

Early Feminist Pioneers, Their Lives, and Their Reform Efforts

Early Feminist Pioneers, Their Lives, and Their Reform Efforts:

Eight Case Studies

By

Satish Sharma

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



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This book first published 2021

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-6357-X

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-6357-5

**Dedicated to,
My True Teacher,
My Spiritual Master**

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FOREWORD

Reflecting on my twenty-eight years as an academic, I am almost immediately brought back to my experience of being a twenty-two-year-old African American female, first-generation college student, pursuing a master's degree in social work. It was during this time that I encountered a highly regarded professor from India who would impact my view of academia. Dr. Satish Sharma, the author of this book, would become my lifelong mentor and the person, who by uttering one word, changed my life trajectory. Near the end of my graduate program, while preparing for a recognition ceremony, Dr. Sharma handed me a card containing his handwritten note that I have kept for nearly three decades. On that notecard, the greeting began: *To my scholar*. The word *scholar* bounced from the card into the very fabric of my soul. I share this story for a few reasons. First, words have power and the profound potential to ascribe meaning and value to a person's life. The words that we render can be used for harm, but they can also be the start of something significant. For me, the twenty-two-year-old protégé experiencing an impactful moment with her senior mentor, my professional life was transformed and I was inspired to encourage positive outcomes for those individuals I have encountered along this journey. I share this story to express to readers the author's genuine positive regard and respect for women. This respect forms the basis of his scholarly work. His scholastic work has elevated women, by recognizing and valuing our many contributions. The author's body of work and his latest offering, chronicles the status and role of women, acknowledging that we are the vessels of life and preservers of societies. This short window into my life is shared to illustrate the author's understanding of the power of the narrative. Through his latest writing, *Early Pioneer Women, Their Lives, and Their Reform Efforts: Eight Case Studies*, the author embraces the power inherent in narrative accounts by illustrating the transformative and consequential nature of eight women who changed societies. In my case, the author helped to define my life narrative through the utterance of a single word. Likewise, in his eloquent and powerful narration of the lives of eight women pioneers, he allows others to study these women's lives and the emulative nature of their work.

The book contains several important elements and provides readers a newfound way to understand the domination of men over women and how such was entrenched and pervasive in multiple societies and cultures, including Indian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Israeli. Additionally, throughout the book, we learn that although some women fared better than others, depending on the historical time or their location in the world, male dominating societies, although persistent, have unsuccessfully thwarted the advancement of women. Moreover, some readers will be surprised to learn that in ancient and early times (varying across societies), women and men's status was more equal. The author's careful research and study of the matters reveal that although women's quest to receive equal rights, privileges, authority, and power has been a long haul, there are historical time periods (including contemporary times) worthy of review because they highlight women's incredible resilience and resolve to create more just societies. Ultimately, the signature pedagogy of the book are the eight case studies contained in chapters 2-9. Highlighted are the achievements and works of: Margaret Fell (1614-1702), religious leader and Mother of Quakerism; Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845), social reformer and Angel of Prisons; Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), philosopher and advocate for women's rights; Lucretia Mott (1793-1880), abolitionist and credited with launching the women's suffrage movement; Dorothea Lynde Dix (1802-1887), social reformer and humanistic advocate for those suffering from mental illness; Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), confident journalist and unapologetic feminist; Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), activist, reformer, and convener of the Seneca Falls Convention (convention about women's rights); and Jane Addams (1860-1935), social worker and leading force in the settlement house movement.

The author's powerful narrative of the eight pioneering women's lives is a valuable literary contribution. The manner in which the author chronicles the women's achievements enables readers to draw modern-day parallels. By way of carefully highlighting the challenges that the women faced and how they galvanized networks, resources, courage, and conviction to usher in broad sweeping reforms, the author positions readers to seriously examine today's leaders, women and men. For example, the author narrates Margaret Fell's courage and conviction and in doing so, communicates to today's activists that it is fitting and indeed necessary to use your voice to decry unjust and unfair dealings, even when perpetrated by our governmental leaders and religious establishments. Other lessons for today's reformers, many of whom are fighting for economic and social justice, are found in the work of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The author brings to life the risks and bravery associated with

social movements. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was an outspoken critic of political and religious systems and she did not shy away from espousing her belief that the masses were manipulated by institutional leaders. The author's writing inspires today's organizers to look to the lessons of the eight pioneers and he does so through the discovery of archival data and records that were challenging to uncover, but perfectly examined.

As readers are guided through the lives of eight remarkable pioneers, they will find themselves contemplating who might be regarded as women pioneers of our current era? A hundred years from now, what will be said about the bold and brilliant women who are leading us through: surviving a global pandemic; fighting against racism and uplifting racial reconciliation; demanding the removal of tyrannical leaders; shedding light on corrupt governments; reminding us that environmental and climate change are real concerns; and ensuring that we have distributive models where resources and power, especially as it relates to advances in technology, are equally leveraged. Today, we do not have those answers but the author has provided us a roadmap and the reflective capacity by which to assess future contributions of pioneering women. In doing so, the author's words will again influence the life trajectory of a young woman, and this time, it will be the reader who happens upon this illuminating book.

