

PANDITA RAMABAI: A WOMAN FOR ALL SEASONS  
Pandita Ramabai Saraswati Mary Dongre Medhavi (1858 - 1922)

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1. Introduction

Ramabai Dongre (1858 - 1922) was a woman for all seasons. Born under colonial rule while Queen Victoria reigned and to the politically powerful Chitpawan Brahmin caste in western India, Ramabai moved from Hindu Orthodoxy to Evangelical Christianity, from poverty to securing funds from western countries to build and maintain Mukti Mission, from being oppressed as a young widow to championing the cause of Indian women, and from rare insights into sacred, ancient writings to developing a lexicon in Marathi from the Greek and Latin texts when translating the Bible. Ramabai is acclaimed as a social reformer, scholar, visionary, diplomat and Christian saint.

In this article we first gain an understanding of her early life, the context that formed a foundation for her enculturation. Second, recognition of Ramabai's intelligence and communication abilities follows as the pundits in Calcutta bestow two esteemed titles - Pandita and Saraswati - on the young girl. In the third section, Ramabai's indignation rises against unjust social practices, especially the conditions of women, which moves her to interact with westerners. Extending her vision, Ramabai and Manoramabai (her young child) study, visit, and form support groups in England and in the United States. Living her vision in section five, we read of her life's work at Mukti. This is followed by a description of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Mukti. Finally, we summarize the life's work of an intelligent and acclaimed woman who was led by the Holy Spirit.

## 2. Early Life

The *Chitpawans* were one of the highest of the 12 divisions of Brahmans whose achievements were notable in India's earlier history. They belonged to the *Madhava* sect of *Vaishnavite* Hinduism. Special position was not to be hers as her learned father disagreed with their interpretations of education and the role of women. He was a reformer. Ananda Shastri Dongre would not accept that women of the higher castes should not learn to read and write the Sanskrit language, study sacred literature, and master the truths of the Hindu religion.<sup>1</sup>

Due to his caste and learned position, Ananda Shastri was regarded as both a philosopher and a teacher. Early in his life he lived under the patronage of the Indian princes and had studied in the court at Poona. There to his astonishment, Ananda observed one of the princesses in the household of the Royal *Peshwas* reading Sanskrit. The seed was sown for extended literacy. His privileged life was soon to change as he began to propose alternate education practices for women.

Teaching women to read Sanskrit was a heresy. Ananda Shastri violated this when he taught his second wife, Lakshmibai 9 years of age, who then taught their children to read and write Sanskrit.<sup>2</sup> He was called before a jury of 400 scholars, priests, and sastris at Udipi at their religious headquarters. After two months, the disputation continued. He won the debate but lost some friends. Seeking a holy life, Ananda entered the Gangamula forest with his family. They became expositors of the *Puranas*, which were the scripture of the common people and shared freely their resources with wandering pilgrims.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>William F. Smalley. *Alliance Missions in India - 1892-1972*, volume I. The Christian Missionary Alliance Archives, Colorado Springs, Colorado, typewritten manuscript, 975.

<sup>2</sup>Helen S. Dyer. *Pandita Ramabai, The Story of Her Life* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1900), p. 13. He found her while on a pilgrimage from a fellow pilgrim. He took his young wife and delivered her to his mother to train, with the understanding that she would become literate. Later Ramabai believed the old Brahmin scholar was one of the class whom Peter confessed to be "accepted" with God in Acts 10: 35.

<sup>3</sup>Vishal Mangalwadi. *Pandita Ramabai Saraswati: Indian Woman of the Millennium*. <http://www.intindian.com/Vol7-6/Pandita%20Ramaibai.htm>. October 1999, 1.

When finances were depleted, the family became holy pilgrims traveling from one holy site to another seeking salvation. At the age of six months, Ramabai was carried in a woven, cane basket on a man's head down the mountainside. From one holy place to another, bathing in sacred rivers, visiting temples, worshipping household gods, studying, and teaching, the family subsisted.

