PRESENTING AND COMPARING EARLY MARATHI AND GERMAN WOMEN’S FEMINIST WRITINGS (1866-1933):
SOME FINDINGS

A Dissertation in German

by

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Abstract

In this dissertation I present the feminist writings of four Marathi women writers/activists: Savitribai Phule’s “Prose and Poetry”, Pandita Ramabai’s “The High Caste Hindu Woman”, Tarabai Shinde’s “Stri Purush Tualna” (A comparison between women and men) and Malatibai Bedekar’s “Kalyanche Nihshwas” (“The Sighs of the buds”) from the colonial period (1887-1933) and compare them with the feminist writings of four German feminists: Adelheid Popp’s “Jugend einer Arbeiterin” (Autobiography of a Working Woman), Louise Otto Peters’s “Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb” (The Right of women to earn a living.), Hedwig Dohm’s “Der Frauen Natur und Recht” (“Women’s Nature and Privilege”) and Irmgard Keun’s “Gilgi: Eine Von Uns” (Gilgi: one of us) (1886-1931), respectively. This will be done from the point of view of deconstructing stereotypical representations of Indian women as they appear in westocentric practices. I will also show through comparison that the differences between east and west in terms of gender and other factors related women’s oppression are not that vast, thus enabling and creating a bridge for a dialogue between the two cultures. The findings that emerge through the comparison will be of benefit to postcolonial scholars of German and feminism, who have engaged themselves with the problem of too generalized and stereotypical depictions of Indian women in Westocentric discourses and practices. Indian women often get ascribed with adjectives such as average, restrained, ignorant, dutiful, victimized, maternal, uneducated, tradition-bound, leaving out their other achievements in the areas of intellectual scholarship and feminist initiatives, on a local as well as a global scale. This kind of
stereotyping, and generalization, lacking in historical and cultural variation, leads to further colonizing impulses and justifies the civilizing mission that came about with the beginning of the colonial period. It also affects the self-perception of Indian women and further affects the way laws, educational and institutional policies are shaped, locally and globally. It is therefore a necessary imperative to deconstruct stereotypical images and representations of Indian women as they appear in Westocentric discourses. The feminist endeavors of Savitribai Phule, Pandita Ramabai, Tarabai Shinde and Malatibai Bedekar provide and represent a more coherent and real picture of the images of Marathi (Indian) women in international discourses.

Furthermore, if we look closely at what German feminists in the Western world were writing, in the same time period, we come across remarkable similarities in the writings of these feminists. I will examine these similarities on the basis of the attitude of these feminists towards patriarchy, the nation-state, means of resistance, choice of language and formal characteristics of the works. Moreover these similarities stand out in marked contrast to the ‘differences’ that have been the object of study of current and pre-colonial and colonial scholars of various disciplines. The precolonial and colonial German engagement with Indian culture showed that Indian culture (especially women) appeared to them as different, exotic or as the ‘other’ of German culture. My study contributes to current debates by showing the similarities or the comparable elements, which further prove that there is scope for a dialogue and feminist alliances between the two cultures.
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Presenting and Comparing early Marathi and German women’s feminist writings (1866-1933): Some findings!

Introduction

Drawing upon the theories of Chandra Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak, Lata Mani, Pompa Banerjee, Linda Alcoff, bell hooks, Uma Narayan, Elaine Showalter and others, I propose to present and analyze the feminist writings of four Marathi feminists: Savitribai Phule’s Prose and poetry writings (1854-1891), Pandita Ramabai’s “High Caste Hindu Woman” (1888), Tarabai Shinde’s “Stri Purush Tulana” (1882) (A comparison between women and men) and Malatibai Bedekar’s “Kalyanche Nihshwas” (1933) (The sighs of the buds) and compare them with German feminist writers, Adelheid Popp’s “Jugend einer Arbeiterin” (Autobiography of a Working Woman”) (1913), Luise Otto Peter’s “Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb” (The Right of women to earn a living) (1866), Hedwig Dohm’s “Der Frauen Natur und Recht” (“Women’s Nature and Privilege”) (1876), and Irmgard Keun’s “Gilgi: Eine von uns” (Gilgi: one of us) (1931) in their socio-historical and cultural contexts. This will be done with the point of view of deconstructing stereotypical representations of Indian women, as they appear in westocentric discourses and practices. Furthermore for the sake of solidarity, we need to supplement this endeavor with a comparative perspective on Indian and Western (German) culture. That is, by looking at the comparable elements or the similarities regarding gender and other factors related women’s oppression in the

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1 Although I don’t introduce bell hooks and Uma Narayan in the introduction, their positions come up in the analysis of Chapter three and Chapter four respectively
two cultures, we can see if a dialogue for feminist alliances is possible. This results in several findings, of which I will elaborate in the course of my chapters. These writings are comparable because not only were they written around the same time period and formed a part of the larger early feminist movement of the time, but also because they show similarities or comparable elements towards questions of patriarchy, the nation-state, means of resistance, choice of images or language used to express this resistance, and other formal work characteristics. Based on various theoretical, discursive and empirical contributions, I will analyze these comparable elements as they come across to us in the writings and also explore why some of the stereotypes associated with Indian women came about. In Section one, I present the view of postcolonial scholars regarding their estimation of the way, western methodologies deal with the problem of ‘otherness’ of Indian culture and women. Section two provides examples and critique of western methodologies depicting Indian women by postcolonial scholars. Section three talks about the Indo-German connection since the ancient times. Section four talks about theorization of feminism. Section five offers Chandra Mohanty and other theorist’s models and section six offers Elaine Showalter’s model of literary analysis.
The “Other Third World Woman”

Postcolonial scholars of Germanistic and feminism, both from the Third World and the First, have been actively engaged since the past few decades in demystifying and destabilizing stereotypical representations of Third World Women as presented and framed by Western cultural and feminist discourses in certain literary and non-literary texts. These ongoing struggles have sought to demystify, rectify and broaden our understanding of the “Other Third World Woman” as framed by Western cultural and feminist discourses, and with the obvious aim of creating a dialogic platform for East-West cultural studies and building feminist alliances. Mainly responsible for framing this ‘Other Third World Woman’ are the forces of colonization and patriarchy and their combined effect in the subjugation and the omission of the Third world woman as a Subject altogether from Western discourses. This subjugation and repression of the Third World woman as seen in certain colonial and postcolonial texts, (some under study here) has led to the Western understanding and assumption that there was an absence of feminism in India, in the colonial period. More so ever it also leads to certain adjectives descriptive of Third world women such as: average, poor, uneducated, dutiful, tradition-bound, ignorant, victimized, etc. (Mohanty “Feminism without Borders” 22) This kind of stereotyping affects the self-perception of Indian women and further repercussions of this lead to the way educational, legal and international policies regarding Indian women are shaped, etc. (Cartographies of Struggle 32)
This study attempts, to deconstruct, re-conceptualize and add to an enlarged understanding of agency, and originality as shown by Marathi feminists in the colonial period and through a juxtaposition of German and Marathi women’s feminist writings, show that Marathi women, in the colonial period, were capable of showing feminist endeavors comparable to those of prominent German feminists of their times. I will further prove the presence of Oriental elements in certain Western texts; (Drewitz, Dohm, Peters, Lewald), that need to be rectified. The presence of comparable elements or similarities shows that there can be an interstitial ground for dialogue and for alliances between the feminists from two different cultures.

This dissertation will also highlight questions of feminist agency, work-reception and mutuality through a close reading of the feminist writings of Adelheid Popp’s “Jugend einer Arbeiterin” (“Autobiography of a Working Woman”) (1913) with Savitribai Phule’s “Prose and Poetry” (1854-1891), Luise Otto Peters “Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb” (The Right of women to earn a living) (1866) with Pandita Ramabai’s “The High Caste Hindu Woman” (1888), Hedwig Dohm’s “Der Frauen Natur und Recht” (“Woman’ Nature and Privilege”) (1876) with Tarabai Shinde’s “Stri Purush Tulana” (A Comparison between men and women) (1882) and Irmgard Keun’s “Gilgi: Eine von uns” (Gilgi: one of us) (1931) with Malatibai Bedekar’s “Kalyanche Nihshwas” (“The Sighs of the buds”) (1933). A juxtaposition of the writings of these authors has not occurred earlier (neither in colonial nor in postcolonial times) and neither have they been looked at earlier in terms of a comparative feminist historiography. What were the stereotypes and generalizations against Indian women? In what ways have postcolonial scholars of German and feminism contributed towards destabilizing these constructions?
What were the constraints faced by German and Marathi women of the colonial period in understanding their selves and what means were available to them to fight for their Rights? How were patriarchies reconstituted during the colonial period in Maharashtra and likewise in Germany? Since the colonial period and its proceedings have a bearing upon the present or the post-colonial, a closer look at the colonial period is significant from various points of view.

But firstly, we need to see how post-colonial literature and feminist methodologies from the Third world have reacted and rectified the appearance of stereotypical images of the Indian woman.

II

Representation, Constitution and Rectification of the ‘Indian Woman’ in Postcolonial and Colonial Literature:-

A noteworthy and interesting study made by Monika Shafi (1997) critiques the presence of Eurocentric stereotypes and prejudiced accounts of Third World women and circumstances in the work of a prominent German intellectual Ingeborg Drewitz (1923—1986), who visited India in the 1980’s. Although Shafi also analyzes the work of Günter Grass and Hubert Fichte in her paper, and shows that their portrayal of India was either in a stereotypical manner (Grass) or in a more nuanced way (Hubert Fichte). Her analysis of Ingeborg Drewitz’s writings need mention here, since Drewitz’s work deals a bit with gender. Drewitz maintained her observations in several of her autobiographical
and historical accounts during her stay in India. As informed by Shafi, Drewitz and Grass’s study had been pre-mediated \(^2\) and informed their understanding of several aspects of their work. Shafi exposes the exaggerated and stereotypical images of the Third World—as they appear in Drewitz’s writings: namely as a deprived poor and backward land. In her too generalized descriptions of the conditions of and challenges faced by Third world women, Drewitz, overlooks and fails to pay attention to particular women and recognize them as individual subjects. (Shafi 46). For eg:


(…Afterwards, again talks. The rhetorical certainty of older women is admirable. They are sure that with the resolutions, there will be improvement in the film programmes, schooling and promotion of art by women. They also talk about the improvement of life conditions of the pauperized. Middle class women with not such insignificant bank accounts of their husbands. Their saris depict their well to do situation. I am skeptical, whether they are capable of bringing about changes.)(Drewitz 13)

Drewitz, in Shafi’s words, also fails to acknowledge her own position as a subject researcher in her writings, and fails to produce any interview or dialogue with native Indian women. In Shafi’s words:

“She (Drewitz) never considers the politics of location and thus fails to recognize that she is constantly framing India as the object of her inquiry and that her own position discursively reinscribes precisely those power structures whose political manifestations she hopes to critique. Indicative of this attitude is the almost complete lack of any dialogue in her text.” (Shafi 47)

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\(^2\) Günter Grass’s and Ingeborg Drewitz’s journey was pre-mediated by the Goethe institute, and hence they did not have to explore the surroundings by themselves, prior to their arrival in India and were informed about the images of India through German intellectuals and philosopher’s writings.(namely Herder, Goethe and others.)
Thus by exposing German Centeredness in the works of Drewitz (and Grass), Shafi challenges the epistemic authority of the Western gaze on the Third world women subjects and contributes towards a just and nuanced understanding of the so-defined Indian Otherness. The stereotypical images, lack of dialogue with native women and an absence of understanding one’s own subject position as a researcher regarding native women are certain points of critiquing the apparent Eurocentrism that figure in the analysis of Drewitz and Grass’s writings. Both Drewitz and Grass also relied on certain previous images of India, as they appeared in the German imaginary, a point worth noting according to Shafi, since it led to their pre-conceived notions of the ‘miserable’ situation of India.

One of the key issues, taken up by Banerjee, Spivak, Mani and others is the issue of Sati and its representation in Western colonial discourses. Pompa Banerjee’s book “Burning Women” elaborates further on the way widows and satis were represented in the European travel writings of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. These forty-three travelogues, in Banerjee’s argument, failed to draw attention to instances of witch burning in their own culture, while picturizing and depicting images and proceedings of Sati in India. Likewise, almost every European traveler, all of them been men, included a verbal description of sati. Lack of proper evidence and improper research based on translations also showed ‘mythical and misconceived evidence and these depictions were often used in the European conduct manuals for women, for positive and negative uses. In Banerjee’s words:
“But even the “originals” in any language could not have been uncomplicated transmissions of reality. Most European travelers had little or no knowledge of the local languages of the Indian regions they visited. They frequently relied on native interpreters and, as we will see, at times supplanted their own script for things they did not fully understand. We are dealing then ---- and this is even the case with English language texts--- with gaps and fissures between reality and representation.”(27)

Indeed, as Banerjee further highlights, the inaccuracy of these representations also led to the creation of the configuration of these so-sanctioned religious customs as been uncanny, strange or the “Other”. These type of configurations of the ‘uncanny or the strange’ in the Indian scenario, helped to assert their (European) sense of superiority and been civilized’. (Bannerjee 5) These constructions of the ‘Indian Other’ could have been corrected if these European travelers had also taken cognizance of the gruesome treatment meted out to witches or bad women in their own countries and culture, points out Banerjee. This failure, as Banerjee argues needs to be rectified, and it needs to be further seen, after having discovered the connections in Indo-European gender issues that, ‘European identities were often porous and susceptible to cross-cultural influences’. (Banerjee 210) It follows from this that the categories of the ‘foreign and the domestic’ need to be rethought. (Banerjee 210).

My juxtaposition of German women’s feminist writings with Marathi women’s writings tries to show comparable elements regarding questions of agency, co-relation, mutuality, work reception and genre choice between the two cultures, so that as Banerjee shows and asserts, questions of the foreign or the backward Other and the
domestic, civilized Self, be reconsidered and further lead to the observation that their boundaries are more fluid.

Added to the fact that British feminists were motivated by imperial and Evangelical interests in constructing the ‘colonized female other’, and as Banerjee says, a failure to take cognizance of women’s oppression (witch-burning) in their own culture, and hence justify their own sense of superiority, Indian women also faced constraints from local religious customs and the interpretation of these scriptures in their attitude towards women. These religious discourses, often backed by material interests, also led to the subjugation of women and widows in India. Lata Mani’s “Contentious Traditions’: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India, shows the marginalization and lack of agency of the widow, who became an object for colonial, religious and patriarchal discourses and hence, could speak, but in a different way. Mani builds on and contradicts Gayatri Spivak’s argument about the widow or the ‘subaltern women’s disability to speak’. A brief discussion of the book is important from the point of view of my argument here.

Mani’s “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in colonial India”. (involving the period 1780—1933 in colonial Bengal) starts with an objective critique of the colonial discourse, which framed the indigenous ‘Other woman’ in terms of its Western self. This Western self, for whom the ‘Other was variously an alter ego, an underground self and repository of irreducible cultural and or racial difference’ (Mani 3) had the frequent effect of marginalizing the Third World. This Western self created the Third World and its women. The British colonial discourse on Sati, which was namely a ‘legislative issue’ was constituted as an object of knowledge that was
partially informed by the interpretations of religious scriptures by local pundits and eyewitness accounts of missionary discourses. Women, in Mani’s words became the site on which tradition was debated and formulated.’ (79). They were merely objects of local colonial and indigenous patriarchal discourses. The issue of Sati became an ‘alibi for the colonial civilizing mission for the British’ but the pain and suffering of the widow figured nowhere in their depictions and analysis.

“The civilizing mission of colonization was thus seen to lie in protecting the weak against the artful, in giving back to the natives the truths of their own “little read and less understood Shaster”. 3

Added to this fact, was the marginalization of the widow’s agency and a failure to question the material basis of the practice. (Mani) Numerous colonial accounts and examples of the way colonial narratives about Sati depicted the proceedings of Sati, and Mani emphatically shows that there was a lack of empathy and a subject status for the widow to become a sati.

“the women who burned were neither subjects nor even the primary objects of concern in the debate on its prohibition. They were rather the ground for a complex and competing set of struggles over Indian society and definitions of Hindu traditions. The debate, in which public opinion was mobilized in India and Britain alike, inaugurated a process whereby an exceptional and caste-specific practice was to emerge in the West as a potent signifier of the oppression of all Indian women, and thereby of the degradation of India as a whole.”(Mani 2)

3 The quote is from an other article by Lati Mani also titled as “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India” appears in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid’s “Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History” (91)
As Mani taps into eyewitness accounts of British observers of the event of Sati, she remarks on the colonial attitude of the following depiction --- the minimal representation of the widow’s suffering on the pyre. The following description and others in her work, prove Mani’s observation towards this non-chalence on behalf of the foreign observer:

“loose cords (or rather unlaid jute) were thrown across on which the body was laid after having been washed in the river water by Brahmins and widows. One of the sons then put a small piece of gold in its mouth, nostrils, eyes and ears. The Widows then washed themselves and prayed in the river, putting red powder or paint on the front of the head where the hair is parted. While they were praying, one of the sons walked three times around the pile with some lighted Straw in his hand and touched the mouth of the Corpse with it, some native music striking up at the same time. When the women came out of the river, they took off their earrings and the ornaments of their arms and legs and gave them to the priest for distribution to those they named, some were given to the priest for distribution to those they named, some were given to the musicians: the women were next led around the pile amidst the shouts of spectators: we were told that they should have gone 7 times round, but they appeared unable to walk more than once around, being very old, probably between 50 and 60 years of age (the husband was said to be 72). They were then assisted on to pile from which they threw cowries to the surrounding people, who seemed anxious to obtain them, after which they laid down one on each side of the body—when instantly the cords above mentioned were drawn across them and the bodies tied together. (182)

Unlike Spivak,4 who showed that women who underwent Sati, were often seen as objects and could not speak, Mani rearticulates and changes the claim by saying:

“The issue, returning to Spivak’s question, may not be whether the subaltern can speak so much as whether she can be heard to be speaking in a given set of materials and

4 Spivak’s earlier essay “Can the Subaltern Speak”? on the issue of Sati in India situates the issue of sati, as motivated by colonial intentions of a ‘civilizing mission’ backed by motivations of territorial expansions. In this ‘Eurocentric ambit’, the figure of the woman disappeared not into ‘a pristine nothingness, but into a displaced figuration of the third world woman’ (306). This subaltern woman, could not speak and remained muted due to an alignment of the discourses of imperialism, patriarchy and religion. (Spivak)
what, indeed, has been made of her voice by colonial and postcolonial
historiography.” (Mani 190)

Like Spivak, Mani and Bannerjee, who reframe the issue of marginalization
of the Third World women and her agency in colonial and later in post-colonial
discourses, it is equally important to see, how the ideals of German and Marathi
womanhood were framed, during colonial times. This will be important from the point
of understanding feminist concerns in German and Marathi contexts. Was there a
German- Indian connection? Why compare Marathi feminist writings with those of
German women’s feminist writings? What is the significance of this comparison?

III

The Indo-German connection:

The German pre-occupation with Indian literature and culture dates back to the
18th century, and increased with the rise in colonialism. Even before that India appeared
in German medieval texts like the “Herzog Ernst”, “Parzival” and other translations like
those of the Pancatantra etc. Moresoever, there were German missionaries like the
German Jesuit Father Heinrich Roth, who went to India, learned Sanskrit and died as the
Head of the Jesuit College in Agra in 1668. There were other fathers who followed him
to India and wrote Sanskrit grammar, did translations from Sanskrit to German etc.
Indology was established as a discipline at German universities like Berlin and
Heidelberg. The German missionaries, travelers and others were supported in their research through the work of English and French scholars. Many German Sanskritists like Martin Haug, Georg Buehler and Franz Kielhorn worked for the British, in that they tracked down ancient manuscripts in Indian collections. The manuscripts would then be purchased, Indian pundits would be hired to make copies, while the originals were then brought back to Britain, while still others found their way into German libraries. (Suzanne Marchand 190). German poets like Goethe and Heine were inspired by Indian literature and their poetry showed imagery and translations of Indian poems (eg: Sakuntala). There was also a large amount of translation of the Indian Vedas into German. All this occurred in the modern period and has been continuing in the 20th and 21st centuries in various forms and content. (Freidrich Wilhelm395-405)

Also the views of 18th and 19th century poets and philosophers is of utmost importance, from the point of view of understanding German orientalism. Unlike Max Mueller and Georg Forster (who translated the Sanskrit Drama Sakuntala) and Carl von Huegel who appreciated and glorified India’s Vedic past and literature and was seen as a land that had to offer rich non-materialistic insights, --- the rise of capitalism and colonization also reflected the imperialistic gaze of writers such as Goethe, Hegel, and Herder and others who watched India with some distance and condescension. (Anil Bhatti). Although German Orientalism showed ambivalences in its attitude towards India, research by McGetchin, Kamakshi Murti and Jennifer Jenkins show that overall german orientalism was not outside of the project of colonization and the establishment of intellectual superiority over the Orient. For eg: The situation of Indian women undergoing Sati had reached the ears of the German public and many intellectuals
reacted in ambivalent ways towards these incidents. The German public was mainly informed about the brutal act of Sati through the British missionaries. For eg: Reverend James Pegg’s “Indias’ Cries to British Humanity and William Ward’s “Farewell Letters” were books that talked about the sacrifice of the Hindu Widow and other atrocities. Moreover, pamphlets and cheap tracts were distributed among the poorer sections of the community in order to raise awareness about Indian conditions and gain support for missionary activity in India. It is through this literature that Germans or the German public were informed about the conditions in India. These conditions obviously generated a lot of discussion amongst the German intelligentsia. Some of these reactions are worth discussing here as they inform us about the ways some parts of what constitutes the Western and the First World thought about Indian customs regarding women.

The first mention in this regard is that of the famous German women poet, Karoline von Guenderrode who was inspired by the exotic aspects of Indian wives towards their dead husbands and chose to end her life, after a disheartening love affair, in a dramatic way, ‘masquerading as a sati’. (Figueira 56) Before she died, she left a ‘Sanskrit’ suicide note behind. She wrote a poem in German “Die Malabarischen Witwen” in which she depicted a sati’s sacrifice. The poem deserves mention here for its depiction of imagery of the Indian landscape.

Zum Flammentode gehen an Indusstranden
Mit dem Gemahl, in Jugendlichkeit,
Die Frauen, ohne Zagen, ohne Lied
Geschmückt festlich, wie in Brautgewanden.
Die Sitte hat der Liebe Sinn verstanden,

5 See Andrea Major in Introduction.35-36.
Sie von der Trennung harter Schmach befreit,
Zu ihrem Priester selbst den Tod geweiht,
Unsterblichkeit gegeben ihren Banden.
Nicht Trennung ferner solchen Bunde droht,
Denn die vorhin entzweiten Liebesflammen
In einer schlagen brünstig sie zusammen.
Zur süßen Liebesfeyer wird der Tod,
Vereinet die getrennten element,
Zum Lebensgipfel wird des Daseins Ende.

(Dorothy Figueiras translation of the poem goes as this: Women go to the banks of the Indus, for a death by fire. They go with their husbands, in their youth, Without hesitation and without song, Adorned in finery, As in bridal costumes. The custom understood the meaning of love, Released them from the harsh humiliation of separation; They consecrated death itself as their priest And gave immortality to their marriage bonds. Even separation did not threaten such a union, Since the previously disunited flames Fall together ardently into one. Death becomes a sweet festival of love; It unites the separated elements. The end of existence becomes the pinnacle of life.)

Apart from Guenderrode’s exotic and fascinated understanding of the heinous and brutal act of sati, the German reception of the Indian Act of Sati was also shaped by patriarchal and religious ideas. These two discourses utilized Indian imagery of the situation of Indian women, thus contributing towards an understanding of ‘gender codes’ and issues in their fatherland. Goethe’s poem “Der Gott und die Bajadere” reflects a patriarchal and religious understanding of Sati. This poem talks about a Christlike Indian God who descends to earth in order to test the quality of human love. The young bayadera, a prostitute in disguise offers him hospitality, and also falls in love with this God. However, the God dies and the bayadera sacrifices herself and shows her devotion to her dead husband by entering the flames, against priestly protests. (Figueira 59)

Goethe acknowledges in a journal entry dating from June 6—9, 1797 that “Der Gott und

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6 The translation appears in Dorothy Figueira’s “Die flambierte Frau: Sati in European Culture.”. 68-69.
die Bajadere” was inspired by a German translation of Sonnenrat’s Voyage and an other tale by Michael Beer’s “Der Paria”. The poem goes as follows:

“Der Gott und die Bajadere”
Und er kusst die bunten Wangen,
Und sie fuehlt der liebe Qual,
Und das Mädchen steht gefangen,
Und sie weint zum ersten mal,
Sinkt zum seinen Füssen nieder,
Nicht um Wollust noch Gewinst,
Ach! Und die gelenken Gliedcr,
Sie versagen allen Dienst.7

(The God and the Bajadere)
And he kisses the colored cheeks
And she feels the pain of love,
And the girl stays mesmerized
And she cries for the first time
Sink down to his feet,
Not out of desire or profit
Oh! The bent organs,
They fail all service.)

From the above example we see that the idea of an eternal feminine, and the value of chastity located amongst Indian women, served to displace German bourgeois sensibilities and values,’(Die flambierte Frau 67) and also contributed towards the building of gender roles in Germany. However Enlightenment reformers and thinkers like Herder (whose stance was based on Voltaire’s contention of the Hindu belief in metempsychosis) denounced the religious sanction that was granted to Sati, and strongly criticized the lack of compassion endemic to Hinduism and the sati’s motives as been

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misguided or as a matter of self-punishment. (Die flambierte Frau 59). These two viewpoints, as per my analysis, where Indian women featured in ‘certain’ ways, justified colonization either as a means to civilize the backward people of India and to strengthen patriarchal concerns in their own lands.

An other popular play by the famous German playwright, August von Kotzebue, written in the 18th century, shows how Indians themselves viewed their own women and the western woman thus again speaking of stereotypes, which added to the inaccurate and popular German perception of Indian women and Western women’s picture in the mindsets of German people. Kotzebue’s play “Die Indianer in England” lets one of his characters, who happens to be in love with a British woman say the following about Indian and Western women in general:

“Besse dich Kamberdar! Du bist nicht in Indien, wo du dein Weib einsperren darfst, wenn sie dir das Leben vergällt; wo sie, ohne deine Erlaubnis nicht einmal das Mittagsbrot an deiner Seite verzehren darf. Du bist in Europa, wo man die Weiber nicht zu Puppen herabwürdigt; wo sie selbst einen Willen haben, und sogar selbst denken dürfen--- wenn sie können” (Kotzebue. Zweiter Akt: Erster Auftritt)

(Think sensibly, Kaberdar! You are not in India, where you can imprison a woman, if she embitters your life, where she, without your permission, can not even eat the afternoon bread on your side. You are in Europe, where one doesn’t degrade women to the status of dogs; where they have a will and even may think for themselves, if they can. Kotzebue. Second Act: First Entry)

If this was the popular perception and reception of Indian womanhood as against Western womanhood in the 18th century by playwrights, and which got reflected in literature, German feminists also looked at this ‘Other Indian Women’ and tried to destabilize patriarchal norms in their own lands. As seen in the analysis of one of the
prominent feminists Hedwig Dohm’s ‘Woman’s Nature and Privilege’ (whose analysis comes up in Chapter three), Dohm perceives the Hindu widow as only been a victim of Indian patriarchy and religion, and who falls in dire need of the protective wand of the British. The widow is not shown to have any agency of her own.

“The burning of Hindu widows has only been put a stop to through the influence of long years of British rule….. The widow who did not sacrifice herself was cursed. Her head was shaved and she lived in shame and disgrace. What are riches to her,” says the Ramayana those who judge her will say: She is only a widow.’ The people pass her by in disgust and loathing and even her son turns his head as she goes by: the earth rejects thee, die, miserable creature!”(104)

“In the Hindu drama a woman does not speak the same language as her lord, but employs the dialect of a slave. The Indian code shows a woman her position in the following terms: ‘A girl, a maiden or an elderly woman, must do nothing she pleases in her own home. In her childhood she is dependent on her father, in her womanhood on her husband, and when he is dead on her son; if she has no sons, on her husband’s nearest relations, or failing near male relatives of his family and her own she is dependent on her liege lord or sovereign.”(104-105)

Like Dohm, who uses the Eastern repository of women’s images as supplied by their Western sisters, in her attempt to deconstruct the accepted and expected gender codes of her times in her own society, an other prominent Jewish feminist of her times, Fanny Lewald (1811-1889) complains in her autobiography “The Education of Fanny Lewald: An Autobiography”, about the stifling family atmosphere, in which she had to live and which subjected her to a life of dependence and suffering for some years. Lewald criticizes certain norms of the Hindu caste system, which subjugated women, and hoped for a betterment of all classes in Prussia, by asking Prussian women not to mimic the ‘Other indigenous woman’.
“Although we demand equality before the law for all classes, most families maintain a sort of caste prejudice that is more appropriate to the ancient laws of the Hindus than the concepts of the nineteenth century. Even I had initially considered it a humiliation to earn money, and although I had escaped from this Brahmin-like family spirit much earlier and forever, unjustified and uncomprehending opinions and advice still ruined many a happy hour for me—our life is made up of hours. (Lewald 251) (italics mine)

The above understanding of the situation of the Hindu woman by a prominent German feminist who was living at the peak time of Prussian nationalism, is an incorrect depiction of the caste system. Lewald seems to be uninformed about the time period in which the caste system existed and its prevalence even in the 19th century of India. Lewald defines what agency means for German women, in that she portrays a negative example of the other Indian women, subjected more to caste pressures than her German counterpart. Lewald’s expressions were further supplemented by the provision of images and representations of colonized Eastern women under British rule. Worth mentioning here is the role of German Orientalist Max Mueller, who served to extend British Orientalist ideas about India’s past and culture, by linking the origin of the Vedas to that of the Aryan race. According to Mueller, Aryans or the (Indo-Europeans, he spotted similarities in the Indo European languages) had written the Vedas, and these contained true knowledge of India’s past. Therefore their discovery was crucial from the point of view of informing the British traders and infuse them with a zeal for discovering India’s glorious past for their present needs. In his analysis of India’s past, Max Mueller also showed the state of degradation, Indian women were subjected to and hence showed
the need to bring in back Vedic knowledge to the Indian society. Based on some research, he makes the following observation about the situation of Indian women.

“Indians did not communicate their metaphysical doctrines to women thinking that if their wives understood these doctrines and learned to be indifferent to pleasure and pain, and to consider life and death as the same, they would no longer continue to be slaves of others; of if they failed to understand them they would be talkative and communicate their knowledge to those who had no right to it.”

Mueller’s perception of the inferior position of indigenous Indian women and the need to reform them by connecting them to their Aryan roots was further shared by British feminists. It is important to note here, that the kind of relation German women had with British feminists, was different from that of the British with Indian feminists. Moreover, as Bonnie Anderson’s research shows that there was in the middle decades of the 19th century a coalition between German, British, American and French feminists who corresponded with each other through various means, discussing feminist issues, however leaving out Indian feminists. Indian feminists did not enjoy a similar relation with German and British feminists, in that they sought to maintain their own feminist identity through differences particular to the Indian situation. For eg: Religion played an important role in Indian feminism and differentiated it from German and British feminism.

British feminist’s furthered their demand for women’s rights by aligning it with the discourse of an imperial rhetoric and evangelical Christian enthusiasm, explains

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8 The above quote appears in Mueller’s text titled “A History of Ancient Sakaætí Literature. The primitive Religion of the Brahmans. 27.
Antoinette Burton in her book “Burden’s of History”. These white women’s burdens were portrayed as ‘helpless victims awaiting the representation of their plight at the hands of their sisters in the metropolis’ (Burton 7). More so ever, the issues that drew the attention of the British press and journals were typical issues such as child marriage, the treatment of widows, practice of suttee, prison of zenana, which led to the creation of a ‘colonized female Other’. This image of the ‘colonized female Other’ became necessary from the point of view of British women suffragists and feminists, who sought to justify their demands, for themselves in their own fatherlands and by justifying their intervention in the lives of their Oriental counterparts. Like Burton, who analyzes and presents the viewpoint of former British colonizer women and their imperial stance towards their Eastern sisters in India, later Indian feminists like Sarojini Naidu and Muthulakshmi Reddi termed feminism as something western and rejected it. ⁹ However for the case study of Maharashtra and the time period under consideration here, British feminists had a role to play in shaping Indian feminists perceptions of themselves and their conditions. This was largely due to the role the missionaries and the British governors had to play in establishing schools for women in Maharashtra. Many Indian women, including women in other parts of the country (Maharashtrian women as a case study) were able to reap the benefits of this education brought about through reforms by the British along with the help of local reformers etc.

⁹ See Mrinalini Sinha’s article “Refashioning Mother India: Feminism and Nationalism in Late-Colonial India” for a greater discussion of feminism in late colonial India.
Since we deal here with feminism, it is essential to theorize feminism and understand this comparative endeavor as a part of Third wave feminism.\textsuperscript{10}

IV

Theorizing Feminisms: The Feminist Standpoint

In postmodern and post-colonial times, Feminism or the word ‘woman’ has come under a lot of scrutiny. Especially, since poststructuralists question the word ‘woman’, as against been seen purely in biological terms. Poststructuralist thought adds to the definition of woman other factors such as race, class, ethnicity, age, nationality and sexuality. In other words, ‘femininity’ or being a ‘woman’ is not seen and defined merely in biological terms or as a unified subject. A nuanced understanding of the term ‘feminism’, which implies a fight for women’s Rights, is therefore necessary for our understanding of some of the reasons behind misrepresentations and stereotypical representations of Third World women in Western feminist and cultural discourses.

