

**Introduction to Modern Indian Political Thought**  
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**Lecture – 26**  
**Pandita Ramabai: Gender and Caste**

Hello and welcome friends to this second and concluding lecture on Pandit Ramabai. Today, we are going to discuss reviews specifically on caste and gender through two of her significant writings *Stri Dharma Niti*, which we have partially discussed in our previous lecture, and also high-caste Hindu women. So, through these text we will try to understand her views on gender and caste.

And we will also try to focus on how her views from a kind of orthodox, conventional approach to the role of women in how within that role the condition of women can be improved and emancipated. To a more radical approach to women's emancipation developed in her thought or in her views on women's emancipation.

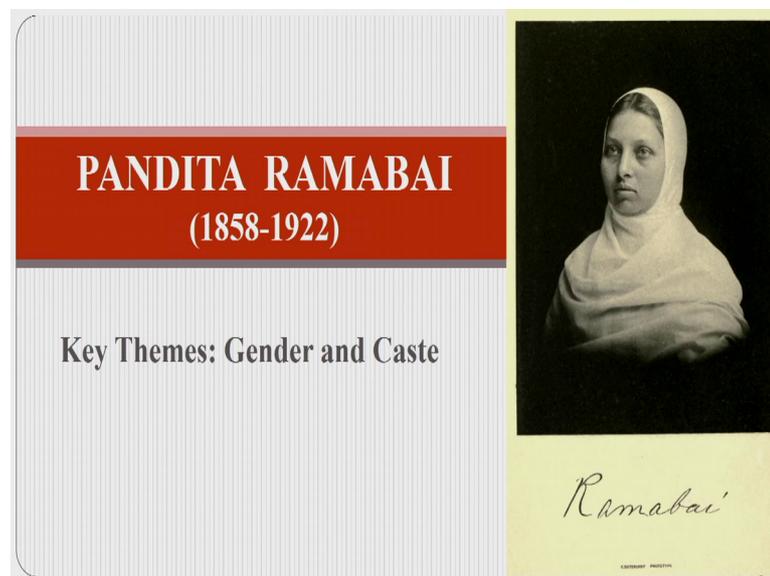
So, in Ramabai you see a kind of evolution or a transition from a kind of more conventional approach, which was more or less similar to say male counterpart reformers in 19th century India. We were also talking about women education, women reforms or emancipation. Ramabai more or less started with this similar approach to the question of women emancipation and gradually developed her on radical views on gender question or emancipation of women. So, there is a kind of transition in our thought, which we will discuss.

Then we will also see her views or discuss our views on the caste question, and also especially the women from the lower-caste, what is her thought about that and what are the criticisms against Ramabai views and then we will finally conclude. Now, to begin today's lecture one need to understand the extraordinary lives she lead in the 19th century and her evolution or her transition from a higher-caste Brahmin women marrying to someone outside the caste Prisk, Crimson. Her travels to different parts of India and also to the world, which was extraordinary considering the prevailing orthodoxy and conservatism, which prevents even male Hindu travelling across the sea, and she went to England and also in America and also to Japan in the east.

So, her wide travel her unconventional or in many ways radical personal life, her conversion to Christianity allow her to embody many challenges or many issues that women's were facing too she and encounter them first in. And then to reflect upon those and develop her on thought and throughout her life she remains honest or she remains committed to her on consigns more than anything else. And her on consigns as she has argued, and we have discussed in our previous lecture becomes the basis of her understanding of religion, hierarchy rule of women and how the condition of women can help in creating a better society or a better nation.

So, she has her on subjectivity, her on thinking, and that thinking and subjectivity was guided by her on consigns more than anything else. And she continue to evolve her thought and reflect upon many of the challenges. So, from a orthodox upper caste Hindu women to a religious convert, to a social reformer and a thinker Ramabai had truly a remarkable and extraordinary life in 19th century India. And she continue to be a pillar of a strength in many women's struggle or feminist movement across the India.

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**Ramabai on Gender**

- The entire life of Ramabai was devoted to the cause of women's emancipation. She passionately championed the rights of women through her writings and social works.
- However, there are drastic transitions and evolutions in her views on patriarchy in caste Hindu society. This also helped in shaping various works she undertook over the years for the emancipation of women. Such transitions in her visions can be easily traced if one closely studies her works and writings.
- Two of her major works *Stri Dharma Niti* (1882) and *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* (1887) also establishes this transitions in her thought where she engages with the questions of caste and gender in Hindu society. These texts are representative of different stages in Ramabai's life and ideology which deals with her views on gender and its underlying system of patriarchy.

Now, to look at her role her views on gender, find as we have discussed it in our previous lecture that she was committed; she has a lifelong passion commitment towards women's empowerment or women's emancipation. So, the entire life of Ramabai was devoted to the cause of women's emancipation. And she passionately championed the rights of women through her writings and social works, which she under took in the later years of her life.

What we also find is there are as I was I was saying drastic transitions and evolution in her views on patriarchy in the caste Hindu society. So, her views on caste the women question, the role of women in society or in family was not something, which was aesthetic. She developed her thought, she evolved her thought and in later years rectified many of her earlier positions what women women's role and the role of religion or religious text in empowering the women and also.

So, there is a kind of drastic transitions and evolution in her views on patriarchy in Hindu society. This also help in shaping various works she under took over the years for the emancipation of women. And this transition in her vision on orthodoxy or women emancipation or patriarchy in Hindu society one can easily traced if one closely studies her works and writings.

