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## Social Reform Movements in India

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**Abstract:-**In India, the nineteenth century witnessed a series of social reform movements starting which aimed at revolutionizing the social setup and bring equality among human beings. Under social reform movements Christian missionaries and Indian socio-religious reformers raised their voice against the evil practices towards women of Indian societies, such as, sati, child marriage, infanticide, polygamy, widow remarriage and property laws, devadasi system, women education etc. Thus in the nineteenth century, very strong and practical steps were taken by the social reformers to mitigate the social sufferings of women. In this chapter, some of the important social reform movements of the nineteenth century India have been discussed in the following pages.

### Objectives

The following have been set out as the objectives of the present study:

1. To explore and critically evaluate social reform movements in India.
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3. To critically evaluate the impact of social reform movements on the Indian society.
4. To study the contribution of various social reformers of India.

### Hypotheses of the Study

Following are the tentative hypotheses of the study:

1. The main objective of the Indian renaissance movement was to face the challenges posed by the importation of western ideas and values on Indian culture and outlook.
2. The Indian renaissance movement tried to modernize Hinduism by discarding the irrational rituals, false doctrines and monopolistic priest craft.
3. The Indian renaissance movement has universal rather than sectarian outlook.
4. The advancement of English education and scientific knowledge exercised a fruitful influence in stimulating the process of social reforms.

### Research Methodology

In the completion of the study archival method will be adopted. The information relevant to this research work would be based on both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources would include Reports published by the Government of India, works of social and religious reformers, Constituent Assembly Debates and the like. The secondary sources would include books authored by eminent writers and research articles contributed in national and international journals of repute.

**Intoduction:-**The greatest social reform with which Roy's name will be permanently associated is the abolition of the cruel practice of 'Sati'. He through writings showed that the sacred books of Hindus did not sanction Sati and appealed to the reason, humanity and compassion of the people. The rite of Sati was the most furious social evil in the eighteenth and early nineteenth country. The Sati practice was prevalent in the Hindus society since a long time past. The highest ideals for a woman with in the Indian culture are virtue, purity and allegiance to her husband. From this tradition stems the custom deceased husband as a proof of her loyalty. Self-immolation of woman is known as *Sati*.



In the original meaning "Sati" was defined as a woman "true to her ideals". A pious and virtuous woman would receive the title of "Sati". *Sati* was derived from the ancient India language term *Sat*, which means truth. *Sati* has come to signify both the acts of immolation of widow and the victim, rather than its original meaning of "virtuous woman". The term "sati" is always associated with the Hindu goddess *sati*. In the Hindu mythology, *Sati* was the wife of lord *Shiva* who consumed herself in the holy pyre. She did this in response to her father's refusal to invite *Shiva* to the assembly of the Gods. She was so mortified that she invoked a yogic fire and was reduced to ashes. The act of *sati* probated the belief that if a widow gives up her life for her husband, she will be honoured. Socially the act of *Sati* played a major role in determining the true nature of a woman.

Roy concluded that such an act would be deliberate female murder. Another interesting point which has been raised by Raja Rammohan Roy was that that willful murder had a limited practice in a small part of Hinduism. So, it could not be the custom of the country.

For orthodox Hindus, the real reason behind this was their moral and intellectual inferiority and social and legal disabilities, as they passionate and they do not possess virtuous knowledge.

By sacrificing herself a widow saves herself from the cruel existence of widowhood and ends the threat she possessed for society. She is considered a member of society who has unrestrained sexual vigor and thus may harm society with immoral act. A widow was seen as having irrepressible sexual power and could be a danger to her society.

A widow was not allowed to remarry, nor was she able to turn to religious learning and hence lived a black and barren life. The pain that *Sati* endures on the pyre was less painful of an experience than the torture she must endure emotionally. She was separated from social world of the living and considered to be "cold sati". She was only allowed to wear rags and was treated polluted being.

In 1811<sup>2</sup> Roy witnessed his beloved sister-in-law widow of his elder brother Jagmohan Roy being burned alive on her husband's funeral pyre. This incident shook his mind. This personal experience thus termed as a fuel for his activities against the evil social custom of *sati*. He was the first Indian to protest from against this custom and strictly opposed it.

He concentrated on complaining against the practice of woman dying as *Sati*. He advocated that this was completely against the women's right to live in the society as a human being. In spite to protest from orthodox Hindu, he carried on his propaganda against the custom.

The activity which will be linked all time with his achievements was the abolition of *Sati*. He out of his anxiety and shame, with his tireless efforts and zeal abolished the evil practice of *Sati*.

Historically as early as in 1772, that *Sati* custom came into the notice of the British Government, but they were reluctant up to 1812. In 1813, they promulgated regulations relating to *Sati*. But the orthodox circles were in favour of retaining the evil practice of *Sati* in the society. That appeal was made by the learned scholars and the educated leaders of the *Hindu* society.

Roy maintained that observance of rites and rituals ignoring the true *Hindu* scripture was prevalent in our society and one horrible dominant ritual suicide under the cloak of religion was the practice of *Sati*. That practice was predominantly prevalent among upper caste *Hindus*. One of the various causes behind such willful deliberate murder was the self-interests of the *Brahmins*. The *Brahmins* knew that in that rite, they had their comfort and happiness, they used to make misinterpretation of the *Hindu* texts, and knowing fully that *Sati* was not mentioned in the *Hindu Shastras*, they continued its propaganda for their self-interests and happiness.

