Chapter 19

Ideological Changes and Social Reforms in Modern India

Indian Society has a developed cultural heritage, since the ancient times. Although, constant efforts were made to maintain it yet, due to a conservative approach some vices developed in the society. The society remained aware towards these social evils, eventually the efforts were made from time to time to eradicate these bad customs for example – around 2500 years ago, Gautam Buddha and Mahaveer Swami came forward for the cause of society and subsequently made efforts to eradicate the social evils prevalent in the contemporary society. Later on the Bhakti period the saints came forward to eradicate the Karma-kandas of medieval period.

Activity-
Acquire the knowledge regarding the contribution of Gautam Buddha and Mahaveer Swami.

In 19th century, the British Rule had been established in India. The wide-spread of western education and philosophy could be seen everywhere. At that time, 'Satipratha' (a custom in which a women immolates herself on her husband's funeral pyre), BalVivah (Child marriage), Parda Pratha (Veil system), Jati Pratha (Casteism), Kanyavadha (Girl Child Slaughter), were prevalent in the Indian society. Highlighting these bad customs, the Britishers started criticizing the entire civilization and culture of India. Britishers displayed the weaker points of Indians instead the better part of Indian culture. Some educated Youth of India, started imitating the British thought and behaved alike. This symptom was worrisome for the Indian Society.

In this situation, some intellectual persons came forward and tried to eradicate the prevalent bad customs of the society. They went through the old Vedic literature thoroughly and on the basis of the essence of their study carried out, they put forward the fact, that the Indian culture is the best. The criticism related to the social evils has nothing to do with the Indian culture. These social evils appeared in due course, due to circumstances and ignorance, which were essential to be removed. Raja Ram Mohan Roy

Some of the social reformers motivated the Government to make laws to forbid the social evils. On the other hand, some reformers were of the opinions that the eradication of social evils can be done only by persuading the people about the impact of bad customs. Thus, in modern India many persons of philanthropic approach, contributed towards social reforms. We will study about some of the social reformers and their contribution in this lesson.

Prominent Social Reformers

Raja Ram Mohan Rai

In 19th century the wave of social reform appeared in Bengal was named as Renaissance. In Bengal, a terrible custom was prevalent in the early 19th century. People of Bengal established it as Sati Pratha. Mention of Sati Pratha is found very occasionally in the

Raja Ram Mohan Roy
ancient times. It increased in the medieval period, but it became dreadful in the 19th century especially in Bengal. In the noble families, a new widow was forcibly thrown in her husband's funeral pyre, in the name of Sati. This was the horrible situation, whereas people were doing this frightful act under the cover of custom.

**Activity**
What is custom? Prepare a list of some customs observed in your neighbourhood. Some customs are good. Name some good customs. Some customs are bad; which are those customs?

Raja Ram Mohan Rai of Calcutta started a campaign against this custom. Raja Ram Mohan Rai was born in a Brahmin landlord family in RadhaNagar in Bengal. He had learned many languages and studies Vedic Granthis. He translated the Vedic literature into a simple language.

On the basis of the analysis of the religious literature, Raja Ram Mohan Rai elucidate the fact that it not prescribed anywhere to through a widow in funeral pyre after her husband's death.

Raja Ram Mohan Rai made the British Administration believe on the basis of his arguments. In 1828, he formed Brahme Sabha along with his friends. Next year the name was changed to Brahm Samaj. In 1829, under the pressure of Brahmsamaj, the government made a law and a provision of punishments was made under the law for person whoever supports this Pratha. Now, the people who help the women who become sati were punished. Thus, this social evil started disappearing rapidly.

**Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar**

Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar was a great social reformer. He was a second person from Bengal who came forward for the society. Born in a poor family, Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar acquired knowledge and high degree in education on his own. He worked extensively in the field of women education. Many schools for girls were started with his efforts. He was also a strong supporter of widow marriage. Many widow marriages took place with his efforts and he, him-self set an imitable example by getting his son married to a widow. With the efforts made by Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar widow marriage Act came into existence in 1856; which gave recognition to such marriages.

**Jyotiba Phule**

Besides Bengal, the work of social reform was held in the other regions also. Prarthna Samaj was constituted in Pune—Maharashtra, for deliberations on religion. In Pune,'Satya Sodhak Samaj' was formed under the leadership of Jyotiba Phule. Jyotiba Phule fought against the casteism and wrote a
book - 'Gulamgiri'. Jyotiba Started schools for girl education. When he didn't find capable women for teaching, he made his wife capable enough and ran his school. He had contributed for the widow marriages also.