So, two of her major works the *Stri Dharma Niti*, which she wrote in 1882, which is the first text where she argues about women's emancipation and how women can uplift her a

status in the family or in the society within the religious or cultural conventional views about the role of women. And there she was arguing by following to such conventional understanding about the role of women in society and family. So, the two of her major works is *Stri Dharma Niti* and the high caste Hindu women, which was published in 1887, when she travel to England, and from England to US.

Ah that is the these two text also establishes this transition in her thought, where she engages with the question of caste and gender in Hindu society. And this text are representative of different stages in Ramabai's life and ideology which deals with her views on gender and its underlying system of patriarchy especially in the caste Hindu society. So, in the first takes you will find her more conventional in terms of articulating the role of women and a status of women within the society and the household and how women can improve her status in such given role.

In the second text, which is more mature she clearly departed from many of her earlier positions and argued for radical reforms in terms of social status of women or the family status of women or arguing even for the assertion of agency or independence of women about taking decisions, which has influence not just in her personal life, but also in the life of community or the nation.

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**Views on Gender in *Stri Dharma Niti***

- *Stri Dharma Niti* was her first text on reforming the degrading conditions of women in Hindu society. In this text, like her male counterparts, she took on her shoulders the responsibility of enlightening women and improving their status in the society. She wrote in the preface: *The women of this country, being totally helpless and lacking in education, do not understand how to achieve their own welfare; it is therefore necessary for learned people to explain it to them and make them conduct themselves accordingly.*
- She argued that lack of education and ignorance about the *Shastras* were major reasons for the deplorable conditions of women. She, therefore continued her emphasis on education in her later writings. In later phase of her life, however, she changed much of her views and positions on role of *Shastras* and its education in improving the conditions of women in India.
- In *Stri Dharma Niti* she regarded woman as capable of self-improvement and progress. And in order to achieve that she advised them on various aspects of life such as the need of education; modesty; appropriate conduct for brides; domestic duties; and on nurturing children.

Look at *Stri Dharma Niti* and through that text we try to understand Ramabai's views on gender. We find that this is the first text on reforming the degrading condition of women

in Hindu society. And in this text, like her male counterparts, she took up on her shoulders the responsibility of enlightening women and improving their status in the society. So, this is a kind of approach, which she shares with many of her male counterparts, who were also involved in reforming the women condition providing them education. And took upon themselves the responsibility to provide education, to improve the status of women in the society.

Ramabai in this text took more or less similar approach on the question of women reforms and women emancipation. And this she wrote in the preface of this text where she writes, the women of this country being, totally helpless and lacking in education, do not understand how to achieve their own welfare. It is therefore necessary for the learned people to explain it to them and make them conduct themselves accordingly. First, the role of those literate or learned in empowering women or in providing education to the women, so that they can understand their role better, they can perform their role better.

But, here the point is that the conduct that the these women have to abide by is something, which is already prescribed by the society or it is already given. So, there is no acknowledgement or the role of women in deciding upon these conducts and their role which is prescribed by society. So, this is the kind of conventional approach and many of her prescriptions or kind of advice to the women for performing their rules in the society or in the community is something she has taken from her religious centric approach towards the question of women and women reforms.

So, she argued that lack of education and ignorance about the Shastras were the major reasons for the deplorable conditions of women in India. So, she was having kind of religious cultural approach to this whole question of women reforms and women emancipation, where she argued that the deplorable condition of women are mainly because of their lack of knowledge or ignorance about the Shastras, so if Shastras are accessible to them. And this question we have discussed in our previous lecture, where women were prohibited to read prohibited to even get education. And to allow them to read Sanskrit literature or Shashtra is something which was unimaginable or unthinkable.

So, Pandit Ramabai because of the progressive outlook of her parents especially her father were allowed to learn Sanskrit. And she was very familiar with many of the Sanskrit retises and has a mastery over the language. And therefore, she was given this

Pandita and Saraswathi title by the university of Calcutta, which we have discussed. She wanted the Indian women to have the knowledge of Shastras and this knowledge will allow them to improve their social and family status and also improve their life. So, she following those lines she argued that the lack of education and ignorance about the Shastras were the major reasons for deplorable condition of women.

And she therefore, continued her emphasis on education in her later writings. And the education becomes the very basis for women's transformation and women's emancipation in Ramabai's works. And writings throughout her lives, we consider the education as one of the major tool or instrument for bringing about transformation in women life and intern in the life of society and community.

So, in later phase of her life, however she change much of her views and positions that she has expressed in the states such as role of Shastras and it is education in improving the condition of women. So, many of her positions and the arguments, she has changed in later years of life. And she developed a very critical approach towards Shastras, which actually perpetuate the divides and the inferior condition of women in Hindu society and family.

In Stri Dharma Niti, she regarded women as capable of self-improvements and progress. And in order to achieve that she advise them on various aspects of life such as; we need of education; modesty, appropriate conduct for brides, domestic duties and also what nurturing children. So, her advice was moulded by her belief in religious teachings Shastras and also the cultural or social sign role to the women. And within that a signed role how to improve the status of women that was the major task of Ramabai through this through this text Stri Dharma Niti.

