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SHAKTI ASCENDING: HINDU WOMEN, POLITICS, AND RELIGIOUS LEADER- SHIP DURING THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

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No student of Indian religion familiar with Western women's struggles to win an expanded role in religion can fail to be struck by two aspects of India's contemporary Hindu scene. The first is the expanding prominence of women in roles of religious leadership and the second is the extent of acceptance and even promotion of these expanding roles by men.

Of course women leaders by no means dominate the contemporary scene. The Hindu tradition has always been patriarchal in its institutional structure, especially in public roles of the upper-caste brahmin-dominated tradition. Its sacrificial priests have been male, its world-renouncing *sannyāsi* orders have been largely hostile to the prospect of female entry; its preceptors for many centuries denied to women the right to learn the Sanskrit language that would give women access to sacred knowledge. Men have been the philosophers, the expositors of sacred texts, the *gurus* who dispensed initiations and spiritual advice and sometimes assumed the roles of *avatāras*, living gods. Women have been expected to remain within their respective households, marrying, bearing children, and restricting religious efforts to the discipline of service to families, observance of caste rules of purification, and enactment of the many *vratas*, vows, by which domestic well-being has been thought to be maintained. Exceptions to this pattern were to be found only in heterodox groups such as the Buddhists and Jains who provided

a renunciant option for women and in the lower-caste devotional and tantric movements that from time to time had raised challenges to upper-caste hegemony.

Yet within the past century this tapestry of orthodox masculine dominance has begun to unravel. Women are taking on the shaven heads and saffron robes of *sannyāsi*-hood, both in its old modes of expression in lives of perpetual wandering and teaching and in new groups such as the service-centered *sannyāsini* organization Sarada Math, sister organization to the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.¹ Women are studying Sanskrit, Vedic texts, other scriptures, and *yoga* techniques as *brahmacāriṇis*, celibate students, in India's multiplying *āshrams*, *guru*-centered communities.² They are themselves acceding to the role of *guru*, giving initiation with *mantras*, advising with divine authority, heading *āshrams* small and large, and offering textual expositions and instruction in spiritual discipline.³ They are leading *kirtans*, sessions of devotional song, officiating at *pūjās* of image veneration, and even, at times, performing Vedic fire rituals.⁴ They are teaching religious classes for children, running charitable dispensaries, heading schools, colleges, hostels, orphanages, old-age homes and hospitals sponsored by religious organizations. They hold office in major religious organizations once dominated by males⁵ and in at least one instance—that of the group called Brahma Kumaris—they are the sole governors and teachers of a worldwide organization that has many enthusiastic and able-bodied male members.⁶ Women have even—sadly—harangued fellow Hindus to kill; hate tapes cut by the VHP *sādhvis* Rithambhara and Uma Bharati have been frequently used to stoke Hindu fury in the waves of Hindu-Muslim rioting that has bloodied recent years.⁷ As one American writer has asserted, “the new wave is women.”⁸

Moreover, men have played a noteworthy role in promoting this process. It is male *gurus*, sometimes even the prestigious and conservative Dasanami Sannyasi *śaṅkarāchāryas*, who have initiated women into India's old *sannyāsi* orders.⁹ It was a male, Swami Vivekananda, who first envisioned the women's order Sarada Math and brought to India Sisters Nivedita and Christine, the two women who laid the foundation that would eventually make it possible. The male Arya Samaj educator Lala Devraj broke the male monopoly over Vedic learning and rites by teaching girls at his school to chant *mantras* and perform Vedic fire rituals. Another

male, the eccentric Brahmin saint Upasani Baba, created the women's order of Kanya Kumaris and likewise trained them in Vedic practice.¹⁰ The male founder of the Brahma Kumaris, the prophet and former jeweler Dada Lekraj, has mentored them even past death through his writings and periodic sessions of institutionalized seance.¹¹ Moreover, the majority of women who have achieved widespread fame as *gurus* have been vested with their spiritual authority by even more famed male mentors;¹² in fact, virtually every male *guru* of note has produced at least one prominent female protégé—several of whom have been, ironically, foreigners. Sri Ramakrishna authorized his wife Sarada Devi to administer *mantras* and charged his woman disciple Gauri Ma to form an Ashram for women. Vivekananda summoned Nivedita and Christine and encouraged women disciples to teach in his American centers. Yet another Ramakrishna disciple, Swami Paramananda, trained his niece Gayatri Devi to head an American center. Sri Aurobindo passed his spiritual mantle to the Frenchwoman Mirra Richard, who for decades after his death ably headed his *ashram* and organization as "The Mother." Swami Sivananda mentored the Canadian Sivananda Radha, Yogananda the American Daya Mata, and Upasani Baba left his *ashram* and authority to Kanya Kumari Godavari Mataji. More recently, Swami Muktananda sanctioned his female successor Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, and Dhyanyogi Madhusudandas has appointed his mentee Asha Ma to head his American Mission.¹³

Unlike their sisters in the U.S., women in India have not lobbied for such promotion. There is in fact no movement of Hindu feminist theology or Hindu feminist activism comparable to those which are so prominent among Christian, Jewish, and Buddhist women in the U.S. Moreover, these developments are not expressions of liberal movements such as the Reform Judaism which ordained the first women *rabbis*, or the liberal Protestant churches that produced America's first woman ministers. Most have occurred in "new" movements, it is true—movements that have challenged rigidities of inherited orthodoxy. But the teaching of these movements remains conservative, recalling followers to the values and wisdom of the Hindu past. In fact, their conservative tone is an important clue to the process which has brought women into leadership, as is the avid mentoring women leaders have received from Hindu men.

Contemporary research is showing that Hindu women's emergence into public roles of religious prominence has been a by-product of a conservative and male-initiated process—the process by which Hindu men sought to conserve their integrity and self-respect in the presence of British colonialism. Movements of male response to the colonial experience such as those described in this volume established, step-by-step, a series of conditions that facilitated women's entry into public religious roles. Efforts at reform and ensuing reaction set the stage by drawing women out of homes into public life, but assigning them special responsibility for preserving Hindu cultural and spiritual identity. Revivalist movements recovered precepts and precedents from the past that allowed them to claim an array of roles from India's prestigious Vedic tradition. Radical nationalism brought publicity to concepts of *shakti*¹⁴ and female forms of divinity that enabled women to be recognized as divine *avatārs* and accepted in *gurus'* roles. Gandhi's *satyāgraha* campaigns produced a confluence of expanded vision, engagement, and competence that enabled the organization of complex service-centered organizations.

The remainder of this chapter tells the story of these developments, and traces the male motivations that brought them into being. This entails revisiting groups and developments described in this text, however, examined this time from a woman-centered point of view. Although our story is principally about men's initiatives on behalf of women, women swiftly became active agents in this process; hence, wherever possible, I shall call attention also to their contributions to these events. My account depends heavily on recent researches by Indian scholars; I am grateful to them for helping me understand a phenomenon that has been a puzzle to me for many years.

The Push for Reform: Women Emerge

Much of our tale is set among the upper-caste, urbanized and often well-to-do classes who have launched so many of the developments that Westerners like to call "modern." It was sons of these classes who first summoned women to assume new roles and who publicized the ideologies that would bring those roles a measure of public acceptance. It was the women of their families who became their shock troops and collaborators for many of the new efforts.

Women descendants of these families would go on to assume a substantial proportion of women's leadership roles in both the secular and the religious realms of India today.¹⁵

To understand their efforts, it is necessary to understand the family system out of which these sons and daughters came, and against which they often strived. Most were products of the large, complex, households often called "joint" families; in such families, several generations lived together and shared income and property. Elders held decision-making authority, allocating resources and work, and settling disputes; younger members, both men and women, were expected to obey them. The families were patrilineal, meaning that men of a common blood-line (grand-fathers, fathers, and sons) formed the basic family unit, while wives "married in." Elders decided whom their sons and daughters would marry, just as they decided all other significant family-related business. Daughters were often married and brought into husbands' households while still very young to ensure that they would properly absorb their new family's customs and would learn to treat its interests as their own. To ensure that they would adjust, and not cause destabilizing tensions, they were kept a blank slate before marriage; learning to read, for example, was disparaged because it might fill heads with contrary ideas.

Wives were taught to respect and obey their husbands; the ideal of *pativrat*, taking one's husband as one's god, was frequently enjoined on girls being prepared for marriage. But in fact, most wives saw little of husbands during daily family rounds, for labor was strictly divided. Men worked outside, in fields or at trades, under supervision of the family's males. Women worked inside, subject mainly to the authority of older females; children, too, stayed under older women's supervision until the time came for sons to be trained by fathers. If sons travelled, either for work or education, they travelled either with other males or alone, while wives and children stayed behind in the common household. In some regions such as Bengal, where our story begins, this confinement of upper-class women to the household reached the extent of keeping women in seclusion, *purdah*; this meant that they could not even be seen by males not of their own families. If they travelled outside, they were heavily veiled or enclosed in palanquins, curtained boxes carried by bearers. Most of the time they remained in inner apartments of their in-laws' homes. Even if husbands died,

most women remained bound to in-laws' families, where they were expected to observe customs of perpetual mourning; as unproductive drains on family resources, such widows sometimes found themselves mentally or physically abused. One route of escape, again not observed in all areas of India, was for a faithful wife, a *sati*, to join her husband in the flames of his funeral pyre.

