

BLOCK : I

**REFORMIST AND LIBERAL
CONSTITUTIONALISM**

UNIT: 1**Origins of Reformist Ideas and Liberalism in Modern Period**

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1.1 Introduction

The conquest of India by the British during the 18th and 19th century exposed some serious weaknesses and drawbacks of Indian social institutions. The socio intellectual revolution that took place in the nineteenth century in the fields of philosophy, literature, science, politics and social reforms is often known as Indian Renaissance. An important part of this Renaissance was reforming Hinduism from within on the basis of Post-Enlightenment rationalism. The Renaissance was especially focused in Bengal and is popularly known as the Bengal Renaissance.

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However, the use of 'renaissance' is slightly problematic as in European history it is used to refer to the "rebirth" or revival of Greco-Roman learning in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries after the long winter of the dark medieval period. But in Indian context, it implied rediscovering rationalism from within India's past.

India's liberalism has evolved through stages that first emphasized earthly life and materialism, then social reforms and political independence, and now economic and social freedom. While ancient liberalism of materialism was a philosophy for living life on this earth; it did not directly concern itself or rather left individuals free to choose their beliefs about after-life, Modern liberalism in India took roots during the social reform movements of the middle and late nineteenth century. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and others launched a systematic attack on anti-life social practices like Sati and ban on Widow remarriage through Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj movements. Later, with the rise of demands for independence from the British, the social reform liberalism gave way to the liberalism of political independence.

A distinct feature of the 19th century India was the urge for social and religious reforms which cut across castes and communities. India had a long tradition of religious reforms and social dissent. During the ancient period, an urge for reform can be seen in Upanishadic texts, Buddhism, Jainism, Vajrayan, Tantricism etc. During the medieval age, the popularity of the Bhakti and the Sufi saints is well known. Attempts to explore India's past by the first generation of British rulers helped to sharpen educated classes consciousness of their own existence.

If we look back into the reform movements in the 18th and 19th century India, we can see two kinds of reform movements during that time. Firstly, it was the Reformist movement which responded with the time and scientific temper of the modern India. Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and Aligarh Movement were some of the reformist movements of the 18th and 19th centuries India. Secondly, there was Revivalist movement which aimed to revive ancient Indian traditions and thoughts and believed that western thinking ruined Indian culture and ethos. Arya Samaj and Deoband Movement are the second kind of reform movement in the 18th and 19th century India.

The major social problems which came within the purview of the reform movements were: Emancipation of women in which sati, infanticide, child and widow marriage were taken up, Casteism and untouchability

Education for bringing about enlightenment in society etc. In the religious sphere the main issues were: Idolatry, Polytheism, Religious superstitions, exploitation by priests. Reform movement started in different parts of India in different period but having considerable similarities. They were link with one religion or one caste. It was clear to the leaders of reform movements that without religious reformation, there cannot be any social reformation.

Reform movements of the 19th century set a strong background for the national liberation movement against the British imperialism. Some women reformers also played a prominent role in the social life of the 19th century. One may mention such names as Pandita Ramabai in western part, Sister Subbalaksmi in Madras and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain in Bengal. Reform movements helped the growth of a modern middle class which was conscious of its rights.

1.2 Objectives

This unit is planned and designed with a view to understand and have knowledge about the origin of reformist ideas and liberalism in India during the 19th century. By the end of this unit one shall be able to:

- Discuss about the background of the Reform ideas and movements in India.
- Analyze the various significant socio-religious reform movements along with the social reformers during the 19th century in India.
- Describe about the features, contributions along with the limitations of the social reform movements.
- Discuss about the key social legislations of the 19th and 20th century in India.

1.3 Backdrop of the Reform Movement: Causes and Analysis

The earliest expression of reform was in Bengal, initiated by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. He founded the Atmiya Sabha in 1815, which was the forerunner of Brahmo Samaj formed by him in 1829. The spirit of reform soon manifested itself in other parts of the country. The Paramahansa Mandali and Prarthana Samaj in Maharashtra and Arya Samaj in Punjab and other parts of North India were some of the prominent movements among the Hindus. There were several other regional and caste movements like Kayastha Sabha in Uttar Pradesh and Sarin Sabha in

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Punjab. Among the backward castes too reformation struck in the forms of roots; The Satya Sodhak Samaj in Maharashtra and Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sabha in Kerala. The Ahmadiya and Aligarh movements, the Sing Sabha and the Rehnumai Mazdeyasana Sabha represented the spirit of reform among the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Parsees respectively.

The reform movements of the nineteenth century were not purely religious movements. They were socio-religious movements. The reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal, Gopal Hari Deshmukh (Lokhitavadi) in Maharashtra and Viresalingam in Andhra Pradesh advocated religious reform for the sake of "Political advantage and social comfort". The reform perspectives of the movements and their leaders were characterised by a recognition of interconnection between religious and social issues. They attempted to make use of religious ideas to bring about changes in social institutions and practices.

The reform movements within the Hindu community attacked a number of social and religious evils. Polytheism and idolatry which negated the development of individuality or supernaturalism and the authority of religious leaders which induced the habit of conformity were subjected to strong criticism by these movements. The opposition to caste was not only on moral and ethical principles but also because it fostered social division. Anti-casteism existed only at a theoretical and limited level in early Brahmo movement, but movements like the Arya Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and Rama Krishna Mission became uncompromising. They unambiguously advocated the abolition of caste system, as evident from the movements initiated by Jyotiba Phule and Narayana Guru. The latter gave the call-only one God and one caste for mankind. The urge to improve the condition of women was not purely humanitarian, it was part of the quest to bring about the progress of society. Keshab Chandra Sen had voiced this concern. He said, "no country on earth ever made sufficient progress in civilization whose females were sunk in ignorance". The social conditions of the then Indian society were equally depressing. The most distressing was the position of women. The birth of a girl was unwelcome, her marriage a burden and her widowhood inauspicious. Another debilitating factor was Caste. It sought to maintain a system of segregation, hierarchically ordained on the basis of ritual status, hampering social mobility and fostered social divisions. There were innumerable other practices marked by constraint, status, authority, bigotry and blind fatalism. Rejecting them as features of a decadent

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society, the reform movements sought to create a social climate for modernization. An attempt to change the then prevalent values of the society is evident in all these movements.

1.4 Social and Religious Reform Movements

India in the 19th century witnessed a series of reform movements undertaken in various parts of the country. These movements were oriented toward a re-structuring of the Indian society along modern lines. The reform movements should be seen as a response to the challenge posed by the colonial intrusion. They were indeed important just as attempts to reform society but even more so as manifestations of the urge to contend with the new situation engendered by colonialism. In other words the socio-religious reform was not an end in itself, but was integral to the emerging anti-colonial consciousness. Thus, what brought about the urge for reform was the need to rejuvenate the society and its institutions in the wake of the colonial conquest. This aspect of the reform movement, however, introduced an element of revivalism, a tendency to harp back on the Indian past and to defend, Indian culture and civilization. Although this tended to impart a conservative and retrogressive character to these movements, they played an important role in creating cultural consciousness and confidence among the people.

Reform Movements are linked with different ideas including presence of colonial government, economic and social backwardness of society, influence of modern western ideas, and rise of intellectual awakening in the middle class and poor position of women in society. British rule in India acted as a catalyst to deep seated social changes. Western culture also influenced the Indian Life and thought in several ways. The most important result of the impact of western culture was the replacement of blind faith in current traditions, beliefs, and conventions by a spirit of rationalism.

1.4.1 Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Brahmo Samaj: His Social Reforms

Ram Mohan Roy, the father of Indian Renaissance was versatile genius, who opposed the idolatry, denounced Sati, polygamy and abuses of the caste system, favoured remarriage of Hindu widows. Ram Mohan Roy was a great patriot, scholar and humanist. He was moved by deep love for the country and worked throughout his life for the social, religious, intellectual and political regeneration of the Indians. In 1814, Rammohan

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Roy settled in Calcutta and dedicated his life to the cause of social and religious reform. As a social reformer, Rammohan Roy fought relentlessly against social evils like sati, polygamy, child marriage, female infanticide and caste discrimination. He organized a movement against the inhuman custom of sati and helped William Bentinck to pass a law banning the practice (1829). It was the first successful social movement against an age old social evil. Sambad Kaumudi (founded in 1921) was a Bengali weekly newspaper published from Kolkata in the first half of the 19th century by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Sambad Kaumudi regularly editorialised against Sati, denouncing it as barbaric and unHindu. It was the main vehicle of Ram Mohan Roy's campaign against Sati. He started the 'Atmiya Sabha' in 1815 and carried a consistent struggle against the religious and social malpractices. In his first philosophical work "Tuhfat-ul-Muwahiddin" he analyzed major religions of the world in light of reason and social comfort. As a reformist ideologue, Roy believed in modern scientific approach and principles of human dignity and social equality. He put his faith in monotheism. He wrote Gift to Monotheists and translated the Vedas and the five Upanishads into Bengali to prove his conviction that ancient Hindu texts support monotheism.

Ram Mohan Roy was one of the earliest propagators of modern Western education. He looked upon it as a major instrument for the spread of modern ideas in the country. He was associated with the foundation the Hindu College in Calcutta (which later came to be known as the Presidency College). He also managed at his own cost an English school in Calcutta. In addition, he established a Vedanta College where both Indian learning and Western social and physical science courses were offered. He sent petitions to the government to adopt a wider system of public education in English.

Ram Mohan Roy fought persistently against social evils. He argued that ancient Hindu texts the 'Vedas' and the 'Upanishads' upheld the doctrine of monotheism. To prove his point, he translated the Vedas and five Upanishads into Bengali. In 1849 he wrote 'Gift to Monotheism' in Persian. Ram Mohan Roy was a staunch believer in the philosophy of Vedanta (Upanishads) and vigorously defended the Hindu religion and Hindu philosophy from the attack of the missionaries. He only wanted to mould Hinduism into a new cast to suit the requirements of the age. In August 1828, Roy founded the Brahma Sabha which was later renamed Brahma Samaj in 1829. The organization opposed idol worship and stayed away from practice of priesthood and sacrifice. The worship

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was performed through prayers, meditation, and readings from the Upanishads. Great emphasis was laid on “promotion of charity, morality, benevolence, and strengthening of the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds. The role of the Brahmo Samaj as the ‘first intellectual movement which spread the ideas of rationalism and enlightenment in modern India’ cannot be over-emphasized. Its liberal approach to social and religious questions won the approbation of Europeans and Indians alike. Its educational and social reform activities instilled a new confidence which, in turn, contributed to the growth of national movement. A number of the members of Brahmo Samaj were later prominent in the India’s struggle of Independence.

Ram Mohan Roy was a pioneer of Indian journalism. He himself published journals in Bengali, Persian, Hindi and English to educate the public on various current issues. He was also a firm believer in internationalism. He held that the suffering and happiness of one nation should affect the rest of the world. He took a keen interest in international events and always supported the cause of liberty and nationalism. Ram Mohan Roy represented the first glimmerings of the rise of national consciousness in India. He opposed the rigidity of the caste system because it destroyed the unity of the country. Rabindranath Tagore has rightly remarked: “Ram Mohan was the only person in his time, in the whole world of men, to realize completely the significance of the Modern Age.”

To sum up, Ram Mohan Roy from Bengal was the most notable reformer of the modern times. He was among the first to bring political questions in the ambit of public debate. His Atmiya Sabha discussed important social and political questions of the time. He wished to purify Hinduism by removing all kinds of evils that had crept into it over centuries.

