1889. The public meeting took place at noon in the Congress Hall. Ranade was the founder of the Indian National Social Conference movement. The first social conference was held in 1887 in Madras, and was automatically and naturally linked with the National Congress which had been started in 1885. Lokamanya Tilak gave a new interpretation to the functions of the two organisations when he disagreed to the two conferences being held under the same pandal. The hostility between Lokamanya Tilak and the Social Reformers began as early as 1885, the very year of inception of the Congress. In 1889, however, the Congress and Social Conference were still more or less allied. There were over 4,000 members present at the meeting when Ramabai appeared. "The delegates from several associations who had expressly come for the Social Conference were present in the hall, but as the admission was free to all, it was not found possible to allot separate places to the members of the Social Reform Association, so as to mark them off from those who were not members.

"Among those present were: Sir W. Wedderburn; the President of the Fifth National Congress, the Hon'ble Mr. Justice Telang; Diwan Bahadur R. Ragunatha Rao; Rao Bahadur Mahadev Govind Ranade; Mr. G. Subramaniam Aiyar, . . . Dr. R. G. Bhandarkar, the Hon. Mr. Subramaniam Aiyar, Pandita Ramabai . . . some European ladies were also present." The Hon. Mr. K. T. Telang took the chair.

[25] *Report of the Fifth National Congress*, p. 155
[26] D. N. Tilak: *Pandita Ramabai*, p. 293

The President then called upon Mr. G. Subramanyam Aiyer to propose the fourth Resolution which ran thus: " 'That the disfigurement of child widows before they attain the age of eighteen and even after that age without the consent of the widow, recorded in writing before a Punch and a Magistrate, should be declared an offence and prohibited as such by Law.'

"Pandita Ramabai in supporting the proposition said that there were hundreds of thousands of widows in the country, and therefore, it was time that the resolution should be passed; but she would suggest an amendment that instead of the age being eighteen, she would not have any particular age specified. The widow when of age must be left to choose for herself freely how she will live if she wished her head to be shaved, she ought to be allowed to do so. She had seen a great number of widows in her time but she had never yet met one, who was willing to have her head shaved (cheers). On the contrary, she had been told again and again that they did not wish their heads to be shaved, but that they had been compelled to submit to the disgrace (cries of shame). They had been told that if they wore their hair long, it would serve to bind their husbands in hell! She needs scarcely tell them that this was a wild superstition. In the Konkan, she had seen child-widows, only ten years of age, with their heads shaven; she would like to know how many of the gentlemen before her would consent to shave their heads on the death of their wives (cheers). If they thought this a hardship in their own case, she would ask them to defend their wives and daughters from a similar outrage. A great deal had been said, in that very Hall about Government allowing the people the right of speech; all their women asked for was the same privilege. She had heard of a cowardly father, who yielded to the clamour of his relations, and allowed the head of his infant daughter to be disfigured, merely because he was not brave enough to seek the protection of the law that defended his child. The law prescribed three years hard labour for anyone, who forcibly disfigured his daughter, but he was afraid of his caste and allowed his child to be dealt with according to custom. That poor child was unaware of the existence of such a law, and she would call upon her hearers to spread the knowledge of such a law far and wide as they were men. She would not quarrel with anyone who did not think that this reproach to the community should be removed; but what she would

impress upon them was that if once they came to a resolution, they should keep to it. If they came to the conclusion not to disfigure their widow, they might perhaps find that their women, like the Spartan women of old, were ready to cut their hair, and give it to their husband for their bow strings in time of need (loud and prolonged cheers)."[27]

Ramabai, though she strongly upheld the right of widows not to have their heads shorn, herself always wore short hair, being a widow, but she never shaved her head. That this short hair was actually commented on as a desire for Ramabai to follow the modern fashion of bobbed hair by a few adverse critics shows how unfair were some antagonists. One friend, who had seen her as a child and had been an inmate of Mukti remarked that: "In modern style she had her hair bobbed. Her short black hair could be seen in curls round her neck."

In the midst of all her activities Ramabai accomplished another miraculous achievement in 1889. She published her book, *The Peoples of the United States,* in Marathi which was at once acclaimed as one of the greatest books of the time.

5

The peoples of the United States, one of Ramabai's most renowned books, was published in Bombay in 1889 and was immediately recognized as a Marathi classic. It aimed to show, while frankly criticizing American customs and manners, the capacity for women to overcome superstitious and reactionary customs and build a world of education, love and good citizenship.

One of the most astounding features of Ramabai's dynamic energy and powers of concentration was the prolific amount of writing she managed to finish in America while leading one of the fullest social and philanthropic lives of which any human being was capable. In two short years she achieved the translation of children's textbooks from English into Marathi, her book in English—*The High-Caste Hindu Woman*—and also a large volume in Marathi—*The Peoples of the United States.* She was, in fact, a gifted writer though her name has gone down in posterity more as a social worker and Christian evangelist. Ramabai wrote as easily as she talked and was an adept author and orator. Her *The Peoples of the United States* was prescribed by the University of

[27] *The Times of India,* December 30, 1889

Bombay as a textbook and students were asked to study especially the elegance and beauty of its language and style.

Ramabai felt that India should know something of the manner in which Americans lived, their home lives, their education and the position of women. The book describes the aspects of Western life which would be an inspiration for India to follow, for it was the object of all social reformers, as it is even now, to take the good from other countries and wisely supplant it in India, without India losing its own national identity. Ramabai felt that America had achieved the greatest progress among women.

The first two chapters of *The Peoples of the United States* are devoted to the discovery of the New World, and a description of living in the country. Ramabai utters a panegyric about the beautiful American flag and remarks that she had never seen so lovely a national emblem, such good public administration, and such an upsurge of life in the people.

Ramabai found unity everywhere, in thought, administration and business life of the U.S.A. The Government was for the people, by the people and of the people. This fact must have presented a vivid contrast from life in India to Ramabai who had, except for her three years' stay in England, lived in her own country which was ruled by foreigners. The *laissez-faire* attitude of Queen Victoria seemed to have irked her, as she has mentioned in *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*. Here in America, everything was free and a democratic rule governed and united the people. Merit was important in America, and a person's own worth, not the caste in which he or she was born. Americans did not cater to honoured visitors only, or to outward appearances; but helped a person, no matter what he was, so long as he needed help.

Ramabai praised rural American life. There was little crime, and not much fear of theft. There were libraries everywhere, where not only light literature but books of every nature, classical, historical, scientific and religious could be found. Art and music were encouraged; and the standard of journalism reached a high level.

Boys and girls were treated alike. There were no child marriages as in India, and the girls were given opportunity for high intellectual development. Circumstances did not change after marriage. Married women enjoyed the same freedom and honour as unmarried girls in their parent's home. Girls and wives were in no way inferior to boys and husbands.

In May 1887, Ramabai said she came to know many of the students of Cornell University. She was invited by a student to visit his village and she was attracted by the cultured background of a peasant's house and the enthusiasm for life in general which prevailed there. When a peasant could spare a little leisure after cultivating his fields, he discussed profound philosophical problems and spoke beautiful words. This greatly astounded Ramabai who was more acquainted with the ignorance of the Indian peasant. Ramabai noticed also that the mother treated her son and daughter alike and made no difference in their education or mode of living. Ramabai felt that a nation which gave its citizens individual freedom and equality must prosper. She was always a great democrat, and any form of dictatorship angered her.

Ramabai goes on to describe the construction of American houses and their heating and cooling systems. She was impressed by the respect shown to women in American society, of the manner in which men took off their hats to them and saluted them in the streets. She was also struck with American politeness, and the readiness with which they thanked each other. Their formalities were also praiseworthy.

Ramabai then relates an incident which occurred in India in 1865 or 1867. She was travelling with her parents by boat to Bombay. There were three or four English ladies with them on the boat, and Ramabai was afraid of their full skirts. She thought they would hide children inside their skirts and kidnap them. She herself must have been but seven or nine years old at the time. Ramabai says naively in her book that she laughed when she thought of these childish fears. The dress of the American woman is then described. Small waists were considered a symbol of beauty. So, by unnatural methods they were squeezed in and Ramabai describes the old world corset as some kind of contraption of wires by which the waist was bound in!

But Ramabai explains that dress reforms had started and women who had studied physiology were trying to bring about a more healthy change in the habits of dress. Ramabai says: "When I went to Frances E. Willard to say goodbye to her, she remarked, 'wherever you go, advise women that they should not be fanatical about fashion, which has a bad effect on their health.' "

Ramabai then describes the hats of American women. She says that wings and feathers are fixed on hats and each year so many

birds are killed for this purpose. Natural teeth, says Ramabai, were not considered good enough and so false teeth were used instead, which she naively remarks was for the sake of beauty. Many people asked Ramabai if her teeth were natural!

Men were as interested in fashions as women in America, according to Ramabai. They kept changing their mode of dress, and each occasion asked for a new variety. They imbibed wine freely and also smoked cigarettes for which they spent "lakhs of rupees."

As regards the treatment of Negroes, Ramabai felt that the behaviour of white Americans was not good. Negroes were not allowed to enter the churches and restaurants. But there were friends of the Negroes among the whites. In 1865, the slaves were freed and it was a good sign towards abolishing the racial differences between the black and the white. Books had been written about the wretched condition of the tribal Indians. As a result of philanthropic workers, Red Indians were permitted American citizenship.

The Americans hated the Chinese but the Irish, German, Scandinavian, Italian, Russian and other emigrants were allowed to settle in America. There was a form of caste system but it was not exaggerated as in India.

Americans were naturally honest and religious. Ladies were more just than men. Americans were kind, cultured, humble, moral and industrious. "God helps those who help themselves," and Americans certainly came under this category of "those who help themselves." Ramabai was also struck with the advertising system in America. Advertisements were vivid and attractive but nothing vulgar.

In March 1886, Ramabai says she was in an American woman's house in Philadelphia. It was a hot summer. So, one day she went downstairs without her slippers to drink water, and her hostess's grand-daughter saw her. All at once, she wrote a chit to Ramabai, suggesting that she should wear slippers when she went about the house, and Ramabai remarks that the Americans were very formal, adding, "After this incident, I did not go before anybody without slippers!"

In 1887, Ramabai went to Lake Michigan near Chicago and talked about coming across a mosquito-ridden well, just like the one she saw in Assam. She was told that the water from this well

could cure diseases; but she could not imagine how this could possibly be true.

Ramabai felt the cold in winter, and it was dangerous to go out, for one often started out in bright sunshine, and ended in intense cold, in January or February when the roads would be ice-bound.

From Philadelphia Ramabai went to New York. It was warm then, and Ramabai gave a speech in a Church. Many people came to hear her and Ramabai put forward her idea of starting a home for widows. The next day Ramabai wanted to go to Boston but was astounded to find that it was snowing. She had to cancel her programme. The snow fell silently and in no time the mountains, trees and roofs were asleep in their white garments. Skating was popular and Americans were very interested in this form of sport.

The national festivals which Ramabai noticed were New Year's Day, Washington's Birthday, Thanksgiving Day, Independence Day, Easter and Christmas Day, which were all important festivals of America. America was free from English rule on 4 July, 1776, and this day was always a great event. The slaughter of chickens, turkeys, goats and cows on these days much disturbed Ramabai and she felt that the principles of Lord Buddha would greatly change the mentality of Americans.

As regards education, Ramabai was impressed that this was given from earliest childhood equally to boys and girls. A professional education was also provided so that a boy or a girl was fitted out to earn a livelihood while receiving education. Homes were always well-stocked with books, newspapers and magazines.

The motto in America seemed to have been "as you work, so you yield" (As you sow, so will you reap). Those who deserved help were willingly given support and it was not felt that salvation would be achieved by giving alms to beggars. Religions consisted of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. There were differences of religious opinion but fundamentally, the religions were the same.

In May 1886, the Methodists held a meeting in New York. Here Ramabai noticed that women were not treated equally with men. Ramabai then mentions the Anti-Slavery movement started in 1832 which was the Golden Year.

Women's education started from 1789. In 1819 Miss Willard justified that women must also be educated like men and she worked for this cause. In 1832 ladies were allowed for the first time

with men to receive higher education in Ohio State. In 1850 some prominent leaders felt that no benefit accrued by giving women higher education because they were not as intellectual as men. But after thirty years in 1880 the leaders allowed co-education. When Ramabai was in America, men and women studied and worked side by side, and women had performed great and remarkable deeds in the field of education, religious propaganda, science and medicine.

On her way to a village, in November 1887, the people requested Ramabai to speak at their meeting, and all arrangements were made in a Church. Ramabai was asked to ascend the pulpit. She begged other ladies to sit beside her in the pulpit but they refused. She was told that Pandita Ramabai was the first woman to address the congregation from the Church pulpit.

In November 1887, under the auspices of Frances E. Willard, of Tennessee State, Ramabai took part in the 14th Anniversary of U.S. Women's National Prohibition Society. Miss Willard's capacity to manage and control meetings and her knowledge of the laws of Parliament were exceptional. She was the living image of education (Saraswati), politics and administration.

The British were inspired by the crusade for Prohibition which American women started, and inaugurated the "British Women's Temperance Association." Ramabai felt that Indian women should also start such a movement.

Comments are then made about the advanced state of Industry and agricultural development, meteorology and the fact that money was spent freely for the advancement of the people.

Teaching as a profession was given great importance, as also co-operative efforts and the advance of science. Self-respect and patriotism was much developed, and stress laid on maximum production. Fortune had given America wealth in ores and the people had made every use of natural resources and attained a high position in the world.

It is not possible in one short chapter to describe the beauty of Ramabai's book nor to capture the charm of her style and her deep interest in a foreign country. The book when published in 1889 made a deep stir in Maharashtrian society and helped to bring the New World of America into contact with the ancient world of India. It is one of the tragedies of good writers that a good part of the material they write often never sees the light of

day. The second part of *The Peoples of the United States* is said never to have been published. Marathi literature is all the poorer that this should have happened. One wonders how much more valuable material has been lost, for Ramabai was a prolific writer and composed even poems and hymns. But she was ever modest about exhibiting her talents and a great deal, therefore, of what she has written was never published, as for example, the "Account of Travels in India," being the second part of Pandita Ramabai's book, "Voyage to England."

VI

Poona

1

In November 1890, Ramabai shifted the Sharada Sadan from Bombay to Poona, which was then the capital of the Deccan and the centre of orthodoxy. She felt that here she would be able to help more high caste widows and it would also be cheaper to run the institution in a smaller city than Bombay. A piece of land was bought in the city with a bungalow for which a price of $15,000 was paid. The Sharada Sadan now had its own premises and the number of the inmates was now eighteen.

Before Ramabai left Bombay she was given a hearty send off by the members of the Arya Mahila Samaj of Bombay. In token of their love and affection the women presented Ramabai with a loving address and a gold wrist watch and a copy of *Rigved Bhashya.*

Before settling in Poona, Ramabai revisited her childhood home in Gangamul forest in the summer of 1890. In the Quarterly Mission Paper of 1890, in a letter to a friend, Ramabai writes: "The whole ground seemed hallowed with the association of my beloved parents. The clear blue sky which looks like a grand canopy

over the plane looked more beautiful than any other sky that I had ever seen."[1]

How delightful was the Tungabhadra river at its course, the Constellation Scorpie and Southern Cross stretched across the sky and the trees, many of which had no doubt been planted by her father. Ramabai returned to her work fully refreshed to face the storm which awaited her. But her faith was only enriched the more with the attacks of the public and she writes: "A new leaf was turned in my life. It is full of joy. I can scarcely contain the joy and keep it to myself. All the riches, all the gain, all the joy of the world do not begin to compare with joy of salvation."[2]

Although the Reformers were so favourably inclined towards Ramabai, when she started the Sharada Sadan, and happily consented to serve as members on its Advisory Board, Lokamanya Tilak voiced his objections to a Christian lady's activities from the beginning. His first objection to Ramabai's venture was that it was financed by foreign money and established by missionaries. He felt that despite the policy of the Ramabai Association not to convert girls, and the promise to give perfect religious freedom to them, it was bound to become a centre for proselytizing. But even Bal Gangadhar Tilak enrolled himself as a sympathizer at the very beginning and it was only when the news appeared in the *Illustrated Christian Weekly* of December 1889 that out of seven child-widows residing in the Sharada Sadan, two had voluntarily expressed their willingness to become Christians that he was distressed.

Lokamanya Tilak was further shocked when he heard that four Hindu girls were learning Christianity and were attending Christian prayers. Suggestions were now being expressed that the Sharada Sadan was in reality a proselytizing organization, though this was not true. Justice Ranade and the Prarthana Samaj group fully understood this position at the beginning of Ramabai's work despite Tilak's opposition. Ramabai's valuable service to India was recognized, and one of the reasons for the widening gulf between the Reformers and Tilak was their different attitudes towards Ramabai.

Gradually, the criticism in the papers, especially in Tilak's mouthpiece, the *Kesari* became more and more bitter against

[1] Dr. Nicol Macnicol: *Pandita Ramabai,* pp. 88, 89

[2] *Ibid.,* pp. 88, 89

Ramabai. It must be clearly understood here that Bal Gangadhar Tilak was not averse to women's education, the emancipation of women or even to the Sharada Sadan; but he was opposed to the change of religion of his country-women, and in his criticism of the Pandita he did her an injustice in feeling that she was using the school as a subtle means to convert women to Christianity. She was far too much a woman of integrity and far too courageous not to have announced her designs openly if she ever had such machinations in her mind. But Tilak's criticisms and attacks were bitterly sarcastic. His antagonism against Ranade's group also grew.

Many difficulties now arose despite Ramabai publishing an assurance in a leading paper that every girl in the Home was free to follow her own religious practice.

As time progressed, the situation became more critical especially as the good that Ramabai did to the widows strongly attracted some of them to the religion she followed. Ramabai herself was so much a living example of all that was kind and good, that the widows began to take notice of her God, who was behind the loving actions and words of this lady. Miss Hamlin, working in the Sharada Sadan at the time, averred that few could resist Ramabai's influence; it was magnetic.

Troubles now descended one after the other on Ramabai and she wrote: "At the time the sky seemed full of black clouds, and it looked as if it never will be clear."

But Ramabai had at the time the support of the Social Reformers who were still Members of her Advisory Board. They formed a strong clique in her favour, and to these magnanimous men she applied for help. Ramabai Ranade even brought a desolate widow to the Sharada Sadan. The Brahmins themselves had suggested that this poor woman should take shelter in the Home. Ramabai wrote: "Don't you think it quite remarkable after all the storm we had surging around us and after our enemies tried their best in misrepresenting our motives—that some of the orthodox and bigoted persons should themselves send a widow to the school?"[3]

And thus the Sharada Sadan progressed and Ramabai remarked: "My Hindu brethren thought I was Christianizing the girls. They wanted me to shut my room when I was reading the Bible and praying. I said: 'No; I have the same freedom to practise Christianity which these girls have to practise their religion. Why

[3] Dr. Nicol Macnicol: *Pandita Ramabai,* p. 82

should I shut the door of my own room, which I do not shut at any other time during the twenty-four hours of the day?' The Hindu friends were much offended at it, and wanted to pull our school down and raise another school on its ruins; but I am glad to say that the foundations of this school have not been set on the sand, but on Eternal Rock. It stands there to this day, and it will stand for ever and ever."[4]

Even when the real storm broke in 1893 and when her friends, the Members of the Advisory Board, resigned, the Sharada Sadan increased rather than decreased in strength.

Pandita Ramabai appeared in public many times during the first few years of her work in Western India, and when criticisms started against her, the audience often seemed to have been rude to her. She visited Poona in 1889 May and June, a year before the Sharada Sadan was moved there and gave a lecture which was attended by Poet Rabindranath Tagore. In *Rabindra Rachanabali* is a letter to a friend first published in the Bengali Monthly, *Bharati,* dated *Jaishta* 1296 in which the poet describes having heard the Pandita in Poona.

He comments on going to hear a speech by the renowned intellectual Ramabai. He describes her as a slim fair woman, bright of countenance, glowing like a white lotus, a famous Maharashtrian woman who remarked that women are equal to men in every way except in imbibing strong drinks. The poet goes on to criticize this opinion of the Pandita's and says that if women are equal in all respects with men, then he has to say that the Creator has dealt unjustly with men. In some matters women are superior to men, i.e. in looks and in various aspects of the heart. Over and above this if they have equal qualities with men in human society, where do men have any position? There is a law in nature, which has made men superior to women in health and strength, while women are superior in beauty. Men are also superior in intellect as women are in tenderness and matters of the heart. Women and men are, therefore, complements to each other and can never claim equality. Tagore goes on to write his views on the equal status of men and women and refutes the fact that women can equal men intellectually as right through the centuries there are no great women in art, music or literature. It is true more women learnt music than men. Women practised the piano all day long

[4] Manoramabai: *Pandita Ramabai, The Widows' Friend,* pp. 116, 117

in Europe; but how many Mozarts or Beethovens had they produced? Educating women does not necessarily prove that the capacity for genius or greatness is the same between men and women. Women were the passive ministers in the home and have to depend on men. This letter, though it does not agree with the Pandita's views, shows clearly that Rabindranath Tagore greatly respected Ramabai as a personality and thought highly of her intellect and beauty.[5] Rabindranath Tagore seems to have witnessed the audience behaving rudely towards Ramabai and strongly criticized such ungentlemanly manners, especially as Ramabai had to stop speaking due to the disturbance caused by the learned members of the audience. Rabindranath Tagore felt strongly that such disturbances, when a lady was speaking, should not occur. He felt it was a great pity that Ramabai had to abandon her speech due to the bad manners of the audience. Rabindranath Tagore felt that the men in the audience certainly showed their strength. "Finding a woman talking about the powers of women the men could hardly refrain from exhibiting their own powers and having drowned her voice by bullying and blustering, returned home proud of victory." The poet and his family were staying in Poona at the time with Prof. Gobinda Vithalkar, a friend of Satyendranath Tagore, the poet's elder brother, and the first Indian to pass the I.C.S.

Nothing deterred Ramabai's efforts to raise the status of women. At a woman's Convention held in Bombay in February 1891, she was made the convener, and left her work in Poona to attend the meeting. Miss Cornelia Sorabji was the Chairman. The subject was the enactment of a Bill to raise the age of consent to fourteen. Mrs. Kashibai Kanetkar spoke in favour of the Bill but she was opposed by a woman who asked: "How would you like your son-in-law to be sued in court for infringing the conditions laid down in the Bill?" Mrs. Kashibai was rather taken aback and could not answer this question; but Ramabai remarked: "Never mind the son-in-law; his life is not worth more than that of his daughter." Dr. Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, we are told, supported the Bill though orthodox opinion was against it, and criticized him for his liberal opinions. Pandita Ramabai is said to have published a statement in the *Times,* London, in September 1887 regarding the Age of Consent Bill which was finally enacted in

[5] *Rabindra Rachanabali,* Vol. 12, p. 50 *et. seq*

1891; but at the time, the criticism against her was bitter. Ramabai's great strength, however, lay in the fact that she turned a deaf ear as much as possible to all critics and proceeded with her work, undaunted and unaffected.

Despite unsympathetic audiences, she continued to make speeches. In one she remarked that the subject of patriotism was sadly neglected in schools. Most textbooks propagated the worship of the Queen and her Government. "Not that I consider it to be a sin to be loyal to the Government," she remarked. "But I care more for the mother's worship than for worship of the Queen. I see no point in worshipping the Queen while ill-treating our other mothers." She was criticized for this remark also.

No reforms can be successful unless a few great souls broke the reactionary bonds of the more unpleasant aspects of traditions and dared to speak up boldly in the face of bitter opposition. Ramabai was a tradition-breaker, even as later, Mahatma Gandhi sought to break the chains which hindered progress and bound down his country to social wrongs. Ramabai did not lack friends and supporters in the political and social world in which she moved during the first two or three years of establishing the Sharada Sadan in Poona. But no sooner did anyone praise Ramabai's work and words, than she was bitterly criticized by her opposers. And thus did Ramabai slowly begin to realize that the work would have to be more withdrawn and further away from the "maddening crowd" of Poona in which she first tried to move.

2

So far, though Ramabai had been converted to Christianity seven years earlier, she still lacked that joy in salvation which came to her in the year 1891, when faith and peace in Christ really descended upon her. This change took place when Ramabai came across a book called *From Death Unto Life,* by the Rev. W. Haslam, M.A., an Evangelist. One day she had travelled to Bombay from Poona. When she was at the Guardian Mission Press she found this precious book. Mr. Haslam had previously been a missionary in Bombay. Ramabai writes frankly of the painful time in her life before she really found Christ. She seemed to have suffered from severe mental upsets. She says: "It was nobody's fault that I had not found Christ. He must have been preached to

me from the beginning. My mind at that time had been too dull to grasp the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. The open Bible had been before me, but I had given much of my time to the study of other books about the Bible, and had not studied the Bible itself as I should have done. Hence my ignorance of many important doctrines taught in it. I gave up the study of other books about the Bible after my return from America and took to reading the Bible regularly."[6]

But even this procedure does not seem to have satisfied her. She writes: "Following this course for about two years, I became very unhappy in my mind. I was dissatisfied with my spiritual condition. I read this book *From Death Unto Life* with great interest. Rev. Haslam being a Clergyman of the Church of England, had charge of a good Parish and was interested in all Christian activities connected with the Church. While he was holding conversation with a lady, a member of his Church, she told him that he was trying to build from the top. The lady meant to say, he was not converted, and had not experienced regeneration and salvation in Christ."[7]

It was only after this incident that Rev. Haslam really became a Christian in the true sense and Ramabai read this account with interest. Then she began to wonder where she herself really stood. "I took the Bible and read portions of it, meditating on the messages which God gave me. There were so many things I did not understand intellectually. One thing I knew by this time, that I needed Christ, and not merely His religion."[8] So far, she had believed that sins would be truly washed away with Baptism. "These and such other ideas, which are akin to Hindu mode of religious thought, stuck to me. For some years after my Baptism, I was comparatively happy to think that I had found a religion which gave its privileges equally to men and women; there was no distinction of caste, colour or sex made in it."[9]

But Ramabai soon became aware that she had not placed her faith implicitly in Christ, she had not been born again, a child of God of the Holy Spirit. She was unhappy and even desperate because she felt herself still a sinner; she had not been led by her spirit to God nor did she feel she was a child of God.

She asks simply: "What was to be done?" She surrendered her-

[6] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 15
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 16 [8] *Ibid.*, p. 16 [9] *Ibid.*, p. 16

self unconditionally to the Saviour, and asked Him to be merciful to her, and to become her Righteousness and Redemption, and to take away all sin.

"Only those, who have been convinced of sin and have seen themselves as God sees them, under similar circumstances, can understand what one feels, when a great and unbearable burden is rolled away from one's heart. I shall not attempt to describe how and what I felt at the time when I made an unconditional surrender, and knew I was accepted to be a branch of the True Vine, a child of God by adoption in Christ Jesus, my Saviour. Although it is impossible for me to tell all that God has done for me, I must yet praise Him and thank Him for His loving kindness to me, the greatest of sinners."[10]

Ramabai writes: "I do not know, if anyone of my readers has ever had the experience of being shut up in a room where there was nothing but thick darkness, then groping in it to find something of which he or she was in dire need. I can think of no one but the blind man, whose story is given in St. John IX. He was born blind and remained so for forty years of his life; and then suddenly he found the Mighty One, who could give him eyesight. Who could have described his joy at seeing the daylight, when there had not been a particle of hope of his ever seeing it? Even the inspired Evangelist has not attempted to do it. I can give only a faint idea of what I felt when my mental eyes were opened, and when I, who was sitting in darkness saw great Light, and when I felt sure that to me, who but a few moments ago 'sat in the region and shadow of death Light had sprung up.' I was very like the man who was told, 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth to rise up and walk.' 'And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God.'"[11]

From this time onwards, to the end of Ramabai's life thirty-one years later, a joy had entered her heart which no sorrows, wants, abuses or adversities could vanquish. The God her family had sought, whom she had craved for, even the Unknown God, entered into Ramabai's heart in the form of Jesus Christ and like St. Patrick she saw Christ before, behind and on every side of her, and bound herself to Him. A mystic, a saint, she now trod on

[10] Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, p. 17
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 18

the ground with feet as light as gossamer, she strode the world, she was the handmaid of Christ, and the Peace which He promised, the Peace which passeth all understanding and which the world cannot give, entered her heart at last.

Grief, as the earthly human being feels it, was not hers any longer, even though she had lost father, mother, sister, brother and husband one áfter another before she had even reached the age of twenty-four. When Manorama passed away in 1921, it was this Peace which sustained Ramabai. Sorrow was there; but it was detached and an everlasting companionship had been formed with Manorama which no parting of the mere earthly bodies could separate. The joy she received on being reborn in Christ soon after Ramabai moved the Sharada Sadan to Poona was profound. In those first glorious days of revelation after reading Haslam's book, she cries: "O, the love, the unspeakable love of the Father for me, a lost sinner, which gave His only Son to die for me! I had not merited this love, but that was the very reason why He showed it toward me."[12]

The old idea that she must earn merit for future happiness no longer hampered her, forcing her to search for endless expiation. Now she was free. She was also comforted that Christ received women and outcastes. She need worry no more. She cries in a paean of joy: "How good, how indescribably good! What good news—for me a woman. . . . The Holy Spirit made it clear to me from the word of God that the salvation which God gives through Christ is present, and not something further. I believed it, I received it and was filled with joy."[13]

Only Jesus, said Ramabai, revealed God as Father. In the Old Testament, He was the Creator, the mighty God, the Judge, Jehovah, but to Christ He was Father, and only the Son could reveal Him. But one had to be as a little child—simple and trusting—to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus, like a child Ramabai sought Him and her new joy in the Saviour gave her the strength to meet the many problems which were to face her, to overcome her difficulties and to inspire her to stride from victory to victory.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 18
[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 20

3

It was not till July 1892 that the Sharada Sadan was formally opened in Poona. There were forty resident widows, by now from the age of seven to the Brahmin cook woman who was forty. The older widows still had their heads shaved and wore their widow's saries in such a manner as to hide their faces. Though some widows such as Godubai had their hair grown others seemed to have adhered to their age-old customs.

By the time the formal opening took place in the middle of 1892, Ramabai's attitude to Christianity had become much more positive and even assertive. Though the rules of the Ramabai Association advocated a strictly non-sectarian attitude, the longing to impart the joy which Ramabai had found in Christ was fast taking possession of her. She says: "I feel I must tell my fellow creatures what great things the Lord had done for me. And I feel that if it was possible for Him to save such a great sinner as I am, He is able to save others. The only thing that must be done by me is to tell people of Him, and of His love for sinners, and His great powers to save them."[14]

The building in Poona which now housed the Sharada Sadan was in a large compound away from the road. It was purchased by the Ramabai Association. Ramabai's immediate task was to beautify the house and garden. She was an ardent gardener and loved flowers. The planting of trees also was an absorbing occupation with her. Perhaps, she was influenced by the belief that those who planted trees earned great virtue. Colour, especially of flowers, was an obsession with Ramabai, and wherever she lived, she created beautiful gardens. Her Homes were also clean and comfortable, even though she could never afford luxuries. The Sharada Sadan in Poona was soon surrounded with a trellized screen on which clung many coloured creepers. The garden and home were now abodes of beauty. At the dedication, a "gala occasion" indeed, missionaries and Christian friends from all denominations gathered. Mrs. Andrews, Chairman of the Board of Managers of the Association, and Ramabai's intimate friend and almost a mother, was present. Ramabai gave public thanks to God for His great gift and the wonderful things He had done for her and her country. America was also praised for its generosity.

[14] Basil Miller, *Pandita Ramabai, India's Christian Pilgrim,* pp. 51, 52

Hindu friends and relatives of the inmates came to the evening function, and many addresses and congratulatory speeches were delivered. Ramabai spoke in Marathi and many Hindus also spoke, and admired the atmosphere of the Home, which was more like one big family. Ramabai remarks: "My pupils are as free to come and go in the drawing room as any other part of the house. The Sadan with all of its privileges has been instituted for their benefit. They come from homes where they have been treated as outcastes, where no love has been bestowed upon them and no comfort provided for them. I wish them to see the contrast in all things where love rules. I wish them, to become acquainted with as many good people as possible, to learn what the outside world is about from pictures and books and to enjoy the wonderful work of God as they ramble in the garden, study with the microscope and view the heavens from the little verandah on the roof."[15]

After the formal opening of the school, Ramabai went to her home town—Malheranjee in Mangalore—and was welcomed by her relations. She returned to Poona with a number of widows, and it was at this time that her great helper and co-worker came to the Sharada Sadan. She was the widow of her step-brother and was known as Mami by the girls of the Home. With her came a lovely little girl of seven, Subhadra, who had been adopted by Mami when she had been abandoned by a cruel family. Mami was widowed in childhood and had no children of her own; she loved Subhadra as her own child.

Later, both Mami and Subhadra became Christians in the great revival which took place in Ramabai's institutions; but when they came to Poona in 1892 they lived in the Home as Hindus.

