

# PANDITA RAMABAI

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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. ANCESTRY AND EARLY LIFE ... ..	1
II. CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY ... ..	14
III. WIDOWS' HOME ... ..	20
IV. THE RESCUE AND TRAINING OF FAMINE GIRLS ..	24
V. LAST YEARS ... ..	41

## PANDITA RAMABAI

THE name of Pandita Ramabai is a household word not merely in India but in foreign lands like America, Australia, New Zealand and England. She was like a light set upon a hill, lighting many lives and shedding its radiance afar. A great linguist and profound Sanskrit scholar, she earned the title of Pandita while she was still in her teens. After she had turned fifty she acquired the Hebrew language in order to read the Bible in the original, and undertook and completed the stupendous task of translating the Christian Scriptures single-handed into Marathi, adding her own references to it. She was a pioneer in the domain of women's education in India and did a great work as teacher, philanthropist and missionary. She rescued and saved numerous lives, and the institutions that she founded and managed with such conspicuous ability still remain as standing monuments of her greatness and love.

### I. ANCESTRY AND EARLY LIFE

Her father Ananta Shastri was a native of Mangalore district. When he was quite young, he left his home and went to Poona to study under a renowned scholar called Ramachandra Shastri, who was then employed by the reigning Peshwa to teach his wife Sanskrit. Young Ananta enjoyed the privilege of accompanying his teacher, and while thus going in and out of the palace he occasionally heard the lady reciting Sanskrit poems. The boy was filled with delight and wonder

that a woman should be so learned as to be able to recite such beautiful melodious poetry and he resolved that he would teach his little wife Sanskrit just as the Sastri taught the fair Rani of the palace. His student life ended at the age of twenty-three and he hastened to his native village to carry out his high resolve. But his parents strenuously objected to it; the bride herself had no desire to be instructed and he had to give up his idea.

Ten years were spent by him as a State Pandit under the patronage of the Maharajah of Mysore. These were years of wealth and prosperity. He then undertook a pilgrimage to Benares in the course of which his first wife died. He made the acquaintance of a fellow-pilgrim of his own caste, and from him he received a fine little girl, nine years of age, as his second wife. He took her home at the end of his travels and delivered her to his mother for domestic training, but undertook himself to teach the child to read and write. He met with so much opposition that he realized that this experiment was also likely to fail. So he took his young wife and started off into Gangamula forest where a rude log hut was made for the lonely couple. The child wife was tenderly cared for; but carefully taught. Life must have been very lonely for the young wife: but it was here that little Lakshmi Bai was to live for many years and acquire a profound knowledge of Sanskrit language and literature. As years passed by and womanhood and family life came on, it was she that undertook the task of teaching the sacred language to her children.

Ananta Shastri, who supported himself mainly from the rice fields and cocoanut plantations which he owned, was considered a holy and learned man. For many years he entertained at his home in the

forest numerous pilgrims and students who placed themselves under his instruction. The entertainment proved too costly for him and eventually poverty threatened his household. So he was obliged to leave his home and lead the life of a pilgrim.

Ramabai was born in Gangamula forest, near the source of Thungabadra, and was only six months old when she left her forest home. She was placed in a wicker basket and a man carried the precious burden from the mountain top down to the valley. Thus her pilgrim life began when she was still an infant.

Her father, though a very orthodox Hindu adhering strictly to the rites and customs of his caste, was a reformer in his own way. The Brahmin Pandits living in Mangalore district tried hard to dissuade Ananta Shastri from teaching his wife the sacred learning. A council of nearly four hundred men was summoned for the purpose of convicting him of unorthodox practices and expelling him from his caste. But his extensive studies in the Hindu sacred literature enabled him to quote chapter and verse from the scriptures which gave authority to teach woman and even Shudras; and they could not put him out of caste as they had threatened to do.

Ramabai says: 'Ever since I remember anything, my father and mother were always travelling from one sacred place to another, staying in each place for some months, bathing in the sacred river or tank, visiting temples, worshipping their own household gods and the images in the temples, and reading the sacred books to the general public in temples or in other convenient places. The reading of the Puranas served a double purpose. The first and main object was to get rid of sin and earn merit in

order to qualify for Moksha. The other subsidiary purpose was to earn an honest living without begging. The readers of the Puranas were the popular and public preachers of religion among Hindus. My parents followed this vocation. We never had to beg or to work to earn our livelihood. We used to get all the food and money we needed and more; what remained over after meeting all necessary expenses was spent in performing pilgrimages and giving alms to Brahmins. This sort of life went on until my father became too feeble to stand the exertion. When he was no longer able to direct the reading of the Puranas by us, we were not able to do any other work to earn our livelihood, as we had grown up in perfect ignorance of anything outside the sacred literature of the Hindus. We could do no menial work nor could we beg to get the necessities of life. Our parents had unbounded faith in what the sacred books taught. They encouraged us to look to the gods to get support. For three years we did nothing but perform religious acts. At last all the money which we had was spent; but the gods did not help us. We suffered from famine and the country too where we lived (Madras Presidency) had begun to feel the effects of famine. People were starving all over the land and we like the rest of the people wandered from place to place.'

In another place Ramabai describes her famine experiences as follows:

'My recollections carry me back to the hard times some twenty-two years ago. The last great famine in the Madras Presidency reached its climax in the year 1876-77, but it began at least three years before that time. I was in my teens then, and so thoroughly ignorant of the outside world that I cannot remember observing the condition of other

people, yet saw enough of distress in our own and other families to realize the hard-heartedness of unchanged human nature.

'High caste and respectable poor families who are not accustomed to hard labour and pauperism, suffered then, as they do now, more than the poorer classes. My own people, among many others, fell victims to the terrible famine. We had known better days. My father was a landholder and an honoured Pandit, and had acquired wealth by his learning. But by-and-by, when he became old and infirm and blind in the last days of his earthly life, he lost all the property in one way or another. My brother, sister and myself had no secular education to enable us to earn our livelihood by better work than by manual labour. We had all the sacred learning necessary to lead an honest religious life, but the pride of caste and superior learning and vanity of life prevented our stooping down to acquire some industry whereby we might have saved the precious lives of our parents.

'In short, we had no common sense, and foolishly spent all the money we had in hand in giving alms to the Brahmins to please the gods, who, we thought, would send a shower of gold mohurs upon us and make us rich and happy. We went to several sacred places and temples, to worship different gods and bathe in sacred rivers and tanks, to free ourselves from sin and curse, which brought poverty on us. We prostrated ourselves before stone and metal images of the gods, and prayed to them day and night; the burden of our prayers being that the gods would be pleased to give us wealth, learning and renown. My dear brother, a stalwart young fellow of twenty-one, spoilt his health and wasted his finely built body by fasting months and months. But nothing came of all this futile effort to please the gods. . . .

'We knew the Vedanta, and knew also that we worshipped not the images, but some gods whom they represented; still all our learning and superior knowledge was of no avail. We bowed to the idols as thousands of learned Brahmins do. We expected them to speak to us in wonderful oracles. We went to the astrologers with money and other presents, to know from them the mind of the gods concerning us. In this way we spent our precious time, strength, and wealth in vain. When no money was left in hand we began to sell the valuable things belonging to us—jewelry, costly garments, silver-ware; and even the cooking vessels of brass and copper were sold at last, and the money spent in giving alms to Brahmins, till nothing but a few silver and copper coins were left in our possession. We bought coarse rice with them and ate very sparingly; but it did not last long. At last the day came when we had finished eating the last grain of rice—and nothing but death by starvation remained for our portion. Oh the sorrow, the helplessness, and the disgrace of the situation!

