

Social Reform Movement in India (Pre and Post Independence)

Dr. Sainath Radhesham Bansode
Head, Department of Sociology
JSPM, Mahila Kala Mahavidyalay,
Aurangabad.

Introduction

In the pages of history we find traces of some socio-religious movements in India and some individual efforts of some women who did not comply to evil practices and traditions. However, the first organised efforts by a group of people to bring some change in the traditional social structure, institutional arrangements, customs, beliefs and relationships, emerged in the nineteenth century. "Reform" is interpreted as reconstructing of a particular system and abolishing the earlier one, but "social reform envisages amendment, improvement etc., thus entailing peaceful crusading, use of nonviolent means for change and change in slow-speed". So it was a gradual change in certain aspects of society with special reference to women in the context of differences found on the basis of sex, caste, class, religion and ethnicity that created problems for women and caught the attention of some people who tried to infuse new ways of life and thought to transform the members but preserving the society at large. Changes have their roots in the contemporary socio-political and economic changes of the different time periods we are dealing with. Over the passage of time, a lot has changed in the lives of women. Their social and economic status has changed with the growth of colonialism, Western Education, international interaction of activists and most importantly government initiatives.

Objectives of Research

- 1) To know and understand the evils existing in the society and the launching of social reformation movement in India in pre-independence period.
- 2) To analyse the role played by men and women for the eradication of the social evils from the society

- 3) To evaluate the social reformation in the post-independence period for enforcing the 'culture of equality'

Research Method

A primary and secondary source has been used for writing the research paper presented. Information is collected from through various texts, magazines, newspapers, various reports, internet, etc. The information is structured and analyzed according to the purpose of the research paper. An analytical and descriptive method is used for this.

Social Reformation in Pre-Independent India

Pre-independence India was engulfed with social practices that subjugated women and assaulted their human rights. Some of the most prominent ones were sati by a wife on her husband's pyre, bal-vivah, female infanticide, purdah, ban on education for women and widow remarriage, being the most dominant. Some scholars credit the international interaction of social reformers who understood the problems and created awareness and situations that were ripe for bringing forth changes.

The problems of women came into focus during the nineteenth century as a social issue that had to be addressed. The movement started with the active participation of a number of individuals and organisations. The pioneer of Modern India, or the Father of Modern India as he was called, Raja Ram Mohan Roy ushered in a new chapter in the history of women of the country. A social & religious reformer, marking the beginning of the modern age of enlightenment, Ram Mohan Roy began a series of social reforms that changed the course of social history of the country. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's work was carried forward by Debendranath Tagore and Keshab Chandra Sen. In 1834 Debendra Tagore assumed the leadership of Brahmo Samaj, is considered its chief architect and under Keshab

Chandra Sen the Brahmo movement became an all India movement - Bharatiya Brahmo Samaj - which he joined in 1857 and adopted radical reforms like abolition of Purdah, caste system, child marriage. He has been the pioneer of Depressed Class Movement and started educational institutions for women and the Native Marriage Act (III) was passed in 1872 legalising the unorthodox casteless marriage and banned polygamy and also fixed the marriageable age of girls and boys as 14 and 18 respectively .

However, a voice of dissent was also present during this phase. Writing around the 1890s Jyotiba Phule, whose primary concern was to break the hegemony of the high castes, referred to 'the subjugation of women as an instrument for maintaining Brahmanical dominance in Indian society. Jyotiba Phule rose to being a leading social reformer of the nineteenth century India from Maharashtra. Along with Justice Mahadev Gobinda Ranade, he founded the Satya Shodhak Samaj, whose main objective was to make the lower class people aware of their civil rights and free them from religious and emotional slavery imposed by Brahminical scriptures and through his writings and deeds he made continuous efforts to improve the condition of women and masses. Through the Satya Shodhak Samaj, the reformers fought for the rights of the peasants and other lower caste people, supported widow re-marriage and propagated the remarriage of widows.

Arya Samaj by Swami Dayanda Saraswati was the socio-religious reform movement established in Bombay on April 10, 1875 and spread the branches to whole country. The organization vehemently criticized child marriage, image work shop and caste system and started crusade against the untouchability, and disparity in male & female rights, polygamy, purdah, sati, it also worked for famine relief and spread of English education.

Social Reform Movement - After Independence

In the fourth phase, or the first phase after independence, the question of women with regard to social reformation was deemed to have been solved, with the adoption of the principle of equality in the

Constitution, and throwing open to women the rights to education, the vote and entry into

professions, public services and political offices. This phase benefitted large number of women from this class, breeding in them a complacency and support for the status quo. Women's organizations that had fought militantly for women's rights during the 30's and 40's settled down to perform needed welfare services for the people with grants provided by the Government. For all practical purposes, the women's question disappeared from the public arena for a period of over 20 years. This was reflected in the decline of both research and writings about women during this period. The shift securing quality social welfare was however marked. Also, this phase saw a rise of women securing their place in different professions and documenting their experiences. There were notable writers, novelists, dancers, artists, doctors, teachers and social workers.

