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Pandita Ramabai: A Quest for Improvement

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Resumo

A Índia britânica constituía uma sociedade regida pelo patriarcalismo e sob domínio colonial do Império Britânico, que restringia o papel da mulher indiana, principalmente, à esfera doméstica não só pelas tradições hindus e muçulmanas, mas também pela subordinação da Índia em relação à Grã-Bretanha. Por isso, as conquistas políticas e sociais de mulheres da história indiana recente são recontadas com orgulho por tantas outras mulheres atuais assim como as histórias de santas e heroínas de mitos e lendas em outras partes do mundo. Entre as primeiras, está Ramabai Dongre (1858-1922), conhecida posteriormente como Pandita Ramabai Sarawasti, e que é o foco da presente dissertação que visa dilucidar alguns aspectos da vida e obra desta notável reformadora social, educadora, conferencista e defensora das causas femininas.

Com o intuito de contextualizar o objecto de estudo deste trabalho, começa-se por considerar o período de intensa transformação tanto na Índia colonial como no mundo, mais especificamente em Inglaterra. Por isso, traça-se uma panorâmica das relações históricas mútuas, ou seja, a intensa relação político-financeira, dos movimentos culturais e da circulação de ideias entre a Índia e a Grã-Bretanha desde o estabelecimento da Companhia das Índias Orientais em 1600, passando pela Rebelião Indiana de 1857, o início do Raj britânico até a fundação do Congresso Nacional Indiano em 1885. Num primeiro momento, considera-se a importância do Utilitarismo de James Mill para o imperialismo inglês e a consequente propagação da ideia de países "civilizados" (como a Inglaterra) e de países "atrasados" (como a Índia), conduzindo à crença da intervenção por obrigação moral de modo a aperfeiçoar e aprimorar os povos subjugados, assim preparando o caminho para a autonomia. Por outro lado, contrapõe-se ainda nesta primeira parte, as ideias românticas de Edmund Burke provenientes do fenómeno cultural surgido nos finais do século XVIII com todo um conjunto de posições opostas ao racionalismo iluminista de Mill. Na segunda parte deste capítulo, dedica-se especial atenção às missões cristãs e à relevância das mesmas no desenvolvimento do sistema educativo na Índia na segunda metade do século XIX e avalia-se ainda a importância de nomes como Charles Grantt, Thomas Macaulay, Charles Wood, entre outros, para a discussão sobre o desenvolvimento do ensino baseado no modelo inglês na Índia, bem como as consequências das missões cristãs, sejam estas consideradas aliadas ou

oponentes do Império, na formação de uma geração de jovens indianos que receberam uma educação moderna e valores ocidentais.

Seguidamente, analisa-se a contribuição multifacetada de Pandita Ramabai como sendo, simultaneamente, uma feminista indiana, uma escritora da Diáspora em Inglaterra, uma mulher pertencente à sociedade indiana ao mesmo tempo que uma estranha devido à sua conversão ao Cristianismo. Para isso, expõem-se os principais eventos da vida e obra de Pandita Ramabai, relatando desde as dificuldades enfrentadas na vida de peregrinação com a família, passando pelo momento de primeiro contacto com reformistas indianos e a comunidade ocidental, até à viagem para Inglaterra em 1883, a polémica conversão ao Cristianismo, a ida aos Estados Unidos da América e o retorno à Índia para a continuidade do seu trabalho. Posteriormente, traça-se o estado da arte, seguindo uma modalidade cronológico-temática das referências sobre Pandita Ramabai em, basicamente, quatro grupos: primeiro, as biografias escritas por missionários que a retratavam como um exemplo da missão civilizadora e usavam as críticas dela sobre a própria tradição para ressaltar a decadência da sociedade indiana. Esse é o caso dos textos de Helen Dyer, Nicol Macnicol, Paul Buchenel, entre outros. Em segundo lugar, há os trabalhos críticos de A.B.Shah e S.M. Adhav que se debruçam sobre a contribuição de Ramabai para a teologia cristã e filosofia hindu. Para além dos cristãos que tinham profunda apreciação pelo trabalho social de Ramabai, há inúmeros trabalhos e pesquisas de escritoras feministas contemporâneas que demonstram grande interesse por aquela que teve coragem de se comprometer nas causas femininas ainda no século XIX. Esse é o caso de Meera Kosambi e Uma Chakravarti, cujos trabalhos apresentam contribuições significativas para aprofundar o conhecimento sobre Pandita Ramabai. Finaliza-se esse capítulo com os trabalhos de Antoinette Burton e Leslie A. Flemming que se concentram nas relações ambivalentes de Ramabai com as autoridades na Índia Britânica e na Inglaterra Vitoriana. Todos esses textos e pesquisas conduzem-nos a um aspecto primordial do trabalho de Ramabai: a posição entre o mundo primariamente da cultura indiana e a mentalidade e valores ocidentais.

Servirão como base para análise da contribuição de Ramabai os próprios textos da autora: A *Testimony of Our Inexhaustible Treasure* (1907), o seu livro mais famoso na América *The High-Caste Hindu Woman (1887*), e a compilação de cartas *Letters and Correspondence of Pandita Ramabai (1977).* Considerar-se-á também a maneira como Pandita Ramabai articulou suas escolhas e construiu seu próprio ser no que diz respeito, não somente, à sua identidade religiosa, mas também, à condição de mulher fora do alcance das restrições impostas à população feminina do mesmo período. Em relação à identidade

religiosa, serão consideradas suas primeiras conexões ainda na infância no seio familiar e a gradual desilusão com o Hinduísmo a partir da sua vivência com a dura realidade da mulher indiana durante a vida de viagens e peregrinação pela Índia. Em seguida, discute-se os primeiros contactos com o Cristianismo, o começo do trabalho assistencial até a ida para a Inglaterra e a consequente e controversa conversão. Neste mesmo capítulo, explora-se a repercussão de tal ato tanto para os ocidentais como para os indianos, destacando-se as dúvidas e dificuldades em aceitar dogmas cristãos e a autoridade hierárquica da Igreja Anglo-Saxónica.

Já em relação à busca da identidade como mulher, começa-se por esclarecer alguns conceitos como feminismo, casta e normas de género na Índia colonial do século XIX. Posteriormente, é dado uma visão geral da sociedade de Maharashtra assim como se caracteriza a posição da mulher indiana de alta casta que sofria de uma desigualdade supostamente divina dentro do sistema patriarcal. Ainda assim, demonstra-se que, além de Pandita Ramabai, outras mulheres indianas também contribuíram para a causa feminina de alguma maneira. Na sequência, explora-se principalmente a relação entre Ramabai e a mulher inglesa, baseada no relacionamento de Ramabai com a sua mentora Irmã Geraldine e a Diretora da Cheltenham Ladies' College, Dorothea Beale, visando tentar entender o Império à luz de uma perspectiva de género e dos primeiros movimentos feministas organizados de mulheres britânicas na Índia Britânica ligados à missão civilizadora. Nesse enquadramento, o desafio consistiu em explicar Ramabai como um produto intercultural, mas ainda assim um paradigma para mulheres indianas.

Na conclusão realça-se o modo como Ramabai, posicionando-se entre dois mundos, luta por selecionar valores e normas das comunidades indianas e britânicas tão diferentes e, até mesmo parcialmente, concorrentes, e acaba por representar um novo paradigma para as mulheres indianas.

Palavras–chave: *Ramabai, identidade, religião, feminismo, Império Britânico.*

Abstract

Ramabai Dongre (1858-1922), later known as Pandita Ramabai Sarawasti, is the subject matter of the present dissertation which focuses on the life and work of this remarkable social reformer, educator, speaker and advocate for the causes of women, renowned for prodigious learning. Considering the period of intense transformation worldwide, the study begins by outlining and discussing the interconnected history, i.e., the intense political and economic relationship, cultural flows, and circulation of ideas, between India and Britain from the establishment of the East India Company in 1600 to the foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885.

This thesis assesses Pandita Ramabai's multifaceted contribution as being simultaneously an Indian feminist, a Diaspora writer in England, an insider to the Indian society yet an outsider because of her conversion to Christianity. It focuses on the analysis of her own writings, in particular a text called A *Testimony of Our Inexhaustible Treasure* (1907), her most famous book *The High-Caste Hindu Woman (1887*), and the collection of *Letters and Correspondence of Pandita Ramabai (1977)*.

It also takes into account the way Pandita Ramabai articulated her choices and constructed herself not only regarding her religious identity but also as a woman apart from the constraints female population had to face in the same period. Furthermore, the thesis provides some conceptual clarification of feminism, caste and gender norms in the nineteenth-century colonial India, an overview of the Maharastrian society, the position of the High-caste Indian woman and the relationship between Ramabai and British women.

Ultimately, it attempts to answer how Ramabai, standing between two worlds, struggles to select the values and norms of several different and at least partially competing Indian and British communities.

Keywords: *Ramabai, identity, religion, feminism, British Empire*

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1. Introduction

In the Victorian era, women's rights were especially limited. In a society ruled by patriarchalism, the role of women was mainly restricted to the domestic sphere. Hence, it comes as no surprise that the situation for women in India was surely more difficult and complex not only due to the constraints imposed by the Hindu or Muslim tradition, but also the subordination of India towards the British Empire. Despite that, several Indian women played important roles in the domestic and political life of the country.

The present contribution concentrates on Ramabai Dongre, later known as Pandita Ramabai Sarawasti, a social reformer, educator, speaker and advocate for the causes of women, renowned for prodigious learning. She was born in 1858, a year after the Indian Mutiny (seen still today by Indian Nationalists as India's first war of independence) and died in the year that Gandhi was imprisoned for Civil disobedience, 1922. Pandita Ramabai's life provides an instructively complex example for a temporal and socio-cultural product, since it extends over different and distant cultural spaces, times and practices, not uniquely Indian.

As one can imagine, the time that she lived in was a period of intense transformation worldwide. Therefore, when speaking of her life history we are implicitly talking about part of the world history. Because of that, in Chapter 2, it will be outlined and discussed the connected history, i.e., the intense political and economical relationship, cultural flows, circulation of ideas, between India and Britain in the period that involves the establishment of the East India Company (in 1600), the discussion of opponent ideas such as Romanticism and Utilitarianism, the socio-educational reforms of 1840s onwards, the Indian Munity or the Great Rebellion of 1857, and the foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885. In addition, the Christian missions and their importance in the development of education in India will also be analyzed. This historical perspective as lived by Ramabai will definitely help to understand some of the choices she made.

Chapter 3 shows the main events from Pandita Ramabai's life and work, and some of the literature and studies discussed by different kinds of works by contemporaries and authors of later generations. Regarding her personal life, we will attempt to trace all the hardships she went through from her childhood, her travels around India, from south to north, east to west, in the function of an itinerant religious story reciter until the period in which she achieved distinction as a Sanskrit Scholar when Calcutta University granted her the title of Pandita in 1878, moved to England, converted to Christianity, spent two years in America, before returning and settling in India to keep struggling to promote women's cause. This

chapter also brings her biographical narrative, located within various and overlapping social and ideological contexts, written and analyzed by missionaries from the beginning of the twentieth century and contemporary feminists who explore different aspects, such as the relationship between gender, class and nation in the 19th century, the process of caste contestations, class formation and the emergence of nationalism shaped issues of gender.

The first two chapters are paramount to assess Pandita Ramabai's multifaceted contribution and to move on the analysis of her own writings, in particular a text called *A Testimony of Our Inexhaustible Treasure* (1907) (hereafter *Testimony*), which is an autobiographical approach to her Christianity, disclosing her retrospective perspective on her own life, her most famous book *The High-Caste Hindu Woman (1887*), which was written whilst still in India and was meant to be a "cry of Indian womanhood" abroad and locally, and the collection of *Letters and Correspondence of Pandita Ramabai (1977)*, which is part of the critical works that confirm her contribution to Christian theology and Hindu philosophy. It was compiled by Sister Geraldine, her spiritual mentor, and provides us not only with relevant material to understand the methods of work employed by missionaries, but also a deep understanding of the areas of tension and bounds in this female East-West encounter.

In approaching these writings, this dissertation wants to understand how Pandita Ramabai, being simultaneously an Indian feminist, a Diaspora writer in England, an insider to the Indian society yet an outsider because of her conversion to Christianity, articulated a conscious choice and constructed herself. Moreover, at the intersections of which communities did she see herself standing? How did she deal with the issues that fundamentally distinguish these communities? Furthermore, what tensions emerged in her articulation? Finally, is she an alternative paradigm of women's roles in this construction of her self?

These questions can be answered by assessing the tensions in her religious identity in Chapter 4 and her identity as a woman in Chapter 5. For Chapter 4, it will be explored the religious path from childhood to her conversion in an attempt to trace her early connections and disappointments with Hinduism and her tights and confrontation to Christianity. In the beginning of Chapter 5, it will be discussed some conceptual clarification of feminism, caste and gender norms in the nineteenth-century colonial India, an overview of the Maharastrian society and the position of the High-caste Indian woman. Then it focuses on Ramabai's relationship with British women and her social identity between two worlds.

Between these two situations, the answers to the aforementioned questions are obviously not simple but sufficiently exceptional to attract out attention and of course one

desires to know more about this woman who circulated in various backgrounds, and whose life reflects multiple layers of transcultural encounters. To understand a person who struggled for freedom, free will and independence on all levels of her life is a challenging task, yet revealing.

2. India and Britain

2.1. Historical framework

The East India Company had been set up in 1600 by enterprising and influential businessmen, under Queen Elizabeth I, starting a long and successful trading history with India and the Far East. With the East India Company firmly established on the Indian subcontinent, India became the center of British trade in the area, and Britain set up trading posts in China, Ceylon and on the sea route to India, especially along the African coast. With the monopoly trading control of the lucrative spices from the pacific islands, the Company established factories at Bombay, Madras and Calcutta and turned India into an important point to restock food and water on the trading journeys.

The Company transformed from a commercial trading venture to one, which virtually ruled India as it acquired auxiliary governmental and military functions until its dissolution in 1858 (Hyam 3). Initially, the Company servants showed willingness to respect and work through existing Indian institutions by allying and dealing with Indians who invoked (or invented) a historicized version of Indian political traditions. In Lawrence James' words (28), by then, "[t]he Indians were a 'harmless idolatrous people' among whom there were well-established communities of Parsis, Gujaratis and Moplahs willing to trade with the Company". Robert Eric Frykenberg (*Land Control* 351) pointed out how from the earliest years of East India Company activity in India, the local Indian participation had been recognized as essential and inescapable, as the very key to power. As it will be discussed further in this chapter, increasingly, the company had been compelled to promote the material and moral progress of its Indian subjects, as, while trade remained the main goal of Empire, the British started to justify imperialism by speaking of a duty to "civilize" and "educate". Contradictorily, servants of the company would make vast amounts of money and were highly paid while their counterparts at home received modest salaries.

Technically, the company had always governed as agents of the Mughal Emperor. Yet, even without any major source of economic competition, the company continued to experience resistance from local rulers (James 27). Robert Clive led company forces against French – backed Siraj Ud Daulah to victory at the Battle of Plassey in 1757, thereby snuffing out the last known resistances in Bengal (James 55). With a weak and unstable government, the Mughal Empire gave up the administrative rights over Bengal, Bihar and Orissa after the

Battle of Buxar. Robert Clive thus became the first British Governor of Bengal, establishing the Company as a military as well as a commercial power (Hyam 5).

After the decline of the Mughal power, the company started creating its own substantial private army to protect its interests. The "jewel in the crown" (Judd 78) had started to acquire significant political influence and effective control over different parts of the Indian territory by exploiting the weaknesses in the Indian political system. According to Lawrence James (90), the metamorphosis of the Company "was largely undertaken by a handful of ambitious officials and generals, who sincerely believed that they could enrich themselves while at the same time advancing the interests of their country and their employer".

Part of this significant change in the role of the British in India was due to the Treaty of Allahabad of 1765 by which the Emperor gave the East India Company the *diwani* [revenue management]. Through the *diwani* rights the British India Company was granted the rights to collect revenues and decide the civil cases. By collecting revenue in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the Company was now richer and could use the money to consolidate business, organizing and increasing the armed forces. P. J. Marshall (492) pointed out that "[t]his settlement gave the British rule over 3 million £, and it took British influence nearly up to Delhi".

This all happened during the period that Robert Clive, who emerged from an unpromising trader to a military genius, in his first governorship (1755-60), turned the initial trading interest into substantial territorial power and "an asset to an effective government of India" (Metcalf 17); Bill Nassom (82) highlighted that "[u]nder Clive, the British had become eager mercenaries in the violent service of Indian political intrigue, not forgetting, of course, to take a very large cut for themselves." Not only was he responsible for expanding the military and political supremacy of the East India Company in South Asia, but he also turned himself into a multi-millionaire.

As a result of the *diwani* rights, there was one of Clive's main administrative achievements: the infamous dual – system of government (Nassom 85). During this period, 1765 to 1772, the country was ruled by shared power and responsibility by the Company and the Indian rulers. In this system, the *diwani* was carried out by the company whereas the *Nizamat* (territorial) jurisdiction was entrusted to Bengal Nawab. However, the real authority was the East India Company.

In contrast, the biggest fall out of this system was that the Indian merchants were reduced to beggars. On the one side, the British kept enjoying the duty-free trade whereas the Indian merchants were to pay around 40% of the revenue. The peasants were now under the

British revenue collection. The new confusing administrative machinery which was not properly set up created chaos. This was the beginning of the economic loot from India, which made England the wealthiest country in the world in nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The consequence of this steady drain upon the production of the country soon began to be felt.

Even within this framework, there was no said intention on the Company's part to administer directly. In Tim Leadbeater's (9) words, "it was simply trying to protect trade and capture (literally) more market". However, the *diwani* rights were also leading to the discussion about the Company's identity and purpose in India since it was getting away from the humanitarianism approach of Imperial trusteeship. For Marshall (497), "British rule was sustained by Indian wealth and built on the foundations laid by regional rulers".

For Edmund Burke, the advocate of 'trustee' representation, the Company should not abuse from its power and take advantage to the moral or material detriment of Britain and India (Porter, "Trusteeship" 199). Burke saw India as a land that needed to be improved. Burke's version of British India was one of several colonial discourses, which permeated Romanticism in the end of the eighteenth century. The treatment of other cultures became a central issue in this cultural phenomenon, which highlighted the value for sensibility, for nature as well as for the ruins and relics of the ancient past. Moreover, Burke reiterated, "Britain must secure the prosperity of India's people before seeking any gain itself" (in Metcalf I). One of the issues was how to balance the aesthetic discourses of Romanticism and the material practices of empire. Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh (4-5) concluded that

> British Romanticism itself – associated as it has been with the sublime, the exotic, and the 'primitive,' and more recently implicated in the founding of an 'English' cultural identity and the grounding of a wishfully autonomous form of subjectivity, at once defensively isolated and yet aggressively incorporative – may be interpreted as a response to the collective experience, ideological requirements, and deforming effects of imperialism.

In contrast to Burke's conservative and defensive view of how individuals could and – as often – could not participate in the public life of their society, James Mill provided a more radical and rational approach to the idea of representation in his work about British India. With the book *History of British India* (1818), Mill contributed in shaping attitudes, based partly on the European Enlightenment, and turning his utilitarian text a standard reading on the voyage out to India for those joining the Indian Civil Service (Hyam 75). Mill (105)

wrote: “Exactly in proportion as *Utility* is the object of every pursuit we may regard a nation as civilized. Exactly in proportion as its ingenuity is wasted on contemptible or mischievous objects . . . the nation may safely be denominated barbarous”. According to this rule, he found “conclusive evidence against the Hindus”. Their religious ideals he described as barbarous because “the attention of the Hindu is much more engaged by frivolous observances than by objects of utility”. Assuming that “a scale of civilization can be formed, on which the relative position of nations may be accurately marked”, it was Mill's object in his *History of British India* “to ascertain the true state of the Hindus in the scale of civilization”, by which he meant of course measuring them by what he supposed to be the accurate and universally valid British standard (Hyam 76).

Since India was in the lowest level of civilization, this subcontinent offered a unique opportunity to the Utilitarian program and their zeal for reform, which aimed to facilitate the path towards progress and civilization (Ferreira 24). For the Utilitarians, there was much to condemn in the social organization of Asian societies and India needed to overcome its rudimentary culture and be guided until they were granted self-government. Mill praised the East India Company for the way in which it had discharged its governmental functions, and was opposed to any suggestion that India should be ruled directly by the British government; this would merely lead to neglect and corruption. He was in favor of encouraging British emigration to India because a large British population would exert ‘moral pressure’ on the natives and act as a civilizing influence. In contrast to a society “shaped by the ideals of liberalism, and, in time, of democracy”, another great question was, according to Metcalf (x): “could a liberal democracy assert a claim to imperial dominion based on conquest?”