Though Ramabai was much appreciated in her home town, "it is a curious fact that even when she had become famous through the establishment of her school, when she visited in her step-brother's home, they showed affection for her, and pride in her career, but the wife would only occasionally condescend to eat in the same room with the widow. On such rare occasions, Ramabai was obliged to serve herself and to wash her own dishes, while the brother and his wife, whenever they had sat by her side, or touched her hand, as they sometimes did, felt it necessary to purify themselves from the contact by changing their

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 53

garments before they would venture to eat. Yet she succeeded in gaining from them a promise to send their two child-widow daughters to her school.[16]

By now Ramabai's family worship which she held in her room with open doors, was a welcome source of inspiration for many of the widows. Ramabai's attitude changed to invite the widows to "cast their burdens upon the Lord." Many of the orphaned and guardianless widows were also adopted by Ramabai. Prayers were held from 5 a.m. to 6 a.m. each morning and the girls came voluntarily to attend them in great numbers, and by the spring of 1893 about half the residents attended the prayers; but the resident teachers, though themselves Christians, seemed to have caused some form of mischief; and the storm broke. Though the paper *Subodh Patrika* had announced a short time earlier that "The history of Pandita Ramabai's Sharada Sadan may well deserve to be written in letters of gold. A Hindu woman's pluck brought it into existence, and American generosity supports it," the papers now shrieked that the Sharada Sadan had received its "death blow."

What had happened to change the attitude so rapidly of the Maharashtrian public? A picnic had been arranged and two teachers who were not sympathetic with Ramabai's spiritual change of attitude were to have taken the girls out. But Ramabai and her assistants did not wish to go to the picnic. When asked why they remained behind, they said that they wished to spend the day alone with God in prayer and that any of the girls who wished to remain behind could also do so. Immediately more than half the girls chose to stay back with Ramabai and they spent all day praying and studying the Scriptures. At the end of the day over twenty widows wished to follow Christ, and some of them wanted to make Him their personal Saviour. By this time, Ramabai's friend, Sunderabai Powar, had joined the institution. She and Ramabai greatly rejoiced at the number of girls who wished to become Christians and soon afterwards a Christian Endeavour Society was established and a room set apart for prayers.

The storm immediately broke in August 1893, among the Hindu members of the Advisory Board and helpers of the Home. A premonition of this trouble seems to have assailed Ramabai a few months earlier, for she had remarked to a Hindu friend: "God

[16] Clementina Butler: *Pandita Ramabai Saraswati,* p. 51

seems to be showing me that some great trouble is coming. This is not the first time I have felt this; I think God sometimes lets me know beforehand, in order that I may have time to pray for special grace. You see, the same God who warns me about the difficulties had also promised that 'He will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.' "[17]

In her report to the Ramabai Association at this time, the Pandita writes: "The cause of the last great storm was a sad and strange one. A woman whom we had appointed to do the matron's work, and whom we thought to be our friend, and one who took an interest in this movement, proved to be our deadly foe. Her mischievous work was begun by tyrannizing and exercising a bad influence over the girls. For this she was promptly removed from the institution. When going away she took a young widow with her, who also was a relative of hers; she then went into the town and identified herself with the great army of our opponents, manufactured many false stories, and spread them through the town, causing people to doubt and turn against us. A terrible storm surged around us for a time. Although we were living in our own country, and among our own people, we were continually made to feel that we were among a strange and hostile people in a strange land."[18] Ramabai continues, "We are utterly defenceless, and almost friendless, in this beloved land of ours; but our very weakness is a strong appeal to God, and we feel that He is on our side. We hear Him say, 'My grace is sufficient for thee', and realize that 'He giveth power to the faint.' There are times when we see nothing but darkness, thick enough to be felt on all sides; but we are soon made to see the silvery lining of the clouds that surround us. Our enemies are watching us quietly now but God only knows whether their present silence is a calm before a great storm or not."[19]

The Advisory Board visited Sharada Sadan and took exception to Ramabai's Christian teaching and prayers and withdrew 25 of the girls. This was a great setback to the widows who had to return to their orthodox homes. Some begged their parents and guardians to allow them to remain on promising not to attend the prayers, but the feeling against Ramabai was then so strong that

[17] Manoramabai: Pandita Ramabai—*The Widows' Friend,* pp. 118, 119
[18] *Ibid.,* p. 119 [19] *Ibid.,* pp. 119, 120

one of the reformers even preferred to return a widow he had placed in Ramabai's home to her original temple where she had been a Devadasi, rather than allow her to remain in the Home. It was considered the lesser evil for her to be a temple girl than to become a Christian!

Ramabai again writes in 1893: "Our efforts to educate the widows and help other women are far from being liked. The storm raised against our school by some people has somewhat subsided, but the spirit of opposition is still alive. Some are carried away so far by their prejudices that they not only talk against us but try and do us some harm and by doing so think that they offer 'service to God' for they think that it is a sin to support and educate widows. I will mention here one or two of the curious instances out of the scores which have come to our knowledge."[20] Ramabai then gives the story of the Sharada Sadan clerk, Gangadharpant Gadre, who went to Bombay to buy a stock of timber for the building, and was asked to pay something on account. After the bills had been written and the merchant was asked to send the timber to the Sharada Sadan, he "lifted his hands in holy terror" and said he would never sell wood to Ramabai unless he got ten per cent more than his usual price. Some men also who looked after the building had to be dismissed because they tried to deceive Ramabai and extract extra money from her.

Ramabai cites an instance about the year 1892, when the Poona Branch of the National Indian Association was holding its meetings in Government House, presided over by Lady Harris, the Governor's wife. The latter wanted Ramabai to be made a member of the Working Committee of the Branch Association, a proposal which was accepted by the Hindu gentlemen. Ramabai says: "As a member of the Working Committee, my duty was to help forward women's education in private and public, to visit the girls' school in the town, to make any useful suggestions, and to help and encourage the school mistresses by giving lectures on the Kindergarten system and other useful branches. But I had to look after my own school and the building work, and so was unable to go into the town three times a week. I, therefore, said to the Secretary of the National Indian Association, Poona Branch, that I would be glad to instruct the school mistresses if the Municipal School Board saw their way to send the ladies to the Sharada

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 120

Sadan once a week. Mrs. Kirkham, the Hon. Secretary, wrote to the School Board, suggesting that carriages should be supplied to the school mistresses to attend lectures here. After a long-time she received a very polite answer from the Board, declining the writer's offer with thanks."[21]

Ramabai says that the reason put forward was the Board's inability to send carriages, "but the local papers of last week quoted a speech of one of the members, in which he said that, since I and my school were not popular, and the majority of people did not talk well of us, he thought it would not be well for the school mistresses to have anything to do with us. Though I am sorry that I am thus prevented from helping many women whom I would have been glad to aid in any way, I am not sorry to hear the honoured member of the School Board say that all people did not talk well of me and my school, for the Blessed Saviour has said: 'Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you.' "[22]

In August 1893, the storm gathered ominous force when Mr. Ranade, Dr. Bhandarkar and other members of the Advisory Committee and old friends of Ramabai's sent in their resignations direct to the Ramabai Association in Boston. They reported that they believed that girls were actually induced to attend the private prayers held by Ramabai and that they were taught Christian doctrines; that the Pandita showed missionary tendencies and that two girls had declared their intention to embrace Christianity. This procedure, the Committee felt, was a departure from Ramabai's promise to run a neutral institution and not to interfere with the religion of the girls. They concluded that if the Sadan was to be a proselytizing institution they could not be connected with it.

Out of fifty-three girls in the Sadan, twenty used to attend the prayers and scripture reading. This letter of the Advisory Board seems to have been written before the first widow was actually baptized a Christian in 1894, and one of the reasons for the Board being so upset was possibly due to the fact that the Sharada Sadan was receiving undue popularity and the Reformers were beginning to feel that a Home for widows within the Hindu religion could at this stage be started. Ramabai was condemned by Lokamanya Tilak for a "vaulting ambition that desired to work miracles and achieve startling results."[23]

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 121. [22] *Ibid.*, p. 122

[23] Dr. Nicol Macnicol: *Pandita Ramabai*, p. 83

When the widow was baptized in 1894, twenty more girls were removed, and "people came flying even late at night to take away their girls as from a pestilence or fire. Many of the girls were taken away weeping, and Poona was filled with wrath and vituperation. Ramabai had played them false; the Committee upon whose solemn assurance girls had been committed to an unspeakable Christian widow, had played them false. The committee was deeply chagrined and called Ramabai sternly to task. She met them, so Mrs. Ranade told me (Miss Fuller) many years after, 'as only so great a person could'. She had kept her word. She would neither apologize nor vindicate herself."[24]

Anonymous threats to her life reached Ramabai, papers abused her and even scurrilous words were used. Parents were advised to withdraw widows from the Home.

Ramabai could do nothing and the situation became quite impossible. There had to be freedom of worship; there had to be freedom of thought. The Ramabai Association in America was alarmed at the strict secular atmosphere of the Home being broken and Ramabai was reprimanded for breaking her promise not to convert the girls. The American Council asked Ramabai to go to America and give a personal report, but she refused to leave her work. Even the local Christians did not come to her aid at this time. Loud protests were published in the papers.

Ramabai continued dauntless. Her faith was such that she believed in miracles. She determined to work all for Christ no matter how many girls were converted. A strange relief now suffused her whole being. She was prepared to face all reverses. She was determined to live and act as she felt inspired to do. God would help her even if all human aid was withdrawn.

Soon the Ramabai Association sent a Commission from Boston to Poona and "found there was no effort to proselytize, but the mere force of Christian example was the occasion of these converts accepting the new faith."[25] The faith of the members of the Ramabai Association remained unshaken in the woman they had sponsored, which again fostered bitterness among the people, for they felt their complaints had been too lightly waived aside. The attacks against Ramabai became more and more virulent.

[24] Mary L. B. Fuller: *The Triumph of an Indian Widow*, p. 33
[25] *The Christian Advocate*, 27th April 1922

Hindus now felt that a Home for widows within the principles of the religion should be started. Maharshi Karve took this great task on his shoulders.

The Institution which stands today as the *Hingne Stree-Shikshan Samstha,* which includes the well-known S.N.D.T. Women's University, was first launched by Bharat Ratna Maharshi Dr. D. K. Karve in June 1896 under the name of "The Hindu Widows' Home Association" (*Anath Balikashram*). Its beginnings were humble until it rented a house in Poona in 1899 and the Widows' Home was really launched. In his message at the Pandita Ramabai Centenary Celebrations in Bombay in 1958, the late Maharshi Karve said: "Pandita Ramabai was my contemporary. (The Maharshi was born on 18 April 1858, five days before Ramabai). Although I am older than her by five days, she started her social work before me. When I was studying in Bombay, Pandita had already started her Sharada Sadan. I was anxious to see her but had not the courage to face such a scholarly and illustrious person when I was merely a student. When my friend actually dragged me to see her, I slipped away and avoided the meeting. Later on I made her acquaintance and was greatly impressed by her personality. I had the greatest admiration for her.

"Later on, she shifted to Poona and I also left Bombay. I had the fortune of seeing Pandita Ramabai's activities closely, as my wife Anandibai (Godubai) was the first widow-student of the Sharada Sadan founded by her. She had a great influence on her students and Anandibai owed a great deal to Ramabai for the kindness with which she was treated. Pandita Ramabai's sincerity, devotion, idealism, drive and compassion for the downtrodden and distressed were to a certain degree imbibed by my wife.

"Pandita Ramabai was my predecessor in the field of education of widows. In fact, I might not have started my institution if the Sharada Sadan had not changed its complexion."[26]

This was when it was felt that a Hindu Widows' Home was needed which could cater for the widows' needs without, as it was believed, their being converted to Christianity. Regarding this

[26] Pandita Ramabai Centenary Memorial Message, written on 19 March, 1958 by Maharshi D. K. Karve. (See: Centenary Souvenir compiled by Mr. S. M. Adhav, Secretary of the Memorial Committee, Bombay)

question, Prof. Karve says in his autobiography, *Looking Back,* after frankly admitting that he owed his inspiration to Ramabai, the "pioneer in the cause of widows' education. Her efforts were crowned with success and in her Sharada Sadan the number of widows and non-widows from respectable families had grown to over sixty. My wife, as has been mentioned before, was the first widow to get the benefit of her institution. Pandita Ramabai had become a Christian but the Sharada Sadan was being conducted on Hindu lines, and there was an Advisory Board consisting of Dr. Bhandarkar, Mr. Justice Ranade and other influential people to help her.

"However, about ten inmates of the Sadan got themselves baptized one morning and the news spread like wild fire in Poona. The Advisory Board immediately resigned and suggested to the guardians of the girls in the Sadan to remove them from it. This happened in the later part of 1893 and could have been utilised for the starting of an independent widows' home. My mind was, however, absorbed in the cause of Widow-Marriage. A few other enthusiasts did make an effort, but it was not successful. They collected some funds out of which they supported a few of the poor widows who left Sharada Sadan and enabled them to study in Government institutions. The Hindu Widows' Home later on took charge of these widows and also of the remnants of the funds collected. It was the success of Pandita Ramabai's Sadan that encouraged me to make a similar effort with due precautions in order to respect popular sentiment. Even from the orthodox point of view the marriage of widows was not so objectionable as their conversion to Christianity and I had strong hopes of success."[27]

Thus started the Hindu Widows' Home Association out of what was believed to be the mistakes and faults made by Ramabai in the Sharada Sadan. The Widow Marriage Association had already been started by Prof. Karve on 31 December 1893. It began very humbly at Wardha with six founder members, because "people suspected that widows in the institution might be encouraged to remarry."[28] So great was the prejudice of the educated classes against remarriage of widows! How much more then was it against a change of religion, and it is a matter of astonishment that the

[27] D. K. Karve, *Looking Back,* pp. 60, 61

[28] *Sixty Years of the Hingne Stree-Shikshan Samstha,* p. 3

Sharada Sadan after its evidence of Christian influence was not completely closed down. Nevertheless, it not only survived, but grew from strength to strength under the Grace of God. Maharshi Karve's association with Ramabai, as he himself has testified, began long before the need arose for starting a Hindu Widows' Home. He says in his Centenary message: "Pandita Ramabai was one of the greatest daughters of India and I am constrained to say that her worth is not yet fully appreciated by the country. She had in her sterling qualities of the head and heart. I have the deepest regard for her and I am glad to pay my humble homage on the occasion of her birth centenary."[29]

When Maharshi Karve's first child was born, it was Ramabai who made arrangements for the confinement of Anandibai in the Mission Hospital in Mangalwar Peth. Anandibai walked about a mile and a half to the hospital and the baby was born an hour and a half later. Ramabai suggested that the boy should be called Shankar, and Prof. Karve said it meant: "One who bestows happiness", and approved of it.[30]

Godubai's marriage also greatly influenced the life of her younger sister, Krishni, who is now known as one of India's greatest widow reformers. Anandibai herself was a ceaseless worker for the sake of her sisters. She gallantly supplemented the good work her husband was doing. "Her husband's example and the training she had from Pandita Ramabai inspired and sustained her work."[31] Prof. Karve himself always had great reverence for Ramabai and watched her work and the progress of the Sharada Sadan with admiration. He admitted that his wife had been transformed by the Pandita and that institutions such as the Sharada Sadan had held great possibilities. Prof. Karve decided to start a home himself. When the Sadan incurred public censure after some students had been converted, an effort was made to form a Hindu Sharada Sadan but fell through for want of support. There were only two other institutes in India for widows supported by Hindus at the time. One was in Bengal started in 1887, by Babu Shastri Pada Bannerjee in Baranagar which later closed down for want of support. The other was started by Pandit Veerasalingam Pantulu in Madras. Karve heard of these institutions and they were also a

[29] Centenary Souvenir, op. cit
[30] Dr. D. K. Karve, op. cit., p. 91
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 85

source of inspiration to him. But as Ramabai had declared, the country was slow in wishing to help its helpless widows. And Maharshi Karve helped by Godubai and Krishni, both of whom had been inspired by Ramabai, started a successful campaign against the wrongs of widows. Mr. G. M. Thenge, speaking at the Memorial Meeting in 1922 after the death of Pandita Ramabai remarked that apart from "showers of choicest abuses" being heaped on Ramabai's head when some widows became Christians, "nothing was done by them to ameliorate the condition of the thousands of miserable young widows who remained uncared for and neglected and were shamefully treated by society. This was left for the great Mahatma, the foremost reformer of the day, Prof. Karve, who later on, appeared on the scene and amidst persecution similar to that which was the lot of Anant Shastri Dongre carried the day in favour and succeeded in improving the lot of the widows and educating and uplifting Indian womanhood."[32] Prof. Karve's work increased rapidly from the Widow Remarriage Association to the Anatha Balikashram at Hingne, the Mahila Vidyalaya and Nishkam Karma Math, to the final Shrimati Nathibai Damodar Thackersay Women's University. Prof. Karve's work bounded forward from strength to strength until in 1956 he was conferred the Padma Vibhushan and in 1958 the Bharat Ratna. He lived to be 104, passing away only in 1962, as one of India's greatest sons. His devoted wife Godubai, or Anandibai, lived to be her husband's right hand till her death, in November 1950. Never had a widow-remarriage proved more successful or more of a precedent for others to follow. But always, it must be remembered that Ramabai inspired both Maharshi Karve and his wife, and it was in the Pandita's Home, Sharada Sadan, that Godubai, a shy retiring widow, was, under the auspices of the Home, and with the blessings of Ramabai, married to Bharat Ratna Maharshi Karve.

A letter from Prof. Karve was written to Ramabai as follows:

"It is not easy to mention all the numerous advantages which my wife derived from her stay of four years at the Sadan. She has come out of it with a keen love of knowledge and a mind enlarged and enlightened. In the time she was there she learnt Marathi upto fifth standard and English upto the third standard. This instruction is in the first place highly useful to her, and

[32] Clementina Butler, *Pandita Ramabai Saraswati*, pp. 71, 72

secondly it has filled her with a desire to learn more, a desire which I am doing all in my power to gratify. Her views about life and our work in this world have also been materially altered. She has become free from many of our degrading superstitions. She feels that she has been raised to a sphere where she can render good work for her more unfortunate sisters; and life seems now a blessing instead of a curse. I find that she is an excellent housewife. The habits of neatness and order which she acquired in the Sadan are of great use in managing our domestic affairs. In short, I find her an excellent wife, an excellent companion in life, and feel sure that in her company in the natural course of things many happy days are in store for me."[33]

Maharshi Karve also wrote thus of the Pandita in his autobiography: "Though there have been differences between Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati and myself, I am of the opinion that she belonged to a very high order of eminent personalities—to the category of 'saintly personalities who live to serve others'—*'Paropakaraya satam Vibhootayah.'*

"She gave definite shape to the cause of widows' education, striving all on her own and patiently expanding her work. Indians, especially the Maharashtrians, should always be deeply indebted to Ramabai for the pioneer work done by her."[34]

A few more extracts from *Maze Puran* show the great love Anandibai had for Ramabai:

"My whole life has been impressed and moulded by Bai's teachings and experiences. It was Bai's example that filled me with the desire that I also should do something for my sisters, and whatever I did for the Hingne-Ashram and other institutions, was the result of the lessons I learnt from Bai. I felt a sort of compassion for the orphans because I saw what Bai did for her orphans.

"While I was in the Sharada Sadan at Poona, my father came one day to see me. He was then Karve's guest. Karve was then Professor at the Fergusson College. He had lost his first wife then. My father asked him: 'Are you not going to marry again?' Karve replied: 'If possible, I am determined to marry a widow.' My father was pleased. He came and met Panditabai and asked

[33] This extract is taken from a letter written to Mrs. J. W. Andrews, President, Ramabai Association, Boston, by Maharshi Karve in 1894 and has been published in the *Pandita Ramabai Centenary Souvenir*, p. 50

[34] D. K. Karve, *Atma Vritta and Charitra*, p. 167

her to persuade me and obtain my consent for the marriage. My consent was conveyed to him, and through him to Karve. My father then proceeded to his native place, for, he did not want to openly show his approval to this re-marriage. Karve came to Panditabai; then met me and said, 'I am a poor man, and you will not get all these comforts and conveniences which Pandita Ramabai has'. I agreed to marry him.

"I was completing my twenty-seventh year. Bai said to Karve, 'I am glad you both have decided to marry, but you should first agree to keep Rs. 3,000 in Godubai's name. He agreed and a deed was accordingly made. Our wedding was fixed for the 11th March 1893 and that was the anniversary day of the Sharada-Sadan. I was Bai's pet. And Bai made elaborate and magnificent arrangements for our wedding reception. There was a large gathering. There was a wedding-cake at the party and a grand wedding dinner with a variety of sweet preparations. Bai gave me a grand present of sarees and ornaments as also to her son-in-law Mr. Karve, to whom she gave clothes. Bai then said to the girls in the Sharada Sadan: 'Do not suppose that I shall always spend so much on all similar occasions. This is the first and the last time.'

"During my pregnancy and delivery time, I went to Ramabai and stayed with her at the Sharada Sadan. Even when I was ill once, Ramabai asked me to come and stay with her.

"It was at the Sharada Sadan that I was filled with the desire that I should do something for the people. Later, after marriage and by the example set by Karve, I was greatly encouraged and there were many orphans at my place after our marriage. I had witnessed the Missionary-work, and the method of working at the Sharada Sadan. I was greatly impressed and I did not feel ashamed to nurse dirty children. I used to take delight in doing this kind of service.

"My religion is the one that is taught by Pandita Ramabai: of showing the way to the crippled or disabled, helping the needy, and this is the religion I have been following."[35]

Despite such loyal friends like Maharshi Karve and his wife, Ramabai's persecution at the hands of the people increased. Criticisms almost grew abusive, and she found it more and more difficult to carry on; but to characters like Ramabai, unjustified

[35] Anandibai Karve, *Maze Puran* (My story, an autobiography in Marathi)

opposition only resulted in strengthening her own character, and she determined to weather all storms, and with the one object of serving Christ, carry on her work.

PART III

1893-1922

I

New Fields

1

AFTER the storm there is peace. The earth battered and torn, by nature's upheaval, is nevertheless the cleaner and purer, and settles down once again to repair the ravages that have been wrought, and to start a new and more vigorous life. So it was with Pandita Ramabai. Her antagonists and even many of her friends had accused, criticized and abandoned her. She was insulted and even threatened with anonymous letters. Above all, after twelve of the inmates became Christians in 1894, twenty were withdrawn by angry guardians and parents. But the storm brought its own reward. "The little widows all over the country heard the gentlemen talking about a dreadful woman named Pandita Ramabai, who was a friend to widows, and many thought to themselves, 'If there is a place where a widow is welcomed I should like to go there.' " And so from 1895 a new life began to surge around Ramabai, and by 1896 there were forty-nine inmates in Sharada Sadan.

Ramabai's influence in the Sharada Sadan increased as the years passed and she was sought after for her wisdom, her motherly

love, and Christian charity. Gradually, she watched the nature of the girls change. Like buds opening their petals the girls began to expand, learning to appreciate the cult of service and unselfish sacrifice which Ramabai inculcated. They even began to think of other unfortunate girls outside their immediate environment, and during a time of scarcity in Madras, Ramabai was glad to see them respond to her story of the sufferings of those in the South. The girls gave of what little they possessed. "One poor young widow, just appointed to serve the girls at their meals for four shillings per month, begged that her first month's pay be taken for the famine relief fund" for a famine was also then raging in Central India.[1]

A Brahmin widow, too proud at one time to touch her own shoes, volunteered to sweep the floor, in order to earn money to send to the famine stricken, and thus, along with Ramabai the girls began to think of new fields of service.

In 1895, Ramabai felt the urge to expand her work. She determined to visit North India and investigate the conditions of widows in that distant part. She went to Brindaban where she wished to tell the widows who had taken shelter in the temples of her Home that they would be cared for and sheltered under her protection. She had heard that in the temples, the priests were using widows for immoral purposes, thus increasing the number of temple prostitutes. Ramabai therefore decided to disguise herself as a religious beggar woman. Such mendicants were always well-treated in India, and therefore Ramabai chose this mode of disguise.

"Being dressed as a religious beggar," writes Ramabai concerning this trip, "and caring little what people said or what might happen to me, I went round to all the houses of the town with open eyes to see the conditions of the widows. I saw hundreds and hundreds of them . . . hundreds, I might say thousands, of widows young and old, come to those places every year and fall into the snares of the priests. . . . When the poor women get a little older and are not pleasing to these horrid men, they are turned out of the houses to care for themselves as best they can. . . . Oh, the sin and misery and heartless cruelty of men to women which I saw there on every side is beyond description."[2]

[1] *The Widows' Friend, Pandita Ramabai,* p. 124
[2] Macnicol, *Pandita Ramabai,* pp. 90, 91

Even today, despite the many reforms and the many employment opportunities open to widows, a number of them still take shelter in temple towns where they are fed and housed free in the many shelters provided for them by philanthropists. Religious reform bodies would perhaps do well to probe into the conditions of these widows and their mode of living. Ramabai, if she had lived today, would undoubtedly have made the study of widows dwelling around the sacred temples of India one of her main activities.

The priests met Ramabai and her friend at the station. One was chosen as a guide, but he led them to a tiny dirty room where no food was provided. They remained hungry till morning. At dawn, they attempted to bathe in the Jumna; but felt it was not clean enough. Ramabai lived in Brindaban for two whole weeks. Though she was suspected because she refused to worship at the temples or visit them, her beggar's robes protected her and she tried to rescue widows. "Oh, the sin and misery of it all," she cried. Seven widows wished to go with her to Poona but they were locked up by the priests and only one was rescued, and it almost cost Ramabai her life.

On this trip to the North Ramabai studied the conditions of widows in the sacred places, and was able eventually to aid many of these to escape. Her deep study led her to paint vivid pictures of the social position of widows. At this time, Mrs. Andrews was in Poona. She had come for the dedication ceremony of the school house, and was regarded by the girls as their grand mother; and Ramabai was able directly to let Mrs. Andrews, who was Chairman of the Board of Managers of the Association, see her plans and refute the accusations made against her by members of the Advisory Board.

Ramabai had also been troubled at the presentation made of Hinduism in America, at the time praising only the philosophy of the religion and ignoring the prevailing practices. She was afraid, possibly, that in the new picture presented abroad, the evils under which women suffered may be ignored.

But Ramabai had by now taken the bull by the horns and was ready to attack anyone who belittled her assertions that widows were ill-treated in India. Many of the reformers themselves, in their search for truth, confirmed with their own findings Ramabai's accusations. Their determination to ameliorate the position

of women proved that Ramabai had not exaggerated. For instance, Dr. Bhandarkar, who was then Vice-Chancellor of Bombay University and had just resigned from the Sharada Sadan Advisory Board, had declared before the 5th Session of the Indian National Conference in 1889 as follows: "The misery of our widows has been the subject of frequent remark. I will not detain you long with a full exposition of it. I will only make a general observation that that society which allows men to marry any number of times even upto the age of sixty, while it sternly forbids even girls of seven or eight to have another husband after one is dead; which gives liberty to a man of fifty or sixty to marry a girl of eleven or twelve, which has no word of condemnation for the man who marries another wife within fifteen days of the death of the first, is a society which sets very little value upon the life of a female human being and places women on the same level with cattle, and is thus in an unsound condition, disqualifying it for a successful competition with societies with a more healthy constitution. Oft times the marriage of a girl under certain circumstances proves her death warrant."[3] Mr. Justice Ranade also testified against the inhuman treatment meted to widows. "A Hindu widow may not be married. Against the child widow the rule prohibiting re-marriage is enforced with inexecrable rigour. For them there is no relaxation, no pity, no sympathy. But the old Hindu widower who is shuddering on the verge of the grave may marry again and again, as often as he likes. For him there is no restriction—he is under no obligation to exercise self-restraint."[4]

Ramabai's writing against the priests at this time is almost a tirade of rage and contempt. In her disguise as a Sanyasini she seems to have penetrated the evils and she wished to expose the crimes to the very core. In her interpretation of Hindu philosophy, it was evident, and also vouched for by friends who knew her, that Ramabai was not very well versed in the Vedas and Upanishads. She only started reading these after Keshub Chundra Sen introduced her to Vedantic literature. Her understanding of ancient Hindu ideas was mostly based on her thorough study of the Shastras, Puranas and epics. Ramabai, therefore, missed much that was beautiful in Hindu philosophy, but her interpreta-

[3] Clementina Butler, *Pandita Ramabai Saraswati,* pp. 48, 49
[4] *Ibid.,* p. 50

tion of the status of women in India in ancient days was correct to a great extent. Also whatever the conditions in olden days, it was with present-day injustice that she was concerned and which she tried to remedy. After visiting Brindaban, she and Mrs. Judith W. Andrews visited Delhi and Agra where they unearthed many evils.

Ramabai would have rejoiced if she had lived today and seen the freedom given to women. She would have been over-joyed at the high level of social equality and at the various reform Acts passed after India became free in 1947. It will not be an exaggeration to say that Ramabai was the first woman to stir the social consciousness of the people to create this happy age.

2

Not only did Ramabai travel to new fields; but she was inspired by wider reading and the spirit of revivalism. In one of her many tracts, she says: "Last year, 1895, I happened to read the life of Amanda Smith; she had been a slave in America, and had been freed. When she was converted, she shouted and said she had been delivered out of bondage twice—once out of slavery, and once from the slavery of sin. And I have a right to praise God too, for I have been first delivered from the slavery of man's opinions, from the fear of man which holds so many of my dear people; and the second time from the bondage of sin. As I read further in this book, where she gives an account of her spiritual experience, I felt my need of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in me.

"I prayed earnestly to God to show me the way, and to remove all the hindrances that came in the way of my receiving this great blessing. I read in the papers that Mr. Nelson Gregson was to hold some special mission services in Bombay, and I longed to go, but could not easily leave my school. I did not know anything about Mr. Gregson, but the desire to hear him preach became very strong. I left the matter in God's hands and rested quietly."[5] At this time Ramabai received a letter from a girl whose mother was dying in Bombay. She went to the great city immediately, and there heard Mr. Gregson preach his first sermon. "I Am Crucified in Christ". Ramabai stayed in Bombay for three

[5] *The Widows' Friend,* pp. 125, 126

days and attended the services. Then she went in April 1895 to the Lanauli[6] Camp meetings and heard Mr. Gregson. She spoke ardently with him and asked to receive the Holy Spirit. In the evening she felt His presence and says, "Since then I have received much blessing, and am very grateful to God for showing the way of this blessed life."

At the last Lanauli Camp meeting in 1896, Ramabai took fifteen of her girls with her, who had confessed their belief in Jesus. "Amid the troubles and trials that faced me at that time I rejoiced much to think that the Lord had given me fifteen immortal souls whom I could call my spiritual children. One day, early in the morning, I went out to a quiet place in the woods, when I saw the sun rising in all its glory. Then I thought of the son of righteousness and wished much that my people, who were sitting in darkness, should be willing to open their eyes and hearts and see Him rise in all His heavenly glory. At that time my heart was full of joy and peace, and I offered thanks to the Heavenly Father for having given me fifteen children, and I was by the Spirit led to pray that the Lord would be so gracious as to square the number of my spiritual children before the next camp meeting took place."[7]

At the time, however, there was no idea of such a wish being fulfilled. Circumstances were completely against it. There were forty-nine school girls and some were on leave for the summer. How, Ramabai wondered, could she pray for such a request? Ramabai says: "I then prayed to God to give me a clear word about it, and He graciously gave me the following words: 'Behold, I am the Lord, the Lord of all flesh; is there anything too hard for me?' (Jeremiah XXXII, 27). This proved to be a rebuke to my unbelieving soul, as well as an assurance of the great things which God meant to do for me." Ramabai made a note of these things and put down the date when she claimed fifteen times fifteen girls, *i.e.* 225, for Christ, and waited for God's promise. Ramabai then returned to Poona and invited those who wished to join her in praying to meet her at five a.m. These prayer meetings continued for six months in Ramabai's room. "Promise after promise was pleaded before the Throne of Grace, and it is needless to say that every one of them was fulfilled. In that early morn-

[6] Lonavla, near Poona

[7] *The Widows' Friend,* pp. 126, 127

ing hour, teachers and pupils learnt better than ever before the blessedness of asking great things of God, and of thanking Him for prayers answered and promises fulfilled."[8]

Thus from 1891 onwards, Ramabai's life was gradually transformed. The great change began when she read Mr. Haslam's "From Death Unto Life". "Since the year 1891," Ramabai says, "I have tried to witness for Christ . . . and I have always found that it is the greatest joy of Christian life to tell people of Christ and of His great love for sinners."[9]

At Mr. Nelson Gregson's meeting Mr. and Mrs. Marcus B. Fuller, Miss Mary Fuller's parents, used to meet Ramabai. Mr. M. I. Garrison, father of Mr. A. R. Garrison and Mr. K. B. Garrison, both belonging to the Alliance Mission, were also regular habituees of these meetings. The latter were greatly interested in Ramabai and helped her with their prayers. Mrs. Marcus B. Fuller then became a warm friend of Ramabai's. Addressed by Mr. Haslam, Dr. Pentecost, Mr. Robert Wilder who later became the General Secretary of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, Mr. Reeve and other missionaries were avidly listened to. Ramabai had actually lost the faith which Father Goreh had inspired in her in 1883, when she was baptized. We are told that "Fr. Goreh lost the influence over her which he had exercised in the few years just preceding. However, they remained friends till the last. Ramabai was engaged in an excellent work, having opened a home for Hindu widows at Poona. Many of these widows have become Christians, so that Fr. Goreh's work goes on growing.