**Problems and efforts in women education in 19th century**

“It took very long to change the preoccupied mind set in respect of women education. My father started a school, but the teacher was a female and the classes were held in the premises of my house.................. the atmosphere of my would-be wife's family was completely different.

My mother-in-law sent her to a teacher without disclosing a fact to anyone. When her grandfather came to know the fact, he threatened her that if she set her foot out of her house in future she will never be able to walk on her feet. With this background, one can easily understand that what had happened when a girl's college was started in Jalandhar”.

Reference: From the Book of a journalist Durgadas “Bharat Kurzen se Nehru AurUnkePaschat”, (pg. 31) Think about the background and evaluate the extent of struggle of Ishwar chand Vidyasagar and JyotibaPhule for women education.

**Saiyed Ahmed Khan**

Saiyed Ahmed Khan was born in Delhi in 1817. After his father's death he joined East India Company due to the financial problems. Noticing the Muslim backwardness, he started a campaign to educate them with modern system and take them forward in the society. He wanted the Muslims to leave the age old conservative approach and educate themselves through the modern educational system. Aiming to this target he opened a school in Delhi. Later on in 1875, he founded a college named Mohamdan Anglo Oriental College, in Aligrah, near Delhi. This college was later on converted in Aligarh Muslim University. The credit to bring the Muslims in mainstream goes to Saiyed Ahmed Khan. Initially, Saiyed Ahmed Khan emphasized on communal harmony and unity. He said, “Hindu and Muslim are the two eyes of India”. He also founded the scientific society. He passed away in Aligarh in 1898.

**Swami Dayanand Saraswati**

Swami Dayanand Saraswatiwas born in Gujarat. His childhood name was Moolshankar. In the age of 14, he left his home and initiated by Swami Vrijanand of Mathura. He and his followers were of the opinion that any problem can be solved if the essence of Vedas is understood.

Dayanand Saraswati put forward his views:
- One should be ready to accept truth and leave false
- Behaviour of a person should be full of love and affection and
He valued the foreign dependence as a curse. He was a first who used the term – Swadharma (own religion), Swadesh (Own Country), and SwaBhasha (Own language). The Arya Samaj which was founded by him made many efforts to sustain his thoughts. The important achievements of Arya Samaj were to make available the Right of VedAdhyayan (Study of Vedas) to dalits and women, protest for Child marriage and propagation of education etc. Arya Gurukuls and DAV schools related to the Arya Samaj are working for the propagation of education till date. Members of the Arya Samaj played an important role in the national Movement also.

**Swami Vivekanand**

In the last decade of 19th century the name of Vivekananda has become very popular in Bengal. Vivekanand was born in Calcutta on January 12, 1863. His childhood name was Narendra Dutta. He has done his B.A. from an English college. He was impressed with the western but didn't find spiritual peace. Afterwards he made Ram Krishan Paramhans his Guru and learned the knowledge of Vedanta under his guidance. Ram Krishan Paramhans has given him a name – Vividishananda; afterwards, on the advice of MaharajKhetri (Rajasthan), he accepted the name – Vivekanand. Vivekanand participated in a Sarva Dharma Sammelan held in Chicago, America in September, 1893. Vivekanand elucidate the 'Hindu Dharma' for 2 days in front of the religious scholars across the world. Everyone was impressed by his speech. He communicated perpetuity and greatness of Hindu Religion. Vivekanand was very sad about poverty of Indians. He was of the opinion that serviced towards the poor and distressed is a real service. He wanted to eradicate poverty, and untouchability from the society. He expressed his views – that Dharma is the development of divinity which is inherent in human beings. Dharma (religion) is neither in the books nor in religious principles. Vivekanand generated the feeling of Nationality through his messages.

On the name of his Guru, Vivekanand founded Ram Krishna Mission. Ram Krishna Mission is serving the society till date.
Activity-
Draw the emblem of Ram Krishna Mission and colour it.

Annie Besant
Impressed with the Indian culture some foreign institutions have also served here for the Indian Society. Amongst them, the contribution of Theosophical society is very important. This institution was established in India by - Annie Besant. She was a woman of Irish origin. She studied Hindu religion and culture, and was so impressed that she completely changed her lifestyle and adopted Indian clothes and food etc. She visited the Hindu Pilgrimages and eventually, executed social reforms while staying in Banaras. She had founded a college named – Central Hindu College, which was consequently converted into Banaras University. Annie Besant had contributed in freedom-fight of India also.

