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Extremes Meet



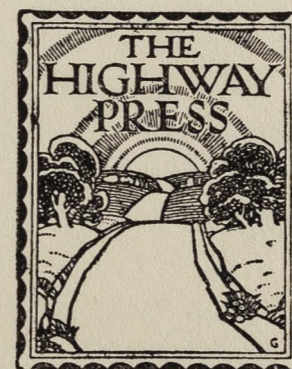
Lilian A. Underhill

Extremes Meet:

Some facts about India's Women.

By

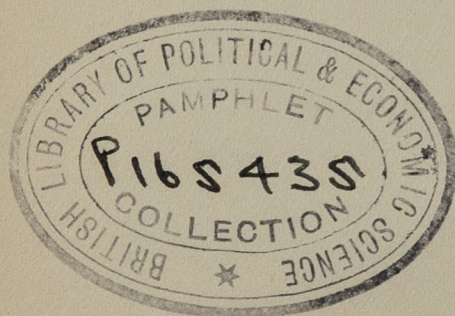
LILIAN A. UNDERHILL



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Extremes Meet :

Some facts about India's Women

AMONG the mass of problems contained in that little word of five letters, "INDIA," one of the greatest, one of the most perplexing, yet one of the most hopeful is the rapid change taking place among the women. Their conditions, problems, and development are of tremendous and vital importance to the whole country. The matter is urgent. The second Round Table Conference report reminded us that "the key to progress is the women." There is an Indian proverb that "a cart cannot run on one wheel." Unless the women as a whole share in the progressive movement there can be no true national progress.

We are thinking of a country too vast in outline, as in population, to be called a country. Its area is more than twenty times that of Great Britain; its female population alone amounts to nearly 170,000,000, while the total figure stands at 353,000,000, or about a fifth of that of the world. It must always be remembered that there are in India many races, distinct nationalities, separate and sometimes antagonistic religions; in Hinduism, the preponderating religion, there are over two thousand castes or social divisions.

Extremes meet in India, and never were there greater contrasts, wider extremes than those which exist to-day among the women of India, for they are at every stage of development. Many are living in this decade as they did

hundreds of years ago, while others are in the throes of sweeping changes through contact with the West. The differences caused by the march of time and development are even greater therefore than those caused by nationality.

The women of India may best be introduced under three types: the workers—low caste and no caste—who have entered the field of labour; the vast numbers of the orthodox who are bound by the old laws of custom and caste; and the advanced, emancipated women of modern India.

WOMAN IN INDUSTRY

Eighty-seven per cent of India's population is rural, yet at the International Labour Office at Geneva, India ranks as one of the eight great industrial countries of the world. In recent years, as a result of the present economic pressure, Indian women of the poorest and most ignorant type are being swept out of the villages into the industrial centres along with their men, as cheap labour. They are employed in cotton and jute mills and factories, as well as in coal and salt mines; also in the production of rice, of silk and woollen goods, and in tobacco and pottery works. In the tea gardens of Assam and the Nilgiris there is a large female labour force. Women also sweep, clean, sort waste, do coolie work, and odd jobs in many other factories and mines which do not officially employ female labour. Some of these occupations are not detrimental to health, but most people in England have no idea that within the British Empire women are to-day actually working in coal mines as they were in the mines of England eighty to a hundred years ago. The majority of these work above ground, but thirty thousand are still employed below. By a series of regulations women will be gradually excluded from underground work in the larger coalfields and in the salt mines of the Punjab; this process is to be completed by July, 1939.

The Government is working through legislation and by the appointment of women inspectors to improve the lot of women workers generally, but the worst conditions prevail, not in the large, well-regulated and supervised factories, but in the numbers of small ones which are Indian-owned, where inspection is non-existent, and legislation is evaded. In 1934 a social service worker, travelling in India to study in an unofficial capacity rural and industrial problems, came across a modern cotton factory where women workers were obliged to stand at a stretch for the ten hours of the day's work. This is but one among many.

It must be remembered that the hardships of industrial life press far more heavily on women than on men, and that industrialism in India brings added problems which are non-existent in the West. The equivalent of the strap-ping mill hand of the West is the Indian woman, from thirteen upwards, who, since marriage is universal, is attempting the impossible three-fold task of home making, child bearing and rearing, *and* factory work. The labour of these women is never done, for before and after factory hours to them fall the cooking, cleaning, and sweeping of the one-roomed home, and the care—such as it is—of the children. Yet owing to the long hours of work it is said that many never see their homes in daylight. While at night the men are able to sleep out-of-doors, the women naturally are obliged to remain in the hopelessly overcrowded and unventilated rooms, which house as many as two or three families to a room. A woman cannot live and work alone in India, therefore if she is a widow or deserted, she forms an irregular union to last as long as she and her protector are in the same employment.

The total lack of privacy in tenement life, due to the excessive overcrowding which factory workers have to endure, undermines the old family system and affects the women workers far more seriously than the men. The

women must either take their infants to spend the days in the noise and impure air of their surroundings or leave them alone, opium drugged, in the tenement homes. It is said that ninety per cent of workers' babies are drugged. These terrible conditions of life result in disease, exceedingly high infant mortality, and very many of the women live in open prostitution. Why are these things so?

