



# TALKS BY SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Referred by Shri.Kamlesh D Patel during the  
Heartfulness Convention

## Note

Kamleshji referred to talks by Swami Vivekananda praising Sitaji from Ramayana. These talks refer these mentions and also include 2 speeches by him about the Women of India

## SOURCES

1. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda Vol 3, 5, 6 8 & 9.

Heartfulness Convention Organizing Team

## Table of Contents

FRAGMENTARY NOTES ON THE RAMAYANA .....	2
Volume 6 .....	2
SAYINGS AND UTTERANCES .....	3
Volume 5 .....	3
THE SAGES OF INDIA .....	3
Volume 3 .....	3
WOMEN OF INDIA : Given at Pasadena, CA on Jan 18, 1900 .....	4
Volume 8 .....	4
THE WOMEN OF INDIA: Given at Cambridge MA on Dec 1894 .....	22
Volume 9 .....	22
<Reference to Sita> .....	28

## FRAGMENTARY NOTES ON THE RAMAYANA

### Volume 6

Worship Him who alone stands by us, whether we are doing good or are doing evil; who never leaves us even; as love never pulls down, as love knows no barter, no selfishness. Râma was the soul of the old king; but he was a king, and he could not go back on his word.

"Wherever Rama goes, there go I", says Lakshmana, the younger brother. The wife of the elder brother to us Hindus is just like a mother. At last he found Sitâ, pale and thin, like a bit of the moon that lies low at the foot of the horizon. Sita was chastity itself; she would never touch the body of another man except that of her husband.

"Pure? She is chastity itself", says Rama.

Drama and music are by themselves religion; any song, love song or any song, never mind; if one's whole soul is in that song, he attains salvation, just by that; nothing else he has to do; if a man's whole soul is in that, his soul gets salvation. They say it leads to the same goal. Wife — the co-religionist. Hundreds of ceremonies the Hindu has to perform, and not one can be performed if he has not a wife. You see the priests tie them up together, and they go round temples and make very great pilgrimages tied together. Rama gave up his body and joined Sita in the other world. Sita — the pure, the pure, the all-suffering!

Sita is the name in India for everything that is goods pure, and holy; everything that in women we call woman. Sita — the patient, all-suffering, ever-faithful, ever-pure wife! Through all the suffering she had, there was not one harsh word against Rama. Sita never returned injury.

"Be Sita!"

## SAYINGS AND UTTERANCES

### Volume 5

When Swamiji was at Ramnad, he said in the course of a conversation that Shri Râma was the Paramâtman and that Sitâ was the Jivâtman, and each man's or woman's body was the Lanka (Ceylon).

The Jivatman which was enclosed in the body, or captured in the island of Lankâ, always desired to be in affinity with the Paramatman, or Shri Rama. But the Râkshasas would not allow it, and Rakshasas represented certain traits of character.

For instance, Vibhishana represented Sattva Guna; Râvana, Rajas; and Kumbhakarna, Tamas. Sattva Guna means goodness; Rajas means lust and passions, and Tamas darkness, stupor, avarice, malice, and its concomitants. These Gunas keep back Sita, or Jivatman, which is in the body, or Lanka, from joining Paramatman, or Rama.

Sita, thus imprisoned and trying to unite with her Lord, receives a visit from Hanumân, the Guru or divine teacher, who shows her the Lord's ring, which is Brahma-Jnâna, the supreme wisdom that destroys all illusions; and thus Sita finds the way to be at one with Shri Rama, or, in other words, the Jivatman finds itself one with the Paramatman.

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## THE SAGES OF INDIA

### Volume 3

And what to speak of Sitâ? You may exhaust the literature of the world that is past, and I may assure you that you will have to exhaust the literature of the world of the future, before finding another Sita.

Sita is unique; that character was depicted once and for all. There may have been several Ramas, perhaps, but never more than one Sita! She is the very type of the true Indian woman, for all the Indian ideals of a perfected woman have grown out of that one life of Sita; and here she stands these thousands of years, commanding the worship of every man, woman, and child throughout the length and breadth of the land of Âryâvarta.

There she will always be, this glorious Sita, purer than purity itself, all patience, and all suffering. She who suffered that life of suffering without a murmur, she the ever-chaste and ever-pure wife, she the ideal of the people, the ideal of the gods, the great Sita, our national God she must always remain. And every one of us knows her too well to require much delineation. All our mythology may vanish, even our Vedas may depart, and our Sanskrit language may vanish forever, but so long as there will be five Hindus living here, even if only speaking the most vulgar patois, there will be the story of Sita present.

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

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WOMEN OF INDIA : Given at Pasadena, CA on Jan 18, 1900

Volume 8

[http://www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/vivekananda/volume\\_8/lectures\\_and\\_discourses/women\\_of\\_india.htm](http://www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/vivekananda/volume_8/lectures_and_discourses/women_of_india.htm)

(Delivered at the Shakespeare Club House, in Pasadena, California, on January 18, 1900)

**SWAMI VIVEKANANDA:** "Some persons desire to ask questions about Hindu Philosophy before the lecture and to question in general about India after the lecture; but the chief difficulty is I do not know what I am to lecture on. I would be very glad to lecture on any subject, either on Hindu Philosophy or on anything concerning the race, its history, or its literature. If you, ladies and gentlemen, will suggest anything, I would be very glad."

**QUESTIONER:** "I would like to ask, Swami, what special principle in Hindu Philosophy you would have us Americans, who are a very practical people, adopt, and what that would do for us beyond what Christianity can do."

**SWAMI VIVEKANANDA:** "That is very difficult for me to decide; it rests upon you. If you find anything which you think you ought to adopt, and which will be helpful, you should take that. You see I am not a missionary, and I am not going about converting people to my idea. My principle is that all such ideas are good and great, so that some of your ideas may suit some people in India, and some of our ideas may suit some people here; so ideas must be cast abroad, all over the world."

**QUESTIONER:** "We would like to know the result of your philosophy; has your philosophy and religion lifted your women above our women?"

**SWAMI VIVEKANANDA:** "You see, that is a very invidious question: I like our women and your women too."

**QUESTIONER:** "Well, will you tell us about your women, their customs and education, and the position they hold in the family?"

**SWAMI VIVEKANANDA:** "Oh, yes, those things I would be very glad to tell you. So you want to know about Indian women tonight, and not philosophy and other things?"

## THE LECTURE

I must begin by saying that you may have to bear with me a good deal, because I belong to an Order of people who never marry; so my knowledge of women in all their relations, as mother, as wife, as daughter and sister, must necessarily not be so complete as it may be with other men. And then, India, I must remember, is a vast continent, not merely a country, and is inhabited by many different races. The nations of Europe are nearer to each other, more similar to each other, than the races in India. You may get just a rough idea of it if I tell you that there are eight different languages in all India. Different languages — not dialects — each having a literature of its own. The Hindi language, alone, is spoken by 100,000,000 people; the Bengali by about 60,000,000, and so on. Then, again, the four northern Indian languages differ more from the southern Indian languages than any two European languages from each other. They are entirely different, as much different as your language differs from the Japanese, so that you will be astonished to know, when I go to southern India, unless I meet some people who can talk Sanskrit, I have to speak to them in English. Furthermore, these various races differ from each other in manners, customs, food, dress, and in their methods of thought.

