

## 5. India : Social and Religious Reforms

### 5.1 Call for Social and Religious Reforms

### 5.2 Age of Reforms

### 5.3 Religious Reform Movements

### 5.4 Contribution of Social Reformers

### 5.5 Contribution of the rulers of Princely States in India

The contribution of the Indian social reformers who emerged from the first generation of Indians and who studied under the new educational system introduced by the British is very significant. The visionaries in the Indian society were aware that political freedom was not adequate without the internal transformation. It could happen through social and religious reforms. Hence, it is essential that we briefly review the social-religious reform movements. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's efforts was the beginning point of these movements.

### 5.1 Call for Social and Religious Reforms

The progress of Indian society was stunted because of superstitions, orthodox way of life, caste discriminations, false social notions, lack of curiosity and rationality that prevailed on large scale. The social reformers who were trained in the modern education system introduced by the British developed a different world view. They felt the need of creating a new Indian society which cherished the progressive values of 'Freedom, Equality, Fraternity and Humanism'. Therefore, they began to work towards creating mass awareness on various social and religious issues.

### 5.2 Age of Reforms

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was born in Bengal. He translated Sanskrit Upanishads in Bengali. The experience of witnessing



Raja Ram Mohan Roy

his brother's wife immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre (she followed the custom of *Sati*), perturbed him very deeply. Roy published a letter about the evil practice of *Sati*. He was the first Indian to

point out that none of the Indian religious texts mentioned the practice of *Sati* as a prescribed religious obligation. It is because of his efforts that a law was passed by the Governor General Lord William Bentinck, abolishing the practice of *Sati*, in 1829. He was also opposed to the practice of child marriage and segregation of women (*Purdah* system). He opened an English medium school. He also launched the first weekly periodical in Bengali. Later, he also launched another publication in Persian language. He also started a philosophical discussion circle, named '*Atmiya Sabha*'. This circle became a platform for searching

### You would like to know :

The British 'East India Company' made a resolution restricting the freedom of the press in 1824. An appeal was submitted to the government by Raja Ram Mohan Roy protesting against the resolution. The appeal was also signed by Chandra Kumar Thakur, Dwarka Nath Thakur, Har Chandra Ghosh, Gauri Charan Banerjee and Prasanna Kumar Thakur. When the Governor General ignored the appeal, Roy resubmitted it to the King of England. Two lines in that appeal are important. Roy wrote, 'The rulers usually oppose freedom of press because it may restrain their power'.

similarities value systems of different religions. In 1828, he founded 'Brahmo Samaj' and proclaimed that 'God is one and there is no need to worship idols to propitiate him'.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy spoke in support of the anti-colonial movements in the Spanish colonies in South America. He supported the liberal people in Spain who were against the monarchical rule. In 1830 he had gone to England to plead the case of the Mughal emperor. In recognition of this the Mughal emperor conferred the title of 'Raja' on him. He stayed in England for 2 years. Later, he went to France. In India, he unfolded Europe for the Indians and similarly, whenever in Europe, he unfolded India to Europeans.

Roy, being trained in the British regime, laid the foundation of modernity in India through his writings and work. Organisations like 'Manavdharm Sabha', 'Paramhansa Sabha' and 'Dnyanprasar Sabha' were inspired by his work.

### 5.3 Religious Reform Movements

**Prarthana Samaj :** 'Prarthana Samaj' had its origin in the 'Paramhansa Sabha'. It was founded by Dadoba Pandurang Tarkhadkar. The founding members of 'Prarthana Samaj' like Dr. Atmaram Pandurang, Justice M.G. Ranade, Dr. R.G. Bhandarkar opposed idol worship and emphasised on the principle of 'One Supreme God' (monotheism). They opened orphanages, schools for girls and night schools for workers. They focused on the importance of gender equality, wiping out caste discriminations and also on appreciating the value of mundane life.



**Dr.R.G.Bhandarkar**



**Mahatma Jotirao Phule**



**Savitribai Phule**

**Satyashodhak Samaj :** In 1873 Mahatma Jotirao Phule founded 'Satyashodhak Samaj' in Pune. It challenged intellectually and rationally unjust religious traditions. Mahatma Phule cracked a whip on the social customs and practices, which pushed the masses of Indian society into a miserable state. He showed a new path to the farmers, artisans, workers and various suppressed castes for their upliftment. The characteristics of the Satyashodhak Samaj included monotheism, rejection of the authority of Veda-Puranas, acceptance of rationality, opposition to dominance and intrusion of the priests and idol worship, pilgrimage, disbelief in miracles and opposition to the notion of a world after death. Mahatma Phule and Savitribai Phule took initiative in the movement of education for girls by starting a school for them. They emphasised on the fact that educating the girls is the only way to their emancipation. The work of educating girls was continued by Pandita Ramabai and Ramabai Ranade.