Ramabai reports awakening early by a loving mother to hear and repeat her lessons. Sanskrit, the sacred language of the Hindu classics, became her mother language. Hearing her parents speak Marathi and later reading books and newspapers, she became proficient in the local vernacular. While traveling she acquired knowledge of *Kanarese*, *Hindustani*, *Bengali*, and other Sanskrit based languages.

Then the great famine of 1876 - 1877 swept the subcontinent. Within a few months, Ananda Shastri (now old and blind), Lakshmibai, and Ramabai's elder sister died from starvation. Ramabai reports her father held her tightly in her arms, and stroking her head and cheeks told her with broken emotion to remember how he loved her, how he had taught her to do right, and never to depart from the way of righteousness. She was to live an honorable life and to serve God all of her life. "Remember, my child," he said, "You are my youngest, my most beloved child. I have given you into the hand of our God; you are His, and to Him alone you must belong, and serve Him all your life." Ramabai continues, "The God of all flesh, did not find it impossible to bring me, a great sinner and unworthy child of His, out of heathen darkness into the saving light of His love and salvation. I can now say to the departed spirit of the loving parent - 'Yes, dear father, I will serve the only true God to the last.'" <sup>4</sup>

We had all the sacred learning necessary to lead an honest religious life, but the pride of caste and superior learning and vanity of life prevented our stooping down to acquire some industry whereby we might have saved the precious lives of our parents. In short, we had not common sense, and foolishly spent all the money in giving alms to Brahmans to please the gods, who, we thought, would send a shower of gold mohurs upon us and make us rich and happy. My dear brother, a stalwart young fellow of twenty-one, spoilt his health and wasted his finely built body by fasting months and months. But nothing came of all this futile effort to please the gods - the stone images remained as hard as ever,

<sup>4</sup>"Pandita Ramabai, *The Story of Her Life*," 19 -21.

and never answered our prayers.<sup>5</sup> Their faith in the Hindu religion was shaken.

Ramabai and her brother Srinivasa continued the pilgrim wanderings throughout northern and eastern India to Calcutta, seeking a deeper level of spirituality. They experienced hunger, walked barefoot, and used sand to cover them at night. Occasionally they were taken in to the homes of high caste Hindus. It was here Ramabai with her keen observation skills saw the cruel details of home-life, especially the lives of child-widows. These injustices were to build a resolve that became her lifelong mission.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Recognition in Calcutta

As early as December, 1880 news of Ramabai's eloquence reached England. It was reported that "an accomplished Brahmin lady traveling through Bengal with her brother was holding meetings on the education and emancipation of women. They were received everywhere with great enthusiasm by the Hindus, who were delighted to hear their holy Sanskrit from a woman's lips."<sup>7</sup> It seemed to them as if Sarasvati (the goddess of eloquence and learning) had come down to visit them." She was twenty-two years of age, had fair complexion, and light grey eyes.

The learned pundits bestowed the title of Sarasvati on Ramabai. In addition, they declared she was to be known as Pandita Ramabai, the highest, and most esteemed title for a great teacher. This is the first time this title was given to a woman.

While in Dacca Srinivasa died in 1880. Pandita was without family. After six months she married a Bengalee gentleman, Bipin Behari Das Medhavi. He had been a friend of her brother.

Since Pandita Ramabai's parents refrained from marrying her at an early age, she was able to select her husband. As a Brahmin, Ramabai broke caste rules by marrying a Sudra, the fourth of the Hindu castes, who was educated at a mission school and went on to be trained as a Bengali lawyer. He was born in the Sylhet District of Assam. The ceremony was a civil marriage rite, for they had rejected Hinduism.

<sup>5</sup> Pandita Ramabai, 16, 17. Pandita asserts they "know also that we worshipped not the images, but some gods whom they represented."

<sup>6</sup> Meera Kosambi. *Stri Dharma Niti*, June 1882 in *Pandita Ramabai: Through Her Own Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 36 -101.

<sup>7</sup> "Pandita Ramabai. *The Story of Her Life*," 27 - 29.

Their marriage was a short (16 months) but happy union. The women around her expressed dismay when Ramabai called her husband by his first name. As was the custom in those days, the wife should call her husband terms such as "my lord," or "most exalted one."

