



The late Right Honorable
V. S. SRINIVASA SASTRI, P.C., C.H., LL.D.
who delivered the first lectures
under the Dr. Abhayambal Endowment.

RIGHTS AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

BY

THE RT. HON. V. S. SRINIVASA SASTRI, P.C., C.H.

WITH

A FOREWORD

BY

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EDITED BY

S. R. VENKATARAMAN

Publisher

S. VISWANATHAN

Copies can be had of

S. VISWANATHAN

“Acton Lodge,” 11, McNichol Road

Chetput, Madras-31

Printed and published by S. Viswanathan at the Central Art Press,
‘Acton Lodge’, 11 McNichol Road, Chetput, Madras-31.

FOREWORD

I have great pleasure in commending Mr. Srinivasa Sastri's lectures on the "*Rights and Status of Women in India*", to the Indian public. Recent legislation, for instance, the Hindu Marriage Act and the Hindu Succession Act, have accorded to women a position of almost complete equality with men in Hindu Society, but these lectures may still be read with profit for they are permeated with that deep feeling for justice and equality which is essential to the establishment of a democratic society.

Mr. Sastri was born of orthodox Brahmin parents in that stronghold of orthodoxy in Southern India, the Tanjore district, but he early developed a catholicity of outlook and a passion for a humane and liberal approach to human relationships in all spheres of life—in domestic life, education, politics, administration—which were far from common in his days. He practised what he preached and as a teacher, contrary to the prevailing system, he allowed his pupils to come near him and yet commanded their admiration and respect. As a husband and father, he set a fine example by replacing the traditional ideas of the relations that should prevail between husband and wife and father and child by a sense of comradeship between himself and his wife and children who were allowed to enjoy the freedom that is an essential constituent of a happy life. And in the larger sphere of public life he took pains to understand the other man's point of view and cheerfully tolerated differences of opinion. The understanding and toler-

ance for which he was well-known lent whatever he said a depth and grace which we might well envy.

These lectures will enable their readers to realize the magnitude of the social changes that have taken place in the course of a few years. The freedom that we won in 1947 has freed women from the shackles that had bound them for ages. Both law and enlightened public opinion, in shaping which women have played a significant part, today freely recognize the equality of women with men. I am sure that the freedom that they have gained will impel an increasing number of our educated women to play that role in the making of a new India which Mr. Sastri assigned to them.

NEW DELHI

18th September, 1956

H. N. KUNZRU

EDITOR'S NOTE

I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the University of Mysore for permission to publish the two lectures delivered by the late Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri under the Dr. Abhayambal Memorial Endowment Lectures in January 1940 and, to Sri S. R. Naidu of Durban, South Africa, Joint Editor of the South African Speeches of Sastri, for permission to publish Sastri's lecture on "The Women of India" delivered by him at the Efficiency Club in Johannesburg in November 1928.

I am deeply beholden to Dr. H. N. Kunzru, President of the Servants of India Society, for his illuminating foreword to this publication.

My thanks are also due to Sri V. Gopalaswami Iyengar, retired Registrar of the University of Mysore, for his good offices in securing me permission from the University of Mysore to publish these lectures, to Prof. K. Swaminathan, Prof. S. Ramaswami and Prof. K. Subramanian, who all had the inestimable privilege of having been admitted to the intimate friendship and the stimulating intellectual company of Sastri during his life time, for their valuable help in bringing out this book. My grateful thanks are also due to Mr. S. Viswanathan for undertaking this publication on behalf of the Servants of India Society.

S. R. VENKATARAMAN

19th September, '56.

Member, Servants of India Society
Madras

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UNIVERSITY OF MYSORE

**The Dr. Smt. U. Abhayambal Memorial
Lectures, 1940**

BY

The Rt. Hon'ble V. S. SRINIVASA SASTRI, P.C., C.H.

LECTURE I

Monday, the 29th January, 1940



The late Dr. U. ABHAYAMBAL, M.A., Ph.D. (Lond.)
Principal, Maharani's College, Mysore
In whose memory the Dr. U. Abhayambal Endowment
lecturership was founded by her brother in the
Mysore University.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I owe you first a word of explanation for my presence here. Mr. Subba Rao was good enough to invite me nearly two years ago to inaugurate this series of lectures ; and he would take no refusal. I am at last here for that purpose. It gives me great pleasure to do so for the reason that Mr. Subba Rao has already explained. I had the honour of Abhayambal's friendship. I first came to see her under Mr. Subba Rao's hospitable roof. But I met her subsequently in London, where she had gone to finish her education at the Crosby Hall, where she invited me to give a speech. She made a great reputation for her industry and her devotion to duty, for her amiability of disposition and, furthermore, for the faithfulness with which she retained Indian ideals as regards dress, diet, and thought. It was a shock to me to hear that she was taken away while yet her work was less than half done.

I believe it will be recognised that the subject of my discourse to-day and tomorrow is particularly fitting to the occasion. I am going to speak to you about the position of women in India in the future. There is no question whatever

that if the lady whose memory we are commemorating were alive to choose, she would choose this topic.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, let me say a word about the nature of my talks. You may not expect from me any statistical treatment of the subject. I am old and feeble, and cannot study a subject in that exhaustive and exhausting way. Nor should you look for anything like a biological treatment of the subject dealing with the fundamentals of the relationship between the sexes. I should also put aside all ideas of dwelling on the legal aspects of the question as to the position that women have attained in various parts of India as regards their right of property and the incidentals of marriage, divorce and so on. My talks will contain the impressions obtained during a long life by a man who has passed his time in various parts of India and in almost all grades of society. It will be, if I may say so, a confession of faith embracing certain major articles of belief.

When one looks at it from the point of view of history, it appears strange that the relationship between man and woman which has subsisted ever since the creation of our races should still be in dispute and, not merely in dispute, in hot dispute. There are those who believe that woman is by nature very different from man, that he

must treat her in all vital ways as he does not treat his brother man. By some she is regarded as the incarnation of temptation and wickedness, to be, if possible, shunned altogether, but, if necessary, admitted only within a very limited degree of intimacy. Literature, both Western and Eastern, is full of the most harsh and unsympathetic characterisation of woman. On the other hand there are those who give her a position of exceeding dignity ; who would concede to her her due influence both in the home and in all other relations of life, and who would regard her in all matters as an influence to soften and to regulate on proper lines the affairs of the world. Between these two extremes there lies a gradation of views assigning to her, more or less, I fear less rather than more, equality with man. My own conviction arrived at, I must say in a rough and ready manner, is, that there ought to be equality between the sexes.

I am not forgetting what is meant by equality. We do not mean equality in all respects. That does not exist even amongst men, or even amongst women taken by themselves. The idea upon which the constitutions of the famous Republics of the world are based, that all men are born equal and must be treated as equal, is not now believed in its literalness any-

where. Men are not born equal. Men cannot be made equal by any process within our power. But what we mean by equality amongst men is that, as regards certain privileges open to us, all men should be placed upon the same footing. So limited, the proposition, I am sure, will command general assent and receive general assent. I will not say such equality, even limited as it is, has been fully attained anywhere. But it is now recognized, and by all civilized people it is put on the high road of attainment. You remember, however, constantly pressed upon you, the distinction between White and Black, between the races of the world even in the British Commonwealth, where equality is considered to be best established. You hear of these things every now and then. No student of the affairs can put aside for one moment the sad reflection that equality even as regards fundamentals is scarcely fully and firmly established amongst men. We are fighting, however, for it and we believe that we shall be able to achieve it in the not distant future.

But that is amongst men. What about women? Are we agreed at all that woman is, in respect of these matters, the equal of man? I am afraid the agreement is much less general on this point. There are a great many even amongst women themselves, and a great many of the

population whom we call students, of various grades, who would like human society to be built upon the foundation of certain essential differences between man and woman. We are constantly reminded that Nature herself has made vital differences between the sexes ; that, perhaps, man upon the whole, is physically stronger and endowed with greater powers of endurance than woman. These facts are there. Nobody can dispute them. But do they necessarily lead to the conclusion that as regards education, for example, or as regards employment, or as regards franchise, or the rights accruing under the head of marriage and property, she should be placed on a distinctly inferior footing ? I have the conviction, a longstanding conviction, that it is by no means necessary. Society can progress as harmoniously as it has done, and perhaps far more efficiently than it has done hitherto, if in all these important respects man and woman were treated alike.

Now, a hundred questions press themselves upon our attention under this head of equality. But a question of that kind has various aspects. It is not essential that we should consider them all simultaneously. It is not possible. But can't we see that there are many respects in which inequality persists, but in which it need not ? Do we not see in our own families women treated differ-

ently from men even as regards the quarters that they occupy, the occupations in which they indulge, the pastimes and recreations that are open to them and the means of movement and other intercourse that are available to them? Are these differences and disparities necessary? By no means are they necessary. For instance, when you take a walk with your wife,—it does not happen in Mysore as far as I can see,—should your wife follow you at a respectable distance, compelling you, when you wish to make a remark, to turn back and call her to stand by your side?