1.4.2 Henry Vivian Derozio and Young Bengal Movement

The establishment of the Hindu College in 1817 was a major event in the history of Bengal. It played an important role in carrying forward the reformist movement that had already emerged in the province. A radical movement for the reform of Hindu Society, known as the Young Bengal Movement, started in the college. Its leader was Henry Vivian Derozio, a teacher of the Hindu College. Derozio was deeply influenced by the revolutionary ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity. He was a brilliant teacher and within a short period of time, he drew around him a group of intelligent students in the college. He inspired his students to think

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rationality and freely, to question authority, to love liberty, equality and freedom and to worship truth. By organising an association for debates and discussions on literature, philosophy, history and science, he spread radical ideas. The movement started by Derozio was called the Young Bengal Movement and his followers were known as the Derozians. They condemned religious rites and the rituals, and pleaded for eradication of social evils, female education and improvement in the condition of women.

1.4.3 Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was a towering personality of the mid- 19th century who was born in a poor Brahmin family of Bengal in 1820. He was a renowned Sanskrit scholar and became the Principal of the Sanskrit College in 1851. The Sanskrit College conferred on him the title of ‘Vidyasagar’ for his profound knowledge of Sanskrit. He was determined to break the priestly monopoly of scriptural knowledge, and for this he opened the Sanskrit College to break the self-imposed isolation of Sanskritic learning. The great scholar and reformer, Vidyasagar’s ideas were a happy blend of Indian and western thought. He believed in high Moral values and was a deep humanist and was generous to the poor.

Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar was both a scholar and a reformer. He was a great humanist and had deep sympathy for the poor and the oppressed. He dedicated his entire life to the cause of social reform which he thought was necessary for modernizing India. By admitting non-Brahmin students to the Sanskrit College, he dealt a severe blow to the prevalent caste system.

Vidyasagar was a staunch supporter of women’s education and helped John Elliot, Drinkwater Bethune to establish the Bethune School, the first Indian school for girls, in 1849. As Inspector of Schools, Vidyasagar opened a number of schools for girls in the districts under his charge. Vidyasagar’s greatest contribution lies in the improvement of the condition of widows. Despite opposition, Vidyasagar openly advocated widow remarriage. Soon a powerful movement in favour of widow remarriage was started. After prolonged struggle under his leadership the Widow Remarriage Act was passed in 1856. Through his efforts, twenty-five widow remarriages took place. The first lawful Hindu widow remarriage was celebrated in Calcutta in 1856 under the inspiration and supervision of Vidyasagar. He also started a crusade against child marriage and polygamy.

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1.4.4 Dayanand Saraswati and Arya Samaj

The most significant reform movement in the late 19th century India was the Arya Samaj which was founded by Dayanand Saraswati in 1875. It started in the western India and the Punjab, and gradually spread to a large part of the Hindi heartland. Saraswati attacked puranas, polytheism, idolatry and domination of the priestly class and adopted Hindi for reaching out to the masses. He also opposed child marriage and fiercely opposed to multiplicity of castes which he thought was primarily responsible for encouraging conversion of lower castes into Christianity and Islam.

1.4.5 Jyotiba Phule and Satyashodhak Samaj

Jyotiba Phule played a prominent role in bringing about social reforms in India. He fought for improving the condition of women, the poor and the untouchables. Jyotiba Phule belonged to the Mali (gardener) community and organized a powerful movement against upper caste domination and brahminical supremacy. Phule founded the Satyashodhak Samaj (Truth Seekers' Society) in 1873, with the leadership from the backward classes, Malis, Telis, Kunbis, Saris, and Dhangars. People from all castes and religions were allowed to join the association. He was opposed to the domination of the Brahmins and started the practice of conducting marriages without Brahmin priests.

The main aims of the movement were Social service, Spread of education among women and lower caste people. Phule's works, Sarvajanik Satyadharma and Ghulamgiri, became source of inspiration for the common masses.

1.4.6 Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and the Aligarh Movement

Syed Ahmed Khan was born in 1817 in a respectable Muslim family and was a loyalist member of the judicial services of the Government. Syed's progressive social ideas were propagated through his magazine Tahdhib-ul-Akhlaq (Improvement of Manners and Morals). The Aligarh Movement emerged as a liberal, modern trend among the Muslim intelligentsia based on Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, Aligarh. It aimed at spreading modern education among Indian Muslims without weakening their allegiance to Islam. He tried to bring about social reforms among Muslims relating to purdah, polygamy, widow remarriage, women's education, slavery, divorce, etc.

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1.4.7 Balshastrri Jambhekar

Balshastrri Jambhekar is known as Father of Marathi journalism for his efforts in starting journalism in Marathi language with the first newspaper in the language named 'Darpan' in 1832. He was one of the pioneers in Bombay who attacked orthodoxy and tried to reform popular Hinduism. Jambhekar emphasized on widow remarriage. At the same time he tried to develop a scientific set of mind in the uneducated people of India. Other prominent reformers in western India were Gopalhari Deshmukh (Lokhitawadi) and Gopal Ganesh Agarkar who attacked Hindu orthodoxy and criticized blind dependence on tradition and false glorification of past.

1.4.8 Pandita Ramabai

The British Government did not take substantial steps specifically to educate women. Still, by the end of the 19th century, there were several women who became aware of the need for social reform. Pandita Ramabai who was educated in United States and in England wrote about the unequal treatment meted out to the women of India. She founded the Arya Mahila Sabha in Pune and opened the Sharada Sadan for helping destitute widows. She also founded Mukti Mission in Pune.

1.4.9 Sarojini Naidu

Sarojini Naidu was a renowned poet and social worker. She was a proponent of civil rights and women's emancipation. She inspired the masses with the spirit of nationalism through her patriotic poems. She stood for voting rights for women and took an active interest in the political situation in the country. She also helped to set up the All India Women's Conference.

1.4.10 Swami Vivekananda and the Ramkrishna Mission

Swami Vivekananda was a major force in the contemporary Hindu reform movements in India. In 1896, Vivekananda founded the Ramkrishna Mission to propagate social welfare. It laid emphasis not on personal salvation but on social good and social service. The Ramkrishna Mission stood for religious and social reform based on the ancient culture of India. Emphasis was put on the essential spirit of Hinduism and not on rituals. Rendering social service was the primary aim of the Ramkrishna Mission. It believed that serving a human being was the same as worshipping God. The Mission opened a chain of schools, hospitals,

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orphanages and libraries throughout the country. It provided relief during famines, earthquakes and epidemics. A math or monastery was established in Belur near Calcutta. The Belur Math took care of the religious developments of the people.

1.4.11 Prarthana Samaj

In 1867, the Prarthana Samaj was started in Maharashtra with the aim of reforming Hinduism and preaching the worship of one God. Mahadev Govind Ranade and R.G. Bhandarkar were the two great leaders of Prarthana Samaj. It was a movement for religious and social reform in Bombay. The Prarthana Samaj did in Maharashtra what the Brahmo Samaj did in Bengal. It attacked the existing caste system in India and the predominance of the Brahmins, campaigned against child marriage and the purdah system, preached widow remarriage and emphasised female education. In order to reform Hinduism, Ranade started the Widow Remarriage Association and the Deccan Education Society. In 1887, Ranade founded the National Social Conference with the aim of introducing social reforms throughout the country.

1.4.12 Debendranath Tagore

Debendranath Tagore, the father of Rabindranath Tagore, was responsible for revitalizing the Brahmo Samaj. Under him the first step was taken to convert the Brahmo Samaj into a separate religious and social community. He represented the best in traditional Indian learning and the new thought of the West. In 1839, he founded the Tatvabodhini Sabha to propagate Ram Mohan Roy's ideas. He promoted a magazine to do a systematic study of India's past in Bengali language. Debendranath Tagore supported the movements for widow remarriage, the abolition of polygamy, women's education and the improvement in the condition of the peasantry.

1.4.13 The Sikh Reform Movement

The formation of the two Singh Sabhas at Amritsar and Lahore in the 1870's was the beginning of religious reform movement among the Sikhs. The setting up of Khalsa College in Amritsar in 1892 helped promote Gurumukhi, Sikh learning and Punjabi literature. In 1920, the Akali movement which rose in Punjab started the cleansing of the management of the Gurudwaras or Sikh Shrines, from the corrupt Mahants (Priest).

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SAQ :

1. Assess the contributions of Raja Rammohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar towards making of modern India.

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1.5 Characteristics of Social Reform Movements

An analysis of the reform movements of the 19th century brings out several common features. Some of them are highlighted below:

- The targets of the intellectual attack were the existing socio-cultural evils and malpractices in India such as obscurantism, superstitions and irrationality imbedded in the society. The social reform movement did not, however, attack the social system as a whole; their attack was mainly only on the perversions and distortions that had crept into it.
- The reformers attempted to improve the status of girls and women in society. They all emphasised the need for female education.
- Reformation movements were not revolution. They did not stand for structural transformation; changes were sought within the framework of the very structure. In a word, they were advocates of reform and not exponents of revolution. The upliftment of the position of women, late marriage, monogamy, widow-marriage, elimination of caste distinctions, monotheism, etc., did not signify any revolutionary change in the society. Even they themselves were not unaware of the reformist nature of their ideas and endeavours. The course they delineated for transformation was to be evolutionary, and not revolutionary.
- All the reformers propagated the idea of one God and the basic unity of all religions. Thus, they tried to bridge the gulf between different religious beliefs.
- All the reformers attacked priesthood, rituals, idolatry and polytheism. The humanitarian aspect of these reform movements was expressed in their attack on the caste system and the custom of child marriage.
- By attacking the caste system and untouchability, the reformers helped

to unify the people of India into one nation.

- The reform movements fostered feelings of self-respect, self-reliance and patriotism among the Indians.

1.6 Social Legislations in the 19th and Early 20th Century

In the early decades of the nineteenth century there began internal movements within Hindu society against its own customs and practices. In the light of the changing consciousness among the people, the Government too changed its policies. It was a coincidence that the British initiated social legislation when the Indian reformers created an opinion in their favour. The East India Company proceeded very hesitantly and cautiously against the abolition of the custom of Sati till Ram Mohan Roy represented the view of rational Indians against the evil. On 4 December, 1829, by Regulation XVII of the Government, the custom of Sati was declared illegal and punishable by the Criminal Courts. A less significant social measure than the abolition of sati was the introduction of widow marriage. Accordingly, on 26th July, 1856, the Act XV was passed legalizing widow marriage and giving the status of legitimacy to the children of the married widows. After the Widow Marriage Act 1856, the Bengal reformers wanted to abolish polygamy by legislation. In June-July 1856, petitions signed by fifty thousand men and women were submitted to the Government to abolish polygamy. In spite of the Act, the cause of remarriage of Hindu widows did not make much headway. Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in Bengal and Vishnu Shastri in Western India put their heart and soul into propagating this reform. A Widow Remarriage Association was started in Bombay in 1866. Prof. D. R. Karve founded the Widow Home in Poona in 1896. Several legislations, starting from 1807, forbade slavery and slave trade and keeping slaves or trafficking in them became an offence under the Indian Penal Code, enacted in 1860.