On 4 December 1829, Lord William Bentick, the Governor General of India passed the *Sati* Regulation Act was passed, banning *Sati* as a punishable criminal offence. Not only that but also the act prevented any person from experiencing or aiding to the sacrifice of a *Hindu* widow. The Act further proposed that whether the widow was willing or not and whether she had requested for self immolation or not did not matter here. Under no circumstance, such willful deliberate murder would be considered as legal as it was detrimental to the feelings of human nature and therefore could not continue in the name of religion. The prohibitory regulation banned *Sati* as an imperative duty and mentioned that any person indulged or involved in such a practice would be considered as guilty as the practice of *Sati* was unlawful in the eyes of any man with common intelligence and humanity.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy also opposed child marriage and supported widow remarriage. The abolition of *Sati* is one of the most significant turning point is the social History of modern India.



His aim was the creation of a new society based on the principles of tolerance, sympathy and reason, where the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity would be accepted by all, and where man would be free from the traditional shackles which had enslaved him for ages. He yearned for a new society which would be cosmopolitan and modern.

### **Widow Remarriage**

According to Hindu customs, a marriage is indissoluble even after the death of one's husband. Monogamy was prescribed as an essential condition to preserve the chastity of women. Serious restrictions were imposed on widows who had lost their husbands lest should they go wrong, the most serious being the denial of freedom to re-marry. While widow-marriage was prevalent among the Hindus in the ancient times, gradually it was abandoned and came to be regarded as a sin. The forced celibacy of widows became a strict social custom which few could dare to defy. Society imposed the duties on widows as prescribed in the Manusamhita. It was one of the most severe codes of conduct which the widow was required to observe in accordance with semi-religious injunctions. A widow had no right to marry.

Her life was adjusted to a formal routine of fasting, devotion, prayer and pious work. Through the centuries, such became the lot of the Hindu widow.

In normal cases, the austere celibacy of the widow was no social evil. But the real trouble arose with the spread of the evil of child-marriage and with the consequent increase in the number of child widows. For them, the laws of widowhood constituted a code of tyranny. The position of child widow was most pathetic particularly among the higher castes. The treatment of widows varied from place to place and also according to their age. Old widows had an established place in the Hindu Joint family. They commanded respect and played the role of counselors in domestic matters to their younger relations. It was the younger widows who suffered miseries and humiliations so frequently. People regarded their persons as inauspicious of even ominous. They deserved neither sympathy nor pity from men. Extreme ignorance also led people to believe that young widows were responsible for family misfortunes.

### *AryaSamaj on Widow Remarriage*

The AryaSamaj not only sought spiritual reorganisation of the Indian psyche, it also worked towards abolishing various social issues. The issue of women emancipation was an integral part of agenda of AryaSamaj's social reforms. AryaSamaj vehemently condemned dowry system, polygamy, purdah system, child marriage and practice of Sati etc. Primary among these were widow remarriage and women education. Associated with the evil practice of child marriage was another serious problem of large number of Hindu widows. Swami Dayananda advocated honour and respect for women, yet initially, he did not favour the widow remarriage. He suggested *Niyoga* (temporary union between man and woman to beget child) in place of remarriage for both sexes. Swami Dayananda made this provision mainly to allow the widows and widowers bear children in certain well defined condition. Not only this, he allowed even married women (whose husbands were alive) to have Niyoga, if their husbands were impotent. The AryaSamaj movement created greater consciousness and awareness for the approval of widow remarriage. Sami Dayananda's views on widow remarriage, *Dharmatva*, writes, "If a widow wants to remarry, she should be allowed to do so, There were two categories of widows in those days, first, who became widows in their childhood and never had sexual intercourse with their husband; and secondly, who became widows after having matured as woman.

Aryas preached widow remarriage and AryaSamaj branches of Kohat, mritsar and Lahore organized hundreds of widow remarriages.<sup>8</sup>

Census Report of 1911 recorded: "The AryaSamaj has done a good deal towards encouraging widow remarriage and discouraging child marriage. It is due to the influence of AryaSamaj and other similar reform societies that the ideas above mentioned have permeated the Hindu society at large with the exception of the more orthodox."<sup>9</sup> Though, widow remarriage s were not held in large numbers at that time, yet this *Satyarth* propaganda by the AryaSamaj movement created a psychological revolution in society.

### *Role of Ishvar Chandra Vidyasagar*

One of the evils that plagued nineteenth-century Bengali society was widow remarriage. His diligent effort for the legalization of widow marriage ultimately paid off in 1856 as the British colonial administrators drafted widow marriage into law.



Because widow marriage was prohibited in accordance with the general interpretation of the *Shastra*, Vidyasagar understood that unless he engaged with and reinterpreted the very *Shastra* that forbade widow marriage, it would be nearly impossible to mould public opinion in favour of his cause. He also realized that people would not have a favourable opinion of widow marriage if he wanted to promote it as their duty as citizens but they might gradually change their minds if he could establish it as their religious responsibility. In his 1850 tract titled "Balyabibaher Dosh" ("The Demerits of Child Marriage"), instead of viewing marriage in the light of the shared knowledge of the day as a union geared toward procreation, he interpreted it as the conjoining of two souls,<sup>10</sup>

As for the widows, by the time of Vidyasagar, they were saved from their husband's funeral pyres, thanks to Rammohan Roy's heroic efforts resulting in a 1829 legislation against widow immolation, but they were still destined to a life of unimaginable hardship. Denied access to property, family festivities and considered ominous, these "wicked widows", to borrow Tanika Sarkar's powerful phrase, were often subjected to cruel treatment by their families.<sup>11</sup> They were also put on a stringent diet, many widows were also subjected to unwanted pregnancies that were followed by abortions. The deplorable condition of upper caste Hindu widows forced them to hold that death was preferable choice for them because it made them once for all, free from all sorrow, sin and suffering of life. It was a tradition in India that lower caste widows could marry the brother of the deceased husband. In Punjab region, the custom of widow remarriage is known as Karewa. In this custom widow is married to nearest male relative of her husband which will save the share of her husband and it will remain in family.