On you, young men, rests the responsibility of seeing that, if differences there should be, they should be reduced to an absolute minimum. My own idea is that we still have a great deal of leeway to make up before we abolish all these unnecessary and unmeaning differences which testify to the age-long sense of superiority that man has had and, I am afraid, the age-long sense of inferiority that woman has had. Much leeway has to be made up before all these unnecessary differences are bridged up and man and woman learn to associate together upon terms more like those that ought to exist between human beings yoked together in life for the performance of common tasks and the bearing of common responsibilities.

Now, as soon as equality is mentioned, people turn round and ask you, "Do you really say that women should have equal right with us in entering all the professions and discharging all the occupations of life?" There are some things which men alone can do. To instance only one on each side, we cannot bear children; and, allowing for a small set of people called Amazons who have left a name in history, women cannot undertake the risks and dangers of war. But short of this, on matters of similar magnitude I hold that equality ought to be established. There are no other functions that I can specify which woman is not equally fitted to discharge with man. Now they teach in schools and in colleges. They play a great part in the work of administering health and health measures and relief to people. They make eminent doctors. They have also put their best foot forward and taken places at the Bar. And if only we knew how we could give them those honoured places in the various public offices that they are winning so rapidly and filling so efficiently in the West—secretarial positions are sought, ministerial positions in offices, commercial positions. Oh yes. These they are probably even better fitted to discharge than men. Still we are far from these things in India. It seems that we are casting a glance at Utopia as we talk of these

things ; but the West has seen them in actual operation. Mind you, ladies and gentlemen, we may put off the day, which some of you may regard as safe. You may put off the day. But these things will come to India, they are bound to come, and at the rate at which the world is rolling in space, you may one day wake and find that such things are established even in this country.

Woman will force her way into all the occupations that we discharge. And why should'nt she ? There are several reasons which are urged commonly by people as to why women should be carefully shut out of rivalry with men in the professions. Of course we shall put aside all the arguments that are based upon the idea that men are superior and naturally fitted to discharge these duties better than women. It is merely the result of their self-conceit. There is no truth in it at all. Given a fair and square chance, woman would vindicate her position in these occupations just as well as man has done. We deny her the chance, and on the basis of inexperience put her down as our inferior. But there are other grounds upon which men will question her entry into competition with themselves. They say, there is already so much unemployment, that if we had women competing with us, our chances would be greatly reduced.

And as we know, woman is paid at a lower rate when she competes with man. Even in the West great disparity as to emoluments exists between the sexes. They are trying to abolish them all ; but, I think, it will be some time before complete equality as to pay is established. Now you are all fond of saying 'equal work, equal pay'. Yes. But there are some practical inconveniences that even in the West are beginning to be felt. For instance, if we say 'equal work, equal pay', employers will find it better to employ men than to take women, for upon the whole, they are accustomed to deal with men. They can talk roughly to them. They can get extra work from them. At any rate, that is their belief. So it is likely if equal pay has to be paid to both sexes, man would win in the struggle. To woman, whom we wish to uplift in life, this cry of 'equal work, equal pay' would therefore be disadvantageous in the beginning.

That there is another consideration on the other side we must all remember. We think, in India, being under a tradition of very long standing, that woman's main occupation in life is motherhood. This idea is being slowly abandoned in the West. But we must reckon with this fact that for long generations yet in this country women will regard as their final destiny in life the care of the home and the bringing-up of children. Is it

possible, we should ask, for women to enter the professions also and discharge the double duty devolving upon them at home and outside? There is bound, therefore, to be a great limitation on the employment of women.

I was telling you that India, although at a great distance, is following the example of the West in all matters in public life and in the regulation of private life. And, sooner or later, marriage will cease to be compulsory even as to women. There will be large numbers of fairly well educated women who, either by inclination or by some disability or other, cannot enter the status of married women, and must find jobs in order to maintain themselves. Our laws of property are yet so backward that woman, not being treated as equal in that respect, has always been a dependent upon man. You know the saying of our ancient law givers that, "First parents, then the husband, lastly the son, has in his hands the shaping of the life of woman." Never is she destined to be free. As child, as mother, as old woman, she must bear the yoke of bondage, cannot think for herself, cannot move about for herself, but must look to the guidance of some man. That is the old idea out of which we have got to emerge and, although we should be long in doing so, there is no doubt that a few generations hence there will be lots of

women seeking employment, and not thinking for the time being that their destiny will end in marriage. Now, if they cannot earn they cannot maintain themselves in self-respect. For, believe me, there is an axiom that when law is fully established, you know it, amongst men, the same law must be extended to women. No real respect, no real honour, no real social consideration will accrue to a person unless that person has in some measure or other economic independence and self-sufficiency. We know in life that if a woman has considerable property to herself, she does not submit to ill-treatment in the same way as a woman who even for her ordinary and simple wants of the day has to look to the mercy, I won't say tender mercy, of somebody or other. The sense that you are not dependent for the simple wants of life upon another is an essential condition of self-respect ; and unless the bulk of our women come to have that feeling, that they are in some measure independent, their behaviour to us will not take the complexion of that of free people. That is a vital consideration.

Laws of property will have to be changed. They are being changed. The amelioration of the legal position of women will have to take place on a considerable scale before it can be

said that man and woman are placed upon a position of comparative equality as regards this primary need of economic independence.

Now I spoke of ill-treatment. It must be within the experience of even the youngest members of my audience, that from about the age of ten years our girls are separated from the life of boys ; that they are in certain respects slowly, unconsciously, but all the same clearly, taught to believe that they cannot enjoy the same advantages in life as their brothers, that they must prepare themselves for a position of dependence. We are teaching them that in slow, unperceived ways. But they are taught that from the very beginning. Unfortunately, today all human relationship in India is based on this sense of superiority on the one side and complete dependence on the other. To rise to that level of life when man and woman will learn to look upon each other as perfect equals is itself a hard education. We shall all have to go to school, a very stern school, before we master the lesson that the women of the household are our equals and must be treated with honour, that their feelings in all matters must be respected, that nothing should be decided for them by authority, that as we claim, in matters concerning us, a voice before settlement, so they too—as regards their movements, ways of life,

studies that they undertake, tasks that they assume in life—are entitled to be heard. They are entitled to have their views respected and, as far as possible, followed. In all these matters, as I told you, it will not be easy for us to readjust ourselves nor would it be easy for women to readjust themselves. For them to claim all these incidents of independence which we are accustomed to, is not easy. The family has to run on smooth lines, children have to be brought up more or less as they have been brought up for generations. Before all these subtle relations are remodelled and placed upon a new footing of equality it will be not only a long time but will entail a process of adjustment which, as we go on, we shall find exceedingly difficult and highly inconvenient. But it seems to me all these things have to be faced. You cannot avoid them. And it is just as well that you begin this task of mental adjustment and inward balance early enough. Learn to treat with respect your fellow-students who belong to the other sex ; say nothing in their presence which is injurious to your or their sense of self-respect ; let no mean-idea find expression in their presence ; cultivate all through life those habits of refined deportment which characterise those societies where men and women are accustomed to mingling together. In that respect,

I am afraid, our young men have a bitter lesson to learn. They must learn it quickly.

Now I must say a word, however unpleasant it may be, upon a question which is disappearing in the West, and not only not disappearing but unduly prominent in the relationship of the sexes in India. Excuse me, I do not mean to be light or provoke laughter. But I am full of sadness as I contemplate the gross, brutal ill-treatment of women in all grades of life, not only the roughness and brutality of the things that they are employed in, but the rough ways in which they are actually handled. Well, I have seen in my life many cases of brutal, physical ill-treatment, commonly called beating, but assuming many forms of physical torture, gross and subtle, to which woman should become, as quickly as possible, a stranger.

Yes, I was saying that even in the West it is perceptible in certain sections of society. But in the upper classes that lay claim to any refinement whatsoever, to lay a rough and punitive finger upon a lady is regarded as a degradation and disgrace to man. People will not tolerate the beating of one's wife by anyone in good society. There are, however, levels of workpeople where the beating of wife by a drunken husband is still common. But it is fast disappearing. Woman is

learning to assert herself. She knows that she can resort to courts for redress, and she knows too that she can turn to the sympathetic assistance of friends from outside. This evil, this mark of bestiality, this idea that man has the right to chastise his wife or his daughter physically, is a sure mark of a very degraded type of society. But I know, ladies and gentlemen, it is fairly common still, and not merely in the West amongst whom it is noticed. No grade of society is free from it. No level of education is a guarantee that corporal punishment is abolished from the home. Alas! to our disgrace it still persists. We had the sad spectacle of a person in the eminent position of a district judge who, the other day, said that it would be unwise by law or by practice to deprive man of the power of occasionally inflicting upon his wife a gentle degree of physical correction.