Several important measures were also taken in the cause of female education. The initial efforts in this direction were made by the Christian missionaries. But the social reformers also greatly contributed towards the growth of female education. Mention ought to be made in this regard of the efforts of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar who opened nearly 35 girl's schools in 1857- 58 in Bengal. Prof. Karve founded several educational institutions in Maharashtra, the most notable being India's first Women's University in Bombay in the early 20th century. The spread

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of female education led to several other social reforms of great consequences, such as, the abolition of purdah, which further led to the participation of women in the freedom struggle. In the twentieth century, policies regarding social change mainly resulted from Indian opinion rather than from British interests. The progress of western education and the growth of political consciousness created a new atmosphere in the country affecting various socio-economic issues. The press played a useful role in giving appropriate prominence to these issues. The Child Marriage Restraint Act XIX of 1929 (popularly known as Sarda Act) was a long awaited social measure in favour of which opinion had been growing for many years. It came into force on 1 April, 1930.

Stop to Consider

List of Legislative Measures for Women :

Bengal Regulation (1829) banning sati

Bengal Regulation Acts (1795, 1804) declaring infanticide illegal

Hindu Widow's Remarriage Act, 1856

Age of Consent Act, 1891

Sarda Act, 1929

Special Marriage Act, 1954

Hindu Marriage Act, 1955

1.7 Contributions and Significance of Social Reform movement

In spite of the opposition from the orthodox sections of Indian society, these movements contributed towards liberating people from the exploitation of priests. The religious texts were translated into vernacular languages; there was more emphasis on interpretation of scriptures and simplification of rituals, thus making worship a more personal experience. The movement gave the upcoming middle class cultural roots and reduced the sense of humiliation that the British powers had created. Modern, rational, secular, and scientific outlook was promoted realizing the need of the modern era. Many reformers like Dayanand Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda upheld Indian philosophy and culture. This instilled in Indians a sense of pride and faith in their own culture. Female education was promoted. Schools for girls were set up. Even medical colleges were established for women. The cultural and ideological struggle taken up by the socio-religious movements helped to build up national consciousness. They, thus, paved the way for the growth of nationalism.

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The reformers aimed at modernization rather than outright westernization. A favourable social climate was created to end India's cultural and intellectual isolation from the world. It was greatly due to the constant endeavours of the reformers that abolition of Sati and legalization of widow-marriage were achieved during the nineteenth century. The ideas and activities of the intellectuals were directly or indirectly related to the task of nation-building and national reconstruction. The social reform movement, as a matter of fact, was not an isolated phenomenon in fact it was loaded with wider national political and economic considerations. Thus, the social reform movement was a prelude to nationalism.

Check Your Progress

1. Mention three significant features of socio- religious reform movements in India during the 19th century.
2. Mention five notable social legislations during the 19th century in India pertaining to the social evils prevalent in the society during that time.

1.8 Weakness and Limitations of Social Reform movement

As every rose has its thorn, there were some limitations and weaknesses in the social reform movements too. It may be mentioned here that only the educated and urban middle class was involved in some of the social reform movements while the needs of vast majority of peasants and the urban poor were ignored. At the same time movement did not reach rural India. Given the situation of widespread illiteracy in the rural areas and because of the absence of modern and diversified communications network, they were doomed to have a very limited audience, mainly urban-based. Thus even in terms of its practical appeal the movement remained urban, besides its other limitations. Casteism remained strong, caste distinctions remained strong and the religious and social practices did not die away. Caste and customs proved to be hard to eradicate from Indian consciousness.

1.9 Summing Up

The 19th century reformers undertook a two-fold task. A critique of the Indian society was made. Institutions like caste, Sati, widowhood, child-marriage etc. came in for a sharp attack. Superstitions and religious obscurantism were condemned. An attempt was made at the

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modernization of the Indian society and appeals were made to reason, rationalism and tolerance. The scope of their activities was not confined to religion only but included the society as a whole. Although they devised different methods and were also separated by time, they showed a remarkable unity of perspective and objectives. They gave a vision of a prosperous modern India and subsequently this vision got incorporated in the Indian National Movement.

Check Your Progress

1. Mention some of the significant reform movements undertaken in various parts of the country during the 19th century.
2. Discuss the significance of the socio-religious reform movements in India during the 19th century?

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Unit 2

Raja Ram Mohan Roy: Social Reform

Unit Structure

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- 2.2 Objectives
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- 2.4 Social Ideas and Reforms of Raja Ram Mohan Roy
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2.1 Introduction

The story of Raja Ram Mohan Roy's life is the story of India's transition from the medieval to the modern age. It is necessary to stress the significance of his life as a turning point in the history of India as a whole, for this significance is likely to be obscured if Raja Ram Mohan Roy is merely admired as a special glory of Bengal, or venerated as the founder of a reform movement within Hinduism.

The social and political thought in modern India had its beginning with Raja Ram Mohan Roy who emphasized the need of religious and social reforms on rational principles. He was an intensely admired and beloved leader dedicated to the service of mankind, a great multifaceted personality, the Father of Renaissance of Modern India, a profound religious scholar, a mighty social reformer, a champion of regeneration and upliftment of India. Raja Ram Mohan Roy inaugurated the Modern Age in India and stood for the introduction of new ideas and ideals in order to raise the country to the height of civilization. He strongly

advocated for the cause of social, religious, political, administrative and economic reforms.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was born at a time when India had lost touch with her ideals and stood subjected to unreason and dogmatism. He is the great path maker of the country, who has removed ponderous obstacles that impeded our progress at every step and initiated us into the present era of worldwide co-operation of humanity. Indeed he heralded a new era of social and religious reforms, persuading his countrymen to give up the gross superstitions and evil practices with which Hinduism had become associated during the preceding centuries and to realize the true spirit of ancient religion as taught in the Vedas and the Upanishads. As such in the dark gloom of India's degeneration, he rose up as a luminous star on the horizon of India's history.

2.2 Objectives

This unit is designed with a view to understand and have knowledge about one of the most prominent socio-political reformer of India during pre-independence period. By the end of this unit you will be able to:

- Discuss about the life sketch of Raja Ram Mohan Roy
- Analyze his major social ideas and reforms
- Describe about Brahma Samaj

2.3 Life Sketch of Raja Ram Mohan Roy

He was born on 23rd May 1772 in an orthodox Brahmin family to Tarini Devi and Ramakanta Roy of Radhanagar, then a part of the district of Burdwan and later a part of the Arambagh sub-division in the district of Hooghly in West Bengal. His early education included the study of Persian and Arabic at Patna, where he read the Koran, studied the Islamic metaphysics and other outstanding works of Sufi poets. This made him critical of idolatry and polytheism. After completing his Islamic Studies at Patna he went to Banaras where he studied Sanskrit and learnt about the ancient Indian scriptures specially the Vedas and the Upanishads. Returning to his village at the age of sixteen he wrote a rational critique of Hindu idol worship which greatly displeased his father and as an aftermath he had to leave his home. His wanderings took him to Tibet where he gathered in depth knowledge of Buddhism, the tenets of Buddhism. Raja Ram Mohan Roy also studied Hebrew, Greek, Latin as

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well as English which resulted in development of a very liberal outlook in him.

A short while after the death of his father in 1803, he went to Murshidabad and renewed his Arabic studies. There he wrote 'Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin (a gift to the monotheists) in Persian with an 'Introduction' in Arabic'. In his introduction to the book he attempted to show the general unity of thought among mankind regarding the existence of One Being. He tried to bring out the fact that faith in the unity of Realty and recognition of human values are the cardinal principles of all religions. Subsequently, the acceptance of the fundamental unity of all religions becomes a leading feature of the Indian Thought. This is quite evident in the writings of Vivekananda, Tagore and Radhakrishnan.

Ram Mohan Roy's impact on modern Indian history was a revival of the pure and ethical principles of the Vedanta school of philosophy as found in the Upanishads. He preached the unity of God, made early translations of Vedic scriptures into English and founded the Brahma Samaj. The Brahma Samaj played a major role in reforming and modernizing the Indian society. He successfully campaigned against Sati i.e. the practice of widow burning. He also sought to integrate Western culture with the best features of his own country's tradition. He established a number of schools to popularize modern system of education in India. It was he who first introduced the word 'Hinduism' into the English language in 1816. For his diverse contributions to the society Raja Ram Mohan Roy is regarded as one of the most important figures in the Bengali Renaissance. His efforts to protect Hinduism and Indian rights by participating in British government earned him the title the 'Father of the Indian Renaissance'.

2.4 Social Ideas and Reforms of Raja Ram Mohan Roy

Raja Ram Mohan Roy is a great historical figure who made numerous efforts to transform India and dared to defy the age old Hindu tradition. He undertook various social reforms to change the society and worked to uplift the status of women in India. He was a great scholar who translated many books, religious and philosophical work and scriptures into Bengali and also translated Vedic scriptures into English. He was an Indian socio-educational reformer who was also known as 'Maker of Modern India' and the 'Father of Indian Renaissance'.

As Raja Ram Mohan Roy saw a close link between the political and

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social progress, he held that no improvement in the political condition of the people could take place unless improvements were effected in their social conditions. He therefore tried to bring about social and religious reforms. Firstly, he attacked idolatry, which he considered as the root cause of all the evils prevailing in Hindu Society. Through his researches he tried to establish that idolatry was not sanctioned by the Vedas and Upanishads and was only a later addition. Secondly he tried to get the inhuman practice of Sati (burning of widows on the funeral pyre of dead husband) abolished, which had been prevailing in the Indian society for decades. He carried out incessant agitation against this evil and created a powerful public opinion in favour of its abolition through his writings and discussions. Ultimately, he succeeded in getting this evil abolished through a law enacted by Lord William Bentick. Thus he became the pioneer of the social reform movement in India. His significant social reforms and ideas have been discussed below:-

2.4.1 Abolition of Sati

Practice of Sati during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century was an outrageous social evil. Raja Ram Mohan Roy raised his voice against the Sati system. It was a system in which in the funeral pyre of the deceased husband, his wife was mercilessly thrown if she did not enter into the flame voluntarily. Her sacrifice was considered as an act of deep love and attachment for her deceased husband and was termed as Sati. It was an age-old phenomenon which afflicted more or less every society at different points of time. The Brahmins and other higher castes in the society encouraged it. Roy opposed this evil practice which he felt as barbarous and inhuman. It was a cruel custom based on an irrational philosophy. His sound argument was considered to be an onslaught on Hinduism. Describing the practice of Sati as heinous, he treated it as murder as the widow was forced to commit it. He therefore requested the government to stop this practice. He was opposed by the fundamentalists who argued that the custom was bound up with the religion of the Hindus and any kind of interference would offend the religious sentiments of the people. He paid a heavy price for his progressive policies as he was humiliated and ridiculed by orthodox members of the society. Finally all his efforts bore fruits and this practice was stopped by an act passed in 1829 during the time of Lord William Bentinck. The act is known as Bengal Sati Regulation 1829. Thus a long prevailing ugly practice of the Hindus was uprooted.

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2.4.2 Champion of Women Liberty

Raja Ram Mohan Roy advocated liberty for women. He was determined to give women her proper place in the society. Besides abolishing Sati, he advocated in favour of widow remarriage. He also told that like the sons, daughters have also their right over parental property. Women were not only forced to become Sati, but also debarred from inheriting any property from their parents or husbands under the then existing Hindu law. They were forcibly deprived of the means of sustenance; they became a liability for those on whom they depended. Therefore, their physical extermination had its financial advantages. This was the bitter and gruesome truth that lay beneath the killing of the widows in the name of religion. Protesting against the practice of denying the right to women, Roy wrote a pamphlet entitled “Modern Encroachment on the Ancient Rights of Hindu Females according to the Hindu Law of Inheritance” in 1822. It was said that it was an unjust practice to deprive the women from enjoying property as a matter of right. It was the result of deliberate distortion of traditional Hindu law.