It is easy to put the blame on rapidly-increasing industrialization or on the poverty which abounds. The real reason lies much deeper and is three-fold. It is because human life is considered of little value, because all women are marked by a brand of inferiority so long as the religions that have produced this attitude hold sway, and because no Indian religion teaches any responsibility towards the oppressed. Such a thought as: "Am I my brother's—my sister's—keeper?" is not found in Hinduism. "Bear ye one another's burdens" is not found in Islam. The very essence of Hinduism is self-preservation, keeping one's own caste inviolate at all costs; any contact, even the shadow of an outcaste man, would defile the higher caste. The fact that the outcaste is what he is, is regarded as the inevitable result of sinful actions in a former life, and therefore merited: why should he be pitied or helped now? It is this view which counteracts any natural springs of pity and removes any sense of responsibility for the over-worked and the downtrodden. Perhaps it was this realization which made a certain British woman, sent officially to India to investigate conditions for women workers by reason of her expert knowledge of industrial life in the West, on her return to England, state in her report: "I do not wish to belittle what England has done for India, but I feel compelled to admit that I believe Christianity is the only hope for the uplift of her women."

Legislation is being put into force, but legislation alone is not enough. Only the law of Christ is sufficient to raise the whole position of women, and this is the great necessity.

Neither in Hinduism nor in Islam is there any suggestion of the equality of the sexes. Woman is cheap labour because *she is always "cheap" except where the standards of Christ are accepted.*

ORTHODOX WOMANHOOD

Under this heading may still be included the great majority of India's women. Many know of no possibility of change, or if they have the knowledge frankly oppose it, and are living exactly as women lived hundreds of years ago, not yet touched by the sweeping advances of these days. Others desire they know not what, but, while filled with longings, cannot and dare not break with age-old custom and the religious laws of "old India," oft-times unwritten but nevertheless binding and completely limiting their life.

"Hinduism . . . is a system that regulates the life in every detail from birth and before birth, and on to death and long thereafter. . . ." ¹ The tremendous and combined forces of tradition, conservatism, and prejudice are arrayed against the rebel or the innovator. Is it any wonder that until now comparatively few have broken with age-long custom? It is these, bound by caste and custom, who are the real "oppressed," and India is full of them. Indeed no orthodox person, man or woman, is free. A man has no freedom of choice in the matter of marriage, and is not at liberty to follow the profession which may appeal to him. All life is under this bondage; his food, family arrangements, and all his daily occupations are controlled by it. It cannot be altered or mitigated, for behind custom and caste is religion. Custom and caste, the horoscope, the priest, and heredity, rule with an iron rod the peasant or the town dweller, poor or rich.

¹ *India in the Dark Wood.* Nicol Macnicol, p. 32.

It is true that India is an intensely religious country but "religion" is not necessarily inspired by the Spiritual. Religious expression may reach to heights of mysticism on the one hand, or sink to depths of degradation on the other. Ceremonial law is religion for the average man or woman.

A writer in the paper, *Krishnamurti Stri-Dharma* says: "We all concede, we all agree, with a certain amount of conceit and pleasure that India is spiritual. Believe me, as long as we treat our Indian women as we do, India is not spiritual." Gandhi says: "To force widowhood upon little girls is a brutal crime for which we Hindus are daily paying dearly." The late Lajpat Rai said: "Certain Indian customs are sufficiently bad, and one at least pretty general, *viz.*, child marriage." An Englishman, speaking from experience, says: "What it [Hinduism] cannot escape from, or escape only with great difficulty, is the network of custom and practice which almost everywhere trips up Indians or Europeans who set about improving India," and, he might have added, *all* these customs are rooted in religion.

Pardah

If men are thus bound by ceremonial law women are infinitely more so. "The imprisonment for life behind the bolts and bars of social custom which goes by the name of *pardah*" has resulted from Islam, and has been widely adopted by Hindu India. It is not commonly practised in the South, but in the North it is universal, though in varying degree. Of Moslem origin, it dates from the Moslem invasions of India some seven or eight centuries ago, and was found to be necessary at that time for the protection of women, but *to-day* at least forty million women still live in strict seclusion behind the *pardah*.

What does *pardah* really involve? On the physical side absolute confinement, on the mental extreme limitation;

the more refined and well-born the family the more strict the *pardah*. It would be prison to the average English girl. Since those in *pardah* have little or no exercise, and spend most of their lives in closed rooms the women suffer terribly in health, and even the healthy are lacking in vitality and power to resist disease. *Pardah* women are starved for want of light and air, and the fatal results are seen in anæmia, osteomalacia, and in tuberculosis which is ten times more common among women than among men. Some are allowed to go into the streets, covered from head to foot in a sheet-like garment enveloping the person, but the real *pardah-nashin* is never allowed to walk beyond the protection of the courtyard of her home. Some *pardah* women are allowed perhaps to drive in a closed and shuttered carriage after dark. I remember meeting a girl of nineteen, who had not been out in daylight since she had married, and she had entered her husband's home at the age of fifteen.

If the physical results of such seclusion are bad, the mental stagnation is far worse. The *pardah* women may be refined and cultured, but they can have little knowledge of the life of their country or of the world beyond. Their families, household affairs, handwork such as embroidery, and gossip are their chief occupations. The world-famous historical buildings of old India they may not visit, nor see the great rivers or places of fame and beauty of their own land. Girls may go into *pardah* at any age from eight years old. The contrast between the life of an English girl and an Indian lies here: where the life of the former opens out through new friendships, competition in work and play, and all the variety of knowledge that a free, open-air life brings, the life of the Indian girl closes up as she goes into seclusion.

