# Putting Herself into the Picture

## - Women's accounts of the social reform campaign in Maharashtra, mid nineteenth to early twentieth centuries

**by**

**Jyotsna Kapur**

*"Truly I did not understand psychology. Nor do I yet understand it. I believe Jijai (Tukaram 's wife) did not understand it either, nor yet the wife of Socrates. Had they but written their lives, the world would have understood the difficulties tliey faced in running their homes. Of others' minds they may have known nothing, but well did they know the tumult of their own."*

- Lakshmibai Tilak, *Smritichitre*

The position of women was a central issue of concern to the social reform movements in the mid nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Campaigns ranged from arguing against Sati, female infanticide, child marriage and maltreatment of widows, to working for improvement in women's health and education. Yet the reform movement campaigns have conventionally been studied in isolation from what they meant to women themselves and how they were perceived by them. They have been studied largely in terms of the efforts of the educated, upper caste, male intelligentsia, who initiated and largely determined their direction. We have tittle understanding of what the campaign was actually saying to women of the same class, or of the new roles, options and tensions to which it led. In this essay, I talk about the perceptions of middle class, upper caste women, whose husbands or fathers were lawyers, teachers or administrators, members of the professional intelligentsia: and were a highly visible and articulate group living in Poona and Bombay.

Through a study of select autobiographies of women associated with reform, in their capacity as members of reformist families, particularly as wives of men advocating reform, I attempt to explore the ambivalence with which women viewed reform. These autobiograpbies shift the focus from the public debate about reform to changes within the family and thus give an insight into how the public debate about the role and position of women was being translated into practice at home, where these relations were actually played out.

**Lakshmibai Tilak**

These autobiographies expressive of the "tumult of their own [minds]", give an insight into how reform was perceived by those for whom it was advocated and how this related to the degree of control women experienced in discussing, evaluating and determining its direction. I argue that this "tumult" was the result of the contradictory messages women got at this time -they were asked to change and not really allowed to change, inasmuch as the husband emerged as the new figure of authority in the reformist family, which was more often NUCLEAR than extended.

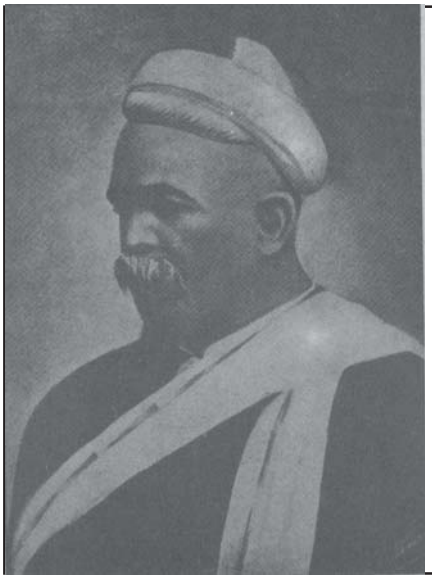
In this essay, I focus on the writings of women whose husbands or fathers were important social reformers in Maharashtra in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. I do not deal with the writings of the woman social reformer and the complexitiesof her struggle in the social reform campaign, largely controlled by middle class, caste men, at a time when the movement for social reform was being taken by a nationalism, which, B.G. Tilak, was defined in strongly revivalist terms. In this paper, I try and explore the ways in which the social reform campaign was translated into police, within the middle class home from where it was initiated.

Women from middle class, upper caste families began to learn to read and write Marathi and some English in the middle of the nineteenth century. Some amongst them wrote autobiographies, which were published in the early and

mid twentieth century. These are written in simple, idiomatic Marathi. There are some accounts in English as well, particularly those written by Christian women. Education until then had been taboo to women and the lower castes. The upper caste woman was socialised into seeing education as something evil, the acquisition of which was disreputable or might lead to her husband's death.

The tradition of women telling and sharing their life stories was not new. Women have told their stories through folk songs, stories and simply by talking to each other. In Maharashtra, stories told by women saints like Bahinabai and Sakubai about their lives and experiences have been carried forward through an oral culture. Being oral, successive generations express the commonalities of women's experience. These autobiographies appear to be a means to share personal experience with a larger audience. A thread that runs through these autobiographies is the sense of standing on the threshold of changing times. Women establish their identity in these autobiographies in terms of how their lives are different from those of their mothers or of women in earlier times.

These written autobiographies express a sense of individuality, which is thought of as important enough to be shared with others. The sense of individuality is made inevitable by writing your story down, in your own



name. Pandita Ramabai's writings are in her own name without a second name and so is Ishvani's autobiography, called *Tlie Brocaded Sari,* published in 1946. Anandibai Karve and Parvati Athavale express this individuality in the title of their autobiographies which are *Maze Kahani* and *Maze Puran,* both meaning "My Story."