Then, again, there is caste. Each caste has become, as it were, a separate racial element. If a man lives long enough in India, he will be able to tell from the features what caste a man belongs to. Then, between castes, the manners and customs are different. And all these castes are exclusive; that is to say, they would meet socially, but they would not eat or drink together, nor intermarry. In those things they remain separate. They would meet and be friends to each other, but there it would end.

Although I have more opportunity than many other men to know women in general, from my position and my occupation as a preacher, continuously

travelling from one place to another and coming in contact with all grades of society — (and women, even in northern India, where they do not appear before men, in many places would break this law for religion and would come to hear us preach and talk to us) — still it would be hazardous on my part to assert that I know everything about the women of India.

So I will try to place before you the ideal. In each nation, man or woman represents an ideal consciously or unconsciously being worked out. The individual is the external expression of an ideal to be embodied. The collection of such individuals is the nation, which also represents a great ideal; towards that it is moving. And, therefore, it is rightly assumed that to understand a nation you must first understand its ideal, for each nation refuses to be judged by any other standard than its own.

All growth, progress, well-being, or degradation is but relative. It refers to a certain standard, and each man to be understood has to be referred to that standard of his perfection. You see this more markedly in nations: what one nation thinks good might not be so regarded by another nation. Cousin-marriage is quite permissible in this country. Now, in India, it is illegal; not only so, it would be classed with the most horrible incest. Widow-marriage is perfectly legitimate in this country. Among the higher castes in India it would be the greatest degradation for a woman to marry twice. So, you see, we work through such different ideas that to judge one people by the other's standard would be neither just nor practicable. Therefore we must know what the ideal is that a nation has raised before itself. When speaking of different nations, we start with a general idea that there is one code of ethics and the same kind of ideals for all races; practically, however, when we come to judge of others, we think what is good for us must be good for everybody; what we do is the right thing, what we do not do, of course in others would be outrageous. I do not mean to say this as a criticism, but just to bring the truth home. When I hear Western women

denounce the confining of the feet of Chinese ladies, they never seem to think of the corsets which are doing far more injury to the race. This is just one example; for you must know that cramping the feet does not do one-millionth part of the injury to the human form that the corset has done and is doing — when every organ is displaced and the spine is curved like a serpent. When measurements are taken, you can note the curvatures. I do not mean that as a criticism but just to point out to you the situation, that as you stand aghast at women of other races, thinking that you are supreme, the very reason that they do not adopt your manners and customs shows that they also stand aghast at you.

Therefore there is some misunderstanding on both sides. There is a common platform, a common ground of understanding, a common humanity, which must be the basis of our work. We ought to find out that complete and perfect human nature which is working only in parts, here and there. It has not been given to one man to have everything in perfection. You have a part to play; I, in my humble way, another; here is one who plays a little part; there, another. The perfection is the combination of all these parts. Just as with individuals, so with races. Each race has a part to play; each race has one side of human nature to develop. And we have to take all these together; and, possibly in the distant future, some race will arise in which all these marvellous individual race perfections, attained by the different races, will come together and form a new race, the like of which the world has not yet dreamed. Beyond saying that, I have no criticism to offer about anybody. I have travelled not a little in my life; I have kept my eyes open; and the more I go about the more my mouth is closed. I have no criticism to offer.

Now, the ideal woman in India is the mother, the mother first, and the mother last. The word woman calls up to the mind of the Hindu, motherhood; and God is called Mother. As children, every day, when we are boys, we have to go early

in the morning with a little cup of water and place it before the mother, and mother dips her toe into it and we drink it.

In the West, the woman is wife. The idea of womanhood is concentrated there — as the wife. To the ordinary man in India, the whole force of womanhood is concentrated in motherhood. In the Western home, the wife rules. In an Indian home, the mother rules. If a mother comes into a Western home, she has to be subordinate to the wife; to the wife belongs the home. A mother always lives in our homes: the wife must be subordinate to her. See all the difference of ideas.

Now, I only suggest comparisons; I would state facts so that we may compare the two sides. Make this comparison. If you ask, "What is an Indian woman as wife?", the Indian asks, "Where is the American woman as mother? What is she, the all-glorious, who gave me this body? What is she who kept me in her body for nine months? Where is she who would give me twenty times her life, if I had need? Where is she whose love never dies, however wicked, however vile I am? Where is she, in comparison with her, who goes to the divorce court the moment I treat her a little badly? O American woman! where is she?" I will not find her in your country. I have not found the son who thinks mother is first. When we die, even then, we do not want our wives and our children to take her place. Our mother! — we want to die with our head on her lap once more, if we die before her. Where is she? Is woman a name to be coupled with the physical body only? Ay! the Hindu mind fears all those ideals which say that the flesh must cling unto the flesh. No, no! Woman! thou shalt not be coupled with anything connected with the flesh. The name has been called holy once and for ever, for what name is there which no lust can ever approach, no carnality ever come near, than the one word mother? That is the ideal in India.

I belong to an Order very much like what you have in the Mendicant Friars of the Catholic Church; that is to say, we have to go about without very much in

the way of dress and beg from door to door, live thereby, preach to people when they want it, sleep where we can get a place — that way we have to follow. And the rule is that the members of this Order have to call every woman "mother"; to every woman and little girl we have to say "mother"; that is the custom. Coming to the West, that old habit remained and I would say to ladies, "Yes, mother", and they are horrified. I could not understand why they should be horrified. Later on, I discovered the reason: because that would mean that they are old. The ideal of womanhood in India is motherhood — that marvellous, unselfish, all-suffering, ever-forgiving mother. The wife walks behind-the shadow. She must imitate the life of the mother; that is her duty. But the mother is the ideal of love; she rules the family, she possesses the family. It is the father in India who thrashes the child and spansks when there is something done by the child, and always the mother puts herself between the father and the child. You see it is just the opposite here. It has become the mother's business to spank the children in this country, and poor father comes in between. You see, ideals are different. I do not mean this as any criticism. It is all good — this what you do; but our way is what we have been taught for ages. You never hear of a mother cursing the child; she is forgiving, always forgiving. Instead of "Our Father in Heaven", we say "Mother" all the time; that idea and that word are ever associated in the Hindu mind with Infinite Love, the mother's love being the nearest approach to God's love in this mortal world of ours. "Mother, O Mother, be merciful; I am wicked! Many children have been wicked, but there never was a wicked mother" — so says the great saint Râmprasâd.

There she is — the Hindu mother. The son's wife comes in as her daughter; just as the mother's own daughter married and went out, so her son married and brought in another daughter, and she has to fall in line under the government of the queen of queens, of his mother. Even I, who never married, belonging to an Order that never marries, would be disgusted if my wife, supposing I had married, dared to displease my mother. I would be disgusted. Why? Do I not

worship my mother? Why should not her daughter-in-law? Whom I worship, why not she? Who is she, then, that would try to ride over my head and govern my mother? She has to wait till her womanhood is fulfilled; and the one thing that fulfils womanhood, that is womanliness in woman, is motherhood. Wait till she becomes a mother; then she will have the same right. That, according to the Hindu mind, is the great mission of woman — to become a mother. But oh, how different! Oh, how different! My father and mother fasted and prayed, for years and years, so that I would be born. They pray for every child before it is born. Says our great law-giver, Manu, giving the definition of an Aryan, "He is the Aryan, who is born through prayer". Every child not born through prayer is illegitimate, according to the great law-giver. The child must be prayed for. Those children that come with curses, that slip into the world, just in a moment of inadvertence, because that could not be prevented — what can we expect of such progeny? Mothers of America, think of that! Think in the heart of your hearts, are you ready to be women? Not any question of race or country, or that false sentiment of national pride. Who dares to be proud in this mortal life of ours, in this world of woes and miseries? What are we before this infinite force of God? But I ask you the question tonight: Do you all pray for the children to come? Are you thankful to be mothers, or not? Do you think that you are sanctified by motherhood, or not? Ask that of your minds. If you do not, your marriage is a lie, your womanhood is false, your education is superstition, and your children, if they come without prayer, will prove a curse to humanity.

