

APPOLO STUDY CENTRE

MODERN INDIA

National Renaissance - Socio religious reform Movement

8 th std	Unit - 3	Status of Women in India through the ages
10 th std	Unit - 5	Social and Religious Reform Movements in the 19th Century
11 th std	Unit - 19	Towards Modernity

8th History

UNIT - 8 Status of Women in India through the ages

Introduction

Generally human society is constantly changing with additions, assimilations and omissions from within and outside. Women constitute half of the population. It is imperative to have a historical understanding of the status of women through ages.

The position of women was not uniform in all periods, differed with regional variations. In ancient India particularly early Vedic period women enjoyed equal rights. But with the passage of time their status in the society found deteriorated as a result of frequent foreign invasions. They were subjected to subjugation and subordination. New social practices, customs and systems which crept into the society in turn put limitations and restrictions on the liberty of women.

During the British Raj, many socio- religious reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, DayanandaSaraswathi, Keshab Chandra Sen, Iswara Chandra VidyaSagar, PanditaRamabai, Dr.MuthulakshmiAmmaiyar, Jyotiraophule, Periyar E.V.R, Dr.Dharmambal were the prominent leaders who fought for the uplift ment of women. Raja Rammohan Roy's eff orts led to the abolition of sati in 1829. Vidyasagar's crusade for the improvement in the condition of widows, led to the passing of Widow Remarriage Act in 1856. The reformers rightly realized that female education as an emancipating agent in eradicating social evils. So they started girls' schools in various parts of the country, which brought significant changes in the lives of women.

Women played an important part in Indian Freedom struggle. Until independence, there was no radical changes in the status of women. In independent India, last few decades have witnessed the all round development of women. Women are now making their presence felt in every walk of life.

The position of women

a) Ancient Period

In the ancient Indus civilization of India, evidences show the worship of the mother goddess. Hence, the adoration for the mother is evident during that period. During the Rig Vedic period, it is believed that the position of wife was honoured and women's position was acknowledged, especially in the performance of religious ceremonies.

During later Vedic age witnessed a transitional development in the status of women restricting her role in the social life except in the performance of religious sacrifices. Her social and political freedom was restricted. Sati became popular during the later Vedic period where the widows either chose for themselves or were forced to jump into the pyre of their husbands. The patriarchal system became rigid. Women were denied to study Vedic scriptures.

b) Medieval Period

The position of women in the society further deteriorated during the medieval period and they suffered from many social evils such as sati, child marriages, female infanticide, and slavery. Normally monogamy was in practice but among the rich polygamy was prevalent. 'Sati' was in practice particularly among the royal and upper strata of the society. Widow re-

marriage was rare. Devadasi system was in practice in some parts of India. Among the Rajputs of Rajasthan, the Jauhar was practiced. The condition of widow became miserable during the medieval period. But we don't ignore the fact that the Mughal ruler Akbar attempted to abolish sati. In fact very little attention was paid to female education.

Jauhar refers to the practice of collective voluntary immolation by wives and daughters of defeated Rajput warriors, in order to avoid capture and dishonour.

In spite of general determination, we can find some exceptions Razia sultana, Queen Durgavati, Chand bibi, Nurjahan, Jahannara, Jijabai and Mira bai.

During medieval times Women's education was not completely ignored, though no regular separate school seems to have existed. Female education was informal. Girls usually had their lessons from their parents in their childhood. The rich appointed tutors to teach their daughters at home. The daughters of Rajput chiefs and Zamindars studied literature and philosophy.

c) British Period

For centuries women in India had been subordinated to men and socially oppressed. The major effect of national awakening in the nineteenth century was seen in the field of social reform. The enlightened persons increasingly revolted against rigid social evils and outdated customs. Numerous individuals, reform societies and religious organisations worked hard to spread education among women, to encourage widow remarriage, to improve the living conditions of widows, to prevent marriage of young children, to enforce monogamy and to enable middle-class women to take up professions or public employment.

In the beginning of nineteenth century female literacy was extremely low when compared to male literacy. The Christian missionaries were the first to set up the Calcutta Female Juvenile Society in 1819. The Bethune school was founded in 1849 by J.E.D. Bethune, who was the president of the council of education in Calcutta.

Charles Wood's despatch on education in 1854 laid a great stress on the need for female education. Indian Education Commission (Hunter) of 1882 recommended to start primary schools for girls and teacher-training institution and suggested special scholarships and prizes for girls. In 1880's Indian women began to enter universities. They were also trained to become doctors and teachers. They began to write books and magazines. In 1914 the women's medical service did a lot of work in training mid-wives. In the 1890s D.K. Karve established a number of female schools in Poona. Prof D.K. Karve, Pandita Rama bai, made sincere effort to emancipate women through education was really remarkable. The Indian women's university was started by Prof. D.K. Karve in 1916. It was an outstanding institution imparting education to women. In the same year Lady Harding Medical College was started in Delhi.

Major Social Evils

a) Female infanticide

Female infanticide was another inhuman practice afflicting the nineteenth century Indian society. It was particularly in vogue in Rajputana, Punjab and the North Western Provinces. It was mainly to avoid economic burden.

Factors such as family pride, the fear of not finding a suitable match for the girl child were some of the major reasons responsible for this practice. Therefore, immediately after birth, the female infants were being killed.

The company administration in India took steps to ban this practice by passing the Bengal Regulatory Act XXI of 1795, the Regulating Act of 1802 and the Female Infanticide Act of 1870.

b) Female Foeticide

Female foeticide is also an inhuman practice which cuts across the caste, creed, class and regional boundaries. Whether it is female infanticide or female foeticide the prime motive remained the same. In order to ban the female foeticide and sex-determination the central Government passed various Acts.

c) Child marriage

The practice of child marriage was another social disgrace for the women. In 1846, the minimum marriageable age for a girl was only 10 years. The native marriage Act was passed in 1872. It fixed the minimum marriageable age of girls at 14 and boys at 18. In 1930, the Central Legislative Assembly passed Rai Saheb Harbilas Sarada's child Marriage Bill fixing the minimum marriageable age for boys at 18 and 14 for girls. It was later amended to 18 for girls and 21 for boys according to Hindu Marriage Act 1955.

Akbar prohibited child marriage and made it obligatory for the parents to obtain the approval of both the bride and the bridegroom before the marriage. He prescribed 14 years as the age of constant for girls and 16 years for boys

d) Sati

Sati was social evil that prevailed in Indian society especially among the Rajputs. Earlier it was a voluntary act but later by the relatives forced the widow to sit on the funeral pyre. The Italian traveler, Niccolo Conti, who visited Vijayanagar about the year A.D. (C.E) 1420, notes that 'the inhabitants of this region marry as many wives as they please, who are burnt with their dead husbands'.

In the early years of 19th century, sati was in practice in various Parts of Bengal, western India and southern India. In 1811, Jagan Mohan Roy, brother of Rammohan Roy, passed away and his wife was burnt along with him. Rammohan Roy was moved to the extreme at the sight of it and took an oath that he would have the cruel practice abolished by law. He carried on a continuous agitation through press and platform for the abolition of Sati.

Raja Rammohan Roy published his tracts in 1818-20, making the point that the rite of Sati was not enjoined by the Sastras. This material was used by the Serampore missionaries to shatter the generally accepted view that Sati was an integral part of the Hindu religion. Orthodox Hindu opinion against the abolition was advocated by Radhakanta Deb, and Bhawani Charan Banerji.

When Lord William Bentinck took up the question of Sati, he found that the abolition had been recommended by the judges of the criminal courts. He passed Regulation XVII on December 4, 1829 'declaring the

practice of Sati or burning or burying alive the widow of Hindus, illegal and punishable by Criminal Courts'. Similar legislative measures were enacted soon after in Bombay and Madras.

e) Devadasi System

The word Devadasi (Sanskrit) or Devaradiyal (Tamil) means "servant of God" dancing girl dedicated to the service of god in a temple. Devadasi system was a social evil. There was also tradition of dedicating one daughter to the temple. In addition to taking care of the temple, they learnt and practiced BharathaNatiyam and other classical traditional Indian arts. Later on they were ill treated and humiliated. The Devadasis lost their dignity, sense of pride, self-respect and honour.