## Biography as Autobiography

However, considerable self-consciousness accompanied this sense of individuality, and the majority of these autobiographies are described as "biographies" of husbands. Ramabai Ranade,[2] Leelabai Patwardhan[3] and Lakshmibai Tilak[1] state that they are actually writing "biographies" of their husbands, at their husbands' request. In a sense this assertion is borne out by these writings, for the central issue in all these writings is the description of married life. Many of these accounts, those of Ramabai Ranade, Lakshmibai Tilak, and Leelabai Patwardhan, end with Ire death of their husbands. Ishvani's account ends with her divorce and departure for the US. Ramabai Ranade lived 23 years alter the death of her husband and these were the most active years of her public life. In these years she set up the Seva Sadan, was member of the Lady Dufferin Fund Committee, presided over the first session of the All India Women's Conference in 1907, agitated for free and compulsory

### Biographies in Brief

● Lakriimibai Tilak, wife of Narayan Titak, the social reformer who fought against the caste system and was a social worker helping the poor, especially during famines, TO THE point of impoverishing himself and his family. Converted to Christianity.

● Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), scholar, and educiationist and social reformer, widowed young, the only woman reformer to have functioned independent of male relatives; founded institutions for women's education, relife of widows and destitute women at Poor and Khedgaon; was dteawd from the other social reformcri after her convection to Christianity. For derailed account, see Manushi No.5, 1980.

● Anandiboi Kant (1865-1950), child widow mareied to eminent social reformer and women's educationist D.K. Karve who was the founder of the widow's home at Hingne and the SNDT Women's University at Poona.

● Parvall Athavale (born 187O) younger sister of Anandibai Karve, married at 11, widowed at 20, sent to the widows' home at Hingne, when she educated and developed inio an active full time worker, raisng funds by public speaking on women's situation; visited America whereshe earned her keep, leamed English, and raised funds for the Hingne institute.

● Ramebai Rainwde '(1862-1924), second wife of leading social reformer Justic G.M. Ranade, who was one of the founders of the Indian National Congress and nominated member of the Bombay legislative council. She founded the Seva Sadan for widows and destitute women and the Arya Mahila Mandal; she worked with women in prison, and was also one of the leading campaigners for women's franchise.

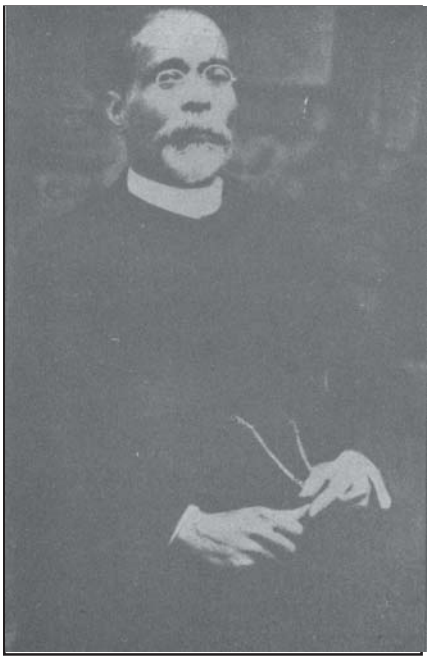
● Leelabai Patwardhan, wife of M.T. Patwardhan (1894-1945), who was a professor at Ferguson College, Poona, noted Marathi poet and author, and Persian scholar.

● Dosebai Cowasjee (died 1911) one of the first women to receive an English education, advocate of women's education within the Parsicommunity; married to Cowasjee Jehangir Jessawalla.

education for young girls, and campaigned for votes for women in the Bombay legislative council. It is significant that women chose to describe that part of their lives which was spent with their husbands and the hopes and tensions involved therein, rather than the pan of life spent without the husband. The woman activist, however, who took to activist work early on account of being widowed or separated, describes married life in minimal detail, for example, the writings of Pandita Ramabai, Rakhmabai or Parvati Athavale.

Married women's "biographies" of husbands, however, do not give details of the husband's role in the public debates about reform or in the development of institutions, but describe life, changing relations and work within the family. There is a short description of life before marriage; the wedding and its arrangement are described in great detail and this is followed by a detailed account of married life, the relations with husband and inlaws and the trials involved in running the home, often in difficult circumstances. A similar emphasis on married life is found also in the stories of the women *bhakta* saints and in folk songs. The central character in the supposed biographies of husbands is the woman author, and the story is told from her point of view. These accounts, then, describe women's experiences in great detail and are really autobiographical.

