

habits, or disappears without trace for a number of years, and so forth.

In special cases, Hindu law sanctions polygamy also, though only under very exceptional circumstances. It follows from what we have stated above that the Arya Samaj is strongly opposed to child marriage.

following. It was left to Dayanand Saraswati and his followers to turn them into fodder for a widespread movement, mainly in north India, and, to some extent, in west India. A peasant from Kathiawar, Saraswati became a *radha* and convert to the golden age theory in the course of his wanderings across India. Sent by his guru to spread the message of Vedanta and Arya-dharma, he travelled all over the country, holding public meetings and debates with the pundits, and preaching a doctrine of the egalitarianism and humaneness of Aryan principles: the Vedic *varna* system was based on virtue, not birth; the paths of virtue were open to all in Aryan India, but had been barred in contemporary Hinduism.⁴² Saraswati's principles, however, were closer in certain ways to Duff's 'aggressive Christianity' than to the Tattvabodhini Sabha's views: he believed that the preaching of Vedic doctrine must include attacks on the falsity of other religions; in his *Satyarth Prakash*, written in 1875, both Islam and Christianity were subjected to vehement and lengthy criticism. He was, moreover, critical of the Brahma Samaj for not espousing Arya-dharma sufficiently single-mindedly and the founding of the Lahore Arya Samaj in 1877 drew

It has conducted a fiery crusade against this unnatural custom, and may be congratulated on its success in rallying public opinion to favour its view. It fixes sixteen as the minimum marriageable age for girls and twenty-five for boys, and it encourages celibacy up to the age of forty-eight.

many Punjabi reformers out of the Brahma Samaj.⁴³

As Uma Chakravarti has pointed out, Saraswati differed from most exponents of the golden age theory in that while they wished to awaken their fellow subjects to pride in their past, he wished to venerate that past in colonial India.⁴⁴ It appears that he began to think about the position of women while he was in Calcutta, and that he was especially influenced here by Vidyasagar; despite this, however, he was definite that only widows without children should be allowed to remarry, suggesting that the ancient practice of *nyoga*, or marriage to the dead husband's brother, be revived for this purpose.

According to Saraswati, practices such as polygamy, child-marriage and the seclusion of women did not exist in Aryan India, moreover, men and women had equal rights. In his *Satyarth Prakash* he stressed, as the Tattvabodhini Sabha had done, the parity between learned men and women in Vedic India, saying that girls were entitled to wear the sacred thread and undergo the initiatory ceremony of *yagnopavit*⁴⁵ both girls and boys should start learning Sanskrit, Hindi and foreign languages at the age of five; after the age of eight both sexes should be compulsorily educated, but in separate schools, that true education was part of religion, and *sandhya* and Vedic *yajna* should be performed at the start of every school day. Moreover, both girls and boys should be *Brahmacharyas* for some years; the minimum age of marriage for girls should be 16, and for boys 25.⁴⁶

In a way, Saraswati shifted the terrain of discussion on women's education: by defining learning as a path to virtue, and virtue as individually acquired. He diverged from the functionalist views of most other advocates for women's education, who argued that women needed education so as to be able to perform their duties as wives and mothers adequately. Saraswati appears not to have made such a connection between education and function, though he too believed that the role of the woman was as mother, laying down a series of guidelines to ensure the birth and post-natal care of her children.

While most advocates for women's education were agreed that it should be functionalist there were certain differences in emphasis when it came to the functions concerned. In perhaps the dominant view the emphasis was on household accomplishments which would benefit both husband and children. The



Herbert Johnson, Mission teachers and scholars at Calcutta, in *Woman in India*

Brahmo schools for girls, for example, especially those run by Keshub Chandra Sen, taught 'cooking, sewing, nursing, and such like . . . (which were) deserving of quite as much encouragement and reward as purely literary proficiency'.⁴⁸ A less dominant view at this stage which was later to grow influential, emphasized the role the mother played in forming the child's consciousness, arguing that women should be educated so that they could educate their children. This view was advanced even by so radical a reformer as Jyotiba Phule.

Phule's attitudes towards the reform of women's conditions appear to have been unusual even when compared to those of other reformers of the time. For example, he tried to start a 'home' in which unmarried women and widows could give birth to illegitimate children in secret, promising to then have the children adopted; this was especially radical as the codes repressing women's sexuality were most strongly administered by the upper-castes, so such a home would have been used largely by upper-caste women. Yet his views on women's education were, in certain respects, not very different from those of other reformers. 'Female schools', he observed, 'first of all attracted my notice as, upon mature consideration, they were found to be even more necessary than male ones, the roots of education lying in the proper turn mothers give to the disposition of children between their second and third years.'⁴⁹

The conditions of women's lives, then, needed reform not only because of the hardships women were subjected to, but also for the sakes of their husbands and children. Over the years an increasing emphasis was placed on the latter, so that the rationale advanced for improving women's lives in India was that they were mothers. The importance of this was stressed in the following way: the conditions under which women gave birth to and brought up children were such that the 'Indian race' had 'degenerated', sickly children were born who grew up to be stunted adults; the ignorance and superstitiousness of their mothers led whole generations of Indians to lose the 'entrepreneurial spirit'; this was what had allowed India to be colonized by the British; therefore it was important to the Indian nation that its children be born and brought up in the right conditions.⁵⁰

While in the early nineteenth century women had been the sign of the decline of the community, by the late nineteenth century it was children who reflected the decline of the race. The onus, of course, remained on women, but a spotlight was now turned on children. Philippe Aries has shown how eighteenth century France gave birth to the idea of childhood and adulthood as separate spheres; he describes the way the earlier notion of children as little adults gave way to the notion that children needed protection from the rigours of adult life.⁵¹ By the early nineteenth century this idea had grown enormously: the conditions engendered by

industrialization were so gruelling for childworkers that a host of movements demanding the reform of their working lives arose in Europe.