Advanced Indians are anxious that *pardah* should go, yet we are faced with the fact that neither men nor women are ready for it to go. "Although the enforced inactivity

of women is as serious for society as it is for the individual," as Dr. Rukhmabai tells us, freedom, without the removal of the inferior position for women in general, is of little worth. It opens the way for liberty to become licence.

Child marriage

Even worse than *pardah* and frequently accompanying it, is the terrible custom of child marriage, leading only too surely to child motherhood. This is still the chief cause of the incomparably heavy maternal mortality of India, and the greatest obstacle to the freedom and progress of her women. There is, I suppose, no woman who has been in medical work in India who has not seen something, some more, some less, but *something* of the misery and the agony of motherhood at twelve or thirteen, girls of fifteen who have had two or three children, grandmothers—old women—aged twenty-four or younger. Yet the causes of the heavy maternal and infantile mortality are mostly preventible. Since a woman is truly honoured only when she is the mother of sons, and since every Hindu man requires a son to perform the necessary rites at his death, it follows that every girl is married, and "the sooner the better." Since there is no efficient registration of births, marriages, and deaths, there is no proof strong enough to get the marriage postponed when a bride is very young or of doubtful age.

I think of a Hindu wedding to which I was invited, ostensibly as a guest, but asked to go by certain advanced Hindus in order to ascertain the age of the girl, because if she was under age (the age of consent was then twelve) they could use their influence to postpone the marriage. I went, and got a glimpse of the little bride in the large upstairs room among the many women guests; but how helpless I felt! The girl was so small that she might have been nine, yet with so old a face she might well have been thirteen, and I could not state that she was not. We are

told that the Hindu wedding is the ceremony only, and the marriage is not consummated till puberty. This is usually, though by no means always true, but the findings of the most careful inquiry—the Age of Consent Committee—prove that fifty per cent of India's girls are actually married by the age of fifteen, and many are mothers at an age when no English girl thinks of marriage.

Child marriage, words which express the greatest injustice to the Creator's plan for human nature, by which the holy is made vile, signifies: "*A weight of suffering physical and mental greater than it is possible to grasp.*"¹ Perhaps that is why there is such ignorance on the matter, such general apathy among Indians and Europeans, in official and unofficial circles, towards this the greatest sore, the crying wrong of India. Because in 1930 the Child Marriage Act became law, by which the marriage age for girls was raised to fifteen, people believe that legislation has abolished child marriage. What is the immediate result of this legislation?—Disaster. In the words of a Brahman, it "did havoc." "It is also undeniable that the Act has not only been an almost complete failure, but that indirectly it has been the occasion of a colossal increase in the evil it sought to remedy."²

Passed on October 1, 1929, the Sarda Act was not to come into effect until six months later, *i.e.* April 1, 1930; fatal six months! The 1931 Census Report announces: "The number of married males under fifteen has risen by fifty-one per cent and the number of married females by twenty-six per cent since 1921, an increase which is undoubtedly due to the enormous number of infant marriages which took place in the six months' interval between the passing of the Sarda Act and its coming into operation." (Vol. I, pt. 1, p. 215.) The Act practically

¹ *Child Marriage: The Indian Minotaur*, E. F. Rathbone, p. 72.

² *Ibid*, p. 43.

a dead letter! Truly legislation alone is not sufficient for these things!

But it is only since the report of the 1931 Census became available in the summer of 1933 that the extent of the havoc could be calculated. This has now shown that though the total population has been increased by only 10.6 per cent, the number of acknowledged wives under fifteen has increased from roughly eight and a half to twelve and a quarter million, and the number of husbands under fifteen from under three and a quarter to over five and a half million, while wives under five years old have nearly quadrupled. . . . From the figures it appears that, even if we allowed for an increase in the number of child marriages proportionate to the increase in the population (and fortunately, the Census Report gives reason to believe that there was up to 1930, a decrease of about one per cent in each decade), the number of children hustled into matrimony during the fatal six months was probably not less than three million girls and two million boys.¹

We have still to remember that unquestionably a number of very young girls who are married have been returned as unmarried, through fear of the law on the parents' part. This frightful increase in child marriage has been proportionately as great among Moslems as among Hindus, which is a significant and ominous fact. "Deaths in child-birth will go on, the slow, agonizing, unnatural deaths of women mostly in their twenties, their teens,—some not yet in their teens,—at the rate of 200,000 every year, or twenty every hour of every day and night."² Surely "a weight of suffering, physical and mental, greater than it is possible to grasp." Is not a great publicity campaign in

¹ *Ibid*, pp. 46, 47.

² Estimate of the late Director of Medical Services.

this cause urgently needed? We, who justly pride ourselves that we have brought stable government and western civilization to India, should insist that something be done, and speedily, to end her greatest wrong.

