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The domesticated public sphere: Women's work and service in late colonial India

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Abstract
In the first half of this paper, I explore the construction of 'public domesticity' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to argue that with the centrality placed on the spatial geography of the home in the nineteenth century, domestic work undertaken by women began to gain prominence under civilisational pressures of colonial modernity. In the second half of the paper, I discuss how the domestication of the public sphere, another practice of colonial governmentality, became essential for the entry of upper caste and upper class educated women into the public sphere. This paper will thus raise questions of feminine modesty vis-a-vis bourgeois domesticity and moral economy and how this domesticity of public sphere led to the granting of agency to the respectable middle class woman but shifted the relationship lower class and lower caste women had with the public sphere in late colonial India.

Keywords: domestic work, social service, public sphere, late colonial India, colonial modernity

1. Introduction

1 Bourgeois Domesticity and Colonial Modernity

Middle class domestic discourse emerged during the nineteenth century from a dialectical encounter between the metropole and the colony. There existed in England in the nineteenth century a great anxiety about unmarried men who travelled to the colonies for missionary or imperial work as well as unease about influences of the empire that could be seen at 'home' in the metropole, in the figure of the exotic traveller, the consumption of imperial goods and around agitations for philanthropic and reformist causes of the Empire [1]. This led the metropole to define itself against the qualitative markers it fixed onto the East and commentators both at home and abroad placed great significance on the values and practices of domestic life. With the interconnectedness of the metropole and colony and the 'domestic' as their contested site of influence, ideas of home and family came to be foregrounded in the nineteenth century so that the history of the Nation became intricately linked with the history of the 'home'. The public domesticity of the Empire was to be an active demonstration of the racial and cultural superiority of the coloniser. English women were to be the exemplars of virtuous domesticity who took on the "role of agents, teachers and practitioners of *civilisation*"; their virtue was posited against the uncivilised, unorganised, disorderly and unhygienic practices of native home [2]. It is this construction of 'public domesticity' that I will explore through the length of this paper to argue that with the centrality placed on the spatial geography of the home in the nineteenth century, domestic work undertaken by women began to gain prominence under civilisational pressures of colonial modernity. In the second half of the paper, I will discuss how the domestication of the public sphere, another practice of colonial governmentality, became essential for the entry of upper caste and upper class educated women into the public sphere.

The 'domestic' is a significant space of investigation of the daily practices of the colonial world and can throw light on how women related to the social spaces around them. It is the 'home' that came to be a contested space in the nineteenth century so that domestic practices of cleaning, hygiene, child rearing, diet, exercise and dress became significant and imbued with meaning. The discipline and the orderliness of European home was seen as key to prosperity and political power and educated men of the emergent middle class argued that the domestic was inseparable from the national; reconstruction of the public sphere could not take place without the reorganisation of the private [3].

Women's periodicals, journals, advice manuals, and novels, produced by both men and women, were filled with injunctions of how a perfect wife is one that is educated. These products of modern print culture, available to Indian women as a medium of instruction and learning, exposed women to constructions of domesticity and the Victorian subject, "Home Science"[4]. This advice literature combined

[1] Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose ed., *At Home with the Empire, Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 16-17.

[2] Judith E. Walsh, *Domesticity in Colonial India: What Women Learned When Men Gave Them Advice* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004) 14. (my emphasis) While the wives in imperial families found themselves "married to the Empire", taking up its work, maintaining it and spreading its influence, women at 'home' were expected to strengthen the Nation by performing the role of motherhood by reproducing the "citizens of tomorrow", the children, who do not merely belong to the parents but are "a national asset" and on them depended "the future of the country and the Empire". For more see, Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood", in *Tensions of Empire*, 88.

[3] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Difference–Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in Colonial Bengal," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures of a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 373-405; Pradip Kumar Bose, "Sons of the Nation: Child Rearing in the New Family" in *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*, ed. Partha Chatterjee (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 118-144.