When British merchants established outposts of their East India Trading Company at what would become the cities of Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta, they were appalled by practices such as widow-burning, perpetual mourning for widows, seclusion, child-marriage, and denying women literacy; they were even more appalled by the fact that certain of these practices, such as *sati*, seemed to be sanctioned by religion. Historian Lata Mani has shown how citing such presumed abuses became a central feature of the discourse by which British officialdom justified expanding the British reach and rule. They would also therefore become a central preoccupation of Hindu reformers who took up the British challenge and sought to remake their worlds and religions in such a way that foreigners would find less reason for criticism and interference.¹⁶

The first chapter of this volume has stressed the more explicitly religious and theological reforms that marked such efforts by reformers such as Rammohun Roy, Debendranath Tagore, Keshub Chunder Sen, and the other men whose vision produced the Brahma Samaj and its various imitators. It must not be forgotten, however, that virtually all the *samaj* reformers sponsored programs of social reconstruction along with their theological efforts. Many of these programs would work towards eliminating abuse of women. Thus Rammohun Roy waged a successful campaign for prohibition of *sati*; Keshub Sen at various times in his career challenged *purdah*, fought child marriage, backed his compatriot Vidyasagar's campaign for widow-remarriage, campaigned himself for women's education, and established a girls' school, a normal school, and at least two Brahma-Samaj related women's organizations.

Although response to the colonialist challenge had been a significant factor in defining the perimeters of the reformers' "women problem," it had never been the only motivation for working to change the status of women. Personal factors were a significant influence: Rammohun Roy, for example, had been ignited to work

against *sati* by the burning of his own brother's second wife. Yet another important consideration pointed to by historian Sumit Sarkar was the isolation of the reformers "in a hostile social world."¹⁷ Many were on uncomfortable terms with their families; some had even been driven from homes and disinherited as a result of actions that had drawn the wrath of caste organizations upon them. Certain actions on behalf of women, such as undertaking their education and combatting *purdah*, held the promise of creating women who could be companions rather than distant servants for males. Keshub Chunder Sen was to articulate this hope clearly in a speech that he made on women's education in the year 1870:

Give them education and they will prove helping hands. They will not only learn what is right, they will not only accept right convictions in their own hearts, but they will also render you valuable practical aid, and prove your companions in the higher enterprises of life. At present there are educated fathers and uneducated mothers, enlightened husbands and illiterate wives. There are conscientious and pure-minded and earnest-hearted fathers, but their daughters are being trained up by their superstitious mothers in the midst of falsehood and impurity. Try to remove such anomalies, and by educating your mothers, wives, sisters and daughters, bring them up to your level. As you are marching forward and endeavoring to place yourselves in the front rank of civilization, take your female relatives with you; then the amelioration of the country will be complete . . . By educating women we would reinforce our own energies, and with mutual cooperation elevate and reform our country.¹⁸

The record of reformers' initiatives towards their own wives, sisters, and daughters shows that they shared Keshub's anticipations. Many early reformers defied family wishes to educate wives and sisters secretly, or to coax wives out of *purdah*. They founded schools for their daughters, postponed daughters' marriages so they could study, and married them to reform-minded men like themselves.

The transformation that would thus be worked in the lives of many such women can best be shown by reviewing the life of one. Ramabai Ranade, wife of Maharashtrian jurist and reformer R.G. Ranade, has left a vivid account of her 28 years of life with her distinguished husband.¹⁹ When married in 1873, at the age of

eleven, Ramabai was totally illiterate, for her family had shared the widespread belief that a girl who learned to read would hasten the death of her husband. Her thirty-two year old husband, a widower, had tried to resist his family's efforts to marry him to a child; when his father's wishes prevailed, he determined that he would at least see Ramabai educated. For a long time he taught her himself at night after returning from work; meanwhile, during the day, the older women of Ranade's family harassed her mercilessly and tried to induce her not to cooperate with him. But she herself loved the learning and the attention that he was giving her and so she kept on, bearing the punishment as best she could. As she grew older, Ranade began to take Ramabai along with him to various work assignments. In the city of Nasik, at Ranade's urging, she organized a social gathering for women and aided with the graduation program for a girl's school. Later, in Bombay, she became active in an Arya Mahila Samaj, an educational club for women organized by the famed woman reformer Pandita Ramabai. Returning to the Ranade homestead in Poona, she founded a Mahila Samaj of her own and presented her first public speech in English on behalf of her husband's campaign to gain British backing for founding of a woman's high school. Thus, little by little, she built up her confidence and abilities until she became an invaluable aide in her husband's reform initiatives. When Ranade died in 1901, Ramabai struck out on her own, organizing a women's club which brought together women of different communities and founding Seva Sadans (Houses of Service) in both Bombay and Poona. These promoted girls' education and offered training in teaching and nursing to widows, abandoned wives, and girls without family support.²⁰

Such patterns would be repeated many times with other women. Especially important for women's development were burgeoning numbers of women's societies, at first organized through male initiatives, later run entirely by women. These brought in lecturers, served as a forum for exchanging ideas and practicing expression through writing, and organized service projects, such as fund-raising to acquire equipment for hospitals and schools. By the turn of the century, this work had gained its own momentum, surviving well after political events diverted men's attention to other concerns. It eventually bore fruit in the founding of the nationwide All-India Women's Conference, which worked on behalf of women's education and helped to win many political rights for

women.²¹

A Wave of Reaction: Women are Made Keepers of Culture and Religion

However, even as education for women grew more acceptable, and as women learned how to take over the drive for their own countrywomen's betterment, evidence was mounting of a deep anxiety over the project for women's reformation. Indian historian Partha Chatterjee, known for his research on the rise of nationalist movements in India, has pointed to manifestations of this anxiety in his native Bengal:

It is striking how much of the literature on women in the nineteenth century was concerned with the theme of the threatened westernization of Bengali women. It was taken up in virtually every form of written, oral and visual communication, from the ponderous essays of nineteenth-century moralists, to novels, farces, skits and jingles, to the paintings of the *patua* (scroll painter). Social parody was the most popular and effective medium of this ideological propagation. From Iswarchandra Gupta and the *kabiyal* (popular versifiers) of the early nineteenth century to the celebrated pioneers of modern Bengali theatre—Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Dinabandhu Mitra, Jyotirindranath Tagore, Upendranath Das, Amritalal Bose—everyone picked up the theme. To ridicule the idea of a Bengali woman trying to imitate the way of a European woman or *memsahib*. . . was a sure recipe calculated to evoke raucous laughter and moral condemnation in both male and female audiences.²²

Chatterjee notes that the emerging Bengali women were not behaving even remotely in the ways that the caricatures portrayed. Rather the portrayals reflect popular fears that something very important to India was on the verge of being lost.

Chatterjee explains these fears by pointing to a paradigm that was helping many middle-class Hindus to make choices among the disorienting tidal wave of changes that colonial rule was thrusting upon them.²³ The paradigm approached the Indian context via a series of dichotomies: material/spiritual, outer/inner, world/home, men/women. According to its assertions, a culture has two fundamental domains: the material, on which well-being depends, and

the spiritual, which is the source of all integrity. Material life is outward, and is pursued in the public world. Because it is also less significant than the spiritual, it can be permitted to change. Spiritual integrity, however, must be preserved for cultural survival. Spiritual life is interior, and is preserved through the values and customs of the home. Men, working in the world in the pursuit of things material, are repeatedly threatened with subversion of their inner spiritual foundations. Women, staying at home, are the natural guardians of spiritual values. This dichotomizing of life was not unique to India; parallel versions of the paradigm were current at the time both in Britain and in the United States. But Chatterjee believes that it held special urgency for Indians, for it pointed to a domain in which they had not been conquered—their distinctive, even superior, spiritual culture. It was this precious, uncolonized, spiritual essence of Hindus that was felt to be threatened when reformers began to tinker with women's roles and with the Hindu home.

The social history of the later nineteenth century in India would record at least three responses to this imagined threat. One was resistance to attempts at reconstructing women's roles; as late as the 1920s, many orthodox Hindu families were still withstanding social pressure to permit daughters to leave *pardah* and/or go to school.²⁴ A second was denial of the issue; a few intrepid reformers decided their goal was full partnership for women and continued with their program as initially construed.²⁵ The third solution, chosen by emerging groups with strong nationalist sympathies, was to design a new construct of the ideal woman as someone who would carry her "spirituality" with her wherever she might go. This in effect would entail a double cultural standard for behavior of the men and women who were actors on the public stage. Men were allowed to continue the drift towards absorption of things "materialistic" and "Western" that had in fact already occurred: as required by circumstances, they could smoke, drink alcohol, eat meat, and wear Western tailored suits. Women were to assert their continuing commitment to spiritual values by assuming contradictory cultural markers:

The 'spiritual' signs of her femininity were now clearly marked: in her dress, her eating habits, her social demeanour, her religiosity . . . The 'spirituality' of her character had also to be stressed in contrast with the innumerable

surrenders which men were having to make to the pressures of the material world. . . . Each of these [men's] capitulations now had to be compensated by an assertion of spiritual purity on the part of women. They must not eat, drink, or smoke in the same way as men; they must continue the observance of religious rituals which men were finding it difficult to carry out; they must maintain the cohesiveness of family life and solidarity with the kin to which men could not now devote much attention.²⁶

Both men and women would come to propagate this double standard. Its traces are found throughout the writings of women that began to be published after the last decade of the nineteenth century. Its most poignant expression has nonetheless been penned by a man—writing sorrowfully in memory of a wife who burned herself out trying to uphold it. In 1929, G.S. Dutt of the Indian Civil Service wrote a loving memorial to his wife Saroj Nalini, born in 1887 and reared during years when the double standard had attained its most forceful articulation.²⁷ Saroj Nalini had been an ideal wife, Dutt would assert: not only a seemingly tireless worker on behalf of women's needs, but also a loving partner, superb cook and housekeeper, and gifted tennis player, musician and linguist. She had prized modest dress and adornment, eschewing all forms of extravagance, and had defended native Bengali customs such as women's bantering at marriage, wives wearing vermilion in their hair and conch-shell and iron bangles, touching elders' feet, lighting Diwali lamps, and blessing brothers at the Bhai-phonta festival. Purity of character had been her highest value, while her own love, spirituality, and deep faith in God had won Dutt himself back from his own youthful, Western-influenced, agnosticism.