At the same time, the rapidly growing natural sciences gave rise to new biological theories which drew attention to the development of the human body (including brain), both over the centuries and in an individual's life-span. An adage was coined: 'The child is father of man' (note bias), its formative years were studied; the importance of correct nutrition, education and domestic environment were pointed out. While the opposition between theories of genetic determination and theories of environmental influence only really developed in the twentieth century, it was implicit here. Genetics, for example, contributed to the formulation of theories of racial superiority which implied—even asserted—that British rule was ordained by nature (not god-ordained, as in the Crusades or *jihad*). In other words, the British were genetically fitted to rule: their subjects were biologically inferior races.⁵²

No wonder, then, that Indian social reformers turned



Herbert Johnson, 'Three Generations' in *Women in India*



Herbert Johnson, Women workers in the Giridih mines, in *Women in India*

their attention to matters of race and biological definitions of it; nor is it surprising that their efforts were directed towards proving that inferiority was not genetic, but contingent on social practice. Hence the attacks on sati, infant marriage, purdah, and the growth of movements for women's education and widow remarriage. Two campaigns in the 1890s best reflect the development of these ideas in India: the campaign for factory legislation to improve the conditions of industrial labour and the movement against child-marriage.

Though the campaign for factory legislation in India was launched partly by Lancashire mill-owners suffering from Indian competition in the production and sale of cotton textiles, it was supported by both English and Indian philanthropists, who had for some time been agitated by the conditions besetting mill-workers at home and at work. Their attention focussed upon the two groups which had been the most frequent subjects of well-intentioned scrutiny in the period: women and children. High rates of child-mortality were discovered and correlated to gruelling hours of work; at the same time, it was pointed out that women worked such long hours that they were forced to neglect their children.

In 1875, the Government of Bombay set up a Labour Commission to enquire into the need for legislation; though most of the Commissioners saw no need to regulate factory practices, there was sufficient debate in parliament and the press to persuade them otherwise. The first Indian Factories Act was passed in 1881, codifying a distinction between adult and child which had not hitherto been made: a 'child' was defined as 'being any person below 12 years of age', the minimum age for employment of children was fixed at seven years, their hours of work were limited to nine a day, with a one-hour rest interval; and they were granted four days holiday a month. The Act, however, left considerable dissatisfaction at its lacunae: no special regulations for women workers were included, and the protection of children was found insufficient. Agitation for legislation on these aspects was renewed, especially in Bombay, where the Government instituted fresh enquiries into labour conditions. In 1884, the Bombay Factory Commission recommended amendment of the Act, but no action was taken until after the First International Labour Conference of 1890, in Berlin, which recommended the regulation of conditions of work for women and children. The Manchester Chamber of Commerce started to press the Government to apply these recommendations to India; British and Indian factory owners in India opposed them. The Government of India appointed yet another Factory Commission in 1890, and in 1891 the Indian Factories (Amendment) Act was passed. A 'child' was now defined as 'being any person below 14 years of age' and the minimum age of employment of children was raised to nine; their hours of work were correspond-

ingly lowered to seven, but the rest interval was halved. The hours of work for women were limited to eleven a day, with a one-and-a-half hour rest interval—or less for fewer hours of work. Further, the working hours of both women and children had to be between 5 a.m. and 8 p.m., in recognition of children's health requirements and women's domestic and maternal duties.¹³

If the campaign for factory legislation showed first attempts to codify the years of childhood, and regulate working-class family life, the campaign against child marriage showed the increasing obsession of social reformers with the 'debilitation of the race'.

Though in 1860 an Act was passed fixing the age of consent at ten, no campaign as such had been launched until Behram Malabari took up the issue in the late nineteenth century. He canvassed a wide range of Hindu opinion in support of his campaign, though he was not himself a Hindu. Most of the men whose opinion he sought were drawn from professional groups—lawyers, doctors, teachers, public servants. Supporters of the campaign argued, as in the campaign against purdah, that child marriage was responsible for most of the physical and spiritual ills besetting India:

We hold that early marriage weakens the physical strength of a nation; it stunts its full growth and development, it affects the courage and energy of the individuals, and brings forth a race of people weak in strength and wanting in hardihood. (*The Jevore Indian Association*).