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PREFACE

Throughout the history of humankind people have desired personal, social, and societal welfare all over the world, and used such means as: sound character at individual and community levels; adequacy of human and material resources; proper values and beliefs; suitable social and political environments; harmonious and supportive linkages among people and systems; and sympathetic, peaceful, and interactive living at different levels. Orientations of freedom, liberty, equality, fairness, justice, cooperation, unity, regard for one another, patience and tolerance in dealing with situations, eagerness to solve problems collectively, efforts to not create problems, and taking care of worldly and non-worldly tasks have also been part of the struggles of the people. Those considerations guided the earlier research by the author, and his main focus was on general and specific foundations of welfare, peace, and pacifism, with added interest in the problems and issues of women. Thus came forth eight monographs: *Migratory Workers and Their Socio-Cultural Adjustment* (1964); *Modernism and Planned Social Change* (1982); *Gandhi, Women, and Social Development* (1982); *Gandhi's Teachers: Rajchandra Ravjibhai Mehta* (2005); *Gandhi's Teachers: Leo Tolstoy* (2009); *Gandhi's Teachers: John Ruskin* (2011); *Gandhi's Teachers: Henry David Thoreau* (2013); and *Quakerism, Its Legacy, and Its Relevance for Gandhian Research* (2017).

The first piece of research was undertaken by the author in 1964, when he was a student at the Panjab University in India, and started a study on the socio-cultural adjustment of migratory workers in the labor colonies of Chandigarh. That research fulfilled the partial requirement for a master's degree in sociology and was published by the Panjab University in 1964 as a monograph.¹ The next piece of research by the author was a research project focused on the modernization and planned social change in Indian villages. That work was undertaken when the author was a student at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, in America. When completed, that work took the form of a dissertation and fulfilled the partial requirement of a Ph.D. degree. With upgrading and modifications that work was published as a book by the Asian Research Service in Hong Kong in 1982. The foreword to that work was written by Dr. Jerry D. Stockdale at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls, Iowa.² In 1979 the author undertook another research project focused on Gandhi,

women, and social development; this entailed a search for peaceful alternatives to the development and planning in India with global contexts. Some explorations for that work also came from the social development and social planning courses taken at the University of Iowa where the author was a Master of Social Work (MSW) student. That project also took the form of a thesis and fulfilled the partial requirement for the degree. With some revisions and upgrading that work took the form of a book and was published by the Asian Research Service in Hong Kong in 1982. The foreword to that work was written by Dr. Ruth A. Brandwein at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, New York.³

After finishing those research projects some time passed while taking care of several administrative, professional, and scholarly assignments, including “Directorship” of a School of Social Work, guest and book review editorship of two journals, and the founding of a new MSW program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. In 1999 the author returned to his scholarly pursuits and started a book series related to the four proclaimed teachers of Gandhi: Rajchandra in India, Tolstoy in Russia, Ruskin in England, and Thoreau in America.⁴ The lives, endeavors, strategies, and lessons provided by those visionaries on welfare, peace, justice, and nonviolence were recounted, and the four books were published by the Gujarat Vidyapith University⁵ in Ahmedabad, India, in 2005, 2009, 2011, and 2013 respectively. The forewords to those works came from the vice-chancellors of the university, Dr. Arunkumar Dave and Dr. Sudarshan Iyengar.⁶ Having finished these research projects the author became interested in Quakerism, as some of Gandhi’s co-workers in South Africa and India were Quakers, and Gandhi was impressed by them and by their faith.⁷ Accordingly, a research project was started with the topic Quakerism, its legacy, and its relevance for Gandhian research. That research effort lasted four years, and the book was published by the Cambridge Scholars Publishing in England in 2017. The foreword to that work was written by Dr. Brij Mohan at the Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.⁸

After finishing these research endeavors the author turned back to his earlier interest in the problems and issues of women, one of which was their non-recognition in spite of all kinds of contributions they made to the growth, development, and welfare of society since the hoary past. The goal was to highlight and illustrate the lives, endeavors, reform efforts, and contributions made by several early pioneer women who tried to make life and living better for others in different time periods – even at great personal costs. The lessons they left for the future generations of reformers and activists were also a focus of the work. Thus, a comprehensive list of

