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WHAT HINDU WOMEN THINK OF THEIR AMERICAN SISTERS

SHE has spoken, at last, has the Hindu woman. For years the object of pity on the part of her Western sisters; pictured as the mere slave of a sensual husband; the theme of countless missionary addresses, which have dwelt upon her unhappy condition in her home and her degraded position in society—the woman of the Orient has “come back” at the woman of the Occident, and, truth to tell, has uttered some criticisms which American womankind will, perhaps, find it not a little difficult to answer. These criticisms are presented to American readers by the Baba Bharati in his magazine formerly known as the *Light of India*, and now appearing under its new title *East and West*. The critics are two Indian ladies of whom one is a queen, the Maharani of Baroda, wife of the Gaekwar of that state, and the Princess Prativa, a daughter of the Maharaja of Kooch Behar and grand-daughter of the renowned Keshub Chunder Sen.

The Maharani of Baroda has twice visited the United States. The first time, in 1906, she said nothing about our countrywomen. On the last visit, a few months ago, being pressed by the newspaper-men, she did say something. Her Highness's remarks are reported to have been as follows:

The women of your big, vast, young country, I confess, disappointed me. I had heard so much of them; that they equaled the French women in their two most striking qualities of chic and vivacity; that they dressed far better than the English women; were as coquettish, though in franker way, as the Spanish; that they were, in short, as fascinating as the most fascinating women in the world—the Russian.

Well, they are not. They are less chic than the French women, because their clothes are more exaggerated, less becoming, and not always appropriate to the occasion. . . .

They dress better than the English women. More conspicuously, perhaps, but their clothing is not so durable, suggests nothing of the solid qualities of modesty and station, as do the tweeds and broadcloths worn by the English. Their coquetry is not attractive, for it possesses no subtlety. The manner of the American woman who wishes to

attract a man is that of the boy who wants to play golf with him—as frank, as devoid of poetry.

I understand that some American women make the proposals of marriage. That I do not doubt after watching them make themselves “agreeable” to a man at dinner. I am not surprised that American men do not make love well. The women save them the trouble. As for the fascinations of the Russian women. No! No! No! The Russian women are soft and feminine. The American women are masculine. The only softness about them is in the stuffs with which they drape themselves—not in their souls.

They are tactless; which is only another way of saying “unkind.” They are ignorant. Else why should they ask me, as many did, “Are you an East Indian, a West Indian, or an American Indian?” And they are vulgar; else why should they stare at me on the streets as they do at the tigers in a circus parade, merely because I wear different and more reasonable garments than their own?

Commenting on the foregoing, the Baba Bharati reminds his readers that the Maharani “is not a Western woman and, therefore, she does not know, not having cultivated it, the trick of concealing or glossing over her thoughts.” He thinks the American woman may resent it all, but “so have the Hindu women a right to resent the American woman’s criticism of them, criticism entirely unmerited.”

The Princess Prativa, who was interviewed in London, had this to say concerning her Western sisters:

The women of the rest of the world are so unhappy. We of India alone know the art of happiness. I am glad that there is an opportunity to carry the gospel of peace into the nations of the restless. I want to go to America, for it is the most restless, unhappy land of all. I have been told that America is very rich. Yes, yes. But what of that? We judge a nation by the status of its women, and the status of the American women is eternal unrest. One woman once said to me: “I have nothing but money, and I’m tired of that!” They lack that calm center of philosophy without which life is a whirlpool and the world is in a vast turmoil. They talk loudly. They try to be sprightly, and only succeed in making ugly faces. They are not enough alone. They do not read enough. They chatter too much and think too little.