The enduring tension between these two aforementioned ideals would be the foundation of the European civilizing mission during the nineteenth century and greatly influenced the attitudes of the government of India and the image that British developed towards India. As argued by Metcalf (x): “[…] throughout the Raj, and especially during the years of uncontested British supremacy from 1858 to 1918, the ideas that most powerfully informed British conceptions of India and its people were those of India’s ‘difference’”. Regarding what will be discussed in the next chapters, these ideas provide the scaffold for understanding the ideological framework in which Pandita Ramabai was inserted not only in her own country but at the heart of the Empire during her quest for improvement, and therefore are of major significance to this work.

Despite all that combined with its military might, the Company’s power became formidable. Consequently, from time to time, the British parliament had to intervene in the

affairs of the Company because it had become a fertile area for intrigues and corruption, and had frittered away its money and profits. Under the leadership of Warren Hastings, the first appointed Governor-General in India, the East India Company traced a "route to personal riches", "encouraged private trade" and became a "by-word for corruption" (Leadbeater 9).

Hastings had no interest in trying to transform Indian society and favored the retention of many customary land, taxations and legal practices under British overrule like his predecessors. The Governor-General had to face the eminent political thinkers and reformists who strongly disapproved of Hasting's despotism and started a long trial of impeachment. Edmund Burke was a fierce opponent who pursued "to make Hastings a symbol of the rapacity with which the East India Company had exercised 'arbitrary power in India'" (Metcalf 18). The whole process of impeachment lasted two years and in 1788, Hastings was impeached by Parliament for bribery, despotism and disregard of the Company policy. The Hastings trial helped change the way the British public understood Britain's role in India; tales of the East India Company's commercial exploits were subsumed within a paternalistic, moralizing idiom as the British public confronted Burke's "exhaustive compilation of colonial guilt" (Suleri 51). Discursively and materially, the remote trading outpost became part of an empire.

The Clive-Hastings era had set the foundations of the power with a vision that would go beyond the illusion that 'the dominance in India rested on anything other than gunpowder and musket-fire' (Metcalf 399). Their 'model' of Indian Empire was after unlimited authority. Yet there was no consensus in the British opinion whether it was best to the East India Company to avoid policies which would change Indian society or bring Christianity and the model of western government to rule India. Either way, it was important to clean the image of Britain's agents in the country as well as reorder their activities. Scholars like Lawrence James (97) believe that "the growing India empire was becoming a state within a state" and those responsible for India had abandoned British habits of mind and codes of public behavior and had embraced those of the subcontinent. Hastings' successors redirected not only the course of the East India Company policy but also the British conceptions of Indians as Jane Samson (93) showed: "[o]nce defined as commercial and political allies (or rivals) with an ancient civilization, they were now identified as cultural inferiors requiring guidance and reform".

By the early decades of the nineteenth century, Britain was the dominant power in India with military success, territorial acquisition and administrative competence. Until then, the Company's agents didn't consider their duty to take any constructive action towards the

‘development’ of the Indians as it was explained earlier. The concept of trusteeship became associated with certain forms of colonialism as illustrated in Edmund Burke’s influential argument as applied to British rule in India in 1783:

> All political power which is set over men, and… all privilege claimed… in exclusion of them, being wholly artificial, and… a derogation from the natural equality of mankind at large, ought to be some way or other exercised for their benefit. If this is true with regard to every species of political dominion, and every description of commercial privilege, … then such rights or privileges, or whatever else you choose to call them, are all in the strictest sense a *trust*; and it is of the very essence of every trust to be rendered *accountable*; and even totally to *cease,* when it substantially varies from the purpose for which alone it could have a lawful existence (Porter, “Trusteeship” 199).

Edmund Burke and Charles Grant held two strong and yet substantially different interpretations of Imperial trusteeship. For Burke, by means of reform, “indigenous freedoms were to be preserved by restricting the incursions of outsiders” (Porter, “Trusteeship” 201), following the discourse of Romanticism. In contrast, Grant believed that “the remedy of Indian depravity depended on the communication of European knowledge and, especially, the excellence of Christian morality” (Bain 34). In common, both believed in promoting the welfare of people who were incapable of choosing for themselves. It is worth noting that the principle of trusteeship is unavoidably related to the justification of power and the supposition the domination involves great responsibility.

Nevertheless, mutual dependency was growing between India and Britain. At that moment, the English people were beginning to see “themselves as permanent masters of India, but as temporary foster-parents, holding her ‘in trust’ for a self-governing future” (Porter, *Lion’s* 31) as the utilitarians believed. This more positive and developed sense of ‘trusteeship’, however, led to a certain self-confidence and paternalistic concern and attitude which would end in a need of spreading the ‘benefits’ of British civilization and Christian cultures.

It was time to change thus utilitarian adherents, who “advocated the reinvigoration of society and sound laws” (Smith 51), attempted to apply their ideas to change Indian society, aiming to be benevolent, but with an unquestioned sense of cultural superiority (Samson 122) as it was previously described. The two key words in the British attitudes to non-Europeans

were Improvement and Regeneration (Hyam 121), which turned India into "a sort of laboratory for British liberal, evangelical and utilitarian theorists" (James 149). Metcalf (29) highlighted that, despite the differences over the urgency of reform, liberals agreed to invariably seek "to free individuals from their age-old bondage to priests, despots, and feudal aristocrats so that they could become autonomous, rational beings, leading a life of conscious deliberation and choice".

With this conviction, there was then an ideological justification on social and humanitarian grounds to a series of social and educational reforms that were yet to come in the colony to appease the orthodox upper section of society, such as the ban of *Sati*[1] effected by Lord William Bentinck in 1829, the abolition of slavery in 1833, Macaulay's famous Minute on Education in 1835, the widow remarriage in 1856, the education of women, subsidization of mission schools, the prohibition of caste-marks among sepoys, the raise of the marriageable age of girls in 1860, the inter-caste and inter-communal marriages in 1872 and a law that aimed at discouraging child marriage in 1891. In section 2.2, the educational reforms will be further discussed and explored in the context of Christian missions for they are of great importance to the development of this work. The aforementioned reforms promoted the causes of evangelical Christianity and/or Utilitarian rationality, previously discussed in this chapter, and some Indian intellectuals may have responded positively to the new Western spirit, hence the creation of "a distinctive ideology of imperial governance shaped by the ideals of liberalism" (Metcalf 28). To Liberals, the reform program meant improvement based on Western education. To utilitarians, the improvement could be reached through good laws whereas the evangelicals believed in the improvement through Christianity and conversion. Despite the influence and support of different ideologies, these reforms were definitely, as Leadbeater (9) suggested, "a public precedent of interference in Hindu socio-religious affairs". Bernard Porter (45) explained that all these reforms infringed on religious convention and "dispossessed, demoted or degraded one class of people or another". Still, "[f]rom Bentinck's time to that of Lord Dalhousie (1848-56) this reformist sentiment gained a near universal ascendancy among the British in India" (Metcalf 28).

"The Age of Reform" (1815-1870) as described by Metcalf (28) and its consequences to the Indian society is of major significance for the scenario in which Pandita Ramabai, the main focus of this work, will later develop her work, as it will be discussed in the next chapters.

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[1]*Sati* was the Hindu funeral customs where a widow immolates herself on her husband's pyre or commits suicide in another fashion shortly after her husband's death.

Nevertheless, all the growing self-confidence among the British was about to change with the so-called the “Indian Munity”, the “Great Rebellion”, or the “First War of Indian Independence”.

On 10 May 1857, the Indian soldiers, also known as sepoys, organized a mutiny, which started from a military station at Meerut and marched up to Delhi. There were 136,000 Indian men against only 24,000 European troops. Metcalf (43) said that “Landlords and peasants, princes and merchants, Hindus and Muslims, each of their own reasons threw off the British yoke and sought their own independence”. Back in Britain, the word about the Rebellion was: “[…] the ‘unpleasantness’ of 1857 could be written off as the results of over-indulgence in hashish or as the ill-informed responses of peasants in uniforms to unscrupulous agitation” (Judd 68). Through the British’s eyes, there was a sense of betrayal of all the benefits granted by Britain’s civilizing mission in the sub-continent.

In contrast to the ruler’s understanding, the reasons for discontentment could be explained by several perspectives. One of these is the insensitivity of the British authorities towards Indian religious sensibilities. For instance, there were hostile reactions to the new cartridges which would need contact with unclean pig fat, the refusal of a Hindu troop regiment to cross the sea that could involve the loss of caste, the sepoys’ subjugation to a process of military modernization and adjustment together with the demands of military routine and discipline. In other words, the British officers were unable to establish a cordial rapport with their men.

Besides the military reasons, there also was a matter of growing power that the East India Company was gradually establishing. Even though for the majority of the Indian people it was not relevant who ruled them, princes, landlords, religious leaders and members of the upper castes saw things differently (Leadbeater 10). For them, some British actions, such as the social and economic reforms, had all seemed to be part of their intention to subvert the Indian tradition, implying the superiority of British ways over Indian.

Moreover, there were established landed families who were indebted due to their effort to meet harsh British revenue assessments. Even though this may not be a direct reason for the rebellion, it can be understood as another reason for the revolt (Leadbeater 10). With all this, the Company had broken one of the crucial rules of the maintenance of British power in India, namely the policy of cooperation with powerful local elites.

The 1857 Indian Rebellion revealed the disorganization and weakness of the Company’s government. Even though India became the direct responsibility of the British government, this had a limited impact on the shape of the British rule in the sub-continent

(Stockwell 111). After nearly two years of struggle the so-called British Raj started and put an end to the control of the East India Company. This rupture brought consequences to the political, social and economic rule and "[t]he legacy of the Mutiny in particular contributed to a growing fearfulness that could never wholly be quelled" (Metcalf 160). In 1858, in the aftermath of the event, the India Councils Act established that a Viceroy and Governor-General would act in the Queen's name subjected to the orders issued by her through a Secretary of State. Besides, military government and civil government were fully separated. However the army was still an important aspect in the Imperial policy and it was agreed that the proportion of European to Indian troops must be raised above the pre-Mutiny level and a ratio of 1:2 was adopted as desirable.

It is worth noting that not the entire land was under the control of the British at that time and there was no political entity called India. Two-fifths of the sub-continent was still governed by large and small principalities. The Indian subcontinent was a patchwork of many kingdoms, and unlike in Europe there was no concept of the state as a political institution anywhere in this expanse of land. As Stockwell (11) pointed out, "British India, where the British governed directly, was "Native State India". It was indeed with the absorption of British and western ideas that the concept of India as a single nation arose some time later.

Above all, the "Indian Munity" reinforced the profound racial differences between ordinary Indians and Britons. The levels of hierarchy were even more rigid and the Indian social rank seemed to be even more familiar. Philip Manson (Cannadine 43) argued: "British India was as much infected by caste as Indian India".

The second half of the nineteenth century brought symbols of the irreversible march of progress and large-scale capital investments in infrastructure, in railways, canals and irrigation works, shipping and mining. The Industrial Revolution had turned Britain into a commercial superpower and India was a source of wealth and a field of investment. Nassom (185) argued "[…] India became an increasingly vital market for Britain's staple export, cotton textiles and, for the absorption of its iron, and steel goods, including machinery". Consequently, there were the commercialization of agriculture, the establishment of an education system in English and the order to create suitable conditions for the growth of industry and enterprise which would lead the integration of India into the world economy. Despite all this, very little skilled employment was created for Indians and the British retained the levers of economic power in their hands since they doubted of Indian abilities and saw them as "a greater burden, serving as a badge of inferiority and a bar to progress towards European political rights and freedoms" (Judd 77).

However, it was the taxpayers – primarily farmers and farm-laborers – who endured the risks and had to face exhorting high taxation, draining Indian revenues and increasing the debt. Additionally, this period also saw an increase in number of large-scales famines in India. Even though it had been a recurrent feature of life in the sub-continent countries, these were particularly severe, with millions dying. In short, the second quarter of the nineteenth century brought no boom in economy, prolonged depression, social economy became increasingly agrarian and peasant based leading to a more rigid caste. For all this, Washbrook (397) claimed "in the terms through which they viewed the world, Bentinck and Macaulay were preaching sermons on Westernization and progress to an Indian society which was actually becoming more 'Oriental' and 'backward'.

The elite of conservative rulers who had previously fought the British in the "Great Rebellion" of 1857 were now turning into useful allies, lending money and military support. They would also serve as political defenses in the nationalist movements that were arising from the late nineteenth century and got stronger over the first half of the twentieth century. They were a synonym of power and importance, bringing a traditional status and authority aiming to "fulfill the assigned role of English notables" (Cannadine 43). The new government, then, avoided any drastic political and social change in order to prevent a similar reaction of 1857. Yet, as pointed out by James (157), "[a] collision between westernized Indians and the government had been predicted at the onset of the government's educational reforms in the 1840s".

In the political sphere, by 1880, a new middle class had arisen in India and spread thinly across the country. On 28 December 1885, professionals and intellectuals from this middle-class – many educated at the new British-founded universities in Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras (all founded in 1857), and familiar with the ideas of British political philosophers, especially the utilitarians – assembled in Bombay and founded the Indian National Congress. The Indian National Congress, during the period from 1885 to 1905, was dominated by leaders who were staunch believers in liberalism. In the next chapters, it will be shown how these earlier reformers were the first supporters of Pandita Ramabai in her struggle for women's education and rights.

This class was conscious of the benefits of the British connection and adopted a very positive approach towards the colonial rule. Hence, during its first twenty years, the Congress primarily debated British policy toward India and had as main objectives to promote the feeling of unity among Indians, to establish contact with the patriots of different parts of India, to adopt principles of social reforms with co-operation of educated people, and to

formulate the economic and political demands (James 155). However, its debates created a new Indian outlook that held Great Britain responsible for draining India of its wealth. Britain did this, the nationalists claimed, by unfair trade, by the restraint on indigenous Indian industry, and by the use of Indian taxes to pay for the high salaries of the British civil servants in India. The "ideology of difference" (Metcalf 185) that was growing among these educated Indians brought the feeling that it would never be possible to reconcile and to stop the growth of nationalism. The westernized Indians no longer accepted the idea that "only a disinterested and fairminded British government could command the loyalty of all Indians, protect them and secure internal order" (James 157).

After 1857, the Indian intellectuals felt frustrated with the British policy to keep the country in an economically backward condition for the benefit of their own industries. They saw the destruction of India's indigenous industries and the insignificant use of the national wealth in education, irrigation, sanitation and national health. Furthermore, the better-paid jobs were reserved for the British, leading to a growth in the unemployment that every section of Indian society felt.

The improved communication and postal and telegraph facilities helped the Indian nationalist movement to grow. The early nationalists of the 1880s demanded the development of modern industry and had a leading role in developing a sense of patriotism among the people, including Pandita Ramabai as it will be explained later. They urged for the reduction of the heavy land revenue and demanded a radical change in the existing pattern of taxation. These political leaders worked for the reform of the administrative system and wanted to transfer the power to the elected members in corporation and municipalities while adopting constitutional and peaceful means to achieve their aims (Stein 254). They would have free access to British political and philosophical writers hence "it was inevitable that they would apply what they read to their own country, and ask why they were excluded from those political rights which were their ruler's birthright" (James 227)

These early leaders who dominated the Indian National Congress were believers in 'moderate' politics. In this first phase, these affluent middle-class men had full faith that British rule in India was necessary for the interest of the Indians. Most of them believed that British people were just and righteous. They demanded few concessions and not freedom for the nation.

After 1905, the *babu* élite had become a serious challenge to the British. Andrew Porter (421) explained: "Indian nationalism was itself to be torn between attempts to pursue a modern Western future and to evoke a glorious, unchanging, and distinctively 'Oriental'

Indian past". The westernized elite of the Indian National Congress is certainly a key turning point in formalizing opposition to the Raj that would expose the sense among the British of vulnerability and unease and be seen as the prelude to Indian self-government (James 156). In addition to these oppositors, we will see in the following chapters that Pandita Ramabai was also a fierce critic and opponent to the British Empire.

2.2. Christianity in India and the missions

It was definitely in the nineteenth century that Christianity, as part of British culture and overseas activities, expanded in an unprecedented scale and reinforced Britain's imperial purpose. The Missionary movement included groups of people who believed that it was their religious duty to spread their religion around the world. Out of the European world, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, and other denominations spread their churches (Porter, "Religion" 223) and set out in a mission of converting and making others conform their beliefs and sense of passion and superiority.

Regarding India, Christian missionaries impacted its society both religiously and spiritually in a significant and consequential manner (Palsetia 616). The relationship between Christian missions and Empire was complex in India. One reason for this is the 'neutrality' of the political system that the East Indian Company constructed in the early years with regard to the religious and social affairs of its subject, as it was explained in the previous section. As Bernard Porter (31) described before the first decades of the nineteenth century "[t]here seemed no point in provoking the Indians unnecessarily, and endangering the Company's own position." There was an opposition from the Company and few other influential people in England who tried hard to stop the promotion of Missionary Movement in India.

Despite the opposition, since the 1770s and 1780s, several Englishmen, such as Edmund Burke, argued that the Company's power must be exercised with morality and subject to Parliament's control. They believed that "[r]eligious establishments would sustain Empire most effectively if fully integrated into colonial society" (Porter, "Religion" 224). Even though their effort was taken for granted at that moment, Charles Grant wrote, in 1792, the resolution *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain*, considered the first blueprint on English education in India (Krishnaswamy 11). This famous essay pleaded for education and Christian missions to be tolerated in India alongside the East India Company's traditional commercial activity. It argued that India could be advanced socially and morally by compelling the Company to permit Christian missionaries

into India, a view diametrically opposed to the long-held position of the East India Company that Christian missionary work in India conflicted with its commercial interests and should be prohibited. Grant neither sought for Company's money not its manpower; he was only seeking for an official endorsement. Yet he only got a hearing with Governor General Lord Cornwallis who did not oppose the move for missions, but didn't give his active support.

Grant found great support in William Wilberforce, a member of the evangelical party, who strongly believed in the Evangelicalism and that the revitalization of the Church and individual Christian observance would lead to a harmonious, moral society (Hind 323). In 1793, Wilberforce revised and moved the resolution to the House of Commons (Frykenberg, "Christian Missions" 110). The resolution referred to ministers of religion and chaplains being sent out to minister to Europeans in India. However, the clauses were rejected and the Court of Proprietors of East India Stock had a special meeting and passed a resolution against the Missionary clause. Yet Christian missionaries and religious-minded persons such as William Wilberforce and Charles Grant adopted a critical attitude towards Indian society but on religious grounds. They passionately believed that Christianity alone was the light to the world to remove India from the 'darkness' (Hint 325). For them, education was understood "as the means of lifting Indian children out of the darkness of heathenism, not as an instrument of worldly learning" (Marriot xvi).

It was only in 1813, with the Company's twenty-year renewal Charter, that the missionaries finally had access to Company territories and, one year later, the first Anglican diocese was established at Calcutta (Porter, "Religion" 225). The Company's ban was only broken after an "alliance of voluntary (missionary) agencies with free-trade opponents of monopoly" (Frykenberg, "Christian Missions" 108). Even with the great unrest in the Company, the missionaries and their political supporters got (the grant) permission to encourage people to go to India "to organize more systematic ecclesiastical and educational provision for British expatriates and to supervise or discipline the growing number of Anglican missionaries and their converts" (Porter, "Religion" 225). Even so, it was on the Company authorities' hands to punish and expel any missionary whose actions provoked social unrest, and the connections between the religious expansion and the Empire were not simple. Yet, the Missionaries understood that their mission should continue even with no direct government support although the "involvement with Imperial government was equally difficult to avoid" (Porter, "Religion" 320).

The new Charter also imbedded an annual £10,000 expenditure of government funds for education. During the governor-generalship of Lord William Bentinck (1828-35) this was

formally settled. This set up an aggressive campaign of Christian missionaries schools – an important tool for the application of Christianity and imperial ideologies. The mission societies were the answer to promote English education and just like in England, "the schools were run by various Christian sects, and they taught Christianity as an integral part of their mission" (Metcalf 39). However, the government was aware that the direct introduction of Christianity into the schools it sponsored in India might provoke intense hostility. Therefore, the solution to decrease the tension between the ideals of neutrality and the involvement in Indian education was the introduction of English literature. As it was argued by John Marriot (xx), "although the educational reform in this period reflected and was guided by orientalist visions of colonial rule, it took place against of a backdrop of an Anglicism which was slowly gathering strength" and that found room for maneuver with the 1813 Charter and the increased demand among the indigenous elite for western education.