[4] For a discussion on the emergence of Home-Science as a discipline for Indian women see Mary Hancock, "Gendering the Modern: Women and

traditional Hindu woman's values or *stridharma* with Victorian ideals of order, cleanliness and lifestyle thought necessary for a reformed home. There is ample literature from late nineteenth and early twentieth century advising women to educate themselves so that they could be better companions to their husbands and be better managers of the home. This was the first generation of women in India who had available to them an array of advice manuals to be consumed for improvement of their domestic duties, which were never made to look like work but as a delightful privilege to be able to serve a modern husband who supported female education and indulged in friendly repartee with the wife. The aim of these manuals was to cherish and enhance the quality of life and domestic work and to "elevate domestic work to a respectable status rather than its abolition" [5].

Activities like domestic cooking were seen as a way of effecting change in the public sphere. Godavaribai Pandita's Preface to her treatise on culinary skills, the first of its kind in Maharashtra, demonstrated how domestic cooking would contribute to an improvement of public health by discouraging the habit of eating restaurant food. Thus, she hoped to restore 'respectability' to the art of cooking to be taken up by middle-class housewives [6]. Husbands and advice manuals also impressed upon women the importance of *kataksar* (thrift) and account keeping in minimising household expenses and the need for improved household management. From the 1850s to the end of the century, the middle-class and the lower middle-class felt the pinch of the rising prices of agricultural goods and the depreciation of the rupee so that the women of this class were often exhorted to practice thrift by devising tabular columns for expenses under different areas of household expenditure[7].

2. Domestic Work and Labour in Late Colonial India

In a letter to Mrs. Carpenter in 1882, Anandibai Joshee gives a general but detailed account of the daily routine of Indian women. A day that typically began at five in the morning and ended at nine, filled with worshipping of Gods, preparing meals for large families, feeding and changing the children, serving the husband, cleaning the dishes, plastering the floors with cow-dung and cutting and sewing clothes for the family. These activities described in detail, from putting the pan on the stove to the preparing the beds for sleep, and not interspersed with any leisurely activities like writing letters, reading books, receiving or visiting friends, provide a picture of dull monotony and repetition[8]. However, Anandibai begins this letter with: "*My* time is not so usefully employed as yours"[9]. Women's work at home is often considered useless when compared to the 'public' work undertaken by their husbands and colleagues hence rendered invisible by both men and women. Women rarely "appreciated their work at its proper and proportionate value" [10]. There is a need to locate domestic work within the historical reproduction of male privilege and entitlement. Naturalisation of male entitlement leads to an obscuring of the role female service plays in bolstering men's work and activities outside the home as well as privileging it as more valued and productive than household chores[11]. Ramabai Rnanade in her biography of her husband M.G. Ranade, a prominent nineteenth century reformer, narrates an incident when she urged him to visit Mahabaleshwar for rest and quiet after a bout of illness. To this Ranade responded thus:

> You women are God's own darlings. He has given you a constitution, different and superior to ours. He has created us to bear the whole burden of work and strain and He created you womenfolk to sit in the shelter of the home, relax and enjoy life. We cannot digest even the little measured food we eat without toil and exercise. We cannot enjoy leisure unless we have worked for six or seven hours on end. On the other hand, just look at you all! Whatever and however much you eat, you need no exercise to digest it. You don't have to read, write or do any housework. You can spend all the time in chess or cards or other games and yet enjoy it. And, in spite of this, God has given you one great right. That is, even if you do not do anything else, you must argue with men. You are great experts in that! [12]

Just a little earlier in the narrative, Ramabai had recorded her daily routine and the work she did about the house, cooking and serving her husband [13]. Her day began at four in the morning. Till daybreak, she chanted the Sanskrit *shlokas*, with their meanings, chanted the ones learnt the day before and practiced English reading, meanings and spelling from the *Howards Reader*. Then she busied herself in the kitchen, preparing the breakfast. Once Ranade had left for the courts preparing a lunch and some snacks for the afternoon which took another two hours. That done she would sit down with her lessons again because failure to do so would anger Ranade before beginning the preparation for the evening meal and serving thereafter. This was followed by another hour and a half of lessons. For an hour she read out to him and for another hour she massaged his feet with *ghee*. Her day typically ended at about eleven at night with no rest during the day[14]. This and Anandbai's accounts are in sharp contrast with Ranade's comments about the leisure enjoyed by women. By representing women as creatures of leisure, Ranade undermines domestic work undertaken by women. There are two reasons for the insibilising of women's labour in the home. One, a wife's service to the household and the husband was not considered work or labour but an expression of love and duty or *stridharma*. Two, women's work is invisibilised through the veils of the woman's quarters and the rhetoric of interiority that impressed upon women modesty regarding their work. Women's work does not intrude upon public space, and

Home Science in Modern India", in *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities*, ed. Antoinette Burton (London: Routledge, 1991), 149-162.