While living in her husband's home in Assam, a baby girl was born. She was named Manorama, or "Heart's Joy." This name was in contrast to derogatory names for girl babies used by most families, who preferred male children, especially for the first child.

Then after sixteen months, Bipin Medhavi died of cholera. Now, she was a young widow and without a son. She knew the consequences of being a young widow. She had campaigned to change how society treated these young girls. Now she was a young widow. After paying off the family debts and gathering Manorama in her arms, Ramabai traveled back to Poona in western India. A group of intellectuals there had begun advocating for social justice, including women's issues.

In 1882 Ramabai spoke before the Hunter Commission, a British governmental agency about the lack of education and desperate social conditions and treatment of women. The president was so impressed by her views and ability to communicate that he had her talk translated from Marathi and printed in English. It is said that Queen Victoria was so moved that she subsequently established women's hospitals and medical training for the first female physicians in India. This led to the establishment of the Arya Mahila Samaj, where teachers were trained to teach women.

Pandita's lectures made a positive impression on the best families in Poona. She soon traveled throughout Bombay Presidency forming branches of the Arya Mahila Samaj. She based her speeches on her knowledge of the Shastras, which she interpreted as supporting the instruction of women.

Soon afterwards, Pandita Ramabai perceived the benefits of learning English and becoming a physician. *Stri Dharma Niti* was written and published at this time to pay for the widow's and child's passages to England. Christian friends referred her to the hospitality of the Anglican Sisterhood at Wantage, working in Poona. Later from England, Pandita writes, "As I was by birth a Brahmin, my religion was at first Hinduism. Then for a time, I was a Theist, believing that Theism was taught in the Vedas. In the last two months, however, I have accepted Christianity and hope shortly to receive Holy Baptism."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "The Cry of Indian Women," (June, 1882) in *Pandita Ramabai Through Her Own Words*, 106 - 118.

#### 4. Extending Her Vision

In 1883, Ramabai and Manorama arrived in England. After a year of studying English and the Christian scriptures, both Ramabai and child were baptized according to the rites of the Church of England. On trips to London's lower east side, Ramabai saw the compassion extended to these unfortunate women and children. Her heart responded with the message and practices of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, a hearing loss precluded her acceptance into medical school. Ramabai accepted the post of Professor of Sanskrit at the Cheltenham Ladies' College, where she stayed for a year and a half.

Upon receipt of an invitation from Anandibai Joshi, of Poona, to attend her graduation exercises from medical school, Ramabai traveled to Philadelphia. Here she met a dear friend, Rachel Bodley, A.M., M.D., the Dean of the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia. Both women shared a common grief when Anandibai died shortly after graduation in Poona.

The women and the ecclesiastical missionary movements were fervent in the United States. Denominational women's groups were moved by Pandita's stories. They shared her vision to found a school where Hindu widows of high caste could be educated and become self-sufficient. *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* was written during this time. From an insider's perspective, it told of the practices and abuses heaped on Indian women.

In an interview (December, 1887) with a reporter from a Chicago daily press, Ramabai shared her view regarding missionaries. "(They) are showing by their precepts and example that Christianity does not mean going into other countries and taking possession of them, putting taxes upon the people, introducing the liquor traffic, and gaining a great deal of revenue from the infamous traffics in rum and opium. As their numbers multiply they are gaining a foothold in the country and commanding the love and respect of the people by their earnestness in missionary work... I hope some day we shall owe to their labours and their prayers a great army of Christian apostles..."

<sup>9</sup> *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* (1887), in *Pandita Ramabai Through Her Own Words*, pp.131-180. "Religious Denominations and Charities in the USA" (1889), in *Pandita Ramabai Through Her Own Words*, pp. 181-194. "The Condition of Women in the USA" (1889), in *Pandita Ramabai Through Her Own Words*, 195-244.

"Christ," argued Ramabai, "came to give different gifts to different people - some He made prophets; some He made preachers; some He made teachers. Since I have become a Christian I have thought He has given me the gift of being a sweeper. I want to sweep away some of the old difficulties that lie before the missionaries in their efforts to reach our Hindu widows."<sup>10</sup> Pandita did not condemn missionaries and mission work.