With regard to early marriage, I hold it a most pernicious custom which makes the nation very weak. It is necessary that in a country there should be a number of bachelors who would venture upon enterprise, foreign travel, etc. What makes Hindus so feeble is the custom of early marriage. They have hardly any strength either to become soldiers, or to cultivate land, or to go for trade to foreign countries. They are unfit as colonizers. (*G.H. Deshmukh*)

What is good for the individual's health is good for the health of the community, and indirectly beneficial to the State. There is a good deal of sickness and mortality and difficulty in the act of childbirth, due to imperfect consolidation of the bones of the pelvis at the tender age at which women, in consequence of early marriages, give birth to children. The heads of the children of young mothers are also unduly pressed upon and so either the children die prematurely or grow feeble, or both in body and in mind, and turn out helpless idiots. (*Surgeon-Major D.N. Parakh, Chief Physician, Gokuldas Tejpal Hospital, Bombay*).¹⁴

Malabari himself added a further biological ill of early marriage to the list: quoting from a number of Victorian medicals, he adduced evidence to show that early marriage—and, therefore, early proximity between males and females—led girls to menstruate earlier, and thus led to early pregnancies and weak children, 'debilitating the race'.¹⁵ Not all social reformers agreed with these views. The British Indian Association, for example, used the same biological terms of argument, but said:

'the Committee deny that it has been proved that early marriage is the sole, the most important cause of the degeneracy of the native race. Climate, food, hereditary predisposition to disease, injudicious selection in marriage, and other causes of arrested growth, are patent factors in the case.'¹⁶

The Jessore Indian Association, which accepted Malabari's arguments, added that child-marriage should not be discussed solely in terms of its physical effects:

Mr Malabari has considered the institution physically only . . . its moral influence he has not taken into consideration. It is a most powerful check upon our youths against deviating in wantonness and vice . . . The Hindus are the only nation [emphasis mine, to underline that the concept of a Hindu nation already existed] among whom matrimonial scandals, and disgraceful breaches between husbands and wives are rarely heard of.¹⁷

Most of the arguments against reform of the age of consent were couched in social and moral terms; they simply ignored the biological arguments of Malabari; if and when they talked of the degeneration of the Indian race, it was in social terms, not physical ones. The nature of the Hindu family was defined as resting on the girl's fusion with her husband and his family; it was only possible for her to look upon them as her own if she grew up with them. Extending this argument, the *Hindoo Patriot* declared; 'Hindoo society is so constituted that early marriage is a necessary institution for the preservation of our social order. Its abolition would destroy the system of joint family and caste'.¹⁸ The debate grew more heated as women entered the fray; women doctors in Calcutta supported the social reform argument for raising the age of consent; and 1,600 'Hindu ladies' sent a petition asking for legislative reforms to Queen Victoria in 1890.¹⁹

Though the campaign against child-marriage was started in Bombay, Poona reformers were less active in support of it, and Poona, in fact, became a major centre of opposition to the campaign. From the 1860s on, opposition to social reform had mounted in Poona; by the 1870s, many prominent social reformers had

capitulated to pressure from their caste-brothers. G.H. Deshmukh, who had argued in the 1840s that 'the Brahmins should give up their foolish concepts they must accept that all men are equal and everybody has a right to acquire knowledge',²⁰ succumbed to the Chitpavan threat to outcaste him in 1871, and withdrew from campaigns against Brahman social control. M.G. Ranade, an influential Poona reformer, refused to dine intercaste or 'marry a widow' when his first wife died in 1873; bringing home a child bride instead; and, when the Sarvajanic Sabha, a liberal political organization, was formed in 1871, its members decided they would not venture into 'religious' terrain, thus disassociating politics from social reform.²¹

The Bombay social reform movement split into two in the 1870s: in the one, Brahman reformers tended to concentrate on reform within their own community, taking up issues such as widow remarriage; in the other, the non-Brahman movement against the Brahmanic regulation of society developed. In 1873, Phule founded the Satyashodhak Samaj, first in Poona and then in Bombay; among other activities, the organization held widow remarriages and intercaste marriages, using a simplified ceremony, conducted by non-Brahman priests.²²

The theory of an Aryan golden age began to be increasingly widely accepted in these years; interestingly, two very different versions of it were propounded at the same time, by groups who often opposed each other. The first was largely an expansion of Saraswati's views; but the second was used by opponents of social reform, to evoke a Hindu nationalism which was interconnected with the defence of Brahmanic practices. Aspects of Aryan India which were left implicit by social reformers, were now drawn to the fore. In the one view, Aryan India was an age of learning, and its varna system showed caste mobility; in the other, it was an age of conquest, and its varna system showed racial solidarity between the upper castes. This latter theory drew on some of the ideas developed by Max Müller and other German indologists, which were beginning to attract a wider audience in Europe: that Sanskrit and European languages had similar, 'Indo-European' roots. From this discovery, an 'Aryan theory of race' developed, that the Aryan invaders of India were of Indo-European stock, and thus racially superior to the Dravidians they conquered.²³

In 1873, most of the Maharashtra Brahman social reformers joined the newly founded Society for the Vedas and Shastras, which propounded the reformist interpretation of Aryan India described above. When Saraswati came to Bombay Presidency in 1875, his meetings were attended by all the social reformers, from Ranade to Phule. And when Pandita Ramabai founded the Arya Mahila Sabha in Poona, she was helped by many of the Poona social reformers. At the same time, the