In some accounts, an effort is made to justify the autobiographical nature of the writings. Ramabai Ranade explains, rather conventionally: "When I began writing this account I had no intention of saying much about myself, I think I have succeeded more or less up to now. But one of the strange things in life is that a wife is like a shadow of her husband. You cannot avoid her even if you wish to, while speaking of him,"[5] Her "biography"of Ranade, however, is not aboul his public role as a social reformer but about her relationship with him, how this affected her relationship



**Narayan Waman Tilak**

with others in his family, and her own opinion about some of the public decisions that he took which affected her -for example, his marrying her, an 11 year old, after his first wife's death, when he was advocating widow remarriage and adult marriages, or his agreeing to a purification ceremony after the Panch Howd mission incident.* Two thirds of Lakshmibai Tilalk'a account is about her struggle on account of the conversion to Christianity of her husband, Narayanrao Tilak. Tilak is absent through this long period in which she hears of his conversion, struggles against it and finds ways to support herself through it . We have liltle description of his struggle or activities during this period. Even though Lakshmibai calls, this the "biography" of her husband, she is the central character of *Smritichitre.*

Married life is central to these accounts, for marriage was the arena in which most women's lives were played out. Except for Leelabai Patwardhan, the others married early, between the ages of 11 and 15. The emphasis on married life also points to the extent to which the question of identity was linked to marriage and the importace given by women to changes taking place in this relation which continued to be seen as primary.

## Bonding with the Husband

Among the professional intelligentsia, break up of the joint family was necessitated by govemment jobs, which were transferable and involved moving away from the traditional family home to distant towns. Wives accompanied their husbands on these tours and transfers. Ramabai Ranade writes ".....so happy were the days of that tour.....we cherished them even more than our days at home."[6] Break up was also necessitated by the partitioning of family property, unable to support the growing members of the family. Both Ranade and Karve recount the partitioning of family property.

Support for social reform would also isolate the reformist family, particularly the wife who bore the brunt of boycott by the orthodox community. Boycott of the reformist family however, does not seem as total in Maharashtra as it was in Bengal. As Wolpert points out in *Tilak and Gokhale: Refonn and Revolution in the Making of Modem India* (California, 1962), the Prarthana Samaj did not set itsself apart from society. Also, inspite of transfers and a separate home, the elders of the joint family still continued to have important decision making powers affecting the couple. So the break up was in no sense complete, nor did it allow complete autonomy to the couple. It was, however, an important temporary or transitional phase in which relations between the husband and wife could be developed away from the restrictions posed by other family members. In case of conversion, though, the break from the orthodox community was irrevocable.

* On October 14, 1890, at the St. Mary's Convent, the nuns offered tea which the women declined and the men accepted. This was followed by an attack in conservative circles, demanding that those who took tea should be boyeotted or render an apology to the Shankaracharya. B.G. Tilak apologised and, later, so did Ranade.

Freedom from the constraints of the joint family, however limited, was seen as a significant new development by wmen. They write in their autobiographies that this allowed a greater closeness with the husband. This closeness with the husband was seen as crucially important, for it allowed the young bride emotional bonding with at least one person in a group of strangers. The husband was the person who would establish her standing in the new family, which she entered at the very bottom of the hierarchy. With the power of the elders slowly fading away, the husband became the central figure of authority. To the young bride, this meant, in real terms, only one difficult person to please. The choice between the elders and the husband was nevertheless a difficult one and it was the woman who bore the resultant tensions for it was she who spent her time at home, living out these tensions on a day to day basis.

Bonding with the husband was expressed in notions of romance and companionship, which were seen as important constituents of the new marriage. This was in keeping with the myth of the husband and wife as partners and companions in the colonial home, which was represented as an ideal.*

An indication of the trend emphasising romance was the new gifts that men gave their wives. Dosebai Cowasjee's husband presented her on her wedding with "A cupboard having all manner of things just suiting my taste - silken fabrics, stockings, kid gloves....velvets, bodies of otto of roses, handkerchiefs and every requisite of sewing and writing." Ishvani writes of the letters she received from Rachid, before they married, in which "...he placed me at the centre of his universe and credited me with all kinds of beauty and intelligence. Was I worthy of all this adoration and worship?"8 Some degree of appreciation of the woman's individuality was made possible by the notion of romance. There was also a lot of emphasis on personal attractiveness. Parvati Athavale criticises Indian women who, according to her, dressed most shabbily after marriage, unlike their English counterparts. She writes: "If an occasion arises for a short sermon to them on the neatness of dress, they reply, 'Why should I care how I look? Is there anything I want to go to see or is there anyone coming? I have seen all that there is to see'" Personal attractiveness was advocated as an important binding factor between the couple.

**Dosebai Cowasjee Jessawala**

However, romance was defined primarily in spiritual rather than physical or sexual terms. None of the autobiographies allude to physical relations between the couple, these being thought of as extremely personal. Also, these accounts are of fairly well known men and women and this may help explain the inhibition in writing about sexual relationships. Each of these autobiographies, however, describes the experience of childbirth which in most cases was painful and happened at an early age. Towards the end of her autobiography, Ramabai Ranade writes: "We had been denied the main source of happiness in worldly life. We were childless. But we had accepted our lot with contentment. We had never complained or brooded over it....."