'We assembled together to consider what we should do next; and after a long discussion came to the conclusion that it was better to go into the forest and die there than bear the disgrace of poverty among our own people. And that very night we left the house in which we were staying at Tirupati—a sacred town situated on the top of Venkatghiri—and entered into the great forest, determined to die there. Eleven days and nights—in which we subsisted on water and leaves and a handful of wild dates—were spent in great bodily and mental pain. At last our dear old father could hold out no longer; the tortures of hunger were too much for his poor, old, weak body. He determined to drown himself in a sacred tank near by, thus to

end all his earthly suffering. It was suggested that the rest of us either drown ourselves, or break the family and go our several ways. But drowning ourselves seemed most practicable. To drown oneself in some sacred river or tank is not considered suicide by the Hindus; so we felt free to put an end to our lives in that way. Father wanted to drown himself first; so he took leave of all the members of the family one by one. I was his youngest child, and my turn came last. I shall never forget his last injunctions to me. His blind eyes could not see my face; but he held me tight in his arms, and stroking my head and cheeks, he told me, in a few words broken by emotion, to remember how he loved me, and how he had taught me to do right, and never to depart from the way of righteousness. His last loving command to me was to lead an honourable life if I lived at all, and to serve God all my life. He did not know the only true God, but served the—to him—unknown God with all his heart and strength; and he was very desirous that his children should serve Him to the last. "Remember, my child," he said, "you are my youngest, my most beloved child. I have given you into the hand of our God; you are His, and to him alone you must belong, and serve Him all your life."

'He could speak no more. My father's prayers for me were, no doubt, heard by the Almighty, the all-merciful Heavenly Father whom the old Hindu did not know. . . . We were after this dismissed from father's presence; he wanted an hour for meditation and preparation before death.

'While we were placed in such a bewildering situation, the merciful God, who so often prevents His sinful children from rushing headlong into the deep pit of sin, came to our rescue. He kept us

from the dreadful act of being witness to the suicide of our own beloved father. God put a noble thought into the heart of my brother, who said he could not bear to see the sad sight. He would give up all caste pride and go to work to support our old parents; and as father was unable to walk, he said he would carry him down the mountain into the nearest village, and then go to work. He made his intentions known to father, and begged him not to drown himself in the sacred tank. So the question was settled for that time. Our hearts were gladdened, and we prepared to start from the forest. And yet we wished very much that a tiger, a great snake, or some other wild animal would put an end to our lives. We were too weak to move, and too proud to beg or work to earn a livelihood. But the resolution was made, and we dragged ourselves from the jungle as best we could.

‘It took us nearly two days to come out of the forest into a village at the foot of the mountain. Father suffered intensely throughout this time. Weakness caused by starvation and the hardships of the life in the wilderness hastened his death. We reached the village with great difficulty, and took shelter in a temple; but the Brahmin priests of the temple would not let us stay there. So we were obliged again to move from the temple and go out of the village into the ruins of an old temple where no one but the wild animals dwelt in the night. There we stayed for four days. A young Brahmin seeing the helplessness of our situation gave us some food.

‘The same day on which we reached that village, my father was attacked by fever from which he did not recover. On the first day, at the beginning of his last illness, he asked for a little sugar and water. We gave him water, but could

not give sugar. He could not eat the coarse food, and shortly after, he became unconscious, and died on the morning of the third day.

'That same evening our mother was attacked by fever, and said she would not live much longer. But we had to leave the place; there was no work to be found, and no food to be had. We walked with our sick mother for a while, and then some kind-hearted people gave us a little food and money to pay our fare as far as Raichur. There we stayed for some weeks, being quite unable to move from that town, owing to the illness of my mother. Our life at Raichur was a continuous story of hopelessness and starvation. Brother was too weak to work, and we could not make up our minds to go to beg. Now and then kind people gave us some food. Mother suffered intensely from fever and hunger. We, too, suffered from hunger and weakness; but the sufferings of our mother were more than we could bear to see.

'Yet we had to keep still through sheer helplessness. Now and then, when delirious, mother would ask for different kinds of food. She could eat but little; yet we were unable to give her the little she wanted.

'Once she suffered so much from hunger that she could bear it no longer, and sent me into a neighbour's house to beg a little piece of coarse bajree cake. I went there very reluctantly. The lady spoke kindly to me; but I could on no account open my mouth to beg that piece of bajree bread. With superhuman effort and a firm resolution to keep my feelings from that lady, I kept the tears back; but they poured out of my nose instead of my eyes, in spite of me, and the expression of my face told its own story. The kind Brahmin lady, guessing what was in my mind, asked me if I would

like to have some food; so I said, "Yes, I want only a little piece of bajree bread." She gave me what I wanted, and I felt very grateful; but could not say a word to express my gratitude. I ran to my mother in great haste, and gave it to her, But she could not eat; she was too weak. The fever was on her; she became unconscious, and died in a few days after that. Her funeral was as sad as that of my father, with the exception that two Brahmins came to help my brother and me to carry her body to the burning-ground, about three miles from the town.

'I need not lengthen this account with our subsequent experiences. My elder sister also died of starvation, after suffering from illness and hunger. During those few months before our sister died, we three travelled on foot from place to place in search of food and work; but we could not get much of either. My brother and myself continued our sad pilgrimage to the northern boundary of India, and back to the east as far as Calcutta. Brother got work here and there; but most of the time we lived wanderers' lives. Very often we had to go without food for days. Even when my brother had work to do, he got such little wages—only four rupees a month, and sometimes much less than that—that we were obliged to live on a handful of grain soaked in water, and a little salt. We had no blankets or thick garments to cover ourselves; and, when travelling, we had to walk barefoot without umbrellas, and to rest in the night, either under the trees on the road side or the arches of bridges, or lie down on the ground in the open air. Once on the banks of the Jhelum, a river in the Punjab, we were obliged to rest at night in the open air, and tried to keep off the intense cold by digging two grave-like pits, and putting ourselves into

them and covering our bodies—except our heads—with the dry sand of the river bank. Sometimes the demands of hunger were so great that we would satisfy our empty stomachs by eating a handful of wild berries, and swallowing the hard stones together with their coarse skins.

‘While wandering in the Himalayas in the year 1876, we came to a place called Revalsar, not very far from Mundi. It is surrounded by high hills. Within the hilly walls is the little lake called Revalsar. We did not know it, but on reaching the banks of the lake, the priests living in a village, called Revalsar after the lake, told us that it was Revalsar, and asked us if we had come on a pilgrimage, for it was a great place of pilgrimage.

‘On hearing from us that we had no money in hand, and that we were famine wanderers, the priests left us, warning us against getting into the waters of the lake, for they said there were crocodiles in it. Besides the crocodiles, there were the Floating Hills, which they said, were the Seven Great Sages in the shape of hills, performing penance in the waters of the lake. This mode of penance is called Jalavasa, that is, living in water, and is a very difficult one. Some persons undertake to do it for a few hours in a day sometimes. They get into the water of some sacred tank or river, till the water reaches their chests and there they stand, muttering sacred texts and repeating the names of the gods, in order to get extraordinary merit, to gain greatness in this world and in the next. Human beings are not able to perform this sort of penance for more than a few hours: but the sages, who, the priests say, are the stars of the Great Bear, live in this lake and perform penance. They are visible in the shape of these Floating Hills on this earth, and are supposed to have the power

to be present in more than one place in any shape they like.