(Statement of Valentine Chirol regarding Annie Besant)
When an eminent European adorned with excellent intellect and eloquence goes to India and tell Indians that the key of the highest knowledge is not possessed by Europeans but you. The Europeans don't even have the shadow of your God, your philosophy, your ethics thus, if the Indians turn back from our (European) civilization, then it will not be surprising.

Social Reforms in Rajasthan
Gradually, the ideological changes started in Rajasthan also. Swami Dayanad Saraswati visited Karoli, Ajmer, Chittorgarh, Udaipur and many other regions of Rajasthan. Vivekanand was in good relation with Khetri Maharaja, and dwelt in Alwar for quite some time. The thought of these great persons made an impact over the people of Rajasthan as well. In 1883, Dayanand Saraswati founded Paropkarini Sabha in Udaipur. Much work related to social reforms was done here, influenced with Arya Samaj.

Govind Guru
In many areas of Rajasthan, the issue of social reforms was being raised at that time. Govind Guru a Philanthrope, born in a Banjara family of Bansia village (Dungarpur), dedicated himself for social reforms in the scheduled tribes class. He wanted to unite his class. In 1883, Govind Guru founded an institution – Samp Sabha. He wanted to keep away the tribals from the superstitions and make them self-dependent and self-confident. His priority was to open schools and to stop the tribals from the activities like – drinking liquor, Loot, stealing etc.
In the field of economic reforms he emphasised on the use of indigenous goods. He also motivated the people to 'Say No' to 'Begar' the forced labour. As a result, Britishers started to oppose Govind Guru. In 1913, British army attacked on a meeting which was being held at MaangarhPahadi (Hill) where 1500 people were killed; and Govind Guru was arrested.

Other Social Reformers of Rajasthan and Efforts of Social Reforms

Other than Govind Guru there were many other persons who contributed for social reforms. Surji Bahgat (Surmal Das), born in a Kharadi family, resident of lasodiya village was also one of them. He made efforts of social reforms in the tribal community. Govind Guru and Surji Bhagat tried to uplift the tribes along with social reforms. Thus, many efforts of social reforms were made in Rajasthan.

Many Laws were made by the Rulers to abolish the social evils. Like- In 1822 Bundi on Sati Pratha, In 1835 Kota for Girl Slaughter, In 1841 Jodhpur on Tyag Pratha, In 1847 Jaipur on Human Trafficking, in 1853, Udaipur on Dakan (Witch) Pratha, made laws to ban such social evils prevalent on society.

In 1889 Rajput Hitkarini Sabha was found in Ajmer, which tried to control over polygamy and dowry system.

Like this, on the efforts of Harvillas Sharda of Ajmer, the Government brought an Act to ban Child Marriage in 1929. Chand Karan Sharda and his wife Sukhdadevi did a lot for the upliftment of Dalits. Likewise, Pandit Harinarayan Sharma of Alwar set an imitable example by allowing Harijans in his temple at home and tried to abolish the caste discrimination. Acknowledging his efforts in the field of social reforms Alwar maharaja appointed him as his adviser. In the other regions of Rajasthan, ThakkarBapa, KunwarMadan Singh, Mama Baleshwar Dayal etc. also contributed for social reforms.

Glossary

Social Evils : Bad Customs of Society
Noble Families : High Class Families
Forerunner : leadership
Tyag Pratha : The amount given to the charans on the marriage or any other auspicious occasion

Exercise

Write the correct answer of question no. one and two in the bracket –

1. Who had established the Theosophical Society in India?
   (a) SurjiBhagat    (b) Swami Vivekanand
   (c) Saiyad Ahmed Khan (d) Anne Besant  ( )
2. Who had founded SatyaShodhakSamaj
   (a) JyotibaPhule    (b) Swami Dayanand
   (c) Raja Ram Mohan Rai    (d) Govind Guru
3. Who had formed Brahma Samaj?
4. Illustrate the contribution of Sir Saiyad Ahmed Khan?
5. Give a brief description of MaangarHatyakaand (massacre)?
6. What inspiration should be received by the Youth from the life of Swami Vivekanand?
7. Illustrate the contribution of Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar.
8. Narrate the efforts made by Raja Ram Mohan Rai and Swami Vivekanand towards Social Reforms.
9. Describe the contribution of Arya Samaj.

**Activity**
1. Collect the pictures of the leading social reformers of India
2. Compile the information of the efforts made by the leading social reformers of India
3. Some social evils are prevalent in society today. Discuss this in the class and obtain suggestions to abolish them.