Dr.MuthulakshmiAmmayyar who was the first woman doctor in India, dedicated herself for the cause of abolishing the cruel practice of Devadasi system from Tamil Nadu. Appreciating her role in the agitation against Devadasi system she was nominated to the Tamil Nadu legislative council in 1929. Periyar E.V. Ramasamy was instrumental in passing the "Devadasi abolition bill". Dr.MuthulakshmiAmmayyar proposed the bill to the Madras legislative council in 1930.

MoovalurRamamirdham was yet another woman who fought for the emancipation of the Devadasi. With the continuous moral support rendered by Rajaji, Periyar and Thiru.Vi.Ka, she raised slogan against this cruel practice. As a result the government passed the "Devadasi Abolition Act".

The Madras Devadasi Act was a law that was enacted on 9th October 1947. The law was passed in the Madras presidency and gave Devadasis the legal right to marry and made it illegal to dedicated girls to Indian temples.

Role of Social Reformers

From the second half of the nineteenth century, a number of social reformers and social reform movements sought to promote the upliftment of women by giving them education, raising their marriageable age and taking care of widows, as well as to remove the rigidity of caste and raise

the suppressed class to a status of equality. The reformers who led the movements were the forerunners of modern India.

a) Raja Rammohan Roy

There were some enlightened Indians who supported the British attempt to reform the oppressive social order of India. The first was the abolition of sati by law, on humanitarian grounds. Raja Rammohan Roy, the pioneer of Indian social reform movement was a casteless crusader of sati after having seen this practice in the case of his own sister-in-law. He started his campaign against this inhuman evil practice. Influenced by the ruthless attack of the movement led by Rammohan Roy the British government declared this act as “culpable Homicide”. Raja Rammohan Roy is most remembered for helping Lord William Bentinck to declare the practice of Sati a punishable offence in 1829. He also protested against the child marriage and female infanticide. He favoured the remarriage of widows, female education and women’s right to property. Thus the evil practice of sati on any scale was wiped out.

b) Ishwar Chandra Vidhyasagar

Ishwar Chandra Vidhyasagar carried on the movement for female education, widow remarriage and abolition of polygamy in Bengal. He submitted petitions to this effect to the Indian Legislative Council and to the passing of the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act in 1856. His son Narayanachandra set an example to others by marrying a widow of his choice. To promote female education, Vidhyasagar founded several girls’ schools in the districts of Nadia, Midnapur, Hugli and Burdwan in Bengal.

c) Kandukuri Veeresalingam

Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu was the earliest champion in South India of women’s emancipation. He published a journal vivekavardhani. He opened his first girls’ school in 1874 and made widow remarriage and female education the key points of his programme for social reform.

d) M.G. Ranade and B.M. Malabari

In Bombay presidency, M.G. Ranade and B.M. Malabari carried on the movement for the upliftment of women. In 1869, Ranade joined the Widow Remarriage Association and encouraged widow remarriage and female

education and opposed child marriage. In 1887, he started the National Social Conference, which became a pre-eminent institution for social reform. In 1884, B.M. Malabari, a journalist, started a movement for the abolition of child marriage. He published pamphlets on this subject and appealed to the government to take action.

e) Gopal Krishna Gokhale

In 1905, Gopal Krishna Gokhale started the Servants of India Society which took up such social reform measures as primary education, female education and depressed classes' upliftment. The spread of female education further led to the participation of women in the freedom struggle.

f) Periyar E.V.R.

Periyar E.V.R. was one of the greatest social reformers of Tamil Nadu. He advocated women education, widow remarriage and inter-caste marriages and opposed child marriages.

g) Women Reformers

Most of the reform movements like Brahma Samaj (1828), PrarthanaSamaj (1867) and AryaSamaj (1875) were led by male reformers who set the limit of the freedom and development of women. Women reformers like PanditaRamabai, Rukhmabai and TarabaiShinde tried to extent further. In 1889, PanditaRamabai opened SaradaSadan (Home of Learning) for Hindu widows in Bombay. It was later shifted to Poona. Her greatest legacy was her effort, the first in India, to educate widows. Theosophical society was established at Chennai and Dr. Annie Besant who came from Europe and joined it. It also developed general social reform programme.

Dr. S. Dharmambal was another reformer who was very much influenced by the ideas of Periyar. She showed great interest in implementing widow remarriage and women education. Among 'MoovalurRamamirdhamAmmaiyar' raised her voice against Devadasi system along with Dr.MuthulakshmiAmmaiyar. In her memory, the government of Tamil Nadu has instituted the "MoovalurRamamirdhaAmmalNinaivu Marriage assistance scheme", a social welfare scheme to provide financial assistance to poor women as

poverty was the root cause for all these evils. Thus women reformers also contributed a lot for winning their own rights.

Leading women realized the need of forming their own associations in order to safeguard their interests. As a result three major national women's organizations - Women's India Association, National Council of Women in India and the All India Women's Conference were founded.

Women in the freedom movement

In the early anti-colonial struggle women played major roles in various capacities. Velunachiyar of Sivaganga fought violently against the British and restored her rule in Sivaganga. Begum Hazrat Mahal, Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi led an armed revolt of 1857 against the British.

In the freedom struggle thousands of women came out of their homes, boycotted foreign goods, marched in processions, defied laws, received lathi charges and Courted jails. Their participation in the struggle added a new dimension of mass character.

Impact of reform movement

- ❖ Significant advances were made in the field of emancipation of women.
- ❖ It created of national awakening among the masses.
- ❖ It created the feeling of sacrifice, service and rationalism.
- ❖ The practice of sati and infanticide were made illegal.
- ❖ It permitted widow remarriage.

Women in Independent India

Women in India now participate in all activities such as education, politics, medical, culture, service sectors, science and technology.

The constitution of India guarantees (Article 14) equal opportunity and equal pay for equal work.

The National policy for empowerment of women was passed under the National Policy on Education (1986), new programme was launched called Mahila Samakhya, its main focus was on empower of women. Reservation of 33 percent to women envisaged an improvement in the socio-political status of women.

The National Commission for women was set up January 1992. Its main functions is to review women related legislation and intervene in specific individual complaints of atrocities and denial of rights.

The following legislations have enhanced the status of women in matters of marriage adoption and inheritance.

Legislation	Provisions
Bengal regulation of XXI, 1804	Female infanticide was declared illegal
Regulation of XVII, 1829	Practice of sati was declared illegal
Hindus Widow's Remarriage Act, 1856	It permitted widow remarriage
The Native Marriage Act, 1872	The Child Marriage was prohibited
The Sharda Act, 1930	The age of marriage was raised for boys and girls
Devadasi abolition Act, 1947	It abolished Devadasi system



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5- Social and Religious Reform Movements in the 19th Century

English education, introduced with the object of producing clerks, also produced a new English-educated middle class. This class came under the influence of western ideas and thoughts. Christianity also had its effect on the newly emerging middle class. Though small in number, the educated middle class began to take a lead in political as well as in reform movements. The Indian reformers were, however, quite hesitant to subject their old notions and habits to critical scrutiny. Instead they attempted to harmonize both Indian and Western cultures. Their ideas and their actions helped to mitigate social evils such as sati, female infanticide, and child marriage and various superstitious beliefs.

The reform movements of nineteenth century in the realm of religion fall under two broad categories: reformist movements like the Brahmo Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj and the Aligarh Movement; and the revivalist movements such as the Arya Samaj, the Ramakrishna Mission and the Deoband Movement. There were also attempts to challenge the oppressive social structure by Jyotiba Phule in Pune, Narayana Guru and Ayyankali in Kerala and Ramalinga Adigal, Vaikunda Swamikal and Iyothee Thassarof Tamil Nadu.

