

Role of Social Movement on Women Education

Ashlesha Nidhi

Assistant Professor, Rural Teachers' Training College, Shekhpura, Nalanda

ABSTRACT

The condition of women was very pathetic and miserable during nineteenth century. Many inhumane customs towards the Indian women were prevailing in those days eg. Sati-pratha, child-marriage etc. the dowry system made the girl child unwelcome in families which led several times to female infanticide. In human society there is always a struggle between tradition and change. No doubt change is the law of nature. But women are considered to be the real protector of tradition. If change has to be all pervasive, it should start and end with women. Generally change takes place as the result of socio-political movement. Modern India witnessed (a large number of) such strong socio-political movements. One of the important aims of all these movements was to educate the people especially the women who had been in deep slumber for centuries. These movements proved to be of great educational significance for women. It transformed them from submissive, obedient housewives to equal partner in every field of life.

Keywords: Educational, Salvation, Literature, Liberal, Women Education, Good Quality, Empowerment

Received : 13/8/2025

Acceptance : 5/11/2025

Introduction:

The girls were not allowed to get education. Purdah Pradha was prevailing in both Hindu and Muslim communities. They were confined to four walls of their home and they were not allowed to participate in social and political activities. They were denied the right to inherit property. With the arrival of British in India, western education opened the floodgate of western ideas. This education served to replace blind faith in the traditions, beliefs and customs by a spirit that sought to enquire and argue before accepting anything blindly. Social and religious reform movements therefore arose in all the Indian communities throughout the 19th century. Hence, some enlightened Indians took up the task of reforming Indian society.

Among them Raja Ram Mohan Roy's (1772-1833) campaign against Sati-pratha was unprecedented. He fought for the rights of women. He founded Brahma-sabha in 1828 (later it was called as Brahmo Samaj) for his campaign against Sati-pratha in Bengal. His lifelong crusade against sati-pratha was on the basis of reason, humanity and compassion. It was his strong protest against

Sati-pratha that William Bentinck, the then Governor General had to make a law and it was passed in 1829, banning Sati-pratha.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), in Maharashtra founded Arya Samaj in 1875 in Bombay. He was also strongly in favour of widow remarriage. Arya Samaj ran many widow homes. He believed in the principle of equal justice for all men and all nations and equality of the sexes. He gave new interpretation to reform the stagnant Hindu thought through his book 'Satyarth Prakash'. He preached that salvation was possible through social service. The Prarthana Samaj was founded in Bombay in 1867 to promote social reforms. The Prarthana Samaj was founded by M. G. Ranade, K.T. Telang and R.G. Bhandarkar, they all advocated widow remarriage.

Pandita Ramabai was also one of the great reformers of the 19th century. Ramabai learnt Sanskrit and studied many books including the Geeta. She married to Bipin Bihari Das Madhevi, an educated 'Shudra'. She was the one who gave stress on girl education and she started Arya Mahila Samaj with the help of Ranade and Bhandarkar.

She went to England and America to receive higher education in English. She came back to India in 1889 and started Sharda Sadan, a boarding house for widows. Throughout her life, Ramabai worked for the upliftment of the neglected women. She died in 1922.

In the 19th century formal education for women was rare in India. The social reformers of the time believed that education could draw women out of their backwardness. Hence, they promoted education. In 1820 Christian missionaries established girls schools but they got little success. In 1849 with the help of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar J. E. Drinkwater Bethune established school for Indian girls by the name of 'Hindu Balika Vidyalaya.' Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar opened many girl's schools. Brahmo Samaj also worked for education of girls and opened many schools. In Maharashtra Jotirao Govind Rao Phule, fondly called Jyotiba (1827-1890), prominent activist thinker and social reformer opened school for girls of backward caste. Due to dearth of women teachers, Jyotiba educated his wife Savitribai and then appointed her as a teacher in his school in August, 1848.

In 19th century the child marriage prevailed in many parts of India. Due to early marriage girls were denied their childhood pleasures. They had to bear the responsibility of motherhood at an early age which used to affect their health badly and at the same time, they were married to much older men. Consequently many of them suffered early widowhood. In Maharashtra Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Ranade and in Bengal the Brahmo Samaj fought against the child marriage. With their efforts in 1872, the early marriage of girls was made illegal by the British Government and Sharda Act of 1929 was passed in which the marriageable age of girls was raised to 14 and that of boys to 18 years.

In 1875, a housewife named Rashsundari wrote 'Amar Jiban', the first autobiography in Bengali. She learnt to read and write secretly. In 1878, Bethune College for women was established under the University of Calcutta. In 1880, its first

students Kadambini Basu and Chandramukhi became the first women graduate of India. Kadambini also became India's first female physician.

These movements made the people to adopt a more rational outlook towards life. This paved the way for enacting law. Some of the laws which helped emancipation of women were :

Ban of Sati Pratha (1829)

Declaration of Slavery as illegal (1843)

Legalization of widow remarriage (1856)

Legalization of Inter Caste Marriage (1872)

Marriageable age of girls raised to 14 and boys to 18 years (Sharda Act, 1929)

In spite of these laws many evils prevailed. But at the same time they became stepping stones on which the women's empowering bridge is being made.