He also influenced the British government to bring necessary modifications in the existing law. He raised voice against child marriage and polygamy. He was also the advocate of women education. Roy had a tremendous respect for women. He ridiculed those who believed that women by nature were inferior to men mentally without resolution, unworthy or trust, subject to passion and void of virtuous knowledge.

2.4.3 Opposed Caste System

The caste system was very ugly practice prevailing in Indian society right from the later Vedic age. Indian society was fragmented by the name of different castes. Roy strongly opposed this ugly system. To him everybody was a son or daughter of God and as such no differences should be made among them. According to him caste system in the Indian society was not only a divisive and destructive force but it also had a deleterious effect on the political life in India. The distinction of castes with innumerable divisions and subdivisions among them had entirely deprived them of patriotic feeling. He even encouraged inter-caste marriages.

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Check Your Progress

1. When was the practice of Sati prevalent in India?
2. When was the practice of Sati stopped?
3. Mention one significant writings of Raja Ram Mohan Roy in regard to women inheritance over parental property.

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2.4.4 Voice against Idolatry

Raja Ram Mohan Roy raised his voice against idolatry. In his book Tuhfat-ul-Muwahidin he championed the cause of Monotheism. He criticized idol worship by the Hindus and advocated Monotheism or unity among Gods. He also advised people to be guided by the conscience and appealed all to observe the principle of unity of God. From 1809 to 1814 he lived at Rangpur (a town in Northern Bengal); and there he came into contact with the Jains and studied Kalpasutra and other religious books of the Jain philosophy. While at Rangpur, he also took a keen interest in the political development in England and Europe. He studied all the journals and newspapers that could be made available to him, and was attracted towards political liberalism prevailing in Europe at that time.

In 1814 Ram Mohan Roy resigned from the service and settled down in Calcutta. By that time he was fully equipped with the knowledge of philosophy and religions of the world. He therefore decided to take up his life's mission to salvage India's deepest realizations covered up for centuries by ritualism, superstitions and customs and to harmonize them with the living thought currents of the world. With that purpose in view, in 1815 he founded Atmiya Sabha- a sort of discussion club for scholars of religion and philosophy. Its members were soon drawn into social and religious controversies, and Ram Mohan Roy started his campaigns against the evils of Hindu society, particularly against the custom of Sati. A year later he published his Vedanta Sara in which he pleaded for the adoption of monotheism in place of the prevailing religion which was largely polytheistic and ritual-ridden. In 1821, he established the Calcutta Unitarian Committee, the object of which was to work for an all round development of the Indian masses. Such an object was amazingly modern and also strikingly indicative of the fact that although Ram Mohan was a deeply spiritual man, he did not ignore the material and economic aspects of life. According to him, a perfect life cannot be possible without an inherent unity of its different aspects. Likewise, the salvation of man cannot be piecemeal but has to be total.

Stop to Consider : Raja Ram Mohan Roy's views on Religion

Raja Ram Mohan Roy's views on Religion was quite different from the views which were prevalent among the people of his time. Unlike his father, he was logical and heterodox. He differed from his father on fundamental issues. The monotheism of Muhammedan theology and the Brahma knowledge of the Hindu sacred books changed his mind. He opposed the idol worship and criticized the superstitions. He felt that spiritual purity had been polluted by the superstitions and blind beliefs. His parents were therefore unhappy with him.

Space for Learners**2.4.5 Supporter of Western Education**

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a great scholar having sharp intellect in the Vedas, Upanishads, Quran, Bible and several other holy scriptures. He very well realized the importance of English language and could visualize the need of a scientific, rational and progressive education for the Indians. He supported the move of Lord Macaulay and championed the cause of the English system of education in India.

Opposed to all kinds of social injustice, he felt that people should be given education on the British model as this could help them in rebuilding a modern society for India. A master of many languages, he felt the importance of the English language as it was not only relevant but also the need of the day. Impressed by Western art, culture etc., he laid emphasis on science-oriented education. As such he always supported education undertaken by the missionaries. His motto was to take Indians the path of progress. He established an English school in 1816 and Vedanta College in 1825. He wanted to introduce modern system of education in India but he could not live to see the introduction of English system of education in 1835. However his efforts and dreams were materialized into reality even after his death.

Check Your Progress

1. Since when the evil practice of caste system has been prevailing in Indian society?
2. Name the book in which Roy championed the cause of Monotheism?
3. In which year Vedanta College was established by Roy?
4. When was the system of English education started in India?

2.4.6 Opposition to Kulinism and Polygamy

Kulinism and Polygamy were other evils that existed in the contemporary Indian society. Kulin Brahmins were placed on the highest pedestal of the caste structure as they were treated with utmost respect. A girl married to a Kulin Brahmin was considered to be very lucky. 'Caste' was the only factor that was taken into consideration for solemnizing any marriage. Physical ability, height, age, education, wealth etc, were secondary and caste was the primary factor. Ram Mohan Roy was deady opposed to this Kulinism and its concomitant on this problem. As the Kulins occupied the highest position in the hierarchy of castes they were much sought after. As a result, they exploited their position to their own advantage. They married as many wives as possible, invariably for monetary consideration. In some cases the age gap between the husband and wife ranged from 30-70 years.

Through Press as well as in various platforms he articulated his views on this problem. He argued that anyone who wanted to go for a second marriage or more than that during the life time of his first wife should be allowed to do so only on proving before competent legal authority that the conditions under which polygamy was permitted by the Hindu shastras were fulfilled.

2.4.7 Brahma Samaj

The most important event which brought fame to Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the establishment of Brahma Samaj in 1828. Originally it was named as Brahma Samaj. The purpose of the Brahma Samaj was 'the worship and adoration of the eternal Unsearchable and Immutable Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe'. Since Roy believed that every religion believed in existence of the Supreme Being as the creator and preserver of the universe along with a moral code necessary for social peace and happiness, the Samaj was widely acclaimed by the people. It was directly or indirectly responsible for giving rise to a great movement called Indian Renaissance or new awakening, which stood for a national reorganization of society and rediscovery of the ancient Indian heritage.

In Brahma Samaj no designation or title was to be given to the Supreme Being. No image was to be placed and no sacrifices to be offered to God. The Samaj was open to men of all castes, creeds, colour etc. without any distinction. The Samaj sought to promote bonds of union

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between men of different religions and promote qualities of piety, virtue and benevolence among the members. He laid the foundations of the principle of religious tolerance and put forth the concept of universal religion. The ideas of the Brahma Samaj gradually spread far beyond Bengal and created an atmosphere of liberalism, rationalism and modernity which gradually influenced Indian Thought. “ If there is ever to be a new religion in India,” said Max Muller about half a century later when the Brahma Samaj was already being shaken to its foundations by schisms, ‘it will, I believe, owe its very life blood to the large heart of Ram Mohan Roy and his worthy disciples, Debendranath Tagore and Keshab Chandra Sen.’ But Marx Muller’s prophecy could not be fulfilled, because the condition attached to it- the emergence of a ‘new religion’ in India.- was impossible of realization. Hinduism proved strong enough to counteract the growing influence of Brahmoism as it had done in the case of Buddhism. In other words, Hinduism gradually raised superior to Brahmoism.

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SAQ :

Do you think Brahma Samaj has brought changes in the Indian Society ? Explain.

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The Brahma Samaj as conceived and founded by Ram Mohan Roy brought into existence a common and universal platform of organized public worship which emphasized besides the cult of the One Supreme God, the ideal of service to humanity. Raja Ram Mohan Roy wished that this institution i.e. Brahma Samaj to be a meeting ground of the people of all religious denominations who believed in one God, who is formless, eternal, unsearchable and immutable. Roy called himself a follower of the Universal religion. He told one of his friend that after his death the Hindus would claim him as their own, the Muslims would do the same and as also the Christians, but he belonged to no sect as he as the devotee of Universal Religion.

The philosophy of Brahma Samaj left its decisive influence on the Indian thought. Today its followers are few in number but that is because the needs that necessitated its origin and growth have been fulfilled. Since its mission has been accomplished during the course of time through the efforts of many distinguished persons and devout social reformers, it

has now lost its importance. But about a century back it did a commendable service to the Hindu society and to the country at large.

Check Your Progress

1. When was Brahma Samaj established by Raja Ram Mohan Roy?
2. What was the main aim and objective of Brahma Samaj?
3. Discuss about Raja Ram Mohan Roy as a Progressive and Liberal thinker?
4. Critically discuss about Raja Ram Mohan Roy as a Socio-Cultural reformer?
5. Elaborately discuss about the social evils prevalent during the time of Roy in the Indian Society and the steps initiated towards curbing those evils?

Stop to Consider :

Significant dates and events of Roy's Life

- 1772 : Born on 22 May at Radhanagar.
- 1818: Published his first tract on Sati.
- 1826: Founded Vedanta College.
- 1828: Established Brahma Samaj.
- 1833: died on 27th September.

2.5 Summing Up

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a remarkable figure with vision and foresight, a dedicated spirit with deep love towards mankind and God; bold, courageous, sincere, honest and fearless to preach his convictions. He can be regarded as an early feminist in modern India and a social reformer to the core. Symbolizing the spirit of new India; fighting against ignorance, superstitions, social and cultural decadence in Eastern India; arguing for a deeper unity through the synthesis of monotheism and social reform. Providing a rational basis for religion, he condemned all irrationalities found in Hinduism. He did his best for the revival of Hinduism. In other words he tried to free the individual from the tyranny of blind customs and superstitions. His significance lies in the fact that the social and religious reforms inaugurated by him inspired the subsequent leaders of Brahma Samaj in Bengal and other organizations like Prarthana Samaj

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in Bombay, the Theosophical Society in Madras and Arya Samaj in Punjab and U.P to work for further reforms. Raja Ram Mohan Roy thus dealt with various problem of his day and led the country to progress and modernity. He stands in history as the living bridge over which India marches from her unmeasured past to her incalculable future. He was the arch which spanned the gulf that yawned between ancient caste and modern humanity, between superstition and science and between despotism and democracy. He died on 27th September, 1833 at Stapleton Hill near Bristol, England.

2.6 References and Suggested Readings

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UNIT: 3**Raja Ram Mohan Roy: Political Ideas**

Unit Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Objectives
- 3.3 Raja Ram Mohan Roy as a Political Reformer
- 3.4 Political Ideas and Reforms of Raja Ram Mohan Roy
 - 3.4.1 Love for Liberty
 - 3.4.2 Freedom of Press
 - 3.4.3 Views on Spheres of State Activity
 - 3.4.4 Views on Education
 - 3.4.5 Civil Rights
 - 3.4.6 Nationalism
 - 3.4.7 Internationalism
 - 3.4.8 Father of Indian Journalism
 - 3.4.9 Views on Economic Development
- 3.5 Summing Up
- 3.6 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 Introduction

Raja Ram Mohan Roy born in 1772 in an orthodox family in West Bengal had a towering personality who inaugurated the modern age in India. In his childhood he had a strong liking for Persian literature and as such he went to Persia when he was twelve year old. He also went to Banaras where he learned Sanskrit. On one hand he was very logical and heterodox while his father was a devout and an orthodox person. As such often the relationship between the two turns out to be bitter due to their ideological differences. He was a strong believer of 'One God' and criticized idol worship and superstitions. He is often regarded as the Father of Indian Renaissance. He favoured science-oriented education and laid stress on economic development and on self-governing India.