See the different ideals now coming before us. From motherhood comes tremendous responsibility. There is the basis, start from that. Well, why is mother to be worshipped so much? Because our books teach that it is the pre-natal influence that gives the impetus to the child for good or evil. Go to a hundred thousand colleges, read a million books, associate with all the learned men of the world — better off you are when born with the right stamp. You are born for good or evil. The child is a born god or a born demon; that is what the books

say. Education and all these things come afterwards — are a mere bagatelle. You are what you are born. Born unhealthful, how many drug stores, swallowed wholesale, will keep you well all through your life? How many people of good, healthy lives were born of weak parents, were born of sickly, blood-poisoned parents? How many? None — none. We come with a tremendous impetus for good or evil: born demons or born gods. Education or other things are a bagatelle.

Thus say our books: direct the pre-natal influence. Why should mother be worshipped? Because she made herself pure. She underwent harsh penances sometimes to keep herself as pure as purity can be. For, mind you, no woman in India thinks of giving up her body to any man; it is her own. The English, as a reform, have introduced at present what they call "Restitution of conjugal rights", but no Indian would take advantage of it. When a man comes in physical contact with his wife, the circumstances she controls through what prayers and through what vows! For that which brings forth the child is the holiest symbol of God himself. It is the greatest prayer between man and wife, the prayer that is going to bring into the world another soul fraught with a tremendous power for good or for evil. Is it a joke? Is it a simple nervous satisfaction? Is it a brute enjoyment of the body? Says the Hindu: no, a thousand times, no!

But then, following that, there comes in another idea. The idea we started with was that the ideal is the love for the mother — herself all-suffering, all-forbearing. The worship that is accorded to the mother has its fountain-head there. She was a saint to bring me into the world; she kept her body pure, her mind pure, her food pure, her clothes pure, her imagination pure, for years, because I would be born. Because she did that, she deserves worship. And what follows? Linked with motherhood is wifeness.

You Western people are individualistic. I want to do this thing because I like it; I will elbow every one. Why? Because I like to. I want my own satisfaction, so I marry this woman. Why? Because I like her. This woman marries me. Why? Because she likes me. There it ends. She and I are the only two persons in the whole, infinite world; and I marry her and she marries me — nobody else is injured, nobody else responsible. Your Johns and your Janes may go into the forest and there they may live their lives; but when they have to live in society, their marriage means a tremendous amount of good or evil to us. Their children may be veritable demons-burning, murdering, robbing, stealing, drinking, hideous, vile.

So what is the basis of the Indian's social order? It is the caste law. I am born for the caste, I live for the caste. I do not mean myself, because, having joined an Order, we are outside. I mean those that live in civil society. Born in the caste, the whole life must be lived according to caste regulation. In other words, in the present-day language of your country, the Western man is born individualistic, while the Hindu is socialistic — entirely socialistic. Now, then, the books say: if I allow you freedom to go about and marry any woman you like, and the woman to marry any man she likes, what happens? You fall in love; the father of the woman was, perchance, a lunatic or a consumptive. The girl falls in love with the face of a man whose father was a roaring drunkard. What says the law then? The law lays down that all these marriages would be illegal. The children of drunkards, consumptives, lunatics, etc., shall not be married. The deformed, humpbacked, crazy, idiotic — no marriage for them, absolutely none, says the law.

But the Mohammedan comes from Arabia, and he has his own Arabian law; so the Arabian desert law has been forced upon us. The Englishman comes with his law; he forces it upon us, so far as he can. We are conquered. He says, "Tomorrow I will marry your sister". What can we do? Our law says, those that are

born of the same family, though a hundred degrees distant, must not marry, that is illegitimate, it would deteriorate or make the race sterile. That must not be, and there it stops. So I have no voice in my marriage, nor my sister. It is the caste that determines all that. We are married sometimes when children. Why? Because the caste says: if they have to be married anyway without their consent, it is better that they are married very early, before they have developed this love: if they are allowed to grow up apart, the boy may like some other girl, and the girl some other boy, and then something evil will happen; and so, says the caste, stop it there. I do not care whether my sister is deformed, or good-looking, or bad-looking: she is my sister, and that is enough; he is my brother, and that is all I need to know. So they will love each other. You may say, "Oh! they lose a great deal of enjoyment — those exquisite emotions of a man falling in love with a woman and a woman falling in love with a man. This is a sort of tame thing, loving each other like brothers and sisters, as though they have to." So be it; but the Hindu says, "We are *socialistic*. For the sake of one man's or woman's exquisite pleasure we do not want to load misery on hundreds of others."

There they are — married. The wife comes home with her husband; that is called the second marriage. Marriage at an early age is considered the first marriage, and they grow up separately with women and with their parents. When they are grown, there is a second ceremony performed, called a second marriage. And then they live together, but under the same roof with his mother and father. When she becomes a mother, she takes her place in turn as queen of the family group.

Now comes another peculiar Indian institution. I have just told you that in the first two or three castes the widows are not allowed to marry. They cannot, even if they would. Of course, it is a hardship on many. There is no denying that not all the widows like it very much, because non-marrying entails upon them the life of

a student. That is to say, a student must not eat meat or fish, nor drink wine, nor dress except in white clothes, and so on; there are many regulations. We are a nation of monks — always making penance, and we like it. Now, you see, a woman never drinks wine or eats meat. It was a hardship on us when we were students, but not on the girls. Our women would feel degraded at the idea of eating meat. Men eat meat sometimes in some castes; women never. Still, not being allowed to marry must be a hardship to many; I am sure of that.

But we must go back to the idea; they are intensely *socialistic*. In the higher castes of every country you will find the statistics show that the number of women is always much larger than the number of men. Why? Because in the higher castes, for generation after generation, the women lead an easy life. They "neither toil nor spin, yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them". And the poor boys, they die like flies. The girl has a cat's nine lives, they say in India. You will read in the statistics that they outnumber the boys in a very short time, except now when they are taking to work quite as hard as the boys. The number of girls in the higher castes is much larger than in the lower. Conditions are quite opposite in the lower castes. There they all work hard; women a little harder, sometimes, because they have to do the domestic work. But, mind you, I never would have thought of that, but one of your American travellers, Mark Twain, writes this about India: "In spite of all that Western critics have said of Hindu customs, I never saw a woman harnessed to a plough with a cow or to a cart with a dog, as is done in some European countries. I saw no woman or girl at work in the fields in India. On both sides and ahead (of the railway train) brown-bodied naked men and boys are ploughing in the fields. But not a woman. In these two hours I have not seen a woman or a girl working in the fields. In India, even the lowest caste never does any hard work. They generally have an easy lot compared to the same class in other nations; and as to ploughing, they never do it. "

Now, there you are. Among the lower classes the number of men is larger than the number of women; and what would you naturally expect? A woman gets more chances of marriage, the number of men being larger.

