



# Tarabai Shinde: A Pioneer feminist in India

\*Aakansha R. Bhumbar

Department of English, Brijlal Biyani Science College, Amravati-444604 (M.S.) India

Email- [aakanshabhumbar@gmail.com](mailto:aakanshabhumbar@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT:-**In colonial Maharashtra women tried to converse with themselves and the society through biographies, autobiographies, articles in newspapers, journals and they even wrote books, trying to discuss women's issues that arose from the patriarchal system of society at the time. They criticized social customs and blind faith in religion pertaining women, very intensely. Their writings were theoretical and visionary, and stood out creating a baseline for a feminist approach to historiography; here my efforts are to interpret writings from that point of view with reference to Tarabai Shinde.

**KEYWORDS:** -patriarchal, social, feminist, religion etc.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tarabai Shinde, a 19th Century Social Reformer who wrote India's First Feminist Text, was a women's rights activist who protested patriarchy. Her first published work, *Stri-PurushTulana*, which translates to, 'A Comparison between Women and Men', is considered to be one the country's first modern feminist text. Her defiance of inherent patriarchy in Hindu scriptures seems to remain controversial even today. In the modern India still, same question remained in patriarchal setup, asked by TarabaiShinde, "But do men not suffer from the same flaws that women are supposed to have?" Tarabai was born in 1850, a period when the British Raj was at its peak and the quality of life for women in the country had become worse. Tarabai's father was a radical thinker himself, honed her linguistic with skills. Due to societal norms at the time she became a child-bride. When a widow aborted her unborn child, a criminal case was filed against her and she was sentenced to death. Tarabai decided to speak up against this act through her writings.

## 2. THE EMERGENCE OF FEMINISM IN INDIA

The history of feminism in India is often regarded in post-independence era. However, a closer assessment suggests the presence of the feminist movement in India even during pre-independence era. Even during the earlier phase in the form of writings of TarabaiShinde, PanditaRamabai, Rakhmabai to name of few describing the reaction to the feminist movement in India, Suma Chitnis writes "The most distinctive features of this movement that it was initiated by man. It was only towards the end of the century the women joined the fray.

The of who, champion the cause of women is long – Raja Ram Mahonar Roy, Ishwarachandra VidyaSagar, Keshav Chandra Sen, Matahari, Phule, Agarkar, Ranade, Karve to mention a few. The record of the reform they undertook to achieve is impressive. It reveals that their efforts spanned action to abolish the

practice of sati, the custom of child marriage custom of distinguishing widows, the ban on remarriage of the upper caste Hindu widows and many other civil practices that affected women”.

India is and was a land where women were exploited under a patriarchal ideology. This was a problem is still continuing in contemporary India. We are actually living in Such period where we discuss about feminism, gender discrimination and gender-based problems. This was not a situation century before. The word ‘Feminism refers to an intense awareness of identity as a woman and interest in feminine problems. According to Jonet Richards, “The essence of feminism has a strong fundamental case intended to mean only that there are excellent reasons for thinking that woman suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex, the proposition is to be regarded as constituting feminism”

In Indian context, the history of feminism divided into three phases. In first phase, beginning in the middle of Nineteenth Century which is initiated by the social reformer who began to speak in favour of woman’s rights and women’s education. In second phase, it was started from 1915 to Indian independence in which Mahatma Gandhi incorporated women’s movement. In this phase, it is related to post-independence period, which has concentrated on fair treatment of women at home after marriage, and feminism become tool of social change. Feminism is arduous struggle by abused oppressed, tortured, disrespected, ignored women coming together putting their lives at stake, for the sake of their rights.

The nineteenth century was a period of pivotal changes in the socio-political scenario of the nation. It was a period that witnessed the emergence of the feminism. Socio-religious practices such as child marriage were contested; issue of widow re-marriage debated and British Government passed a law for the welfare of women. In India, women education highly recommended and various school and college started in nineteenth century.