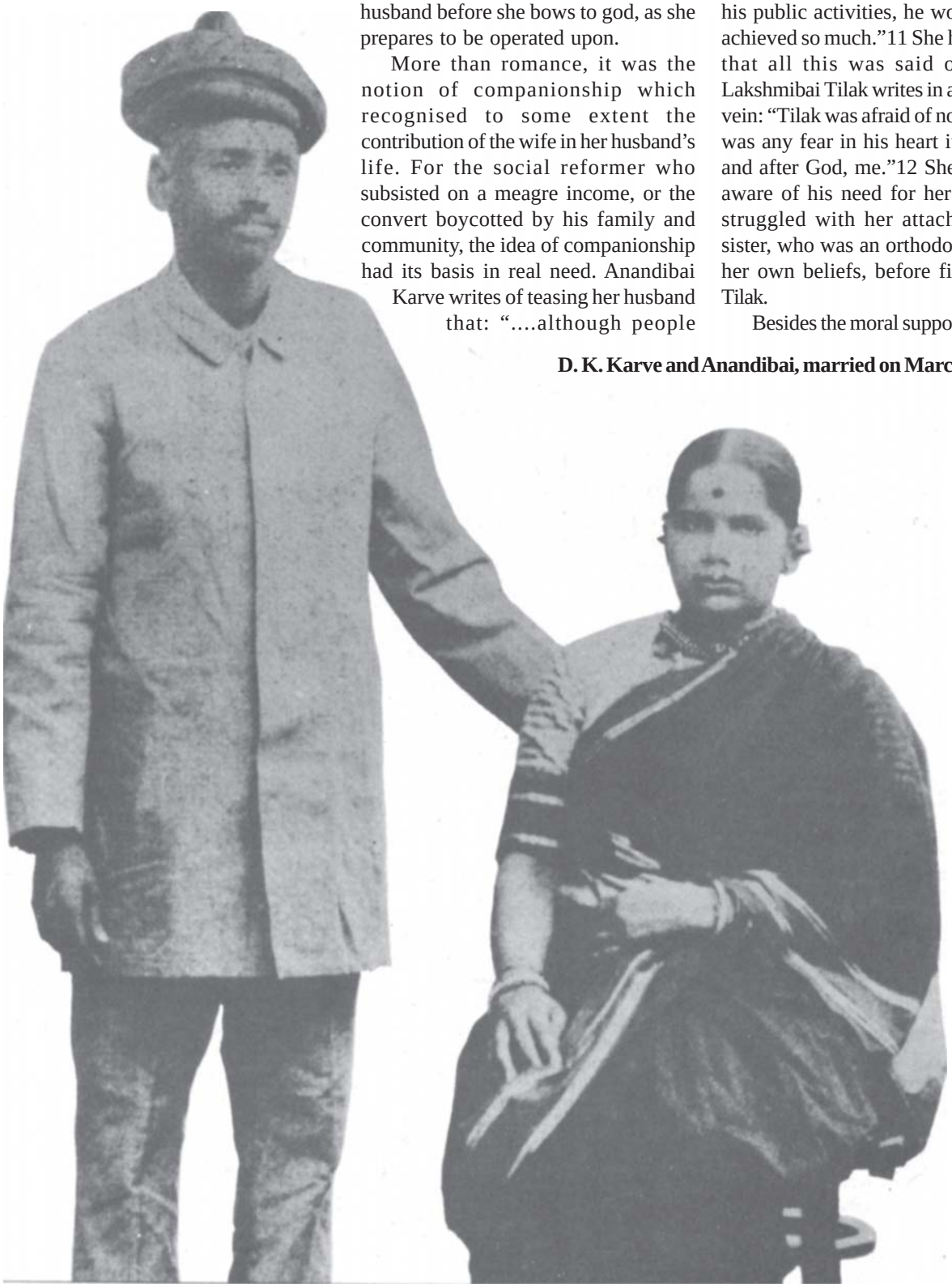
Dosebai tells her English friends: "It is not so much the body as the mind that we love and seeing my betrothed highly spoken of by everybody, my mother thinks she gives me in good hands and I myself expect to be happy."10 In fact the spiritual content could almost become devotional, coming close to the notion

* Travel armuinsflnd and writing of European women, on the contrary, point to Ihc boredom, frustration and emptiness of life in the colonial home. Mary Fiancis Billington, a journalist with the Daily Graphic, London, wrote after her visit to India: "Women,who rarely in the East find the same amount of interest and occupation for their lives as their husbands or fathers, are wont to complain of its tedium and monotony.....It is only a really energetic character who in fact does not become demoralised into flabbiness and inertia under the combined influences of heat, laziness and servants at command." (Mary Francis Billington, Women in India. London 1895, pp. 190-91).

of *pati parmeshwar* (husband as god). Ramabai Ranade puts her husband before god in her life and bows to her husband before she bows to god, as she prepares to be operated upon.