To remove all legal obstacles to the marriage of a Hindu widow, one of the most significant Act, The Hindu Widow Remarriage Act XV of 1856 was enacted which legalized marriage of widows and declared issues from such marriage as legitimate. It was provided that on her remarriage, she forfeited her rights and interests in her certain estates specified in Section 2 of the Act which was one of the major reasons for the failure of the Act of 1856. The effectiveness of this Act was lost by the condition of losing property. The Act of 1856 had two serious limitations. First, the widow was heir to the deceased husband's estate only if there was no son. Second. Her right to property was subject to many restrictions.

It left Muslim women entirely out of its consideration. Muslim women would have to wait for another social reformer in the figure of Rokeya Hossain (1880-1932) to find out for themselves that life outside the *zenana* could be pregnant with possibilities.

### Abolition of Caste System

In India, the caste system developed and is prevalent since ancient times and it remains a great thorn and mystery in the flesh of mother India. It is believed to have been adopted by the Brahmins to express their superiority and to maintain it.

#### *Rammohan Roy's Views on the Caste System*

Roy also emphasized more on caste system which was dominantly prevalent in the society during those days. He strongly opposed the barrier of caste system. He felt pity on this heinous social evil. He took more care on the divisive nature of the caste system and its harmful effects on the social and political life in India. According to him social and political problems were inter-linked. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's strongest objection to the caste system was on the grounds that it fragmented society into many divisions and subdivisions. Caste divisions destroyed social homogeneity and the integrated texture of society and weakened it politically.

"Raja Ram Mohan Roy felt that India has been the ground of foreign invaders on account of the existence of the caste system. Raja Ram Mohan Roy always opposed caste system and never fear to argue against it.

According to him, the quality of man was resolved by his character and attainments. "He felt it very much that Indian progress was so slow because of the rigid caste system which kept man separate from man, sect from sect, province from province. He clearly saw that with a rigid caste system, national unity could not be achieved and political emancipation would always remain distant".<sup>14</sup> Raja Ram Mohan Roy was fully against this vital evil and was the first man to destroy the roots of caste system. "He wanted to form caste and creed and those ills of recent growth, which he wanted to counter by means by synthesis of the Eastern and Western idealism."<sup>15</sup>

He was equally vocal in the abolition of the caste system. He considered the caste system in the society, responsible for causing the degradation and degeneration of the society, and the causes of disunity and sectarian bias.



In 1827, he published the first chapter of a Sanskrit work against caste, named *Vajrasuchi* or *The Needle of Adamant*.<sup>15</sup> By *Mrityunjayacharya*. For the eradication of caste system and for a significant progress of the society, Roy was very much in favour of Saivamarriage, which he held in the same rank as that of Vaidikmarriages.

He, being a passionate advocate of freedom, raised his voice for widow marriage.

Raja Rammohan Roy was truly a reformer. He had a patriotic heart, sound mind and good reasoning power. Being a lawyer, he scrutinised the ancient laws of the Hindu Shastras analytically. He criticised the present social, educational and religious conditions of his countrymen and made tireless efforts for providing a better, freer, and more liberal orderings of things.

He believed that the caste system was one of the gravest of many ills under which his country labored. Raja Rammohan Roy mentioned that multitude of religious rites and ceremonies, without any social significance, have totally disqualified his countrymen from undertaking any difficult enterprise.<sup>16</sup>

He was in favour of inter-caste and inter-racial marriages, which he thought, could effectively break the barriers of the caste divisions.

#### *Swami Dayananda on Caste*

According to Swami Dayanand at the time of creation all men belonged to one class, that of man, but later on they were divided into two main classes—the good and the wicked. The good were called Aryas and the wicked Dasyus. Says the Rig Veda, "there are two classes of men—Aryas and Dasyus" The Aryas were again divided into four classes, namely, Brahmins commonly identified with the learned ones (teachers), Kshatriyas, associated with Ruler and Warriors (rulers or protectors), Vaishyas, associated with Commercial livelihood (merchants), and Sudras, associated with Manual Labour (labourers). Those who belonged to the first three classes being educated and bearing good character, were called Dwijas means twice born; whilst the fourth class was so named because of being composed of ignorant and illiterate persons. They were also called Anaryas (not good). This division into Aryas and Shudras is supported by the *Atharva Veda* wherein it is said "Some are Aryas, others Shudras."<sup>17</sup>

Dayanand rejected this caste system on the basis of clour. He cited a mantra from the Yajur Veda which runs as follows: the Brahmins were born from the mouth of the Brahma, the Kashatriyas from the arms, the Vaishyas from the thighs and the Shudras from the feet. Dayanand says that it is wrong and absurd. God has no mouth, no arms, no thighs and no feet.<sup>18</sup>

The true meaning of this hymn is that this universe created and sustained by the Omnipresent God, he who is the (mukh) head, leader among men is called a Braahman, he in whom the power and strength (Baahu) reside ore-eminently in a Kshatriya. He gives correct interpretation thus: The Brahmins occupy the same position in the society as the mouth in the body, Kshatriyas that of arms and so on. And he proved that the whole society was nothing but a body with four distinct divisions—face, arms, thighs and feet. Just as these organs functions differently for the well-being of the whole body as well as for themselves.