Relative to such questions as to widows not marrying: among the first two castes, the number of women is disproportionately large, and here is a dilemma. Either you have a non-marriageable widow problem and misery, or the non-husband-getting young lady problem. To face the widow problem, or the old maid problem? There you are; either of the two. Now, go back again to the idea that the Indian mind is socialistic. It says, "Now look here! we take the widow problem as the lesser one." Why? "Because they have had their chance; they have been married. If they have lost their chance, at any rate they have had one. Sit down, be quiet, and consider these poor girls-they have not had one chance of marriage." Lord bless you! I remember once in Oxford Street, it was after ten o'clock, and all those ladies coming there, hundreds and thousands of them shopping; and some man, an American, looks around, and he says, "My Lord! how many of them will ever get husbands, I wonder!" So the Indian mind said to the widows, "Well, you have had your chance, and now we are very, very sorry that such mishaps have come to you, but we cannot help it; others are waiting."

Then religion comes into the question; the Hindu religion comes in as a comfort. For, mind you, our religion teaches that marriage is something bad, it is only for the weak. The very spiritual man or woman would not marry at all. So the religious woman says, "Well, the Lord has given me a better chance. What is the use of marrying? Thank God, worship God, what is the use of my loving man?" Of course, all of them cannot put their mind on God. Some find it simply impossible. They have to suffer; but the other poor people, they should not suffer for them. Now I leave this to your judgment; but that is their idea in India.

Next we come to woman as daughter. The great difficulty in the Indian household is the daughter. The daughter and caste combined ruin the poor Hindu, because, you see, she must marry in the same caste, and even inside the caste exactly in the same order; and so the poor man sometimes has to make himself a beggar to get his daughter married. The father of the boy demands a very high price for his son, and this poor man sometimes has to sell everything just to get a husband for his daughter. The great difficulty of the Hindu's life is the daughter. And, curiously enough, the word daughter in Sanskrit is "duhitâ". The real derivation is that, in ancient times, the daughter of the family was accustomed to milk the cows, and so the word "duhita" comes from "duh", to milk; and the word "daughter" really means a milkmaid. Later on, they found a new meaning to that word "duhita", the milkmaid — she who milks away all the milk of the family. That is the second meaning.

These are the different relations held by our Indian women. As I have told you, the mother is the greatest in position, the wife is next, and the daughter comes after them. It is a most intricate and complicated series of gradation. No foreigner can understand it, even if he lives there for years. For instance, we have three forms of the personal pronoun; they are a sort of verbs in our language. One is very respectful, one is middling, and the lowest is just like *thou* and *thee*. To children and servants the last is addressed. The middling one is used with equals. You see, these are to be applied in all the intricate relations of life. For example, to my elder sister I always throughout my life use the pronoun *âpani*, but she never does in speaking to me; she says *tumi* to me. She should not, even by mistake, say *apani* to me, because that would mean a curse. Love, the love toward those that are superior, should always be expressed in that form of language. That is the custom. Similarly I would never dare address my elder sister or elder brother, much less my mother or father, as *tu* or *tum* or *tumi*. As to calling our mother and father by name, why, we would never do that. Before I knew the customs of this country, I received such a shock when the

son, in a very refined family, got up and called the mother by name! However, I got used to that. That is the custom of the country. But with us, we never pronounce the name of our parents when they are present. It is always in the third person plural, even before them.

Thus we see the most complicated mesh-work in the social life of our men and our women and in our degree of relationship. We do not speak to our wives before our elders; it is only when we are alone or when inferiors are present. If I were married, I would speak to my wife before my younger sister, my nephews or nieces; but not before my elder sister or parents. I cannot talk to my sisters about their husbands at all. The idea is, we are a monastic race. The whole social organisation has that one idea before it. Marriage is thought of as something impure, something lower. Therefore the subject of love would never be talked of. I cannot read a novel before my sister, or my brothers, or my mother, or even before others. I close the book.

Then again, eating and drinking is all in the same category. We do not eat before superiors. Our women never eat before men, except they be the children or inferiors. The wife would die rather than, as she says, "munch" before her husband. Sometimes, for instance, brothers and sisters may eat together; and if I and my sister are eating, and the husband comes to the door, my sister stops, and the poor husband flies out.

These are the customs peculiar to the country. A few of these I note in different countries also. As I never married myself, I am not perfect in all my knowledge about the wife. Mother, sisters — I know what they are; and other people's wives I saw; from that I gather what I have told you.

As to education and culture, it all depends upon the man. That is to say, where the men are highly cultured, there the women are; where the men are not, women are not. Now, from the oldest times, you know, the primary education,

according to the old Hindu customs, belongs to the village system. All the land from time immemorial was nationalised, as you say — belonged to the Government. There never is any private right in land. The revenue in India comes from the land, because every man holds so much land from the Government. This land is held in common by a community, it may be five, ten, twenty, or a hundred families. They govern the whole of the land, pay a certain amount of revenue to the Government, maintain a physician, a village schoolmaster, and so on.

Those of you who have read Herbert Spencer remember what he calls the "monastery system" of education that was tried in Europe and which in some parts proved a success; that is, there is one schoolmaster, whom the village keeps. These primary schools are very rudimentary, because our methods are so simple. Each boy brings a little mat; and his paper, to begin with, is palm leaves. Palm leaves first, paper is too costly. Each boy spreads his little mat and sits upon it, brings out his inkstand and his books and begins to write. A little arithmetic, some Sanskrit grammar, a little of language and accounts — these are taught in the primary school.

A little book on ethics, taught by an old man, we learnt by heart, and I remember one of the lessons:

"For the good of a village, a man ought to give up his family;  
For the good of a country, he ought to give up his village;  
For the good of humanity, he may give up his country;  
For the good of the world, everything."

Such verses are there in the books. We get them by heart, and they are explained by teacher and pupil. These things we learn, both boys and girls together. Later on, the education differs. The old Sanskrit universities are mainly

composed of boys. The girls very rarely go up to those universities; but there are a few exceptions.

In these modern days there is a greater impetus towards higher education on the European lines, and the trend of opinion is strong towards women getting this higher education. Of course, there are some people in India who do not want it, but those who do want it carried the day. It is a strange fact that Oxford and Cambridge are closed to women today, so are Harvard and Yale; but Calcutta University opened its doors to women more than twenty years ago. I remember that the year I graduated, several girls came out and graduated — the same standard, the same course, the same in everything as the boys; and they did very well indeed. And our religion does not prevent a woman being educated at all. In this way the girl should be educated; even thus she should be trained; and in the old books we find that the universities were equally resorted to by both girls and boys, but later the education of the whole nation was neglected. What can you expect under foreign rule? The foreign conqueror is not there to do good to us; he wants his money. I studied hard for twelve years and became a graduate of Calcutta University; now I can scarcely make \$5.00 a month in my country. Would you believe it? It is actually a fact. So these educational institutions of foreigners are simply to get a lot of useful, practical slaves for a little money — to turn out a host of clerks, postmasters, telegraph operators, and so on. There it is.

As a result, education for both boys and girls is neglected, entirely neglected. There are a great many things that should be done in that land; but you must always remember, if you will kindly excuse me and permit me to use one of your own proverbs, "What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander." Your foreign born ladies are always crying over the hardships of the Hindu woman, and never care for the hardships of the Hindu man. They are all weeping salt tears. But who are the little girls married to? Some one, when told that they are all married to

old men, asked, "And what do the young men do? What! are all the girls married to old men, only to old men?" We are born old — perhaps all the men there.