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- Her positioning of woman appears somewhat contradictory in this book. She opposed child marriage; supported the freedom of man and woman in choosing their life partners; and marriage after attaining appropriate age. She also described the complementary role of man and woman in society. However, she also argued that complete independence is the basis of happiness for women.
- But, in the same book she also advised the wife to not to disobey her husband presuming that domestic works as the sole responsibility of women she posited somewhat inferior status of women in the household.
- In this text, Ramabai's position appears to be in "conformity to convention and an emergent feminism". Her approach was not very different from contemporary male reformers - emphasizing upon the need of education for women's emancipation but unable to surpass the immediate gender roles ascribed upon women by the society.

Her positioning of women in this text appear somewhat contradictory as I was saying. She opposed child marriage in this text and supported the freedom of men and women in choosing their life partners and marriage after attaining appropriate age. So, child marriage or after attainment of certain age which something, which she championed in this text and she also described in this text the complementary role of men and women in society in family or in the progress or in a strengthening of the community or nation.

However, she also argued that the complete independence is the basis of happiness for women. So, the absolute independence of women she has argued, but somewhat did not develop or explore properly in this text focusing more on the given or assign role of women. However, when she acknowledge or identify that the complete independence is the basis of women's independence.

She went on to advise the wife to not to disobey her husband's and presuming that the domestic work as the sole responsibility of the women, she posited somewhat inferior status of women in the house hold. And this is the somewhat contradictory or immature proposition in this text, which she later developed and which we will discuss her next text.

So, in this text Ramabai's position appears to be in conformity to the conventional, as I was saying the conventional religious assign role of the women and emergent feminism, so that is the beginning or the kind of starting point. So, very entry of Ramabai into the

field of political, public, social so social religious reformer is something which was radical. Considering the status of women and male dominated public arena in India.

So, her very entry into the public, political life and to argue for the women reforms and women emancipation and to identify the independence of women, as the basis of her happiness is something radical in itself. So, we find in this text the beginning of a feminist or feminism. Her approach was not very different from the contemporary male reformers as we have been discussing and emphasizing upon the need of education for women's emancipation, but unable to surpass the immediate gender roles ascribed upon women by the society.

So, in this text, however she more or less followed the conventional or her male counterparts approach to the women's reforms or women's emancipation question, where they are arguing for women's education, but that to argument do not extend to transcend the limits or to the roles set up on a set up on women by the society. So, the women and their a space was already set, already limited by the society.

And there in this text or many by many of her male social reformers, they did not really argue to transcend such roles for the over man and acknowledge in their writings or in their work. The independence of women to take decisions that is related to their life or death is about their personal life, so that things develop much later. And in Ramabai also she continue to look at the question of women and emancipation from the same approach as her many male contact as parts we are looking at.

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**Ramabai's radical feminism in *The High-Caste Hindu Woman***

- It was written in 1887 after she went to England and converted to Christianity. Giving an account of the plight of high caste Hindu widows it appealed to the people of West for helping her opening a shelter home for them. It is in this book that Ramabai's emancipatory feminism took a radical stance.
- According to Ramabai Hindu sacred laws divide a caste Hindu woman's life into three stages: childhood, married life and old age or widowhood. And accordingly assigns her father, husband and son responsibility to look after her as she is seen as incapable of living an independent life. Ramabai explained how in all three stages she is oppressed by social customs.
- She stated that, in India, male child is desired since he is regarded as the only means of salvation. Girl child is unwanted as she is thought to be the property of someone else and is of no use for her parents in their old age. Moreover the pressure on the family of marrying the daughter within a fixed age; with a person equal or higher to their clan; and expenses that a Hindu marriage incurs made girl child unwanted. Practice of female infanticide was therefore very high.

Now, we find this emergent feminism in Ramabai turned into a radical feminism in her text *The High-Caste Hindu Women*. And this says also to do with her exposure to different cultures, to different language, to different society and also religion. So, this text she wrote once she was converted to Christianity. And it was written in 1887, when at the age of around 30 she travel to England and stayed there for 3 years and from England she went to US and stayed there for 3 years mobilizing the support and financial support for her reformers back in India.

So, in this text we find Ramabai's more mature articulation about status of women and the question of women emancipation and also kind of critical approach to the many religious text including Hindu Shastras. So, it was written in 1887, when she went to England and converted to Christianity. And giving an account of the plight of the high caste Hindu widows or women, it appealed to the people of west for helping her opening a shelter home for them in India. And it is in this book Ramabai emancipatory feminism took a radical turn or radical stance.

So, this text in itself become very popular and especially till then the question of social reforms and religious reforms, where the domain of male reformers. And they were also talking or arguing for the women reforms or women education. But, this text where she critically argued an articulated the condition of women and how to improve their condition was something which was very widely popular and celebrate in text and

considering its publication in 1887, make it is a remarkable contribution in social and religious reforms movement and thinking in modern India.

In this text, Ramabai argued that Hindu sacred laws or texts divide a caste Hindu women's life into three a stages that is childhood, married life and old age or widowhood. So, these three stages of caste Hindu women life as divided by Hindu text or Hindu laws. Ramabai argues that the same text accordingly assigns her father, in her childhood husband in her married life and son during her old age or widowhood, the responsibility to look after her as she is seen as incapable of living an independent life.

So, this is something which is a kind of radical approach in Ramabai from a more conventional orthodox approach to the question of women and talking about the morals or Niti of women and how that can help in improving the status of women. To developing a more critical and radical approach to identify the root cause of the women status, which divides according to Ramabai women's life's into three phases. And then accordingly assign different male to look after her life to give them the responsibility, to look after her life as she is seen as inherently innately incapable of leading her on independent life.