Raja Rammohan Roy and Brahmo Samaj

Rammohan Roy (1772–1833) was one of the earlier reformers influenced by the Western ideas to initiate reforms. He was a great scholar, well-versed in Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and English apart from his knowledge in his mother tongue, Bengali. Rammohan Roy was opposed to meaningless religious ceremonies and all forms of pernicious social customs. Yet he wanted to preserve continuity with the past. In his religio-philosophical social outlook, he was deeply influenced by monotheism and anti-idolatry. Based on his interpretation of the Upanishads, he argued that all the ancient texts of the Hindus preached monotheism or worship of one God.

Deeply concerned with the prevailing customs of sati, child marriage, and polygamy he published tracts against them and petitioned the government to legislate against them. He advocated the rights of widows

to marry. He wanted polygamy to end. His opinions were resisted fiercely by orthodox Hindus. He appealed to reason and humanity and compassion of the people. He visited the crematorium of Calcutta to try and persuade the relatives of widows to give up their plan of self-immolation. His campaign played a key role in forcing the Governor-General William Bentinck's legislation abolishing sati in 1829.

Ram Mohan Roy condemned the subjugation of women and opposed the prevailing ideas that women were inferior to men. He strongly advocated education for women. He gave his full support for the introduction of English language and western sciences in schools and colleges. Ram Mohan found in the Upanishads a new revelation of one infinite, divine Being, the eternal Brahman, while Hinduism as he saw in the daily life around him was a perversion of their teaching.

Ram Mohan Roy founded the Brahmo Samaj in 1828. On 20 August 1828 he opened a temple in Calcutta, where there was no image. There he laid down that 'no religion should be reviled or slightly or contemptuously spoken of or alluded to.' The Samaj forbade idol-worship and condemned meaningless religious rites and ceremonies. However, from the beginning, the appeal of the Brahmo Samaj remained limited to the intellectuals and enlightened Bengalis. Though the Samaj failed to attract the people from the lower sections of society, its impact on the culture of modern Bengal and its middle class was quite significant.

Maharishi Debendranath Tagore

After the death of Ram Mohan Roy (1833), Maharishi Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905), the poet Rabindranath Tagore's father, carried on the work. He laid down four articles of faith:

1. In the beginning there was nothing. The one Supreme Being alone existed who created the Universe.
2. He alone is the God of Truth, Infinite Wisdom, Goodness, and Power, eternal, omnipresent, the One without second.
3. Our salvation depends on belief in Him and in His worship in this world and the next.
4. Belief consists in loving Him and doing His will.

Keshab Chandra Sen & Brahma Samaj of India

Debendranath was a moderate reformer. But his younger colleagues in the Sabha were for rapid changes. The greatest of these, Keshab Chandra Sen, (1838–84) joined the movement in 1857. He was greatly influenced by Christianity, believing in its spirit but not in the person of its founder. But in 1866 a split occurred in the ranks of Brahma Samaj. Keshab left the Samaj and founded a new organization. Debendranath's organization, thereafter, came to be known as Adi Brahma Samaj. After Keshab had his fourteen-year-old daughter married to an Indian prince, in contravention of the Samaj's condemnation of child marriages, the opponents of child marriage left the Brahma Samaj of India and started the Sadharan Samaj, which developed anti-Christian tendencies.

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

Another outstanding reformer in Bengal was Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820–1891). While Ram Mohan Roy and others looked to western rationalist ideas to reform society, Vidyasagar argued that the Hindu scriptures were progressive. He provided evidence from scriptures that there was no sanction for burning of widows or for the prohibition on the remarriage of widows. He wrote a number of polemical tracts, and was the pioneer of modern Bengali prose. He played a leading role in promoting education of girls and helped them in setting up a number of schools. He dedicated his whole life for the betterment of the child widows of the Hindu society. The movement led by Vidyasagar, resulted in the Widows' Remarriage Reform Act of 1856. This Act was intended to improve the lot of child widows and save them from perpetual widowhood.

Prarthana Samaj

The Maharashtra region was another region where reform activities gained Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar steam. A movement similar to the Brahma Samaj, but founded in Bombay in 1867, was Prarthana Samaj. Its founder was Dr. Atma Ram Pandurang (1825–1898). The two distinguished members of this Samaj were R.C. Bhandarkar and Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade. They devoted themselves to activities such as intercaste dining, inter-caste marriage, widow remarriage and improvement of women and depressed classes. Ranade (1842–1901) was the founder of the Widow Marriage Association (1861), the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha (1870) and the Deccan Education Society (1884).

While the above reformers worked among the upper castes, during the same time Jyotiba Phule worked for the uplift of depressed castes and the cause of women. His book Gulamgiri ('Slavery') is an important work that condemned the inequities of caste.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Arya Samaj, 1875

In the Punjab, the reform movement was spearheaded by the Arya Samaj. It was founded (1875) by a wandering ascetic in the western Gangetic plain, Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824–83). Swami Dayanand later settled in the Punjab to preach his ideas. His book, Satyarthaprakash, enjoyed wide circulation. He declared the practices such as child marriage, the prohibition of widow remarriage, and the alleged polluting effects of foreign travel had no scriptural sanction. The positive principles enunciated by Dayanand were: strict monotheism, condemnation of idolatry, and rejection of Brahman domination of ritual and social practices. He also rejected superstitious beliefs in Hinduism, especially Puranic literature and his cry was "go back to Vedas."

Arya Samaj attempted to check the incidence of religious conversion in British India. One of its main objectives was counter-conversion, prescribing a purificatory ceremony called suddhi, directed at Hindus who had converted to Islam and Christianity. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a period of great turmoil in undivided Punjab with intense debates between Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. The primary achievements of the Arya Samaj were in the field of social reform and spread of education. The Samaj started a number of Dayananda Anglo-Vedic schools and colleges.

Ramakrishna

As we saw earlier, the Brahmo Samaj, as a response to Christian and rationalist criticism had criticised idolatry and other orthodox Hindu practices. The popularity that Ramakrishna (1836–86), a simple priest of Dakshineswar near Kolkata, gained in the latter half of the nineteenth century was a response to this. He emphasised the spiritual union with god through ecstatic practices such as singing bhajans. An ardent worshipper of goddess Kali, the sacred mother, he declared that the manifestations of the divine mother were infinite. In his view, all religions contain the universal elements which, if practised, would lead to salvation. He said, "Jiva is Siva"

(all living beings are God). Why then talk of showing mercy to them? Not mercy, but service, service for man, must be regarded as God.'

Ramakrishna Mission

Ramakrishna's primary achievement was his ability to attract educated youth who were dissatisfied with the rational orientation of religious reform organizations such as the Brahmo Samaj. After his death in 1886, his disciples organised themselves as a religious community and undertook the task of making his life and teaching known in India and abroad. The chief spirit behind this task was Vivekananda. Following the organizational structure of Christian missionaries, Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna Mission which did not restrict itself to religious activities but was actively involved in social causes such as education, health care and relief in times of calamities.

Swami Vivekananda

Narendra Nath Datta (1863-1902), later known as Swami Vivekananda, was the prime follower of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. An educated youth, he was drawn to Ramakrishna's message. Dissatisfied with conventional philosophical positions and practices, he advocated the practical Vedanta of service to humanity and attacked the tendency to defend every institution simply because it was connected with religion. He emphasized a cultural nationalism and made a call to Indian youth to regenerate Hindu society.

His ideas bred a sense of self confidence among Indians who felt inferior in relation to the materialist achievements of the West. He became famous for his address on Hinduism at the 1893 World Congress of Religions in Chicago. Despite his fame, he was condemned by orthodox Hindus for suggesting that the lower castes should be allowed to engage in the Hindu rituals from which they were traditionally excluded. Vivekananda's activist ideology rekindled the desire for political change among many western-educated young Bengalis. Many of the youths who were involved in the militant nationalist struggle during the Swadeshi movement following the Partition of Bengal were inspired by Vivekananda.

Theosophical Movement

During the nineteenth century, Hindu religion and culture were being discredited in the West, especially due to missionary propaganda. However, some Western intellectuals looked to the East for spiritual salvation as a

remedy to the materialistic orientation of the West. The Theosophical Society, founded by Madame H.P. Blavatsky (1831–1891) and Colonel H.S. Olcott (1832–1907) played a key role in this. Founded in the USA in 1875, it later shifted to India at Adyar, Chennai in 1886. Theosophical Society stimulated a study of the Hindu classics, especially the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. The Theosophical Society also played an important role in the revival of Buddhism in India. Western interest in Hindu scriptures gave educated Hindus great pride in their tradition and culture.