Jones (27) argues that "Orientalists and Anglicizers sparked a formal debate as to what kind of education, English or classical Indian should be funded." Orientalists and Anglicists or Anglicizers had different opinions on the development of education of India. The Orientalists group wanted to promote the teaching of the "Oriental subjects" in India's vernacular languages whereas the Anglicists argued that the government spending on education should be exclusively for modern studies. In 1835, Lord Macaulay's famous Minute on Education settled the row in favor of Anglicists (Sirkin, N. & Sirkin, G. 407). Their hope was to instruct high-caste and well-born urban Hindus in English language, Eurocentric morality and the promotion of Christian conversion (Palsetia 617). James Mill's *The History of British India* (1817) helped to determine the anglicist agenda, and, as result, the promotion of English-style education was faced as a means of cultural advancement and a common means of communication and exchange of ideas between educated Indians from different linguistic regions of the country. The knowledge of English was a key factor to give access to government service and to different types of careers in various fields.

Thomas Macaulay was a keen advocate of British-style education to produce an Indian middle class educated in English ways, he said, "who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in color and blood, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay 158). For Macaulay, this new class would serve not only as a link between rulers and ruled but also as a source of inexpensive manpower for the lower levels of the administration. In his speech on 10 July 1833 when he was about to become legal adviser to the Governor-General of India, Macaulay showed his position regarding Westernization:

> It is scarcely possible to calculate the benefits which we might derive from the diffusion of European civilization among the vast population of the East. It would be, on the selfish view of the case, far better for us that the people of India were well governed and independent of us, than ill governed and subject to us – that they were ruled by their own kings, but wearing our broad cloth, and working with our cutlery, than that they were performing their salams to English collectors and English Magistrates, but were too ignorant to value, or too poor to buy, English manufactures. […] (Macaulay in Samson 134-35).

With remarkable foresight, he claimed that exposure to British ideas and patterns of thinking would, in time, create an Indian élite, which would demand self-government as James Mill had argued with his utilitarian logic. The difference between Macaulay and James Mill is that the former placed his faith in English education whereas the latter looked first to good government, just law and scientific taxation (Hyam 109). Lord Macaulay refuted the contention of the orientalists that after getting English Education, the Indians would not remain submissive. He believed that if educated Indians demanded democratic institutions at any future age that would be the proudest day in English history. In Macaulay's words:

> It may be that the public mind of India may expand under our system till it has outgrown that system; that by good government we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government, that, having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions. Whether such a day will ever come, I know not. But never will I attempt to avert or to retard it. Whenever it comes, it will be the proudest day in English history. To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, to have them as to have made them desirous and capable of all the privileges of citizens would indeed be a title to glory all our own (Macaulay in Samson 134-35).

Missionaries believed that the conversion of India to Christianity would spell temporal benefits to the heathens. Far from unsettling it, the conversion of the heathens to Christianity would further consolidate the empire (Palsetia 618). Even though some may understand that "Christianization and Civilization was meant to be benevolent, it was based on an

unquestioned sense of cultural superiority" (Samson 122) that they would not only redeem souls, but regenerated whole races, showing clear influence of utilitarian logic. The Company was pushed in a different direction, that is, into more paternalist policies which, obviously, disturbed Indian society. With the different direction in the policies and reforms, the Company expanded and consolidated its authority. Moreover, "[o]fficial fears of missions declined as their common interest in the transformation of colonial society became evident" (Porter, "Religion" 231).

The reforms insisted on images of Indians as barbarians, linked to unacceptable practices that offended European sensibilities as it was spread by Utilitarianism. To some extent, Christian missionary polemics were designed to directly attack Indian religion and undermine the Hindus self-confident beliefs and taboos in a direct opposition to the Romanticism ideals aforementioned discussed. Andrew Porter ("Religion" 236) noted that the "dominant approach rested on the theological proposition that evidence of conversion would include the cultural transformation of indigenous society". Shullai (332) complemented this idea by arguing "Christian missionaries unable to distinguish Hinduism – on what is *culture* and what is *religion*, taught Christian converts to reject every Hindu custom indiscriminately". Thus moral and intellectual advancement of the Indian people was directly opposite to practices (mostly religious) considered stupid or evil. Consequently, campaigns such as the one against *sati,* or widow burning "reinforced notions of Indian women as helpless victims of religion" (Metcalf 41). Especially after the Mutiny, the social reforms were considered too radical and too destructive. The missionaries and their patrons pointed out that the Christian natives did not rebel and that their intentions were right and good. Bernard Porter (49) explained that they doubted the capacity of the Indians to take the reforms in all at once:

> Either they were beyond the pale of civilization, inferior beings incapable of enlightenment, who must always be ruled and led by others, therefore, if they were to progress; or, slightly more charitably, the raw material of civilization was there underneath, but so deeply encrusted with centuries of superstition and prejudice that the process of enlightenment would take much more time and patience that the *ante bellum* reforms had allowed for.

As it was shown earlier in this chapter, a series of social and educational reforms, promoting the causes of evangelical Christianity, Utilitarian rationality and Liberal ideologies,

had taken place since Lord William Bentinck in 1829. Later, Lord Dalhouise, the then Governor-General of India (1852-1856), passed the last charter act for East India Company in 1853. Dalhouise was able to execute utilitarian policy and his years as governor-general can be seen as constituting "a second age of Indian reform" (Metcalf 42), continuing to shape British perceptions of their imperial mission in India.

Because of Dalhouise, investments for 'Improvement' were done in railways and telegraphs, a central Public Works Department, India Legislative Council, and a renewed commitment of educational responsibility of the Company was declared, confirming a broader vernacular education (Metcalf 42). This provision led to the *Educational Despatch of 1854* prepared by Sir Charles Wood, a devout Evangelical. This document is considered the first comprehensive plan for the spread of education in India; its ideals and methods dominated the field for five decades which saw rapid westernization of the education system in India, with educational institutions run by European headmasters and principals. Missionary enterprises played their own part. The "Wood's Despatch" combined the streams of both the lowest and the highest of education and is called as Magna Carta in the history of English Education in India. Its recommendations were: 1) to form a separate education department; 2) to establish three universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madra presidencies; 3) to take adequate measures for the teachers and the teaching; 4) to reform the government schools and colleges; 5) to establish new middle schools; 6) to improve the native primary schools; 7) to start grants-in-aid in private schools; 8) to expand women education, mass education, progress in vernacular language and to set up teachers' training; 9) to increase the number of government schools arranged for inspection and to initiate secular education system (Chaudhuri 424). In accordance with Wood's despatch, Education Departments were established in every province and universities were opened at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857 on the model of the London University. Most certainly, the Education Despatch was a document of great historical importance since it went right into the problem of education in the social context of India. After it, a new era of organized educational administration began, defining the aim of Indian Education and determining the Government's attitude towards the need for technical and Women's education. Regarding the latter, this concern is crucial to this study and it will be emphasized in the following chapters.

The discussion whether the Christian missions were or not the arm of British imperialism is not a simple one. The primary interest of the Raj was to keep control over India (Frykenberg, "Christian missions" 128). The dominant interest of missions was to work for the conversion of Indians to Christianity. But in the colonial situation they found themselves

in need of one another and so mutual support was but natural. With the expansion of the British Empire missionaries began to arrive and Christianity began to spread by establishing dioceses at Madras and Bombay. There is no doubt that the missionary movement and expansion represented distinct forms of cultural and institutional imperialism. Porter ("Religion" 239) stated that the missionaries' presence and teaching "undermined customs and self-confidence, eroded respect for traditional authorities, and created social and political conflict". The cooperation between the missionaries and the colonial power was renewed with the Charter Act of 1833 which laid down regulation of permanent presence of missionaries in India. Moreover, this Act made provision for Anglican hierarchy at Calcutta.

Scholars from the middle of the twentieth century like Edward Said (100) would dismiss the Christian missions as "openly joining the expansion of Europe" and missionaries were described as arrogant and rapacious imperialists. Christianity became not a saving grace but a monolithic and aggressive force that missionaries imposed upon defiant natives. Indeed, missionaries were now understood as important agents in the ever-expanding nation-state, or "ideological shock troops for colonial invasion whose zealotry blinded them" (Silverman 2005:144). According to Porter ("Religion" 240), scholars nowadays offer a different understanding of the conversion; for them, it is not simply "the imposition of Western 'civilization'", but "religious consolations unavailable in indigenous systems of belief". On the other hand, Panikkar (297) claimed that one of the causes of the failure of Christianity and its mission's activities in Asia was related to the fact that "the missionary brought with them an attitude of moral superiority and a belief in their own exclusive righteousness. The association of Christian missionary work with aggressive imperialism introduced political complications." In chapter 4, it will be explained how this was one of the areas of frictions between Pandita Ramabai and the Church leaders and members.

Nevertheless, whether the missionaries are understood as saints or as fierce imperialists, this path of progress, reforms and proselytism brought problems as well as solutions. The nineteenth-century missions had a favorable atmosphere and necessary infrastructure – provided by the British rule – to work on the conversion and multiplication of missionary efforts.

As one of the positive outcomes of the Christian missions, one can point out the improvement on education. During the first half of the Nineteenth Century, a few schools for Female Education were established due to the initiative of the Missionaries and a few Indian aristocratic families. There was a contradictory struggle between tradition and modernity in the way in which the question of women's education was posed. The conservatives were not

in favor of Female Education. This explains the fear that the figure of the modern educated women, such as Pandita Ramabai, provoked in most circles. She was usually portrayed as one who violated or mocked traditions. Hence female education in India spread only due to the initiative of the Western Educated, Liberal Minded Indians.

Nevertheless, generations of young men and women received modern education, many of whom were endowed with the ideals of service and uprightness and rectitude because of the educational institutions maintained by these missionary societies (Sarkar 128). Even Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948), who was inspired by the life of Jesus Christ, was educated at a mission school — although he opposed Christian missionaries to the end of his life. Moreover, important female Indian leaders from the time, such as Krupabai Satthianadhan (1862-1894) and Cornelia Sorabji (1860-1936) are relevant examples. The former was one of the first Indian women to write in English and the first novelist in English. She acknowledged the importance of education given in the mission high school, commended the influence of Western women and expressed her identity with them (Flemming 84). The latter became the first Indian woman's lawyer and advocate for princely and high-caste widows and orphans. As a child, Sorabji received her education both at home, with her missionary father, and at mission schools. She studied at Bombay University and in England. Baptista (156) described her as "rooted in an ethnic and religious minority in India, and is also Anglicized and a sponsored student in Oxford".

The interesting outcome of the missionary schools is that they were marked by interdependency and contestation between Europeans and Indians and this was also a side of colonial rule, because some Indians did not allow themselves to be culturally subordinated (Bellenoit 393). Pandita Ramabai is one Christian Indian that can illustrate this, as it will be explained in chapter 4 regarding her position at the intersection of East and West. In this light, it can be said that Christian activity did bring some forms of modernity in India, mostly in the form of Western-style schools and education. Indians, mainly the privileged classes saw the benefit of this system as it was shown in the previous section. Lawrence James (131) argues that "[a]s well as preaching the Gospel, missionaries were also responsible for bringing their Congregations into contact with the value of the West." This helped Indians to revive or discover what would eventually shape Indian modernity and the process of Independence but also brought into discussion the demands for Western political rights. It was inevitable that after the educational reforms in the 1840s a collision between westernized Indians and the government would happen.

Another great achievement that was a high priority for the missionary movement was Women's liberation. Frykenberg ("Christian Missions" 127) reported that "two-thirds of missionaries were women", and "universal claims clashed with local dilemmas of gender, race, and imperial privilege". Inevitably, the perceived indicators of women's low status like *purdah*[2], *sati*, female infanticide, child marriage and enforced widowhood, formed essential items in the agenda of attack of almost all the major British reformers of the nineteenth century India. As it was discussed previously, the problem of women received the attention of social reformers right from the beginning of the nineteenth century

Another significant impact of Christian missions in India was the shape of European attitudes towards India and its people. For many Christians, the world was divided between the lost and the saved. To put it in another way, what divided people was beyond the color of their skin or their race but whether they were or not in relationship with God. In order to get the full support from their home-base for their missions, missionaries "tended to transmit the negative aspects of India's religion and society" (Guest 141). This can be understood not only by their evangelistic, humanitarian and civilizing objectives but also their ignorance of the ritual and practices of the Indian religion. It is noteworthy that most missionaries had already developed strong negative attitudes towards Hinduism even before arriving in India and were greatly influenced by ideas and attitudes developed by the utilitarian imperialism in James Mill's *History of British India* and Presbyterian and Evangelical thinkers.

Emerging from the proselytism process, there is the debate of religious identity and religious behavior. Attempts to induce changes in religious identity, by any means, can be understood as unethical. It affected standards of ideology and moral behavior within groups, leading to discussions not only about who and what they were, but also who and what they were not. In other words, to construct themselves, they had to define their opposites as to what it meant to be a true Hindu, Christian or Muslim. In this polemic, "converts were convinced of abandoning their culture and religions and embrace Christians culture which looked foreign to the people of India" (Shullai 332). While one can point out that Christian mission activities brought health, education, relief and justice into the lives of people, many people of other faiths saw Christian Missions as a threat to the society, as one that initiates a rival society, which was claimed to be superior and which was not accessible elsewhere.

[2] *Purdah* (from Persian meaning "curtain") is a religious and social practice of female seclusion prevalent among some Muslin and Hindu communities in South Asia. It takes two forms: physical segregation of the sexes and the requirement that women cover their bodies so as to cover their skin and conceal their form.

Nevertheless, Christian missionaries had united Hindus in defense of their tradition and finding a national identity along with their religious identities and social reforms.

From all these discussions it is possible to understand that, on one hand, Colonialism enhanced the work of missions and provided material resources and moral support; on the other hand, because of its co-operation with colonial governments Christian missions received many accusations and generated negative attitudes towards Christian missions by many indigenous people. Frykenberg ("Christian Missions" 129) explained "[c]lashes between alien and indigenous, foreign and native were more than religious or theological. They were cultural, political, and psychological". It is because of these allegations that European missionaries are still seen as dummies of colonialism even though there were still those who would take the opportunities to really spread the Christian message to the world, teaching ethical values and looking for social improvements rather than endorsing the British Colonial Empire.

3. Pandita Ramabai

Nobody continues to remain in the same state forever. There is nothing in this ever-changing world which stays in the same condition from beginning to end.
Pandita Ramabai (*Stri Dharma-Niti*, 1882)

3.1 Life and work

Pandita Ramabai's story should be told by beginning with the early years of the nineteenth century when her father Anant Shastri Dongre, a chitpavan Brahmin from Karnataka, was a pupil of Ramchandra-shastri Sathe, a teacher at Pune. While visiting the Peshwa Bajirao II[3]'s palace with his teacher, Anant was truly impressed by the Peshwa's wife reciting Sanskrit verses, and he committed himself to teach his own wife the sacred language.

At that time, he was married to a woman who was completely against this ambitious plan of learning Sanskrit. His family also didn't support him and forbade him from attempting such a radical reform. His wife died shortly after and he went on a solitary pilgrimage. It was at the holy town of Paithan that he met a Brahmin and his pilgrimage family. The father was greatly impressed by Anant that offered him his nine-year-old daughter in marriage. This kind of marriage was far from unusual in the Hindu society. (Paul 86)

The forty-four years old Anant Shastri was married now with Laxmibai Dongre who did not object to her husband's daring ambition. Regardless of his family and surrounding society, Anant was determined to teach his new wife the sacred language (except the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*). Nevertheless, he had to justify himself to the head priests and eventually succeeded in persuading them that even the sacred literature sanctioned his views (Bodley XI). Despite his victory, Anant decided to leave his home in Mangalore and build a home in the nearby Gangamula Forest. As Ramabai (*Testimony* 11) explains, this decision was made "in order that he might be away from the hubbub of the world, carry on his education work and engage in devotion to the gods in a quiet place, where he would not be constantly worried by curious visitors"

Thus started the story of Ramabai Dongre who was born near Mangalore, in Karnataka State, India on April 23 1858 in a family who would, at first, make money by reading from the Hindu sacred writings called the *Purunas* to pilgrims as they passed by. Of

[3] He was the most powerful Maratha ruler at the time (Kosambi *Pandita Rambai* 8).

the six children born to the couple, three survived, Ramabai being the youngest daughter. She started her pilgrimage life with her family when she was only six months old. Antoinette Burton (*At the Heart* 73) explains:

> [l]ike the history of Indian women's social and political in the modern period more generally, Ramabai's biography is at once parallel to and in collision with the trajectories of 'the Indian nation' and Indian nationalism(s) as well.

Ramabai (*Testimony* 12) said of her father: "He cared little for what people said, and did what he thought was right. He taught and educated my mother, brother, sisters and others". Between the ages of eight to fifteen, Laximibai taught Sanksrit to her youngest daughter. Ramabai proved to be an exceptional student and also learned the Marathi, Karanese, Hundustani, and Bengali languages. As Ramabai (13) reported, to learn English was not an option for her at that time since this was forbidden on pain of losing caste.

Throughout her childhood, Ramabai had the chance of going all over the Indian sub-continent. This, obviously, gave her the opportunity of learning and seeing different aspects of the Hindu system of religion and the daily lives of the people in her country. She could also see how her parents would continue to worship the priests even though they were not in complete accordance to their practice. Meera Kosambi (*At the Intersection* 68) has argued that it was in part "her life of unceasing pilgrimage" that enabled Ramabai to produce some of the most astutely gendered critiques of nationalist reform and of the British imperial civilizing mission in the nineteenth century. Helen Dyer (11) stated that

> [w]ith her parents and brother all enthusiasts in Brahminic learning, and pioneers in the education of women, it was no wonder that Ramabai's remarkable talents were cultivated, till she became, under their instruction, a "prodigy of erudition".

In 1876, Pandita Ramabai had to face the almost simultaneous deaths of Anant Shastri, Laxmibai, and the their eldest daughter. Ramabai (*Testimony* 16) never forgot her father's final words to her:

> His blind eyes could not see my face, but he held me tight in his arms, and, stroking my head and cheeks, he told me in a few words, broken with emotion, to remember how he loved me and how he taught me to do right and never

> depart from the way of righteousness. His last loving command to me was to live an honorable life, if I lived at all, and serve God all my life. He did not know the only true God but… was very desirous that his children should serve Him to the last.

Ramabai and her brother Srinivas decided to continue their father's work though they both had their significant doubts in the Hindu religion. Bodley (XIV) showed that "[t]hey spent their time in advocating female education […]". They would walk barefoot over 4,000 miles throughout the great continent of India continuing the same life of poverty, hardship, and ritual observances. In 1878, they reached Calcutta and this was a landmark in Ramabai's life because she was immediately recognized as a learned woman, and honored with the titles of 'Pandita' and 'Saraswati'. The title of a Pandit was an honor given only to the most learned individuals. Ramabai was the first woman in India ever to be honored with this title. The title Saraswati was given after the Hindu goddess of learning. Both were given by distinguished educators of Calcutta University that were impressed by her ability to recite over 18,000 verses from the Bhagavat Purana, to answer their questions in extemporaneous Sanskrit verse, "and her ideas on reform were considered remarkable for so young a person" (Dyer 17). For this reason, Frynkenberg (*Legacy* 62) argues that "[h]er instant celebrity symbolized national pride and soon reached beyond India".

During a year, she was asked to give a series of lectures on the Dharma Sastras, i.e., the Hindu sacred law book and the religious duty for women. This activity allowed her to expand her studies of sacred literature and get in touch with the Vedas, the most sacred of all (Schouten 62). It was the first time that she had the chance to learn the Vedas since her father had never allowed it.

In Calcutta, Ramabai had the chance to have her first real interaction with Christians. In the social gatherings, she saw Indians dressed in western attire, eating the same food as the foreigners and was impressed to see the Christians kneeling down to pray (Schouten 63). Ramabai (*Testimony* 18) recalled that the kind Christians gave her a Sanskrit copy of the Bible, which she began reading but did not understand.

In May of 1880, Ramabai had to face another loss: her brother died of an illness while travelling in Bengal. In October of the same year, Ramabai married Babu Bipin Beharidas, a Bengali lawyer and intimate friend of her brother. Since neither of them believed in Hinduism or Christianity, they were married with the civil marriage rites. If the fact that she had not been married until the age of twenty-two was considered an indignity by the surrounding

society, her marriage to a lowly Sudra was scandalous. She had committed the unpardonable transgression of breaking caste. Her marital decision cost her many Braham friends and supporters. Burton (80) noted “she defended choosing to marry outside her caste by declaring that she had lost all faith in the religion of their ancestors”.

The couple moved to Silchar in Assam, the city in which Medhavi practised law. In the local library, the Gospel of Luke and the Genesis fascinated Ramabai. She eagerly read everything she could about the Christian religion. Her husband, however, was not enthusiastic about her intention to become a Christian. Ramabai (*Testimony* 23) reported that she did not “know just what would have happened had he lived much longer.” Medhavi died of cholera at age thirty on February 4, 1882. With another heavy loss, Ramabai lost her love and the father of her newly born daughter, Manorama (Heart’s Joy) Bai.