And that she found very problematic. And she went on to explain how all these three stages from her life is riddled with or replete with lot of exploitative or thought trust practices, customs and rituals to which the women are subjected to from the very childhood. She has stated that in India and that has the implication on the thinking or preference about male and female child.

And that we see even in our contemporary times the preference of male child, of course to a great extent it has improved. The role of women and participation of women in many sphere of our public professional, political life has enormously changed, but thinking about her time. We can find her approach or her articulation was very articulative or very insightful.

So, she is stated that in India, male child is desired since he is regarded as the only means of salvation to his family or his father especially. And girl child is unwanted as she is thought to be the property of someone else and is of no use for her parents in their old age. So, this is kind of both psychological emotional on the one hand or religious on the

one hand, and material on the other. So, a male child can help or expected to help his parents or his father not to attain salvation after this life.

But, also to help them in their old age or the in comparison to that the female child is seen as something as a property of someone else, who cannot help their her parents in their old age. So, besides right the pressure of the family of marrying the daughter within a fixed age. So, even before the (Refer Time: 24:33) the marriage or such practices in caste Hindu society with a person equal or higher to their plan or their status. And expenses that a Hindu marriage in curse made the girl child unwanted and undesired by. And therefore, there was the practices of female infanticide, which was very high during that time.

So, the overall implication of such preferences, the social structure, the religious basis of such inferior status of women is something, which we find very fascinating in her thought about the condition of women in how to women spirit. So, she has identified the real cause of or the root cause of women's conditions and their subordinates subordinate condition, how to then empower them or emancipate them from such structural a exploitation of women.

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➤ Even after all these hindrances, if a daughter is born; she is never treated equally or with respect. Despite of all, comparing her probable condition in married life and widowhood, Ramabai considers childhood as “the heyday of a Hindu woman’s life”.

➤ Early marriage puts the girl child in the exploitative family system even before the end of her childhood. After marriage, she is considered the property of her husband and his family; thus not allowing any subjectivity of her own. She enters her husband’s home not as an equal partner but as the lowest in the family hierarchy and continues to serve it in whatever ways it wants her to.

➤ But it is not the worst until widowhood arrives. It is the most dreaded period for a high caste Hindu woman, argues Ramabai. Widowhood is viewed as the punishment for the crimes which the woman had committed in her past lives, thus justifying the inhuman torture that society subjected her to in the present life.

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So, even after all these hindrances, which we have just discussed, if a daughter is born, she is never treated equally or with respect. And despite of all, comparing her probable

condition in married life and widowhood, Ramabai considers childhood as the heyday or the best days of a Hindu women life.

So, from the very early childhood, once Hindu women is married, this is usually at a very early age of 8 to 12 years. So, early marriage puts the girl child, even considering the overall condition of women or status of women. Ramabai did consider childhood as the best part or best years of a Hindu caste women Hindu caste women life. And even that is taken away by the early marriage. So, before the end of her childhood, she is married to other family and after marriage, she is considered the property of her husband, and his family. As we have discussed about the Hindu laws, how the responsibility to look after the women shifts from father to husband and then husband to son.

So, once she is married to another family, she is now treated as the property of her husband and his family. Thus not allowing any subjectivity or independence of women of their own. And in this households she is not treated as an equal partner, but as the lowest in the family hierarchy, and has to serve that family in whatever capacity or whatever ways that family or that household desire. So, this is the absolute condition of subjugation even before the end of the childhood, the caste Hindu women is married to another family, where she is treated as a property.

And denied any subjectivity or independence of her own in the family, she is there merely to serve or merely to fulfil the desire and role that is set for the other members of that family. So, in the hierarchy or the in the hierarchy of the household, she is treated as the lowest in the household of her husband. So, however compared to her childhood or marriage day what Ramabai found more dreadful or more worse or the most challenging phase of a caste Hindu women's life is her widowhood.

So, it is not the worst until widowhood arrives. And it is the most dreaded period of High- Caste Hindu Women, argues Ramabai. Widowhood for a caste Hindu women is viewed or seen by the society as the punishment for the crimes or sins, she committed in her past life, thus justifying the in human torture or subjugation or operation of women that society subjected the women in her present life.

So, the condition of widow and their treatment in the society was so in human. So, dreadful that Ramabai consider, it as the worst phase of a of a caste Hindu women's life. And that subject hurt to a torture or a subhuman or in human life and that is justified in

the name of the past sins that such women have committed. So, in other words this system or this inhuman treatment of women in the present life is justified in the name of the sins or crimes, she have commit she had committed in her previous life. So, there is then the no sympathy or no compass compassion for the widowed life in that society. And therefore, the condition of women in the caste in the society was more dreadful than her treatment during her marriage years or in her childhood certainly.

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- Ramabai, in this context, illustrates the practice of sati. She conveys how sati is the result of the misreading and misinterpretation of the Vedas by the priestly class. Referring to the account of Max Muller, Ramabai too argues that in the Rig Veda there is no hymns that suggests self-immolation of the widows. Instead it advised her to go back to the earthly life.
- Ramabai believed that women had a better status in the past which had been degraded in contemporary period. She relates this degradation in the status of women with the degradation of the Hindu nation as such. This she explained in the light of the affect of marginalised and deprived women on the progeny. Drawing on the pre-natal influences on a child, Ramabai argued that an unhealthy and depressed mother cannot give birth to a healthy child.
- Moreover, ignorance on the part of women also prevents any liberal men to take progressive actions in both the household and in the society. Deplorable conditions of woman thus affects the progress of men, society and nation too.