The social system in India was based on social inequality. Mahatma Phule worked for creating a social system based on equality. His work was continued by Gopalbaba Walangkar, who severely criticised untouchability in his book, 'Vital Vidhwamsan' (Destroying Defilement). Shivram Janba drew attention to the problems of the deprived women like Murali, Jogatini and Devdasi.



**Swami Dayanand Sarawati**

**Arya Samaj :** Swami Dayanand Sarawati founded 'Arya Samaj' in 1875. Arya Samaj regarded Vedas as holy books. Arya Samaj rejected discrimination based on caste difference and encouraged education of women, widow remarriage and inter-caste marriages.

**Ramkrishna Mission :** Swami Vivekanand established 'Ramkrishna Mission' in 1897. Ramkrishna mission focused more on serving needy people. They worked for people affected by famine, healthcare for the sick people, serving the weak, upholding the cause of education for women and spiritual betterment. It gave a message to the Indian youth to get up, to awaken and keep moving until the goal is achieved.



**Swami Vivekanand**

### Try to do this:

Collect information with the help of internet and teachers about these people : Pandit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Vishnushastri Pandit, Veereshlingam Pantalu and Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve.

## 5.4 Contribution of Social Reformers

**Sir Sayyad Ahmad Khan :** He was born in 1817 in Delhi. He was fluent in Urdu, Persian, Arabic and English. He had edited 'Ain-i-Akbari', a book about Emperor Akbar's administration,



**Sir Sayyad Ahmad Khan**

written by Abu'l Fazl. He established 'Scientific Society' for Muslims. Members of this society were scholars of History, Science and Political Economy. In 1869 he went to England. After returning from England he founded 'Mohammadan Anglo Oriental College' in 1875. Later it developed into 'Aligarh Muslim University'. He started a periodical entitled, 'Mohammadan Social Reformer'. He worked for the propagation of modern education, science and technology.

### Let us find out.

Collect information about 'Singh Sabha' that was founded in Amritsar.

**Tarabai Shinde :** She was born in 1850 at Buldhana. She wrote an essay comparing the situation of women and men. In this essay she wrote about women's rights. She expressed her thought in a very upfront manner. She did not just stop at discussing about reforms like widow remarriage, women's education, abolition of Sati but proceeded to demand gender equality. Considering the time frame of her essay, it was indeed, very brave step. She was the first Indian woman to challenge the patriarchal system. She opined that religious systems suppress women because religions are created by men. Mahatma Phule justified her thoughts by giving resolute answers to her critics.

### Maharshi Vitthal

**Ramji Shinde :** He opened Marathi schools and schools for technical training in Paral, Deonar in Mumbai, under the umbrella of 'Depressed Classes Mission' that was established by



**Maharshi Shinde**

him. He worked to create public awareness about the issues affecting the depressed classes, like entry in temples, (for example,



entry in Parvati temple in Pune) Agricultural conference and joint electorate system of depressed classes.

### **Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar :**

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had determined to work for creating a society based on the principles of 'Freedom, Equality and Fraternity'. He began a movement for fighting the caste system and bringing equality. He gave a message from the platform of



**Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar**

'Bahishkrut Hitkarini Sabha', "Educate yourself, get united and fight". This movement led to the 'Satyagraha of Chavadar Tank' at Mahad. He asserted that the public water bodies should be open to all. He burnt Manusmriti, the book that was the source of social inequality in India. In 1930 he launched a Satyagraha to open the 'Kala Ram Temple' in Nasik for all. Karmaveer Dadasaheb Gaikwad headed this Satyagraha.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar knew the importance of print media. For him it was the best instrument for creating public awareness and to build the movement for social equality. He began to publish his own newspapers, namely, 'Mooknayak', 'Bahishkrut Bharat', 'Janata' and 'Samata'. He formed, 'Independent Labour Party' for the good future of the working class. Later he formed 'Scheduled Caste Federation' to continue the work of shaping a society based on equality. In 1956, along with his numerous followers, he got initiated to Buddhism. Among his contributions the most important is the drafting of the 'Constitution of India'.

**Ramaswamy Naikar :** He was born in 'Erode', a city in Tamilnadu in 1879. He began his work in 1920 as a member of

the Congress. He became a follower of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy and worked for propagating the use of 'Swadeshi' and for temple entry to all. He participated in the 'Vykom Satyagraha' in Ramswamy Naikar Travancore, against untouchability. He started 'Swabhimani Andolan' in Tamilnadu. He fought against the varna system and child marriage. People began to address him as 'Periyar' (Great Soul) because of his magnanimous work. He was a great speaker and author. He took a radical position on the issues like women's rights and family planning.