Feminist thought or the origins of the feminist standpoint are often synonymous with Western thought. Postcolonial feminists have tried to deconstruct and deemphasize these notions, by broadening the definition of feminism and a feminist, and by showing examples of radical women figures in their respective cultures. In other

\textsuperscript{10} The term Third Wave refers to the contestations and responses to second wave feminism and also refers to the third generation feminist moment in theory and praxis. (Gillis, Howie and Munford 22) Third Wave feminism also focuses on the age of consumer culture, multiculturalism, multiple identities. It also focuses on women’s issues beyond the West (Anita Harris 91) and looks into places often disregarded as sites for feminist work. (ibid)
words, we are headed towards new models of feminism, which can be loosely labeled as the Third Wave of feminism. Since every country does not modernize in the same sequence, or have a similar trajectory of feminism, we need a definition of feminism that fits women’s struggles across cultures and time. In this regard, I find Karen Offen’s “Defining Feminism” (1988) to be useful in understanding and defining feminism. Offen pre-requires the essentiality of a comparative historical approach towards understanding the definition of feminism. This approach is necessary from the point of view of understanding feminist thought prior to the 20th century, as well as apply it to feminism in non-Western parts of the world. Feminism, according to Offen, takes gender as a category of analysis. The concept of Gender analyses masculine and feminine behavior which is socially ascribed to both the biological sexes. Based on this understanding, feminism further opposes the subordination of women to men in the family and society, challenges patriarchal thought, social organization and control mechanisms.’(Offen 152) In challenging patriarchal thought, feminism also analyses the relation of women to various social organs, such as the family, State and other political, and economic systems. A feminist can be either male or female, insofar as they are able to recognize the validity of women’s interpretations of their lived experience, needs and acknowledge the values, women claim as their own, in assessing their own status as been distinct from men.’(Offen152). Also, they recognize and exhibit consciousness of, discomfort at or even anger over institutionalized injustice towards womanhood as created by patriarchal thought and finally they aim towards eliminating that injustice that upholds male prerogatives in that particular culture.( Offen 152)
Although Offen’s definition is comprehensive and comparative, it is still modern and contemporary. It fails to take the specificity of the 19th century Indian feminist thought into account. Kumari Jayawardena who has done pioneering work on feminist movements in Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries defines feminism by taking into account the historical side and values of Indian feminism. She also locates 19th century Indian feminism in a context. It is important to give this definition as India was seen to be lacking in feminism or feminism was considered to be an off-shoot of the presence of the British rule in India. Hence as per Jayawardena’s definition, Indian feminism existed and meant:

“embracing movements for equality within the current system and significant struggles that have attempted to change the system.” She further asserts that these movements arose in the context of

1) The formulation and consolidation of national identities which mobilized anti-imperialist movements during the independence struggle and 2) the remaking of precapitalist religion and feudal structures in attempts to modernize third world societies.11

As per Jayawardena then, Marathi feminists especially of the colonial period (1865-1933) fit under the second criteria of this broad definition and can be called feminists, according to our rational sense of understanding these terms.

Offen’s understanding of feminism takes gender as a useful category of analysis and views women’s subordination in terms of their relation to the State, society and family. The social organ of the State or the Nation forms a crucial component of understanding its influence on gender or for feminists, on women. Other theorists of feminism also analyze gender subordination in terms of class relations, sexuality and caste. Of these, I will elaborate on class and caste as defining modes of femininity.

The Caste factor deserves mention here, since Marathi notions of femininity during the colonial and pre-colonial times were described and defined in terms of caste identity. During the colonial period, women’s behavior was regulated by caste terms and terminologies. ‘Streedharma’ (duty of women) was defined in terms of service to parents, care, nurture of children and observation of pativratya’ (devotion to husband) (Vidyut Bhagwat 320). With the arrival of the British, many local and national reformers saw education as fit for women—however only that kind of education which would serve the patriarchal interests and needs. This meant reforming typical women’s habits which were associated with them since pre-colonial times, such as being spendthrift, illiterate, adivasi, animal-like, financially irresponsible and short-sighted. A renowned text, by the then known writer ‘Narayan Bapuji Kanitkar’, for instance argues against reformist positions on women’s education. He writes in ‘Taruni Shikshan Natika’:

…….. once for all if you become equal to men, fearless and tough like them and start wandering like them on roads then men will not have any feelings for you. This will destroy all the pleasures, pride, and honor that you have. Indian men are not free as
much as you are today. You must forever endeavor to gain such education as befitted Arya Woman …… as was available to our ancients.”

More ever, what Kanitkar has to say regarding the situation of Hindu widows is reflective of most of the orthodox patriarchal thought of the times.

“Those who really wish to do something good for widows they must direct them towards the path of knowledge, towards religious actions, towards altruism. Give widows an opportunity for travels, for visiting pilgrimages, seeing different places. Do spend as much as possible for such activities. Widows will gain knowledge in this process and this will help all women. Remarriage should be prescribed only for those widows who have no intelligence, no higher goals, no pure ambition—in short for those widows who only understand animal level instincts.”

In addition to restrictions on women’s reforms and code of conduct imposed by religious fundamentalists in the colonial period in the Marathi speaking region, the social stratification of the society in terms of Caste boundaries made specific allocations for gender, observes Vidyut Bhagwat. (332).

Likewise, Prussian discourse on femininity expected certain norms of behavior for women. Numerous lexicons of the 19th century sought to define the woman, gender, characteristics of gender, in certain terms. Women had to face difficulties because of unfair and difficult divorce laws, strict punishment to women for adultery as compared to men, lesser options of vocations etc.)

From the above, we see caste wise definitions of ‘femininity’ and feminist struggles against these notions towards emancipation of women, in German and Marathi

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12 As quoted by Vidyut Bhagwat ‘Patriarchal Discourse: Construction and Subversion”( 330)
13 Bhagwat. 332.
societies of the colonial period. Furthermore, as Tharu and Lalitha have asserted in their anthology ‘Women Writing in India’ From 600 B.C….. , the colonial ideology also sought to define woman in terms of class.

But firstly, the role of the nation, in terms of constituting the gender norms of its territory and that of the ruling class of gender in constituting gender norms for other nations is of importance here. Mrinalini Sinha in ‘Gender and Nation’ analyzes questions of women’s agency in the wake of national configurations. Sinha argues for an understanding of the constitution of the nation and the nationalist discourse and its requirements about the performance of certain notions of masculinity and femininity (7). Since nations are invented and are often ‘limited imagined communities’, women form an integral part of the national culture and through a restriction of their sexuality, and adherence to certain norms, they are expected to contribute towards the nationalist culture of the time. (Sinha 7) It is crucial therefore, to analyze and research into women’s experience of nationhood, and the formation of gender roles, argues Sinha. Furthermore, since nations and Western discourses of nation and ideals of gender differences, became the ‘yardstick of civilization’, people of the colonized world came to be represented as ‘children of the child-like’ (Sinha 19). A historical perspective shows that feminists have often felt the need to detach themselves from nationalist concerns, in order to analyze women’s experiences and for the sake of feminist politics. (Sinha) The Prussian nationalist discourse, for instance assigned certain gender codes in the wake of its military defeat at the hands of the French. Sinha observes in “Gender and Nation”:
“The discourse of Prussian nationalism during the anti-Napoleonic wars (1806-15) was founded on a gender order that assigned distinct and complementary roles to ‘manliness’ (Männlichkeit) and “womanliness” (Weiblichkeit). In the wake of Prussia’s military defeat at the hands of the French in 1806 and 1807, the discourse of Prussian nationalism urged men to enlist in a people’s war to defend the fatherland and reclaim German manliness, which was defined as different from and superior to the manliness of the French. The introduction of universal conscription during the Wars of liberation, in the context of gendered war rhetoric, was limited only to men and became the basis for the extension of civil rights and political citizenship to men. In this case, therefore, the production and demonstration of a militarized German masculinity was based on the defense of the nation. Yet this militarized German masculinity was also defined in relation to, and as a complement to, the proper feminine roles of German women.” (24)

Hence for anti-colonial nationalists during the colonial period in 19th century India (as in the case of Bengal), there was a felt need to appropriate ideas of modernity and progress and assert the nation’s difference from the West.(Sinha 21) Indeed, as seen in the process of anti-colonial nationalism in 19th century Bengal, there was the construction of a spatial dichotomy in nationalist discourse between an inner'spiritual world, where the cultural authenticity of the nation was located, and an outer/material world, where the nation acknowledged its subordination to, and the need to borrow from the modern West.(Sinha 21). Sinha, further sees the position of the middle class woman or the Bhadramahila (respectable woman) as having a new identity in the nationalist discourse which was defined against the excesses of modernization associated with the Western and Westernized woman and the backwardness associated with peasant and lower-caste/class women in India. This modern woman and not the
traditional woman could truly embody the cultural identity of the new nation in the making.¹⁴

The case of Bengal, where the British established their hold is of significance for an analysis of women’s writings, since Bengal, followed by Maharashtra saw many reform movements where feminists like Tarabai Shinde, Pandita Ramabai, Savitribai, Bedekar and others felt the need to theorize patriarchy and fight for women’s Rights. Hence, although these women showed detachment towards nationalist concerns in their feminist writings under analysis here, and more of a concern for women’s uplift, education, independence etc, their concerns were for indigenous women and were articulated by forming alliances with feminist sisters abroad.

Sinha further highlights the importance of class as one of the many factors (race, nation, sexuality, religion, age, ethnicity) that constitute gender. Class (financial status) figures in the analysis of Popp, Savitribai Phule, Pandita Ramabai, Louise Otto Peters, Keun and Bedekar and is seen as extremely crucial for women’s emancipation. Given the historical time under study here, class seems to have played a crucial role in shaping patriarchy and women’s conduct. However, merely analyzing patriarchy and class is not sufficient for articulating feminist concerns. It is equally important to argue for a ‘specifically feminist historical materialist standpoint’ and analyze women’s oppression. Amongst women’s oppression, Nancy Hartsock’s “The Feminist Standpoint” argues for the case of working women and other experiences of women such as that of women of color, differences between women and women, father-daughter relations, motherhood and lesbianism. These activities specific to women need to be theorized, since Marxist

¹⁴ Sinha bases her above observations on Partha Chatterjee’s ‘Colonialism, Nationalism and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India.’
methodology doesn’t take into account female experience in its diversity. For eg:

Working women’s position as compared to the male worker is worse off since the working woman is involved in production and reproduction relations at home and outside. She distinguishes the situation of the male worker from the woman worker:

“First, women as a group work more than men. We are all familiar with the phenomenon of the “double day” and with indications that women work many more hours per week than men. Second, a larger proportion of women’s labor time is devoted to the production of use-values than men’s. Only some of the goods women produce are commodities (however much they live in a society structured by commodity production and exchange) Third, women’s production is structured by repetition in a different way than men’s. While repetition for both the woman and the male worker may take the form of production of the same object, over and over—whether apple pies or brake linings----women’s work in housekeeping involves repetitious cleaning.15

Therefore for a feminist standpoint, the above differences between women’s and men’s work, women’s experience and labor validate feminist engagements with social change. Hartsock further advocates a socialist society, where there would be no ownership of private property, where the State would institutionalize the participation of both men and women in child-rearing, and ultimately bring about changes in social relations. Supplementing Hartsock’s arguments about the specificity of a feminist standpoint with socialist leanings, Iris Marion Young critiques the ‘dual systems theory’ or the role of capitalism and patriarchy in explaining women’s oppression. Young advocates a ‘feminist historical materialist standpoint’. Criticizing the Dual approach theory, which analyzes women’s oppression from the point of view of patriarchy, and

the mode of production (capitalism), and the effect of the two on women’s oppression, this approach, opines, Young, tends to be either too general and ignores the specific aspects of a feminist historical materialist viewpoint. A feminist standpoint also takes cognizance of various nuances and details of women’s oppression, which the dual system theory fails to take into account. Iris Young hence propagates separate women’s organizations to combat class, fight for abortion rights, fight against capitalism and gender oppression. In other words, she talks about a woman’s sub-culture important for feminist Rights. With the exception of Dohm and Shinde, Keun and Bedekar, the other feminists under study here were able to organize women together to fight for their Rights and build a women’s sub-culture to question patriarchal authority.

Postmodernists find the concept of a ‘feminist standpoint’ questionable, since women’s experience as a collective, especially across cultures, class, race, ethnicity, race, sexuality, age etc is diverse and it is impossible to group all women’s experience together and draw general conclusions from it. But however, we can still locate comparable elements as will be seen from the case studies of the following feminists writings under study here. From this it will be possible for us to see and read these works in their totality and not as isolated elements of the larger feminist movement of the times. (First wave feminism)

Just as it is important to have a definition of feminism, it is equally important to theorize patriarchy. Veronica Beechey sets herself to the task of elaborating on the definition of patriarchy. Like Iris Young, Beechey emphasizes the intertwinement of class and patriarchy and their role in women’s subordination. In Beechey’s reflection then, a theory of patriarchy: should be historically specific and should explore the forms
of patriarchy which exist within particular modes of production. This becomes important
from the point of view of viewing patriarchy that existed in pre-capitalist and socialist
societies as different from that existing under capitalism. Beechey also ascribes more
importance to the different forms of social construction of gender and the forms of social
institutions in which patriarchies exist. In addition, the forms which exist in particular
social institutions need to be investigated. Here Beechey gives the example of the
differential forms of patriarchy as in domestic economy and the later ones which
emerged as capital seized control over the production process. It follows from this
therefore that, women’s experience under various forms of domination, and in different
institutions, within a capitalist economy are expected to be different. (Beechey 80)
Beecheys’ definition however leaves out the role of religion, and caste in reconstituting
patriarchy. For eg. Society in 19th century and early 20th century India was under
colonial rule, which implied changes in patriarchal formulations. Furthermore the nature
of patriarchy in rural and urban society differed. Therefore, while comparing German
women’s feminist writings with Indian women’s feminist writings, it is necessary to
keep in mind all these factors as they impacted patriarchal formulations. Likewise, it is
important to keep in mind the historicity of the concept of patriarchy as suggested by
Beechey while applying it in general terms to various societies (rural or urban) and to
specific classes and castes.
Need for Comparative feminist models:

As mentioned earlier, Bonnie Anderson’s research into “Early International Feminism: The Contributions and Difficulties of Comparative History” shows that in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, hundreds of people in the United States, Britain, France and the German States formed an international community dedicated to changing women’s status in society. (69). This internationalism helped foster a spirit of solidarity and sisterhood amongst feminists from across the Western States. However, places like India were left out from this international community and the achievements of Indian feminists either ignored or not known. On this Ann Taylor observes that:

“There is a need to re conceptualize the West and integrate it into global history, and see it no longer as a model of modernity, democratization or any other universal ideas, but as a region with its own specific characteristics.”(91)

Furthermore, as it is essential to reconceptualize the West, there is a need to compare and juxtapose, international women’s movements, so that we can perceive an interaction between general trends and particular cases. (Ann Taylor 89). While the comparative angle provides us richer insights into various cultures, it helps further in demystifying as well as deconstructing stereotypes, misrepresentations or a lack of representation of various types of feminisms. Since this thesis concerns itself with feminist writings, we need a sound and coherent model of comparative feminist criticism
to analyze the feminist writings from across the cultures. While Chandra Mohanty’s comparative feminist model ranges on the sociological and the material and shows examples from the past few decades, Elaine Showalter talks for the need for a feminist criticism which analyzes women’s writings from four different perspectives. But firstly, lets see Mohanty’s model of feminist criticism.

Mohanty argues against the marginalization of women and their powerlessness in various Third World communities in post-colonial times. Her “Feminism without Borders” (2004) presents a powerful theoretical and methodological critique of Westocentric and ethnocentric representations of Third World women in Western feminist discourses. Mohanty’s arguments are useful from the point of view of building a comparative model of feminist studies based on “imagined communities” (which will be open to women of all cultures and color, including white women) and would appropriately locate the fault-lines in Westocentric and ethnocentric practices on categorizing Third World Women. Mohanty argues against grouping Third World as a monolith category and shows that such generalizations lead to the propagation of stereotypical images of Third World women as ‘average, sexually constrained, ignorant, poor, uneducated and victimized’ as in contrast with Western women, as been more modern and having freedom of choice in terms of education and sexuality. She argues for a more historically and culturally specific analysis of women as a group, before they fall into the binaried division of the oppressed versus the oppressors. These kinds of generalizations prove to be a potential threat to solidarity amongst women, both amongst the Third and the First world women and leads to the object status of Third World
women. This objectification further serves the purpose of a ‘colonialist move’ on behalf of the West. In Mohanty’s words:

“What happens when this assumption of “women as an oppressed group” is situated in the context of Western feminist writing about Third World women? It is here that I locate the colonialist move. By contrasting the representation of women in the Third World with what I referred to earlier as Western feminisms’ self-presentation in the same context, we see how Western feminists alone become the true “subjects” of this counterhistory. Third World women, in contrast, never rise above the debilitating generality of their “object” status. (Feminism without Borders 39)

For eg: Just as during colonial times, the number of Indian women who underwent Sati and travel accounts of the process of Sati by the British in Bengal justified missionary intervention and appeal to women in Britain to unite and save Hindu women from a horrible death and oppression, calling for feminist intervention, but disregarding the facticity of this phenomenon, Mohanty’s postcolonial critique argues for a methodological critique of Western methodologies that demonstrate the oppression of Third World women and their exploitation in too general or monolithic terms.

Her first critique is against the proof of universalism based on the use of an arithmetic method. As per this method, the greater the number of women, (who for instance wear the veil, undergo physical abuse), the more universal the fact of their sexual segregation and control. Numbers decide the percentage of suffering and subordination. In addition, a large number different, fragmented examples from a variety of countries also add up to a universal fact. (Mohanty 33) Furthermore, in (reference to Fran Hosken’s study on female oppression in Africa and the Middle East) equating the wearing of the veil with rape, domestic violence and prostitution, Hosken asserts that
purdah’s “sexual control” function, is the primary explanation for its existence, whatever the context. (Mohanty 34) The institutions of purdah are denied any cultural and historical specificity and contradictions, thus leaving out subversive accounts. (Mohanty34). Descriptive generalizations are drawn based on numbers. Mohanty’s critique is against this method.

Mohanty’s second critique on methodological considerations concerns the use of concepts such as ‘reproduction, the sexual division of labor, family, marriage, household, patriarchy’ without their specification in local cultural and historical contexts. More so ever, the concept of “sexual division of labor” shows the differential value placed on men’s work versus women’s work. By applying these kinds of general concepts without taking cognizance of the socio-historical and local contexts, these concepts, for example, the concept of sexual division of labor indicate a devaluation of women’s work. Mohanty argues that such concepts should be used only through the analysis of particular socio-cultural and historical local contexts. (Feminism without Borders36).

Mohanty’s third critique is against the use of ‘gender’ as a superordinate category of analyses. Often the binaries that are implicit in this category, male-female, and nature-culture are used to organize a universe of a system of representation in different cultures. Western methodological universalism tends to demand empirical proof of its existence in different cultures. Feminist work based on certain western methodological considerations blurs the distinction between Woman and Women16

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16 Mohanty makes a distinction between Woman (as a cultural and ideological composite Other constructed through diverse representational discourses—scientific, literary, juridical, linguistic and cinematic), and “women” (real, material subjects of their collective histories) aiming to show that the
thereby leading to the construction of monolithic images of “Third World Women”. This in other words means ignoring the specificity of relationship between the historical materiality of the level of specific oppressions, and political choices, on the one hand and their discursive representations on the other hand.” (Feminism without Borders 37).

In other words, the feminist movement also has to combat other oppressive factors such as race, class and imperialism, and not only gender oppression.

Mohanty therefore advocates the feminist comparative model for the sake of solidarity amongst women from the Third World and the First, where points of agency, co-relation, mutuality, resistance, difference and similarities emerge more specifically through comparison.

An other study by Mohanty and Biddy Martin involves a questioning of feminism as a Western phenomenon and its inadequacy to explain many concerns of white women themselves. In their literary analysis of Minnie Bruce Pratt’s autobiographical narrative entitled “Identity: Skin Blood Heart” Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty’s “ Feminist Politics: “What’s Home got to do with it? show how Pratt’s narrative foregrounds the fact that there are ‘homes within feminism based on absolute divisions between various sexual, racial or ethnic identities” (192). By doing this Martin and Mohanty wish to challenge the hegemony of the West that subsumed feminism to the West and thus reproduced the hierarchical polarities of the East/West divide. Their analysis seeks to deconstruct the conceptual and political work of Western feminists that tend to “homogenize the experiences and conditions of women across time and culture” by assuming their own positions as referent.”(195)

relation between Woman and Women is an arbitrary one set up by particular cultures. (Feminism without Borders 19)
Supplementing Mohanty’s critique of Western methodologies and constructions of Third World and First World women as a monolith, singular oppressed group, are Gayatri Spivak’s observations and insights of a critique of First World woman and her method. It is crucial for the First World feminist to acknowledge the heterogeneity amongst Third World women, and in order to be able to do so, the First World feminist must learn to stop feeling privileged as a woman. (Spivak in French Feminism in an International Frame 53). Therefore, while framing research questions, the First World feminist also needs to have an other focus:

“However unfeasible and inefficient it may sound, I see no way to avoid insisting that there has to be a simultaneous other focus: not merely who am I? but who is the other woman? How am I naming her? How does she name me? Is this part of the problematic I discuss? Indeed, it is the absence of such unfeasible but crucial questions that makes the colonized woman as subject see the investigators as sweet and sympathetic creatures from another planet who are free to come and go;……( 54 )

While Mohanty’s and Spivak’s method argues for a critique of western methodologies so as not to generalize and produce stereotypes of Indian women, Linda Alcoff adds to the issue of identity another important marker. “Location” or the social location has, in Alcoff’s terms, a bearing on the meaning and truth on what he or she has to say, and hence the speaker cannot “assume an ability to transcend her location”. Alcoff’s claim is important, since it highlights the effectiveness of the speaker’s identity, depending on the location from where he or she has to say something’s and the effects of which are thus epistemically salient. For eg, it is not one and the same thing when a dominant group speaks for the oppressed, or when a man in a certain social position says
something and the same thing is been said by a women. (The Problem of Speaking for others 79-81)

Alcoff’s position matters from the point of view of the feminist stance taken by Marathi feminists, who favor the British rule for women’s uplift. However, since the Indian Nation had not been well defined and the feminists under concern here, found certain Western concepts apt for local concerns, their praise of the British can be understood from the point of view of the location, in which they were placed in. In this regard the leading feminist historian Padma Anagol, who has done monumental work on the “Emergence of feminism in Maharashtra” (1850-1920) explains the origin of feminism as arising through a combination of factors, such as the presence of a colonial economy, the new web of modernizing impulses which interacted with the contending circumstances and criteria of sex, race, status, class, caste and religion.” (Anagol 13).

More so ever, the need to study the most ‘subaltern’ group in India, during the colonial period, shows us that:

“Women’s adulation of the Raj and their firm belief in the state’s will to do good can be read as a sign of how the state was utilized as a tool to counteract patriarchal injustice. The Raj is seen as a humanitarian resource and the final arbiter --- certainly in Girijabai Kelkar and Tarabai Shinde’s conception of state, wherein the state is registered as the sovereign authority, far more so than the patriarchal head of household. (Anagol 224)

An other possible explanation of the adulation of the British Raj by Marathi feminists would be the kind of progressive changes that the British rule brought about and the system of values perpetrated through the various laws that were passed. (eg: abolition of the caste system, ban on Sati, Widow remarriage Act, Access to higher
education etc.) However, the above mentioned feminists and others also sought to preserve their indigenous identity by making use of Hindu religious concepts such as ‘dhandharma’ (philanthropy) and liberal ones like “strihak (rights of women); ‘bhaginivarg (sisterhood); ; strivarg (womankind or womanhood); strihak (women’s rights); strianubhav (women’s experience); bandhivasan (bondage); dasyatva (slavery); mokaleek (independence and masculinity); stri jati (female sex); purush jati (male sex); purushartha (manliness and masculinity) were vernacular terms used to express local (and feminist, emphasis mine) concerns. (Anagol 14) More so ever, these phrases occur regularly in the colloquial and formal texts written by Maharashtrian women and the most significant of the magazines within the broader women’s press of the time. Arya Bhagini and Swadeshbhagini” were some of the women’s periodicals run towards the turn of the century in colonial Maharashtra. (Anagol 15)

The theoretical perspectives offered by Mohanty, Spivak, Alcoff and Anagol figure in my analysis of the feminist writings under study here in that they throw more light on how the stereotypes come about, how these stereotypes can be deconstructed, how these theorists address each other and finally supplement in the close reading of the writings under study here.
Elaine Showalter’s model of literary analysis:

Since writing often becomes the context through which new political identities are forged, it becomes a space for struggle and contestation about reality itself. (Cartographies of Struggle 34) Written texts are not produced in vacuum. (Cartographies of Struggle 33). The following case studies of women authors’ writings are a selection from the socio-literary, and the material. A feminist model of literary criticism by Elaine Showalter seems to be appropriate for analyzing the feminist writings and for a comparative analysis under study here. This model is suited for analyzing texts from different cultures for the following reasons.

Showalter talks about four perspectives on feminist writings: the biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, socio-historical and the cultural17 Feminist criticism or ‘gynocritics’ needs to incorporate the following while analyzing women’s writings.

Firstly, Showalter aims to analyze women’s writings and look for the ways how ideas about the bodily images figure in the writing and are important in the analysis of women’s writings. But more than that it is also necessary to see how society frames ideas about the body. In general, then the ‘body of the writing needs to be analyzed and not the body’, recommends Showalter. (252).

The second aspect of gynocritics talks about women’s need to reinvent language, which is a language that can speak outside the phallogocentric structures of the society. (A position taken up by Irigaray and Cixous as well.) Women have been denied the full resources to languages and hence forced into silence, euphemism and circumlocution. (253) This aspect, is also important from the point of view of problems of decolonization and the decision to select a State language. This means that we also need to see whether women had access to language and finally which language becomes the official one. (Showalter) Feminist criticism or ‘gynocritics’ tries to locate women’s linguistic range in their writings’.

One point that deserves attention is the difference between and ‘gynocentrism as understood by Iris Marion Young and ‘gynocritics’ as understood by Showalter. Gynocentrism as per Young emphasizes the advantages of ‘femininity’ in posing a challenge to masculine culture. Liberal humanist feminism of the 19th and early 20th century or even the contemporary aspects of feminism show that feminists tend to question traditional expectations of femininity and not necessarily emphasize femininity. Hence the term ‘gynocentrism’ doesn’t apply much to feminist writings under consideration here, given the time period under consideration here. (First wave feminism stressed sameness with men.)

The third part of Showalter’s model analyzes women’s writing and how women’s psyche figures in the writings. This aspect analyzes the relation of gender to the creative process, the psychodynamics of the family and its impact on women’s role and their inscription in the process of writing and creativity. Mother daughter relationships, female friendships are also a site for creativity and also a source for
research. The psychoanalytic angle to literature however doesn’t emphasize the impact of historical change, ethnic difference, economic and generic difference (availability of genres for women’s writings) as influential to women’s writing. Therefore these factors need to be considered as well.

The fourth aspect of gynocritics emphasizes the impact of cultural forces (such as language, class, race, nationality, history, other women’s experience and availability of literary genres) as significant and influential to women’s writing. This culture, according to Showalter also needs to look for relations between modes of production and distribution, relations of author to audience, high culture to popular art, hierarchies of genre etc and its impact on women’s writings. It also means analyzing the impact of women’s culture as a collective experience within the cultural whole on women’s writing.

From the above theoretical observations, it is important to see to what extent the work of literature, so crucial to that of ‘subject formation’, audience reception and reading is influential in generating stereotypes and generalizations. How does a work of literature break stereotypes of a certain cultures’ representation? How does it lead to them? How crucial is feminist address and audience to the work reception? How did women reading other women affect feminist writings? Do formal and textual aspects play a role in generating or breaking stereotypes? What did it mean for feminists like Dohm, Peters, Popp, Keun, Phule, Pandita Ramabai, Shinde and Bedekar to write in the wake of socio-political turmoil? What language did they use to express their turmoil and traumas? Were these terms adequate or weren’t they? If women showed low literacy or lack of literacy in colonial times and were represented in certain ways in various texts,
written by men, how did this representation affect their judgments about themselves and their writings? How did other women, who read these women’s feminist writings react to them? Since Marathi and German feminists also compromised aesthetic values to ideology and form\(^\text{18}\) (Ellen Rooney), it was highly likely that these works did not receive the merit which they deserved and hence failed to register in the mindsets of their Western and non-Western sisters and brothers abroad!

**Chapter divisions:**

**Chapter One:** compares feminist positions of Adelheid Popp’s ‘Autobiography of a Working Woman’ with Savitribai Phule’s “Collected Literature”, in which both women developed strategies to fight off Upper Class and Caste domination. Based on Mohanty’s critique of Westocentric practices, that feminism is a bourgeois white women’s initiative, and using Showalter’s insights, this chapter tries to recognize the contribution of not-so privileged sections of society towards development of feminist thought. It also analyzes, how the “physical suffering of the body” becomes a site of resistance and shows that lower classes and castes in German and Marathi societies achieved Enlightenment values in different ways.

**Chapter two:** analyzes the feminist agendas of two remarkable women writers and activists, Louise Otto Peters and Pandita Ramabai (also known as Mother of feminism in

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\(^{18}\) Ellen Rooney brings up the question of literariness of feminist writings. The fact that certain texts like those written by Peters, Ramabai, Dohm and Shinde range more on the sociological rather than the literary (since literature is associated with certain genres and plots or narratives), opens up the possibility of understanding the lack of the literary by analyzing the socio-historical situation of these women. Dohm and Peters, for instance wrote novels as well, but very often these women and others like themselves needed to confirm to male standards of the canon in order to get published and accepted. Hence the choice of certain forms and genres.
their respective cultures) in their fight against patriarchy, the system of marriage and unfair Laws. (Government laws in case of Peters and religious laws in case of Ramabai). Ramabai uses certain Western concepts to analyze local needs, without omitting difference of Indian identity. Her agenda for women’s uplift shows mutuality and co-relation with the feminist agendas with her Western sisters. More so ever by using a ‘programmatic form of writing’, (almost the same as that of Peters) that offers an analysis of the reasons of women’s suffering, and solutions as well, Ramabai’s appeal for Indian women’s reforms is able to reach Western audiences as forcefully as well to indigenous ones.

Chapter Three: compares Hedwig Dohm’s “Woman’s Nature and Privilege” with Tarabai Shinde’s “Stri Purush Tulana”. Their writings offer a critique of patriarchy, patriarchal customs and literature by re-conceptualizing womanhood, attacking ‘invented traditions’ that led to the oppression of women and created inequality amongst the two sexes. Their analysis also critiques nationalist aspirations that set certain standards of womanhood and sought to reform these ideals through an appeal by intervention through the laws and other liberal idealogues of the times. Although Shinde shows a romantic longing for a lasting British rule, she still holds onto certain concepts inherent to Hindu thought and epics and thus shows a remarkable reach towards diverse audiences in Marathi speaking regions. Although the essay was written in Marathi and is known for its stylistic innovation and thought, it became known to the Western audiences only recently. The essay acts as a response to Orientalising elements as they appear in Dohm’s text.
How were the concerns of the ‘new woman’ of the early 20th century articulated by feminist writings? How does this new woman adapt to social change and to unjust laws? Chapter four takes up these questions by comparing agency, and co-relation in Irmgard Keun’s “Gilgi: eine von uns” (1931) and Malatibai Bedekar’s “Kalyanche Nishwas” (1933). Both women take up comparable issues of women’s agency in matters of sexuality, mother-daughter relations and various forms of women’s assertion. Furthermore by tapping into the author-function and that of its audience, the conceptions of high and low art, and the hierarchies of genre, prevalent at that time period, this chapter sees whether these socio-literary aspects led to the suppression andor the renewed emergence of feminism, and women’s agency respective to the society of their times.
In the following, I present and compare the prose, poetry and essays of a lower caste woman leader, Savitribai Phule (1831-1897) in the Marathi context with the autobiography of a working woman, Adelheid Popp (1869-1939). Both women wrote around the Turn of the 19th century and were capable of subverting the injustices in the socio-political order through their writing. Adelheid Popp’s work seems to be comparable to Savitribai’s prose, since both women belonged to the lower classes and castes, were leaders and wanted to bring about a change in gender ideology as well as seek uplift for their class and caste.

Although written in a simple and straightforward style, their writing is still very modern for their times and meaningful, even today. It attempts to question some of the generalizations about women of their class and caste by specifying their sources of oppression and offering solutions for its removal. Although there is heavy reliance on pre-modern forms of writing and revolting, they merge into Popp and Phule’s time to emerge as a new voice reflective of and heralding women’s emancipation and progress in the coming years. Furthermore, they have shown that the poor or the outcastes have a major voice in feminist movements worldwide, unlike the popular notion that feminism is an upper class (bourgeois), western movement. A dialogue between them is certainly possible, since both women have a sense of pain incommensurable to bourgeois standards, and valor enough to fight against powerful upper class and caste domination.
**Biographical details on Savitribai Phule and Adelheid Popp**

Born on the 3rd of Jan 1831, the fourth child of ‘Khanduji Patil’ of the Mali (gardeners) caste, in a small remote village of Naigaon in the State of Maharashtra, this intelligent, enthusiastic, and caring woman was helpful towards those not as fortunate as her. This great woman was married to Jotirao Phule in the year 1840 at the age of six. Jotiba Phule was 13 then and Savitribai became the Jotiba Phule’s first disciple, whom he educated so that she could teach in schools started by him for women and lower castes. Savitribai’s prose occurs in a collection “Kavyaphule”, which was published in 1854 by the missionaries, (Sheela press) while her biography on Jotiba Phule appeared in 1890. Besides a poetry collection and a biography, Savitribai has several essays, lectures and a list of reading books to her credit. Of these books the ones that find mention in M.G Mali’s biography are “History of India and the “The biography of Socrates”. In the year 1897, there was an outbreak of plague in Maharashtra. Savitribai gave all her help to plague patients by bringing them to the hospital. While carrying a “Shudra caste boy” on her shoulders, this great lady caught the disease herself and succumbed to it. She died on 10th of March 1897. The entire collection of her literature, to which I refer to here, was published in Dr.M.G. Mali’s book on Savitribai Phule, titled as “Savitribai Phule: Samagra Vadmaya”. Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Mandal. Mumbai, 1988.

Although both these women did not share similar background, they show similarities in their perceptions towards certain questions of class and caste identity. Popp, for instance was born in 1869 as Adelheid Dworschak (1869—1939) as the
fifteenth child of five surviving children to a forty seven year old working class woman, Adelheid (although a quick and bright student) had the misfortune of been removed from school by her traditional Catholic mother. As a person, she was known to be kind, generous and enterprising by nature. Adelheid had to unfortunately endure several exploitative apprenticeships and factory jobs and also suffered from poverty and malnutrition. She depicted a remarkable amount of will and enthusiasm for learning and reading as much as she could. She discovered that the socialist party did not elevate women’s demands much, and hence felt the need for a separate women’s organization and vote for their upliftment. In her book “Der Weg zur Höhe”, Die Sozialdemokratische Frauenbewegung Österreichs”, (The Way towards heights: The social-democratic women’s movements of Austria) she attempts to trace the history of working women’s rights and their needs:


(Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the great scientific leaders of the Proletariat made the workers open their eyes, that women and children were seen as welcome labor by the Capitalists, in times of men’s unemployment. The Capitalists exploited our men and husbands, in order to employ women and children as competitors and wage earners in their factories. The worker’s resentment directed itself against the women. That is why the demand for the women’s vote, for an organization-- which did not meet with a lot of agreement.)