So, Ramabai in this context illustrates the practices of Sati. So, this question we have discussed, when we were discussing Raja Ram Mohan Roy and how it was legally prohibited during the colonial rule. So, she conveys how sati is the result of misreading and misinterpretation of Vedas by the priestly class. And referring to the works of Max Muller, she also argue that in the Rig Veda there is no hymns that suggest self-immolation of widows. In fact, this text advisor to go back to the earthly life and not to commit sati along with her husband as widely, it was prevalent during her time.

So, Ramabai believed that the women had a better status, therefore in the past following this Shastric or the Vedic text and their prescription of women. And divide of such knowledge to the large masses, which is control or which is under the command or a priestly class, which misinterpret or misread such text. And perpetuate such in human practices such as sati or justify the torture or the in human condition of women can be prohibited if they have right interpretation or access to the these text.

So, Ramabai believed that the women had a better status in the past, which had been degraded or degenerated in contemporary period. And this she relates to the degradation of the Hindu nation as such. And this she shares with many of the contemporary social religious reformers, and their vocabulary to use ancient past or glorious past as a response to the colonial challenges and to reform the there a contemporary degrading society in terms of women's education, widow remarriage a lot of reforms that we have seen or heard about during that that face.

So, Ramabai also say some of those consciousness some of those insights to relate the degenerated condition of women in her times is a synonymous with the degeneration of Hindu nation as such and the vice versa. So, then the reform or the strengthening of the condition of women will help in the a strengthening of the Hindu nation also. So, this she explained in the light of the affect of marginalized and deprived women on their progeny. So, drawing on the pre-natal influence on a child, Ramabai argue that an unhealthy and depressed mother cannot give birth to a healthy child and that will affect the strength or the status of community or nation as such.

So, moreover ignorance on the part of women also prevents any liberal men to take progressive actions in both the household or in the society. And deplorable condition of women thus affects the progress of men, society and nation or too. So, she saw the a status of women and improvement for better in the larger contacts of family society and nation as well. And this she relates with the condition of women and how that condition influence the status of a family society and a nation. And therefore, why there is a need to improve the condition of women, which will ultimately improve the condition of society and nation as well.

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**The path of women's emancipation**

- Ramabai, in addition to portraying the marginalised upper caste Hindu women, paid equal attention on how to uplift their conditions. She explained three ways of doing that: a) Self-reliance, b) Education, and c) Native women teachers.
- She argued that the upper caste Hindu women is forced to stay within the household for her entire life and thus the scope for her being self-reliant is completely removed. She is made dependent on the male members of the family which often lead to her exploitations and oppressions. She stressed upon the need of self-reliance and urged the 'Western sisters' to teach them in this matter.
- Ramabai explained how women are deprived of education that affects their overall progress. She stated that any passion for reading in a girl child was ridiculed, her marriage in early childhood shuts off the door of her further education and so on.

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So, Ramabai in addition to portraying or identifying the marginalised upper caste Hindu women, paid equal attention on how to uplift their conditions. And she explained three ways of doing that one was self-reliance, 2nd education, and 3rd the native women teachers. So, she argued that the upper caste Hindu women is forced to a stay within the household for her entire life and thus the scope for her being self-reliant is completely remove.

There is no scope for her to develop any self-reliance in a condition where for her entire life she is made dependent on others. Now, she is made dependent on the male members of the family, which often lead to exploitations and operations. And she therefore, Ramabai stressed upon the need of self-reliance and urged the Western sisters to teach them in this matter.

So, she not just identified the root cause of the degrading a status of women in Hindu caste society, but also to improve their condition and to emancipate them from such subjugated condition. The first important task is to teach them self-reliance and not to as she has argued in her previous text Dharma Niti to improve her conduct in the given role by the society. Here she is arguing more about this self-reliance as a way for work for women emancipation and social transformation.

So, Ramabai explained how women are deprived of education that affects their overall progress. And this in turn had influence in society or community and their status as well.

So, stated that any person for reading in girl child was ridiculed and her marriage in early childhood shuts off the door for her future education and so on.

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➤ Explaining the affects of lack of education, Ramabai wrote: *Shut in from the world and destitute of the ability to engage in newspaper and useful book-reading, they have little or no knowledge of common things around them, and of the most important events that are daily occurring in their own or foreign lands . Ignorant unpatriotic, selfish and uncultivated, they drag the men down with them into the dark abyss where they dwell together without hope, without ambition to be something or to do something in the world.*

➤ As a solution to the problem of lack of education, Ramabai stressed on the need of native women teachers. She thought that for spreading knowledge to the Indian women neither male members of their own race nor any female teachers from foreign land were appropriate. The diffusion of knowledge should come from within and therefore only native women teachers were regarded as suitable for this task.

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So, explaining the effects of lack of education, Ramabai wrote shut in from the world and destitute of the ability to engage in newspaper and useful book-reading, they have little or no knowledge of common things around them. And of the most important events that are daily occurring in their own or foreign lands. Ignorant unpatriotic, selfish and uncultivated, they drag the men down with them into the dark abyss where they dwell together without hope, without ambition to be something or to do something in the world.

So, in this paragraph Ramabai articulates the implication of lack of education note a just on women, but also on man society and nation as a whole, where this lack of education makes the women ignorant unpatriotic and selfish and also uncultivated. And that leads to a lack of participation or social or public spirit to become something to contribute in a positive way in the society or to make a society better society or a just society or to influence the world.

