Dear female readers, have you ever thought about the condition of your misfortune? What we are in this civilised world of the twentieth century? *Slaves!* I hear slavery as a trade has disappeared from this world, but has our servitude ended? No. There are reasons why we are still in bondage.¹

It's true that nobody knows the history of the primitive times, and yet it seems that in the ancient age when civilisation didn't exist, when social ties didn't prevail, our situation was not like it is now. For some unknown reason, as one half of mankind (male) continued to flourish in different spheres of life, the other half (female) failed to keep up with the pace and so, instead of becoming the companions or partners of men, they ended up as their bondmaids.

Can any of you explain the cause of such world-wide degradation of women? Perhaps lack of opportunities is the main reason for it. Unable to get on, the female sex had pulled back from all affairs of life and, considering them to be weak and inefficient, men began extending a helping hand to them. Gradually, the more the womenfolk received support from men, the more incompetent they became. We can jolly well be likened to the beggars of this land. The more that the wealthy give alms with a religious mission, the greater the number of low-life beggars that are on the rise. Eventually, begging has become a profession for the indolent. They are now no longer ashamed of taking alms.

¹ Some of us might think that it's God's wish that women should live in the subjugation of men. He first created man, and later, to serve him, He created woman. Here, however, we will not discuss views of any of the scriptures but only express what we understand from common sense. That is to say, I am only voicing my own opinion.

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¹ First serialised as “Alankar na Badge of Slavery” (Jewellery or Badge of Slavery) in *Baishakh, Jaisththa* and *Ashar* 1310 (May, June, July 1903) issues of the monthly magazine *Mahila* (Ed. Girishchandra Sen), it was republished with certain modifications as “Amader Abanati” (Our Downfall) in *Bhadra* 1311 (2.5; September 1904) issue of *Nabanur* (Ed. Syed Emdad Ali), and included with a new title, “Istrijatir Abanati” (Woman’s Downfall), in *Motichur* (A String of Sweet Pearls), Vol. I, published in the same year. This translation is based on the text of the essay in Abdul Quadir, ed. *Rokeya Rachanabali* (11–22).
Likewise, with the loss of our dignity, we feel no trepidation in taking favours from men. Therefore, we have become slaves of indolence and, by extension, of men. Slowly, even our minds have become enslaved. Being serfs for centuries, we have now become used to our serfdom. In this way, our higher mental faculties of self-reliance and courage, having been nipped in the bud over and again for lack of cultivation, have probably stopped sprouting altogether. Consequently, men have found it appropriate to suggest: “The five worst maladies that afflict the female mind are: indocility, discontent, slander, jealousy and silliness ... such is the stupidity of her character, that it is incumbent on her, in every particular, to distrust herself and to obey her husband” (Japan, the Land of the Rising Sun).

Then there are those who say, “Exaggerations and lies are accessories of the female tongue.” Some consider us foolish and others, unreasonable. Because of such flaws in us, they have begun to consider us as inferior. But that is quite natural. Let me give you an example. Sons-in-law are much loved in our country; even a witch loves her son-in-law, and yet a son-in-law who moves in with his parents-in-law is not viewed with affection.

Thus, when we lost our ability to differentiate between freedom and captivity, progress and stagnation, slowly, from being landlords and masters of the house, men, in stages, ended up being our lord and proprietor. And,

2 “Although the Japanese wife is considered only the first servant of her husband, she is usually addressed in the house as the honourable mistress ... acquaintance with European customs has awakened among the more educated classes in Japan a desire to raise the position of women” (Japan, the Land of the Rising Sun).

Some women may object to the use of the word “slave.” But let me ask, “What does the word ‘husband’ mean”? If one who gives charity is called a “giver,” the person who receives it must be described as a “receiver”; likewise, if we describe one as “husband, lord, master,” what else can we call the other but “slave?” If you claim that wives have dedicated themselves to the service of their husbands from love, then of course nobody can complain against such selfless devotion. But haven't men also taken a similar vow of support and service to their family from a bondage of love? Even when the poorest of workers receives his meagre wage after a day's work in starvation and goes to the market, he doesn't waste money on titbits to feed himself. Instead, he buys a little grocery with it and hands it over to his wife. When the wife serves the husband with a handful of rice after cooking it, the poor fellow is happy with it. What a remarkable self-sacrifice! And yet why does society describe married men as “husbands” rather than “love-devotees”? I remember one more important point here. Those privileged wives who feel offended by the word “slave” and often cite the examples of Sita and Savitri, don't they know that there are one or more aristocratic classes within the Hindu community who buy young girls at a price for marrying? One who is purchased with money, what else you could call her but a “slave?” In this context, some may of course point to the practice of grooms bargaining on their academic qualifications but, generally, there is no instance of male spouses being sold. Importantly, it is the groom's degrees that are sold but not the groom himself. But this argument doesn't apply in the case of brides because eight to twelve year