Contribution of Annie Besant

In India the movement became further popular with the election of Annie Besant(1847–1933) as its president after the death of Olcott. She played a role in Indian nationalist politics, and formed the Home Rule League demanding home rule to India on the lines of Ireland. Annie Besantspread Theosophical ideasthrough her newspaperscalled New India andCommonweal.

Jyotiba Phule

Jyotiba Govindrao Phule was born in 1827 in Maharashtra. Phule is chiefly knownJyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule as the earliest leader of the non-Brahman movement. He opened the first school for “untouchables” in 1852 in Poona. He launched the Satyashodak Samaj (Truth-Seekers Society) in 1870 to stir the non-Brahman masses to self-respect and ambition. Phule opposed child marriage and supported widow remarriage, which was prohibited particularly among high-caste Hindus. Jyotiba and his wife Savitribai Phule devoted their lives for the uplift of the depressed classes and women. Jotiba opened orphanages and homes for widows. Unlike many contemporary nationalists he welcomed British rule and missionary activities on the ground that British rule enabled lower castes to challenge the supremacy of Brahmins. His work,Gulamgiri (Slavery) is an important text thatsummarized many of his radical ideas.

Narayana Guru

Born to poor parents in Kerala, Narayana Guru (1854–1928) evolved into a poet and scholar in Malayalam, Tamil and Sanskrit. In his days the people of depressed classes had no access to temples, streets, public tanks and wells and educational institutions. Men and women belonging to lower castes were not allowed to wear the upper garments. Disturbed by the terrible caste tyranny, that the lower caste people suffered, he dedicated his

whole life for the betterment of the oppressed. He set up the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, an organization to work for the uplift of the “depressed classes”. He established a grand temple at Aruvipuram and dedicated it to all. His movement inspired a radical transformation of Kerala society, especially among the Ezhavas. Thinkers and writers such as Kumaran Asan and Dr Palpu were influenced by his ideas and carried forward the movement.

Ayyankali

Nineteenth - century Kerala region was plagued by caste discriminations of worst kind. Certain social groups were not only considered untouchable but also un-seeable. However, the strident campaigns by thinkers such as Narayana Guru and Ayyankali (1863–1941) in the context of larger political and economic changes ushered in tremendous social changes, especially in the caste structure. Ayyankali was born in 1863 at Venganoor in Thiruvananthapuram then in the princely state of Travancore.

The discrimination he faced as a child turned him into a leader of an anti-caste movement and who later fought for basic rights including access to public spaces and entry to schools. Ayyankali challenged many caste conventions such as clothing style; he wore clothes associated with upper castes that were prohibited for lower castes. He rode on an ox-cart challenging the ‘ban’ on untouchables from accessing public roads used by caste Hindus. Inspired by Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali founded the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam (Association for the Protection of the Poor) in 1907 which campaigned and raised funds to educate the lower caste Pulaya people.

Islamic Reforms

After the suppression of great revolt of 1857 Indian Muslims looked to Western culture with suspicion. The community feared that Western education, Western culture and Western ideas would endanger their religion. Therefore only a small section of Muslims accepted the new avenues for modern education. Consequently, Indian Muslims as a community lagged behind in comparison to the Hindu elite of various parts of India.

Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan

As Indian Muslims steadily lost ground in education, in the public services and in general leadership in India, there was a realization that there was no alternative but to accept modern education if the community was to go on the path of progress. The man who gave life and soul to it was Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan (1817–1898). Born in Delhi into a noble Muslim family, Sayyid Ahmed Khan thought that lack of education, especially modern education, had harmed the Muslims greatly and kept them backward. He exhorted the Muslims to accept Western science and take up government services. He founded a scientific society and translated many English books, especially science books into Urdu. He believed that the interest of the Muslims would be best served if they bonded with the British Government rather than pitch in with the rising nationalist movement. So he advised the Muslims to take to English education and to concentrate on it.

Aligarh Movement

Say id Ahmed Khan's movement, the "Aligarh movement," is so called because it was centred around the Aligarh Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental college founded by him in 1875, which is a landmark in the history of Indian Muslim education. The college was raised to the status of a university in 1920. Aligarh produced a huge body of intelligentsia over successive generations who played a key role in public life.

Deoband Movement

Deoband was a revivalist movement organized by the orthodox Muslim Ulema with the twin objectives of propagating the pure teachings of the Quran and the Hadith as well as encouraging the spirit of Jihad against the foreign and un-Islamic elements. The Ulema under the leadership of Muhammad Qasim Wanotavi (1832-80) and Rashid Ahmad Gangotri (1828-1905) founded the school at Deoband in the Saharanpur district of the U.P in 1866. The school curricula shut out English education and western culture. The instruction imparted was in original Islamic religion and the aim was moral and religious regeneration of the Muslim community. The Deoband School did not prepare its students for government jobs but for the preaching of Islamic faith.

In politics, the Deoband School welcomed the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885. In 1888 the Deoband Ulema issued a religious decree (fatwa) against Syed Ahmed Khan's Organisation called "The United

Patriotic Association” and “The Muhammadan Anglo - Oriental Association.” It is said the Deoband Ulema were mainly influenced by their determination to oppose Sir Syed Ahmed’s activities. Maulana Mahmud-ul-Hassan became the new Deoband leader. The Jamait-Ul-Ulema (council of theologians) led by him gave a concrete shape to Hassan’s ideas of protection of the religious and political rights of the Muslims in the overall context of Indian unity.

In the middle of the nineteenth century the reform activities of the educated Parsis (the Zoroastrians who had fled from Iran in the tenth century in the face of religious persecution) began in Mumbai. Furdunji Naoroji founded the Rahnumai Mazdayasnan Sabha (Parsis’ Reform Society) in 1851. Rast Goftar (The Truth Teller) was the main voice of the movement. The leaders of the Sabha criticized elaborate ceremonies at betrothals, marriages and funerals. They opposed both infant marriage and the use of astrology. Behrramji Malabari organized a campaign for legislation against the practice of child marriage. The community produced many leaders such as Pheroza Shah Mehta and Dinshaw Wacha who played a big role in the early Congress.

Sikh Reforms Movement (Nirankaris and Namdharis)

The wave of reform movements did not leave any community untouched. Among the Sikhs of Punjab too there were attempts to reform. Baba Dayal Das, founder of the Nirankari Movement, stressed the worship of God as Nirankar (formless). Rejection of idols, rejection of rituals associated with idolatry, reverence for the authority of Guru Nanak and of the Adi Granth formed the essence of his teachings. He reiterated the prohibition on meat-eating, and liquor consumption. The Namdhari Movement, founded by Baba Ram Singh, was another socio-religious movement among the Sikhs.

The Namdharis insisted on wearing the symbols of Sikhism except the kirpan (sword). Instead Baba Ram Singh wanted his followers to carry a lathi. It considered both men and women equal and accepted widow remarriage. It prohibited the dowry system and child marriage. In the wake of the gathering influence of Arya Samaj and the Christian missionaries, the Singh Sabha of Amritsar was established. Its main objective was to restore the purity of Sikhism. With the support of British, it established Khalsa

College for the Sikhs in Amritsar. Singh Sabha was a forerunner of Akali Movement.

Ramalinga Swamigal

Popularly known as Vallalar, Ramalinga Swamigal or Ramalinga Adigal (1823–1874), was born in Marudhur, a village near Chidambaram. After his father's death, his family moved to his brother's house at Chennai. Despite having no formal education he gained immense scholarship. Ramalinga emphasised the bonds of responsibility and compassion between living beings. He expressed the view that 'those who lack compassion for suffering beings are hardhearted, their wisdom clouded'. He showed his compassion and mercy on all living beings including plants. This he called jeevakarunya.