‘No stranger, pilgrim or other, is allowed to get into the pond, or get near the Floating Hills. There are little boats belonging to the local priests. They get into these to go near the floating hills to worship them, as they say. The pilgrims have the privilege of worshipping these hill-sages if they give a large amount of money to the priests. They tell the pilgrims, that only persons possessing extraordinary merit, can hope for such an honour; for them, the hill-sages will float toward the land so as to be nearer the worshippers. They will not allow any ordinary persons or sinners to touch them and they do not come floating toward them.

‘We had no money to give the priests, so we could not hope for the honour of getting the hill-sages to come near us to accept our worship. I do not remember if we worshipped them from a distance or not. There were not many pilgrims visiting Revalsar at the time when we went there, and the place was very quiet. We rested in one of the Dharmashalas or free lodging-places, built for the benefit of the pilgrims.

‘The next morning before any one was up, my brother and I went to bathe in the sacred lake, to wash our sins away and to worship the hill-sages. Yes, there they were, the floating hills in the lake. We counted seven rather large hillocks, but there were other small ones. We took the large ones for the Seven Great Sages, and the others for the minor sages. We thought that we had at last seen the greatest wonder of the world. Who ever heard of hills floating in the water? We could hardly believe our eyes, as it was too great a privilege for such sinners as we were, to be allowed to see these holy sages, even from a distance.

'We were very happy to be at a place of such great sanctity, where the holy ones made their abode in order to perform penance. We cared little whether the crocodiles swallowed us or not, for we were suffering from great privations and would have counted it a blessing to die in such a holy place. My brother got into the water. It was a fine day, as the sun had risen in all his glory, and the sky was cloudless. He swam out into the water so as to be near one of the nearest floating hills. The rays of the rising sun, which penetrated the blue waters of the lake, revealed the mystery to him. He saw, at a glance, that great big beams of pine wood were fastened together, and made into tremendous rafts. On these were heaped earth, sand and stones, in a way that made them look very much like natural hillocks from a distance. On these were growing little shrubs and plenty of long grass which made the mounds look like the hill around.

'The ordinary pilgrim would not know that these hillocks were the creation of priestcraft, but would put his whole faith in the statements of the priests, and gave them all the money he could possibly spare in order to obtain the great privilege of worshipping the wonderful sages. It is easy to guess how the priests get into their own little boats, go behind the hill-sages and push them toward the bank of the lake, where the rich and generous worshippers await their arrival. The pilgrims prostrate themselves before the hills, while they are floating toward them. They are too wonder-struck to look on this great marvel with a critical eye, or to find out the truth.'

Ramabai relates in her testimony several instances of similar deception practised upon her which had the effect of disgusting her and loosening her faith in Hinduism.

She thus travelled for years from the south to the north as far as Kashmere, and then to the east, and reached Calcutta in 1878. Then she was about 18 years of age.

## II. CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY

In Calcutta Ramabai's profound erudition in Sanskrit and her extreme youth created a great sensation. She astonished the scholars by being able to repeat 18000 slokas from the Hindu scriptures and to converse and lecture in the Sanskrit language. She was summoned before an assembly of Pandits and as a result of their examination the title of Sarasvati was conferred upon her by acclamation. When they welcomed her in Sanskrit verse which they had prepared for the occasion, she was able to respond in impromptu verse composed then and there. She was the only Indian lady who merited or received the title of Pandita for her great learning. She was welcomed everywhere with open arms, and men like Keshab Chandra Sen and Kali Charan Bannerjea received her into their homes and introduced her to others.

Soon after this event her brother who had suffered greatly because of his wanderings and starvation was taken seriously ill. 'His great thought during his illness' Ramabai says, 'was for me. What would become of me left alone in this world?

'When he spoke of his anxiety I answered: "There is no one but God to care for you and me."

"Ah!" he answered, "Then if God cares for us, I am afraid of nothing."

'And, indeed, in my loneliness it seemed as if God was very near me; I felt His presence.

'While still in Calcutta some of the learned Pandits requested me to lecture to the Purdah

ladies on the duties of women according to the Sastras. I had to study the subject before I could lecture. While reading the Dharma Sastras I came to know many things which I never knew before. The husband is to be the woman's god; there is no other god for her. She can have no hope of getting admission into Swarga, the abode of the gods, without his pleasure. And if she pleased him in all things she will have the privilege of going to Swarga as his slave, there to serve him for ever. My eyes were being gradually opened. I was waking up to my own hopeless condition as a woman, and it was becoming clearer and clearer to me that I had no place anywhere as far as religious consolation was concerned. I became quite dissatisfied with myself.

'As my father wanted me to be well versed in our religion he did not give me in marriage when a little child. This was of course against caste rules. So he had to suffer for it, being practically put out of Brahmin society. But he stood the prosecution with his characteristic manliness and did what he thought was right, viz., to give me a chance to study and be happy by leading a religious life. So I had to remain unmarried till I was twenty-two years old. Having lost all faith in the religion of my ancestors I married a Bengali gentleman, Bipin Bihari Medhavi, M.A., B.L., a High Court Vakil. Neither of us believed either in Hinduism or in Christianity, and so we were married under the civil marriage rite.'

After her wedding Ramabai lived with her husband at Silchar, in Assam.

There she came across a copy of St. Luke's Gospel in the Bengali language and started reading it. A Baptist missionary, Mr. Allem, was permitted to visit her and explain the passages which were

new to her. As she had lost all faith in her former religion she expressed to her husband her desire to become a Christian if she were perfectly satisfied with this new religion. But he did not approve of this and forbade further studies.

After two years of happy married life her husband died of cholera. A few months before his death a little daughter was born and they called her 'Manorama' (Heart's delight).

The widow was at a loss to know what to do next; she was invited to go to Maharashtra and lecture to the women there. She gladly accepted the invitation and went to Poona. She travelled in Maharashtra and organized a society for ladies known as the Arya Mahila Samaj, whose object was the promotion of education among women and the discouragement of child-marriage.

She lectured in the different places to which she went and founded branches there. The seed then sown fell on good soil: for Poona has always been ahead of other places in the matter of women's education: and the first university in the world for women has been founded there.

When the Education Commission visited Poona in 1883 for the purpose of inspecting the education imparted in the institutions of that city, the leading Brahmin ladies, most of them members of the Arya Mahila Samaj, assembled in the Town Hall to welcome the Commission. Pandita Ramabai was the chief speaker. She pleaded that girls' schools should have specially trained teachers to instruct them, and that woman inspectresses should be appointed to inspect the schools; government should also make provision for the study of medicine by women. In her opinion one of the greatest needs of women of India was the employment of skilled women doctors. She further told the Commission that she felt

bound to the end of her life to labour on behalf of her countrywomen, because of her father's, brother's and her late husband's views on female education and what they had done and suffered for it.

Hitherto Ramabai had been lecturing in Sanskrit and Marathi. Now she began to feel the need of learning the English language. Miss Hurford, then a missionary in Poona, undertook to come and teach her English. At this time Ramabai came into contact with the leaders of the reform party and members of the Prarthana Samaj. Messrs. Ranade, Modak, Kelkar and Dr. Bhandarkar were among those who took interest in her and showed her great kindness. Rev. Father Nilakanta Goreh used to explain to her the difference between Hindu and Christian religions.

