

Introduction to Modern Indian Political Thought
Dr. Mithilesh Kumar Jha
Department of Humanities & Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati

Lecture - 25
Pandita Ramabai: Introduction

Hello and welcome friends to this lecture on Pandita Ramabai and through Ramabai, we will try to understand the question of Caste and Gender in Modern Indian Political Thought. And Ramabai is someone who is really very fascinating in terms of understanding this question of gender and caste, which for long have been the male (Refer Time: 01:01) only. So, we have discussion and public debate over the question of women's education, abolition of sati or say widow remarriage or abolition of child marriage and so many other social reforms that is about women and women's reforms movement.

But, for a very long time it was male dominated and upper caste led Social Reforms Movement. Pandit Ramabai comes as a surprise as a new development in the in such women's reforms movement or social reforms movement, in the initial decades of our Indian renaissance. And, she has actually transcended that women reforms movement, which was aiming merely for educating the women or preserving the prevailing women's role or maintaining such roles and just to do that in a better way, they were trying to promote modern education and a lot such things.

Ramabai was trying to theorize or articulate women's role much beyond this kind of approach or conservative approach towards the reforms movement or women education to maintain the household or the a gender demarcated role within the Hindu household or the caste Hindu household.

So, in such kind of debate Ramabai's intervention was radical and revolutionaries in so many ways. And, her own personal life from a Brahmin, Sanskrit conservative family to her religious conversion and then his her support for a women's empowerment and women's emancipation, had generated a polarized debate about the acceptance or the role of Ramabai.

So, internationally when with her work she was admired and supported in England, in US, Japan or in Australia, back home she was also divided was also opinion, where on the one hand many people admired and acknowledged her role, but in larger main stream public, political, debate or what social history her works remain largely unexplored or largely suppressed for a century. And, this is the intriguing or surprising thing when we talk about modern Indian political thought or modern Indian political thinking, largely the contributions made by thinkers like Pandita Ramabai is remain somewhat marginalized suppressed in the mainstream political.

But, it is no longer see and from many for many contemporary feminist scholars or in many progressive discuss the works and contribution are of Ramabai is retrieved and she is also projected as a first Indian Feminist thinker who fought against the patriarchy of Hindu or orthodoxy. So, around Ramabai and her legacy also there is a kind of controversy surrounding around her conversion to Christianity on the one hand and also to see her as the first feminist thinker in India.

But, Ramabai has again the overall role or articulation about various aspects of individual and collective life including, certainly her focus was on the issue of caste and gender and how also the role of religion in constructing a good society or a good community. So, there is also a kind of controversy for a very long time about the role and contribution of Pandita Ramabai and that we will see more when we proceed with this lecture.

Now, her personal life certainly was embodiment of a lot of confrontations a lot of binaries that was prevailing in her time. So, her period was from 1858 to 1921 and this period was in many ways a phase of transition from one mode of thinking, one mode of governing to a different mode of thinking and governing. And, response to that there were also various kind of response including from Hindu orthodoxy or those championing the cause of Sanskrit and Hinduism as the basis of Hindu regeneration and so on to those who were arguing about more liberal and secular kind of India.

So, there was a kind of transition from one mode of thinking or response to other modes of thinking and response. And, in such phase Ramabai's her life her personal life and her contribution is really remarkable or unique.

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Introduction

- Pandita Ramabai's life, writes Meera Kosambi, was 'the site for a series of overlapping encounters – primarily that between Hinduism and Christianity, rationalism and dogma, individuality and Church hierarchy, surrounded by the larger confrontation between Indian-ness and Western culture, feminism and patriarchy in its multiple guises'. In both her personal and public life and also through her writings, Ramabai led a very influential and remarkable life. She was deeply engaged with the questions of gender and caste hierarchies in modern India. However, her works and thought are relatively less explored in comparison to other modern Indian thinkers.
- She devoted her entire life for the empowerment of women. Although primarily concerned with the plight of the upper caste Hindu women in the initial stages of her reform movements, Ramabai equally emphasized upon to the multiple sites of exploitations and oppressions such as patriarchy, religion, caste, nationalism and even internationalism.
- Ramabai is not only praised for her reform movements and shelter homes for the subjugated women; she is also admired for her unique life story. She set her own life as a glaring example of women's liberation and emancipation. Her own life was a defiance of patriarchy and orthodoxy of caste Hindus.

So, her biographer Meera Kosambi writes about her life, that Pandit Ramabai's life was the site for a series of overlapping encounters, primarily that between Hinduism and Christianity. So, the religious confrontation between these 2 religious groups Christianity promoting or expanding, Christianity and considering as the superior or true religion and response. So, this historical period as we have seen in many other thinkers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and many others was also a kind of rearticulation of the true meaning of Hinduism, or true meaning of Islam, or true meaning of Christianity and the competitive and competitive claims about the true meaning of religion.

So, her life had this series of overlapping encounters primarily between the Hinduism and Christianity, rationalism and dogmas many ritualistic practices like idol worship or sati or such superstitious practices, which will be criticized by many Hindu reformers and yet they embodied or they tried to revive the true meaning or a true interpretation of Hinduism, so, through rationally through use of science or logic. So, rationalism and dogma was another such encounters, individuality and church hierarchy. So, within a religion the hierarchy that exist between the priest and the followers the Pandits and the large Hindu followers.