Many people, relying upon their observation of what is happening in advanced circles among the Indian intelligentsia, would have us believe that child marriage, the reign of the untrained *dai*, and *pardah* are all rapidly giving way before the forces of progress! Here again extremes meet, for the Bombay correspondent of a leading English paper wrote in July, 1934:—

An inquiry may be held soon into the working of the Child Marriage (Restraint) Act, which may well be described as an utter failure. Reports show that the Act is being deliberately evaded or ignored. Many highly-placed government officials are breaking the law, provisions being made in the wedding budget for the payment of fines.

In one State on the borders of British India the Act is infringed almost daily. The marriages take place in special sheds erected for let or hire, and the ceremonies are kept secret. From one native State, it is reported that fifty-two child weddings took place recently within three days, while on the borders of Calcutta there is a sort of Indian *Gretna Green*.

Truly legislation alone is not sufficient, and there is nothing harder to create in India, until produced by the coming of Christian standards, than public opinion. Would the abolition of early marriage open the door to immorality and licence? Enforced morality serves a purpose. Unless the life of Indian womanhood is controlled by a stronger law, will freedom bring progress?

A general uprising of Indian women against child marriage and its sister evils would do more to forward the

cause of Indian self-government, and to raise India in the esteem of the world than any other single reform that it is in the power of women to accomplish. This one immense social service would prove a fitness that without it must remain a doubt.

Premature motherhood

Premature motherhood is the fate of the large majority, with all the unnecessary suffering, mental terror, and waste of life involved. I myself have seen mothers of eleven, and sometimes girls of eighteen completely crippled because of this custom, which has resulted from the Hindu religion. And yet there are educated but ignorant people in the West who can say "their own religion is good enough." Christianity alone is touching the deepest sore of India with healing and renewal, and not merely exposing the wounds. An Indian leader says: "Lands where motherhood is degraded can never produce a fine intelligentsia." Therefore for every reason let us set ourselves to right the wrongs of Indian motherhood, for the evil is widespread and affects such a large number of women as to necessitate redress. Indeed, it is so extensive as to affect the whole framework of society.

The conditions of Indian motherhood are not realized in the West. Since religion controls the events of birth and death in particular, "the Hindu mother is regarded as ceremonially unclean at the time of labour, and until she has undergone the ceremony of purification, some forty days later."¹ "*Motherhood* unclean?—Therefore, whatever her caste, she is attended by a low-caste or an outcaste woman, illiterate, dirty, and completely ignorant of hygiene or the elementary laws governing birth. Her professional trade of midwifery is hereditary. She, 'the indigenous dai,' goes from case to case, without changing her clothes

¹ Dr. K. R. Platt in *The Key of Progress*, p. 49.

or removing bracelets and other accessories. Her methods are crude in the extreme, often brutal, sometimes revolting. She receives eightpence or a rupee per case, and the successful issue of the case is regarded as depending not on her skill, but on fate's decree. Knowing no better, the women in their hour of need seek her ministrations, and the agony that results where Nature has not saved the situation without interference, may not be told, and cannot be imagined. The birth is often followed by blood poisoning, and if she recovers the mother is often permanently and seriously injured. Deprived of light and fresh air after the event as before, kept in the worst corner of the house or courtyard instead of the best,—for forty days, she suffers unnecessarily because of religious ideas which in reality are veiled superstition." Added to all these bad conditions is the belief in a merciless spirit which inevitably decides what will happen, whatever is or is not done, and with it the all-pervading atmosphere of fear, both physical and mental.

"Those who through fear of death [of evil spirits and many other things as well] are all their lifetime subject to bondage."¹ Written many hundreds of years ago, there is no word truer to-day of the great majority of India's women, or of the real bondage that enthralls them. And yet, it was to deliver them from this that the Great Deliverer came! And, where He is allowed, He is winning His way through caste and pardah, fear and distrust, into the lives and work of those in India who have found His service to be their perfect freedom.

In all India, with its total female population of 170 millions, there are to-day but 600 qualified women doctors. And so still "the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty" even in the twentieth century, a cruelty probably unintentional, heartrending to victim and perpetrator alike, yet cruel beyond imagining. Let me

¹ Hebrews ii. 15.

illustrate the real bondage and the true liberty by two little pictures which remain vividly in my mind; the contrast shows how extremes meet.

Some time ago I was called to a rich house in Peshawar City. The family was well known and wealthy, and an heir was expected and desired; but wealthy though they were, no preparation was made, for to do that is unlucky. The mother-to-be is often in an outhouse or hidden in a small, dark room for the event. In this case she was on the roof—the flat roof of an eastern house—and there her son was born. Before we were allowed to do anything for the new-born child he was taken, as he was, unwashed and unclothed, and placed alone for a time on a little heap of rags and refuse, ashes, and dust, which had been put ready in another corner of the roof, the object being to make it appear that he was not wanted at all—just because he was wanted so much; the real reason was fear—fear lest the vague but real spirits of evil should use their powers to bring harm to the child who was so precious. There is no greater bondage of mind than that of fear.

Soon afterwards, I was with another woman, who, like the former, was awaiting her first-born, and, like her too, she hoped for a son. But, in contrast, here was a little white-washed house, plain and poor, for she was the wife of the hospital's dispenser, and the missions cannot afford to pay large salaries to their Christian staffs. But every simple preparation had been made, and an absolute cleanliness was the order of the house. When later, wrapped in soft, warm clothing and cared for as every babe should be, the small son was given to his mother, I asked her what she would call him. With a bright smile, she looked up, and immediately replied: "His name is Samuel, for we have 'asked him of the Lord.'" Here was true freedom of mind, with a complete absence of fear; and how could it be otherwise? "Where the spirit of the Lord is

there is liberty"; also it is true that "love casteth out fear."