Roy opposed colonialism and favoured internationalism. According to him an international organization needs to be set up to solve the problems faced by different countries. He was a champion of liberty and freedom and supported the struggle for freedom and democratic rights. Roy

supported freedom of press which was opposed by the British government. He was very distressed to see the conditions in which press functioned. However, he was against the absolute freedom of press. He was a remarkable figure, a man of vision who fought against the social evils and stood for assimilation of culture. He had a vision of League of Nations.

3.2 Objectives

This unit is planned and designed with a view to understand and have knowledge about Raja Ram Mohan Roy's political ideas and his contributions towards the reformation of India in the political sphere during the pre-independence period. By the end of this unit one shall be able to:

- Discuss about Raja Ram Mohan Roy as a Political Reformer.
- Analyze Roy's political ideas and reforms.
- Describe about his role as a progressive political thinker of India.

3.3 Raja Ram Mohan Roy as a Political Reformer

Ram Mohan Roy was not only the pioneer of religious reform and the first advocate of social reconstruction in India, he also labored on the educational, economic and political problems of his time and for the valuable contributions, which he made to the intellectual and political development in the country, he is known as the father of all progressive movements in modern India.

Ram Mohan Roy felt unhappy to see the miserable economic plight of the Indian people under the rule of the East India Company. He even fought against the monopoly of the salt trade by the servants of the East India Company. About a century after, the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru raised its voice and fought against the economic exploitation of the Indian people by the British rulers. But Ram Mohan Roy was the first to draw the attention of his countrymen to the economic drain of India carried on systematically by the British rulers. At the same time, he had not the slightest doubt in his mind that the changes that he wanted to bring about in the religious, social and educational systems of his country would exert beneficial influence on the political advancement of India. He fully recognized that

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the inter-relation between religious reformation and political and social progress. Although he was not a politician who was to shine in the Indian firmament after him, he was a keen student of politics and thoroughly understood the politics of Europe, particularly England. His contributions to the political awakening of India were immense.

3.4 Political Ideas and Reforms of Raja Ram Mohan Roy

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was one of the pioneers to enunciate the rights and privileges of the Indian people and in the name of the nation to speak to the government of their duties and responsibilities as the Sovereign power. He championed the struggle for freedom and democratic rights not for India alone but for every country of the world. Some of his significant political ideas and reforms are highlighted below :

3.4.1 Love for Liberty

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a champion of liberty and freedom; which is indeed a priceless possession of human being. His love for liberty and freedom was the basis of all his social, political and religious activities.

Roy is known as the pioneer of Indian liberalism because of his love for liberty and rights. He emphasized on personal as well as the liberty of the nation. Roy was for the necessity of personal freedom. He was a champion of freedom and rights. Roy can be regarded as the first person to deliver message of political freedom to India. Interestingly he did not speak about the liberty of one nation or one community. Instead, he spoke about universal liberty. Raja Ram Mohan Roy supported all kinds of struggles which aimed at human freedom. He was against all restrictions imposed by consideration of race, religion and customs on human freedoms.

He was the first Indian to emphasize that India must cultivate a rational outlook so that it could grow into a nation. He said that a nation might not have one religion but it must have one State with common economic and social objectives seeking welfare of all its citizens, it must have political freedom to pursue its objectives in any manner.

3.4.2 Freedom of Press

Press plays a vital role in a society as it creates, influences. and shapes

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public opinion and provides information to people on various aspects. Without information there would be a communication gap which might prove disastrous to a society. It acts as a deterrent to the arbitrary rule. Because of its role and importance, it has been rightly described by Edmund Burke, Carlyle and others as the Fourth Estate.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy laid emphasis on freedom of Press, rights of women and separation of executive and judicial functions. He made a strong plea for freedom of press in his Memorial submitted to the Supreme Court against the Press Ordinance which prohibited the publication of a newspaper or other periodicals without previous license from the Governor-General in Council. He argued that freedom of press was conducive to the good of both the government and the governed. It is good for the government because it enables it to acquit itself with the views and wishes of the people concerning the various measures adopted by it. He remarked that if it is denied to the people, the government shall not be able to know the shortcomings of its policy and injustice will be done to the people. He refuted the argument advanced by the government that free press has never yet caused a revolution in any part of the world because while men can easily represent the grievances arising from the conduct of local authorities to the supreme government and thus get them redressed, the grounds of discontent that excite revolution are removed; whereas where no freedom of press existed and grievances consequently remained unrepresented and unredressed. However, it may be noted that Roy never pleaded for absolute freedom for the press and permitted reasonable restrictions on the exercise of this freedom.

The British Government in India did not tolerate the role of the Press during the freedom struggle. Roy argued that Press was beneficial to the governed as to the government. Excellence in government and greatest virtue and enlightenment in the society could be secured only when the Press is free. He never argued for the absolute liberty of the press. He anticipated many of the arguments of John Stuart Mill on behalf of liberty in his appeals for protection of Press freedom. He always emphasized that a free Press has never yet caused a revolution in any part of the world. He believed that it was only a despotic government that always wanted to suppress a free flow of knowledge and information as it considered the spread of knowledge dangerous to the existence of all kinds of authorities. Bold, fearless and courageous, he said that the publication of truth, the natural expression of men's sentiments, through

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the medium of the Press, does not pose any problem to the state. As such there should be no restrictions from the government.

3.4.3 Views on Spheres of State Activity

It may be mentioned that Raja Ram Mohan Roy sought state intervention to bring about social reforms, which clearly shows that he did not believe in the principle of 'Laissez Faire'. However, it would be wrong to assume that he was a socialist and stood for full control of the state. He stood for right to private property and insisted that it was the duty of the state to protect the existing titles to property. But he wanted to protect the cultivators from the oppression of zamindars and insisted that the Zamindars should not have any right to increase the rent.

Check Your Progress :

1. When and where was Raja Ram Mohan Roy born?
2. Ram Mohan Roy favoured absolute freedom-True or False
3. Did Roy believed in the principle of "Laissez Faire"?

Stop To Consider

Relation between Men and Women

In 1818, Ram Mohan Roy wrote a Pamphlet in his native Bengali opposing the practice of asking Hindu widows to immolate themselves on their husbands funeral pyre. In the same year, he published an English version entitled, 'A Conference between an Advocate for and an opponent of the Practice of Burning Widows alive'. During that time women were generally considered inferior to men in regard to merit, knowledge and wisdom. But the male part of the community taking advantage of their corporeal weakness have denied to them those excellent merits that they are entitled to by nature and afterwards, they are apt to say that women are naturally incapable of acquiring those merits. Women are always denied of the fair opportunity of exhibiting their natural capacity. If after instruction in knowledge and wisdom a person cannot comprehend or retain what has been taught to him, we may consider him as deficient but as women are kept void of education and acquirement, it will not be in justice to pronounce on their inferiority.

With regard to their worthiness if we look minutely into the conduct of both the sexes, we may be enabled to ascertain which of them is

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the most frequently guilty of betraying. If we enumerate such women in each village or town as have been deceived by women it is presume that the numbers of the deceived women would be found ten times greater than that of the betrayed men. Men are in general able to read, write and manage public affairs, by which it means they easily promulgate such faults as women occasionally commit but never consider as criminal the miscount of men towards women. Therefore Raja Ram Mohan Roy wanted to eradicate the social evils from the society.

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3.4.4 Views on Education

Raja Ram Mohan Roy has been a strong critique of the existing Indian educational system and has often been condemned for his zealous advocacy of the western system of education. Opposed to all kinds of social injustice, he felt that people should be given education on the British model as this could help them in rebuilding a modern society for India. A master of many languages, he felt the importance of the English language as it was not only relevant but also the need of the day. He was very much impressed by Western art and culture and laid emphasis on science-oriented education and as such he always supported education undertaken by the missionaries. He considered the western system of education based on study of Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Anatomy, Natural Philosophy etc. as superior to the existing Indian system and pleaded for the adoption of the same for the advancement and progress of the country. However, he had great admiration for the rich treasures of ancient Indian philosophy and religion and wished to place them before the common man by transiting the Vedantic literature in Indian languages.

He was the first Bengali writer to write religious philosophical literary and historical books in Bengali for the enlightenment of his compatriots. He remained firmly rooted in the spirituality of India. However, it cannot be denied that Roy played an important role in getting the controversy raging between the oriental and western system of education, in favour of the latter. According to Vivekananda, Raja Ram Mohan Roy was 'the first man of a new regenerate India.'

3.4.5 Civil Rights

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the first to create awareness for civil rights

among the Indian masses. He gave the greatest importance to the right to freedom of opinion and expression. He was a supporter of the impersonal authority of law and opposed all kinds of arbitrary and despotic powers. He was convinced that the existence of constitutional government is the best guarantee of human freedom. Roy was a strong advocate of Civil rights and political liberty. He held that the British rule was a divine-boon because it assured greater civil and religious liberty of the subjects. Though Roy did not specify the liberties made available by the British rule, he obviously had in mind civil liberty right to life and liberty, the right to property, freedom of opinion and freedom for religious worship. He also suggested the means for the attainment of civil rights. According to Dr. B.B. Mazumdar for securing life and liberty Raja Ram Mohan Roy demanded 'codification of laws', separation of powers, integrity, efficiency and independence of judges, introduction of the jury system and the Habeas Corpus Act, and the legal responsibility of officials. He held that the civil and criminal laws should be codified in such a way as not to require any explanation by a reference to any other book or authority, either Mohammedan or Christian. Separation of powers was to him a cardinal principle of good government. He strongly protested against the union of magisterial and judicial power with the office of the Collector.

3.4.6 Nationalism

A staunch nationalist, Roy loved everything that was Indian and did his best to promote the country's progress and prosperity. Right type of education, national in character and austere in make-up, should be imparted. Emphasizing nation's rights and priviledges, he suggested that steps should be taken to remove socio-economic backwardness from the country. He believed in the political freedom of man. He advised Indians to have self-freedom in thought and action.

Since the Indian society was multilingual and multi-religious, people professing different religions should co-exist together with perfect harmony. Political stability, social advancement and economic progress could be achieved in a society only when it was free from social evils like polygamy, caste system, child marriage, Sati system etc. To achieve his goal, he struggled very hard. As a true nationalist, he did not desist from adopting any means to achieve his goal. He believed that customs, traditions and usages responsible for the schism or division among the people should be scrapped and a new social morality based on social

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justice and economic equality evolved. To him, the purpose of religion and politics should be to establish a welfare society. Rabindranath Tagore described Roy as the ‘Prophet of Indian Nationalism.’

3.4.7 Internationalism

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a strong believer in the freedom of the human race. He regarded the whole world to be one large single family and all nations its members. He felt that the economic conditions of the downtrodden living in different countries of the world should be improved. A man of very broad and clear ideas, he was a true internationalist. He keenly felt the need of an instrument that would ensure and guarantee peace in the world. As an individual needs the help of his neighbour to resolve his family or domestic problems, so also a nation at the time of crisis should seek the help of other nations. He wanted that people belonging to different races, speaking different languages and professing different religions should live together so that peace and happiness would be established. He believed that religion could bring peace to mankind. He also suggested that a central organization or a Congress of all nations should be formed so that it could amicably resolve all crises that confronted the nations. He in his own limited way conceived an idea of a League of Nations or United Nations. According to him, all the disputes affecting different nations should be settled by an international organization. He was the champion of internationalism. He wanted universal religion synthesis of human culture and ideas, end of imperialism and peaceful co-existence of nations. He really advocated the principle of collaboration of mankind.