Now, I think, I hope, we shall learn as quickly as possible to rise out of this depth of social infamy. I can give it no softer word. But that is an essential condition by the presence of which all thinking people will test the soundness of the relationship between the sexes.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to say today, a few words upon the subject of education, leaving other aspects to be dealt with to-morrow.

Upon education, my remarks will be based mostly upon this idea of equality. For, I am one of those who think that, barring certain optional courses of study for which women have a special aptitude and even necessity, barring certain alternative courses of study, the general curricula of men's education and women's education should run on identical lines. Man and woman must be educated to the same standard so as to form the same pattern, for they have common tasks to discharge, common ambitions to fulfil, and common destinies to achieve. I know, for many ages in our country as in the West, the idea was that man and woman, having their spheres lying far apart, must also have their education far dispersed. We are learning other ideas to-day. Just as different races of mankind are learning to assimilate each to the other, so must the sexes. In schools and in colleges I am of the distinct opinion that there should be no radical differences in subjects that are prescribed for the sexes. Girls as well as boys must learn the same things and up to the same standard. They must sit for the same examination. You may teach girls, if you wish, after a certain age, when they assimilate instruction, something about mothercraft, something about knitting, something about music and dancing. But that does not impose upon us the necessity

for devising for them different syllabi. As regards the subject of the English language and literature for instance, or history or geography, mathematics, or elementary science, from the beginning there has been unfortunately a wide school of thought in India that for women a smattering of knowledge in these subjects and an inferior type of education, even an inferior set of examinations, should be enough. No. Women should be educated to their full capacity, even as men should be educated to their full capacity. If a woman is competent to learn mathematics and science, history and economics and political administration, let her, by all means, be trained as her aptitude directs. Why devise special courses for her? She has the same intellect as men have. In many cases in the same family we find sisters better circumstanced so far as intellectual equipment is concerned than brothers. Why should they be treated as though they were inferior? If you have brains, they must be fully cultivated, they must be adequately trained so that in life the tasks that we have to face may be faced with courage and with efficiency.

That being my conviction, I am all for co-education. It seems to me that it is idle to think that being educated in different places men and women will treat each other any better than if

they had been trained together from the beginning. It is one of the great mistakes that throughout ages have been made. Co-education where it has been tried under good circumstances has proved successful. And we in India, whatever our theoretical views may be, are adopting a certain measure of co-education where finances do not permit a separate school being established for women. We know how to bend to economic necessity. Perhaps, for a matter of rupees, annas and pies, there is no course that we may not be compelled to adopt. But speaking on broad lines of efficiency and sex equality, you find people advancing all sorts of theories as to why woman should learn certain things and why man should learn certain things.

There is an experiment that is being made amongst us. It is now being made under the very best auspices that we could conceive. There is, for instance, the Women's University in Poona where different courses of study are adopted, different examinations have been instituted, and degrees more or less analogous to ours are also awarded. Now let us for a moment ask ourselves, "What is the testimony of experience on the point?" The Women's University in Poona has been established now for several years. People are fully used to the kind of education that is

imparted there. Yet there is one fact that stands out. In the institution of the Fergusson College which is affiliated to the Bombay University, there are more girls attending any day than there are in this whole University dedicated entirely to women. Public opinion does not tolerate a different, not to speak of an inferior, education for women. Women themselves do not want it. They want to be placed in respect of education on the same footing as men. They feel that they are competent to master the same subjects up to the same standard of efficiency as men. Why keep them out? It is a mere matter of pride on our part, unjustifiable pride, pride that we shall do well to put aside altogether.

I am of opinion, further, that there should be compulsion as regards elementary education for our women as well as for our men. It is not right to keep girls uneducated in large numbers, whilst boys are being driven into the schools to receive elementary education. That is a mistake that we have long made, that we should no longer make. And furthermore, there is this important thing, that to all places of authority in education women should be admitted as well as men. They should be professors and lecturers along with men; they should be senators in the University along with men; they should be members of the

syndicate. I know of no reason except that of ability and fitness to discharge the task, I know of no reason at all, why women should in respect of these matters be denied all these rights. The only reason is that men have hitherto regulated all these affairs and monopolised the positions of trust and honour. They must learn better now. Women have come to demand these things, more or less loudly. If you have read the debates that are conducted in women's associations where they are sure of a certain amount of privacy, you can see what opinion they have of us. Among these women's associations there are a few speakers and thinkers of a high order who can hold their own amongst men, who have risen to a perception of the rights of their sex, and who are continually indoctrinating our wives and sisters in the struggle for their rights. They say, "Man has been the eternal enemy of woman, and nothing gives more pleasure to him than the idea that a certain person at home will bend, will bend and bow and make all sorts of prostrations before the exercise of his authority. Man is a tyrant by training, if not by nature, and it is time that we put him in his place." So say our forward women to one another.

Yes, just as we have put upon them the brand of inferiority for long ages, so now the

reaction has set in and they are demanding that they should be recognised and treated in all respects as our equals and co-sharers in all departments, in all activities and in all concerns of life. The sooner we recognise this equality even in respect of education, the better. To-morrow, Ladies and Gentlemen, I shall speak about two other vital aspects of this question : about franchise which has been extended to women in this country without a struggle—and that is a matter for which woman should be thankful to man—and also about the question of marriage and property.

LECTURE II

Tuesday, the 30th January, 1940

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The franchise is a recent acquisition of women in India. We have had in parts of the country the municipal franchise. The parliamentary franchise is, comparatively speaking, new ; and it cannot be said that our sisters have yet learnt to make full use of it. Even in Great Britain the parliamentary franchise has been won by slow degrees. It is difficult even there, in spite of ample statistics, to state clearly and unequivocally which way women vote on any given occasion. In India we gave franchise to women with comparative readiness. Perhaps we thought that it was a necessary adjunct of a democratic policy. Perhaps also most of us had a secret thought behind it ; that if our women got the franchise, practically speaking, our votes would be doubled.

Some fifteen years ago, I happened to be present at a provincial conference held at Conjeevaram. At that time the differences between our Moderates and our Extremists had become pronounced. And no meeting could take place without an exhibition of the antagonism between these parties. Things came to a head at this provincial conference. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu was our chairman, and she delivered, as you may

expect, a very impassioned address. On an important point, for the first time, votes were taken ; and it was then discovered that about two dozen ladies had attended the meeting and were seated in a compact circle in the centre of the audience. The men's votes were registered easily enough. But there was a little trouble amongst the women. One lady, I believe the solitary one amongst them, was anxious to follow her husband and give a Moderate vote. We could hear the husband approaching as near to the citadel as he dared, shouting to his wife 'Vote Moderate.' But the ladies around were all Extremists and they put pressure upon her and taught her, apparently for the first time, to rebel against her lord and master. After a struggle, during which the husband was fretting and fuming as we could all see, the lady found it impossible to resist the pressure immediately around her and she voted Extremist. An exclamation of glee amongst the ladies and the general audience when the vote was declared followed suit. But amidst thunderous applause we could hear the disappointed husband crying out, 'Come home, I will teach you.'

It is claimed generally that woman in all public matters has a special view of her own contrasted with that of man and sometimes hostile

to it. This claim was made emphatically during the suffragist activities in Britain : that the welfare of women and children could only be promoted by the intimate knowledge of women representatives and for that purpose they claimed representation in parliament. I do not think events have proved conclusively that the advent of women in the legislative bodies of the realm has served this purpose or that it would not have been served by men working independently. The claim was put forward in England during the war. Sometime after, when ideas of general peace had taken possession of peoples' minds and we all looked forward to the day when there would be no more war and the nations would have learned to regard each other as brethren, and swords would be beaten to ploughshares and so on, in those days, women used to claim further that, as woman's special purpose in creation was creative activity, she, if she was free and had power, would never use it for the purpose of destruction of fellowbeings. The claim was not fully accredited when it was made, but it continued to be made with full vigour and with persistence. I for one believe, ladies and gentlemen, that there is no foundation for that claim. When the war fever seizes her, I believe woman succumbs to it quite as readily as man. I have heard women say upon such occasions, " I

had a son who died in the war. But if I had ten sons I would wish they all had died on the field of battle in defence of their king and country." So does national spirit at times burst forth and suppress the feeling which, in peace, seems to be the dominant feature of our character.

I have recently been reading an Irish book dealing with the affairs of Ireland when Britain and Ireland were mortally inimical to each other. I heard then that the friends of an amicable settlement between these two countries, the champions of peace as it were, were derided and held to public obloquy, and it was troops of young ladies that went about with white feathers and, wherever they could, presented them to these peaceful men and, wherever possible, stuck them on their breasts.