Premature motherhood brings a proportionately heavy infant mortality. In spite of a vast increase in population the vitality of the people is deplorably low. "A terrible thing that nearly half the babies born (at least 45,000 out of every 100,000) slip into death before they reach the age of five."¹ The main cause of the increased poverty of the masses and the present great economic problem is the appalling increase of the population in the last decade by over thirty millions. It is probable that a general improvement in the standard of living and culture will normally be followed by a reduction in the birth rate, as well as greatly lessening the sum total of woman's agony.

The orthodox Hindu widow

Early marriage inevitably leads to a tragic increase in the number of India's young widows. The report of the 1931 census showed that the remarkable decrease in the number of child widows since 1921 (from approximately 396,000 to 321,000) was likely to become a great increase, as the result of the fatal six months. "This had already become true of the infant widows under five, whose numbers had increased from roughly 15,000 to 31,000." The Census Report observes: "The year that elapsed between the rush of anticipatory marriages and the taking of the census left time for many infants married in haste to become widows for life," and this is "probably significant of sorrows to come" (p. 224).

What does orthodox widowhood involve? None are more oppressed and restricted by social customs than the Hindu widow. She is in disgrace, for it is through some

¹ *Child Marriage: The Indian Minotaur*, p. 72.

fault of hers, in this life or a past one, that her husband has died. She may never marry again, and becomes at best a drudge, at worst a slave, in her husband's household, and in the joint family system of old India she is therefore at the mercy of all. Neither her body nor her soul is her own. Since she may not marry she may not have children; if she does they may not live. Her head is often shaved, she is not accustomed to have more than one meal a day, and she wears no colours and no jewels. This last deprivation seems a small matter to Westerners, but in the East, where a woman has neither banking account nor cheque book, she wears her worth in gold, silver, ivory, even glass, in chains and anklets and bracelets—I have counted thirty-four on one arm—and thus she shows her position in life. A widow has no position, and is of no worth, therefore wears nothing attractive or worth having.

Lest this should seem to suggest exaggerated degradation, read of the lot of the Hindu widow as described by Hindu speakers. Before the Legislative Assembly, Kumar Garganand Sinha said: "I shall not take the time of the House by narrating what Hindu widowhood means. There is no Hindu who does not know it from practical experience in his own household. It is a life of agony, pain and suffering, and austerity. It is a life which has been inflicted not so much by Providence, not so much by the Shastras, as by social customs."

Another noted Indian writes: "When a man dies leaving a young widow, she becomes the common property of the entire village caste."

Again, a lady recently visiting in a Brahman house, having heard that there was a widow in the family, asked to be allowed to see her. She was admitted to a dark room opening on the inner courtyard, and found there a young girl, widowed at eighteen, who from that time had existed for seven years in that one room, working out her penance in the misery of imprisonment. She lay on the floor

crippled with rheumatism, a burden and a shame to the family name, longing for a freedom which could only come through death.

An Englishwoman through whom another young widow was saved, wrote of the latter's experiences thus: "The law of the high-class widow appears to be formed to crush every vestige of self-respect and hope from the shattered life of the child, the girl, or the woman who is widowed. For three weeks M— had to lie on her mat on the floor, never once in daylight was she allowed to sit up or rise, or speak to any one, or to read, or do anything but wail! For sixteen days no food passed her lips but cold rice-water gruel, and for the whole three weeks curry and rice was forbidden. Every day she had to wail continuously and loudly—anything more exhausting cannot be imagined." Could *sati* have been worse than this? Is it any wonder that suicide among widows is a commonplace even in this generation?

In many families conditions are relaxed, and in the joint family system of Hindu home life there may be several middle-aged widows who are the drudges of the family, and since they are useful workers their presence is tolerated. For some years Hindu reformers have even advocated remarriage to get rid of the problem of India's twenty-six millions of widows. A certain monthly paper printed by a Hindu reform agency advertises the names, ages, caste, *etc.* of widows whose people have put them up for re-marriage, or who wish for it themselves. In the same paper are published the names of men, often widowers, brave enough to run counter to public opinion and marry widows. Details about them, such as their income and family, are stated, and the agency then arranges the marriages. Through this organization alone some 500 and often more, are married each month. This may seem a crude method; it is, however, an attempt, though a rather pathetic one, at constructive reform. The same organization advertises

various *asbrams*, or places of refuge, where older widows and those not wishing to marry, may live and learn a trade by which they may earn their living and so become independent. There is much that is both good and useful in such a scheme, and yet, unless governed by standards of purity and honesty, it may very easily be misused. This is known actually to have happened.

Temple girls

What of those girls who, having been married to the gods are considered honoured and can never suffer the indignities of widowhood? Here is Hinduism at its worst. As tiny girls they are dedicated to the temples, and given over to all the nefarious practices that such "dedication" demands; it is prostitution, not in spite of, but actually in the name of, religion. Some public opinion is aroused which realizes the enormity of such traffic as is still widely practised in the great temples of the South, but a public opinion that of itself has not the power to cleanse the land.