such early pioneer women was prepared, with the imposed geographical limits of England and America. The list was long and the selection process was difficult as only a total of eight early pioneer women were to be chosen for the case studies. With that consideration, the screening factors of the time periods to which the early pioneer women belonged, the levels of their accomplishments, the fields to which the accomplishments belonged, and the scope of the effects of the accomplishments on the lives and functioning of the societies were applied. The list that emerged was: Margaret Fell (1614-1702), Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), Lucretia Mott (1793-1880), Dorothea Lynde Dix (1802-1885), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), and Jane Addams (1860-1935). Three of those early pioneer women were from England and five were from America; they belonged to the mid-seventeenth century through to early modern times. Among them, in terms of their multi-tasking, were religious and moral reformers, social, political, and educational activists, model teachers and healers, social advocates, community organizers, abolitionists, suffragists, feminists, social workers, journalists, critics, writers, thinkers, philosophers, historians, prison reformers, mental health workers, transcendentalists, pacifist, humanists, and internationalists. Gathering information on them was difficult as their activities were multifarious, and they belonged to the times when action was the rule, and not its publicity or documentation. Moreover, it was men who wrote about women rather than the women themselves, with the exception of their diaries, memoirs, journals, letters, and occasional articles or pamphlets. The time at which these women lived was a factor; the farther the author went back the less information was available. The authenticity of the information was an issue as different writers had assigned different dates and times to the facts, making it difficult to determine which were the correct ones to use. There were also other gaps in information. Those were the periods when the histories of the societies were “the histories of men” and nothing much positive was written about the lives, endeavors, reform efforts, and achievements of women. Therefore, the most helpful sources for this work were the diaries, memoirs, journals, letters, and epistles written by the pioneer women, and the appeals they made in writing to the governments and the authorities to rectify prevalent undesirable situations. Several good books and other pieces of literature were also helpful for this work.

The author is thankful to many institutions and people for their help and cooperation in the completion of this work. Foremost among them was the University of Nevada, in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA. To it, the author is thankful for the provision of partial financial support and the free time it

allowed through a faculty sabbatical leave to finish the work. To a group of scholars and friends also, like Dr. Brij Mohan, Dr. Shreesh Juyal, Dr. Tom Walz, Dr. Guy Backman, Dr. Paramjit Singh Judge, Dr. Gurpreet Bal, Dr. Felecia Campbell, Dr. Ramona Denby, and others, the author is thankful for their encouragement and support, and the useful feedback they provided on earlier drafts of this work. To the staff and officers of Cambridge Scholars Publishing, the author would like to say “thanks” for taking care of the publication process so carefully and diligently. Finally, he would like to express his gratitude and appreciation to his wife Asha Sharma, son Ashish Sharma, and daughter Anu Sood for their constant patience and the encouragement they provided in the completion of this work. Their suggestions for making some significant improvements in the drafts were also invaluable.

Like his earlier works, this book is also offered by the author to the readers with the same sense of humbleness and humility as Gandhi always expressed to his audiences.

Satish Sharma,
Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the status, role, and parity of women with men has varied a lot from ancient to modern times, and from one society to another. Many disparities have existed between the status and role of men and women, reinforced by existing traditions, customs, and institutions. The domains were personal, familial, economic, social, political, religious, and others. Biases, prejudices, and discriminations prevailed against women, as preference was given to males; that was true of most societies, except for a few matriarchal societies. One world existed for men and another one existed for women. The world of men was superior and it provided them with rights, privileges, and facilities; it pampered them and gave them greater control over the decision-making processes at home and outside of the home. Authority and power also rested with men, with women being relegated to carrying out inferior routine chores and being kept under control by men. They were dependent on men for most of their needs, and the law was also tilted in favor of men. Women had no legal identity of their own and could not represent themselves in courts. They had no property rights and no civic rights. Social and political participation of women was limited; they were taken as insignificant entities, treated as possessions, their status and role undermined, and their achievements underrated. Coercion against women was common and took physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual forms. All of this happened despite the fact that women were the first teachers, philosophers, creators of art and music, and contributed much to the progress and development of societies. They have also toiled alongside men, shoulder to shoulder, throughout human history; participating in the struggles of life with them, and attempting to resolve problems and issues at all levels. During the last two or three centuries, some gains have been made by women in different fields, but they still remain far from their established goal of the same worth, rights, privileges, and freedoms as men. The struggle of women goes on, and it is likely to continue for many centuries more.¹

This introductory chapter looks at the status and role of women over the centuries. Starting with ancient times, it pinpoints reform issues that

existed, the struggle undertaken by women to rectify these issues, and an indication of what this work is about.

Women in Ancient Times

There is evidence that, during ancient times, women had considerable equality with men in most areas of living and functioning, and they were much better off in terms of their position, status, role, and responsibility in society. One example of that comes from India during the early Vedic times² when “male gods” and “female goddesses” were mentioned in religious literature, and both were to be revered and worshipped by the male and female populations. Some examples of the female goddesses are Aditi,³ Prithivi,⁴ and Saraswati;⁵ hymns spoke of them as being kind, thoughtful, eloquent, holy, immortal, heroic, pure, auspicious, lofty, just, honorable, radiant, benevolent, opulent, divine, powerful, creators of everything, supporters, and protectors of life. There were also references to them as holy teachers and queens who gave strength and power to all. People depended on them for their needs and requirements in their life and life thereafter.⁶ In practice men and women had the same high status and the same access to all forms of knowledge. That included their right to remain celibate and pursue *moksha*⁷ through a union with the Absolute. Women could also become religious teachers and *rishis*,⁸ and could compose hymns for the scriptures. Gargi and Maitreyi were two prominent examples who were counted among the highest of pious people, and their names appeared in many places in religious literature. Ordinary women, too, had high status and were allowed to pursue spiritual and mundane goals and knowledge. Many of them wrote plays, composed verses, and excelled in music, painting, and other art forms. They married at a mature age and were allowed to choose their own husbands. That equality between men and women lasted for a long time, and women felt respected, secure, and were not treated as inferiors.⁹