It is important to realize that the double standard was promoted even by moderate members of the reform groups themselves; Saroj Nalini herself had been reared by Brahma Samaj parents. One result of its impact on reform efforts would be stiff arguments about the appropriate reach of education for women. Among Brahmans, for example, such an argument would become one precipitant of the rift that resulted in formation of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj. When Keshub Sen launched a Brahma normal school for women, with Shastri to be its headmaster, Shastri planned a curriculum including logic, philosophy, and mathematics. Sen, fearing such subjects would "unsex" women, rejected this plan

and held out for English, music, drawing, needlework, housekeeping skills and a generous dose of moral instruction.²⁸

As a general principle, the more conscientious the group in guarding its religious identity, the more thoroughgoing were its efforts to impress that identity on women if it undertook projects for women's education. Hence when a group of Bengali landowners backed former princess Mataji Maharani Tapaswini in her 1893 initiative to found a school for orthodox Hindu girls, they received a program that featured instruction in both Bengali and Sanskrit, moral texts, *pūjā* rituals, shastric teachings on household life, literature and history taught from the *Kāvya*s and *Purāna*s, and the drawing of *ālpanās*, designs used in *vratas*, as well as the by now standard household skills. This school, the Mahakali Pathshala, became quite popular in Bengal; at its turn-of-the-century peak it had 23 subsidiary branches.²⁹

Revival Movements Reclaim Vedic Roles

This trend toward heavy-handed religious instruction for women would come to have unforeseen consequences. Revivalist groups seeking to restore Hinduism to the practice and teachings of its most ancient heritage began to instruct women in religious knowledge and practice of the Vedic past that had once been considered a strict prerogative of men. The most daring manifestation of this process would be in schools for women founded by the Punjabi Arya Samaj. In the year 1893 Arya males Lala Devraj and Munshi Ram joined with a group of Arya Samaj women to promote a school that would train Arya girls according to proper spiritual ideals. This school, to be named Kanya Mahavidyala (henceforth KMV), became the pilot institution of a widespread Arya Samaj system of schools and colleges for women; significantly, this was established first in the more conservative Arya Samaj Gurukul branch. KMV's history and innovative instructional program have recently been described in a long and thoughtful article by Madhu Kishwar, editor of the Indian feminist magazine *Manushi*.³⁰ This work is important both because it shows both how Aryas inducted women into the new gender standards, but also how far Aryas went in assigning to women roles once reserved for men.

Studying the early KMV curriculum, Kishwar finds a blend of conventional subjects such as literature, history, geography, natural

science, and household management, with a close attention to messages delivered both by textbook reading materials and by play. For example, readers designed for students of the third and fourth standards (grades) conveyed messages about the importance of hair hygiene, daily bathing, balanced diet, charity, honesty, industriousness, and love of country. A game designed for young students and witnessed by a contemporary visitor taught them the virtues of using time wisely, attending school regularly, speaking the truth, and obeying their parents. Biographies of women used in history classes had been clearly selected to provide models whom students could emulate, with examples chosen from Western as well as Indian women. Other fictional heroines portrayed both in stories and games show women who are healthy, bright, able to defend themselves and able to move confidently in the world of men. Household skills were similarly prominent in the KMV curriculum; girls learned to cook, stitch clothes, embroider, manage money, nurse, garden, take care of children, and guard a household's health via inoculations and personal hygiene. They were encouraged to develop physical fitness via treks and field trips. Modesty was instilled by dress codes and simplicity of taste both by codes prohibiting wearing of ornaments in school and by tracts telling young readers that too much jewelry would make them look ugly. Likewise attacked were beliefs and practices deemed to be superstitious, such as belief in ghosts and demons, refusals to eat certain foods, and fears about travelling on inauspicious days.

KMV girls learned to sing, dance, and play musical instruments—sometimes over the objection of other elements in the Arya Samaj community. They were instructed, however, to sing only “virtuous songs,”³¹ such as the *bhajans* (devotional songs) composed for them by school principal Lala Devraj and his staff. Students moreover learned to worship according to the Vedic forms deemed proper in the greater Arya community: they recited *mantras*, Vedic hymns and performed Vedic *havans*, purificatory fire rituals. Each evening they chanted together the Vedic twilight prayers. All of these Vedic practices were restricted to males in orthodox Hindu communities. The girls likewise studied Sanskrit through the most advanced levels, as well as a variety of holy books: Arya founder Dayanand Saraswati's *Satyarth Prakash*, the Hindu texts *Ramāyana*, *Manusmṛti*, the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, and portions of the *Veda*; orthodox Hindus had likewise forbidden all

Vedic studies to girls.³² By standards 11 and 12, KMV was training its students in the arts of Vedic preaching and in offering lectures on the Aryan way of life. Girls who travelled this far often became teachers in satellite schools and/or leaders in the Arya Stri Samajes, the Arya women's branch. A few became popular preachers on the Arya Samaj lecture circuit.

It is instructive to pause here and ask just how Arya Samajists justified offering women access to practices once considered a thoroughgoing male prerogative. The innovation had been accompanied through the same hermeneutic process that permitted all revivalists to institute change while asserting that this arose from Hindu, not Western, norms. Both recent custom and Western-influenced innovation were declared to be products of religious degeneration; only texts from India's most ancient past held the authority to be instruments of Hindu restoration. Arya founder Swami Dayananda's study of the Vedas had recovered verses which suggested that both women and men had the right to study, that women had once chanted Vedic *mantras*, and that men and women were intended to practice religious duties together.³³ It was moreover argued that thus engaging women fully in their Aryan heritage would make them better Aryan mothers, enabled in this way to produce more enlightened Aryan daughters and sons.³⁴

When Swami Vivekananda likewise envisioned a system of women's schools to transmit his own version of a revitalized Hinduism, he would cite with approval such Vedic interpretations by Dayananda, asserting that true Aryan ideals had always upheld women's partnership with men in matters of religion. It was the later period of degradation instituted by rapacious Puranic priests which had deprived women of their originally exalted functions.³⁵ He cited precedents from the Upanishads for training women in religious lore: the stories of Gargi, who challenged the distinguished philosopher Yajnavalkya in philosophical debate at the court of King Janaka, and of Maitreyi, the wife of this same philosopher, whom Yajnavalkya had accepted as his disciple after deciding to leave the household life.³⁵ The term *brahmavadini*—she who knows the teachings of Brahma—became Vivekananda's justification for assuming that female instruction was normal. The very sparse references to educated women in the ancient texts became, in Vivekananda's expansive imagination, a “complete . . . equality of boys and girls in our old forest universities.”³⁷

India, he asserted, had degenerated after it lost its respect for women, for the lawgiver Manu had taught, "Where women are respected, there the gods delight; and where they are not, there all works and efforts come to naught."³⁸ To reinstitute their ancient, respect-worthy status, women must be restored to their privilege of spiritual education. The Swami envisioned a nationwide network of schools offering instruction in "religion, arts, science, housekeeping, cooking, sewing, hygiene . . . History and the Puranas" as well as "principles that make for the development of an ideal character" and training in "ethical and spiritual life."³⁹ To "carry the light of (women's) education among the masses from village to village,"⁴⁰ and to serve as teachers and heads of such schools, Vivekananda further envisioned a cadre of unmarried girls and chaste widows educated in scriptures, literature, Sanskrit, grammar, sewing, cooking, household and child-rearing skills, "and even some amount of English."⁴¹ Japa, worship, and meditation would be a regular feature of its practice. Some girls of this group might be married after an initial five or six years' training; but others would take vows of *sannyāsa* renunciation and would stay to become the permanent staff and missionary arm of this Math (convent) and school for higher training. When interviewers protested that India had no precedent for a women's Math, the Swami turned to philosophical justification:

The Vedanta declares that one and the same conscious Self is present in all beings . . . In the highest truth of the Parabrahman, there is no distinction of sex. We only notice this in the relative plane. And the more the mind becomes introspective, the more that idea of difference vanishes. Ultimately when the mind is wholly merged in the homogenous and undifferentiated Brahman, then such ideas as this is a man or that a woman do not remain at all. Therefore do I say that though outwardly there may be difference between men and women, in their real nature there is none.⁴²

That is to say, he argued that gender is ultimately irrelevant in determining a person's capacity for high spiritual achievements. The same spiritual potential lies latent within all humans; with proper training any can tap it. Release of such spiritual potential was essential if educators were to avoid errors of direction; therefore women who would educate must have access to advanced spiritual discipline.