So, this encounter also faced between the individuality of all a believer or a subject and then the hierarchy that is prevailing in that particular religion. These encounters between Hinduism and Christianity, or rationalism and dogmas, individuality and

religious hierarchy or the hierarchy of the church is surrounded by the larger confrontation between Indian ness and the western culture. So, among many social religious reformer of that time, the embodiment of Hindu ness or Indianness is also something which is seen or projected. As a kind of response to the domination of the west and therefore, the opposition to the western culture or western dress and a lot of things.

So, you will find many scholars or reformers were trying to embody, what they conceived as the Indianness or in opposition to the western culture or domination of the west.

So, besides such encounters she was also confronting or facing. The controversy or confrontation regarding the Indian nation the western culture, feminism and patriarchy, in it is multiple guises. So, there are different sites of such patriarchy or the encounters between hin[du]- indianness or the western culture, feminism or patriarchy, rationalism or dogmas, Hinduism or Christianity. So, such encounters were taking place at different sites in multiple disguise.

So, Ramabai personal life or her social contribution is in a way embodiment of such encounters. And, that is the uniqueness of Ramabai and through her life one can unravel. Such encounters, such fogginess, or such confrontation, between different traditions, different kinds of issues or concerns that our reformers or the activists were grappling with, in this historical period of transition from one mode of thinking to another mode of thinking.

So, in both her personal and public life and also through her writings Ramabai led a very influential and remarkable life. She was deeply engaged with the questions of gender and caste which we will discuss in more specifically in the next lecture. In this lecture we are going to focus more on her personal life, her social reforms, her views on religion and how she was seen or her contribution was seen by many of her contemporaries.

So, in the next class we will focus more on her views on gender and caste and caste hierarchy in modern India. However, her words and thought as I was saying or relatively less explored when it comes to theorize or to write about the modern Indian thinkers.

She devoted her entire life for the empowerment of women. So, that remains her lifelong mission or objective to empower to emancipate the women from the separation of all

kind. And, there the separation and oppressions of women and through her life, which is about a lot of journey from one place to the other place and she has seen the condition of women. From the upper caste to the excluded to child to the the adult to the aged women, their conditions deeply influenced and moved her emotional and intellectual commitment, to the social cause and this empowerment or self-reliance of women. And not just access to education or a of course, that was the basis for such self-reliance, but Ramabai was arguing much beyond the then held aims or objectives for the women as promoted by the male counterparts in their social reforms.

So, Ramabai has a kind of revolutionary or radical approach to women reforms and this reminds her lifelong mission or projects. Although, primarily concerned with the plight of upper caste Hindu women in initial stages of her reforms. So, in the initial decades or initial stages of her engagement with the condition of women, she exclusively talked about the upper caste Hindu a Hindu women. Ramabai; however, equally emphasized upon the multiple sites of exploitations and oppressions of women, such as patriarchy, religion, caste, nationalism and even internationalism and the biases that was inherently prevailing in these multiple sites of such exploitations and oppressions.

So, Ramabai has a wide ranging interest and involvement in the reform movement of society, of religion, of caste, or thinking about nation or international developments as well. So, Ramabai is not only praised for her reforms movement and shelters home for the subjugated women. She is also admired for her unique life history her personal life was a glaring example of women's liberation and emancipation or in some way the assertion of women agency is very reflective in her personal life. So, she was born into a orthodox Brahmin family, married someone who is from other caste he was a Kayastha which Ramabai referred to as a Shudra from Bengal.

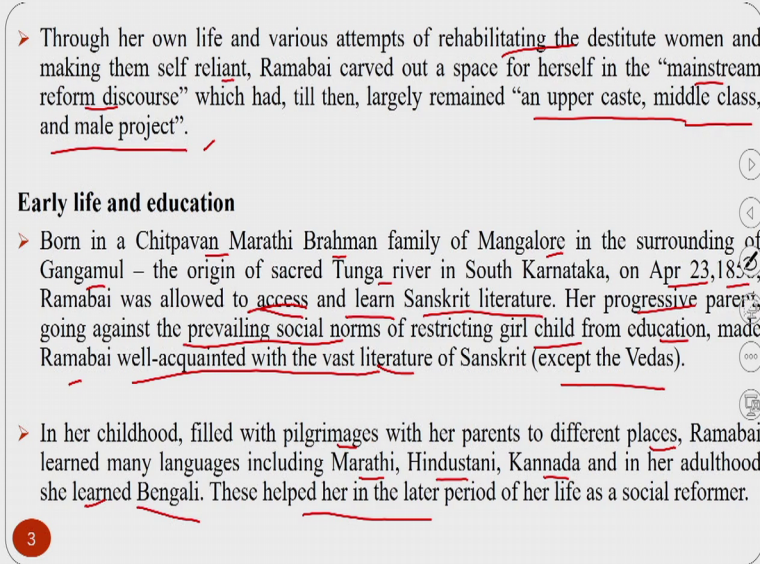
She travelled different parts of the country and also went to England or America, which is not very conducive even for the Hindu male or even prohibited by the Shastras and the orthodoxy to across the sea. And, she converted to Christianity, but also criticize many elements and practices of church. And, enter into a field which was male dominated upper caste led reforms movement.

So, her personal life her own personal life was a glaring example of the assertion of women agency and also the example of women liberation and emancipation. And that

lead to a lot of interest into her life or in her works in the world, but at home for some reason her work was suppressed for a very long time primarily because of the dominance of Hindu orthodoxy.

Her own life was a defiance of patriarchy as I was said through her marriage, through her conversion and by taking decisions which was revolutionary and radical in so, many ways considering the grappling effect of orthodoxy. So, her own life was a defiance of patriarchy and orthodoxy of caste Hindu and that she set as a kind of example for women emancipation and liberation.