He established the Samarasa Vedha Sanmarga Sangam in 1865 and it was renamed "Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Satya Sanga" which means "Society for Pure Truth in Universal self-hood". Ramalinga also established a free feeding house for everyone irrespective of caste at Vadalur (1867), in the wake of a terrible famine in south India in 1866. His voluminous songs were compiled and published under the title Thiruvartuppa (Songs of Grace). His radical views deeply disturbed Saiva orthodoxy, who condemned his writings as Marutpa (songs of ignorance).

Vaikunda Swamikal

Vaikunda Swami (1809–1851), one of the earliest crusaders for social justice in south India was born at Sasthan Koil Vilai, the present Samithoppu, a village near Kanyakumari. His original name Mudichudum Perumal was changed to Muthukutty by his parents due to objection raised by the upper caste Hindus. Muthukutt had no opportunity to have any systematic school education but acquired knowledge of various religious texts. He preached the ideas of equality and advocated the rights of depressed class people in the face of stiff opposition from upper castes as well as the princely state of Travancore. Vaikunda Swamikal criticised the rule of the British and the rule of Rajah of Travancore as the rule of White devils and Black devils respectively.

He visited Tiruchendur temple and experienced a new vision. Calling himself Vaikundar, he requested the people to give up all the irrelevant rites and rituals in their worship. His preaching's against the prevailing

religious order brought about a considerable change in the attitude of the lower caste people. In 1833, Vaikundar commenced his meditation at Samithoppu for the abolition of caste differences and social integration of the society. During this period, he led a life of a hermit. In south Travancore, there were many restrictions on lower caste people such as what they could wear and not wear. At a time when there was prohibition on certain sections on wearing headgear he advocated the wearing of a turban in protest. It gave a sense of honour to the oppressed people and offered a spirit of self-respect.

A new confidence was installed in the minds of his followers. Like the other contemporary reform movements of India in the 19th century, Vaikunda Swamikal condemned the worship of idols. The low caste people had no temples for their gods, they erected small pyramids of mud or bricks in their honor, plastered and white-washed. He considered this kind of worship as an uncivilized custom. The people sacrificed goats, cocks and hens. He condemned these religious customs and campaigned against animal sacrifice.

Vaikunda Swamikal founded Samathuva Samajam to unite all the people of various castes. He organized inter-dining to accomplish it. Even though he was imprisoned by the Maharajah of Travancore, he never gave up his principles. His followers called him respectfully as Ayya (father). His cult was also known as Ayya Vazhi (The Path of Ayya). His message emancipated the people from the unjust social customs and superstitious beliefs. His ideas are collected into a text called Akila Thirattu.

C. Iyothee Thassar

Pandithar Iyothee Thassar (1845-1914) was a radical Tamil scholar, writer, Siddha medicine practitioner, journalist and socio-political activist. Born in Chennai, he was fluent in Tamil, English, Sanskrit and Pali languages. He initiated a new knowledge practice by using journalism as a tool to make inroads into the print public sphere, which, was hitherto an upper caste domain. He campaigned for social justice and worked for the emancipation of the “untouchables” from the caste clutches.

He worked for the construction of a casteless identity and castigated caste hegemony and untouchability. He considered education as an important tool for empowerment and became the driving force behind the establishment of several schools for the “untouchables” in Tamil Nadu. Pandithar Iyothee Thassar founded the Advaidananda Sabha to raise the

voice for the temple entry of the “untouchables”. In 1882, John Rathinam and Iyothee Thassar established a movement called, Dravida Kazhagam and launched a magazine called Dravida Pandian in 1885. He founded the Dravida Mahajana Sabhain 1891 and organised the First Conference of the association at Nilgiris.

He started a weekly journal, Oru Paisa Tamilan, in 1907 and published it until his demise in 1914. Pandithar Iyothee Thassar was disappointed with the Hindu dharma, which served as the basis for propagating and validating caste in Hindu society. Influenced by the Theosophist organizer, Colonel H.S. Olcott, he went to Sri Lanka in 1898 and converted to Buddhism. In the same year, he founded the Sakya Buddhist Society at Madras to construct the rational religious philosophy through Buddhist religion. He argued that the so-called untouchables were originally Buddhists who were stigmatized by Brahminism.

He further constructed an alternative history through the interpretation of Tamil literature and folk traditions of Tamil from a Buddhist standpoint. In addition, he stated that the revival of Buddhism could liberate the people from the evil of caste that afflicted the Hindu society. He called the “untouchables” Sathi Petham Atra Dravidar (Casteless Dravidians) and urged them to register as casteless Dravidians in the Census.

11th History

19. Towards Modernity

Introduction

By the first quarter of the nineteenth century, India had produced a small English-educated intelligentsia, closely associated with British administration or British trade. The ideas and the work of the Christian missionaries had already begun to have its impact. Bengal was the first province to be affected by the British influence and so it was here that several ideas of reform originated. British administration, English education, and European literature brought to India a new wave of thoughts that challenged traditional knowledge. Rationalism as the basis for ethical thinking, the idea of human progress and evolution, the concept of natural rights associated with the Enlightenment, were the new ideas which led to what has been termed as Indian Renaissance. The spread of printing technology played a crucial role in the diffusion of ideas.

Emergence of Reform Movements

The British characterized Indian society in the nineteenth century as being caught in a vicious circle of superstitions and obscurantism. In their view idolatry and polytheism reinforced orthodoxy impelling the people to follow them blindly. The social conditions were equally depressing. And the condition of women was deplorable. The practice of sati came in for particular condemnation. The division of society according to birth resulting in the caste system was also criticized. Most importantly, the British argued that without their intervention there was no possibility of deliverance from these evils for Indians. Needless to say, this was a self-serving argument, articulated by missionaries and Utilitarians to justify British rule.

Utilitarians: believers in the doctrine of greatest happiness of the greatest number

India was a much bigger, more complex and diverse country in the early nineteenth century. Conditions varied vastly across it. The social and cultural evils had been fought by Indian reformers through the ages. But the advent of the British with their Enlightenment ideas undoubtedly posed a

new challenge. This chapter looks at how social reform movements emerged in various parts of the country.

The development of the Western culture and ideology forced the traditional institutions to revitalize themselves. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the expression of protest and desire for change were articulated through various reform movements. These movements aimed at reforming and democratizing the social institutions and religious outlook of the Indian people. The emergence of new economic forces, spread of education, growth of nationalist sentiment, influence of modern Western thoughts, ideas and culture, and awareness of the changes taking place in Europe strengthened the resolve to reform.

What gave these reform movements an ideological unity were rationalism, religious universalism and humanism. This perspective enabled them to adopt a rational approach to tradition and evaluate the contemporary socio-religious practices from the standpoint of social utility. For example, Raja Rammohun Roy repudiated the infallibility of the Vedas and during the Aligarh Movement, Syed Ahmed Khan emphasized that religious tenets were not immutable. As Keshab Chandra Sen said, 'Our position is not that truths are to be in all religions, but that all established religions of the World are true.'

These movements enveloping the entire cultural stream of Indian society brought about significant practices in the realms of language, religion, art and philosophy. These reform movements can be broadly classified into two categories:

1. Reformist Movements
2. Revivalist Movements

Both the movements depended in varying degrees on an appeal to the lost purity of religion. The primary difference between them lay in the degree to which they relied on tradition or on reason and conscience. The social reform movements formed an integral part of the religious reforms primarily because all the efforts towards social ills like caste- and gender-based inequality derived legitimacy from religion. Initially, the social reform movement had a narrow social base - they were limited to the upper and middle strata of the society that tried to adjust their modernized views to the existing social reality. From then on, the social reform movements began

to percolate to the lower strata of society to reconstruct the social fabric. Heated debates among the intellectuals expressed in the form of public arguments, tracts and journals played a big role in taking new ideas to large sections of the people, as well as to reformulate older ideas in a new form.

At the start, organizations such as the Social Conference, Servants of India and the Christian missionaries were instrumental in giving an impetus to the social reform movements along with many enlightened individuals about whom we dwell on in the following pages. In later years, especially by the twentieth century, the national movement provided the leadership and organization for social reform.