Religious training, the formation of character, and observance of the vow of celibacy—these should be attended to. In the female education which has obtained up till now in India, it is religion that has been made a secondary concern: hence those defects you were speaking of have crept in. . . . Reformers having proceeded to start female education without being Brahmacharins themselves have stumbled like that. Founders of all good undertakings, before they launch on their desired work, must attain to the knowledge of the Atman through rigorous self-discipline. Otherwise defects are bound to occur in their work.⁴³

Vivekananda died too young to translate his educational dream into reality; the most he ever saw of its inception was the tiny school for girls founded by his disciples Sisters Nivedita and Christine. But Vivekananda's enormous popularity spread far and wide both the precedents he cited and his Vedantic justification for giving women access to high levels of spiritual knowledge and roles that would enable its realization. Echoes of his words show up in pronouncements of many a later teacher. We can compare, for example, the following rationale for a women's order offered by Vinoba Bhave nearly sixty years later:

The difference between men and women is external, not basic . . . Men and women have the same identical human soul and therefore, even if there are apparent external differences, there is no need to emphasize them.⁴⁴

Through such arguments, women had acquired even by the beginning of the twentieth century a full rationale for participating in institutions of the brahmin-borne Vedic tradition. Prestigious male teachers had told women that they had a right to study Sanskrit, to learn and recite Vedic *mantras*, to perform fire sacrifices. They could be *brahmachariṇīs*, pure students sitting at the feet of religious teachers. They could be *brahmavādiṇīs*, applying themselves to high Upanishadic teachings. They could even become *sannyāsiṇīs*, renouncing all ties to develop the spiritual authority that would permit them to become teachers of religion themselves. All of these possibilities would eventually be recognized, after receiving additional impetus from a further set of developments.

Of goddesses and Shakti

One significant *leit-motif* in Vivekananda's arguments for creating

a system of education for Hindu women had been a reference to concepts that had originated in Bengal's *shākta* tradition, rather than in Vedic orthodoxy. This tradition, once denigrated by purist Brahmanic Hindus, had taught that a female power, *shakti*, lay at the source of the world's creativity. This power manifested in the goddesses whose *pūjās* were a central feature of Bengal's popular festival and *vrata* traditions. When Vivekananda referred to women as "living images of Shakti"⁴⁵ or spoke of them as "living embodiments of Divine Mother,"⁴⁶ he was drawing on concepts instilled in him by his own teacher, the Bengali saint Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Although Ramakrishna drew his religiosity from many of India's spiritual streams, he was at base a priest and devotee of the goddess Kālī, to whose service he had been called by the wealthy *shudra* widow and philanthropist Rani Rasmani.⁴⁷ Kālī was one of Bengal's most extreme evocations of *shakti*, with her lolling tongue, necklace of skulls, and bloody sword, one of India's most extreme icons of creative but daunting *shakti* energy. Yet despite her ferocious exterior the mystic Ramakrishna had come to experience and praise her as a loving mother. The enthusiasm of such a well-publicized saint for her had done much to enhance her respectability and to popularize the *shakti* concept in middle and upper-caste circles.⁴⁸

Attention to female images of divinity and to the *shakti* concept was further enhanced by contributions from an unexpected quarter—the tide of extremist Hindu nationalism whose rise would overlap the final years of Ramakrishna's life. In the year 1882, four years before Ramakrishna's death, Bengali author Bankimchandra Chatterji would publish his novel *Anandamath*, which swiftly became a best-seller.⁴⁹ Much of its appeal lay in its implicit challenge to the colonial government and its model for a type of underground struggle that could be waged against British oppression. Central to the novel's plot was a group of militant *sannyāsīs* committed to freeing their land from alien aggression. In a hidden monastery deep in the wilderness where the *sannyāsīs* make their headquarters, they worship the goddess Kali as an image of their agonized and suffering motherland. To her they offer their vows, dedicating their lives as a sacrifice for their cause. For her they sing their song of resistance *Bande Mataram*, celebrating her beauties and mourning her violation. Determined to win her freedom and restore her, they go forth on covert raids and kill to

drive invaders from their nation.

Chatterji's image of the motherland as a bound and suffering goddess would thenceforth become a staple of radical nationalist propaganda, especially in Bengal, where it had had its genesis. As anger with Britain grew over such issues as the Ilbert Bill of 1883, the famine of 1896-97, and the 1897 arrest of popular nationalist leader Lokamanya Tilak, *Anandamath's* hymn *Bande Mataram* was adopted as an anthem of nationalist resistance. By the turn of the century young radicals of the Hindu extremist movement were forming cells for underground resistance, inspired by Chatterji's *sannyāsi* orders.⁵⁰

One of the most ambitious of these organizers was Barin Ghosh, brother to an accomplished young writer who had just recently returned from studies in England. In 1902, Barin prevailed on his brother Aurobindo to write a tract calling for the founding of a revolutionary temple and order like those described in *Anandamath*. Aurobindo, whose fiery writings would soon bring him nationwide prominence, gave his summons cosmic dimensions. An Age of *Shakti* was rising in the world, he proclaimed in his tract *Bhavani Mandir*.⁵¹ This was manifest in the vast energies of war, wealth, and science swirling throughout other lands: the Mother was "pouring her spirit into the old; She is whirling into life the new."⁵² But India's own *shakti* lay dormant, unrealized because of the want of national strength. The time had come to realize Her through a rebirth of spiritual power and commitment. Aurobindo's tract ended with a rousing summons:

Come then, hearken to the call of the Mother. She is already in our hearts waiting to manifest Herself, waiting to be worshipped, inactive because the God in us is concealed by Tamas, troubled by Her inactivity, sorrowful because Her children will not call on Her to help them. You who feel Her stirring within you, fling off the black veil of self, break down the imprisoning walls of indolence, help Her each as you feel impelled, with your bodies or with your intellect or with your speech or with your wealth or with your prayers and worship, each man according to his capacity. Draw not back, for against those who were called and heard Her not she may well be wroth in the day of Her coming; but to those who help Her advent even a little, how radiant with beauty and kindness will be the face of their Mother.⁵³

Subsequent developments in Aurobindo's life would show that these words were more than mere revolutionary rhetoric. Eight years after writing *Bhavani Mandir* he withdrew from revolutionary activity to become a *guru* and prophet devoted to bringing in a new era of spiritual evolution. The entire tract evokes an openness to the future as well as the past, a willingness to heed divine callings and to permit creation of new institutions.

It also implies—apparently without Aurobindo's own intention—that the future's new forms could hold an expanded role for women. *Shakti* was not only a cosmic force and a goddess. Traditional *shākta* teachings had seen it as a power residing especially in women, and, in fact, the *shākta* tradition had been one of the few in India welcoming women teachers and saints as freely as it had welcomed men. Nationalist leaders seem to have been initially reticent to exploit this implication of their imagery.⁵⁴ Nonetheless women picked it up, and soon began claiming their own place in the resistance movement. By the time of Vivekananda's death in 1903, his Irish disciple Sister Nivedita had entered the movement, once again weaving Kālī's imagery through her own exhortations to nationalist fervor.⁵⁵ In the same year Sarala Devi, niece to Rabindranath Tagore, intensified her own activist campaign, interweaving Bengali *vratas* and goddess festivals with nationalist themes, as Lokamanya Tilak had previously done for Ganesh festivals in his own state of Maharashtra.⁵⁶ As police grew more aggressive in tracing activities of revolutionary leaders, a Bengali Brahmin girl, Kumudini Mitter, organized fellow women students to deliver messages and tracts for the latter.⁵⁷ Women organized meetings to back *swadeshi*, boycott of British goods and took to spinning thread for native *khadi* in their *zenanas*. They donated their gold bangles, nose rings, and bracelets, to be melted down and sold for the national fund.⁵⁸ By 1910, the wife of British diplomat Ramsey Macdonald observed that there was a "tremendous movement going on amongst the women. We are fond of labelling the Indian aspirations as sedition when if they were amongst ourselves we should call them patriotist. This movement seems to be spreading as much amongst women as amongst men."⁵⁹

While many historians have noted these apparent effects of politicized religious images of the female on Hindu women's engagement in politics, few have given thought to their potential implications for women's roles in religion. The same era and region that

drew Hindu women into a fervent engagement in nationalist politics would bring India its first women *gurus* of national standing. All of them, significantly, would be hailed as manifestations of *shakti* and incarnations of female deity; two had significant ties to political nationalists. Once again, Ramakrishna had established the initial precedent by designating his own wife Sarada Devi as Kālī's incarnation, literally putting his wife on a pedestal and worshipping her shortly after she came to live with him in Calcutta.⁶⁰ She nonetheless lived a virtually invisible life during his stay at Dakshineshwara temple. After his death she nearly starved for a time, living from a few vegetables that she managed to grow on a tiny plot of land she had claimed from his native village. At last a few disciples remembered her and claimed her, calling her Holy Mother and honoring her in their lost master's place. Vivekananda's repute and the rising tide of goddess imagery brought her new fame as the woman who had been Ramakrishna's own *shakti*. In later life she was pursued by her own would-be disciples, eager to touch her feet and receive from her *mantras* of spiritual initiation. Stories spread of miraculous cures she had effected. By the time of her death in 1920 she was known beyond Bengal and could include among her memories a triumphal tour to Madras, Madurai, Rameshwaram, and Bangalore in southern India.⁶¹

Where one goddess-manifestation had blazed a trail, others would follow. Aurobindo Ghosh, transformed by a jail term from revolutionary to *guru*, found a Holy Mother for his *ashram* after relocating his residence from Calcutta to South India's Pondicherry. She was Mirra Alfassa Richard, a young woman of Egyptian and Turkish parentage born in Paris in February 1878. According to her own accounts, she had had visions and other spiritual experiences of a child, including one vision of a man whom she called "Krishna." When, in 1914, her new husband Paul Richard took her to meet the *guru* he had found during a trip to India, she knew her "Krishna" had been found. She and Paul helped Aurobindo found his journal *Arya*, but soon had to leave due to the outbreak of World War I. They returned in 1920, but Paul left soon after, while Mirra chose to stay behind with Aurobindo. When membership to Aurobindo's *ashram* began to increase steadily, Aurobindo attributed this to Mirra's own dynamism. By 1926, he was referring to his own spiritual force as "*purusha*," while calling Mirra's "*shakti*"; soon he began referring to her simply as "The Mother."⁶²