So, the life and the a status of men and women in a society, which prevent or prohibit. Women to acquire knowledge to access education do not allowed in them a consensus or an awareness about the world outside, to think about the world and the happening outside in a meaningful way and then carve or there on a space there on contribution in the

society, in the world and to help in shaping the world in a better way. So, in the lack of lack of education has implication not just on the life of women, but also in the life of overall society and community.

So, as a solution to this problem of lack of education, Ramabai stress on the need of native women teachers, so that is the third solution that she provided. Why native women teachers, because she thought that for spreading knowledge to the Indian women, where the parents were not willing to send their daughters or female member in the household to a school, which is taught or where there are male teachers or the foreign teachers in the fear of conversion or the harmful impact of a teaching, which is foreign or which is very different from there on cultural or religious teachings.

So, Ramabai thought that for a spreading knowledge to the Indian women neither male members of their own race nor any female teachers from a foreign land, where appropriate or suitable. And the diffusion of knowledge should come from within and therefore the only native women teachers, so she wanted to train. A number of native women's to teach the large illiterate or destitutes women and to give them vocational training or to enable them to rely on themselves or to inculcate in them the value of self-reliance. So, that is something Ramabai undertook with first identifying the value of self-reliance, then to identify the role of education in inculcating that value of self-reliance in the women and then the role of native women teachers to inculcate such education and to inculcate such value of self-reliance in the Indian women.

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**Ramabai on Caste**

- In her autobiographical account, *A testimony of Our Inexhaustible Treasure*, Ramabai reflects on various phases of her life. Here she also depicts on the marginalisation of both women and lower castes in India.
- She criticized in this book, the Dharma Shastras which she previously promoted in *Stri Dharma Niti*. She prophetically stated that all the Hindu scriptures had one thing in common- marginalization and subjugation of women and the lower castes. These texts established, in Ramabai's words, that "women of high and low caste, as a class were bad, very bad, worse than demons, unholy as untruth; and that they could not get Moksha as men could."

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So, in other words, we see Ramabai second word as a more radical approach to understand the question or a status of women. And also to provide a solution, which is much beyond the thinking or the prevailing thought process of many of her male counterparts were thinking about the role of women within the confines, within the assigned rule that is provided by the society family and community. Here, Ramabai was arguing more about self-reliance, role of education to develop that value of self-reliance and how women native women teachers can help in inculcating such value among the high caste Hindu women and destitutes women.

Now, if you look at her views on caste, in her autobiographical account, a testimony of our inexhaustible treasure. Ramabai reflects on various phases of her life in this autobiographical note and she also depicts on the marginalisation of both women and lower-caste in India. And she criticize in this book the Dharma Shastras, which she previously promoted in *Stri Dharma Niti* as we have seen the many advice, she has given to women there is directly related to the Shastras and Hindu dharma Shastra specifically.

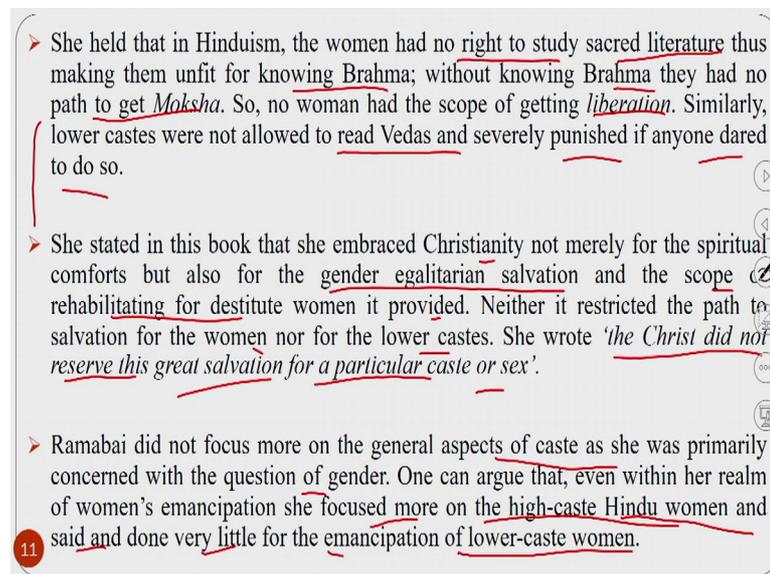
She prophetically stated in this testimony that all the Hindu scriptures had one thing in common. This is a mature radical, critical approach to the Hindu Shastras. And she stated that these Shastra's had one thing in common and that one thing in common is marginalization and subjugation of women and the lower-caste. So, like other reformers certainly as we have seen in Ambedkar she identify this text as the basis of the degrading

condition or marginalised inferior condition of women and not just one, but also the lower-caste in India.

So, she overall evolved from someone using the religion, religious text as the basis of right conduct or good conduct. To someone criticizing the whole basis of such scriptures and such text as something, which perpetuate or reproduced the marginalisation or separation of woman and the lower-caste in India. So, these text established in Ramabai words, that women of high and low-caste, as a class were bad, very bad worse than demons, unholy as untruth and that they could not get moksha, which is liberation or salvation as men could.

So, this understanding or this critical reading of Hindu scriptures or Hindu text in Ramabai's testimony or in her autobiography, understood the reason for the marginalisation and suppression of not just to women or caste women caste Hindu women, but also the lower-castes in India. And she argued that the a scriptures or Hindu a scriptures were the reason for such marginalization and subjugation of women.