Dayanand holds that it is written in the ApastambhaSootras that "A low Class man may, by leading a virtuous life, rise to the level of a higher Class man and he should be ranked as such. In like manner a high class man can by leading a sinful life, sink down to the level of a Class low than this, and should be considered as such." The same law applies to women in determining their Class. Dayanand holds that if a man born in Shudra family possesses merits, actions and temperaments of a Brahmin, a Kshatriya or a Vaishya, he becomes a Brahmin, a Kshatriya or a Vaishya, as the case may be. Similarly, a man born in a Brahmin, Kshatriya or Vaishya family should become a Shudra if his merits, actions and temperaments are Shudra like.<sup>22</sup>

In the past many have become Brahmins, many in the present do and many in future will. Here are some of the historical proofs. In the ChhaandogyaUpnishad we read that the sage Javaal of an unknown Class became a Braahman. In the Mahabhart, it is written that Vishwaamitra, a Kshatriya (second class) became a Braahman, so did the sage Maatang an outcast by birth. Even at the present day, he who possesses the qualification, character and knowledge of a Braahman is respected as such and the ignorant are treated as Shudras (lowest class). So will it be in the future.<sup>23</sup>

Actually the caste is a social system and was meant for the good and smooth functioning of a vital society. As Lord Krishna says in 'Bhagwat Gita' is a scientific system for the division of labour. There were four castes or Varnas strictly according to the ability and



aptitude, namely the Braahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. The Braahmans are the Scholars, Kshatriyas-the Warriors, Vaishyas- the Merchants and the Shudras- the Workers or Peasants.

Vivekananda believed that caste is a must in a growing society. The basic aim of Indian system was spiritual. That is, to accelerate the progress of the individual towards his goal of spirit. This was a certain type of classification which allows maximum freedom for the individual to grow according to his will. In this system, there is the whole freedom to choose the path. The Sanskrit word Jati means species. The individual is a member of society. By virtue of his qualification and attitude to his certain obligation to the society which is to be fulfilled, and it is his duty. By performing this duty, he could reach the spirit.

### *Polygamy*

Polygamy led to an attitude of neglect to women and weaker sex by patriarchal gender biased society. Polygamy was an old social evil, popular among the Zamindars, rich landlords and mostly among the people of well to do families. The practice was more common among both the Hindu and Muslim societies. It was confined mostly to the richer and affluent sections of the society. With their affluence and wealth, the rich could afford to become polygamous and licentious. It was neither a matter of shame or sorrow to maintain a harem, rather, it was a matter of pride and social prestige if one affords it. The upper class Hindus and Muslims, when polygamous, suffered family unhappiness and economic hardships. Maternal mortality was very high in polygamous system. Among the Muslims, polygamy made the purdah system more stringent. The only best feature in this regard to it was that it did not become a common vice among the general populace.

### *Raja Rammohan Roy and Polygamy*

Raja Rammohan Roy equally fought against polygamy. He was conscious about the property rights of the women because he knew that without this right, the women could never be made independent. Widows were the burden of the then society, so an easy solution to remove that burden was Sati system. Raja Rammohan Roy using the platform of *AtmiyaSabha* and the printing press was always held that if anyone wished to marry second time, having his first wife alive, he could do so under eight circumstances as prescribed by the Hindu Shastras, only under eight circumstances on the part of his first wife, which were:

1. The vice of drinking spirituous liquors.
2. Incurable sickness.
3. Deception.
4. Barrenness.
5. Extravagance.
6. The frequent use offensive language.
7. Producing only female offspring and
8. Manifestation of hatred towards her husband.

Roy vehemently opposed polygamy and with utmost vigour brought to light, its shameful evil consequences. He pleaded for an enactment allowing a Hindu male to marry second wife only after getting a clearance from the magistrate. Roy was in favour of the remarriage of women under certain circumstances. BrahmaSamaj which he founded paid special attention to women's education.

In 1856, Mr. Rama Prasad Roy, a judge of the Calcutta High Court pointed out the fact that so far back in 1822, the sentiments on the subject of *Kulinpolygamy*, which was held by Raja Rammohan Roy were similar to the sentiments of those who had joined in the legislative body to suppress the abomination of *Kulinpolygamy* at Rama Prasad's times. He further asserted that the views of the legislature of his time were moving in the same direction of independency of prejudices as were held by Raja Rammohan Roy so many years back.

### *Views of Ishvar Chandra Vidyasagar*

The Kulin Brahmin polygamy also led to many social ills. The Kulins, who happened to be the highest sect of Brahmins, were especially notorious for being polygamous. Collecting handsome dowries through multiple marriages almost became their profession. Many Kulin wives could meet their husbands only once or twice during their lifetime and it was not uncommon for all of them to be burnt at the stake for the sake of the one husband they had shared amongst themselves.<sup>28</sup> The polygamous nature of the Kulins were well exposed in 1836 by the Young Bengal in their journal *Gananneshan* ('Search for Knowledge') in which they published a list of Kulin Brahmins, some of whom had married more than 60 times.<sup>29</sup>

Brothels, where many Kulin wives deserted by their husbands ended up, gradually became an important part of Bengali life, and often used as a meeting place by Bengali *baboos*. Nirad C. Chaudhri observed how the status of housewives was much lower than



those involved in prostitution. Outside the *zenana*, Bengali housewives hardly had any existence, while considerable power was yielded by the famous prostitutes of Kolkata zealously courted by powerful Bengali men.<sup>30</sup>

### Infanticide

Another horrible and cruel rite particularly among the Bengalis and Rajputs was killing their infant daughter at birth, taking female children to a great economic liability. Some socially backward tribes followed the practice of killing their infant daughters at their birth. Maharaja Dalip Singh, son of Ranjit Singh, mentions that, "He had actually seen when he was a child at Lahore, his sister put into sack and thrown into the river."<sup>31</sup>

Destruction of female children at their birth was not a common custom. But its worst aspect was that it was practiced secretly. The reasons for infanticide varied. It was primarily due to economic cause, veiled by ignorant pride. They killed their infant daughters as it was imperative to spend large sums of money for the marriage of a daughter. The methods of killing the infants were extremely barbaric. At many places the child was destroyed immediately after birth by filling the mouth with cow dung or by immersing the head in cow's milk or by coiling the umbilical cord around the face. These are the cruelties associated with the custom.