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In 1894, Popp married the Social Democrat and owner of the Arbeiter-Zeitung (Workers’ Newspaper), with whom she had two children. Her husband died after two years of marriage. In 1918, Popp was elected as an executive of the Social Democratic Party and became a member of the Austrian parliament and the Viennese district council. She succeeded Clara Zetkin as chair of the International Women’s Committee. Popp died in Vienna in 1939.

**Comparable elements in lower class and caste histories:-**

In the following I deal with the comparable aspects of class and caste and the lower class movement with that of the lower caste movement. But firstly, we will see why class and caste appear to be comparable.

Although Class is understood in terms of an economic category and Caste (as in the Indian context, in terms of the vocation of a person based on birth in a particular ‘Varna’ or class) and are not the same, lower castes in the Indian context had very little access to the economic and the political system. They also did not have much access to higher education, and were generally occupied in menial tasks such as cooking, cleaning, gardening, serving, etc and did not have the same kind of privileges as those of the upper castes. The lower classes in the German and British context in the 19th Century were somewhat in a similar position and were fighting against Upper class domination, notions of nationalism and code of conduct. One of the reasons why Marxist methodology is used to understand caste oppression in the Indian context, is expressed by Gyan Prakash in “Writing Post Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives
from Indian Historiography”, where he says that the Marxist framework seems appropriate while understanding caste oppression and rebellion in India, mainly because Marxist thought (*existed parallel at the time the lower caste movement was taking shape in India*) (italics mine) and emphasized questions of political economy while raising “questions of production and political control to be of paramount importance” (Gyan Prakash). Furthermore “Marxists wrote contestatory histories of domination, rebellions and movements in which they accused others of biases and claimed that their own biases were true to the real world of class and mode of production.”

Gail Omvedt terms Jotiba Phule’s (Savitribai Phule’s husband) social movement as an ‘alternative socialism’, although different from traditional Marxism. He, i.e. Jotiba Phule “developed the rudiments of a new historical materialist theory of exploitation and liberation, which became a forerunner of the new social movements of the late twentieth century and of an alternative socialism.” (Reinventing Revolution 14)

Hence I find that the situation of lower castes in India in the 19th century is comparable to that of the lower classes in the 19th Century in the German context.

As mentioned in the Introduction, 19th Century India witnessed the spread of the British rule, and it in turn saw a rise in nationalist ideology, which sought to define boundaries for their women-folks through selective means. (Partha Chatterjee). These

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20 Cited in Gyan Prakash “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography” 175.

21 Although the official years of the arrival of Socialism in India could be termed the decades between 1922-1932, Omvedt is right in her observation about designating Phule’s activism as an alternative socialism for the above reasons. Socialist literature and thought, in the Marxist sense was developed by M.N Roy, Jawaharlal Nehru, Narendra Deva, Sampurnanand, Jayaprakash Narayan, Rammanohar Lohia and Asoka Mehta and the various trade union leaders. (Source: R.A. Prasad. “Socialist Thought in Modern India.” Meerut and Delhi: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1974.)
means sought to define Indian womanhood as been different and essentially spiritual in nature from those of Western women. This meant, as asserted by Vidyut Bhagwat, that Indian women had to refrain themselves from Westernization brought about through the rational means of science and technology. The new emerging middle-class (upper castes as understood in Maharashtra) set for themselves the values of chastity, self-sacrifice, submission, devotion, kindness, patience, love, orderliness, thrift, cleanliness, a personal sense of responsibility, practical skills of literacy, accounting, hygiene and the ability to run the household according to the new physical and economic conditions set by the outside world. These virtues were seen to be cultivated as against the common (lower caste) woman, who was coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous and subjected to brutal physical oppression by males. This was the understanding of the nationalist ideology in the 19th century Bengal (Bengal was colonized first), who contrasted the new woman of the indigenous nationalist ideology as culturally superior to the Westernized women.

The prose writings of Savitribai Phule and Adelheid Popp’s autobiography, are situated in comparable aspects of ideologies of working class and caste movements, and their concomitant ideas of gender emancipation and progress. Their agency as seen in thought and deed breaks some of the stereotypes associated with women from these classes and castes, while the socio-political and the historical circumstances will explain why the stereotypes came about.

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22 As cited by Partha Chatterjee in “Colonialism, Nationalism and Colonized Woman.” 629
Lower Class/Lower Caste movements during the Turn of the 19th Century in
the German context and Maharashtra:

Some background details of the socio-political aspects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the 19th century and the working class movement tell us more about Adelheid Popp’s initiation into the socialist party and her contribution towards its aims and her political identity as a socialist feminist. Although a part of Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Socialist party members were influenced by German leaders like Marx, Engels, Bebel and other writers. The Austro-Hungarian Empire consisted of several ethnic communities, the Moravians, the Bohemians, the Czechs, the Germans and others. Added to the presence of various ethnic groups, the process of industrialization brought with it questions of worker employment in industries and many work-related issues such as the amount of work, the duration of working hours and health–related matters. Industrialization also increased women’s employment in factories and their employment. Often the Habsburg Empire had to look for workers from elsewhere in case of inadequate technology and hence meant more work for workers. But on the other hand, with the emergence of new technologies, workers also got laid off. In general the condition of workers meant a lot of suffering since they had to keep up with long working hours, unhygienic conditions of work etc as well as a lot of suffering from several diseases including hunger, tuberculosis, typhus and other sexually transmitted diseases. Lack of protective measures in the factories, alcoholism, and long working hours lead to high death rate for children, unemployment for men and
increased work for women as cheap laborers. (Mommsen) Working class population found the measures taken by the then existing Liberal government and the later Christian Socials as inadequate to their problems.

This provided an impetus to the worker’s movement, which gained momentum under the leadership of Victor Adler, the founder of Austrian worker’s Socialist party in 1888. Other leaders included August Bebel, Otto Bauer, Max Adler and Karl Marx etc. The worker’s movement founded various organizations for the benefit of workers and considered questions of nationalism and national conflicts as bourgeois concepts. Their fight for Enlightenment consisted in asking for the establishment of libraries and newspapers for workers, (for eg. in 1887 the “Socialist” was established) and sickness insurance and less working hours. What set Popp apart from other working class women was her initiative and recognition of the problematic situation of women workers, whose cause remained underrepresented.

In her endeavors, Popp met with opposition from some of her male colleagues and did not receive any support from the middle class women’s organizations such as the League of Austrian women’s societies (founded by Margaret Hainisch in 1902). Furthermore, Popp’s sense of exploitation through capitalist means forms a part of the larger reform movement initiated by the Socialists. Popp was further influenced by an important socialist leader “August Bebel”, who wrote ‘Woman under Socialism’. Bebel’s foreword opens the fourth edition of Popp’s narrative. It was Bebel, who along with others argued for women’s Right to equal pay, regular occupation and that

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23 Information regarding the rise of the social democrats in multiethnic Austria is based on Hans Mommsen’s research in “ Die Sozialdemokratie und die Nationalitätenfrage im Habsburgischen Vielvölkerstaat. Wien: Europa Verlag, 1963.
overwork was hazardous to the female body (Gerstenberger 117). His views on women’s pay are worthy of note:

“Again the wages of women are, in almost all branches, considerably lower than the wages of men for the same hours. ….. Worst of all are the earnings in the tenements industry, for men as well as for women, but for the women it is still more miserable than for the men. In this branch, hours of work are unlimited; when the season is on, they transcend imagination. Furthermore, it is here that the sweating system is generally in vogue, i.e. work given out by middlemen who, in recompense for their irksome labor of superintendence, keep to themselves a large part of the wages paid by the principal. Under this system, women are also expected to submit to the indignities of other nature. (169,175 Women under Socialism)

…….. German legislation has not yet been able to rise to the height of really effective measures for the protection of working women; consequently, these are exploited by inhumanly long hours, and physically wrecked in the small factories, especially in the tenement house industry. Their exploitation is made all the easier to the employer through the circumstance that, the same as the men, they must organize in their trades, and there where also men are employed, they must organize jointly with them, in order to conquer for themselves better conditions of work. “(177 in Women under Socialism)

As much as the sense of legal intervention was heightened by the working class movement by men and women as well who took up the cause of the working classes in German speaking nations, the lower caste movement in India found certain aspects of the British rule welcoming to forward their cause. Here, however I don’t want to draw an analogy between the welcoming aspects of Marxist thought in the German speaking nations on the one hand and that of the arrival of the British on the other hand. In fact, much doubt has been cast regarding the role of lower castes in shaping the nationalist movement in India. But as Mrinalini Sinha has already highlighted, feminists often had to go against the concerns of the nation in order to forward their cause, as was true in the case of the lower castes in India. Moreover, the British missionaries educated the lower castes and also praised Jotiba Phule for his anti-caste hierarchy endeavors.
Hence although the lower caste movement has been criticized as been anti-national by elitist historiography, historians of lower caste movements have argued about recognizing the sources of lower caste people’s agency and contribution towards the nation’s progress and their later cause for Indian nationalism. In this regard, I find that the noted social historian Sumit Sarkar’s observations of significance:

“Movements by, or on behalf of, women and lower castes clearly raise severe problems for the application of the Saidian (reference to Edward Said’s theory on Orientalism) framework to the history of colonial India, for very often these did try to utilize Western ideologies and colonial law, justice and administration as major resources. If reforms like the banning of sati, the legalization of widow remarriage – measures brought about primarily through pressure from some Indians and usually after considerable official hesitation – are to be condemned as instances of surrender to Western values, we are really back to the crudest and most obscurantist forms of nationalism.”(Orientalism Revisited 247)

Precisely, nationalism carried a different meaning for the lower castes, since belonging to lower caste Varna and caste meant suffering from several injustices and no social mobility as well. Not only people of lower castes were ill-treated, but even their shadows were considered inauspicious to the other upper castes. Hence people of the Shudra Varna had to tie branches around their waists while entering an area inhabited by the Upper castes, so that their shadows did not fall on those around them. In addition, just in case if they had to spit or cough, they had to tie pots around their necks. Other injustices included denial of access to drinking water wells outside the village, often found in unhygienic conditions. Untouchability, i.e. coming in the way of or touching an upper caste person, only to be shoved aside with curses, in order to maintain their purity,
was a major factor that hindered communication between the upper and lower castes. Other kinds of punishments which were meted out to the Shudras, ranged from those of been buried alive, to that of making them stand on hot pans for minor offences. Thus the caste system maintained hierarchies between pure and impure, high and low, superior and inferior, intellectual and menial labor.

In addition, the lower castes especially felt a ‘lack’ in the system of education, which the process of ‘Sanskritization’, that is rising up in one’s own ‘varna status’( class status) through change of occupation, did not meet with much sanction for the lower castes. Being lower caste, meant several restrictions for women as well, such as not only confirming to the prerequisites of lower caste norms but also to upper caste norms for Hindu women. The arrival of the British signified several changes for people from all castes. Higher caste people, informs M.G. Mali, took advantage of their higher education and learning and came to occupy a certain proportion of clerical and professional positions at all levels in the British administration. Savitribai Phule’s husband, Jotiba Phule took initiative in fostering the demands of the lower castes, through a brilliant reversal of the so-called understanding of the ‘Shudra castes self identity.’ Like the working class movement in the German context, which profited from a scientific theory of social development and rebellion, developed by Karl Marx and others, the lower caste movement, profited from a critique by the then ruling British government, the missionaries and the work of local reformers like Phule and others. The American missionary, Reverend Ballantine of the Ahmadnagar Debating Society, in October 1855, founded this society to question and critique Hindu social practices in small towns and
villages around Ahmadnagar.24 Savitribai Phule’s husband, Jotiba Phule was one of the leading activists, theorist who developed an agenda for reforming and critiquing Brahminical oppression and society. Although, he took his insights from what the British missionaries and indigenous Brahmin reformers had to say, his critique assumes a unique position in the oeuvre of lower caste struggles, through its thought provoking and originary style and content. Jotiba Phule was the founder of the ‘Satyashodhak Samaj’ or the ‘Truth Seeking Society’ in 1873. Apart from this society, Phule also sought to bring about reform through his own newspaper (‘Din Bandhu’ and laid down 28 rules for their society).

Savitribai owes and learned a lot from her reformist husband, who believed in equality for women as well and was even willing to adopt and care for upper caste children. It was in this reformist atmosphere that Savitribai took birth.

**Comparable elements in “Autobiography of a Working Woman and Savitribai’s prose and poetry”:**

In the following, we will see how Adelheid Popp and Savitribai’s writing chalk out their own language, reflecting their psyche as well as those of their fellow class and caste mates. Both forms of writing were and are capable of reflection, confession and inducive to collective action. The comparison highlights these commonalities and thus breaks some of the stereotypes associated with women of these classes and castes.

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24 See Rosalind O’Hanlon’s research on lower caste protests in India and the role of the British. “Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in 19th Century Western India.” 73.
Adelheid Popp wrote about her emancipator ideas in some other works as well, but her autobiography, “Autobiography of a Working Woman” which was published in 1910, made a great impact in Socialist circles and appealed to the middle class sensibilities as well. Although an autobiography, where a character generally describes the development of his or her personality, Popp shows the remarkable ability to enlighten and inspire other working women like her to rise up against social injustices. Besides the personal, the political self emerged as a part of a larger mass movement and her story appealed to her other working class sisters. Popp’s writing shows an endeavor towards inclusion of her other working class sisters for a larger social movement. But defying the title of an ‘Author’, doesn’t mean denial of a subject position. Popp performs the daring feat of exposing her personal pain, for the collective good of her other sisters and hence has a cathartic effect on the reader as well. The anonymity in the title could serve several functions, such as that of modesty, self-protection, at the same time a warning message for the employer, who needed to control his exploitative tactics. Based on our larger understanding of the emergence of the Socialist movement and Enlightenment philosophy of that time, we get a sense of Popp’s sense of purpose. The I perspective, foregrounds a sense of urgency, reality and pathos and also evokes a greater sense of identification with her other working class sisters, who inspired by her courageous story and solutions, joined the “Arbeiterinnenbildungsverein” (Working women’s union) and helped run the newspaper “Arbeiterinnenzeitung” (Women Worker’s newspaper). The autobiography ran into six editions and was also successful in Europe and the United States. It formed an important element in dissolving the feudal State society and furthered the rise of the modern industrial State with the working class
as a political unit in the State apparatus.” (Gerstenberger 101) True to her work, mission, and integrity, Adelheid writes in the Preface to the third and the fourth Edition of her Autobiography 25:

“Ich schrieb die Jugendgeschichte nicht, weil ich sie als etwas individuell Bedeutsames einschätze, im Gegenteil, weil ich in meinem Schicksal das von hunderttausenden Frauen und Mädchen des Proletariats erkannte, weil ich in dem, was mich umgab, was mich in schwere Lage brachte, große gesellschaftliche Erscheinungen wirken sah. Ich habe mich nicht getäuscht, wie die zahlreichen Zuschriften bewiesen, die ich von Arbeiterinnen erhielt und die in meinem ein Spiegelbild des ihrigen erblickten. (20 in Jugendgeschichte einer Arbeiterin)

(“I did not write the narrative because I esteemed it of some individual importance, but on the contrary, because I recognized in my lot that hundreds of thousands of the working class, because I saw great social phenomenon at work in what surrounded me and brought me into difficult situations. I was not mistaken as is proved by the numerous letters which I received from working women who see in my lot an image of their own.”(13 in Autobiography of a working woman) 26

Since the time the first workers’ autobiographies came out in the 1890’s, Popp’s narrative, although modeled on the idea of a ‘male subject and plot’, served to inspire and be a model autobiography for the women of the proletarian class. It added to an extended term of literature, and was concerned like the worker’s movement was, with questions of culture and humanity. 27

Likewise, the way Popp’s agency is propagated through written words and encouragement towards mass organizations for women, Savitribai shows courage and

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25 I am referring here to the original version of the Autobiography in German which was the fourth edition, while the English translation of the autobiography was the third edition of its publication.
26 I am referring to the third edition of the translated version of the Autobiography of a Working Woman. Originally titled as “Jugengeschichte einer Arbeiterin”. (The story of the youth of a female worker) The American version of the autobiography appeared in 1913 in Chicago and was translated by E.S. Harvey.
27 Ursula Munchow. “Frühe deutsche Arbeiterautobiographien.” 13
innovation by questioning the meaning of the word ‘Shudra’ or the ‘untouchable’. We do not have any evidence of how far their publication went, but Jotiba Phule’s works enjoyed considerable attention and were even welcomed by the British.\textsuperscript{28} By making the real meaning of the word “Shudra” known, Savitribai instills a sense of worth and solace in the minds of her brethren and enlightens them towards collective action. Savitribai’s sense of purpose lies in educating lower caste women, so that they feel a sense of dignity in their vocation and rise up if they educate themselves by learning English. Like Popp, who recognizes the advantages of collective action and a scientific attitude towards the acquisition of Rights, Savitribai traces the historical roots of the ‘Shudra community’ and inspires them to conquer Brahminical hierarchy. The poem “Shudra Shabdacha Artha” talks about the meaning of the word ‘Shudra’, while the undertitle ‘Abhanga’ (devotional song or song of success) adds a religious note to its content. This note is also meant to shock the lower caste person from his ignorance and grievous condition which stops him/her from learning, knowing and awakening to a new acceptable condition of mind. The Abhanga is supposed to be a chant that offers solace to the injured and restless mind.

\textsuperscript{28} In a letter to her brother Savitribai mentions that a ceremony was organized to felicitate Jotiba Phule by the British in honor of his great work. (The letter appears in the volume “Women Writing in India.” Ed. Tharu and Lalitha. New York: The Feminist Press, 1991. 214.
The meaning of the word Shudra (Abhanga)\textsuperscript{29}

The meaning of the word Shudra! Means Native

........................................

The Shudras won over the Brahmins! The Brahmins of the English!!
The Real Shudras are wealthy! They were the original inhabitants
They were prosperous!!
Their names were Indian!!

Our ancestors were valorous! We are their descendants!! Yes We are!! (Kavyaphule) (22)

While both women aspire for ‘mass organization’, they are also aware of the objective aspects of the portrayal of their pain. The realistic description of their physical suffering shows traces of various trends in the depiction of the social conditions, adopted by Realist and Vormaerz writers in German prose such as ‘Lenau, Georg Herwegh and members of the Young Germany\textsuperscript{30}, who participated in the 1848 Revolution. Although modeled on the revolutionary aspects of their writing which also meant protesting against Prussian nationalism, Popp brings out aspects important from the women’s point of view--- mainly that of a lack of space for the

\textsuperscript{29} All translations of Savitribai’s poems from Marathi to English are mine, unless specified otherwise. Since the Marathi font was not easily available, I could not provide the original source of the writing.

\textsuperscript{30} Over 70 \% of the Prussian population was still working in rural areas in Prussia in the 1840’s, where peasants emphatically demanded the elimination of aristocracy’s remaining feudal privileges. In the months of April and May 1847, uneven demographic growth contributed to revolts and to 158 food riots in Prussia. The so called WeberAufstand took place in Upper Silesia in 1844. The Revolt was not provoked directly by the deaths of over 50,000 people who had succumbed to malnutrition related illnesses over the years. Instead, the abusive working conditions and frequent cases of child labor triggered the uprising and the demolition of small textile mills and of factory owner’s properties. In general, there were revolutions throughout most of Europe and these were against the upper classes. One of the victories that emerged from this was the eventual abolition of feudal dues. (Cited in “German Literature of the 19. Century.” Camden House, 2005. 70-72.)
girl/woman in a working class family. Her sense of alienation, not only experienced at home, but also at the factory sights and workplace tell us the story not only of her personal suffering but that of her other sisters. The description that follows shows a sense of claustrophobia that speaks of a ‘dehumanized’ existence brought upon women like Popp and others through their poverty and capitalist exploitation. The reader, from across caste and class barriers, is no doubt moved towards an emotional response, that was intended to be the first step towards social change” (Gerstenberger 109)


(“What I recollect of my childhood is so gloomy and hard, and so firmly rooted in my consciousness, that it will never leave me. I knew nothing of what delights other children and causes them to shout for joy—dolls, playthings, fairy stories, sweet-meats, and Christmas-trees. I only knew the great room in which we worked, slept, ate and quarreled. I remember no tender words, no kisses, but only the anguish which I endured as I crept into a corner or under a bed.”(Autobiography of a Working Woman16)

Avoiding the personal in the political unlike that in Popp’s Autobiography, Savitribai exposes the dehumanizing conditions meted out to the Shudra community, and the factors responsible for their fate. Inspired by the writing of Thomas Jefferson, the beginnings of various reformist societies in 19th Century India, lower castes in India felt drawn towards emancipator ideas that would free not only the lower caste men, but the women as well. Furthermore, it is also very likely, that Savitribai’s voice was unheard amongst the popular literature and the canon

31 Rosalind O’Hanlon researches into the various aspects of the Satyahsodhak Samaj, and lower caste protests in general, but shows no traces or links with the Socialist movement or other inspiring factors, behind its origins. Excluding the role of the British and the British missionaries, as main motivators for the lower caste protests in India, there is no mention of Savitribai’s work in her book titled “Caste, Conflict and Ideology. Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in 19. Century Western India”.

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in Western circles, since the majority of the Orientalists were from the bourgeois classes or had other interests that did not touch upon the problematic and the valorous aspects of lower caste women. Indeed, lower caste women’s representation of themselves and their agency, either through large organizations like the “Satyashodhak Samaj” (The Truth Seeking Society founded by Jotiba Phule), had a nation-wide reach, due to several biographies which were published in the last few decades. But since Savitribai wrote in the Modi script, and her writing was published by the ‘Sheela Press’ in 1854, followed by later publications---- the fact that they had limited appeal for the Western audiences follows from an inaccessible language----- which is one of the reasons why indigenous women came to be seen only as ‘helpless victims awaiting representation’(Mohanty). However despite, admittedly influenced by Western thought and concepts of freedom and Enlightenment, lower caste movement thought articulated by Savitribai shows a need for concepts of freedom of expression’ and access to better jobs, articulated in her own language and forms. These concepts, although borrowed, fought against rigidification of caste boundaries since the time of Peshwa rule (Chitpawan Brahmin rulers, who were defeated in the year 1827), a longing for King Shivaji’s rule (The Maratha king who was defeated at the hands of the Mughals, and was succeeded later by the Brahmins as rulers of the throne), and finally an imposition of Brahminical norms of purity, chastity, rites and rituals which resulted in a traumatic situation for the lower castes and made way for intellectual and political revolt.

An important correlation here is seen in terms of what the Lower classes in Britain and elsewhere had been fighting against----a recognition of the nature of oppression (lack of wealth, poverty, disease and education) and how grievous their circumstances were. Marx and Engels developed a theory of oppression that made a redressal of grievances, and supported the woman’s cause as well, while Jotiba Phule was helped in his endeavors by Brahmin friends like Govande and Valvekar, who also helped to establish schools for lower caste men and women. Savitribai historicizes the roots of this felt trauma, comparable to the unhealthy work conditions
of working classes in Britain and German speaking context of the time. Bold enough to state the ills of the Peshwa regime and to announce its death as well, at the hands of the British in 1827\textsuperscript{32}, the following prose compares and contrasts the changes in the circumstances before and after the end of the Peshwa rule. The kind of suffering that the shudra community underwent is similar to that of the lower classes in Turn of the century Austria.

**The Peshwa Regime**

Later the Peshwas came to power

By their ill-treatment, they scared the Shudras!

Carrying pots around their necks, in case they had to spit!

……So were the Shudras destined to doom

Never had any happiness, had to suffer

But no one cared for their plight!

Tortured the Shudra woman, these Peshwas

Which is why the English happened

………………

The English served to inspire the Shudras

They brought many lower castes together

And defeated the Peshwas

The Shudras brought in the English wisely!! (Bavannakashi Subodharatnakar 84)

\textsuperscript{32} Savitribai talks about the downfall of the Peshwas in 1827, while Vidyut Bhagwat’s article cites 1818 as the defeat of the Peshwas.
Both Popp and Phule make us aware of the role of the State in governing individual Rights. In the German context, the Liberal State which came to power in 1848 had to share their power with both the aristocracy and the imperial bureaucracy. The liberal Party comprised of middle class Germans and German Jews of the Urban Centers, and since they allowed only restricted franchise, they were often associated with Capitalism and imperialism. The 1880’s also saw an emergence of many groups like urban artisans, the anti-Semites, workers and Slavic groups, who formed mass parties to challenge the liberal hegemony. Very soon, the Christian Social Democrats followed path, and Karl Lueger, the anti-Semite Catholic leader became mayor of the Habsburg Monarchy. However, the Christian Socials failed to meet up with the demands of workers and meet with the problems of nationalist aspirations. The year 1906, saw half the industrial workers working for more than ten hours a day. This meant for women like Popp, exploitation of their labor and lack of care on behalf of their employer.

“Ich arbeitete wiederholt bei Beamten-gatinnen oder bei Angestellten kaufmännischer Berufe, wo die standesgemäße Lebensweise nach außen nur möglich war durch die Ausnutzung unserer Arbeitskraft.(38 Jugengeschichte…)…….. Die Krakenversicherungspflicht war damals noch nicht eingeführt.(45 Jugend…)"

(“I frequently worked for the wives of officials or the employees of commercial business who could only keep up an appearance suitable to their station by the exploitation of our labor (34) ………..
No insurance against sickness had then been started. (43 Autobiography of a working woman)
A similar tirade was seen to be made by Jotiba Phule against the Brahminical dominance, where Jotiba was tried to stop in his way from opening schools for the lower castes by the domineering Brahmins, who at the most felt that lower castes should be given only knowledge of the alphabets and not about other areas. In his endeavors to establish schools, Jotiba Phule was helped by the Europeans (reference to M.G. Mali’s biography). In addition to that, Phule and his friends resented the nationalist aspirations of the Brahmins, who also showed indifference to lower caste saints like Chokhamela and Gora Kumbhar, from the earlier ages. In response to these happenings, Jotirao wrote three major works and several prose pieces, which influenced Savitribai’s thought and proceedings. Like Bebel, who was the supporter of the woman’s cause, Jotiba Phule laid the founding basis of the lower caste movement and its aims. The Satyashodhak Samaj, for instance, sought to regulate the behavior of its members and uphold a certain set of values that would elevate them from their degradable position. The following books, for instance tried to trace a history for the lower castes, like Marx, Engels and Bebel, who tried to explain history in terms of class exploitation.

Jotiba Phule’s three important books “Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale”, “Priestcraft Exposed” and “Slavery”, sought to question the policies of the State. The “Ballad of Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale” seems to have influenced Savitribai’s verse (Shudra, Ya Shabdacha Artha”: “The Meaning of the word Shudra”)

33 The form of the ballad finds itself in German literature of the Biedermeier period and later in the Realist period. In the Beidermeier period so many Ballads were written that Schiller designated the year 1797 as the year of ballads, while following this period of realism there was an upsurge of what was known as the ‘cult of ballads’. For both the periods ballads had a different function. While the Biedermeier or the Kunstperiode forwarded the aesthetic education of the human being, the realist period aimed for nationalist aspirations and hence forwarded examples of great men from former periods. Jotiba Phule makes a similar use of the form of the ballad to build up on a history of the lower castes by forwarding an example of their great warrior king from the past, who through his courage and determination was able to oust the Muslims out of the land and was also known to treat his subjects well.
The above knowledge about Jotirao (rao is a word used to signify respect. Jotiba was his real name) Phule’s theoretical formulations is necessary from the point of view of understanding Jotirao’s position towards the colonial State and also the possible reasons why he needed the help of the British.

Like Phule, who tried to educate the lower castes about their sense of history and code of conduct, Popp sought to reform the minds of her working class sisters and deconstruct some of the ‘moral characteristics’ ascribed and associated with them. Through her critique of them, she sought to instill values that would help to elevate their moral standards and raise their esteem in society. Truly, Popp proved to be an efficient sister, who cared for the genuine good of working class women.

“Auch den viel verlästerten Leichtsinn der Fabrikmädchen lernte ich kennen. Gewiß die Mädchen gingen tanzen, sie hatten Liebesverhältnisse; andere stellten sich um drei Uhr nachmittag bei einem Theater an, um abends für dreißig Kreuzer einer Vorstellung beizwohnen zu können. Sie machten im Sommer Ausflüge und gingen studenlang zu Fuß, um die paar Kreuzer Fahrgeld zu ersparen. Das bisschen Atmen in der Landluft mußten sie dann tagelang mit müden Füßen bezahlen. Das alles kann man Leichtsinn nennen, wenn man will, auch Vergnügungssucht, Liederlichkeit, we aber hat den Mut dazu? (62 in Jugendgeschichte…..)

“I also learnt to know the much slandered levity of factory girls. Certainly some girls went to dances, some had love affairs; others took their places at three o’clock in the afternoon at a theatre, in order to be present at an evening performance, for 7 ½ d. They took excursions in the summer, and walked an hour in order to save a halfpenny fare. They had, in consequence, to pay for the breath of country air by having tired feet for the whole day. All that may be called frivolity, even thirst for pleasure or dissipation; but who has the courage to call it so?” (71 in Autobiography of a working woman)

Savitribai presents a similar critique of the Shudra community and motivates them to rise from their ignorance and blind beliefs. The poem “The Dependence of the
Shudras” talks about this urgency to an Awakening from a dehumanized existence. In her poem “Mother English”, Savitribai also tries to show that the Brahmins are capable of having vices that the Shudras must overcome by their good deeds. These deeds emphasized, along the rules of the SatyashodhakSamaj a formation of their own collective identity. Some of the critique points of the Satyashodhak Samaj included the following and are the same as those emphasized by Popp:

….. giving up drinking habits, (Popp’s father was a habitual drinker), habitual debt (Popp’s mother was often in debt and hence Popp needed to work), overcoming the reluctance to continue working hard when stores of grain were full after a good harvest, the holding of village tamashas, (lewd dancing by women and frivolity) with the drunken and lewd singing and dancing that accompanied them, gambling, prostitution (Popp mentions this in her experience at the factories, where factory girls used to flirt or give in to the sexual advances of the factory workers), quarrelsome, litigation and even the predilection of the cultivators for spending too much time gossiping and smoking with neighbors, less expensive marriages, (Popp emphasizes individual choice in marriage), abolishing the notion of child-marriages, widow remarriage and inter-caste marriage.(some of these been typical Brahmin norms).

**Mother English**

The empire of the Brahmans has burnt down
The wise English have become victorious
This proved to be an asset to the Shudras
The Laws of Manu have died…… mother English has arrived!! (Kavyaphule 29)

In addition to emphasizing changes in behavior that were looked down upon by the Upper Classes, Popp encouraged working women to come together on a common platform and ask for the right to vote. Through her endeavors, she was able to obtain the suffrage for women workers as well as have May 1 proclaimed as an international worker’s holiday. A striking similarity is seen in the Maharashtrian context, where May the 1st is declared as ‘Worker’s day’ even today. Owing to the efforts of these movements that working classes across the German and the Marathi speaking areas have acquired political Rights that recognize these free spaces. In this regard, propagandistic speech or provoking speeches proved to be of great importance. Gerstenberger designates Popp’s narrative aspects as sensational, and hence effective and affective. This kind of sensational literature based on the model of the sensational novel showed connections between femininity and suffering, (Gerstenberger) but served to use this femininity for masculine purposes. Here, masculinity also stands for standards set by the bourgeois class. This aspect further questions accepted standards and ideals of femininity and masculinity pertaining to the age and class of a historical time. Since working classes and lower castes were used to doing all kinds of menial work that men would also do, women from the lower classes and castes served to displace bourgeois and aristocratic notions of

34 The laws of Manu were ancient texts which prescribed code of conduct for women in general and were practiced by the Brahmans and other upper castes.
masculinity and femininity and acceptable standards of gender codes respective to the times. It is therefore likely, that bourgeois classes in the European context took cognizance of gender codes of the Upper castes (the Brahmin castes, namely) and used them to either model or deconstruct gender codes in their own lands. In building these codes, which was a mutual process (Partha Chatterjee’s essay…), each country had its own set of specific problems in dealing with other sections of their society. The following patriotic speech by Popp, similar to the slogan given out by Karl Marx and Engels “Workers of the world unite” goes against the military spirit of the times, and gives out the same message as that given out by Savitribai Phule.


(“Working Women! Have you ever once considered your position? Do you not all suffer from the brutality and sweating of your so-called masters?……. But how far does the wage itself suffice for such long, continuous work? …………

“Working Women! Show that you are not quite depraved and mentally stunted. Rise and recognize that men and women workers must join hands in a common bond of union. Do not close your ears to the cry which goes out to you. Stand by the organization which will also train women for the social and political struggle. Visit meetings, read workmen’s papers, become worker-conscious of the aims and various divisions of the Social Democratic party.” ( Autobiography of a working woman 108-109 in Autobiography of a working woman).35

35 Popp’s feminist manifesto is not the only encouraging one written by a woman from the lower ranks of the society of her times. There were other feminist manifestos appearing in the form of newspapers, lyric poetry and novels written by lower class women like Emma Döltz, Clara Müller Jahnke und Lu Märten. (See Source Gisela Brinker Gabler 257-260) The choice of this narrative fell naturally because of the its availability and the recognition of certain comparable elements with Savitribai’s prose and poetry.
The encouraging and provoking speech intended for lower class girls proved to be as inspiring as the poem written by Savitribai. Savitribai evokes the name of the Goddess Saraswati—who had to go through penance to acquire knowledge and becomes a guiding force for them in times of their need. (text cited below) The word prose signifies a concrete grounding in reality and a kind of a ‘mantra’ for lower caste girls who must get into the practice of learning, reading and ignore house work sometimes. Both women appeal to women and inspire them to rise up against injustices and towards Enlightenment. Here Mother, who is none other than Goddess Saraswati, says that if you want to maintain your humanness, then it is wise to study and educate yourself. “The Prose of a Collective Dialogue” (Samudayeek Samwad Padya) (Five girls together in five groups) made by Savitribai is worth noting:

**Prose of a Collective Dialogue (Five girls in five groups)**

*First Group*

This court belongs to Goddess Saraswati (Goddess of Learning)  
Let’s go (addressed to women) and see it  
Let’s go to schools and acquire knowledge  
Girls! Let’s go to school!