Before leaving the United States, Ramabai began two initiatives, one relating to education and the other was organizational. First, she conceived the idea of introducing kindergartens in India. Money was raised to purchase 600 electrotype plates for the illustration of her complete series of educational materials for girls. Second, with the help of others, they formed the Ramabai Association. The Association headquarters was in Boston. The President and Vice-Presidents included representatives of five religious denominations. The Board of Trustees secured some of the best business intellects of Boston, and the Executive Committee was composed entirely of women.<sup>11</sup> Their goal was to establish circles throughout the United States who would pledge for ten years to support Pandita Ramabai's work among the Indian women.

Bidding farewell (May, 1888) to her friends in Boston, Pandita traveled through Canada gaining friends and forming circles all the way. Before leaving for India from San Francisco (November 1888), she entreated her friend Dr. Rachel Bodley to remind the readers that we must educate "the high-cast child-widows, for I solemnly believe that this hated and despised class of women, educated and enlightened, are by God's grace to redeem India." When she landed in Bombay (February 1, 1889) there was Manorama, now about 8 years of age. The mother did not want her daughter to have all her education in England and not be able to live within the Indian culture. This belief of respecting one's heritage culture was extended to western missionaries. Often converts of Christianity drifted towards a western style of life. Sometimes missionaries fostered this unintentionally. As a result, discontent over styles of living frequently led to debt, and other relational problems. Since Christianity was an Asiatic religion, Pandita thought it would be adaptable to Indian customs of food and dress. She maintained her practice as a vegetarian, wore saris, and kept her hair cropped, which was

<sup>10</sup> "Pandita Ramabai, *The Story of Her Life*," 42- 43, In the Indian context, a sweeper is a low, menial job, often required to empty portable toilets and remove debris.

<sup>11</sup> "Pandita Ramabai, *A Great Life in India Missions*," 23 - 42.

the sign of a widow. Pandita advocated that Hindi become the national language and the devanigiri script be adopted as the national alphabet.

Six weeks later Ramabai opened the Widows' Home in Bombay, the Sharada Sadan or Abode of Wisdom. It was located back of the Chowpatty Sea-face. Two students were enrolled and the curriculum was taught in three languages - Marathi, English, and Sanskrit. The primary goal was not to "promulgate" Christianity. She pledged to her friends the school would respect religious freedom. There would be facilities for each to perform their sacred rites and the customs of caste would be observed. Although she and her assistant would worship according to the Christian faith, no conversion attempts would be made on the students.

By 1892 the Abode of Wisdom was moved to Poona because it was a healthier place, cheaper, and the two-acre compound more suitable than the congested urban life. There were about 40 pupils; most of the girls were from 15 to 25. Many of the older women had their heads shaved and hid their faces in their saris to hide the disfigurement imposed by cruel customs. Each morning Ramabai, Soonderbai, and Manorama met for Bible reading and prayer before the duties of the day began. They left their door open. Soon the students began to draw closer and some joined in the worship. By the spring 1893, about half of the child widows in the Sharada Sadan were attending these prayers. The Brahmin supporters were indignant and withdrew 25 girls. Several of the leading social reformers were enraged and demanded closing the school. But her American supporters stood behind Ramabai and she weathered the storm.

Besides social unrest, there were health and disease considerations in the cities. Initially, Ramabai thought the Hindus would realize the advantage of educating women and financially support her work after ten years of outside financial support. As time passed, it became evident internal support would not be forthcoming. After meditation and prayer, Ramabai thought of starting a fruit farm. Land was found in Kedgaon, which is about 40 miles south of Poona. First, the trustees of the American Fund turned down the request. Ramabai went to Bombay to extract money from her life insurance, but did not succeed. As the steam engine pulled in to Poona station, a tiny bird was seen unperturbed on a branch as the smoke and steam cloistered around. Ramabai "thought of what the Bible said about the sparrow, and felt ashamed of her lack of faith."<sup>12</sup> Prayers and supplications followed. In 1894, two years after

Ramabai and Soonderbai joined in prayer, sufficient funds were received from American friends to purchase the farmland.<sup>13</sup>

## 5. Spiritual Formation

Ramabai writes (1895) in a tract about her spiritual experiences. "When I turned my attention to searching for the truth in the Hindu and Christian religions, and comparing them with each other, I found Christianity to be the better of the two, and accepted it. I was duly baptized in the Church of England. I believed the Apostles' Creed, and all the essential doctrines of Christianity. My mind was at rest; and I trusted in God, believed on Christ, and prayed in His name. I did not adhere to any special sect, nor do I now. It was enough for me to be called a Christian, on the ground of my belief in Christ as the Saviour of mankind."