The ideal of the Indian race is freedom of the soul. This world is nothing. It is a vision, a dream. This life is one of many millions like it. The whole of this nature is Maya, is phantasm, a pest house of phantasms. That is the philosophy. Babies smile at life and think it so beautiful and good, but in a few years they will have to revert to where they began. They began life crying, and they will leave it crying. Nations in the vigour of their youth think that they can do anything and everything: "We are the gods of the earth. We are the chosen people." They think that God Almighty has given them a charter to rule over all the world, to advance His plans, to do anything they like, to turn the world upside down. They have a charter to rob, murder, kill; God has given them this, and they do that because they are only babes. So empire after empire has arisen — glorious, resplendent — now vanished away — gone, nobody knows where; it may have been stupendous in its ruin.

As a drop of water upon a lotus leaf tumbles about and falls in a moment, even so is this mortal life. Everywhere we turn are ruins. Where the forest stands today was once the mighty empire with huge cities. That is the dominant idea, the tone, the colour of the Indian mind. We know, you Western people have the youthful blood coursing through your veins. We know that nations, like men, have their day. Where is Greece? Where is Rome? Where that mighty Spaniard of the other day? Who knows through it all what becomes of India? Thus they are born, and thus they die; they rise and fall. The Hindu as a child knows of the Mogul invader whose cohorts no power on earth could stop, who has left in your language the terrible word "Tartar". The Hindu has learnt his lesson. He does not want to prattle, like the babes of today. Western people, say what you have to say. This is your day. Onward, go on, babes; have your prattle out. This is the day

of the babies, to prattle. We have learnt our lesson and are quiet. You have a little wealth today, and you look down upon us. Well, this is your day. Prattle, babes, prattle — this is the Hindu's attitude.

The Lord of Lords is not to be attained by much frothy speech. The Lord of Lords is not to be attained even by the powers of the intellect. He is not gained by much power of conquest. That man who knows the secret source of things and that everything else is evanescent, unto him He, the Lord, comes; unto none else. India has learnt her lesson through ages and ages of experience. She has turned her face towards Him. She has made many mistakes; loads and loads of rubbish are heaped upon the race. Never mind; what of that? What is the clearing of rubbish, the cleaning of cities, and all that? Does that give life? Those that have fine institutions, they die. And what of institutions, those tinsplate Western institutions, made in five days and broken on the sixth? One of these little handful nations cannot keep alive for two centuries together. And our institutions have stood the test of ages. Says the Hindu, "Yes, we have buried all the old nations of the earth and stand here to bury all the new races also, because our ideal is not this world, but the other. Just as your ideal is, so shall you be. If your ideal is mortal, if your ideal is of this earth, so shalt thou be. If your ideal is matter, matter shalt thou be. Behold! Our ideal is the Spirit. That alone exists, nothing else exists; and like Him, we live for ever."



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## THE WOMEN OF INDIA: Given at Cambridge MA on Dec 1894

Volume 9

[http://www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/vivekananda/volume\\_9/lectures\\_and\\_discourses/the\\_women\\_of\\_india.htm](http://www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/vivekananda/volume_9/lectures_and_discourses/the_women_of_india.htm)

(*New Discoveries*, Vol. 2, pp. 411-26.)

*The following lecture was delivered at Cambridge, December 17, 1894, and recorded by Miss Frances Willard's stenographer.*

*Swami Vivekananda faced bigotry in America on several issues of Indian culture — one was the Indian woman. Naturally he sought to correct Western misconceptions. When he lectured in his own country, however, there was no greater advocate for improving the life of Indian women than the Swami.*

In speaking about the women of India, ladies and gentlemen, I feel that I am going to talk about my mothers and sisters in India to the women of another race, many of whom have been like mothers and sisters to me. But though, unfortunately, within very recent times there have been mouths only to curse the women of our country, I have found that there are some who bless them too. I have found such noble souls in this nation as Mrs. [Ole] Bull and Miss [Sarah] Farmer and Miss [Frances] Willard, and that wonderful representative of the highest aristocracy of the world, whose life reminds me of that man of India, six hundred years before the birth of Christ, who gave up his throne to mix with the people. Lady Henry Somerset has been a revelation to me. I become bold when I find such noble souls who will not curse, whose mouths are full of blessing for me, my country, our men and women, and whose hands and hearts are ever ready to do service to humanity.

I first intend to take a glimpse into times past of Indian history, and we will find something unique. All of you are aware, perhaps, that you Americans and we Hindus and this lady from Iceland [Mrs. Sigrid Magnusson] are the descendants of one common ancestry known as Aryans. Above all, we find three ideas wherever the Aryans go: the village community, the rights of women and a joyful religion.[1](#)

The first [idea] is the system of village communities — as we have just heard from Mrs. Bull concerning the North. Each man was his own [lord?] and owned the land. All these political institutions of the world we now see, are the developments of those village systems. As the Aryans went over to different

countries and settled, certain circumstances developed this institution, others that.

The next idea of the Aryans is the freedom of women. It is in the Aryan literature that we find women in ancient times taking the same share as men, and in no other literature of the world.

Going back to our Vedas — they are the oldest literature the world possesses and are composed by your and my common ancestors (they were not written in India — perhaps on the coast of the Baltic, perhaps in Central Asia — we do not know).

Their oldest portion is composed of hymns, and these hymns are to the gods whom the Aryans worshipped. I may be pardoned for using the word *gods*; the literal translation is "the bright ones". These hymns are dedicated to Fire, to the Sun, to Varuna and other deities. The titles run: "such-and-such a sage composed this verse, dedicated to such-and-such a deity".

In the tenth chapter comes a peculiar hymn — for the sage is a woman — and it is dedicated to the one God who is at the background of all these gods. All the previous hymns are spoken in the third person, as if someone were addressing the deities. But this hymn takes a departure: God [as the Devi] is speaking for herself. The pronoun used is "I". "I am the Empress of the Universe, the Fulfiller of all prayers." (*Vide* "Devi Sukta", Rig-Veda 10.125)

This is the first glimpse of women's work in the Vedas. As we go on, we find them taking a greater share — even officiating as priests. There is not one passage throughout the whole mass of literature of the Vedas which can be construed even indirectly as signifying that woman could never be a priest. In fact, there are many examples of women officiating as priests.

Then we come to the last portion of these Vedas — which is really the religion of India — the concentrated wisdom of which has not been surpassed even in this century. There, too, we find women preeminent. A large portion of these books are words which have proceeded from the mouths of women. It is there — recorded with their names and teachings.

There is that beautiful story of the great sage Yâjñavalkya, the one who visited the kingdom of the great king Janaka. And there in that assembly of the learned, people came to ask him questions. One man asked him, "How am I to perform this sacrifice?" Another asked him, "How am I to perform the other sacrifice?" And after he had answered them, there arose a woman who said, "These are childish questions. Now, have a care: I take these two arrows, my two questions. Answer them if you can, and we will then call you a sage. The first is: What is the soul? The second is: What is God?" ( Brihadâranjaka Upanishad 3.8.1.-12.)

Thus arose in India the great questions about the soul and God, and these came from the mouth of a woman. The sage had to pass an examination before her, and he passed well.

Coming to the next stratum of literature, our epics, we find that education has not degenerated. Especially in the caste of princes this ideal was most wonderfully held.

In the Vedas we find this idea of marrying — the girls chose for themselves; so the boys. In the next stratum they are married by their parents, except in one caste.

Even here I would ask you to look at another side. Whatever may be said of the Hindus, they are one of the most learned races the world has ever produced.