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➤ Through her own life and various attempts of rehabilitating the destitute women and making them self-reliant, Ramabai carved out a space for herself in the “mainstream reform discourse” which had, till then, largely remained “an upper caste, middle class, and male project”.

Early life and education

➤ Born in a Chitpavan Marathi Brahman family of Mangalore in the surrounding of Gangamul – the origin of sacred Tunga river in South Karnataka, on Apr 23, 1850, Ramabai was allowed to access and learn Sanskrit literature. Her progressive parents going against the prevailing social norms of restricting girl child from education, made Ramabai well-acquainted with the vast literature of Sanskrit (except the Vedas).

➤ In her childhood, filled with pilgrimages with her parents to different places, Ramabai learned many languages including Marathi, Hindustani, Kannada and in her adulthood she learned Bengali. These helped her in the later period of her life as a social reformer.

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So, through own life and various attempts of rehabilitating the destitute women and making them self-reliant, Ramabai carved out a space for herself in the “mainstream reform discourse” which had, till then, as I was saying largely remained “an upper caste, or middle class and male project”. So, through her life, through her works for the destitute or subjugated women or by teaching them self-reliance Ramabai carved out a space, which was largely by then dominated by the upper cast or middle class male Hindus.

Now, if you look at her early life and education that was also a kind of radical step in in such time when women were forbidden. Even to be educated through their vernacular education say Marathi, certainly during her time there was a debate about women education, but her father was trying to teach his wife Sanskrit. And, that created a lot of

controversy, in their native in their native land and certainly the this progressive attitude of Ramabais parent enabled her to learn Sanskrit and not only learn, but also master it is literature and all just prohibit was not to read Vedas.

So, Ramabai in many ways inherited a lot of progressive ideas from her parents certainly her father. And, also from her association, from her journey and her encounters with many reformist, many religion, many culture or the intellectual tradition. So, she was born into a orthodox Chitpavan Marathi Brahman family of Mangalore. So, this Marathi family is migrated few generations ago from Maratha to Karnataka. And, she was born in the surrounding Gangamul which is the origin of the sacred river Tunga in south Karnataka on April 23rd 1858. Ramabai was allowed to access, which was forbidden or prohibited for the women and also learn Sanskrit literature. And, this is something very radical in those days, but her progressive parents going against the prevailing social norms of restricting girl child from education, made Ramabai well acquainted with the worst literature of Sanskrit except Vedas.

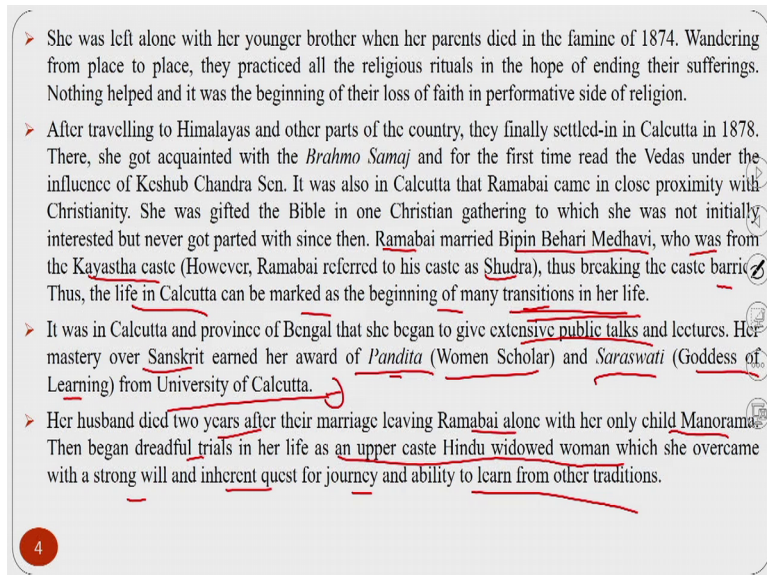
The Vedas she began to learn when she came into contact with reformist organizations such as Brahmo Samaj and its leader Keshab Chandra Sen, but from the childhood itself she was allowed to access or learn Sanskrit literature by her progressive or reform oriented parents. In her childhood which was filled with pilgrimages or family pilgrimages with her parents to different places. Ramabai learned many languages or also she worked as a Puranik. So, locally in some temples, preaching and (Refer Time: 20:10) to the common masses. And, that allowed her enabled her to learn many languages including Marathi, Hindustani, Kannada and in her adulthood when she settle in Bengal or Calcutta she learned a Bengali as well.

So, the learning of these languages certainly helped her to see multiple sites or the experiences of women or oppressions of women in different parts of the country and to develop her outlook. About the condition of women in different parts of the world and different parts of the country certainly in India. And, to respond to such challenges by expressing or by asserting or by fighting for their self-reliance and not just by literating them or giving them access to education.

So, the question of taking decision, which affects their life, should be also given to the women which were not being taught what in the reforms movement that was happening.

So, her wide ranging travels pilgrimages and also the learning of different languages enabled her to develop her outlook about the question of women, question of religion and the unnecessary or ineffectiveness of ritualistic or performative side of any religion so, for this developed in her later career.