"I had many doubts and many difficulties in matter of belief. So many sects, so many opinions, so much want of spirituality and much shallow talk in the name of religion... I went on reading the Bible only and trusted in God's mercy."

"Some years ago I was brought to the conviction that mine was only an intellectual belief - a belief in which there was no life. It looked for salvation in the future after death; and consequently my soul had not 'passed from death unto life.' God showed me how very dangerous my position was, and what a wretched and lost sinner I was; and how necessary it was for me to obtain salvation in the present, and not in some future time. I repented long; I became very restless and almost ill, and passed many sleepless nights. The Holy Spirit so got hold of me that I could not rest until I found salvation then and there."

After reading the biography of the Life of Amanda Smith, Pandita Ramabai earnestly desired the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in her body. At a camp meeting in April in Lanouli she heard Mr. Gregson speak as one who had received and was filled with the Holy Spirit and knew the deep things of God. After talking with a friend and Mr. Gregson, "we prayed then that I might receive the Holy Spirit; but it was not until the evening of that day that I felt conscious of His presence in

<sup>12</sup> "Pandita Ramabai, A Great Life in Indian Missions," 29 - 31.

<sup>13</sup> "Pandita Ramabai, The Story of Her Life," 77, 78. The two women relied on the scripture, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven."

me. Since then I have received much blessing, and am ever grateful to God for showing me the way of this blessed life."<sup>14</sup>

Ramabai received a spiritual message that the Lord was preparing her for a greater work. God impressed on her that He was going to give her 300 souls. Puzzled, she did not know how the Sarada Saran fit into the eternal plan. One friend suggested that Ramabai go out as a traveling evangelist all over the land proclaiming what God can do for those who trust him fully. She was willing to relinquish her salary and trust God for her needs.

#### 6. Rescuing Famine Girls<sup>15</sup>

By the autumn 1896 some were beginning to doubt her prophecy that God was going to give her more souls to help. In October, news of the terrible famine in the Central Provinces was received. She realized God called her to go and rescue some of the young widows who were starving to death. By the end of December Ramabai mustered sufficient courage to obey the call. With a few rupees in hand, she started her rescue missions. God provided the money as her rescue efforts grew. Friends began to donate funds for transportation and expanding expenditures. Three hundred girls were rescued during the first mobilization.

Not to underestimate the rescue perils, equally remarkable was caring for these poor creatures. "All were miserably dirty; many diseased - most were suffering from sore heads, sore mouths, and other complaints caused by starvation." A couple tried to burn the buildings. Some of the older ones ran away. From Rajput, they learned the practice of infanticide was still prevalent. Usually girl children were strangled or exposed to death to avoid the expense of their lives and marriage. Then Ramabai urged removal of young girls from the relief camps and poor houses where agents of evil lured them to destruction. They were contracting bad diseases from their cruel masters and left to die along the roadside.

Rescuing the famine girls was halted when news arrived that the bubonic plague that had been raging in Bombay had spread to Poona.

<sup>14</sup> "Pandita Ramabai, *The Story of Her Life*," 86-89. Ramabai supports her spirituality by the following scriptures: Romans 8:16, John 1:12, John 18:3, Matthew 11:27, Matthew 11:25, Matthew 18:3, John 3:36, Romans 8:15.

<sup>15</sup> "Famine Experiences" (1897), 248-260 in *Pandita Ramabai Through Her Own Words*.

This meant stopping the building at the Sharada Sadan. Thinking outside of the box, Ramabai hired a dozen tents and sent the whole establishment out into the open country 20 miles away. After receiving permission from the board of trustees that held the Sharada Sadan property, the famine girls were transferred from the tents to grass huts erected on the wasteland at the farm.