The Hindu is the metaphysician; he applies everything to his intellect. Everything has to be settled by astrological calculation.

The idea was that the stars govern the fate of every man and woman. Even today when a child is born, a horoscope is cast. That determines the character of the child. One child is born of a divine nature, another of a human, others of lower character.

The difficulty was: If a child who was of a monster-character was united with a child of a god-character, would they not have a tendency to degenerate each other?

The next difficulty was: Our laws did not allow marriage within the same clans. Not only may one not marry within his own family — or even one of his cousins — but one must not marry into the clan of his father or even of his mother.

A third difficulty was: If there had been leprosy or phthisis or any such incurable disease within six generations of either bride or bridegroom, then there must not be a marriage.

Now taking [into account] these three difficulties, the Brahmin says: "If I leave it to the choice of the boy or girl to marry, the boy or girl will be fascinated with a beautiful face. And then very likely all these circumstances will bring ruin to the family". This is the primary idea that governs our marriage laws, as you will find. Whether right or wrong, there is this philosophy at the background. Prevention is better than cure.

That misery exists in this world is because we give birth to misery. So the whole question is how to prevent the birth of miserable children. How far the rights of a society should extend over the individual is an open question. But the Hindus say that the choice of marriage should not be left in the hands of the boy or girl.

I do not mean to say that this is the best thing to do. Nor do I see that leaving it in their hands is at all a perfect solution. I have not found a solution yet in my own mind; nor do I see that any country has one.

We come next to another picture. I told you that there was another peculiar form of marriage (generally among the royalty) where the father of the girl invited different princes and noblemen and they had an assembly. The young lady, the daughter of the king, was borne on a sort of chair before each one of the princes in turn. And the herald would repeat: "This is Prince So-and-so, and these are his qualifications". The young girl would either wait or say, "Move on". And before the next prince, the crier would also give a description, and the girl would say, "Move on". (All this would be arranged beforehand; she already had the liking for somebody before this.) Then at last she would ask one of the servants to throw the garland over the head of the man, and it would be thrown to show he was accepted. (The last of these marriages was the cause of the Mohammedan invasion of India.) (Vide [later this chapter](#) for the story of Samjuktâ, daughter of a Rajput prince, who became the Queen of Delhi.) These marriages were specially reserved for the prince caste.

The oldest Sanskrit poem in existence, the Râmâyana, has embodied the loftiest Hindu ideal of a woman in the character of Sitâ. We have not time to go through her life of infinite patience and goodness. We worship her as God incarnate, and she is named before her husband, Râma. We say not "Mr. and Mrs.", but "Mrs. and Mr." and so on, with all the gods and goddesses, naming the woman first.

There is another peculiar conception of the Hindu. Those who have been studying with me are aware that the central conception of Hindu philosophy is of the Absolute; that is the background of the universe. This Absolute Being, of whom we can predicate nothing, has its powers spoken of as *She* — that is, the

real personal God in India is She. This Shakti of the Brahman is always in the feminine gender.

<Reference to Sita>

Rama is considered the type of the Absolute, and Sita that of Power. We have no time to go over all the life of Sita, but I will quote a passage from her life that is very much suited to the ladies of this country.

The picture opens when she was in the forest with her husband, whither they were banished. There was a female sage whom they both went to see. Her fasts and devotions had emaciated her body.

Sita approached this sage and bowed down before her. The sage placed her hand on the head of Sita and said: "It is a great blessing to possess a beautiful body; you have that. It is a greater blessing to have a noble husband; you have that. It is the greatest blessing to be perfectly obedient to such a husband; you are that. You must be happy".

Sita replied, "Mother, I am glad that God has given me a beautiful body and that I have so devoted a husband. But as to the third blessing, I do not know whether I obey him or he obeys me. One thing alone I remember, that when he took me by the hand before the sacrificial fire — whether it was a reflection of the fire or whether God himself made it appear to me — I found that I was his and he was mine. And since then, I have found that I am the complement of his life, and he of mine".

Portions of this poem have been translated into the English language. Sita is the ideal of a woman in India and worshipped as God incarnate.

We come now to Manu the great lawgiver. Now, in this book there is an elaborate description of how a child should be educated. We must remember

that it was compulsory with the Aryans that a child be educated, whatever his caste. After describing how a child should be educated, Manu adds: "Along the same lines, the daughters are to be educated — exactly as the boys".[2](#)

I have often heard that there are other passages where women are condemned. I admit that in our sacred books there are many passages which condemn women as offering temptation; you can see that for yourselves. But there are also passages that glorify women as the power of God. And there are other passages which state that in that house where one drop of a woman's tear falls, the gods are never pleased and the house goes to ruin. Drinking wine, killing a woman and killing a Brahmin are the highest crimes in the Hindu religion. I admit there are condemnatory sentences [in some of our books]; but here I claim the superiority of these Hindu books, for in the books of other races there is only condemnation and no good word for a woman.

Next, I will come to our old dramas. Whatever the books say, the dramas are the perfect representation of society as it then existed. In these, which were written from four hundred years before Christ onward, we find even universities full of both boys and girls. We would not [now] find Hindu women, as they have since become cut off from higher education.[3](#) But [at that time], they were everywhere pretty much the same as they are in this country — going out to the gardens and parks to take promenades.

There is another point which I bring before you and where the Hindu woman is still superior to all other women in the world —her rights. The right to possess property is as absolute for women in India as for men — and has been for thousands and thousands of years.

If you have any lawyer friend and can take up commentaries on the Hindu law, you will find it all for yourselves. A girl may bring a million dollars to her husband, but every dollar of that is hers. Nobody has any right to touch one dollar of that.

If the husband dies without issue, the whole property of the husband goes to her, even if his father or mother is living. And that has been the law from the past to the present time. That is something which the Hindu woman has had beyond that of the women of other countries.

The older books — or even newer books — do not prohibit the Hindu widows from being married; it is a mistake to think so. They give them their choice, and that is given to both men and women. The idea in our religion is that marriage is for the weak, and I don't see any reason to give up that idea today. They who find themselves complete — what is the use of their marrying? And those that marry — they are given one chance. When that chance is over, both men and women are looked down upon if they marry again; but it is not that they are prohibited. It is nowhere said that a widow is not to marry. The widow and widower who do not marry are considered more spiritual.

Men, of course, break through this law and go and marry; whereas women — they being of a higher spiritual nature — keep to the law. For instance, our books say that eating meat is bad and sinful, but you may still eat such-and-such a meat —mutton, for instance. I have seen thousands of men who eat mutton, and never in my life have I seen a woman of higher caste who eats meat of any kind. This shows that their nature is to keep the law — keeping more towards religion. But do not judge too harshly of Hindu men. You must try to look at the Hindu law from my position too, for I am a Hindu man.

This non-marriage of widows gradually grew into a custom. And whenever in India a custom becomes rigid, it is almost impossible to break through it — just as in your country, you will find how hard it is to break through a five-day custom of fashion. In the lower castes, except two, the widows remarry.

There is a passage in our later law books [which states] that a woman shall not read the Vedas. But they are prohibited to even a weak Brahmin. If a Brahmin

boy is not strong-minded, the law is applied to him also. But that does not show that education is prohibited to them, for the Vedas are not all that the Hindus have. Every other book women can read. All the mass of Sanskrit literature, that whole ocean of literature — science, drama, poetry — is all for them. They can go there and read everything, except the [Vedic] scriptures.<sup>4</sup>

In later days the idea was that woman was not intended to be a priest; so what is the use of her studying the Vedas? In that, the Hindus are not so far behind other nations. When women give up the world and join our Order, they are no longer considered either men or women. They have no sex. The whole question of high or low caste, man or woman, dies out entirely.