Brahmo Samaj (1828)

Raja Rammohun Roy was a man of versatile genius. He established the Brahmo Samaj in August, 1828. The Brahmo Samaj was committed to “the worship and adoration of the eternal, unsearchable, immutable Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe”. His long term agenda was to purify Hinduism and to preach monotheism for which he drew authority from the Vedas. He emphasized human dignity, opposed idolatry and social evils such as sati. A retired servant of the East India Company, he was conversant in many languages including Persian and Sanskrit. His ideas and activities were aimed at the political uplift of society through social reform. He was a determined crusader against the inhuman practice of Sati. His tract written in 1818, A Conference Between an Advocate for and an Opponent of the Practice of Burning Widows cited sacred texts to prove that no religion sanctioned the burning alive of widows. His efforts fructified and the Company through an enactment of law (1829) declared the practice of sati a crime.

The overall contribution of Brahmo Samaj can be summed up as follows

1. It denounced polytheism, idol worship, and the faith in divine avatars (incarnations)
2. It condemned the caste system, dogmas and superstitions.
3. It wanted the abolition of child marriage, purdah system and the practice of sati
4. It supported widow remarriage

Inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution, Rammohun Roy left for Europe and died in Bristol. After his death there was a steady decline but for the new lease life given to it by Devendranath Tagore (father of

Rabindranath Tagore). After him the organization was taken forward by Keshab Chandra Sen from 1857. The strength of the organization is known from the number of branches it had in 1865, 54 Samajas (fifty in Bengal, two in North West Province, one each in Punjab and Madras). In course of time, the Brahma Samaj broke into two namely Devendranath Tagore's, 'Brahmo Samaj of India' and Keshub Chandra Sen's 'Sadharan Brahma Samaj'.

In Tamilnadu, Kasi Viswanatha Mudaliar was an adherent of the Samaj and he wrote a play titled Brahma Samaja Natakam to expound the ideas of the Samaj. He also wrote a tract in support of widow remarriage. In 1864, a Tamil journal titled Tathuva Bodhini was started for the cause of the Brahma Samaja.

The Brahma Samaj met with great opposition from orthodox elements in Bengal society such as the Hindu Dharma Sabha. However, there were also reformers such as Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, who advocated the same ideas but drew on Hindu scriptures as authority.

Even though the Brahma Samaj did not win many adherents, it had a big impact on the intellectuals. In the early stages, many young men seized of the radical ideas avidly propagated them. Tagore's family was a Brahma family and its influence can be seen in his writings and ideas.

The Prarthana Samaj (1867)

An off-shoot of the Brahma Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, was founded in 1867 in Bombay by Atmaram Pandurang (1823- 98). The Prarthana Samaj as an organization never had any great influence but its members, like M. G. Ranade (1852-1901), R. G. Bhandarkar, and K.T. Telang, were among the great leaders of nineteenth-century Maharashtra and they became the founders of the social reform movement in later years.

Prarthana Samaj was similar to Brahma Samaj, but it was consciously linked with the bhakti tradition of the Maharashtrian saints. The Prarthana Samaj continued its work mainly through educational work directed at women and workers at the lower level. It concentrated on social reforms like inter-dining, inter-marriage, remarriage of widows, and uplift of women and depressed classes.

The National Social Conference organized at the initiative of M.G. Ranade met each year immediately after the Indian National Congress

(1885) annual sessions. Justice Ranade was an erudite scholar with a keen intellect and under his able guidance the Prarthana Samaj became the active centre of a new social reformation in western India. He was one of the founders of the Widow Marriage Association and was an ardent promoter of the famous Deccan Education Society. Its object was to impart such education to the young as would fit them for the unselfish service of the country. When Ranade died in 1901, his leadership was taken over by Chandavarkar.

Arya Samaj (1875)

The founder of the Arya Samaj was Dayananda Saraswati (1824–83). Dayananda, a Gujarati, left home in his youth to become an ascetic. For seventeen years he wandered around India. In 1863 he became a wandering preacher, and five years later he added the establishment of schools to his activities. In 1872 he met the Brahmos in Calcutta. In 1875 he founded the Arya Samaj and published his major work the Satyarth Prakash. In his view, contemporary Hinduism had become degenerate. Therefore he rejected puranas, polytheism, and idolatry, the role of Brahmin priests, pilgrimages, many rituals and the prohibition on widow marriage. As a good Sanskrit scholar, he made a call to “Back to the Vedas”. He wanted to shape society on the basis of the Vedas. He disregarded the puranas. Like the other social reformers, he encouraged female education and remarriage of widows.

Swami Dayananda’s sphere of influence was largely in the Punjab region where the trading community of Khatri experienced great mobility in colonial times. However, in the Punjab region, there was much communal conflict among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Dayananda’s Shuddi (purification) movement i.e., conversion of non-Hindus to Hindus was controversial and provoked controversies especially with the Ahmadiya movement.

Arya Samaj is considered to be a revivalist movement. Dayananda’s influence continued into the twentieth century through the establishment of Dayananad Anglo Vedic (DAV) schools and colleges.

Ramakrishna Mission (1897)

As we saw above, the early reform movements in Bengal were radical, questioning and criticising tradition very strongly. In response to this

emerged the Ramakrishna Mission as an important religious movement. Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836–1886), a poor priest in a temple at Dakshineswar near Kolkata, had no formal education but led an intense spiritual life. He had a deep faith in the inherent truth of all religions and tested its belief by performing religious service in accordance with the practices of different religions. According to him ‘all the religious views are but different ways to lead to the same goal.’ In a backlash, the later generation of Western educated intellectuals were drawn to Ramakrishna’s broad view, mysticism and spiritual fervour. He expounded his views in short stories and admirable parables which were compiled by an admirer as Ramakrishna Kathamrita (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna).

The most famous among his disciples was a young graduate of the Calcutta University named Narendranath Dutta, afterwards famously called Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902). Emphasising practical work over philosophizing he established the modern institution of the Ramakrishna Mission. He carried Ramakrishna’s message all over India and the world. His learning, eloquence, spiritual fervour and personality gathered round him a band of followers across the country, many of whom also joined the national movement. He attended in 1893 the famous, ‘Parliament of Religions’ at Chicago, and made a deep impact on those congregated there. The Mission opened schools, dispensaries and orphanages and helped people during their time of distress caused by calamities.

Theosophical Society (1886)

Even as Indian intellectuals felt challenged by western Enlightenment and rationalistic movements, there was a strain of thinking in the West which looked to the East for spiritual salvation. From this idea emerged the Theosophical Society, founded by Madam H.P. Blavatsky and Colonel H.S. Olcott in the United States of America in 1875. They came to India in 1879 and established their headquarters at Adyar in 1886. Under the leadership of Annie Besant, who came to India in 1893, the Theosophical Society gathered strength and won many adherents. The Theosophical Society started associations across south India. Though involved in many controversies, the Society played an important role in the revival of Buddhism in India. Iyothethoss Pandithar, the radical Dalit thinker, was introduced to modern Buddhism through his interaction with Colonel Olcott who took him to Sri Lanka. There he met many Buddhist monks

including the renowned revivalist Anagarika Dharmapala and Acharya Sumangala.

Swami Vivekananda was a personification of youth and boldness and referred to as the Morning Star of the Modern India. In the words of Valentine Chirol, 'the first Hindu whose personality won demonstrative recognition abroad for India's ancient civilization and for her newborn claim to nationhood.'

Satya Shodhak Samaj (1873)

While the movements discussed above were largely focussed on upper castes there were some exceptional movements which mobilized lower castes and articulated their perspective. The most important among them was Jyotiba Phule, who belonged to the Mali (gardener) community. Born in 1827, he received initial education in a mission school but had to discontinue it in 1833. Jyotiba Phule waged a life-long struggle against upper caste tyranny. In his quest for the truth, Phule read the Vedas, the Manu Samhita, the Puranas, and the thought of Buddha, Mahavira and the medieval Bhakti saints extensively. He also acquainted himself with Western thought, and Christian and Islamic religions. Phule judged the whole culture and tradition through the spirit of rationality and equality. While the principle of equality called for a total rejection of caste system, authoritarian family structure and subordination of women, the principle of rationality demanded the removal of superstitions and ritualism.