[5] Padma Anagol, *The Emergence of Feminism in India, 1850-1920* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005), 77.

[6] Anagol, *Feminism in India*, 78.

[7] Anagol, *Feminism in India*, 114.

[8] Caroline Healey Dall, *The Life of Dr Anandibai Joshee, A Kinswoman of the Pundita Ramabai* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1888), 56-58.

[9] Dall, *Anandibai Joshee*, 56.

[10] Margaret E. Cousins, *The Awakening of Asian Womanhood* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1922), 19.

[11] Heidi Tinsman makes for a similar argument in her sociological study of domestic service in 1970s-1980s Latin America and United States. Heidi Tinsman. "The Indispensible Service of Sisters: Considering Domestic Service in United States and Latin American Studies." *Journal of Women's History*, Vol 4 No. 1 (Spring, 1992): 52.

[12] Ramabai Ranade, *Ranade: His Wife's Reminiscences* tr. Kusumavati Deshpande (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1963), 169.

[13] Ranade, *Reminiscences*, 30-32.

[14] Ranade, *Reminiscences*, 58-59.

feminine modesty required that such work was not to be boasted about. Domestic service is an abstract product of labour; it does not produce an identifiable physical commodity and continues to be inseparable from the female body. Therefore service remains invisible and insignificant.

Several of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century women's narratives available today could not have been published without the active support of British and American benefactors[15]. A wide network of sisterhood had begun to develop since the late nineteenth century with greater number of western women traveling to India for imperial or missionary work. There were also instances of Indian women, such as Anandibai Joshee, Pandita Ramabai, Parvathi Athavale and Rakhmabai traveling to England or America and being hosted by women abroad. While recent scholarship has shown how the *memsahibs* were themselves embroiled in the imperial work of the 'civilising mission', the narratives left by these women provide rich descriptions of life of women in India through the 'female gaze', as the *zenana* was accessible to these women, a space which had hitherto to been veiled from male writers [16]. An archive of the immensity of domestic work is often found in the representations of Indian women by western women writers. Mary Billington, a British journalist, wrote that girls from a very young age were put to simple household duties like cleaning the rice and pounding the corn [17]. She remarks upon the usefulness of wives in India; Indian society was organised in such a way that a wife "far from being an additional burden on the resources of the household, directly or indirectly adds to them" [18]. Margaret Cousins, too, valorises women's work, especially childbirth, as a "service given by women to the nation" – these "national heroes" faced the battlefield of life and death without any "pomp, glory, proper equipment or due appreciation" – and part of that service of building the national bodies consisted of the "immense work of feeding, clothing, and cleaning the community". Cousins writes that the "work of the world would go on badly, and the temper of the men suffer seriously" if not for the amount of cooking done by women [19]. The writings of British and American women along with the advice literature published in this period unveiled domestic work and foregrounded its enormity and significance in the public sphere.

3. Public Sphere, Employment and Middle Class Women

Women's entry into the public sphere, however, was not an entirely smooth process. Caroline Dall, biographer of Anandibai Joshee, the first Indian woman to receive her education abroad, who studied medicine in Philadelphia after she received financial aid from an American philanthropist, narrates several instances of the difficulty and dangers the public sphere posed for Anandibai. She was harassed in the streets for not observing *purdah* in Calcutta. In a letter to a Mrs. Carpenter dated June 1881, Anandibai describes Calcutta as conservative and opposed to women's movement in public spaces on account of the *purdah* being followed strictly in Calcutta through the *zenana* so that women, their faces always veiled, did not appear in front of their relatives and much less their husbands. This led to pelting of stones at her if she went out alone in the streets or Europeans laughing at them or "natives" stopping to stare if she went out for a walk with her husband. In one particular incident, a sepoy approached them while they were walking in the Esplanade to cast aspersions on Anandibai's moral character and to ask her husband what sort of a woman "he had with him" [20]. In Bombay, too, people stared or laughed when they saw her walking around with books or petulantly remarked that *Kaliyug* was imprinted on the minds and character of people if women walked around in boots and stockings. In a speech at Baptist College Hall, Serampore in 1883, she defended her decision of going abroad to study by stating that it would have been easier for her to get an education as a female if she were a Christian or a Brahmo [21]. She left for New York soon after to pursue her ambitions.