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- She was left alone with her younger brother when her parents died in the famine of 1874. Wandring from place to place, they practiced all the religious rituals in the hope of ending their sufferings. Nothing helped and it was the beginning of their loss of faith in performative side of religion.
- After travelling to Himalayas and other parts of the country, they finally settled-in in Calcutta in 1878. There, she got acquainted with the *Brahmo Samaj* and for the first time read the Vedas under the influence of Keshub Chandra Sen. It was also in Calcutta that Ramabai came in close proximity with Christianity. She was gifted the Bible in one Christian gathering to which she was not initially interested but never got parted with since then. Ramabai married Bipin Behari Medhavi, who was from the Kayastha caste (However, Ramabai referred to his caste as Shudra), thus breaking the caste barrier. Thus, the life in Calcutta can be marked as the beginning of many transitions in her life.
- It was in Calcutta and province of Bengal that she began to give extensive public talks and lectures. Her mastery over Sanskrit earned her award of *Pandita* (Women Scholar) and *Saraswati* (Goddess of Learning) from University of Calcutta.
- Her husband died two years after their marriage leaving Ramabai alone with her only child Manorama. Then began dreadful trials in her life as an upper caste Hindu widowed woman which she overcame with a strong will and inherent quest for journey and ability to learn from other traditions.

She was left alone with her younger brothers Srinivasan when her parents died in famine of 1874. And, wandering from place to place they practice all religious rituals in the hope of ending their sufferings, but nothing helped much and they faced in their personal life in their childhood a lot of trials a lot of sufferings. And, through ritual performance and all they were trying to overcome such, but nothing helped much and this lead to their loss of faith in the performative side of religion.

So, after travelling to different parts of country or Himalayas they finally, settled in Calcutta and there she got acquainted with Brahmo Samaj and many reformers. And, for the first time she began to read Vedas on the advice of Keshav Chandra Sen the leader of Brahmo Samaj. It was in Calcutta that Ramabai came in close proximity with the Christianity or the church or their bible.

So, she was gifted the bible in one Christian gathering to which she was not initially interested, but never got parted with since then. So, initially when a bible was gifted to her in a gathering, she was not very interested not very convinced and the Brahminical, Sanskrit teaching had or the norms and the values had strong influence on her character

and in her initial writings she was even arguing for the revival of Sanskrit or Sanskrit learning as a way of reestablishing the glories of India.

In one of her SSC was arguing about the rule of Sanskrit and Sanskrit learning in the reestablishing the glories of India and decadence of the Indian society or community was result of their distancing from the Sanskrit and it is learning. So, she was not very interested when the bible was gifted, but she was also not parted completely with the influence of such context. Ramabai married Bipin Behari Medhavi, in Calcutta and who was from Kayastha caste, which Ramabai referred as Shudra, thus breaking the caste barrier and thus in many ways we can say in Calcutta or life in Calcutta was a remarkable or mark as a beginning of many transition in her life; from orthodoxy Sanskrit kind of learning, to modern scientific or rational outlook to society, to questioning some of the practices of Hindu orthodoxy especially in the context of women.

Ah. And, her gradual distance or seeking a spiritual comfort from Christianity and then gradually also criticizing the many practices in of the church. So, this intellectual journey or her transition from a particular kind of thinking and life to encounter, different kinds of culture or different religion or yet maintaining her on consensus decision, or thinking is something which she began to deeply reflect upon from her engagement with various reforms movement or reformist organization or reformist in Calcutta.

So, Calcutta can be seen in many ways a kind of beginning of her transition to many other kind of culture, or religion, or possibilities, or approaches to think about herself or the life of women, or the question of cast and the role of religion in such issues.

So, it was in Calcutta of Bengal that she also began to give extensive public talks and lecture. So, she visited different parts of Calcutta or Bengal to deliver public talks and lecture and develop her own intellectual capacity to reflect to engage with many social and political issues of her of her time. And, her mastery over Sanskrit earned her award of Pandita or the women scholar and Saraswati goddess of learning from university of Calcutta. So, there was a public scrutiny or interview conducted in the senate hall of the university by many by a panel of eminent Sanskrit scholars, which seem faced and her mastery of Sanskrit in earn her this award of Pandita and Saraswati from the University of Calcutta.

So, Ramabai in many ways was a great Sanskrit scholar and her mastery over Sanskrit, enabled her to think about lot of social and political issue in her own unique way. And, through that she carved out her own space her own judgment, from the prevailing dogmas and practices or performativities in different religion including Hinduism and Christianity. So, it allows her to connect to her on concerns and develop for judgment on the basis of her own concerns and not guided by any external text or influences.

So, Calcutta in many ways played a crucial role her personal, political and as well as in intellectual life. Her husband died 2 years after their marriage and Ramabai was left alone with her only child Manorama, to take care of. And after that began the dreadful trial in her life as an upper caste Hindu widowed women which she overcome with a strong will and inherent quest for journey and ability to learn from the other tradition.

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Voyage to England and Conversion to Christianity

- After the death of her husband she returned to Maharashtra. She greatly admired the works of *Prarthana Samaj*. She immediately set out for a visit to England in 1883. There she taught Sanskrit and in turn studied natural science, mathematics, English literature and Greek in the Cheltenham Female College.
- During her stay in England, she converted to Christianity. Her religious conversion and its larger impacts are discussed in following section.
- Ramabai also visited USA in 1886, after her nearly three years stay in England. And there through her public lectures and participations in the reform movements she garnered the supports for her social especially women reforms back in India. She also published a book *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* (1887) in which she described the deplorable conditions of upper caste Hindu women. Publication of this book instantly iconized her life and works. And, she received wide admirations and financial supports from USA, Japan, and Australia. She returned to India in 1888 and immersed herself into women empowerment and emancipations.

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After, the death of her husband she went to Maharashtra and there she greatly admired the works of Parthana Samaj. She was the follower of or believer in Brahmo Samaj and it is teachings and when she came back to Maharashtra and her um popularity reached different parts of the country, because of her works her public talks on lecturers and certainly after the award of University of Calcutta, Pandita and Saraswati to Ramabai.