Phule held radical views on social, religious, political and economic issues. He considered the caste system as an antithesis of the principle of human equality. He sought to raise the morale of the non-Brahmins and united them to revolt against the centuries old inequality and social degradation. Towards this end Phule founded the Satya Shodhak Samaj (Society for Seeking Truth) in 1875. His most important book is Gulamgiri (Slavery).

Phule looked upon education of the masses as a liberating and revolutionary factor.

Since women and deprived and downtrodden were the worst sufferers in the society, Phule argued that women's liberation was linked with the liberation of other classes in society. Equality between classes as

also between men and women was stressed by Phule. During marriages he asked the bridegroom to promise the right of education to his bride.

Phule also tried to translate his ideas into actual struggles. He urged the British Government to impart compulsory primary education to the masses through teachers drawn from the cultivating classes. He started a school for girls in Poona in 1851 and one for depressed classes with the assistance of his wife Savitri. He also started schools for the "untouchables" and founded a home for widow's children.

In his work we find the beginnings of the later day non-Brahman movement of Maharashtra.

Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922)

Pandita Ramabai was foremost among the Indian leaders who worked for the emancipation of women. She came from a learned family and was a great scholar of Sanskrit and addressed many learned groups in different parts of the country. She was given the title of "Pandita" and "Saraswati" for her deep knowledge of Sanskrit. After the death of her parents she and her brother travelled to different parts of the country. They went to Calcutta in 1878. Two years later her brother also died. A little later in 1880 she married a Bengali belonging to a family of lower social status. Thus, even at that time she was bold enough to marry a man of a different caste and different language. After the death of her husband two years later she returned to Poona and started the Arya Mahila Samaj with the help of leaders like Ranade and Bhandarkar. 300 women were educated in the Samaj in 1882.

Ramabai started the Sharada Sadan (shelter for homeless) for the destitute widows with the help of Ranade and Bhandarkar. But soon she was accused of converting Hindu women to Christianity and hence had to shift her activities to Khedgoan near Poona. She established a Mukti Sadan (freedom house) there. Soon there were 2000 children and women in the house. Vocational training was given make them self-reliant.

Sri Narayana Guru

This movement emerged in Kerala and was born out of conflict between the depressed classes and the upper castes. It was started by Sri

Narayana Guru (1854- 1928) spearheading a social movement of the Ezhavas of Kerala, a community of toddy tappers. The Ezhavas were the single largest group in Kerala constituting 26% of population. A great scholar in Malayalam, Tamil and Sanskrit, Sri Narayana Guru established the Sri Narayana Guru Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam in 1902. The SNDP Yogam took up several issues such as (i) right of admission to public schools. (ii) recruitment to government services. (iii) access to roads and entry to temples; and (iv) political representation. The movement as a whole brought transformative structural changes such as upward social mobility, shift in traditional distribution of power and a federation of 'backward classes' into a large conglomeration. As a response to the prohibition on Ezhavas into temples, Sri Narayana Guru established new temples, and empowered the community to modernize itself. Great personalities such as the poet Kumaran Asan Dr. Palpu and Sahodaran Ayyappan emerged from the movement, and made a lasting impact in the democratization of Kerala Society. Even though the Guru himself was not directly involved in the movement, the Vaikom Satyagraha, organized to protest against the ban on the entry of Ezhavas on the templestreets of Vaikom made a deep impact on subsequent temple entry movements.

Islamic Reform Movements

The Revolt of 1857 and its brutal suppression by the British had an adverse impact on the Muslims of South Asia. While they were viewed with suspicion by the British for the 1857 insurgency, the Muslims themselves withdrew into a shell and did not use the opportunities opened up by colonial modernity. Consequently, they lagged behind in education and attendant employment opportunities. In this context, a few decades later some reform movements emerged among the Muslims.

Aligarh Movement (1875)

Aligarh Movement was started by Syed Ahmad Khan in 1875. He wanted to reconcile Western scientific education with the teachings of the Quran. The Aligarh movement aimed at spreading (i) Modern education among Indian Muslims without weakening their allegiance to Islam, and (ii) Social reforms among Muslims relating to purdah, polygamy, and divorce.

Syed's progressive social ideas were propagated through his magazine Tahdhib-ul-Akhluq (Improvement of Manners and Morals). Syed

Ahmad Khan's educational programme emphasized from the outset the advantages of the use of English as the medium of instruction. In 1864 he founded a Scientific Society of Aligarh for the introduction of Western sciences through translations into Urdu of works on physical sciences. The same year he founded a modern school at Ghazipur. In 1868 he promoted the formation of education committees in several districts, to initiate modern education among the Muslims.

During his visit to Europe in 1869–70 he developed the plans of his life-work, a major educational institution for Indian Muslims. In order to promote English education among the Muslims, he founded in 1875 a modern school at Aligarh, which soon developed into the Muhammdan Anglo–Oriental College (1877). This college was to become the Muslim University after his death. It became the nursery of Muslim political and intellectual leaders.

In 1886 Syed Ahmad Khan founded the Muhammedan Anglo Oriental Educational Conference as a general forum for spreading liberal ideas among the Indian Muslims. He rejected blind adherence to religious law and asked for a reinterpretation of the Quran in the light of reason to suit the new trends of the time. He attempted to liberalize Indian Islam and made it amenable to new ideas and new interpretations. In this mission he had to face the brunt of vehement attacks of orthodox theologians.

Ahmadiya Movement (1889)

The Ahmadiya movement founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (1835–1908) in 1889 established a different trend. While emphasizing the return to the original principles enunciated in the Quran, Ghulam Ahmed became controversial when he claimed to be a Messiah, which was considered heretical by mainstream Islam. But he won many converts. His primary work was to defend Islam against the polemics of the Arya Samaj and the Christian missionaries. In social morals the Ahmadiya movement was conservative, adhering to polygamy, veiling of women, and the classical rules of divorce.

The Deoband Movement (1866)

The Deoband movement was organised by the orthodox section among the Muslim ulemas as a revivalist movement with the twin objective

of propagating the pure teachings of the Quran and Hadis among Muslims. The movement was established in Deoband in Saranpur district (by Mohammad Qasim Nanotavi (1833-1877) and Rashid Ahmed Gangohi (1828-1905) to train religious leaders for the Muslim community. In contrast to the Aligarh Movement, which aimed at the welfare of Muslims through Western education and support of the British Government, the aim of the Deoband Movement was religious regeneration of the Muslim community. The instruction imparted at Deoband adhered to classical Islamic tradition.

The seminary at Deoband was founded in 1867 by theologians of the School of Wali-Allah. Muhammad Qasim Nanotavi took a prominent part in counter-polemics against the Christian missionaries and the Arya Samajists. The principal objectives of the seminary at Deoband were to re-establish contact between the theologians and the educated Muslim middle classes, and to revive the study of Muslim religious and scholastic sciences. As a religious university Deoband soon became an honoured institution, not only in Muslim India but also in the world of Islam at large.

Nadwat al-'ulama

A school less conservative than Deoband and more responsive to the demands of the modern age was the Nadwat al- 'ulama,' founded in 1894 at Lucknow by the historian Shibli Nu'mani and other scholars. The school aimed to offer an enlightened interpretation of religion in order to fight the trends of agnosticism and atheism which had followed the advent of modern Western education.

Farangi Mahal

The third famous traditional school is the much older one at Farangi Mahal in Lucknow. Farangi Mahal accepted Sufism as a valid experience and a valid field of study. Another traditionalist movement was the ahl-i-hadith or of the followers of the dicta of the Prophet.

Parsi Reform Movements

Zoroastrians, persecuted in their Persian homeland, migrated in large numbers to the west coast of India in the tenth century. As a trading community they flourished over the centuries. A close-knit community it

too was not left untouched by the reform movements of the nineteenth century.