After her husband’s death, Ramabai moved with her daughter to Madras and then Pune. It was a way of escaping from the predictable criticism she received because of her husband’s death. It was common to blame widows for the death of their husbands. In her case, this seems even more obvious since she had the audacity to marry outside her caste. In Pune, she formed a society for Indian women, the “Arya Mahila Samaj” (Noble Women’s society) with the support of leading personalities and reform-minded Hindus, such as Justice Ranade and his wife (Schouten 64). The aim of this very first Indian feminist organization was to work for the deliverance of Indian women from the oppression of child marriage. Since the first meeting Ramabai used her own experience as a widow and amazing skill in winning the listeners’ hearts to challenge the ladies in the assembly “to free themselves from oppressive customs, child marriage, illiteracy, and especially, oppression of child widows”. (Frykenberg, *Legacy* 62). The foundation took root, and branches were set up in other major towns such as Ahmednagar, Solapur, Thane, Mumbai, Pandharpur and Barshi (Paul 87).

In 1882, Ramabai was invited to testify before the Hunter Commission on Education[4]. In her speech, not only did she plead for women’s educational programme and the need for training women doctors but also showed her passion for her cause:

> In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the educated men of this country are opposed to female education and the proper position of women. If they observe the slightest fault, they magnify the grain of mustard-seed into a mountain, and try to ruin the character of a woman. (Sengupta 97)

[4] A British Governmental Agency.

It was at that moment that the first part of Ramabai's life ended. Shah (10) describes this period (from 1858 to 1882) as "[…] the most difficult and also the most important in shaping her ideas and determining the direction of her future life and work." Inspired to study medicine, Ramabai went with her daughter to England in 1883. They stayed with the Sisters of the Community of St. Mary the Virgin. Her plans to study medicine were thawed by the allegedly discovery of an increasing deafness. Instead, she decided to study the natural sciences, mathematics and English at the Cheltenham Women's College. Besides, she was a professor of Sanskrit at the same college (Frykenberg, *Legacy* 63).

While living with the Anglican Sisters, Ramabai got touched by the love that these sisters showed toward suffering women at a rescue home. According to her, it was the first time that she had witnessed true compassion and "the more convincing truths expounded by Christianity; its message of love and forgiveness; its egalitarian treatment of all people, in contrast to the inferiority assigned by Hinduism to women and shudras" (Kosambi, "Women" 117). These were the reasons for her conversion to Christianity.

After four years living and studying in England, Ramabai and her daughter set sail for the United States to attend an important graduation at the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia. It was the graduation of Anandibai Joshi, the first Indian woman to earn a medical degree through training in Western medicine. For the next two years, she travelled across that country in a campaign to expose the oppression of women in Hindu-dominated India. Furthermore, she got the opportunity of networking with influential people and starting friendship with philanthropists, educators, and feminist leaders like Frances Willard, Susan B. Anthony, Harlet Tubman and Rachel Bodley (Paul 88). Due to this campaign, the Ramabai Association of Boston was created to pledge financial support for ten years to such an institution. She also took the chance and published *The High-Caste Hindu Woman,* one of her most important books, which appealed to Americans to come to aid of the women of India. Rachel Bodley (VII) explained in the introduction that the chapters of this book were prepared to correct the popular and erroneous ideas concerning the women of India and to reveal fully their needs. Sonia Hazard (2009) added that "[t]he book delivers a heart-rending yet culturally sensitive feminist critique of the plight of these women and girls".

The time she spent in the United States was also to visit several kindergarten schools and vocational training centers for women and start preparing text-books for her own proposed school (Sengupta 98).

Back to India in February 1889, Ramabai settled down in Bombay where she opened Sarada Sadan, which means "Home of Wisdom". It was a school especially for high-caste girls who most felt the oppression of their surrounding society. Babbli Paul (88) explained that "[t]his school was modeled on the radical kindergarten system pioneered by Friedrich Froebel"[5]. Due to economical reasons and better access to the orthodox Brahmin society, the Home was shifted to Pune in 1891.

Even though the Home was supported by all the leading social reformers at first, criticism arose when a couple of child-widows openly expressed their willingness to become Christians. Ramabai was accused to use the school as a means to convert girls to Christianity. Though the investigation found the charges to be unfounded, the breach with the local reformers was not healed and they withdrew twenty-five girls from the Sadan. (Kosambi, "Women" 118)

Overcoming severe criticism Ramabai continued her mission and became actively engaged in helping famine victims that stroke India in 1894. Besides, she opened a new and Christian institution in Kedgaon, the "Mukti Sadan" (Home of Salvation[6]) in 1896. Differently from the previous ones, this was openly Christian, with a church, and regular missionary activity. Its main aim was to make the women self-sufficient. It soon became a refuge for hundreds, including orphaned boys. There, boys and girls not only received education on school subjects like physiology and biology, but they also learned practical work skills, such as teaching, nursing, weaving and sewing. The institution had a unique system of education in India based on ethical values which were supposed to instill in the students not only attributes of compassion but also sensitivity and morality (Paul 88).

She spent the rest of her life in relative isolation, though in incessant activity. As a latter work, Ramabai essentially spent every moment she could to the work of translating and printing her version of Bible. First, she undertook the task of mastering the biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew. Then, she started the job to put the Scriptures into the simplest form of Marathi speech, so that common people could easily understood God's work. She began this work in 1904 and completed in 1922. In 1921 Manorama died, and the following year Ramabai herself passed away.

Throughout her life she had won several awards. One of the most important was the

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[5] Friedrich Froebel was a German educator who was founder of kindergarten and one of the most influential educational reformers of the 19th century (Curtis, Stanley James. "Friedrich Froebel". Encyclopedia Britannica. March 2016. Web).

[6] The name of the center was inspired by a biblical text: "you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise- Isaiah 60:18" (Schouten 70)

Kaiser-e-Hind award granted in 1919 by the British Government. It was given to her for all her contribution for the women's cause of India and it was the highest award an Indian could receive during the period of the British Raj. Meera Kosambi (*Intersection* 144) wrote: "the distinction of Pandita Ramabai Saraswati lies as much in her status as a solitary woman leader of the women's cause whose equal in stature is yet to emerge in Maharashtra".

3.2. Review of research

During a time when women education was almost non-existent, Pandita Ramabai left a deep mark in the history of India in the nineteenth century. As the first feminist thinker and champion of women's rights and education, this remarkable woman changed the lives of countless oppressed girls and women. Called by the magazine "The Times of India" in one of its long obituaries, one of the "makers of the modern India" on April 7th 1922, Ramabai dedicated her life and reform work to contest not only the indigenous patriarchy but also the colonial role within the intersecting and sometimes conflicting structures of patriarchy, religion, nationalisms and internationalism.

Ramabai was a well-known figure in mission circles and many Western missionaries, such as the Anglican Community of St. Mary the Virgin and Dorothea Beale – the Lady principal of the Cheltenham Ladies' college, were mostly pleased by Ramabai's language of faith in her personal testimonies. Her social and educational work and idealistic energy were of great significance for the spread of the Christian faith as well as for the image of the church in India. It is worth mentioning that she was one of the first Indians to show the social face of the church. Moreover, the different institutions that she funded were her own idea and initiative, i.e., it was the first time that these kind of Christian missions were completely Indian. Ramabai, with all her charisma and involvement, was able to mobilize both Western donors and Indian colleagues.

Her biographical narrative – also located within various and overlapping social and ideological contexts – together with her achievements has been discussed by different kinds of works by contemporaries and authors of later generations. From the beginning of the twentieth century, there are some reverential biographies, mainly written and published by missionaries, which articulated a special attention for Ramabai. They portrayed her as an example of the civilizing mission and use her criticism of her own traditions as an insight into the Braham decadence. These books are in four different languages, French, German, Dutch and English, and show their appreciation right from the subtitles which is simply *Pandita*

Ramabai. Hence, the French subtitle is: "The Mother of Little Widows", the German is "The Mother of the Outcasts, and the Dutch one is "The Trailblazer for Lifting Up Hindu Women"[7]. Even though the subtitle of the English book may seem more neutral – "The Story of Her life", it is the book that praises her most and announces her as a "noble example of faith, sacrifice and sanctified talent" (Dyer 5). Helen S. Dyer (9) also showed her appreciation to Ramabai's dedication for the cause of Indian woman by noting that the nature of Ramabai's work was the heart and soul she would put for the highest ideal she knows.

In *Pandita Ramabai: the story of her life*, it was emphasized the association of travel and freedom. For Dyer (17), Ramabai's doubts about her religion came from her travels around India:

> It was during these wanderings with her brother that Ramabai's faith in the Hindu religion was shaken, though until twenty years of age she worshipped the gods of brass and stone. The freedom of their lives had given to the brother and sister keen powers of observation, and they resolved to test the teachings of the sacred books whenever possible.

Following this line of thought, Dyer connected Ramabai's reformist ideas to her "free" access to Hindu homes, disregarding the terrible tragedies in the wanderings of Ramabai and her family. Nevertheless, to consider that the construction of Ramabai's self and even her conversion to Christianity was a product generated only by her travels erases her negotiations with nationalism and colonialism, which positioned her in a complex and liminal relation to these phenomena.

Nicol Macnicol's biography of the Pandita illustrated a similar understanding of the influence of the years of pilgrimage with her family in Ramabai's life. In *Pandita Ramabai. Builders of Modern India,* published in Calcutta in 1926 in the Builders of Modern India series, Macnicol (12) stated that Ramabai emerged from all the travel as a "graduate in life, in its wisdom and calm judgment". According to this author, what would in other countries be called a beggar or a tramp is in India a pilgrim, and Ramabai's family fell into this category. Differently from Dyer, Macnicol (13) acknowledged that Ramabai's wanderings were more

[7] Respectively, Paul Buchenel, *Pandita Ramabai: La mère des petites veuves* (Lausannne: Secrétariat de La Mission Suisse aux Indes, s.a.); Nicol MacNicol, *Pandita Ramabai: Die Mutter der Ausgestobenen,* transl. P.Baltzer (Stuttgart/Basel: Evang. Missionverlag, 1930); N.J. Schelling, *Pandita Ramabai: Baanbreekster voor de opheffing der Hindoe-Vrouwen,* Lichtstralen op den akker der wereld 30/1 (Hoenderloo: Zendingsstudie-Raad, 1924).

pilgrimage than travel. Yet, he continued to see Ramabai as occupying the subject position of a European traveller when he claimed that Ramabai's travels were an education in which "the panorama of India in all its mystery and variety passed before her eyes and she had eyes to see it". In this sense, Ramabai would be like a tourist with little interest in participating in the life of the region she was moving into. However, that was not the case. Ramabai was not a European traveller or a tourist, but a native, a daughter in a family expelled by Brahmin orthodoxy.

An important document that records her conversion journey and provoked much controversy among Ramabai's contemporaries is the collection of *Letters and Correspondence of Pandita Ramabai*, which is part of the critical works that confirm her contribution to Christian theology and Hindu philosophy. Sister Geraldine, her spiritual mentor and the one that caused most of the friction between Ramabai and the Anglicans, compiled it. Sister Geraldine was sometimes a fierce critic of Ramabai's religious journey but explained in the preliminary note – called *Apologia pro opera* – that no one but herself could record Ramabai's conversion and thus she felt the duty to compile the letters "as a contribution to the history of the conversion of India" (Shah, *Letters* 26). Sister Geraldine highlights in this note that she tried not to withhold "the faults of the person under review… Shadows up the light and help to give true proportion" (26). Therefore, the compilation of these letters provided us not only with relevant material to understand the methods of work employed by missionaries, but also a deep understanding of the areas of tension and bounds in this female East-West encounter. It is worth mentioning that Ramabai's own voice is sometimes inaudible except through some occasional letters.

A.B.Shah, who later edited *Letters and Correspondence of Pandita Ramabai* in 1977, labeled her a 'rebel in religion' in "Pandita Ramabai: a rebel in religion". He was one of many scholars who still considered her coming to consciousness within a religious framework. Also writing about her contribution, S.M. Adhav (238-241), an Indian Christian, provided a list of 114 books "about the life of Pandita Ramabai" which includes biographies as well as other compilations. The main outcome in both contributions is to offer access to the variety and richness of her writings in the English language and to trace some biographical details about her life.

Nevertheless, it was not only Christians in India who had deep appreciation for her social work. Recently, an increasing number of contemporary feminists have begun to take an active interest in Ramabai's work, "which already in the dark nineteenth century stood up so

militantly for women's interests" (Schouten 56). For instance, Uma Chakravarti's work[8] and Meera Kosambi's articles, books and selection of the writings of Pandita Ramabai are significant additions to these works that deepens our understanding of this extraordinary woman.

A classic study, *Rewriting History* by Dr. Uma Chakravarti, went beyond just introducing one of the foremost thinkers of nineteenth-century India; it rescued Ramabai from the marginalization of her contemporaries. Arguing that this controversial figure has been actively suppressed in the writing of India's pre-independence history, Uma Chakravarti liberated Ramabai with an acute and nuanced critique of the power relations and hierarchies within a colonized society. Thoroughly researched and meticulously detailed, *Rewriting History* provided an alternative framework of analysis of Ramabai's controversial life as an entry point to explore the relationship between gender, class and nation in the 19th century.

The central aspect of Chakravarti's work is to analyze the way in which the process of caste contestations, class formation and the emergence of nationalism shaped issues of gender. The author elaborated a feminist theory of Brahmanical patriarchy prevailing in the pre-colonial and colonial state. In an article titled "Whatever happened to Vedic Dasi", Chakravarti argued that Pandita Ramabai and some other women went against the norms and defied the ideal of what was been constituted as the ideal of womanhood despite the expectations of nationalist endeavors, and broke from tradition, thus questioning the way the past was being reconstituted for the purposes of the present. For this reason, the author ("Whatever happened to the Veduc Dasi" 72) maintained the argument that Ramabai's conversion did not make her a stereotype of a Christian convert in India as explained below:

> Ramabai was the butt of controversy both from Hindus and the British government whom she indicted for its ineffective plague relief measures in 1897. Even the Christian missionaries she worked with found her too difficult to contain in any system where she was required to submit to authority. Ramabai did not fit into any stereotype of womanhood, either Hindu or Christian.

Meera Kosambi produced several writings about Pandita Ramabai, emphasizing mostly the feminist causes but also discussing her position in the triangle of international

[8] *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai.*

network (American society, British mission and India) and how she negotiated her way through this triangle. *Pandita Ramabai Through Her own words* contains translations from Ramabai's Marathi writings as well as her original English works. With the collection of these writings, Kosambi (x) aimed to contribute to a "more informed charting of her ideological trajectories – feminist, religious and other – during the quarter-century from 1882 to 1908". Throughout the book, it is possible to see the change of Ramabai's ideas on women issues and the shifts in her attitude toward Christianity during the different stages of her life. This is all told, as the title suggests, through Ramabais's texts with a brief but informative introduction providing background to the texts.

Kosambi (*Pandita* 3) described Ramabai as both an "insider" and an "outsider" within Maharashtra's "social generation" as well as within the "larger international project of Christianization". The years she spent in England followed by the years in the United States had provided her with a closer look and the encounter of the West and the East during the time of the Empire. The book also provides materials, reproduced from pamphlets in the Archives of the Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission. These materials offer the reader a glimpse of the life and perception of these women through Ramabai's eyes.

In other articles and books, such as "Indian Response to Christianity, Church and Colonialism: Case of Pandita Ramabai" (1992), *At the Intersection of Gender Reform and Religious Belief.* (1993), "Women, Emancipation and Equality. Pandita Ramabai's Contribution to women's cause" (2000), Kosambi explored Hindu patriarchal norms, conversion, gender reform and the women's cause. These texts are of great importance for a deep understanding of Ramabai's value as a nineteenth century feminist and the only woman reformer of her times in the galaxy of male socialist reformers. Regarding Ramabai's legacy, Kosambi's thorough analysis showed that today feminists in the country actually reinvent what Ramabai had advocated a century ago. Additionally, in "Motherhood in East-West Encounter: Pandita Ramabai's negotiation of 'Daughterhood' and Motherhood" (2000), she examined, with the help of Ramabai's published letters and correspondence, the two tension-filled sets of motherhood and daughterhood in the triangular relationship of Sister Geraldine, Pandita Ramabai and Manorama.

Both Antoinette Burton (*At the Heart of Empire* (1988) and in the review "Colonial Encounter in late-Victorian England: Pandita Ramabai at Cheltenham and Wantage" (1994)) and Leslie Flemming ("Between two worlds: Self-construction and self-identity in the writings of three Nineteenth-century Indian Women" – 1994) explored the ambivalent relations between Ramabai with the authorities in colonial India and late Victorian England.

Antoinette Burton (*At the Heart*) examined the lives and experiences of three Indians, Pandita Ramabai, Cornelia Sorabji and Behramji Malabari, who travelled to England in the 1880s and early 1890s, wrote about their experiences, and challenged the British power at the heart of the empire. Her main focus is on what she calls the *ethnographic* aspect of their writings in which the travellers describe their experience of English culture to which they already had a complicated relationship as imperial subjects. Cornelia Sorabji went to Oxford to study law and became the first Indian woman to be called to the Bar. Behramji Malabari sought help for her Indian reform projects in England, and subjected London to colonial scrutiny in the process. Regarding Pandita Ramabai, Burton explained that she went to England seeking educational opportunities and opposed the religious and social views of her Anglican mentors, thus challenging the latent cultural and political assumptions of the British civilizing mission. Moreover, the author referred to Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "contact zone", which stresses the reciprocal nature of the cultural encounter at the colonial frontier. Her argument is that London, and England more generally, must be conceived as just such a zone. The seat of empire was a place where both imperial ideology and cultural identity ("Englishness" and "Indianness") were formed in response to the presence of the colonial subjects in the metropolis. Burton (73) saw Ramabai as an early subject of the Indian diasporic movement, whose temporary exile in Britain nurtured resistance to colonialism.

Leslie A. Flemming analyzed the autobiographical writings of three Indian Christian women, Cornelia Sorabji, Krupabai Sattianadhan and Pandita Ramabai, and how they constructed their self-identities through alterity and by using both speech and action as weapons for their purposes. The author explored the experience of these Indian women simultaneously in terms of cultural and religious confrontation and assimilation. Flemming's work contributes for the arguments that these women were "products of particular temporal and socio-cultural milieux" (82) and are not uniquely Indian. In approaching their writings, she argued that these Indian Christian women urged to reflect in their written self-construction a partial attempt to deal with the tensions they experienced in standing at communal intersections.

Flemming (82) suggested that Ramabai, in particular, "found her primary identities in religious communities". Besides, she argued that Ramabai (as well as the other women) articulated a sense of standing at the intersection of more than one community and constructed her self-identity precisely because she was "rooted in any one community" (83).

The review of the literature leads back to the discussion on a significant aspect of her work – her plight of both her primarily Indian Culture and the Western mindset. In this

intersection of two worlds, we attempt to understand how Ramabai managed to build a path for her improvement as a scholar, social reformer and a champion for the women's cause.

4. Ramabai in the intersection of religions and her religious identity

"A life totally committed to God has – Nothing to fear, Nothing to lose, Nothing to regret" – Ramabai

4.1. Hinduism: early connections and disappointments.

A deep religiosity served as an anchor to Ramabai's life since her childhood. As a daughter of a very orthodox Hindu – and yet a reformer in his own way – she was raised on an unceasing pilgrimage to holy places across the Indian subcontinent, leading a life supported by reciting sacred stories and practicing austerities calculated to earn religious merit. She spent her earlier life in an eclectic form of the Hindu doctrine and outside a conventional social setting. Nevertheless, she had a vivid experience of Hinduism from her childhood to widowhood.

In a country shaped by religion, her father was courageous enough to defy the tradition and believe in women's education. Thus, he "incurred the hostility of fellow Brahmins by his only deviation from orthodoxy – insistence on impairing the 'sacred' Sanskrit language and its texts to a woman, namely, his wife" (Kosambi, "Multiple contestations" 195). In the Hindu society of that time, it was established that women education was improper and even dangerous as there was superstition that education led to widowhood and pursuing of knowledge was tantamount to suicide. In some cases, women of rich families learnt basic reading and writing to keep accounts if not to read for pious recreation (Forbes 36). Moreover, education was seen as tool for communication to women and because of that there was such an anxiety to control women that it was feared that literacy would allow women to write about they went through. In this universe, education was one of the unorthodox elements in Ramabai's life. However, secular education or knowledge of the English language remained forbidden (Ramabai, *Testimony* 13).