More than romance, it was the notion of companionship which recognised to some extent the contribution of the wife in her husband's life. For the social reformer who subsisted on a meagre income, or the convert boycotted by his family and community, the idea of companionship had its basis in real need. Anandibai Karve writes of teasing her husband that: "....although people called him "Maharishi" some of the credit is due to me. For if I had not managed the family affairs and set him free to carry on his public activities, he would not have achieved so much."11 She hastens to add that all this was said only in jest. Lakshmibai Tilak writes in a more serious vein: "Tilak was afraid of no man. If there was any fear in his heart it was of God and after God, me."12 She was acutely aware of his need for her support, but struggled with her attachment to her sister, who was an orthodox Hindu, and her own beliefs, before finally joining Tilak.

Besides the moral support that women



**D. K. Karve and Anandibai, married on March 13, 1893**

provided their husbands, they also ran the home with very little money. Anandibai Karve worked as a midwife and kept children from well off families in her house as boarders, to make ends meet. Lakshmibai Tilak had the same propensity for making money last and producing everything at home. She writes: "I sat like a snake upon our possessions." In some cases wives publicly supported their husbands' reform efforts. Ramabai Ranade and Parvati Athavale attended meetings with their husbands and addressed both mixed and "women's only" audiences on social reform issues.

The companionship idea was reflected in certain developments like wives calling their husbands by their first names, jokes and discussions shared by the couple and, in general, greater time spent together. Women addressing their husbands by their first names was seen as unconventional and is commented upon by women in their writings. Anandibai Karve writes; "I never uttered my husband's name Dhondo, not because I believed in the superstition that if a wife utters her husband's name his life is shortened, but because I did not like the name. So I always used Karve, when I had occasion to refer to him."[13] Ramabai Ranade recounts that on the first day of her marriage Ranade asked her if she knew his name. She writes that he seemed pleased when she told him his full name. Ramabai Ranade, however, refers to Ranade as *swatah* (he or himself) in her writings while Lakshmibai Tilak and Pandita Ramabai refer to their husbands by their names. Calling the husband by his name did appear to reduce the distance between the two. This, and the greater time spent together by the couple, would be seen as scandalous by the elders in the family, particularly by the older women, for it upset the traditional hierarchy in the joint family, wherein the older women had greater access to the men. Ramabai Ranade's *TAI sasubai* reacted sharply to Ranade teaching Ramabai and talked of

**Parvatibai Athavale**

the time when wives did not come into the presence of men. She said: "Were they not darlings of their husbands? But now this love has crossed all limits. Wives must now sit close to their husbands as though their clothes are knotted .....they must read and write like men."

## Possibility of Earning

Financial insecurity and the break from the joint family made one significant difference for women - it made the husband's illness, absence or death an eventuality that would have to be faced alone. On account of this, women trained in teaching, nursing, midwifery or any other occupation to be able to support themselves in an emergency. Sex segregration opened jobs for women in women's health and education.

In training for these jobs, women had the husband's cooperation as well. Irawati Karve recounts Anandibai Karve telling her "When as a Hindu widow I remarried again, I lost all contacts with my parent's home and my first husband's family. My second husband's family treated me as an outcast. The usual means of livelihood for a brahmin widow, serving as a cook, were closed to me. If unfortunately I had been widowed a second time, there was nothing else left for me to do but to commit suicide." To guard against this, Anandibai Karve went to Nagpur to do a year's course in nursing. Karve and his son and nephew shifted to a house in Fergusson College and "....as a measure of economy decided to cook for ourselves and do all the housework."[15] Lakshmibai Tilak too went away from home to do a course in nursing. Leelabai Patwardhan's husband, Madhavrao, insisted that she continue her education for, ".....who knows what you will have to face in life. It may be in some difficult situation you have to take service."[16] Leelabai started teaching six months after her husband's death. Pandita Ramabai made Karvedrawupa life policy of Rs3,000 in favor of Anandibai Karve on their wedding day. Lakshmibai Tilak writes that on the day Tilak died, she held Tara their daughter, close to her and said: "Tara, let us say that you have lost your mother and your father is still living. I will not let you want you for anything. I will complete your education."[17] Exchange of roles in an emergency became a definite possibility.