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Pandita Ramabai, 1858-1922

Pandita Ramabai was born on the 23rd of April in the forest of Gungamal in Western Maharashtra. Her



father, Ananta Shastri, was a learned Brahmin and something of a social reformer. He married a girl of nine and decided to educate her. The village Brahmins responded by ostracising him and he decided to leave the village and build a home in the forest. His wife, Lakshmi-bai, hated the loneliness

of the forest, but had perforce to accept it. Soon after, Ramabai was born. While she was still a mere child, Ramabai's family started wandering from forest to forest, city to city, village to village. Wherever he could, Ananta Shastri would give lectures on the need for female education. In the 1877 famine both Ananta Shastri and Lakshmi-bai died. Ramabai and her brother, to whom she was very close, decided to carry on their father's work, and live in the same manner as he had done. 'Ramabai's fame as a lecturer reaching the ears of the pundits of Calcutta, they desired to hear and see for themselves. She obeyed their summons to appear before them; so astounded and pleased were they by the clearness of her views and her eloquence in presenting them, that they publicly conferred on her the highest title—Saraswati, Goddess of Wisdom.'¹ After the death of her brother, Ramabai married a Bengali lawyer, Bipin Behari Medhvi, and they had a daughter whom they named Manu. Medhvi was a sudra, so her marriage was inter-caste as well as inter-religious. Husband and wife had planned to start a school for child widows, when Medhvi died in 1882.

After his death, Ramabai moved from Bengal to Poona, where she founded the Arya Mahila Samaj. When in 1882 a commission was appointed by the Government of India to look into Indian education, Ramabai gave evidence before it. She suggested that teachers be trained and women inspectresses of schools be appointed. Further, she said that as in India women's conditions were such that they could only be medically treated by women, Indian women should be admitted to medical colleges. 'Ramabai's

evidence created a great sensation and reached Queen Victoria herself, and bore fruit later in the starting of the women's Medical Movement by Lady Dufferin.'² In 1883 Ramabai decided to train as a teacher in England, and join the Episcopal Church. At their invitation, she went to America in 1886, and it was there that an association was formed to fund her school for child widows. By April 1898 she had started a home-cum-school in Bombay which she named the Sharada Sadan. This was the first home for widows in Maharashtra—the only other home was in Bengal, started by a Mr Sen. As Ramabai was Christian and the school was funded by missionaries, local citizens viewed it with extreme caution and wariness. Anticipating this, Ramabai had said when opening the school that it 'would not actively preach Christianity or try to make converts.'³ However, the December 1889 issue of the *Christian Weekly* carried a report that 'at present there are seven young widows in the Sharada Sadan, two of whom have expressed their love for Christianity. . .'

In the revivalist climate of the period this was bound to raise a storm. Public outcry at Ramabai's conversion became so great that Dr Bhandarkar and Justice Ranade, both noted reformers, severed ties with the Sadan. Representations were made to the American supporters of the Sadan, urging them to put pressure on Ramabai to cease from spreading Christianity. Not surprisingly, the Americans refused. Ramabai moved the Sharada Sadan to Poona. As she had been worried about being entirely dependent on American funds, she set up a Trust to collect money for a farm, which would render the Sadan self-supporting. The money, however, had again to be collected in America. By around the turn of the century she had bought land in Khedgaon, and called the farm Mukti Sadan. When they were hit by the 1900 famine, Ramabai and her helpers were able to rescue several hundred women. According to Manmohan Kaur, at the turn of the century there were as many as 1900 people in the Sadan. 'A school was organised. . . . Four hundred children were accommodated in the Kindergarten. A training School for Teachers was also opened and an Industrial School with gardens, fields, oil press, dairy, laundry, ovens, was started. It also taught sewing, weaving, and embroidery.'

1. Pandita Ramabai, *The High Caste Hindu Woman*, 1887, Fleming H. Revell Company, New York.

This extract is from the Preface.

2. Manmohan Kaur, op cit., p. 87.

3. Ibid., p. 88.

martial and racist interpretation of Aryan India began to be advanced. V.S. Chiplunkar's 'Nibandhmala' series, published from 1874, was especially influential, invoking bygone Hindu glory, both Brahman and Maratha, and attacking both social reform and individual social reformers. Two incidents in the 1880s brought the revivalists out in full force against campaigns to reform women's conditions: in 1884, one Dadaji Bhikaji filed a suit for the restitution of conjugal rights, because his wife, Rakhmabai, married in childhood and subsequently educated, refused to live with him when she grew up.⁶⁶ Though he lost his case in the District Court,⁶⁷ he went to the Bombay High Court on appeal. The revivalists mounted a strong campaign against the District Court judgement, saying that 'foreign rulers' had no right to interfere with Hindu customs, and B.G. Tilak wrote that the women's education movement was the route 'for an attack on our ancient religion under the cover of Rakhmabai with the intention of *cutting* (emphasis mine) our eternal religion'.⁶⁸ Dadaji Bhikaji won his case on appeal, though the Court made it clear their sympathies were with Rakhmabai. Now the social reformers were up in arms, accusing the Government of 'perpetuating Hindu orthodoxy' and saying the judgement exposed the 'reactionary' nature of the British and their administration of law in India. Rakhmabai herself refused to obey the High Court judgement, was made to pay a substantial fine and excommunicated, went to England and qualified as an M.D., returned to India where she practised medicine, and died at 91.⁶⁹

While debate was raging between reformers and revivalists, Pandita Ramabai converted to Christianity, and began to use the Sharada Sadan, which she had founded in 1889, to convert Hindu women. This was adduced as further support for revivalist claims that reformers were 'anglicisers',⁷⁰ and in the ensuing campaign to raise the age of consent, reformers were treated as colonial anti-Hindu propagandists. Though in 1889 Tilak had signed a reformist pledge to educate his daughters, and not have them married until they were 11, by 1891 he led the agitation against the Age of Consent Act, which merely raised the age of consent from 10 to 12.⁷¹