#### 7. Mukti

In December 1897, Christians gathered at Kedgaon for a dedication service and to praise God for His goodness. The new settlement was called Mukti, salvation. Isaiah 60:18 provided the source. "Thou shalt call thy walls salvation and thy gates praise." Their large barn held the services, while the visitors camped out in grass huts. Plans were made for permanent buildings.

Ramabai returned to the United States (1898) to give a progress report. While there a new association supplanted the former and the land transferred to her personally.

In July, she visited England with the hope of forming an English Society. This did not occur. She visited the Keswick Convention. "My heart was filled with joy to see nearly 4,000 Christian people gathered together, seeking and finding the deep things of God. At that time the Lord led me to ask those present to pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all Indian Christians. Since that time God wanted me to pray and expect great things of Him. Then I read the accounts of the revival in Khassia and Jayantia Hills, and praised God for sending the revival wave so near us."<sup>16</sup>

Interpreting the scriptures literally, Ramabai began praying for healings, for herself and for others with serious maladies. "There are neither doctors nor medicines found in this village (Kedgaon); those girls who wish to resort to medical help in sickness are in no way hindered from it. They are taken to Poona, and proper medical treatment is given them. Yet it must be said to the glory of God that the large majority of girls seek God's help in their sickness. The Lord has wonderfully protected us from the dreadful plague and other sickness. The girls realize that divine help is better than human means. So when any one among them is sick, they get around her and begin to pray, and God answers their prayer beyond their hope and expectation."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Pandita Ramabai. "More Surprises." *Mukti Prayer Bell*. October, 1905, 5-9.

<sup>17</sup> "Pandita Ramabai, *The Story of Her Life*," 134, 135.

Another famine spread through India (1899 - 1900) with the state of Gujarat being most severely affected. Three of the older women, Gangabai, Kashibai, and Bhimabai, traveled hundred of miles on foot in their search for starving girl outcasts. Ramabai reported caring for 750 girls in her institutions. Her work continued to expand when requested to open a school for girls at Gulbarga (Hyderabad). This was placed under the supervision of Manorama.

#### 8. Pentecostal Outpourings

With the continual inclusion of girls from different backgrounds, the three hundred and fifty Christian residents were "in danger of being submerged beneath a tidal wave of grossness and superstition." Manoramabai writes, "Many Hindu girls professed to be possessed by evil spirits, and all troubles and diseases were attributed to them. Every death that occurred in the school was thought by them to have been caused by the devil."<sup>18</sup> An atmosphere of faith had to be created through the power of prayer. By December 1901, about 1,200 girls submitted themselves to the "yoke of Christ and entered His church." Then in 1903, Manoramabai and Miss Minnie Abrams were sent to Australia to study the movement of the Holy Spirit and new life-giving experiences. While there, they learned of the revival in Wales with moving and manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

As was her discipline, Pandita began her prayers around 4:00 a.m. She reported being led by the Lord to start a special prayer circle at the beginning of 1905. Seventy women met together each morning at 4:30 a.m. and prayed for the true conversion of all the Indian Christians, including themselves, and for a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all Christians of every land. The group grew to nearly 700 and the church building had to be used. "There were indications of God's Spirit doing His work silently, but surely."<sup>19</sup> After six months of praying in this

<sup>18</sup> Pandita Ramabai, Australasian Edition, p. 174 f. in Nicol Macnicol. *Builders of Modern India, Pandita Ramabai*, 1926, 114.