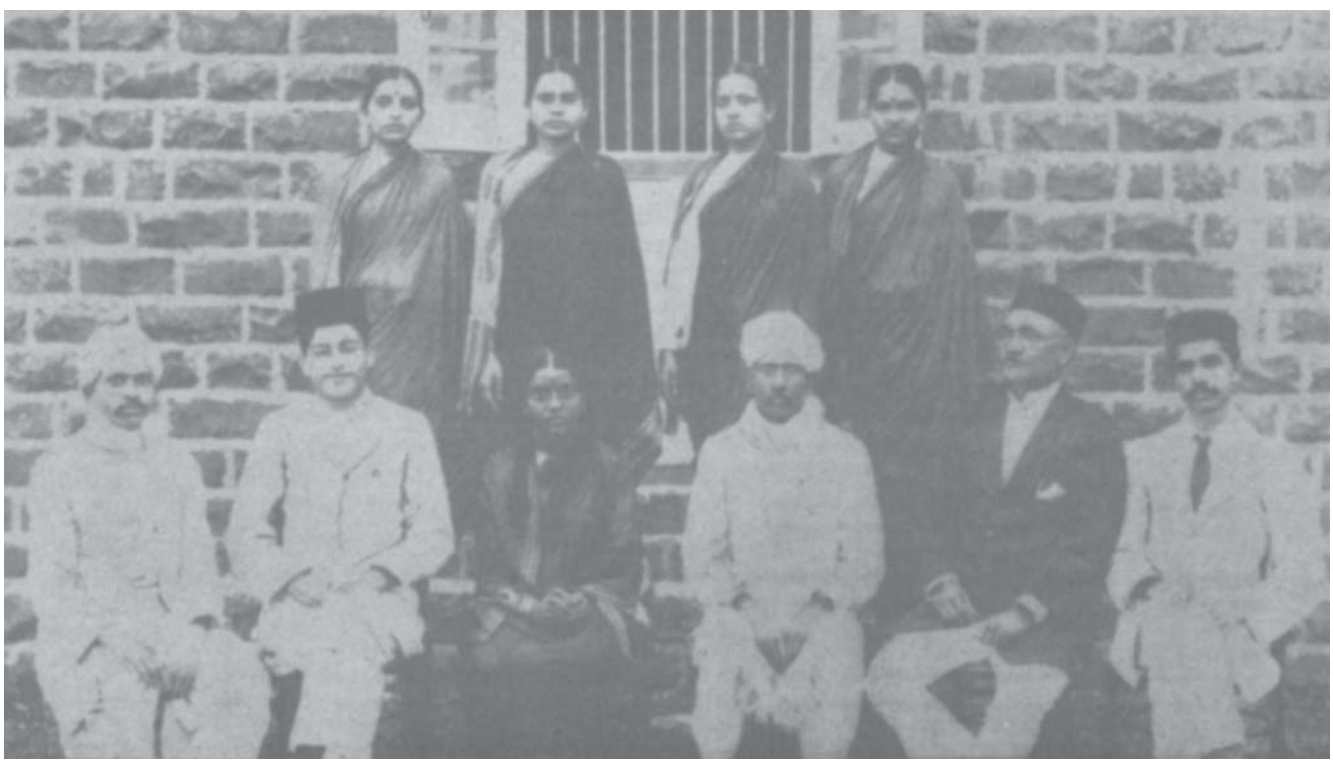
Conservatives saw the dangers in conceding to women the possibility of self sufficiency through education. Bal Gangadhar Tilak stated that the virtues of the ideal Hindu wife were "Obedience to her husband and contentment with her lot in life." He went on to say that: "all the education implied by the B.A. degree would not compensate a Hindu woman for the absence of these qualities."[18] *Power,* published from Calcutta, carried the following comment on Rakhmabai's practising medicine in Kolhapur; "She might have been a useful member of society if she had not so indecently got rid or her husband and if she had taken to the duties in the household of a Hindu wife....while wishing Rakhmabai a successful career as a lady doctor, we must repeat that she cannot be a model to our sisters and daughters,"[19] Lakshmibai Tilak faced strong opposition in her attempt to study

nursing, living away from home, She had to give up the attempt and return home, on the insistence of the head of the mission, Dr Hume, that she was neglecting her home and her children. She writes; "Dr. Hume might throw all Miraj hospital into confusion, but was not my mind my own?...I now understand why students commit suicide when they fail in their examinations. I know what examinations and learning are worth."20

Thus, while the break up in the joint family and the opening of avenues in some jobs and public services created the possibility of newer relations between the couple and the building of self esteem in wornen, the dependence on husbands was strongly reimposcd by the economic, social and educational superiority of husbands. While it was the responsibility of the wife to see the family through an economic crisis, she had little control over the husband's income. Anandibai Karve and Lakshmibai Tilak write in detail about the financial constraints under which they lived, and about what they often saw as wasteful or thoughtless expenditure by their husbands. But they were not consulted in these decisions. Ramabai Ranade was given charge of the household budget as soon as she learnt to read and write. She writes: "I never spent more than five rupees from the sum allotted for household expenses without his permission. He never said "no".....but he did not like it if it was done withoutasking him."21