Certainly, you cannot claim that woman was a greater advocate of peace than man. If to-day in Great Britain you poll the nation, I am sure that the hatred of the German, hatred of Hitler if you so like to put it, would be found as strong in women's hearts as in men's. They are, just like us, swayed by the feeling of the moment; and still I am one of those who think they are no worse than we. I am not prepared to concede the claim that they are any better. I do not believe that it is necessary at all to put forward

these questionable claims in claiming franchise on behalf of women. As our sister, as our daughter, as our wife, she is entitled to it if she possesses the necessary qualifications, so far as qualifications are still required by the law. But not beyond that. That she has a view as a sex to put forward and advance in public life, I for one do not believe at all. In India too, sometimes, claims have been made by women which seem to lack confirmation from facts. It is difficult to judge the Indian situation on this question because so few women amongst us, out of the millions of women, are really entitled to an opinion on this matter. The women's conferences are usually attended by a few hundreds drawn from all parts of the country. They no doubt put forward their views with complete assurance and with every appearance of profound conviction. They are worthy of consideration from that point of view.

There are just two claims, which I will mention to you, to which I have been unable from the beginning to give my own assent. One is this : that if only the women in India had the franchise and were allowed to come into public life and take their places by us, they would put an end to this communal spirit, that they do not want communal representation, that Hindu women, Muslim

women, Christian women, and women belonging to all provinces and all faiths have one view on this matter and that view is shared by the dumb hundreds and thousands of people belonging to that sex all over the country. It is obvious that the claim is unsustainable. I do not think it could be said that, when we men are so communal, women are different from us and have clear and definite views in opposition to those held by their husbands and brothers.

But they make another claim. For instance, in some provinces of the country a special provision exists in order to enable some women at least to get into the houses of legislature : special electorates in some cases and special arrangements for ensuring that at every general election a few women will find place in parliament. This special provision was made because it was felt that the number of women voting would not be able to turn the election in favour of the female sex. We also have the experience of Great Britain where, notwithstanding the much happier and more developed conditions existing, comparatively few women have got into the House of Commons. You may well remember how, when this arrangement was first announced to the Indian public, most advanced women protested against this special treatment to their sex and said they would be

ready to repudiate it. They did not want to be distinguished from men ; they would find other ways, if they cared, to get into the authoritative bodies in the country. Now, that, gentlemen, is a very peculiar claim to make ; and I am not prepared to censure the authorities for having made, in spite of this emphatic expression of hostile opinion, special arrangements to secure the entry of some sisters of ours into the houses of legislature. But these facts are contradicted by another important circumstance. That women alone can advance certain theories and certain ways of life, is a claim not allowed by a very considerable body of women themselves. I have talked to French women, for instance, who do not possess the franchise even to-day. If you ask them, " Why have you not put forward a claim and fought for the franchise as your British sisters have done ? " they tell you, " Oh ! why do we want the vote ? Without the bother of the vote and candidature at election, we get all we want from our men. There are no peculiar views that we wish to put forward and that they do not understand or appreciate." It is a claim, then, whether in Britain or in India, for which there is no justification. But, ladies and gentlemen, should we wonder at all that woman learning for the first time how to use her power and her endowed

influence in these matters should put forward extravagant claims? We have kept them down with a heavy hand all these centuries. The pendulum seems to swing well over to the other side before we can get anything like an equilibrium. Well, summing up, I should think the establishment of women's franchise in this country is a definite step in advance in the public policy; and as we move further and further in this direction and establish perfect equality between the sexes in matters of legislation, the entry into the legislature, and the voting power to be brought to bear on our elections, I think conditions in our country will improve palpably and we may look forward to a happy time when in the councils of the country all the available and trained wisdom, whether from one sex or the other, will be brought to bear upon public matters and bear abundant good fruit for succeeding generations.

Now, let us, for a few moments, consider the question of marriage, and allied topics. Upon this head, too, I hold views that may be called progressive. The institution of marriage and all the particulars connected with it have their foundation in this country, as in the Catholic countries, in religion. Every detail, therefore, is invested with religious significance, and men and women approach the discussion of all these topics, whether

principal or merely ancillary, with this tremendous bias of religion, so that you dare not touch a question however remotely connected with this topic and argue it upon the pure grounds of reason without being accused at once of endangering the foundations of our traditional faith. It is therefore an exceedingly delicate subject to handle. But I know, ladies and gentlemen, that our notions upon this matter have not always been the same. They have undergone great and profound changes, and few young students who study our marriage institutions to-day will claim that they bear upon them the impress, except in a very fine degree, of descent from the original purity and wholesomeness of our ancient marriage system. We have travelled far, and not always in the proper direction. To-day, whether in the arrangements preceding marriage or in the ceremonials attending the marriage ceremony, or, alas ! in the long sequences that follow during the lives of the bride and bridegroom, in these matters, it is impossible to maintain that our marriage institution is productive only of happiness and promotes the welfare of the race ; or even, I will venture to add without any hesitation, maintains intact the original notions that prevailed on the subject when our ancestors two thousand years ago, with much less sophistication and closer contact with nature and its demands,

made the lives of men and women alike of comparative freedom. Marriage is to-day a bondage more than anything else to woman. She abandons all notions of freedom from that moment when she is claimed by man as his own. And then, even with our, I should say, deepest notions of human dignity as regards her claims and as regards the property that she can claim, we do not always attain them.

You know in practical life how rarely harmony and peace run in our homes and in the family gatherings ; how rarely, indeed, children are brought up in the atmosphere that we should wish them to be brought up in. Yes. It is because woman is so compliant amongst us, so entirely resigned to her lot, it is because she has imbibed the notions of *paathi vratya* to an extent that is almost incredible, it is because of these facts that in our homes there is still a kind of happiness, a kind of harmony. But, alas ! how very different from the harmony and the peace and the happiness that could be established if men and women learn to treat each other as full and honoured companions, share their confidence and anxieties together, rule over the family affairs in common, nothing open to one side hidden from the other. Ah ! that kind of happiness is far superior and could only be achieved if relations more like

equality were established between the sexes. I do not for one moment maintain that all is well in the country where equality is being approximated to and where men and women marry when they can understand the duties and responsibilities of married life. No. There too are unhappiness and misery ; but the unhappiness and misery are quite different in their nature, and there are remedies procurable there which are not to be found in our country.

Is there anybody in these days who would venture to put forward the idea that it is right and proper that girls of three and four should be given away in marriage ? You may have known of no such cases. But look at the census report before you say with confidence that nothing of the kind occurs in this country. There are brides of any age—about 2 and 3 there are. I do not believe, ladies and gentlemen, that we can long postpone this elementary duty of a civilised government, of declaring in this country by law that no marriage shall be valid if the bride is below, say, a certain age. I will mention it. You may have to raise it : eight for the beginning ; then 11, 12, 13, 14 if you like. But that is the direction in which our marriage reform should proceed—declaring that the public opinion and the conscience of the country will not recognise as valid for any purpose a

connection established between a bride and bridegroom below a certain age.

That, coupled with the amelioration of the conditions of the widows and unhappy women, I would urge as the next step desirable in our marriage institution. For instance, just to mention one, it is commonly believed that by law in this country, so far as Hindus are concerned, men and women alike are denied the relief afforded by divorce. There are cases of extreme and intolerable misery brought about by the marriage yoke. But we all know that in practice, whatever the legal theory may be, man has the full and unrestricted right of divorcing his wife, keeping her apart, giving her a precarious maintenance and sometimes denying it in toto ; that he holds himself absolutely free to deal with her as he pleases ; that he can compel her to live under the same roof with the second wife and, alas ! in some cases with a woman not having the status of a wife. We know that man, when he feels the burden of marriage, has the power unquestioned, without recourse to law, to rid himself of an unwanted wife. But are there not cases within the knowledge of each one of us, are there not cases of an extreme kind in which women suffer the utmost torture of mind and body and would be glad, if it were only possible, to be freed from the yoke? To deny

divorce altogether to woman and to tell her, 'Once the wife of a certain man, for ever his wife and bond—slave' is not to recognise the dignity of the human soul so far as one half of mankind is concerned. I am all for a law of divorce. May be, we shall have to begin very carefully, hedging round the conditions of divorce with every possible care and consideration for ancient tradition and long established views. May be, too, that although there may be the law of divorce on the statute book, we may not hear for decades of any more than a dozen cases where the woman has availed herself of it. But still, it seems to me, that the public policy of any country is incomplete unless it affords a means of escape from a position, however sanctified by religion, which has become intolerable to one of the parties, and which could only mean therefore misery to both sides. I think a divorce law cannot be delayed very long in this country. I am very much in sympathy with the movement, both in the provinces and at the Central Government, that has made itself manifest to provide a law of divorce. There is wide disagreement, as I ventured to say before, upon the conditions which should justify the courts in granting an application for divorce. But upon some things it is possible to arrive at an agreement. And although in the beginning no law can be perfect, and every decade the law may

have to be widened, it is as well that we make a beginning at once.

There is amongst us, ladies and gentlemen, prevalent in parts of the country, chiefly on the hills near Simla, the custom of public selling, more or less, of brides to men who are in want of them. The particulars are settled and the man takes away a girl after paying down the price, a girl whom he has never seen and whom he is hereafter to enthrone in his family as the mistress. Well, semi-publicly in such places and secretly and surreptitiously in others, this practice of selling and purchasing girls takes place. It must be put down. The law cannot countenance it any more. I do not think it countenances it to-day. But there is a body of public opinion in favour of it amongst the communities that desire the system. With such a body of public opinion Government have been unable to deal with it yet. But with our own Governments coming into power, I think it is possible to look forward today to the very early removal of this disgraceful blot from our country.