His work titled *The Mother* would be devoted to her role in the Divine Plan.⁶³

Anandamayi Ma soon followed—the one woman *guru* to achieve all-India standing without backing of a male mentor. Born in 1896 of Brahmin parents in an East Bengal village and given no more than two years of schooling, she was married at the age of twelve to a man considerably her senior.⁶⁴ She began having “spells” of lost consciousness and reciting syllables in a strange language. The episodes continued until she was eighteen when, for a span of nearly three years, she stopped speaking almost entirely. By 1924, she had acquired a disciple named Hara Ram, who began calling her Mother—implying that she was an incarnation of the goddess. Soon another, Jyotish Chandra Ray, had dubbed her Anandamayi Ma. Ray, later known as Bhaiji, encouraged her to found her first *āshram*, while his book written about her would help to spread her fame and the claim of her divine powers. By 1933, Anandamayi Ma was attracting admirers from beyond the Bengal region; the most significant for her would be Kamala Nehru, wife of Indian National Congress leader Jawaharlal.⁶⁵ This famed patronage brought to Anandamayi Ma numerous well-placed followers in the national movement. The veneration she inspired brought her numerous branch *āshrams* and a community of disciples that continued to grow steadily until her 1982 death. The community she founded remains active and influential in India.

The examples of these three female divine incarnations and the widespread attention paid them in turn helped to spread the *shakti* ideology farther. With its spread came additional female *gurus* such as Godavari Mata, the Maharashtrian brahmin Upasani Baba's protégé. Installing her as his own Holy Mother in 1928, he too is said to have summoned *shakti* imagery, telling disciples: “Do not bow to me. Bow to her, for she is the supreme Shakti. Her very *darshana* (the vision of her) will wash away hundreds of sins.”⁶⁶ *Shakti* philosophy in fact became the ideology of national choice for legitimating women *gurus*. Virtually all women *gurus* have been regarded in some way as *shakti* incarnations and hence as living goddesses.

Women Rise to Regenerate a Nation

With the widened respectability of *shakti* theologies and images

and their resultant spate of women *gurus*, all fundamental rationales were in place for the basic types of women's leadership that have become so prominent in the religious life of today's India. Nonetheless, in the pre-Independence era, very little of this potential had been realized. Women teachers and renunciators and *gurus* were still tiny, isolated specks in a vast male religious sea. Most women's conceptions of the possibilities of religious life seem to have been quite limited: religion was personal devotion, adherence to *gurus*, and fund-raising projects for famine relief, widow's homes, orphanages, and schools. Moreover, by the 1920s and 1930s, women were as little interested as men in expanding women's roles in religion, for both sexes were deeply engrossed in the national struggle. It was this very struggle, I believe, which propelled women towards the final level of women's leadership to emerge, the collaborative effort to organize complex outreach and service-centered organizations.

Let us return to our story. We have already seen how women were drawn into the extremist movement in Bengal during the first decade of the twentieth century. Women's involvement in the nationalist movement would be sustained and extended by the Home Rule Drive of Mrs. Annie Besant—herself a religious as well as political leader, for she had come to India to head its Madras-based Theosophical Society. Women were therefore primed and willing when Gandhi extended his call for them to support his movement of non-violent resistance.

In the first phase of this movement extending from Gandhi's *satyāgraha* declaration of 1919 through the Civil Disobedience campaign of 1920-21, this appeal to women was similar to those of the earlier *swadeshi* and Home Rule campaigns: women were asked to spin, clothe their families in *khadi*, and donate their gold and silver jewelry to the resistance movement's coffers.⁶⁷ Much of this activity could be conducted in homes, where many orthodox women still remained in *purdah*. A handful of women assumed public roles, most notably the popular poet and orator Mrs. Sarojini Naidu.

By the second phase, launched by the Salt campaign of 1930, women themselves were demanding more extensive responsibilities. Although Gandhi resisted pleas to admit women in the core group that accompanied him throughout the Salt March to Dandi, he did call for them to join the wave of civil disobedience that followed.

Many women showed themselves in public for the first time of their lives to make and sell sea salt and to sit in front of the British liquor and cloth shops that had become targets of the new round of boycotts. Many were dragged, beaten with *lathis*, jailed, and even raped by frustrated law-enforcement officers. British-born sympathizer Margaret Cousins was to write of these women:

The response to the call of Mahatma Gandhi was magnificent. Within the next three years over five thousand women had served terms of severe imprisonment, they had suffered lathi charges, loss of property, loss of livelihood from ill health, lost of caste, loss of reputation. They willingly faced publicity of the most trying kind in picketing drink shops and foreign cloth shops, in walking in public processions, in proceedings in law courts. They sacrificed all kinds of cherished privileges of caste, ceremonial purity, and privacy.⁶⁸

Often leaders of these protesters were themselves women, for the 1930s campaign was also marked by the development of an infrastructure of training camps and courses for female *satyāgrahis*. As male leaders were arrested, newly trained women moved into their places—until they, themselves, would be arrested.

By the third phase of the movement (1940-1947), women were not only running training camps and stepping into shoes of jailed male organizers; they also had their own department within the National Congress and a network of women's committees working at neighborhood levels to gather information and train women in resistance. They moreover had a roster of female national martyrs—for women, like men, were dying in the movement—some from maltreatment and illness in jails, others from bullets and beatings by colonial police and soldiers. The significance of these activities for us is threefold. First, they expanded women's vision of their own salvific capacity and mission. This is because the Gandhian struggle had presented itself not merely as a political effort, but as a utopian movement and religious discipline. Freedom fighters were told they were working to establish *Rāmrajya*, literally a kingdom of God, where an ideal of *sarvodaya*, the welfare of all, would prevail.⁶⁹ Winning freedom from the British was just a necessary preface to this project, which intended to banish untouchability, redistribute wealth, put all Indians to work, decentralize government, establish justice, and in general defuse all causes of exploitation and oppression. To accomplish this cause, workers would have to strive

to overcome all their own hatreds and violent habits. Accordingly, *satyāgraha* meant not merely resistance to oppression by means of non-violent demonstration, but also receptivity to Truth and Divine Calling (*satya*), purity of motive and person (*brahmacārya*) and cultivation of harmlessness (*ahimsa*), which entailed the ability to absorb harm oneself rather than attempt to return it to its perpetrator. Gandhi phrased his appeals to women in terms of the match between this discipline and older gender stereotypes. Women were ideal *satyāgrahis*, he asserted, because women were already drawn towards purity and renunciation, and even in their everyday roles they embodied the spirit of self-sacrificial endurance. He claimed that he had learned the technique of non-violent passive resistance from his own mother and wife, who had simply stood their ground when his own demands became unreasonable and waited patiently until he saw the error of his ways.⁷⁰ He believed that women had a natural capacity for non-violence, and hence their presence would protect the freedom struggle from its own inclinations to retaliate. Women were rightful leaders "in the war against war . . . It is their special vocation and privilege."⁷¹

Modern feminists have called attention to the problems in this position, which like many male dicta for women before, tended to praise the very qualities in women that kept them from challenging decisions that men made for them. We shall return to this problem in this chapter's concluding reflections. Let us look for now at the positive outcomes of Gandhi's summons to women. First, the summons brought to women a vastly expanded sense of their own mission in the future of their nation and even of humankind. They were working for changes that could bring a real transformation in the experience of their own society and even of humankind; they had a responsibility for everyone, not just their own family, or caste group, religious community, town, district, or region. Second, Gandhi's call engaged women, persuading them that their own supposedly natural feminine qualities were the ones most especially needed to carry on this project. Finally, as women did become engaged and actually participated in the struggle, the struggle itself helped them to discover their own and very real competencies. They could bear opposition and hardship—ridicule, physical abuse, and the rigors and squalor of jails. They could overcome the prejudices and taboos that kept them divided: Brahmin women and untouchables marched side by side in processions;

women just out of *pardah* and sophisticates squatted in front of boycotted stores; pure housewives and prostitutes shared jail cells and nursed one another when sick. Women could moreover organize training camps, mobilize grass-roots networks, quench spiraling antagonisms and stave off riots.

What was the inheritance of these discoveries? When Independence was won, many women simply went home and slipped back into ordinary lives as if nothing unusual had happened.⁷² Nonetheless some pursued a wide range of efforts intended to carry on the project of national regeneration. Some of these were wholly secular, often substituting Marxist ideology for Gandhi's anarchic and spiritual utopianism. Others retained Gandhi's basic premise that to redesign the world one must also carry on a persistent effort to redesign and to discipline and deepen oneself.

One example of such an effort has been described by its leader Radha Bhatt in the conference collection *Speaking of Faith*.⁷³ In 1952, the community called Lakshmi Ashram was founded in the Kumaon Hills, foothills of the Himalayas. Guided by Gandhian precepts and his practice of daily song and prayer, it serves as a residential school for village girls and a center for training older women in spinning and weaving skills which are used in producing handloomed fabrics for cottage industries. It is also a self-supporting subsistence farm, to which all *ashram* members contribute daily work. Its own members and trainees moreover serve as a leadership cadre for various community action projects. Radha Bhatt has described how she herself, as a schoolgirl of the *ashram*, travelled the hillsides asking for gifts of land for the land-distribution (Bhoodan) campaign of Gandhi's disciple Vinoba Bhave. Subsequently *ashram* residents have helped village women of the region to campaign against liquor shops, to save threatened forests, and to close down a limestone quarry that was disrupting village life.