Ramabai left for England in 1883 in order to study and fit herself for her life work. When she landed there, she was welcomed by the kind Sisters of Wantage who were introduced to her by Miss Hurford. These sisters taught her many secular and religious subjects. After spending a year at Wantage, Ramabai received the appointment of Professor of Sanskrit in the Cheltenham College, where she took full advantage of her opportunities and studied Mathematics, Natural Science and English Literature. The motherly kindness and deeply spiritual influence of the sisters greatly helped her in building up her character and aims. They once sent her for a change to their Home at Fulham, where she saw the rescue work carried on by them. She met several of the women who had once been in the Rescue Home; but who had so completely changed and were so filled with love of Christ and compassion for suffering humanity that they had given their lives for the service of the sick and infirm.

She then came to know that something should be done to reclaim so-called fallen women. The Hindu Shastras do not deal kindly with such women. The Hindu Law she knew ordered that the king shall cause the fallen women to be eaten up by dogs, in the outskirts of the town. They were considered the greatest sinners and not worthy of compassion. After her visit to the Homes Ramabai began to think that there was a real difference between Hinduism and Christianity. She realized that Christ was truly the Divine Saviour He claimed to be. And no one but He could transform and uplift the down trodden women of India and of every land. She says, 'Thus my heart was drawn to the religion of Christ. I became intellectually convinced of its truth on reading a book written by Father Goreh, and was baptized in the Church of England in 1883, while living with the sisters of Wantage. I was comparatively happy and felt great joy finding a new religion which was better than any other religion I had known before. I knew full well that it would displease my friends and countrymen very much. But I never regretted having taken the step. I was hungry for something better than what the Hindu shastras gave. I found it in the Christian Bible and was satisfied. I was very happy to think that I had found a religion which gave all its privileges equally to men and women. There was no distinction of caste, colour, or sex made in it.

'There were, however, some old ideas stamped on my brain. For instance, I thought that repentance for sin and determination to give it up were necessary for forgiveness of sin. I had failed to see the need of true faith in Christ and His atonement in order to become the child of God by being born again by the Holy Spirit, and justified by faith in the

Son of God. The Bible says that God does not wait for me to merit his love; but heaps it upon me without my desiring it. How very different the truth of God was from the false idea I had entertained from my earliest childhood, viz., that I must have merit to earn present or future happiness, the pleasure of Swarga or the utterly inconceivable last condition of Moksha or Liberation. God has given me a practical turn of mind. I wanted to find out the truth of every thing, including religion, by experiment. I experimented on the religion in which I was born. I did what the books prescribed. I had seen many others also doing the same thing. The sad end was that I found that they were not saved by it; nor was I. It was dire spiritual necessity that drove me to seek help from other sources. I had to give up all pride of our ancestral religion etc., which is preventing many of my countrymen from finding Christ, although they knew well that they have not got the joy of Salvation. They can never have it except in Christ.'

At this time Ramabai received an invitation to go over to the United States from Anandibai Joshi, a relative and friend of hers who was now about to graduate as M.D. from the Women's Medical College of Philadelphia. At first Ramabai did not like the idea of going to America just at this time. But afterwards she felt it would be a help to her lifework to visit America and study the methods in use there. She went intending to stay only a few weeks. But when she got there she was so fascinated with the public school system and the training in Kindergarten that she stayed nearly three years and joined the Philadelphia Training school for a course of Kindergarten study. Dr. Bodley, M.A., M.D., the Dean of the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia, took a keen interest in Ramabai, who

confided in her about her plans for the benefit of her country women. Ramabai wrote while in America her first famous book called *The High Caste Hindu Women* in which she describes the evils of child marriage, the sufferings of child widows and the ignorance and superstition of women in India. Dr. Bodley prefaced this book with an article relating the life of Anandibai Joshi and the history of Ramabai herself. She wholeheartedly supported Ramabai's appeal for help to found a school for child widows in India. The book was widely read and Ramabai was invited to speak in many public meetings and was entertained by cultured, earnest women all over the country. She travelled up and down the United States. In 1887 an Association was founded in Boston known as Ramabai's Association. Ramabai circles were also organized in many of the cities and they undertook to collect money and support the school in India for ten years. Ramabai went to Canada for a trial visit and then left for India via St. Francisco and Hong Kong. She arrived in Bombay in 1889.

### III. SOCIAL REFORM WORK

A Widows' Home was started by her soon after she landed in Bombay and it was called Sarada Sadan (Abode of Wisdom). The Hindu reform circles in Bombay and Poona welcomed Ramabai, though they did not approve of her religious attitude. Miss Sunderbai H. Power joined her at this time. Manorama, Ramabai's daughter, now nine years old, also returned from England. After a year or so, Ramabai moved the school to Poona as being a cheaper and more healthy place. In 1892 she was able to purchase a bungalow in a good locality in Poona through the generosity of her American friends.

‘This is not an institution in which all the best rooms are reserved for the teaching staff,’ remarked Ramabai to a party of visitors she was showing over the building on the occasion of its opening ceremony in July, 1892.

‘My pupils,’ she continued, ‘are as free to come and go into the drawing room as in any other part of the house. The Sadan with all its privileges has been instituted for their benefit. They come from homes where they have been treated as out-castes, where no love has been bestowed upon them. I wish them to see the contrast in all things where love rules. I wish them to become acquainted with as many good people as possible; to learn what the outside world is like from pictures and books; and to enjoy the wonderful works of God as they ramble in the garden, study with the microscope, or view the heavens from the little verandah on the roof.’

There were at that time forty widows in the Sadan. Some of them had come from homes where they had been cruelly treated. Ramabai paid a visit about this time to the ancestral home of her family in Mangalore district. Several young widows followed her. One girl widow at this place was most cruelly treated by her relatives. She was punished by being suspended from the rafters of the roof by her wrists; either burning charcoal or prickly pear bush was placed underneath so that she might not try to free herself. This poor girl was a most unhappy creature and Ramabai was very anxious to take her into her school. But her people would not let her go. So Bai invited the mother-in-law and another relative to pay a visit to her school with this girl. They came and were very kindly entertained by her. After a few weeks Ramabai was able to gain the confidence of the

girl and when she was convinced that she trusted in her and had promised to remain in the school, she told the mother-in-law that she may return to her place. As the girl was of age the mother-in-law could not compel her to return. Thus Ramabai was able to save her from cruel treatment. She afterwards became a most useful helper in the Sharada Sadan. Ramabai heard about another little girl who had been married to a man forty years her senior and had become a widow at six. Her husband's brother, a Brahmin innkeeper, took charge of her as she grew up. She was employed to fetch water from a well a quarter of a mile away, and was treated very cruelly, beaten and half-starved. The treatment she received was no secret to the village people. Ramabai sent one of her helpers to the place in disguise. She gained the confidence of the child who was then eleven years old. She was disguised as a Muhammadan boy and thus escaped being found out by her relatives. She was brought to Poona and there she grew up to be a fine lovable girl and was married later on to a good Christian young man. There were many such incidents in the life of Ramabai : but limitation of space forbids my multiplying such instances.

Several well known evangelists visited Poona and the neighbourhood at this time; among them were such men as Lord Radstock, Dr. Pentecost, Henry Varley, John McNeill and others. Ramabai attended their meetings and was greatly helped in her spiritual life by what she heard from them. She began to put into practice the truths of the Christian faith learned from them. This was a critical point in her life as from this time onward she ceased to care for secular learning or glory but cultivated a more intimate prayer life and began the abounding and overflowing life of faith which was thenceforth to distinguish her.