<sup>19</sup> Pandita Ramabai. "More Surprises," *Mukti Bell*. October, 1905. A dream or vision of the descent of the Holy Spirit on Wednesday night, June 28, 1905 and multiple manifestations of the Holy Spirit are reported on Thursday, June 29, 1905 and "He has been working in great power ever since." *Mukti Bell*, September, 1906. In 2000 Ramabai's prayer list and translation sheets were available in her bedroom, now a museum (2000).

manner, "the Lord graciously sent a glorious Holy Ghost revival among us, and also in many schools and churches. The results of this have been most satisfactory."<sup>20</sup>

Some girls reported a burning sensation accompanying the descent of the Holy Spirit. Others broke into a clamor of simultaneous prayer. While others experienced "speaking in unknown tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." It is not reported that Pandita spoke in unknown tongues in these meeting, but it is reported that on one occasion she was conscious of the Holy Spirit as a burning flame within her. Also once, when she was in prayer alone, she uttered by another volition than her own some sentences in Hebrew. In response to outsiders, Pandita responded that "Love, perfect divine love, is the only and most necessary sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But other gifts, such as the power to heal, to speak with tongues, to prophesy, are not to be discarded. Indeed we should seek from God such gifts as will enable us to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ with power and draw men unto Him." "Not only did the wild girls from Gujarat yield to these gusts of ecstasy, but to even the calm-soul Manoramabai prayed for a long time aloud though the words were absolutely incomprehensible."

Changes among the girls included rebel wills subdued, undisciplined natures brought under a higher control, truthfulness, and gladness replaced that of sullenness and gloom. Prayer brought about "expelling slave vices," which often came out with loud cries. The purpose of the revival was the abandonment of evil practices and the experience of joy in the divine love and divine forgiveness. The outcome was hundreds of devoted, spirit-filled women, who had a love for God and His word.<sup>21</sup>

The Bible was one supreme book to Pandita. When she made an observation, frequently Ramabai would quote scriptures supporting the comment. She was troubled that the Marathi-speaking people did not

<sup>20</sup> "A Testimony of our Inexhaustible Treasure," in *Pandita Ramabai Through Her Own Words*, 320 (reproduced from the booklet published by the Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission, 11th edition, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> "The Triumph of an Indian Widow, The Life of Pandita Ramabai." 1928, 114-123. Minnie F. Abrams. "How the Recent Revival Was Brought About in India." *The Latter Rain Evangel*, July, 1909, 6-12. Minnie F. Abrams. "The Battles of a Faith Missionary, Some of the Inner Conflicts at Mukti." *The Latter Rain Evangel*. March, 1910, 13-18. Minnie F. Abrams. "Brief History of the Latter Rain Revival of 1910." *Word and Work*. May, 1910. pp.138-141. Minnie F. Abrams, "The Object of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit." *The Latter Rain Evangel*, May, 1911, 8-11.

have the Bible in their vernacular that was free from the Sanskrit that contained many Hindu-laden words. So Pandita sought the assistance of Indians of the Beni-Israel community who had studied the Hebrew Scriptures. Not thinking that the chores were too much, she began to develop a lexicon in Marathi from the Greek and Hebrew. She supervised the translation with intelligence. Each volume was printed and bound by the women at Mukti. This Bible was not to be sold, because Pandita Ramabai felt she had freely received and now must freely give.

### 9. Conclusions

Recently certain historical revisionists have tried to disavow that Pandita Ramabai ever became a Christian. They point to her maintaining her birth name of Ramabai rather than the Christian name of Mary. It must be noted she did not refer to herself as Sarasvati, the Hindu goddess.<sup>22</sup> When one reads her writing and those of her colleagues, there is no doubt she followed in the footprints of her beloved Lord Jesus Christ. When Pandita Ramabai designed the cornerstone of the granite church in Mukti, she took deliberate care to dedicate the building to Yahweh, not using a generic divine term for fear the holy space would be used to worship another god.

Ramabai Sings Magnificat - April 23rd, 1908 at Mukti, Kedgaon, India

"About forty years ago when I was a little girl, my parents visited Benares as pilgrims to get merit, for they thought they would save themselves, and us their children, by bathing in the Ganges, and by worshipping the idols in that place. As orthodox Brahmins, they most religiously avoided coming in contact with Christians and the Mlechchas, i.e. the foreigners, but one day in the providence of God, a Christian man came to see my father while we were at Benares. I do not remember whether he was an Indian or a European Christian, nor what he spoke to my father. But I remember two words which I heard him say while he was conversing with my father. The words were "Yeshu Khrista" i.e. Jesus Christ. He shook hands with my father when taking leave, and said

<sup>22</sup> Frequently, Pandita Ramabai signed her letters to Sister Geraldine, Community of St. Mary the Virgin, as Mary Rama.

something which I do not remember. But I found myself repeating the two words "Yeshu Khrista" (Jesus Christ) which I heard from him, after he went away. I must have repeated them many times because my sister was much alarmed and drew my mother's attention to what I was whispering to myself. Mother asked me what it was that I had been repeating; but I was afraid to answer her question and kept silence. She warned me against repeating the name of the God of the Mlechchas, and told me not to bring His name to my lips again. But I never forgot that Name.