"A new influence came to bear upon Ramabai in 1892, when an American evangelist visited Poona after preaching in various parts of Indore, with special letters of encouragement from persons high in office. He gathered large attendances. Ramabai's heart was again stirred with the love of Christ. She now regarded her acceptance of Christianity as an intellectual change, while she looked at the later teaching of this evangelist, Dr. Pentecost, as having affected the real conversion of her heart."[10]

Ramabai entered into a new discipline in 1895 and a new freedom of the spirit. The turmoil of the world no longer worried

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 128
[9] Mary L. B. Fuller, *The Triumph of an Indian Widow*, p. 40
[10] Gardner, *Life of Father Goreh*, p. 277

her nor any criticism of her. She also felt that God must instruct and correct her and even punish her. She realized her many failures and sins and determined to obey and give herself to God. Gradually she experienced a great serenity and "the peace which the world cannot give" descended on her. She cried out in joy: "Whenever I hear and obey the Lord's voice with all my heart, I am very happy and everything goes right. Even the tests of faith, and difficulties and afflictions become great blessings."[11] Though Ramabai was immersed too deeply in active administration to be a mystic, "there was something distinctly mystical in the very clarity with which she received divine guidance. It was as if a voice spoke to her . . ."[12]

In 1895, Ramabai also read about the lives of John G. Paton, missionary to the New Hebrides; George Mueller of Bristol, who built orphanages by faith and of Hudson Taylor, who founded the China Inland Mission, and her faith increased in leaps and bounds until her Home also became an institution of faith. Ramabai now indulged in writing poetry more than she had ever done before, so full was her heart of joy. She wrote three hymns all included in the Marathi Christian Church Hymn Book—two of them entitled "I Found a Friend in Jesus" and "Have You Been to Jesus for the Cleansing Love". She writes: "I did not know that there were faith missions in India. Since then I have come to know that there are a few faith missions working in this country, and I thank God for setting them up here and there as great beacon lights."[13] Thus Ramabai reached the year 1896, her heart filled with new faith, and prepared to expand her work into new fields of service for her Lord.

Ramabai declared that God had given her a practical turn of mind, and though from 1895 onwards, Ramabai gradually became more withdrawn and self-possessed in her work, more of a Christian mystic, she was of a most practical turn of mind. "If this woman is to be classed as a mystic, then she must be described along with others who put their visions to the proof, as a practical mystic."[14] The call of God came upon her more forcefully than ever at this period of her life and she gave all her mind to follow the inner voice. Henceforth she would work depending entirely

[11] *The Triumph of an Indian Widow,* p. 42
[12] *Ibid.,* p. 42
[13] *A Testimony,* Pandita Ramabai, p. 24.
[14] Macnicol, *Pandita Ramabai,* p. 99

on faith and she cries: "I feel very happy since the Lord called me to step out in faith and I obeyed. To depend upon Him for everything—for spiritual life, for bodily clothing, for food, water, and all other necessities of life . . . is most blessed."[15]

Her questions as to why there are no faith missions in India were answered directly by God. "Why don't you begin to do this yourself, instead of wishing for others to do it?" the Lord said to her. "How easy it is for anyone to wish that someone would do a difficult thing, instead of doing it himself?" Ramabai declares that she was greatly rebuked by that "still small voice" which spoke to her. It was this voice she referred to perhaps at the 5th Indian National Congress when she remarked that men were not able to hear her "still small voice". Always there was this voice of God within her whispering to her to have faith to be up and doing, trusting entirely in Him.

3

Forward thinking and planning for the future was always one of Ramabai's methods of work, although, after her renewed faith was established she did not worry for the days to come, leaving it to God to provide. She was always aware, however, that God helps those who help themselves, and also that her faith could only be substantially rewarded if she herself planned carefully. Ideas, therefore, forever flooded her virile mind, and as early as 1892, soon after she had opened her Sharada Sadan in Poona, Ramabai began to wonder how she could make her institution self-supporting. The American Ramabai Association had only pledged itself to help her for ten years. In 1898 she felt that this help may, for some reason or the other, come to an end. On the other hand, if she made plans for an institution which could support itself, she need not depend entirely on foreign help. The best method for achieving such a purpose, she felt, would be for her to buy a large plot of land and convert it into a fruit farm, the income from which would help to maintain itself. Ramabai was blessed with shrewd business acumen. She knew the value of land would with the years be considerably appreciated. But where was she to find the money to purchase the land? She enquired of the American Association whether they would buy land but they felt that the move was unwise. Ramabai now had no one to

[15] *A Testimony*, p. 25

turn to but God and she characteristically left the matter entirely in His hands. Had not Christ promised that if two were agreed on earth regarding anything it would be conceded for them by the Heavenly Father? Ramabai and her colleague Soonderbai Powar therefore, prayed constantly for two whole years for money to purchase the farm. Ramabai even went to the extent of finding a plot in the town of Kedgaon, thirty-four miles out of Poona. and tried to raise the money on her life insurance in Bombay: but was not granted the loan.

When she returned home from Bombay, having received no financial help, she was not disheartened. On the contrary, she began a more complete and whole-hearted request to God for her farm. Her teachers and Christian pupils were asked to unite more strongly in prayer and gradually the money began "to trickle in".

Then one morning, the miracle happened. A cablegram was put into her hand. "I trembled," she says, "fearing I knew not what, but raised my heart in prayer to God to help me bear whatever the cablegram contained. I opened it and—*the farm was mine.*" Ramabai's American friends had helped her. They had been told by God to put their trust in her and send the money to her. From henceforth, all Ramabai's work was accomplished entirely by faith. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain thee"—was her motto.

Immediately Ramabai bought a hundred acres of land and began to clear it and plant it with orange, lime and mango trees. A well was dug and the rest of the land was prepared to cultivate crops. It was no easy task on which Ramabai had set her heart. The land was completely "bare, stony, treeless, and waterless". but this was the land which eventually sheltered the famine victims.

At this time, famine was again knocking at the door and Ramabai remembered vividly the days of her childhood and her teenage tragedies. She recalled the painful scene in Raichur where her mother died a famine victim, and now she was inspired to work for similar victims. She could not rest quiet. In 1896, the dreadful famine in the Central Provinces drew Ramabai's attention. But was it her affair to travel miles away from the centre of her work? Was not the Government there to start charities and help the people? But whispers sounded in her ears. "Remember the days of old!" She followed the instructions of her "still small

voice" and went forth. Her target was to save three hundred girls. But where would she house them? How would she feed them? She replied: "I don't know, but the Lord knows what I need, and He has promised me that 'Ye shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God that hath dealt wonderously with you; and my people shall never be ashamed.'"

The famine was one of the worst that India had ever experienced. Thousands were suffering. Ramabai writes: "At the end of 1896, when the great famine came on this country, I was led by the Lord to step forward and start new work trusting Him for both temporal and spiritual blessings. I can testify with all my heart that I have found the Lord faithful."[16]

Four years earlier, when Ramabai formally opened the Sharada Sadan in Poona, she was told by one of the speakers at the function that "the Lord shall increase you more and more, you and your children." (Psalms XV. 14) When the famine started in 1896, Ramabai realized that these words were to come true despite the opposition she had experienced. Ramabai writes: "A little over four months ago, I heard about the distress of the people in Central India, and at once my heart went out to them in sympathy. Common sense said: 'You had better stop here, and whatever your hand finds to do, do it here. You have no measure and no strength to do what you wish. Your powers are limited, and you will not be held responsible for not doing anything to help these famished people. Indeed what can a weak woman do to help the dying thousands?' "[17]

But Ramabai's conscience clamoured within her. The Voice of the Lord became louder and louder. She started for the Central Provinces in the Autumn of 1896, along with a Missionary lady, Mrs. Drynan, from Rajputana, who travelled part of the way with her to save some children from the famine. Soonderbai Powar was left in charge of the Sharada Sadan.

Ramabai gives a clear picture of her famine work from a letter written in January 1897. Their first destination was Sohagpur. Here they began work at once. No orphan child could be rescued without Government permission. They went to the Doctor of the Hospital, and the Tahsildar in charge of the Poor

[16] *A Testimony*, p. 24
[17] *The Widows' Friend*, pp. 129, 130

Home; but could find no officials present. Right in front of the Hospital, however, Ramabai found three little famished skeleton-like forms, which horrified her.

They were orphans; a girl of seven and her two younger brothers of five and three. Only a rag covered the girl, in spite of the cold. The boys were entirely naked. They had suffered intensely and were crying for food. They were also suffering from sore eyes and had fallen and hurt themselves. Who would help these tragedy children? Ramabai was in an agony of despair.

The Poor House proved to be no shelter. The starved victims were sitting about in a grove and some were lying down. Many were naked. The diseased were mingled with the healthy but hungry. Good and bad and young and old were jumbled together. The only food provided was dry flour adulterated with earth and some salt. The children who could not cook had to wait for the favour of those who could. There was much unkindness. Parents ate and gave nothing to their children. Some parents sold their children for a mere pittance of grain or money. Even the pigs roaming around were not as dirty as the poor victims who were mere skin and bone. They were also filthy and covered with sores.

According to Ramabai the devil also was at work in the poor houses and camps. Widows, waylaid girls and women carried on a wholesale trade. Two sisters of twelve and fourteen sought Ramabai's protection and begged to be kept pure. Ramabai writes: "The sight of the pitiable condition of these poor orphan girls brought to my memory that state which I was in some twenty-two years ago. I bless and thank God for not having allowed us to go to Relief Camps in the days of our need. My sister, a fine young woman of 25, and myself, a girl of 18, would have easily fallen into the cruel hands of the wicked people of such places. There are not many girls who will resist the devil in the face of starvation and death."[18]

As the women and girls were rescued, they were sent to the Sharada Sadan and Soonderbai Powar rehabilitated them. They had to be cleaned and many had to have their heads shaved to rid them of vermin. The girls of the Sadan, however worked hard to help the victims. Helen Dyer says she saw them three months later, "encamped under the trees in a pleasant country

[18] *The Widows' Friend,* p. 135

district a few miles out of Poona. They looked a promising party of young people. They were beginning to put on flesh."[19]

Ramabai returned to Poona after she had rescued sixty women and wrote about her own famine experiences, emphasizing the great danger of moral degradation and appealing for help.

The hearts of Missionaries were touched all over the country. A supplement was printed of the *Bombay Guardian,* a Christian Weekly edited by Mr. Dyer, Helen Dyer's husband. Edition after edition were printed and aroused much sympathy. A *Bombay Guardian* famine fund was opened and orphanages were started in a number of Missions all over India.

"Ramabai's letter was like the Disciples' beckoning to their partners who were in the other ship. All wanted to have a hand in the good work of saving the children. Its influence will go on to all eternity!"[20]

4

As Ramabai's astounding famine work drew more and more attention, her ill-wishers suggested that since she was now unable to gather high class widows around her, she was trying to fill her school with famine victims. But the Sharada Sadan was by no means bereft of high caste widows. Ramabai's interest in the famine was due to pure kind-heartedness and love for the suffering, and not because she wished to fill her rooms with famine cases for want of the higher class. As Mr. D. G. Vaidya says: "Ramabai had a very tender heart; she was deeply moved by others' sorrows. She could not bear to sit at home in comfort and plenty while thousands were starving."

In May 1897, Ramabai wrote a second letter referring to the famine. She had started on another tour of rescue to Central India. Famine was still raging in these parts. Now, she had only a few rupees with her, but she felt no qualms, for God had given her all the money she needed for the first journey. He would provide her for the second also. Ramabai writes: "money was poured into the treasury, the blessings of the Lord came down like a shower, and His promise, as recorded in Psalm LXXXI, 10, which He gave me has been literally fulfilled."[21]

[19] Helen S. Dyer, *Pandita Ramabai,* p. 58
[20] *Ibid.,* p. 59
[21] *The Widows' Friend,* p. 136

Ramabai's second journey was a help to countless souls. In fact, for the next four years she was steeped in famine work.

The Pandita and her helpers travelled by bullock carts day and night in the famine area, stopping only for an hour or so by the roadside or in the jungle for rest and refreshment. One can hardly realize now the great risks this brave woman took seven decades ago. The land was covered with dacoits and wild animals, but nothing seemed to daunt Ramabai. Once when the bullock cart had stopped to rest at night, Ramabai tells us of a wolf which was "prowling around that place in search of food, and came very near one of our carts as we were getting ready to go away. Just at this time two little girls, about eight or nine years of age, came near us. We found out from them that they had no one to take care of them. Their parents had died, and the two, one of them a Brahmin and the other a Chamar girl, were wandering in search of food. I asked them if they would come with me, and they gladly consented. It was great joy to feed these hungry little ones, and to rescue them from death as it were, for the hungry wolf would have killed them that night had not the merciful heavenly Father guided our footsteps to that place."[22]

After two nights of travel in bullock carts, Ramabai's party arrived at the River Herna, about twenty-three miles from Jubbalpore. Imagine Ramabai and her helpers, and those she had rescued, descending and refreshing themselves by the river. They washed and ate a cold meal and drank the clear water. One of the girls, at this time, felt she could do better by wandering into the fields and seeking green grain. She tried to tempt others to follow her; but Ramabai caught the culprits and forced them to return the stolen grain to the owner of the field. Ramabai gave the little thieves a lecture on honesty; but the ring-leader disappeared and had to be brought back by the bullock cart driver; and Ramabai explained to her that there was no need for her to go with Ramabai if she did not wish to do so. "I told her," says Ramabai, "that she need not have run away in that manner, and that I was perfectly willing she should go if she did not care to remain with us, and I was not willing to take her back in our family, as she had not shown herself worthy of such a privilege. She pretended to cry and repent, but I could see from her face that it was not true."[23] Ramabai therefore, asked the girl to go

[22] *The Widows' Friend,* pp. 136, 137
[23] *The Widows' Friend,* pp. 138, 139

away if she so wished. And now comes one of Ramabai's remarkable evidences of the profound love she bore to all human beings—a love which overflowed with generosity and kindness. At five o'clock in the evening, the carts were loaded and the party was ready for the night journey. There were seven bullock carts in all, and Ramabai's was the last one so that she could look out of the back and see the scenery. Only those who have travelled in bullock carts can understand the jolting and tiresomeness of the slow journey over the miles. But the "little offender" said she had made a mistake and would like to go with Ramabai; but thinking that she was not sincere, Ramabai refused her, and the little girl, now no doubt really frightened to be left alone said she would follow on foot. Ramabai wishing to test her ordered the carts to move on and would not allow her to climb in. The girl sat down and looked at the procession of receding carts and a few people gathered around her and then left her alone. Ramabai almost bursts into poetry as she describes this scene: "I had seemed very cold and indifferent, and perhaps the poor girl thought that I did not love her, and did not care to come to such a loveless person. It was getting dark, the sky was clouded, and looked as though it was going to rain. The dark mountain range, and the river bank now deserted by people, formed the background of that living picture of misery and helplessness. The world seemed very wide, and on it was thrown one little girl, friendless, homeless, and helpless. The picture is everlastingly engraved on my heart. I shall never forget the lonely figure, sitting there on the elevated ground under the dark sky. The sad picture was too much for me. I ordered the driver to stop the cart, for I could not move an inch from that place.

"My heart burnt within me and I thought of the sublime love of the dear Heavenly Father for me. How often I have rebelled against Him and gone my own way, and how many countless times He has called me back and taken me to Himself."[24] Ramabai sat still in her cart and took in the whole scene, and then she motioned to the little girl to go to her. Ramabai writes: "At once she bounded and raced towards me, looking as though a new life had been put into her dead soul. I felt very happy to see her face brightened with hope, and it was such a relief to me to take her back into my family. This girl, Girija, a child of the mountain—for this is the meaning of her name—is a well-behaved child,

[24] *The Widows' Friend,* pp. 138, 139

and is now getting to be civilised, and learns her lessons well."[25]

Very soon after Ramabai started on this second famine journey, she was called back to Poona due to the outbreak of bubonic plague in 1896 which was then raging in an epidemic form in Western India. Buildings had been constructed to house the famine victims in the compound of Sharada Sadan. But when plague broke out the Municipal authorities did not wish to undertake the extra responsibility of so many girls living in an epidemic area. They sent an order that the girls should be removed from Poona within 48 hours. It was now that Ramabai's foresight in buying the farm was rewarded. The girls were sent to the plot of hundred acres which Ramabai had bought outside Poona. Though a well had been dug there was not a drop in it, for drought and near famine conditions existed in and around Kedgaon where the farm was situated. But money came in soon and three wells were dug, two of them supplied with "living springs of water." Many poor families were employed to work on the land and the famine victims were housed as far as possible in tents which Ramabai hired or in speedily constructed sheds. There was not even a tree for the trees Ramabai had planted earlier had not yet grown. The land was therefore, steeped in the sun. Sunstroke and illness soon broke out, for the sheds were wholly inadequate for human habitation. Snakes crawled on the girls' bodies at night and scorpions and reptiles crept into every nook and corner. But God protected the girls and no real harm came to them.

Thus started the renowned institution now known as the Mukti Mission which is still so outstanding a place of non-denominational Christian refuge.

All the inmates greatly thanked God for the help He had given them. Ramabai in a letter, gives thanks to His mercies and like the gallant creative builder that she was she exercised all her energies and driving power in establishing a paradise out of a wilderness. She started Mukti without funds and the money began to seep in. It is a strange coincidence that she built the institution Mukti on the most rocky portion of the land, thus automatically carrying out Christ's desire to build his Church on a rock. Ramabai continues her letter of March 1899: "He has not let us starve, nor allowed us to get into debt. All bills in connection with Mukti School have been paid upto date, and the dormi-

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 140

tories and the industrial school house have been completed. We are sure God is not forgetting our needs. Sometimes we did not have money in hand to order rice and wheat, but the girls have subsisted upon scanty meals of coarse grain without murmuring."[26] Thus did Ramabai's work develop.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 142

II

The Mukti Mission

1

FROM a mere undeveloped plot of jungle land, rocky and reptile ridden, Ramabai gradually established Mukti Sadan until it became a refuge for hundreds of girls. At first shelters made of matting were constructed and then pukka buildings gradually began to take shape. Soon a little village developed where previously there had been waste land. The hand of God was moving, and money poured in from all sides for "there is a good deal of money in the world". $85,000 found its way to Ramabai in 1897, received from different parts of the world in answer to prayer. Ramabai comments: "Money was poured into the treasury, the blessings of the Lord came down like a shower, and His promise, 'open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it!' has been fulfilled."

It is characteristic that Ramabai never begged. She published a magazine called Mukti Prayer Bell which gave her much publicity. Articles were also written about Ramabai and her work in English and American papers, and the news and reports of the work carried on in Poona deeply stirred the hearts of kind-hearted people abroad. Ramabai fasted, prayed and trusted in God. The Lord was her shepherd. His rod and His staff comforted her. He anointed her head with oil and her cup ran over.

A strange story is told as to how Ramabai often received money when she least expected it. Mukti was indeed a faith mission. When she was on her journey to rescue girls the second time from famine she only possessed a few rupees. She had to change trains at Bhusawal Junction, and some inner voice advised her to miss her connection and to catch a later train at night, though this would mean a much longer wait. But the inner voice persisted, and Ramabai waited, sitting on the platform praying, planning and meditating. The train from Bombay stopped at the station before going on to Nagpur, and suddenly, an English friend, Miss Helen Richardson, stepped out and ran to Ramabai placing some notes in her hand. Miss Richardson had been thinking of Ramabai in the train, and the sudden impulse made her decide to send Ramabai some money. Then she saw Ramabai, to her great surprise, sitting on the platform, and decided to give it to her in person. The money was enough to meet Ramabai's needs for her journey, and it enabled her to bring back a second contingent of girls rescued from the famine area.

The hundred acres of land at Kedgaon now developed into a prosperous settlement and was called Mukti Sadan or House of Salvation. "It may have been called the House of Incessant Labour, for Ramabai and her helpers had little rest at first—or ever, for that matter! There were dormitories, workrooms, school rooms and a Church to be built, Bible and Primary classes to be carried on; industries to be organised", besides the tremendous daily chores in order to make it possible for such a vast number to live—the grinding of corn and flour, cooking, washing, and never-ending cleaning; and through it all, endless nursing, for recovery from starvation and its attendant nursing is very slow. Many of Ramabai's girls, during those "terrible months of hunger and suffering before their rescue, had got into slack dirty ways—even though they were all high castes—which took months of patient and persistent oversight to mend. There were nauseous things to deal with and to do."[1]

No matter how arduous her duties, Ramabai never neglected the spiritual development of the girls. There were many who had been forced to evil ways before they had been rescued, and Ramabai did not wish to mingle them too freely with those who were pure and innocent. She felt a separate house was badly needed. Thus developed a Home for fallen women beside the

[1] *The Triumph of an Indian Widow,* p. 50

House of Salvation, which was called Kripa Sadan. Whichever house they belonged to Ramabai treated each girl as an important human entity. She remembered the history of every girl, how she had found them, some half dead, others crawling along the roadside. The girls also reciprocated Ramabai's individual attention and adored her.

At times the work on the buildings had to be stopped and trust placed in God to receive more money and the non-Christian workmen soon began to realize that there was a living God who heard prayers and never deserted His people.

Pandita Ramabai gathered 600 girls from the famine areas in the Central Provinces. Of these she kept 300 and passed the others on to other Missions. Ramabai's activities now began to be confined more and more to her own circle, though she never shut out the outside world. Here, in this farm, now so miraculously turned into a refuge for hundreds, she felt she was wanted and loved. The outside world, especially her own people, the reactionary Hindus and even some reformers had been quite cruel to her. They had left her no choice but to withdraw; but they had not been able to defeat her. On the contrary, Ramabai grew in strength, and though she was mostly busy with her own Mission, she was in constant touch with the people and still delivered public lectures. One day she went to Poona to address some students and immediately discovered that the audience was electrically charged against her. She sensed a deep antagonism against her because she condemned the evil practices of the times; but Ramabai continued her lecture fearlessly. Soon a veritable storm began to brew. "Then the Pandita, holding up her Marathi Bible, claimed to read from its pages the real cause of all this moral degradation and helplessness, even their departing from the living God and his service. It was a striking interlude amid the tension of feeling, when she requested one of them to bring down the lamp, so that she might see to read, and one quickly obeyed. Then she wound up by telling them that their opinion of her action, of their threats of doing her physical injury were alike undeserved by her. They might be slaves, but *she* was free: and how? Because the truth had made her so. Her audience, with excitement hardly suppressed, heard her quietly to the end, and suffered her to go unmolested."[2]

[2] *Sunday at Home*—May 1896, quoted in the Quarterly paper of the C. S. M. V. Poona

This experience made Ramabai feel she was no longer really wanted by the orthodox world. She had her work to accomplish, and perhaps she felt she should no longer throw away her pearls. She remarks: "There is no room left for murmuring." The inner voice commanded her to keep to the activities of her Homes and she says: "Whenever I heed and obey the Lord's voice with all my heart, I am very happy and everything goes right."[3]

2

Ramabai had arranged with the American Association to finance her Home from 1889 to 1898, and now the ten years undertaking had come to an end. She had not only started and run the Sharada Sadan despite many diversities but she had inaugurated an immense project, the Mukti Sadan. Although by now she was living more and more in faith, and leaving it to God to finance her, she had to make sure that the main source of her income, obtained purely through the mercy of truth, was still available. Ramabai also wished to make her Homes as self-supporting as possible and this object she achieved in Mukti as will be seen later; but she could not manage entirely without help.

In the meantime some internal changes had to be made. Ramabai's friend, Minnie Abrams was sent on October 15, 1897, to Mukti while Ramabai went on her second famine tour. Also, in that month she asked Rev. W. W. Bruere, of the Methodist Episcopal Mission of America, to come from Poona to conduct evangelical services, and seventy-three girls were baptized at the close of these services, and coincide with services held by Miss Abrams at Kedgaon. At about this time Mr. Gangadharpant Gadre, Ramabai's clerk of Brahmin extraction, was also baptized. He had long been inspired by Christianity; but had not confessed Christianity openly. On September 30, 1897, he went to Dhond Junction to see Ramabai off to Allahabad, and Miss Bruce, a missionary from Satara, was there. She asked Mr. Gadre: "When are you going to decide for Christ?" And she left in one train as Pandita Ramabai puffed out of the station in another. Mr. Gadre stayed at the junction, waiting for a return train to Kedgaon and all at once he began to feel that he would like to become a Christian. He sent a telegram to Ramabai as soon as he reached Kedgaon. He and his children were among those to be baptized

[3] Macnicol, *Pandita Ramabai,* p. 105

at the first Baptismal party. Ramabai was greatly delighted at his conversion. Mr. Gadre continued till his death to be Ramabai's right hand and his daughter Krishnabai even took over charge after Ramabai's death, for some time.

On November 6, 1897, seventeen cart loads of converts travelled to the Bhima river, six miles away. It was this very river that Ramabai had crossed as a girl. She says of her childhood episode: "On a certain auspicious day, when the stars were favourable, we set out from Poona on our way to the sacred city. We had a long and tiresome journey in the bullock carts and reached Pandharpur after some days. At the site of the city we were told by our parents that we must prostrate ourselves and show our respect for the sacred city."[4] Ramabai now travelled to the same river over a quarter of a century later. This time, she did not prostrate herself; but those aspiring to Christianity were immersed in the river. They sang all the way as their carts jogged along. A tent was pitched on the bank of the river which served as a dressing room. A short service was held by the Rev. W. W. Bruere, after which the baptism took place. One of the school mistresses on the shore called out the names of those who were to be baptized. It was very interesting to hear each one repeat with the minister: 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'

To those non-Christians who must have watched this strange ceremony, the fanatical fervour of the Christians must have appeared as mere superstition or evidence of a zeal which they could not understand, just as Ramabai, years earlier, even though she was a Hindu at the time, could not understand the custom of people prostrating themselves before the river. That she travelled to this particular river with her converts may signify the fact that "its sacred waters are associated in Marathi religious poetry with many a tale of Vaishnavite rapture."[5] Ramabai also must have been strangely attracted towards this river because of the old superstitious associations she had in connection with the river, which must have instinctively made her feel that its waters were the most suitable for Christian baptism. Later she had a tank built in Mukti for baptismal purposes when immersion was done according to the custom of the American Baptists.

Ramabai was now filled with as much joy as she was with be-

[4] *India's Christian Pilgrim,* p. 30
[5] Macnicol, *Pandita Ramabai,* p. 101

wilderment twenty years earlier. She longed to attend the next camp at Lanauli, but as she could not wait, she decided to hold the next meeting in Mukti itself. In December 1897, invitations were sent out to Indian Christians, and the large barn was used and the compound was converted into a camping ground of grass huts. Ramabai now decided to dedicate her new property to the Lord and therefore called the Institution Mukti or Salvation or Liberation from the words: "Thou shalt call thy walls salvation, and thy gates praise."[6] (Isaiah LX, 18) The name of the first girl who entered the new Home was Mukti just as the Sharada Sadan was named after Sharada, the first girl who was to be admitted as a day scholar. The meaning of the word Mukti is admirably explained by Rabindranath Tagore. Perhaps Ramabai, being so profound a Sanskrit scholar was aware of this inner significance when she chose the name. Tagore says: "In all appearances our world is a closed world of hard facts; it is like a seed within its cover. But within this enclosure is working our silent cry of life for *Mukti,* even when its possibility is darkly silent. When some huge overgrown temptation tramples into stillness this living aspiration, then does civilisation die like a seed that has lost its urging for germination. And this *Mukti* is in the truth that dwells in the ideal man."[7]

The Christmas of 1897 was a feast of great rejoicing. Ramabai told the girls her story of her faith in God and His help in establishing the Institution. The Sunday after Christmas was marked for organizing the Mukti Church by Miss Lily Abrams, and Rev. W. W. Bruere, and some older women were appointed as officers. A Sunday School was next established and Mukti Mission became a centre of spiritual Christian work. Now Ramabai's one great aim was to evangelize, and she concentrated her efforts on the surrounding country. She needed women to travel into the villages for this purpose, and started training some of them as Bible women. Since that time, hundreds of women were trained and sent out to spread the story of Jesus.

At last, in March 1898, the first ten years of Ramabai's work were completed and she decided to re-visit America and re-establish her contacts there.

[6] *Isaiah,* LX, 18

[7] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man,* The Hibert Lectures for 1930. George Allen and Unwin, p. 73

3

Miss Minnie Abrams was now put in charge of Mukti Sadan and Miss Soonderbai Powar remained head of Sharada Sadan in Poona which still existed. As the plague had now subsided, the younger children were housed and taught there. Ramabai felt sure that her Homes were built on foundations of rock and would be well looked after in her absence. She sailed for America in January 1898. So far Ramabai had received $91,500 from the Ramabai Association, and she had helped five hundred widows, deserted wives and destitute girls. She also had acquired property worth $60,000. The first ten years now being over, the Ramabai Association transferred the whole property to its founder—such was the trust placed in her. Ramabai, however, was not happy at this decision and determined to form a new Association and transfer the property to its name.

The old idea of running the Institution on a secular religiously neutral basis was now changed. The new Ramabai Association allowed conversions to take place freely though all those who embraced Christianity did so voluntarily. Hindu immates were allowed to practise their own faith though no idol worship was allowed.

The day on which Ramabai was to sail was a sad one for the girls. Helen Dyer was present at the time and says: "This was indeed a day of farewell. The grief shown by the rescued women and girls at the close of the afternoon meetings, which had been held at the barn, was a touching one. As Pandita's train did not leave until midnight, the younger girls retired, and more than a hundred of the older girls and women, with the teachers, sat in the bright moonlight in the cool air of that pleasant January evening.

"As the party travelled towards the station, according to Miss Dyer, it resembled a swarm of ants carrying a cherished trophy along the trail. There were girls in front of Ramabai, behind her, and at each side, pressing to get as near her as they could."[8] The year before Ramabai had sent three of her brighter girls to America and eighteen years earlier, her daughter Manorama had gone to England. On the way to America Manorama joined her mother. Ramabai also took two more girls with her from Poona.

Ramabai's object in going to America was to give a full re-

[8] *India's Christian Pilgrim,* pp. 66

port of her ten years work in India and to express a hope that her future work would also receive support. Ramabai was away from India altogether for seven months, but her absence was greatly felt in her home and she never again ventured abroad.

Ramabai uttered the following words at the Annual Meeting of the Association in America in 1898: "God gave me this morning a name for it if you will adopt it. That is the faith, hope and love association for the emancipation of the high caste child-widows of India. Do not concentrate your interest in one person for that person will die and be gone, and many have gone before, but this association must not die. It must be perpetually alive, and how will it live but through faith, hope and love?" She had been so far sanctioned $5,000 annually but had been sent $6,000. Now she wanted $20,000 a year, for, said Ramabai: "I believe if we had not a single cent in hand God would shower from Heaven the funds we want. Last year God sent $30,000. He is rich today and He will send us $20,000, not for one year, or two, but as long as India and its needs exist. We are not to take thought for the morrow. We are only to do this work faithfully. 'Seek ye, first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.' "[9]

Her lecture in Channing Hall, Boston, on March 16th, 1898, attracted a large gathering. She said she had incurred a great debt, not of money but of gratitude to her American friends.

During this visit, Ramabai met Mr. and Mrs. Albert Norton, who had already been to India. She travelled with them in Rochester, New York and also met Mrs. Baker who was at the time running a training home for girls. Ramabai's wish to add a rescue home to her other activities was substantiated by Mrs. Baker, and they both prayed over the idea; but the lack of a reliable Superintendent was felt by Ramabai. While praying, Mrs. Baker thought of Miss Edmonds, who was then working in a Rescue Home in North India, and wrote to her. Miss Edmonds eventually consented to join Ramabai. After Ramabai's return to India she started Kripa Sadan with Miss Edmonds' help in 1898.

Ramabai persuaded the Nortons to return, which they did a few months later than her. Ramabai herself attended the Keswick Conference in England on her way back home. Here she was given five minutes in which to speak and she pleaded at the Convention for prayers to be said for 100,000 men and women among

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 69

the Indian Christians to preach the Gospel of Christ among their own community.

On the way home, Ramabai said of the Keswick Convention: "While there I received much blessing, and was greatly refreshed in my spirit. My heart was filled with joy to see nearly 4,000 people seeking and finding the deep things of God. At that time the Lord led me to ask those present to pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all Indian Christians."[10]

On Ramabai's return to India she set to work with her new plans. All her friends from America joined her in Kedgaon, including Mr. and Mrs. Norton, and Mrs. Baker. Miss Edmonds was welcomed from North India. Kripa Sadan was started and six girls who had been "sinned against" were installed in it. These soon increased to twenty and a special building was planned to be set aside on a 22 acre plot purchased earlier by Ramabai. This plot had been bought because Ramabai wished to prevent a liquor dealer from establishing himself there. It was on the opposite side of the road to Mukti. A well was soon dug and the building started.