She also came into contact with high caste destitute girls and orphans but she found that they could not be supported from the funds of Sharada Sadan. So she adopted them herself and supported them from the personal allowance she received from her American supporters. Ramabai felt it was her duty to teach these girls the principles of the Christian religion. Every morning she met together with little Manorama and Sunderabai for scripture study and prayer. If any others chose to come they were not forbidden. The door was left open. At first a few came; afterwards half the number of widows in the home attended prayers. The girls were anxious to know more about Ramabai's religion; and some of them expressed their desire to be baptized. The news soon reached the ears of the Hindu Reformers and Ramabai's Brahmin friends. They asked Ramabai whether the girls attended her prayer meetings. She said they did. They then asked her to prevent the girls from doing so, and wanted her to shut her door when she prayed. But Ramabai refused to do so. She said that her Hindu pupils were to have full liberty to retain their caste and perform their religious observances. They were also to be free to worship as they liked. The members of the Advisory Board then resigned and wrote letters to the parents of the pupils asking them to withdraw them from the school. About twenty-five girls were thus removed. Ramabai was greatly troubled in mind about this and prayed earnestly to God to square the number of pupils she had i.e. to increase them to 225 before the next year. There was room only for sixty-five girls in Sarada Sadan. Ramabai says, 'My mind began to be doubtful and I asked the Lord if it were advisable for me to venture to pray such a

prayer, and if it were even possible for me to have so many girls in my school. I then prayed to God to give me a clear word about it, and He graciously gave me the following words: "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is there anything too hard for me?" This proved to be a rebuke to my unbelieving soul as well as an assurance of the great things which God meant to do for me. I noted those words in my book; put down the date on which I claimed 225 souls from God on the strength of this assurance, and waited for Him to fulfil His promise in His own good time.'

#### IV. THE RESCUE AND TRAINING OF FAMINE GIRLS

Six months passed but there was no increase in the number of pupils; on the other hand a few more left the institution. But Ramabai trusted in God to fulfil His promise.

She heard of the terrible famine in the Central Provinces, but she had no money to go there, or to start work among the famine children. She felt she received a call from the God to go there, and started out in faith. Soon a friend in Bombay undertook to pay for the work of rescuing famine children; and another friend sent money enough for current expenditure. Being thus encouraged Ramabai started on her great quest. After recovering and sending sixty girls to Poona, Ramabai herself returned and wrote an article in the *Bombay Guardian* in which she described the famine scenes she had witnessed.

Ramabai said: 'My sympathies are excited by the needs of young girl-widows, especially at this time. To let them go to the relief camps and

poor-houses, or allow them to wander in the streets and on the highways means their eternal destruction.

‘Ever since I have seen these girls in the famine districts—some fallen into the hands of wicked people; some ruined for life and turned out by their cruel masters, owing to bad diseases, to die a miserable death, in a hopeless, helpless manner; some being treated in the hospitals, only to be taken back into the pits of sin, there to await a cruel death; some bearing the burdens of sin, utterly lost to all sense of shame and humanity—hell has become a horrible reality to me, and my heart is bleeding for these daughters of fond parents who have died leaving them orphans. Who with a mother’s heart and a sister’s love can rest without doing everything in her power to save at least a few of the girls who can yet be saved from the hands of the evil ones?

‘The Father, who is a very present help in trouble, has enabled me to get sixty widows, forty-seven of whom will go to school to study, and others will work. To go to work to get these widows, to fetch them from Central India to here, and to feed and to clothe them, is an expensive business. Harder still is the work of civilizing them and teaching them habits of cleanliness. Some of them are little better than brute beasts. The filthy habits they have acquired during the period of famine have become second nature with them. It will take a long time to civilize and teach them. We can do all things in the power of the Lord. The Lord has put it into my mind to save three hundred girls out of the famine districts, and I shall go to work in His name. The funds sent to me by my friends in America are barely enough to feed and educate fifty girls; and several people are asking me how I am going to support

all the girls, who may come from Central India. Besides their food and clothing, new dormitories and dining rooms must be built. Our present school-house is not large enough to hold more than one hundred girls at the most. And how are these emergencies to be met?

‘I do not know; but the Lord knows what I need. I can say with the Psalmist—“I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me”; and He has promised that “Ye shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God that hath dealt wondrously with you; and my people shall never be ashamed.” My co-workers and I are quite ready to forego all our comforts, give up luxuries and live as plainly as we can. We shall be quite contented to have only one meal of common coarse food daily, if necessary; and so long as we have a little room or a seed of grain left in this house, we shall try and help our sisters who are starving. It seems a sin to live in this good house, eat plenty of good food, and be warmly clothed, while thousands of our fellow-creatures are dying of hunger, and are without shelter. If all of us do our part faithfully, God is faithful to fulfil His promises and will send us the help we need at this time.’ Ramabai started again for the Central Provinces determined to rescue 300 girls at least; but she was soon recalled; Bubonic plague had spread to Poona and the authorities ordered that the number of inmates of Sharada Sadan should not be increased. So Ramabai had to put a stop to the new buildings that she was erecting for the famine children in the same compound. She soon found a solution for the problem with which she was faced. She hired a dozen tents and pitched them twenty miles away from Poona. Sunderabai was put in charge of the girls.

Ramabai's American supporters had promised to undertake the financing of Sharadan only for ten years. Ramabai had hoped that by that time her Hindu friends would come forward to support the work. But she soon found out that it was vain to expect help from the latter. So she bought a farm at Khedgaon, forty miles away from Poona, with the consent of her American friends. She had hoped to have fruit-trees planted there and also to have a dairy farm, the produce of both of which, she thought, would support the widows in Sharada Sadan, when Ramabai's Associations in America ceased to help. At this time Ramabai thought it would be a good plan to move the famine children down there; and so cabled to America for permission. They gladly consented to the proposal. Soon a large dormitory was put up and the older women who were rescued from famine were sent to Khedgaon while the younger girls of school-going age were kept in a house in Poona and were sent to the Sharada Sadan school. Gangabai, Ramabai's faithful Bible-woman, carried on the rescue work and gathered from five to six hundred starving women and children. Ramabai sent all these to various mission organizations and kept only three hundred for herself. Ramabai felt free to instruct these in Christian truth. Ten months afterwards, ninety of these were willing to become Christians.

After the girls had been comfortably settled in Khedgaon Ramabai wished that a good Christian woman could live among the girls and train them in the word of God so that they might in their turn go to the villages round about and preach the Gospel and she found a suitable person in Miss M. F. Abrams. She came out to India to do evangelistic work and heard God's call to go to Khedgaon and help the girls and women who were

gathered there. Ramabai was over-joyed when she heard of this and welcomed Miss Abrams as a co-worker.

Ramabai had a Brahmin clerk of good education. He was a Brahmo. When the Brahmins rose up against Ramabai this man also joined them and worked against Ramabai. She however retained him in her service. After some years, being influenced by Ramabai's faithful life, Mr. Gadre also became a Christian and helped Ramabai to the end of his life. One of his daughters Krishnabai still continues to work in Mukti. She was of great help to Ramabai and her daughter during the last years of their lives.