"About thirteen years after this, a Baptist missionary<sup>23</sup> living at Silchar, Assam, sent a little printed card to me by my husband. The card had these words on it: 'Incline your heart unto the Lord.' I read them and pondered over them in my heart. I had lived without God and without hope for many years. I felt as if there was a great emptiness within me, which needed to be filled, and no one but the God who was full of love and compassion for sinners would be able to fill it. I felt I needed His help and for the first time in my life I prayed to the Unknown God to incline our hearts unto Him."

"I did not know how to pray, but without my knowing it, the Holy Spirit converted the Words of the Scripture into a prayer in my heart, and God did answer that prayer in His appointed time, when it pleased Him to bring me into the light of the blessed Gospel."

"A few weeks after the incident, I found a little booklet, the Gospel of St. Luke in my room. I do not know who had brought it or left it there, but I began to read it and greatly liked the story told in it. About this time my husband introduced me to the missionary who some weeks before had sent the card to me. The missionary read the first chapter of Genesis and explained it to me. There was a wonderful attraction in the words which he read. My soul responded to the message of God's Holy Spirit. I resolved then without knowing the reason why, that I would become a Christian. Sixteen years after the time when I first heard the Name of Jesus Christ, I realized that "there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

"Some unknown friend, whose name is written in the Book of Life, made me acquainted with the Name at Benares and another unknown friend left a small Gospel in my room for me to read, that I might come

<sup>23</sup> Edited by A. B. Shah, (ed.), Sister Geraldine, (compiler), *The Letters and Correspondence of Pandita Ramabai* (Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture, Bombay), 428, 429. The name of this Baptist missionary was Mr. Issac Allen whom Pandita Ramabai later met while she was in England.



to know the Son of God, 'Who loved me and gave Himself for me.' These dear people who are well known to God and whom I expect to meet soon in the presence of the King, sowed the seed, others watered, and God gave the increase and I was born into His Kingdom. How I thank God with a full heart today for sending His messengers in order to make Himself known to me. I realize more and more the wonderful power that is in the Name of Jesus and in the Word of God which converted me. It will be an encouragement to the dear children of God, who have toiled long in this country without seeing any visible fruit of their labours, to know that the Word-Seed, faithfully and prayerfully sown, does surely bear fruit."<sup>24</sup>

## 10. Summary

Pandita Ramabai stands among the most esteemed Mothers of the Christian era. She laid the foundation for women's liberation in India. Pandita was a Sanskrit scholar, who extended her linguistic skills by developing a Marathi lexicon from the Greek and Hebrew. From this, Pandita translated and supervised the first Holy Bible in Marathi. Not one to perceive and ignore human needs and social injustices, she first championed the health and educational needs of Indian women. Her eloquent discourses reached India's social reformers as well as the court of Queen Victoria. Later, Pandita presented the desperate situation of child widows, destitute women, victims of famine and disease, orphans, and those with disabilities to church friends and societies in England, Australia, and the United States. While she accepted resources from all over the world, Pandita maintained a life of prayer and faith, which brought international credibility. She was able to capture and integrate the western and eastern hearts and minds.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "The Word Seed," (1908) in *Pandita Ramabai Through Her Own Words*. (2000), 325-327.

<sup>25</sup> Rachael Nalder, "Miracles of Salvation, Healing, Provision and Protection. God's Wonderful Work through Pandita Ramabai," *The Latter Rain Evangel* (November, 1908), 7-12. Robert Eric Frykenberg. *Pandita Ramabai's America* (Grand Rapids: Michigan. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003).