Inserted in a life with no material privilege and dominated by spirituality and ritual observances, Ramabai (*Testimony* 12) reported that her parents wanted their children "to be strictly religious and adhere to their old faith". Therefore, the parents kept them away from the outside society. Hence, religion was their only guiding force of life, their "total reliance on the conscience as the only arbiter of conduct resulted in a strength of character as well as intense individualism which led her later to tread a lonely path to spiritual salvation" (Kosambi, "Indian Response" 62).

During these endless pilgrimages, the family earned their living by reciting the Puranas, though they gave away most of what they earned as alms to other Brahmins. It is worth noting that Ramabai's family was from the highest caste (and the small minority) in the Maharashtrian society. According to their belief, only the Brahmins could achieve salvation. Kosambi ("Women" 104) noted that the Hindu society was acutely vulnerable to assaults on its religious identity, and "[t]he upper-castes, mainly Brahmins, who wielded socio-cultural hegemony over this society and preserved orthodoxy, were box leaders and subjects of the newly-initiated social awakening and reform".

After many years of pilgrimage, her parents and one sister died from starvation; an event with much anger and pain in Ramabai's *Testimony,* and that can be considered a crucial turning point in her life in terms of her attitude toward her religion. She continued to travel all over India with her brother for six years. In her writings, she reported all the hardships they had to face. For instance, they had to dig holes in the ground and cover themselves with dirt to protect themselves from the cold (16). Times were difficult, but the two siblings kept their father's work, "visiting sacred places, bathing in rivers, and worshipping the gods and goddesses" (16). Despite all efforts, Ramabai emphasized that the gods were not pleased with them, and did not appear to them. As a result, they "began to lose their faith in the religion and held out the hope of a great reward to the worshippers of the gods" (16).

In this unconventional early life, another unorthodox element that can be highlighted in Ramabai's life is her unmarried state. As it was previously discussed, child marriage was a common Hindu practice in the nineteenth century. Following the custom, Ananta Shastri's married off his elder daughter in a young age. Nevertheless, he attempted to create a more humane world and persuaded his young son-in-law to remain in their house so that "he could be exposed to learning and have a chance to break away from the iron law of custom" (Chakravarti, "Whatever" 66). When Ramabai's sister was old enough to perform her married duties, it was demanded that she would go and join her husband. The parents were against it, but the community supported the young man and they sued her in court. The young girl had to follow the Hindu law and as Ramabai (*High-Caste* 62-64) wrote she was "doomed" to go with the husband, but was fortunately soon "released from this sorrowful world by cholera".

Luckily, after "the failed marriage of her elder sister, Ramabai's own marriage was not arranged, and she was allowed to remain at home with her parents past the customary marriage age" (Flemming 96).

But how could Ramabai be saved if there were no men in her life? No father, no brother, no husband? "Brahamanical texts emphasized the supremacy of men and the

procreation of male descendants as the most important goal in life, assigning to women passive roles as a vehicle for the production of sons" (Kosambi, "Women" 105). This was the time when the trouble of oppressed Indian woman was internationally popular. By proving herself to be an exception to this stereotype, Ramabai became an icon figure. She was unmarried, never experienced community life and had not been exposed to the constraints placed on women activities or to any oppressive social customs. Also she used to make her own decisions and was taught that constancy was the main author of one's action.

This "model of stubborn resistance to public opinion" (Flemming 97) was provided since the beginning by her father: "He would not heed them and as he was in no way beholden to them, he pursued his own ways" (Shah, *Letters* 15). Moreover, the other two male figures in her life also contributed to her distance from the elements of the Brahmin culture. For instance, her brother was her companion during six years around India, sharing the lectures and critiques of women's roles. She stated that his death brought an intense moment of loneliness, and it was the first time she was comforted by the presence of God. Similarly, her husband was not attached to the traditional values and that was the reason for them to choose a civil ceremony to their marriage as she explained, "neither my husband nor I believed in the Hindu religion" (Shah, *Letters* 18).

By the time Ramabai and her brother reached Calcutta, the heart of the *Raj*, she was invited to deliver lectures on women and was advised by the leading Brahmin reformer, Keshub Chandra Sen, to study the reading of the 'forbidden texts'. However, this brought unintended consequences: she became greatly disillusioned with these religious scriptures as they ascribed a very low status to women (Paul 87) and realized that woman was unable to obtain salvation directly. Ramabai completely refused these claims as they had been written in these sacred epics and started questioning the fundamental propositions of Brahmanic Hinduism. Ramabai (*Testimony* 19) wrote:

> Women of high and low caste, as a class, were bad, very bad, worse than demons, as unholy as untruth and that they could not get Moksha as men. The only hope of their getting this much desired liberation from karma and its results, that is countless millions births and deaths and untold sufferings, was the worship of their husbands. The husband is said to the be woman's god; there is no other god for her. This God may be worst sinner and a great criminal; still HE IS HER GOD, and she must worship him… by which she will be reincarnated as

> a high caste man, in order to study Vedas and the Vedanta and thereby get the knowledge of the true Braham and be amalgamated in it.

By then, her faith in her ancestral religion had grown cold and this completed her disillusionment. In her travels, Ramabai (*High-Caste* 99) had a good opportunity of "seeing the sufferings of Hindu women" and this became the primary focus of all her concerns and even one of the strongest reasons for her conversion as it will be discussed below.

4.2. The conversion to Christianity

Struggling with all these disillusionments with her religion, Ramabai felt that the Hindu religion held out no hope for her. In the previous chapter, it was shown that, during her stay in Calcutta, she had the chance to attend a Christian gathering for the first time. She described (*Testimony* 17) the gathering as if the Christians were paying "their homage to the chairs before which they knelt". She even got a Bible as a gift but found no interest in reading it. After this first contact with Christianity in an Anglo-Catholic context, she felt it was all too foreign and was interested to see "compatriots who acted like Europeans" (Schouten 63). However what shocked her the most was to be offered tea and cakes since she had not renounced the rules for her caste concerning everyday purity.

After her marriage, while living in Silchar, Assam, she read a pamphlet containing St. Luke's Gospel in the Bengali language. She also met a Baptist missionary, Rev. Isaac Allen, who interested her greatly in the Christian religion as it mentioned earlier. Her husband, however, did not like "the idea of his wife being publicly baptized and joining the despised Christian community" (*Testimony* 23). Yet, not only was she deeply moved by the first chapter of Genesis that the missionary had explained to her, but she also realized that she was definitely searching for something: "I was desperately in need of some religion. The Hindu religion held out no hope for me; the Brahmin religion was not a very definite one. For it is nothing but what a man makes for himself." (*Testimony* 35)

After becoming a widow, she returned to Maharashtra, joined the reformers and became an eloquent advocate of women's rights. Flemming (97) suggested "she was reform-minded even before her conversion to Christianity". As a result, social reformers of Maharasthtra began to make great efforts to reclaim Ramabai, their "native daughter" to assist in their work due to her fame as a Sanskrit scholar and a champion of women's education (Kosambi, *Multiple* 196). Justice M. G. Ranade and his reformer associates were great

supporters of Ramabai's work and were more than happy to have her in their movement, since she "fulfilled all expectations of reform effort" (Kosambi, *Indian Response* 62). Particularly with the Ranade's family, Ramabai developed a close relationship that led to collaboration in social activities. Together, Ramabai Ranade and Pandita Ramabai took English lessons from Sister Hurford, an Anglo-Catholic missionary, and at the height of the opposition, Ms. Ranade continued to show great support and sympathy toward Pandita Rambai (Macnicol 100).

She was lecturing widely from public platforms and wrote the Marathi book *Stree Dharma Niti* (Morals for Women).[9] By the time she gave her famous testimony before the Hunter Commission on Education on September 1882, she was already a famous expert on women's education. In her speech, she stressed the value of women's education as well as the need for women teachers and inspectors of schools; moreover, she added a plea for women doctors because Indian women would not consult male doctors, especially for gynecological complaints. This eloquent speech greatly impressed Dr. William Wilson Hunter, president of the commission, who admired her work and spoke of her in lectures in Edinburgh, making her known in Britain. According to Bodley (xiii-xiv), Dr. Hunter had Ramabai's Marathi testimony translated into English and printed separately, which was indirectly responsible for the formation of the National Association for Supplying Female Medical Aid to the Women of India.

Despite all her efforts, she found that the Indian reformers were unwilling to support her far-reaching plans for women's emancipation. So long she praised the monotheism of patriarchy and Hinduism she was treated as a living example of all great Hindu women and greatness of Hinduism towards its women, but when she spoke the hard reality of women all vice turned against her even before her conversion to Christianity.

Chakravarti (*Rewriting* 39) noted that even though "Ramabai was a Brahmana woman herself she had no 'community', no social base and no real emotional bonds to fall back upon". This detachment was cause of horror to the orthodox, both men and women who believed Ramabai wanted to free women from the tyranny of men in her foundation Arya Mahila Samaj. Despite this hard criticism, the dialectic of Pandita Ramabai was to attained emancipation for women whose life are subjected to inhuman badgering from the exclusivist orientation Hindu, patriarchal and upper caste. The society, however, saw her mission not as a personal quest and struggle but a betrayal of religion already threatened by alien rule and as a desertion of the fledging social reform movement.

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[9] The Government bought 600 copies and from the sale of this book, Pandita Ramabai and her daughter were able to pay for their passage to England (Kosambi, "Indian Response" 62).

Within this scenario of lack of opportunities and support, she turned to other avenues for assistance. With the help of the Wantage Sisters of Poona, she decided to go to England with her little daughter to study medicine. She was provided hospitality and help by the Sisters of the Community of St. Mary the Virgin "without any religious pressure" (Kosambi, "Indian Response" 62). When she went to England, she

> was no longer bound by this time by traditional Hindu teachings, but in her behavior she was still largely faithful to the Brahmanic culture. But she was convinced that only in Europe could she acquire the knowledge and skills that were necessary for what she saw as her life's task: relief for Hindu widows (Schouten 65).

Less than five months after arriving in England, she decided to embrace Christianity. Her conversion may be understood from three different perspectives: the Indians', and the Christians' perceptions, and her own.

The news about her conversion created "the expected storm, generating charges of betrayal, deception and mercenary behavior" (Kosambi, *Multiple* 197) in India. Hindus, who had regarded her as learned and had conferred on her the title of Saraswati, were outraged at this slap in the face, especially from a woman, and everything that she was to thereafter was controversial. She was accused by the social reformer Sri Ramakrishna to be too ambitious and a representative of a "kind of egotism and idealism which was not 'good' as it was a mere pursuit of name and fame" (Chakravarti, *Rewriting* 68). The national press also made some remarkable notes. For instance, *The Times of India* (14 November 1883) wrote a sensitive note of the fact that "the sudden news of Ramabai's conversion… has fallen like a thunderbolt upon her followers and admirers", and "created a profound sensation among the native communities of Western India". *The Mahratta's* (4 November 1883) gave voice to the conservative Hindu skepticism and wrote with irony that "the learned lady has deceived and disappointed alike her friends and foes" and "enrolled herself into the charitable clan of Christ" for monetary reasons.

Ramabai's critique of Brahmanical patriarchy and her decisive break with its oppressive structure through her conversion to Christianity were too much for those riding the high tide of history and for whom nationalism was synonymous with Hinduism. By 'choosing' to become a Christian, she was betraying her religion, becoming an outsider and thereby her nation in the eyes of nineteenth-century Hindu society. Hence she symbolized a

threat to the moral and social order of the kind of nationalism being forged by the patriarchal Hindu Nationalists because of "her unique international, liberal, feminist, and introspectively critical Self" (Kosambi, "Returning" 7). The most important in her conversion was her high visibility and how it (the conversion) would expose a hundred year old Hindu fear of loss of national identity. There was a generation of reformers like Justice Telang and B.G. Tilak who shared the idea of "the construction of nationalism as a prioritized and male project thus succeeded in both sidelining social reform (potentially beneficial to women) and excluding women themselves from the political arena (Kosambi "Returning" 13). This mismatch may explain why she was, and still is, marginalized from the Indian society and history and called "the forgotten heroine of India" (Paul 85).

Nevertheless, her lack of nationalism, as most reformists portrayed it, may not be the main reason for the hostility she generated. Chakravarti (*Rewriting* 68) argued:

> The anger of the middle-class Hindu intelligentsia across the country at Ramabai's renouncing Hinduism for Christianity was partly because they could no longer use her as an example of an educated, 'Hindu' woman who fully endorsed 'Hindu' culture. It was also partly because women had no right to choose to break from Hinduism anyway.

On the other hand, to the Christian missionaries, she was an example to be followed since she had become the image of Church in India and her criticism of her own traditions, a strong argument against the decadence of Indians constantly pointed out by Evangelicals and Utilitarians as explored in chapter 2. The Community of St. Mary the Virgin (CSMV) invited Ramabai to visit Wantage and enabled her to gain access to England. Ramabai represented to them "an insider's knowledge of the oppressed Hindu womanhood with an outsider's constructive critique, and an authentic Hinduness with the missionary discursive practice" (Kosambi, *Through her own words* 39). Rachel Bodley (xvii) described her with admiration and respect as "the high-caste Brahman woman, the courageous daughter of the forest, educated, refined, rejoicing in the liberty of the Gospel".

A.B. Shah (*Letters* 24) highlighted the importance and impact of Christianity to Indian people:

> Indian people are touched by the simplicity of Christ's teaching. Take away all the outward shows of your words and grand ceremonies and teach simply the

> words of Christ as they fell from His lips, without making any comments and you will see what power they have of enchanting the people's hearts.

This explains the exciting tone of relationship between missionaries to gain the most useful (that is, the most socially respectable) converts to continue mission work in India. Hence, the extraordinary investment in a high-caste learned woman like Pandita Ramabai, whose conversion was a prize acquisition and one not to be lost easily. Ramabai's British biographer Helen Dyer is an excellent example of how the Westerners saw in the conversion a triumph of Christianity and a conflation of racial-cultural and religious superiority with a denigration of Hinduism. It was the chance to mobilize people in India to bring about the change that was discussed and sought since James Mill and Macaulay as argued in chapter 2.

Many scholars have tried to understand Ramabai's conversion through her own perception. Definitely, it was not an easy choice and she claimed it was a personal statement (*Testimony 20*). A close analysis of *Testimony* allows the reader to disentangle her position relating to conversion. The book was written in 1907, 18 years after her return to India, 24 years after her conversion and 15 years before her death. The text documented that two very different conversions had taken place with Ramabai and that it is necessary to understand her conversion: one as the *outer* conversion in England, where she became Christian but was never truly happy about it; on the other side, the *inner* conversion where she realizes Christ within herself.

In the book *Testimony,* she revealed her own history and led the reader to understand it in the light of her inner conversion to Christianity. She constructed her writing in a way that made her life appear as if Christianity had been her destiny, but that she did not always see it clearly from the beginning, or to say it in other words: it is a Christianized version of her life. In sharp contrast to her other writings, factual and scholarly, in *Testimony*, Pandita Ramabai is quite personal and attributes all that happened to her to the will of God, perceived as the actual agent of her life.

Ramabai encountered Christianity at a moment when she was completely disappointed with Hinduism, religion, priests and patriarchalism. Still in Calcutta, she described her state as follows:

> My eyes were being gradually opened; I was waking up to my own hopeless condition as a woman, and it was becoming clearer and clearer to me that I had no place anywhere as far as religious consolation was concerned. I became quite

> dissatisfied with myself. I wanted something more that the Shastras could give me, but I did not know what I wanted (*Testimony* 34).

Once in England, she started to recognize that there was a real difference between Christianity and Hinduism, which she saw in the infinite love of Christ for sinners. Schouten (77) observed, "Ramabai bases her Christology primarily on Paul and John. There she reads what has become of fundamental significance for her: the Son of God came into the world to reconcile sinners with God through his death". She recognized Christ as the true Savior and started to believe in the truth of Christ. For her, the meaning of her conversion was related to Christ's teachings, the true essence and meaning of Christianity according to her belief. She reinforced this belief in a letter to Sister Geraldine on Ash Wednesday, 1884, where she highlighted the simple message of Christ and "the compassionate deeds of the Christians". It is significant that in her reconstruction many years later, she only spoke of Christ and did not mention the Christian religion.

Moreover, Ramabai was attracted to one main aspect of Christianity: its egalitarian doctrine. "In contrast to Hinduism which made spiritual salvation contingent upon an individual's sex and position in the caste hierarchy, Christianity treated all as equal in the site of God" (Kosambi, "Indian Response" 65). She was deeply touched by the figure of Christ, whom she saw as the one who accepted her as a woman equal to men and guaranteed love and liberation, two major factors she was striving for. She finally realized that liberation was no more forbidden to her, but could be achieved in the present life through the love and grace of Christ.

> The Holy Spirit made it clear to me from the Word of God, that the salvation which God gives through Christ is present, and not something future. I believed it, I received it, and I was filled with joy (*Testimony* 37).

Some scholars, such as Meera Kosambi and Uma Chakravarti, have stressed the feminist content of her conversion and interpreted this action as a rebellion against Hindu patriarchy. She understood Christ to be the liberator of the least privileged of society and in that sense there were practical effects of Christian faith for Hindu women. Kosambi ("Indian Response" 65) states that "[t]o a devout Hindu widow such as Ramabai who was placed outside the pale of salvation Christianity held out a promise". Chakravarti (*Rewriting* 113) questions "how far could she have gone in her own life and in her conceptualization of society

and of women's place in it, if she had remained a Hindu widow, contained within the agenda set by men of her caste and class?" The author suggested that there were real constraints, which would made it very difficult for Ramabai to work in this scenario. Therefore, her social concerns led her to the dissatisfaction with Hindu social practices and consequently find fulfillment in Christianity.

Thereafter, her exposure of the ugly face of Hinduism made it impossible for her to be accommodated even within a reformed Hinduism. "In England not only did she see tender relief but she also learned how women could change because of such care and find new direction in life" (Schouten 65). Finally, her feminism was freely reconciled with the new faith and she came to realize that Christ could truly transform and uplift the downtrodden women of India (Hazard). In *Testimony,* she expressed the belief that Christ had entrusted her a great job – the job of a sweeper to sweep away the age-old ill practices against women. Yet, it was only later that Ramabai connected the start of her social work with a new religious orientation (65).

Another aspect that has been appointed as hidden dimension for her conversion was the fact that Ramabai had always faced a certain personal loneliness and social isolation: "[…] she could no longer stand quite alone, she wanted to belong to somebody, and particularly to be able to worship together with those she loved and who had long been so kind to her" (Sengupta 136). The time she spent in Wantage offered her an opportunity to get to know the religious community and "perhaps she saw the community of Sisters as the supportive social structure she had missed all her life" (Kosambi, "Indian response" 63).

This understanding and bond to the message of Christ, not the rituals of the Church, together with the independence of her character brought Ramabai to have deep questionings about some doctrines and to carry throughout her life a simultaneous battle against the Hindu and Christian social norms as it will be shown below.

4.3. Doubts and controversies

Pandita Ramabai belonged to this rare group of people who never compromised her ideology for anything. Thus, she has a complex relationship with her religious identity. As it was previously discussed, when Ramabai got convinced of the truth of Christian faith, she was no longer bound by traditional Hindu teachings, but in her behavior she remained bonded to some aspects of her own culture.

Schouten (74) stated that Ramabai "did not reject her earlier religion completely during these years. To the contrary, she wanted to hold on to the good that Hinduism had produced". As part of her way of life, she kept Brahmin customs like a strict vegetarian diet, excluding onions and garlic, abstinence from alcohol, and preference for simple Indian clothing, often wearing even the traditional white clothing of widows (Flemming 98). Moreover, her food was cooked by a Brahmin woman, she raised her daughter in Indian manners and continued to express respect throughout her life for the classical Sanskrit literature that had been the foundation for her early education.

To her, these were part of her cultural background; to her British friends, it was interpreted as "little clingings to caste prejudices" which should have been discarded at her conversion, and which fostered the pride, which held her back from accepting the full teaching of the Gospel (Shah, *Letters* 100-1). She defended herself by saying that her change of religion did not mean a change of country (Kosambi, "Indian Response" 67), and she often characterized her Hindu aspects as essential to her personal identity as she explained to Sister Geraldine on October 1885:

> I confess that I am not free from all my caste prejudices, as you are pleased to call them. I like to be called a Hindoo, for I am one, and also keep all the customs of my forefathers as far as I can. How would you, an Englishwoman, like being called a proud and prejudiced [sic] if she were to go and live among the Hindoos for a time but did not think it necessary to alter her customs when they were not hurtful or necessary to her neighbours? (in Shah, *Letters* 109)

Despite the series of contestations – religious, racial and cultural – the Anglicans viewed the independent-minded Ramabai as a potential missionary. The Rev. Canon William Butler of Wantage wrote in a letter "I think that Mary Ramabai's knowledge of Indian ways, etc. will give her a power of influence which no English woman can have. All that she needs is an English development on her Indian brains" (in Shah, *Letters* 45).