So, when she reached Maharashtra she involved in many reforms work there and greatly admired by the work of Prathana Samaj, but the inherent quest for learning and visiting different places and transcending the bond reset by the orthodoxy allowed her to go to

England in 1833. And, there she taught Sanskrit and in turn studied natural science, mathematics, English, literature and Greek in Cheltenham female college in England. Ramabai was in a constant search of learning new or scientific or from other tradition, or culture, or religion to develop her own ways of articulating the social or the political challenges in India.

Now, during her stay in England she converted to Christianity and that created a lot of furore in Maharashtra or back home and the impact of such conversion we will discuss in the following section. So, from England she went to us in 1886, after staying nearly 3 years in England. And, through her public lectures and participation in reforms movement, because now she has imbibed or she has converted to Christianity which made her participation in different reforms movement in us more accessible. So, through this public lectures and participation in different reforms movement in us she garnered the support for her social especially women's reforms back in India.

This is also a time if you remember Vivekananda was in us for the world religion conference. So, she was also trying to garner the support for the women's reforms work that she was intended to carry when she will be back in India. So, she also published a text the high caste Hindu women. And, this text instantly become a great hit or a wildly admired and acknowledged and surprised many a scholars around the world and also people back in a scholars back in back in India that this was something a unique attempt to understand or to express the condition of women the exploitative status or the oppressive structure of domination of a women within the cast society written by a Hindu women.

And, this she published in 1887 in which she described the deplorable condition of upper caste Hindu women, this we will discuss in the following lecture of what she described and how she explain the conditions of upper caste Hindu women and how caste and gender come together to subjugate or to exploit the women.

So, publication of this book instantly iconized her life and works and she received wide admiration and financial supports for her works from USA, Japan, or specially Australia. She return to India in 1888 and immersed herself into women empowerment and emancipation. So, when she came back to India after her religious conversion to Christianity and also publication of this book the high caste Hindu women. She now

clearly or very um consistently started to work for the empowerment or emancipation of the subjugated women or the oppressed women in India.

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Ramabai's role in the emancipation of women

- Ramabai entry into the struggles for women emancipation and reforms movements, which were till then the exclusive domain of male reformers, were looked down upon with a degree of contempt even suspicion.
- Ramabai, while championing the cause of women, transcended the limits of gender reforms set by the male reformers. She envisioned far beyond the mere goal of uplifting women through reform in social traditions and education. She added one significant aspect to women's emancipation; that was liberating women through self-reliance.
- Ramabai opened two shelter homes – *Sharada Sadan* and *Mukti Sadan* for the destitute women. In these homes, she offered emotional and physical support to these oppressed and marginalized women. And through vocational training, she taught them self-reliance.

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Now, we can look at some of the emancipation works Ramabai had done. The first thing her entry into this women reforms or women empowerment movement was a kind of radical step as it was a male dominated. So, Ramabai entered into the struggles for women emancipation and reforms movement, which were till then the exclusive domain of the male reformers, were looked down upon with a degree of contempt even suspicion. So, her work or her entry into this women emancipation work was not really appreciated. Even many people deployed it because of her conversion to Christianity and this they saw it as a kind of attempt to convert the Hindu women to Christianity and so on.

So, her entry was not welcomed or appreciated in India or particularly in western India. So, therefore, it also lead to her marginalization or her suppression, when it comes to write the social history or the political history of western India for a very long time almost a century. It is only in the recent times that her work or there is a retrieval of her work and activities and her contribution in the social reforms movement especially in reforming the condition of women.

So, Ramabai while championing the cause of women transcended the limits of gender reforms set by the male reformers. So, she envisioned far beyond the mere goal of uplifting women through reforms in social tradition or education.

So, the male reformers were trying to reform tradition or trying to make a education accessible to the women to reform their life. Ramabai transcended such objectives to include the self-reliance of women as the major objective of reforms movement, the question of taking decision that affects their life, about marriage, about divorce, about property and so on and so forth.

So, this is something which is the contribution of Ramabai. And, Ramabai also opened 2 shelter homes Sharada Sadan and Mukti Sadan for the destitute women. In these homes, she offered emotional and physical support to such oppressed and marginalized women. And through vocational training, she also taught them the self-reliance.

So, the role of education or vocational training, in self reliance is something Ramabai began to inculcate or to impart in the destitute to women and their lives.

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- She tried to create an awareness among the women about the need for self-improvements. To reach out to the women from various backgrounds and orientations, she gave lectures on different topics including religious scriptures, morality and general conduct.
 - Ramabai founded *Arya Mahila Samaj* in 1882. She identified a) protesting against child marriage; b) preventing man remarrying while the first wife is alive; and helping the destitute women; as the major objectives of this organization.
 - Through *Arya Mahila Samaj*, Ramabai developed a tactical and unique way of organizing women. Being herself familiar with the restrictions on women's entry into public spaces; Ramabai made it compulsory for men to bring along with them at least one female member form their family if they wanted to listen to her lectures.

So, she tried to create an awareness among the women about the need for self-improvements through education or through vocational training. And to reach out to the women from various backgrounds and orientation, she gave lectures on different topics including religious scriptures, morality and gender conduct. Ramabai also founded one

Arya Mahila Samaj in 1882 and this Samaj and the objective of this Samaj she mentioned as protesting against child marriage that is the one objective.