Somewhat similar, but more monastic in style is the Brahma Vidya Mandir, organized at Paunar in Maharashtra in 1959 by Vinoba Bhave himself. Like Lakshmi Ashram, Brahma Vidya Mandir was conceived as a kind of women's leadership training center for Bhoodan and other rural redevelopment projects. Its initial twenty-seven sisters adopted the rule of Gandhi's Sevagram *ashram* and called themselves *brahmācarīnis*. They have followed a discipline of sacred study, devotion, teaching, and service to surrounding rural areas. They, too, are self-supporting, maintaining themselves

through farming and publications which they issue through their own press. One of their noteworthy projects has been an all-India Women's Conference at Kuruksetra, India, held in 1973; out of this was to come the concept of *padayatrās*, walking tours by supporters in rural areas to raise the consciousness of women, learn their problems, and gather ideas for solutions.⁷⁴

Less explicitly linked to the Gandhian heritage is Sarada Math and Mission, which has realized Vivekananda's old vision of a women's *math*, while extending its services much farther than he had anticipated. Organized in Calcutta in 1954 at the instigation of women of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, this order and service organization parallel to that of the men had grown by the year 1992 from eight original members to a total of 144 fully ordained *sannyāsīnis* and 100 novice *brahmācarīnis*. A requirement that all members must be college graduates assures that they will be able to carry out the Math's and Mission's work of running some nineteen centers in India and another one abroad (in Australia). These centers in turn manage schools, hostels, libraries, a publications program, clinics and dispensaries, a maternity hospital, an old age home, an orphanage, vocational training classes for poor women, and numerous outreach and welfare programs for women and children of slums and other depressed areas.⁷⁵ The Sarada Math and Mission are wholly independent of the Ramakrishna organization for men both administratively and financially. Their funding—as well as much voluntary aid—comes from local affiliated laywomen's organizations.

Finally, we might mention a Lingayat group, the Vishwa Kalyana (World Welfare) Mission founded in Karnataka at some point soon after 1966 by Mathe Mahadevi. This has a headquarters in Bangalore and at least two branch missions also in Karnataka; its full-time renouncers follow the precedent set by twelfth century Lingayat woman saint Akka Mahadevi. It defines its own aims as "propagation of knowledge and service of mankind."⁷⁶ Unfortunately, only one brief reference to it occurs in available published literature, and I have been unable to learn more about its activities.

Concluding Reflections

By now we should be able to see clearly why men have been so prominent in the rise of women religious leaders in India. The

promotion of women for leadership roles has been intricately linked to a broader range of male projects, many of which have had decided political overtones. Women have been commandeered to advance the nation, to preserve the nation, to free the nation, to reconstruct the nation. Moreover, much of this has been accomplished with a highly appealing pitch to women's special properties: women have been called more pure and modest than men, more spiritual than men, more selfless than men, more resilient and tolerant than men, more moral, less corrupt and less violent than men.

As we have seen, such an appeal to special characteristics can be a highly effective strategy. The notion of one's inherent superiority in the midst of circumstances where others clearly hold the balance of real power has been as attractive at least to India's middle and upper-class women as it has been when preached among similar groups in America. It is always a powerful mobilizer, and writings from women's history on both sides of the globe show how readily it is internalized. Nonetheless, it has also found its fair share of critics willing to challenge men's hypocrisy whenever men vaunt women's superiority while treating women as second-class citizens. Such critics tend to be found less in the religious movements we have described than in various secularized groups—college and university teachers, for example, or the many independent activist groups that have sprung up during the last three decades of the twentieth century. They point to at least three detrimental effects of the ideology of women's "special" traits.

A) It is cooptive. It makes use of women's energies, imprints ideas in their minds and words in their mouths without challenging them to form their own assessments and conclusions. As noted earlier, it reinforces the very qualities in women—such as self-restraint, tolerance, and modesty—that prevent women from protesting policies and decisions they may experience as harmful. Moreover, it fails to radicalize women—as, for example, the very opposition to women's critiques in the Western churches has done. Instead, it tends to contain their protest to the arenas where these are least inconvenient to the organizations which may surround them. As Madhu Kishwar has noted of women's political roles in the aftermath of Gandhism:

The tradition was set for patronised entry of a handful of urban middle-class women into politics and for tailoring the

movement in such a way that some women's issues could easily be accommodated within the parameters of male domination and supremacy without throwing a serious challenge to it.⁷⁷

B) It is distracting. Particularly where women's "special traits" are said to include a "natural" concern with spirituality, devotion, or ritual custom, emphasis on these may divert privileged women into self-cultivation and retreat into *guru*-adulation and *ashrams* rather than cultivating the solidarity with other women that might help both to seek solutions for their mutual oppressions. Given the past association of religion with marking of boundaries—such as the rules of purification that divided castes or the mutual customs and manners that aided women in a given class to establish affiliation with one another—reinforcing women's commitment to "Hindu tradition" can moreover reinforce the lines of separation between them. To borrow a telling statement from a conservative Viswa Hindu Parishad worker cited by feminist historian Tanika Sarkar, such women will tend to engage in " 'class work' rather than mass work."⁷⁸

C) It can embroil women in undertakings detrimental to their own interest. Two examples can be cited here. The first is the latest manifestation of "politicized Hinduism," the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. Feminist scholar Veena Poonacha has pointed out how this movement's Ram-centered ideology is now displacing previous philosophies that created a more favorable space for women—such as, for example, Vivekananda's Vedanta-based teaching that sex distinctions do not hold in the highest spiritual realms. Ram ideology comes closer to classic Western theologies, with its dualistic premises and celebration of *machismo* traits such as domination and aggression. The popular TV version of Ram's story produced under the influence of right-wing Ram-centered movements has undercut Indian folk versions of Sita as a strong-willed woman and has made her into a pale shadow of her husband, thus further enhancing the message that males are more important than females.⁷⁹ Tanika Sarkar has pointed to the Ram movement's recent and growing successes in recruiting women for its organizations and projects.⁸⁰ As more and more women become active in the movement, they will inevitably absorb its denigratory messages.

A second example of the pitfalls in appealing to women's religiosity and regard for tradition is the Roop Kanwar *sati* contro-

versy of 1987. The Rajput caste of Rajasthan has of late been attempting to reassert its former primacy in Western India by pointing to its heroic traditions, including legends of wives who burned themselves alive either in *jauhar*, mass immolation to evade capture in warfare, or in *sati*, joining a husband's corpse on his funeral pyre. On September 4, 1987, eighteen-year old widow Roop Kanwar, encouraged by her in-laws, entered her husband's pyre—despite the long-time legal prohibition of *sati*. A huge and enthusiastic crowd cheered her on, while cowed police made no effort to interfere. Nor was any effort made afterwards to arrest and prosecute in-laws who helped her, despite insistence by Indian feminists that the anti-*sati* laws must be upheld. Instead Roop Kanwar was made part of a growing glorification and cult of *satis*, defended by Rajputs in the name of "freedom of religion." The most frightening aspect of this new cult and of the Roop Kanwar *sati* itself is the support given to them by many Rajasthani women. In fact, according to feminist scholar Kumkum Sangari, *sati* is now coming to be claimed not merely as a Rajasthani custom, but one belonging to all upper-caste Rajasthani women.⁸¹ In their eagerness to defend the claim of "religious freedom," such women forget that they thereby sanction at least a painful suicide and possibly even the murder of another woman who could have been one of themselves or of their daughters.

Despite the Roop Kanwar incident's ironic reminder that the struggle which Ram Mohan Roy began is by no means over—and despite the pitfalls arising from the views of women that this struggle promoted—Hindu women have, without a doubt, travelled a long distance as a result of the struggle's efforts.⁸² They have occupied many roles and undertaken many responsibilities that would have been unthinkable for women at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Moreover, while doing so they have maintained far more good will between themselves and male mentors than many Western feminists have known from supervisors and teachers. Perhaps the most impressive testimony to this good will among the mentors has been the number of men willing to take the risk of setting up structures which would subsequently let their proteges act in full independence. One thinks, for example, of leaders such as Vinoba and Vivekananda who stipulated that women's groups whom they furthered must maintain full control over their own projects, including control over economic resources. The fact that

such structures exist—that there are religious organizations where women have a genuine final say—over theologies, educational curricula, administrative structures, images generated, and prophecies spoken and heard—means that an extraordinary window of opportunity has opened for the Hindu women of India. If they do have unique insights, unique gifts, unique moral perspectives and methods of solving human problems, they can articulate these and use them. How this opportunity will be utilized remains to be seen.