Mrs. Baker now felt that her mission to India had been accomplished and she returned to America. Before she left, Ramabai felt that the foundation stone for Kripa Sadan should be laid, and one evening Mr. Norton and Mrs. Baker laid the stone on the site where Kripa Sadan was to be built. A hundred workmen were present at the time and Ramabai spoke like one inspired. She described the sad condition of the girls to be housed and said she had no money but that she had "a mighty God back of it all." Thus was established Kripa Sadan. Mrs. Baker promised to help to find the money when she returned to America. Three years later there were 300 inmates in the Home. Miss Edmonds worked for a year and then left to establish another similar Home in another part of India. Mrs. Baker died in 1914 but the interest she had created in the Kripa Sadan continued long after she passed away.

When Ramabai was in America for the second time she had suffered a great deal due to her strict dietary habits, and the changing climate. She had travelled from Maine to California, giving addresses about her work and organizing Circles of help for the New Association. Ramabai never complained about her hardships in America and was always charmingly courteous, but

[10] Helen S. Dyer, *Pandita Ramabai,* p. 66

those who knew her had said that she often went without sufficient food, for at times she could touch nothing at a meal except potatoes. Her friends tried to accommodate her with a suitable diet but there were amusing incidents.

Once, a "gracious" hostess had arranged a luncheon in Ramabai's honour and many distinguished ladies were present. But the hostess did not know that Ramabai was a vegetarian, and was horrified when her guest of honour could not touch any of the courses which were offered to her, most of them being non-vegetarian. The embarrassed hostess then felt that Ramabai would at least enjoy her dessert; but even this was denied her, as the pudding had been prepared with lard. "Upon Ramabai's return to Mukti she was describing to her girls some of the queer manners and customs of the United States. Unconscious of the fact that among her listeners was an American lady, whose sense of humour made her delight in the situation, Ramabai mentioned her occasional hunger when seated at tables loaded with plenty, and then told of her particular feast just referred to. She said that the hostess, smiling happily, urged her to partake of the dessert, a delicately browned cake heaped with rosy strawberries and covered with mounds of whipped cream! Beautiful to look at and fragrant! Ramabai was about to enjoy it when in a curious mood, she inquired how it was made, and this is her report: 'Fancy dear girls, what they had done! Over those berries they had put a cake made with pig oil.' "[11]

Miss Clementina Butler, who was later Chairman of the Executive Committee, American Ramabai Association, says that Ramabai was her guest in America, and one day, Miss Butler prepared a chicken curry for her, which Ramabai could not eat. Also, she did not approve of the bottled curry powder. Miss Butler says that they had a good laugh over it and Ramabai was invited to the kitchen to cook herself. "I watched her as she daintily clarified the butter till it resembled the ghee used in India, to which she then added the spices and lastly the peppers. Let us hope that this one meal at least was as she desired it."

On September 24, 1898, Mukti was dedicated to the service of God with the words from Isaiah IX, 18 over the gate: "PRAISE THE LORD."

11 *Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati,* p. 56

4

Despite Ramabai's absorption in her Institutions she continued to take a lively interest in the welfare of the people of Poona. She did outstanding service during the plague epidemic and complained that Government arrangements for prevention and even treatment, especially to women, was anything but satisfactory. She made bold statements criticizing the authorities and objected to the manner in which women were treated by "male" doctors. She felt that women should have been at least screened and protected while being examined as it would not have been possible to provide so many women doctors to treat them. She openly criticized the Governor of Bombay because he had protested about Ramabai's complaint regarding the shameful manner in which one of her girls had been treated in the Poona Hospital. She felt that the Governor should have consulted her before blaming her and that the Superintendent of the Plague Hospital would never have acknowledged the truth. She thought that Lord Sandhurst should never have declared her statements as "grossly inaccurate" without even asking her to prove them. Ramabai, in her bold statement against the inadequate arrangements made to combat the plague epidemic, found much ill-favour in the eyes of the Bombay Government. In fact, due to her anti-Government criticism she came very near being arrested, and yet this very woman was awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal in 1919.

An interesting event occurred at this time in connection with the outbreak of bubonic plague. Ramabai was a great friend of that patriot and social reformer, Gopal Krishna Gokhale. In 1896, a Royal Commission was appointed, presided over by Lord Welby to enquire into the financial relationship of India and England, and India was invited to send representatives to London to lay their views before the Commission, which did not visit India. The Deccan Sabha accepted this invitation and Gokhale was asked to be a representative; he was only thirty-one years old at the time. He studied hard and though he was already a renowned economist, he was examined by his senior and mentor, Ranade, and passed as suitable before he sailed for England. With him went Mr. (later Sir) D. E. Wacha. Gokhale gave evidence on economic problems, expenditure of the army, Indianization of the services and education. He was the country's spokesman. He showed great powers of analysis and criticism. In the

meantime the plague epidemic had taken a terrible toll of the people in India.

"When the plague reached Poona, certain courses of action were initiated by the authorities which led to great popular discontent. Stringent regulations were put into force with regard to segregation, disinfection of houses, compulsory inspection of infected localities,"[12] etc. And this important work was allotted to British troops. The soldiers did not understand popular prejudices or show any sympathy to the people. It was these soldiers that Ramabai criticized. Letters were immediately written to Gokhale in England by responsible citizens of Poona including Ramabai relating to the horrors happening in Poona. Gokhale took the matter up without waiting for concrete proof. The resentment in Poona rose to such a pitch that two European officials were murdered while returning from Government House one night. A tumultuous sensation was caused in England and drastic revenge was urged.

" 'A section of the Brahmin community', the late Mr. Rand stated, 'including some of the most influential men of the city, were disinclined to support any measures that emanated from an official source, and were more likely than not to work against any operations that might be set on foot by the Government to deal with the emergency.' The justice of this remark was fully amplified. Malicious rumours were set afloat and disloyal and inflammatory articles appeared in the local vernacular press. The excitement thus fomented, culminated in the dual murder of Mr. Rand and Lieut. Ayerst just at the time that the former of these officers had succeeded in subduing the epidemic."[13]

Gokhale tried to counteract the reaction by spreading the news he had heard of British troops behaving in a high-handed manner in Poona; but the Government of Bombay took up the question and insisted that an enquiry be made into the accusation which Gokhale's friends had spread. Gokhale's complaints against the British troops in India, it was alleged, were malicious and false. Gokhale returned to India when matters were in this state, and to his great surprise he found that his friends, who had been so vehement in condemning the British troops' behaviour, now no longer wished to substantiate their complaints. At Aden, his so-

[12] John S. Hoyland, *Gopal Krishna Gokhale,* pp. 44, 45

[13] Extracts from *The Plague in India,* 1896, 1897, 1898, Mr. R. Nathan, I.C.S., Home Department, Government of India, Simla

called friends from Poona wrote beseeching him not to betray their identities. "Gokhale had already decided to bear the whole responsibility for the affair. When he reached Poona he found himself unable to obtain the support of witnesses to the statements which he had made on his friends' authority in England. These friends, 'with the exception' of Pandita Ramabai failed him in what he called 'his dark hour of trial'.[14] Consequently, he decided that the only honourable thing that he could do under the circumstances was to submit a full and unconditional apology to Government. In this decision Mr. Ranade and other friends upon whom he relied strongly supported him."[15] Gokhale was respected for the gesture he made in taking all the blame and apologizing; but the extremists greeted his noble retraction with a "chorus of execration and insult". One can imagine Ramabai, in all this turmoil, sticking fast to her first accusations and being the only one to be loyal and trustworthy while everyone else, so vehement one moment, shrank with fear and only left a woman and the noble-hearted Gokhale to stand up to the furore. Ramabai herself was being blamed at the time by the Government for the complaints she had made and her one small voice backing Gokhale's complaints made in England was not enough to exonerate the great Indian leader, forcing him finally to apologize.

Ramabai had previously gone with one of her girls to the Plague Hospital. This girl was said to have been suffering from fever when all the girls, under Municipal orders, were being transferred from Poona Sharada Sadan to Kedgaon in 1896. The authorities examined the girls at an intermediate station and insisted on the girl with fever, before ascertaining whether she had plague or not, being taken immediately to the Plague hospital. Ramabai went with her and found conditions very bad. She also later complained of the girl being misused and living with one of the ward boys.

During this epidemic, i.e. in May 1897, Ramabai seems to have had a severe attack of sore eyes, and went to a hospital in Poona. The surgeon was rather concerned and insisted on Ramabai taking good care of them. She therefore asked for a separate room which did not receive the full glare of the light and where she could rest her eyes. To her horror, she was put into a room which had been occupied by plague patients. Ramabai also found

[14] Natarajan, *G. K. Gokhale, the Man and His Message*, p. 2
[15] *Gopal Krishna Gokhale*, p. 46

the common bathroom in a filthy condition and complained bitterly against the state of affairs in the hospital. Her experiences during the plague epidemic were most unfortunate; but she never lost faith and her courage in facing the consequences of uttering the truth never failed her.

Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak was very pleased with Ramabai for protesting against the authorities regarding the plague. He himself was a victim of the British Raj! "He was arrested and tried before the High Court of Bombay on a charge of sedition under Section 124 of the Indian Penal Code. He was found guilty and sentenced to eighteen months' rigorous imprisonment."[16] This was for an article published in the "Kesari" which was said to be "particularly notorious by reason of the inflammatory nature" of the articles published therein.

5

In the meantime, Ramabai's three Homes continued to grow in strength. Ramabai writes: "Eighty-five of the old and new girls had found work in their own mother institution, and sixty-five of the old girls are either married or earning their living as teachers and workers in different places. We had a hundred requests from missionaries and superintendents of schools to give them trained teachers, Bible women and matrons. I have had quite as many, perhaps, more requests from young men to give them educated wives. It will not be difficult to find places and comfortable homes for all of these younger girls when the proper time comes."[17]

Ramabai knew that each girl had to become a potential worker and be capable of an independent economic existence, and various forms of work were planned by her facile brain. Her executive value now proved invaluable. She says that over two hundred girls promised to be good school teachers because of their "native" intelligence. Sixty were learning to be cooks and forty were mastering the weaver's trade, and over fifty could sew their own garments. But above all, Ramabai wished to train Bible women. She remarks: "I hope there will be eventually a trained band of Bible women who will take the Gospel to their sisters in their own homes. Some girls have already begun to go about in the

[16] *The Plague in India*: 1896, 1897, 1898
[17] *India's Christian Pilgrim*, p. 73

villages around here. They are working as zenana Bible women and Sunday School teachers in their spare time."[18]

From 1899 to 1900 another great famine broke out—one of the most serious India had experienced up till that time in Western India. As Kedgaon and Poona were in the middle of the famine area, victims came by the hundreds to the Mukti Mission. Soon there were 1,350 women and children for Ramabai to help and she started having new buildings constructed while wells were dug and new industries inaugurated.

But the wells in Mukti Mission began to dry up due to intense drought, and the fruit trees began to wither. The cows yielded little milk and even the babies began to be deprived of their nourishment. Ramabai's anxiety now grew. She began to pray for every individual by name. There is a picture of Ramabai's Bible in the Prayer Bell of January-February, 1957, with the following inscription below: "Carefully preserved in Ramabai's own room is her Bible here pictured. Notice the long list of names pasted therein for prayer. Whenever there is any blank space in her Bible at the close of a Book, Ramabai posted names of the women and children composing the Mukti family, then numbering two thousand, for whom she prayed individually."

Though the Gujarat Famine brought with it great horror, the liberality of the people was, according to Lord Curzon, "notable". The Government spent $32,000,000 on food alone. Contributions flowed in from abroad and all the missions gathered thousands of orphans. Ramabai sent out twenty women to help in the famine among whom eight were themselves famine victims rescued from the Central Provinces. The women and children pouring into Mukti were all admitted, and according to Ramabai some seemed "to have lost their minds, and indeed the care of this overwhelming multitude was staggering." Gradually order was restored out of chaos. Ramabai was untiring in her zeal. She "was everywhere, directing and helping, finding out malingerers, prodding on laggers, encouraging and teaching the diligent, and doing many things with her own hands. Anywhere on these busy hundred acres might be seen the indomitable little generalissimo in her spotless white."[19]

Ramabai's comments about the famine are interesting in her report of 1899. She says: "We have had no rain this year. The

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 74

[19] *The Triumph of an Indian Widow*, p. 54

first crops are all lost. Not only at Kedgaon, but in the whole of the Bombay Presidency people are suffering from scarcity of water. The villagers have lived for sometimes in a half-starved condition.... Our girls had scarcely any vegetables during the past six months, and, as the grains were growing dearer and dearer, we had to give up eating rice, wheat, and other nourishing things, and lived on *jivari,* the coarsest and cheapest grain we could get."[20]

One day, over 200 starving people came into the garden and beseeched Ramabai for help. She was greatly overcome and took them all into the barn to pray. All of them were impressed and "All heard the glad tidings that they have a Saviour who is deeply touched by their sorrows, and a God, the Father of us all, who is ever merciful, ready to hear and answer their prayer."[21]

Ramabai told them to go away after the Service and return the next day. They came in from every where and sixty were at once employed, though told to come later as there was no immediate work. But they sat about, despondent and starved. Ramabai could not send them away and wrote down all their names and trusted in God, "Every evening one could see the bottom of the wells, and would wonder where the water would come from for the use of so many people next day. But there came a fresh supply of water in the morning in each of the wells, and it lasted all day. So, day by day, the Lord gave us water and the bread that was needed to fill so many hungry mouths. We cannot but wonder at the loving kindness of our Father in Heaven, and praise Him every moment of our lives,"[22] writes Ramabai in her report of 1900.

A recent visitor to Mukti Mission has written about these wells: "There are thirteen wells and the water supply depends on them. Almost all go dry during the summer, with one exception which is always full. The well has a legend behind it. It was named *Dheer* or patience by Pandita Ramabai. About forty years ago there was a famine and drought. Pandita Ramabai had a vision of God that she should dig a well in a particular spot in the vast Mukti fields where water would be available. Though the workers stopped digging, saying there was no water, the Pandita felt that God would not deceive her, and the workers continued to dig and

[20] *The Widows' Friend,* pp. 152, 153
[21] *Ibid.,* p. 154
[22] *Ibid.,* p. 155

lo! there was plenty of water. The well is fifty feet deep and twenty-eight feet in diameter. The remains of the mortal flesh of Pandita Ramabai are lying in eternal rest near this well. Another well which supplies the daily needs of Mukti is called *Stuty* or Praise"[23].

A friend suggested at the time that Ramabai should stop gathering girls; but Ramabai felt she should continue until the Lord told her to stop. The friend suggested having only five or six hundred girls as resources were limited; but Ramabai says: "It is quite true that my resources are very limited, with no income of any kind. I own nothing on earth except a few clothes and my Bible. Under these circumstances, my friends may wonder and ask how I am going to support and educate all these hundreds of girls for years to come? It is not difficult to answer the questions that are arising in my own mind, and in the minds of my friends."[24]

But God's resources are limitless and Ramabai felt His promise to give her the necessary supplies. Ramabai says: "In stepping forward to take up the responsibility of rescuing many girls, and sheltering them in this school, I had to consider not only the money question but how to provide for their education—secular and spiritual—how to build houses to shelter them, how to guard and keep them from bad influences, how to care for the sick, how to train the girls morally to be strong women, how to get their food cooked, their garments prepared, how to keep their dwelling and persons clean and healthy, and a hundred and one other questions which cannot be answered here."[25]

But she went to the Father who always comforted her and made her life joyful and worth living. The girls rescued from Central India in 1896, rendered invaluable service and the Pandita writes: "It seems to me that these girls were sent here by special providence of God, to get training to care for their sisters who came here from this present famine. I am thankful that God has given me out of the Central India girls a band of at least one hundred and fifty noble young women, who are incessantly working for

[23] *Pandita Ramabai's Mukti Mission,* Shantaram Khale, in *Anuradha*, April, 1960. (A special Pandita Ramabai number was published when Mr. Shantaram Khale, at the instance of Mr. S. M. Adhav was deputed to visit Mukti and obtain first hand information)

[24] *The Widows' Friend,* p. 156

[25] *Ibid.,* p. 157

their Guzerati sisters, day and night. There are forty-five matrons, each one of whom has thirty girls under her charge. They are proving themselves real mothers to the new girls. The nurses who attend to the sick in the hospital do their work of mercy as unto the Lord."[26]

[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 157, 158

III

Life In Mukti Mission

1

KEDGAON Railway station is about 32 miles away from Poona on the railway once known as the G.I.P. (Great Indian Peninsular). Ramabai after establishing her Mukti Mission was "henceforth almost as completely confined within the boundaries of Mukti as if she had been a Mother Abbess within her convent walls. Greatly gifted as she was with powers of persuasive speech and with a magnetic presence, she no longer gave these gifts, as she had hitherto done, to India, but to the company, for the most part obscure, unlettered, who lived along with her in the Home."[1]

By 1900 Mukti was well organized. There were three age groups: from 7 to 14; 14 to 20; and the rest above 20 but under 30 years. It was necessary to have a school with many classes. Every member of the normal school, therefore, was expected to teach those who were illiterate for three hours a day, and study themselves during the other periods. There were 400 tiny tots in the Kindergarten section, and in these nursery schools the Kindergarten trainees were occupied. After Primary School the

[1] Macnicol, *Pandita Ramabai,* p. 159

girls went on to the High School if they showed an aptitude for studies. Those who did not wish to become teachers were taught trades with which they could earn a living. For this, the Mukti Industrial School was organized. There were also the gardens and fields, the oil press and dairy, the laundry and bakery, and tailoring, embroidery, lace-making departments apart from small industries which included the making of ropes, brooms, baskets, spinning of wood and cotton, thread-winding, grain-threshing, caning, manufacture of culinary utensils, dyeing and printing. Here indeed was an organization the like of which had never been heard of in India. In fact Ramabai was the pioneer in the country to sponsor the idea of combining a school education with the teaching of a trade. She had inaugurated a new form of education, that of earning while learning, a system on which today, the basic education institutions are run.

Ramabai, however, could do nothing without prayer. Only God could help her and in August 1900 she writes: "With more than 1,350 illiterate girls on hand, I was naturally led to pray to God to give me teachers for the school. So we had a few days of fasting and prayer, and waiting on God for guidance in this matter. The Lord led me to select about fifty from among the older Christian girls, and to form a Normal School Class. These girls attend the Teachers' Bible Class from nine to ten in the morning, and learn Bible History, and God's dealings with mankind from wonderful books. Besides two hours religious instruction, these Normal School girls will get an all-round education, to be fit to teach in school and kindergarten."[2] The children after passing took up the vocation which most suited their temperament.

By August 1902, a Boys' Orphanage was opened in which there were about sixty boys. Ramabai's diary, as quoted by her daughter Manorama is of great interest as regards the daily routine observed in Mukti.

"The big Church bell rang at 4 A.M. to rouse everybody from sleep. I was up. At 4.30 I walked out of my room to Chruch, where I saw the pupil teachers and some of the new girls assembled for prayer and Bible study. They sang a hymn, after which I read the Bible lesson from *Isaiah,* Chapters IV, V, VI; and II Peter 1, and explained. Prayers were offered and the meeting was closed with the Lord's Prayer. It is 6.30 A.M. The pupil teachers have gone to take their breakfast, and to prepare for school. All of us

[2] *The Widows' Friend,* p. 159

workers, too, have to take our breakfast at this time. The new girls rose at 5 A.M., their matrons helped them to put their bedding in good order, and to sweep the sleeping rooms. The girls who do the washing for the little girls, and for the invalids, have tied up their bundles of clothes, taken them up, and placed them on their heads. Water is drawn from the well in large leather buckets. Four pairs of bullocks and their men are helping to draw it. The water is poured into two tanks, whence it flows into the garden to water the fruit, plants and vegetables, etc."[3] This system of irrigation is still used in many villages, though more modern methods are replacing the old bullock power or shaddufs which were so common and so picturesque in the olden days. Ramabai's pen continues to depict a clear picture. Washing was done in the tanks in the morning and clothes dried out. The girls who took on the task of water-women returned home at about 11 A.M., took their lunch and then attended school.

The new girls emerged when the bell rang at 7 A.M. and assembled with their matrons for morning prayers. After breakfast the pupil teachers began their work. From 8 A.M. to 10 A.M. Rescue Home girls came to the school rooms to learn their lessons. They breakfasted after 10 A.M. and then went to bathe.

Arrangements were thus made in shifts for the various age groups to breakfast and bathe. In the mean time a girl was allotted to inspect sanitary conditions and supervise the sweeping. Ramabai herself walked from one end to the other, inspecting the workmen, superintending the new buildings to be constructed, trees to be planted or uprooted, hospital grounds to be checked. Countless tasks had to be planned and the master-mind of Ramabai thought of everything, even the exacting necessity of coping with the vagaries and moods of the girls and teachers, as for instance, when a head girl was in a bad temper and left her work neglected, so that Ramabai had patiently to fill the gap. A touching note by Ramabai says: "They have a little time for play. Some are walking about, some sit and enjoy themselves. Some chat in the garden and examine the flowers and leaves. They are beginning to love flowers. A year ago they used to tear up the leaves of the flower plants and break the branches of the growing trees."[4]

Night came, the girls in response to the bell dispersed to their various dormitories, spread out their bedding of a carpet, sheet

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 160, 161
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 163

and blankets. They knelt and prayed before sleeping. But not all were well disposed and some prayed even for the illness of others, but Ramabai knew they meant well. They sang, "I shall not W-A-A-ANT" and they have known what this means. Ramabai writes: "It is quiet everywhere; but in one or two places naughty girls are still talking aloud, and quarrelling with each other. They are using bad language, their names are noted down on a piece of paper; they are to be sent into what is called 'the segregation camp' the next day." In these punishment camps the girls sewed and stayed on till they stopped quarrelling. Some stayed two or three weeks if they were stubborn. But they usually repented and their tongues became clean. One can imagine the types of girls Ramabai had to deal with. There were endless problems to face—nagging troubles, but nothing was impossible for Ramabai and she overcame all her difficulties.

2

Side by side with Mukti grew Kripa Sadan, the rescue home. In addition to the innumerable tasks Ramabai undertook in Mukti, she longed to establish Kripa Sadan also on a firm footing; but here her troubles were endless. Some of the cases were psychological and needed more the consultation of a psychiatrist than a social worker and missionary; but Ramabai was given some insight and was able to understand and cope with most of the girls. One day, as Ramabai stepped out of church, after morning prayers, she was handed a note from a much loved missionary. A Marathi woman had been sent to Ramabai to be admitted into Kripa Sadan. She had been led into sin at some relief camp and had been shamefully treated. She could not return to her people. There were many similar cases where girls had been ruined through no fault of theirs. Kripa Sadan was indeed a refuge for the fallen.

Attached to the Rescue Home was the Mothers' Home, and new mothers with their babies were sent there. Many of these girls were under fifteen years of age. The story of Jesus was taught daily to them and some went out to work to tell others about their Saviour. Ramabai inspected the Kripa Sadan every day after which she went to her office. But even in this whirlpool of activity, Ramabai always found time to study and meditate on the Word of God, for after attending office an hour and a half

went by before she started work. But Ramabai's troubles were innumerable. She gives a few examples of the tasks she daily had to face. "A young teacher comes to consult me on a certain subject to be taught in the school. After giving instructions on that particular matter, I enquire of her if she has spoken rudely to a poor Christian woman worker. She answers in the affirmative; but when I tell her to apologize she leaves the office angrily, and in about half an hour she returns with the keys of the almirahs in the school, and declares in a loud voice her intention to resign her position as a teacher."[5] Immediately, two pupil teachers follow her bad example, and Ramabai's tender heart is pained to see these girls thus hurt themselves, for any teacher who "repeatedly disobeyed the rules" and was unworthy of her position was sent out and kept in a separate department. One wonders at times if Ramabai's treatment of recalcitrant girls was too harsh; but only those who have had experience of dealing with raw, unbridled cruelly-treated humanity can understand the need for discipline which Ramabai had to exercise in order to keep the girls together as one family.

Apart from the girls, there were the workmen who created endless problems. She writes of two foremen complaining about a lazy carpenter, an old servant, who says there "is no grain left for tomorrow" or matrons refusing to watch the girls. Some of the girls purposely destroyed the growing vegetables from a patch of ground; others used bad language, others quarrelled and swore. Some even cursed Ramabai and used "dirty words" about her. Blankets were needed, but how were these to be found when there was no money even for grains? There were so many small things which had to be attended to, and often it was evening before Ramabai knew that the day had come to an end. At times she felt she had accomplished little. There was so much to do, and so little time to do it in. Burdens became heavier each day. Ramabai, apart from dealing with tasks and troubles, listened to grievances and endless tales of want. Few women could have dealt with her work as she did. Even such petty troubles as a girl not having enough oil for her hair were brought to Ramabai. One wonders how Ramabai never felt frustrated, never bemoaned the fact that she gave so much and received so little in return; but in fact, did Ramabai receive little? Did not God give her always, all she wanted? Was not her life now rich and had she not receiv-

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 166

ed the peace the world could not give? One remembers her visit to Max Müller's home in Oxford, in 1883, and the state of almost nervous prostration in which she was at the time. Doubts had assailed her, her belief in God was vague, even though she had been baptized at the time; the course she had taken in becoming a Christian had seemed full of pitfalls. But now, twenty years later, she was like the steadfast star, Dhruva, the Constant Northern Star, a gleaming light inspiring hundreds to steep themselves in the everlasting glory of love and peace in Christ.

Ramabai often instead of punishing the girls, returned love for suspicion and hate. She mothered them and kissed them good night at the end of a day. She writes: "My feet were aching and my head was tired. Before going to bed, at half-past eight, I opened my Bible and began to read. The Holy Spirit brought one special verse to my mind to comfort me. 'And the Government shall be upon His shoulders.' 'What a blessing,' I said to myself, 'all this burden does not fall on me, but He bears it on His shoulders.' Then the spirit said: 'Therefore I say unto you, what things so ever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them'. So then I began to pour out my soul in prayer before my God. How many things I desired to have. Strength for spirit, soul, and body, Christlike love for girls, freedom in spirit, food, clothing, money to pay wages and to buy saris, material for building, plans for work, wisdom to meet certain difficulties. I want to know what my duty is toward the girls who have been under punishment for some days. One of them is a confirmed thief, and incorrigible. Six other girls are still unrepenting. I want to get rid of an apparently good woman whose influence is spiritually bad for the girls. I want wisdom and love to speak to her and to other such persons, that I may not cause them to stumble by my work of action. I want patience to deal with a woman whose tongue is rather sharp, and ask God to give me the wisdom out of my soul. So many girls are sick, and some in a dying condition. I want health and comfort for them. Spiritual comfort for each one of the girls and workers. At last the burden is rolled off my heart, I am joyful, and I say with the Psalmist, 'I will both lay me down in peace and sleep. For thou Lord, makest me dwell in safety.' "[6]

By 1905, Mukti Sadan and the other homes covered 225 acres. About four lakhs had been spent, and the Sharada Sadan in

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 167, 168

Poona was merged into Mukti Sadan. There were now a total of over 1,500 inmates. 1,400 of these being girls, 100 boys and 20 blind girls. The whole institution was divided into three. The Sharada Sadan, Mukti Sadan and Kripa Sadan meant respectively for Brahmin widows, Christian girls and rescued women and girls. The activities of the homes had now expanded to education, including elementary and high schools and kindergarten departments; industries comprising cloth weaving, book-keeping, printing, manual training, domestic work consisting of kitchen work, agriculture, and serving and menial work.

Those taken into the homes also included street waifs, and destitutes. Ramabai seemed to have been a natural psychologist. "If a girl does not show any aptitude for high school education, she is put to one or another of the above mentioned practical pursuits. But in every case she is given an elementary education that covers the proverbial three Rs of reading, writing and arithmetic."[7] A small girl was put into the kindergarten and gradually rose to higher classes. Work was in two divisions and the day in two long shifts, three in the forenoon and three in the afternoon. One division worked while the other studied in the morning and these changed places in the afternoon. Girls' aptitudes were studied, though every girl was taught kitchen work for at least a year. Cleaning and menial tasks were allotted to girls who were not fit mentally or physically for education and industry. They were also put to work on the farm. Many of them turned out into excellent "helps". The feeding, clothing and housing, and more than anything else, looking to the moral and religious welfare of this large army of young girls and small children, taxed all the patience with which Providence had endowed Ramabai and the friends who had come to help her. At one time, when she had to depend entirely on stipendiary assistance, the annual cost of keeping up the Institution used to be Rs. 125,000, but since several of the girls brought up in the Institution began to work when their training was completed, the annual cost was lowered to Rs. 100,000. Ramabai had 150 assistants. Of these there were 120 pupil teachers and matrons, all non-stipendiary. Only 30 assistants were paid regular monthly salaries. In addition to these Indian workers there were ten European and American women workers who had voluntarily come out to assist Ramabai without receiving a salary. Mukti was run on purely

[7] *Men and Women of India,* p. 320

Indian lines. Even pots and pans were of brass and copper, and the only western form of crockery or culinary were tea cups and kettles. Food was Indian and ample in quantity, and no difference was made between teacher and pupil in diet. Meals were served in Indian style. European and American assistants took their food with Ramabai, squatting on low stools (*pats*) and eating with their fingers. "Of course the Institution was professedly Christian, but we in India have long since passed the time when religion used to be identified with nationality. Mukti Sadan was a vast settlement of a purely philanthropic character, the main motive power of which was the all-absorbing feeling and passion for humanity. This intense passion years ago had its source in the tender and sympathetic heart of one single individual, and that individual a lonely woman, whom the world laughed at and scoffed at, nay, whom it often tried to harm and injure; but she had gone on regardless of all this bitter opposition, carrying succour and giving relief to thousands of forlorn and neglected children."[8]

Rehabilitation of girls was always sought. They were, when ready, suitably married or became nurses, school teachers, Bible women, or industrial workers. Thus the outside world was fed with women from Mukti Mission, women who always carried with them the noble traditions of Pandita Ramabai.

"The great story of Mukti is that it is an Indian enterprise, conceived in an Indian brain and carried out by an Indian faith."[9]

3

Though it is becoming more and more difficult to contact people who personally knew Pandita Ramabai, for, as the years pass, her friends are gradually joining her in eternal rest, many intimate records and reminiscences have been left by those who loved and served her. There are also a few who still survive, and who vividly remember her.

Among such friends is Mr. A. V. Shrikhande who saw Ramabai first in 1904 and was a pupil in her Boys' school which was started in 1902. He is the grandson of Mr. Gangadharpant Gadre and the nephew of Miss Krishnabai Gadre, one of Ramabai's staunch friends. It was Gadre's daughter who first entered the

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 320
[9] Stephen Neill, *Builders of the Indian Church*, p. 133

Sharada Sadan as a day pupil and after whom the Home was named. Gangadharpant Gadre was Ramabai's clerk and her great friend and helper.

Mr. Shrikhande says that Ramabai has become "far greater than he ever imagined." He says Ramabai was a keen observer and her eyes could grasp and see everything. Once, "Bai" as she was lovingly called by one and all (some people later called her "Aai" or mother) was once seated in the dining hall, and observed that the girls were not serving meals in the correct manner. Mr. Shrikhande says: "Bai got up from her seat, went into the kitchen and gave instructions as to how to tie up the loose end of the sari. Then, taking the pot in her own hands, she demonstrated how courses should be served. All the European ladies sitting on their low stools admired Bai for her keen sense of observation. On one occasion, I happened to be late for my midday meal. I cannot remember now what caused the delay, but when I entered the dining hall, I found Bai already in her place. I was sitting just opposite her, and after a little while Bai started laughing and beckoned to a girl and whispered in her ears. The girl went out and brought a mirror with a stand and placed it before me. I could not understand why the mirror was brought and why I had been chosen for this honour when there were many around me. When Bai discovered that I had failed to understand the significance of the mirror, she explained that I had been making faces while I ate my food and the only way she felt that this could be set right was for me to see my own mannerisms in the mirror."[10] A sense of humour was obviously Ramabai's great forte.

Mr. Shrikhande says that Bai protected and watched over all the inmates. At mid-night, she used to get up, take a lantern and stick and go round the compound to see if the night-watchmen were doing their duty. Watchmen in those days often belonged to criminal tribes, for it was well-known that they were faithful to those who fed and cared for them. They also prevented other criminals from harming the household from which they ate their "salt". "One day," says Mr. Shrikhande, "Bai called us into her sitting room. We were four, my Uncle Baloo Mama and we three brothers. She asked us to take a cloth and go out into the fields and collect botanical specimens. It was indeed a delightful task, specially as we had been commanded to collect different

[10] Mr. Shrikhande's reminiscences sent to the author

varieties. This made us compare our specimens with one another before we included them in the collection. In our enthusiasm, we forgot how hungry we were. After working for four hours, and after feeling exhausted, we returned to the Mission, and deposited our load of specimens and went for our meals. Bai summoned us in the afternoon, and taking up one specimen after another, she went on telling us how wonderful nature was and how it was planned to nourish even the tiniest sample. She then sent for a foreman of the Mukti press and asked him to have all these specimens pressed with their names attached to each one." How great indeed were her interests and her knowledge! "Bai was a strict disciplinarian. She would not allow anyone to misbehave. I remember Bai caused a group of naughty girls to be literally roped off. After standing for a long time with a rope round them all, they tearfully apologized for their guilt and then were released with admonitions. Yet, all the inmates loved Bai. Girls were summoned, kissed, petted and allowed to go. Bai could remember the names of each and every girl."