Enlightened British and Indian opinion was unanimous in condemning infanticide. When persuasion alone could not help, in Bengal Regulation XXI of 1775 and III of 1804 declared infanticide illegal and equivalent to committing murder as a precautionary measure, the Government of India passed an Act in 1870, making it compulsory for parents to register the birth of all babies and providing for verification of female child for some years after birth.

### Untouchability

Untouchability is a unique Hindu social institution which emerged in the remote past. The so-called untouchables have been suffering the stigma of untouchability followed by servitude, illiteracy and grinding poverty. Due to its serious adverse effects on the Indian society in general and the untouchables in particular, it has been vehemently opposed by many sensible persons including saints, social reformers and political leaders in the past. Previously, it was given to understand that untouchability had religious sanction. Thus it has lost its religious sanction. Swami Vivekanand, B.G.Tilak, V.D.Savarkar, Swami Chinmayananda, GolwarkarGwuji and many others refuted the custom of untouchability and interpreted the religious text so as to suit the principle of equality and Hindu fraternity.

#### *Swami Dayananda on Untouchability*

Swami Dayananda was deeply perturbed by the attitudes of Orthodox Brahmins towards the depressed class of the Hindus, known as Dalits, Outcaste or Untouchables. They were not allowed to enter Hindu temples, homes and Brahman rituals. They were prohibited to fetch water from the village wells. Their children were not allowed to study in the village school with other children. Swami Dayananda was first to declare equal rights for lower caste, the right for education, right for reciting Ved mantras, right for inter-dining, right for marriage and right to fetch water from common wells. Swami Shraddhanand (formerly known as LalaMunshi Ram) spent his whole life for the uplift of the lower class. This cause was taken up by Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress Party during freedom movement. . Thanks to Swamiji that in 1950, The Indian Constitution adopted to provide equal social, religious and Cultural rights to the Dalits or Harijans. Since its inception, AryaSamaj has been fighting an uncompromising fight against untouchability.

The social ideas of the Samaj were the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man; the equality of sexes; absolute justice and fair-play among men and men and nations and nations, equal opportunities to all according to their nature, action, merit and love, and charity towards all. In pursuance to these ideals ,Swamiji along with his Samaj took great interest in the social uplift of the lower classes. Two ways were adopted:

(a) the raising of status of castes not entitled to wear the sacred thread by giving them that privilege, and (b) raising untouchables to the rank of touchables, and educating them to higher social ideals, with a view to eventually putting them on a footing of social equality with other Hindus. For the fulfillment of this purpose the DayanandDalitodharMandal was



### Abolition of Purdah System

Purdah is fundamentally, the hindrance to the progress and development of the Muslim society. Adopting purdah custom was a landmark of growing social status of prosperity of family. This custom was not found from earlier periods but it led to a separate apartments in 836 A.D. during Abbasid period. Purdah or the seclusion of girls who have attained puberty, was a Muslim institution that was partially adopted by Hindus and rich people of Bombay Presidency, after Muslim invasion in India.

The position of women in the nineteenth century was far from being satisfactory. It was their total seclusion which brought about their physical and mental degeneration. In the nineteenth century, for a majority of girls and women, life was much harder as certain social practices like Purdah system, polygamy and Sati Pratha were prevalent in some sections of Indian society.

On scientific basis, Maulana Maududi's opinion was that biologically, a woman is by nature, a tragic being. This is what he calls "biological tragedy of woman."<sup>34</sup> Purdah system is a necessary mode of organizing human social life activities and functions on the basis of dichotomous parallelism in sex and their respective roles with their natural functions.<sup>35</sup>

The Purdah is a symbol of social prestige and own security. Purdah was a main obstacle to a healthy life of women. *Purdahnashin* women had no work of any intellectual, physical or mental activity. They were full of fears and frustration. It was terrible to live in zenanas as due to purdah, their physical health was deplorable and it increased the cases of tuberculosis. The Arya Samaj movement broke the Purdah system and premised full freedom of women. Each woman has to keep a member of Arya Samaj and vote and represent in higher bodies like "Arya Samaj Pratinidhi Sabha" "Arya Dharam Sabha" were greatly concerned and want to fight the social abuses, evils of the restriction imposed on women by Purdah system.

### Against Child Marriage

Child marriage was one of the social evils which captured the attention of progressive minded people in India in the nineteenth century. For a considerable period in ancient Hindu history, there was perhaps no system of early marriage though there were probably exceptions to the rule. But by the time of Manusmriti the custom had already become so familiar that the marriageable age for girls had been prescribed as twelve or even eight. Gradually, early marriage became an established custom. By giving them in marriage before they were of proper age, people felt assured that society would retain its moral purity. Child marriage produced many side evils in the lowest and most ignorant strata of society, according to the depth of their economic misery, parents could sell away their child daughters as bride to those who could afford to meet their demands. The difference in age between the bride and the bride-groom was of no account. The greatest evil arising out of child marriage was the growing number of child-widows.