Among the social reformers, members of the Satyashodhak Samaj were especially active in mobilizing support for the Bill. In Bombay, Lokhande organized a petition in its favour, signed by hundreds of Marathas; the *Din Bandhu* ran a campaign against the shaving of young Brahman widows and exhorted barbers to refuse to perform this act. In response, Bombay barbers resolved at a meeting that they would no longer shave the heads of Brahman widows. Yet reformers were outnumbered by revivalists, whose demonstrations against the Bill swelled to upwards of fifty thousand people.⁷²

The period was one of rising fundamentalist, communalist, nationalist and extremist sympathies. British ra-

alism in private and public spheres created increasing resentment, and there were protests against preferential treatment to whites in jobs, investment, and under the law, while the sense that Hindu communities were being singled out for attack, which was increasingly articulated as laws concerning women were passed (for most of these were directed at reforming the conditions of Hindu women), was further fuelled by the British introduction of separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims. The demand for a ban on cow-slaughter, raised in the Punjab in the 1870s, was taken up by Hindu groups in various parts of north, east and west India: many U.P. municipalities restricted slaughter-houses and *habas* shops, to which Islamic fundamentalists reacted by presenting the *Bake-Id* sacrifice as an endangered symbol of Muslim identity. Turmoil over the issue culminated in riots in 1893, at Azamgarh, Ballia, Saran, Gaya, and Patna. The worst riots were in Bombay city, set off by the issue of whether Hindu processions could play music before mosques. Junagadh and Rangoon were also affected.⁷³

Tilak's attack on the social reformers was conjoined with attacks on Christianity and Islam, especially the latter. The Ganpat festival started by him in 1894 were used to caution Hindus against attending Muharram, saying 'the cow is our mother, do not forget her'; and in the Shivaji Festival he started from 1896, Shivaji was portrayed as the *go-Brahman-bratijalak* (he who nurtures cows and Brahmins), defender of Hindus against Muslim hordes.⁷⁴ In 1895, revivalists led by Tilak succeeded in preventing Karade's National Social Conference from using the Congress *mandal* (enclosure) for their annual meeting;⁷⁵ soon after, they rejected the Maharaja of Kolhapur's claim to Kshatriya status, pushing him into the non-Brahman movement; and created such a climate of intolerance in Poona that in 1908 the reformer D.D. Karve decided to open his widows' home in Hignc, outside the city.

In Calcutta, Rabindranath Tagore was one of the Liberals who turned to the support of child-marriage, on a nationalist wave to reclaim Hindu tradition. Agitation against the Bill was spearheaded by the newspaper *Bangabasi*, which held huge meetings at the Calcutta Maidan and a puja at Kalighat, at which protest against the 'foreign ruler's' interference with Hindu social customs was mixed with calls for boycott and to organize indigenous enterprises.⁷⁶ Revivalism had taken a slightly different form in Bengal, with a greater emphasis on culture than on race, but with an equal anti-'Westernism', together with anti-Muslim feelings.

These ranged from claims of 'shastric precedents for all the discoveries of Western science', to the search for inspiration in both mythic and real figures, such as Krishna, Chaitanya, and Ramakrishna Paramahansa,⁷⁷ a peasant priest who became enormously popular with

martial and racist interpretation of Aryan India began to be advanced. V.S. Chiplunkar's 'Nibandhmala' series, published from 1874, was especially influential, invoking bygone Hindu glory, both Brahman and Maratha, and attacking both social reform and individual social reformers. Two incidents in the 1880s brought the revivalists out in full force against campaigns to reform women's conditions: in 1884, one Dadaji Bhikaji filed a suit for the restitution of conjugal rights, because his wife, Rakhmabai, married in childhood and subsequently educated, refused to live with him when she grew up.⁶⁶ Though he lost his case in the District Court,⁶⁷ he went to the Bombay High Court on appeal. The revivalists mounted a strong campaign against the District Court judgement, saying that 'foreign rulers' had no right to interfere with Hindu customs, and B.G. Tilak wrote that the women's education movement was the route 'for an attack on our ancient religion under the cover of Rakhmabai with the intention of *cutting* (emphasis mine) our eternal religion'.⁶⁸ Dadaji Bhikaji won his case on appeal, though the Court made it clear their sympathies were with Rakhmabai. Now the social reformers were up in arms, accusing the Government of 'perpetuating Hindu orthodoxy' and saying the judgement exposed the 'reactionary' nature of the British and their administration of law in India. Rakhmabai herself refused to obey the High Court judgement, was made to pay a substantial fine and excommunicated, went to England and qualified as an M.D., returned to India where she practised medicine, and died at 91.⁶⁹

While debate was raging between reformers and revivalists, Pandita Ramabai converted to Christianity, and began to use the Sharada Sadan, which she had founded in 1889, to convert Hindu women. This was adduced as further support for revivalist claims that reformers were 'anglicisers',⁷⁰ and in the ensuing campaign to raise the age of consent, reformers were treated as colonial anti-Hindu propagandists. Though in 1889 Tilak had signed a reformist pledge to educate his daughters, and not have them married until they were 11, by 1891 he led the agitation against the Age of Consent Act, which merely raised the age of consent from 10 to 12.⁷¹