The degeneration of the status and role of women started during the Brahmanical period¹⁰ with the effort of Brahmans to monopolize Vedic practices, and for which they created elaborate ritual, ceremonial, and philosophical orders. Thus, priestly Hinduism began and, instead of direct communication between man and God, Brahmans became the brokers of that relationship. All sorts of powers and privileges started shifting in their favor, and the process of male domination began. Priests started giving women lower estimates of their abilities and capabilities, and more and more curtailed their participation in the social, political, religious, and spiritual affairs of society.¹¹ Some improvements in the status and role of

women occurred during the Upanishadic period,¹² when priestly Hinduism came under scrutiny and an effort was made to bridle the powers, privileges, and practices of Brahmins. That resulted in a better status and role for women in society, and their greater equality vis-à-vis men. Jainism and Buddhism¹³ were born later out of a similar socio-religious mix, and these traditions also tried to cut into the powers, privileges, and practices of Brahmins while upholding equality between men and women in all areas of life.¹⁴ But ritual, ceremonial, and philosophical orders proved to be too deep-rooted, and priestly Hinduism continued more or less in the status quo, in spite of pressures from the Upanishadic, Jain, and Buddhist traditions. The literature of the time also reveals that women still had a respectable status in society, and enjoyed a large number of personal, social, intellectual, and religious freedoms.¹⁵

The Upanishadic period was followed by the Dharmashastra period,¹⁶ when the Hindu culture was described, laws were codified, moral appeals were made to men and women to follow these laws, and punishments were prescribed for not being in compliance with them. The most famous of such codifications was accomplished by Manu in *The Laws of Manu*.¹⁷ On the one hand Manu profusely praised women in a most lofty manner, but on the other depreciated them abundantly. See, for example, the following verses:

“The teacher is ten times more venerable than a sub-teacher, the father a hundred times more than a teacher, but a mother is a thousand times more than the father.” (2.145)

“They (Mother, Father, Teacher) are three worlds; they are three principal orders; they are the three Vedas, and they are three fires.” (2.230)

“Where women are honored, there the gods are pleased. But where they are not honored, no sacred rite yields rewards.” (3.56)

And, then:

“In childhood, a female must be under the control and surveillance of her father; in youth, under the control and surveillance of her husband; and when her lord is dead, under the control of her sons. A woman must never be independent.” (5.148)

“Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure, or devoid of good qualities, a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a Stri Sadhvi (devoted and faithful wife).” (5.154)

“No sacrifice, no vow, no fast must be performed by women apart from their husband. If a wife obeys her husband, she will for that (alone) be exalted in heaven.” (5.155)

These mixed reviews of women considerably hurt their status and role in society. Women came under the charge of the male members of the family (fathers, husbands, sons, and others) and they were assigned more and more indoor duties. A husband was the lord, and he was to be obeyed and respected, even when he did not possess a single virtue. His desires and wishes were of paramount importance and were to be carried out without complaint or questioning. That further diminished the status of women, hurt their authority within the family, and cut into their personal, social, and religious freedoms. Manus placed a prohibition on the remarriage of widows, and many other restrictions were placed on their personal, social, and religious lives.¹⁸ The Puranic period¹⁹ made Hindu practices common among ordinary people and attitudes toward women remained ambivalent. On the one hand, there was high praise for the thirty-two godly virtues carried by women and their important position in society but, on the other hand, there was their negative condemnation as being wicked and responsible for everything that was wrong and evil in society. See, for example, the following verses:

“(A woman) is the embodiment of rashness and a mine of vices. She is hypocritical, and treacherous.... She is an obstacle to the path of devotion, a hindrance to emancipation.... She is practically a sorceress and represents vile desire.”²⁰

“Falsehood, vain, boldness, craftiness, impatience, over-greediness, impurity, and harshness are the natural qualities of women.”²¹

There remained high regard and affection for unmarried daughters, but the necessity of a son for personal, social, spiritual, and ritual matters was also there, as enjoined in the Brahmanical period and reinforced by the expectations in *The Laws of Manus*. Other prohibitions and restrictions were there too, and it was emphasized again and again that women ought not to be left alone and must be guarded and protected by fathers, husbands, and sons. Women’s access to religious activities, education, and social affairs was limited but, in spite of all that, there is enough evidence that many women rose above these barriers and excelled in different worldly and non-worldly domains.²² Overall, however, the expectation of an ideal wife was:

“She who speaks sweetly to her husband and is a clever manager of household affairs, is a true wife. She who is one in spirit with her lord and devotes her whole self to his happiness, is a true wife.”²³