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- She held that in Hinduism, the women had no right to study sacred literature thus making them unfit for knowing Brahma; without knowing Brahma they had no path to get Moksha. So, no woman had the scope of getting liberation. Similarly, lower castes were not allowed to read Vedas and severely punished if anyone dared to do so.
- She stated in this book that she embraced Christianity not merely for the spiritual comforts but also for the gender egalitarian salvation and the scope rehabilitating for destitute women it provided. Neither it restricted the path to salvation for the women nor for the lower castes. She wrote 'the Christ did not reserve this great salvation for a particular caste or sex'.
- Ramabai did not focus more on the general aspects of caste as she was primarily concerned with the question of gender. One can argue that, even within her realm of women's emancipation she focused more on the high-caste Hindu women and said and done very little for the emancipation of lower-caste women.

She also held at in Hinduism, the women had no right to study sacred literatures, thus making them unfit for knowing Brahma or the supreme god; and without knowing the Brahma they had no path to get moksha. So, no woman had the a scope of getting liberation. Similarly, lower-casts were not allowed to read Vedas and severely punished if any one dare to do so. So, there is the prohibition there is the control to ensure that who

or who cannot access Vedas or the Hindu scriptures. So, women were denied and so were the lower-caste in Hindu society.

So, she has stated in this book that the reason for her embarrassing Christianity was not merely for the spiritual comforts as we have discussed in our previous lecture, but also for the gender egalitarian salvation and the scope of rehabilitating for destitute women it provided. So, within the Christianity there is a scope for salvation, which is available equal to men and women. And but also the possibility or a scope of rehabilitating the destitute women and that is something which attracts her to convert to Christianity, when she did and not just merely the spiritual comfort.

So, neither it restricted the part to salvation for the women nor for the lower-castes. And she wrote the Christ did not reserve this grade salvation for a particular casts or sex. And that is egalitarian value she found in Christianity and she was inspired by Christianity in terms of allowing or in terms of it is views on salvation, which was open for both men and women also for the lower-caste. And also it is scope for providing the scope for rehabilitates rehabilitation for the destitutes men and women.

So, in Ramabai, however what we find is that she did not focus more on the general aspect of caste as many other social and political reformers and thinkers, did you do not find Ramabai focusing exclusively on caste her main area or main interest lied in improving the condition of women. So, the gender is to remain more significant, more central in her thought or in her activities then perhaps cast, but she also argued about the caste as we have discussed.

So, she was primarily concerned with the question of gender and one can argue that, even within her realm that is what the question of gender and women emancipation. She focused more on the high-caste Hindu women and said and done very little for the emancipation of the lower-caste women.

So, even within the arena or within the scope of gender questions, she focused more on the condition or exploitative condition of high-caste Hindu women then the lower-caste women. But, certainly in many of our activities social reforms, she did include the lower-caste women or work for their improvement in emancipation, but in comparison. If one sees she focuses more on the focused more on the condition of a high-caste Hindu women, then the lower -caste and lower-caste women.

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➤ However, this criticism against Ramabai is not very convincing. Because, what comes to a reader of her writings is that it was the severe exploitations and degrading status of upper caste Hindu women in comparison to the conditions of the lower caste women that influenced her to focus more on emancipation of the high caste women. It does not necessarily mean that she wilfully ignored the lower castes and lower caste women in particular. It was the historical circumstances that put her to work in that direction.

**Conclusion**

➤ Considering the orthodoxy and conservatism prevailing all around, Ramabai lived an extraordinary life. She was unique among many of her contemporaries in the sense that her life itself was the site of confrontations and reforms. With an experimental radical life, full of travellings and an inquisitive mind she did all that she thought to be in conformity with her own conscience.

➤ The religion to which she converted did offer her the moral, financial and practical support for reforms but at the same time alienated her from her own society. Although powerful as a social reformer, her association with Christianity placed her in the constant suspicion and scepticism by her contemporaries.

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So, however this criticism against Ramabai is not very convincing. Because, what comes to a reader of her writings is that it was the severe exploitation or degrading status of upper-caste Hindu women in comparison to the condition of lower-caste women that influenced her to focus more on the emancipation of the high-caste Hindu women. It does not necessarily mean that she wilfully ignored. As we have seen in many of her reform works, she did include the member of the lower-caste women. So, the lower-caste and the lower-caste women in particular, it was the historical circumstances that put her to work in that direction.

So, in her encounter with different communities, different societies and her familiarity with the condition or exploitative condition of high-caste Hindu women of different is different groups, different class allowed her or motivated her to work for the emancipation of such women. And also to identify the root cause of their degrading status and how to emancipate them from such degrading status.

So, one can argue that of course she was more engaged in emancipation for the high-caste or high-caste Hindu women, but that does not mean that she excluded or wilfully excluded those who are from the lower-caste. And some of the questions, as I have discussed while discussing Raja Ram Mohan Roy, which is available to us now was not available in their expectation of horizon, where for them the burning question of social

and religious reforms, as we see through the prism of language caste class was not available to them in the similar fashion.

So, their understanding of women reforms or the caste reforms has very different connotation different approach, then perhaps we do in our contemporary times. So, it may be the historical circumstances that put Ramabai to think about caste questions or caste is or gender issue in a particular with that she did, then we perhaps expected her to do.

