

Chapter – 7: Women, Caste and Reform

- Now a days – most girls – go to school, colleges, universities – study with boys
- Girls – marry anyone they like – widows – remarry too – only condition – have to be adult
- All women, men – vote, stand for elections
- In reality – these right – not enjoyed by all
- Poor people – little to no access to education – many families – women cannot choose husbands
- 200 yrs ago – very different situation
- Most children – married at early age
- Hindu, Muslim men – marry more than one wife
- Women (widows) – encouraged – jump on funeral pyre (*chita*) of husbands – known as ‘sati’
- Right to property, education – restricted
- Many parts – people believed – educated women – become widow
- Difference between men and women – not the only one
- People – divided in castes – Brahmins, Kshatriyas – considered as ‘upper caste’
- Traders, moneylenders – Vaishyas – placed below them
- Peasants, artisans – weavers, potters – Shudras – at the lowest
- These lower caste – worked – menial (polluting) jobs – these jobs – not done by upper caste
- Many lower caste – considered ‘untouchables’ – not allowed – enter temple, draw water from common wells, bathe in ponds – seen as inferior
- 19th-20th centuries – many things – slowly changed

Working Towards Change

- Early 19th century – debates, discussion – social customs – changing
- One imp. Reason – development – new forms of communication – books, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, etc
- These new forms – much cheaper than manuscripts
- Ordinary people – read and write – own languages
- All kinds of issues – social, political, economic, religion – now – discussed and debated by men and women
- Discussion – reach out to more people – linked to movements
- These debates – started by reformers
- On such reformer – Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) – started reform association – Brahmo Sabha (Brahmo Samaj) – Calcutta
- These people – reformers – they believed – changes in society – very necessary
- Best way – ensure changes – persuade (make someone believe) people – give up old customs – adopt new ways of life
- Rammohun Roy – spread knowledge – Western education – bring – greater freedom and equality – women
- He wrote books – about problems – faced by women – burden of domestic work, stay at home, no education

Changing the lives of widows

- Rammohun Roy – too sad – problems of widow – started a campaign against – sati practice

- He was – well versed (have knowledge about) – Sanskrit, Persian, other Indian and European languages
- His writings show – practice of sati – no evidence in ancient texts
- Early 19th century – many British – against Indian traditions – agreed with Rammohun – 1829 – sati was banned
- His strategy – used by others as well
- Whenever – any practice – felt harmful – need to be changed – find a verse from ancient texts – disagree with the practice – then suggest – practice followed today – against earlier traditions
- Most famous reformer – Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar – used ancient texts – suggest – widow remarriage
- His suggestion – accepted by British – passed a law – 1856 – permit widow remarriage
- Those – against widow remarriage – opposed Vidyasagar – boycotted him
- Second half – 19th century – movement – favouring widow remarriage – spread to other parts
- Telugu areas – Madras presidency – Veerasalingam Pantulu – formed association – widow remarriage
- Same time – young reformers – Mumbai – worked – same cause
- North – Swami Dayanand Saraswati – started Arya Samaj – reform association – supported widow remarriage
- Number of widows – remarried – very low – those who did – not accepted by society

Girls begin going to school

- Reformers believed – necessary for girls – attend school
- Vidyasagar, Calcutta – other reformers, Bombay – set up schools for girls
- Mid-19th century – first schools opened for girls – people feared them
- They believed – going to schools – prevent girls from their domestic duties
- Other than that – girls – travel through public places – may corrupt (change in attitude) them
- During 19th century – women – taught at home by fathers or husbands – OR – taught themselves secretly
- Example – Rashsundari Debi – secretly learned to read and write
- Later years – 19th century – schools for girls – set up by – Arya Samaj, Punjab – Jyotirao Phule, Maharashtra
- Muslim families – North India – learnt reading Koran in Arabic – taught by women
- Some reformers – Mumtaz Ali – re-explain verses from Koran – support women's education
- Late 19th century – first Urdu novels written – encourage women – read in a language they understand

Women write about women

- Early 20th century – Muslim women – Begums of Bhopal – imp role – promoting education among women – started primary school for girls – Aligarh
- Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain – started schools for girls – Patna, Calcutta
- She believed – religious leaders – placed women – inferior places in society
- 1880s – Indian women – enter universities – some – became doctors – others – teachers
- Many women – write about – place of women in society
- Tarabai Shinde – taught at home – Poona – published a book – *Stripurushtulna* – comparison between men and women – wrote against – social differences between men and women

- Pandita Ramabai – scholar of Sanskrit – believed – Hinduism – against women – wrote a book about – miserable lives – upper caste Hindu women
- She started – widows’ home – Poona – provide shelter to widows – treated badly by husbands and relatives
- These women – trained – support themselves financially
- All this – alarmed the orthodox (traditional) people
- Hindu nationalists – believed – Hindu women – adopting Western ways – corrupt Indian culture
- Orthodox Muslims – worried about – impact (effect) of changes
- End 19th century – women themselves – working for reforms
- They – wrote books, edited magazines, started schools, training centres
- Early 20th century – started political groups – pressure govt. – new laws – better health care, education for women
- Some – joined – nationalist movements – 1920s
- 20th century – leaders – Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose – provided support – greater equality and freedom for women
- National leaders – promised – complete equality after Independence – till then – focus on anti-British movements