The ten years during which Ramabai's Circles in America promised help was to expire in 1890. They sent an invitation to Ramabai to visit America a second time and reorganize the Ramabai Associations. Bai left Khedgaon in January 1898 with two other girls whom she wished to educate in America. A friend of hers undertook to educate five girls in America. Ramabai had already sent three in 1897. Another lady friend had undertaken to support Manoramabai and educate her. Ramabai was very grateful for such help as it left her free to devote herself entirely to the great work she had undertaken. She received a warm welcome in America and inaugurated a new committee which was to support the work but without a time limit as before. She spent only six months in America this time during which she addressed several meetings and told them about the development of her work in Khedgaon. Miss Abrams and Sunderabai continued the new building operations started by Ramabai in India. When she arrived in August the buildings were nearing completion. They had a dedication service in

September, a great many of Ramabai's Christian friends came from Poona and Bombay to the service and the place was called 'Mukti' meaning Salvation and its gates 'Praise' in accordance with the promises given to her from Isaiah lx. II. Ramabai and her workers prayed earnestly that the inmates of the Sharada Sadan might be protected from the plague. God heard and answered their prayers. The Gospel was also preached to the workmen employed on the building. Miss Abrams was able to found a Mission band of thirty-five girls at Mukti who were willing to go out with her for evangelistic work.

The ground on the opposite side of the road to the Mukti buildings was owned by a toddy seller and she heard that he was going to open a toddy shop close by. Ramabai went to the Collector of the District and asked him not to issue a license to sell toddy in Khedgaon. She also arranged to buy the land for herself from that man. She then asked the people to have a weekly bazaar or market there. The villagers were very thankful for this great public service rendered by her. It proved a great boon to the poor people as Ramabai bought a good deal of the produce brought for sale. The Gospel was at the same time preached to the sellers.

Ramabai started some new industries at Mukti which helped to train the girls in manual work and made living cheaper. The dairy department provided all the milk, butter, ghee, and buttermilk needed for the institution. Kardi, a kind of grain from which oil is made, was grown on the farm at Mukti. Sugar-cane for making jaggery, and jowari which is greatly used for making bread, were also grown in her fields. The girls were taught weaving and spinning. They had about

twelve looms and were taught the art of weaving sarees. Ramabai employed no servants except the watchmen. All the work connected with the institution was done by the girls. They cooked food, washed their clothes, swept the place and were also taught part of the time in the school to read and write.

There was another great famine in 1900 in the course of which Gujarat and Rajaputana suffered most intensely. Ramabai who had herself suffered from famine and who had also witnessed with her own eyes the sufferings of others in the previous famine felt that it was her duty to go again and help the poor girls. She writes as follows: 'The treasury was quite empty; and when the quarterly balance sheet was prepared in the middle of October, there was no balance left at all. Reports of the widespread famine and the traffic in girls reached me from many sides. Still there was nothing to be done except to wait and pray. The Lord did not try my faith very long. The very next day a cheque for Rs 272-2-0 was sent for Mukti, and another daily need was also supplied in a wonderful manner. It was then made clear to me that I must step out in faith, and receive as many girls as the Lord would have me reach. So the work was begun at once. Workers were stationed at different places to search for young girls. There was no money for buying material to build new sheds, so some old material was gathered, and a shed was prepared to shelter the new-comers.'

At this time Ramabai had some very good helpers; among these Gangabai, her faithful helper Kashibai and Bhimabai suffered many hardships while rescuing famine girls. 'These three simple and almost illiterate women, protected by the strong and mighty hand of God, travelled alone for

hundreds of miles in jungles, villages and cities, on highways and byways, in search of starving and dying young girls. They have walked for miles in the burning sun; gone without food and rest; and worked incessantly for the salvation of the dying hundreds. Their work will be recorded in the Book of the Lamb; for no one who has not borne the hardships of work among famine-stricken people and been with them for nights and days, can appreciate their labour and know what they have to endure. I see the Gospel declaration—I Corinthians i. 26-29—verified when I see these and other simple Christian women used of the Lord for His service. They were doing work from which many a mighty man would shrink.'

'Bad men have succeeded in gathering large numbers of girls by enticing them away, and selling them to bad life. It is shocking to the refined feelings of the refined people; but facts are facts, and Christian mothers ought to know them, that they may be prompted to pray and work hard for the salvation of young girls—perhaps of the same age as their own sweet daughters. Let the thought and love of our daughters move our mother-hearts to come forward and save as many of the perishing young girls as we can. I have found to my great horror and sorrow that over twelve per cent of the girls rescued by my workers have been ruined for life, and had to be separated from the other girls and placed in the Rescue Home. The bodies of some of these poor girls are so frightfully diseased that there is no hope for their recovery.'

'The word of God says:

"Open thy mouth for the dumb

In the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction."

And woe will be to me if I do not obey the command, even at the cost of losing the favour of the high and mighty of this world.'

The following is an excerpt from the report prepared by Ramabai about the progress of the Mukti school in 1900. 'From a small beginning of temporary character, the Mukti school has grown into a permanent and large institution. Three hundred girls rescued from starvation in 1897 have received regular secular and Christian instruction. They are the children of many prayers; much love and labour have been bestowed on them; and I am able to say, with great joy, that the workers have not laboured in vain. The money which so many friends have sent for them has not been spent in vain. The Lord is very good to let us see the fruit of our labour; and He is giving us abundant joy as we see the girls growing in grace and proving themselves worthy of the love and labour bestowed on them.

'Five hundred and eighty in the Mukti Sadan and sixty girls in the Kripa Sadan are being trained to lead a useful Christian life. The number of inmates of these homes is doubled, and will increase as days pass by. God is greatly blessing the work, and the prayers of our friends in all parts of the world are being answered daily. Including the hundred girls of Sharada Sadan, I have altogether seven hundred and fifty girls under training.

'A question has often been asked, namely: What is to become of all these girls? It is not difficult to answer it. India is a large country, and a vast amount of ignorance prevails everywhere. Men and women of education and character are needed to enlighten this and the coming generation. I have had a hundred requests from missionaries and

superintendents of schools to give them trained teachers. Biblewomen, or matrons. I have had quite as many, perhaps more, requests from young men to give them educated wives. It will not be difficult to find good places and comfortable homes for all these young girls when the proper time comes. My heart is burdened with the thought that there are more than one hundred and forty-five millions of women in this country who need to have the light of the knowledge of God's love given them.

'My aim is to train all these girls to do some work or other. Over two hundred of the present number have much intelligence, and promise to be good school teachers after they receive a few years' training. Thirty of the bigger girls have joined a training class for nurses. Some have mastered the business of oil-making. Others have learnt to do laundry work, and some have learnt dairy work. More than sixty have learnt to cook very nicely. Fifty or more have had some training in field work; but want of rain has stopped that branch of our industry, which will, I hope, be started again after the rain falls. Forty girls have learnt to weave nicely; and more than fifty have learnt to sew well, and make their own garments. The rest, small and large, are learning to do some work, together with the three R's.

'One of the smaller girls rescued from starvation in the last famine is taking charge of a few of our blind girls. Miss Abrams has very kindly taught her to read the blind characters. The girl herself is studying hard, while engaged in teaching the blind girls to read the Scriptures.

'Some girls who are not intellectually bright have a mother's heart, which is full of love for children. They are appointed as matrons, and have small groups of children under their charge, and

love and care for them. These very girls, who are so gentle and loving now, were very wild, greedy, and selfish, before their conversion to Christ. One would hardly have believed that they could ever be so changed and become what they are now. But the Scripture says that nothing is impossible with God. His love has won their hearts, and He has made them new creatures in Christ.

'Most of my helpers have joined the Bible training class taught by Miss Abrams. The daily study of the Word of God has made them willing workers. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." We have found that nothing helps so much to make matters straight as the study of God's Word.