Literary Movement as Source of Women's Upliftment :

Along with the expansion of British power in India the radical modernization of western thoughts also came in the 19th century. Though, some of the indigenous literature criticized it especially in the case of women. They were of the opinion that Indian women were pious, religious and obedient who were expected to carry out their domestic responsibilities such as Satya Charan Mitra's A Husbands Advice to His Wife (1884) & Nagendrebala Desi's Women's Dharma (1900) in which they have portrayed the duty of domesticity which was the accepted norm for women at that time.

However, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, through Tattvabodhini Patrika ventilated his thoughts against Sati Pratha. He launched a weekly in Bengali, Sambad Kaumudi in 1821. It was the first education newspaper which was edited, published and managed by Indians. This weekly also attracted the views of liberal Indians for emancipation of women. Keshav Chandra Sen started Bamabodhimi Patrika (1863) to improve the social and moral conditions of women. Rabindra Nath Tagore's women protagonists were always self

conscious, beautiful, elite and highly self respecting individuals. Sharat Chandra's women though poor, had high moral and ethical values. Among women writers Toru Dutta, Swarnkumari Devi, Kamini Roy, and Sarojini Naidu were eminent literary stalwarts in the 19th century. The eminent Hindu novelist Prem Chand wrote about everyday life of common people. His female protagonists went through the daily grind stoically. Writers like Vibhuti Bhushan Banerjee, Tarashanker Banerjee, Manak Bandopadhyay, Satinath Bhaduri, Achintya Sen Gupta, Prabodh Sanyal etc. wrote about humanism and portrayed lives of poverty and squalor.

In 1902 women's education took the form of a movement. Now the parents were also becoming conscious for the education of girls. The education department set up schools for girls. Inspectors were appointed for these schools. In 1904 Annie Besant set up a Hindu Girls' College at Banaras. In 1916, first medical college for girls was setup at Delhi and at the same time SNDT Women's University was established at Bombay, Prayag Mahila Vidyapeeth, Arya Kanya Gurukul etc. encouraged women education. Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya, Dr. Radha Krishnan were all of the opinion that women education should be given most importance because female literacy is considered to be a more sensitive index of social development compared to overall literacy rate. Female literacy is negatively related with fertility rate, population growth rates, infant and child morality rate, and show a positive relationship with female age at marriage, life expectancy, participation in modern sectors of the economy and female enrollment. After independence in first census (1951), 15% girls were studying in schools.

Since independence, education of girls is at the priority of national agenda. Many commissions and committees viz University Education Commission (1948), Secondary Education Commission (1953), Education Commission

(1964), Hansa Mehta Committee (1961) and National Policy on Education (1986) etc. were set up from time to time to assess the progress of girls education and to propose suitable intervention to promote their participation in education. So that gender inequality in education can be minimized. It is observed that girls are less likely to access schools. Thus to increase girls access and their retention in school is the main focus. Many strategies are used to fulfill this need including the use of inactive programmes. Education helps them to claim their rights and realize their potential in economic, political and social arenas. It was rightly said in Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) everyone has the right to education. The right to free and compulsory primary education without discrimination and of good quality, has been reaffirmed in every international human right conventions. For this literacy rate of women have to be increased effectively because according to 2001 census literacy rate in India was 65.38% with male literacy level was 75.85% and female literacy level was 54.16% this shows that still 45.84% females are to be encourage to get education because literacy is an effective instrument for social and economic development. National Policy on education (1986, IV, 4.2) framed a policy to ensure accessibility of education to girls and empowering the women by implementing the following strategy.

- To gear the entire education system to play positive role in the empowerment of women.
- To encourage educational Institution to take up active programmes to enhance women's status and further women's development in the empowerment of women.
- To widen women's access to vocational, technical and professional education at all levels, breaking gender stereotypes.
- To create dynamic management structure that will be able to respond to the challenges posed by this mandate.

Conclusion:

Thus the social movement and educational reforms have made the women more powerful. The Hindu Succession Act gives female heirs equal right to inheritance. Working women are contributing to the economy of India. It is estimated that 90% of working women's work is not documented for in official statistics; they are involved in the informal sector. In recent years there is a move to increase women's political participation. Women's representation in the Panchayati Raj System is a sign of their political empowerment. The Women's Reservation Policy Bill is slated to further strengthen political participation of women. More and more women are in positions of respect and prestige; more and more work places are occupied by women who work on equal terms as men. Work is a means to self worth and growth for women. We are in the midst of great revolution in the history of women education; still we have miles to go.

References:

1. Department of Education. 1986. National Policy on Education 1986. New Delhi : M.H.R.D. Government of India.
2. Nayar, Usha 1991-93. Factors of Continuance and Discontinuance of Girls in Elementary Schooling. Study sponsored by NCERT and M.H.R.D, New Delhi.
3. Department of Education. 1992. National Policy on Education 1992 : Programme of Action 1992. New Delhi : M.H.R.D. Government of India.
4. Government of India. 1995. 'Country Paper India', presented in Fourth World Conference on Women. Beijing.
5. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 1997-98. Annual Report. New Delhi : Government of India.
6. National Literacy Mission. 1998. Literacy Rates : An Analysis Based on National Sample Survey Organization Survey. New Delhi : Government of India.
7. Dua Neeta, Bhandari Omvali & Sherley. 2008. India and the World, Arti Prakashan, New Delhi.
8. R. Sushma. 2010. Task Force on Higher Education for Women Equality: Female Education as a Global Consideration, University News, 48(16) April 19-25.
9. <http://www.womeninindiaandhumanrights.org> by Ashish Garg, htm.