We are told: "It is not the will of your Father that one of these little ones should perish"—how far do we His followers endeavour to carry out that holy will? How little is it understood that missions are doing this; they stand for *righting wrongs*, and the wronged are the girls and the women.

Reforms

Why is it that the enthusiasm of Indian reformers has not accomplished more, and that the work of ardent though non-Christian "Servants of India" shows but meagre results? Why are they so frequently disappointed at the non-success of their endeavours? It is because their own religion is against them. A lessening of these evils can only permanently be brought about by the overthrow of orthodoxy in India. Yet to stop there—to take

away the old social laws and moral code without putting a higher and purer in its place, might be to make the last state worse than the first.

It is here that we find the most striking proof of the uplifting power of Christianity, whose Leader alone can "make all things new." He takes the things and the people which are despised, and turns them into forces of honour and blessing, the hope of India! This is a part of God's plan of reconstruction and He works from the bottom upwards.

We find Christian widows proving the most satisfactory welfare workers. Indeed the demand for Christian welfare workers is far in excess of the supply; they are wanted on every hand. A letter received from the head of the central government welfare school of the Punjab says: "I am always being asked for Christian welfare workers, and certainly we get by far the best results from them. They seem to have an objective other and greater than their work or pay."

Hindu widows entering rescue homes find that they are of value! Slowly they are healed body and soul, because brought into touch with the Great Physician, and a love which they had not known; and they are themselves trained for service. Neither rapid nor easy is the work of renewal, yet see these glimpses of lives re-made.

J— is a widow of Brahman family, one whose life in that community would have been made desolate with drudgery and degradation. In her heart she became a Christian, when as a young girl she was allowed to attend the mission school. After her widowhood, openly avowing herself a Christian, her family wanted her no longer. She (with her baby) reached the Women's Christian Medical College at Ludhiana, and trained as a doctor. . . . Later, in a terrible earthquake, from village to village she went, humble and heroic, unknown to the outside world, on her errands of mercy. Still, in private practice, she heals

the sick and binds up the broken-hearted,—the noblest type of Indian womanhood—and a widow.¹

A letter written to the mission hospital which trained her refers thus to one of these cases: "The midwife is the wonder of the whole community. She is called to attend women in their homes, and very often has to go on foot six or eight miles, and she has never yet had a woman die on her hands, although often she is called too late to save the child's life. She was only a poor widow, just able to read—and yet!"²

Not only themselves "made new," but with the new desire for service that they have learned from the Great Example, these salvaged lives go out to spend and be spent for their Indian sisters. Widows can go where young unmarried Indian girls cannot freely go; they have more knowledge of life, and are able to stand against public opinion, for they have been accustomed to being despised and ill-used. They are wholehearted in their work, for it has brought them a new position and prestige among their fellows. The old stigma gone, the life's outlook changed, the cursed become a blessing!

MODERN WOMANHOOD

What of the educated, emancipated Indian women, numerically a small number, but with tremendous influence, and of incalculable importance to India? Cultured, refined, often with western education and knowledge of western ways, they feel their ability and position, and long for independence in every sphere. Their chief demand is for education for girls, as they realize how far behind this is compared with that of the boys.

Educated women number less than two per cent of the total number of Indian women; the remaining ninety-eight

¹ See *Sister India*, by M. E. Craske, pp. 89-91.

² *Sister India*, M. E. Craske, p. 80.

per cent can neither read nor write. The education of the women and girls is a crying need of the day. Those in touch with progressive thought show a pathetic desire for education to enable them to gain a knowledge of, and take a share in, the life of their country, and to prepare themselves for a day when there shall be no need of *pardah*. They are so eager to continue their studies that parents yield to their entreaties to prolong their education, and even approve of it, though this entails the necessary step of postponing marriage.

No one can fail to see almost infinite possibilities of good in such changed status of woman, and in the new attitude that is noticeable throughout the entire East. India's educated women are demanding their rights, and are impatient of delay. They ask for equal rights of inheritance with men and the Bill to bring this into law is before the Legislative Assembly. Up till now a woman in India has had no rights. Any property or possessions stand in her father's name for her, then in her husband's, then in her son's; even in her grandson's. This has been a necessary custom and arose to protect both her and her property. She could not write; she had no banking account or cheque book; it was the only safe way. In fact woman has been regarded more or less as property herself. Rs. 150, equal to about £11, is a not uncommon value, one might call it price, for a woman in North India. I heard of one the other day valued at Rs. 500, and that sum was paid for her as a wife.

Education is indeed a pressing need if the women are to play their part. And so we find in town areas girls pouring into schools and colleges in larger numbers than existing institutions, government or mission, can cope with. In Calcutta alone the number of these girls has doubled in the last three years, over 1000 each year entering college life. The result is that private Hindu colleges are springing up to supply the demand; these are co-educational,

frequently no suitable hostels are available, or even separate cloak room accommodation for men and women, though some of the latter, have only recently broken *pardah*! In the words of a Y.W.C.A. worker who lives among them: "There is a terrible lack of discipline in hostels, colleges, and homes. Western learning brings baffling ideas, bewildering difficulties, a liberty without law." Restrictions which have been all-powerful in the lives of Indian women, are going, and new influences like a flood tide sweep them off their feet with overwhelming force.