The second was preventing man remarrying while the first wife is alive. So, that is the second objective to prevent the man from marrying when the first so, polygamy or the unmatched marriage was something which was widely prevalent and she was focusing on this preventing man to marry when the first wife is alive and third helping the destitute women as the major objective of. So, the Arya Mahila Samaj was a kind of women organization to achieve these 3 objectives, which she identify for the Samaj and through Arya Mahila Samaj Ramabai also developed a kind of tactical or unique way of organizing or mobilizing the woman.

So, the reason for such tactical or unique ways of reaching out to the woman was her awareness, her personal understanding of the prohibition or the restraining restrictions that was there on the women in their participation in the public life. So, the socially the role of women was confined to the household. And, in the public political life her entry was prohibited or seen with suspicion with lots of character and other kind of assassination.

So, you may also think that even in contemporary time such a stigma or such prohibition is being practiced in many part many parts of the country and their participation their assertion in the public life is not seen with a kind of respect or with dignity, but it is seen as a kind of transcending the limits or the boundary of the rules.

She was aware of such prohibition or restrictions on women's enter into public space to overcome this be able to access women. Ramabai made it compulsory for men to bring along with them at least one female member from their family if they wanted to lis10 to her lecture. So, this was a kind of tactical way to reach out to the women or to invite women in the works and the philosophy that she was arguing for.

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Her views on Religion

- In her first book, *Stri Dharma Niti (Morals for Women, 1882)*, Ramabai offered a detailed account of her understanding of a true religion. For her, religion did not mean any particular religious doctrine like Hinduism or Christianity. But the true religion is "the conduct in accordance with conscience." In this sense, all the doctrines have similar perception of a true religion. She referred to the ten characteristics of a true religion. These are: *courage; forgiveness; control over mind; abstaining from stealing; purity; control over the senses; intelligence; knowledge; truth; and absence of anger.*
- Practicing the true religion is considered the primary duty of man and woman. It is for two reasons. Firstly, religion is the basis of all things. As nothing can stand without the foundation, a man or woman without religion can't manage his/her life in a desired way. Secondly, it is the good conduct or true religion which accompanies man/woman till his/her death and beyond. Therefore, religion for her is a source of salvation. And moreover, only a true religion, in her opinion, can protect this world and ensure its welfare.

Now, if you look at her views on religion in her first texts that she wrote in 1882 the Stri Dharma Niti her thinking or theorization of women and the role of religion in the life of women or the men is something articulated, in her first text and here she is deeply influenced by the religious Sanskrit text and (Refer Time: 39:34) and she theorize or articulate the conduct of women or men, in a particular way and there she explained her views on religion and role of religion as well.

So, in this text she offered her understanding of a true religion. And, this understanding of true religions remained there even in even when she converted to Christianity. Now, if you look at her views on religion the first text that she wrote on Stri Dharma Niti, which we can translate is that morals for women in 1882. She argued for the role of religion in the life of men women and their salvation. And, also in the progress of the humanity and welfare of the humanity, the role of religion is very influential. In this text also her, the influence on her thought is from her exposure to the Sanskrit literature or her understanding of Sanskrit, which allowed her to develop a conscience or connection to the conscience.

And, the role of conscience as the basis for the judgement in individual life about the social and political challenges is something which stick to Ramabai. And, her conception of religion is very different in a way then the narrowly or in a kind of ritualistic dogmatic or in an organised understanding of religion in Hinduism and Christianity. And there in

the stage, she also then find the meaning of what she calls the true religion and the role of true religion in individuals life and salvation.

So, this understanding of true religion remains there even when she converted to Christianity and that allow her to critique many of the practices by the church as well. So, Ramabai offered a detailed account of her understanding of a true religion in this text is *Stri Dharma Niti* the morals for women.

So, for Ramabai religion did not mean any particular religious doctrine such as Hinduism or Christianity for her the true religion is conduct in accordance with conscience. So, the role of conscience or the conduct that is guided by conscience is something which she defines as the religion.

So, in this sense all the doctrines have similar or same message. And, that message is about the supremacy or the religious conduct, or how the individual can attain, a spiritual heights by following once conscience. And this kind of understanding of religion we have seen in many thinkers as well certainly in Gandhi Tagore also in Aurobindo Ghosh or Vivekananda. So, the message, the essential message in all the religion is more or less same it is a similar.

So, Ramabai for her the understanding of true religion is something which is very similar to this kind of conception of religious message, which we have seen through Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Aurobindo Ghosh, Vivekananda and also Gandhi.

So, she referred to 10 characteristic of a true religion. And, these 10 characteristics are courage, forgiveness, control over mind, abstaining from stealing purity, control over the senses, intelligence, knowledge, truth and the absence of anger. So, the moral or the ethical conduct of life is should be based on certain principles. And, that principles she characterized as 10 such characteristics or principles, which is the basis of a true religion for her and not the narrowly limited conception of doctrinaire religion as it is there in Hinduism or a or in Christianity.

So, practicing this true religion according to Ramabai's is the primary duty of man and women. And it is for 2 regions. Firstly, religion is the basis of all things. As nothing can stand without the foundation, a man and women without religion cannot manage his her life any desired way. So, in her thought in her articulation the role of religion and

religion the conception she had is a true religion and not the doctrinaire religion of Hinduism or Christianity. So, that provides the foundation for individual life to have a meaningful or a kind of desired objective or a kind of achievement in the life.

So, therefore, the role of religion is a very necessary or essential in the individual life. Second, it is the good conduct or true religion which accompanies man women till his her death and also beyond her death. And therefore, religion for her is a source of salvation. And, moreover only a true religion in her opinion can protect this world and ensure it is welfare.