TarabaiShinde had begun working with social reformer, Savitribai Phule and Jyotirao Phule and was a member of the Satyoshodhak Samaj or Truth Seekers Society. Tarabai Shinde was revolt against patriarchy and caste system in nineteenth century in India. In her debut book named ‘A Comparison of Men and Women’ She criticizes patriarchal system. She is one of the earliest proponents of women’s right. Shinde anticipated the physical and psychic emancipation of women from the cruel traditional clutches of patriarchal ideology. The response for the book from contemporary society was hostile and it remained undiscovered until its re-publication by S.G. Malshe in 1975. This book originally published in Marathi in 1882. In 1885, JyotiraoPhule wrote in defence of TarabaiShinde’s ‘Stri-PurushTulana’ in SatashodhakSamaj’s Second issue of its magazine, Satsaar. TarabaiShinde known as a pioneer of Indian Feminism.

### 3. TARABAI SHINDE: A PIONEER IN INDIAN FEMINISM

Tarabai Shinde was born in 1850 in Maratha family, Buldhana, Berar Province, and British India. In presently day in Maharashtra she was the only daughter in the family. She acquired an intellectual bent of mind and love for learning from her father, BapujiHari Shinde worked as a head clerk in the office of the Deputy Commissioner who taught her Marathi, Sanskrit and English which gave her courage to speak against oppression of womanhood. She was a feminist, rights activist, writer and social reformer. TarabaiShinde played a significant role in the leadership of feminism movement in India. She revolted against all the discriminatory practices on all fronts of human affairs. Her main purpose is to improve the status of women. Her writing reflected a growth and expansion of her understanding.

TarabaiShinde has the sensibility and awareness of exploitation and oppression of womanhood. Shinde insists on a new identity for women’s, radically different from the submissive and docile image of Sita

and Savitri she analyses many social arrangements and institutions as convert ways of manipulating power so as to establish and perpetuate the dominance of men and the subordination of women she attacked the stereotypical images of womanhood which imposed by patriarchal society. Tarabai was highly influenced by ‘SatyaShodhakSamaj’ which is set up by JotiraoPhule in 1873. She became the member of ‘SatyaShodhakSamaj’.

Tarabai Shinde has written a book entitled “Stri-PurushTulna’ which translates to ‘A comparison between Man and Women is considered to be a milestone in Indian Feminism. This book is the first modern feminist text of India which is written 1882. The text was originally published In Marathi language in response to an article in ‘Pune Vaibhav’ an orthodox newspaper. When Vijayalaxmi is young Brahmin widow of 24 was sentenced to death for the murder of her illegitimate child, Vijayalaxmi was victim of child marriage and early widowhood. This incident stirred the consciousness of TarabaiShinde and prompted to pen down against the hypocrisy of patriarchal ideology. Tarabai raised questions on the nineteenth century patriarchal ideology and ridiculed all the men who used the shastra as to advocated superiority and treat women as inferior being.

Today TarabaiShinde is apprehended as the makers of modern India and pioneer of Indian Feminism Through this book entitled “A comparison of Men and Women” Shinde succeeded to draw the attention of society towards the oppression of women. The most important feature of this book is arresting vocabulary which stirred the emotion and ideas and indicates new intellectual dimensions of the mind.

Tarabai differentiate from born a woman and becoming a woman. Vidyut Bhagwat Points out that ‘appeared almost a century before Simone de Beauvoir’s ‘The Second Sex, Tarabai’s Forth right polemical style stands in sharp contrast to de Beauvoir’s’. TarabaiShinde extended critique stri – PurushTulana is a forty pages essay written in 1882. Hereby remain unknown till 1975 Malshe found this essay and he republished it in 1975 because it directly attacked on mechanism of patriarchy, even today Indian women not pluck up courage to write in such language where she wrote nineteenth century Indian feminism is influenced by Tarabai’s work.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In spite of a century’s long struggle for emancipating women, the Indian woman's image is entangled in the ancient ideal of devoted woman. Everyday there are different examples of men’s hypocrisy and terrible violence against women in India but every time women is blamed by society, hollow conventions of society and religion supports men and not the women. Until her death in 1910, Tarabai Shinde remained a voice against patriarchy and ill treatment of women. Her feminist text still remains a pamphlet of reference of many present-day women’s rights activists.

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