Whatever I know of religion I learned from my master, and he learned it of a woman.

Coming back to the Rajput woman, I will try to bring to you a story from some of our old books — how during the Mohammedan conquest, one of these women was the cause of what led to the conquest of India.

A Rajput prince of Kanauj — a very ancient city — had a daughter [Samjukta]. She had heard of the military fame of Prithvi Raj [King of Ajmere and Delhi] and all his glory, and she was in love with him.

Now her father wanted to hold a Râjasuya sacrifice, so he invited all the kings in the country. And in that sacrifice, they all had to render menial service to him because he was superior over all; and with that sacrifice he declared there would be a choice by his daughter.

But the daughter was already in love with Prithvi Raj. He was very mighty and was not going to acknowledge loyalty to the king, her father, so he refused the invitation. Then the king made a golden statue of Prithvi Raj and put it near the

door. He said that that was the duty he had given him to perform — that of a porter.

The upshot of the whole affair was that Prithvi Raj, like a true knight, came and took the lady behind him on his horse, and they both fled.

When the news came to her father, he gave chase with his army, and there was a great battle in which the majority of both armies was killed. And [thus the Rajputs were so weakened that] the Mohammedan empire in India began.

When the Mohammedan empire was being established in northern India, the Queen of Chitore [Râni Padmini] was famed for her beauty. And the report of her beauty reached the sultan, and he wrote a letter for the queen to be sent to his harem. The result was a terrible war between the King of Chitore and the sultan. The Mohammedans invaded Chitore. And when the Rajputs found they could not defend themselves any more, the men all took sword in hand and killed and were killed, and the women perished in the flames.

After the men had all perished, the conqueror entered the city. There in the street was rising a horrible flame. He saw circles of women going around it, led by the queen herself. When he approached near and asked the queen to refrain from jumping into the flames, she said, "This is how the Rajput woman treats you", and threw herself into the fire.

It is said that 74,500 women perished in the flames that day to save their honour from the hands of the Mohammedans. Even today when we write a letter, after sealing it we write "74½" upon it, meaning that if one dares to open this letter, that sin of killing 74,500 women will be upon his head.

I will tell you the story of another beautiful Rajput girl.<sup>5</sup> There is a peculiar custom in our country called "protection". Women can send small bracelets of silken

thread to men. And if a girl sends one of these to a man, that man becomes her brother.

During the reign of the last of the Mogul emperors — the cruel man who destroyed that most brilliant empire of India — he similarly heard of the beauty of a Rajput chieftain's daughter. Orders were sent that she should be brought to the Mogul harem.

Then a messenger came from the emperor to her with his picture, and he showed it to her. In derision she stamped upon it with her feet and said, "Thus the Rajput girl treats your Mogul emperor". As a result, the imperial army was marched into Rajputana.

In despair the chieftain's daughter thought of a device. She took a number of these bracelets and sent them to the Rajput princes with a message: "Come and help us". All the Rajputs assembled, and so the imperial forces had to go back again.

I will tell you a peculiar proverb in Rajputana. There is a caste in India called the shop class, the traders. They are very intelligent — some of them — but the Hindus think they are rather sharp. But it is a peculiar fact that the women of that caste are not as intelligent as the men. On the other hand, the Rajput man is not half as intelligent as the Rajput woman.

The common proverb in Rajputana is: "The intelligent woman begets the dull son, and the dull woman begets the sharp son". The fact is, whenever any state or kingdom in Rajputana has been managed by a woman, it has been managed wonderfully well.

We come to another class of women. This mild Hindu race produces fighting women from time to time. Some of you may have heard of the woman [Lakshmi

Bai, Queen of Jhansi] who, during the Mutiny of 1857, fought against the English soldiers and held her own ground for two years — leading modern armies, managing batteries and always charging at the head of her army. This queen was a Brahmin girl.

A man whom I know lost three of his sons in that war. When he talks of them he is calm, but when he talks of this woman his voice becomes animated. He used to say that she was a goddess — she was not a human being. This old veteran thinks he never saw better generalship.

The story of Chand Bibi, or Chand Sultana [1546 - 1599], is well known in India. She was the Queen of Golconda, where the diamond mines were. For months she defended herself. At last, a breach was made in the walls. When the imperial army tried to rush in there, she was in full armour, and she forced the troops to go back.<sup>6</sup>

In still later times, perhaps you will be astonished to know that a great English general had once to face a Hindu girl of sixteen.

Women in statesmanship, managing territories, governing countries, even making war, have proved themselves equal to men — if not superior. In India I have no doubt of that. Whenever they have had the opportunity, they have proved that they have as much ability as men, with this advantage — that they seldom degenerate. They keep to the moral standard, which is innate in their nature. And thus as governors and rulers of their state, they prove — at least in India — far superior to men. John Stuart Mill mentions this fact.

Even at the present day, we see women in India managing vast estates with great ability. There were two ladies where I was born who were the proprietors of large estates and patronesses of learning and art and who managed these estates with their own brains and looked to every detail of the business.

Each nation, beyond a general humanity, develops a certain peculiarity of character — so in religion, so in politics, so in the physical body, so in mental habitude, so in men and women, so in character. One nation develops one peculiarity of character, another takes another peculiarity. Within the last few years the world has begun to recognize this.

The very peculiarity of Hindu women, which they have developed and which is the idea of their life, is that of the *mother*. If you enter a Hindu's home, you will not find the wife to be the same equal companion of the husband as you find her here. But when you find the mother, she is the very pillar of the Hindu home. The wife must wait to become the mother, and then she will be everything.

If one becomes a monk, his father will have to salute him first because he has become a monk and is therefore superior to him. But to his mother he — monk or no monk — will have to go down on his knees and prostrate himself before her. He will then put a little cup of water before her feet, she will dip her toe in it, and he will have to drink of it. A Hindu son gladly does this a thousand times over again![7](#)

Where the Vedas teach morality, the first words are, "Let the mother be your God" (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.11.) — and that she is. When we talk of woman in India, our idea of woman is mother. The value of women consists in their being mothers of the human race. That is the idea of the Hindu.

I have seen my old master taking little girls by the hands, placing them in a chair and actually worshipping them — placing flowers at their feet and prostrating himself before these little children — because they represented the mother God.

The mother is the God in our family. The idea is that the only real love that we see in the world, the most unselfish love, is in the mother — always suffering, always loving. And what love can represent the love of God more than the love

which we see in the mother? Thus the mother is the incarnation of God on earth to the Hindu.

"That boy alone can understand God who has been first taught by his mother." I have heard wild stories about the illiteracy of our women. Till I was a boy of ten, I was taught by my mother. I saw my grandmother living and my great-grandmother living, and I assure you that there never was in my line a female ancestor who could not read or write, or who had to put "her mark" on a paper. If there was a woman who could not read or write, my birth would have been impossible. Caste laws make it imperative.

So these are wild stories which I sometimes hear — such as the statement that in the Middle Ages reading and writing were taken away from Hindu women. I refer you to Sir William Hunter's *History of the English People*, where he cited Indian women who could calculate a solar eclipse.

I have been told that either too much worship of the mother makes the mother selfish or too much love of the children for the mother makes them selfish. But I do not believe that. The love which my mother gave to me has made me what I am, and I owe a debt to her that I can never repay.