But let us try to understand their problems and to sympathize, for "Miss India" is a most capable and attractive young person, and in greater need and danger than she knows. These girls are living a life their mothers know nothing of, and therefore they receive little understanding or sympathy in their homes. The mothers equally need our sympathy, living as they are in a different generation and a different world!

Then, too, these modern girls are making new traditions while living in an atmosphere which is both chaotic and politically dangerous, and it is easy for their energies to be spent on political rather than social questions. Never was there greater need of counsel and leadership, for many of the best of these young Indian women are overwhelmed and positively frightened by the problems of their country, more especially the economic depression and poverty of the masses. They feel so inexperienced, and yet responsible, knowing that every one is looking to the educated women of India to lead towards a new national uplift.

For instance, it is common knowledge—though new to these girls—that over ninety per cent of the people of India live in villages, and it follows that any educated women who wish to serve the real India must make themselves familiar with the needs of this vast rural population. In order that students may have an opportunity of studying village conditions at first hand, mission colleges and

Y.W.C.A. centres are arranging to hold village-study weeks, when parties of students live in an ordinary village house, doing their own housework and cooking, and drawing their water from the well with the village women. Thus they observe the conditions of rural life, visit the homes of the poor, and learn to share in and to understand their country's deepest needs. Many of these modern women are *Ranis* and *Begums*, among the highest in the land; yet they too are catching the spirit of service. They are organizing *pardah* clubs, women's institutes, guide companies, and working in many ways for the true emancipation of their less fortunate sisters. What power lies in their hands! Such progressive changes, expressed in service, fill all who love India with hope for her future.

Another Y.W.C.A. report tells us:—

Students in India are conscious of being pioneers. . . . They have accepted the fact that on their shoulders will lie in the future, responsibility for their country's problems. . . . Christian work is turning the burning patriotism of these girls into channels of usefulness by promoting well-planned schemes of social service. . . . In the Christian hostels, Moslem, Hindu, and Sikh students find more than protection and a home. They come [to the big cities] from up-country stations, and are startled and attracted by the new free life of the city. They meet Christian girls with the same aspirations and the same longing for learning, they listen perhaps for the first time to the teaching of Jesus Christ, and are attracted to Him by the example and friendship they meet. . . . The "East and West," or "Cosmopolitan Clubs" are very popular. They are composed of women of many faiths, but they appreciate the goodwill and the chance for friendship with *all* women. Recently one of these clubs, consisting of Indian Christians, Hindus,

Mohammedans, Parsees, Marwaris, Brahmans, Anglo-Indians, Russians, English, and Canadians, was asked to produce a poster depicting their activities. This club was determined to tell the world what the club existed for in one sentence: "We are paving the way towards universal peace by discarding communal and racial prejudice. . . ." The girls, members of the Y.W.C.A. of India, Burma, and Ceylon, have their own statement of purpose, and their motto is: "Seek Light, Share Light."

And in spite of India's determination to be sufficient unto herself, her women still turn with candid trust and willingness to be helped in their great struggle, to those whom they recognize as being actuated by the spirit of the Christ Who came among men as One Who served.¹

It cannot be too strongly urged that the Spirit of Christ is the *unifying force* that alone can uplift the lives of the industrial workers equally with those women oppressed by custom and tradition, and give women as such a new status. It is no less essential as the *balancing power* to direct the new spirit of liberty, zeal, and energy, from riot into reason, from bitterness and clamour into unselfish service.

Compare, or rather contrast, these two passages from two reports. The first:—

The great problem of these days in . . . [one of the provinces] is the communal one. . . . For the first time this communal poison has crept in amongst the women. Before, the educated women who took an interest in public questions were able to think and act together as women in the common interests of their sex. Now every question has a communal turn and it

¹ From *The Y.W.C.A. in India*.

is heartbreaking to see meetings break up in disorder or the most flagrantly dishonest methods resorted to directly any question of election of delegates, office bearers, or any other kind of choosing of people comes up. It is then merely a question of getting in a Mohammedan (or a Hindu) by any means, fair or foul, apart from suitability. One hopes this phase will pass . . . so that the women can give their minds to the things that so urgently require to be done, and are now being *hindered* by this absorption in communal affairs. I believe Christians have a special opportunity here.

A hospital report opens with these words:—

The political and financial position [in the same province as referred to above] has been difficult and often a source of anxiety; but we have been able to go steadily on, caring for all classes alike, and receiving their love and confidence, as our graduates, scattered throughout India, often in lonely and difficult stations, are seeking to minister in the name of the Great Physician to the womanhood of this land.¹

Extremes meet indeed! The same liberty in one case causing destruction, in the other construction, reconstruction, and renewal. Picture some great Indian river, coming down in the monsoon flood, the irresistible volume of water sweeping all before it, causing widespread death and destruction. Then the same force of water, controlled and harnessed by dams and canals, turned and spread over the parched land, bringing rich harvests, joy, and even life, to country and people. Water—India's most precious possession; true liberty—her greatest need!

¹ By Dr. Edith Browne, O.B.E., of the Women's Christian Medical College and Hospital, Ludhiana.