Among the social reformers, members of the Satyashodhak Samaj were especially active in mobilizing support for the Bill. In Bombay, Lokhande organized a petition in its favour, signed by hundreds of Marathas; the *Din Bandhu* ran a campaign against the shaving of young Brahman widows and exhorted barbers to refuse to perform this act. In response, Bombay barbers resolved at a meeting that they would no longer shave the heads of Brahman widows. Yet reformers were outnumbered by revivalists, whose demonstrations against the Bill swelled to upwards of fifty thousand people.⁷²

The period was one of rising fundamentalist, communalist, nationalist and extremist sympathies. British ra-

alism in private and public spheres created increasing resentment, and there were protests against preferential treatment to whites in jobs, investment, and under the law, while the sense that Hindu communities were being singled out for attack, which was increasingly articulated as laws concerning women were passed (for most of these were directed at reforming the conditions of Hindu women), was further fuelled by the British introduction of separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims. The demand for a ban on cow-slaughter, raised in the Punjab in the 1870s, was taken up by Hindu groups in various parts of north, east and west India: many U.P. municipalities restricted slaughter-houses and *habas* shops, to which Islamic fundamentalists reacted by presenting the *Bake-Id* sacrifice as an endangered symbol of Muslim identity. Turmoil over the issue culminated in riots in 1893, at Azamgarh, Ballia, Saran, Gaya, and Patna. The worst riots were in Bombay city, set off by the issue of whether Hindu processions could play music before mosques. Junagadh and Rangoon were also affected.⁷³

Tilak's attack on the social reformers was conjoined with attacks on Christianity and Islam, especially the latter. The Ganpat festival started by him in 1894 were used to caution Hindus against attending Muharram, saying 'the cow is our mother, do not forget her'; and in the Shivaji Festival he started from 1896, Shivaji was portrayed as the *go-Brahman-bratijalak* (he who nurtures cows and Brahmins), defender of Hindus against Muslim hordes.⁷⁴ In 1895, revivalists led by Tilak succeeded in preventing Ranade's National Social Conference from using the Congress *mandal* (enclosure) for their annual meeting;⁷⁵ soon after, they rejected the Maharaja of Kolhapur's claim to Kshatriya status, pushing him into the non-Brahman movement; and created such a climate of intolerance in Poona that in 1908 the reformer D.D. Karve decided to open his widows' home in Hignc, outside the city.

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The 'marry a widow doctrine'

The tactic of using newspaper advertisements for widow remarriage spread to various parts of India, although, on the whole these were generally placed by men who were looking for widows to marry, not vice-versa. Though most often it was specified that the widow be of the same caste as her prospective husband, sometimes this was not done, perhaps because it was taken for granted, as was the condition that she be a virgin. An anecdote of the south Indian campaign for the 'remarriage of virgin widows', which at first sight may seem frivolous, reveals a mixture of paternalism, Brahminic Hinduism, and personal courage, which must have been characteristic of several social reformers of the time, even if they were in a minority. By and large, the men who offered to 'marry a widow' tended to specify that these would have to be of the same caste as their prospective husbands, most of whom were high-caste and college-educated. Madras seems to have been no different in this respect, for most of the 'marry a widow' doctrines were young, college-going Brahmins, some of whom wrote to the *Hindu* advertising their willingness to marry 'Brahmin widows'. In 1905, however, when the *Hindu* published a letter from a Brahmin called K. Subramania Aiyer, saying he wanted a widow to marry, they received a reply from a woman reader who signed herself 'virgin widow' and asked whether 'Mr S. A. would marry a Sudra widow'. In his reply he said he would, 'as the Shastras provide for the Brahmin the privilege of marrying a woman of any of the three lower castes'. Though the implication quite clearly is that it was all right for a Brahmin male to marry a woman of any caste as he could only raise her status, while she could not affect his, it is difficult to believe this was the way things were in practice. Other reports show that several South Indian reformers who married widows were ostracized in different ways; many of them found especial difficulty when it came to conducting funeral ceremonies. Surely, then, marriage to a low-caste widow would be treated with even greater severity?

middle class Hindu Calcuttans, especially women, perhaps because he, as he said, 'worshipped all women as representatives of the divine mother'. At the same time, the device of using stories of Hindu resistance to Muslim invasion as a metaphor to stimulate contemporary nationalist sympathy began to be widely used. Tod's depiction of heroic Rajput resistance to Muslim invasion

became so popular that a whole host of plays, novels and songs were written on this theme, and to the glorification of child-marriage was added that of sati. Revivalist literature constructing images of the ideal Hindu woman was often double-edged: if some preferred to dwell on the sweet, flower-like qualities of the child-bride, others approvingly described the great strength of Hindu women when acting as wives or mothers, especially against the Muslims. This was a favourite theme of the literature glorifying the Rajputs, in which the sati was lauded for having preserved the honour of the race, literally and figuratively. B. C. Pal later described the effect Bankimchandra's use of the device, in *Durgah Niswari* (The Chieftain's Daughter), had on him as a school boy:

The episode of Katu Khan's assassination in the midst of the revels of his court in celebration of his victory over the Hindu chief of Gar Mandaram left a permanent mark upon my sensibilities. That episode appealed to my boyish imagination as a brilliant example of the courage and cunning of the Hindu woman who had all her life lived in the sequestered seclusion of the zenana yet when the occasion called for it, who did not shrink from boldly intriguing for the defeat of the enemies of her clan and country. Bimla, to whose knife Katu Khan fell, was the widow of the Hindu chief Bir Siroa who had been killed by the Muslim invader. Her assassination of her husband's murderer was justified by her love and loyalty of her dead lord and husband. But behind the personal note there was in this episode the far larger National or Racial issue—the contest for supremacy over the Hindu populations of West Bengal between their own King and the Moslem invader.⁷⁶