Thus, the evidence so far has revealed that the best period for women’s status, role, and honor in society were the Vedic times, after which their rights and freedoms were gradually curtailed; although they were still placed high in terms of dignity and honor in society. The Muslim period²⁴ hurt the status and role of women, and a time came when women were stripped of almost all of their rights and privileges, were paired with the untouchables, and treated like children. Reform movements had been occurring concurrently, and the earliest ones were during the Upanishadic, Jain, and Buddhist movements. That trend continued through the centuries; later examples included the Bhakti movement, Sikh movement, Brahmosmaj movement, and Arya Samaj movement. Some prominent people also contributed to the uplifting of women’s status and role in society; examples were Ramanuja in the twelfth century, Chaitanya in the sixteenth century, Raja Ram Mohan Roy in the nineteenth century, and Mahatma Gandhi in the twentieth century. Past trends and influences also stayed on, and attitudes and opinions about women remained mixed. Gandhi had involved women in his freedom struggle, as he had also done for the untouchables and other low caste populations. That move considerably impacted the status, role, and position of women, and of low caste people. Therefore, after the independence of India, women and low caste people started participating in almost all realms of civic, political, and governmental functioning on an equal basis with others.²⁵

The history of the status and role of women in other ancient cultures is not that lucid, but some glimpses are available from Egypt, Greece, Rome, Israel, and other societies. Some women in ancient Egypt were elevated to the status of “goddess”, and many of them were related by blood or by marriage. Isis and Nephthys, for example, were sisters married to two god brothers; Osiris and Seth.²⁶ Life was of central concern in Egyptian culture and, accordingly, pregnancy, birth, death, and funeral rituals were eventful happenings to be taken seriously. The planes of life were physical and spiritual, and the movement of life from one plane to another was of great significance. One symbol of life was the palm tree which indicated the eternal nature of life. Goddesses were intimately connected with the conception of life, and the most influential of them were Isis,²⁷ Hathor,²⁸ Bastet,²⁹ and Sekhmet.³⁰ In real life, divine titles were conferred upon influential women to indicate their importance and significance. “God’s Wife of Amun” was the highest ranking priestess of the Amun cult. Ahmose-Nefertari was the wife of Ahmose I, and she held a similar title

which was later passed on to her daughter Meritamen, and then to Hatshepsut. “God’s Wife” was another title for royal women in sacral roles, with two other titles being “Divine Adorer” and “God’s Hand.”³¹ Religion was also a mainstay of Egyptian culture. It guided the lives of people, justified the powers of Pharaohs, gave them divine rights, and made them transfer power from one male member to another. Women were excluded from that process, but occasionally they managed to overcome the hurdles and became rulers of the land. Some significant female rulers were Nitocris, Sobekneferu, Hatshepsut, Neferneferuaten, and Twosret, and they ruled society with immense power. Royal blood was another important consideration in the transfer of power; people preferred to be ruled by a woman with royal blood in her veins than by a man who did not have royal blood.³²

Older times were better in Egyptian culture, and that was also true for women’s status, roles, and gaining of power. In those days, many women were able to rise to the top as rulers or gain high ranks in the administration. Many were also able to accomplish much in professions that were considered high and noble. Overall, women were taken as equal to men, but in complementary ways to men. They were taken as the creators and nurturers of life, and men were the supporters of life. Women produced heirs for the throne, and men ruled the land. Once a female became a Pharaoh, she adorned herself in masculine robes; it was then difficult to distinguish who was a male Pharaoh and who was a female Pharaoh. A large number of women belonged to the peasant classes. They moved around freely and helped their husbands in their undertakings and activities. Some women were known to run businesses. Upper-class women did not normally work outside of their homes, but managed home affairs and supervised servants and slaves. Some wealthy families kept governesses to help with child care. Dancing, acrobatics, singing, and music-making were respectable professions, and well-to-do women engaged in them frequently. Courts and temples were also respectable places for work, and wealthy women sought employment there too. Noblewomen became priestesses of a male god or a female goddess, but priesthood was also found among ordinary women.³³ As time went by women’s status and role in ancient Egypt started to diminish, and fewer and fewer women were found in prominent positions. However, their legal status remained, and they could still buy and sell land, hold or inherit property, and enter into contracts without the consent of male family members. Women could divorce their husbands, and also enjoyed many other freedoms.³⁴