*******

*Fourth Group*

Wait for some time and let’s ask Mother  
Whether its play, or house-work, it will be she who will say  
It will be she who will advice

*Mother (reference to Goddess Saraswati) says:*

If you want to live with pride, go and study  
Man’s real piece of jewelry is education  
Go to school!  
First task is to study, second task is study  
If possible, accompany in sweeping, dusting and house-work  
First go to school
All Women sing together:
Let’s go to the court of Saraswati to learn
Let’s make the Goddess of Learning Happy and ask for a boon
Let’s break the chains of ignorance, poverty and slavery
Let’s free ourselves from the yoke of tradition
No will should persist to rest
Let’s be inspired towards education
Let’s take this opportunity
See the novelty of this new time
Women!! Don’t complain, don’t be lazy, let’s study
Let’s break the chains of slavery and tradition, Come!! (Kavyaphule 30-31)

The affinity in the content between Popp and Savitribai Phule’s prose is remarkable, as both women are able to challenge the epistemic privileges of the Upper Castes and Classes and generate a sense of solidarity. This solidarity is generated through a dialogue and collective prose, necessary for collective action. Black feminist writer and activist, Patricia Hill Collins notes in this regard

“Dialogue implies a talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object. It is a humanizing speech, one that challenges and resists domination, asserts bell hooks. For Black women’s new knowledge claims are rarely worked out in isolation from other individuals and are usually developed through dialogues with other members of a community. A primary epistemological assumption underlying the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims is that connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of the knowledge validation process.” (Hill Collins 202)

Just as connectedness formed an integral part of working class and castes in German and Marathi contexts, Popp and Phule find it necessary to emphasize norms of sexual code of conduct and chastity. By doing this they sought to elevate the honor of their sisters and hold high morals for them. They also tried to show that lower class
and caste women were equally capable of good morality and would abstain from prostitution and coquetry.

Both women show to their upper class and caste sisters that they are capable of genuine praise and love for the men in their lives. By depicting the support that Phule and Popp receive from men, they elevate ideals of manhood, held uncommon to their class and caste and which in turn serve to be ideals for these women and serve to lessen their exploitation. (evidence cited below) Popp uses the following emotive language in describing the support, she receives from her brother at a worker’s meeting, while Julius, her husband, is praised a lot for his loving guidance towards her.


“Er teilte alle meine Sorgen und meine Kümmernisse, er erleichterte mir meinen Weg wie er nur konnte. Manches persönliches gab er auf, um mir die Agitation unter den Arbeiterinnen zu ermöglichen. (99 in Jugendgeschichte)

“At some workers meeting at which I was present I met my eldest brother, and I was delighted to possess a fellow believer in a member of my family. Through him I now learnt to know many persons whom I had only hitherto admired at a distance.”(110 in Autobiography……)

He (Julius) shared all my sorrows and cares, he lightened my path whenever he could. He gave up many personal comforts to render possible my propaganda work among working women.”(124 Autobiography of ……)

Savitribai too is shown to uphold standards of chastity and loyalty towards her husband, unlike the popular misconception about the sexual mores of lower caste
women. Both women show that there is a place for love in their lives, which serves to surpass general objections against patriarchal imperatives. Both Julius and Jotiba attain God-like status, open to praise by men and women of all classes and castes.

**Composition on Savitri, Jotiba/ or An Ocean of Pearls**

“The person who gave Savitri her knowledge!!

I salute him, Jotiba!!

…Cares for the Shudra, gives them courage

A leader who proved valorous

It is to him that Savitri offers this verse!! (Bavannakashi Subodharatnakar 83)

What then could be some factors that served to undermine or discourage Popp’s radical spirit and agency, besides been hindered in her work through the State and the Upper classes? (Popp is sent to the prison once, for opposing the institution of marriage). Popp’s autobiography tells us about the strict opposition she met through her mother, who believed in certain standards of femininity, opposes her marriage to a man much older than she is and also pressurizes her to get married.

“Meine Mutter führte unsere Wirtschaft, aber in ihren festgewurzelten Anschauungen, daß die Frau ins Haus gehöre, vermochte sie nicht, ihre Verbitterung darüber zu unterdrücken, daß ich nicht ausschließlich beim Herd war…. Meine Mutter hatte sich gegen diese Heirat sehr gesträubt.(99 in Jugendgeschichte)
My mother managed our house, but as in her deeply rooted convictions the woman belonged to her home, she could not help expressing her bitter displeasure at my not keeping exclusively to my own fireside………. My mother had been very much against this marriage. (125 in Autobiography of a )

Other factors that hindered Popp’s agency and perpetuated prejudices against the working classes, could be the very few writings done by other working class women, and also that many bourgeois women like Clara Zetkin, Helene Lange, Minna Kautsky and Rosa Luxembourg, who took up the cause of working class women, and themselves met with ostracism.36 Popp herself was prompted into writing this work, which after it had approval from leaders like Bebel and others, was published by the Socialist Press. Not forgetting the fact that very few working class women could read or write well enough or had the courage to follow and understand Popp’s suggestions and cause, and bourgeois women readers looked at the sensational or the foreign aspects in these writings (Gerstenberger), Popp’s autobiography enjoyed a considerable amount of circulation and research. However, nowhere do we find any reference to working class or lower caste women’s initiative, in the autobiography. In addition to opposition from upper classes, Popp was arrested once for critiquing the then prevalent institution of marriage and was put into a prison under dehumanizing conditions. But she meets her ordeal with courage by comforting herself with George Herwegh’s (a Vormaerz poet’s) poem:

“Was wir begehren von der Zukunft Fernen?
Das Brot und Arbeit uns gerüstet stehn;
Daß unsere Kinder in der Schule lernen
Und unsere Greise neigt mehr betteln gehn.” (105 in Jugendgesichte)

36 See Ursula Muenchow in “ Neue Wirklichkeitssicht und politische Praxis. Sozialistische Literatur und Arbeiterinnenbewegung. 253
What do we desire of the distant future?
That we may be provided with bread and work;
That our children may learn in the schools;
And that our old people may not go begging”
(135 Autobiography of a working woman)

Savitribai Phule, besides having met with opposition from the upper castes (Brahmins), meets with opposition from her brother as well. In her letter to Jotiba, she mentions what she finds worth believing in, in her courageous husband and his cause.

“While we were talking one day, Bhau said, “You and your husband have rightly been excommunicated. You help the lowly castes like the mangs and mahars37 and that, undoubtedly, is committing sin. You have dragged our family name in the mud. Therefore, I want to tell you that you must behave according to the customs of our caste and follow the dictates of the Brahmins.”38

The above letter which expresses, Savitribai Phule’s brother’s criticism towards her husband and a general discouragement towards him is one of the many incidents that occur in her life. In reply to this strong sense of discouragement from her family member, Savitribai shows remarkable courage and sensibility in counter-arguing with him—held as uncommon to that of her class members. Remarkably, she describes and defines the ‘human’ again and feels that only the path of education can lead to an enriched understanding of the problems faced by her community. She replies:

37 Mangs and Mahars are the lowest castes, also known as the Shudra caste and were known to do menial work like cleaning, rope making, basket weaving, musicians and generally stayed on the outskirts of the village.
38 Cited in SusieTharu and K.Lalitha. 213.
“To refute his argument, I said, “Bhau, your point of view is extremely narrow and, more ever, your reason has been weakened by the teachings of the Brahmins. You fondle even animals like the cow and the goat. You catch poisonous snakes on the day of Nagapanchami and feed them milk. But you consider the mangs and mahars, who are as human as you, untouchables. Can you give me any reason for this? ........It was the possession of knowledge that gave the Brahmins their superior status.”(ibid)

Apart from this, Savitribai also had to meet with situations where she was pelted with stones and rubbish and confronted with disreputable language and physical harassment. These did not stop her either, instead she confronted this abuse with great courage and wise words.

“You aren’t throwing cow dung and rubbish on me, you are instead heaping flowers on me. This deed of yours is teaching me, that I should continue serving my younger sisters in the same fashion. May God bless you.”39

One certainly feels a sense of commitment by both women towards a difficult mission which meets with so much opposition, both from her family members and from society as well. This also explains why Savitribai’s works do not figure much in her times, or for that matter, in the working class literature and bourgeois people’s literature of her times. The other aspect of this not been discovered by the world at her times, are the number of books published by her in a different language and there not been many lower caste women, who read and wrote about their problems as well.

However, a letter written by Muktabai, a girl who studied at a school in Pune, in 1855 talks about the grief felt and experienced by the Mangs and the Mahars. The letter is worth mentioning here, since it talks about the atrocities committed by the Peshwas, which proved to be unfair for them as well. The letter shows remarkable agency and an understanding that is constitutive of a sense of injustice, contributing towards an overall understanding of what the lower castes had been fighting against.

“Do the merciless Brahmins, who strut around in their so-called holy clothes, ever feel even a grain of pity for us when we suffer so much grief on account of being branded as untouchables. We have to endure miseries because we do not have any money. O learned Pandits, wind up the selfish prattle of your hollow wisdom and listen to what I have to say. 40

This grievance and command against the injustice meted out by the Brahmins, as expressed by a lower caste girl creates a sense of empathy in a way Popp was able to generate amongst readers of all classes.

In many ways then, Popp’s narrative fits the bourgeois narrative of the German Bildungsroman, where the education of the hero is depicted towards cultivating aesthetic and other values, expected by the society of his/her times. The autobiographies of class-conscious and politically motivated workers made up only a small part of the numerous memoirs and confessions by members of the lower classes (including maid-servants, prostitutes and vagabonds published at that time), which had the intention of integrating these people into the ‘organic whole’ of the society. (H.J.

40 As cited by Tharu and Lalitha in “Women Writing in India”. 216. The letter was translated by Maya Pandit.
In that, Popp offers alternative images to working women of her times in a style theoretically similar to the communistic manifesto written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to the working classes all over the world. Popp however adds the gender angle, which is a lot different from the confessional memoirs or other kinds of content, which these narratives had to offer.

H.J Schulz questions the traditional reception or hermeneutics, regarding texts (by lower classes) in terms set by canonical texts written by bourgeois writers and intellectuals. This made access and analysis of texts written by lower class or socialist writers difficult as well as not acknowledged for their political, social, and cultural values propagated as per the times. In addition, since these were considered to be historical texts, it was generally considered to be of less lasting value as against recognized texts. (Schulz) This also meant that ‘recognized texts’ (generally those written by bourgeois intellectuals and with aesthetic qualities) made their reach into faraway lands, like India, while the unrecognized ones stayed within certain circles. Since the British were anxious to prove their righteousness and good governance, they also saw to it that only certain kinds of texts would reach their Indian reading audiences, which in the 19th Century meant the select few audiences of the intellectual Brahmin and other Upper castes. Each class had access to certain texts which had either been translated into Marathi by British Orientalists, or Indian writers who went abroad and saw only certain sections of the population. Added to this, there was the possibility that there were errors of translation and interpretation. It also depended upon the worldview of the translator and interpreters as to which aspects of reality were to be portrayed and which ones to be ignored. There exists therefore, a strong likelihood that
works written by Popp and Phule did not reach diverse audiences and hence their own people failed to take cognizance of them or did not read the right message in them.

Marathi literature, for instance had been rewritten and interpreted by British Orientalists after the arrival of the British in India in the 19th century. Prior to that the Sanskrit tradition was accessible to a select few elite. More so ever, since the early literature dealt mainly with popular oral literature of fables, ghost stories, adaptations of episodes from the Puranas and the Epics, never to be written down, more than prose, it was Marathi poetry from the 13th century onwards that got carried down the ages.

(Raeside and G.M. Pawar) Overall then, Marathi literature showed a greater accent on the oral tradition, which prevailed through times, but was also open to be forgotten with time. However with the arrival of the British, printing presses were set up by them which managed to preserve some of these oral traditions. Missionaries also did a lot of work of translating etc. However because of internal hierarchies imposed by the caste system, just as Jotiba Phule was ignored by the locals, Savitribai’s work too remained undiscovered till recent decades41. German feminists and western feminists in general would need to acknowledge that there were other issues besides the typical issues that reached their ears and that Savitribai and Popp have shown that the oppressed within their own culture can also add to feminism and the feminist movement in general.

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41 The Pune University’s women’s studies department is named after Savitribai Phule. (Pune is a city in Western Maharashtra, a state in Western India)
Chapter 2: An Agenda for women’s empowerment: in Louise Otto Peter’s “Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb: Blicke auf das Frauenleben der Gegenwart”( The Right of women to earn a living: Perspectives on women’s lives of the present” and Pandita Ramabai’s “The High Caste Hindu Woman”

This Chapter analyzes the comparable elements of two remarkable feminist writers and activists, also known as Mother of Feminism in their respective cultures, and sees to what extent a dialogue is possible between them. Known to take up the cause of lower class/caste women and that of bourgeois women of their respective cultures, their programmatic form of writing, and especially that of Pandita Ramabai, a woman from the Third world, was capable of reaching Western audiences, (including the United States.) Pandita Ramabai Saraswati Dongre’s “The High Caste Hindu Woman” (1887) and Louise Otto Peters’s “The Right of women to earn their living”: Perspectives on women’s lives of the present” (1866) show remarkable similarities in their sister-agenda for single, widowed and outcaste women in both German and Marathi cultures. Furthermore, the writing and personalities of Ramabai and Peters seem outrightly comparable, not only because of the choice of their genres for their feminist agendas, and their content, but also because both women showed the remarkable ability to keep their personal sorrows aside and to fight for the cause of their other suffering sisters.

42 Both Ramabai and Peters’ carved out feminist manifestos second to none, wrote extensively and identified problems of downtrodden women, which is why probably they came to be known as mothers of feminism.
Pandita Ramabai’s cause for the uplift of child widows, and other helpless high Caste Hindu women in colonial India:

Citing a sentence from the popular book “Society in America”, written by the Englishwoman and feminist Harriet Martineau in 1840, where the Englishwoman Harriet Martineau writes about the native women, Pandita Ramabai cites the sentence in her book “United Statesschi Lokasthithi ani Pravasavritta” or the “People of the United States”:

“Women are mere prisoners of men, like slaves.”

Meera Kosambi further adds to the passage, where the above sentence appears, a footnote that says that Ramabai intended to use Martineau’s sentence “Women are mere prisoners of men, like slaves” to plead for her cause for Indian widows during her stay in the United States where she spent several years studying the educational system and collecting funds for The American Ramabai Association and other organizations founded for the cause of the uplift of Indian widows.

If Ramabai’s remarkable ability of learning, intellect and aptitude to understand and grasp the problem of widows, child widows and other helpless outcaste women arose from her own personal situation and that of her family, the socio-political factors such as that of the presence of the British, the work of the Bengali and

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43 Pandita Ramabai cites this sentence in a passage which appears as mentioned in the book “The Peoples of United States”, rewritten and abridged by Meera Kosambi in her book “Pandita Ramabai’s American Encounter”, Indiana University Press. 167. Kosambi explains that the sentence “Women are mere prisoners…” appears as a part of a passage, which doesn’t figure in Martineau’s book. Ramabai intended it as a gist of Martineau’s argument. 254.
Maharashtrian social reformers and their inadequate measures, forced Pandita Ramabai to take matters in her own hands and seek radical measures, which made her famous in the annals of history and for times to come.

Born in a Chitpawan Brahmin family (1858-1922) as the youngest of six children to the couple Anant Shastri Dongre and Lakshmibai, Ramabai had to endure the misfortune to be the one of the three surviving siblings along with her brother Srinivas and Krishnabai, who were to later succumb to famine and disease, leaving Ramabai alone to fend for herself. Ramabai’s father, Anant Shastri Dongre was a religious reformer and believed in the education of women. He took painstaking efforts to educate his child-wife Lakshmibai in Sanskrit and other religious knowledge, and was ostracized for going against the norm of the times. It was Ramabai’s mother, Lakshmibai, who educated Ramabai in the ancient scriptures, religious knowledge and Sanskrit. Pandita, the title which was conferred on her in Bengal, upon been called to deliver lectures, meant someone of great learning and aptitude, and helped her later to gain access to other religious knowledge and subjects even across the borders of the country. At a time, when orphaned at the age of sixteen, having lost her brother and earlier her sister to disease, it was Ramabai’s ‘Calling’, to go on various educational trips abroad, where she was to learn new subjects, and gain new ideas that would help her care for her other unfortunate sisters. The British religious missionaries in Bengal, enabled her to gain access to England, where she taught Marathi in return for the education that she would receive during her stay there. If being a widow was not enough, life was cruel to her as after misfortune struck again and again. Her husband Bipin Behari Medhavi, a Brahma Lawyer, died of cholera, leaving Ramabai alone with a
daughter at the age of twenty-four. Ramabai felt the vagaries of being a widow with a child and with no stable support in life. An invitation from the United States came at the right time and opened new vistas for her. Ramabai spent two and a half years studying the educational system there and was able to make a name for herself by teaching Sanskrit. She was also able to gain friends as well, who were to later help her with her cause of widow uplift. It was here that she met her friend Dean Rachel Bodley, of Women’s Medical College of Pennsylvania, who supported her in her endeavor for widow uplift and also provided a lasting friendship. In addition, her travel abroad also exposed her to the writings of works of several feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Hannah More, Emma Willard and she also came to know about various colleges and universities in the United States, where women were allowed to be educated.

A brief glance at the condition of widows described in the “High Caste Hindu Woman” also tells us about what it meant to be a widow in pre-colonial and colonial India. The situation of widows in India was pitiable, especially for the upper caste widows, with not many resources to live on, and meant either death or a severe life of austerity and penance, as one of the two alternatives. The first alternative meant adherence to rules of purity and pollution. This purity had to be maintained through vegetarianism, teetotalism and tight constraints on women’s sexuality and code of conduct. Furthermore, widows were debarred from inheriting immovable property in the form of land, and their exclusion from the productive economy, ‘involved removal from public life to the domestic sphere of the home in the form of seclusion or purdah’ (Liddle and Joshi 59). Since widow remarriage was debarred it was up to the upper caste women to maintain ritual purity either through the second option: Sati or burning herself
on the pyre along with her husband or go by the ways sanctioned by the Shastras, if she refused to undergo Sati. The poor helpless widow, who chose to live by the Shastras was debarred from patrilineal inheritance, as sons were more valued than daughters.

In the Chapter on Widowhood in the “High Caste Hindu Woman”, Ramabai gives a realistic description about what constituted the idea of a body---- that too that of a widow’s body, as prescribed by God Manu and makes a mockery of the rules and regulations---- which an already suffering woman has to undergo.

“The duties of a widow are thus described in the code of Manu:--
“at her pleasure let her emaciate her body by living on pure flowers, roots and fruit: but she must never even mention the name of another man after her husband has died.” Until death, let her be patient of hardships, self-controlled, and chaste, and strive to fulfill that most excellent duty which is prescribed for wives who have one husband only.”Manu V. 157-158

“nor is a second husband anywhere prescribed for virtuous women: Manu V. “A virtuous wife who after the death of her husband constantly remains chaste, reaches heaven,. Manu V.162

“In reward of such conduct, a female who controls her thoughts, speech, and actions, gains in this life highest renown, and in the next world a place near her husband.Manu V.166. (98 High Caste Hindu Woman)

The above passage shows the ways in which a widow’s body was put to use, whereby her material and moral existence was viewed in fearful terms, so as to prevent any mishaps from occurring, lest she lets go of her chastity or makes a demand in the family’s property, etc.

The “High Caste Hindu Woman” was written in 1887 whilst still in India and was meant to be a “cry of Indian womanhood” abroad and locally. It was meant to collect funds for a widow’s home, where high caste Hindu widows, who had nowhere to go
were to be housed. Although the book was written in English, its first edition sold out ten thousand copies in 1888, before she left for the U.S in 1889, thus providing funds for her travel.

Although the ‘High Caste Hindu Woman’ lacked the language of feminism, Ramabai succeeded in ‘naming the problem’ \(^4\), claims Kosambai (Pandita Ramabai Through her own words 23). My contention here is that one cannot aspire for a correct definition of feminism, considering the time in which this great woman lived, not only for herself but for others as well and worked (as per Jayawardena and Offens’s definitions of feminism), to unravel the cause of other women’s suffering and radically do something about it to alleviate their problems. Today, if widows in India have the option of remarrying or leading normal lives like those of other women, it is thanks to the efforts of feminists like Ramabai and others that they are treated as human beings. Therefore, Ramabai’s feminism also speaks of humanitarianism and reformation of the age old ideas that did not make meaning in the times, in which she lived.

The book “High Caste Hindu Woman” had a remarkable international circulation and the American Board of Ramabai Association ordered a reprint of it with a brief background on Ramabai’s life and her work at Sharada Sadan in India. The American Ramabai Association pledged funding for ten years for Ramabai’s home in India and in conclusion, Juliet Andrews, Chairman of the Executive Committee wrote in praise of this remarkable woman in the preface to its new edition that appeared in 1901:

“Fourteen years ago God put into the hearts and hands of the American people the desire and the power to grant Ramabai’s prayer; to help inaugurate and carry forward

\(^4\) Ramabai was critical of Hindu doctrines, customs and patriarchy.
In a bold attack on the patriarchal system, Ramabai exposes the general attitude of the patriarchal father, as a result of which the helpless widowed daughter had no means of sustenance left if the father didn’t leave her some property or that if she herself was uneducated or didn’t have the necessary means of survival left for herself. This forms one of the central theses of her book, the “High Caste Hindu Woman”

“Fathers very seldom wish to have daughters, for they are thought to be the property of somebody else; besides, a daughter is not supposed to be of any use to the parents in their old age. Although it is necessary for the continuance of the race that some girls should be born into the world, it is desirable that their number by no means should exceed that of the boys. If unfortunately a wife happens to have all daughters and no son, Manu (Hindu God) authorizes the husband of such a woman to supersede her with another in the eleventh year of their marriage.” (High Caste 41-42)

From the above we see how patriarchy backed by religion (God Manu) sought to prescribe severe restrictions for women, and thus added to the predominant male ideology of her times. Both the patriarchal ideas and God Manu, who were challenged by local reformers then and by Ramabai herself sought to question and reform some of its tenets. “By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently. In childhood, a female must be subject to her father, in youth, to her

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45 Reference is to Pandita Ramabai’s work, as in the establishment of homes for high caste child widows, deserted wives, children of famine victims, etc, for which she was on a journey to the United States to collect funds.
husband, when her lord is dead, to her sons; a woman must never be independent.....”  (High Caste..85-86)

Finally having realized that some of God Manu’s tenets would not be reformed, that easily and also from pressure from the various missionaries,46 (Kosambi) Pandita Ramabai converted to Christianity and met with further criticism. But this conversion gave her access to new ideas and resources, which she would have never been able to gain, had she remained a poor helpless Brahmin widow in a staunchly patriarchal and orthodox society of her times.

Although Ramabai provides strong criticism about God Manu’s prescriptions for gender codes of the time, it is very likely that this source of authentic knowledge held the interest and horror as been referred to by German poets and philosophers, who sought to uphold the patriarchal biases prevalent in a distant society. This knowledge in turn became an ‘Other’ from which to gauge and base their own patriarchies and their own standards of civilization as well. Nevertheless, the comparable elements between the sufferings of German widows and Indian widows do serve to deconstruct this sense of horror and degradation felt by the Western world towards that of the Indian society.

Despite the neglect from her own community, Pandita Ramabai was able to carry on the mission of gathering funds through her writings, which were intertwined with personal and political experiences and contributed to the ‘realist literature’ of her times.

In addition, she did several translations, such as a translation of the Bible from the

46 It was Ramabai’s ambition to study medicine, for which she reached England in 1883, where her companion Anandibai Bhagat converted to Christianity on her deathbed. Ramabai was to discover that her deafness would prevent her from studying medicine. Furthermore, as she explains in her Autobiography “A Testimony” (18-21), she failed to find solace in Hinduism and Christianity offered her salvation and a great deal of hope for her current situation, which Hinduism couldn’t offer. (italics mine) Therefore she felt like converting. She was soon baptized, along with her daughter Manorama. (Pandita Ramabai through her own words. 9)
original Hebrew and Greek into Marathi, during the course of which she also wrote a Greek grammar in Marathi.” (Kosambi 12). In 1889, Ramabai returned to India, where she settled down with her daughter Manorama and founded a widow’s home “The Sharada Sadan”. In 1890, the Sadan was shifted to Pune, Kedgaon, for reasons of economy” (Kosambi 11). Apart from a home for widows, Ramabai also performed the noble task of housing the victims of famine in huts in the village of Kedgaon. Here she opened a new Christian institution, “The Mukti Sadan” (Home of Salvation). Mukti Sadan was followed by Kripa Sadan, a home for the blind, where blind women were given general education in Braille and were taught useful crafts, while still another home, looked after aged women. Thus Ramabai, while adopting ideas from the West, showed openness to western scientific innovation and used them for the goodness of the suffering woman’s cause. She was also able to supersede the stereotypical ideas of what ‘gender codes’ stood for in her times and do work that was capable of been done by men, as well as work for lower caste women. Hence, ‘gender’, as per Mohanty’s model doesn’t need to be a superordinate category, as it distinguishes women from woman, and succeeds in reinforcing stereotypes. In other words, Ramabai, worked for upper caste and lower caste/class women, children and for the general well being of her community effectively. A task, which meant that one had to surpass the constraints of her caste norms.

The “High Caste Hindu woman” was successful in its critique of Brahminical patriarchy and its treatment of women throughout the country. Uma Chakravarti points out in “Conceptualizing Brahminical patriarchy in Early India” with examples about the instances of Brahminical patriarchy throughout the ages and with specific mention of the
Bhagwad Gita, for instance, which outlines the collapse of the social and moral order, when there are leakages in the closed structure of marriages. Families are broken, rites are forgotten, women are defiled and from this corruption comes the mixing of castes (Bhagwat Gita I. 41-44). In order to prevent this from happening, women’s sexual subordination was institutionalized in the brahminical law codes and enforced by the power of the state. (ibid) Women were coerced into practicing strict law codes and code of conduct and the caste system supported or even coerced women into maintaining marriage and caste norms. Pandita Ramabai was able to comment on and criticize these forms of brahminical patriarchy, being a Brahmin herself and having married a man from some other community, thus providing a base for a theoretical model of a critique of Brahminical patriarchy.

Passages from the first part of the “High caste” titled ‘Childhood’ give us examples of her critique of cruel customs and mores throughout the country, and also show the felt need for lawful intervention from the British government as well as an inner reformation. The following passage regarding the way the girl child was killed in certain parts of Northern India, shows this lack and disregard for the weaker sex, and an awareness to bring about changes in other parts of the country. Here Ramabai shows an extraordinary sense of been a citizen of the country, or a nation that was to be India. Besides, she supplements the empirical evidence with statistical means, an aspect uncommon for women of her times.

“……who can save a babe if the parents are determined to slay her, and eagerly watch for a suitable opportunity? Opium is generally used to keep the crying

47 Uma Chkravarti “Conceptualizing Brahminical Patriarchy”. 274.
child quiet, and a small pill of this drug is sufficient to accomplish the task; a skillful pressure upon the neck, which is known as the ‘putting the nail to the throat answers the purpose.’” (53 High Caste). The Census returns of 1880-81 show that there are fewer women than men in India by over five millions. (55 High Caste)

Further awareness to stop and bring in reformation is made by a plea to the lawmakers, who however fail to bring in the necessary reform. It is here that Pandita Ramabai sees need for feminist intervention, which she is able to achieve only through the means of an international community of friends.

“Large expenses might be stopped by law, but a belief, deeply rooted in the hearts and religiously observed by the people for centuries, could not be removed by external rules.” (54 High Caste Hindu Woman)

Ramabai’s turning towards help from the western reformers, is explained by Uma Chakravarti in “Whatever happened to the Vedic Dasi”. The article argues for a more nuanced understanding of the reconstruction of womanhood as created during the colonial period, based on a few models of the right kind of womanhood and code of conduct for women from ancient times as the base for women’s behavior in the colonial period. Pandita Ramabai and some other women went against the norms and defied the ideal of what was been constituted as the ideal of womanhood despite the expectations of nationalist endeavors, and broke from tradition, thus questioning the way the past was been reconstituted for the purposes of the present. Ramabai, explains Chakravarti, (Whatever happened to the Vedic dasi? 71) herself felt frustrated by the attempts of local
religious reformers, who failed to practise the practice of child marriage. For examples, the great moderate leader Justice Ranade succumbed to pressure after his first wife died, and instead of marrying a widow, chose to marry a nine year old unmarried girl, thus disappointing and frustrating feminist reformers like Pandita Ramabai and others. However the charges of her conversion did not make Ramabai a stereotype of a Christian convert in India, as she was in Uma Chakravarti’s words:

“Ramabai was the butt of controversy both from Hindus and the British government whom she indicted for its ineffective plague relief measures in 1897. Even the Christian missionaries she worked with found her too difficult to contain in any system where she was required to submit to authority. Ramabai did not fit into any stereotype of womanhood, either Hindu or Christian.” (Whatever happened to the Vedic Dasi 72)

The very fact that Pandita Ramabai showed her originality by celebrating inter-caste marriages and letting widows attend marriages and other ceremonies, brought out the true reformer in her, in an age where mostly men were reformers. Even the British government failed to satisfy her hopes: “We cannot blame the English government for not defending a helpless woman; it is only fulfilling its agreement made with the male population of India. (High Caste 93). The following incident in which she married her widowed student Anandibai, to the reformer D.K. Karve (who founded a school for girls), by inviting fifty to sixty widows to the function further proves that by integrating widows into society, Ramabai was reconceptualizing widowhood and womanhood in a way most male reformers and British government (emphasis mine) could not think of. (The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai 328)
Louise Otto Peters and the cause of widows, single women and other bourgeoisie women:

Before I set upon the task of understanding and locating the comparable elements in the feminist agendas of these two remarkable women, let us see the co-relation in the personalities and their spirit, which still lives on today. Indeed Astrid Franzske and Gisela Notz raise the question about republishing “Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb” even today, almost 131 years later (1997 by Leipziger University Publication). They write in their afterword:


(We the publishers of this volume often felt and quoted from the Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb in the course of the past years, at conferences, whose framework dealt with the actual situation of women in professions and in private and public life. The Interest and surprise and the actuality of the “old thoughts” was often remarkable. The Book appeared to us to be as current today, just as it was so then. That is why we wanted to make it accessible to a bigger readers circle.)

Louise Otto Peters (1819--1895):-- was born into an enlightened and well to do family in Meissen on 26th March 1819, as the youngest of six children. Her father Wilhelm Otto was a jurist and believed in educating women and hence encouraged them to read newspapers, so that they would not feel the need to be driven to marriage out of
necessity. (Carol Diethe). Her mother was a seamstress. Unfortunately, like one of her
ever sisters, Louise’s mother succumbed to tuberculosis, and five months later, Louise’s
father died, leaving her orphaned at the age of seventeen. Left with only two other
surviving sisters, it was Louise’s Uncle Otto Lindner, who acted as a guardian to the
Otto sisters, until a new law was enforced in Saxony that freed single women from
having a male guardian. (Diethe) Like Pandita Ramabai, Louise was trained in theology
where a student of theology taught a mixed group of students. Since the cut off age for
girl’s was fourteen, Louise’s private education would have come to an end, but upon her
request continued for another year. This fact of limited education because of being a
woman was to affect Louise’s outlook towards women’s education and felt need for
reform in the education system for women. Like Ramabai who was taught Sanskrit by
her mother, Louise’s mother too initiated her into a reading habit, which exposed her to
the ideas of Schiller, Hegel, Walter Scott, Jean Paul as well as women writers such as
Henriette Hanke and Caroline Pichler. Besides reading, Louise also took interest in art,
music, poetry and was to write several poetic compositions of her own. She was to meet
her fiancé Gustav Mueller, only to watch him die later. Later Louise married Auguste
Peters, who too unfortunately was to die in 1864.

Despite coming from a bourgeois family, Louise did not lose track of the
sufferings of her working class sisters and brought out their plight in her monumental
novel “Schloss und Fabrik, in 1846, which talks about the condition of factory workers
in the town of Oederan. But what made her more famous was her programmatic writing
of the “Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb”, which she started writing in 1843, only to have it
published much later, with difficulty, in 1866.
Like Ramabai, Peters had many accomplishments. Besides being a journalist, she was able to pioneer the “Frauenzeitung” (Women’s newspaper) which was first published in April 1849 and ran the caption: Recruiting women Citizens for the Realm of freedom”. This showed a greater awareness on behalf of one of Germany’s leading feminist, who was determined and responsible enough to have women as citizens develop freely as human beings.

If not the newspaper, then The “Allgemeiner deutscher Frauenverein” (General German Women’s Society) was founded in 1865, which was pioneering the German women’s cause keeping in line with the international conferences mentioned in Bonnie Anderson’s articles, where German, French, English and American feminists were meeting for conferences. Although there is no mention anywhere in the secondary sources, a leading feminist like Louise Otto Peters must have greatly benefitted from these joint collaborations and sought inspiration regarding the formulation of several of her writings. She was one of the few women, who were to earn her living through her writings, and devoted herself to the cause of women’s uplift with the same zeal as that of Pandita Ramabai.

What were some of the motivations behind the seminal work the “Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb”? Besides being a part of the larger feminist/women’s movement of the times, Peters like Ramabai wanted a structural change in the system of the household. The bourgeois German household did not produce its own consumer goods, but purchased and stored raw or semi-finished products which would then take a great
deal of time to process\textsuperscript{48}. If the family was well off, then they could afford to keep a servant for menial work. Women and girls in the family were supposed to be doing housework and raising children and work towards the general well being of the family, required of the family as an institutional category. Similar to the Indian situation, the women’s sphere consisted of the three K’s (children, church and kitchen) and other activities permitted were those of been part of organizations such as charitable institutions, providing care for the sick and prisoners of war, thus doing occupations that suited the innateness of their natures and stopping themselves from providing competition to men and avoiding their areas.

Peters, does use the phrase ‘das ewig weibliche’ (a phrase from the last part of Faust 2)\textsuperscript{(} she uses it in her foreword to the work “Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb—which means the forever feminine, but doesn’t imply women’s confinement), since as it appears in her writings, that widows, single women and even married women confined to their bourgeois households, suffered not only from the lack of financial worth, but also from lack of dignity and self worth, as they were confined to the private sphere of the family and hence suffered from lack of support or were dependent on their spouses.