Though "swadeshi" had not as yet been introduced, Bai could easily have been the forerunner of this national form of culture. Everything she used was swadeshi and almost everything home-made. She retained the title of a Brahmin lady with her strict adherence to vegetarianism and abstinance from garlic and onions. She used to have her food cooked by a Brahmin widow, separately from the other food. Often people used to wonder why she behaved in such a strict manner when she was a Christian; but habits die hard and Bai was brought up in great orthodoxy. Mr. Shrikhande remarks: "I remember Bai travelling to Poona once to have a tooth extracted and carrying her own drinking water from one of her favourite wells. This can be ascribed to a secret resolution she may have made when she left the unhappy Poona atmosphere and determined not to drink its water again." This is one of Ramabai's few expressions of renouncement of the place she so loved; the inhabitants of this city had been so cruel in their condemnation of her in spite of her great service to Poona. Even here, Mr. Shrikhande merely supposes that the reason for Ramabai carrying her own drinking water to Poona was because she felt she should not even touch its water again. She may, one feels, have been influenced by Christ's instructions to His Disciples to shake the dust off their shoes in the city which did not receive them, and never enter the place again.

Ramabai solemnized many mass marriages, and couples were housed in thatched sheds outside the Mission compound. She had the habit of carrying a leather case hung on her shoulder containing red and blue pencils, a small rubber, a pair of scissors, a pen-knife and a paper cutter and a leather case holding a pair of spectacles. Bai often cut the hair of girls who did not know how to keep it clean. She also disallowed any forms of beauty aid such as *Kumkum* and glass bangles as these entailed an extra expense.

"So long as I was at Bai's Mission," says Mr. Shrikhande, "I found Bai visiting her widowed relations for Bible reading. I often accompanied her on such missions. A mat used to be spread on which Bai sat, and read the Bible. At times refreshments were given to her and she used to eat and asked me to eat also."

Mr. Shrikhande closes his reminiscences by taking us back to a day in 1904, in Kedgaon: "Imagine you have arrived at the Railway station. You will meet my grandfather Mr. Gangadhar Balkrishna Gadre, a bearded fair-complexioned gentleman wearing a dhoti. With him is an elderly missionary lady. They will at once get into conversation with you in such a way as if you were intimately known to each other for years. You are then conducted to a bullock cart awaiting outside; this cart is put to use for many purposes besides taking and bringing guests to the Mukti Sadan. It is used as an ambulance for bringing the sick from villages around or for carrying Gospel preachers to the villages in the neighbourhood. As you approach the entrance to the Mukti Sadan, another Missionary lady in charge of guests comes forward to greet you. You are then at once conducted to your apartment assigned to you. The moment you have entered, you will find many mottoes hung on the walls: They read, 'God is Love;' 'Jesus is My Light and Strength;' 'The Lord is my Shepherd'; etc. The girl who looks after the guest room goes out to fetch you a tray for your refreshment, containing a teapot, milk and sugar, butter and toast. The tray is found covered with an embroidered cloth, an appetizing smell emanating from it. The Missionary lady then goes to Bai and arranges for an interview for you. If Bai is busy, you will be taken around the institution and then you will be taken to Bai at the appointed hour. When you go round the various departments, you will be surprised to find how the girls keep on working in their respective places silently. You may even think the room empty but will be surprised to see at least

a hundred girls at work.... You will notice that almost all the girls have short hair up to their necks as combing would take up too much of their valuable time, which they can ill-afford to waste. When you are ready to leave the Sadan Bai does not forget to place in your hand a small bundle of literature printed in the Press and a basketful of sweets for your children."

Bai was busy with the translation of the Bible, and she had tutors to teach her Greek and Hebrew. The word Jehovah caught her imagination and she would often substitute this word for God.

"What about Bai herself? She is dressed in simple white, a cheap sari costing about two or three rupees, with a white shawl over her shoulders during winter. Her face depicts firm determination, and her greyish-blue eyes are piercing and resolute. She is fair-complexioned short and stout. She speaks in a whisper and also laughs gently. No one has ever heard her laugh hilariously. When annoyed, she keeps staring without uttering a word and this silent language is more eloquent and properly understood than loud words of anger."

Mr. Shrikhande recalls Ramabai's firm faith in God. One week the cheques from abroad did not arrive. The following week was Bai's birthday, and she knew that all the inmates were planning to celebrate it, so she decided to ask the girls for a present. During evening service Bai addressed the girls as follows: "Dear girls, you will be surprised to see me here standing before you. I know that you are planning to celebrate my birthday and also to give me a gift. I do not expect any gift from you. And if at all I ask for a gift, it will be easily possible for you to afford it. That gift should be that you should each surrender a meal a day." The girls were surprised on hearing this but later on they understood the reason. Bai had foreseen starvation as no cheques had arrived. Hence she had prevailed upon the girls to forego one meal a day till the cheques arrived, rather than go without any food. Her instructions were followed by one and all voluntarily. God never failed her and all her needs were supplied.

4

Another boy pupil who knew Ramabai well and has been kind enough to write his Memoirs for this book is Dr. Vishnu Bhaskar Govande. His father was the Doctor at Mukti who embraced Christianity but later returned to Hinduism. Ramabai when she

began more and more to lean on faith for her cures is said to have dispensed with the services of the Doctors, or rather made it difficult for a scientific physician to accept Ramabai's blind faith. Considering that Ramabai at one time so strongly advocated the expansion of medical services in India, especially for women, and was one of the prime inspirers of the Lady Dufferin Medical Movement, and also wished herself to become a Doctor, it is strange that she insisted entirely on faith cures and is said to have abolished medical aid in Mukti, though hospital services play a very important part in the Mission today. At the same time Ramabai is said to have disagreed completely with Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science, and was seen by Dr. Govande tearing up the Christian Science book. Here indeed there seem to be a few inconsistencies, but they can be explained away if one realizes that Ramabai depended entirely on her own form of faith in her Mission, and if it is understood that this faith developed many years after Ramabai spoke before the Education Commission in 1882 in favour of medical expansion. Also, she would never have hindered the spread of medical services in India, but must have felt that in Mukti Mission alone, her own faith was so strong that she did not at the time need the help of Doctors.

Dr. Govande first met Ramabai when he was only five or six years old. Bai's Sharada Sadan was then in Poona, and his mother and he went and stayed with Ramabai in her Bungalow, which was surrounded by a beautiful garden.

Bai used to dress in the modern style, and not in the old Marathi fashion with the sari tucked behind in between the legs. Her blouse was long sleeved and she wore bright red slippers (*Pooneri joda*). She was fair, stoutish with grey eyes. She was also hard of hearing. Though one had to speak loudly to her, she herself hardly ever raised her voice. Sometimes she used the horn as her hearing aid. She was always found talking to a group of girls.

In 1903, Dr. Govande's father, Dr. Bhaskar Govande, was appointed as a physician in Bai's Ashram at Kedgaon. His mother worked as a nurse. He himself was a pupil in the boy's home for two years from 1903 to 1905. He was a boy of about fifteen at the time, and he says that Ramabai used to ask him to kiss her good-night as she did the girls but that he felt a little shy

to do this. She would enquire whether his mother did not kiss him good-night but he replied that this was not the Hindu custom. Ramabai herself of course knew this, and no doubt adopted the good-night kiss from the custom abroad. Her loving heart, overflowing with kindness must have thought this habit a fitting one with which to end the day, and many a lonely girl appreciated this kiss as a token of affection which they had never experienced in their homes.

The whole of Mukti Mission was enclosed by a high and thick wall, and within Ramabai had built the big Church, a large granary, a handloom house, a printing press, a roomy cook-house and many other houses and dwelling places. There were also large open spaces for the girls, and of course agricultural fields and gardens. In the shade of one of the larger trees Bai had placed two or three chairs, according to Dr. Govande. These were placed in the form of the letter S and two people could sit in them facing outwards, which brought their head together, thus making it easy for Bai to hear clearly and to talk softly to herself. Near this tree was a low bungalow with about ten or twelve rooms. One of these was used by Panditabai as her personal room, and three Western Missionaries who helped Bai lived in the next three rooms. The other rooms were reserved for select visitors and staff members. All the floors and walls were clean and coated with cowdung paste. Furniture consisted of one cot, one table and two or three chairs for each room. No signs of white-washing or interior or exterior decoration could be seen. Bai was simplicity itself, as she tried to keep down expenses in every way. But cleanliness was the key word of the Ashram.

Dr. Govande says: "I never saw Bai getting angry with any of the young boys or girls. To express her displeasure she would simply say 'Arey, Shankha' (Shankha is a conch shell in Marathi, but can be used for an empty head).

"Bai took no tea but a glass of milk for breakfast. She would then take her white umbrella and start her daily rounds. Her first task was to visit the hospital where she would speak to each patient and kneel down and pray beside the beds of the seriously ill. The various departments of the institution were then inspected, including the cow-sheds and stables. After her midday meal Bai rested for a while and then read religious books. She never retired later than 9 P.M."

Mukti was the only Ashram in India where European and American women worked under an Indian. There were 8 or 9 Missionaries, and they all felt the greatest respect for Bai, and this fact earned great respect for Ramabai. The fact that she was a staunch vegetarian was a setback to Bai in her Christian life, as most of them were meat-eaters. Bai found it difficult to accept invitations, and this caused some ill-feeling amongst Indian Christians who were not Brahmins or vegetarians.

The Mandir of Worship or the great Church was unique in itself, though architecturally simple. The floors were of teak wood, and the walls of grey stone. The building was shaped like a great cross lying on the ground. It had no pews, and members of the congregation sat on the floor in rows, and it could hold about two or three thousand or more. No idol, pictures or even the cross could be seen. It was difficult to recognize the place as a church. People from the surrounding villages attended the church every Sunday. The corners of the church were at times used as class rooms for the girls.[11]

The Mukti Church, though spireless and simple, was a monument in and around Kedgaon. The Foundation-stone bears the following inscription:

Praise the Lord

Not by Might nor by Power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord.

That Rock was Christ

Upon this Rock will I build My Church.

"Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Corner-stone; in Whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an Holy Temple in the Lord; in Whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

"That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace."

20th September 1899.

"The Foundation of this building was laid in Christ upon this date."

Dr. Govande says that he witnessed the complete immersion

[11] Dr. V. B. Govande's Memoirs

of those to be baptized in the tank at Mukti. After going waist deep into the water, the convert had to bend down three times and be immersed, repeating the words, *Pita, Putra ani Pawitra Atma.* Holy Communion was offered with wheat bread (*Chappaties*) and the juice of crushed raisins instead of bread and wine. Some foreign missionaries opposed this innovation, but Bai remained unperturbed.

Dr. Govande felt that the Revival which took place in Mukti was more like "Mass Hysteria". He comments: "Some one would sing a hymn at the end of which some women suddenly broke into hysterical laughter whilst others began to wail loudly and yet others threw themselves on the floor rolling, twisting and turning without regard to their clothes or what they were doing. This was popularly believed as the act of the Holy Ghost which made all the worshippers do the bidding of God. In 1905 this religious Revival was introduced in Pandita's quiet and serene Church by some foreigners. Even Panditabai looked upon this way of worship with reverence and awe. Soon this folly was recognized as "Mass Hysteria" and abandoned.

"Another revolutionary idea introduced by Bai in the church was to discard the English tunes of hymns and to sing religious songs composed to popular Indian tunes. Here again the European Missionaries opposed the idea but Ramabai carried out her wish. The then noted Rev. Narayan Vaman Tilak, one of the greatest poet-saints of Maharashtra was once Bai's guest and it was through his efforts that Indian songs were introduced. He also started the *kirtan* and the *bhajan.* When the Missionaries refused to allow him to play Indian musical instruments like the *tun tuna, taal* and *chipalya* inside the church he conducted his *kirtan* and *bhajan* in the open and this type of worship was loved by all Indians. Till today the *bhajan* is popular with Marathi Christians.

"Every New Year's Eve, all Christians above the age of 12 gathered in the Ashram's church. Bible reading and singing of hymns continued till 11 P.M. and then there would be calm and quiet. Enough time was given to everyone to repent of their past sins. Quarrels had to be dissolved, and wrongs forgiven. Urged by Bai, apologies were tendered and whole-heartedly accepted before the stroke of twelve. Then the atmosphere changed and the New Year was hailed joyously in."[12]

[12] *Ibid*

5

Many glimpses of Ramabai's work are given in American Missionary Magazines by friends. Lucy Guinness, a Missionary writing from London to the American "Woman's Missionary Friend" remarks that when she was in India she received an invitation from Ramabai to speak at Mukti: "A drive in a bullock bandy through streets lit by the blazing glare of Christmas sunlight: a few moments waiting in a pleasantly furnished parlour, the hot afternoon air fanning in from the verandah through open doors and windows, and then an Indian lady enters and greets me cordially. She is middle-aged and slightly deaf, with black hair, an olive-coloured skin, and clear blue eyes. A sense of quiet power impresses you about her. You watch this little woman in her white widow's dress of plain material loosely wound and plaited about her person, without any of the dress-making to which we are accustomed—you watch her as she sits in the next room presently among her girls, with her dark hair cut short and loosely hanging, and her bare feet slipped out of her shoes, in Eastern fashion. You notice the bright intelligence with which she listens, you recall the story of her brave and noble life, and you feel an interest in her and her girls that is not easy to express.

"Thirty or forty of them are here, Ramabai's widows, young things, sweet-looking many of them, in their loose flowing wrappers with dark attentive little eyes fixed on the speaker."[13]

The writer then gives a graphic account of Ramabai's life, which must have deeply stirred her readers abroad. Miss Minnie F. Abrams and Miss Clementina Butler have also written a great deal about Ramabai in foreign papers. The former, writing from Boston says: "In Western India there are few Christian women who have received training for service, and the demand for teachers, matrons, nurses and Bible women is great. During the latter half of 1899 and the first half of 1900 there came requests to this institution from various missions for fully trained one hundred Bible women."[14]

Ramabai therefore was among the first women in India who realized that it was essential for women to work, as there were so many unattached girls who had to earn their own living.

[13] *Woman's Missionary Friend,* Aug. 1898, Vol. XXX, No. 2
[14] *Ibid.,* Feb. 1901, 56

Ramabai therefore popularized the professions of nursing, teaching, and industrial workers among the middle classes and trained countless women for other jobs among the lower classes. Miss Abrams continues: "Many are taking normal methods and practice in teaching, instructed by Pandita Ramabai, and many are learning under the same wise guidance how to become good matrons. Fifteen are in training as nurses under the efficient direction of Marybai Aiman, an Indian Christian woman of great ability."[15]

In another article Miss Abrams says: "Pandita Ramabai's work for high caste widows now embraces the school of Sharada Sadan in Poona, containing seventy widows; the Mukti Mission on a farm near Kedgaon, containing two hundred and eighty widows and orphans, and the rescue home being built across the road containing sixteen women."...In Mukti, "mornings and evenings are occupied in various industries, cooking, grinding the flour, housework, washing and ironing, care of the little children, sewing, mending, dairy work, making butter and ghee, gardening, orchard work, field work, manufacture of sweet oil, oil-cake and castor oil, weaving, etc. The women have also helped to lay out walks and roads about the houses, carrying concrete, brick and stone for the use of the builders, thus saving hundreds of rupees for labour."[16] Ramabai was also then one of the pioneer women to teach her sisters the dignity of labour. They were to do all kinds of work, the most strenuous physical or mental tasks, for nothing was mean or undignified in the sight of the Lord. In a country like India, where caste demarcates occupational departments, Ramabai was among the first to make the Brahmin lady realize that she could with pride, sweep the floor, or the low caste girl realize that she could with diligent striving rise to become highly intellectual. Caste, creed and colour were levelled down to one standard by this robust Christian worker, and lessons were taught that were much needed in a country replete with traditional religious and class prejudices and inhibitions.

Clementina Butler also wrote about Ramabai in American Magazines. "In my childhood," she comments, "it was my good fortune to sit in church behind a wonderful mother. Her seven children, unless prevented by illness, were always at church, on

[15] *Ibid*

[16] *Ibid.*, March 1900

Sunday mornings, and there on time! Since then, it has been my rare privilege to sit in the great church at Mukti where Pandita Ramabai sat surrounded by 1,300 of her adopted daughters, and they also were all present on time!"[17] Miss Butler felt that Mukti was one of the marvels of administrative work in India. "The Pandita was modest almost to a fault, absolutely self-forgetful, yet with such a strong personality that she was able not only to achieve the realization of her vision but to prove her executive ability in governing thousands who came under her care and control. She had a sense of kindly humour which relieved many a tense situation, and a love for children which drew them to her as to a magnet."[18]

[17] *Ibid.*, July 1922
[18] *Ibid*

IV

Christian Output

1

BEFORE and over the turn of the century and until 1922, Ramabai's religion took a different form to that with which she started work in 1889. She longed to "save souls" to inspire her girls to wash away their sins and enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Together with those who worked with her Ramabai began to realize that a Revivalist movement was necessary to combat the Devil. To those who are neither pure evangelists nor revivalists, Ramabai's enthusiasm appears not only puzzling but verging on the fanatical. Where, one asks, are Ramabai's love of tolerance, her condemnation of any form of dogmatism, her hatred of set forms of worship. She now not only insisted on complete immersion at baptism to those who wished to become Christian, but the Christian girls were disciplined to worship in the form set down by her. Though non-denominational, worship in Mukti was gradually becoming set and even rigid. Ramabai in her Testimony says that she found "a Babel of religions in Christian countries. Each sect was different from the other." She therefore rightly and justly started a non-denominational institution, purely Christian in its outlook, with no other theological complexes. But was not Ramabai's rigid interpretation becoming another one of the many

compartments of Christianity she bemoaned? Dare anyone, for instance, criticize or condemn or even disagree with Ramabai's way of running her institutions? In fact, was Ramabai inclined to become dictatorial? These are questions which those who do not belong to the "school of thought" established by Pandita Ramabai in her Mission at Kedgaon are surely entitled to ask without in one jot lowering their own high opinion of Pandita Ramabai, for there are many indeed outside the Mukti Mission and the Ramabai Association who revere and profoundly respect her. Perhaps a time will come when these so-called outsiders will also form a united whole with the Mission, thus spreading to the whole of the country the unprejudiced influence of Ramabai, who as a true Christian loved Jew and Gentile, and therefore the whole of the universe. Perhaps the time has come when the opening up of the doors of Mukti Mission is essential in free India, so that one and all can enjoy the benefits of the work of one of India's greatest women.

As the years went by, Ramabai's mystic experiences became more and more pronounced. A great Revival movement now began to take place in Mukti, and "perplexing as are some of its aspects" it played an important part in Ramabai's life. Many of the new girls—the famine victims and others, some coming from strange backgrounds, had brought superstition and idolatry into the Mission. Some girls were even said to be possessed of evil spirit and all troubles and diseases were attributed to them, by some of the more superstitious girls. Evil influence had even caused death, they felt, and these exotic beliefs naturally deeply troubled Ramabai. She prayed and fasted and determined to exterminate these evils. The answers Ramabai received were nothing short of miracles. Manorama recounts an astounding experience. In 1901, a grass hut caught fire and as the wind was from the east, the flames were being carried towards the other precious buildings and towards the school. The danger was very great. Manorama says: "Mother was of course, praying all the time that God would help us in some way or other. The men were working as hard as possible, but they, too, were beginning to despair when, in a most marvellous manner the direction of the wind changed and it began blowing from the West instead of the East thus causing the fire to recede."[1]

[1] *Quarterly Paper of C.S.M.V.*, Poona 1901

Mahatma Gandhi believed in prayers and he believed in miracles wrought through prayers. He believed in God answering prayers through his inner voice and this is not fundamentally different from Pandita Ramabai.

Here was a miracle which one and all can believe in, for more things are done by prayer than man is aware of. As her power of prayer increased, Ramabai became more and more anxious to save sinners. In December 1901, about 1,200 were baptized; but the need for a much deeper religion was felt and in July 1902 the revival started. For three weeks meetings were held at the end of which 600 more were converted. In their conversions, however, the new Christians were not affiliated to any particular church. In the meantime, apart from miracles such as the one described above, many things were leading up to the spirit of the revival. When Rev. W. W. Bruere went on furlough in 1899, Ramabai decided that Rev. W. E. Robbins, of the same mission would be the proper man to fill his place; but he lived at Kalyan and it was too far for him to come to Kedgaon every week. Ramabai's prayers to secure his services however must have telepathetically travelled to the Presiding Elder in Poona, for one night he woke his wife and said: "I feel I ought to station Mr. Robbins in Poona in order that he may help the Pandita." After prayer, Mr. Robbins appeared in Poona the next Sunday and took the services. Mr. Robbins was much loved in the Mission. On Easter Sunday, the first foreign Missionary meeting was held and Ramabai handed over the collection to which some Hindus had also contributed and a cheque for Rs. 30 which had been sent to her for the girls in order that they may help some poor cause. They wished to send it to Central India but Ramabai remarked that it would be like "making sugar and eating it all yourself." So the girls decided to send the money to the China Inland Mission to help Mr. Hudson Taylor's work.

A year later, Ramabai decided to collect money for Mukti. A committee was formed and a large sum was allotted to the church building fund. Money was also to be sent to missions abroad. More than $5,000 found its way to China to relieve the victims of the Boxer riots. Some orphans in America were also adopted. Thus Ramabai's work stretched itself across the world. The spirit of sacrifice among the girls began to grow and many gave up one meal on Sundays in order to contribute something

personally to the poor. The more they gave, the more did the Lord enrich the Mission. In her annual report for 1902 Ramabai writes: "But I have been particularly thankful for one cheque which I received in 1897. One of God's children sent it to me, from England."

Ramabai's intuition always came to her aid. One evening in 1903, there was a great storm and some of the unfinished buildings tumbled down. The dormitories were built in squares, with a courtyard within. The new house had almost been completed and one quarter was left. The girls moved into the secure part, and Ramabai had no inkling that one room of the first completed house was insecure. But some intuition caused her to remove the girls from the building and it was vacated in eight hours. The foreman was sent for the next day to examine the roof and complete the remaining work. Strangely, he found a fault in the corner of a roof, and while repairing it, ten men were caught underneath as it tumbled to the ground. Two men were seriously injured and sent to the Government hospital, Poona, and both recovered. No one lost his life. But the girls had been saved. Ramabai's ear, deaf to the outer world, was attuned to inner voices. Like Beethovan, the grand symphonies of the world of God thundered in her ear. She was in tune with the Universe.

In 1903, Ramabai sent Manorama to Australia with Miss Abrams to imbibe inspiration from the revival there and to organize praying bands. Manorama, while in Australia, addressed many meetings. *"Our Federation,* published at Adelaide, South Australia, says that she has become a general favourite, and that her accounts of the work for the child widows in India are listened to with eagerness."[2]

At the same time, Ramabai organized Prayer Circles of ten girls each. The idea of Circles was started during Ramabai's first visit to America when she formed the Ramabai Association and Circles pledging themselves to help her work were inaugurated in all parts of America. When she revisited that country in 1898, she again accented the use of Circles, this time not for money but "Prayer Circles". She wished "believing" Christians would pray for her Mission. "If Circles of two, three or more Christian people be organized in each place, and if they agree upon this subject and pray for it especially, the Lord will hear and answer

[2] *Women's Missionary Friend, March* 1903, p. 38

their prayer and raise many from among the despised, rejected and down-trodden young widows of India to take the word of life to the dying millions in the country."[3] This appeal was written when Ramabai was at Windsor, Nova Scotia on June 3rd, 1898.

In 1905, a revival in Wales greatly pleased Ramabai. She says: "I was led by the Lord to start a special prayer circle at the beginning of 1905. There were about seventy of us who met together each morning, and prayed for the true conversion of all the Indian Christians including ourselves, and for a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all Christians of every land in six months from the time we began to pray in this manner. The Lord graciously sent a glorious Holy Ghost revival among us and also in many schools and churches in the country. The results of these have been most satisfactory. Many hundreds of our girls and some of our boys have been gloriously saved, and many of them are serving God and witnessing for Christ at home, and in other places."[4] The Revival now reached the Welsh missions in the Khassia Hills of Assam and Ramabai wanted volunteers who would go out into the villages and preach the Gospel. Thirty answered her call. Girls began to receive the Spirit. One girl, J. . ., was "called" and the Spirit entered her. Miss Abrams "saw the fire" and ran across the room for a pail of water and was about to pour it over her when she discovered she was not on fire. All the girls were on their knees, "weeping, praying and confessing their sins. J. . .sat there exhorting the girls to repent, and telling them she had received the Spirit. There was real power in her testimony. She said: 'Oh Lord, I am full of joy, but forgive and cleanse my sisters as you have me; give me strength to bear this sorrow for their sins.' Then she would exhort them and break out into new and beautiful praise. She said: 'Oh Lord, we must have a revival; we must have it; begin it today.' "[5]

The next evening, the Holy Spirit descended while Ramabai was reading John, 8. All the inmates, old and young began to weep and confess their sins. "Two little girls had the spirit of power poured on them in such torrents that they continued to pray for hours. They were transformed with the heavenly light shining on their faces."

[3] *Ibid.*, August 1898
[4] *A Testimony*, p. 8
[5] Helen S. Dyer, *Pandita Ramabai*, pp. 100, 101

The Bible School then became an enquiry room and prayer was poured forth all night. "The Bible School was filled with those crying for mercy. Such repentance, such heart-searching, such agony over sin, and tears, as they cried for pardon and cleansing and the baptism of the Holy Ghost! Then a baptism like fire within came upon them. They seemed to have their eyes open to see the 'Body of sin' in themselves. Then came a strong realization of Christ's work upon the cross; then peace, followed by intense joy. It often took a soul hours to pass through all these experiences."[6]

The Spirit of revival was so strong that even the young were affected. They stopped eating and sleeping and tried to find the root cause of their evil. They called "it a baptism of fire. When the Holy Spirit descended on them the burning within was almost unbearable. Then a great transformation took place and the faces of the girls were lit up with joy. Some constantly laughed, a blind girl saw the Lord and all spoke of His coming. One girl composed hymns to Indian tunes."

Ramabai was asked to publish all the miracles of the Revival a month after it started; but she feared that her work would be hindered and did not do so. She was not happy, however, for she felt she must make fearless open confession and a depression came over her. When special prayers were being repeated, she says: "The Spirit revealed to me that the depression had come because we had refused to give glory to God by not allowing the account to be published." She then praised God in public and testified about Him. The depression disappeared and the story was published in the *Bombay Guardian*.

A fortnight later, Ramabai went to Poona with a band of "saved" workers and wished to reach the Indian Christians. Three meetings a day were held including Europeans, British soldiers and non-Christians. Ramabai now came completely into the open and even visited the homes of high caste Hindus and preached Christ to them. The meetings were thrown open to orphanages. Institutions conducted on the lines of George Mueller's famous Homes, "in faith in God for daily bread and all temporal supplies"[7] were visited, and great sums of money came from abroad.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 101
[7] *Ibid.*, Helen S. Dyer, p. 105

Missionaries all over the world were stirred, as were Indian Christians.

In November 1905, God revealed that Ramabai should close the school and suspend work for ten days and wait on the Lord. Everyone went to Church four times a day. Seven hundred girls gave themselves to prayer and went out preaching. Sixty set out daily by turns so that each one had her turn every twelfth day.

At Keswick in 1898, Ramabai wished for 200,000 evangelists to preach the Gospels. She sent 3,500 circulars to missionaries all over India. In a short time 29,000 persons were being prayed for by name. Thus had her prayer at the conference been answered.

In May 1906, Mr. Bird, a well-known missionary of South India visited Mukti and was astounded to see the spirit which prevailed there. He said: "When some hundreds are carried away and can only sing 'Hallelujah, Hallelujah to the Lamb' until unable to sing any more, God is surely getting His own, and His Heart is refreshed."

"Some aspects of the Revival, we are told, might well appear less welcome. They were of three kinds, and all of them were physical rather than spiritual or inward. There was the sensation of burning, said to accompany the descent of the Holy Spirit. There was, further, the loud clamour of simultaneous prayer. And there was, as well, later on, the experience of 'speaking with tongues.' It is to be noted that in none of these ecstatic accompaniments of religious experience did the Pandita herself have any large share."[8]

The girls yielded to "gusts of ecstasy" and even Manorama, so calm and self-possessed succumbed. As Canon L. B. Butcher of the C.M.S. remarked: "It was impossible to hear what anyone was praying about in the volume of sound which arose and which might continue for an hour or more at a stretch."Mr. Butcher, who visited Mukti and witnessed the speaking in tongues remarked: "Manorama herself on more than one occasion, when close to me, prayed for a long time aloud though the words were absolutely incomprehensible. She told me afterwards that she knew perfectly well all the time what she was praying about, and those who had this gift testified to the spiritual help derived,

[8] Macnicol, *Pandita Ramabai,* pp. 117, 118

saying that they had never been able to give God praise or worship in such a satisfying way till they did so in tongues."[9]

Pandita Ramabai, Canon Butcher remarked, maintained a "very sane attitude." She did not forbid speaking in tongues, she gave full liberty for her inmates to follow the inspiration given to them as she did not wish to hinder God's work. Canon Butcher concludes that Ramabai "was kept from the extremes to which some of the exponents of the tongues' movement were led, and I do not feel that the work at Mukti suffered through these manifestations. On the contrary I could not help seeing what a number of splendidly devoted workers she had, women very truly converted and spirit-filled, with keen love for God and for His word and also with a keen evangelistic spirit. If this were the outcome of the Revival I felt it was well worth while even though coupled with these unusual manifestations."[10]

It must always be remembered that however strong the teachings of Christianity was in Mukti, no one who did not wish to embrace the religion was ever forced. Even throughout the Revival and after, there were many non-Christians who continued to practise their own religion. There was always freedom of worship, though no idols were allowed and a Tulsi plant was removed to the proximity of a well and was not allowed to be worshipped within the premises. At no time did Ramabai force her religion on anyone, though she accelerated the pace and force of her form of Christian teaching itself. That she was prone to fanaticism at this time cannot, I feel, be denied.

2

The Mukti Mission was now attracting universal attention, and was becoming a place of pilgrimage. Like a great Rishi, a Sanyasini, Ramabai, from within the Mission compound exercised a tremendous influence. It has already been seen how visitors were welcomed at Mukti; how they were met at the station, and taken to see Ramabai, now a veritable *presence*. All were welcome to come and see her and join the co-operative life if they so wished. Ramabai's hospitality was also quite renowned, almost like her father's in his Chatuspathi in Gangamul forest. Countless were

[9] Quoted in *Pandita Ramabai,* Macnicol, p. 120
[10] *Ibid*

the foreign missionaries who came to see Ramabai and were inspired by her. By now Ramabai began to possess a vision to evangelize more and more.

Soon, Ramabai's Bible women, filled with the spirit of the revival, began to expand outwards from Mukti Mission. Her *Akkas,* called Gospel Bands migrated out of the Mission in various directions. 400 women were now ready to serve Christian evangelism. In 1907 women from the Poona and Indian Village Mission led these Bands from Mukti, and one of the places they visited was Pandharpur, the great Hindu place of pilgrimage in Western India, where Ramabai had once proclaimed she would never embrace Christianity! Into this orthodox centre Ramabai's Gospel Band penetrated. It is said that Miss Parsons, leader of the Band was clearly told to visit the place by the Lord. There was obviously a cholera epidemic on at the time for Miss Parsons remarks: "I saw—I almost hesitate to write it—I saw the corpses of scores and scores of the pilgrims carried off by cholera; cartloads piled one upon the other."[11] The Gospel Band got to work to preach and "weeks passed during which time the city was being saturated with the truth of the Gospel. Our band increased and heralds of the Cross went North, South, East and West of the city proclaiming Jesus as the way."[12]

But soon there was trouble. A young man gathered a mob and followed the preaching Band. He was called "Saul" and his followers began to harass the *Akkas* who were stoned, hooted at and abused. The obstructors also began preaching about Vithoba instead of Jesus; but Ramabai's girls never flinched and were most courageous, even when they had to stand beneath showers of stones. They "sang down" opposition noises. One of the workers of the Second Band wrote: "Yesterday over a hundred people gathered in the principal street and listened quietly; in the afternoon we had a really powerful time when from five to seven hundred heard the story of the cross. We have had five really good meetings in the principal streets of this village, and in eight other nearby villages we have been able to tell forth the glad tidings with varied experiences. The name of Jesus has sounded very sweet in these dark places, where it has not been heard before. Today in two places we had real Pandharpur opposition; we had said the

[11] Helen S. Dyer, *Pandita Ramabai,* pp. 116, 117
[12] *Ibid.,* p. 117

night before that it seemed as if we had left the stones behind us at Pandharpur. So this came to assure us such was not the case."[13] By now the evangelizing Bands had spoken for some months not only in Pandharpur city but in the outlying villages, for despite blocking and obstruction, the Bands fearlessly continued to preach, and a second Band had come forth to reinforce the first.