Now, there is, and I alluded to the subject yesterday, another custom in our country, sanctified again by religion, of compulsory marriage as far as women are concerned. Men may remain bachelors to the very end of their lives. But no

woman can escape the fate of marriage. There are several women in our country to-day, especially after the advent of the new idea of independence, who do not wish to marry, who wish to remain unattached for the whole of their life just like men. But I am not thinking of such women, of these very rare representatives of the other sex. I am thinking, ladies and gentlemen, of the lame, deaf and dumb, I am thinking of the fatally diseased. I am thinking of those unhappy children whom, somehow, their parents seem compelled to give away in marriage. A very heavy dowry has to be paid in their case. The men willing to take them as wives have been demanding complete freedom to remarry, and I have known of cases in which the father of the first unhappy bride was willing to bear the expenses of a second and happier marriage. Why should we not give complete freedom in such cases for women to remain unmarried? Why must they be married too? If they happen to be taken to their husbands' place, they may not hope for a particle of sympathy or human consideration. Their best place is with their parents, with their brothers and sisters, where they can have some real and genuine sympathy. It seems to me a cruel regulation, sanctioned though it may be by pseudo-religion, which compels marriage even in such impossible cases.

In the West, as you know, a new idea is

coming up above the horizon. That is the idea of the sterilisation of the unfit. The unfit have a fatal tendency to reproduce themselves. The whole of the human race is reduced in vitality and efficiency and cannot function to the greatest possible good so long as they are handicapped by the existence amongst them of a preponderant class of people whom we pronounce unfit. The idea is there, but it has not yet taken root and is not being acted upon, that they should be sterilised. It is called sterilisation of the unfit. It is the advanced thinker, it is the expert medical man, it is the man whose vision for the welfare of the human race is fixed far in the future, who thinks of these things. But the world spins round with wonderfully increased velocity. It is possible that before you get many years older, the sterilisation of the unfit may be acted upon in the West. And once it begins there, may be only a decade or two, we shall have to salute this mark of the new time on Indian soil too. I do not think there is any body of crystallised doctrine on this subject to which yet we are bound to give our assent. No. But look at the irony of things. Hardly has the idea dawned in human consciousness when there is already a threat to apply it to inhuman purposes. You may all have noticed it. It is a fact that in Germany it was seriously proposed by the advisers of Hitler that the Jews as a body should

be sterilized. That gives a horrid thought about science and discovery. We see that a scientific truth is not always being used for the benefit of the human race. It is used to its detriment, its peril and its destruction. Are we right in blaming scientific men for it? I think we must place the blame on the right shoulders, the shoulders of these politicians and statesmen whom the unhappy accident of power has raised to omnipotence with no restraint to check their vagaries when they desire to give full play to their demoniac feelings and when they set up to destroy the very foundations of human concord. And there is not, alas! any law, nothing either of a military or of a civil nature, nothing certain in a way that we call public opinion to hold their hands back from their infernal enterprise. Yes. Scientific ideas may be used by such wicked people to wicked purposes. But let us not therefore condemn without discrimination all science and all scientific men. Sterilisation of the unfit, if it could be carried out within due limits and under due safeguards, is an instrument, it seems to me, for developing the health and the welfare and the efficiency of our race in a marked degree. I was only mentioning the circumstance as enforcing the original idea which applies to this country, of allowing the unfit in this country, those who are not fit for the married life at all, the option of

remaining unmarried, and of not laying it as a duty upon the parents to find unwilling bridegrooms for these people and being obliged to pay heavy prices.

The next topic on which I will say a word is our *varadakshina*. Ladies and gentlemen, I am now seventy years old. I verily believe, long before I was born, philosophers and wise men had begun to declare that *varadakshina* was not sanctioned by religion and should be abandoned. Meetings have been held for the purpose and the institution denounced in unsparing terms. People have taken resolutions and in some cases registered vows, never to do this sort of thing. Somehow there is a principle of eternal life in this institution of *varadakshina* which no amount of vowing on our part is able to kill. When there is money to get easily by the simple application of a little judicious pressure, none of us, however highly principled in other matters, will desist. So it happens to-day that if the unit of *varadakshina* was two thousand or three thousand rupees two decades ago, it now runs into five figures. I have heard quite recently of several instances where ten thousand, fifteen thousand, and in one case forty thousand rupees have been mentioned; and the happy recipient in most of these cases seems to be a member of the Indian Civil Service. Education is a costly affair. Parents find it hard to maintain

their children for years at school and in the University, and they have had to bear the expenditure further of eighteen months' stay of their sons in England. This debt is not easily to be wiped off, and if there is a person willing to take the burden over, why not shift it to him? Mind you, it is not explicitly forbidden in the shastras. There is no law to discountenance it; and public opinion, which is loud and clear, whether the matter is discussed impersonally or at public meetings, does not find a channel of clear expression. Where a particular piece of negotiation is going on, public opinion is absent when the offer is made on the one side and accepted on the other and the bargain is struck. I have come to the belief that there is no sufficient moral power in the individual to give up this system of *varadakshina*. It does not obtain everywhere. We are speaking of the limited sphere within which it operates. Now I am trying to think it out. I do not offer it as a solution which is likely to be attended with happy consequences, and I am trying to figure out whether it is not possible slightly to modify this system and convert the money which is paid down to the parent of the bridegroom into a kind of dowry and settle it upon the girl. That will ensure that every girl who attains the status of a married woman has a little money to fall back upon, ensuring her the

economic self-sufficiency and independence which I posited yesterday as the essential condition of self-respect. If every girl was assured at the time of marriage that, although she may not have an honoured share in the patriarchal property, she would have a respectable share consistent with the status or the worldly means of her parent, I think it would be a modification of the system which even the I.C.S. bridegrooms would not be ashamed to discard. It is only a comparatively small suggestion which I make under the head of marriage.

I am now coming, at the end of this talk, to a matter of extreme importance which is being slightly understood in this country, but which, in places where it is understood, is being strongly resisted and resented as an affront not only to religion but to the demands of the races themselves. Ladies and gentlemen, I happen again to differ from the popular view on this matter and must, in justification of myself, proceed to state it; however my audience to-day may receive it. I do so with a profound sense of responsibility and with due apologies to all those whom I may for the moment shock by the astounding nature of the proposal. It is nothing new. I am going to speak of birth control. Now, it seems to me, ladies and gentlemen, that so long as we compel all women to marry, and to marry not according to their wishes

but according to the conveniences of their guardians, so long too as we compel them to reside with their husbands, happiness or unhappiness, we must give them the means of avoiding the burden of life as far as may be. You may think that when a couple have married, they have married for the express purpose of rearing a family. I do not wish at this point to contest that position. But what is a family? Is it a length without some limitation? May not a family have some limitation imposed upon it by the circumstances and means of the parties concerned? Where birth control is admitted as proper, where the knowledge of contraceptives is widespread, it has certainly promoted the welfare and the happiness of men and women. We cannot afford in heavily populated country like India to breed indefinitely. May be, in the old times when the Aryans first came to this country and found a vast area before them which they could people, but for which there was not sufficient population, it may be, in those days the duty was laid upon every householder to marry at a certain age and add to the population. Yes. We must recognise it now that they not only wished to add to the population and therefore to marry and marry frequently, but they did not allow these caste restrictions of to-day to bind them as to whom they should marry. A caste was allowed to marry

below it and the children were recognised to have legal rights and a position was assigned to them. Men were allowed to take brides from other tribes and communities. These were the liberties which our people gave themselves, because of the necessities of a migrating population, small, consisting probably of a preponderance of men, and therefore obliged to take brides where they could get them and multiply. That law cannot be enforced with rigour any more. We have 350 millions and very soon there will be 400 millions. You know, ladies and gentlemen, it is not such an easy matter to dispose of. You know that according to the best calculations, one-fourth of the population are living upon the margin of subsistence and it is asserted, with a certain amount of authority which is impossible to dispute, that there are millions in the land who do not know from day to day what a full and satisfying meal is. Is it right for you, is it right for anybody, to maintain that in this country an indefinite addition to the population is a thing to be desired or even to be encouraged? And we know too that in many cases the arrival of baby after baby at intervals of eighteen months causes the debilitation of the mother. She is less and less fitted to perform the duties of the head of the household. She cannot even attend to her own children. Yet the husband, in many