Remarkably, the way Pandita Ramabai felt the lack of proper laws regarding outcaste and helpless women, Peters too suffered from the injustice meted out by unjust divorce and property Rights for women. Evidence to this is the law minister Savigny’s (1845) quote:

\textsuperscript{48} The above observation made by Peters is explained by Ute Frevert “Women in German History” about how women in the growing middle classes had to make do with appearances, whereby they were relegated to the private sphere of the family and were barred from doing any kind of meaningful or paid work, leaving them feeling despondent and with a sense of purposelessness. 67- 68


“The importance of the woman lies mainly in the ethical and sexual purity. The loss of both implies the loss of her honor, as well as the marital and homely peace and abandoning of child-rearing duties. In many cases the break of marriage by the man is not likely to undermine the honor and peace of the house and the momentary slip of the man is forgiven lightly and can be appeased easily.

Upon this statement, this outstanding woman had to say:

„Die Würde der Frauen ist keine innere, die überall sich gleich bleibt, sie ist nur eine äußere, an die niemand mehr glaubt, sobald der für ihre Aufrechterhaltung nötige Apparat: häuslicher Herd, Familie und Geschlechtsgenossinnen nicht mehr an ihrer Seite ist!

Die gerühmte Sittsamkeit der deutschen Mädchern und Hausfrauen erscheint sonach als nichts Anderes als das Resultat eines stets auferlegten Zwanges—im schlimmeren das erzwungene Produkt einer fast unerträglich befundenen Sklaverie (…) Es bürgt keineswegs für die Sittlichkeit einer Nation oder Gesellschaft, wenn man in den natürlichen und einfachsten Dingen etwas Anstößiges findet.50

("The worth of the woman is not an inner worth, that remains the same everywhere, it is only an outer worth, one which no one believes, as soon as the other apparatus that are known to sustain her such as : the household, gas stove, family and female comrades are not to be found on her side!

The customs that are considered to be appropriate of women and girls are nothing else than the result of a continuously applied compulsion--- in worse cases, the product of an unbearable slavery.

In no way does it suit the ethics of a nation, when one finds the most offensive and repulsive things in the most natural and simple things of nature.")

Oriental elements surface in Peters’ perception of the faraway east, and to combat such an occurrence in the German scenario, is one of the aims of this


50 Ibid 175.
dissertation. The following observation about the rites of the Indians, right at the beginning of the work, shows a marked urgency that seeks to stay away and protect the ‘own’ from the dangers of the uncanny. Here we also come across what Lata Mani has to say in her book “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in colonial India”, as to how the satidaha (woman who is about to go Sati) has no say in what she has to undergo and her subject status is totally ignored. Her objectification comes about through multiple discourses, often marginalizing the widow and her pain.

“Mag immerhin das Weib in dem Verlust ihres Geliebten oder Gatten den Verlust ihres Glückes beklagen--- aber sie muß die Kraft und Fähigkeit haben, an einen anderen Lebenszweck sich hinzugeben. Wäre es nicht so, verweigerte man ihr diese Möglichkeit, verschließt man ihr jeden anderen Beruf—dann allerdings wäre der Brauch der alten Inder, die Witwe über dem Grab des Gemahls zu verbrennen, eine weise Maßregel gewesen, deren Abschaffung sehr zu bedauern, dann müßte man es billigen, wenn jede verlassene Braut zur Selbstmörderin würde. Hinweg mit diesen schauerlichen Bildern, welche doch nichts sind als die Konsequenzen verkehrter Lebensanschaungen und Gewohnheiten! (28)

(If a female were to cry over the loss of her lover or her husband, but she must have the energy and the capability to think about an other purpose for life. If this were not to be the case, if one refused to give this possibility to her, and closed the option of any kind of occupation for her---- then of all that remains would be the custom of the old Indians, which has become a wise rule now, about burning the widow on the grave of the dead husband, and about whose abolition one is regretting much, then there needs to be the approval that every left out bride becomes a self- murderer. Away with these horrifying pictures, which are nothing but the consequences of wrong ways and habits of looking at life. (28))

The above passage shows that though Peters is informed only about a partial view of what were the real happenings about this grave custom in India. She is uninformed about the role of local and religious reformers, who were trying to abolish sati. Peters fails to have a deeper inquiry into the ‘otherness’ of the indigenous woman, thereby showing that patriarchal contructions are not the same everywhere. There is no
evidence about the voice of a widow in her understanding of the native Indian woman and the terms ‘wrong ways and habits of life’ show a moral degradation of a people. From this we also learn that it also depends upon who the source is from whom the knowledge about Oriental women is been obtained.(in this case the newspapers, salons, women’s conferences and local patriarchy of the times or word of mouth). Both Peters, and Pandita Ramabai herself, (who does acknowledge sati, but felt that there were other ways of sustenance), share the view that there are other ways of leading life after widowhood —such as Peter’s rightly calls for, saving the widow through “Erwerb”(occupation) and “Shelter”( in Ramabai’s terms).

These two works are comparable, even when some of the issues don’t coincide. From the following evidence, we will see that common to women, especially widows across two different cultures was the fact of their oppression, powerlessness, marginalization and material poverty. Upper caste Hindu widows, child brides suffered from indignities in ways, widows, single women and bourgeois women in German society did not suffer from. What is common to both is that two brave feminists are taking up their cause and theorizing about it, and turning ‘oppressed women/widows’ into subjects of political attention. More so ever, since both works do not bring in any personal polemic (Joseph Heinrich in Nachwort to Peter’s Das Recht der Frauen)51, but are objective about their agenda (through their programmatic style), these women rise above normal subject status of women of their times, but, at the same time, their appeal

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51 Joseph Heinrich’s Nachwort (afterword) heaps praise upon this work, saying that the work is a product of long reflection, peaceful consideration and many observations. It (the work) tries to clear up many prejudices that were been said against it. The work doesn’t try to take sides or hurt anyone, it gives up on personal polemic and is to the point. That is why it was worth reading. (Afterword to Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb 126)
to the welfare state and their deed for other more suffering sisters, makes them one amongst many ‘women’, and their works readable and accessible to many.

Comparable elements:

As mentioned previously, the German household was characterized by strict and rigid boundaries between that what was permissible for men and what for women. There was rigidity as far as household rules were to be observed and followed. The gender divide made itself evident, when a son, who was supposed to bring in accolades was born, while a daughter was supposed to be not of much use, as sons helped preserved property, while girls were to be given away along with some dowry. This patriarchal- economic structure prevailed for long in Germany, and it was here that Peters sought some change:

„......wird fast allgemein die Geburt eines Knaben für ein größeres Glück angesehen als das eines Mädchens—die Taufe wird dann mit dem dieser Anschauung entsprechenden Pomp gefeiert. Da es sich dabei um die Fortsetzung des Familiennamens handelt, so mag in dieser Beziehung die Sache ihre Berechtigung haben, aber auch wenn schon ein Stammhalter da ist, werden die Knaben gewöhnlich willkommener geheißen als die Mädchen—oder wenn dies einmal bei unbemittelten Familien nicht der Fall ist, so tröstet man sich über die zahlreichen Töchter nur deshalb, weil sie nicht soviel kosten, wie die Söhne, d.h. man beabsichtigt gleich von Anfang an, nichts an sie zu wenden. ..
In den Mädchen erblickt man eine Stütze im Hauswesen, indes die Knaben frei herumschwärmen dürfen…. (52)

(It is considered to be a great luck to have the birth of a boy than a girl in the family--- the child is then baptized with a great pomp. Especially because it concerns the continuation of the family name, so this thing acquires more significance in this regard. But also when an heir is born, the sons are more welcome than girls. But if in case of not so well to do families, if there aren’t any
sons, so one consoles oneself with the fact of numerous daughters, that they don’t cost much, like the sons, that is, one intends not to turn anything to them right from the beginning. One considers the girls to be a support for household work, while the boys are allowed to move around freely.)

On similar lines, Pandita Ramabai recognizes and exposes the gender biases of a patriarchal society of her times, thus showing that like in the Prussian society, sons were more valued in the Indian society because there was religious sanction to patriarchy. The Chapter on ‘Childhood’ exposes this gender bias:

“A son is the most coveted of all blessings that a Hindu craves, for it is by a son’s birth in the family that the father is redeemed. If a man is sonless, it is desirable that he should have a daughter, for her son stands in the place of a son to his grandfather, through whom the grandfather may obtain salvation. In Western and Southern India when a girl or a woman salutes the elders and priests, they bless her with these words—‘mayst thou have eight sons, and may thy husband survive thee’ (40-41)

“In a home shadowed by adherence to cruel custom and prejudice, a child is born into the world; the poor mother is greatly distressed to learn that the little stranger is a daughter, and the neighbors turn their noses in all directions to manifest their disgust and indignation at the occurrence of such a phenomenon.”(45)

The presence of the binaries that emerges from the above comparison, shows how one half of the two sexes were valued over the other and how the situation of women, especially since birth onwards, was predetermined to be molded in certain ways. Anatomy was meant to be destiny. Peters and Ramabai, through a shared concern that emerged through reform worldwide, express concern over this devaluation of the girl child. Peters expected society to change perceptions by making men unlearn their sense of superiority by the very fact that their manhood had oppressive consequences for certain women. Just as Mary Wollstonecraft in her “Vindication of the Rights of Women” (1792)
expected gender role equality and a revolution in manners for both sexes, Peters argued for the same. She wrote:

“Es wäre also ebenso nötig, auch der Mann bereitete sich auf die Pflichten vor, die er einer Frau und seinen Kindern gegenüber übernimmt, wie das Mädchen, und es wäre dann noch viel berechtigter, dem ledig bleibenden Mann vorzuwerfen, daß er eine seiner Lebensaufgaben nicht erfülle, wie dem ledig bleibenden Mädchen, denn bei dem Mann ist jenes eine Sache der freien Wahl und bei diesem nur zu oft Sache des Geschickes.” (21)

“(It is therefore necessary, that the man also prepared himself for duties that he would have to perform towards his wife and children, just like a girl would have to. It would be more justified to reproach the single man, that he isn’t fulfilling one of his life’s duties, just as one would reproach a girl who is single, because for the man it is a question of free will and a matter of talent.)52

For both women, it is necessary to bring about changes in the system of ‘patriarchy, manhood, and certain customs and privileges associated with being a man. Although patriarchies differ structurally in various societies and historically, Pandita Ramabai sees room for critiquing the system of polygamy, where a man has the upper hand of marrying as many wives as he likes. Polygamy also increased the chances of women’s miseries, since the death of a single husband meant widowhood for many wives. Since polygamy as a system is more ‘patriarchal’ in nature, the two patriarchies, (Marathi and German) if not similar in degrees or form, are similar in structure. From these contentions, regarding the system of patriarchy, it seems worthwhile to bring in Sylvia Walby’s and Veronica Beechey’s definitions of the term patriarchy and their relevance to first wave feminism. Beechey’s standpoint, (who has been discussed in the

52 All the translations in this Chapter from German to English are mine; unless specified otherwise.
introduction) says that it is essential to situate a satisfactory theory of or concept of patriarchy to be historically specific and to analyze the forms specific to institutions that are situated in the overall realm of capitalist mode of production and finally to understand gender differentiations as ‘inseparable from the form of organization of class structure’ (80). On similar lines, Sylvia Walby adds more to the theories of patriarchy which deal with historical and cultural variations. She opines that there are six structures that make up the system of patriarchy: paid work, housework, sexuality, culture, violence and the State. The interrelationships between these criteria create different forms of patriarchy. (Walby16). As per these criterion then, we see that the forms of patriarchy that Peters and Ramabai talk about differ in their content and lead to differing forms of violence. Culture emerges as the main factor of patriarchal oppression common to both and needs reform. From the following description that Ramabai gives regarding polygamy, the reader notices the words “Eastern Indian” and hence is not able to reinforce the generalization that polygamy was prevalent in the entire country and that women were mere victims of this system.

“The Brahmans of Eastern India have observed successfully their clan prejudice for hundreds of years despite poverty; they have done this in part by taking advantage of the custom of polygamy. A Brahman of a high clan will marry ten, eleven twenty or even one hundred and fifty girls. He makes a business of it. He goes up and down the land marrying girls, receiving presents from their parents, and immediately thereafter bidding good-bye to the brides; going home, he never returns to them. The illustrious Brahman need not bother himself with the care of supporting so many wives, for the parents pledge themselves to maintain the daughter all her life, if she stays with them a married virgin to the end. (50)
Having identified patriarchal biases respective to their own cultures, both feminists seek reformation in the way daughters were to be considered--- not merely as being to be given away in marriage, in order to fulfill the requirements of the three K’s (children, kitchen and the church), but that there was a need for a revolution in the ‘private sphere’ of the family as well. Unlike the commonly held notion that first wave feminists (1850-1930) mainly fought for women’s Right to education and Right to suffrage in the West, we have evidence here that shows that Ramabai and Peters also fought for a reform in the relation between partners and the way daughters were to be brought up. A comparison of the above and following passages shows that gender seems to be a learned trait, an ideology that attributed femininity to nature. Moreover, psychoanalytic feminism shows that this learning for a purpose prepared these women only for certain type of lifestyles, which left them in mourning, in case they were to lose their husbands, or simply were not to get married at all. Peters argues against seeing the girl child as the only means to be brought up in ways that would prepare her for marriage. She protests against this ‘femininization’ of women and argues in a rational way that there are other alternatives open before women.

“Aber eine noch größere Zahl von Ehen wird nur geschlossen, weil die Eltern des Mädchens froh sind, ihre Tochter “versorgt” zu sehen oder sie überhaupt los zu werden. Wie viele Eltern sind imstande, mehrere großgewordene Töchter standesgemäß, d.h. im süßen Nichtstun oder doch in einer nichts einbringenenden Geschäftigkeit und mit dem immer sich steigernden Luxus, gleichmäßig wachsenden Toilettenbedürfnissen zu erhalten? Darum wird es für wünschenswert und notwendig befunden, daß ihnen sobald wie möglich ein Mann diese Sorge
abnimmt. Das Mädchen fühlt sich überflüssig im Hause geworden, es fühlt, daß es den Ihrigen eine Last ist, ja noch mehr, es denkt mit Angst daran, was die Mutter beginnen wird, wenn der Vater, der Versorger stirbt, was dann aus der ganzen Familie werden soll.”(23)

(But still a large number of marriages are convened, because the parents of the girl are just happy to see their daughter “taken care of” or simply to be rid of. How many parents are in a position to support their growing daughters, who do not bring in any activity, but only increasing luxury and need for dresses? That is why it is worth wishing for and found to be necessary, that a man takes away these worries from them as soon as possible. The girl feels superficial in the house and as though she is a burden to them. She feels scared as to what the mother would be doing, in case the father the provider, were to die and what would happen to the entire family.)

Ramabai gives voice to similar concerns. Peter’s above passage and what Ramabai has to say about the upbringing of the girl child shows similarities in terms of the kind of fates that girls/or women were to follow, once they were born. Ramabai expresses a similar anxiety regarding what were to happen to girls brought up in certain ways that only prepared them for married life. Both Peters and Pandita Ramabai escaped from a rigid or a conventional upbringing and revolted against these forms, which seemed to be inadequate to them as per the times in which they existed. As Ramabai shows what cruel fate awaits a widow in the Indian society, the following passage shows complete agreement with Peter’s views cited in the above passage:

“Having little or no education, except a few prayers and popular songs to commit to memory, the little girls are mostly left to themselves, and they play in whatever manner they please. When about six or seven years of age they usually begin to help their mothers in household work or in taking care of the younger children. I have mentioned earlier the strictness of the modern caste system in regard to marriage. Intelligent readers may, therefore, have already guessed that this reason lies at the bottom of the disfavor shown to girls in Hindu homes. From the first moment of the daughter’s birth, the parents are tormented incessantly with anxiety in regard to her future, and the responsibilities of their position. Marriage is the most expensive of all Hindu festivities and ceremonies. The
marriage of a girl of a high caste family involves the expenditure of two hundred dollars at the very least. (48-49 High Caste Hindu Woman)

It is remarkable of these women to protest in a time, where books like Rousseaus’ “Emile” and Johann Heinrich Campe’s Väterlicher Rat für meine Tochter”, Adolph Freiherr Knigges “Über den Umgang mit den Menschen” had been published in the German context and “Yadi Dharmasthapana (code of conduct for women, widows and pre-pubertal women in Sanskrit) and “God Manu’s codes were published in the Marathi context, to rise above these sermons and offer an agenda of their own.

A brief discussion of these works is important from the point of view of understanding what Peters and Ramabai had been protesting against. Adolph Freiherr Knigges “Über den Umgang mit Menschen” was first published in 1788 and offers us thought about inter-personal relations and how to behave in various situations. Keeping the goals of Enlightenment in mind, it was important to cultivate a certain amount of flexibility,(Geschmeidigkeit) socialness(Geselligkeit), pliability(softness), tolerance( Duldung), the ability to deny at the right time( zu rechter Zeit Verleumdung), to guarantee social success. 53 Knigges’ position about women is rather conservative and stereotypical. For eg:

“Auch die edelsten Weiber haben mehr abwechselnde Launen sind weingier gleichgestimmt zu allen Zeiten, als wir Männer…..(198)…. Die Frauenzimmer finden ein gewisses Vergnügen an kleinen Neckereien, mögen,

53 Cited in Nachwort (afterword) to Knigges “Über den Umgang mit Menschen” 465.
selbst denen Personen, die ihnen am teuersten sind, zuweilen unruhige Augenblicke machen.” (199 Über den Umgang mit Menschen)

(The most noblest of women have always changeable moods and are less well balanced at all times, than we men are, (198).... The ladies find a certain amount of satisfaction in small playfulness, even with the people who are the most dear to them, and at times create restless moments (199).....

On similar lines, Rousseaus’ “Emile”, which appeared first in 1762 and was burned then, offers a general treatise on man’s general education, and also depicts an essentialist picture of woman and what womanhood means. He sees woman as different from man and complementary to him. In Book V of his “Emile”, he paints a too general and stereotypical picture of women. Rousseau’s work Emile is important for the German context as it influenced German educational thought and ways of upbringing. Rousseau writes:

“..... it follows that woman is made specially to please man. If man ought to please her in turn, it is due to a less direct necessity. His merit is in his power; he pleases by the sole fact of his strength. This is not the law of love, I agree. But it is that of nature, prior to love itself. If woman is made to please and to be subjugated, she ought to make herself agreeable to man instead of arousing him.”

Likewise Joachim Heinrich Campe’s “Väterlicher Rath für meine Tochter”, first published in Braunschweig in 1789, gives the following advice to his daughter: As per this advice, daughters need to be good mothers, housewives and supervisors, not only for the well-being of the family and children, but also for the well being of the state. In Campe’s words:

54 I am referring to the translated version of Rousseau’s Emile. Translated by Allan Bloom. 358.
Ihr seid wahrlich nicht dazu bestimmt, nur große Kinder, tändelnde Puppen, Närinven oder gar Furien zu sein; ihr seid vielmehr geschaffen – o vernimm deinen ehrwürdigen Beruf mit dankbarer Freude über die große Würde desselben! – um beglückende Gattinnen, bildende Mütter und weise Vorsteherinnen des innern Hauswesens zu werden; Gattinnen, die der ganzen zweiten Hälfte des menschlichen Geschlechts, der männlichen, welche die grössern Beschwerden, Sorgen und Mühseligkeiten zu tragen hat, durch zärtliche Theilnahme, Liebe, Pflege und Fürsorge das Leben versüßen sollen; Mütter, welche nicht bloß Kinder gebären, sondern auch die ersten Keime jeder schönen menschlichen Tugend in ihnen pflegen, die ersten Knospen ihrer Seelenfähigkeiten weislich zur Entwicklung fördem sollen; Vorsteherinnen des Hauswesens, welche durch Aufmerksamkeit, Ordnung, Reinlichkeit, Fleiß, Sparsamkeit, wirthschaftliche Kenntnisse und Geschicklichkeiten, den Wohlstand, die Ehre, die häusliche Ruhe und Glückseligkeit des erwerbenden Gatten sicher stellen, ihm die Sorgen der Nahrung erleichtern, und sein Haus zu einer Wohnung des Friedens, der Freude und der Glückseligkeit machen sollen. Fasse diese hohe und würdige Bestimmung deines Geschlechts doch ja recht fest ins Auge, mein Kind; und siehe, wie das Wohl der ganzen menschlichen Gesellschaft am End: lediglich davon abhängt, wie gut oder wie schlecht ihr dazu vorbereitet werdet. Denn nicht bloß das häusliche Familienglück, sondern auch – was dem ersten Gehör nach ungläublich klingt – das öffentliche Wohl des Staats, steht größtentheils in eurer Hand, hängt größtentheils, um nicht zu sagen ganz, von der Art und Weise ab, wie das weibliche Geschlecht seine natürliche und bürgerliche Bestimmung erfüllt. (19-20 in Original)

(You all are not only predisposed for that, only to be big children, flirtatious dolls, fools or furies. You are destined to be much more— O listen to your honorable profession with great happiness about the great worth!— in order to become pleasing wives, educating mothers and intelligent supervisors of the inner being of the household; wives, who have to carry the second half of the human race through tender participation, love, care and nurture of the life, wives of the men, who have to carry the great complaints, worries and a labors of life; mothers, who do not have to bear children, but also have to bear the first seeds of those beautiful human virtues, promote the development of the first buds of their capabilities of their soul; supervisors of the household, who through attention, order, purity, courage, economic knowledge and skills, take care of the well-being, the honor, the households’ peace, and take care of the earning husband, relieve him of worries of nurture and make his house into a house of peace, happiness and luck. Grasp this high and worthy definition of your sex, my child; and see, how the well-being of the human race depends upon how good or badly you are prepared for it. Because it is not only the well-being of the family, but also after the first listening may seem unbelievable—the public well being of the state, remains in your hand, depends upon how the female sex fulfills its natural and civil disposition.)

55 Campe’s text has been downloaded from the website: http://www.zeno.org/Kulturgeschichte/M/Campe. I mention the page number from the original. The source of which has been mentioned in the bibliography.
56 The translation of this passage from German to English is mine.
In the Marathi context, the Yadi Dharmasthapana or the memorandum of the establishment of the dharma (religion) of the year 1735, established by the Peshwa government (who ruled Maharashtra prior to the arrival of the British in 1818), set down rules for all Brahmanas. According to this memorandum, all Brahmana women had to be married between the ages of seven and ten. Fathers who failed to do so, faced severe strictures. If a girl began to menstruate before she was married, her marriage could be performed only after the prescribed ceremony of penance.\footnote{Uma Chakravarti cites Kane in “Wifehood, Widowhood and Adultery…” 231.}

Moreover, the Yadi Dharmastaphana sanctioned marriage for pre-pubertal women, rules for married women and widows, strict observance of ascetic widowhood. Only thus could the superior morality and purity of the Brahmanas be established. (Uma Chakravarti in “Wifehood, Widowhood and Adultery…” 241)

The above discussion of the works that formed some of the basic concepts of the 18th Century, were carried over into the 19th. Peters and Ramabai were fighting against these. In a causal style, associated with the emerging scientific ways of life in the 19th century, Peters and Ramabai then go to the next step, that is the system of marriage and how marriage should be? Both women have a romantic notion of how marriage should be. For Peters, there ought to be the higher ideal of ‘love’. This higher ideal was against the free love as advocated by the Saint Simonists in France and as practiced by Louise Aston, who founded the Club of the “Emancipated in Berlin.” Peters did not believe in what her contemporaries sought to do or were radical in doing. She proved to be a
conservative as compared to these women and could be likely adhering to what Joseph Heinrich calls in the “Afterword” to this tract “the true spirit of the Germanen”:

“Gott sei Dank ist der Boden des deutschen Familienlebens noch nicht so unterwühlt von der Sittenlosigkeit, dass unsere Menschenfreunde nötig hätten, die Erziehung der Frauen in die Hand zu nehmen, um die Families und die Gesellschaft zu retten. Wir stehen noch auf festem Boden---- die Tugenden der Germanen, die Tiefe des deutschen Gemüts, deutsche Treue, deutsche sitte und Biederkeit sind noch keine Mythen geworden. Die einzige Emanzipation, die wir für unsere Frauen anstreben, ist die Emanzipation ihrer Arbeit. (122 Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb)

(God is to be thanked, that the ground beneath the German family is still not so much rummaged into by the mannerlessness, which our human friends felt necessary to have—to take up the upbringing of women into their own hands, in order to save the family and the society. We are still on fixed ground/--- the virtues of the Germans, the depth of German feeling, German faith, German custom and conservativeness have not become myths anymore. The only emancipation which we are aspiring for our women is emancipation of their work.)

Hence Peters has to say:

“Wir sind ein für alle Mal dagegen, daß bei der Schließung einer Ehe die äußeren Verhältnisse den Ausschlag geben. Wir haben schon im voraus jede Ehe für unsittlich erklärt totz Trauschein und Priestersegen, wenn ihr das höhere Motiv der Liebe fehlt. Aber wir meinen damit auch nicht die Liebe, welche nur in den Sinnen wurzelt und nur geschlossen wird, um das Verlangen der Leidenschaft zu befriedigen; auch sie kann nicht bestehen vor dem Richterstuhl wahrer Sittlichkeit, welche verlangt, daß zwei Wesen nur dann auch körperlich eins werden, wenn sie es vorher geistig, wenn sie es mit Herz und Seele geworden; und insofern finden wir in der kirchlichen Weihe der Ehe ein symbolisches schönes Moment, welches die geistige Heiligung des Bundes andeuten soll, der eben auf höheren Prinzipien zu ruhen hat als allein auf dem eines bürgerliches Vertrages. (45)

(We are as ever against the idea that the settling of a marriage means that the outer circumstances are met with. We consider every marriage to be unethical despite the marriage certificate and the priestly blessings, especially when the motive of love is missing from it. We also don’t not mean that kind of love to be that which takes its roots only in the senses and is
convened in order to satisfy some kind of passion; even that can not stand in front of the chair of true custom and ethics which demand that two beings can only become one in body, when they are so in heart and soul; and in that solemn moment of a union sanctioned by the church we find a beautiful moment. A moment that implies the sacred union of a bond, which rests itself on higher principles rather than merely on those of a civil contract.)

The above also shows the German need to maintain its distinct identity from the outer influences of their English, French and American neighbors, who were also in the process of Reformation and Enlightenment. Though German feminists, at the time were open to these influences, they also sought to preserve a distinct German identity necessary for the unification of the nation, in accordance with the goals of the 1848 Revolution. This meant for Peters that the institution of marriage had to remain intact, but with certain changes in it, lest it upset the goals of German unification.

Ramabai, too thought of the institution of marriage in a reformed manner. Instead of a mere civil contract, like Peters who argues against it, she wishes for ‘true love and self choice in marriage’. Her ideal of marriage is not a radical, free-love idea, but ranges on the liberal-conservative and thus appeals to many audiences across the cultures. One of the many reasons for this liberal-conservative view could be the terms of the debate set by the local patriarchy. Then, since the onset of British rule in India many a reformist ideas, such as the advent of the caste and gender neutral English education, were brought about, which the reformers, (as Partha Chatterjee has already argued) wanted to be based in a strictly patriarchal framework (“Pandita Ramabai through her own words” 7). This meant being better wives to their Indian educated husbands and more
enlightened mothers for the future generations who would restore India to its former glory and ultimately to political autonomy. Emancipation for women, meant been in line with male progress—rather than bringing about male gender equality. (ibid) But here, Ramabai criticized the early marriage system that imposed several restrictions on girls and increased their chances of widowhood. She sought subversion in the way marriages were structured, but not a complete abolition of the institution itself. While Peters found it necessary to base the marriage on “love and mental compatibility” of the partners, Ramabai wished that the age of marriage for girls be increased and that importance be given to not the wealth of the groom, but to other qualities such as learning, beauty, honor and other good qualities. Her questioning of the authority of men having a chance to choose their partners sought to deemphasize the notion already internalized by women—about male superiority over women. Perhaps, Ramabai’s own unconventional marriage to a man from a different caste and community lay at the root of this challenge to the then accepted views of her times. She also prefers the Swayamwara form of marriage, whereby a woman could choose her own partner. In the following she sounds similar in her critique of the present system of marriage like Peters:

“A great many girls are given in marriage at the present day literally while they are still in their cradles; from five to eleven years is the usual period for their marriage among the Brahmans all over India. As it is absurd to assume that girls

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58 Ramabai informs us about the Swayamwara form of marriage, that was practices till as late as the 11th century A.D, where a woman could come forward to choose her own spouse, was not been practiced as it needed to be. The word Swayam means: by one’s own self and without any coercion, while wara means: husband or groom.
should be allowed to choose their future husbands in their infancy, this is done for
them by their parents and guardians. In the northern part of the country the family
barber is generally employed to select boys and girls to be married, …… Boys as
well girls have no voice in the selection of their spouses at the first marriage, but
if a man loses his first wife, and marries a second time, he has a voice in the
matter….. Although no law has said so, the popular belief is that a woman can
have no salvation unless she be formally married,……. A high caste man will
never condescend to marry his daughter to a low caste man though he be a
millionaire. But wealth in one’s own caste surpasses the merits of learning, beauty
and honor” (60-61High Caste)

Like Peters and Ramabai, who wish for the higher ideal of love and
compatibility in marriage for both partners, other feminists, especially socialist
feminists wish for the abolition of the institution of private property, since it
propagates the continuance of women’s oppression in the institution of marriage.
According to Socialist feminists, domestic work needs to be realized as real work,
and child rearing and housekeeping should be matters of the State. Only when
society turns socialist, then only women would be free and marriage would be the
ideal according to Socialist aims. Neither of the feminists, Peters or Ramabai
come close to a socialist critique of the system of marriage, where, they see a
woman oppressed within the institution itself at the hands of capitalist patriarchy.
However it is also too early to expect a socialist critique of this institution, since
the patriarchies that Peters and Ramabai are fighting against are religious in
nature, backed by class and caste in their respective cases. More over, considering
the time period in which they wrote, where ideas of a socialist society were
emerging, it was unrealistic to expect them to aspire for an overall change in the
society as a whole, so that the parts that comprised it would become free.
Both feminists were successful in the formation of feminist manifestos, which were to influence future generations. Part of the reason for the foundation of a union (in the case of Peters) or homes (in the case of Ramabai) lies in the widening global processes of the 19th century. Globalization, not in the sense in which it occurs in the 20th. and the 21st century, but which had started with the onset of colonization, led to the formation of international coalitions everywhere and the formation of what in modern terminology is called an NGO or a non-governmental organization. Peters and Ramabai had realized the need for help from other resources such as the United States that would help in forwarding their cause of widow uplift and in general the uplift of women themselves. In order that their agenda for women’s emancipation materialized and in line with Kant’s definition of what ‘maturity’ means:


(Enlightenment is the exit of the human being from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to listen to oneself’s rationality, without the help of someone else. This immaturity is self-imposed, especially when the reason of this doesn’t lie in the lack of rationality, but the ability to make decisions and have courage to serve oneself. Sapere Aude! Have the courage to serve oneself through ones’ rationality, is the slogan of the Enlightenment.)

59 It was Immanuel Kant who gave the following definition of what maturity means as one of the founding criterion of the time of ‘Enlightenment’.
60 As cited in Deutsche Kulturgeschichte by Kelling. 182. 1974
Peters and Ramabai lay down the following guidelines for women.

The first and the most important criterion, and in this they deserve merit, for offering their own definition for maturity, thus supplementing the definition of feminism which is capable of surpassing the historical elements of these works:

Selbsthilfe (Self Help)

“Wer sich nicht selbst helfen will, dem ist auch nicht zu helfen, ja er verdient nicht einmal, daß ihm geholfen werde!
Nur was man durch eigene Kraft erringt, hat einen Wert... Sobald jedes Mädchen von dem Bewußtsein durchdrungen ist, daß es selbst mit einstehen muß für sein Geschick, sobald wird es auch aufmerksam über sich selbst wachen in jeder Beziehung und nicht mehr andere für sich denken, handeln und entscheiden lassen—und nur das allein ist eines sittlichen Wesens würdig.”(76-77)

Self-Help:

(One who cannot help himself, cannot be helped, indeed he doesn’t deserve to be helped. Only that, which has been achieved through one’s own energy, has value.
 ........ As soon as every girl becomes aware, that she should stand up for her own fate, as soon as she becomes attentive to herself and watches herself in every relation and others do not think, act and decide for her--- only that alone is of value for an ethical being.)

This image of a strong, resilient woman is inserted into the dominant paradigm of a society where bourgeois and high caste women were ascribed roles such as those of housewives, mothers, daughters and wives and had very few choices open to them in the areas of education and employment. This limited recognition to women or non-recognition of women’s agency, personhood and personality caused them to be viewed as ‘diminished subjects or as disqualified agents’ (Misha Strauss 37). Peters and Ramabai came forward to break this dominant perception of women as ‘diminished subjects or disqualified agents’ and served to strengthen their ‘self-understanding’ by
enforcing positive imagery of strong, self-reliant womanhood. Ramabai expresses this idea of a strong, resilient woman in the following words.

“Self-Reliance---- The state of complete dependence in which men are required by the law giver to keep women from birth to the end of their lives makes it impossible for them to have self-reliance, without which a human being becomes a pitiful parasite. Women of the working classes are better off than their sisters of high castes in India, for in many cases they are obliged to depend upon themselves, and an opportunity for cultivating self-reliance is thus afforded them by which they largely profit. But high-caste women, unless their families are actually destitute of means to keep them, are shut up within the four walls of their house. In aftertime, if they are left without a protector, i.e. a male relative to support and care for them, they literally do not know what to do with themselves. They have been so cruelly cropped in their early days that self-reliance and energy are dead within them; helpless victims of indolence and false timidity they are easily frightened out of their wits and have little or no strength to withstand the trials and difficulties which must be encountered by a person on her way toward progress. But it is idle to hope that the condition of my country-women will ever improve without individual self-reliance; (125-126)

For both women then, the idea of progress and an ethical human being assume significance for the betterment of their countrywomen. Further significance lies in what was been imagined as a nation then. Through their programmatic style of writing, required of and characteristic of Humanism and Reformation but also of what is known as the literary epoch “Realism and the Gruenderzeit” (imperialism), which emphasized educational reform in a way that would suit the needs of the nation and their founders, both feminists avoid the literary voice in order to articulate the pressing needs of their main ideology. Peters favors the programmatic style of writing, in order to be able to address large audiences of both the sexes, whereby the personal would submerge under
the political and show that women could do the same that men were capable of doing. Likewise Ramabai.