The courage of the girls must have been very strong and only the Love of God could have made these once timid girls from obscure Indian homes so powerful in their dauntless work. At one place they were called "the Jesus People". The Gospel Bands were now under police protection, which encouraged them. The Bible women were changed every month in order to give each one "a turn at enduring hardships". People soon began to listen from stores, shops, carriages, temples, housetops and other places. Outside a temple a little man "like a dried leaf" began to run here and there, trying to chase the crowd away. He held up his arms and screamed and the mob followed his example. An old man was then sent to beat a drum right in front of the evengelists, but the latter sang on with great joy "glorying in the Lord Jesus and His Power". The crowd increased because of the disturbance, until a policeman appeared and dispersed the crowd. But only the little leader fled, the others stayed and listened. They got a wonderful clearance to speak. "Oh! such power from God came on the girls, and the Lord triumphed gloriously." Thus this gallant little Band went from village to village, telling the story of the pathos and beauty of Christ. Early in the morning and at night, these girls marched, clearing a space in a street to start their services, surrounded by open-mouthed tousle-haired ignorant villagers gaping at these strange women. Dogs must have barked, children naked and ragged must have pressed around, old men must have hobbled out to see, and men and women must have witnessed scenes which they had never witnessed before.

The Band in and around Pandharpur worked for a whole year until 1908 when many victories were reported by the leader. The opposition was still strong however and the Mission premises were attacked one day by about 40 men and boys. They surrounded the Mission house during prayer time, and when Miss Steele ran out to find out what was the matter, she was set upon and beaten until she fell unconscious. Then the men ran away. Two boys of

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 118

13 were arrested, but could not give much evidence. Only Miss Steele was injured though there were more than 90 women in the mission at the time. She recovered and returned to Pandharpur in a year. The work continued. Later, Manorama wrote: "The great pilgrimage of Hindus to Pandharpur is just over. Our Bands have been working there, and they report of great blessing." Many seem to have believed the word that was preached.

Once Ramabai sent out two or three Bands to a midnight festival near Mukti to tell the story of Jeṣus. The matron at Mukti, who must have been no other than Jivu, whose story is related later in these pages now preached on the roadside, remembering that 14 years earlier, she, a helpless little widow had on a similar occasion heard the Word from a Missionary who had preached near her village, and had eventually, with his help reached Ramabai's protection.

The Bands soon became so constant, that out-stations were started. Two such were established on either side of Mukti, one in Supa village and one in Rahu. Soon the people in the villages began to gain great confidence in the Gospel Bands and even invited them to start a school, which Ramabai immediately inaugurated in Supa village.

3

Even after Ramabai became an ardent evangelist, her old longing for scholarship never deserted her; never in fact had the title of Saraswati been more justified. Ramabai, in the last two decades of her life studied two new languages, Greek and Hebrew, in order to translate the Bible straight from the original. Like a veritable goddess of learning she constructed a stronghold of Christian literature in her midst, organizing a printing press and training her girls hitherto completely ignorant, to run a press all on their own.

The press was started with the main purpose of printing the Bible and Christian tracts. In 1898, a friend had presented Ramabai with a small hand-printing press. It was immediately used for the purpose of promoting the work of the Mukti Mission. Ramabai herself wrote pamphlets and tracts and translated those written by others into Marathi.

By 1904, printing became a very important part of the work at Mukti. Ramabai felt that the training of girls in printing was

essential, as women would be fit to take up a new profession. Ramabai herself had learnt the technique of printing when she was in England with the Wantage Sisters and she took great pleasure in teaching the girls to set type and all the other processes. Four large power presses were now installed in Mukti and the number of girls to be trained was increased to sixty or seventy. These girls soon became experts in this new trade for women.

A veritable circle of Christian literary output and its dissemination was now organized. In order to provide literature for the Bible women to distribute, tracts were regularly supplied from the Press, and people hitherto ignorant of the Gospel were given free literature. Previously when Ramabai was at Wantage, she had learnt to set type in the Press belonging to the Sisters, and now Ramabai spent a great deal of her time teaching the girls to set type in Marathi, Hindi, English and later in Greek and Hebrew. The girls were trained not only in every department of Press work but even in book binding. All the work had to be in the "Category of excellent" to please Ramabai. Miss Victoria Brazier and a Jewish printer, Mr. Aaron Jacob Divekar of the Bene-Israel community, played an important part in the publishing house, and Ramabai went ahead with her printing plans despite discouragement and a general belief that she could not train girls as they had no aptitude for mechanics. Miss Mary Fuller says: "I think she enjoyed being told that she could not do this and that, for with all her great learning she seemed never to have learnt the meaning of the word impossible. She had her girls taught carpenting, brick-making and masonry. It was they who built the Boys' School, to mention only one item. They even blasted and built a big well, and that without the accidents the men had had in digging other wells; all the wells, about a dozen, were named, nine of them for the fruit of the spirit listed in Galatians V: 22, 23. She used to love to name things as well as people and animals, and had a gift for quaint and significant names."[14] This gift may have been a legacy from Ramabai's knowledge of the Puranas and epics of India in which inanimate objects have all been distinguished with sweet-sounding names.

Before Mr and Mrs Dyer left India in 1899, Ramabai had expressed her wish that after they had had their rest, they would return to India and help her to start a Press. Helen Dyer says:

[14] *The Triumph of an Indian Widow,* p. 57

"This was not to be as Mr Dyer suffered from Malaria for many years after he left India. But Ramabai a little later acquired her treadle machine. One man could run this press, and the first Prayer Bell was printed on it. Little by little the press was expanded until by 1910 there were four large machines, a 12 H.P. power engine and a stereotyping plant, an important addition. At first the work was done by men and boys, but Ramabai thought it would be of great advantage if the girls could learn and set the young men free for heavier outdoor work and thus started the industry for girls.

"The women are able to take the engine to pieces and put it together again after cleaning, and to care for all the machinery in the press-room."[15] But at times it took two women to do the work of one man as regards heavy lifting. Visitors were astounded when they saw the press. One said: "to see the ingenuity and skill of the Indian girl when taught you need to pay a visit to the printing department. In the type-setting room rows and rows of girls are before you, picking, sorting, and placing the tiny letters which are in many languages, including Marathi, Hindi, Greek, Hebrew, and English. Each one knows her place, and the work goes on silently and rapidly."[16]

When the Sharada Sadan was started, one of the conditions laid down by the Ramabai Association was that the Bible and the Vedas should be placed side by side for all to read. But this policy had been changed. Ramabai felt that there was a great difference between the two literatures. Many regretted this decision of hers, for they felt that the exclusion of Sanskrit and its rich Sacred literature was a mistake. But Ramabai was now completely changed!

When Ramabai did translate the Bible, she made it simple enough for the lower class literate people to understand, and she withdrew Sanskrit words that at all resembled Hindu precepts. For this reason, her translation is considered by some scholars as being far from scholarly. It is a strange paradox to remember that the very first Christian literature which was handed to Ramabai was the Sanskrit Bible. When given the Holy Book in Calcutta Ramabai remarked that she could not understand it because it was in a language different from the language of the Sanskrit sacred literature she had hitherto been reading. The position was now re-

[15] Helen S. Dyer, *Pandita Ramabai*, p. 125
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 125

versed. Would Ramabai have been more deeply loved in India, outside her immediate Mission circle if she had Sanskritized Christianty and vice versa? Was there need for such forthright condemnation of a literature that is very beautiful and a philosophy which is very renowned? In what way would Ramabai's Christian attitude have depreciated if she had allowed the free culture of the country to reach her girls? On the other hand would not Christianity have been more sublimated if the Mukti girls had not been brought up so much in glass houses as regards the infiltration of other religions? But Ramabai's attitude could perhaps be understood if we realize that her experiences of the practices of her father's religion had been more on the dogmatic ritualistic side, and she and her family had suffered deeply at the hands of an autocratic priesthood and later on by the severe and unmerited criticism she had received in Western India from Hindus. She had withdrawn into a shell, and it was difficult, even for a broad-minded woman like Ramabai to allow a glimpse of that world which she had renounced, through no fault of hers, (for was she not hounded out of it?) to enter the lives of her girls. She was also possibly afraid that their old superstitions would return if she allowed even an inkling of the old beliefs to seep into the Mukti stronghold which she had established. But would Ramabai's Home of Salvation have benefited if it had admitted a more liberal policy, especially as the meaning of Mukti also subscribed to its being a House of Liberation, which could also mean a liberation from all fear of contacts with the outside world for "Perfect love casteth out fear"?

4

Throughout the years, however much Ramabai interested herself in other activities, her hankering after the written word persisted. The desire to preach the Word in writing never left her. In 1904, she started her translation of the Bible into Marathi.

What led to this desire to translate a work which had already been published in Marathi? About the beginning of the century Ramabai began to feel more and more strongly that the Marathi in which the Bible had already been translated was not pure, but *Padri* or Missionary Marathi. With this was also combined the wish to exterminate all Sanskritized allusions. The New Testament

had been translated by the Serampore Bengalis but in a language which could not be understood in Maharashtra. Ramabai was not satisfied with the output of Christian literature from the Bible Society. The translation of the Bible had grammatical and idiomatic mistakes; it was too pedantic and not meant for the simlper people, she felt. Ramabai undertook a translation in a pure but simple style. She laboured over this task for 15 years and more, ending her work only a few months before her death in 1922.

Strong criticism of the *Padri* Marathi of the extant Bible translation had been made by Marathi scholars. Sir Narayan Chandavarkar declared: "If that translation is to touch the hearts of the people of India and become a part of its life and literature, it must avoid both *Padri* Marathi and Sanskrit Marathi, but must have a touch of the peasant Marathi, for the language of the Bible is the language of the shepherds and peasants as all true religious literature has been, and that is, after all, the grand style."[17]

Ramabai says: "Almost all the vernacular translations of the Bible were made with the help of Hindu Pandits for the sake of putting the translations in the correct language. Consequently, they have made many words which teach purer Hindu ideas of religion."[18]

Ramabai therefore determined to master Hebrew and Greek in order to render a true translation. Here indeed was a stupendous task before a woman who was already busy from morning till night running a colossal institution which required her every attention. But languages were never difficult for Ramabai. She knew almost all the Indian tongues, and had mastered English in a very short time. It did not take her long to read and understand Greek and Hebrew, which she had learnt while at Chettenham.

As the years passed, however, Ramabai, whose health was failing, devoted more and more time to her translation and less to her supervision of Mukti Mission. The Bible became the obsession of her last years. She read the proofs almost to the end of her life. She was led "not by Might, nor by Power, but by the Spirit" to accomplish her stupendous task. The New Testament was translated up to the Acts of the Apostles by 1912 and a tentative edition was published. The Editor of the "The Indian Christian" says: "Many in Western India will feel deeply indebted to Pandita Rama-

[17] *India's Christian Pilgrims*, pp. 93, 94

[18] Helen S. Dyer, *Pandita Ramabai*, p. 112

bai for her simple, yet beautiful, translation of the New Testament. Our Lord's discourses were ever of the simplest, and it is most noticeable how the English translators of His sayings have chosen so large a number of words of one syllable and such simple language to convey the sense of the original."[19] Mr. Marcus B. Fuller believed in fact that the purity of the English language was due to the influence upon English literature of the authorized version of the Bible.

Though Ramabai was not satisfied with the Bible in Marathi as translated by the Bible Society, she was never hostile to the society itself. On the contrary, she supported it strongly and contributed over Rs. 11,000 to it during the course of about 10 years before her death. The girls in Mukti were asked to regard it as a worthy cause and contributed 1/15 share of their daily rations towards the British and Foreign Bible Society.

When Ramabai was given the Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal in 1919 she was too ill to receive it in person, and sent Mrs. R. A. Adams, wife of the Secretary of the Bombay Auxiliary of the Bible Society to receive it for her in proxy. In a letter to the Secretary she remarks: "I greatly appreciate your society's work. I have been a Christian for thirty-eight years. I have found a great salvation through the society's work. God bless you and yours."

In her last years Ramabai consented to unite with a number of evangelical missionaries in issuing a call to form a Bible League for India, Burma and Ceylon. The promoters of this League placed Ramabai's name at the head of the list.

The Marathi translation of the Bible was finally printed in 1924, two years after Ramabai's death, though her translation was completed before she passed away. The number of copies printed were 50,000.

Pandita Ramabai is the only woman in the world who has translated the whole Bible, single-handed, and from the original Greek and Hebrew. She further achieved the superhuman task of having it published by her own girls in her own press.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 115

V

Manorama and Friends of Ramabai

1

MANORAMA was born in Silchar in the Cachar District of Assam, on April 16, 1881. That the child came as a great comfort to Ramabai can be gauged from the name given to her—"Heart's Delight". Manorama herself always, we are told, possessed a paper which she greatly treasured. It was written in English by her father with the following inscription: "Saturday, April 16th, Easter Eve; child born at ten minutes to 8 p.m. in 1881."

When a few months after her birth, Bepin Behari Das died of cholera, Ramabai in the midst of the grief she had to bear, at least was given the great joy of caring for a baby in arms. She was not left alone, and Manorama proved to be her mother's right hand till she herself died in July 1921 a few months before Ramabai passed away, in April 1922. Immediately after her husband's death on February 4, 1882, Ramabai, as we know, again became a traveller, reaching as far as Madras and Karachi before she finally settled for a year in Poona. When Ramabai sailed for England in April 1883, she took Manorama, aged two, with her and together with a friend, they suffered all the discomforts of a deck

passage. On September 29, Manorama was baptized with her mother. In March 1886, Manorama, aged five, accompanied Ramabai to America; but the next year, she was sent back to England with friends, on July 21, 1886.

Manorama's education started in England between the ages of three and four with the Sisters of Wantage. She did not live with her mother at Cheltenham College. When the child was sent back from America she stayed with Sister Geraldine, Ramabai's "Mother in Christ", and was called Mano by the Wantage Sisters. Here Manorama learned to read and write English, and wrote as follows to her mother in 1886 after she returned to Wantage. "I am learning French and music and callisthenics. I have dinner at school and a little before dinner we play with a doll's house." This letter must obviously have been dictated to her, as she, at the age of five could not have understood such words as "callisthenics". More childish was she when she wrote to her mother, "I send you sixty loves and kisses."

Manorama later had her education at the Epiphany Girls' School connected with the Panch Howds Mission in Poona though she had attended a Kindergarten School while her mother was at Cheltenham. When her mother returned to Bombay and started the Sharada Sadan, Manorama continued to stay at Panch Howds. But soon she was sent abroad to a school in Colchester and then returned to India. When Ramabai went again to England, on her way to America in 1898, Manorama studied at the North London Collegiate School, one of the best schools in England, started by Frances Mary Buss, a colleague of Dorothea Beale and a great educationist. Manorama then went on to school in America and returned to India in 1900 because of Ramabai's ill-health. Mano's education was wide and international though perhaps rather interrupted.

Manorama was nineteen and she now dedicated all her life to her mother's work. She took charge of Sharada Sadan thus helping her mother during her illness.

Helen Dyer remarks that a friend wrote to her and told her that Manorama was "head and shoulders beyond any other Indian woman in the Institution." She never returned to finish her studies in America; but in 1917, she graduated at the Bombay University in order to meet Government's requirements to enable Mukti High School, of which Manorama was then Principal, to pass out

thirty-five teachers. Rev. W. B. Bogg's report on Mukti, written in December 1901, mentions Manorama thus: "Ramabai's daughter, Manoramabai, returned from America in 1900, to take charge of Sharada Sadan. She also shares with her mother the burden of the work and correspondence. Her ability in the management of the Institutes and as a teacher, and her hearty sympathy with the work, have greatly strengthened her mother, and, as it were, given her fresh vigour and life."[1]

In 1903, Manorama went to Australia and New Zealand to popularize Mukti Mission in these countries. Here during the great Australian Revival, she established Prayer Circles. An announcement in a magazine says: "Miss Manorama, the daughter of Pandita Ramabai, and her Secretary, Miss Abrams, have been holding meetings in New Zeland and giving addresses on the work of the Mukti Mission in India."[2]

Manorama went again to England in 1908, and was able to send out two new workers to Kedgaon. Due to her efforts, the Sharada Sadan was recognized by Government, and High School classes upto the Matriculation were started. After her death the School section was taken up by the Alliance Mission, but only continued upto Middle School as the High School section was abolished.

Manorama gives some interesting reports of the work she and her mother so ably carried on in her various talks and writings. At an annual meeting of the Ramabai Association in America she recounted many case histories. Later, she says that soon after World War I broke out, a British official's wife had made an appeal for help in Bombay for the relief of wounded soldiers; the students of Sharada Sadan responded immediately, and took a keen interest in this work. A Home for the blind was started in Mukti in which Manorama took particular interest, as she had already been trained to teach the blind in England. A trained lady also came from England and joined the Institution. The School for the Blind is today a well-known institution in Western India.

Manorama's interests were so wide that she even took an active part in organizing a silk industry at Mukti. She says: "My mother has planted a number of mulberry trees and castor oil plants, and

[1] *The Widows' Friend,* p. 169
[2] *The Indian Ladies' Magazine,* May, 1903

we have a number of worms spinning their cocoons in baskets made by our girls."[3]

Manorama's interest in the variety of life around her was always evident, and if she had been stronger, and had been spared a few more years, she would in every way have evinced the dynamic energy her mother possessed. She writes: "During the last hot weather vacation, I took a party of 15 to Mahableshwar for a few days. Living as we do here in this village away from the city with its civilization and all its modern improvements, we sometimes find it difficult to explain to our girls the books which they read, because their ideas of many things are so vague. For instance, some have never seen the sea, some do not remember ever being in a train, some have never seen a river or a waterfall or a high mountain; a telephone, an electric lamp, a tramcar, an elevator, a large English shop, and many other things are to them things only in name, and we find that the easiest way to explain them is by taking parties of girls to Bombay or to some other place of interest where they will be able to see things for themselves. There is an old fort in Gulbarga which is an object of great interest. I often take one or two girls with me when I go there and let them study the place. We had a good laugh once in Bombay when a girl about eighteen years old who was preparing for her college entrance examination saw the sea for the first time and drank some of its water, forgetting that it would be salt. She had read about it but had forgotten!"[4]

When Manorama was about 24, she was a healthy young lady, says Dr. Govande. She spoke excellent English and was always polite and friendly. She was slightly darker in complexion than her mother and never resorted to any artificial aids to beauty. She could ride a horse side-saddle and once she had a fall and was sent to hospital. Ramabai seems to have worried much about Manorama's marriage, according to this friend; but Manorama herself was far too engrossed in her work to give it a thought.

Ramabai was beginning to feel that Kedgaon was not large enough to house the increasing number of inmates. She wished to extend her work, and sent Manorama to Raichur, Gulbarga and Kurduwadi to explore possibilities.

In 1912, Ramabai received a request from Gulbarga in the

[3] *Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati,* p. 73

[4] *Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati,* pp. 73, 74

Nizam's dominions to start a school for Marathi speaking girls. The request was made by a Bible woman who worked at another mission nearby, and who created an interest among the higher castes. The families actually asked the Bible woman to request Ramabai to come to their aid. Though the main languages here were Urdu and Telugu there were many Marathis of the higher classes. Gulbarga was about 300 miles from Kedgaon. Ramabai consented to start a school there, provided that Christianity and the Bible could be taught; but this was not acceptable. Manorama, however, went to Gulbarga in 1913, and opened a girls' school, with the proviso for teaching the Bible. A few Indians and one European served on the staff. At first, due to the resistance against the teaching of Christianity, only one pupil came; but one by one others began to attend and by April 1914, there were 14, and a year later 35 pupils. Manorama worked so hard here that soon her health began to break down; but she took no rest, and laboured without respite. She writes: "One day we were visiting a gentleman who had forbidden his wife to have anything to do with the Christian School. He evidently knew something of the power of God's word, for he said: 'Yes, your school will prosper. You Christians are not like other people. Others soon grow discouraged and give up in despair, but you drop a seed in the ground and wait until it grows. You do not get discouraged when you do not see the results of your work. You persevere.' How we long to drop a seed which would take root in that man's heart! He was an orthodox Hindu gentleman of the old type, a very learned man of the highest caste, and in his own estimation far above us."[5]

Zenana work was soon started; but many promises were not kept because of the Christian nature of the work. Hindus increased their opposition with the years, and finally, an outbreak of plague completely stopped the work, and the teachers had to return to Mukti. When they returned, the pupils had decreased from 55 to 23, and it was also necessary to rent a school. The best solution was to buy a site and a fund was started.

Manorama found a site on her first visit to Gulbarga in 1912, and she remarked now to her companion: "Would it not be splendid to have a school just here?" And later, when the land was bought, Manorama writes: "It had been just a passing thought, hardly named with a desire, but the loving Father had taken note

[5] *India's Christian Pilgrim,* p. 109

of it, and knew when we ourselves had quite forgotten. He had remembered and granted the fulfilment of our wish. 'He shall give thee the desires of thine heart,' were the words which came first into our minds as we held our first prayer meeting on our own land in the moonlight, and then followed the verse which had been our stay all through the eight months of waiting and opposition: 'They got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them but Thy right hand, and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou hadst a favour unto them.' "[6]

Standing on the spot, she dedicated the land to God and prayed that soon the people of Gulbarga may worship Him. There was great opposition to her work; but many were baptized and the city was in an uproar. The pupils were now reduced from 70 to 2 and one girl died while trying to win her father to accept Jesus. Manorama adds: "Such cases give us courage to go on and now there are nearly forty pupils. Very slowly but surely we are recovering from the great blow which was intended altogether to uproot the Lord's work at the Shanti Sadan."[7]

Until she died, Manorama entirely managed the work in Gulbarga. Its financial accounts were quite different from Mukti Mission. Manorama also was in charge of the Mukti School. The Gulbarga work was faith work. In 1919, when famine broke out in the Nizam's dominions, it was of great help to the villagers, for many were able to earn their livelihood there. The school at Gulbarga was an inspiration for many similar institutions to be started in other parts of India. At Mukti, Manorama was the backbone of the various branches, especially since 1904, when her mother began to translate the Bible into Marathi.

In 1919, Manorama, whose health was fast deteriorating, went to spend a month's holiday with Mrs. E. S. Appaswamy, a friend of Ramabai's and a fellow student of Manorama's from 1893 to 1896 at the Epiphany Girls' School in Poona. She met Manorama on her way back from Australia in 1904, and on hearing that Mrs. Appaswamy, then Miss Cornelius, was anxious to help her mother, after she graduated, Manorama sent her a wire in July 1905. This was the time of the Great Revival. Miss Cornelius worked at Mukti Sadan till 1907 and remarks on Ramabai's kindness and

[6] *India's Christian Pilgrim,* p. 110
[7] *Ibid.*

goodness to her. She says: "Manoramabai came to Kodaikanal and stayed with us for a month. She was not very well then."[8] Later she had to consult a doctor and went to the eminent Sir William Wanless at Miraj Hospital. Here she was operated on, and passed away on 24 July, 1921 at the age of 40. She had dedicated her life to God, and had worked incessantly, sacrificing her very life for Him.

It was never expected that Manorama would precede her mother in death.

Ramabai, left alone, showed all the courage with which she was endowed. The loss of her daughter was the severest blow that could have been dealt her; but she met it with indescribable fortitude. Writing to the office-bearers of the Association in America, she says: "Let me thank you for your loving sympathy. All I have to say is, 'The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.' "

In the meanwhile, the Sharada Sadan had been renewed into new vigour with a substantial donation from the sale of the old Sharada Sadan. Manorama was to work here, as long as God gave strength. It was well-organized due to Manoramabai's systematic interest and splendid executive management. She had prepared the time-table before classes started in the summer. She had attended the meeting of the Trustees and had even arranged for next meeting which was actually held shortly after her death. She had even said that she would be in hospital when the meeting would be held, not knowing that she would pass away. She had arranged for all the business to be carried on in perfect order. "She never returned," discloses Ramabai. "She has gone to the next world before me."

Ramabai could not attend Manorama's funeral for she was too ill. Neither did she express much external grief for she firmly believed she would soon see her daughter. She herself passed into the greater life on April 5, 1922, nine months after her daughter's death.

On Manorama's grave, in Miraj Cemetery are the words: "In loving memory of MANORAMA MARY MEDHAVI only daughter of Pandita Ramabai, who entered into glory on July 24, 1921. Her life was sweet incense unto God."

[8] *Pandita Ramabai Centenary Souvenir,* p. 20 (compiled by Mr. S. M. Adhav)

2

When she was in England, Ramabai became not only the friend but the much-loved sister of the Sisters of Wantage, the Principal and teachers of the Cheltenham Ladies' College, of scholarly families such as the Max Mullers and innumerable others. She seemed to possess the magnetism and charm of the rare individuals of this earth. Most people who met her, loved her. In America Ramabai spread the same aura of genial love and warm friendship which gathered around her countless ladies who determined to devote their lives to Ramabai's work. They dedicated their lives for the uplift of Indian women, and asked not even a salary in return.

One of Ramabai's greatest friends was Mrs. Helen. S. Dyer, who wrote a lucid biography about Pandita Ramabai. She got to know Ramabai when the latter returned to India from America in 1889. As a result of this intimate friendship, the biography was published concurrently in America and England for Ramabai's many friends were avid to read about her. The British issue was rapidly sold out into ten editions, and another was printed. The book was as popular in the States. Later, when Mrs. Dyer retired to her Kentish home, many of Ramabai's friends visited her there, including Minnie Abrams who went there with Manoramabai in 1908.

Apart from keeping a home warm and hospitable in England for Ramabai's many helpers and friends, Mrs. Dyer became the chief Honorary Representative in Britain of Mukti Mission and a channel for passing on the gift of services to the British Isles. Later, an intimate friend of Manorama's, Mrs. Matthew Barratt, from Yorkshire, took over the service of transmitting gifts. She was also very familiar with the work in Kedgaon.

Helen Dyer first met Ramabai at a meeting of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, then at its zenith, run by Miss Frances Willard, whom Ramabai got to know so well in America. Frances Willard was one of the foremost sponsors of the Ramabai Association in Boston. Helen Dyer says in her biography: "Though I occasionally met Ramabai I did not know much of her for several months, till Miss Soonderbai H. Powar, an Indian Christian lady engaged in mission work in Bombay, called one day and brought news that she had ventured on a visit to Rama-

bai."[9] Soonderbai then started work with Ramabai, and it was she who commenced the practice of reading aloud from the Bible in Sharada Sadan. One day when Ramabai went out of the room Soonderbai Powar began reading the Bible aloud, and the custom continued throughout the years.

Helen Dyer visited Sharada Sadan in 1892, when it was formally opened in Poona. She noticed that the girls loved Ramabai and followed her about outside school hours like "bees". Soonderbai's room was also always crowded. Mrs. Dyer's friendship with Ramabai increased with the years. Mr. Alfred S. Dyer, her husband, was also her friend and adviser, and as Editor of the *Bombay Guardian,* a Christian Weekly, there was constant contact between Ramabai and the Dyers, for the latter gave much publicity to the former's work. All Ramabai's activities were followed with close interest, and Mrs. Dyer says: "After Ramabai's return from the Lanauli camp an early morning prayer meeting was instituted in the Sharada Sadan. The little band of Christians joined with Ramabai and her faithful friend, Soonderbai Powar, in waiting on the Lord. In those early morning hours they pleaded promise after promise before the Throne of Grace, and both teachers and pupils learned better than ever before the blessedness of asking great things of God, and praising Him for prayers answered and promises fulfilled."[10]

The *Bombay Guardian* did much to sponsor Ramabai's famine work, and the fund which was opened swelled rapidly due to the articles published in the Christian Weekly edited by Mr. Dyer. Orphanages were opened in many parts of India after they read the poignant story of Ramabai's own famine experiences when she wandered about India with her parents, and when they realized the great need to help the victims.

Minnie Abrams was another of Ramabai's inseparable friends. She came to India in 1887 in connection with the American Methodist Church, and worked as a Missionary school mistress in Bombay for many years. She was led to forego her salary, which was used to support a Deaconess, and she itinerated in the rural districts of Western India so that she could reach the homes of Indians and the purdah world. With a tent and a Bible woman she wandered here and there, and when Ramabai began to gather

[9] Helen S. Dyer, *Pandita Ramabai,* p. 11
[10] Helen S. Dyer, *Pandita Ramabai,* p. 13

the famine victims she took charge of a band of older women at Ramabai's request, as she happened to be camping in Poona at the time. When she reached Poona she told Soonderbai that she had been led there and the latter answered with tears running down her eyes, "This is what Ramabai and I have been praying for, for months. Ramabai was on the point of asking you, and then she said, 'No, let the Lord do it all, and then there will be no mistake.' "[11]

On Ramabai's return from the Central Province, she asked Miss Abrams for the date when she would join them and by October 15, 1897, Miss Abrams became an inmate at Kedgaon and brought with her a small family of widows and Bible women. Soon, Miss Abrams was one of the great sources of Christian inspiration in Kedgaon, and when Rev. W. W. Bruere held special services at Poona, Miss Abrams conducted them simultaneously in Kedgaon and prepared the way for Mr. Bruere. Some of the girls who had never entered a Church before learned to pray and sing. One illiterate woman clasped her hands and began to plead with God. She was so awkward that the girls near her "began to titter". But she paid no attention and continued to pray and poured out a long list of sins in confession. She praised God and begged for mercy so vehemently that when she stopped all the girls were in tears. She was a woman of about thirty who had suffered much in the famine and had been ill with consumption and in bed for a long time. One day, when Miss Abrams was leading the Bible class, the lesson happened to be about Jesus treating the sick of the palsy. The words, "Whether it is easier to say, thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, arise and walk" were discussed by Miss Abrams and she said: "There is poor Kashebai lying ill with consumption. Has one among you power to heal her? Can any one of you forgive her sins?" The girls replied in the negative and Miss Abrams told them that Jesus could do both and suddenly Kashebai, who was too ill to leave her bed crept into the room and trembling with weakness confessed her sins and asked them to pray for her. Manorama writes: "A solemn silence followed this confession, the spirit of God seemed to move all hearts in prayer; even the youngest children, who are never still, seemed to be spell-bound for a few minutes, while one from the congregation prayed aloud for the poor sufferer.

[11] Helen S. Dyer, *Pandita Ramabai,* p. 61

Kashebai returned to her room feeling sure that God had accepted her. She knew that the Lord was very tired of the sufferings and sorrows of life. Her life had been full, and she began to pray most earnestly that He would take her home."[12] She passed away a few days later.

Miss Abrams organized the Mukti Church and Sunday school classes, and many were the financial crises which she overcame by prayer. Once, due to ill-health, Miss Abrams badly needed a holiday in the hills but there was no money for her to travel as the funds at the time were very low. Knowing this difficulty, which Ramabai was trying her best to combat, she said nothing. Suddenly, Ramabai received Rs. 150 and even without knowing about Miss Abram's need for a vacation, she spread the cheque out before her and asked the Lord what she should do with it. The answer came prompt and clear. "Give it to Miss Abrams." and the cheque was endorsed and sent to her, who returned it, saying she could not use it when there was so much need for the money; but Ramabai insisted on its acceptance and Miss Abrams, having no other alternative, used it for her much needed holiday. The next morning Ramabai received Rs. 1,000 by cheque to meet the food requirements.

While in Australia with Manorama in 1903, the Australasian edition of "The High Caste Hindu Woman," was published entitled "The Widows' Friend," with vivid extra chapters by Manorama. A foundation was also laid in that country and in New Zealand for valuable auxiliary help which has furnished means and workers for Mukti. Deep prayer links were also established.

Miss Abrams and Manorama and many others took an active part in the great Revival in 1905 in Kedgaon. They also ventured out into the villages and sacred cities with Prayer Bands. In 1908, a party of workers visited England. Among them were Miss Abrams and Manorama. A number of meetings were arranged, but due to Manorama's illness nothing much could be done. Manorama was nursed devotedly by Miss Abrams for three months after which the fever left Manorama; but she was still weak, and her mother suggested that she should return to India. On her voyage back she was completely cured, as much prayer had been said for her. Miss Abrams sailed direct to America

[12] *The Widows' Friend,* p. 174.

from England; she herself was sadly in need of rest. She remained there for two years, arousing an interest in Mukti Mission but now "a vision came to her to enlist the sympathy of her American friends on behalf of a large district in North India, near the borders of Nepal, very destitute of missionary effort."

And so, when Miss Abrams returned to India in 1910, six Christian women came with her, two to work with Ramabai and the others to open a new mission in North India. Miss Abrams stayed at Mukti for a few days and then went on to her new venture. She felt she would not live long. Two mission stations were started and named; but Miss Abrams suddenly fell ill with black-water fever, and after some months of suffering, she passed away. Ramabai greatly felt her loss, and Mukti mourned for her. The Bible School in Kedgaon stood as a monument of her work. She was a good woman, a dynamic worker enduring untold hardships, and a simple and devoted soul.