Traditional ideas of women's subservience to husbands did not really change. Husbands were years older - a 10 year difference was the minimum. They were far ahead in terms of education when they began teaching wives. They were thus most impatient tutors and many women resented education as something forced upon them, something that reduced their status to that of children. Also, as there was little reciprocity of interest by husbands in the wives' activities or thoughts, women complained of not finding time or energy to study. Leelaba Patwardhan writes: "He wanted me to spend some time reading and writing and urged me not to be doing house work all the time like uneducated women, but I hardly ever found it possible."22 Most often, the husband soon enough gave up the task of educating his wife. Ramabai Ranade studied on her own with her husband's younger brothers, who were closer to her in age, and from an Englishwoman employed to teach her. Lakshmibai Tilak writes: ".....Tilak found no pleasure whatsoever, in teaching me....and his instruction came to an abrupt end. From then I came to read a great deal." She quotes from Tilak's diary: "Lakshmi is writing down the verse with the end of a match! Though I tell her a line a hundred limes she cannot do it. What innumerable mistakes!"23 Education, however, was deeply valued and seen as an important link with the times. Large parts of the autobiographies are descriptive of women's struggle

**Professors and students of the S.N.D.T. Women's University, 1916**



somehow to acquire it. Ideas of companionship, individuality and connections with a wider movement beyond the home became fraught with contradictions. Women expressed this conflict between their new expectations of change and the unchanging actual power equations.

## New Tensions in Marriage

"I really lack the qualities that an Indian wife is expected to possess. She should sacrifice without a murmur, suffer with a smile and follow blindly wherever she is led....I would never make Rachid happy. Though he thinks he is modern, he still has the same ideas his father and grandfather have about women."24 Ishvani wrote this when Rachid insisted that she change her religion after marriage, which lshvani had not expected to do.

Leelabai Palwardhan writes about her depression in the first year of her marriage: "only grown up Hindu brides can know what it is; the final break wilh familiar surroundings and the beginning of life with one's husband, whom one has known for such a short lime....sometimes I felt that the old traditional marriages when girls were married off young were better in some ways. They enabled the young brides who were more adaptable, to get used to their new homes and relations. On the other hand, the marriages of grown-ups, particularly educated people, the man and the woman had already become fixed in their habits and attitudes, were more difficult and placed greater strain on them ..... there were more chances of sparks flying and the relations becoming strained, particularly if there was no one else in the family."25

Women expressed resentment at having to accept and conform to husbands' opinions when they clashed with their own. There would be differences of opinion about husbands' demands to change traditional modes of dress, behaviour and food - demands that women perceived as foreign or alien. Sardesai gives an account of how his wife

**Anandibai Karve**

resented his demand that she wear the sari without taking it through her legs in the traditional way. Lakshmibai Tilak resented Tilak's interference in the kitchen and refused to wear a gown that he once brought her. Leelabai Patwardhan writes with anger about her husband asking her to adjust her *kumkum* on their wedding day. Possibly, women saw this as an invasion of space that had earlier been theirs - the kitchen and the home.

In the smaller family men seem to exercise greater control over and interference in women's lives. In real terms, then, it appeared to women that nothing had changed in terms of their exercising greater autonomy. This led to a lot of depression. Sardesai quotes from his wife's diary: "Sometimes we have differences of opinion and my husband gets very angry. At such moments I feel that a woman's life is so useless and dependent. I keep on brooding over such incidents and I do not forget them easily."[26]

Sometimes, differences of opinion would arise on account of the stand taken by the husband on social reform. Ramabai Ranade, who writes a most admiring account of her husband, mentions her distress at his apologising and going through the purification ceremony after the Panch Howd Mission incident. She writes that Ranade's purification ceremony ".....hurt me deeply. It hurt me even more than it would have if my husband were taken away to be punished for some offence. It was not a feeling of sorrow, so much, as of outrage, of insult.....Why should he listen to others in such matters?"[27] Ishvani gives an account of her bitter fight with her husband, Rachid, when he asked her to change her religion after marriage. She asked Rachid: "Don'I you think we should have the moral courage to do what we think is right? After all we represent young India.....Shouldn't we be able to think for ourselves now?" He jumped up from his chair and said: "You don't have to drag in India. This is a matter which is purely personal and affects nobody but ourselves."[28] Pandita Ramabai writes of the conflict with her husband over her interest in Christianity and her association with the Christian missionary, Mr Allen. She says: "I do not know what would have happened had he [her husband] lived much longer."[29]

For the social reformer's wife, a constant source of tension was the need to choose between an older and a newer way of living. With little support from her husband, she had to bear the brunt of family and community disapproval, as it was she who spent all her time at home. Alternative groups or associations did not emerge. Ramabai Ranade suffered through the taunts, ritual purification baths and the isolation from the other women in the family. Ranade refused to take sides in this conflict. Ramabai Ranade describes how, after she came back from the Saturday meetings of the Arya Mahila Samaj, she would not be allowed into the kitchen. Then, slowly, by Thursday, she would be asked to cut vegetables and so on. She writes; "I would then feel as happy as an animal, who after having been driven out for a while is taken back into the herd again."[30] The Arya Manila Samaj did not become

a support centre since it did not have a consistent membership. Attendance of women was infrequent on account of transfers and work at home. Lakshmibai Tilak gives a poignant account of the tensions of walking this light rope between the husband and the community. In her case, the tension was compounded by Tilak's long absences. She writes about the death of her son soon after he was born. Knowing that her aunt would start purification ceremonies after the death, which Tilak would oppose, Laksbmibai writes: "....to save us all I sat at a distance and pretended he was alive for a little while", and called her aunt only after Tilak had left the house.[31]