Hence Peters feels the need to broaden the definition of education and include more subjects in it. Subjects such as medicine, photography, teaching and industry needed to be more inclusive and the “Frauenverein” which she founded emphasized more subjects and women’s dormitory, Sunday schools, girls hostels and provision of scientific education for women. Ramabai pleaded for more years of education for women, better teachers, native in origin and more attractive schools.

Representative of the problems of women of their times in a ‘real’ way, the similarity in the vision that these women have for their women sisters is remarkable. The absence of men from these union/homes/organizations meant that it would make women more free to be active and no longer intimidated by other ‘women’ and men in general. It gave more room to these downtrodden women for free speech and women’s activities.

Ramabai and Peters are able to reterritorialize a ‘third public space’ across cultural barriers by presenting to us several aspects of women’s lives in the 19th Century. A dialogue between them is certainly possible and will be effective, if the following questions are considered.61

“Who is speaking for whom? What relations of power enable them to speak for others? What forms of violence do these representations perform? What claims are being made? Since women cannot be seen as one group with a common

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61 I am not only referring to a dialogue between Peters and Ramabai, but a general dialogue between First World feminists and Third World feminists.
tradition, we need to be clear that the term woman carries within itself the notion of an autonomous individual. That is the subjectivity of those persons termed as “women” is not solely constructed by gender. Gender is one aspect of their exploitation.”

Ramabai, therefore performs an important function by creating a network, where women could come together on a common platform, internationally. The fact that she spoke and wrote about the specific situation of the “High Caste Hindu widows” was vital for the emancipation of Hindu widows. Ramabai thus opened a gateway to a transnational feminist approach to the public sphere, through speech, writing and media publicity.

The reading of non-fiction of a programmatic style of writing also meant cultivating sensitivity to various gender and caste/class related issues on behalf of the reader. The reader cannot help but observe that women’s deepest injuries are shared in certain degrees by most women or all women cross-culturally, thus suggesting the need for institutional and material change.

And finally these commonalities/comparable elements suggest and attempt to demystify the West’s mystification of non-western cultures. They open up a bridge for trans-national alliances across cultures through a belief in a gender equitable society and change in gender codes for their respective societies.

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62 I have adapted these questions from Inderpal Grewals’s article “On the New Global Feminism and the Family of Nations: Dilemmas of Transnational Feminist Practice. 504-507.

63 Injury is a word introduced by Wendy Brown in “States of Injury” in trying to locate certain common signifiers in the unproductive alliance of poststructuralism and feminism.
Chapter 3: Reconceptualizing Womanhood in Hedwig Dohm’s “Der Frauen Natur und Recht (Woman’s Nature and Privilege) and Tarabai Shinde’s “Stri Purush Tulana” (A Comparison of Men and Women)

Prior to the agenda of feminist activism of Pandita Ramabai and Luise Otto Peters, was the agenda of Tarabai Shinde and Hedwig Dohm with a new set of questions and perspectives to offer. Shinde and Dohm were renowned for their political works, which stand out for their remarkable intellectual, emotional insights and rhetorical ability in deconstructing the gender codes of their times. Both writers show comparable elements in their critique of patriarchal customs and literature of their times and of those written previously, while also raising significant issues related to gender, caste and class in their respective cultures. How did they reconceptualize womanhood? What means did they suggest for empowering women? What do these comparable elements have to say further about for the development of transnational feminist alliances?

Although there are few biographical similarities in the lives of these two women, it is important to understand the author intention and the impetus behind the writing of these monumental works. Some background knowledge on these works is essential as in sections one and section two, which foreground indigenous elements in Tarabai’s texts and deconstruct oriental ones in Dohms, while the comparative elements in both of them, foreground the other purpose behind this dissertation—that of

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64 Shinde is known to have only written this essay under discussion here, but was an active member of the Satyashodhak Samaj. Secondary sources suggest that criticism of the essay could be the cause that Tarabai never wrote anything else. The Satyashodhak Samaj was started by Jotiba Phule, which meant that Tarabai also had sympathy for the lower castes and fought for their Rights. )
identifying the common structures and causes of gender oppression common to both the cultures, and see whether there can be a platform for a dialogue for feminist alliances.

**Tarabai Shinde’s Stri Purush Tulana** (A comparison of men and women) (1882). **Tarabai Shinde (1850-1910) wrote** “Stri Purush Tulana” in (1882). Tarabai Shinde was born in a family of five, in a high caste, Maratha family (caste second to Brahmins) in the village of Buldhana, a small town of about three thousand people in central India. Her father Bapuji Hari Shinde, owned some land outside the town and also worked as a head clerk in the office of the Deputy Commissioner in the town. Bapuji Shinde was a member of Jotiba Phule’s “Satyashodhak Samaj”, (Truth Seeking Society) founded by Jotiba Phule in 1873, as a part of the non-Brahmin movement. It was because of her father’s reformist commitments that she learned to read and write, not only in Marathi, but to some extent in English and Sanskrit also.

Tarabai was married early, but to a “gharjavai” (a husband who stayed with his in-laws), “unlike the usual practice, where wives left their natal homes and were absorbed into the husband’s households” (O’Hanlon 5). Tarabai’s husband died earlier, and neither did the couple have any children. “Stri Purush Tulana” was the only work that she wrote.

“Stri Purush Tulana”, an essay of about 52 pages (O’Hanlon) was published in a book form (1882) was written in Marathi and was a response to an article that appeared in the “Pune Vaibahav” a newspaper known for its anti-reformist and orthodox views, following an incident over a charged discussion in
the city. Vijaylaxmi, a young widow of twenty-four years was charged with infanticide, and was brought to trial before the local session’s judge and sentenced to hang. The case was then heard before the Appeals Court in Bombay, “where the sentence was mitigated to one of transportation.” (O’Hanlon 1). The “Pune Vaibhav” (a newspaper known for its orthodox conformist views) attacked Vijayalaxmi, and women in general for their alleged “new loose morals” (Tharu and Lalitha 221).

“Stri Purush Tulana” questions many of the stereotypes ascribed to women, and shows that men themselves are capable of the vices they accuse women of, and are unfair in their criticism of women for various faults. Other parts of the essay offer a critique of the patriarchal ideology of her times and popular literature that imposed strict gender roles for women. Just to have a sense of what it meant being upper caste of the Maratha caste, we have to look at what was been written about ‘marathmola’ (which means seclusion of women or keeping women in purdah). The social critic Tukaram Tatya Padaval observed in 1861:

“The Marathas lived within the Muslim state, and so they adopted many of their practices. What is called marathmola really only means keeping women in purdah. If a woman cannot ever meet her father or brother when they come to visit, who can she see! Even if the Marathas fall on very hard times, they will not allow the women out of doors, and because there are no servants in the house, the men have to do it themselves. (O Hanlon 23)
This critique of too much ‘emphasis on feminine modesty’ (O’ Hanlon) and her own personal situation probably served to be an impetus for Tarabai’s criticism of ‘marathmola’. Furthermore, she brought in her own ideas and insights into this brilliantly written essay, which also furthered the cause of widow remarriage and women’s education. In a “style described as “racy and full of fire” (by the critic Maya Pandit) that women be respected and liberated from orthodox patriarchy the essay also argues and propagates modernization. It brings in ideas about the body and its inflicted torture as a cause for concern and action against its humiliation. Through this depiction Tarabai doesn’t mean to generalize this physical torture which had a different relevance to each caste. Here, under ‘marathmola’ physical torture was meant to keep women under subjugation and value chastity. Nevertheless Tarabai sees cause for concern and reform in man- woman relationship and in power relations, in general. She writes:

“There is that story of Savitri (a woman from the epic Mahabharata, who followed her husband after his death and won him back)…….. That story tells us that if a husband kicks you, you should just smile at him and say, Don’t do that, my lord and husband: you will hurt your foot’. And so saying you should sit down and promptly start massaging his foot. You are not to cry if he lets you have it with his fist, even if he beats you with a stick…. (Shinde 80)

It is precisely because of this kind of torture and other means of oppression towards women, such as early marriages, the kind of life that a widow had to lead after marriage (a cause taken up by Ramabai later), that Tarabai sees feminist intervention necessary, contrary to the popular belief by the Anglicists.
that the British rulers were putting an end to all the forms of tyrannies meted out to Indian women:

“Women in this world are forever putting up with all sorts of hard toil, difficulty, hunger and thirst, harassment and beatings--- and all they ask is a kindly word from you. It is true, you have to go out of the house and earn the money. But she has to see to the running of the house, has to do exactly as you tell her, perpetually obedient, kept in ignorance, toiling at the most exhausting work till her body’s pleasures breaks into little pieces, her bones waste away and her blood turns to water----her eyes always on your face. You’ve only got to glance at her approvingly and flash your teeth in a smile, and she feels it’s a joy divine! (Shinde 97)

Although, “Stri Purush Tulana” was her only work, the work was praised by Jotiba Phule in his journal “Satsar” (a journal of the Satyashodhak Samaj). Vidyut Bhagwat further says that “Tarabai’s writing could be taken as the first major feminist expression in the colonial Indian context.”(334). Since Tarabai’s work was criticized by the conservative circles, Phule was also known to criticize men who attacked Tarabai without even reading what she had to say.”(Tharu and Lalitha 222)

**Hedwig Dohm’s “Woman Nature and Privilege” (1876)**

The life of Hedwig Dohm was far different from the one led by Tarabai, but their works show amazing similarities. **Hedwig Dohm (1831-1919):** Hedwig
Dohm was born on the 20th of September 1831, the fourth child and first daughter in a large family of seventeen children in Berlin. Her father was a well-to-do owner of a tobacco factory. Her childhood was an unhappy one, since her mother was authoritarian and she faced many disadvantages because of her position as a girl child. But being a woman did not prevent her from aspiring for higher ideals of “equality for the sexes, education and vote for women.” Dohm was highly inspired by the 1848 Revolution in Germany, which aimed to bring about equality amongst the classes. Very often Hedwig had to escape from the house in order to listen to the democratic lecture series of this time. School came to an end for Hedwig at the age of fifteen. Later her parents allowed her a teacher’s seminar. She later married Ernst Dohm in 1853. Ernst Dohm was a supporter of the 1848 Revolution and had founded the satirical magazine and a speech organ for the March revolution “Kladderadatsch”. Hedwig Dohm had the benefit of getting to know many famous personalities from politics and culture, because of her husband’s contacts. This helped her to found a “Salon”, which happened to host many intellectual personalities such as the writer Fanny Lewald, Adolf Stahr (her husband), Varnhagen von Ense, Theodore Fontane, Ferdinand Lassalle, and Lily Braun.

Dohm was able to publish many fictional and non-fictional works. Most of them were feminist writings. Her writings included “Was die Pastoren von den Frauen denken (1872), Der Jesuitismus im Hausstande (1873), Die wissenschaftliche Emanzipation der Frauen (1874) Die Mütter. Beiträge zur Erziehungsfrage (1903).
Like some of her other contemporaries, Dohm’s feminist writings attacked anti-feminists of her times. Some instances of anti-feminism that happened to be prevalent around the times in which Dohm wrote were as follows. The “Brockhaus” of 1815, for example supported the ideas of what was meant by masculinity and femininity.


(That is why the idea of power reveals itself in the form of the man, and the idea of beauty in the form of the female. The mind of the man is more creative, is able to affect areas far apart, and process abstract objects that can lead to far reaching plans; amongst the passions, the rash and erupting ones belong to the man, while the slow, ones retreating into themselves belong to the female. Bold curiosity stem from the man, while still longing resides in the woman. The woman is restricted to a small circle and which it looks after in a clear manner; the woman has more patience and stamina in small works. The man has to earn, while the woman must preserve; the man acquires with violence, while the woman acquires with kindness or trickery. He belongs to the loud, public life, while she belongs to the silent, family circles. The man works in the sweat of his face and requires the deepest peace, after he is exhausted; the wine is always there, in never to rest activity. The man builds his own destiny and the woman bends its head willingly and finds comfort and help in his tears.)

65 Cited in Karin Hausen “Die Polarisierung der Geschlechtscharaktere: Eine Spiegelung der Dissoziation von Erwerbs und Familienleben. (366)
In 1876 she published her book “Der Frauen Natur und Recht”, (written in German) compiled from some of her earlier writings. “Der Frauen Natur und Recht” (Women’s Nature and Privilege), attacked the stereotypes attached to women of her times, as well as presented her critique on the available literature and patriarchal norms of her times. The essay also pleaded for women’s Right to Vote, Right to higher education and access to the Universities.

Written in an eloquent and objective style, the essay drew on examples of women’s oppression from many countries, including India. Like many other feminists, prior to Dohm, who used comparison as a method for an ensuing women’s politics in their own contexts (Wollstonecraft, Fanny Lewald, Louise Otto Peters and others), the comparative style of the essay made the essay known for its original insights and definition of the ‘Other woman’.

Orientalizing elements surface in Dohm’s text. They are worth mentioning here since Tarabai’s essay, acts as a response to this type of Orientalism. Although Tarabai’s essay was written much later, and it is one of the aims of this dissertation to deconstruct stereotypes about Indian women.

„Dem Verbrennen der indischen Wittwen hat bekanntlich erst der langjährige Einfluß der Engländer ein Ziel gesetztWenn die Flamme um den Leichnam des Mannes auf dem Scheiterhaufen knisterte,« so berichtet ein französischer Reisender, »und flackernd emporstieg, erschien die Wittwe beim Klang wonnerauschender Musik im scharlachenen Kleide, mit Blumen und Betelblättern bekleidet. Bleich, halb wahnsinnig, betrunken von Safran-Branntwein, halb bewußtlos an die Brust eines Brahmanen angelehnt, ging sie schwankenden Schrittes dreimal um die im Scheiterhaufen befindliche Öffnung. Beim dritten Mal stieß der Priester sie hinein und mit herzerreißendem Schrei verschwand sie im prasselnden Scheiterhaufen.«Diejenige Hinduwittwe, welche das Sutti-Opfer nicht bringen wollte, ward verflucht. Ihr Haupt ward kahl geschoren und sie lebte fortan in Schande und Schmach. »Was hilft ihr Gold,«
heißt es im Ramayana, »wer die Sache zu beurtheilen weiß, wird sagen: Es ist nur eine Wittwe! Voll Ekel und Abscheu wich die Menge einer solchen aus, sogar ihr Sohn wendet den Kopf ab, wenn er sie vorübergehen sah: die Erde speit dich aus, stirb, Elende!“( 81 in original)  


(“The burning of Hindu widows has only been put a stop to through the influence of long years of British rule. When the fire crackled and flamed about the funeral pile, says a French traveler, his widow appeared, accompanied by musicians, wearing a scarlet robe, and decorated with flowers and betel leaves. Pale, half mad, drunk with saffron wine, half unconscious, and supported by a Brahmin, she staggered three times round the pile. Then the priest threw her upon it……. The widow who did not sacrifice herself was cursed. Her head was shaved and she lived in shame and disgrace. What are riches to her,” says the Ramayana those who judge her will say: She is only a widow.’ The people pass her by in disgust and loathing and even her son turns his head as she goes by: the earth rejects thee, die, miserable creature!”( Trans. version 104)  

“In the Hindu drama a woman does not speak the same language as her lord, but employs the dialect of a slave. The Indian code shows a woman her position in the following terms: “A girl, a maiden or an elderly woman, must do nothing she pleases in her own home. In her childhood she is dependent on her father, in her womanhood on her husband, and when he is dead on her son; if she has no sons, on her husband’s nearest relations, or failing near male relatives of his family and her own she is dependent on her liege lord or sovereign.”( Trans. 104-105)

Tarabai critiques the Ramayana and other examples from the epics, in general and the orthodox elements of Hinduism. Probably, the essay (as it was written in Marathi did not have a wide circulation) and can be seen as a response
to Oriental elements that surface in Dohm’s negative examples of the Indian scenario. In the above, we have a depiction of the way the widow’s life is put an end to and in addition to it, knowledge of various elements of Hinduism is presented as backup evidence to this horrifying practice. Dohm however, leaves out the critique as been presented by indigenous feminists like Shinde, who also command men to go and do the same, in order to understand the meaning of the term ‘pativrata’ (which in Marathi means, ‘devoted to husband’). For instance, Dohm expresses admiration at the way the British acted and is also shown to be in awe of the way the widow is seen to go the pyre of her dead husband. This account however fails to portray the widow’s voice into the description and there is no expression of pain or empathy on part of this feminist about the gruesome account. Moreover there is no mention of local reformers or of people like Tarabai and other women who were also engagedly trying to put a stop to the practice. There is also no awareness that ‘sati’ was a ritual practiced mostly by the upper castes and at first started in certain parts of India and was largely prevalent in certain parts only. In the second paragraph, there is a stereotypical representation of the Indian woman and there is no mention that Pandita Ramabai was fighting against this prescription to Hindu women. There is no awareness of caste-based discrimination or for that matter that India had enjoyed a golden age once, which had women saints and mathematicians in it.

In the following I will show the comparable elements in the works of Shinde and Dohm and see to what extent a dialogue is possible between the two feminists and other feminists as well.
Comparable elements in Hedwig Dohm’s “Der Frauen Recht und Natur”

and Tarabai Shinde’s “Stri Purush Tulana”

The two essays show remarkable commonalities in terms of their perception of the gender codes of their times, the questioning of tradition and patriarchal literature of their times.

Based on her study of nine middle class women’s autobiographies growing up in 19th Century Germany, of which Hedwig Dohm’s autobiography was included, Juliane Jacobi-Dittrich presents to us some important observations about the meaning and significance of “Growing up female in the Nineteenth Century” German society. Dittrich observes that almost all the women writers that form a part of her study “found themselves at odds with their traditional roles and their families” (206). Growing up in an environment that segregated women from higher education and professions in order to preserve their femininity, writers like Louise Otto Peters, Hedwig Dohm and others confronted these norms through their writing and radical intellectual practices. Some of these restrictions for women meant that women had access to a restricted range of subjects available for study. These subjects placed an overt emphasis on literature, religion, foreign languages and history, barring science, math and ancient languages for women. University education was made available for women not until 1908. Family and schooling both required that women had to perform certain tasks that were considered to be innate to their natures, such as “needlework” and knitting. Labeling women’s behavior and personality as having certain “feminine” characteristics had been in
practice since the 18. Century. Character traits such as “independent, acquisitive, public, effective, abstracting, reasonable, were considered masculine, and other descriptors such as “domestic, modest, receptive and submissive” were characterized as “feminine.”

The result been that the ‘rational’ and ‘independent’ was associated with the public sphere, while the other feminine traits with the domestic sphere, of which women were a part. An example of what more added to this segregation were other literary texts, besides the Brockhouse and encyclopaedias, which added to the gender definitions of the time. Although written much earlier, 1788 and Adolf von Knigge’s “Über den Umgang mit den Mensch” and J.H. Campes “Väterlicher Rat für meine Tochter”(1789) had to do with maintaining the system of the family and hence wanted women to behave in certain ways. Knigges “Umgang mit den Menschen” gives the following advice for a woman and her behavior.

“Der Moralität nach und unseren religiösen und politischen Grundsätzen gemäß, ist die Übertretung der ehelichen Pflichten von einer Seite so unedel als von der anderen! In Rücksicht auf die Folgen hingegen ist freilich die Unkeuschheit einer Frau weit strafbarer, als die eines Mannes. Jene (die der Frau) zerreist die Familien Bande, vererbt auf Bastarte die Vorzüge ehelicher Kinder, zerstört die heiligen Rechte des Eigentums, und widerspricht laut den Gesetzten der Natur.”

(According to the moral, religious and political standards, stepping out of the marital duties is as un noble as the other. In retrospect however, the consequences of the infidelity of a woman is much more punishable than that of a man. The unchaste behavior of a woman tears the sides of a family, bequeaths the privileges of the marriageable children to someone else, destroys the rights of property and contradicts the laws of the nature)

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Quite rightly then Dohm is shown to argue against generalizing against women’s behavior, which is according to her dependent on the upbringing, and class of women and cannot be applied to all women. More over, as she rightly points out, it is men who also need to confirm to domestic fidelity, and the examples of which according to Dohm, we do not find much. She writes:


“A woman should be domesticated and reserved because these qualities form a bulwark for matrimonial fidelity…… Does a man behave more loyally to the domesticated, simple and obedient wife than if she were devoid of these attributes? Hardly. His intelligence and egoism may well be called into requisition. (Womens’ Nature and Privilege . 22)

Likewise Tarabai. She too questions the hypocrisy of men and the burden heaped onto women regarding the maintenance of moral standards in terms of all spheres of life. She repeatedly uses the term “pativrata” (which means devoted to husband or wifely obligation to husband) and says that men also need to confirm to husband’s duties towards their wives.

“This is what pativrata (devoted to the husband) means these days. If I was to tell you the whole of it from the start to finish, it’d take a whole spate book. Who on earth really follows the shastras to the letter or expects anyone else to? If the husband is really to be like a god to the wife, then shouldn’t he behave like one? (Shinde 81)
Thus we see that both leading feminists were fighting against certain stereotypes and expectations associated with women, which had proven to be psychologically burdensome for women. Stereotypes, according to Ingrid Robeyns, are cognitive devices that operate at the non-conscious level, and help to make sense of the staggering amount of information that our brain constantly has to process. They are hypotheses about sex differences, which affect our expectations of men and women and our evaluations of their work, qualities and abilities. These expectations and evaluations will affect the individual’s actual performance, as well as the aspirations they hold. They are shared by members of a society and are formed as a part of the socialization process. The consequence of this is that both men and women form expectations and judge other people with similar gender stereotypes. Since women like Hedwig Dohm, Louise Otto Peters, Fanny Lewald, Lily Braun, Marianne Weber, and Helene Lange sought entry of women into political activities and other professions from which women were debarred, it was a part of their agenda to question the “essentialist” notions of the meaning of womanhood. Dohm further argued that if men expected women to be intellectual partners, they needed to treat them equally and not subjugate them.

"Unsere männlichen Psychologen begehen nur den Irrthum, daß sie entweder individuelle Eigenschaften, wie sie ihnen an den einzelnen Exemplaren ihrer weiblichen Bekanntschaften aufgefallen sind, für den Geschlechtscharakter des Weibes halten, oder daß sie wenigstens den Charakter einzelner Frauenklassen auf das ganze Geschlecht übertragen." (13 in Original)

(Our psychologists only fall into the error of either looking upon individual qualities, which they have seen in certain specimens of their own acquaintance, as the distinctive characteristics of women, or of assigning the characteristics of certain classes of women to the entire sex. Women are as different from each other in certain traits of character as men, according to their station in life, their class and their up-bringing; but peculiarities which arise from special causes can never form the characteristics of the sex. (Trans 13-14)
Shinde’s fight against patriarchy involved constraints that were different from those which Dohm had to face. Her major constraint was that of ‘caste’ of Marathmola and the generalizations that came about it, for instance, when one particular woman (Vijayalaxmi) was accused of certain types of crimes. She pleads that just as men are open to the idea of westernization and new ideas, including even revolutionary men, (she mentions this in terms of the dress code) then women too had the right to give up certain norms and practices that had become outdated and were of no use for their times. Vidyut Bhagwat has to say in all praise of Tarabai, that Tarabai even attacked conservative reformers like Lokmanya Balgangadhar Tilak, who had started the “Swadeshi or the Home rule movement” This movement also meant having certain standards of femininity for women of all castes. Tarabai, been a women from the Maratha caste is shown to openly critique and criticize in a rational way or what can also be termed as positivistic, men’s expectations of women, and whether they were confirming to these expectations themselves first. She pleads for equality of the sexes and writes in response to the Vijayalaxmi case:

“I’m doing it out of the hope that you might stop treating all women as though they had committed a crime and making their lives a hell…. But everyday now we have to look at some new and more horrible example of men who are really wicked and their shameless lying tricks. And not a single person says anything about it. Instead people go about pinning the blame on women all the time, as if everything bad was their fault. (Shinde 77)(emphasis mine)
Having been a part of the reformist movement of the time and having been influenced by the 1848 revolution of the time, the Communist Manifesto and the larger women’s movement of the times, Dohm like her contemporary Louise Otto Peters wants equality in the relation between the two sexes. She fails to understand, why men want to keep women as feminine as possible, when there was a talk of a revolution and the introduction of certain scientific disciplines were able to question essentialist notions of womanhood of the time. One major area where both Dohm and Shinde call for intervention is in the patriarchal literature of the times. Both critique the ‘essential traits’ of women and code of conduct expected of them. This popular literature was able to set up difference between men and women, by ascribing men to the area of masculinity and women to the area of ‘femininity’. Though in reality the differences between men and women were not that vast or distinct, the feminine became a repository for the values that men wanted to inculcate in women or in society in general, or get rid of. As a result the real women, their real needs and Rights were killed in the process. It is precisely these aspects of patriarchal literature that Dohm and Shinde want to deconstruct. Dohm writes:


(A famous French writer, E.de. Neufoille, says quite undisguisedly, “Beauty is woman’s mission, she exists under no other conditions.(25)…. Virchow, in his work “Die Zelle und das Weib”, supposes women to be possessed of deep feeling, of the power of intuition, of meekness, devotion,
and loyalty all on account of a certain bodily organ, a gland. Virchow expresses this opinion in the form of scientific result.” (Womens’ Nature and Privilege. 30)

In the above passage, we see that not only women are expected to confirm to certain norms, but the writings by historians and biologists further had to say things about gender, which not only created difference but also created nationalistic divisions. The construction of womanhood was mostly an apparition based on traditions and scientific results that were no longer valid. Later parts of the essay talk about the ‘Other’ woman, which came from faraway lands and which should not resemble or come close to the Western women, about whom not many aspects are known in detail. The idea of one ‘geographical woman’ is then possible only when both women know each other and understand each other completely and not base their ideas about how the other women is on mere hearsay or unscientific results. Tarabai too criticizes patriarchal literature of her times, which prescribe ‘chastity and pativrata’ only as the domain of women, without admonishing men about it.

“Manjughosha,71 beloved daughter of an all powerful emperor. Would someone like her suddenly decide to jump into a chariot with Vasantamadhava, deceive her poor old father and run away without a thought?... As she was leaving, wouldn’t she at least see the image of her old father before her eyes? Wouldn’t she feel anything at all? So readers, you can decide for yourselves how true to life

71 Manjughosha was a play written by Naro Sadashiv Risbud, a head clerk in the Public Works Department in Sholapur, and talks about the evil natures of women from the old Sanskrit poem Bhartrhari. Risbud puts the words into the mouth of the outraged raja of the story, who has just been told that his daughter has been sneaking out of the palace to meet her lover and is several months pregnant already. (Cited in Introduction to “Stri Purush Tulana” 42.)
this story is….(114)... In the second book, Muktamala\textsuperscript{72} also was the high-born daughter of a chief. Her husband fell out of favor with the king and got put into prison. In her struggles to see him she fell into the clutches of a wicked official called Bhadraksh. He persecuted her horribly and finished up by shutting her away in the darkness of the jungle, but she never deserted her stridharma. (Duty of a woman)(115)... The second story in the play Manorama\textsuperscript{73} shows how Godubai and Ramrao Phadnis are completely unsuited and how the young woman despised the old man and treated him with contempt. Then it describes how Godubai ran off and left him and how the magistrate went about his work, how she was disgraced before the whole court, the evidence given by the woman Saraswati and Tukya the barber and so on.”(116)

Both women seek to go beyond what was been portrayed as ‘essence of womanhood’ and knew what role law had to play. Although aspects of German and English law are not comparable here, since one was not under the rule of a colonizer country, (India), while the other one was into the race for colonies, we cannot bring in what laws had to say about preserving womanhood. Both women are however aware and critical of the invention of new tradition or the revival of tradition that were meant to keep women in a subjugated manner. The Prussian code, for instance wanted to unite many of the disjointed German states and aspire for the unity of the German nation. Indeed 19\textsuperscript{th} century Prussian society saw the revival of many ‘invented traditions’ in the form of new monuments, memorials and architectures. ( Eric Hobsbawm 275)

\textsuperscript{72} Muktamala was written by Laxman Moreshwar Halbe and said that it was the author intention to develop people’s interest in Marathi as a language suitable for prose writing.(Cited in Introduction to the essay “ Stri Purush Tulana 46)

\textsuperscript{73} The play Manorama talks about misogyny, voyeruristic detail and moralizes. It was published in 1871 by Mahadev Blkrisna Chitale. The play also dealt with social problems of abortion, infanticide, prostitution said to be associated with early marriage and the denial of rights to remarriage.( Cited in Introduction to “Stri Purush Tulana 43)
Why tradition needs to be studied and especially why invented traditions needed to be studied are perspectives presented by historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, in their series of cross cultural essays that span the last 200 years. Their focus is on traditions that were invented since the onset of liberal ideology and social change. Eric Hobsbawm and Ranger demonstrate that “invented traditions” needed to be studied for three reasons. By the term “invented traditions”, they refer to new traditions that come into being, which are distinctly apart and different from old ways or old traditions that have been carried on since ages. In their opinion, the study of invented traditions threw a considerable amount of light on the human relation to the past, since “all invented traditions” had a history to it that served to “legitimize action and cement group cohesion.” (Hobsbawm 12). Apart from their potential to throw light on historical phenomenon and identify developments that had not been recognized earlier, invented tradition’s significance was relevant for the study of the nation and other processes such as nationalism, the emergence of nation-state, national symbols, the creation of histories, associated with it. Shinde and Dohm’s reference to tradition, is not that of “invented tradition”. They talk about the hold of age old tradition or the “use of the past” that was emphasized, which kept women under a patriarchal hold, and that these traditions needed to be loosened or completely gotten rid of, so that equality of the sexes would exist.

Tarabai challenges the role of tradition or those traditions unearthed by their ancestors, who played a role in forming certain norms and practices that required women to behave in certain ways:
“Can any of these ancestors of yours produce any evidence direct from God that it’s best for a wife to die before her husband, or a husband before his wife? Who lives and who dies is all in the hands of the all-powerful Narayan. (One of the Gods).”(88)

Likewise Dohm. In her critique of the above cited patriarchal literature Dohm remarks brilliantly that it is empty ‘traditional rhetoric’74 (Woman’s Nature and Privilege 29). The importance attached to certain traditions and their sudden revival also points to the ways and means which maintained division of labor and the responsibility of a better functioning of the family and the society. Both therefore try to displace the patriarchal “other”, which was considered to be the opposite of all that was male.

An other comparable aspect of Dohm and Shinde’s writing is their form of writing—the ‘Essay’. Historically the essay has predominantly been a male genre. It is an activity that requires self-reflection and has implied leisure since it cannot be carried out in the midst of distractions. Theodore Adorno considers the essay as a form that evokes intellectual freedom, and thus met with resistance (in the German context). The essay therefore is a form that neither lies in the field of science or the arts. It is a form that falls in- between science and art and hence has a non-totalizing character to it. Hence meant to provoke more thought and discussion or lead to—Enlightenment.

What does literary feminist criticism have to say about this form? Based on her cross-cultural study of various essayists Ruth- Ellen Joeres “The Politics of the Essay” gives us a brief history of the form of the essay, which emerges as a patriarchal

74 This phrase doesn’t appear in the online version of Der Frauen Natur und Recht. But since it is there in the translated version, I decided to cite it as evidence supporting Dohm’s overall argument.
form, considering that the fathers of this form were Montaigne and Bacon from the 16th century. The essay considers logic as its vital strategy, but there is also room for the elliptical, the elusive and the indirect.”(17) Essays are also a mixture of anecdote, description, opinion, and are said to focus on a little world, on details, to form patterns of relationships rather than a straight line of necessary consequences. For the radical feminist then, the essay becomes a forum, a means by which she can communicate her radical ideas to other women, by deconstructing the social construct of womanhood. Which is why according to feminist activists:

“….namely that the essay is in many ways the ideal form for the presentation of feminist ideas. Activists have long known this: with their paramount goal of communication, they have always realized the need for a written form that resembles speech—that invites dialogue and connection, that is straightforward, comprehensible, yet impassioned; that allows and indeed assumes a personal presence—that has such flexibility that it can take a variety of forms, whatever is most appropriate for the purpose at hand. In its status as a borderline genre, the essay already seems to connect with women, whose sense of marginality and not-belonging is still so present.  

According to the above then both Dohm and Shinde chose a genre that was typically feminist and was radical in approach. They also brought other voices into play by bringing their personal identity as well as their concerns with multiple viewpoints into perspective. Through their stylistic devices, they were able to reach to diverse audiences through questions, anecdotes, examples and ellipses. Dohm’s point of departure is the amount of patriarchal literature that was been produced at her times and

76 Mittmann and Joeres in the introduction to “The Politics of the Essay”.

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previously and also that there was lack of women’s access to higher education, and the vote. As much as it is against her logic of why men want to wish women to be in certain positions, Dohm and Shinde are able to contribute to an important part of what various scholars call ‘female socialization’. In fact women writing and women’s literature began to take shape only towards the last decades of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century in Germany.\footnote{Cited in the Introduction to “In the Shadow of the Olympus”. Ed. Katherine Goodman and Edith Waldstein. New York: State University of New York Press,1992. 4} Till then women were encouraged to read Familienromane, write letters or later wrote and read novels. Mostly women form the upper classes or aristocratic families wrote and read, while they were the ones mostly confined to the private sphere of the family, many of them took recourse to literature to express their feelings, thoughts, discomfort and boredom. There emerged a sense of sisterhood that appealed to the entire female sex. Very rightly then we hear Dohm saying towards the end of the book in the third part of “Der Frauen Recht und Natur” that women of Germany demand the suffrage and not lag behind their European sisters:

“Erwacht, Deutschlands Frauen, wenn Ihr ein Herz habt zu fühlen die Leiden Eurer Mitschwestern und Thränen sie zu beweinen, mögt Ihr selbst auch im Schooß des Glückes ruhen. Erwacht, wenn Ihr Grimm genug habt, Eure Erniedrigung zu fühlen und Verstand genug, um die Quellen Eures Elends zu erkennen. Fordert das Stimmrecht, denn nur über das Stimmrecht geht der Weg zur Selbstständigkeit und Ebenbürtigkeit, zur Freiheit und zum Glück der Frau. Ohne politische Rechte seid Ihr, Eure Seelen mögen von Mitleid, Güte und Edelsinn überfließen, den ungeheuersten Verbrechen gegenüber, die an Eurem Geschlecht begangen werden, machtlos.