Yet this fusion never really happened completely. Considering herself an Indian Christian, Pandita Ramabai, or Mary Rama her "Christian name", raised the discussion about a challenging concept that confronts Hinduism, as a religion, and "Indianness and Western cultures, nationalism and colonial rule, feminism and patriarchy in its multiple guises" (Kosambi,"Indian Response" 61). In this large confrontation, Ramabai is located in a series of overlapping encounters and "is divided between two possible meanings of religion as the

source of cultural and national identity on one hand and, on the other, as universal moral value" (Viswanathan 121).

Primarily, this dual identity – between Hinduism and Christianity – prevented her from completely fitting in with either Hindus or Christians. Living on the boundaries, her new faith brought some unique challenges. Despite her close personal ties with the Community of St. Mary the Virgin[10] (CSMV), she "resisted much of Anglo-Catholic doctrine and devotional practice" (Flemming 99). For instance, one initial conflict was based on her refusal to wear the crucifix, which was alien to the Indian experience or at least having it inscribed with Sanskrit instead of Latin words (Shah, *Letters* 28-29). Hazard claimed that many of her Hindu followers didn't trust Christian missionaries, and, in India the cross often represented colonialism, not liberation.

Her correspondences with the Sisters show us her doubts and her critiques but also "provide firsthand evidence of how thoroughly grounded the rhetoric of social relation was in the language of colonial theology, as well as how imperial power relations invariably intruded on personal" (Burton, *Heart* 85). The conflicts that characterized her conversion and several oppositions are marks of transcultural conversion and results of misunderstanding and irreconcilable positions. From the correspondences, one can understand that just like she had critiques on the Brahmanical patriarchy, she was no less critical of the orthodoxies governing the missionaries' conduct. Viswanathan (131) argued that her letters reveal her alienation not only from Hindu society but also the institutional culture of religion to which she had converted. Kosambi ("Indian Response" 66) highlighted that Christianity was the first organized religion that Ramabai had contact with. Therefore, she was not prepared for the Christian dogma and the Anglican Church hierarchy. The author also added:

> What heightened these contradictions and dilemmas was the fact of Ramabai's conversion in England where, moreover, she was isolated from her cultural support system, and exposed to the full force of white and Christian supremacy.

At the heart of the Empire[11], she came to understand what it meant to be a colonial subject, that she was a native of the British Empire, and what this could imply in terms of identity and inferiority. Her encounter with domestic missions in Britain prompted her to refine her understanding of the ways in which colonial social relations were being established

[10] Especially with Sister Geraldine who, in some sense, was her spiritual mother throughout her life.

[11] Burton's (1998) title of the analysis of the colonial subjects in England.

through theological arguments and evangelical institutional practice in Victorian Britain (Burton, *Heart* 75). The congregation of Anglican nuns who invited her to England believed in the rehabilitation of 'fallen women'. This represented a radical experience for Ramabai, since 'fallen women' were ostracized in Indian society. She was moved and impressed by the testimonies of the nuns who told her about how Jesus treated the adulteress according to the Gospel of John. She saw Jesus as the greatest liberator of women.

Besides the angry public controversy in India, Ramabai herself wrestled with her strong aversion to the cultural imperialism of foreign missionaries in India. She tried to distinguish between her Indianness, her love for her country, and her choice to be a Christian, realizing however that the Anglican Church was directly related to the idea of nation. She was trapped in the political and social implication of her choice for the religion of Christ. Aligning with the British nation was also quite in opposition with her wish to see India independent. These tensions resulted in her being a rebel and qualified her as dissident subject. With the British Raj fully established and the missionary movement still operating in a Western mindset, there was little place for a woman who quietly but firmly insisted on her own cultural and personal identity and refused to accept the gatekeeping of Western denominational Christianity.

After her conversion, she studied Christianity for about five years. She gradually discovered the various and unexpected facets of Christianity and was much puzzled by all the internal fractions and quarrels of religion (*Testimony* 38). She brought to the study and understanding of Christianity the same rational and intellectual approach which made her analyze and reject Hinduism. She would question each and everything that was taught her and very quickly her situation with the Sisters of Wantage became difficult. Writing to Rev. Canon William Buttler she used against the Anglicans their own argument regarding the interpretation of the Bible as the only source of God's special revelation to mankind:

> But a doctrine, which is essential to faith, is not left unnoticed by the Bible, and I am not prepared to accept an essential doctrine, which I shall not find in the Bible. (in Shah, *Letters* 80)

Sister Geraldine, Ramabai's chief mentor, was clearly aware that Ramabai was refashioning Christianity to her own requirements, far beyond what her sponsors desired for this young woman whom they aimed eventually to embrace within their fold. In a letter to Dorothea Beale, she said:

> I fear she is willingly accepting a religion which has no claim to the name of Christianity, as she thinks it will commend itself more to the intelligence of her countrywomen that the revealed Truth, which later will require for them a higher standard of moral and spiritual perfection than they would be willing to accept (in Shah, *Letters* 114).

It was Sister Geraldine, the elderly Sister of the CSMV, who facilitated Ramabai's conversion to Christianity but it was also with her who she had serious differences on her understanding of Christian theology. Sister Geraldine was defined by Kosambi ("Indian Response" 66) as a "lady who had little sympathy with India, no predilection for independent thinking", and who was, by her own admission, intellectually ill equipped for the task. (Shah, *Letters* 5)

Ramabai, her daughter Manorama, and Sister Geraldine developed a multilayered triangular relationship that lasted throughout Ramabai's life in England, USA and India. In this relationship, Sister Geraldine was the typical representative of the Anglican Church and missionary life, whereas Ramabai was a highly unusual and independent-minded Indian convert and Manorama a rare blend of East and West highlights.

Ramabai and Sister Geraldine had strong disagreements on how to raise Manorama. Ramabai, for instance, refused to believe in the doctrine of Trinity, or the divinity of Jesus, for she found that such a mode of prayer was not prescribed in the Bible. For that reason, she became furious when Manorama, her daughter, recited her prayers in the Trinitarian way, and protested to Sister Geraldine for teaching something which she did not believe. Sister Geraldine and Ramabai also had opposite ideas on where Mano should be educated. Whereas Sister Geraldine insisted that the girl's education be carried out in England, Ramabai strongly opposed to the idea, fearing that Mano would lose her identity and declared in a letter to her mentor on May 1887:

> I do not want her to be too proud to acknowledge that she is one of India's daughters. I do not want her to blush when our name is mentioned, such being too often the case with those who have made their homes in foreign lands. (in Shah, *Letters* 199)

Despite all her effort to avoid Manorama to become Anglicized, Ramabai was not successful to make it happen. When mother and daughter returned to India, Manorama was

educated at home and in several English-medium schools in India, never having the chance to complete a course properly. Thus, Flemming (102) described Mano's education as "eclectic, sporadic, and disjointed".

The intricate relationship between Sister Geraldine, Pandita Ramabai and Manorama brings out two sets of mothers, one a Hindu convert to Christianity and the other a superior Christian missionary, that it is found the dialectical relationship between motherhood in two kinds of nation-building. Meera Kosambi ("Motherhood" 64) brings out the complexity of colonial motherhood:

> But more than race or culture, the effective determinant of emotional affinity seems to be the *western maternal authority* (implicitly anchored to colonial power), which was repeatedly contested by Ramabai but unquestionably accepted by Manorama since childhood. In such unconditional exercise of spiritual, cultural, racial and colonial motherhood, Geraldine and her countless western counterparts saw the success of their evangelizing agenda and realized the possibility of emotional bonding.

Another point of friction with Sister Geraldine and the Church authorities was regarding Ramabai's questioning on the 'Sermon on the Mount' as her main doctrine. Moreover, she also refused to believe in the divinity of Christ or miracles such as the Immaculate Conception and Resurrection. Ramabai would strongly argue for a "relatively simple Bible-based Christianity" (Flemming 99) and consequently she would reject any doctrine that she could not find biblical evidence for. As result, she "was accused of having undergone baptism on false pretense while withholding complete acceptance of the Christian doctrine – which was a matter of faith and not open to an intellectual debate" (Kosambi, "Indian Response" 66). Sister Geraldine understood that it was a pre-requisite of a good Christian to subordinate the intellect to faith. She expressed her belief in a letter to Ramabai on October 1885:

> At first the lamp of Faith shone brightly in your heart, and your intellect bowed before it … Humility, childlike simplicity, obedience, truthfulness and trustfulness were there and daily developed themselves in your life. But gradually these graces faded from sight… The germ of the new life given to you

> in holy baptism which at first sprang up and gave such fair promise, has been over-grown by rank and poisonous weeds of heresy (in Shah, *Letters* 91-92).

To moderate this intense relationship between Ramabai and Sister Geraldine, there was Dorothea Beale, principal of Cheltenham Ladies' College and a moderate feminist who had championed women's education in England and was better able than the Anglican nuns to appreciate Ramabai's "wonderful mind and character" (Shah, *Letters* 36). Beale gave great emotional and intellectual support and could develop rational discussion on matters of religion. Sister Geraldine appealed to Miss Beale to give Ramabai "a little teaching on submission to authority" because she has to learn that as a Christian, she is bound to accept the authority of those over her in the Church. She is inclined to take too independent a line" (47). Pandita Ramabai felt that the Church leaders were also under the authority of Christ just as she was.

This great resistance to accept the conservative Anglo-Catholic male church leaders was another source of friction, if not the major contestation. Just like she had authority issue with the male domination of Hindu discourse and ceremonial, she declared on a letter to Sister Geraldine on May 1885:

> I am not bound to accept every word that falls down from the lips of priests or bishops… I have just with great efforts freed myself from the yoke of the Indian priestly tribe, so I am not at present willing to place myself under another similar yoke by accepting everything which comes from the priests as authorized command of the Most High (in Shah, *Letters* 59).

Ramabai's encounter with the patriarchy of the Anglican Church was just as harsh as the Indian version of it. In contrast to the egalitarian nature of the Christian doctrine, she soon discovered the patriarchal element in the Church's authoritarianism. One example of it was when the Bishop of Bombay quickly protested against the offer given to Ramabai of a professorship, which involved her teaching male students:

> Above all things, pray believe that her influence will be ruined for ever in India if she is known to have taught young men. Suffice it to say that it would cause scandal even among the better sort of native men, and that nothing would ever

> undo the harm it would do her among native women. (Letter from Rev. DR. Mylne to Miss Beale on May 1884, in Shah, *Letters* 44)

Needless to say, Ramabai protested again, "[i]t surprised me very much to think that neither my father nor my husband objected [to] my mother's or my teaching young men while some English people are doing so", and that her having addressed mixed or solely male audiences in India "did not seem to take away my influence with my countrypeople, and why should it be so now, I cannot see" (in Shah, *Letters* 60).

After six years in contact with Western encounters, Ramabai returned to India and started realizing her projects, the most important being Sharada Sadan, a school founded in 1889, expanding later into the Mukti Mission. Kosambi ("Multiple Contestations" 201) argues that "[w]hat followed after her return to India was an attempt to achieve a delicate balance between inner Christian conviction and outward religious neutrality".

At first, her sole aim was to help the high-caste widows without any religious dimensions; still it introduced a "structural change in the patriarchal social set-up by carving out a new space for women outside the private domain" (Kosambi, "Indian Response" 63). However, she had to face countless obstacles along the road when the girls wished to take the religion of their benefactor.

Due to the hostility and lack of support, she moved her mission from Bombay to Pune and then finally settled in Kedgaon in 1898, where she reoriented her mission. By this time, she had had enough of being criticized and marginalized and turned towards active Christian behavior. If earlier she considered religion a personal option and her proselytization was covert, now she started to openly praise Christianity and even invited women to convert if they wished it so. With a feeling of dissatisfaction, she said: "One thing that I knew by this time, that I needed Christ, and not merely His religion… I had at last come to an end of myself, and unconditionally surrendered myself to the Saviour; and asked Him to be merciful to me […]" (*Testimony* 29-30).

Schouten (80) explained that Ramabai brought revolutionary standards by choosing Indian forms to the Church services at the time. According to the author, everyone who attended church did not sit on pews but, in line with Indian custom, on the floor with their legs crossed. Also, Indian pancakes (*chapatis*) were offered during communion and grape juice instead of bread and the wine. Instead of English hymns, there were Indian songs (*bhajans*) accompanied by Indian instruments. Certainly, not only Ramabai has a unique importance for the Indian church and theology, but also in showing to nineteenth-century

India, an image of Jesus as “the liberator of the oppressed” for whom “there were no boundaries, including cultural ones” (80).

In all, the theological debate in which Ramabai cannot be dissociated from the colonial setting. Being Anglican implied being British, hence she cannot be Anglican Christian without denying her Indianness. The religion to which she “converted” must not be defined by a connection to a nation, be it Britain or India. The rejection by Anglican as well as by Indian nationalists reveals this dilemma. Hence her choice for Christ, for an internal spirituality was “logical” even though it did not fit the expected pattern of conversion. Gauri Viswanathan (272) drew this parallel when stating that Ramabai’s refusal of trinity was also a refusal of the crown of England: “Two historical positions – that of the colonial subject and religious dissenter - dramatically collapse into a single one in the missionaries’ representation of Ramabai’s questioning”. Yet, her theological options cannot be reduced to only political statements, as she had a deep knowledge and interest in theology.

5. The role of women: Ramabai's beliefs and passion

"Women are mere prisoners of men, like slaves" (Harriet Martineau quoted in Kosambi, "Returning the Gaze" 167)

5.1. Conceptual clarification

"Feminism/ feminist" are modern terms, a century old at most, and in the context of the mid-Victorian women's movements, the phrases "the woman question" and "women's rights" were more extensively used. Even though women's experience is the touchstone of Pandita Ramabai's writing and social work, and she is the figure who first systematized the feminist cause against traditional Hindu institutions, she and her contemporary colleagues never referred to herself or her activities as "feminist".

Nonetheless, these terms are used throughout this work to acknowledge her understanding and criticism of how patriarchal hierarchy and sexual oppression perpetuated Indian women's social, economic and political subordination. For this reason, it is essential to characterize Feminism and understand it as part of a set of movements aimed at pursuing women's rights within the society of India.

Feminist thought or the origins of the feminist standpoint are often synonymous with Western thought. Postcolonial feminists have tried to deconstruct and deemphasize these notions, by broadening the definition of feminism and a feminist, and by showing examples of radical women figures in their respective cultures. Since every country does not modernize in the same sequence, or have a similar trajectory of feminism, it is logical to look for a definition of feminism that fits women's struggles across cultures and time. In this regard, Karen Offen's "Defining Feminism" (1998) is useful in understanding and defining feminism.

"Feminism", both as an ideology and socio-political movement, can be said to be of a "rapidly developing nature" and to include "a broad spectrum of ideas" and strategies (Offen 150). From a historical perspective and in any given culture, the core of feminism has always implied a critique of the inferior position of women in society, a condemnation of male privilege, a wish to improve women's disadvantaged status and a desire to acquire self-determination and autonomy. According to Offen's historical and comparative definition, feminism "offers a frontal challenge to patriarchal thought, social organization, and control mechanism" regardless of time and space (151).

This approach is necessary from the point of view of understanding feminist thought prior to the twentieth century, as well as applying it to feminism in Non-Western parts of the world. In challenging patriarchal thought, feminism analyses the relation of women to various social organs, such as the family, State and other political, and economic systems. A feminist can be either male or female, insofar as they are able to recognize the validity of women's interpretations of their lived experience, needs and acknowledge the values women claim as their own, in assessing their own status as been distinct from men (Offen 152).

Although Offen's definition is comprehensive and comparative, it is still modern and contemporary. It fails to take the specificity of the nineteenth century Indian feminist thought into account. Kumari Jayawardena (1986), who has done pioneering work on feminist movements in Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, defined feminism by taking into account the historical side and values of Indian feminism. She also located nineteenth century Indian feminism in a context. The early feminist movement in India was intrinsically linked to a gendered approach to issues of faith and belief systems. It is important to give this definition as India was seen to be lacking in feminism or feminism was considered to be an off-shoot of the presence of the British rule in India. Hence as per Jayawardena's definition, Indian feminism existed since the nineteenth century onwards and meant: "embracing movements for equality within the current system and significant struggles that have attempted to change the system" (2). She further asserted that these movements arose in two contexts, being the former the formulation and consolidation of national identities, which mobilized anti-imperialist movements during the independence struggle during the Gandhian-led nationalist movement from 1920 to 1947, and the latter consisted of the remaking of precapitalist religion and feudal structures in attempts to modernize third world societies. Taking Jayawardena's suggestion into account, then, Pandita Ramabai and other Marathi feminists (especially of the colonial period, 1865-1933[12]) fit under the second criterion of this broad definition and can be called feminists.

Another important point to define modes of femininity that needs further discussion is gender subordination in terms of class relations, sexuality and caste[13]. The Caste factor deserves mention here, since Marathi notions of femininity during the colonial and pre-colonial times were described and defined in terms of caste identity. Genzo Yamamoto

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[12] As example of influential feminists from this period, it can be mentioned among others Ramabai Ranade, Cornelia Sorabji, Krupabai Sattianadhan, Sarojini Naidu.

[13] The origins of the term 'caste' are attributed to the Spanish and Portuguese *casta,* which means "race, lineage, or breed". (Oxford English Dictionary. Web).

explained (1991) that hints of the caste system could be found in sacred texts written in late second millennium B.C.E. and in the later Vedic texts (c.1000-500 B.C.E.). The texts were deeply concerned with issues of purity and pollution, dividing people into different groupings. Later, in the early Hindu period (c.300 B.C.E.-500 C.E), the Sanskrit epics incorporated the tradition and laid out the classes (Brahman, Kshtriya, Vaishya, and Shudra), which would eventually become the caste (*jasti)* clusters. Yamamoto (1992) adds that although the "racial concepts, as well as racism, existed in Asia prior to the arrival of the West" the influx of Western notions of race "racialized the population". Furthermore, it had distinctive impact in India by the Enlightenment and the Orientalist fascination with the caste system and its assumptions regarding, and potential for, "high civilization captured the European imagination. Definitely, Western colonialism exacerbated and solidified social division that had existed previously in more fluid form.

Women's behavior was regulated by caste terms and terminologies. *Streedharma* (duty of women) was defined in terms of service to parents, care, nurture of children and observation of *pativratya* (devotion to husband) (Bhagwat 360). With the arrival of the British, many local and national reformers saw education as fit for women – however only that kind of education which would serve the patriarchal interests and needs. This meant reforming typical women's habits which were associated with them since pre-colonial times, such as being spendthrift, illiterate, *adivasi*, animal-like, financially irresponsible and short-sighted. A renowned text[14] by the known writer Narayan Bapuji Kanitkar (54), for instance, argued against reformist positions on women's education as follows:

> […] once for all if you become equal to men, fearless and tough like them and start wandering like them on roads then men will not have any feelings for you. This will destroy all the pleasures, pride, and honor that you have. Indian men are not free as much as you are today. You must forever endeavor to gain such education as befitted Arya Woman ... as was available to our ancients.

Moreover, what Kanitkar (58) has to say regarding the situation of Hindu widows is reflective of most of the orthodox patriarchal thought of the time:

[14] The play *TaruniShikshanNatika, athva adhuniktarunishikshan vas tri svantantra yanche bhavishyakathan* [The Education of women, or a prophecy on modern education and women's freedom] was a particularly sexualized critique of the English language. First published in 1886, the print version was written by Narayan Bapuji Kanitkar who sensationalized the lives of the female students in the Poona Native Girl's High School. (Chandra, Shefali. "Mimicry, Masculinity amd the Mystique of Indian English: Western India, 1870-1900. *The Journal of Asian Studies.* Vol.68, No1. February 2009. 199-225.

> Those who really wish to do something good for widows they must direct them towards the path of knowledge, towards religious actions, towards altruism. Give widows an opportunity for travels, for visiting pilgrimages, seeing different places. Do spend as much as possible for such activities. Widows will gain knowledge in this process and this will help all women. Remarriage should be prescribed only for those widows who have no intelligence, no higher goals, no pure ambition—in short for those widows who only understand animal level instincts.

Vidyut Bhagwat (332) observed that besides the restrictions imposed by religious fundamentalists, the social stratification of the Indian society in terms of caste boundaries made specific allocations for gender. Women had to face difficulties because of unfair and difficult divorce laws, strict punishment to women for adultery as compared to men, lesser options of vocations etc.