So, the role of religion is not just for the individual life and for the attainment of salvation in the individual life. And, also give individual life a particular direction or desired way of leading a good life or good conduct in individual life, but also for the welfare of the humanity or the world is also lies in the religion that she has argued for.

And, again one needs to point her the religion for her is not a doctrinaire religion, but a religion which is based on certain characteristics which she has identified.

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➤ In the light of her views on religion, one can infer the reason of her conversion. She, in dire need of spiritual comfort, might have thought that Christian doctrines might provide her such comforts. And therefore, she chose to convert to Christianity. Her conversion to Christianity can only mean her changing of path to religion and not the religion itself (in Ramabai's specific usage of the term 'religion').

Her encounter with Church and colonialism

➤ With her conversion, Ramabai got a sense of the authoritarian Churches and their underlying colonial assumptions. From her analytical mind which viewed everything with skepticism, the dogmas associated with the practices of church could not escape her attention. But this created a problem because any criticism of church might lead to the questioning of honesty and authenticity of her conversion.

So, in the light of her views on religion one can infer the reason for her conversion. So, she was in search of a spiritual comfort and one can argue that she might have thought that Christian doctrines might provide her such comfort, from the emotional or the spiritual urge she was having in her encounter with in alien or a foreign religion and she

might have thought about its contribution or the role of Christianity in comforting her spiritual urge.

And therefore, she might have converted to Christianity to attain such or to achieve such comfort. Her conversion to Christianity can only mean her changing of path to religion and not the religion itself which remains for her based on the individual conscience. And, she on the basis of such conscience as the basis of a moral conduct or ethical conduct in one's life or in one's public life she continued to follow even after her conversion to Christianity.

Where she used the religion as their true religion and the path of Christianity or Hinduism is only the means to attain such inner connection with the conscience. So, her encounter with church and colonialism if you look at so, with her conversion Ramabai also got a sense of the authoritarian churches and their underlying colonial assumptions and biases.

So, from her analytical mind which viewed everything with a degree of skepticism, the dogmas associated with the practices of church could not escape her attention. And, she was aware of the many such dogmatic or ritualistic practices by the church. But, this created a problem because any criticism of church might lead to the questioning of honesty and authenticity of her conversion.

So, she understood the dogmatic or the authoritarian side and as well as the biases that the missionaries or the church is where holding, but it was a kind of problem for a kind of problematic for her, because if she began to criticize which she did, then the danger was that her authenticity or honesty in conversion maybe questioned. So, on the one hand she had criticism by many of her contemporaries in India, because of her conversion to Christianity, but even after her conversion to Christianity she began to look at many of the practices with a degree of skepticism and was very critical of such practices and their biasness.

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➤ However, no matter how much the Church tried to restrict her liberty of conscience, Ramabai always adhered to it and used her inherent skepticism to have her own judgments about social as well as religious practices. She wrote: *I have a conscience, and mind and a judgement of my own. I must myself think and do everything which God has given me the power of doing...I have just with great effort 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 authorised command of the most high.*

➤ Apart from the authoritarianism, Ramabai also experienced the colonial biases in the activities of Church. When Ramabai was asked to teach the native languages, religion and philosophy of India to the English population, the Bishops in India responded very negatively. They considered themselves as having better understanding of the Indian culture and philosophy and stated how Ramabai being the female teacher could offend her Indian counterparts. To this, Ramabai responded that she knew the culture and philosophy of India better than any foreigners; no matter how long they have stayed in India.

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So, however the churches tried to restrict her liberty of conscience or using her conscience, which allowed 1 2 have independent and autonomous thinking about certain or issues of society of one's life and have one's own judgment. On the basis of conscience and they church tried to restrict search liberty of conscience. Ramabai always adhered to the call of the conscience or her conscience as the basis of her judgment and used her inherent skepticism to have her own judgment about social as well as religious practices. And she writes I have a conscience and mind and a judgment of my own. I must myself think and do everything which god has given me the power of doing.

I have just with great effort freed myself from the yoke of the Indian priestly tribe. So, I am not at present willing to place myself under another similar yoke of accepting everything which comes from the priests has authorized command of the most high. So, this is her views on religion. So, it is a similar to a kind of Raja Ram Mohan Roy response to the congratulatory message from a Christian missionaries about his religious conversion which he never did, but her his response is very similar to what Ramabai or vice versa.

So, Ramabais response to the organized or the ritualistic performative side of religion of whether it is Christianity or Hinduism is very similar to this reformist or rational approach to religion where the role of god or the religion is acknowledged, but many practices or the rituals are criticized and Ramabai also developed such approach to the

organized religion or the practices, which she considered as a kind of obstruction in the life of individual to connect to it is on conscience and develops one judgement and moral conduct according to their own concerns. So, the role of god and religion is necessary acknowledged, but the approach to the god and religion is more scientific more personal intimate than through the priestly class of one kind or for the other.

So, apart from the authoritarianism Ramabai also experience the colonial biases in activities of many churches. So, when Ramabai was asked to teach the native languages religion and philosophy of India to the English population, the Bishops in India responded very negatively. And, they considered themselves as having better understanding of Indian culture and philosophy and they stated how Ramabai being the female teacher could offend her Indian counterparts. To this Ramabai responded that she knew the culture and philosophy of India better than any foreigners and bishops no matter how long they have stayed in India.

So, she was also very critical of this negative approach about the authority of knowledge on the part of many Christian missionaries especially those who are living in India. So, their objections their biasness also allowed Ramabai to develop a kind of critical outlook or critical approach to the many practices of church and Christianity as well.