Neither Hinduism nor Islam can save the situation. They are losing their hold during the process of attaining freedom. An Indian Christian lady, herself educated at Cambridge and now the principal of a college for Indian girls, writes: "The awakening womanhood of India is trying every experiment and I am terrified to think to what results these experiments may lead. The Hindu religion that had such hold is losing its value for the younger women who are studying at schools and colleges, and something must be substituted for it, for Indian women are intensely religious and devotional, and that, I can see, can only be filled by the personal factor of Christ. Only it must be acknowledged. The way in which ideals of service are being taken up by women shows that it *is* acknowledged, though not openly."

That influence, intangible, uplifting, is here and there directing their energies into social channels. In Christian colleges Hindu girls are tackling the problems from a Christian point of view. In one city an international students' conference was held, Christian and non-Christian alike attending, and the subject chosen was "the challenge of Christ to our generation." One of the results was a great longing on the part of nominal Christians for power, and a humble sharing with those of other faiths in a discovery, or rediscovery, of God's plan for reconstruction, personal and national.

Though there are reformers of every religion taking a share, it is Christian women who are in the majority in the still-despised nursing profession, and in village uplift.

An Indian Christian leader spoke thus in conference: "In the field of medicine, nursing, public health, social service, and teaching, Indian Christian women have been pioneers among their countrywomen. Even to-day they form the majority of women workers, devoting their lives to the service of their countrywomen."

Have those who criticize "missions" any knowledge

whatever of that work of reconstruction which God has accomplished through His agents, the missionaries? True, it is that there are many nominal Christians in India, though far fewer in proportion than in England where all "profess and call themselves Christian," and this growing, serving, inspiring Church in India is the result of missionary endeavour! If all Britishers serving in India would see for themselves mission schools and hospitals, rescue homes and orphanages, many more would take their share in this, the greatest service, being rendered to India.

Visit with me one little hospital, under the C.M.S. and the C.E.Z.M.S., in the far north, and hear the words of the young, gifted woman doctor, as she pictures life for us in her report, written in 1934:—

One watched the swelling stream of women pouring in at our doors, lying in our beds, and crowding our out-patient rooms. One saw them dirty and unkempt, pale, under-nourished, weak and ill, sad and hopeless many of them, and all of them fatalistic and with such appallingly low standards of truth, morality, and goodness, and almost all in bondage to fears of one kind or another. One saw also their potentialities — patience, self-sacrifice, and loyalty, so frequently evident in [Indian] women, but so tragically wasted in futilities and forlorn hopes.

What is our hospital doing for these people? The answer had much in it to be thankful for. Many were healed and went their way blessing us; more were relieved and very grateful for our help. Some were even a little cleaner, a little more sensible in the way they treated their children or their sick folk, a little more thrifty and careful and less feckless in their homes. Some even learned to trust us, and to come to us first instead of to *bakims* and *dais*, or to take precautions and come to us in time instead of waiting till

the patient was as good as dead. All these were good things, but *it was not enough*. It was not even enough that many of our patients became our friends, and turned to us for help whatever their trouble, though that, I think, was the biggest bit of service of all, and the most worth while.

But more than all this was needed to touch the tremendous needs and evils and problems that we see around them. Nothing less than a fundamental transformation of life and character in each one could do that. True, the task of changing them seemed impossible, when one considered how slight was our contact with them, how enormously different their background, their ideas and their aims and outlook, and how tremendous the inertia caused by their ignorance and dullness of understanding, and by their fears and superstitions. . . . What we can do is to bear witness to what *we* have learnt of the power of God. And we are to believe that the same transforming power can change the lives of these, too, among whom we work, and turn them into flaming torches whose light will carry into every dark corner the radiant message of the Kingdom of God.

What glorious possibilities lie before India's women when introduced to Christ Himself through the work of missions!

It must not be thought that these Christian leaders are necessarily, or even usually, from wealthy homes or high castes. Dr. Azariah, the Indian bishop, in his splendid treatise: "Christianity the answer to the economic problem of India," tells us that in his diocese alone "more than two score of ladies are practising physicians who, but for the conversion of their parents, would have lived as women of the depressed classes." Here again extremes meet!

Words fail to describe the contrast between those, the lowest of humanity, that multitude of outcastes, oppressed and depressed by India's ancient religion, and these Christian women doctors, the crown of India's womanhood! Were we there we could see hospitals where high-caste and low-caste and out-caste are ministered to by the one-time "untouchable," who follows closely in the footsteps of Him Who said: "Behold, I make all things new"!

Only as Christ is presented in life and action to the thinking women of India will they learn (howbeit through devious and costly ways) that neither *legislation, education, nor emancipation*—on each of which they and we set such store—can suffice. Can we visualize a new India brought to the feet of her Lord and ours, through the devotion and sacrifice of those women who have been themselves brought into the only liberty adequate for India—"the glorious liberty of the children of God"?

Could anything be more urgent or more compelling than the present situation? It comes as an ultimatum, not less to the women of India than to the women of our own nominally-Christian England. All that has come to us British women, our present heritage of independence and freedom, our position of equality in education and the professions, and the advance in health and hygiene, has come through the leavening influence of Christianity down the centuries. There was a time when Britain was "a very savage island"! Darkness gave way before the Dawn. We hold in trust what India and the world need. On one condition has the Dayspring (*i.e.* the Dawn) visited *us*, that we should "give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow"—and among these are the women of India. Are we doing it?

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