**Ramswamy Naikar**

### **Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay :**

Kamaladevi was an active volunteer of Congress. She convinced Mahatma Gandhi to let women participate in the salt satyagraha. She herself participated in the satyagraha. She worked for women's rights throughout her life. She organised demonstrations to draw attention to the problems of workers and farmers. She was insistent on justice to female agricultural labourers. Similarly, she also insisted that women working in factories should have necessary facilities. She consistently followed up the issue of maternity leave to women. She was imprisoned for one year by the British for participating in the 'Quit India' movement.



**Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay**

## **5.5 Contribution of the rulers of Princely States in India**

### **Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad :**

Maharaja Sayajirao of Baroda State had adopted progressive policies. He made provision of free schooling and free hostels

for the students from the untouchable-tribal class. He also encouraged women's education and also opened a centre for physical training of women. He started various social programmes, such as, community feasts for all castes ('sahabhajan'), grampanchayat in every village, literate grampanchayat members, library in every village, compulsory primary education, compulsory physical training for boys and girls, ban on child marriage, widow remarriage, etc. He also provided courses for students from farmer families based on agro-industries. He passed a resolution for assuring a share in the ancestral property to married as well as widowed women.



**Maharaja Sayajirao  
Gaikwad**

**Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj :** The ruler of the princely state of Kolhapur, Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj supported Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's leadership, while leading the

'Non-brahminical Movement' in his state. He made a public declaration of reservations and passed a resolution for free and compulsory primary education. He also very strongly opposed the customs of 'Rotibandi' (restrictions on eating together), 'Betibandi' (restrictions on inter-caste marriage) and 'Vyavasaybandi' (restrictions on practicing occupations other than the ancestral occupation of one's caste). He made a law for inter-caste marriage. People in his state were permitted to choose any occupation.

Thus, the social reformers created a positive picture for the future of our country. It was necessary to build a society with firm intellectual and rational base for obtaining freedom from the British rule.



**Rajarshi Shahu  
Maharaj**

In the next lesson we are going to learn about the freedom movement of the Indians.

### **You would like to know**

As far as social reforms in Maharashtra are concerned, the list of people, who devoted their lives for it, is quite extensive. However, it is essential to mention a few prominent names among them. The contribution of Karmveer Bhaurao Patil and Punjabrao Deshmukh, Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve, Godavari Parulekar, Tarabai Modak and Anutai Wagh in the field of education deserves a special mention. Sant Gadge Maharaj and Rashtrasant Tukdoji Maharaj worked for creating

social awareness through their kirtans and bhajans. In the field of social service the work of Dr. Shivajirao Patwardhan, Dr. Baba Amte and Dr. Rajanikant Arole is of great value. Dr. Baba Adhav started the movement of 'Ek Gaon, Ek Panvatha' (One Village, One Water Source). R.D. Karve was on the forefront to inculcate the value of rationality in people in our social life. Efforts of Dr. Narendra Dabholkar sowed the seeds of 'Andhashraddha Nirmulan' movement (movement for elimination of superstition).

**Q.1 (A) Choose the correct alternative and rewrite the statement.**

1. Raja Ram Mohan Roy wrote an English letter against the .....  
(a) caste system (b) child marriage  
(c) practice of sati (d) segregation of women (Purdah system)
2. 'Arya Samaj' was founded by .....  
(a) Swami Vivekanand  
(b) Mahatma Jotirao Phule  
(c) Swami Dayanand Saraswati  
(d) Ramswamy Naikar

**(B) Find the incorrect pair from group 'B', and write the corrected one.**

**Group 'A'**

**Group 'B'**

- |                       |                               |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Brahmo Samaj       | Raja Ram Mohan Roy            |
| 2. Satyashodak Samaj  | Mahatma Jotirao Phule         |
| 3. Paramhansa Sabha   | Maharshi Vitthal Ramji Shinde |
| 4. Ramkrishna Mission | Swami Vivekanand              |

**Q.2 Write names of historical places/persons/events.**

1. The title conferred on Raja Ram Mohan Roy by the Mughal Badshah –

2. The one who founded 'Mohammadan Anglo Oriental College' –
3. The one who participated in 'Vykom Satyagraha' –
4. The one who made the law of free and compulsory primary education in Kolhapur Princely State –

**Q.3 Write short notes.**

1. Prarthana Samaj
2. Satyashodhak Samaj

**Q.4 Answer the following questions in detail.**

1. What were the social reforms on which Raja Ram Mohan Roy put a great emphasis?
2. Write about the contributions of Ramkrishna Mission.
3. Write about the contributions of Sir Sayyad Ahmad Khan.
4. Describe the contribution of Ramaswamy Naikar.

**Project**

Collect information about the efforts for women's education in Maharashtra, with the help of internet.







**Mahatma Jotirao Phule Wada - Pune**