cases, will not keep a servant and imposes upon her the duties of a kitchen-maid, never denying himself the rights of a husband. (Laughter). Yes, before you laugh it out you must think of the unhappy mother who is continually finding that motherhood comes upon her when she least wishes it. It is upon her that the burden, the unhappiness, the misery and mental and physical deterioration fall. That is why our children are not brought up properly. Conceive of a family in good and easy circumstances where there are only two or three children to care for and the education you can give them. Can you not make the best use of them for humanity? Can you not draw out the best that there is in the children? If you had, instead of three, eight, nine, ten and eleven children, it follows as a simple sum in arithmetic that the attention of the parents must be given in less and less proportion to each particular child, and each particular child cannot have in life the full opportunities to which it is entitled. And then, who breed most in the country, here as elsewhere in the world? It is those that can least afford to have children that have the most. These things must be looked at from the scientific point of view, from a large humanitarian point of view and not merely from the point of view of the hide-bound priest who does not see beyond his nose. You of the younger generation

must agree to treat these matters with the responsibility that is due to them. You must look round this question fully, bravely, and with complete independence of traditional views, for a slavish following of these views has brought us to this position that a fourth of the population have to go hungry all their lives, ill fed and incompetent to do the tasks of life. That is a thought that I would like finally to leave with you.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, one word before I take leave of the subject, and take leave of you. Do not suppose for one moment that I have had any sinister idea in coming to this place. Do not give me the pain of supposing that I have come amongst you with the idea of making your women rebel against your authorities. No. That is impossible to do for any person. Woman in this country is so far yet from understanding and realising her position that she will be long in seriously putting forward claims to the things that have for long been held by men. It will be a very, very long time. And you, women, at public meetings where we are not present, may say harsh things of men. But, generally speaking, I am glad, and in a way proud, to testify that in our wives and in our sisters, as in our mothers, there dwells a peculiar quality, I should like to say semi-divine in its essence, a quality that induces them cheerfully to put up

with every hardship and privation, alas ! with every humiliation, because they believe that it is the duty of woman and her station in life to bear the burden of society uncomplainingly, cheerfully and yet contribute all her best to the maintenance of the community. It will be an ill day when woman sheds that quality. I do not wish it, nor do I expect anybody wishes it. And further more, let it be added that in spite of pressure of circumstances, incredible in certain cases, that in spite of every temptation, in spite of every call of the flesh, our women have, upon the whole, maintained a degree of chastity and fidelity to the marriage vow, unexampled perhaps in the history even of our own nation, and certainly unequalled in any part of the world to-day. Ladies and gentlemen, these and similar virtues of the first quality we should like our womanhood always to maintain. But we shall enable them to maintain these in their purity only as we give them the light of knowledge, as we provide them with the means of understanding their exact position, as we make them agents, not merely unwilling—but willing, intelligent and fully prepared,—of our welfare. To-day it cannot be said that they are fully prepared either in body or in mind for their high tasks. We have therefore to enlarge their rights, we have to improve their minds, we have to provide them with the physical

means of some vital life. And then, what they contribute to the future of Indian society will be a benefit of which, to-day, we have no idea, which I can only call absolutely incalculable. To that destiny I venture to call our women, to that destiny I venture to bid you all to help her to come, and that destiny she must fulfil alongside of you as creators of a future generation of free people in whom India to-day places her full faith. And may God grant that that faith be never betrayed.

THE WOMEN OF INDIA

An address delivered by the Rt. Hon'ble V. S.
Srinivasa Sastri to the members of the
South African Efficiency Club,
Johannesburg, in
November 1928

THE WOMEN OF INDIA

I have much pleasure in being present amongst you and enjoying the opportunity of enabling you to understand the conditions under which your sisters live in India. I shall not dwell too long upon conditions in India, but shall confine myself to the topic of women in India.

At the same time it might be well to fill up the background of the picture. It will not be a bad idea if I were to describe the ideals and customs against which the present-day facts have to be understood.

The ideal of women in India is of the old world still. We have not changed it. Woman is still considered to be more or less subordinate to man. She is not entitled to live her own life. The idea would be viewed with surprise in India that she has an individuality of her own. She is supposed to have neither soul nor will. Her business is to grow no will of her own, and if she does have it, she has to learn to suppress it. Her will has at all times to be subordinated to that of her protector.

The woman of India is always protected. In her childhood she is protected by her father. Before she is much of a girl, she is passed on to a husband.

In her old age (and let it be remembered in India people age more quickly than here) she passes under the protection of her son. She is never without protection of one kind or another.

It is not considered proper for woman to be mistress of herself, or her own destiny. She has no right to guide her own life. As her individuality is of no account, she ought to have no strongly marked wishes. Her needs must be few, and such as can be co-ordinated and made to fit in with those of her protector.

Marriage is, according to the Hindu ideal, obligatory for woman. She cannot escape it. There seems to have been a backward step here, for some 2,500 years ago it was permissible for women to engage in Studies of her own. She could pursue learning even at the expense of abandoning her own home. But now it is obligatory for every woman to settle down, and beget children. Woman is considered as a child, the property of man—to be used in subservience to his will and economic interests.

The "old maid" is hence unknown in India. Moreover, since marriage is obligatory, it is obviously unwise to let woman grow up to an age when she might have a will of her own. She has to be mated before she shows any signs of individual characteristics which might make her undesirable

as a wife. It follows, therefore, that a husband has to be given to the girl at a very early age, long before she has a chance to express her own taste or preferences. There was a time when girls had to become betrothed at a very early age, and even now twelve is not considered young. It must be remembered that even in Europe, where girls do not often marry before maturity, the actual legal age of marriage is somewhere about thirteen. In India practice and legal opinion go together.

Marriage in India does not, however, mean what you understand by it here, but mere betrothal. The bride and bridegroom do not begin to live together until several years later. But it is the betrothal ceremony that is of great importance, for the assurance of the disposal of the girl is then gained.

The act of betrothal is never gone back upon. It is considered absolutely binding—so binding, that if the man dies before the consummation of the marriage, the bride is considered a widow, even when they have never lived together.

Widowhood in India is specially miserable. A widow is a widow always : she cannot marry again, however tender in age she may be. In our Census Books these girls are referred to as widows. We find widows even in ages ranging from five to ten. These are, however, comparatively few considering the population of the country,

Nevertheless, there is a number which, considered in itself, is shocking : a hundred thousand innocent children, still romping about the streets, ignorant of worldly things, have become widows, and so they must remain for life. This ideal of marriage is so cruel and antagonistic to the demands of human nature, that some communities have rebelled against it and have adopted a system wherein widows re-marry.

The ideals of womanhood are such as to make marriage obligatory, women wholly dependent, betrothal as binding as marriage, and widowhood enforced. If this is the fate and destiny of womanhood in India it is not difficult to understand that education in the modern sense of the word is impossible. Where the girl is a mother at 15 or 16, her education must be ended before she is 12 or 13, and she cannot learn a good deal, especially when to all this is added the idea that woman's function is to cook for her husband, bring up her children, look after the household, be good, chaste and unoffending, and have no strongly-marked character of her own. This is the background.

Where an ideal is harsh, it is seldom lived up to. People get round it. These basic ideals, if faithfully followed, would result in much unhappiness. It seems as if women could never be happy under such conditions. But when one

speaks of happiness, one is on dangerous ground. The human mind is so elastic, so easily pressed into moulds, that it is difficult to ascertain where happiness is found. The need of lives is so great that it is possible for people in unpromising circumstances to be happy, and people in bright circumstances to be unhappy. That depends on the way we bring up our minds. It is the mind that makes Heaven of Hell and Hell of Heaven. It is possible for people living on small incomes to be happy and cheerful. Soldiers in trenches snatching a little of dangerous pleasure present such a picture.

Some people are more thoughtful than others. If some of your women came to India, lived amongst our women, and studied their lives, you would find that human nature is capable of an enormous amount of accommodation. Really a good part of our womankind are happy in their own way. If they had tasted liberty and freedom, had had education, experienced social intercourse, and were in the habit of receiving attention from men, then the conditions under which they live would bring them misery and unhappiness. If any of you married Indians, you would most likely be unhappy. But the ideals and standards of Indian womankind are perfectly contrasted to yours. It is therefore no exaggeration to say that, consider-

ing the circumstances, they are quite as happy in their own way as perhaps you are. That is when we understand the inner meaning of happiness, which is something entirely individual, and depends upon our own mode of thought.

Do not be carried away by the idea that the women of India are creatures of woes and sorrows. There are many whose protectors will not allow them to be unhappy. The woman has the love of her husband and children. Those of you who are happily married can understand that if there is a child in the house then that home is heaven. The women of India have that, and are not objects of commiseration.

In this world everything changes, even ideals—or the world would cease to move, and God's purpose would be frustrated. In India ideals have changed recently, are now continuing to change more rapidly. I have lived fifty years with a mind capable of understanding and feeling the changes that have taken place, which are absolutely marvellous. When I consider how my mother was circumstanced, I realise that my wife came into a greatly improved life of refinement and happiness. But the circumstances under which my daughter is growing up mark an even greater improvement on my wife's condition.

There is no truth in the theory that the East is

unmoving, goes to sleep, and wakes only when there is a volcanic shock. Those of us in India who have seen the West, and would like to see conditions in the East approximate to those in the West, are satisfied with the reform.