In 1930s Ahmadabad, the case of a Dr. (Miss) Ahalyabai Samant was reported who was abducted and assaulted by a Dr. Balabhai Harishankar Bhatt. The district sessions judge sentenced Bhatt to a prison term of a year to send a message across to all medical staff that female doctors are to be treated with respect. The Chief Justice of High Court, however, let Bhatt go off with a fine stating "If women engaged in professional work come out into the open world they must adopt the standards of ordinary men and women of the world. They cannot expect to retain the hyper-sensitive notions of modesty which their ancestors in *purdah* may have possessed" [22]. Another instance is of Kadimbini Basu, one of India's first female doctors, who graduated from Bethune College in 1883. She benefitted from the Dufferin Fund set up to fund female doctors and aid workers. She was married to Dwarkanath Ganguly, a Sadharan Brahmo Samajist. Through court records we know that she fought a libel case against the Bengali magazine *Bangabashi* which had called her a whore in its editorial [23].

Saraladebi Chaudhurani also noted a few instances where her trepidation and fear of public space is made clear. While at Mysore as a teacher at Maharani Girls School, Saraladebi had this particular experience which she narrates in her autobiography. She was at the time living all by herself in a house with a maid servant. A local dissolute man, the contractor's son, perceiving her to be an 'unprotected' woman broke into the house. There is a silence with regards to the intent of this man but it definitely hints towards the purpose of sexual assault on his mind. Saraladebi wrote:

The matter ended there, but my mind brooded on this incident for a very long time. The Calcutta papers learnt of this incident through various news agencies. The *Bangabashi* published a long editorial, the point of which could be summarised as follows: 'Why do privileged women leave their homes to work in a foreign place? They

[15] Makarand R. Paranjape, *Making India: Colonialism, National Culture, and the Afterlife of Indian English Authority*. New York: Springer, 2013, 104. http://link.springer.com/book/10.1007%2F978-94-007-4661-9 (accessed December 11, 2016)

[16] For studies on the *memsahib*, as the oppressor as well as the oppressed, see Pat Barr, *The Memsahibs: The Women of Victorian India* (London: Seeker and Warburg, 1976), Indrani Sen, *Memsahib's Writings: Colonial Narratives on Indian Women* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2008) and Indira Ghose, *Women Travellers in Colonial India: The Power of the Female Gaze* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[17] Mary Frances Billington, *Woman in India* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1895), 20.

[18] Billington, *Woman in India*, 17.

[19] Cousins, *Awakening of Asian Womanhood*, 18-19.

[20] Dall, *Anandibai Joshee*, 40-46.

[21] Dall, *Anandibai Joshee*, 85.

[22] Geraldine Forbes, *the New Cambridge History of India. Vol IV.2. Women in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 161-167.

[23] Forbes, *History of India*, 161-167.

don't have to worry about feeding or clothing themselves. Why do they needlessly place themselves in danger? This is just blind mimicry of western civilisation.'

I realised that the editorial was somewhat true. I had arrived here on the wings of a momentary whim, fuelled by the various English stories I had read. I had not come here to demonstrate that the equality of educational opportunity that I had enjoyed with my brothers should be translated into an independent life. This may have been a tangential reason, but the foundational justification for my job was mere whimsy.[24]

There is a marked skepticism in her voice in contrast to the sprightly rebellion and strength she had displayed when she had faced opposition from her father regarding this job because of her strong desire to "to leave the domestic cage and escape outside, towards an unknown destination to earn an independent livelihood like my brothers"[25]. She returned home soon thereafter.