When India attained independence in 1947 at least one promise of freedom was fulfilled, and one goal was accomplished: the formal emancipation of women and the granting of franchise to them in their own right. The constitution recognised the fundamental right of all its citizens- the right to education, shelter, dignity, health, food and work irrespective of caste, community, colour race, religion creed and gender recognizing the essential equality of all people. However, over the years these promises were partly fulfilled and women still were unequal and unfree. Unlike the rest of the world, in India today there are more men than women, and the gender imbalance is showing a significantly negative impact in different socio-economic sectors. Another problem that is taking a centre-stage is the nutritional imbalance and deterioration of the health of women. It is attributed mostly to cultural factors as do the state of "nutritional stress", women eat last and they eat less. There has been a decline in the educational status of women too. Only 54 percent of women in India are literate. Only half the numbers of women compared to men are enrolled in school and many drop out much before they finish being required at home to look after younger children and help with house work. Majority of the girls in the country are married by the age of 17 and by the time they are 22 most of them have at least two children, if not more, only 20 percent are in the paid work force- paid much less than men, even though there is a law in India that guarantees equal pay for equal work. The revival of women's activism in the late

nineteen sixties and seventies was the result of the fruits of Indian development not being distributed equally across gender. In what has come to be known as the second wave of the women's movement, a series of small and big struggles in Uttarakhand with an anti-alcohol struggle led by Sarala Behen and Mira Behen, in Nalaxbari in West Bengal, in Maharashtra with the anti-price rise agitation, the Nav Nirman movement in Gujarat, the Progressive Organization of Women in Hyderabad, the formation of the Self-Employed Women's Association, the first women's trade union in the country in Gujarat again -this resurgence began to take roots. Change did not come about till the 1970s, when state-led development planning acknowledged the signs of crisis. At this time, a range of "new social movements" emerged, including an efflorescence of women's movements. Through street agitation and massive grassroots mobilization, women's movements in the 70s and 80s took up the issues of violence, dowry, high food prices and personal law. The biggest shock, especially to the educated, upper class women who had fought for independence, was that the state had failed to keep its constitutional guarantee of equality for more than two decades. A report, produced for the first UN conference on women in 1974, demonstrated that women were not only invisible from the development process, but for the majority rural women and women in the urban informal sector conditions of deprivation had worsened. Consequently, women's movements from very different positions the radical left, which sought to expose the state's class interests, the left-liberal groups, which sought policy reform, and the autonomous women's groups which sought legal redress could all demand that the state respond to feminist concerns. In the 1970s, 80s and 90s a whole slew of legal reforms were enacted including laws against dowry, rape, and pre-natal diagnostic tests (which are used to selectively abort female fetuses), and laws to end sex trafficking and rape within marriage.

Towards Equality was a path breaking report released by the Committee on the Status of Women in India. This document laid the foundation of

women's movement in new wave of women's movement and social reform movements in independent India. The report systematically highlighted discriminatory socio-cultural practices, political and economic processes, as the main culprits for the drop in the development of women and the human development index of India. The findings of the report reopened the women's question for government, academia and women's organizations. It also laid the foundation for the formation of the Centre for Women's Development Studies, and the inclusion of gender studies as a distinct subject within the social science streams in the country.

Conclusion

In pre and post - independence period the impact of social reformation movement brought about tremendous changes in social fabrications of the country. The passing of series of laws, in the pre-independence period, making in human practices on women illegal are, Sati Outlawed, Widow Remarriage legalized, Special Marriage Act passed to allow inter-community marriage, Age of consent revised to 12 years, Women got right to vote in Madras, Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 passed on 28 September 1929 in the British India Legislature of India, fixed the age of marriage for girls at 14 years and boys at 18 years which was later amended to 18 for girls and 21 for boys. It is popularly known as the Sarda act, after its sponsor Harbilas Sarda and Women get limited right to property.

Reference Books

1. Prof.Kamble C.T. and Prof.Pavale T.S. (2010), *An Outline of Social Movement in India*, Creative Publication, Nanded.
2. Dr.Shrikant Gaikwad and Pro.Ramkishan Manjare (2009), *Social Movement in India*, Aruna Prakashan, Latur.
3. Rao M.S.A. (1982), *Social Movement in India*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi.
4. *Indian Social Reformer*
5. *Internate*