#### Swami Dayananda on Child Marriage

The evil of child marriage was responsible for a larger share of deteriorating the society. Swami Dayananda launched a long crusade against the evil custom of infant marriage as it was the cause of many miseries. In his *Satyarth Prakash*, he wrote, "Down into the depths of misery sinks that country where in the people do not practice *brahmacharya*. Nor acquire knowledge, where early marriage and marriage between the unsuitable." He suggested the ideal time for the marriage of a female from 16 to 25 years and for a male from 25 to 48 years. Apart from the physical grounds, he also condemned child marriage as anti-Vedic. The Arya Samaj lent its powerful support to the passing of the Child Marriage Restraint Act (commonly called the Sarda Act) in the teeth of bitter opposition from an influential section of orthodox Hindus.

#### Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

Vidyasagar felt that the practice of child marriage is the main cause of other social evils related to women of India. He demanded the need for a special law to save the child wife from physical suffering and harassment at the hands of the husband. In 1846, when the Law Commissioners drafted the Indian Penal Code, decided to extend the penalties of rape to husband who consummated marriages with underage wives. First, this issue from the Indian side was raised by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar who took this issue through his writings. As a result, the government, in 1850, decided 10 years as the age of consent for sexual consummation with girl children whether married or unmarried and offender was considered rapist and was punishable under Section 376 of the Indian Penal Code of 1860. He continued his efforts in 1870s and 1880s which included the revision of marriage customs of Brahmo Samaj in Native Marriage Act II of 1872. *Behramji Malabari*



BehramjiMalabari, who was a journalist by profession, widely known for his struggle against the custom of child marriage, considered many consequences occur due to early marriage, such as boys must give up their studies at a young age, the girls gave birth to sickly children and they had to face the difficulty for feeding too many months. It was also a hindrance to female education and women's progress. His influential work was Notes on infant Marriage and Enforced Widowhood, which was based on statistics generated by the Census, and was an argument for regulating the age of consent. He fixed sixteen and twenty-five as the age of consummation for girls and boys respectively. He was in favour of governmental interference in these social reforms. He compared protection of girl children in India and protection offered to English girls under a comparable regulation. For bringing about the reformative changes he advocated the following:

1. The formation of a National Association.
2. Introducing the lessons on the subjects of the child marriage and the problems of widows in educational curriculum, and
3. Enactment of a resolution by the University that after a certain number of years who were not Bachelors would be considered eligible for university Degree. Hindu Worker's Remarriage Association solicited that every graduate should discourage child marriage.

#### *MahadevGovindRanade*

The work of BehramjiMalabari was taken to certain height by MahadevGovindRanade, who was prominent theist and social reformer. He doubted the 'Smritis' and 'Srutis' and blamed them for lowering the age of marriages by three methods, (a) by prohibiting unmarried life to the girls; (b) by making it compulsory for parents to get their daughters married before puberty; and (c) by inventing new meaning of the words like Kanci (feminine) etc. Therefore, he concluded that the marriageable age was slowly brought down for the above said reasons.

#### **Rights of Women**

Women comprise of nearly fifty percent of the total population but occupies a very low status in medieval and early modern society in India. Lack of educational facilities, child marriages, prohibition of widow remarriages, prevalence of Devadasi system etc; were some of the social factors responsible for the low status and misery of women who were reduced to the position of glorified slaves. The women of weaker sections and low strata of society enjoyed comparatively more freedom since both husband and wife had to work to earn their livelihood, but their general condition was no better. Social barriers, conservatism and female ignorance reigned supreme. Their economic condition was pitiable. Therefore, the crusade for the emancipation of women became the first objective of the social reform movement, in the nineteenth-century.

#### *Roy on Rights of Women*

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a champion of women's rights in India. He laid the foundations of the women's liberation movement in this country. He revolted against the subjection of women and pleaded for the restoration of their rights. The condition of the Hindu women in those days was very pitiable. They were subjected to different kinds of injustices and deprivations. According to Roy, the root cause of the all-round deterioration of Hindu women was the complete denial of their property rights.

The utter helplessness and humiliation of the Hindu widow was one of the major reasons that prompted the inhuman practice of Sati. Prior to the enactment of Sati Regulation Act, the ancient Hindu lawgivers such as Yagnyawalakya, Narad, Katyayana, Brihaspati and others gave the mother the right to have an equal share with her sons in the property left by her husband so that they could spend remaining life happily and independently; and the daughter to have one-fourth of the portion which a son could inherit in the property left by the father.

Another aspect was that fathers and brothers in the marriage of their daughter and sisters used to take large amount of money and in return used to sell them to those lunatic, sick and incapable *Kulin Brahmins* who could provide them a lump sum amount of money. Being married to a person having natural defects, the wives became widow. After marriage, because of the bar to their share of rights to father's property, the widows became claimless and that made their life full of distress and miseries.

They were supposed to have an existence only at a physical level. Men were free to marry as many women as they thought fit for the satisfaction of their lust. Women however were not allowed to marry a second time.



*Jyotiba Phule on Women*

Women and untouchables were the two worst sufferers in Hindu society. They bore the brunt of unequal social structure and Hindu religious dogma. The social customs and traditions concerning the women in Hindu society had been inhuman to say the least. The institution of 'Sati' which relegated women to a position worse than a slave had its origin in pre-Vedic times.<sup>40</sup>

The missionaries were the first to raise the voice against the degradation of Hindu women. They criticized the customs of Sati, polygamy, lifelong widowhood, taboo on their education etc. They started schools for girls. The first day school for girls was started in 1807 by Mrs. Hannah Marshman, a missionary.<sup>44</sup> In Bombay, the American Missionaries and Scottish Missionaries took the initiative in establishing the school for girls.<sup>45</sup> The enlightened Indians soon realized the gravity of the situation and started social reform movement. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Pandit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar did pioneering works in this area.<sup>46</sup>

The Lokhitwadi, Bhadarkar, Agarkar, as well as the Parsis like Wacha, Malbari etc. tried to create public opinion in favour of women's education against early marriage as well as their economic independence.<sup>48</sup> But the movement encountered mounting opposition. In fact, Tilak himself emerged as a leader in the agitation against the age of Consent Bill of 1891, in which liberals like Ranade and Agarkar were keenly interested.<sup>49</sup>

To Phule, the question of women's liberation was not an isolated issue. He considered the slavery of women as a part of general Hindu culture and the social, structure based on inequality and hierarchical divisions. Unless the whole social structure is revolutionized, there was no chance of liberating women from their bondage. Piecemeal efforts could be of little use.