Caste and Social Reform

- Some reformers – against caste inequalities
- Rammohun Roy – translated – old Buddhist text – against caste
- Prarthana Samaj – believed in – tradition of Bhakti – equality of all castes
- Bombay – Paramhans Mandali – founded 1840 – worked – banning of caste
- Many of these reformers – belonged to upper caste
- Many times – secret meetings – these reformers – violate (break) caste system – sit together, eat together
- Many others – questioned – injustice – caste system
- 19th century – Christian missionaries – set up schools – tribal and lower caste children
- These children – got educated – make their way into the new world
- Same time – poor people – left villages – new jobs in cities
- Work in factories – jobs in municipalities
- New demands of labour – digging drains – making roads, buildings – cleaning cities
- Requirements – coolies, diggers, carriers, bricklayers, sweepers, rickshaw pullers, etc
- Poor people – villages, small towns – many – low caste – moved to cities – new demand for labour
- Some – moved to Assam, Mauritius, Trinidad, Indonesia – work in plantations
- Work – new locations – very hard – BUT – poor people – lower caste people – opportunity – get away from upper caste oppression (domination)
- Other jobs – army – lots of opportunities
- Lots of Mahar people – regarded as untouchables – joined Mahar regiment
- B.R. Ambedkar – leader – Dalit movement – his father – taught at army school

Demands for equality and justice

- Second half – 19th century – people – Non-Brahman castes – organized movements – against caste discrimination – demanded – social justice and equality

- Satnami movement – Central India – founded by Ghasidas – worked as leather worker – organized movement – improve their status
- Eastern Bengal – Haridas Thakur – Matua sect (group) – worked with Chandala cultivators
- Haridas – opposed – Brahmanical texts – supported caste system
- Present day Kerala – guru (Ezhava caste) – Shri Narayana Guru – spread the idea – unity of people
- He was against – unequal treatment of people – caste differences
- According to him – all humans – same caste – ‘*oru jati, oru matam, oru daivam manushyanu*’ – one caste, one religion, one god
- All these groups – founded by leaders – Non-Brahmanical castes – worked against them
- They worked – change practices – against lower castes

Gulamgiri

- Jyotirao Phule – most known – ‘low-caste’ leader
- Born – 1827 – studied in Christian missionaries’ schools
- Growing up – developed own ideas – injustice of caste society
- He attacked – Brahmins’ claim – superiority – reason – they were Aryans
- Phule argued – Aryans – foreigners – came from outside – defeated and dominated – true people – lived from before
- Aryans – created dominance – defeated population – inferior – low-caste
- According to Phule – ‘upper’ caste – no right to land – reality – land – belonged to so-called low caste people
- Phule claimed – before Aryans – golden age – warrior-peasants – used the land – ruled the Maratha countryside
- He suggested – Shudras (labourers), Ati Shudras (untouchables) – unite – challenge caste discrimination
- Phule founded – Satyashodhak Samaj – spread caste equality
- 1873 – Phule – wrote a book – *Gulamgiri* (slavery)
- 10 yrs ago – American Civil War fought – end of slavery in America
- Phule – dedicated the book – Americans – fought to free slaves – creating link between – ‘lower’ castes, India – AND – black slaves, America
- Phule – extended his criticism – against – all forms of inequality
- Concerned about problems of –
 - ‘upper’ caste women
 - Labourers
 - Humiliation of ‘low’ castes
- Movement – caste reform – continued in 20th century – other Dalit leaders – Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (eastern India) – E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker (south)

Who could enter temples?

- Ambedkar – born into Mahar family
- As child – faced caste discrimination
- In school – forced to sit on ground – outside class – not allowed to use taps – upper caste used
- After school – earned scholarship – went to US – higher studies
- Returned to India – 1919 – wrote in detail about – ‘upper’ caste power
- 1927 – Ambedkar started – temple entry movement – followed by Mahar people

- Brahman priests – too angry – Dalits used water – temple tanks
- Ambedkar – leader – 3 movements – 1927-1935
- His aim – everyone notice – caste discrimination in society

The Non-Brahman movement

- Early 20th century – this movement started
- Initiative – non-Brahman castes – access to education, wealth, influence
- They argued – Brahmans – descendants (*vanshaj*) of Aryan invaders from north – conquered southern lands – original residents – Dravidian races
- Also challenged – Brahmanical claims – power
- E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker (Periyar) – middle-class family
- He was ascetic (*sanyasi*) – early years – studied Sanskrit – very carefully
- Later – joined Congress – left it sooner – reason – feast by nationalists – seating arrangement – caste discrimination
- He believed – untouchables – fight for dignity (respect) – started – Self Respect Movement
- He argued – untouchables – true owners – original Tamil and Dravidian culture – controlled by Brahmans
- He believed – religious authorities felt – social divisions, inequality – God-given
- Untouchables – free themselves – from all religions – achieve equality
- Speeches, writings, movements – lower-caste leaders – lead to re-thinking – upper-caste nationalist leaders
- BUT – orthodox Hindu society – founded – Sanatan Dharma Sabhas, Bharat Dharma Mahamandal in north – Brahman Sabha in Bengal
- Aim – these associations – prove caste distinctions – most imp. part – Hinduism – legal according to scriptures
- Debates, struggles – over caste – still continue