Notes

1. For materials on women as *sannyasinis*, see Catherine Ojha, "Feminine Asceticism in Hinduism: Its Tradition and Present Condition," *Man in India* 61-63 (September 1981), 254-85; also [as Clemintin-Ojha], "The Tradition of Female Gurus," *Manushi* 6, No. 1 (= No. 31, Nov.-Dec. 1985), 2-8, and "Outside the Norms: Women Ascetics in Hindu Society," *Economic and Political Weekly* (April 30, 1988), WS34-36; Lynn Teskey Denton, "Varieties of Hindu Female Asceticism," *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1990); Ursula King, "Effect of Social Change on Religious Self-Understanding: Women Ascetics in Modern Hinduism," *Changing South Asia: Religion and Society*, eds. K. Ballhatchet and D. Taylor (London: University of London, 1984), pp. 69-84; Betty Sue Robinson, *The Ramakrishna Sarada Math: A Study of a Women's Movement in Bengal*, Columbia University Ph.D. dissertation, 1978.
2. For women's activities in *ashrams*, see Clemintin-Ojha, "Tradition of Female Gurus" and "Outside the Norms."
3. See Clemintin-Ojha, "The Tradition of Female Gurus"; Marvin Henry Harper, "Four Holy Mothers," *Gurus, Swamis, and Avatars: Spiritual Masters and Their American Disciples* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 178-204; Linda Johnsen, "Women Saints of India," *Yoga Journal* 81 (July-August 1988), 52-109; June McDaniel, "Saints, Seekers, and Bhore Ladies," *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 191-240; Charles S.J. White, "Mother Guru: Jnanananda of Madras, India," *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives*, eds. Nancy A. Falk and Rita M. Gross (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1989), pp. 15-25. Hagiographic biographies have also been written of widely-known female *gurus* such as Sarada Devi, Mirra Richard, Anandamayi Ma, Sri Godavari Mataji, and, most lately, Mata Amritanandamayi.
4. The first to do so were Arya Samajists; women of Upasani Baba's

- Kanya Kumari Sthan followed; I have myself seen Vedic fire rites at the New Delhi branch of Sarada Mission, and they have likewise been mentioned at Vinoba Bhave's Brahma Vidya Mandir; see Katherine Young, "Women in Hinduism," *Today's Women in World Religions*, eds. Arvind Sharma and Katherine Young (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1994), p. 128.
5. For example, during research in India in the fall and winter of 1991-1992, I was privileged to meet and interview Kumari Vidya Vati Ananda, Vice-President of the New Delhi based regional association of the Arya Samaj.
 6. For information on Brahma Kumaris, see Lawrence A. Babb, "Amnesia and Resemblance in a Hindu Theory of History," *Asian Folklore Studies* 41, No. 1 (1982), 49-66; also "Indigenous Feminism in a Modern Hindu Sect." *Signs* 9, No. 3 (Spring 1984), 399-416; also "Amnesia and Remembrance among the Brahma Kumaris," *Redemptive Encounters: Three Modern Styles in the Hindu Tradition* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 93-155.
 7. See Uma Chakravarti et al. "Khurja Riots 1990-91: Understanding the Conjunction," *Economic and Political Weekly* (May 2, 1992), p. 951; also see quotes from Bharati's tapes in Katherine Young, "Women in Hinduism," and the description of Rithambara's in Tanika Sarkar, "The Woman as Communal Subject: Rashtrasevika Samiti and Ram Janmabhoomi Movement," *Economic and Political Weekly* (August 31, 1991), pp. 2059.
 8. Linda Johnsen, "Women Saints of India," p. 52.
 9. See accounts of such initiation in Clemintin-Ojha, "The Tradition of Female Gurus," pp. 4-5 and 7-8, White, "Mother Guru," p. 17, and Johnsen, "Women Saints of India," p. 52.
 10. For an account of this group's development, see B.V. Narasimha Swami and S. Subbarao, *Sage of Sakuri (Life Story of Shree Upasani Maharaj)* (Ahmednagar: Shri Upasani Kanya Kumari Sthan, 1966), esp. pp. 163-173.
 11. These are barely mentioned by Babb, but I became aware of their importance when I myself took a sequence of Brahma Kumari "classes." The current designated medium heads the New Delhi branch of the Brahma Kumaris. During visits to the B.K. headquarters in Mt. Abu, she goes into trance and speaks in the voice of the founder; the homilies and advice thus received are immediately transcribed and sent by fax to all the organization's worldwide centers.
 12. Noteworthy exceptions are Anandamayi Ma and Mata Amritanandamayi, who began falling into trance spontaneously; Jnanananda Ma, as described by White, "Ma Guru," was likewise basically a self-made *guru*, despite the sanction she seems to have received from the Kanchipuram Shankaracarya.
 13. I have followed a list cited in Johnsen, "Women Saints of India," p. 52. See also Clemintin-Ojha, "The Tradition of Female Gurus"; I myself have seen such a male *guru*, female protégé relationship in the budding Sambodh Society of New Delhi and Trivandrum in Kerala; in this case the woman in question had promoted the *guru*'s career when he was still a very young teacher in a large national organization. When he broke away to found his own organization, he made her President. She has subsequently taken *sannyasa* vows.
 14. I have followed common practice of transliterating certain terms such as *shakti*, *shakta*, *ashram*, *swami*, and *pardah* according to the forms which have become most common in English-language texts.
 15. Demographic information about the new women leaders is extremely sparse, but of the 21 *gurus* and teachers from published writings and my own field researches on whom I have been gathering background information, five are brahmins, another four are known to be of other twice-born groups, and another eight are clearly twice-born, although specific caste is undeterminable. Seven are known to have had at least a high-school education. It is noteworthy that the largest and most highly regarded *sannyasini* community, Sarada Math, requires all candidates to have college degrees; this suggests that they, too, come from upper-caste, well-to-do backgrounds.
 16. See Lata Mani, "Production of an Official Discourse on *Sati* in Early Nineteenth Century Bengal," *Economic and Political Weekly* (April 26, 1986), WS32-40 and "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on *Sati* in Colonial India," *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, eds. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989), 88-126.
 17. Sumit Sarkar, "The 'Women's Question' in Nineteenth Century Bengal," *Women and Culture*, ed. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (Bombay: Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT Women's University, 1985), p. 161.
 18. Keshub Chunder Sen, *The Brahma Somaj: Discourses and Writings*, Part I, 2nd ed., Calcutta: Brahma Tract Society, 1917, pp. 45-46.
 19. Translated by Katherine van Akin Gates as *Himself: The Autobiography of a Hindu Lady* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1938). A more recent translation has been issued by the Indian government: Ramabai Ranade, *Ranade: His Wife's Reminiscences* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Publications Division), 1969.
 20. Ramabai's memoirs ended with the death of her husband. Information on her later activities is provided in Aparna Basu, "A Century's Journey; Women's Education in Western India: 1820-1920," *Socialization, Education and Women: Explorations in Gender Identity*, ed. Karuna Chanana (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1988), pp. 86-87. For additional information, see also Manmohan

- Kaur, *Role of Women in the Freedom Movement (1857-1947)* (Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1968), pp. 91-92.
21. The transformations in women's consciousness and lives worked through these reform efforts have been recorded in a number of excellent studies. See especially Maitrayee Chaudhuri, *Indian Women's Movement: Reform and Revival* (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1993); Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Malavika Karlekar, *Voices from Within: Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991); Ghulam Murshid, *Reluctant Debutante: Responses of Bengali Women to Modernization. 1849-1905* (Rajshahi, Bangladesh: Sahitya Samsad, Rajshahi University, 1983); Srabashi Ghosh, "'Birds in a Cage': Changes in Bengali Social Life as Recorded in Autobiographies by Women," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21, No. 43 (October 25, 1986), WS88-96; and Geraldine Forbes, "Caged Tigers: 'First Wave' Feminists in India," *Women's Studies International Forum* 5, No. 6 (1982), 525-36; For the subsequent history of the Women's Conference, see Aparna Basu and Bharati Ray, *Women's Struggle: A History of the All India Women's Conference, 1927-1990* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1990).
 22. Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question," *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, eds. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989), p. 240.
 23. Discussed *ibid.* and in Chatterjee's "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: the Contest in India," *American Ethnologist* 16, No. 4 (Nov. 1989), pp. 633.
 24. The 1920s and 1930s were to be the major time of turnaround. For the pattern of resistance and its subsequent reversal, see Syed Nurullah and J.P. Nair, *A History of Education in India (during the British Period)* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1951), esp. pp. 710-713; and Lakshmi Misra, *Education of Women in India, 1921-1966* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1966), especially p. 87.
 25. This occurred most notably in the Sadharan Brahma Samaj; see Malavika Karlekar's discussion of the Sadharan educational program, "Kadambini and the Bhadrakalok: Early Debates Over Women's Education in Bengal," *Economic and Political Weekly* (April 26, 1986), pp. WS25-26.
 26. Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Reconstruction of the Women's Question," p. 248.
 27. *A Woman of India: Being the Life of Saroj Nalini (Founder of the Women's Institute Movement in India)* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929).
 28. This quarrel is recounted in Sivanath Sastri, *History of the Brahma*

- Samaj*, Vol. 1 (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahma Samaj, 1911), pp. 239. See also Borthwick, *Changing Role of Women in Bengal*, pp. 86-88.
29. Borthwick, *Changing Role of Women in Bengal*, p. 100.
 30. "Arya Samaj and Women's Education: Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar," *Economic and Political Weekly* (April 26, 1986), WS9-24. Kishwar, by the way, would object to the label "feminist" for her magazine *Manushi*, because of the term's implications of Western agenda and divisiveness between men and women; see her *Manushi* editorial, "Why I Do Not Call Myself a Feminist," No. 61 (No.-Dec. 1990), 2-8. She prefers to have it called a "human rights" magazine—as indeed it is, for it covers far more than women's issues.
 31. *Ibid.*, p. WS16.
 32. Kishwar does not tell us whether they studied these works in Sanskrit or in Punjabi and Hindi translations.
 33. For his discussion of these issues, see Dayananda's *Satyarth Prakash* Chapters 3 and 4; English translations can be found in Shri Durga Prasad, *Light of Truth*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Jan Gyan Prakashan, 1970), pp. 72-75, 93-99, 116. Cf. also Madhu Kishwar's discussion of these justifications in "The Daughters of Aryavarta," *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Survival, Work, and the State*, ed. J. Krishnamurty (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 80.
 34. Kishwar cites founder Lala Devraj argument on behalf of women's education: "Arya Samaj would have made a lot more progress if our women had been with us...I am therefore watering the roots...when mothers will become Aryas, why would then sons not be good Aryas?" "Arya Samaj and Women's Education," p. WS12.
 35. Swami Vivekananda, *Our Women* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1961), p. 28. Swami was not always consistent in his explanations of this period of degeneration; at another point he attributed women's downfall to discriminatory practices of Buddhist monasticism.
 36. *Ibid.*
 37. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
 38. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
 39. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26..
 40. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
 41. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
 42. *Ibid.*, p. 27; also pp. 35-36.
 43. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
 44. Vinoba, *Women's Power* (Rajghat, Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, 1975), pp. 17-18.
 45. *Our Women*, p. 29.
 46. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