The end of the First World War and the Second World War witnessed the formation of the League of Nations and the United Nations respectively. These shows how progressive were his political ideas and how prophetic he was. He was indeed the first man of the eighteenth century who was in true sense of the term ‘an internationalist’. He strongly believed that not isolation but interdependence and interaction among the individuals and the nations would enrich the culture and strengthen as well as ensure a civilization of high order. Due to his love for internationalism and freedom he supported the British Reform Bill. Probably the same spirit motivated him to support the people involved in struggle for their independence. He supported the people of South Africa who fought against their colonial master Spain and the people of Greece who wanted to throw off the Turkish Yoke. He strongly criticized

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and condemned the British occupation of the Ireland. All this illustrates how deeply he was involved in international politics but also of the whole world.

3.4.8 Father of Indian Journalism

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the ‘Father of Indian Journalism’. He believed in the freedom of press. He edited a newspaper in Bengali named ‘Sambad Kaumudi’. He was also the editor of Mirat-ul-Akbar. When restrictions were imposed on the publications of newspapers, he reacted sharply and criticized the British authorities vehemently. In his editorials, he reflected important social, political, economic, religious and other problems with which the Indians were grossly entangled. This brought public consciousness. His writings were so powerful that people were moved by this.

3.4.9 Views on Economic Development

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a liberal economic thinker. He wanted the state intervention to protect the property of the individuals. He advocated the right of Hindu women over property. As a liberal economic thinker, he was deeply concerned with the economic strangulation of the poor in the country. That is why he had resented strongly against the existing revenue system of the country whose first preys were the landlords.

SAQ :

Do you agree with Raja Ram Mohan Roy that education and economic development are interrelated ?

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Roy believed that with the help of Western technology and financial assistance, India could be in a position to improve her economic conditions. But he was deeply distressed when he found that India was exploited by the British regime. Nevertheless, he had a tremendous faith in the people. He felt that they should be educated so that they could grow with a new vision, a new thinking and a new attitude. As a true patriot he strives for all round development of the country i.e.

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educational, social, political, economic administrative etc.

Check Your Progress

1. Who said that Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the first man of a new regenerate India?
2. What was the name of the international organization formed aftermath the First World War?
3. What was the name of the international organization formed aftermath the Second World War?
4. What was the name of the newspaper that Ram Mohan Roy edited and it was in which language?
5. Discuss the contributions of Raja Ram Mohan Roy in the political sphere of India.

3.5 Summing Up

Rabindranath Tagore made a remarkable observation on the impact of Raja Ram Mohan Roy on the modern age in India: -“It takes time to understand and appreciate any rare personality who comes at an age when his country has lost itself and contradicts its own majesty. His voice sounds painfully discordant only because the people have allowed the strings of their own instrument to slacken and fail to make them harmonize with the music of truth which once originated in the sublime height of their nature.” In a similar manner, Sophie Dobson Collat, the English biographer of Roy made a brilliant estimate of the life and contributions of Roy in the following manner- “Ram Mohan stands in history as the living bridge over which India marched from her unmeasured past to her incalculable future. He was the arch which spanned the gulf that yawned between ancient caste and modern humanity, between superstition and science, between despotism and democracy, between immobile custom and a conservative progress, between... Polytheism and Theism. He was the mediator of the people, harmonizing in his person, often, by means of his own solitary sufferings, the conflicting tendencies of immemorial tradition and of inevitable enlightenment. Roy embodied the new spirit which rose from the compulsory mixture of races, faiths and civilizations. He embodied its freedom of inquiry, its thirst for science, its large human sympathy, its pure and gifted ethics, along with its reverent but not uncritical regard for the past, and prudent disinclination towards revolt.

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He was a genuine outgrowth of the old Hindu society in a soil watered by new influences, and in an atmosphere charged with unwanted forcing power, but still a true scion of the old stock. He was no merely occidentalized oriental, no Hindu polished into the doubtful semblance of a European. He was just a spiritual Eurasian.” Thus, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, presents a most instructive and inspiring study for the New India of which he was the type and pioneer. There can be little doubt that whatever future the destinies have in store for India, that future will be largely mapped by the life and work of Ram Mohan Roy, and the future of India alone.

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Unit-4

Dadabhai Naoroji: Economic Critique of Colonialism

Unit Structure :

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Objectives

4.3 Naoroji's Economic Critique of Colonialism

4.4 The Drain Theory

4.5 Dadabhai Naoroji's political nationalism and Self-rule or Swaraj:

4.6 Summing Up

4.7 References and Suggested Readings

4.1 Introduction

Dadabhai Naoroji was an Indian social political leader and one of the foremost patriarchs of Indian nationalism. He was born on September 4, 1825 in Bombay Presidency. As a fighter for Indian causes he took the initiative to establish India's first political association, the Bombay Association in 1853. Educated at Elphinstone College, Bombay, he was appointed as professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy in the same college in 1854. Dadabhai Naoroji, the leading nationalist was the founder member of Indian National Congress, established in 1885. He was the first Indian to be elected as a member of British House of Commons in 1892 from Central Finsbury to represent the cause of India in England. Known as the 'Grand Old Man of India', Naoroji became popular as a professor, businessman, administrator, member of British Parliament and President of Indian National Congress (three times in 1886, 1893 and 1906). This great political figure and a spokesman for Indian nationalism died on June 30, 1917.

4.2 Objectives

This unit is an attempt to analyze the economic and political ideas of Dadabhai Naoroji. After reading this unit you will be able to-

- Explain his views on economic nationalism
- Discuss his critical views on colonialism
- Explain his drain theory
- Discuss his ideas of political nationalism.

4.3 Naoroji: Economic Critique of Colonialism:

Dadabhai Naoroji was a critique of British economic policy in India. In his famous thesis, “Poverty and Un-British Rule in India”, he presented a vivid, authentic and critical account of the poverty in India and the reasons behind its occurrence. Although Naoroji was influenced by the liberalism and an admirer of western political values, he soon realized that British rulers were not interested to fulfill the aspirations of Indian people. According to Gauba because of his western education, Naoroji had become an admirer of those rationalist principles which the British political philosophers had evolved from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. These implied that a government is not entitled to govern simply because it wields immense power. Its right to govern the people is based on the fact that it protects their life, liberty and property and enhances their happiness; that is why people owe their affectionate loyalty to the government. (Gauba, 2021). However, Naoroji believed that an alien rule is not preferable. As the condition for self-rule was not present in India he expected that British rule with their intense love of liberty, nobility of soul transform India into a modern state. “But a closer analysis of the situation revealed that the British government had not cared to fulfill its obligation. It had set aside all the promises that it had made to the subjects of its colony. It was engaged in the blatant exploitation of the natural and human resources of India. This had led the colossal drain of India’s resources to England’ (Gauba, 2021).

Stop To Consider

Liberalism

Liberalism is a political philosophy which insists on ‘liberty’ of individual as the first and foremost goal of public policy. It promotes freedom of individual from all restraints. It believes in non-interference of state in the life of individual and upholds the principle of free-market economy. The basic philosophy of liberalism is to protect individual’s right to life, liberty and property by the state. As a political ideology it was evolved in the seventeenth century in the west to protect the natural rights of people. The core principles of liberalism can be found in the writings of John Locke, Adam Smith, J. S. Mill, Jeremy Bentham, T.H. Green, Hobhouse, Laski, Spencer, Hayek, Nozick, Friedman and many others.

Naoroji’s nationalism was guided by the economic explanation of the

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colonial exploitation of Indian resources under British rule. Colonialism was responsible for all miseries and poverty of Indian People. The foreign rule imposed heavy political and economic burden for India with huge public debt and expenses for running the colonial administration both in India and England. For this reason Naoroji pledged for the check of drainage of wealth from India for which in his view Indian's were deprived of natural rights. It can be better understood by analyzing his drain theory which became the symbol of Indian nationalism.

Stop To Consider

Nationalism

Nationalism implies an ideology that believes in a sentiment of an individual's attachment to his nation. It is a doctrine which involves the criterion for the determination of the unit of population proper to enjoy a government exclusively of its own, for the legitimate exercise of power in the state and for the right organization of a society of states. Briefly, the doctrine holds that the humanity is naturally divided into nations, that nations are known by certain characteristics which can be ascertained, and that the only legitimate type of government is national self-government.

SAQ

Why did Dadabhai Naoroji admire the British political tradition?

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Check Your Progress:

1. How many times DadabhaiNaoroji was the President of Indian National Congress?
2. In which year DadabhaiNaoroji was elected as a member of British Parliament?
3. Write true or false.
 - a. DadabhaiNaoroji opposed liberal political tradition
 - b. DadabhaiNaoroji demanded for the check of drainage of resources from India to England.

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4.4 The Drain Theory :

In his “Poverty and Un-British Rule in India”, published in 1901, Dadabhai Naoroji spoke about the wealth drain with statistical analysis. Naoroji launched a campaign against the drain which he regarded as the fundamental evil of British rule in India. In the 19th century the drain of wealth from India to England took the form of unreturned surplus of export over import. He opined that the drain of India’s economic assets retarded the growth of capital formation in the country and led its ever-growing poverty (Naoroji, 1901).

Naoroji spoke about two types of drain of India’s resources- a) Economic drain and b) Moral drain. Economic drain implied that a huge amount of money earned by the British Government in India was forcibly transferred to England. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, this amount was estimated to be ranging between £ 30 million and £ 40 million a year. (Gaubha, 2021). This vast amount of wealth were taken away from India in different forms-

1. Pensions to British officers,
2. Payments to the war office for the maintenance of British troops in India,
3. Expenses of Government of India in England and
4. Earnings send by British professional classes from India.

This drain of India was financially a destructive process. (Varma, 1992). Heavy taxation was imposed upon the Indians to serve the interest of the colonizers. Varma opined that it virtually neutralized the margin for saving which could under the normal functioning of the economic process, have been retained in the country for the purpose of capital formation. But the capitalization of profits and surplus was not allowed in the country. Without capital accumulation it was impossible to foster the industrial development of the country. (Varma, 1992).

Stop To Consider

The Statement on Drain

“This drain consists of two elements- first, that arising from the remittances by European officials of their savings and for their expenditure in England for their various want both there and in India; from pensions and salaries paid in England; and from government

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expenditure in England and India. And the second, that arising from similar remittances by non-official Europeans. As the drain prevents India from making any capital, the British by bringing back the capital which they have drained from India itself, secure almost a monopoly of all trade and important industries, and thereby further exploit and drain India, the source of the evil being the official drain.

Dadabhai Naoroji (1901)

Gauba said that the moral drain implied that all appointments to higher positions in the Indian administration were reserved for the British nationals. Indians could at best become clerks, coolies and labours whose income was hardly enough to make both ends meet not to speak of attaining a reasonable standard of living! Under these circumstances, there was little opportunity for Indians to have money accumulation or capital formation. In the absence of indigenous capital and industry, Indians had no chance to have any share in prosperity. Then the British who gained valuable experiences in the course of their career as administrators and professional experts were lost as they returned to England after their retirement. (Gauba, 2021). In his view the 'devastating British policy of economic and moral drain was draining away the life-blood of India in a continuous stream and the public debt of the country had been constantly widening. Thus the policy of Britain was indeed blood-sucking.' (Varma, 1992). The exploitation and destruction of the heart of India was carried out under the 'attractive phraseology' of 'civilization, progress and what not' by the Britishers. (Naoroji, 1901). Moreover according to Varma the policy of England in India was not only to drain India of her capital but to initiate a policy whereby this same capital would be utilized for the process of further drain. This complicated process of exploitation was bound to lead to the total economic ruin of the country. (Varma, 1992).