3

Many foreign friends who actually did not work at Mukti helped Ramabai throughout their lives. Mrs. Rachel Nalder left her home in Windsor, Nova Scotia, when she was a young widow and travelled from place to place for fourteen years, speaking about Mukti. The first nation she visited was Great Britain in 1905. Here she spent two years, criss-crossing the islands, publicizing Ramabai's work in India. She returned to Canada for a rest, and then journeyed across the U.S.A. sailing from San Francisco for New Zealand in 1912. She remained in Australia and New Zealand for three years, speaking fervently about Kedgaon, and finally reached India in 1915. It must have been a red letter day for her when she landed in the country for which she had laboured for so many years. She had first met Ramabai in 1898 when Mr. Nalder was still alive and when Ramabai had visited her home in Nova Scotia. Commenting on this visit, Mrs. Nalder says: "I do thank God that I was permitted to entertain Ramabai in my home in Nova Scotia. My husband and I felt that we had a greater honour put upon us than if we had entertained our Gracious Queen Victoria. I believe Pandita Ramabai is one of God's Queens. I look upon that brown faced Christian as head and shoulders above many Christians of whom

I have seen thousands. How is it? It is because of her single eye to God's glory. She had but one idea, but one ideal, and that is that she may reflect the Lord Jesus Christ. Pandita Ramabai radiated her Lord Jesus. You could not get into her presence without knowing the direct power of the Lord Jesus. If she were here she would not tell you of any of the things she has done but would be telling you of what Christ had done."[13]

Mrs. Nalder attended a communion service at Mukti on December 6th, 1915. The church was full and the entire service was in Marathi. Though Mrs. Nalder could not understand a word, she felt a spiritual power envelope the place. She remarked that "everyone carried a Bible and hymn book and closed their eyes and prostrated themselves during prayer." Ramabai knelt during the whole service, and Mrs. Nalder realized that this intense concentration in prayer was the secret of all the marvellous work Ramabai conducted.

Of Ramabai's foreign friends it is not possible to make a detailed list, for there were too many. Miss Mary Lucia Bierce Fuller has listed many of them, including Miss Hastie, who took over the burdens from Manorama in 1921. Miss Fuller herself was Ramabai's great admirer and has written a biography entitled "The Triumph of an Indian Widow," which is one of the most authentic books about Pandita Ramabai. Miss Fuller's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Marcus B. Fuller were also friends of Ramabai's, and Mrs. Fuller's book, "The Wrongs of Indian Womanhood," has been enriched by an introduction by Ramabai. Mary Fuller says:" "I loved her (Ramabai) very much and found her a continual delight. Indeed, she was endlessly interesting. And because I had known her since a child, I was on very free and affectionate terms with her. She and my mother had been like sisters, and so I called her Maushi, maternal aunt, and she treated me more like her daughter, even, than a niece. I loved to tell her how wonderful she was, partly because my delight in her clamoured for expression, and partly sometimes, I confess, to tease her a little, and because I loved to see her beautiful humility. Sometimes she only smiled fondly at me or kissed me. Sometimes, if I were very absurd—I called her Saraswati Devi —for example, and she laughed. I loved to make her laugh. I would repeat to her what other people had said of her, mimick

[13] *India's Christian Pilgrim,* pp. 114 and 115

their fervid tones and rapturous gestures, and at such things she would shake with laughter as at a joke. But when I was serious and told her the serious praise of estimable people she was not pleased, and said quickly, 'I would rather you did not tell me these things.' "[14]

Of Ramabai's faults, Miss Fuller remarks: "And had she no faults, and was she not mortal woman? Yes, she had faults, she had the weaknesses of her greatnesses; and where she made mistakes—they were not small mistakes—they were to scale." She could be autocratic and severe. "There was clay in her gold, as the gold was rare gold and thrice refined. I loved her as she was, and to have known her at all is a good for which I shall never cease to thank God. She blessed me as she blessed many, so many that only God knows them all, great and small, widely remote and widely various."[15]

Mary Fuller was in Kedgaon when Ramabai passed away of septic bronchitis on April 5, 1922. She remarks: "Never can I forget that silent morning, and never have I seen such a procession as passed by her all day. Brahmins and outcastes alike came to do her honour, and bowed themselves to her feet. It was a symbol."[16]

Mary Fuller was also one of the few friends who had personally known Ramabai who was present and had taken part in the Centenary Celebrations held in Bombay in April 1958. She gave a glowing tribute to her old friend and Maushi, calling her one of India's greatest women in history—great in many ways because of her extraordinary combination of gifts and abilities. And with it all she was humble. "India needs to remember Bai," concluded Miss Fuller. "Her selflessness even more than her extraordinary gifts. I feel myself very fortunate to have known her."[17]

4

Among Ramabai's Indian friends was Soonderbai Power; their friendship lasted for many years. She was known as Akka or elder sister to the girls in Sharada of which she was in charge

[14] *The Triumph of an Indian Widow,* pp. 67, 68
[15] *Ibid.,* p. 71
[16] *The Triumph of an Indian Widow,* p. 72
[17] *Pandita Ramabai Centenary Souvenir,* p. 7

when Ramabai moved to Mukti. When finally the Sharada Sadan was removed to Kedgaon and became a part of Mukti Mission, Miss Powar felt she would have to leave Ramabai and that the cause to do so came from the Lord. It set her free to step out into her own work again, after years of faithful service to Ramabai. She started the Zenana Training Home in Poona.

An interesting account appeared in the Cheltenham Ladies' College Magazine in May 1909. Miss Powar had gone to England and while there once lectured at the College on "Women of India." Soonderbai spoke warmly of Ramabai's work.

Another Indian friend of Ramabai was Miss Chuckerbutty who started the "Daughters of India Orphanage" at Allahabad. She was the first woman M.A. of the Allahabad University. The orphanage she started was a sort of counterpart of the work Ramabai was conducting in Kedgaon, "an institution for the moral and spiritual training of destitute Indian widows and orphans. Like Ramabai, and inspired by her, Miss Chuckerbutty had rescued many famine victims in 1900. Pandita Ramabai took a deep interest in Miss Chuckerbutty's work, and later, Miss Chuckerbutty was said to have worked with Ramabai until, due to some differences, she started her own work again.

In fact, Ramabai coordinated with and inspired countless Indians and her example was emulated by both the Hindu and Christian worlds. Mrs. Karve continued to have a warm regard and sense of gratitude for Ramabai over the years, as she successfully steered her own Widows' Home in Poona with her illustrious husband Bharat Ratna Maharshi Karve. Ramabai Ranade never lost sight of the Pandita, and the ladies of the Arya Mahila Samaj continued to venerate her memory.

Among her pupils, Ramabai cemented everlasting friendships. Ramabai herself has written the story of Thakubai in a pamphlet, "The Angel who Brought Me a Message from the Unknown God." Thakubai was the little widow Ramabai took into her home in Poona in 1883, before she went to England. The girl was then 12 years, a Brahmin orphan who made a living on the streets, and she was taken to Ramabai. She had a cast in her eye and was not much to look at, and she had been married at the age of five. When her boy-husband died soon afterwards, she had been accused by her mother-in-law of possessing a demon which had swallowed up her husband.

On the day she came to Ramabai, she had been teased by some wicked boys and she appealed to Ramabai, saying she would rather die than be out in the streets.

As early as 1883, then, "Ramabai's kind heart was full of joy to see the look of happy gratitude that came over the poor little wizen face as she realized she now had a home and a friend; and thoughts came crowding into her mind as to the blessedness of doing something for poor forsaken widows. Gradually these thoughts took shape, and the plan of a Home for widows was formed in her mind. Afterwards, she felt this was a massage to her from the Unknown God, who was thus foreshadowing her life work, and showing how the great hollow in her heart could be filled up with a great purpose."[18]

When Ramabai left Poona in 1883, one of her Hindu Reformer friends agreed to support Thakubai, but he died two years later and Thakubai was again homeless. As she was unable, mentally to study, she was turned out of a school to which she was sent. Then she worked for a school teacher and when she heard Ramabai was returning to India she had a letter written and was welcomed as a pupil of Sharada Sadan.

Though not clever, Thakubai soon became very useful, and was able, after being trained for five years, to teach a primary class. After her conversion she went to work with a missionary for some time; but when work was started at Kedgaon, Ramabai, needing good trustworthy helpers, sent for Thakubai, who worked at Mukti as a Bible woman for three years. She also preached to famine victims and taught in Sunday school and lived a good steady life. Finally, she married one of the teachers, a widower with children, and became a good mother to them. When, in 1901, her husband went to Berar, she also went with him, where she became seriously ill, and died. She was mourned for by her husband, step-children and friends and fellow women workers. Ramabai says: "But her work was done, and she went home to the Redeemer whom she loved. Her memory is precious, as she was a living example of I Corin. 1: 26, 27. She was called by God to bring a message to me. I heard His voice through her, calling me to serve Him by giving my life and strength for the service of the despised widows of India. Then He called her

[18] Helen S. Dyer, *Pandita Ramabai,* pp. 74, 75

to give His message to hundreds and hundreds of the poor famine women and show them the way of life."[19]

Among Ramabai's many helpers and friends were some of her own relations, whose fathers and mothers once so scorned Anant Shastri's ideas of education and reform. Ramabai's step-brother's wife, Manikarnikabai, who had suffered much at the hands of a co-wife, was one such faithful follower of Ramabai. In 1890, when Manikarnikabai's husband died, she came to Mukti with Ramabai. Ramabai, on a visit to her ancestral home in Mangalore returned to Mukti with a number of widows and relations, including Manikarnikabai and her adopted daughter Subhadra. Subhadra had been discarded from her home as an unwanted baby and Manikarnikabai had rescued her and cared for her as her own child, as she herself had no children. Manikarnikabai was known as "Mami", in Mukti. Manorama wrote in 1903: "Six years training in Sharada Sadan, and ten years constant companionship with Pandita Ramabai have made Mami a most capable woman. She has learned to know and love the Lord Jesus, and is bringing up her two foster children, one of whom was adopted six years ago, in the fear of God. Mami is Pandita Ramabai's right hand—a woman raised up by God to be her helpmate. She is the head matron at Mukti, and superintends the store keeping, the cooking, the distribution of clothes, and the management of the girls. She settles the disputes, she comforts the lonely and makes special arrangements regarding the food and clothing of those who are delicate. She teaches the children to pray, and tells them Bible stories; in fact, there is hardly anything that she does not do. Pandita Ramabai says: 'There is only one Mami in all the world.' "[20] Mami was possibly one of those relations who prepared Ramabai's food for her, as she kept strict caste rules throughout her life.

When the famine victims began to pour into Mukti, Subhadra was about twelve years old. There were many tiny motherless children and Ramabai asked the older girls to adopt a baby each. Most of the pretty babies were quickly chosen but Subhadra chose the plainest, a "monkey face" as the others called the tiny mite. Subhadra averred that "Not to take a pretty and

[19] Helen S. Dyer, *Pandita Ramabai,* p. 186
[20] *The Widows' Friend,* p. 186

attractive child, but to take a wretched and unattractive one, is love."

When Subhadra's relatives who had thrown her away, heard of her progress, they began to agitate to have her back. Her brother came to Poona to take her home and get her married; but she was past the marriageable age and was left at Sharada Sadan. Here she became a pupil teacher and worked for her matriculation. She was also the head girl and controlled the other pupils. When Manorama went to America she acted as Principal of the High School at Mukti, and later on, wishing to devote her life to Christ, she became a Deaconess of the Mukti Church and then married a college professor and lived happily. Mami went with her to her new home.

Just before Mrs. Helen S. Dyer left India she found Mami had adopted another discarded baby girl and suckled her with a goat. This child also grew into fine womanhood, and was called Kripa or Grace.

Rukminibai was another woman who came from South Canara with Ramabai in 1890. She had been cruelly beaten in her home and had often been locked up.

Among other girls who became outstanding leaders at Kedgaon, were Tanubai, Jivubai, Sagunabai, and others. The story of Jivubai's rescue by Ramabai has been related by Mrs. Dyer. Jivu was the youngest daughter of a cultivator in Ramabai's home town and was married as a very small child to an old man. A jealous woman had administered poison to the husband, who sickened slowly. When Jivu was nine she was taken to her husband's home and a jealous sister-in-law maltreated her. As her husband became worse, Jivu was accused of his illness. Her husband, a kind old man, soon died, but left what he had for Jivu. Her brother-in-law took all the money and Jivu continued to be ill-treated. Then she went home to her parents, who also did not want her, especially as within six months of her return ten members died and Jivu was blamed for this misfortune. When she was thirteen, cholera took away both her parents and Jivu's life became a torture. One day, she heard the story of the Gospel and met a missionary; but her brother found this out and shut her up, and when she refused to worship an idol she was cast out. She was finally found by the police as her brother had reported her disappearance to the authorities. The

police superintendent told her about Ramabai and her Christian school at Poona. He gave her an order to allow her to travel to Poona and hired a cart for her to help her on her journey; but her brother had her intercepted, though Jivu managed to escape to a police station. But she was again detained by her brother in Bombay. Finally, she reached Poona with the help of the police and a missionary lady. "Arrived, she looked about for Ramabai, whom the police superintendent in her own village had said would write to, asking Ramabai to meet her. Ramabai had waited long at the station, but owing to her detention in Bombay Jivu did not arrive when expected. She finally got courage to ask a *tonga* driver to take her to the Sharada Sadan. When he put her down before a large bungalow she thought that could not be the right place, sat down on the roadside and began to cry. Hearing her crying Ramabai herself came out and asked what the trouble was. 'I want Ramabai' Jivu said. 'I am Ramabai! ' was the reply in Canarese, Jivu's own language, and taking her in her motherly arms, she kissed her and took her into her Home. For weeks after, Jivu was ill with fever, but Ramabai herself nursed her till she finally recovered."[21]

In 1898, Jivu went to America with Ramabai, as she was still pursued by relatives. She returned to India after two or three years and stayed happily at Mukti. She even visited her home years later and preached the Gospel there and was welcomed by her people. She returned after giving them the Gospel and staying two weeks, though they begged her to stay longer. She also tried to find the missionary who had first taught her the Gospel; but he had died.

Many other extraordinary cases were reported and in 1901, Ramabai writes: "Soudaminibai and Gungabai, two of the old girls, who seem to be divinely called, have been working in the most needy parts of the Central Provinces, where they have to encounter many difficulties. God has been most wonderfully helping them wherever they have gone in His name."[22] Such cases were countless, and the friends Ramabai made were legion.

[21] Helen S. Dyer, *Pandita Ramabai,* p. 83
[22] *The Widows' Friend,* pp. 187, 188

VI

Last Days and After

1

LIKE all outstanding personalities, Ramabai's was a constructive and creative character. Her mind teemed with ideas. Even towards the end of her life, when her health was declining and when she had to spend more and more of her time in meditation and prayer, she was always busy, always up and doing. Youth finds joy in a future to look forward to. Old age begins when the lure of happy days and planning ahead are dead. Ramabai never knew what it was to be old, for to her there was always a future, and upto her last days she continued to be creative and constructive, Ramabai's successful planning extending in three directions. Her direct rescue and rehabilitation of destitutes, widows and orphans (a rough estimate of the number of human beings she rescued could well be over 3,000); her building of institutions; her prolific output as a writer and orator.

Mukti Sadan now resembled more a village than an institution. It became a type of "socialistic community complete in itself." *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* published the following notice in 1907: "Pandita Ramabai now has 2,000 women and

girls under her charge. A little school started seventeen years ago has grown into a popular village. No effort is being made to proselytize the girls, and even some of the teachers still adhere to the Hindu faith. Ramabai is acknowledged to be the most learned woman of her race, and she alone of all women of India bears the title of Pandita. Dr. Charles C. Hall calls her a statesmanlike servant of God and one of the great personages of her generation."

A visitor to Mukti in 1913 writes the following account: Let us follow Mr. C. D. Airan of Kirkee into Mukti Sadan. He says: "All the inmates were usefully employed, sufficiently clothed and fed and were happy. I am a witness to this. I saw their happy faces in 1913 when I paid a visit to Pandita Ramabai. It was an hour's journey by train and I arrived there in the morning. They had provided a separate room and a bathroom for visitors. The room was equipped with a bed, a table, a couple of chairs and some writing materials. There were a number of books on the table and a Bible. After breakfast, which consisted of tea and chapatis, one of the European missionaries took me and my Brahmin friend around to see the various activities of the settlement. We saw the little children being taught to read, write and count, and taking part in singing and relating Bible stories. We were shown how the blind women were taught to read braille, some of them were made to read to us verses from the Gospel. We saw women making grass mats, baskets, cane chairs and other reed work. There was an oil engine being worked entirely by women and this engine was running the printing press. Then we were shown the weaving department where women were employed in various stages of making cloth for use in the mission as well as for sale. The tailoring and needle work department was very interesting and the girls were being instructed in all branches of embroidery as well as dress-making. Then we saw the Church which was under construction as well as the kitchen and the farm. Everywhere there were happy faces and everywhere we could hear small groups of girls singing. The song which was most prominent during the day I spent there and which I understood later to be one of Pandita Ramabai's favourite songs was 'Oh Happy Day'."

"At lunch time we were surprised to see the girls issuing out of their sections without any noise or confusion and marching

out in single file. As they went past our room, we were struck by the cheerful faces of the young and old alike. Soon afterwards, one of the inmates brought some water for us to wash our hands. Then two brass plates containing rice, vegetables, mutton, chutney, chapatis and fruits were placed before me and my Brahmin friend. For once my friend was mistaken for a Christian, for he was dressed like me and had his hair cut short. And for once he had to eat the food cooked by Christians, though he did not touch the meat. I, however, pointed out to him that though he did not eat the meat, he tasted the gravy which was mixed with the rice as everything was served in the same brass tray. He tried to console himself by asking the girl who brought the food what caste she belonged to before she became a Christian. Her answer was: 'I don't know and I don't care either.' During the afternoon we spent our time reading and conversing with the missionary ladies. My Brahmin friend was no doubt greatly impressed with the surroundings which, though very very poor and unassuming, had yet the dignity of being something wonderful. Although we reached Mukti in the morning we could not see Pandita Ramabai; we were told that she was busy and I discovered later that she was all the time in meditation and prayer. Fortunately she suspended her meditation a few minutes before we had to depart to catch the evening train back to Poona. I say we were fortunate because it was my ambition when I had heard of Ramabai in my childhood, to see and speak to such a wonderful lady. I was rewarded with an invitation to walk into her room. She received us with a smiling face though I noticed signs of care on her face. I introduced my Brahmin friend to her and she asked him to gain a lesson from her, who was a living example of what God can do. She promised to pray for him. She presented us each with a pictorial New Testament which I have preserved with me. She could hardly hear and we had to speak very loudly. When I questioned her as to whether it wasn't a tremendous responsibility that she had taken onto herself to look after the physical and spiritual welfare of so many women and children under such difficult conditions, she only said, 'It is not my responsibility; it is my God's. He has to, and He does, look after us all.' And she pointed out the sixth Chapter of St. Matthew, verses 25-34, which is a part of the Sermon on the Mount. I asked her how she managed to feed and clothe so many. She

said that God had never failed her and though her charitable friends in England and America are either no more or have invested their resources on similar work in other countries, she had never been in want. She also related how once she was told that all the provisions raised within the settlement had given out and they had nothing left for the next day; she merely asked them all to pray and go to bed, remembering well how Jesus fed five thousand with five loaves and two fishes. And she herself spent the whole night on her knees. Her confidence in God was rewarded and the next day brought her a cheque for $ 1,000. I believe there were many such instances in her experience and she never lost faith in God. Before we departed she said a word of prayer and requested us to read a few verses now and then from the New Testament that she gave us.

"We departed from thence very happy and very deeply impressed with her personality and her great self-sacrificing work. I was told she had had an excellent offer of marriage by a famous barrister in Bengal and she could have lived in luxury for the rest of her life. But she had declined this offer and had gone in search of souls instead.

"Her daughter Manoramabai, was well-educated and obtained the B.A. degree of Bombay University. She was later studying for the M.A. degree at the Deccan College, and she was working with her mother at the same time. I heard that she used to come to college in a car and return to Mukti in the evening so that she may be able to help her mother during the night in addition to attending to her studies. Unfortunately she died just at the time when she was most needed at Mukti; her mother was infirm. She had nearly completed her studies and was about to settle down in Mukti to carry on her mother's work."[1]

It is interesting to know how Ramabai managed to house-keep for so many hundreds of inmates. It was not easy for her or her assistants to go shopping and fill the storerooms. A village tradesman was therefore asked to bring his goods to the Mission once a month. Grain, spices, sugar and all the necessary groceries were brought to the Mission. One can imagine Ramabai's tremendous capacity for house-keeping, when she had to plan the

[1] Extracts from the *Life and Work of Pandita Ramabai,* by Mr. C. D. Airan of Kirkee, sent to the author by Mr. Sudarshan Singhal of Fazilka (Punjab).

menus and take in the necessary stores for two thousand human beings. Some girls were asked to plan their meals if they were not satisfied with the food, and thus Ramabai indirectly allowed them to be trained as housewives. Apart from the monthly visit of the grocer, a weekly *hatt* or bazaar was held near Kedgaon Station each week, Ramabai encouraged this as here the local industries found a market. Home products made round about Mukti were sold here and the Mukti Mission helped to advance the very small scale industries by purchasing from them rather than from the open market.

2

As a builder of houses Ramabai set an unprecedented example. The Mukti Mission buildings extended over twenty-five to thirty acres of land, and about two hundred acres were under cultivation. Wells were to be found in every part; and apart from the three original Sadans, of Sharada, which had been moved from Poona to Kedgaon, Mukti and Kripa, there were now Sadananda Sadan, House of Unending Gladness, an orphanage for boys; the Priti Sadan, House of Love, for little girls, where five hundred tiny tots were cared for and lovingly called Rabbits; the Prem Sadan and Shanti Sadan, for women over sixty and the very old. The hospital had sixty beds with a doctor in charge and village medical services had been extended.

About a hundred girls busied themselves in printing Ramabai's translation of the Bible. A new Bible has since been printed and daily, the very girls who worked under Ramabai, ran off pages on the press in Mukti. In 1946, a Jubilee Edition of Ramabai's translation of the New Testament was published and widely circulated.

Mukti's enormous Church witnesses the constructive power of one small Indian widow. To what prowess of creative skill then cannot the daughters of India rise? In the intellectual sphere Ramabai was no less active, and the list below gives an idea of her literary output and the manner in which she had enriched Marathi literature, both Christian and non-Christian.

In a volume on the history of Modern Marathi Literature from 1800-1938, Mr. Govind Chimnaji Bhate has given much prominence to Pandita Ramabai as a contributor towards Marathi

literature. He has listed the *Stree Dharma Neeti; Maza Englandcha Pravas,* or Voyage to England, "a vivid interesting and poetic description of the sea-voyage from Bombay via Gibraltar to England written in a lucid style. Learned and full of allusions and quotations from Sanskrit"; *United Stateschi Loka-Sthiti Ani Pravas-Vritta* (1889) or the Peoples of the United States, a book full of interesting information about America; *Nava Karar* (1912), a simple translation of the New Testament; *Prabhu Yeshuche Charitra* (1913), an abridged translation of the Bible with an account of Christ's life and stories about what He did; *Dev Lok Va Mrityu Lok Yanche Darshan* (1904); *Me Keety Sonsu?* (How Much Shall I Suffer?) (1904); *Udyan Yenar Aahe* (1905); and *Amacha Prabhu Ani Taranara Yeshu Khrista Yancha Karar.* Ramabai also wrote *Nivad Geete,* a collection of hymns and songs.

Apart from the above mentioned Marathi books, to which Ramabai added the translation of the whole Bible published posthumously in 1924 and running into 1,717 pages, her translation of American school textbooks in Marathi were also a pioneering feat. Her book "Fountain of Knowledge" (Mool-Dnyan), a book written for adult literacy classes begins with the sentence "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." It was long out of print, but a reprint was made of five thousand copies to be used as a Marathi textbook.[2] Ramabai's *Testimony,* in English, published in 1917, was of course a startling revelation of a Christian woman's faith. It is still read far and wide in all countries of the world. "The High Caste Hindu Woman" which ran into many editions completed her list of English books.

3

During the first World War prices spiralled up, and there were near famine conditions in India, but there was never any shortage in Mukti. After the war, another famine broke out and Ramabai, though her health was now extremely poor, undertook the arduous task of supplying relief to about 800 starving people in Mukti. She fed them physically and spiritually. Honour from the outside world now began to pour into the Mission. The Abbess of this astounding Monastery was being spoken of in all parts of the world,

[2] *Mukti Prayer Bell,* March-April, 1952

and in India, her *bona fides* had been proved and she had created an aura of faith in herself, just as much as her faith in God had increased. One afternoon, a worker announced the arrival of the Collector of Poona. He brought the news that the Governor of Bombay had come to visit Mukti. "I was taken by surprise, for I never thought that the Governor would ever come to such an out-of-the-way place," remarks Ramabai, "and visit an unpretending institution, which had not earned popularity by great achievements, and by courting the great men of the country. In a few moments my surprise vanished, giving way to perfect pleasure, at finding the Governor so simple and natural in his manner, though he was very dignified and grand." Less than twenty years earlier, Ramabai had got into serious trouble with the Governor of Bombay because she had fearlessly and honestly criticized the manner in which the prevention and treatment of plague was being conducted by the authorities. She had almost escaped being arrested for her bold statements, which the Governor at the time had declared as "grossly inaccurate." She had so fearlessly condemned the allotment of soldiers to deal with the epidemic, and had even gained the praise of her old antagonist, Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, for boldness and courage. How greatly had the attitude of the Government changed when the same symbol of British rule now came and paid humble homage, in person, to Ramabai. True, the Governors had changed, but the office of authority was the same.

"It was delightful to see the greatest man of the Presidency, taking kindly notice of everyone who happened to come in his way, enquiring with interest of every little detail concerning the work. He seemed to be well acquainted with what was going on here. After inspecting all parts of the Mission, he bade us goodbye, and went away. It was a very pleasant surprise, and we shall never forget his visit and kindness to us all.

"As we did not know about his visit, we had not made any preparations to receive him; so he saw us as we were; some walking about, some idly sitting where they were, some doing their work properly, some sweeping the ground and doing other housework, some dressed well and tidily, others in rags with unkempt hair, some giving themselves to their lessons and industry with diligence and some just looking into the air doing nothing and thinking about nothing in particular.

"It does one good to be taken by surprise in this way. The one great thought that filled my heart while the Governor was here, and after he went away, leaving a very pleasant impression on our mind, was, that our Lord Jesus Christ is coming some day just in this manner, and those of us who are prepared to meet Him, will have the joy of being caught up in the air to be with Him. How blessed it will be, not to have anything to be afraid of, or anything that belongs to the enemy. How nice to be able to say with our Blessed Saviour: 'The Prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me'."[3]

The second coming of Jesus became more and more a certainty for Ramabai as the years passed. She writes: "The most precious truth which I have learnt since my conversion is the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. I firmly believe, as taught in the Bible, that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming soon. The signs of the times, in the last decade have taught me to be waiting for Him. I was totally ignorant of this particular subject. It is not generally taught in the country. The Missionaries connected with some denominations do not believe in it at all. They believe that Christ will come to judge the quick and the dead at the time of the last judgment but they do not think He will come for His Servants before the time of the resurrection of the dead, and before the final judgment."[4]

Ramabai therefore admonished one and all to "watch and pray" "for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." (Matt. 24:42) But she herself was ready, just as Mukti was prepared to welcome all visitors, great and small, they were in no fear of receiving the Lord.

In 1919 the King Emperor chose to bestow the Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal on Pandita Ramabai, but by 1920 Ramabai's health was rapidly beginning to fail. It is strange that this woman of sorrows, who had suffered so many bereavements throughout her life was not even allowed the comfort of her beloved daughter during her last days. Ramabai though grief-stricken, was not defeated. Not only did she continue to work, but spent her days and a good part of her nights "in praise and *praise* and PRAISE" of the Lord. In her later works she emphasized more and more the work of God and almost completely eliminated her own ego.

[3] *A Testimony* p. 30
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 31

This was indeed the sign of a saint. Early on April 5, 1922, Ramabai passed away, all alone in her room in Mukti. She fell asleep joyously and with great dignity. It is the Hindu belief that only God's children die in such peace. It is their Samadhi.

Jessie Fergusson, a member of the Mission staff, describes that final day as follows: "At five a.m. we were aroused by a cry and knew without any telling what had happened. Only one word was on our lips—*Bai!*, and only too true was the thought that filled our hearts with alarm, and which we hoped against hope was a mistaken one. We hurried around and found that a crowd had gathered near Bai's door. We went into her room and there she lay upon her bed as though in sound sleep—and such it was . . . .Her face shone with glory and beauty and only one word seemed to come to everyone's lips: *Beautiful.* No earthly beauty but the beauty and peace and joy of a soul whose home is God's."[5]

The inmates gathered in silent grief. Miss Hastie who was to take over the work, read the verse: "Jesus the author and finisher of our faith", and remarked: "Her faith is finished now. It is changed to sight, and while we are stricken indeed, we try to see things from the other side, from the glory side where she is. What a welcome she has had and what a greeting from Manorama. Not long have they been separated. Now, no more separation."

All day a stream of visitors poured in from villages—many of whom Ramabai had saved from starvation. One old Brahmin widow cried: "O great mother, Great Mother, whom shall I call 'Mother'? Who will care for me?"

The funeral was in the great church the next morning. The girls had fasted and prayed all night and bore the coffin on their shoulders to a grave near the great well *Dheer*. Her body was laid to rest in the presence of a large gathering of Christians and Hindus. After her death the New Zealand Council donated $ 25,000 for printing and circulating Ramabai's translation of the Bible. Thus ended one of the most noble lives India has ever had the honour of calling "her own." For Pandita Ramabai was Indian, and she was Christian, and through Ramabai a mighty link was connected between the Lord Jesus and Hindustan, as it was always meant to be, for Christ belonged to India from the beginning and there is never any need for Indians to think otherwise. Indeed Christianity came to India in the first century A.D.

[5] *India's Christain Pilgrim,* pp. 118, 119

and needed no outsiders to introduce Him, but Ramabai paved the way to bring Him back to His own.

4

With Pandita Ramabai's passing away all differences were smoothened out and Hindus and Christians alike mourned the loss of this great daughter of India. Throughout her life she was a "Protestant and an iconoclast", but she built a pattern, one of non-denominational international unity, which has created a new precedence in the Christian world. It was no wonder then that Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, herself one of the greatest women India has ever produced, at a memorial meeting in Bombay in 1922 remarked that Pandita Ramabai was "the first Christian to be enrolled in the calendar of Hindu Saints." No words could have been more to the point. Ramabai interlocked Hindu culture with the Christian faith; she presented Christ as a Saviour of the East, and to her our humble thanks must ever be poured forth.

Looking back to the sad occasion of the passing of Pandita Ramabai on April 5, 1922 how great was the grief in which the cities of Poona and Bombay were steeped, not to speak of the rest of India, and the English speaking world. Many tributes were paid to Ramabai including an eloquent panegyric by Mr. Deodhar, the Chairman at the time of the Prarthana Samaj. This Samaj, though it had first befriended Ramabai, later condemned her, and after her death, she was again hailed as a heroine.

Mr. Govind Mallinath Thenge, who knew her personally remarked at the condolence meeting that the image of the Pandita was before his eyes "covered in pure white robes in every part except the face which is alone visible; the lustrous face beaming forth in all serenity divine like the full moon in the white heavens above."[6] Earlier, Rabindranath Tagore, when he heard Ramabai speak in Poona in 1889 had compared her to a "white lotus." Though he had not agreed with her views about the equality of men and women, he could not but praise her virture, her poise and dignity. Mr. Thenge remarked on this same "White" splendour for all God's children have a divine radiance about them. Reminiscing about the opening of the Sharada Sadan in 1889, Mr. Thenge said: "One of my cousins who was unfortunately widowed at the

[6] *Subodh Patrika,* May 7, 1922

age of 20 was an inmate of the Sadan from its beginning, and she often gratefully recounts the tales of the affection, love and care bestowed upon all the inmates alike by the Pandita who was looked upon as their own mother. Such was the influence shed by the Pandita over the life of my cousin that notwithstanding the fact that she has a son who is an M.A. and a Professor, she still continues, at the age of 58 to impart education to girls with the same tender care and affection which a mother would bestow on her own children."[7]

Ramabai's critics had nothing to say after her death, but the untold good she had done lives on. Assessing her achievements, it is not strange that Ramabai had been named "Ashta Pailu" and "Divya Ratna" by the Maharashtrians. She shines like a gem and her facets are even more than eight-sided. The rays she emanated can by classed under the following headings: Introducer in India of the Kindergarten system and Brail for the blind; Sponsor of industrial training centres for boys and girls; among the first to advocate Hindi to be the Rashtra Bhasha and the Devanagari script to be the Rashtra-Leepy; first woman to appear before and to lead women delegates to the Indian National Congress; bold critic of the Governor of Bombay and his Government for the irresponsible attitude during the plague epidemic; advocater of loyalty to India first as the Motherland, rather than to the Queen Mother; pioneer of the Swadeshi movement and the use of home products and industries such as hand-spun cloth; first to start a Home for women, destitutes and the unwanted; prime mover of medical education for women and the starting of the women's medical movement; first to champion prohibition; pioneer among women to champion the freedom of women in the East and the raising of their status. This movement extended even up to Indonesia as was evident at the Centenary celebrations in 1958, for Mrs. Herawati Diah, Editor of the "Indonesian Observer", Djkarta, Indonesia, writes: "On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of PANDITA RAMABAI, the greatest woman of India and the world, I would like to express my deepfelt congratulations to the organizers of the memorable day.