'Khedgaon is by no means a romantic place. The girls have to walk a long distance in the burning sun, bare-footed and without umbrellas, to go to bathe in the wells. They have to rise as early as four in the morning in order to get their day's work done . . . . School is closed on Saturdays, Sundays and other festival days. During the long holidays, as in May and December, they have to do some little work in order to keep their minds busy. Those who cook in the morning have their rest in the afternoon. Their time of work is changed after a few weeks. When one class has mastered the work assigned to it, another takes up the work, and the former one begins to learn something else. In this way all the girls are trained to do almost every kind of work done here. All get from seven to eight hours of sleep. They are neither over-fed nor get too delicate food; but none of them is under-fed. They get three good meals a day, as a rule. The weak and sick ones, as well as the very little children, have milk and other nourishing food. We have a regularly trained hospital nurse—a

good Christian woman—to look after the sanitary condition of the place. She has a large band of girls working under her. No time, labour, or money, has been spared to save life and make the girls comfortable. But weakness produced by prolonged starvation, and the extreme heat caused by want of rain, have been difficult to cope with. Yet I cannot but thank God out of the fulness of my heart for so wonderfully protecting so many hundreds of lives from plague and famine. Although life in Khedgaon is hard, the girls look fat and healthy, and are full of spirit. I find that hard work makes better women of the girls. The easy and comfortable city life is, of course, preferred by the flesh; but life in places like Khedgaon, with fewer comforts and harder work, is more conducive to bodily and spiritual health.'

The Pandita goes on to tell of a time of testing and trial in temporal supplies. 'The storeroom was almost empty, and the saries of our girls and most of their blankets had turned into old rags—there was no money to buy new saries and blankets. But saries had been ordered from the cloth merchants, with the understanding that they were to take all back if by a certain date their bills were not paid; not one of them, however, was touched. Grain and other necessities of life were not ordered for the month. Many people could not understand why I had to make certain changes in food, etc. But the Lord knew all about it. He let the trials come at certain times, and let the house and treasury be quite empty only to fill them again. He made me realize from time to time that His "hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear." No one was informed about the needs at times of trial; but according to the command of God all requests were

made known to Him, and He did keep my mind in perfect peace in Christ, and sent help in His own good time, to buy not only grain, but saries and blankets, etc., for the old and new girls.

'The work of rescuing girls went on and is still going on, in spite of all difficulties and trials; for God makes it very plain to me from time to time, by removing obstacles when they come, that it is His will that this work should not be stopped until He Himself stops it. Prayer is being answered in our case. We are not allowed too much or too little of food and clothing and other comforts. Moreover, the Lord is teaching our Christian girls to deny themselves a little for the sake of others, that they may meet the expenses of their Christian instruction and other expenses. He sent us a message one day to give up one of our meals on Sundays to save money to feed the hungry and poor, and to help His work in other Missions. Most of the girls very cheerfully came forward with the request to cut off one of their meals on Sundays, and the money thus saved has been used to feed the Lord's poor and to help on His work in other places.

'The question of self-support of Indian Christian Churches is becoming a very serious one. Indian Christians are very poor, it is true, and will not be able to pay the high salaries and bear the heavy expenses of fashionable churches. But as Hindus, neither they nor their parents looked to some other nation, or to the high priests, for the support of their temples and their priesthood. As Christians there is no reason why they should not train themselves and their children to deny themselves and to systematic giving. The Lord showed me this was my opportunity to practise and teach what I believed; and I am very thankful to say that the

experiment has proved to be a success, and the Lord's promise in Mal. iii. 10 has been literally fulfilled. Some of us perhaps give one-fiftieth or one-hundredth part of our income to the Church, and call it tithe; but little realize that tithe is no less than one-tenth of the whole; and that is the income tax God would have us give Him for His poor. If we give one-twentieth or fiftieth part and call it a tithe, or give very little with great means, we are robbing God His dues, and robbing ourselves of great blessings which He is eager to give us if we only accept them by fulfilling the conditions. This, to me, seems to be the true cause of the material poverty of the native Christian Church in India. We must not expect that God will give us many spiritual and temporal blessings unless we cheerfully fulfil the conditions on which He has promised them to us.'

Over a thousand women, girls and boys were rescued by her during this time. Ramabai found that some of the industries started in Mukti needed boys to carry them on. A devoted Christian lady who loved boys was put in charge of them. This lady, Miss Couch by name, has been a very faithful worker in Mukti for several years. Boys are taught to keep up the printing press. They also work in the fields and do carpentry, gardening and other forms of manual labour.

The girls in Mukti were divided into companies according to age: girls from five to twelve—about six hundred of them—were housed in a separate enclosure called Prithi Sadan (abode of love); girls from thirteen to eighteen lived in another block; and the older girls lived in a separate place. The rescue home called Kirpa Sadan stood by itself, with a hospital attached to it. It was not by any means a soft job to care for the famine orphans. Some had

troublesome bowel troubles and needed special attention as to diet. Others had great boils or reeking sores which had to be washed and bandaged more than once a day. Some had a kind of whooping cough during the course of which they spat blood; but the worst of all was the sore-mouth which ate up lumps of flesh out of the jaws, and the roof of the mouth. The odour issuing from them was unbearable. Some had sore heads which had to be washed and cleaned. Many of them had fevers of different sorts and lung diseases. A great deal of patience was needed to attend on these children. Fortunately the girls that Ramabai had rescued in the previous famine came forward now to help their suffering sisters.

The first Christmas that the famine children spent at Mukti was a memorable one. The church is built, from the Pandit's own design, of dark grey stone and roofed over with Mangalore tiles. It is 230 ft. long and 45 ft. wide and has two transepts, each 107 ft. long. The floor is throughout of teak wood. 4,000 people can be seated in it. The building is used both as a church and as a school. A portion of it still remains unfinished. The boys helped in the building work as well as in the carpentry. December in Khedgaon is very cold and the children needed saris and blankets. Ramabai prayed to God to supply the need. On Christmas day the saris, blankets and other things which were received in answer to her prayers were piled up in a great heap in the centre of the church. Ramabai stood on this pile and preached to them on the following passage: 'The young lions do lack and suffer hunger. But they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.' She proved to the girls in a very practical way how their Heavenly Father cared for them. Then she distributed two

new saries to each girl together with other presents.

Ramabai had a vision of establishing a small colony in the neighbourhood of Mukti. The older boys who had learnt some industry and were able to earn for themselves were married to the girls from the Mukti Home. Bai allowed them to build little houses for themselves so that the villagers may not only hear the preaching of God's truth but also see for themselves the honest lives of Christian people. Ramabai also taught the Christian girls the great privilege of doing the work of God. She herself decided to tithe all the money that she received and considerable sums of money were thus sent to Missions in different parts of India. A large amount was sent to China. Some of the girls in Mukti adopted some orphan children in Armenia and thus learnt early the blessedness of giving. Those who were able gave up one meal on Sundays. The money thus saved was given to the poor and needy living round Mukti. Some more European helpers joined the staff. At one time she had about twelve of them in various capacities. Ramabai had faith in God and Christ and she trusted God more and more. The first Tuesday of each month was set apart as a special day of prayer in Mukti. She had a special prayer band of about seventy girls who used to spend one hour, viz., 5 a.m. to 6 a.m. with Ramabai every morning. They prayed that God may pour out His Holy spirit upon His people. After six months God graciously answered their prayers. And several girls and women were truly saved and were used of God in winning others to Christ. The number of the praying band soon increased to 400. And they were given the names of Indian Christians and others on whose behalf special prayers were desired.