**Property Rights to Women**

The social reformers felt that the miserable economic position of women was due to the denial of property right to women. Hence the progressive thought of getting property right to women would alleviate the sufferings of women. The Married Women's Property Act was enacted in 1874. Under the Act, the separate property of the women was included as follows:

1. Wages and earnings of any married women gained by her in any employment, occupation or trade carried on by her and not by her husband.
2. Money acquired through literacy, artistic, and scientific skill.
3. All savings from and investment of such wages and earnings shall be deemed to her separate property over which she should have absolute right.
4. A policy of insurance effected on her own behalf and independently of her husband and the same and all benefits should be deemed to her separate property.

**Education of Women**

The dismally low social status of Indian women was accounted by several long-standing, widely prevalent and peculiar social customs prominent among which were 'purdah', i.e., closetting women within the four walls and not allowing them to interact with the outside world in any manner, child marriage, female infanticide, 'sati' or immolation of widows on the funeral pyre of their husbands, complete ban on widow remarriage, assigned role of women only as the producer of the progeny, particularly sons, and denial of the right of women to education. Under such all pervading social prejudice against women their education was practically out of question.

Hindu society in the nineteenth century suffered from false religious illusions that Hindu scriptures did not sanction female education that education of girls wrought wrath of Gods leading to their widowhood. The Christian missionaries, whatever their motive, were the first to set up the Calcutta female juvenile Society in 1819. Charles Wood's dispatch on education in 1854 laid great stress on the need of female education.<sup>55</sup> In the broad perspective, women education became a part of the general campaign for amelioration of the plight of women in society.<sup>56</sup>



*Vivekananda on Education*

According to Swami Vivekananda, the purpose of education is man-making. The aim of all training should be this, that is, education should help the man to be Man. He says, "the end of all education, all training, should be man-making. But instead of that we are always trying to polish up the outside. What use in polishing up the outside, when there is no inside? The end and aim of all training is to make the man grow, the man who influences, throws his magic, as it were upon his fellow being, is a dynamo of power and when that man is ready, he can do anything and everything he likes that personality put upon anything will make it work."<sup>57</sup> Such an education only make man strong and manly. In that case the education is the way to fulfill his manliness, his perfection, his true nature. Therefore, true education is the training by which the conduct and expression of Will are brought under control. He says, "By which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's feet."<sup>60</sup> So, the education should be self supporting and strengthening the mind and health controlling the mind. The very essence of education is concentration of mind not the collection of facts. He says," one who has not experienced the art of concentration of mind can gain no knowledge; greater the concentration of the mind, greater will be his knowledge, will only prevent their growth and spoil them. It is a fact that if you speak kind words to them, they are bound to improve in time. If you can give positive idea, people will grow to be men and learn to stand on their legs."<sup>61</sup>

Each child is potentially divine, and to be helped to grow according to his own nature; to manifest the divinity in him. Then education is the manifestation of divinity in him and the only requisite for education is purity of mind and a real thirst for knowledge.

If education is the manifestation of divinity, it also is the aim of Vedanta. Man is essentially the soul. Which is pure consciousness, absolute knowledge and eternal perfection. So, education is the self-discovery – discovery of the true self. Thus, the main aim of education, according to him is to achieve the "manifestation of perfection already in man."<sup>62</sup> Swamijiopined all material and spiritual knowledge is already present in man covered by curtain of ignorance. Education should tear off the veil so that the knowledge shines forth as an illuminating torch to enliven all the corners by and by. "Then knowledge is inherent in man; no knowledge comes from outside; it is all inside. What we say a man knows should, in strict psychological language, be what he discovers or unveils what a man learns is really what he discovers, by taking the cover of his own soul, which is a mine of infinite knowledge."<sup>63</sup> He says again," this is the one call, the one knock, which opens the gate of nature, and lets out floods of light; this the power of concentration is the only key to the treasure house of knowledge."

Character formation is one of the most important aims of education. Swami Vivekananda opined that the character of any man is but the aggregate of his tendencies, the sum total of the bent of his mind. The best way to develop a character is the personal example of high character set by the teacher. The educators should present high ideals before learners. For character development Vivekananda emphasized on the practice of Brahmcharya which foster development of mental, moral and spiritual powers leading to purity of thoughts, words and deeds.

Thus, we can see that the education is a harmonious process of body and mind. Besides these two his intellect, his personality and behavior are also to be considered because man is the integral of these all. Thus, he puts it," the personality of man is two-thirds and his intellect, his words, are but one third."It is the harmonious growth of the real man, the personality of the man including the intellect, that should be the objective of education. The finer feeling and emotion should not remain under development. The true man is he, who is strong as strength itself and yet possess a woman's heart."<sup>70</sup>

**Anti-Nautch Movement (Abolition of Devadasi System)**

The problem of Devadasis is basically the problem of social inequality, dysfunctions of religion, deprivation of girls of particular sections from normal opportunities in life and the disabilities enforced upon the Devadasis by the community at large.