It is not surprising, that, paralleling Hindu communalism, there was a rise in Islamic fundamentalism in rural Bengal, where campaigns against syncretic cults began to occur. Hindu-Muslim communalism spread to the industrial suburbs of Calcutta, where many migrant workers from East U.P. and Bihar lived, resulting in riots in 1896-97.⁷⁷

Looking at the example of Maharashtra and Bengal, it could have been argued that the increasingly racist and communalist interpretation of the golden age theory of Aryan India was opposed to most ideas of social reform, especially concerning women. However, developments within the Arya Samaj in Punjab showed that the relationship between communalism and movements for women's rights need not always be one of opposition, for the more moderate College faction of the Arya Samaj was hostile to further education for girls, while the chauvinist Gurukul faction was committed to it. Both,

however, emphasized the need for a Hindu consciousness, so that the debate was primarily over what was required of a Hindu girl.

Saraswati's Arya Samaj movement grew rapidly from the 1880s on, moving from a criticism of orthodox Hindu customs to their replacement with 'Aryan' ceremonies. Saraswati's *Sanskrit Vidya* provided a set of ceremonies for Aryas which were now gradually put into practice: beginning with reformed funeral rites, many Aryas moved to using simplified marriage rites. As this immediately made the arrangement of marriages more difficult, the Aryas 'developed a new marriage institution: the newspaper advertisement'. In 1892-83, two tracts were written by leading Arya Samajis, advocating widow remarriage; in the same years Arya journals began carrying accounts of widow remarriages. The Amritsar Arya Samaj was especially active, performing widow remarriages 'with a great deal of fanfare. Yet the Arya Samaj was able to gain limited acceptance of the remarriage of 'virgin widows' alone, not of those with children.²¹ By the mid-1880s, the Arya Samaj grew increasingly active in movements for women's education: an issue which they had earlier shown concern for in a sporadic way. From the late 1880s, various mofussil Arya Samajis began to open girls' schools, largely out of fear that the existing schools were being used for conversion. In 1890, the Jullundhur Samaj opened an Arya Kanya Pathshala; one year later, the school decided to accept widows as well as unmarried girls; and the year after that they announced they would open a Kanya Mahavidyalaya, for higher education. This proposal was supported by the newly-organized Arya Stri Samajis, one of which, in Ludhiana, ran a Female Vedic School and an ashram for widows. Before the Kanya Mahavidyalaya was opened, however, Arya Samajis were divided on the question of higher education for women. Its opponents ranked Lajpat Rai and Lal Chand, both of whom accepted primary education for women but opposed higher education, the former arguing, 'I maintained and do so still, that the spread of education among males has some strong and important inducements to back it, while the education of girls cannot necessarily derive any support from the same motives for education.' Many of the advocates for women's education, too, departed from Saraswati's views, arguing that: 'the character of girls' education should be different from that of boys. . . . The Hindu girl has functions of a very different nature to perform from those of a Hindu boy, and I would not encourage any system which would deprive her of her national traits of character. The education we give our girls should not unsex them.'²² Though the Kanya Mahavidyalaya was opened, its curriculum was merely an expanded version of the Kanya Pathshala's curriculum, and both were similar to those used by the Brahmo schools. Apart from basic literacy,

arithmetic and some poetry, Arya Samaj religious literature, sewing, embroidery, cooking, 'hygiene', drawing and music were among the subjects taught.²³

Towards the turn of the century, the Arya Samajis started a *shuddhi* movement, in which purification ceremonies were performed to reclaim Hindu converts, caste barriers were broken by allowing all caste members to wear the sacred thread; and attempts were made to bring outcastes into the fold of caste. Yet there was a certain tension here: outcastes were admitted to the Sanskrit *pathshalas* opened by the Arya Samaj, but could not wear the sacred thread; nor did the Aryas deal satisfactorily with the tricky problem of what Aryan role over Dravidian subjects consisted of.²⁴ Even so, the *shuddhi* movement became a means of sanskritization (upward caste mobility), and membership of the Arya Samaj shot up from 40,000 in 1891 to over half a million by 1921.

In the 1890s, the Arya Samaj split, ostensibly over whether meat-eating should be permitted or not, but equally on issues of westernization. The moderate faction were those who supported the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College, where Western science and Vedic culture were equally taught;²⁵ the militants were the Gurukul faction, who refused to accept financial support from the government, based education on the principles of brahmacharya, taught only Sanskrit and Hindi, and hired preachers to proselytize for them.²⁶ Both factions, however, shifted in this period 'from Arya-dharm to Hindu consciousness'. Lekh Ram, one of the founders of the Gurukul faction, conducted a bitter polemic with the Ahmadiyah Muslims, which resulted in his assassination in 1897; and Laia Lal Chand of the 'moderate' faction attacked the Congress, saying 'the consciousness must arise in the mind of each Hindu that he is a Hindu and not merely an Indian.'²⁷