So, now, if you look at Ramabai and many of her contemporaries and as we are saying that the role and contribution of Ramabai lead to a kind of polarization where many admire her work and accepted her contributions, or respected her words and intellectual engagement with the question of caste and gender.

On the other hand a number of people also look at her words with contempt or demonized her legacies and contribution. So, that happens with many of her contemporary as well and that also lead to a kind of admiration of her words outside and condemnation of her work in the country and for a very long time. For this reason her work and her contributions are not sufficiently explored or examined in India.

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Ramabai and her contemporaries

- Ramabai's conversion and following missionary activities created instant shock and incomprehension among many of her contemporaries. Many wrote, in different magazines and newspapers like *Indu Prakash*, defaming accounts of her character especially her religious conversion.
- But, gradually her reform initiatives generated a great deal of admirations. One of the prominent social reformer M G Ranade was very appreciative of her works. Ramabai also found a comfort in reform-oriented *Prarthana Samaj*. Although most of her contemporaries like B.G. Tilak could not support her conversion, they did applaud her courage and her works for social reforms.
- The only prominent figure who supported Ramabai and defended her conversion was Jotirao Phule. He viewed her conversion as a radical act of defying the upper caste Hindu patriarchal system.

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So, Ramabai's conversion especially was the major reason for such separation or such condemnation of her work and contribution.

So, Ramabai's conversion and following missionary activities created instant shock and even incomprehension among many of her contemporaries. And many wrote in different magazines such as *Indu Prakash*, defaming accounts of her character especially her religious conversions. So, think about the India of that time and the context and the education was being promoted, but for very long time prohibited for the women. And, especially her entry into the public political life was seen with some kind of suspicion or some kind of skepticism, when an orthodoxed upper caste women like Ramabai lead a public life married someone from the other caste.

And, also on top of that converted to an religion which was seen as a kind of challenge to Hinduism. She was; obviously, condemned by many of her contemporaries and also a number of social reformers. However, gradually we could and the point in this kind of demonetisation on admiration is not to engage more critically or more closely with the evolution of one of a remarkable, modern, Indian, thinker or women thinker, who started with a orthodoxy or orthodox learning and gradually developed an encounter many other traditions or intellectual approach to reflect on society, to reflect on religion, to think about the nation. To think about the role of women in the nation and how to empower or events repeat the women.

So, somewhere in this admiration or condemnation the actual evolution of thought and thinking in one of the remarkable life of Modern India, in Pandita Ramabai is somewhat less explored or mercerized or suppressed to a great extent. So, it is not enough or sufficient just to recognize her because of her conversion and condemned her because of that, it is equally not sufficient to retrieve her merely as a feminist thinker which she was and she asserted the agency or the right of women in making decisions which affect their life.

But, she was also envisioning about the role of religion, the role of women, in the construction or in the imagination of nation and all lot of other things. So, that we need to have a kind of critical engagement with the evolution of thought process in Ramabai, which will help us to understand some of the overlapping encounters and challenges that many of our modern Indian thinkers and reformers were facing. So, this was the way she received the responses from many of his contemporaries which was divided among the admirals and all also those who were the critic, those who condemned her work her life and also her character.

So,; however, gradually because of her work and consistent work to improve the life of women, it was gradually generated a great deal of admiration even among those who were the critic of Ramabai. One of the prominent social reformer MG Ranade in western India Maharashtra was very appreciative of her works. And, Ramabai also found a comfort in the reform oriented Prarthana Samaj. Although most of her contemporary like Bal Gangadhar Tilak could not support her conversion at any cost. So, they were very opposed to her religious conversion they did applaud her courage and her works for social reforms even among the critics.

She was able to turn them into an admirer, because of her consistent reform regarding the women or in the emancipation of women. The only prominent figure who supported Ramabai in her conversion was from Jyotirao Phule. Jyotirao Phule himself articulating about the caste domination, caste exploitation, by the upper caste Hindus or in the Hindu society stood by Ramabai and supported her conversion to Christianity and consider it as a radical act of defying upper caste Hindu patriarchal system.

So, in conclusion one can see a kind of a remarkable or influence the life that Ramabai lead and her personal life was embodiment of such in context from a orthodox Hinduism

to Christianity from rationalistic scientific outlook to dogmatic, ritualistic, practices from patriarchy to caste exploitations. And, also the re-emergence or the biasness that was inherent in the conception of nation or internationalism.

So, something which we need to deeply engage with to understand the various aspects of Ramabai and her thoughts which remain for a very long time suppressed or less explored in the mainstream discuss about the social and political reforms in India. So, on this text and in the next lecture we are going to focus more specifically about her views on caste and gender.

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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. 'Indian Response to Christianity, Church and Colonialism: Case of Pandita Ramabai', by Meera Kosambi, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.27, No. 43/44, 1992
4. 'Women, Emancipation and Equality: Pandita Ramabai's Contribution to Women's Cause', by Meera Kosambi, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.23, No.44, 1988
5. '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)

So, on this lecture you can look at some of these words like Pandita Ramabai life and landmark writings by Meera Kosambi one of the best known works so, far on the life and works of Ramabai. You can also look at Crossing Thresholds Feminist Essays in Social History by Meera Kosambi. And also "Indian response to Christianity Church and Colonialism; Case of Pandita Ramabai" again by Meera Kosambi and some other writings in EPW and also journal of feminist studies in religion, about Christianity reforms and the reconstitution of gender the case of Pandita Ramabai Parinitha Shetty.

So, these are some of the works which you can refer to understand the life and times and the words of one of the remarkable modern Indian life of Ramabai. So, that is all in today's lecture. Thanks for listening thanks for your patience.

Thank you.