Rafft Euch empor! Organisirt Euch! Zeigt, daß Ihr einer begeisterten Hingebung fähig seid und durch Eure That und Euer Wort erweckt die Gewissen der Menschen, erschüttert ihre Herzen und überzeugt die Geister! Verläßt Euch nicht auf die Hülfe der deutschen Männer. Seid muthig, hilf dir selbst, so wird Gott dir helfen“. (183-184 in Original)
(*Wake, women of Germany, if you have a heart to feel for your sister’s wrongs, even if you
yourselves are contended and happy in your lives. Wake, if you have spirit enough to feel your
degradation, and intellect enough to see the source of your misery.
Demand the suffrage!
Organize, show that you are capable of enthusiastic devotion, and awake the conscience of men.
Appeal to their hearts and convince their intelligence! Do not rely entirely on the help of your
countrymen.
Be courageous, help yourselves and God will help you. (Womens’ Nature and…. 150)

The genre choice then becomes a political choice in crossing the domain of
men and male socialization. Like the German market the Marathi market was also slow
in letting women come into the field of literature. The Marathi field of literature saw the
production of essays through the modernizing efforts of English education. People like
Lokahitawadi and Vishnushastri Chiplunkar and others had started the ‘Nibandhamala”
(a garland of essays) (started in 1874) that talked about socio-political issues. Women
started publishing in the vernacular since the 1860’s and 1870’s. Amongst the various
English essays that were to influence the Marathi field of literature were those written by
Francis Bacon. Marathi women then took their impetus from these writings. However
they did not forget a sense of sisterhood for their countrywomen. For example Shinde
uses the term “my countrywomen” in the following passage, and shows the awareness
that women had a few Rights that needed to be met with. The political tone that emerges
from the genre of the essay is worth comparing to that of Dohm’s essay, a response to
patriarchal literature and women’s Rights, while Shinde’s response is openly an attack
against the editor of the Pune Vaibhav (a newspaper known for its orthodox views)
enabling an academic discussion between the two writer-activists.

“God brought this amazing universe into being, and he it was also who created
men and women both. So is it true that only women’s bodies are home to all kinds of
wicked vices? Or have men got just the same faults as we find in women? I wanted this to be shown absolutely clearly, and that’s the reason I’ve written this small book, to defend the honor of my entire sister countrywomen. (Bhaginivarg) I am not looking at particular castes or families here. It’s a comparison just between women and men. (75 Shinde)

What do these comparable elements mean for the sake of a dialogue? What hinders dialogue or what factors need to be taken into consideration while attempting a dialogue? Coming to the point where both Dohm and Shinde have to comment about the tradition of sati, the status of the widow and her code of conduct after her husband’s death, we cannot but help but point out that it is Tarabai who takes up the issue more seriously and effectively than Dohm, who merely uses the example of the Hindu widow as the ‘other’ of the German women. We do get a sense that the cause of the Indian woman can be taken up more effectively by Indian feminists. Even though Tarabai and later Ramabai plead for the perpetual rule of the British government, they have proven through their writings and several examples that Western epistemology is inadequate in describing and grasping some of the intricacies of the situation of Indian women. In an age, where Indian women were ‘doubly other’ (Tharu and Lalitha) i.e. subjugated by the indigenous men-folks and the British government, it was harder for them to rise above these powers and articulate themselves. Hence the translator of Tarabai’s ‘essay’ leaves certain words un-translated, and provides a footnote to certain words translated into English (for eg: God- parmeshwara to designate the all powerful creator as

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78 Rosalind O’Hanlon’ translation of Tarabai’s essay leaves certain words untranslated to retain the flavor and meaning of the original words in Marathi. She gives a brief description of the meanings of these words in the Glossary at the back of the book.
distinguished from the masculine fictions in Hindu sacred writing79) thus showing that she had to maintain the meanings of the original word, lest they lose their flavor and depth. This proves Chandra Mohanty’s point that Western methods for local concerns need to be applied cautiously, lest there be misinterpretations and/or false derivations.

Contemporary scholarship on cross cultural studies regarding women’s emancipation, which seeks to understand women’s similarities and differences across cultures have encountered many dilemmas. These questions range from what criterion to select for understanding the similarities and the differences, and what are we to conclude from the existence of these similarities and differences, in order to frame legal and communicative models. Just as it is true that many oppressed sections of women like the lesbian community, the Third World women etc do not like or resent it if certain groups speak about them and hence form a barrier between the two to create a feminist community, it is necessary to have closed epistemological communities based on equals and to continuously re-imagine or imagine a global feminist community.80 Therefore when it comes to the question of who can participate in a global feminist discourse, answers Alison Jaggar:

“...At least on the level of morality, global feminism means that feminists in each culture must re-examine our own commitments in light of the perspectives produced by feminists in others, so that we may recognize some of the limits and biases of our own beliefs and assumptions. Of course, the moral evaluations of any cultural practice must always be “immersed” rather than “detached” taking account of the ‘practices, the perceptions, even the emotions of the culture. Elsewhere I suggest that a feminist conception of discourse, with its emphasis on listening, personal friendship and

79 See notes to the essay “Stri Purush Tulana” 125.
responsiveness to emotion, and its concern to address power inequalities, is especially well suited to facilitate such an immersed evaluation.” (Jaggar 16)

Thus my objective in presenting the comparable elements in Dohm and Shinde’s texts is to show that just as there are limitations in forming an imagined epistemological community between the two cultures as there are biases of our own beliefs and assumptions, there are some essential similarities that we need to look into for a dialogue and alliances. For example, Dohm, no matter how well intentioned her ideas about presenting examples of patriarchy from other cultures are, there is still no dialogue or citation of individual elements or expressions regarding how women in the Indian context were fighting patriarchy etc. This also means that we cannot posit an essential womanness, especially because there are differences of class, race, age, sexuality, nationality and caste that need to be considered. What can be said, however is that in both societies men were more powerful than women, and women of all castes, classes and ages were oppressed due to a sexist culture. It can be further said that there are significant differences amongst women in the same society.

Location or the social location has, in Linda Alcoff’s terms a bearing on meaning and truth or on what he or she has to say. That is from where the speaker speaks, there are effects depending upon the location and these effects are epistemically salient. For eg: it is not one and the same thing, when a dominant group speaks for the oppressed, or when a man in a certain social position says something and the same thing is been said by a woman. An example of this would be that Indian feminism was not acknowledged much in the 19th century Western discourses, because it had to learn a lot
from the presence of a foreign power which brought about changes in the status of women and men. The British brought in reforms in the areas of child marriage, sati (ban on Sati in 1829), widow remarriage, the Age of Consent Bill, women’s education etc.  

It was not only through laws that the British sought to bring in changes in the area of the private sphere, but it was through various ‘agitated debates on other issues that accompanied the setting of the law’ (Tharu and Lalitha 158). Furthermore these laws and debates were constituted in exclusively religious terms and had complex and problematic connections with caste, tradition, Victorian norms of feminine propriety and imperialist ambitions.

But however, while only the role of the foreign power was acknowledged regarding social change, and in the realm of private law, the notion of ‘interdependence’ between the colonizer and the colonized remained unacknowledged, in other words, the role of local reformers and indigenous feminism and their voice was either ignored or did not receive the attention that it needed to be given. Local or indigenous women’s concerns that were been articulated in vernacular press and medium were equally ignored. Even in the 1930’s and the 1940’s British feminists were eager to help their ‘little sisters’ but remained convinced that imperial rule was benevolent.

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81 These reforms were brought about because the British sought to criticize the way Indian women were treated as a part of their civilizing mission and for a better control over the Indian society. After their establishment of colonial rule over India in 1757, the British passed various Laws from the capital of Calcutta in India. These laws were passed in order to put an end to the chaos and fiscal disorder its intervention had precipitated in West Bengal. (Metcalf 56)

82 Ibid. 158.

83 Pandita Ramabai’s voice was acknowledged in Philadelphia in a convention in the late 19th century during her stay in the United States, while she was on her mission for collecting funds for a widow’s home in India. We have however no record about the feminist achievements of Tarabai Shinde, or for that matter of other feminists. Even Pandita Ramabai did not get the attention she deserved.

84 See Geraldine Forbes. 4.
Dohm’s vision of patriarchy and the examples of the situation of Hindu widows had the effect of creating greater awareness amongst the Western world about the extreme form of patriarchy as occurring in other parts of the non Western world. While this did reinscribe a ‘hierarchy of civilization’ effect, it occurred because the speaker was positioned as a white woman from a developed, industrialized country and not someone from a less developed, poor country. This could have two effects: either that the natives, about whom the speaker from a developed country was speaking about, would loose confidence in themselves and their heritage to speak about their grievances or that their motivation to speak for their own grievances would increase, knowing that their cause was been taken up or being referred to by someone from a developed world. Hence it is significant not to universalize certain claims, without ascertaining the location, language and the position of the speaker and the listener in order to ensure a fair play of politics. Or in other words as Alison Jaggar has said, unless the claim has been made with its emphasis on listening, personal friendship and responsiveness to emotion, and its concern to address power inequalities--- there can be no just feminist politics.

While keeping differences in mind and the dangers of universalizing, it is also crucial that, one does not fall into the trap of ‘relativism’ which implies that a person could have knowledge of only the sort of things, she had experienced personally and that she would totally be unable to communicate any of the contents of her knowledge to someone who did not have the same sort of experiences.85 This is essential to guard us

85 Cited in Uma Narayan “The Project of Feminist epistemology: Perspectives from a non-western feminist. (313) and in her other essay “Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism.”
against “idealizing oppression and romanticizing it and also the view that some
knowledge is incapable of being communicated to only some class of persons.” (ibid
313-317). There can always be parallels and others who feel for the issue and can take
up the cause as well.

While relativism has its advantages and disadvantages, it teaches us to be
aware that sympathetic members from dominant groups need to be aware of the
complexities of the oppressed groups. For instance, Western feminists understanding of
the situation of Indian widows. Hence Narayan suggests that Western feminists
interested in the problems of women in Other cultures need to think about the:

1)  The kinds of Third world women’s issues that cross the Western borders more
frequently than others.

2)  The effects of the editing and reframing such issues undergo when they do cross
borders.86

When one examines the first claim made by Narayan we become aware that one
needs to understand the effects of the ‘specific focus’ on certain issues regarding
colonized women’ from different cultures, that crossed border in the 19. th century. The
issue of widow immolation and subjugation that found mention in Dohm’s text, for
instance, had the effect of focusing on all sections of women from the Indian society,
which is not true, since it was namely women from the Upper castes who underwent
Sati. The oppression faced by women from the lower castes did not find mention in
Dohm’s text. (She mentions the Sudra, but not the Sudra woman and what it meant to

86 Uma Narayan talks about this in the context of dowry murders in “Cross Cultural Connections, Border-
Crossings, and Death by Culture”. 68.
belong to that caste). Secondly, the fact that she mentions only the British rulers as saviors of the sati widow, shows or highlights the effects of the editing and re-framing of such issues that crossed borders. From this it can be said that phenomenon that seemed to be ‘different, Other, alien’ tended to cross borders more frequently than those that were similar to the ones experienced by mainstream women. (Narayan) It further leads to the synecdochic conclusion\textsuperscript{87} that “Indian women” were victims of their own culture and more susceptible to it in ways that were different from that of Western women, who were ‘seemingly more immune to death by their own culture’. (reference to Uma Narayan’s essay “Cross Cultural Connections, Border Crossings and Death by Culture). This view is important from the point of view of building alliances and for a fair feminist politics. Narayan’s observations regarding the dangers of ‘relativism’ also are equally valid, if there is to be a common ground for ‘strategic feminism or essentialism’, a term used by Gayatri Spivak in her works.

Likewise Tarabai also needed to keep in mind that women in Western societies were also subjugated under various forms of patriarchy, which were equally complex in nature. And lastly but not the least, the comparison shows based on the above, that a dialogic platform between the two feminists, or contemporary feminists regarding certain issues is possible if what Narayan, Alcoff and Jaggar have to say is understood--- so that a fair feminist politics ensues.

\textsuperscript{87} Uma Narayan talks about dowry murders in India and their reception in the United states as compared to the problem faced by U.S. women and their victimization to domestic violence. She further compares the impact that location has on the understanding of these issues and why the case of dowry murders cross border more frequently than the victimization of U.S women. According to Narayan, the nationalistic contexts play an important role in shaping feminist agendas and very often the absence or presence of terms are responsible for the kind of border crossings that take place, as in the mentioned cases. In the above, I use her explanations for highlighting the views of a post-colonial scholar on issues that have been going on since the colonial period.
Chapter 4: New Woman: New Questions in Irmgard Keun’s “Gilgi: eine von uns” and Maltibai Bedekar’s “Kalyanche Nihshwas (The sighs of the buds)

The early 20th century proved to be a turning point in the history of feminism. It saw the emergence of the “New Woman” in the German and Marathi contexts. This “New Woman” had more opportunities (both in Germany and Maharashtra) to go to schools and universities, vote, ask for political rights and at the same time step into some professions, from which they had been barred earlier. Owing to the efforts of earlier feminists (including men) and the international women’s movement, women in the early 20th century were able to turn to a new leaf. But this turning point brought newer questions and new issues related to gender, which were taken up in literature by writers like Irmgard Keun in the German context and Malatibai Bedekar in the Maharashtrian context. Indeed, both women writers contribute towards the subaltern studies group project in their attempts to explain hegemonic processes and articulate the stories of suppressed peoples (here women).

Both writers are considered to be representative of the ‘new woman’s concerns of their respective societies. The term ‘new woman’ needs elaboration here. Carolyn Nelson informs us in her Reader “A New Woman” that the term “new woman” was coined in England in March 1894 when Sarah Grand, whose well known novel “The Heavenly Twins” appeared the previous year, published “The New Aspect of the

88 The term subaltern is used to voice concerns of women coming from the lower ranks of the society. Although the term has been used mainly by postcolonial scholars and Third world activists to voice concerns about suppressed people and minorities, the term can apply to the project undertaken by Keun and Bedekar. The first volume of ‘Subaltern Studies” appeared in 1982, heralding a new school of history focusing on all non-elite colonial subjects. (Geraldine Forbes 3)
Woman Question” in the “North American Review”. In this essay, she uses the phrase “the new woman” to denote the woman who has finally “solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with ‘Home is the Woman’s Sphere’, and prescribed a remedy for it.” Followed by this there were many women writers who took up this term and argued that women should be given the same opportunities and choices as men were been given and that separate spheres ideology was a construct of the society and not that of culture. (Carolyn Nelson. ix.) Gerladine Forbes uses the term ‘New Women’ for Indian women in her book “Women in Modern India” in order to highlight the cases of Indian women whose world was not confined to the household and who were the beneficiaries of the social reforms and educational efforts of the 19th century.(54) The term ‘new women’ is also used by Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha in their anthology “Women writing in India” for the same reasons as those cited by Forbes. The radical elements of Keun and Bedekars’ feminism lie in their representation of the complexities of the New Woman of the early 20th century, and a questioning of the traditional norms of their respective societies. Hence they themselves are new women and portray new women in their stories. What were the concerns of the “new woman” of the early 20th century? How did this new woman adapt to social change? What can we say about a dialogue, based on the comparable elements that emerge from these writings?

89 I am referring to only two case studies, one from the German, the other from the Maharashtrian context. There are several questions that concerned the new woman. All of them do not find mention in the stories of these two women writers.
Background on Irmgard Keun and “Gilgi: eine von uns”.

Irmgard Keun (1905-1982) was one of the leading women novelists of the early 20th century Weimar Germany. She was born into a well to do family to Eduard and Elsa Keun. Irmgards’ father was the owner of a big firm which granted Irmgard the privileges of a good education and exposure to foreign languages. Irmgard lived with her family and her brother Gerd in Berlin until 1913, after which the family moved to Cologne. Initially Irmgard attended Evangelical school and graduated in 1921. She then attended a training school for “Stenotypists”, one of the few vocations available to women of the Weimar time, pre-Nazi Germany. But her main passion lay with acting. She joined an acting school from 1925-1927 and gave performances in some parts of Germany. But, it was her contact with the writer intellectual Alfred Doblin, that encouraged her to a career in writing. In 1932, she married the writer/director Johannes Tralow, whom she divorced in 1937. Keun also had many friendships with intellectuals and traveled to various cities. Her later life was tragic in several ways in that she suffered from depression and had to spend some time in an asylum and financial set-backs. Although her emotional life was on a roller-coaster at times, she won many acclaims as a writer, feminist and was awarded many prizes. Although “Gilgi: eine von uns” is fictional, it shows many aspects of the socio-political background of Weimar Germany and depicts various aspects of Keun’s life as well.

Post- First World War Germany brought about several changes for women in terms of their employment chances and availability of the choice of
professions. The end of the war saw a dismissal of many women in order to recruit the returning men home. The most sought after areas for women as workers were the industry, where women were required as cheap laborers. The post war time, hence saw an increase in the number of secretaries, stenotypists and shop assistants. Keun’s novel is able to capture and portray the life of one such lower middle-class girl shown to be working as a stenotypist. While the war served to affect women’s employment in positive and negative ways, it also had modernizing effects for women. Although the Weimar constitution recognized sexual equality as a basic right, by granting the same civil rights and duties to men and women (Article 109), it was the women’s movement that emphasized that “sexes were to be regarded not as equal in kind, but as equal in value”90. The “New woman” of the Weimar constitution was shown to assimilate male mores and values, and male attire. But this also did not imply that the new woman enjoyed Rights in terms of issues such as ‘abortion, sexual harassment at work etc’. It is precisely these and other issues that Keun takes up and leaves them open for discussion.

“Gilgi: eine von uns” (published in 1931) was Keun’s first novel, which made her famous. Her later novel “Das kunstseidene Mädchen” or the “( The Artificial Silk Girl) was also a best seller. Keun however also had to meet with strict opposition from the Nazis and had to go into exile from 1936-1940. Her books were also banned during this time.

The life of the protagonist Gilgi or Gisela is based in Cologne. Gilgi, aged 21, comes from a lower middle class family and works as a stenotypist. She has an affair with Martin, a wealthy middle class bohemian businessman. On her 21st birthday, her parents reveal to her the news of her adoption, which makes her anxious to discover the real identity of her parentage. Upon meeting the seamstress Margarethe Täschler, whom she thinks is her real mother, she is disappointed to learn that this woman also had been paid to take Gilgi as a child, who was the daughter of a wealthy and prominent family. Other parts of the novel tell us about Gilgi’s attempts to help her colleague Hans, in gathering money, her meeting with her own real mother, her pregnancy and her final decision to keep her child and move to Berlin. She finally decides to live as a single mother and raise her child, probably with Olga, her female friends’ help. The novel raises questions regarding women’s progress, their fear of being sexually exploited at work, availability of the choice of roles and alternatives for women, and questions of identity and independence concerning the “New Women” of the 1920’s.

**Background on Maltibai Bedekar and “Kalyanche Nihswas”** (1905-2001)/ Malatibai Bedekar or Vibhavari Shirurkar91-- was born and brought up in a small town in rural Maharashtra. Her father was a primary school teacher who took pains to encourage his daughters to study. Her mother was a house-wife, who managed the household along with their family dairy. Malatibai had the benefit of joining the Karve University in Bombay, where she earned the degree of

91 Malatibai Bedekar wrote under the pen-name “Vibhavari Shirurkar”. It was not till 1946 that this intellectual writer-feminist revealed her real name.
Pradeyagamma. From 1923-1933, she worked as the principal of a girls school and from 1937 to 1940 with the Department of Education and Welfare. In 1938, she married the well known novelist and filmmaker Vishram Bedekar.

Bedekar’s experience at “Hingne”, the institute founded by D.K. Karve⁹² for girl’s education and welfare provided her the ‘material’ for several of her prose works that this accomplished writer-intellectual was to write. In addition to this the early 20th century in India saw a greater revival of the nationalist movement against the British. The Swadeshi (or the home rule movement that emphasized indigenous practices and goods) gained momentum during 1905-1908. This movement called for a boycott of all foreign goods which soon expanded to include government schools and colleges, Western education, courts, titles government services etc. Women played an important role at this time by rejecting foreign goods, including utensils, bangles, and dress and organized “samitis” (meetings) to propagate the Swadeshi message through speeches, discussions and songs.”(Tharu and Lalitha 171). In Maharashtra, under the leadership of Lokmanya Tilak (1856-1923), the Savarkar brothers and several others, people showed increased efforts to further the Swadeshi movement. At such a time, a new image emerged for women that sought to keep them in line with the nationalist imagination. This “new woman”, as explained by Tharu and Lalitha,(172) was to exhibit the then naturalized Victorian ideals of domestic

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⁹² Dhondo Keshav Karve was one of the pioneers of women’s upliftment in Maharashtra. Karve, married a Brahmin widow, after having lost his first wife. Besides being a Professor for Mathematics, he also devoted most of his energies to the upliftment of Hindu widows. In 1899, he opened a widow’s home in Poona, which he later shifted to Hingne. Its primary emphasis was to train widows for teaching and nursing professions so that they could be made economically independent. Unmarried girls were also admitted and were encouraged to learn. This also meant that the home was open to admitting women from non-urban areas.
virtue, patience and long suffering, and at the same time, show self confidence and maintain the nation’s moral life. This image of the ‘new woman’ dominated the literary imagination, and broke with earlier images of women in the literary landscape of the 19th century, by emphasizing “self-reliance” as well as building the nation’s honor.” (Tharu and Lalitha 172-173).

Malatibai Bedekar’s collection of short stories “Kalyanche Nishwas” runs contrary to the demands of the general motives of nationalism in the country and in Maharashtra it gave rise to questions which were considered to be far ahead of her times. There was also much anger and ostracism in the conservative circles of her times regarding her works.

Besides the popular short stories collection “Kalyanche Nishwas” (The sighs of the buds) (1933), with which this chapter deals with, Bedekar wrote several other works (Virlele Swapna, Bali, Shabari, Hindolyawar and others) that dealt with various problems and issues regarding the emerging new woman of the 20th century. Most of the stories showed the impact of the socio-economic situation on women’s lives, while other themes dealt with the changes that were happening in man-woman relations of her times, new alternatives for women who challenged the institution of marriage and other dilemmas faced by women of her times. Bedekar’s short stories in this collection are marked for their psychological and intellectual insights into man-woman, women-women and mother-daughter relationships.
Comparable elements in Irmgard Keuns’s “Gigi: eine von uns” and Maltibai Bedekar’s “Kalyanche Nihshwas”

Both Keun’s Gilgi and Bedekar’s protagonists become comparable because of the concerns depicted regarding the new woman of the early 20th century. Keun depicts this new woman or “Gilgi” or Gisela in the new attire that was characteristic of other new women, and which thereby signaled a break with the costumes worn by women in the past and an arrival of modern times. The new attire of this new woman shows women’s readiness to become more ‘masculine’, and less feminine, as the first wave feminism stressed “sameness” with those of men and the ability to prove that women could work and be efficient like men in the work place. Part of this ability to become more masculine was requirements of the workplace, and hence meant that women also needed to break away from traditional costumes to have an appearance that was appropriate for the work place. The other reason could be the chances of finding a partner and what attire went well with the taste of men in Gilgi’s times. A description of Gilgi’s concern with appearance which appears quite often in the novel is shown below.

“Gilgi zieht kurze blaue Samthöschen an, eine weiß-seidene Hemdbluse mit blauer Krawatte, schwarze Lackpumps. Fertig. Mißlaunig pudert sie ihre nackten Beine und Schenkel.”(86)

(Gilgi pulled on short blue velvet trousers, a silk-white shirt-blouse with a blue tie, black varnished pumps. Finished. She powdered her naked legs and thighs in a dispirited mood.) 93

93 All translations from German to English are mine, unless specified otherwise.
Thus while the new woman in the German context was concerned about appearance in the workplace and in terms of finding a marriage partner and found a mention in Keun’s novel, repeatedly, the very term ‘appearance’ acquires a similar meaning and importance for the ‘new Marathi woman’ in the marital context. Bedekar’s female protagonists do exhibit a new confidence as well as shown to reason for themselves in terms of their importance to “appearance” as having value for their marriage. The protagonist in the short story “Antakarnache Ratnadeep” (The lights of the soul) is shown to express distress over the fact of her average looks and the possibility of reduced chances of finding a suitable partner for herself. Her market value for finding a suitable marriage partner is further reduced by her belonging to a particular caste. (The Saraswat Brahmin’s who placed a lot of emphasis on appearance and preservation of caste rules).

“Because I have a soul, this question of my marriage will not get resolved in a marketable way. Since you have no money, neither do I have a charming appearance. This question is no longer yours. (question to her parents). Till I have a mind of my own, I cannot accept any man just for the sake of marriage. What if he were to get tired of my ugliness and abandon me? What will I do then? What would my father, or mother or society would degrade me; what if you were to ask them, how to resolve my question? (17)\textsuperscript{94}

Like Bedekar’s portrayal of the question of “new woman” which is very often linked with the financial situation of the girl, Keun’s Gilgi is equally shown to be aware of her financial situation. She is shown to be aware of the

\textsuperscript{94} All translations in this Chapter from Marathi to English are mine, unless specified otherwise.
requirements of the job market and is scared of the chances of her unemployment. She is shown to be learning foreign languages in order to ensure proper job prospects and is attracted to white collar jobs. She shows the desire of traveling on her own and experiencing the world as it is. This articulation of her desire to travel, though not uncommon for the 20th century new woman (19th century German women expressed this desire too and did travel, if not by themselves),
does depict changes in the wants as expressed by woman of the early 20th century.

“She would travel. Perhaps alone or perhaps with Olga. Travel. If one can speak three foreign languages perfectly, then one is insured against unemployment. Perhaps she would also not need to go the office one day. She still has other possibilities. She is talented, can design clothes and do needle work like no other women.”

Like Keun who depicts a typically class and gender related behavior of a specific age group of women of her times, she also doesn’t want to personalize the experience too much. This is shown by the sub-title ‘one of us’, which aims to show that Gilgi’s behavior was typical of many women of her times, and often class and the availability of career choices for women at that time, played a decisive role in their impact on women’s personalities and aspirations. Bedekar’s protagonists depict the general situation of women who were forced into arranged marriages and in marriage in general. Their situation was further restricted
through their class, gender and caste. Like Keun’s ‘Gilgi, who is shown to aspire for material benefits that were common for women of the earlier generations, Bedekar’s protagonists are shown to strive against caste, class and gender boundaries. They are shown to question certain norms regarding marriage, especially arranged marriages, affirm the need for financial independence and take it upon themselves, whether to marry at all or not. In the short story “Tai, hech bare Sukhache Sansar” (Sister, these are only the happy marriages), the female protagonist is shown to comment upon the criterion that went into discussing the issue of marriage. The woman in this story is shown to address her sister and express her sorrow at facing rejection. She also expresses her notion of what she considers as being ‘sinful’. She ponders over the various reasons for rejection. Not knowing English is one of them. Like Keun’s Gilgi, who is aware of the worth of foreign languages, not only for the job market but also for finding a suitable partner, Bedekar’s protagonist depicts a remarkably similar awareness too. Both women are at the mercy of the market governed by patriarchy and although helpless at times depict courage against being rejected. In the Marathi short story, Bedekar portrays the inner thoughts of this woman in her story, and makes the reader aware of the pain that women like the one in this short story who were made to marry in arranged marriages often had to go through--- the ordeal of imagining various men as possible husbands, before the final decision was made and finally what it meant for the woman to be rejected and for what reasons (italics mine) at the hands of men, who had the upper hand in this situation. The
following highlights this, when the woman protagonist, comments upon the
reasons for her rejection.

“Whenver they showed me, then someone would say she doesn’t know
Marathi; some would say she doesn’t know English, some said, she is too old;
some would say, how would someone like her get any groom? Some who
approached me, were widowers or had two children. Whoever came to see me, I
would keep thinking about that match. If he said no, then I would begin thinking
about the next one. This mind of mine needs to be condemned! I have sinned by
thinking about many men as possible husbands! After hearing a no after 8- 15
days, my mind used to go into a shock. How could I ever convey a sense of this
to you, sister? (50-51)

Both Keun and Bedekar’s works show a concern for the women’s
situation of their times, their aspirations, difficulties and yearnings of their
protagonists. Both writers depict a remarkable emphasis on mother –daughter
relations and their importance in the development of their daughter’s personality.
Both of these protagonists are shown to question their mother’s attitudes, and
imply that women needed to shed their old ways of thinking for the sake of
women’s emancipation and acknowledging women as a rational subject. Since
feminist theorists are interested in the way women are ascribed certain roles, how
they are socialized, what their attitudes towards these roles are, the way women
speak to each other, in which language etc, the analysis of mother-daughter
relations forms an integral part of feminist research. A comparative perspective
further shows and confirms whether these roles and relations are valid and have
the same significance for women’s gender specific roles, across different cultures.
Patriarchal societies have always expected and conferred a nurturing role on women. Women as mothers have always been expected to confirm to an ideal of motherhood as prescribed by the norms of a patriarchal society and according to the historical time. Women were brought up in ways that would ensure their adaptation to such ideals. Being a mother meant seclusion from the public sphere and confinement to the private sphere of the family. After the onset of industrialization (in the German context) the burden of upbringing of children was left to the mother alone, unlike previously where grandparents and other members of the family played an important role in lightening the load.” (Katharina Aulls 26). The image of the new mother emerged during the time, industrialization began to take place, bringing with it the question of women’s isolation and the question of taking up the sole responsibility upon herself for the well being of her children.” (ibid). Added to the socio-economic factors, various psychological theories at the beginning of the 20.th century, invented many reasons for the sacrifices that were required from the mother which would confirm to the ideal of motherhood. Especially during the Nazi time, women were expected to be nurturing mothers and expected to produce many children. They were also expected to remain within their homes and produce as many children as possible in order to meet the requirement of providing people for the war. Women with the highest number of children were awarded medals and mothers were generally shown a lot of respect in society. These psychological theories also showed that women were biologically and psychologically inclined to care and provide for their children. Mothers were held responsible for children’s psychological
problems. These and other politically motivated reasons for furthering the ideal of womanhood as ideal mothers, gained in importance from the onset of industrialization. (ibid.)

Mother-daughter relations have been a source of analysis for psychoanalysts and feminists as well and writers like Keun and Bedekar also take up these issues in their works, unlike the former focus on father-son relationships in literature. What insights do psychoanalysts have to offer shows that for Gilgi as well as for the protagonist in “Mother are you my mother or an opponent?” it's harder for the protagonists to make a choice of a marriage partner, since both have been beguiled in their love for their mothers and have been disillusioned in their understanding of the choice of marriage partners, since both mothers have made mistakes in their lives in their choice of marriage partners.

Contemporary psychoanalyst feminist theorist Nancy Chodorow observes that people’s heterosexual choices are the outcome of the Oedipus complex for both sexes. For men this transference to other women, who is like their mother, is easier than it is for women. For a girl, her primary love object is her mother. In order to obtain a proper heterosexual orientation, the girl must transfer her primary object of choice to her father and men. This creates asymmetry in the feminine and masculine Oedipus complex, and difficulties in the development of female sexuality. This also means that a father’s behavior to his daughter and his role in the family are crucial for the emotional development of the daughter’s personality and her sexual choice. Hence a father’s availability for his family, his

lack of participation etc, play a further role in strengthening mother-daughter relationships and as a consequence of this, “a girl never lets go of her attachment to her mother and tends to oscillate between mother and father.” Therefore, observes Chodorow, the “contradictions in women’s heterosexual relationships are due as much to men’s problems with intimacy with their family as well as due to outcomes of early childhood relationships.” (Chodorow 188). Keun’s protagonist Gilgi is shown to engage in a dialogue with her mother, which brings out possible applications of Chodorow’s analysis. Although psychoanalysis offers a universalizing, ahistorical explanation regarding women’s heterosexual choices and ability to connect or not connect with their mother’s behavior, we cannot generalize this explanation for all women. However certain aspects of Chodorow’s theory fit, regarding Gilgi, who herself has been abandoned by her real mother, and is shown to even go against her real mother’s ways. We learn that Gilgi’s father is a non-communicative person, and this explains the lack of any normal communication between Gilgi and her father. Instead of the father confronting Gilgi about her code of conduct, the father leaves the responsibility to her mother. Since Gilgi’s adoptive mother is a part of a patriarchal tradition that emphasized women’s chastity before marriage, she is shown to reinforce these values in her. Gilgi resents the interference and is shown to assert her independence from her mother’s way of thinking. She is further shown to break the rules set down for her by her parents, by having an affair. Keun considers bringing this important aspect of “mother-daughter” relationship into importance,

96 Ibid. 183
and thus unravels questions of mother daughter relationships and their importance in the formation of women’s personality and sexual choice. Gilgi’s behavior goes against that of all her mothers. By doing this, Keun is shown to represent the capacities and possibilities available to the new woman of the early 20th century.

In the following, Gilgi is confronted by her mother about her sexual conduct.


“Gigli, du hast doch nichts Häßliches getan?”

“Was du häßlich nennst, Mutter—wird immer und nur häßlich, wenn ein Dritter darüber denkt und spricht. Gilgi hofft brennend, die Mutter würde verstehen, daß diese Unterhaltung unmöglich ist.(108-109)

(Gigli, says Mrs Kron suddenly with an easy complaining undertone in her voice and forgets her Kölsch dialect. Gilgi, hopefully you aren’t doing anything bad, you are not bad? you are not one of them? Gilgi clenched the hands, till the knuckles, which had turned as white as wax, lifted themselves from the palms of her hands. That is terrible, such a conversation. She should have left the place long time ago. The mother drilled questioning glances into her face. That is not to be tolerated. You weren’t with a man in the night, Gilgi? Gilgi was ashamed for her mother in an incomprehensible way. That she could say something like that. Reproach, participation, interest, curiosity— all justified—yes indeed, yes—but so repulsive. All that happened between Martin and me. That concerns only me. This is something, which she doesn’t understand. She is not allowed to imagine anything between me and him. I don’t do that also--- I also don’t think about things between her and her husband…

Gilgi, you did not do something ugly?

“What you call ugly, Mother will always and be ugly only, when a third person would think about it and speak. Gilgi hopes in a burning way, that the mother would understand, that this conversation is impossible. (108-109)
Like Keun’s protagonist who is shown to engage in an unconventional dialogue with her mother and even disobey her, Bedekar’s female protagonist in the story “Tyag” (Sacrifice) is shown to assert her independence from her mother’s way of thinking. The daughter in this story is faced with the burden of supporting a large family with her earnings, as her father is retired, and she is the eldest. The onus of earning falls solely on her. After a long period of mental turmoil, in which her decision is partly motivated by her acute awareness of the limitations imposed upon her by her ‘gender’, brought about through her mother’s speech and actions, the protagonist decides to remain single and support her family. On one occasion, her mother is shown to be saying the following “Anything happens, her marriage should happen. Now what if the question of dowry arises”? (9Tyag) The protagonist also forgives her mother’s patriarchal notions about men’s superiority in matters of earning subsistence. However her mother’s patriarchal attitude and firm belief in the superiority of men, probably explains her aversion to the institution of marriage and her later decision of not getting married. It also shows that she is capable of a man’s role in the household and is mature enough in fulfilling this role. Truly this new woman is far ahead of her times in that she surpasses gender expectations of her society at her times by her ‘sacrifice’, although admittedly brought upon her by her mother’s attitude towards women in general.