From the above, it can be understood that caste definitions of femininity struggles against the notion towards emancipation of women in nineteenth-century India society. Thus feminists of the colonial period felt the need to detach themselves from nationalist concerns. In this scenario, the middle class woman was in a position of having a new identity in the nationalist discourse which was defined against the excesses of modernization associated with the Western and Westernized woman and the backwardness associated with peasant and lower-caste/class women in India. Pandita Ramabai was one of these modern women who could truly embody the cultural identity of the nation in making. However, she showed detachment towards nationalist matters in her writings, and more of a concern for women's uplift, education, independence. Her main involvement was the indigenous women and her work was articulated by forming alliances with feminist sisters abroad as it is going to be discussed in the next sections.

5.2. The high-caste Indian Woman

As it was previously shown, caste is undoubtedly an India phenomenon in the sense that there are everywhere hereditary, endogamous groups which form a hierarchy, and that each of these groups has a traditional association with one or two occupations. The

hierarchical structure of nineteenth century Maharashtrian society[15] was the social context in which Pandita Ramabai was rooted. The traditional caste structure was "based on a broad, but fairly rigid division of labor" (Kosambi, "Returning the gaze" 11). At the top of the pyramid, there was the Bhramin caste cluster and the Prabhus who together formed a small minority. Following, there were the Marathas who corresponded to half of the population and included the minority who claimed Kshatriya descent and the majority who were peasants and considered to be Shudras. Artisan and service castes were the lower Marathas, and, at the bottom, the 'untouchable' castes (Singh 200-201).

Brahmins were the intellectual and spiritual leaders so they framed elaborate rules laying down not only the status and grade of the various social and cultural groups but also prescribing distinct rituals and ceremonies for each. In pre-British days, their supremacy was reinforced by the political-military and economic power. Kosambi ("Women" 38) described this caste as "both leaders and subjects of the newly initiated social awakening and reform" due to the new social, economic and political conditions ushered in by the British conquest of India.

It was the women of these upper castes who suffered the most severe constraints. The inequality resulting from caste was supposed to be ordained by God, the patriarchal social system was derived from ancient sacred texts and hallowed by tradition and custom (Singh 201). Sacred texts emphasized the supremacy of men, the procreation of male descendants and assigned a passive role for women, i.e., "a vehicle for the production of sons" (Kosambi, "Women" 38).

Women were not only passive and inferior, but they also needed to be controlled and strictly disciplined to curb their inherently "evil and weak character" (Kosambi, "Women" 38). It should be noted that inferiority of women is not inborn; rather it was enforced on them by cultural practices and consequent attitudes prevalent in community. Women should forever be kept in obedience, should not be given any knowledge, should not be well educated, should not know about religion and should not mix with men (Chakravarti, "Reconceptualizing" 168).

That is why women from the dominant classes have not be involved in any struggle for their rights, despite the fact that they did not have any share in most of the privileges of their caste. Therefore, women were powerless. Some of the prominent women in public life

[15] The Maharashtra region was the politically and economically dominant western part of India. It was largely rural and agrarian. Its capital was Bombay, which was the largest city in India and route of international maritime commerce and industrialization. Poona was considered the cultural heartland. (Kosambi, "Returning the gaze" 11).

(e.g. Savitribai Phule and Ramabai Ranade) did not have the quality of leadership, and their involvement was based upon their husbands' support and encouragement. This would become clear in contrast to Ramabai's life and activities. Still, they had contributed somehow to the cause. Savitribai Phule (1831-1897) helped her husband Jyotiba Phule to run a girls' school and pioneered the rehabilitation of the untouchable castes of Western India. Ramabai Ranade headed Seva Sadan for women (Kosambi, "Women" 49), but her husband did not encourage women's participation in political life.

Yet Padma Anagol (32) argued that the second-generation Christian women, like Cornelia Sorabji, Krupabai and Pandita Ramabai, reviewed "the commonest allegations of Indian male reformers[16] that women were the greatest opponents of education": they preferred ignorance, then their interest could never rise above petty gossip and trifles, and hence they blocked reform work. These women gave a cultural explanation for Hindu women's inferior status rather than rooting it in a biological theory of weakness of the 'gentle sex'. Ramabai, "befitting her role as a foremother and founder of modern Indian feminism" (Anagol 35) proposed a more complex view on women's rights, stating that, in the 'golden' past of Indian history, there were no caste distinctions, no widow-burning, nor were women secluded. Pandita Ramabai attributed the subjugation of women to the gradual ascendancy of the priestly class in Hinduism.

Due to all these constraints, high-caste Indian women were the focus of the efforts of Pandita Ramabai and other reformers in the movements for the uplift of women that started in the mid-nineteenth century. These movements were mainly led by intellectual men, such as B.G. Tilak as mentioned in the previous chapter, who didn't attack the prevalent patriarchal system in any way and were the "first generation of educated Maharashtrians, who in turn were impacted by the advanced British technology, secular education, and a more efficient and formalized system of administration and justice" (Kosambi, "Returning the gaze" 11). Rather, the attempt was to improve the condition of women within the frame of patriarchy. The term patriarchy meant, not only the system of familial organization in which the father as head is vested with primary rights, but also all the extant economic, social political and cultural systems which 'naturally' grant the first place to men rather than to women (Talwar 205). However, efforts were made to improve the lot of women within the framework of patriarchy so that as wives, mothers and daughters they could have a better deal inside the family. But this was not a result of some sudden outbreak of generosity on the part of men.

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[16] The opinions of Influential Hindu reformer were recorded in Cornelia Sorabji, "Social Relations – England in India", *Pan-Anglican Papers* (London:1908): 1-4.

The social reform movements arose out of the conflict between the needs of an emergent 'educated' urban middle class and the norms of the older, feudal joint family system – in fact the reforms were an attempt to change the patriarchal system and bring it in live with the material needs of the urban middle class.

Initially, the social reforms[17] were product of the English system of education and Christian missionary propaganda as further explored in chapter 2, and were "loosely aligned along the twin axes of caste inequalities and gender injustice" (Kosambi, "Returning the gaze" 11). The gender-related social reforms were primarily an upper-caste concern, "its site the well-regulated family unit, which was hierarchically organized along the sex-age grid, sanctioning the dominance of men over women, and of older member over younger ones" (Kosambi, "Returning the gaze" 12). The core issues of social reform – the abolition of child marriage, improved treatment (and possible remarriage) of widows, and introduction of women's education – were promoted increasingly in tension with "political reform," or the nationalistic demand for political autonomy. The first generation of social reformers, pioneered by G.H. Deshmukh (1823-1892) and Jotirao Phule (1827-1890), sought to remodel traditional society by reconciling their admiration for the progressive aspects of British rule with their patriotism.

In contrast to these earlier reformers, Pandita Ramabai struggled for a qualitative change in approach to the ongoing search for a new woman. She used media for projecting the persistent social blindness to the contentious issue of gender-relations and natures of women's oppression (Mohan 177-178). Her social activism of the early 1880s coincided with the advent of the third generation of reformers, dominated by B.G. Tilak (1856-1920) and G.G. Agarkar (1856-1895). In a scenario of overlapping reform generations, Ramabai got great support from Deshmukh, Ranade, Bhandarkar and Telang (Kosambi, "Returning the gaze" 11).

With the book *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*, originally written in Marathi and then translated into English and sold in America, Ramabai broke a silence of a thousand years. Before the book was published, very few in America were aware of what conditions for women were like in India – though the knowledge was of course available in England.

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[17] As examples of these earlier initiatives, there are the *Arya Samaj* (1875) – a socio-religious reform with the aim to promote values and practices based on the belief in the infallible authority of the Vedas; and the *Prarthana Samaj* (Prayer society in Sanskrit), a movement for religious and social reform led by intellectuals, such as Justice Ranade and R.G. Bhandarkar from the second generation of social reformers, which aim was to make people believe in one God and worship only one God.

The High-Caste Hindu Woman was written in 1887 whilst still in India and was meant to be a "cry of Indian womanhood" abroad and locally. Ten thousand copies sold out before Ramabai left America in 1888 (Burton, *At the Heart* 83) and the profits were used to help destitute women in India where high-caste Hindu widows, who had nowhere to go, were to be housed. The book that is considered her most famous in America had a remarkable international circulation and the American Board of Ramabai Association ordered a reprint of it with a brief background of Ramabai's life and her work at Sharada Sadan in India. The American Ramabai Association pledged funding for ten years for Ramabai's home in India and in conclusion, Juliet Andrews, Chairman of the Executive Committee wrote in praise of this remarkable woman in the preface to its new edition of 1901:

> Fourteen years ago God put into the hearts and hands of the American people the desire and the power to grant Ramabai's prayer; to help inaugurate and carry forward this unparalleled work. Will they let it languish it now? No, they will not, of it is the loving Father of all who calls upon them to give to this heroic woman their loving sympathy and generous aid" (Ramabai, *The High-Caste* 26-27).

The book covers every stage of a high-caste woman's life, beginning with childhood, stating a woman's place in religion and society so that Ramabai's comments can be given a clear context and ending with an appeal for the betterment of women's lives through the creation of an institution where high-caste widows could be educated and cared for and taught to be independent – this, she pointed out in an earlier chapter is against Manu's laws, since women "are never fit for independence".

In her analysis of Hindu womanhood – which remained the primary focus of all her concerns – Ramabai combined "quotations from the sacred texts with personal reminiscences of instances she had witnessed of the miserable plight of women" (Chakravarti, "Whatever" 68). With a clear conscience, she outlined the contradiction between custom and religious precepts and the superior weight given to custom in actual practice. Her deep knowledge and command over sacred texts allowed her to support her own position with relevant passages.

The miseries of Hindu womanhood is analyzed since the beginning from the agony of the mother even before a child is born:

> In no other country is the mother so laden with care and anxiety on the approach of childbirth as in India. In most cases her hope of winning her husband to herself hangs solely on bearing sons… [to ensure this] women pray with herbs and roots… and don-giving gods are devoutly worshipped… There is [even] a curious ceremony which is administered to the mother for converting the embryo [of a pregnant woman] into a boy (Ramabai, *The High-Caste* 14).

Ramabai explained that since childhood a girl is made conscious of her inferior status, and also feels despised. Obviously, to have some girls born into the world is "necessary for the continuance of the race" (8) but is not expected that they outnumbered boys. As consequence of this subjugation to humiliation, she added, "most girls become sullen, morbid and dull" (11). For that reason, Chakravarti, ("Whatever" 69) shows that the practice of infanticide is a common custom and that Ramabai provided a "psychological understanding as to why mothers sometimes subject their daughters to miseries which she attributes to the internalization of the values of the communities".

Passages from the first part of the book give us examples of her critique of cruel customs throughout the country, and also show the felt need for lawful intervention from the British government as well as an inner reformation. Besides, she supplemented the empirical evidence with statistical means, an aspect uncommon for women of her times. Further awareness to stop and bring in reformation is made by a plea to the lawmakers, who however fail to bring in the necessary reform. It is here that Pandita Ramabai saw a need for feminist intervention, which she was able to achieve only through the means of an international community of friends: "Large expenses might be stopped by law, but a belief, deeply rooted in the hearts and religious observed by the people for centuries, could not be removed by external rules" (Ramabai, *The High-Caste* 54).

If early childhood is not an easy period for girls, it gets even worse with the custom of child marriage: "It is not easy to determine when the childhood of a Hindu girl ends and the married life begins" (14). In a bold attack on the patriarchal system, Ramabai exposed the general attitude of the patriarchal father, as a result of which the helpless widowed daughter had no means of sustenance left if the father didn't leave her some property or, that is, she herself was uneducated or didn't have the necessary means of survival left for herself. This forms one of the central theses of her book, the *High-Caste Hindu Woman* (41-42):

> Fathers very seldom wish to have daughters, for they are thought to be the property of somebody else; besides, a daughter is not supposed to be of any use to the parents in their old age. Although it is necessary for the continuance of the race that some girls should be born into the world, it is desirable that their number by no means should exceed that of the boys. If unfortunately a wife happens to have all daughters and no son, Manu (Hindu God) authorizes the husband of such a woman to supersede her with another in the eleventh year of their marriage".

From the above we see how patriarchy backed by religion (God Manu) sought to prescribe severe restrictions for women, and thus added to the predominant male ideology of her times. Ramabai and local reformers challenged and sought to question and reform some of the tenets from the patriarchal ideas and God Manu (85-86): "By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently. In childhood, a female must be subject to her father, in youth, to her husband, when her lord is dead, to her sons; a woman must never be independent...."

Therefore, the control over women involved two major aspects. One was women's disinheritance from real estate property in the form of land, and their consequent exclusion from the productive economy, which led women to live their lives only in the domestic sphere in the form of the seclusion or purdah. The second is the far greater control exercised by men over women's sexuality, through arranged marriage, child marriage, the prohibition divorce, and strict monogamy for women, leading to *sati* and a ban on widow marriage including infant or child widows (Liddle & Joshi 59).

Regarding child marriage, Ramabai (*High-Caste* 29, 34) defined it as "the old custom of my country" and stated in chapter III that "the popular belief is that a woman can have no salvation unless she be formally married". It was only after marriage that a woman's life was revolved. Because of that, parents would avoid to keep their daughter unmarried until the 'late' age of eleven since this could bring severe social censure. Consequently, "girls were married in the cradle or at any time during their childhood, the limit being eight to ten years, the groom being about ten years old" (Kosambi, "Women" 39).

According to Ramabai, marriages were arranged by friends and relatives of the families and "boys as well as girls have no voice in the selection of their spouses at the first marriage" (*High-Caste* 33). Wealth was a paramount 'quality' in the selection, "but even this powerful wealth is nothing before caste rule" (34). The caste and clan of a man are enough for

fathers to give away their daughters even if the husband-to-be is a stranger. Ramabai highlighted that once the marriage is concluded, it was henceforth indissoluble according to the Laws of Manu: "Neither by sale nor repudiation is a wife released from her husband; such we know the law to be which the Lord of creatures made of old" (Manu, ix, 46 quoted in Ramabai, *High-Caste* 39).

In this chapter, Ramabai described the ceremony of marriage as the "heyday of a Hindu woman's life" (42), a day when "momentarily a girl will feel elevated, a feeling compounded by the fact that girls are married off while they are still babies" (Chakravarti, "Whatever" 70). However these romantic illusions are over immediately after the ceremony when the young girl finds herself with a yoke put on her (42-43). At the end of the chapter, though, Ramabai acknowledged that there are many happy and loving couples in India where the wives would have nothing to complain about except the "absence of freedom of thought and action" (48).

The widowhood is considered by the Indian woman "the worst and most dreaded period of a high-caste woman's life" (69). In the chapter about this stage of life, Ramabai gave a realistic description about what is considered a retribution from crimes committed in an earlier life and about what constituted the idea of a body, the widow's body, as prescribed by God Manu. She made a mockery of the rules and regulations by putting together his injunctions for widows and widowers. She quoted:

> Let her emaciate her body by living on pure flowers, roots and fruits but she must never ever mention the name of another man after her husband has died… Until death let her be patient of hardships, self controlled, and chaste… In reward of such conduct, a female who controls her thoughts, speech and action gains in this life highest renown, and in the next world a place near her husband" (72-73).

The above passage shows the ways in which a widow's body was put to use, whereby her material and moral existence was viewed in fearful terms, so as to prevent any mishaps from occurring, lest she lets go of her chastity or makes a demand in family's property, etc.

A brief glance at the condition of widows described in *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* also tells us about what it meant to be a widow in pre-colonial and colonial India. The situation of widows in India was pitiable, especially for the upper caste widows, with not many resources to live on, and meant either death or a severe life of austerity and penance, as

one of the two alternatives. The first alternative meant adherence to rules of purity and pollution. These would be maintained through vegetarianism, teetotalism and tight constraints on women's sexuality and code of conduct. Kosambi ("Women" 40) explained, "the most dreaded offshoot of widowhood was the disfigurement through shaving off the widows' hair and the requirement to keep the head clean-shaven throughout her life". In addition to the social isolation and mental torture, widows were debarred from inheriting immovable property in the form of land leading to their removal from the productive economy. Since widow remarriage was debarred, it was up to the upper caste women to maintain ritual purity either through the second option, Sati or burning herself on the pyre along with her husband or go by the ways sanctioned by the *Shastras*, if she refused to undergo Sati. The poor helpless widow, who chose to live by the *Shastras* was debarred from patrilineal inheritance, as sons were more valued than daughters. In Ramabai's view the momentary agony of suffocation in the flames was nothing as compared to her lot as a widow (75).

Ramabai also analyzed the place of women in religion and society, arguing that although women are looked upon as inferior beings, as mothers they are honored. This honor, however, is surrounded by countless condemnations and restrictions placed upon them. She used a collection of proverbs from popular literature:

> What is cruel? The heart of a viper.
> What is more cruel than that? The heart of a woman.
> What is the cruelest of all? The heart of a soulless, penniless widow (57).

Chakravarti ("Whatever" 70) considered Ramabai's writings about the marital rights of men over their wives the sharpest part. It is in this chapter that Ramabai showed how the wife is classed with cows, mares, female camels, slave-girls, buffalo-cows, she-goats and ewes (60). By quoting from Manu, she outlined the complete rights of a husband over a wife and how the courts provided no relief for women as his rights were recognized by the law.

In the last chapter, Ramabai discussed how the condition of women tells upon society and made, according to Chakravarti ("Whatever" 72), a "remarkable correlation". If Hindu men are weak it is because their mothers were kept weak and sickly; what is more important is that because women have had years of submission behind them they have been converted into slavery-loving creatures. In Ramabai's words: "They are glad to lean upon any one and be altogether dependent, and thus it has come to pass that their sons as a race, desire to depend on some other nation and not upon themselves"(98). She concluded by talking about

psychological and not physical weakness; according to her, a subject womanhood could not be expected to produce anything better than a subject nation.

5.3. The British women

Phillipa Levine argues that one way to understand the Empire is to analyze it through a gendered perspective. The social isolation and struggles faced by Pandita Ramabai can be understood in Levine's (1) argument:

> Studying gender means, of course, far more than acknowledging the actions and presence of women, and more, too, than merely arguing that the British Empire was run by men in ways that they claimed were universal, but which materially differentiated on ground of sex as well as other kinds of social divisions.

As to the aforementioned notion of Indian women's inferiority, it is possible to understand the degraded position for women that was made abroad, especially when added to the imperialist ideology of western racial superiority, for the context of imperialism created a notion not only of women's inferiority to men, but also of Indian women's inferiority to western women.

The beginnings of the organized British women's movement at midcentury coincided with the apogee of British imperial preeminence. In this period, feminists worked for "reform in the political, social, and cultural arenas of late Victorian Britain" (Burton, *Burderns* 28) and demonstrated their allegiances to the imperial nation-state and revealed their imperial mentalities in a variety of ways. Feminist writers from the 1860s onward, such as Josephine Butler[18], Florence Nightingale[19], Mary Carpenter[20] "used what they and their contemporaries viewed as Indian women's plight as an incentive for British women's contributions to the imperial civilizing mission" (Burton, *Burdens* 36).

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[18] Butler (1828-1906) was a 19th century British social reformer, who played a major role in improving conditions for women in education and public health. (Duignan, Brian. *Judith Butler.* 2015. Web. Accessed on October 3rd, 2017).

[19] Nightingale (1820-1910) was a British nurse, statistician, and social reformer who was the foundational philosopher of modern nursing (Selanders, Louise. *Florence Nightingale.* Encyclopedia Britannica. 2017. Web. Accessed on October 3rd, 2017).

[20] Carpenter (1807-1877) was a British philanthropist, social reformer and founder of free schools for poor children. She supported the movement for higher education for women, and Indian social reform. (*Mary Carpenter.* Encyclopedia Britannica. 2007. Web. Accessed on October 3rd, 2017).

Regarding the role of British women in colonial India, they are usually located in their chosen variation of ‘civilizing mission’, or the White Woman’s Burden (Burton, *Burdens* 7). These white women’s burdens were portrayed as ‘helpless victims awaiting the representation of their plight at the hands of their sisters in the metropolis’ (Burton, *Burdens* 7). Their main concerns, which were the attention of British press and journals, such as the *Englishwoman’s Reviews*[21], were typical issues such as child marriage, the treatment of widows, practice of suttee, prison of zenana, which led to the creation of a ‘colonized female Other’. British feminists were eager to demonstrate their solidarity with colonial philanthropy and gave special attention to their role in Indian efforts. This image of the ‘colonized female Other’ became necessary from the point of view of British women suffragists and feminists, who sought to justify their demands for themselves in their own fatherlands and by justifying their intervention in the lives of their Oriental counterparts.