How did women of reformist families cope with the contradictious between the new possibilities created by the loosening of joint family controls, the opening of some jobs to women, public discussions of the subordination of women and the greater dependence on the husband, and unchanging definitions of traditional ideas of women's subservience to men? Some women took to activist life, campaigning for reform in a public sphere largely controlled by men. In this essay, however, I am concerned with the women who continued to stay at home or played a supportive role in their husbands' lives.

Some resolved this contradiction in apparently traditional ways. Ramabai Ranade translated the traditional idea of unswerving support to the husband into the new context. In any conflict between the older and newer values, she says she chose to be by her husband. She writes: "A single shower of rain can efface the heat of a long drawn out summer....he never put on the airs of the head of the family and dictated what he liked or how the wife or anyone else in the family should behave....but it was tacitly understood that one who he looked upon as his own (myself) should be able to do just what he wished without being told."[32] Ramabai explains her addressing public audiences, learning to read and write and mixing with European women, all non-tradidonal acts for a Brahman wife, as expressions of her devotion to her husband. This was the version of married companionship which was idealised by the male social reformer as well. G.K. Gokhale comments on this in his introduction to Ramabai Ranade's work. He writes: "A deep love between the husband and wife is often found in western society. That is a relationship of equality. But, even here is similar deep love, in that the wife should devote herself wholly to the service of the husband and consider this the fulfilment of her life.This is a special characteristic of the woman of the East, and particularly of India."

The resolution was not always so smooth, Lakshmibai Tilak expressed strong resentment against Tilak's ways of thinking and conversion. She accepted these slowly, only when she was convinced about their value. Finally, when she adopted a Mahar girl as a daughter, even Tilak admitted that he might noi have done so. She caused Tilak some embarrassment in the mission and in his classes by her outspoken ways and her stubbornness in refusing to up many traditional practices. For example, she stayed vegetarian, and for over six months continued lo have energetic *pujas* in her house. She recounts an amusing incident when she was asked in Tilak's class one day if she beat her husband. Her reply was that yes she did, but only with her tongue! Sometimes, the conflict would not be so obvious and public. Sardesai gives an account of how his wife, with great reluctance, wore the *sari* without taking it through her legs. When his mother came to visit them and saw this, she returned home without stepping the house. Sardesai says that from that day his wife went back to wearing the *sari* in the traditional way and he never brought up the subject again.

In most cases women turn their energies into the home and continued to do what they could for vother women. Anandibai Karve was to some extent involved in the Widows Home which was started by Karve in their house in 1896. She would help with checking provisions, buying corn and so on. But she took no part in the internal management of the Home, did not touch the water that the inmates drank and ate separately from them. When the Widows Home shifted to a separate building, she was totally dissociaied from it. Anandibai Karve was kept out of the Home for fear that since she was a remarried widow her association might give rise to allegations that the Home actually encouraged widow remarriage although its stated purpose was only education of widows. Anandibai writes that she would then employ some women who could not join the Widows Home for they needed parents' or guardians' permission to get admission. She writes that her children resented the fact that the orphans and widows got poor food as compared to them. She explains:"If I had kept these widows and orphan same way as I did my children, I would not have been able to help even 1/10 the number I actually did."33 Karve's noninvolvment in their own home was balanced by its centrality to her life. She says: "My greatest anxiety was if my sons did not turn out well, people would say that the children of such marriages could not possibly turn out well. I looked to their studies and them that their father would educate them only up to their 12th year."34 At the height of the scandal in August 1893 surrounding the conversion in the Sharda Sadan run by Pandita Ramabai, when Ranade, Bhandarkar and others on the management committee sent in their resignations, Ramabai Ranade secretly took a Brahman widow to Pandita Ramabai for shelter. Pandita Ramabai writes about the reassurance this gave her, even though this was never made public. In many ways then, social reform was translated in very conventional ways at home. The ideas of companionship and romance, borrowed

from the colonial home, made possible the recognition of a woman's individuality and altered the relationship between the couple; it also made the husband the centre of the woman's world. Loosening of joint family controls made greater autonomy possible; it also increased the dependence on husbands. Yet the education of women, the possibility of jobs in certain professions, the uncertainty and financial insecurity of depending on the husband entirely, and the public debate on the position of women, raised questions that could not be closed. In the mid nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, some women like Pandita Ramabai and Rakhmabai articulated these questions publicly; many lived and struggled with them within the home. Autobiographies were a way to express these new tensions and energies which would find an outlet in the mass campaigns led by Gandhi in the mid 1920s and 30s.

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