There is a great Reform Movement now in India. A modern system of education has been planted there, thanks to the sleepless activity of the Christian Missions and the British Empire. This has brought about an entire change in the outlook of our national life. Owing to the change of ideals, our womanhood is receiving liberation. The modern student wants his sister and wife educated. He is struggling hard to raise the age of marriage, and to bring about a state of things which would make marriage optional. Moreover, an attempt is being made to enable widows to remarry.

In a world where there are widows of all ages, we concentrate on the girl widow. Reform would be surer and more stable when the primary appeal is made to conscience with regard to those who never have been wives and are already widows.

So we see how all India's energies are concentrated in replacing old world ideals by those we see in more civilised communities. No real progress in Society and social institutions can

take place unless the efforts of enlightened men are reinforced by the efforts of enlightened women.

All the world over many of the reforms for the enlightenment of women have been attacked by women themselves. The enfranchisement of women has been opposed by women as much as by men. This is the fate of all reform movements in India. Perhaps the worst enemy of the emancipation of slaves was the slave himself.

Now when we lift our hand to assist her, woman says, "No. Do not make us change our ways of living. Leave us where we are." They seem to be in love with the chains that fetter their feet. At the same time we find women taking their share in all Reform Movements. The first fruits of having given the franchise to women on equal terms with men are now being seen in all the Legislative Councils. Not only do women vote in India, but they also sit on our Legislative Councils.

In Madras a woman* is Deputy-President of a Legislative Council where men form the preponderating element. A woman has made herself responsible for three of the four measures of reform. She is working hard to raise the age of marriage, to improve conditions of children, and to strengthen the work of our hospitals and dispensaries. Her efforts are meeting with a good deal of res-

* Dr. (Mrs.) S. Muthulakshmi Reddi.

ponse—more response than would have met the efforts of mere men. These tendencies are strongly marked in Madras, but are likewise operating in other Provinces. This is the redeeming feature of a situation with a black background.

The condition of woman's education is improving considerably. Whereas education was once considered harmful for woman, and calculated to unsex her, it is now reckoned very necessary. No mother is now content to bring up her girls in a state of illiteracy. In all the Provinces are found separate girls' schools, as well as girls' colleges. Considering that woman's education in India is but twenty years of age, it is remarkable that there is hardly a city without its girls' college. In Madras there are two very large girls' colleges. Both are full, and have long waiting lists. Moreover, they are officered by women graduates—most of whom are Indians raised in India and educated in our own colleges.* In Poona there is an entire University for women.

In this University are found many original ideas of education. It has for its basic idea that all education should be imparted through the mother tongue. In India, where the system of education is modelled upon British lines, the medium of education is English. But there is a

* Now there are 7 Women's Colleges in Madras.

rising wave of the nationalistic spirit which attaches great importance to the mother tongue. The feeling is growing that it would be more economic and conducive to learning if all subjects were taught in the mother tongue. Marathi is the language of the Women's University.*

Formerly it was most unusual to find women doing such work as men are able to do. Now man is eager to seek woman's assistance in everything. The work of the world belongs to both men and women. It was rather presumptuous for man to have tried it all himself. The best work is accomplished, and it yields best results, when woman's heart and energies are enlisted in the same service as man.

Not only in the Faculty of Education do we find women, but we have women doctors of medicine, nurses and assistants of all sorts. They serve on our Hospital Boards, our Boards of Charity, and there is no Municipality of any consequence that has not women on its Council. In most big towns women are now appointed as Honorary Magistrates.

In Social Service women play a large part. India is such a large country that it is never without

*The Nathubhai Thakersey Women's University, Poona, owes its origin and present position to Prof. D. K. Karve, the well-known educationist of Poona. The late Sir Vittaldas D. Thakersey made a donation of several lakhs to it.

its social service problems. There are always areas suffering from famine or flood, and to these assistance must be rendered and relief given. Relief is given either by the Government directly or by our missionary agencies. On every relief expedition where five men go, there is at least one woman. Women always seem glad to volunteer their services for the help of others. About five years ago there was a severe famine in the Province of Bombay. Access to that area was most difficult, and possible only by a combination of means of travel. It entailed a tiresome journey by boat, train and camel. There were many hardships to overcome, but in this expedition women took their share bravely with the men. That has remained as a precedent, and small contingents of women are found everywhere.

To those of you who go to statistics and historical records, the picture looks dark indeed. But you must note the present-day tendencies. See the marked changes, with their potentialities for the future. Never mind the past. Where is India to-day? Is it moving forward or backward? If forward, is the movement steady, and will it be permanent? These questions must be asked. As far as I can judge impartially, I cannot conscientiously return any answer but an emphatic affirmative.

Woman is being uplifted rapidly. Our ideals are changing, and our practice follows our theory. Humane thoughts are filling the minds of our politicians and statesmen, magistrates and lawyers. Progress is found everywhere—in our schools and colleges and in all our institutions. Time is changing all things for the better, and certainly the condition of woman.

NOTES

(**N.B.**—Numbers within brackets refer to pages in the text.)

Abhayambal (page 3)

Dr. U. Abhayambal, M.A., PH.D., was a distinguished student of the Maharajah's College, Mysore and a graduate of Madras University. After taking her M.A. Degree in History and Economics in 1917, she joined the staff of the University of Mysore in 1917 and was appointed Assistant Professor of History and Economics in the Maharani's College, Mysore. In 1929 she was deputed for higher studies to England and took the Ph.D. Degree in Economics of the London University in 1931. In February 1932 she was appointed Professor of Economics in the Maharani's College and in July 1932, she was appointed Principal, on the retirement of the late Srimathi K. D. Rukminiamma. She had hardly been two years in office as Principal when she died in her fortieth year, in the latter part of 1933.

Her brother Sri U. Ramachandran, B.A., B.L., Advocate founded a Lectureship in her memory in the University of Mysore. The lectures under the endowment are to be delivered once in three years and should be a course of two lectures on a subject of University standard. The first lectures under the endowment were delivered by the Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri.

Bride Price or Varadakshina (page 43)

Varadakshina is the price paid to the bridegroom to induce him to marry a girl. The opposite is Kanya Sulkam where the bride is bought by the bridegroom as in the Simla Hills. Varadakshina is also called Varasulkam.

Crosby Hall (page 3)

A historic building on the eastern side of Bishop Gate, London, built in 1466 by one Sir John Crosby, a soldier in arms and of fortune. It passed into the hands of Sir Thomas More in 1523 and to several others subsequently. In 1841, it was occupied by the Crosby Hall Literary and Scientific Institute. After several vicissitudes in its fortune, it was purchased by the Chartered Bank of India who wanted to demolish and rebuild it. However having consideration for the historic associations of the building, a Crosby Hall Preservation Committee was constituted and the Crosby Hall in Chelsea was reconstructed with the dismantled timber facade in Bishop Gate (a reproduction of the timber house of the

15th century). Now Crosby Hall is occupied by the British Federation of University Women, and overseas women students going to London for higher studies stay at the Crosby Hall.

Fergusson College (page 21)

Sir James Fergusson was a popular Governor of Bombay, who pursued a liberal and sympathetic policy towards all non-official educational endeavour. He extended his support both moral and material to educational institutions started in Poona by the Deccan Education Society. In recognition of his valuable services to the Society, the first college that was started by the Life Members of the Deccan Education Society was called after Sir James Fergusson as the Fergusson College.

Paativratya (page 35)

“The ancient ideal of womanhood in India was the compulsory merging of the woman’s individuality in that of her partner.” The Hindu ideals of womanhood are represented not only by Savitri, the Indian Alcestis, the meek devoted wife who had no other interest in life than that of being by the side of her husband at all times and serving him, but by Nalayini, who nursed her leprous husband, by Draupadi, who was both faithful and dynamic, following her husbands in their exile and sharing their dangers and privations at the same time and encouraging them on to action, by Satyabhama, who accompanied Sri Krishna to the battlefield, by Sita who shared with her Lord Sri Rama the terrors of a forest life, by Lopamudra and Arundati who with utter self-effacement fully identified themselves with the mission of their great husbands. The integral view of the Hindu Religion that man and woman are part and parcel of each other, is exemplified in the worship of Sita Rama, Radhakrishna, Gowri-Sankar, Lashmi-Narayana and Ardhanariswara. *Pativrata* is one whose sole aim, purpose and ideal in life is service of the *pati* or husband. The husband is therefore called *Pathi Devata* or the husband god.

—See *Hindu Society at the Cross Roads* by Panikkar

Public Selling of Brides in Simla Hills (page 39)

The following account extracted from an article on Problems of North Himalayan Region, published in the Social Welfare in India, a publication of the Planning Commission, will be read with interest :

“The evil of selling girls (by the parents or husbands often with the consent of minor girls) is particularly prevalent in Jaunsar-Bawar and Rawain-Jaunpur (U.P.), Mandi, Mahasu (Himachal) and the Kangra Valley (Punjab). In these areas poverty has blunted the social conscience and the heavy sums

given (in addition sometimes to monthly m.os from the sold girl) represent an easy income that parents or husbands seem to be unable to resist."