The Rahnumai Madayasan Sabha (Religious Reform Association) was founded in 1851 by a group of English educated Parsis for the “regeneration of the social conditions of the Parsis and the restoration of the Zoroastrian religion to its pristine purity”. The movement had Naoroji Furdonji, Dadabhai Naoroji, K. R. Cama and S.S. Bengalee as its leaders. The message of reform was spread by the newspaper Rast-Goftar (Truth Teller). Parsi religious rituals and practices were reformed and the Parsi creed redefined. In the social sphere, attempts were made to uplift the status of Parsi women through education, removal of the purdah, raising the age of marriage and the like. Gradually, the Parsis emerged as the most westernised section of the Indian society. They played a key role in the nationalist movement and in the industrialization of India.

Sikh Reform Movement

The Sikh community could not remain untouched by the rising tide of rationalist and progressive ideas of the nineteenth century. The Singh Sabha Movement was formed in 1873, with a two-fold objective (i) to make available modern western education to the Silks (ii) to counter the proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries as well as Hindu revivalists. A network of Khalsa Schools was established throughout Punjab. The Akali movement was an offshoot of the Singh Sabha Movement. The Akali movement aimed at liberating the Sikh Gurudwara from the corrupt control of the Udasi Mahants (priests). The Government passed the Sikh Gurudwara Act in 1922 (amended in 1925), which gave control to Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) as the main body.

Reform Movements in Tamilnadu

As we saw earlier, the reform movements of the north India had its own impact on Tamilnadu. Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj had their branches. Keshab Chandra Sen visited Madras and lectured here. But Tamilnadu also saw its own reform movements.

Vaikunda Swamigal (1809-1851)

The Sri Vaikunda Swamigal's cult, which survives to this day, was organized in the 1830s. Born in a poor family (1809) at Sastankoil Vilai (now known as Swamithoppu), a village then in south Travancore (the present day Kanyakumari district), Muthukutti, spent his childhood in the village pial school, learning religious and moral texts. He also learnt the Bible and became well-versed in Christian theology. At the age of twenty two, Muthukutti, cured of a skin disease, after a holy bath in the sea during his visit to the Murugan temple at Tiruchendur (Thoothukudi district), claimed that Lord Vishnu had given him a rebirth as his son. On his return from Tiruchendur, assuming the new name of Sri Vaikundar, he practised austerities for two years. Soon his fame spread far and wide.

In his preaching Vaikundar attacked the traditional caste-ridden Travancore society and its ruler for collecting excessive taxes from the lower caste people. He was arrested and jailed by the Raja of Travancore for his "seditious speeches". When he was released from jail (1838) he became more popular among the people. His followers called him Aiya (father) and his cult came to be known as Aiya Vazhi (path of the father). His teachings were compiled as a text called Akila Thirattu which is recited religiously to this day.

Vaikunda Swamy instructed his followers to give up worship of pudams. He also exhorted them not to offer animal sacrifices to their deities. He advocated vegetarianism.

As a symbol of protest, Vaikunda Swamy urged his followers to wear a turban, a right which was permitted only to upper castes in those days. As a part of his effort to practice equality, Vaikunda Swamy regularly organized inter-dining through his Samathuva Sangam, among different castes. In his feeding centres called NilalTangals, caste-based restrictions were broken down. The Vaikunda Swamy cult posed a serious challenge to the spread of Christianity in south Travancore even after his death in 1851.

Vallalar Ramalinga Swamigal (1823-1874)

Ramalinga Swamigal was born in a modest family near Chidambaram and spent his early life in Madras. He never had formal schooling, but exhibited great scholarship. Inspired by the Saiva Thevaram and Thiruvagasam hymns, he began to compose moving poems on his own. In

his time, Saiva religion was in the grip of Saiva monasteries such as those at Thiruvaduthurai, Dharumapuram and Thiruppanandal. Ramalinga Swamigal's poems expressed radical ideas and condemned bigotry and irrationality. He underwent certain mystical experiences which he expressed in his poems. This was resented by the orthodox elements in Saiva religion. He established the Sathya Dharma Salai at Vadalur where he began to feed poor people, especially in the context of the 1860s famine and pestilence, irrespective of caste and creed. He founded the Sathya Gnana Sabhai to organize his followers. This brought him into conflict with established Saivite orders, and matters came to a head when his followers published his poems under the title of Thiruvirutpa (Songs of Grace) in 1867. Orthodox Saivites under the Sri Lankan reformer Arumuga Navalar criticized this as blasphemous and launched a tract war. But ultimately, Ramalinga Swamigal's contribution was recognized and his writings inspired universal ideas, and undermined sectarianism in Saiva religion.

Buddhist Revivalism and Iyothethoss Pandithar (1845-1914)

As we saw in an earlier lesson, Buddhism had been practically wiped out in the Tamil country by the beginning of the second millennium. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was a revival of Buddhism. The publication of the complete edition of Jeevaka Chintamani (1887) and Manimekalai (1898) were landmarks in the recovery of heterodox traditions.

But the most important figure was Iyothethoss Pandithar (1845-1914). A native doctor by profession, he was an erudite scholar. He also came under the influence of Colonel Olcott of the Theosophical Society. In the 1890s he began a movement among the Adi Dravidars arguing that they were the original Buddhists who had been consigned to 'untouchability' due to their opposition to Vedic Brahminism. He re-read classical Tamil and other texts to make his case. He also encouraged the conversion to Buddhism. He found the greatest following in north Tamilnadu and among the working classes of the Kolar Gold Fields. In this movement, M. Singavelu and Prof P. Lakshmi Narasu also played an important role. Pandithar ran a weekly journal called Oru Paisa Tamilan (later Tamilan) from 1908 until his death.

Christian Missionaries

The official religious policy of the East India Company was one of neutrality towards the native religions. Their reason for continuing this policy was the belief that the earlier Portuguese rule had come to an end because of their attempts to forcibly convert people to Christianity. As a result of this concern, the Company government prohibited the entry of missionaries into the territories under their control.

In 1793 two English missionaries, William Carey and John Thomas, both Baptists, set out to India with the intention of starting a mission. In view of the ban on missionary activity they settled down in the Danish Colony of Serampore, north of Calcutta. Carey, along with two other missionaries, Joshua Marshman and William Ward established the Serampore Mission in 1799.

The Serampore missionaries were the first evangelical Baptist missionaries in India. They were followed later by other missionary groups belonging to different Protestant denominations. Before the arrival of the Serampore missionaries, several centuries earlier, there were Christian missions in the Portuguese territory of Goa, and also on the Malabar Coast and the Coromandel Coast. The work of the earlier missionaries was limited both geographically and in terms of the number of conversions to Christianity. Thus major attempts at proselytization began during the nineteenth century.

The missionaries organised schools for the socially and economically and pleaded for their economic improvement through employment in the state service. They also fought for their 'civil rights' that included access to public roads, and permission for the women of these groups to wear upper garments.

The missionaries gave shelter to orphaned children and other destitute widows in their missions and provided education for them in their boarding schools. Particularly after the famines which were quite common during the nineteenth century, about which we discussed in the previous lesson, the missionaries organized relief. Providing shelter and succour gave these an opportunity to convert people to Christianity. In Tirunelveli district many villages took to Christianity during famines, especially in the last quarter of

nineteenth century. The same phenomenon was witnessed in Andhra where Malas and Madigas embraced Christianity in a big way.

The Company government did little to provide modern education for the native population. For a long time, the provision of elementary school facilities to the native population, especially in the interiors for the disprivileged and the poor people, was a responsibility willingly accepted by the Christian missionaries. It must be noted that the Christian Missionaries took the initiative of establishing Hospitals and Dispensaries.

Significance of the Reform Movements

The orthodox sections of the society could not accept the scientific and ideological onslaught of the socio-religious reformers. As a result of this, the reformers were subjected to abuse, persecution, issuing of fatwas and even assassination attempts by the reactionaries. However, in spite of opposition, these movements contributed towards liberation of the individual from the conformity born out of fear. The translation of religious texts into vernacular languages, emphasis on an individual's right to interpret the scriptures, and simplification of rituals made worship a more personal experience. The movements emphasised the human intellect's capacity to reason and think. By weeding out corrupt elements in religious practices, the reformers enabled their followers to counter the official taunt that their religions and society were decadent and inferior. It gave the rising middle classes the much needed cultural roots to cling to.