In January, 1906, Ramabai wrote: 'It has been laid on my heart to pray definitely for all the missionaries living in this country and for the Christians working with them . . . . The Mukti praying bands are praying for more than 29,000 individuals by name, the burden of requesting being that these persons may be baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire, and may become true and faithful witnesses for Christ.'

After some years of study in England and America Monoramabai, the Pandita's daughter, returned in 1900 to help her mother. She took charge of the school and correspondence and relieved her mother of a portion of her responsibility. Later on she felt the need for qualifying herself according to University requirements; she therefore appeared for the B.A. and L.T. degree examinations and passed in both of them.

Ramabai was not-satisfied with the Marathi translation of the Bible and undertook the stupendous task of translating it anew herself. She studied Hebrew and Greek in order to read the Bible in the original, and get the right sense. She gave all the time she could spare to this great work. It took nearly seventeen years for her to complete it. The girls in Mukti helped her to compose and print the translation.

Ramabai cared little for earthly honours but in recognition of her public services she received the Kaiser-i-Hind gold medal in 1919. In 1908 when the Governor of Bombay visited Mukti he asked Ramabai to write the story of her life and in response to his request a continuous account known as 'The Testimony' was published by her. Many excerpts from this pamphlet and from other publications are incorporated in this account of her life. She also wrote a life of Christ in Marathi about

this time and distributed 23,000 copies of it gratis to non-Christians.

## V. LAST DAYS

During the last twenty years of her life Ramabai confined herself more or less to her work at Mukti and to her favourite task of translation. The *Mukti Prayer Bell* was a quarterly magazine published by Bai telling of the progress of the work in Khedgaon. In running such a great institution on faith lines Ramabai had to endure several hardships. She was often misunderstood and there were not wanting people ready to criticise the work she was doing. Sometimes government officials would suddenly visit the place, call for certain girls of whom they had heard and ask them if they wished to leave Mukti. Khedgaon is a very rocky place and suffers from water famine. Though Ramabai had dug several wells at very great expense, owing to the scarcity of rainfall they suffered severely at times and had carefully to economise the water oozing from the springs. The girls and women who had been brought from the famine districts were not always willing to fall in line with the discipline of school life. Some of them had wandered from place to place like gipsies before coming to Ramabai and soon they got tired of being within the four walls of Mukti and tried to escape. The care of the motherless babies and of the sick also added to her tremendous burden. Though a woman of great faith in God she had her trials; sometimes when the storerooms were empty she would tell the girls to pray their Heavenly Father to give them food.

She herself led a very simple life. In her room there was hardly any furniture except a broad

bench on which she slept, and a wooden stool close by. When Dr. Eddy asked her what her earthly possessions were, she showed him the Bible and said that it was all that she possessed. Her office room was close by and her doors were open during all the hours of the day. Girls went in to see her any time they liked. Ramabai knew each one by name and knew her history and character as well. She had a wonderful memory. She loved the girls and was able to speak to each in her own language, and thus earn her confidence.

Ramabai had some times to punish the girls severely when they were naughty. Some of the girls who had come from famine districts were given to the use of abusive language. She advised them to give up this habit; and if she found them continuing it in spite of reminders and remonstrance, she thought of a unique punishment, i.e., to cut off the hair (of which they were so proud) growing in the front part of the head. Then the girls learnt the lesson. Sometimes those who were not willing to do their daily tasks were brought to Ramabai for correction. She would, in the first instance, advise the girl to go back to work; but if she refused she would make her sit on the way to the dining room, place a piece of cloth in front of her, put some chillies, rice and onion on it and tell all the passers-by that the girl was unwilling to work and so was begging. Soon the girl would ask Ramabai's pardon and go back to her work. She was able to understand the girls as no one else could. When she was at Mukti things went on like clock-work but when she happened to be absent, even for a day, breaches of discipline occurred, girls ran away or something went wrong.

In appearance she was fair with dark grey eyes, a wide brow and a commanding intellectual face.

As a widow, according to Indian custom, she wore her hair short and always dressed in plain white saris.

Her presence was pleasant and inspiring. She was not only an educationist but could turn her hand to anything. The plan of the great church building in Mukti was given to her by God. She had no engineer to advise her when her numerous buildings were under construction. She had a fine garden in front and was very fond of flowers and plants. Whatever she planted seemed to thrive and bear abundant fruit; in her orchard there were several kinds of fruit-bearing trees. She had a printing press and managed it herself and taught the girls also to print. The sick girls would often ask for special dishes or sweets to be prepared by Ramabai's own hands. She was an excellent cook and gladly complied with the request in order to please the girls. She would welcome visitors on whom she always made a great impression and would give an appropriate message to them. Though she believed that God could keep away the plague from the inmates of Mukti, when the government officials gave her special instructions she took all the precautions that were demanded. They advised her to have some cats on the premises to kill the rats. One of Ramabai's friends gave her two beautiful cats and they multiplied so much that at one time there were about twenty-five cats. During the last years of Ramabai's life when she was very weak and tired and unable to sleep she would, to while away the long hours of the night, amuse herself by watching the kittens playing about. She was very fond of animals. Whenever there was scarcity of water in Khedgaon the farmers would drive away the cattle which they were unable to maintain. Sometimes they would

come to Mukti where they were always welcomed and fed. At one time a donkey strayed in. Ramabai allowed it to come in and fed it with her own hand. When the donkey had a colt, it brought the little one to Ramabai very proudly. She gave the donkey some bread and the colt a name. This donkey would come to her door whenever it had a new colt. The animals in the cattle-shed all seemed to know Ramabai. Whenever she went there, the calves would follow her; and there would be a great deal of uproar if she went near them. She had several peacocks and pigeons and always loved to spend a little time feeding them. She was very generous-hearted and entertained her guests in a princely way. Having been a famine orphan herself, she took great delight in feeding others; but she could not bear to see good food being wasted.

Towards the end she aged somewhat rapidly and the death of her daughter Manorama Bai, on whom she had reckoned for the continuation of the work at Mukti, hastened the decline. Some weeks before she died she knew that her end was near and she wrote letters to her co-workers that she was anxious to set her house in order. On April 5, 1922, during the night she quietly fell asleep in God, like a tired child in the arms of its mother.

Her body was laid out in the church that she had erected and the girls at Mukti streamed past, taking a long last look at their beloved mother and saying their farewells to her. Their loss was great and their sorrow poignant. Nearly every one of them—and there were 1,600 at that time—had been saved by Bai, cared for and maintained by her without any visible resources on which she could draw, and brought under the purifying influences of a home life illuminated by the Gospel. Many of them had been snatched

from unscrupulous people who were only too anxious to profit by them, and saved from a life of degradation. All of them had received at her hands the care and affection given by a mother. It was a pathetic sight to see the donkey which she had saved from famine bring her latest colt which was born soon after Bai's death to the yard in front of her room and refuse to go away because it had not received Bai's word and touch of affection.

Soon the sad news reached Poona and Bombay and the surrounding villages. Her friends and others came in great numbers to bid her their last farewell. The villagers in the neighbourhood, to whom she had been such a great benefactor, came in multitudes to pay their homage to her. Hindus who had known her all her life felt that they had lost in her a gem of purest ray, which had been shedding its radiance all around. Christians all over India could scarcely find words to express the great loss they had sustained. But though she is dead, she still speaketh: her life has been a great example and inspiration. And the seeds that she had sowed in thousands of hearts will continue to bear fruit for many generations.