Somewhat similar conditions prevailed for women in ancient Greece, ancient Rome, and ancient Israel. In ancient Greek culture, some women were raised to the level of “goddess”; an example being the goddess Athena.³⁵ Other examples were the goddesses of fertility, where Demeter and Persephone were particularly popular. In real life, however, women were treated differently and cast as conspirators and troublemakers with wild passions, and led men astray and made them lose their wits. An ideal woman was one who was of mild nature, submissive, chaste, faithful to her husband, and loyal to his desires and passions.³⁶ The reverse was not true. Men could engage with prostitutes, live-in lovers, and other shady characters; there were no serious consequences for them. The consequences of infidelity for women were horrible. Women were expected to remain virgins until marriage, but that rule did not apply to men.³⁷ The overall Greek culture was male-dominated and male-controlled, where women had few personal, social, political, or legal rights. They participated in festivals and religious ceremonies, but could not be part of the assemblies, sports, or warfare. They could not engage in civil or political proceedings, hold public offices, vote, express themselves in public, or freely own or inherit land.³⁸ Their mainstay of life was the home where they took care of chores, reared children, and kept busy with hobbies like spinning, weaving, and wool-work. Women had no identity of their own, and were on a par with other belongings in the home, under the control of fathers, husbands, or guardians (*Kyrios*). They could not represent themselves in courts and could not make wills. They were not even full citizens of the land. There were, however, variations by region. Spartan women, for example, carried a higher status and role in society compared to other women and were treated differently. They could not vote, or participate in civil, political, or military proceedings. They were, however, permitted to own and inherit land, receive the same physical training that men did, wear clothes of their own choice, work in shops, run businesses, and pursue artistic interests. Many of them distinguished themselves in the areas of their pursuits. Then there were courtesans, slave women, sex-workers, brothel prostitutes, higher-class prostitutes, and other like-women. They fell outside normal society and were treated at variance with the citizen women.³⁹ Girls married at the age of fourteen or fifteen, but men when they were in their late twenties or early thirties. Marriages were arranged by fathers or guardians. Dowry was expected and all girls were expected to marry. Love or romance had very little to do with marriage, a general positive feeling about it was enough. Marriages could end in three ways: 1) when the husband repudiated his wife and threw her out of the home - no reason was necessary, 2) when the wife left the home of her husband

for any reason, and 3) when the father of the wife asked for her return on any pretext. Marriages could also end by mutual consent and overall divorce policies were liberal. However, a bad reputation came with divorce, and women were hesitant to bring about divorce proceedings.⁴⁰ Education was essential for boys and girls. Their initial education entailed reading, writing, and basic arithmetic. Their higher education was focused on literature, poetry, philosophy, history, astronomy, religion, mythology, music, and other fine arts. Athletics was also considered essential for both sexes. Boys, however, were encouraged more toward intellectual and professional accomplishments, and girls more toward taking care of household duties and the rearing of children. Women were also expected to be proficient in dance, music, gymnastics, and fine arts. So the intellectual achievements of women were handicapped, although many did distinguish themselves in their areas of endeavor.⁴¹ Rituals and ceremonies were important, and women were expected to play a significant role in them. Activities in them were masculine only, feminine only, and mixed. Accordingly, in some rituals and ceremonies women were excluded, in some men were excluded, and in some both men and women participated. Deities were both male and female, and they were worshipped by both men and women.⁴² In ancient Rome and ancient Israel similar circumstances prevailed, but with variations according to the land, the people, and their social, cultural, and political histories.⁴³

In summary, the status, role, and equality of women with men varied in ancient times from one period to another, and from one society to another. Generally, the earlier times were better for women as they enjoyed considerable freedom of movement and accomplishments, and were held in high regard. But hurdles and bottlenecks were always there in relation to their rights, privileges, authority, and power. Public arenas, administration, and political participation were three main areas where women were specially excluded, and men dominated there. The preference for a male child over a female child was there in most societies, and having a male child was almost essential for ritual purposes and for the continuation of the progeny. That was particularly true during the later periods. The expressed equality of men and women was more symbolic than real. In symbolic terms, women were raised to the level of “goddess”, capable of doing anything and bestowing boons upon people, but in reality, gaps existed between the symbolic equality and the practical equality, and men were in advantageous positions in most areas of functioning. The above circumstances applied to almost all societies across different cultures, and so the problems of status, role, authority, and power have existed for women since the earliest times. As societies moved forward these issues

became bigger and increased in intensity. Thus, women were never equal to men, even though visionaries and reformers had tried to accomplish that from time to time.⁴⁴

Europe and America

Europe had gone through very tough times during the earlier parts of the Middle Ages due to the tense internal conditions and the invasions which had been coming from the outside. By the tenth century, things started calming down as foreign invasions ceased, and that gave Europe room for stabilization and balancing. Agricultural and technological innovations had come on board, production had increased, populations had expanded, and towns and cities were growing. All of this gave a boost to trade, and new methods of economic dealings were invented. But ups and downs continued, and violent clashes with the Islamic states added to the uncertainties. Nevertheless, the power of the church continued to grow. This led to the organization of military orders, and several Christian states were established. Papacy now started demanding temporal authority in addition to the religious authority which it already had. This led to clashes between states and the church, and these clashes intensified over time. The church had been under attack from the public since 1024 due to its autocratic functioning, revision of pristine Christian teachings, and increased leanings toward secular practices. With time these attacks and clashes increased. There were internal dissensions within the church, and they played a part in prevailing tensions and confusions. A fusion of philosophy and theology had been occurring, scholastic thought was gaining ground, and systematic approaches to the discovery of truth were being emphasized. This led to many new trends in science and religion. Chivalry, courtship, love, and romance were also being advocated, and people were paying attention to that. This led to further changes in the arts, literature, living styles, and aspirations. The windmill, heavy plow, horse collar, and advanced methods of preparing war materials had been invented, alongside other developments. Both the state and the church benefited from these changes. As far as theology, teachings, and practices were concerned, the church maintained its medieval position, and resistance to that came from the laity. People wanted the church to be more transparent in its functioning and involve common folks more in its decision-making processes. That did not happen, and so frustrations and tensions increased. People started breaking away from the church and new religious orders started to form. These orders favored Apostolic living,

hermetic practices, and the taking back of Christianity to its earlier beginnings.⁴⁵