So, in conclusion we can find that considering the orthodoxy and conservatism prevailing all around, Ramabai lived an extraordinary life. And that extraordinary life, we have seen that how it started from a orthodox religious kind of life travelling to different parts of the country. Then going across the sea and to England, America and Japan converting to Christianity and then starting the social reforms work or works related to women women's, women emancipation and thinking, and theorising, reflecting about their status throughout using her on consensual something very remarkable and unique to Ramabai.

And in many ways her on personal life was embodiment of so much of contradictions and relationships or interrelationship on the caste line, religious line question of nationalism and internationalism. So, different currents of thought in so many ways was embodied by Ramabai in her personal life and she set it as an example for many of the successive generation of women reformers and activist.

So, she did lead an extraordinary life considering the orthodoxy and conservatism prevail in her time. And she was unique among many of her contemporaries in the sense that her on life was the site of confrontation and reforms of many kind with an experimental radical life, which was full of travellings and visits and inquisitive mind, she did all that she thought to be in conformity with her own conscience. And that becomes the basis of her thought or her or her thinking or and or on her reflection on the question of gender, caste, religion, nation and it lot of other thing she was engaged in.

So, the religion to which she was converted did offer her the moral, financial and the practical support for reforms, but at the same alienated her from her society or many of her contemporaries. Although powerful as a social reformer, her association with Christianity placed her in the constant suspicion and scepticism by her contemporaries.

And this we have discussed at how she was very influential lead a very remarkable and extraordinary life, and paid a significant role in the society yet. Many of her contemporaries or different communities in India looked at her work with some scepticism, some apprehensions and for a very long time her life writings and ligases, where very less explored compared to the other mainstream so, called Indian political thinkers on modern Indian political thinkers. The life and works of Ramabai, and her legacy remain very less explored.

And it has been retrieved or it has it is being retrieved only in contemporary times to re-established her and her legacy as the beginning of the feminist movement or the emergence of feminist thinking in modern India.

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➤ But mere Christianity was not the reason for her initial Othering in Maharashtra. According to Meera Kosambi, more than her conversion, it was her radical feminism with the emphasis on “self-reliance” that was responsible for this.

➤ In the words of Gauri Viswanathan, Ramabai “lived a life that was a prototype of feminist aspiration to succeeding generations of Indian women, but to her own generation her career appeared confusing, inconsistent, and even contradictory”.

➤ As a radical social reformer and thinker Ramabai and her writings remain a source of inspirations for fighting for the cause of women, defying orthodoxies and continues to inspire successive generations of women reformers and activists. She remains a pillar of strength for the feminist movements in India and her text *The High-Caste Hindu Women* is rightly regarded as ‘an unofficial Indian feminist manifesto’ by many scholars.

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So, however many writers such as Meera Kosambi argued that the mere Christianity was not the reason for her initial Othering from the accepted norms or the beliefs in Maharashtra in western India, more than her conversion it was her radical feminism. This is a kind of feminist reading of her works and activities, where it is argued that Ramabai was othered or her works and writings were marginalised or were less explored not only because of her conversion to Christianity.

But, also because of her radical feminism, which emphasize upon the self-reliance of the one which was much beyond the thinking or the expectation of the social and religious reforms leaders of course male in her time. And that was also responsible for her

othering or silencing in the social and political discourse for a very long time. In the words of Gauri Viswanathan, Ramabai lived a life that was a prototype of feminist aspiration to succeeding generation of Indian women, but to her own generation her career appeared confusing, inconsistent and even contradictory.

And that is the personal embodiment of cross currents of different issues, different concerns, regarding religion, nation, internationalism her conversion. So, a lot of such happenings appear to be confusing or inconsistent for many generation, many contemporaries of her generation, but for a successive generation Ramabai appeared to be the prototype of feminist aspiration.

So, as a radical social reformer and thinker Ramabai and her writings remained a source of inspiration for fighting for the cause of women, defying orthodoxy and continue to inspire successive generation of women reformers and activist in India. She remains a pillar of a strength for the feminist movements and her text the High-Caste Hindu Women is rightly regarded by many a scholars as the unofficial feminist manifesto.

So, she has been retrieved or established as a feminist thinker. But, if you look at her thought her own writings, we find a kind of broader approach towards social reforms, to caste questions and also on religion, society and nation. So, perhaps we need to while engaged closely with her life, legacy and writings, we also need to go beyond the particular approach to look at or to explain her works merely as a feminist or a socialist reformer or only as a religious convert. So, we need this is a time for helps to think about Ramabai, her work and legacy beyond these exclusive approach to understand Ramabai and her thoughts.

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**Resources**

1. *Pandita Ramabai: Life and Landmark Writings* by Meera Kosambi, Routledge, 2016
2. *Crossing Thresholds: Feminist Essays in Social History* by Meera Kosambi, Permanent Black, 2007
3. 'Women, Emancipation and Equality: Pandita Ramabai's Contribution to Women's Cause' by Meera Kosambi, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.23, No.44, 1988
4. 'Christianity, Reform, And the Reconstitution of Gender: The Case of Pandita Mary Ramabai' by Parinitha Shetty, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring 2012)

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So, with that you I conclude this lecture, you can look at some of the texts to understand her views on caste and gender. So, Pandit Ramabai life and landmark writings by Meera Kosambi and also *Crossing Thresholds: Feminist Essays in Social History* by Meera Kosambi. And these are the some other texts, which you can look at to study her life, legacy and works and especially on the question of caste and gender.

So, thanks for listening, thank you all.