Opposing the drain of Indian resources, Dadabhai Naoroji argued this as injustice to India and it is against the maxims of political economy. In his view India solely needs the aid of foreign capital; but it is English capital that she needs, and not the English invasion to come also and to eat up both capital and produce. (Naoroji). The cruel exploitation of India's resources had subjected millions of people to starvation, famines, disease and death. The British rulers had imposed tax on a thing of common use like salt, and this was responsible for making common man's life miserable. The opium trade was also poisoning bulk of people. (Gauba, 2021).

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Dadabhai Naoroji criticizing the British colonial policy pleaded that the inhabitants of the country should be helped in preparing themselves for developing her resources. He wanted India to be free from all the miseries and poverty. In early period, Naoroji was an admirer of British political tradition based on the notion of justice and liberty. But he was against the system of administration run by the Britishers in India which was destructive and exploitative. He acknowledged the British contributions regarding western education, administration, railways, telegraphs, hospitals etc. However the final outcome of this rule compelled him to write that ‘the present system of government is destructive and despotic to the Indians and un-British and suicidal to Britain.’ (Naoroji, 1901). He wanted to check the drain and end the ‘bleeding’. So he expressed that once the drain was ended India could become a civilized and advanced nation with the help of British modern administration and that would be beneficial for both Britain and India. He opined that if it were British rule and not un-British rule which governed us, England would be benefited ten times more than it is. (Naoroji, 1985).

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SAQ

What is drainage of wealth?

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4.5 Dadabhai Naoroji’s Political Nationalism and Self-Rule or Swaraj:

As a result of his discontentment to the un-British rule in India, Dadabhai Naoroji insisted on granting ‘Swaraj’ or self-rule to India. He expected that England would honestly, honourably, conscientiously and faithfully fulfill the promises and pledges that she had made to India. (Varma, 1992). But after years of reconciling effort and persuasion of British authorities, he was disappointed from lack of any reform on the part of British rulers. (Islahi, 1995). He realized that without the acquisition of the right of self government India could not be saved from the miseries and poverty. He warned that a despotic and autocratic government could not continue as the ‘evil system of government’ was leading to bankruptcy

and ruin. (Naoroji, 1985). It was evident from his speeches in different Congress sessions where he asserted that, ‘Without self-government the Indians can never get rid of their present drain, and consequent impoverishment, misery and destruction.’(Naoroji, 1985). Thus he transformed his ideas from economic nationalism to political nationalism without which the former cannot be achieved. He wanted the Britishers to allow India to run her own administration under their superior control and guidance.

In 1906 Congress session at Calcutta, Naoroji declared that ‘Swaraj’ must be the goal of Indian National Congress. The main political association which led the anti-colonial movement in India aroused the feeling of nationalism among the Indians under the leadership of Dadabhai Naoroji. In the Calcutta session Naoroji stressed three important rights of Indian people. The first was the right to the increasing appointment of Indians in the public services and the placing of all departmental administration in their hands. The second was the right to increase representation of Indians so that India may have legislative assemblies on the model of self-governing colonies. The third was the right to just financial relations between India and Great Britain. (Varma, 1992). Naoroji advised the Indians to agitate through petitions and meetings against unjust rule, to achieve the goal of self-rule. He had still faith on British conscience and hoped that India would be granted ‘responsible self-government in the shortest possible period’.

Naoroji also emphasized on education of people as it generates in the mind of them a consciousness of right. He urged for the concept of natural rights of people. In his view Indian people must enjoy the right to self-rule. He expected that ‘spread of education and the accumulation of administrative experiences would hasten the process of attainment of Swaraj. Hence he demanded free and compulsory primary education and free higher education of every kind’.(Varma, 1992).

Check Your Progress:

1. Write a few lines on Dadabhai Naoroji’s economic drain and moral drain.
2. Comment on Dadabhai Naoroji as an economic critique on colonialism.
3. Explain Dadabhai Naoroji’s drain theory.
4. Write down of Dadabhai Naoroji’s political ideas of self rule.

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4.6 Summing up

Dadabhai Naoroji was a pioneering nationalist who shaped the Indian nationalist movement against colonialism. Being an economic critique of colonialism, Naoroji developed his drainage of wealth theory. His speeches in British Parliament Congress sessions and various meetings reflect his experiences and evolving thought regarding the political and economic circumstances of despotic colonial policies in India. His economic explanation of India's miserable condition and poverty through drain theory, his efforts to speak out for India's causes representing India in British parliament and the radical transformation of his thinking from pro-British outlook to win Swaraj show his wholehearted engagement to fight for Indians throughout his life. He was the person who laid down the economic foundation of Indian politics. This great patriot, having full faith on British liberal principles did not hesitate to criticize the exploitative nature of British policies in India in a non-violent, peaceful way, guided by moral principles.

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Unit 5 :**Pandita Ramabai: Social Reform and Women's issues**

Unit Structure :

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Objectives
- 5.3 Thought of Pandita Ramabai
- 5.4 Conversion of Ramabai into Christianity
- 5.5 Influential Leadership of Ramabai
- 5.6 Role of Women as per Ramabai's belief
- 5.7 Ramabai's Social Identity
- 5.8 Summing up
- 5.9 References and Suggested Readings

Pandita Ramabai: (April 23, 1858 - April 5, 1922)

"It is not strange my countrymen, that my voice is small, for you have never given a woman the chance to make her voice strong." -- Pandita Ramabai

5.1 Introduction

Pandita Ramabai was one of the most pivotal social reformers and woman's rights activists in Maharashtra. Ramabai was an educationist and scholar even before she turned 20. Her father Anant Shashtri Dongre, a Sanskrit scholar educated her in Sanskrit texts going against the societal norms. Her knowledge and reading in Sanskrit earned her the titles of 'Pandita' and 'Sarasvati'- the highest titles in Sanskrit learning. Ramabai was drawn into the world of social reform early in life. She travelled widely in Calcutta and Bengal Presidency, addressing women for getting educated and empowered. She worked rigorously for women's emancipation. She and her brother had toured the country to spread awareness about female education and social reform.

When she came to Pune after her husband's demise, in 1882, she founded the Arya Mahila Samaj in Pune, a woman's society which worked for woman's education and against the oppression of child marriage. It showed how inclusive her idea of education was and how committed she was for the cause of social reform. She believed in the idea of 'self-reliance' for real progress of society. Ramabai also got involved in Missionary activity

later in life.

Pandita Ramabai, regarded as the first feminist thinker and champion of women's right and education was one of the remarkable figures produced by the nineteenth century in the history of India. Ramabai left her mark in the arena of women issue with her ideologies and work during that time when women education was almost non-existent. Being a radical reformer she always denounced the existing institutions throughout her life which is evident from her inter-caste marriage as well as her refusal to accept conventional widowed life. She became a living legend during her life time with her courage, intellect and hard work. Her contribution was enough to win her a place in the history of India

Pandita Ramabai was fortunate enough as she was born in such a family where liberal views was nurtured at least with regard to women's education and where child marriage was also discouraged. Such upbringing quite naturally had great impact on her thinking throughout her life that leads her to appear as the foremost champion of women's rights in India.

5.2 Objectives

Pandita Ramabai was born into the higher caste of Hindu. After the death of her parents, she shocked her community by marrying a lower caste Hindu. There, she was introduced to Christianity by reading the book " Gospel of Luke" from her husband's library. After his death, she moved to America where she wrote a book The High Caste Hindu Woman to shed light on the atrocities against women in India. She dedicated her life to the Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission in India, Maharashtra, which provides education, housing, and provisions to widows. After reading this unit you will be able to :

- Understand the thought of Pandita Ramabai.
- Discuss about conversion of Ramabai into Christianity.
- Describe the influential leadership of Ramabai.
- Analyse the role of women as per Ramabai belief.
- Examine Ramabai's social identity.

Stop to Consider

Educational and Missionary Activities of Ramabai:

Ramabai's idea of education was very comprehensive in scope. She

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propagated the ideas of women's need for social awareness and self-improvement, through the Arya Mahila Samaj. "Self-reliance" was her password for progress which ran through the Stree Dharma Neeti and formed part of the programme outlined at the end of The High-caste Hindu Woman and translated into the organisation of the Sharada Sadan and the Mukti Mission. Apart from this Missionary activity was a later phase of Ramabai's career. Although a deep religiosity had served as an anchor to Ramabai's life since her childhood, but Ramabai was very dissatisfied with the Hindu tradition of personal belief and practice, which tends to be exclusive rather than inclusive. But Christianity inevitably tend to proselytization, because the Anglican Church consciously groomed her for a missionary career in India.

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5.3 Thought of Pandita Ramabai:

Ramabai was very much concerned about the plight of widows in India. She wrote in her book that the widow must wear a single course of garment white, red or brown. She must eat only one meal during the twenty four hours of a day. She must never take part in family feasts and jubilees with others. She must not show herself to people on auspicious occasions. Because other people thinks it unlucky to behold a widow's face before seeing any other object in the morning. Even a man will postpone his journey if his path happens to be crossed by a widow. These terrible plights of widowed directly force her to appear as the chief architect of women's rights in India and she throughout her life continued her battle against the humiliating and unjustified rules that it inflicted upon widowed women and tried utmost to revive their status. In order to free the Indian society from the shackles of age-old faulty customs and traditions such as child-marriage and prohibition of widowed re-marriage she laid the foundations of women's liberation of India.

She expressed her view by saying that a women of high and low caste, as a class, were considered to be very bad. And that they could not get Moksha as men. The only of their getting this much desired liberation from Karma and its results that is, countless millions of births and deaths and untold sufferings, was the worship of their husbands. The husband is said to be the woman's GOD; there is no other GOD for her. This God may be worst sinner and a great criminal; still he is her God, and she must worship him. She through her writings, publishing pamphlets,

and lectures strongly denounced the oppression of women legitimized by these ancient sacred scriptures totally based on patriarchal norms and told the people what should be accomplished so that women would be able to have more freedom and lead a respectable life

She opined that women should be admitted to medical colleges as in gender segregated Indian society the social condition of Indian women was such that only women could medically treat them. In 1883, Pandita Ramabai along with her daughter Monorama sailed for England with the intention to study medicine wishing to be a physician so that she could be able to return India as a doctor and serve the needy women. In England she stayed for a year and half. Unfortunately her dream to be a doctor could not be materialized because of her alleged defective hearing.

SAQ

1. What are the major activities and thoughts of Pandita Ramabai for the emancipation of women? Discuss (60 words)

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5.4 Conversion of Ramabai into Christianity

In England she was assisted by the Anglican Community of St. Mary the Virgin in Wantage. The sisters not only gave her material support but also helped her in improving her English language. She was made the professor of Sanskrit in the Cheltenham Female College and at the same time she also studied higher mathematics, English literature etc. In England she was also attracted to Christianity the seed of which has been sown long ago while she was living with her husband in Silchar, Assam, shortly after her marriage. Ultimately in England she embraced Christianity along with her daughter and baptized. The search for an alternative religion ultimately pushed her towards Christianity. Meera Kosambi wrote “Possibly there was a hidden dimension to her conversion, born out of personal loneliness and social isolation, never belonging to a kin group or caste Community. Ramabai perhaps saw the community of sisters as supportive social structure she had missed all her life.” Her feminism was freely reconciled with the new faith wrote and she came to realize

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that Christ could truly transform and uplift the downtrodden women of India. Having already lost her faith in patriarchal reading of Hindu scriptures, she found the Bible was a radical instrument for Pandita Ramabai of change. She expressed that Christ had entrusted her a great job—the job of a sweeper to sweep away the age old ill practices against women.”