The narratives of working women are telling signs of the hostile nature of the public sphere when middle class 'respectable' women first began to step out of the realm of domesticity and the subsequent fear women/girls have of this "masculine" space. The editorial in *Bangabashi* brings forth a few issues. One is the need for only lower class lower caste women to earn their living and how their bodies are available for physical and sexual labour. If upper caste and upper class women step out of the home to work they are voluntarily putting themselves in danger much like the comment made by the Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court who argued that women who work in the public space must adopt the standards of "ordinary men and women in the world". Second, the employment of upper class women and putting their education to professional use was deemed unnecessary as this education was to be put to use in a domestic space, to reorganise and modernise the home. Third, there is a rejection of blind mimicry of western women by taking up professional roles. Annie Besant, in fact, in a pamphlet published in 1904 wrote that women in the West had created an "artificial problem" with regards to the relation of the sexes by being the "rival and competitor of man in all forms of outside and public employment"[26].

By 1921, one-third of the thirty-nine million women were in the workforce. Of these 1,04,000 women were medical, education, law or business professionals; 7,37,000 were domestic workers, and the rest were employed in the manufacturing sector[27]. 30,000 to 40,000 women are estimated to be sex workers in Bombay alone[28]. By 1928, 2,50,000 women worked in factories and mills; another 2,50,000 in tea gardens; 78,000 in mines. Contrary to the discourse of bourgeois domesticity that naturalised the home as the domain of the women, a large amount of female labour was being employed outside the home when middle class women first began to make their appearance felt in the public sphere. As early as 1896, women like Franscina Sorabji and Lakshmibai Tilak were conducting relief work in plague-stricken Poona and Bombay villages. Individual names are exceptions to the early interventions that were mainly reformatory and civilising in nature. Work amongst the poor working class women arising from sympathy, while laudable, would have had paternalistic overtones [29]. Seva Sadan founded in 1908, under the leadership of Ramabai Ranade, provided poor and illiterate women industrial training in sewing and laundry to supplement the "meagre family income". Married and older girls were given lessons in hygiene, singing, home-nursing, English and the vernaculars [30]. Similarly organisations like Women's Indian Association (WIA) and National Council of Women in India (NCWI) were combating religious and commercial prostitution and immoral traffic of women, untouchability, gambling, drinking, begging along with providing medical relief, industrial classes, maternity centres and lessons in sanitation and hygiene. Vigilance Associations were formed by women in the main towns for the removal of "pernicious and degrading vices" namely prostitution [31].

4. Social Service and Domesticating the Public Sphere

The taming/domestication of the public sphere and a proliferation of the discourse of bourgeois domesticity led to women's entry and access to the public sphere. The act of *seva* made available, or rendered thinkable, service roles for women—that were simultaneously public and domestic, contributing to self-improvement, care for intimates and work towards nation-building and nation-regeneration. Female labour had hitherto been invisibilised or made trite, by limiting it to the domestic sphere or rendering the domestic space as insignificant and of little consequence to the public sphere. The public roles claimed and reformulated by women were along the lines of bourgeois domesticity and their duty to the nation and to the home.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the process of domestication of the public sphere involved containment of disease, filth and crowds and this was promoted in the language of modernity, civic consciousness, order and public health. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that to the European traveling or living in India, the streets represented a "confusion of the private and the public"; these modernist categories were challenged by the way Indians used and related to open space[32]. This open space that confused the public and the private was deemed unfit for women from respectable upper caste families. For upper caste middle class women to gain access to the public sphere, it had to be domesticated and *purdah*-ed. This period saw the emergence of screened spaces for women entering public spaces, like *purdah*-ed boxes in theatres, *purdah*-ed arenas in temples or *purdah* areas for public meetings. Calcutta Botanical Garden, too, seems to have had the tent-

[24] Saraladebi Chaudhurani, *The Scattered Leaves of my Life*, edited and translated by Sikata Banerjee (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2011), 109-110.

[25] Chaudhurani, *Scattered Leaves*, 90.

[26] Annie Besant, "Document no 62, originally published a pamphlet in 1904. Later reprinted in Annie Besant, The Birth of New India: A Collection of Writings and Speeches on Indian Affairs, Adyar, 1917", in *The Development of Women's Education in India, A Collection of Documents 1850-1920*, ed. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Joseph Bara, Chinna Rao Yagati and B.M. Samkhder, (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2001), 316-319.