Relying heavily on Christian principles, the aforementioned Victorian feminists tried to justify the “notion of female moral superiority” (Burton, *Burdens* 40) linking both to the special righteousness of the British civilizing mission. In contrast to this vision as moral reformers as in their attitude towards Indian society, Metcalf (100) argues “the British could not escape the enduring contradiction between their self-imposed ‘civilizing mission’, with its ideal of an India remade in Britain’s image, and their insistence upon maintaining an imagined India of enduring ‘difference’.

Surely, the relationship between caste, gender and the state was transformed by the establishment of colonial rule and the impact of this transformation on cultural practices in the 19th century. Consequently British feminists trapped Indian woman in a circular utilitarian argument of their imperial ideology: “they need us to progress, they are making progress, we will remain until they’ve progressed, but they’ve never progressed sufficiently for us to say our time is up” (Burton, *Burdens* 119). Therefore, most of the work of the feminist reform in India from the decades between 1865 and 1915 was product of cultural, political, and racial superiority convictions of the British.

British feminists had a role to play in shaping Indian feminists perceptions of themselves and their conditions. This was largely due to the role the missionaries and the British governors had to play in establishing schools for women in Maharashtra. Many Indian women, including Pandita Ramabai, Cornelia Sorabji and Krupabai Sattianadhan, were able to reap the benefits of this education brought about through reforms from 1840s onward by

[21] The *Englishwoman’s Review* was a feminist periodical published in England between 1886 and 1910. It was a product of the early women’s movements.

the British along with the help of local reformers, such as Gopal Hari Deshmukh and Jyotirao Phule.

Yet it is not fair to say that the empire created feminism or that without imperialism colonial women would have been less feminist or incapable of feminist consciousness. This is particularly true in the case of Pandita Ramabai who had her disappointments and disillusionments regarding the condition of women much before she had contact with the Western 'ideas' as it was previously discussed here. Burton (*Burdens* 87) explains that "empire helped to shape the conditions under which imperial and colonial women articulated their claims for equality and citizenship, both differently and similarly, in the modern world". This may be regarded as one of the reasons that drove Ramabai out of England to seek support for her reform projects in America.

Ramabai's relationship with the British women was as complex as with the male figures since she "was unwilling to submit to any authority, English or Indian, male or female" (Flemming 102). The time she spent in England allowed her to experience what it meant to be the "colonized female Other" (Burton, *Burdens* 7) and the limitations placed on women's international solidarity by the constraints of imperial power relationships. Hence her resentfulness particularly of British women "who tried to impose their own lifestyle on her especially in terms of food and dress, and she frequently criticized them for being unwilling to make similar changes in their own lifestyles" (Flemming 101). Many features of English life appealed to her, but having rejected the Indian caste system by her marriage she was uncomfortable with the hierarchy of social classes in England as well as its religious intolerance, and the oppressiveness of the colonial relationship (Kosambi, "Returning the gaze" 6).

She was one of the few Indian women whom Anglo-American feminists met personally in their own land. Even though she contested the British women's representations and hence destabilized the myth of the passive Indian woman (Burton, *Burdens* 118), her career was followed closely in the columns of the *Englishwoman's Review.* Burton (*Burdens* 118), notes that there was a warm and unqualified admiration for Pandita Ramabai and her work:

> As an educated woman, a Christian convert and a social worker dedicated to improving the condition of her sisters in India, she became a heroine for many and the embodiment of the "best" qualities of "Eastern womanhood".

Despite this, it was only in America that she found the kind of democracy and the kind of women's education that she was looking for. "The national might of the United States", she wrote perhaps drawing an implicit contrast with Britain, "does not lie in standing army, cannon, and swords: it lies in the educational advancement and diligence of the nation's inhabitants" (Ramabai, *Through her own words* 139). She repeatedly voiced her appreciation of the USA's "anti-colonial ideology, and her admiration for its system of government and civil society, as well as its liberal and feminist thinking" (Kosambi, "Returning the gaze" 6).

The female East-West encounter between Ramabai and Sister Geraldine was a typical representation of how women's relationships to colonial power were staged in imperial culture in Britain, and most significantly, how they could be contested by an Indian woman at the very heart of the empire. Ramabai had found more sympathy and financial support among American women reformers than among her British 'sisters'. Burton ("Colonial Encounters" 30) commented:

> Despite the considerable rhetoric about British women's responsibility for Indian women among Victorian feminist activists, as well as a growing organizational commitment to improving women's conditions in India in late Victorian Britain, Ramabai returned to India without having found the kind of sisterly solidarity she had expected from British women.

The tangled relationship between Sister Geraldine and Pandita Ramabai is of great interest here not to deeply reinterpret the female colonial encounter but how this may or may have not influenced the construction of part of Ramabai's social identity and her feminist consciousness.

In Kosambi's ("Motherhood" 55) view, "If a motherly attitude towards Indian women came easily to British 'cultural' missionaries, spiritual motherhood of Indian converts presumably came even more naturally to Christian nuns". Therefore, "British imperialistic and Anglican Geraldine" (51) spontaneously assumed the role of a mother towards Ramabai (and of a grandmother towards Manorama), leaving the racially and culturally inferior stereotype to the convert. Their maternal relationship prospected smoothly since Ramabai had an empty space in her heart due to the loss of her beloved mother.

Ramabai saw in Geraldine a parental authority and showed respect and love in several occasion towards the Sister. For instance, she would end her letters to Geraldine with the formal Indian-style declaration of 'love and honor' (*Ajeebai*) and frequently assured her that

"I love you and respect you as my own mother and shall never forget your love and kindness and care" (*Letters*, 335).

Despite these ties of affection between the two, they had to struggle with several areas of friction. Firstly, Geraldine would never understand Ramabai's "innovative attempt to combine her new religion with her old culture" (Kosambi, "Motherhood" 56). Her close ties to India and her cultural assertiveness survived her conversion despite Geraldine's assumption of racial/cultural and moral superiority over the recent convert who was "courteous, gracious, perceptive, resourceful", but lacking in "all the strong virtues which Christian imparts – justice, strength, courage, truth, loyalty, etc" (*Letters* 404).

In *Letters,* the dominant subtext is Ramabai's alleged maternal inadequacies which appeared in Geraldine's letters and editorial comment and silenced Ramabai's own voice on the topic. Kosambi ("Motherhood" 58) also argued that Sister Geraldine tried to portray Ramabai as an antithesis of the ideal woman when, in the preliminary note of *Letters and Correspondence of Pandita Ramabai,* she recalled an event that had happened 25 years before.

> One day she appeared with little Mano in her arms, [and said:] "I have come to give her to you and you shall bring her up, she shall be yours", or words to that effect. How our hearts rejoiced at such a gift! It was indeed an overweight of joy to have so precious a little treasure to bring up for our dear Lord, and to make a child of the Heavenly Father. But our joy was of short duration. Within two hours the mother re-appeared to fetch the little daughter: "My friend will not hear of my parting with the child, and she has been very good to Mano and will miss her; so I have come to take her back". Sorrowfully, we gave up our little treasure (*Letters* 7-8).

For Kosambi ("Motherhood" 58), Geraldine attempted to construct an image of "an ambitious careerist and an irresponsible, unfeeling mother who would casually give away her child to Christian foreigners" and equally casually reclaim her at the insistence of an affectionate friend who possessed the natural motherhood instincts so wanting in Ramabai herself. As a result, Ramabai would be stigmatized as lacking in both Hindu and Christian maternal virtues.

Besides Sister Geraldine, Ramabai had a strong connection with the educator Dorothea Beale. The relationship between Pandita Ramabai and Miss Beale was not less important but definitely less complicated. She would have "empathic discussions with

Ramabai on the same topics yielded a warm and lasting friendship" (Kosambi, "Motherhood" 57).

Beale was responsible for caring and guiding Ramabai shortly after her conversion when the new convert was sent to establish residence at Cheltenham Ladies' College. According to Burton ("Colonial Encounters" 31), Ramabai was sent to Cheltenham not because of theological differences, but because the Sisters wished her to pursue her education. Just like Sister Geraldine, Beale was equally involved in shaping her spiritual direction and had convictions that Ramabai would in the end be "firmly established in the Christian faith" and fully able to preach conversion upon her return to India, but *only* if she could be persuaded to study Christianity as a philosophy". Beale continued:

> She cannot receive it merely as an historical revelation, it must also commend itself to her conscience… If she does not find someone to whom she can speak freely, she will be silent, and might easily pass into Unitarianism… I cannot help thinking that God has given me some preparation of mind and heart to help her with. (Letter from Miss Dorothea Beale to Sister Geraldine, April 1885, *Letters* 43).

While Beale was trying to reassure the Sisters about her capacity to help Ramabai, "her view of Christianity as a 'philosophy' can hardly have comforted Sister Geraldine" (Burton, "Colonial Encounters" 33). Consequently, Ramabai's spiritual education became something of a contest of authority between Beale and Sister Geraldine over which version of reform for women would prevail in India.

Despite their difference and their real concerns, both British women were not acting alone. Beale and Sister Geraldine were tied to the "late-Victorian social and political structures" and "each one was accountable ultimately to the patriarchal institutions which governed even (and perhaps especially) in 'progressive' late-Victorian England" (Vicinus 9).

Both women, each one in a different level, had a true purpose to Ramabai: "to be a soldier of the vast missionary army which advanced the spread of Christianity in Britain's empire" (Burton, "Colonial Encounters" 34). Hence their effort to set Ramabai straight and to be schooled in the correct forms of Christianity according to their point of view. But Ramabai's determination to speak in a "voice of my own" (Shah, *Letters* 50) became more and more clear and drove her away from the Anglican Christian orthodoxy and, by implication, Britain's moral and cultural hegemony as well.

In short, Ramabai's experience of 'sisterhood' during her time in England was more related to a conquest for authority *because* of its imperial context. As argued by Burton ("Colonial encounters" 39), "Solidarity between women of different nations, religions and cultures was not given by virtue of a common gender but could be, as Ramabai's own eloquence attests to, the product of self-determination, personal integrity and negotiation".

5.4. Ramabai's social identity between two worlds

Pandita Ramabai was the outcome of a cross-cultural experience, and consequently she had many identities. Her experience as a high-caste Indian woman, a widow, a single mother, and a champion for women's rights are of great value for those interested in learning about Indian women who have until lately been silent. Moreover, because of her relationship with both the West and India, she offered a new interpretation of both worlds.

Primarily, Ramabai "had initially operated within the prevalent patriarchal socio-cultural matrix, as seen from her advice to mothers in her book, *Stri Dharma Niti* (Morals for Women)" (Kosambi, "Motherhood" 53). Nevertheless, she was "extremely independent-minded in thought and in action" (Flemming 102) and certainly an exception to the stereotype of oppressed Indian woman that was internationally popular.

Her first female influence was of her own mother who had "tenderly lifted [her] from her bed upon the earth, and wakened [her] with many endearments and sweet mother-words" in her earliest years (Bodley xii). Moreover, her mother was the responsible for the little Ramabai's rigorous education. Definitely, her mother's presence and memory had been the "sole anchor in Ramabai's unsettled childhood and lonely adulthood" (Kosambi, "Motherhood" 54) in the patriarchal institution and ideology that she was rooted in.

Through all her life, she never looked angry at her own divided country. She looked at her own society, country and government and pointed out important lessons that India needed to learn. In Flemming's view (102), "[…] she rejected the prescribed roles for women of her *jati*, the social and religious barriers between the various *jatis*, and the domination of religious texts and rituals by males". Thus we find Ramabai turning the Western gaze but also the Indian conventional gaze, and at times defending India against the western gaze in a complex ideological negotiation.

Even though she was not the obvious dominant actor in any interaction, Ramabai took a leading position in the social reform with her motto being "self-reliance for women" (Kosambi, "Women" 47). By giving lectures, writing books, speaking to the Commission, she

grew in a scenario in which women were deliberately excluded from and India was subject to the Western gaze and judgment.

Flemming (103) argued:

> Respecting the English for their insistence on education for women and their allowance of greater physical freedom for women than most prevailing Hindu norms allowed, participating in their religion and controlling their language, she also strongly asserted her commitment to religious liberty and retained her ability to criticize the British government.

Differently from her relationship with British women, Ramabai found solidarity with American women and some Hindu women due to "their common struggle to understand the sources of knowledge production about woman and womankind and the hostility of men to many of their reforms" (Anagol 101), building among these women the concept of sisterhood that cut across caste, religion and nation. Ramabai Ranade is a clear example of this. When Hindu women rallied around Pandita Ramabai due to the accusations spread by powerful Maharashtrian politicians like B.G.Tilak, Ramabai Ranade showed her support visiting her with gifts for her pupils, as well as ensuring that they personally escorted widows who wished to study at her institutions (Anagol 101). Moreover, at a time when very few people had sympathy for Pandita Ramabai, Hindu female leaders were willing to forgive her conversion on the grounds that her institutions were alleviating the miseries of countless widows and deserted wives and female orphans. Ramabai also returned the affections demonstrated by Hindu women in equal measure by encouraging those who were just starting their careers through favorable book reviews. Between 1880 to 1920 Maharashtrian feminists such as Pandita Ramabai, Rambai Ranade, Anandibai Joshi were regularly subjects in articles by women writers in the women's press. As an example of this strategy in practice is Rukmini Sanzgiri, whose works on knitting and crocheting were publicized by Pandita Ramabai in the journals and adopted in her school (Anagol 103).

Regarding the American women, Ramabai developed a notion of sisterhood that was not in a context of authority because of an imperial context in comparison to British women. Thank to her "appreciation to the United States' anti-colonial ideology, and her admiration for its system of government and civil society, as well as its liberal and feminist thinking" (Kosambi, "Returning" 6), Ramabai could make not only a sincere friendship and sisterhood

with American women, but also “feminist connections across the racial-cultural divide, partly through the shared bond of Christianity” (Kosambi, “Returning” 5).

Despite the accusations she had to face (both from Indians and British), her doubts and conflicts that went beyond the ecclesiastical hierarchy, Ramabai embraced the message of Christianity and dedicated her life in the quest of improving women’s situation and to free herself from the authorities, both religious and cultural. Anagol (20) suggested that Ramabai could be understood as one of the Indian Christian women in the era of social and religious reform movements who became Christian by questioning the position of women in the dominant religion of their birth and time, Hinduism, before rejecting it in favor of Christianity. Being both empowered and detached from Brahmin culture and aspects of Western culture she was poised between two worlds regarding her social identity in the same way with the religious identity.

In this sense, India was the community she primarily identified with and the first one she struggled with, whereas Imperial England provided a new perspective not only in religion but also socially. However,

> in pursuit of her emancipationist goals, Pandita Ramabai could not comfortably remain at the heart of the empire. Imperial England proved to be inhospitable ground for her developing reform consciousness. That she chose to leave and seek support elsewhere is not evidence of failure, but rather of informed and critical resistance—a gesture remarkably free of bitterness or recrimination on her part (Burton, “Colonial encounters” 43).

In short, Ramabai’s position at the intersections of several communities allowed her writings and personality to introduce the colonial space from an insider’s perspective and the Western world to Indians from the outsider’s perspective. Besides that, her writings were in clear contrast to the typical British discourses[22] on the “other” and the ways of representing Indian culture. Above all, her extremely complex personality was a product of a conscious selection of norms and values of several different and at least partially competing Indian and European communities.

[22] To illustrate this, it is possible to consider the narratives from Rudyard Kipling to women prose writers, such as Annie Besant, Mary Carpenter, Flora Annie Steel, among others, who contributed to the construction of both the colonized – the “others” – and the colonial identities.

6. Conclusion

Throughout this thesis it was possible to build some conclusions about aspects in Pandita Ramabai's writings, namely her self-construction and self-identity being a subject clearly standing between two worlds and her struggle to select the values and norms of several different and at least partially competing Indian and European communities.

Beyond that, the biographical aspects of her life and the historical framework proved to be determinant to understand her and her contribution to intellectual history and women's studies. Chapter 2, "India and Britain, showed how movements and ideologies, such as Romanticism, Utilitarianism, Liberalism, shaped the course of the relationship between the two countries. Moreover, the Christian missions and reforms of late nineteenth century were product of all the ideological transformation occurred from the beginning of the East India Company to its end after the Great rebellion and helped to promote the causes of evangelical Christianity and/or Utilitarian rationality. Special emphasis also laid upon the importance of these socio-educational reforms in creating ground for the élite Indian intelligentsia who would seek for changes and later for independence.

With an overall understanding of the historical framework, it was possible to move on to the life and work of Pandita Ramabai in Chapter 3 and to establish that her family had great influence in shaping her personality, as well as her strong belief that education was the pillar of change in a society. The fact that her father supported women's education and cared little for what people said, doing what he thought was right, were strong features that marked Pandita Ramabai throughout her life and in her quest for improvement as an educated, enlightened, a social reformer and a champion for women educational and emancipation. Moreover, due to the family's pilgrimage life, she was able to learn and see different aspect of the Hindu system of religion and the daily lives of the people in her country, enabling her to be a more astute critic of nationalist reform and of British imperial civilizing mission. In the same chapter, the section "Review of research" outlined the importance of works about Ramabai from Western Christians to contemporary writers who had and still do explore her complex self and contribution through different perspectives.

Overcoming all the hardships she had to face throughout her life, it was learned that this unique individual constructed her self-identity from two areas of tension that are tangled and inseparable.

Firstly, as shown in Chapter 4, her self-construction also arose from the tensions of her complex religious identity. The chapter explored the path and position of Ramabai regarding

her religious identity. From her childhood as a daughter of a very orthodox Hindu – and yet a reformer in his own way, as it was said earlier – to a Christian convert, it was possible to trace a panorama of her early connections and disappointments with Hinduism and her tights and confrontation to Christianity. As it was analyzed here, her biographical documents show that she certainly 'converted' on a factual level, changed her mind and got the freedom to choose among a set of norms and values. Christianity was the only way to have a religious identity, as her Brahmanism and belonging to her birth community was the very reason to be looked down upon and an object of critique, as a woman, and later as a convert. She solved the paradox by making her own religion centered on the sole figure of Christ and the Bible, to avoid assimilation within the institutionalized Christianity. Her solution was to live an inner religion – the religion of no established religion, by combining her new Christian ideas with old Indian culture thus defining her own identity and spiritual path. Moreover, this solution brought to her mind and heart her true mission: social transformation. For her, this could not be separated from prayer, "I realized after reading the fourth chapter of St. John's Gospel, that Christ was truly the Divine Savior he claimed to be, and no one but He could transform and uplift the downtrodden women of India… Thus my heart was drawn to the religion of Christ" (Ramabai, *Testitomy* 26).

At last, but not least, in chapter 5, after some conceptual clarification of feminism, caste and gender norms in the nineteenth-century colonial India, an overview of the Maharastrian society and the position of the High-caste Indian woman was explored. Following this, the chapter suggested that Ramabai had to struggle hard to define her own identity in the complex relationship with Westerners and with Victorian British culture in particular. Her biography, especially her letters, depicts a unique situation of decisions and options. Pandita Ramabai could be a kind of Hindu in England, and a kind of Christian in India. A close attention to this collection reveals the main clashes of cultural misunderstanding and how she managed to find in the letter writing a way of convincing her English friends, and no doubt herself as well, of the rightness of her particular choices. When addressing to literate Western women and men, she articulated a different and particular view of the 'other' Indian women. In this sense, her life accomplishments have shown that despite her divided position, she was a mean of change and transformation.

It's exactly because she was not rooted in any one community that she was able to construct herself and provide a new paradigm for Indian Women. Primarily, she elected and modelled a socially useful role for widows, i.e., away from the seclusion and concentration of tradition. Furthermore, she demonstrated how education and control of written discourse may

empower women. Last of all, her serious commitment to religion demonstrated how a religious choice could offer possibilities for change. Flemming (103) argued that "[s]he worked for incremental change in Indian culture, pressing for and modelling in her own life significant changes in a few key aspects of women's lives".

By no means can it be claimed that Pandita Ramabai's multifaceted personality was fully assessed here. There are definitely several other perspectives that would be of great value for exploration and study. For instance, how she negotiated her way through a triangle of international network (American society, Britain and India), and the similarities and differences in her relation with both American and British women. Another alternative of line of research would be to trace a parallel of Ramabai's and Malala Yousafzai's[23] struggles for women's education. Even though both are separated by several years, there are innumerous 'coincidences' in their lives and, above all, the common quest for improvement through education.

At the end of the day, we hope that this dissertation will contribute to create further interest in Pandita Ramabai's life and writings.

[23] Malala Yousafzai, born July 12, 1997, Mingora, Swat Valley, Pakistan), is an activist who, while a teenager, spoke out publicly against the Taliban's prohibition on the education of girls. She gained global attention when she survived an assassination attempt at age 15. In 2014 Yousafzai were awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace recognizing their efforts on behalf of children's rights (Blumberg, Naomi. "Malala Yousafzai". *Encyclopedia Britannica.* Web. Accessed on September 13th, 2017).

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