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Check Your Progress

1. When did Pandita Ramabai born?
2. She was one of the ten woman delegates of the congress session of 1889. (Write True or False)
3. Which year did Pandita Ramabai get the title of Sarasvati?

5.5 Influential Leadership of Ramabai

Pandita Ramabai was one who knew how to use her own influence, leverage on existing power structures, inspired the creation of new power structures to have her impact continue on people. She knew how to appeal to the best of the human heart to inspire action irrespective of caste, religion, country or race. Like Cicero she understood how to play with “power structures based on virtues like wisdom, justice, courage and seamliness” (Nelson, 2015). She is one who did not allow the painful past and experiences of loss put her down.

It is true that Ramabai in her life time created not only friendship, justice or liberality for the hundreds of the girls and child mothers she empowered, she also created an opportunity, dignity and indeed a life for them. The ten commitments of self-leadership certainly was important to Ramabai among them was spiritual, mental, relational fitness and mentoring others. This was at a time when these concepts were uncommon, but in many ways she embodied and lived by them.

SAQ

1. What were her major contributions for the development of the widows? (40 words)

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Gardner speaks of two tasks at the heart of leadership - "goal setting and motivation", although it is not easy to find a leader who embodies all, Ramabai certainly knew how to motivate people and keep them excited about a vision. "This world certainly is motivated by highly motivated people, who believe very strongly or who want something very much" that they will refuse to be spectators.

In addition, she had the capacity and courage to face authorities and those in leadership. Romans says "there is no authority except that which God has established" and like this, she was able to work with the Education Commission of India to improve the conditions for the girls child in India at her time.

In the year 1882, the government of India appointed a commission (The Hunter Education Commission) that was to look into education in India and Ramabai gave evidence before the commission suggesting that the teachers should be trained for their jobs and more women should be appointed by schools. She also demanded that there should be more women in the medical field for some treatments for women required the presence of other women. Ramabai's advocacy for woman's education was so strong that even Queen Victoria took notice of it. She fearlessly testified in front of the British, saying that-

"I am the child of a man who had to suffer a great deal on account of advocating Female Education..... I consider it my duty, to the very end of my life, to maintain this cause, and to advocate the proper position of woman in this land."

Ramabai's work earned her a great many followers. In 1887, while she was touring America delivering lectures on woman's education, The American Ramabai Association was formed by her fan base in Boston. In America, Ramabai wrote the book, '**The High Caste Hindu Woman**', which criticized the Brahminical patriarchy in the state of Maharashtra. Her book helped her collect around 30000 dollar which she used to build a residential school for Hindu widows. In 1889 Ramabai returned back to India and on 11th March, 1889 she established Sharada Sadan , a home of learning for widows, in Mumbai. It was the first organisation to provide widows with a formal school education and vocational training. She started this with an aim to empower young widowed women. She taught the women to read, write, learn history and environment, among others. Sharada Sadan was the first institution in India to provide residential school for Brahmin women, mainly widows,

but also unmarried girls. It was the first organisation to provide them formal and regular school education and vocational training. It not only assured economic safety for women, but also social acceptance for their livelihoods. The Mukti Mission, another organisation by Ramabai, was set up to extend the work of the Sarada Sadan. Widows were encouraged to be independent, and were taught a variety of skills. Under Mukti Mission of Ramabai, widows were encouraged not only to be independent, but were taught a variety of skills – from carpentry to running a printing press, the kind of skill sets that women were barred from acquiring and learning then. She also designed a remedial curriculum which included subjects like physiology and botany. It also included learning about one's own body and physical world around them. Industrial training, printing, carpentry, tailoring, masonry, wood-cutting, weaving and needlework, as well as training in farming and gardening was taught.

Being exposed to the patriarchal structures of the Hindu caste society, Ramabai converted to Christianity in 1883. In India at that time Christianity was seen as the religion of whites and Indians of the lowest castes. She received severe criticism from the higher section of society for her decision. This marginalised her from the official histories of western India and especially Maharashtra for betraying her caste and community. Despite the controversies surrounding her work, Ramabai continued to work as a social reformer. In 1919, she was awarded the Kaisar-I-Hind title for her work. Another important fact is that she was also one of only ten women delegates in the Indian National Congress Party.

Pandita Ramabai was a truly remarkable woman who pioneered women's education and rebelliously championed for women's rights and empowerment. She combined ideas she had learned from the sisters and friends of different ethnicity and race at Wantage. Ramabai saw caste as a great flaw in Hindu society. It not only saw physical work and labour as denouncing, but it also led to false ideas of valuing intellect and merit. She also believed that caste associations promoted narrow self-interest and prevented the development of a democratic spirit in the real sense.

Ramabai's work in the educational sector was commendable and greatly impressed her contemporaries, despite her connection to Christianity that irked many prominent personalities in western India. She was of the opinion that all these men were angry at her because her students were from upper caste communities. Had they been from other lower

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caste communities, they would not have bothered at all, is what she believed.

Stop To consider

Pandita Ramabai as Woman's Activist and a Valiant Traveller

Pandita Ramabai was a valiant traveller as she was in Bengal, Maharashtra, England or in U.S during the last quarter of the 19th century. Her journey to U.S from March 1886 to March 1888 was very significant in her life. She became a well-known personality by the time she decided to travel to U.S. She travelled to U.S in order to collect funds for her projects in India focusing on empowerment of widows. The New York Times and Philadelphia Bulletin published the news of the arrival of this intelligent woman. Once she also got an opportunity to stay with an American family. Ramabai's writings also reflected an interest in Economics. Although she very much admired the norms and practices of American society, but she did not blindly praised the society. She definitely pointed out several faults. Alcoholism and tobacco use, impoverishment of the Native Americans and blacks, gender inequality and superstitious practices in American society found mention in her writings. Although she received funding from generous American citizens and institutions, Ramabai was not afraid to call them out on unfair practices.

Ramabai not only studied the American society but also tried to analyse if their economic model would work in India. She correctly judged and understood the growing economy of America and her predictions about the country becoming a superpower turned out to be true in later period. Interestingly, she did not have a home to return to. But she had a country and absolute fondness towards it. The relationship between her and her country was a unique one. Although she expressed righteous anger against the unjust practices she observed and experienced in India. But her affection toward India are also evident in her travelogue.

There have been many books and scholarly works on the life of Pandita Ramabai by writers and scholars from both the east and the west. Some of the prominent ones being the works of Meera Kosambi and Uma Chakravarti. Feminist scholarship remains in debt to the philosophy and work of Pandita Ramabai. Her vision continues to drive the feminist movement and scholarship even today, as it also continues to impact the lives of many women and young girls. She remains one of the most prominent women leader of Maharashtra and India.

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Check Your Progress

1. Kaisar -I- Hind title for community service in ----- awarded by British Govt. of India to Ramabai?
2. In which year Ramabai established 'Arya Mahila Samaj' in Pune?
3. Ramabai's first Marathi book (Stri Dharam Niti), was published in the year-----?
4. During her Britain tour she converted into Christianity (25th September, 1883), she changed her name -----?

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5.6 Role of Women as per Pandita Ramabai's Belief:

Ramabai said that the high cast women were not only passive and inferior, but they also needed to be controlled and strictly disciplined. It should be noted that inferiority of women is not inborn; rather it was enforced on them by cultural practices and consequent attitudes prevalent in community. Women should forever be kept in obedience, should not be given any knowledge, should not be well educated, should not know about religion and should not mix with men. That is why women from the dominant classes have not be involved in any struggle for their rights, despite the fact that they did not have any share in most of the privileges of their caste. Therefore, women were powerless. Some of the prominent women in public life did not have the quality of leadership, and their involvement was based upon their husbands' support and encouragement. This would become clear in contrast to Ramabai's life and activities. Still, they had contributed somehow to the cause. For example, Savitribai Phule (1831-1897) helped her husband Jyotiba Phule to run a girls' school and pioneered the rehabilitation of the untouchable castes of Western India. Ramabai Ranade headed Seva Sadan for women but her husband did not encourage women's participation in political life.

Regarding the role of British women in colonial India, they are usually located in their chosen variation of 'civilizing mission', or the White Woman's Burden. These white women's burdens were portrayed as 'helpless victims awaiting the representation of their plight. Their main concerns, which were the attention of British press and journals, such as the Englishwoman's Reviews.

Ramabai's relationship with the British women was as complex as with the male figures since she "was unwilling to submit to any authority, English or Indian, male or female"

5.7 Ramabai's Social Identity:

Pandita Ramabai was the outcome of a cross-cultural experience, and consequently she had many identities. Her experience as a high-caste Indian woman, a widow, a single mother, and a champion for women's rights are of great value for those interested in learning about Indian women. Moreover, because of her relationship with both the West and India, she offered a new interpretation of both worlds. Primarily, Ramabai "had initially operated within the prevalent patriarchal socio cultural matrix, as seen from her advice to mothers in her book, *Stri Dharma Niti* (Morals for Women)". Nevertheless, she was extremely independent minded in thought and in action and certainly an exception to the stereotype of oppressed Indian woman that was internationally popular.

Through all her life, she never looked angry at her own divided country. She looked at her own society, country and government and pointed out important lessons that India needed to learn. She rejected the prescribed roles for women of her jati, the social and religious barriers between the various jatis, and the domination of religious texts and rituals by males. Differently from her relationship with British women, Ramabai found solidarity with American women and some Hindu women due to "their common struggle to understand the sources of knowledge production about woman and womankind and the hostility of men to many of their reforms"

In short, Ramabai's position at the intersections of several communities allowed her writings and personality to introduce the colonial space from an insider's perspective and the Western world to Indians from the outsider's perspective. Besides that, her writings were in clear contrast to the typical British discourses²² on the "other" and the ways of representing Indian culture.

SAQ

1. How did Pandita Ramabai break the stereotype? (40 words)

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5.8 Summing Up

To impact our world is to understand, expand and apply the “formal and informal” power by creating not only a “holding environment” but direct attention, test reality, manage conflicts, manage information and channel it for the greater good.

Cyrus the great encouraged leaders to “talk less act more”, mere talk does not breed action, Cyrus knew well that leaders need not talk much but listen and do and be decisive by so rally people towards action. This was well demonstrated as her work attracted interest from people across the world and forever her legacy lives.

Several women’s groups were greatly moved by her stories, contributions and sympathized with her cause. Soon the American Ramabai Association was formed to give her financial assistance to materialize her vision to start a home in India where the widows from the high caste families could receive education and become self-sufficient. She was the first to introduce the kindergarten system of education in India and also the pioneer to a vocational bias to give school education in India. The curriculum of Ramabai was also unique.. Literature based on ethical values was supposed to install in pupil the attributes of compassion and sensitivity as well as morality. Physiology and biology was incorporated in the system to inculcate adequate knowledge about the bodily anatomy and the natural world around us. Ramabai was the first woman translator in the world who translated the Bible from its original Hebrew language to Marathi language. She devoted twelve years of her life to this translation and she completed this final drafts only hours before she died in April 1922. Pandita Ramabai was the greatest woman produced by modern India and one of the greatest Indians in all history.

Check your progress

1. In which year she wrote ‘The cry of Indian woman’?
2. Mention the name of the newsletter she started?

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SAQ

2. What social ideas did Ramabai support (50 words)

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