During the Late Middle Ages, trends toward commercialization, urbanization, and secularization increased. Industrialization was also gaining ground, and the mobility of people to towns and cities was expanding. As a result of these events, feudal customs and traditions started to weaken, relationships and affairs became more formal, and traditional support networks started to decline. Extended families started to give way to nuclear families. Climate changes occurred and, accompanied by overspecialization of cropping patterns, brought frequent economic downturns. The number of workers shrank, production decreased, and social unrest began. On the other hand, the changes also led to advances in art, philosophy, science, theology, and literature, and a new Renaissance appeared. That impacted society and the people's way of life changed. Faith and reason became different domains, legal changes occurred, and customary law started falling into disfavor. The Protestant Reformation occurred in 1517 and it challenged many of the previous premises and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. That movement soon spread across Europe. The Protestant Reformation emphasized individualism, humanism, and advocated non-traditional approaches to religious practices. One example of this was that each person could choose their own religious functioning and be their own priest. The Bible was still the final authority for religious affairs, but information and guidance for religious affairs could now come from other sources.⁴⁶ Explorations, discoveries, and innovations during the latter part of the Late Middle Ages also impacted society as new trade routes were discovered. Among the navigators responsible for that were Prince Henry, Bartolomeu Dias, Vasco de Gama, Christopher Columbus, and John Cabot. They helped connect Europe to a much wider world; commercially, culturally, and politically. Religious warfare continued and revolutions occurred in many lands. Thus, the tapestry of Europe changed further. Democracy was also gaining momentum, and the English Parliament and French Estates General came into existence. Centralization of power occurred and territorial power weakened. Religious education remained important throughout, but secular education was there by its side. Accordingly, secular art and literature mushroomed. All of these events impacted both men and women of Europe⁴⁷

Much of what had happened in Europe also occurred later in America, but with variations according to the land, the people, their circumstances, and their history. A new world had emerged with the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus in 1492. But most colonies were

founded after 1600, and by 1770 there were thirteen colonies with a population of about 2.5 million. These colonies were ruled by the British Crown. People in these colonies were independent-minded and the British rule was autocratic. As a result, conflicts were occurring and intensified by 1765. In 1776 a “Declaration of Independence” was issued explaining why they regarded themselves as no longer under British rule. Freedom finally came in 1783 with the “Treaty of Paris.” A new constitution was written in 1787 and adopted in 1789. In 1791 a “Bill of Rights” was added which guaranteed people several fundamental rights; they included equality, liberty, and freedom. With the passage of time, more colonies were established in the South and the West. The population grew, economic activities expanded, and more prosperity came to the nation. However, ideological issues lingered on. One of them related to the existing slavery in the country. The North was in favor of getting rid of this menace, but the South was not. Abraham Lincoln came to power as president in 1860, and one of his platforms was halting and removing slavery from the land. The South did not want this. Therefore, seven Southern states separated from the Union and established their own Confederacy. A civil war followed which lasted from 1861 to 1865. The North won that war, but Lincoln had already freed all the slaves in the South in 1863 through his “Emancipation Proclamation Act.” Slavery finally ended in America in 1865 with the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. The Jim Crow laws of the 1870s prolonged the issue, as they denied some basic rights to blacks and poor white people. This problem was resolved through the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Some issues, however, still lingered on and continued to plague the nation for many more years to come.⁴⁸

The above-mentioned historical circumstances reshaped the lives of men and women in Europe and America, and the influences were both negative and positive. On the negative side, people experienced a sense of loss of what they had in earlier times and expressed how their lives had changed due to the changing circumstances. Now they no longer had the same cozy and secure environment as they had when they lived in small villages and towns, and they could not experience the warmth provided by extended family members, friends, neighbors, and other community members. The informal functioning of the social order they loved, and which provided them empathy, sympathy, help, cooperation, togetherness, and belongingness, was no longer there. Relationships, values, beliefs, and workings had become diluted, and mobility brought them face to face with strangers whose backgrounds and orientations they were not aware of. Increasing commercialization, industrialization, and urbanization also

affected their lives and thrust them into many difficulties never experienced before. They felt lonely in the environment of towns and cities and were forced to work for others, where competition to land a job was strong and working conditions were very poor. Other insecurities loomed large and the risks of manipulation and exploitation were many. No help was available in cases of emergencies and sickness, and that brought additional havocs in living. The sense of fairness and justice was disappearing, and life was caught up in struggles. Hunger and poverty were common. In these circumstances living an ideal life was difficult, and even, almost, unthinkable. On the positive side, the occurring changes brought some new opportunities to the people. The constraining environment of the medieval days was no longer there, and people felt freer to act and live as they wished. They also felt enthused by the new developments and challenges, and they had fresh hopes, aspirations, ambitions, and goals for a better living. They also felt more inclined toward progress, invention, and adventure; desiring more material wealth and comforts. Their outlook had changed, and they were now aware of larger social and political issues. New knowledge excited them, and their sense of individuality became stronger. They liked the democratic trends and felt more empowered vis-à-vis the collectivities and the state.⁴⁹