From Social Welfare in India, p. 529

Mrs. Sarojini Naidu (page 26)

A well-known poet, patriot and woman leader of India who achieved early distinction as a fine lyric poet. As the talented leader of the womanhood of India, she led a deputation in 1919 to E. S. Montagu, then Secretary of State for India, to press for the grant of rights of franchise to Indian Women. She was a coadjutor of Mahatma Gandhi in the struggle for winning freedom for the country and courted imprisonment several times. She represented Indian women at the International Conference in Geneva in 1920, and presided over a session of the All India Women's Conference in London in 1931. In recognition of her services and sacrifices in the cause of the country the nation honoured her by electing her as the President of the Indian National Congress at its Cawnpore Session, 1925. She was the first woman to be appointed as the Governor of Uttar Pradesh when India attained independence. She was born on 13-2-1879 and passed away on 2-3-1954.

N. S. Subba Rao (page 3)

N. S. Subba Rao, M.A., BAR-AT-LAW : a distinguished educationist who served as the Director of Public Instruction of the Mysore Government, and as the Vice-Chancellor of the Mysore University. He was a friend of both the Rt. Hon. V. S. S. Sastri and Dr. U. Abhayambal and was anxious that the first lectures under the endowment should be delivered by the Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri.

Utopia (page 9)

A book written by Sir Thomas More in 1516 describing ideal, social and political institutions set in an imaginary island.

The Women's University of Poona (page 20, 21 and 64)

Reading a booklet on the "Japan Women's University," Prof. D.K. Karve of Poona who had devoted a major part of his time the cause of women's education, outlined his idea of a Women's University in his presidential address at the National Social Conference held in Bombay in 1915. At first the idea was opposed by a section. But Prof. Karve persisted and started the Women's University in a humble way. Sir Vithaldoss Thackersey who had visited Japan with his wife Lady Pramila Thackersey and had seen the Women's University in Japan working was an enthusiastic supporter

of the Women's University founded by Prof. Karve and made a donation of 15 lakhs of rupees.

The courses of studies at the University are devised to meet the special needs of women in general. Domestic Economy, Hygiene including Biology, Anatomy, Human Physiology and Elements of Psychology with special study of the child mind are compulsory subjects. Fine arts, *viz.*, music, painting, needlework and embroidery are included in the course as regular subjects for examination. The medium of instruction is the mother tongue with English as a second language. The University confers graduate and post-graduate degrees on successful candidates. The University has been recognized by the Bombay Government and graduates of the Women's University now enjoy equal status with those of the Bombay University.

We quote the following passage from Prof. Karve's Autobiography :

“ I was the guest of the Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri. He was surprised to see almost a madman going all the way from Poona to Madras in pursuit of an Utopian scheme. He asked a friend to accompany me and to introduce me to some people I stopped for about a week in Madras, addressed a few meetings and secured a goodly number of voters Mr. Sastri wrote to his friends in all these places to arrange for my stay and work. The response everywhere was very encouraging ”

—page 114

APPENDIX

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF THE RT. HON'BLE V. S. SRINIVASA SASTRI

- 1869 *22nd Sept. Born at a Valangaiman Village—Tanjore District.*
- 1883 Passed Matriculation taking 13th rank in the Presidency. Won a scholarship for prosecuting his collegiate studies.
- 1885 Passed F.A. in First Class.
- 1887 *Passed B.A. in First Class. Second in the Presidency. First in the Presidency in Sanskrit and got the Goday Vari Gold Medal. Joined Mayavaram Municipal High School as a Teacher on Rs. 50/- a month.*
- 1891 Joined the Saidapet Teacher's College for Teacher's Training. Corrected Principal Hall's English pronunciation.
- 1893 Assistant Lecturer in English, Municipal College, Salem. Association with C. Vijayaraghavachariya.
- 1895 Assistant, Pachaiyappa's High School, Madras.
- 1899 *Headmaster, Hindu High School, Triplicane. Association with V. Krishnaswamy Aiyar.*
- 1904 Founded the Madras Teachers' Guild.
Founded the Triplicane Urban Co-operative Stores and was its President for a time.
- 1906 Agitated in favour of Post-puberty Marriage for Brahmin Girls—Published a book on that subject in English with authorities from the Sastras.
- 1907 *January 6—Joined The Servants of India Society founded by G. K. Gokhale as a Life Member.*
- 1908 Secretary of the Madras Session of the Indian National Congress.
- 1909 Elected to the Senate of the Madras University.
- 1913 *Nominated to the Madras Legislative Council. Introduced Post-puberty Marriage Bill.*
- 1914 Gave evidence before the Royal Commission on Public Services (Islington Commission)
- 1915 *Feb. 19—Gokhale's death—Sastri became the President of the Servants of India Society.*
- 1916 Published a Pamphlet entitled "Self Government for India under the British Flag."
Elected to the Imperial Legislative Council by the members of the Madras Legislative Council.
Published a Pamphlet on the "Congress-League Scheme—an exposition." Toured the country popularising the idea.

- 1917 E. S. Montagu, the Secretary of State for India announced Responsible Government as the goal of British policy in India. Sasriar addressed public meetings welcoming the proposal. *Presided over the Bombay Provincial Conference held at Nasik.*
- 1918 Opposed the Rowlat Bill in the Imperial Legislative Council. Sasri seceded from the Congress as it opposed Montagu's proposals. Founded the National Liberal Federation along with other leaders.
- 1919 *Went to England as a member of the Moderate Delegation to place his views on the reform proposals—First visit.*
Member—Southborough Committee (Franchise Committee)
Gave evidence before the British Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Reform proposals.
- 1920 *Elected to the Council of State under the Montford Reforms.*
- 1920 Moved a Resolution in the Council of State demanding the appointment of a committee to inquire into the working of the Repressive Laws in India. It was passed.
- 1921 *Nominated as a delegate to the Imperial Conference as a representative of the Government of India.*
Went as a Delegate of the Indian Government to the League of Nations, Geneva.
Was made a Privy Councillor. (P.C.)
Received the Freedom of the City of London.
Member, Railway Inquiry Committee (the Acworth Committee).
- 1922 *Toured Australia, Canada and New Zealand on the invitation of the Dominion Premiers to Study the condition of Indians.*
Went to Washington Naval Disarmament Conference on behalf of the British Empire having been nominated by the Government of India.
- 1923 *Went as a leader of the Delegation sent by the Indian Government to place before the British Cabinet the views of the Indian Government on the position of the Indians in Kenya.*
- 1924 In the Council of State opposed the Class Areas Bill of the South African Government which sought to segregate the Indians.
Went to England on behalf of the Liberal Party and spoke to British audiences on the need to grant more political reforms to India.
- 1925 *Delivered the Kamala Lectures at the Calcutta University on "The Rights and Duties of Citizenship."*
- 1926 Was a member of Indian Delegation and Indo-South African Conference on India and S. Africa.
Appointed as Vice-Chancellor of Annamalai University.
- 1927 *Went as Agent-General of the Government of India to South Africa.*

- 1928 Was appointed a member of the Delegation to give evidence on behalf of the Indian Government on the question of closer union of East African territories, before the Hilton-Young Royal Commission.
- 1928 Declined the offer by Government of India of the title of K.C.S.I. Made a Companion of Honour. (C.H.)
- 1929 Appointed a member of the Royal Commission on Labour (Whitley Commission)—Toured England and India.
Nominated as a delegate to the 1st Round Table Conference. Served on several of its sub-committees.
- 1931 Received the Freedom of the City of Edinburgh.
Nominated to the Second Round Table Conference.
Declined Rhodes Lecturership at Oxford on grounds of health.
- 1934 Lakshmi—Sastri's wife passed away.
Declined Rhodes Lecturership at Oxford a second time.
- 1935 Delivered the Mysore University Extension lectures on Gokhale.
Reappointed Vice-Chancellor of the Annamalai University.
Invited to form a Ministry in Madras when the Congress refused to take up office, but Sastri declined the invitation.
- 1936 Went to Malaya as the Leader of the Government of India delegation to inquire into conditions of Indians.
- 1937 *Nominated to the Legislative Council in Madras.*
- 1940 Delivered the Dr. Abhayambal Memorial Lectures at the Mysore University.
- 1941 Wrote a series of articles in Tamil on "Some aspects of my life" to 'Swadesamitran'—Weekly—a valuable political biography.
- 1943 Delivered lectures on Sir P. M. Mehta.
- 1944 *His "Magnum opus"—Delivered a series of lectures on Valmiki Ramayana in English.*
In his closing years, he spoke opposing vehemently Jinnah's demand for the Partition of India.
- 1946 Died April 17th Wednesday.

Prepared by

SRI. S. R. VENKATARAMAN

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