47. See "Rani Rasmani, a Philanthropist and a Rebel," *Manushi*, No. 78 (Sept.-Oct. 1993), pp. 2-7.
48. The eighteenth-century saint Ramprasad had likewise been extremely important to Kali's rise. For the history of Kali's rise to respectability in India, see David R. Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute: Dark Visions of the Terrible and the Sublime in Indian Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 86-126.
49. Translated by Nares Chandra Sen Gupta as *The Abbey of Bliss* (Calcutta: Padmini Mohan Neogi, 1906).
50. See Peter Hees, "Terrorism in India During the Freedom Struggle," *The Historian*, 55, No. 3 (Spring 1993), 469-482.
51. Reproduced in *Collected Works, Vol. I, Bande Mataram: Early Political Writings* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1973) pp. 61-74.
52. *Bhawani Mandir, Collected Works I*, p. 62.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
54. For a discussion of this reticence, see Lou Ratte, "Goddesses, Mothers, and Heroines: Hindu Women and the Feminine in the Early Nationalism Movement," *Women, Religion and Social Change*, eds. Yvonne Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1985), pp. 361-367. According to Indian researcher Tanika Sarkar, the connection between women and *shakti* became a frequent theme of later extremist tracts; see "Bengali Women in Politics—the 1920s and 1930s," *Women and Culture*, eds. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (Bombay: Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT University, 1985), p. 186. Geraldine H. Forbes offers a good survey of women's activities in radical nationalist movements in Bengal during the 1920's and 1930's: "Goddesses or Rebels? The Women Revolutionaries of Bengal." *The Oracle* 2 No. 2 (April 1980), 1-15.
55. For a description of Nivedita's role in the extremist movement, see Nalini Devdas, "Mother India, Mother Goddess and Militancy in Neo-Hinduism: the Role of Sister Nivedita. *Annual Review of Women in World Religions, Vol. II, Heroic Women*, eds. Arvind Sharma and Katherine Young (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), pp. 62-90.
56. Manmohan Kaur, *Role of Women in the Freedom Movement (1857-1947)*. (Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1968), p. 103.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.
59. *Modern Review* (August 1910), p. 124; cited *Ibid.*, p. 96, n. 4.
60. This story is told in all standard biographies of Sarada Devi. See, for example Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* (Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1977), pp. 48-50, Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother: Being the Life of Sri Sarada Devi Wife of Sri Ramakrishna and Helpmate in His Mission* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1962), pp. 42-43, Swami Saradeshananda, *The Mother as I Saw Her: Being Reminiscences of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, tr. J.N. Dey (Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1982), pp. 11-12; Swami Tapasyananda, *Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother* (Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1977), pp. 26-28.
61. Described most extensively in Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, pp. 240-249; see also Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, pp. 303-306.
62. Most of this account is based on information in Peter Hees, *Sri Aurobindo: a Brief Biography* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 80-81 and 133. See also Kireet Joshi, *Sri Aurobindo and the Mother: Glimpses of Their Experiments, Experiences, and Realisations* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989), pp. 24-68. The major source of biographical materials on Mother Mirra Richard is Nilama Das, *Glimpses of the Mother's Life* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1978).
63. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1928; see also *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and the Mother* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1953).
64. The three principal works available on Anandamayi Ma in the U.S. are Bhajji, *Mother as Revealed to Me*, tr. G. Das Gupta (Varanasi: Shree Shree Anandamayee Ashram, 1972), *Mother As Seen By Her Devotees* (Varanasi: Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha, 1956), and Alexander Lipski, *Life and Teaching of Sri Anandamayi Ma* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977). See also Harper, *Gurus, Swamis, and Avataras*, pp. 183-188, McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, pp. 193-202, and Katherine Young and Lily Miller, "Sacred Biography and the Restructuring of Society: A Study of Anandamayi Ma, Lady Saint of Modern Hinduism," *Boeings and Bullock-Carts: Studies in Change and Continuity in Indian Civilization*, Vol. 2, ed. Dharendra K. Vaypey (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1990).
65. For Anandamayi Ma's relationship to the Nehru family and other Congress luminaries, see Young and Miller, "Sacred Biography and the Restructuring of Society," pp. 136-140; also Katherine K. Young, "From Hindu *stridharma* to Universal Hinduism: a Study of the Women of the Nehru Family, *Traditions in Contact and Change: Selected Proceedings of the XIV Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions*, eds. Peter Slater and Donald Wiebe (Toronto: Sir Wilfred Laurier Press, 1983).
66. Mani Sahukar, *Sweetness and Light: an Exposition of Sati Godavari Mataji's Philosophy and Way of Life* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1966), p. 9. As cited in Marvin Henry Harper, *Gurus, Swamis, and Avataras* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), p. 190.

67. Descriptions of the development of women's involvement are based on Kaur, *Role of Women in the Freedom Movement*.
68. Cited in Kaur, *Indian Women's Battle for Freedom*, p. 201.
69. See M.K. Gandhi, *Sarvodaya (The Welfare of All)*, ed. Bharatan Kumarappa (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1954); also Madhu Kishwar, "Gandhi on Women," Part I, *Economic and Political Weekly* (October 5, 1985), 1691-1701.
70. Kishwar, "Gandhi on Women," I, p. 1697.
71. *Harijan* (August 4, 1940); Vol. 72, p. 326 in Gandhi's *Collected Works*. Cited *Ibid.*, p. 1697.
72. See, for example, Devaki Jain, "Journey of a Woman Freedom Fighter," *Mainstream* (August 22, 1981), pp. 9-10, 28-29.
73. "Lakshmi Ashram: a Gandhian Perspective in the Himalayan Foot-hills." Diana Eck and Devaki Jain, eds., *Speaking of Faith: Global Perspectives on Women, Religion and Social Change* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1987), pp. 179-85; additional materials are given in the introduction to this paper's section, pp. 176-77, and in Devaki Jain's paper from the collection "Gandhian Contributions towards a Feminist Ethic," 278-83.
74. Materials for this paragraph were assembled from Vinoba, *Women's Power* (Rajghat, Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, 1978); King, "Effect of Social Change," p. 80, and Sister Vandana, *Gurus, Ashrams, and Christians* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978); pp. 65-72. Unfortunately, there seems to be no recent material on this group; most research work on Vinoba's initiatives has been directed at his Bhoodan program.
75. Most of the information cited here was secured from two interviews: one at the New Delhi branch in October 1991, and a second at the Calcutta Math in January 1992; I have also used the July 1990 annual report of the Math and Mission.
76. King, "Effect of Social Change on Religious Self-Understanding," p. 80.
77. Kishwar, "Gandhi on Women," II, *Economic and Political Weekly* (Oct. 12, 1985), p. 1757.
78. "The Woman as Communal Subject: Rashtrasevika Samiti and Ram Janmabhoomi Movement," *Economic and Political Weekly* (August 31, 1991), p. 2060.
79. "Hindutva's Hidden Agenda: Why Women Fear Religious Fundamentalism," *Economic and Political Weekly* (March 13, 1993), p. 439.
80. Sarkar, "Woman as Communal Subject," p. 2057.
81. "Perpetuating the Myth," *Seminar* 342 (February 1988), p. 26. Note also Katherine K. Young's discussion of women's support of the Roop Kanwar *sati*, "Women in Hinduism," pp. 119-120.
82. For an excellent survey of contemporary outcomes of this journey and its residual issues, see also Katherine Young, "Women in Hinduism."

JAINS IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

James F. Lewis

Introduction

Modern Jains are one of the six numerically major religions in India today.¹ Its Indian population at the end of the twentieth century is estimated to be around four millions with an additional 75,000 residing abroad.² Compared to other religious groups in India's kaleidoscope of spirituality Jains are rather small in number. But their socio-economic status as a rather wealthy community makes them an important part of Indian society. Since mid-century they have become the only religious group whose urbanites outnumber co-religionists residing in the rural sector.³ And in certain cities, such as Mumbai, where they constitute more than 4 per cent of the population, their impact is much greater than would be expected of such a religious minority. In national life, they have contributed significantly to India's modern history through their emphasis on *ahimsa* (non-injury) and its chief Indian spokesman, Mahatma Gandhi.

They share with other religious communities the challenges of modernity to the continuation of their traditional beliefs and practices. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been decades of continuity and yet change, adjustment and adaptation. The forces of continuity are tradition. Change came from new understandings and interpretations of the tradition as well as new consciousness of Jain identity in the context of social change. Other factors impacted Jains including the rise of nationalism, Western learning and Western interest in Indian religion.