Women's Issues

The influences of the above-mentioned circumstances were common to men and women but, for women, there were additional issues due to the biases and prejudices against them throughout the centuries. The main questions were: 1) whether or not women had an independent existence, separate from men; 2) whether or not women were full citizens of society; 3) whether or not women were to be treated on a par with men at home and outside of the home; 4) whether or not women had the same rights to freedom that men had; 5) whether or not women had the right to consent to marriage; 6) whether or not women had the right to choose their marriage partners; 7) whether or not women had the right to divorce their husbands; 8) whether or not women were entitled to the same privileges and responsibilities at home and outside of the home that men were; 9) whether or not women could keep their names after marriage; 10) whether or not women could decide where to live; 11) whether or not women could dress as they liked; 12) whether or not women could have custody of their children after a divorce; 13) whether or not women had the same guardianship rights to their children, both during and after a marriage, that men had; 14) whether or not women had the same rights to ownership of

property, possessions, titles, and rulings that men had; 15) whether or not women could inherit property and titles, and pass them on to others; 16) whether or not women could sell their property and possessions; 17) whether or not women had survivor's rights to possessions, incomes, pensions, and property; 18) whether or not women could work outside of their homes; 19) whether or not women could keep their wages and incomes; 20) whether or not women could run businesses and be legally responsible for them; 21) whether or not women could enter into contracts and be legally responsible for them; 22) whether or not women could borrow money in their own names; 23) whether or not women were free to enter into trades, occupations, and professions such as law, medicine, teaching, and theology; 24) whether or not women could participate in the security services, and have the same roles and responsibilities that men had; 25) whether or not women could have the same work conditions, wages, salaries, promotions, and ranks, for the same qualifications that men had; 26) whether or not women could have the same prescribed moral standards in social and religious settings that men had; 27) whether or not women could use contraceptives, have abortions, and have a say in maintaining the size of the family; 28) whether or not women could have protection against sexual mistreatment, sex trafficking, and rape; 29) whether or not women could participate in labor unions; 30) whether or not women could have continuity in their jobs in cases of childbirth and other exigencies; 31) whether or not women could have the same rights to education, both basic and higher, that men had; 32) whether or not women could participate in public affairs; 33) whether or not women could openly express their views in public; 34) whether or not women could hold public offices; 35) whether or not women could participate in political processes; 36) whether or not women could vote; 37) whether or not women could take part in governmental and non-governmental activities; 38) whether or not women could have the same treatment before the law as men had; 39) whether or not women could participate in legal proceedings, represent themselves in legal cases, serve as witnesses, and serve on juries; 40) whether or not women had the freedom to have their own religious faith, separate from men; and 41) whether or not women had the same sexual flexibility away from marriage that men had.⁵⁰

All of the above-mentioned questions begged answers, and the main sources for these were the legislative bodies, the governments, the churches, the social organizations, and the people. However, there were other problems and issues which begged attention, and among them were the issues of temperance, slavery, the miserable conditions of mentally ill people, the mishandling of prisoners, the bad treatment of Native

Americans, and a distrust of foreigners. The dangers of strife and war were present, and these threats were internal as well as external. Poverty, hunger, unemployment, work issues, environment issues, religious reform issues, health and sanitation issues, resettlement of migrants, food shortages, corruption at different levels, and conciliation/reconciliation issues were there, which presented challenges and begged attention and resources. Thus, women's issues were in a competing position with them in terms of attention, consideration, efforts, and allocation of resources.⁵¹

Women's Struggle

Women suffered a lot through the centuries and bore adverse circumstances without much complaining or protesting. The needs were there for the establishment of their identity, dignity, honor, credibility, worth, independence, and the same rights as men. Customs, traditions, and institutions that were overbearing to them, and applied pressures on them, also needed changing. But men were at the helm of the affairs and already possessed privileged positions. Accordingly, not much help could be expected of them, and attainment of the changes was difficult to come by. From time to time some women did try to deal with that situation and attempted to fight against the prejudices and discriminative practices they faced. But the countercurrents were strong, and their efforts, energies, and means could not match them. Social movements from time to time tried to do the same, but these also failed to bring in long-lasting changes, and the bases and fundamentals of women's lives remained about the same. This situation continued up to relatively recent times when, finally, an opportunity appeared. Women grabbed that opportunity and were able to start their struggle in a more comprehensive and organized way.

The year was 1840 and the place was London. An Anti-Slavery World Convention was to be held there, with delegates invited from many nations. America was to participate and delegates from the two anti-slavery societies were selected. Among them were women as well as men. When the proceedings were about to begin a question arose as to where to seat the women delegates, and whether or not they were to be allowed to participate in the convention. This matter became contentious when the speeches and discussions started. Finally, a vote was taken of the present delegates and that turned out to be negative. Thus, it was declared that the women from America could not sit with the male delegates, and their status in the convention was to be that of "observers", and not of "participants." This situation irritated the American delegates and, accordingly, most male delegates chose to sit with the women to mark