Why should the Hindu mother be worshipped? Our philosophers try to find a reason and they come to this definition: We call ourselves the Aryan race. What is an Aryan? He is a man whose birth is through religion. This is a peculiar subject, perhaps, in this country; but the idea is that a man must be born through religion, through prayers. If you take up our law books you will find chapters devoted to this — the prenatal influence of a mother on the child.

I know that before I was born, my mother would fast and pray and do hundreds of things which I could not even do for five minutes. She did that for two years. I believe that whatever religious culture I have, I owe to that. It was consciously

that my mother brought me into the world to be what I am. Whatever good impulse I have was given to me by my mother — and consciously, not unconsciously.

"A child materially born is not an Aryan; the child born in spirituality is an Aryan." For all this trouble — because she has to make herself so pure and holy in order to have pure children — she has a peculiar claim on the Hindu child. And the rest [of her traits] is the same with all other nations: she is so unselfish. But the mother has to suffer most in our families.

The mother has to eat last. I have been asked many times in your country why the [Hindu] husband does not sit with his wife to eat — if the idea is, perhaps, that the husband thinks she is too low a being. This explanation is not at all right. You know, a hog's hair is thought to be very unclean. A Hindu cannot brush his teeth with the brushes made of it, so he uses the fibre of plants. Some traveller saw one Hindu brushing his teeth with that and then wrote that "a Hindu gets up early in the morning and gets a plant and chews it and swallows it!" Similarly, some have seen the husband and wife not eating together and have made their own explanation. There are so many explainers in this world, and so few observers — as if the world is dying for their explanations! That is why I sometimes think the invention of printing was not an unmixed blessing. The real fact is: just as in your country many things must not be done by ladies before men, so in our country the fact is that it is very indecorous to munch and munch before men. If a lady is eating, she may eat before her brothers. But if the husband comes in, she stops immediately and the husband walks out quickly. We have no tables to sit at, and whenever a man is hungry he comes in and takes his meal and goes out. Do not believe that a Hindu husband does not allow his wife to sit at the table with him. He has no table at all.

The first part of the food — when it is ready — belongs to the guests and the poor, the second to the lower animals, the third to the children, the fourth to the husband, and last comes the mother. How many times I have seen my mother going to take her first meal when it was two o'clock. We took ours at ten and she at two because she had so many things to attend to. [For example], someone knocks at the door and says, "Guest", and there is no food except what was for my mother. She would give that to him willingly and then wait for her own. That was her life and she liked it. And that is why we worship mothers as gods.

I wish you would like less to be merely petted and patronized and more to be worshipped! [You], a member of the human race! — the poor Hindu does not understand that [inclination of yours]. But when you say, "We are mothers and we command", he bows down. This is the side then that the Hindus have developed.

Going back to our theories — people in the West came about one hundred years ago to the point that they must tolerate other religions. But we know now that toleration is not sufficient toward another religion; we must accept it. Thus it is not a question of subtraction, it is a question of addition. The truth is the result of all these different sides added together. Each of all these religions represents one side, the fullness being the addition of all these. And so in every science, it is addition that is the law.

Now the Hindu has developed this side. But will this side be enough? Let the Hindu woman who is the mother become the worthy wife also, but do not try to destroy the mother. That is the best thing you can do. Thus you get a better view of the universe instead of going about all over the world, rushing into different nations and criticizing them and saying, "The horrid wretches — all fit to be barbecued for eternity!"

If we take our stand on this position — that each nation under the Lord's will is developing one part of human nature — no nation is a failure. So far they have done well, now they must do better! [Applause]

Instead of calling the Hindus "heathens", "wretches", "slaves", go to India and say, "So far your work is wonderful, but that is not all. You have much more to do. God bless you that you have developed this side of woman as a mother. Now help the other side — the wife of men".

And similarly, I think (I tell it with the best spirit) that you had better add to your national character a little more of the mother side of the Hindu nature! This was the first verse that I was taught in my life, the first day I went to school: "He indeed is a learned man who looks upon all women as his mother, who looks upon every man's property as so much dust, and looks upon every being as his own soul".

There is the other idea of the woman working with the man. It is not that the Hindus had not those ideals, but they could not develop them.

It is alone in the Sanskrit language that we find four words meaning husband and wife together. It is only in our marriage that they [both] promise, "What has been my heart now may be thine". It is there that we see that the husband is made to look at the Pole-star, touching the hand of his wife and saying, "As the Pole-star is fixed in the heavens, so may I be fixed in my affection to thee". And the wife does the same.

Even a woman who is vile enough to go into the streets can sue her husband and have a maintenance. We find the germs of these ideas in all our books throughout our nation, but we were not able to develop that side of the character.

We must go far beyond sentiment when we want to judge. We know it is not emotion alone that governs the world, but there is something behind emotion. Economic causes, surrounding circumstances and other considerations enter into the development of nations. (It is not in my present plan to go into the causes that develop woman as wife.)

So in this world, as each nation is placed under peculiar circumstances and is developing its own type, the day is coming when all these different types will be mixed up — when that vile sort of patriotism which means "rob everybody and give to me" will vanish. Then there will be no more one-sided development in the whole world, and each one of these [nations] will see that they had done right.

Let us now go to work and mix the nations up together and let the new nation come.

Will you let me tell you my conviction? Much of the civilization that comprises the world today has come from that one peculiar race of mankind — the Aryans.[8](#)

[Aryan] civilization has been of three types: the Roman, the Greek, the Hindu. The Roman type is the type of organization, conquest, steadiness — but lacking in emotional nature, appreciation of beauty and the higher emotions. Its defect is cruelty. The Greek is essentially enthusiastic for the beautiful, but frivolous and has a tendency to become immoral. The Hindu type is essentially metaphysical and religious, but lacking in all the elements of organization and work.

The Roman type is now represented by the Anglo-Saxon; the Greek type more by the French than by any other nation; and the old Hindus do not die! Each type has its advantage in this new land of promise. They have the Roman's organization, the power of the Greek's wonderful love for the beautiful, and the

Hindu's backbone of religion and love of God. Mix these up together and bring in the new civilization.

And let me tell you, this should be done by women. There are some of our books which say that the next incarnation, and the last (we believe in ten), is to come in the form of a woman.

We see resources in the world yet remaining because all the forces that are in the world have not come into use. The hand was acting all this time while other parts of the body were remaining silent. Let the other parts of the body be awakened and perhaps in harmonious action all the misery will be cured. Perhaps, in this new land, with this new blood in your veins, you may bring in that new civilization — and, perhaps, through American women.

As to that ever blessed land which gave me this body, I look back with great veneration and bless the merciful being who permitted me to take birth in that holiest spot on earth. When the whole world is trying to trace its ancestry from men distinguished in arms or wealth, the Hindus alone are proud to trace their descent from *saints*.

That wonderful vessel which has been carrying for ages men and women across this ocean of life may have sprung small leaks here and there. And of that, too, the Lord alone knows how much is owing to themselves and how much to those who look down with contempt upon the Hindus.

But if such leaks there are, I, the meanest of her children, think it my duty to stop her from sinking even if I have to do it with my life. And if I find that all my struggles are in vain, still, as the Lord is my witness, I will tell them with my heartfelt benediction: "My brethren, you have done well — nay, better than any other race could have done under the same circumstances. You have given me all

that I have. Grant me the privilege of being at your side to the last and let us all sink together".