“Sometimes mother used to say, Say anything, girls are girls and boys are boys! Initially this kind of a talk used to annoy me; because I couldn’t understand her state of mind well. I used to feel “So what, even if they did have an elder son,
in what other way would he have been helpful?” I was even giving tutoring sessions besides my job. And even if this did not satisfy my mother and father, then it is their mind which is at fault. I used to give all my salary to them at the end of every month. I never used to assert myself by saying that I would do this or that thing for myself, because I am the one who is earning. I never said anything of that sort. Would any boy ever have said that? Myself and my younger siblings showed a similar kind of obedience. I would never do anything without taking their permission. Would any boy have ever lived under such circumstances? ......... So I decided to conclude, that whenever mother said that Boys are boys and girls are girls”, that it was nothing but taking sides and nothing else.”( Tyag 7)

Keun and Bedekar, being new women themselves let their protagonists assert their independence by questioning their mother’s fixed opinions. Bedekar’s protagonist is shown to question the concept of manhood. By showing that a daughter is equally capable of earning money and supporting the household, Bedekar challenges patriarchal myths and constructions, that only a man is capable of supporting the household. Keuns’ Gilgi is also shown to depict behavior that most men of her times were doing. Independence and most importantly financial independence which was thought to be a man’s domain was no longer so. It was not only Gilgi who was the one shown to be financially independent and aspiring to exceed gender codes, but there were also others like her doing similar things. (reference to the under title of the novel ‘eine von uns’: one of us)

Keun and Bedekar represent the new woman’s concerns by questioning gender boundaries. They introduce to us new avenues of relationships in terms of female friendships. While for Keun and Bedekar, female friendships remain restricted to the non-sexual, in contemporary times, feminists advocate the
inclusion of the sexual in female friendships. (Lesbianism). In this regard, Luce
Irigaray’s article “This Sex which is not one” presents to us the view as to how
women can challenge the patriarchal order and through what means. Irigaray
posits “strategic essentialism” for women. She further postulates that “woman” is
different from man in terms of her body, her language and her imagination. “Her
body has sex organs just about everywhere”97. Since patriarchy and logocentric
patriarchal thought has tried to suppress woman’s imagination or devalue it,
woman has lost touch with her own sexuality and her own language and
imagination. In order to maintain this “femaleness”, woman must assert herself
through her speech and imagination. Lesbianism and financial independence are
ways of opposing patriarchy. However Irigaray is aware that because there are
differences amongst women themselves, political solidarity is difficult to achieve.
Her notion of gender seeks to assert the difference of women from men and
preserve it in their fight against patriarchy.98 In the short stories by Bedekar and

97 Cited in Luce Irigaray “This Sex which is not One”. The Second Wave. New York: Routledge, 1997. 326.

98 Unlike Irigaray, who posits an essential sexual difference between men and women in her notion of
gender, Judith Butler offers a theory of a “genealogy of gender”. A brief discussion of Butler’s position is
important from the point of view of our discussion on gender. Butler’s “Imitation and Gender
Insubordination” questions the accepted notions of gender as a category, as constructed by society in
general. Society understands “gender” as heterosexual and expects behavior and “psychic identifications”
with a particular sex. This emphasis on heterosexuality also means the abjection of certain behaviors and
other possibilities of sexual choices of partners. Language plays an important role in the assignment of
importance to this normative sexuality and our understanding of the appropriateness of sexual choice of
partners and in the development of ones’ sexuality. Butler questions the cultural and political forces that
invest the “body” with certain notions of gender that are founded on systems of compulsory
heterosexuality. She therefore questions the politics of ontology, or the politics of the ontology of gender
theories by examining the political and cultural interests that tend to get served. She questions the notion
of “gender” which she sees ‘as repeated performance’ and the politics behind the “I” that categories of
gender ascribe to it. Like Irigaray, who pleads her cause for ‘lesbianism’ as an option Butler pleads her
cause for gays, lesbians, drags etc. Her politics lies in overcoming the notion of the binaries which
emphasizes the man-woman divide and hence heterosexual choice and is therefore anti-essentialist. It
questions the logic of the ‘natural’ and offers sexual alternatives etc.
in Keun’s novel, the protagonists are shown to engage in female friendships and have dialogues with them. Keun’s Gilgi prefers Olga as a travel-companion, while Bedekar’s protagonists open out their hearts to female friends or sisters. Although their relationships are shown to be non-sexual, we do get a sense of emotional intimacy that exists between these women (in the novel and the short stories) that is comparable to Irigary’s plea of restoring the female back to the natural order, which has been suppressed by phallogocentric thought. Keun and Bedekar make a female imaginary possible, where men don’t figure in much, and where women are shown to take decisions on their own, through self-reliance.

An other position taken up by Helene Cixous is relevant to our understanding of the category of gender and women’s writing. Cixous, a French feminist argues in her article “The laugh of the Medusa” that it is important “for women to write themselves and write about other women, so that they would return to their bodies” (Cixous 112). Her concern lies with restoring women to history, to the category of the subject and to writing, since their subjectivities have always been suppressed by patriarchal thought and the masculine order of things. Since the act of writing, has been since ancient times considered to be a masculine activity and has been “confounded by patriarchal logic” (Cixous 115), it is necessary that women free themselves from a phallogocentric tradition. To say it in her words:

“I maintain unequivocally that there is such a thing as marked writing; that, until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural--- hence political,
typically masculine--economy; that this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that’s frightening since it’s often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction; that this locus has grossly exaggerated all the signs of sexual opposition (and not sexual difference), where woman has never her turn to speak--this being all the more and unpardonable in that writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures.”(115)

Cixous’ notion of gender is partly ‘essentialist’ in that it advocates overcoming the duality masculine/feminine that leads to logocentric thought. This also means that men can write in a feminine manner too. Writing feminine is to write the repressed, the unacknowledged and the suppressed. Cixous urges women to come out of their closets and insists that women need to write and “create a new language of their own that would wreck partitions, classes, rhetorics, regulations and codes,”(Cixous 115) The notion of ‘feminine writing’ that Cixous advocates would make it possible to transcend the phallogocentric order of nature. In the two narratives discussed above, we do have an instance of writing by women about women’ lives, the expression of the repressed in the ‘erlebte Rede’ (speech as discussed later in Keun’s novel) and the inner monologue (in Bedekar’s narratives)

Bedekar and Keun achieve their feminist goals by exposing the unexposed, the unspoken and what was considered to be taboo themes till then. Their positions however make a dialogue possible between the two writer-intellectuals and make room for Bedekar’s prose across western frontiers.
Since this dissertation is not only about feminism but also about literature and women feminists articulating themselves though the medium of literature, we need to also understand the relation of literature with that of its audience, and finally to that of the ‘author’ itself. The category of ‘gender’ implies cultural constraints for women and women writers. The study of women writers entails sensitivity and understanding of gender related constraints for women writers. Literary criticism, in recent years has come to the stage, where the need for looking at an author is no longer considered to be as important as looking at the ‘reader’. Roland Barthes brings up this point in “The Death of the Author”. According to Barthes, classic criticism has given more importance to author and not to the reader. Giving importance to the author meant giving a definitive explanation to the text and imposing a limit on that text. It was time therefore that literary criticism diverted its attention to various reader related aspects that came up during textual analysis. As Barthes emphasizes, ‘a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination’ and in order to do that, attention to a reader’s response or multiplicity of interpretations are essential and necessary from the point of view of concerns of the literary institution. Barthes’s critique about the insignificance to the author (his reference is only to male authors) fails to bring up the name of ‘women writers’ and their concerns. As much as Barthes is correct in giving importance to the reader and the possibility of several interpretations, it is also important to focus on the women writer and understand aspects of gender that come into her writing. This line of argumentation has been taken up by Nancy Miller in “Changing the subject: Authorship, Writing and the Reader”. Miller
argues that Barthes’ proposition regarding the death of the author doesn’t work for women authors or for that matter for feminist concerns. She corroborates this on the grounds that this meant ‘foreclosing the question of identity for women’ (Miller 106). In Miller’s words:

“Because women have not had the same historical relation of identity to origin, institution, production, that men have had, women have not, I think, (collectively) felt burdened by too much Self, Ego, Cogito etc. Because the female subject has juridically been excluded from the polis, and hence decentered, disoriginated, deinstitutionalized, etc, her relation to integrity and textuality, desire and authority, is structurally different.”(106)

Miller further argues that feminist critics need to concern themselves with female authorship and explore female subjectivity, since the “discourse of the universal had excluded the female” (107). The task of feminist critic was to hence focus on “what it meant to read and write as women within the institutions that authorized and regulated most reading and writing” (112). A similar concern is voiced by Tania Modleski in her article “Feminism and the Power of Interpretation: Some Critical Readings”. Modleski interprets feminist theorists and literary texts articulating feminist concerns about interpreting literary texts from the point of view of feminist criticism. Her concern lies with “freeing women from all male captivity narratives” (136). By emphasizing feminist criticism of literary texts (a concern also articulated by Elaine Showalter), Modleski foregrounds important observations regarding traditional interpretations of texts and feminism’s contribution towards expanding these ‘traditional’ interpretations.
A feminist perspective to literary texts would restore its political edge and is also important if men want to show their support for feminism.

My choice of texts here deal with feminism and pioneering feminists of the women’s movement of the period also known as First Wave. Since these women do talk about agendas for reform in gender codes, the question of feminism arises, indubitably. But besides their agendas, the author also gets reflected into their writings, if not in an overtly personal manner---- considering the time period under consideration here. Therefore feminists feel the concern of studying the author, especially the female author from the point of view of studying female subjectivity and offering new interpretations to male centered literary texts. Unfortunately, we do not have much knowledge about how Popp-Phule, Peters- Ramabai and Dohm-Shinde’s texts were perceived by the conservative circles of the time.

Michael Foucault’s “What is an Author? emphasizes that we need to understand the author as a ‘subject position’ within a text. Studying an author means also studying his thoughts, the society he lived in, the general discourses prevalent at the time and how they get reflected in his/her writings. The author gained in importance towards the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, with the development of capitalism and the introduction of the system of ownership and strict copyright rules. Prior to that there was a tradition of literary works like the epics, stories, folktales and tragedies which did not require the mention of an author. From the Middle Ages onwards, scientific texts were considered authentic, only if the name of the author was known. (Foucault)
Foucault’s analysis however leaves out the issue of gender and the gender of the author. His analysis offers us important insights into why the author is important and why we need to study the author function for our work analysis. But as per the aim of this dissertation it is also necessary to study the ‘reader function’, to get a better understanding about why certain stereotypes about indigenous women emerged. Peters and Dohm are said to be readers as well of Indian women’s situation and conclude in typically Orientalising manner the nature and situation of women’s problems in the east.

Besides these crucial insights offered by two major literary theorists about the importance/insignificance of the author, other theorists have researched into many race, nationality and sexuality related aspects of women writers. My project of showing similarities or the comparable elements in German and Marathi women’s feminist writings tries on the one hand to show, that Marathi feminism is not a mere import of ideas from the West (since the issues been dealt with are differing in several ways) and that within Western feminism there are many varieties and strands that Western feminism needs to negotiate with, as these divisions are based on multiple factors such as ethnicity, class and sexual divisions. The similarities in German and Marathi women’s writings also try to see, on what grounds a fight or alliance for a common feminist cause is possible. Neither are we taking Western feminist ideologies as always referent. We are also critiquing them.

Furthermore other feminist concerns that deal with the issue of ‘diversity’ amongst women has been reason enough for not been able to come
together on a common platform have made it necessary to examine possible strategies and forms that would deal with the issue of diversity among women. Feminists have tried to reconcile the issue of diversity by incorporating new understandings where diversity can be taken into account in order to make coalitions amongst diverse women’s feminisms. The similarities then would make the ‘bottom line clear’ (a phrase used by Charlotte Bunch) on what grounds women across cultures or diverse groups could come together and coalesce.

Some of my other concerns here as a literary feminist scholar, delve into some other issues related to literary aspects of works written by women. This project also concerns itself with the issue of showing similarities or the comparable elements in the early feminist’s women’s writings from two different cultures. While drawing the similarities in these writings it is also necessary to question and dwell upon the notion of what basis do we take for showing the similarities. Which women’s truth and which women’s oppression becomes a greater truth or real oppression and occupies a higher or lower place in hierarchy. Can there be one center of value and hence absolute standards? Postmodernist parlance would say no and question the notion of ‘center’. This denial of an absolute centre has also led to the necessity of alliances based on various divisive lines such as class, caste, sexuality, ethnicity, race etc. But the question of ‘strategic essentialism’ as advocated by Spivak and articulated differently by bell hooks also makes the notion of a ‘temporary centre or temporary alliance’ (italics mine) for immediate feminist goals equally relevant and plausible.
bell hooks’ “Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Between Women” presents the idea of developing political solidarity amongst women from all cultures (her reference is to feminism in the U.S) that is not based on the ‘ideology of the dominant culture’. According to the dominant ideology of white women, the idea of common oppression tends to ‘disguise and mystify’ the true nature of women’s varied and complex social realities.’ (hooks 485). Hence it is necessary to decenter the center of these assumptions that would serve as a base for feminist ideology. Therefore it is not necessary that women unite only on the basis of shared experiences to feel solidarity. Even despite the differences women could unite in order to end sexism or sexist oppression. In hooks words:

“Women do not need to eradicate difference to feel solidarity. We do not need to share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression. We do not need anti-male sentiments to bond us together, so great is the wealth of experience, culture, and ideas we have to share with one another. We can be sisters united by shared interests and beliefs, united in our appreciation for diversity, united in our struggle to end sexist oppression, united in political solidarity. (499-500)

Thus for hooks ‘difference’ doesn’t need to be eradicated in order to come together on a common platform to end sexist oppression. Difference needs to be incorporated within the feminist movement so that the feminist movement grows. It also means that besides socialist feminists, other feminists could take up the cause of socialist feminism, or for that matter, heterosexual women could also support the cause of lesbians and that only black women or non-white women need to be concerned about racism. Thus according to hooks the possibility for
white women to unite with other non-white and black women to form a common agenda is worth realizing, provided “white supremacy is understood and attacked by white women so that they can bond with women from multiethnic communities.” (hooks 493).

On similar lines Gayatri Spivak talks about the work of the ‘Subaltern Studies group’ within U.S. academia which has done considerable amount of work in carving out ‘a national identity in decolonization’ (Spivak ‘In a Word’ 358). The Subaltern Studies group works from within the U.S and other Western Universities. Spivak talks about the importance of strategy, but also adds that one needs to look at the origins of the group. She further emphasizes that a ‘strategy is not a theory, but it is something that suits the situation. The word ‘essentialism’ acquires a negative connotation in Spivak’s vocabulary, instead the idea of a strategic use of an essence as mobilizing force forms an important part of Spivak’s and other Subaltern group scholar’s vocabulary.

Spivak emphasizes ‘heterogeneity, discontinuity and anti-essentialism but also favors strategic essentialism in order to forward goals of Third world feminists. hooks and Spivak articulate concerns of feminists in a contemporary mode. Both emphasize ‘differences’ amongst feminists with regard to Third and First World feminists but still the possibility of alliances despite them. Indian feminists of the 19th Century saw emancipatory possibilities in the colonizer culture, but also took efforts, if not in a similar manner, to maintain their own sense of selves and identity. Bedekar, Ramabai, Shinde and Savitribai have proven so.
How to maintain an indigenous (local) identity and represent local concerns despite the acknowledged presence and indispensability of European concepts of Reason and the idea of a universal subject? This concern has been articulated, like other noted scholars (Gayatri Spivak), by prominent U.S. based South Asian historian and Subaltern Studies Scholar: Dipesh Chakrabarty. Chakrabarty’s book “Provincializing Europe” puts forward the argument that despite the indispensability of European political thought and concepts required to articulate modern concerns of the subject for non-western countries, it is still possible to challenge the hegemony of European thought and show the inadequacy of some of these concepts in articulating local concerns. In doing this, Chakrabarty challenges the notion of totalizing theories of European modernity and the concept of ‘historicism’, that is “the idea to understand anything it has to be seen both as a unity and in its historical development” (Chakrabarty 6). In Chapter six, ‘Domestic Cruelty and the Birth of the Subject’ Chakrabarty cites the example of two important Bengali reformers Rammohan Roy and Vidyasagar, who inspired by European ideas of Reason were able to spread the logic of compassion amongst local people in their fight against the cruel and barbarous act of Sati. By using Enlightenment logic of reason and secular thought, Roy and Vidyasagar were able to document the suffering of high caste widows in the interest of social intervention, even though they had to rely on European ideas of modernity and Enlightenment reason. In doing this, these local reformers and other members of the Brahmo Samaj, and other women writers for instance depicted various nuances of widow suffering and other regional indicators, which
were non-modern or pre-modern (reference to God in their fight against social mores) by the standards of modern political thought.” (Chakrabarty).

Chakrabarty’s intention is to show the indispensability of European thought in formulating and articulating universal concerns of the subject, but also question European hegemony and European pride in claiming Europe’s originality as the “home of the modern”. Thus in order to provincialize Europe, the project of Subaltern Studies needs to include, in Chakrabarty’s words:

“The recognition that Europe’s acquisition of the adjective modern for itself is a piece of global history of which an integral part is the story of European imperialism and 2) the understanding that this equating of a certain version of Europe with modernity is not the work of Europeans alone; third world nationalisms, as modernizing ideologies par excellence, have been equal partners in the process. I do not mean to overlook the anti-imperial moments in the careers of these nationalisms, …..In unraveling the necessary entanglement of history—a disciplined and institutionally regulated form of collective memory—with the grand narratives of rights, citizenship, the nation state, public and private spheres, one cannot but problematize India at the same time as one dismantles Europe.” (“Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History” 21)

In what way is Chakrabarty’s argument relevant to our comparison of Keun and Bedekar’s works and the purpose of showing comparable elements?

Extrapolating from Chakrabarty, who argues that European political thought has been indispensable as well inadequate in articulating modern concerns of the non western people, we could say that Bedekar’s acknowledgement of British rule in freeing and Enlightening women shows the indispensability of European thought, while at the same time proves inadequate, while articulating concerns particular to
certain caste and class, specific to women of her times. (eg: the concern of dowry as a hindering factor to the protagonist’s marriage comes up in the story “Tyag”, which was a typically indigenous concern). Although Bedekar acknowledges the significance of the British in educating the Indian public in matters related to women and lower castes, Bedekar still writes her stories in Marathi and articulates concerns pertaining to women of a certain class and caste. Nowhere do we find a mention of British and other Western women in her stories.

This dissertation also concerns itself with the need and outcome of comparing German and Marathi women’s feminist writings. By showing that Bedekar and Keun take up some issues of the new woman of the early 20th Century proves that even regional works of literature across cultures can be compared and become a part of World Literature. Scholarship regarding the rise of Comparative literature as a discipline has shown, how earlier attempts at comparing East West literatures showed or evaluated non western cultures negatively or in an inferior light. More so ever, the idea of comparing a Western literature with that of a regional or provincial culture has also been not either well received in the discipline of comparative literature (Anne Paolucci) and the results that emerge from such comparisons not received enough attention. This dissertation has been an effort in that direction, where an attempt is made to compare the feminist literature of a country with that of a province, and see if there are certain ‘essences’ that can be derived for the sake of deconstructing the earlier elitist claims of this discipline that sought to establish the hegemony of comparing the canon or Western cultures with themselves. This dissertation also
attempts to expose “Orientalising” tendencies amongst the Western cultures which reiterate European superiority over Oriental backwardness” (Edward Said 7). This backwardness also implied ‘differences’ and a construction of a complete ‘Other’ and ‘Opposite’, thus constructing an unalterable European identity for the sake of political reasons and representation. Implied in the discourse of ‘Orientalism’, according to Edward Said, was the idea of power for the sake of legitimization of policies, personal conduct, the direction of foreign policy etc.” (Said). By highlighting the ‘differences’ and portraying the Arab world in a negative vein, the West sought to reinforce its hegemony over the Islamic world and thus reinforce its prejudices and condescension about the non-west.

Hence the idea of showing the similarities or the comparable elements between East and Non Western literatures is compelling, not in order to highlight the differences by focusing too much on the local aspects of the literary works, but by examining the general patterns between them and locating certain universal essences that would help build bridges across cultures.

Some other examples, where we do see an engagement with Western notions of universal rights (in line with Enlightenment thought) are African women writers and their concerns with the problem of excision in their culture. The reason for bringing up these writers is that their use of Western methodology and Francois Lionnet’ argument about the need for Western ethnocentrism. Lionett explores this issue based on the analysis of African women writers who examine the problem of excision in their works. Elaborating on a text written by Nawal El Saadawi, Francois Lionnet shows how these writers “take up a position
more Western than African” in combating an age old tyrannical practice although their motivations could be spurred by belief in the Enlightenment notion of universal rights and eradication of pain and right to pleasure. In Lionett’s words:

“ These writers (Olayinka Koso Thomas, Awa Thiam and Nawal El Saadawi) are all Western-trained feminist intellectuals or scientists who denounce the practice from the vantage point of the educated elite—— hence, some have argued, from a perspective more Western than African and this alienated them from the masses, who would neither read them nor sympathize with their views.” (Lionnet 23)

Although a Westerner herself, Lionnet admits and argues that showing a stance taken up by African feminist intellectuals that could speak for certain Western ethnocentric values, Lionnet tries to envisage a dialogue between Western and Third World women, that would lead towards building a community:

“Antiethnocentrism can have the unfortunate consequence of undermining feminist political solidarity and the kind of liberalism reinforces Third World masculinist nationalism which attempts to isolate women in their cultures and identify western women as their enemy. It is therefore important to continue speaking of community, and to attempt to find a common theoretical and ethical ground from which to argue for political solidarity without either objectifying the other woman or subsuming collective goals under the banner of sameness.”(20)

Lionett is right in that Marathi feminists like Savitribai Phule, Pandita Ramabai, Shinde and Bedekar then come across as much Western as Indian in their appeal for women’s rights to education and independence, but argue only for local concerns, although articulated in a modern/Western manner.
How did these “New Women” of the early 20th century assert themselves through the phallogocentric discourses available to them at the beginning of the 20th century. Historically, narrative authority is seen to attach itself with the ideology of white, educated men. Hence one major constituent of narrative authority, in the words of Susan Sniader Lanser, is the extent to which a narrator’s status conforms to this dominant social power”99. For non-hegemonic or non-mainstream writers, there is a need to maintain a delicate balance between the available hegemonic practices and their own need to subvert the dominant rhetorics.”(Lanser 6-7) In Germany, for instance, German women had started asserting themselves and their thoughts through their writings and intellectual meetings in salons. Right from the 18th century, German women had started publishing in journals and letters. 19th century German literature by women saw themes such as protest against marriages of convenience, women’s rights to education and employment, women-centred narratives and themes. 20th century Germany saw a greater change in women’s literature, since women’s employment outside the house and women’s education at the university level assumed a larger proportion as compared to the previous century. Women novelists portrayed teachers, women doctors, nurses, female employees, scientists and female artists in their works.”(Heide von Felden 36) Often their protagonists had to choose between marriage and career, were more goal oriented as compared to those of the former times. Similarly their writing also acquired a more fragmentary nature, in order to articulate the complex nature of reality around them. Many women even

chose to write under pseudonyms or false names. This also refers to Susanne Kord’s observation, about why many women writers in Germany wrote under a male pseudonym or under a false name.\textsuperscript{100}

The situation for German and Marathi women of a particular milieu had changed considerably in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. As we know, women had access to the vote, to some acceptable forms of a career and in addition to that there was an ongoing women’s movement that had gained in momentum since its beginning in the previous centuries.

Keun’s “Gilgi: eine von uns” refers to the commonality of the modern women’s experience of her times. It soon became a bestseller with more than 30,000 copies sold within the first year followed by a film adaptation. But at the same time, Keun had to later flee from her homeland after her books were banned by the ‘Reichschrifttumskammer’ as Asphaltsliteratur mit antideutschen Tendenzen. (Barbara Kosta 283). Two years after the publication of Gilgi, the National Socialist party blacklisted Keun’s novels on grounds of the sexual politics represented in her fiction.”(Kosta 278). An important factor for banning Keun’s novels lay in the fact that writers like Keun portrayed the new woman and an alternative lifestyle that came with it. This lifestyle meant an abandonment of married life, an emphasis on the non-maternal (Kosta) and a break away from

\textsuperscript{100} Susanne Kord’s study deals with the women writers choice of remaining anonymous or writing under a pseudonym in the 18\textsuperscript{th} and the 19\textsuperscript{th} century Germany. Kord’s study brings up gender related aspects regarding women writer’s choice of remaining anonymous as Malatibai Bedekar wrote under the pseudonym “Vibhavari Shirurkar. Like Malatibai, Luise Otto wrote under the false name “Otto Stern. Since in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, writing was mainly a man’s domain, writing under false names was mainly to hide one’s gender and avoid ostracism. Hence works published under male names had greater chances of been published and taken seriously. Malatibai wrote under a false name, not to hide her gender, but to protect her identity and to prevent ostracism, as well as getting her works published.
other conservative norms of the time. As cited by Ute Frevert in Barbara Kosta’s article, Frevert documents the anxieties that underpinned discourses of the maternal.

“In 1929 a desperate call could be heard in a Catholic newspaper for a mother for the dying fatherland; But she is nowhere to be found. We may see a few women wearing men’s hairstyles; we may discover women Olympic champions; and we may hear a young woman cooing for her desires to be fulfilled; yet nowhere do we find a mother.”

Other reasons that led to the exclusion of Keun’s novels and this particular novel in general were issues of abortion, illegitimate marriage, children out of wedlock and a general concern towards these issues. Given the fact that Paragraph 218 of the criminal code, which criminalized the intentional termination of pregnancy and abortions being carried out in secrecy, women had few alternatives as to whether or not to have illegitimate children. Keun presented her case for the Right of women to abortion and if the need arose for women to raise their children alone by themselves. Thereby she shows that modern woman or the ‘New Woman’ of the 20th century had different alternatives in front of her. By this act of writing, which presents an unlinear development of the female protagonist (a theme found in the classic Bildungsroman in German literary history), Keun’s works like those of other contemporary modernist women writers undermines national boundaries by offering alternative gender models for women, that ran contrary to those considered acceptable to the society of their times.

Bedekar’s short stories offer gender models that ran contrary to those that were desired by the early nationalists of the 20th century. For writing and bringing female experience otherwise overlooked and not given enough attention to, into the picture, Bedekar’s works too undermined nationalist motivations, in that her role model for women ran counter to those considered to be acceptable for the women of her times. In the preface to ‘Kalyanche Nihshwas’, written in 1976, Bedekar writes:

“It is almost 45 years since the times I wrote “Kalyanche Nishwas”. While writing it, I was not even aware that I was creating a hand-bomb. But surprisingly the middle class reacted in a novel way, while at the same time a large section of the society reacted in an angry manner. The person who writes such dirty books like ‘Kalyanche Nishwas and especially ‘Hindolyawar’, should be killed, so that such a demeanor that goes against society will be stopped. This was the cry. If the woman writer (Bedekar refers to herself as a writer and not by the “I”), had not been identified, then even if the society had not looked for her, then it would definitely mean a loss of a job for her. But since the woman writer wasn’t identified, (Bedekar wrote her stories under a false name) many people wrote derogatory articles about her and felt satisfied. Today when readers hear about this, they feel surprised. (Bedekar 5)

Like Keun, Bedekar had to confront strict social expectations regarding writerly conduct that emphasized certain gender codes. Like Keun’s Gilgi, Bedekar’s protagonists in some of her stories prefer to stay alone or single, although the reasons for doing so are not identical to those for Gilgi. Both writers however portray female experience in its variety and suggest alternative lifestyles for women in their respective society of their times. Both show the impact of gender codes and laws on women and the alternatives or the lack of them before
their female protagonists. Although Keun prefers the novel, and Bedekar the short story, their objective is to present the life or maturation of female protagonists, in their youth and see how they adapted themselves to their societies. The maturation or the ‘Bildung’ of the hero was a theme that was originally thought of and dealt with by German male writers like Goethe, Schiller, Gottfried Keller, Blackenburg and Wieland etc in a genre called the ‘Bildungsroman’. Although this genre dealt with the ‘maturation process’ of the male youth, its ultimate didactic intention was to assimilate the youth towards society’s higher ideals and goals. As such the ‘Bildungsroman’ (a novel that dealt with the education of its hero), was a male genre and sought to respond to the demands of modern life. The Bildungsroman is supposed to lead to an end and thus acquire an epic dimension, where the hero is able to develop inwardly and also able to assimilate himself into the society thus serve society in a better fashion. The purpose of the Bildungsroman is ultimately to inspire the unification of the German nation.”(Todd Kontje 29). Unlike the emphasis on the epic aspects of the novel, Keun and Bedekar focus on the female youth and even identify with the inner thoughts of their protagonists to present an authentic picture of the situation of women. Keun, for instance depicts the inner thoughts of Gilgi in what is known in German as ‘erlebte Rede’ of the (indirect way of depicting the woman protagonists way of feeling). Unlike the epic narrative which serves a collective purpose of the people, the erlebte Rede\textsuperscript{102} and the choice of the ‘Bildungsroman’ for Keun highlights an emphasis on the woman

\textsuperscript{102} Erlebte Rede uses the third person in the past tense, to show the thoughts, reflections, unspoken questions and feelings of a character. It is mainly used to express unspoken thoughts and feelings. This kind of a speech also shows the possibility that both the writers perceptions of reality and that of her character are shown to mix with each other. (See Source: Jochen Vogt 74.)
as an individual. By bringing the inner thoughts of her protagonist into picture, Keun takes a closer look at the subjectivity of women of her times. Unlike the age-old perceptions where women were considered to be objects of patriarchal discourse, Keun and Bedekar foregrounded women’s concerns as individuals and intervened in the processes of modernity. By doing this they proposed modernization for women, just as modernization for men was a natural and taken for granted fact since ages. Through their use of modern techniques to deal with modernity’s demands, these women questioned the tradition of a traditional, patriarchal social order in their respective times. A dialogue is certainly possible between Keun and Bedekar on the basis of mother-daughter relations, ideas of education, female friendships and the concerns of the new woman.

In conclusion, this comparison of women writers across two different cultures, from the early 20th century also illustrates the relation of women writers from the past with those of the present. If contemporary women writers write today about unconventional themes dealing with women, which suggest alternative lifestyles, then it is to the likes of women writers like Keun, Bedekar and others that they could do so. A point highlighted by Gilbert and Gubar, who identified our foremother’s isolation, their need to write and surpass the anxiety of ‘authorship” that was endemic to their literary subculture. Contemporary women writers across both cultures definitely enjoy greater freedom of choice and resources. It is a feminist comparative perspective that makes us see and understand the constraints on women writers across cultures and what women
could achieve in terms of the availability of resources and finally what it means for achieving a dialogue and ultimately political solidarity across cultures.
Conclusion:

To summarize briefly, I have tried to juxtapose Marathi and German women’s feminist writings, in order to bring to light certain comparable elements regarding feminist issues of the time. The presence or absence of comparable elements towards certain feminist issues shows that a dialogue is either possible or that it is possible with limitations. In Chapter one, for instance, Popp and Phule show comparable elements in their approach towards their fellow sisters and in terms of the support they either enjoyed or did not receive in their feminist and activist endeavors. Moreover they also show comparable elements in terms of their approach towards the issue of caste and class politics. In Chapter two, Peters and Ramabai show similarities in their agenda for women’s self-empowerment, their critique of patriarchy, the system of marriage and how women need to develop themselves in order to combat forces of patriarchy, class and caste politics. Despite the orientalising tendencies that appear in Peter’s writing of the text, a dialogue is still possible between them (Peters and Ramabai). Chapter three shows that there are limitations on a dialogue between Dohm and Shinde, since Orientalising elements surface in Dohm’s writings, but nevertheless Dohm’s work shows similarities with that of Shinde in terms of their attitude towards patriarchy, tradition and a general stereotyping of women. Chapter four also shows that a dialogue is possible between Keun and Bedekar based on their similarity in perception towards the questions of the new woman, mother-daughter relations and a general ideas of education for their own times.
This dissertation has tried to bring much neglected feminist writing to light and by placing works from two different cultures together shown that authors like Drewitz, Grass and others contemporary authors will write about Indian women in a much more subtle, just and nuanced ways. Furthermore, this dissertation has shown that by deconstructing stereotypical images of Indian women in Westocentric practices and discourses and elements of comparable agency common to two cultures: one a non-Western and the other a Western one, it has brought two different cultures realistically closer, so that the elements of condescension, or the exotic attitude about India that was characteristic of 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century German writers gets rectified and a more true to reality image of India and Germany emerges in Western and non-Western eyes. The construction of the composite “Other” by German and contemporary Indian discourses is not as composite and static as has been done so far.

Although I have focused here on four case studies from (Mahrashtra) India from the 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, we also cannot forget examples from the pre-colonial period and other examples during the colonial period, where there were many remarkable women who broke stereotypes of Indian womanhood by proving that they (Indian women) are not merely average, dutiful, victimized, poor, uneducated, family oriented or ignorant. Neither can Western feminists conclude that there was absence of feminism in the Indian context. Indian women too become aware of a more realist picture of the forms of patriarchy in the German context after looking at the comparable and other elements that come across in the feminist writings under survey here.
This study has also seen that we need to be more aware of how we use certain set of Western methodologies in mapping indigenous concerns. Western feminism has to learn to avoid the typical mistakes in that certain practices like ‘sati’ or the status of the widow represent the entire Indian culture or becomes symbolic of it. Likewise Indian Hindu nationalists too need to avoid defining the Good Indian woman by highlighting Sati and the status of the Hindu widow as an essence of the good Indian woman. (Essence of Culture and a Sense of History 87) And lastly, but not the least importance to empirical and historical accuracy and political utility or risk need to be considered while framing women’s issues and questions.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{103} Narayan “Essence of Culture and a Sense of history” 97.
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