[27] Jaipal P. Ambannavar, "Changes in Economic Activity of Males and Females in India: 1911-1961". *Demography India, 4*, no. 2 (1975): 362-364.

[28] "Bombay Prostitution Committee's Report," ISR (August 27, 1922) cited in Geraldine Forbes' *Women in Modern India*, 158.

[29] Amrit Kaur wrote how it was the responsibility of women who have been "given" the "light of knowledge" and the "material where-withal" to truly regenerate India. Amrit Kaur, *Challenge to India* (Allahabad: New Literature, 1946), 64-65.

[30] Evelyn Clara Gedge and Mithan Choksi, eds., *Women in India: Fifteen Papers by Indian Women Writers* (Bombay: Hyperion Press, 1929), 43.

[31] Kaur, *Challenge to Women*, 11.

[32] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 66.

purdahs made of bamboo window-blinds since 1857 [33].

Along with this, there was further proliferation of women's organisations and clubs that gave women access to the public. Feminising of the public sphere began in the 1880s with the setting up of Arya Mahila Samaj in Bombay and Poona under the leadership of Pandita Ramabai and with the proliferation of women's organisations and Ladies' Clubs in Bengal, Bombay Presidency and Madras. The Arya Mahila Samaj had evolved from the Striyancha Sabha and its membership included Rakhmabai, Ramabai Ranade and Kashibai Kanitkar. Similarly, the Bharata Mahila Parishad [Indian Women's Conference], inaugurated in 1908 as part of the National Social Conference, evolved into the Bharat Stree Mahamandal [The Great Circle of Indian Women] in 1910 under the leadership of Saraladebi Chaudhurani [34]. These women's societies were not limited to the urban centres but began to mushroom in the smaller towns; Banga Mahila Samaj and Aghorekamini Nari Samiti were a few other local and regional organisations in Bengal; women's organisations opened in towns like Dhulia, Mehekar-Varhad, Jalgaon and Sholapur in Maharashtra. Girijabai Kelkar, too, founded the Bhagini Mandal [Association of Sisters] in Jalgaon [35]. These were often referred to as the *Purdah* Clubs because of their 'by women, for women' nature. Special arrangements were made for women in *purdah* so that men were not allowed to be members or be on the administration. *Purdah*-ed cars and rooms and screened open spaces were used. Incidents of such a fluid use of *purdah* in the public space can be found in the narratives of Shudha Mazumdar and Cornelia Sorabji.

Women's organisations like their male counterparts, and the earlier Christian missions, were constituted by middle class educated women who had internalised the colonial ethic of 'improvement', disgust towards filth and an unorganised and undisciplined public sphere. The disciplining of the public sphere was as much a part of the nationalist project as it had been for the colonial authorities. Public spaces that were "benign, regulated...clean and healthy" and "incapable of producing either disease or disorder" was the basis of the modern state [36]. Educating the poor in the rules of abstinence and hygiene and instilling in them civic sense was all part of the civilising mission undertaken by the educated elite. Similarly, women's organisations made an attempt to domesticate the public space by universalising bourgeois domesticity and constructing "Indian Womanhood" to align it with nationalist aspirations. This construction of Indian Womanhood along the nationalist-domestic as excluding certain kind of work or female agency can be seen in the debates that took place regarding the abolition of prostitution and the *devadasi* practice. The *Devadasis* responded to the abolitionary attempts by forming internal organisations that wanted to reform the institution from within and protect their way of life [37].

The category of social service or work can be used interchangeably because in the twentieth century women were increasingly foraying into the professional sphere under the guise of social service[38]. Their access to public spaces remained limited into the twentieth century. They were not paid well and in fact are a lot of times honorary workers so there is a clear refraction of female labour through unpaid social service. In a letter Cornelia Sorabji writes that "there were more honorary women Social Workers in India than men" yet there did not exist corresponding "public privileges" like libraries, public institutions or Clubs [39]. Here she drew attention to civic duties fulfilled by women, primarily *purdahnashins*, who paid taxes, fulfilled their share of the duties of citizenship and more than their share of relief work and public services. This letter was written in 1929. Thirty years before this Pandita Ramabai in *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* appealed for residence and libraries for widows arguing that charitable institutions would not have succeeded in India if it had not been for the women who never went empty-handed even to a temple or to hear a *puranika* always carrying with them a fruit or a handful of rice [40].