"The women of Indonesia are very proud of any achievement accomplished, whether today or in the past, by their fellow sisters of Asia. Pandita Ramabai is an exceptional case of greatness.

[7] *Subodh Patrika,* May 7, 1922

"We, therefore, are grateful that a woman of such a remarkable distinction is still remembered by this generation."[8]

Finally Ramabai was the only woman who has ever attempted the translation of the Holy Bible direct from the original Greek and Hebrew, and she was the first Indian modern woman to be acclaimed "Pandita" and "Saraswati." Ramabai was an example of a woman who sacrificed herself for the sake of her sisters; she was ATMA YADNYA—A self-renouncer.

5

More than a hundred years have passed away since the birth of Pandita Ramabai. An active Committee was formed to celebrate the Centenary in April 1958. The President of this Committee was Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, and its indefatigable Secretary and Treasurer Mr. S. M. Adhav. Since the 100th year, the anniversary is celebrated yearly and honours are heaped on Ramabai. The Centenary celebration week in 1958 commenced with a public inaugural meeting, held in Sir Cowasji Jahangir Hall on April 19, 1958. It was presided over by Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and the meeting was inaugurated by Shri. K. M. Munshi, Ex-Governor of Uttar Pradesh. The Chief Guest on the occasion was Bharat Ratna Maharshi D. K. Karve, who was born five days before Ramabai on April 18, 1858 and who passed away in November, 1962 at the age of 104. Dr. Karve offered a glowing tribute to his illustrious contemporary and erased with a few words all the calumnies that many of the leaders of his youth had heaped on Ramabai. He said: "I am extremely happy to get this opportunity to pay homage to one of India's most illustrious women. None of you can have any idea about the great struggle this very learned and highly intelligent woman had to carry on against orthodoxy, which has been an obnoxious feature of Hinduism, in the midst of the 19th century.

"My relations with Pandita Ramabai were of a personal nature as my second wife Anandibai was one of the first pupils in Ramabai's Sharada Sadan. I got my inspiration from that institution for starting the Widows' Home in 1896. In sincerity and selfless work for the most humble, none could surpass Ramabai.

"Her ardent desire for service to women, later on drove her

[8] *Pandita Ramabai Centenary Souvenir,* p. 25

into the arms of Christianity, because of the unparalleled opposition of Hindu orthodoxy. It was Christian foreigners who helped her in her great cause with workers and money, when orthodox Hindus were offering hatred and ridicule instead of sympathy and love. It was our own fault that this great woman, like the late Dr. Ambedkar, was lost to the Hindu religion.

"Pandita Ramabai Saraswati must be classed as one of the great builders of modern India. Let Indians, therefore, atone for their past mistake and support the work started by Ramabai for the down-trodden and the poor. After all, that human work is for all Indians even if Christians are carrying it on. It is work for the uplift of India and it has, therefore, my heartfelt blessings"[9] This was an unique and unprecedented occasion in that a Centenarian (Dr. D. K. Karve) honoured by his presence the centenary celebrations!

Such messages of tolerance and a broad outlook on life are much needed today when the integration of India is so essential. The tendency to break into communal and compartmental groups of religion and language and State can only be prevented when all people who work for the Motherland are considered as her children, no matter who they worship. Service to humanity and love for one and all are all that count, and Ramabai set this noble example. Dr. Munshi's remarks about Ramabai were also warm; he praised her work for women. A number of other speakers added their tributes to the Pandita's memory and the Government of Bombay took a Documentary film of the meeting. The Arya Mahila Samaj, still active in Western India, remembered with gratitude its inauguration by Ramabai on 30 November, 1882. This organization still flourishes. Lady Vatsalabai Chandavarkar, President of the Arya Mahila Samaj paid a tribute to Pandita Ramabai as follows: "Seventy years ago, Pandita Ramabai kindled the light from which the Arya Mahila Samaj, Bombay, derived its inspiration. We cherish grateful memories of that great pioneer who was also a great woman. . . . She combined in her the spirit of the modern age with all that is best in the ancient culture of our land. . . . The task which she began is handed down to us. May her example continue to inspire and guide us in our humble endeavours to carry on that task."[10]

[9] *Pandita Ramabai Centenary Souvenir,* p. 19
[10] *Ibid.*

The Protestant Church of India also paid deep respect to Ramabai and the Pandita was remembered in Churches on Sunday April 20, 1958. The Following Collect was used on that day:

> O God! Who didst endow Thy servant, Mary Ramabai, with singular gifts of intellect and a wise and compassionate heart; we thank Thee that Thou didst call her to bear witness to Thee by her learning, and by service to her suffering sisters of India, and pray for her grace to cherish and follow her example, through Jesus Christ Our Lord, Amen.

At the Lambeth Committee III-Progress in the Anglican Community—the centenary of the Pandita Ramabai was discussed by the second Sub-committee and "the question as to how notable heroes of the Christian Faith are to be commemorated in the Calendar of Saints. . . ." "The Pandita is not yet in the list, on account of a principle that names should not be added till fifty years after death."[11]

The Sharada Sadan of Pandita Ramabai (1889) was housed near Wilson College in Bombay, in the immediate vicinity of the Harvey Road. The Arya Mahila Samaj founded by her (1882) is likewise situated in the same area. The Pandita Ramabai Hostel for Wilson College Girls stands opposite to the Arya Mahila Samaj Building.

At the instance of the Pandita Ramabai Centenary Memorial Committee, Bombay, and in fitful recognition of the signal services rendered by the Pandita to the life of the city of Bombay and Maharashtra in particular, and to the women of India in general, the Municipal Corporation of Greater Bombay honoured the Pandita by renaming the existing Harvey Road as the Pandita Ramabai Road.

A large commemorative public function was accordingly held in Bombay in Wilson College on the 11th May 1963 to celebrate the 105th Birth Anniversary of Pandita Ramabai at which the new Pandita Ramabai Road was inaugurated and a bronze bust of Pandita Ramabai unveiled.

The Union Minister, Mr. S. K. Patil who renamed the road said that this Pandita Ramabai Road would be a fitting memorial to Pandita Ramabai, an illustrious daughter of Modern India and

[11] Bishop's Letter No. 4 of 1958

a great social reformer and pioneer in the cause of emancipation of womanhood; and that this memorial would serve as a reminder so that generations to come would remember her. He, however, further stressed that rededication to the cause for which Pandita Ramabai lived and died would be a fitting memorial to her.

The late Mrs. Violet Alva, Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha (Parliament) New Delhi till her sudden death in November 1969, while unveiling the bronze bust of Pandita Ramabai, said that Ramabai showed the way at a time when women's status as citizens had not as yet been recognized. It was she who gave shape to the woman of Modern India of today.

Mrs. Manoramabai Gadre, aged 80, the only surviving student of the Sharada Sadan was the living witness of the work done by Pandita Ramabai and she gave a short and very interesting account of her memoirs from 1889 onwards.

This function was presided over by the Right Rev. C. J. G. Robinson, the Bishop of Bombay. This proved to be a historical occasion, to which almost all the newspapers gave generous publicity.

And, thus the years roll by, and the memory of a small Hindu widow, who through the teeth of opposition embraced Christianity, gathers momentum in ever increasing force. Her grace and blessings, we know, will always be showered on the country, and guide us, the fond and blind, in a world fraught with turmoil and trouble. We can only, in humble gratitude, thank the Pandita for the rich heritage of love and service she has bequeathed to the country.

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APPENDICES

I

Pandita Ramabai Centenary Memorial Committee, Bombay

Aims and Objects: Activities and Attainments

At a meeting of the Bombay Indian Christian Association, held in 1957, I proposed that we appoint a small sub-committee in order to celebrate the Birth Centenary of Pandita Ramabai due on April 23, 1958. Accordingly the above mentioned Committee came into being. Mr. A. Noble Rajamani, the erstwhile Editor of the *Light of Life,* Bombay, and now Editor, *The Christian Focus,* Madras, was my guide and chief adviser; based on this, our Committee made elaborate plans. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Member of Parliament, honoured the Committee by agreeing to be the President. Mr. J. S. S. Malelu was the Chairman. It was decided to initiate matters and invoke all leading cities in India to make arrangements on an elaborate scale to celebrate the Birth Centenary. Hundreds of printed circular letters and appeals were accordingly despatched and the Centenary was celebrated all over India. Public response from all over India was heartening and encouraging. Christians and non-Christians took part in the celebrations and the 'Mahila Samitis' comprising all communities seized this opportunity to bring to the fore the forgotten life of Pandita Ramabai.

Our Committee embraced the following main objectives: To raise a Memorial Fund of one lakh rupees; to write an uptodate biography—a Centenary Memorial Volume; to inaugurate Memorial Scholarships; to request the Government of India to issue a commemorative postage stamp in honour of Pandita Ramabai—all this in order to befittingly perpetuate the memory of Pandita Ramabai. Mr. Noble Rajamani instilled in me all these and many more laudable objectives which then appeared to be too ambitious and too big to be realised. He said Pandita Ramabai was one of the greatest daughters of India and the celebrations should be as great. We could not secure sufficient monetary response (this is a time when even great causes languish) and therefore could not yet fulfil all our objectives. But special mention must be made of some of the following instances and happenings most of them as a result of my initiative, campaign and drive: Two roads in Poona and Bombay were named as Pandita Ramabai Road; a bronze bust of Pandita Ramabai has been erected in Bombay; a portrait of Pandita Ramabai is hung in the Poona University; a large biography in Marathi: *Maharashtrachi Tejasvini Pandita Ramabai* written by Mr. D. N. Tilak was published in 1960; Pandita Ramabai's book: *Stree Dharma Neety* has been reprinted after 86 years; a special Pandita Ramabai number of the Tamil magazine *Arunodayam* was published in 1958; a special Pandita Ramabai number of the Marathi monthly magazine *Anuradha* was published in 1960; a still film-strip on the life of Pandita Ramabai has been made by *Caravs,* Jubbulpore; an announcement has been made by a leading Film Producer in Bombay and a full length movie film on the Pandita's life may become a reality in the near future; a commemorative postage stamp in honour of Pandita Ramabai is expected to be issued by the Government of India in the near future; a special Pandita Ramabai number of the Marathi magazine *Wangmaya Shobha* was published in 1962; a full-life sketch of Pandita Ramabai has been published in the Souvenir issued by the Canara Industrial & Banking Syndicate Ltd., on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of their Karkal Bank. The city of Karkal is only ten miles from the Gangamul forest—the birth place of Pandita Ramabai; Mr. J. B. H. Wadia, a famous Bombay film producer donated one of his films towards the Pandita Ramabai Memorial Fund. (A Marathi biography: *Pandita Ramabai* written by the renowned writer and journalist Prabodhankar Thackeray has been dedicated to Mr. Wadia.)

The *Subodh Patrika* is one of the oldest surviving periodicals in India and the official organ of the Bombay Prarthana Samaj. It was the Prarthana Samaj that gave the first and the widest publicity to Pandita Ramabai; it gave her the platform; it was under its auspices that Pandita Ramabai travelled the whole of Maharashtra and established the Arya Mahila Samaj which still functions. All the old issues of the *Subodh Patrika* are preserved by the Samaj from which the material on the early life and work of Pandita Ramabai has been gathered. I am deeply obliged to Mr. G. L. Chandavarkar, the President of the Samaj, for his ready co-operation and help. Mr. A. V. Shrikhande assisted me a good deal in copying out material from old books and newspapers which are available only in libraries.

Mrs. Padmini Sengupta and I very much longed to see this great book published and I feel really proud that I am able to present this Centenary Memorial Volume, although belated, after the Centenary Year. This is a biography of a great Christian Saint, Scholar and Savant of India and is indeed a Gospel of the twentieth century written for His Glory. May this great life inspire all who read it.

S. M. Adhav

Hon. Secretary and Treasurer
Pandita Ramabai Centenary Memorial Committee
Bombay

II

Sanskrit Ode

To the Congress at Berlin, September 1881 *by the Lady Pandit Ramabai of Silchar, Kachar, Assam with a translation by Sir Monier-Williams, K.C.I.E., D.C.L., M.A., Boden Professor of Sanskrit of the University College, Oxford.*

देववाणी – परिदेवितम् ।

पण्डिता रमाबाईविरचितं काव्यम् ।

इदं हि मोनियर विल्यम्स महोदयैः 'रॉयल एशियाटिक सोसायटी ऑफ् ग्रेट ब्रिटन् ॲण्ड आयर्लैंड' इत्याख्यया संस्थया बर्लिननगरे आयोजिते सांस्कृतिकसंमेलने १८८१ तमे खिस्ताब्दे पठितम्, आङ्गलभाषया अनूदितं, गुणवत् काव्यम् इति च स्तुतिपात्रं कलितम् । पण्डितया एतद् आयुषः २३ तमे वर्षे आसामप्रान्ते सिलचर नगरे रचितम् ।

ओ३म्

समुदारमहाशया बुधा
भवतां स्वस्ति सदाऽस्तु वृद्धिमत् ।
प्रियभाषण-भक्ति-सत्कृतीः
कृपया स्वीकुरुताऽनघा मम ॥१॥

विकला हृतभूषणाऽधुना
जरती संस्कृतभारती विदः।
अहहाऽद्य चिरादसत्कृता
शरणं वः सुमतीनुपास्थिता ॥२॥

इयमार्तरवेण पीडिता
विलपत्यन्तरमर्मभेदिना ।
शृणुताऽवहिता यथा ह्ययं
प्रविशेत् क्षीणतरो भवच्छ्रुतीः ॥३॥

"हा—
परिवर्तिनि नित्यशो जग—
त्यचलं किं नु तदस्ति यन्मुहुः।
विधिदुर्ललिते भ्रमाकुलं
न घटीयंत्रदशां प्रपद्यते ? ॥४॥

तडितोऽपि गतिः क्वचिज्जनै—
रिह निर्णेष्यत एधितश्रमैः ।
न तथापि विधेर्विचेष्टितं
महदायासशतैश्चिरं कृतैः ॥५॥

सुभगाऽहमभूवमेकदा
बहुपुत्रेष्टसमृद्धिशालिनी ।
भगिनीरतिवर्त्म मेऽपरा
भुवि मान्या भुवनैकसुंदरी ॥६॥

कवयोऽखिलमोहनस्वरा
विदुषो (SIC) दार्शनिकाः कलाविदः ।
गणका अपि नीतिकोविदा
गुरुविज्ञानविशेषमण्डिताः ॥७॥

अनिशं नवदिव्यभूषणैः
स्वकृतैस्ते बत ! माममण्डयन् ।
अभवच्चिरजीवनव्रतं
मम सेवैव यदीयमक्षतम् ॥८॥

तदनिर्वचनीयविज्ञता—
मुकुराणां मम केलिसद्मनाम् ।
अवशिष्टमिहाऽद्य खंडशः
परितो ध्वस्तमहो निदर्शनम् ॥९॥

क्व स मे विभवोऽद्य ते सुताः
क्व च वल्मीकभुवादयः प्रियाः ? ।
न कथन्नु ममेदृशी दशा
पुनरावृत्य निरीक्ष्यतेऽपि तैः ? ॥१०॥

विकला हतसाधुपुत्रका
सततं विह्वलहृत् क्षताङ्गका ।
शववत्पतिताऽस्म्यनादृता
श्वसितेऽपि क्षमता न मेऽधुना ॥११॥

मम नाम विलीनतेजसो
मृतभाषेत्यभिधीयते परैः ।
इति दुःसहदुःखदुःखिता
कथमद्यापि भवेऽस्मि हा विधे ॥१२॥

क्व मदीयविपत्सुदुःखिता
अवशिष्टास्तनया ममाऽधुना ?
पुनरुद्धरणं प्रकुर्युरि—
त्यहहाऽऽशास्तमभून्मया चिरम् ॥१३॥

क्व पुनः स्वत एव तेऽद्य मां
बत निःशेषयितुं कुबुद्धयः ।
समवेत्य विचारयन्त्यतः
किमिवाऽन्यद्धविताऽसुखं परम् ॥१४॥

प्राणैः समं मे बत देवनागरं
संहृत्य तत्सद्मनि रोमनाक्षरम् ।
इच्छन्त्यधिष्ठापयितुं यदीदृशी
तेषां मतिः स्यान्न तदा कथं विपत् ? ॥१५॥

यद्यात्मजा मे भुवि चिह्नमात्रम—
प्युच्छेत्तुमिच्छन्ति तदा क एव माम् ।
रक्षन्तु, क वा शरणं प्रयामि हे
किं वाऽपि दुःखावृतजीविताशया ? ॥१६॥

आसन्पुरैके दिवसा यदार्यसू—
वीरप्रजाऽऽसीदतिसर्वमुन्नता ।
भ्रूभंगिसंचालितविश्वमण्डला
सत्कीर्तिभाभासितदिद्विगन्तरा ॥१७॥

आर्याश्च ते यन्महिमाविमोहितं
लोकत्रयं यज्ञयशब्दकम्पितम् ।
छायेव तद्यातपथानुवर्तकं
विश्वं यदाऽभूत्किल मंत्रमुग्धवत् ॥१८॥

वाल्मीकि-कृष्ण-प्रभृतीन् ऋषीन्वहून्
राज्ञः सतो रामयुधिष्ठिरादिकान् ।
सीतादयश्चापि (SIC) सतीः प्रसूय हा
रत्नप्रसूर्भारतभूरभूच्छुभा ॥१९॥

सैवाद्य सर्वत्र परानुवर्तकान्
आत्मद्रुमोच्छेदपरश्वधायितान् ।
पुत्रान्प्रसूयाऽनपनेयदुर्य्यशा
अंगारसूरार्यकलंकसंकुला ॥२०॥

किं ते निधे नाऽस्ति महाशये जलं
विप्लाव्य शीघ्रं प्रलयाय भारतम् ।
संप्रापयैतं पृथिवीकलंकं
त्वं मानचित्रादपसार्य प्रभो ॥२१॥

अद्यैव भस्मीभवतु ज्वलच्छिखे
हुताशने भारतमेतदञ्जसा ।
मा कोऽपि नामाऽस्य पुनः कदाचन
स्ववाक्पथे प्रापयतु स्खलन्नपि ॥२२॥

इत्यादि मातुः करुणागिरो मुहुः
समीरिता न प्रविशन्त्यहो श्रुतीः ।
यद्भारतानां किमतः परं भवेत्—
त्रपामहाश्चर्यसुदुःखकारणम् ॥२३॥

निस्तेजसो वा विकलाः श्वसच्छव—
प्रायाश्चिरं दास्य-निपीडितान्तराः ।
वृथैव कण्ठेन विशोषितेन किं
तेषां पुरो नष्टधियो हि तेऽधुना ॥२४॥

यद्यूयमद्येक्ष्य (SIC) सुदुर्दशामिमां
समागता उन्नतिसाधनोत्सुकाः ।
गीर्वाणवाण्यास्तदतीव भारती
प्रजा चिरायोपकृता भवत्कृतैः ॥२५॥

गास्याम (SIC) यावद्धृदये भवन्ति नः
प्राणाः सुपूज्यान्भवदीयसद्गुणान् ।
जीयास्त नित्यं भवतां सदात्मनां
आशास्महे विश्वपितुः सुमंगलम् ॥२६॥

सिलचर, काचर
आसाम प्रदेशः ।
भारतवर्षात् १२ ऑगस्ट १८८१.

इति—रमाबाई

NOBLE-MINDED and learned Sirs! May health and prosperity be ever present with you! Kindly receive the expression of my homage and devotion. O men of knowledge, the ancient Sanskrit language is at the present day like an aged mother shorn of her beauty and bereft of her ornaments. For a long time, alas! She has remained unhonoured; and now flees to you well-disposed scholars for protection. In the sharpness of her grief, she laments with a heart-rending cry of pain. Listen attentively, that her feeble cry of suffering may enter your ears.

"Alas!" she cries, "in this revolving world every existing thing, however, apparently unchangeable, is subject to the caprice of fate, and has its ups and downs like a machine for drawing water

from a well! It is possible for men with great difficulty to track here and there the path of lightning. Yet not in the same way, even with a hundred efforts, can they trace the course of Destiny. Formerly I was like a favourite wife, blessed with many prosperous sons; surpassing all my other sisters, I was honoured as the most beautiful woman in the world. Poets, whose songs fascinated the Universe, wise men, philosophers, artists, mathematicians, politicians, and men distinguished in every kind of profound science continually adorned me with fresh divine ornaments of their own construction, having vowed to serve me with lifelong, unbroken service. But now, alas! in my own joyous abode, glittering with the tokens of their unbounded erudition, mere fragments are left scattered as sad examples around me. Where are now these my sons who were my glory? Where my countless friends? How is it that none of them return to look with pity on my condition? With impaired energies, bereft of my noble sons, ever agitated in heart and with wounded limbs, have I fallen unhonoured like a dead body on the ground; and now I have not even power to draw a single breath. Nay, my very speech, deprived as I am of all vitality, is described by my enemies as 'dead'. Thus oppressed by insupportable grief, how can I any longer be said to exist? alas, my destiny! Where are now my remaining children, who are deeply distressed by my calamities? Oh! that they may effect my resurrection—this has long been my prayer. And where are those evil-minded ones who of their own accord take counsel together what they may bring me to nothing? Can any other thing be more painful than this?

"And now they wish to tear away the divine Nagari characters —dear to me as my very soul—from their home and replace them by the Roman letters. If their intention be carried out, will not then a great disaster befall me? If my own children seek in this manner to extirpate all marks of my existence on the earth, who will be my guardians? To whom shall I flee for refuge? What hope shall I have of life when thus overwhelmed with misfortunes?

"In former days the land of Bharata was the producer of noble sons and heroic offspring, like jewels; she was exalted above all, her slightest look of displeasure moved the whole globe; her glorious fame illuminated the Universe; and the three worlds were fascinated by the greatness of those noble children, and thrilled by the glory of their victories; and the universe, charmed as it

were by the spell of their example, followed in their path like a shadow. Such were the great sages Valmiki and Vyas (Krishna) and others, and great kings like Rama and Yudhishthira, and devoted wives like Sita and others. Now, to her ineffaceable disgrace, she brings forth sons like charcoal, whose actions cast a dark blot upon the Aryan race, who follow the ways of foreigners, and lay the axe to the root of their own tree of knowledge.

"Is there not sufficient water, Oh Ocean, in thy vast receptacle to inundate our land? May thy floods, Oh Lord, prevail to sweep away these stains from her honour! Or this very day may some blazing conflagration quickly reduce this land of Bharat to ashes, and let no voice pronounce her name, even in faltering accents, till every mark of her dishonour be removed!

"Such is the piteous cry uttered by the mother of learning. Yet, alas! how grievous, how disgraceful, how surprising is it that it penetrates not the ears of the Indian people! Why, then, should her voice be rendered hoarse with useless lamentation before such a people—a people long ground down by slavery, bereft of power, energy and intellect, and little better than breathing corpses?

"If you noble-minded men, assembled this day in the Congress, will look with favour on the miserable condition of the Sanskrit language, and restore her by your efforts to her former exalted position; the people of India will be for ever grateful to you. We will ever sing the praises of your noble qualities; and offer up prayers to the Father of the Universe for your prosperity as long as our hearts throb with life."

Note:

The young lady Ramabai (author of the above Ode) has recently attracted much attention in Indian society. She is described as a slight, girlish-looking woman of fair complexion, about twenty-two years of age. Her family lived in Mysore and her brother was a Pandit in the service of the Gaikwar of Baroda. In the hope of ameliorating the condition of their country-women, the brother and sister travelled together through Bengal and Assam, delivering lectures on female education to crowded audiences. Unfortunately, their further co-operation in this good work was cut short by the brother's death. Since the occurrence of that event Ramabai has married a Bengali gentleman—a Vakil by profession and M.A. of the Calcutta University. She is said to speak Sanskrit fluently, and to be able to repeat the whole Bhagwata Purana by heart. What has gained her the greatest reputation for learning has been her power of improvising the Sanskrit verses. On the third day of the Oriental Congress

at Berlin, I received a Sanskrit letter from her enclosing the above metrical address and asking me to lay it before the Congress. This I did, and the original Sanskrit was read with the proper metrical intonation by Pandit Shyamaji Krishna Varma before a large meeting of members of the Aryan section, held in the Hall of the University. Much interest was naturally excited in the minds of those present, by the unusual phenomenon of a lady Pandit capable of writing such a good Sanskrit poetry.

It would be scarcely fair to criticize the young lady's Sanskrit scholarship too severely. Here and there the inadvertencies are obvious, though the greater part of the composition is unexceptionable. In a few cases where the exigencies of the metre—which is Vaitaliya as far as verse 14, and after that Jagati—have prevented my making the necessary corrections, I have indicated the inaccuracies by the word *sic*. Nor will the original bear too literal a translation, the construction being now and then intricate and obscure. Still I trust my version, though free, will in all cases give a fairly correct idea of the meaning.

After all, the inaccuracies and obscurities are not greater than those in the other two Sanskrit addresses presented to the Congress, and the verses of Ramabai are, in my opinion, by far the best in point of poetical merit.

Oxford MONIER-WILLIAMS
December 21, 1881

III

The Arya Mahila Samaj

Extracts from the "History of the Prarthana Samaj" by Shri Dwarkanath Govind Vaidya, the Prarthana Samaj, Bombay

In the year 1877 some of the leading members of the Prarthana Samaj had begun seriously to think of educating Indian women. The organ of the Samaj, *Subodh Patrika,* announced and convened a meeting in Bombay of gentlemen who had taken keen interest in the reformation of the other sex, "to adjust principles of imparting education to the other sex."

Meanwhile, Pandita Ramabai's "Sharada Sadan" and a Girls' School had already been established. The general opinion was slowly shaping itself in favour of the uplift of women in India. Meetings for them were organized and eminent professors, doctors, and scientists gave interesting lectures of educational value.

However, it was not until 1 May 1882, when Panditabai established the "Arya Mahila Samaj" in Poona, that the movement received a constructive momentum. Pandita Ramabai delivered a series of lectures in Poona and Bombay. She won the hearts of the people and commanded respect from them. The Arya Mahila Samaj was well received. The gist of Panditabai's address, a day prior to the establishment of the Samaj, is given below. The address reflects her great thoughts. She said:

"If we study the ancient Indian culture and the conditions then prevailing, we will see that the women's status in society then was not what it is today. In those days, women were given opportunity to learn and were taught many subjects (विद्या). The result was that we had in our country great and famous women like Sita, Gandhari and Maitreyee. The plight of an Indian woman today is very sad indeed. She is neither educated nor knowledgeable. Some may ask, "What will be the position of men if all the women get educated?" Well, I wish to ask: "Is the position of men any better today?" They are merely wooden dolls subjected to slavery. This is certainly not a man-like quality. Improve the women's condition and status, and the men's status will automatically improve. The advancement of other countries is attributable only to the fact that their women are reformed. A child will always reflect to a great extent, the characteristics of its mother. Look at today's women in our country; bullied and suppressed, with fear of the elders (mothers-in-law) in the family, they resort to telling lies and become proficient liars! Their children, therefore, learn the art of telling a lie. Consequently, the people of our country have become untruthful, timid and lustreless. We have gathered here today to find ways and means to improve the condition of our women. Whatever mode of action we decide upon, we should tenaciously adhere to it. We should pledge ourselves that we shall ever remain truthful. Some will think that we, who are dependent on others, cannot improve. I shall say to such people that women are independent. We must protect our independence. There is no reason why men should have more rights and freedom than women in our society. It is quite obvious that the major part of the family responsibilities rests with the women of the house. For this reason alone women should enjoy more rights and privileges. At present women are ruled by men and considered as part of other lifeless properties in the household. We must pull ourselves out of this degrading situation. I think we should get together and establish an institution of our own. Then we must help this institution wholeheartedly and sustain it with whatever financial assistance we could give. Some women may think that this would be a revolution against men and is therefore a sin. I am telling you that you are committing a greater sin by remaining what you are today. The very fact that you accept meekly without protest, the nefarious outrages by men, is a sin in itself. We are not going to

resort to any unjust or unethical line of action, but shall follow the just and virtuous path. I do not believe that you will have difficulty in giving financial support to this organisation. You offer large sums of money to the 'Puranik' in the places of worship, who tells you a lot of fairy-tales and, of course, you spend money on making ornaments for yourselves. Therefore, if you desire, you can keep a little money by to help this institution."

Panditabai gave the above address on 30 April 1882 and the Arya Mahila Samaj was established on 1 May 1882.

The object and rules as laid down by Pandita Ramabai are as follows:

1. In order to fulfil the ardent wishes of Bharatiya women, we establish this Society and name it "Arya Mahila Samaj".
2. The two main objects of this Samaj are:
   (*a*) To free the gentle women of Bharat from being subjected to blind traditional injustice (viz., child-marriage, dependency due to ignorance and down-right slavery), and
   (*b*) To uplift them from their present regrettable state in religion, virtue and custom, etc.
3. Women from all parts of Bharat and of Indian nationality can become leading members.
4. Women of foreign nationality, who are kind enough to offer their help and assistance to our cause, may be considered as honorary members.
5. Membership is open only to those who are from respectable families and are of good character.
6. As this Samaj will be jointly responsible for all its actions, members are requested not to insist on personal proposals and should abstain from favouritism (or party-spirit).
7. All members shall enjoy equal rights irrespective of their caste, creed, ancestry or richness.
8. Proposals or suggestions shall be put to vote and acceptance or rejection shall be decided by the majority of votes.
9. A subscription of atleast six rupees a year shall be collected from the members.
10. Rich and well-to-do members are expected to subscribe

more.

11. Subscription can be reduced to a minimum of Rs. 3 for the benefit of poorer members.
12. The amount collected by way of subscriptions and donations shall be deposited in the Bank after deducting the minimum sum required for the smooth and efficient running of the Samaj.
13. Those who wish to become members of this Samaj shall, before God and in the name of their religion, pledge themselves with a vow: 'In this social work, I shall not be partial nor entertain any unsocial activity but shall offer my personal help with integrity as long as I live'.
14. Members contravening this vow or the Samaj's rules shall be disqualified and their names shall be struck off from the membership roll.

Panditabai enforced these rules in the formation of similar institutions in Bombay and Poona.

In November the same year, Pandita Ramabai arrived in Bombay and gave a series of lectures in the Prarthana Samaj and various other places. On 25 November 1882, she spoke on the "The Objectives of Arya Mahila Samaj". It was one of her most informative and interesting lectures lasting over an hour. Her popularity and the magnitude of the movement inspired by her were evident in the fact that over 200 women and 400 men attended this lecture.

On 30 November, under the presidentship of Mrs. Gangutai Bhandare another meeting of over 150 women was held with a view to firmly establishing another Arya Mahila Samaj in Bombay. At this meeting Panditabai explained the objects and principles of the Arya Mahila Samaj. On the very same day the Samaj was formally established with 16 women volunteering for the membership. Some asked for time to think it over while a few others asked a number of questions to clarify their doubts. Next day, 8 more women joined the Samaj. It was later announced that the women's educational meetings, held so far, will, in future, be amalgamated with the meetings of the Samaj.

Many men and particularly some editors considered Ramabai's views as a revolt against the male species of the human society!

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Padmini Sengupta comes from a distinguished family of educationists of Madras. She is the daughter of the late Dr S Sathianadhan, LL.B., Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and the late Mrs Kamala Sathianadhan, a pioneer social worker, writer and educationist of Madras. Padmini Sengupta received her early education in England and returned to India in 1923, when she joined the Madras University and took her M.A. in English Literature.

She was for some time Assistant Editor of the *Indian Ladies' Magazine*, and later Editor of *India.*

As a social worker she was a member of the Central Social Welfare Board from 1954 to 1956. She has also been interested in many village and slum projects and was President of the University Women's Association (Calcutta branch) and Vice President of the All Bengal Women's Union, Calcutta.

Her experience in the industrial field began with her work as Welfare Officer to the Indian Jute Mills Association (1945-53). She has acted as Honorary Consultant to the UNESCO Research Centre when it functioned in Calcutta, and is now on a Panel of Consultants of the I.L.O. concerning problems of the Employment of Women.

Padmini Sengupta has written many books, mainly biographies. Among her publications are *Everyday Life in Ancient India, Pioneer Women of India, Portrait of an Indian Woman, Some Indian Leaders, Women Workers of India, Toru Dutt, Deshapriya J M Sengupta, Sarojini Naidu, and Red Hibiscus, a novel.*

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