Though social reform campaigns began to develop in South India in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, they remained relatively weak until the turn of the century. In 1871 a widow remarriage association was started in Madras, but was short-lived; it was revived in the 1880s by Dewan Bahadur Raghunath Rao.²⁸ In 1878, Virasa Lingam started the Rajahmundry Social Reform Association, which focussed on widow remarriage; and in 1890s K. N. Natarajan started the *Indian Social Reformer*, which became increasingly important in connecting campaigns all over the country. In 1892, the Hindu Social Reform Association was started by young men, calling themselves the 'young Madras party'.²⁹ Though they were associated with the *Indian Social Reformer*, they formed a radical caucus within it, criticizing older social reformers for the caution and timidity with which they campaigned against polygamy, child marriage, bride price, and the prostitution of temple dancers. At the same time, the Theosophical Society, formed in Adyar

in 1882, shifted away from its allegiance to social reform, under the influence of Annie Besant, who, in the early 1890s, attacked social reformers and defended traditional Hinduism.⁸⁷

By the turn of the century, therefore, the search for a Hindu identity had become so important that even the Brahmos were talking of the education of 'Hindu' girls, and not, as they did before, of 'Indian' girls.⁸⁸ It is true that while talking of Indian women they were most often referring to Hindu women; in fact, the social reform movement of the nineteenth century has generally been criticized for having taken up issues which

largely concerned upper caste Hindu women, such as sati, widow remarriage, child marriage. Yet this criticism ignores the shift that took place within the social reform movement over the course of the nineteenth century: the increasing identification of 'Aryan' with 'Hindu' and the communalization of both; the splitting of movements on lines of caste or ethnicity; and the strange growth of biological-rationalist arguments within 'Hindu social reform'. In the next chapter, we will describe the forms these developments took in the twentieth century.

NOTES

1. This phrase is increasingly used as a better description of the public-private dichotomy in more traditional societies in India. It is also used to historicise the dichotomy as in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds), *Excavating Women*, Delhi, Kali for Women, 1983, where a series of articles describe how the world-home dichotomy was affected by the colonial encounter.
2. Richard Tucker, *Ranade and the Roots of Indian Nationalism*, Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1972, p. 18.
3. Rajat Ray and Somit Sarkar, 'Ram Mohun Roy and the Break With the Past', in V.C. Joshi (ed.), *Ram Mohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India*, Delhi, Vikas, 1975.
4. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1980.
5. Uma Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, (eds), *Excavating Women*, op cit, pp. 27-87.
6. Arundhati Mukhopadhyay, 'Attitudes Towards Religion and Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal: the Tatvabudhini Sabha, 183-59', in *Studies in History*, New Series, Vol.3, No.1, pp. 9-28.
7. Ashis Nandy, 'Sati: A Nineteenth Century Tale of Women, Violence and Protest', in *At the Edge of Psychology*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 21. Henceforth referred to as 'Sati'.
8. Edward Thompson, *Suttee*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1928, p. 78.
9. Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, *Daughters of Independence*, Delhi, Kali for Women, 1986, p.27.
10. Benoy Ghosh, 'The Press in Bengal', in N.K. Sinha (ed.), *History of Bengal, 1757-1905*, Calcutta, 1967, p. 233.
11. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, op cit, 'Introduction', p. 16.
12. Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, op cit.
13. Anand Yang, 'The Many faces of Sati in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Manushi*, No 42-43.
14. Ashis Nandy, 'Sati', op cit., p. 7.
15. Ibid, pp. 4-5.
16. J.C. Ghose (ed.), *The English Works of Raja Ram Mohun Roy*, Delhi, Cosmo, 1982, Vol. II, p. 363.
17. Ibid.
18. Uma Chakravarti, op cit, pp. 44-46.
19. *West Bengal District Gazetteers*, Hooghly, p. 626.
20. *History of Bengal*, op cit., p. 452.
21. Ibid.
22. The Brahma Samaj was founded by Ram Mohun Roy in 1828.
23. *History of Bengal*, op cit., p. 452.
24. Sushma Sen, *Memoirs of an Oringmarian*, Calcutta, Elin Press, 1971, pp. 10-30.
25. Usha Chakraborti, *Condition of Bengali Women Around the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century*, Calcutta, 1963, pp. 40-42.
26. Sumanta Banerjee, 'Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal', in Sangari and Vaid, op cit, pp. 127-79.
27. Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society*, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Bombay, 1976, p. 100.
28. S. Natarajan, *A Century of Social Reform in India*, Asia Publishing House, 1962, p. 53.
29. Cornelia Sorabjee, 'The Position of Hindu Women Fifty Years Ago', in Shyam Kumari Nehru (ed.), *Our Cause*, 1936, p. 5.
30. Gail Omvedt, op cit., p. 107.
31. Ibid, p. 106.
32. Sumanta Banerjee, op. cit, p. 174, f.n. 40.

53. Subal Chandra Mitra, *Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar*, Calcutta, New Bengal Press, 1902, pp. 282-89.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
55. Cornelia Sorabjee, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.
56. Mrs. Marcus B. Fuller, *The Wrongs of Indian Womanhood*, Delhi, InterIndia Publications, 1984, pp. 62-69, first published 1900.
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58. C.H. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton University Press, 1964, p. 14.
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62. Arundhati Mukhopadhyaya, *op. cit.*
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70. See, for example, Dayaram Gidumal (ed.) *The Status of Women in India*, Bombay, 1889.
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75. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
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80. C.H. Heimsath, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.
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102. *Ibid.*
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