While women's work continued to be domestic, it did not remain confined to domestic space. At the closing of the nineteenth century, women are increasingly expected to take up 'women's work' and to expand the ambit of their service and duty from the family to the community and the nation[41]. This opened up the gendered dichotomy between private and public. The thesis that philanthropy/social service allowed women to negotiate the public sphere is not entirely new and has been researched by scholars both in "domestic" and imperial contexts and the interconnections between the two[42]. A study of Indian women's activism and work throws light on the networks between gendered

[33] The Botanical Society, *Transactions of the Botanical Society Volume V* (Edinburgh, The Botanical Society, 1883), 226.

[34] Forbes, *Women in India*, 15.

[35] This Association was exclusive to Brahmin women. In fact a Maratha woman, Anandibai Shirke, claimed that it was only after her arrival in 1922 did the organization throw open its doors to other Hindu women like Pathare Prabhus and Marathas. (Anagol, *Feminism in India*, 66.) This exclusive membership can be noticed in various organisations of the time and even though the names suggest a pan-Indian membership and a universality of the sisterhood amongst Indian women, these organisations continued to work along caste and class lines. This is something I will discuss further in the concluding remarks in the chapter.

[36] Chakrabarty, *Habitations*, 77.

[37] See Forbes, *Women in India*, 184-186 and Veena Talwar Oldenberg, "Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow", in *Contesting Power*, ed. Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 23-61.

[38] For a discussion on Victorian women who negotiated the professional domain through philanthropy see F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) and Dorice Willaims Elliott, *The Angel out of the House: Philanthropy and Gender in Nineteenth Century England* (The University Press of Virginia, 2002).

[39] Sorabji, letter to Mr McWatters, Hasting House, Calcutta, March 18, 1929, MSS EUR FI65/163, Sorabji Papers. Cited in Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens*, 138-139.

[40] Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* (Philadelphia: The Jas B. Rodgers, 1888), 113-115.
Nicol MacNicol, *Pandita Ramabai* (Calcutta: Association Press, 1926), 72.

[41] It will be important to note here that wives of the British Officers too, along with facilitating their husbands' official work, also undertook "women's work"; much of the work of the Raj, Procida opines was "traditional woman's work" that involved taking care of the needs of the sick, educating Indian women in Western hygiene and other domestic and civilisational practices. Interestingly, this work was invisible and unacknowledged, just as the presence of women and wives was, and "without any cost to the State". For more see, Mary A. Procida, *Married to the Empire: Gender, politics and imperialism in India, 1883-1947* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 30-58.

[42] England as the heart or the home of the Empire is the "domestic" in the works of British historians. For more see Hall and Rose, *Home with the Empire*. Histories of philanthropy in nineteenth century England include Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, Elliott, *Angel out of the House*. Increasingly historians with the influence of Postcolonial theory and Subaltern Studies have traced the networks and interconnections between the two. Most influential work in that regard is Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

ideologies of nationalism, professionalism and citizenship that made available new roles for women in both the private and public spheres along with blurring the line between private and public, traditional and modern, and emotional and political. The domestic was to remain the primary domain of women's functioning even at the height of women's involvement in the nationalist movement. What becomes significant is that the 'task of nation-building', of which all the women mentioned in this chapter were acutely aware of and their role in such a process, was based on the idea of "women as nurturers rather than wage-earners" [43]. Women's organisations like All India Women's Conference (AIWC) and WIA included working women's rights only in the 1930s and women's wage-work was seen as a means of supplementing the male wage and not as the primary source of living or as a means of financial independence. Similarly education imparted to middle class women had a 'domestic' bias [44]; sanitation, hygiene, child welfare, nursing, and cooking were a few topics discussed upon. The attempt at domesticating working class women and taking the civilising projects to the middle class women was part of the larger discourse of the task of nation-building and the role that women could play in it.

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[43] Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing*: *The Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India 1800-1990* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993), 67.
[44] Hancock, "Gendering the Modern", 149-162.