The practice of dedicating minor girls, and compelling them to lead the life of prostitutes in the name of religious services. It was, therefore, natural that reactions against the custom were expressed since the days when the custom took its ugly form. With the advent of Europeans and especially the British in India, the modern values of individual freedom, equality of status and universal brotherhood were widely diffused amongst the Indian intellectuals and social reformers. Two thronged policy was adopted, one by



the process of increasing awareness, and secondly by taking legal measures by the Government against the unhealthy social practices prevalent in India. This process is also seen in the context of eradicating the custom of Devadasi and rehabilitation of the existing devadasis and their off-springs.

Some of the saints advocating Bhakti movement or devotion as a path of liberation attacked evil customs including untouchability. Chaitanya in Bengal and Ekanath in Maharashtra openly criticized the custom of Devadasi. Ekanath categorically said that the Devadasis are themselves immoral in behavior and hence it is not possible for anybody to get emancipation through their applying turmeric powder on the forehead.<sup>71</sup> This shows that the social workers in India right from 10th century A.D. onwards were aware of the evil effects of the custom. Mughal Emperor Aurangzib demolished a temple, situated on the top of a hill, in the village of Sattara, and forbade the temple dancers to ply their shameful profession.

KaramdasMulji, a social reformer and journalist from Gujarat, wrote a series of articles in SatyaPrakash on the prevailing facts behind the immoral practices of that hereditary priests or Maharajas of the Vallabhacharya sect. The first fatal defeat of Devadasi system was tasted by the Maharajas in a libel suit brought against them against the concealed vices relating to temple practices of this sect. This was perhaps the first moral and symbolic victory of the crusaders of devadasi system.

In 1883, JyotibaPhule came to know of dedicating rite and the symbolic marriage of a young girl to god Khandoba. Phule appealed to the then police commissioner of Bombay State to prevent the so called marriage and save the girl from turning into a prostitute. He was successful in this particular case. He also wrote articles denouncing the custom in his periodical 'Deenbandhu' with appeals to the government to take legal measures against those who compel the girls to become devadas.

The movement which was started against Devadasi practice, in which girls were sent to temples as God's offering and by eighteenth century it had turned as more or less a prostitution profession, in history is known as Anti-Nautch movement. The first Anti-Nautch movement was launched in eighteenth century by reform campaigners of different reform movements like Raja Rammohan Roy, MahadevGovindRanade, C. N. Annadurai, IshvarchandraVidyasagar, Periyar E. V. Ramaswamy and other prominent social thinkers who not only questioned the practice of devadasi system but demanded a legal ban on dedication of monor girls, and its sincere and strict execution can save the innocent girls from turning into prostitutes. They admonished the abolition of all ceremonies and procedures by which girls dedicated themselves as Devadasis of Hindu shrines.

Around 1899, the anti-Nautch and puritan movement turned its attention to stopping dedications, and paved the way for anti-dedication movement. This anti-Devadasi movement got strong support from the Theosophical Society, which was based on western scientific temperament. With the help of renowned dancer Rukmani Devi Arundala who was theosophist, changed the dance from Devadasi and gave it modern style known as Bharatnatyam. They stressed that the dance of devadasi was a form of 'Natya Yoga' to enhance an individual's spiritual plane.

The anti-Nautch movement or uplift of Devadasis was a social purity movement which attracted the attention of social reformers in Madras Presidency. In 1910, an Act was passed by which the rite of dedication of a girl known as 'gajja-puja' was determined as illegal. Along with this demand for the abolition of Devadasi in law continued and the first legal initiative to outlaw the devadasi system came as Bombay Devadasi Protection Act, 1934 which made dedication of women illegal, whether consensual or not. According to this Act, marriage by a devadasi was to be considered lawful and valid, and the children from such wedlock were to be treated as legitimate.

### Conclusion

The reform movements were able to create social consciousness among the Indians during the nineteenth century. Social reformers like Rajaram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, MahadevaGovindaRanade, BehramjiMalabari raised their voices against the prevailing practices and social customs affecting women's life adversely such as the practice of sati, female infanticide, plight of the widows, child marriage, polygamy etc. Rajaram Mohan Roy championed the ban on the practice of sati in 1829. Ishwar Chandra VidyaSagar took up the cause of widows and started a movement for widow remarriage resulted in Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. But this act denied them the right to their husband's and family's property. It met with strong opposition from Bengali orthodox.



It has rightly been observed by Nivedita Menon that movements, as well as the resistances to such reforms were decisively shaped by the colonial encounter. Prominent sections of the bourgeoisie had an intent to reform what the colonial discourse presented as primitive and barbaric aspects of the Hindu society, while the resistance came from revivalist nationalists who challenged the colonial interventions into the Indian tradition.<sup>76</sup>

On the other hand, Vina Mazumdar has observed that 19th century social reform movement was as keen to imbibe western progressive and democratic values as it was to re-establish the past glory of Indian society. The urge to change and yet to root this change in one's indigenous culture was natural to a society that has experienced the trauma of colonialism.<sup>77</sup> The movement was not seriously concerned with the question of gender equality. Reforms were restricted by the value system and did not take up the cause of women emancipation seriously. The movement brought in some minor changes and no drastic change in the position of women was brought in. But it is considered as the movement that laid the foundation for women's movements that followed later. All these movements laid stress on rational understanding of social ideas and encouraged a scientific and humanitarian outlook. The reformers felt that modern ideas and culture could be best imbibed by integrating them into Indian cultural streams. These movements looked for social unity and strived towards liberty, equality and fraternity.

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