
UNIT 7 : SOCIO-RELIGIOUS REFORM MOVEMENTS: BRAHMO SAMAJ, ARYA SAMAJ, THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY, ALIGARH MOVEMENT

Structure

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7.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit you will be able to learn about:

- the purpose of development of new ideas aiming at multi-dimensional change of society,
- the 19th century Indian thinkers and their ideas on various aspects of socio-cultural life, and
- the overall impact of these new ideas on the existing socio-cultural-religious beliefs in India.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Nineteenth century was a very significant phase in the history of modern India. It was during this period that the country witnessed the emergence of many intellectual currents for national regeneration in all its aspects: religious, social, cultural, economic and political. Although the intellectual endeavors aimed at achieving all-sided improvement, the main emphasis was accorded to social and religious aspects. Despite the vision of the movement being multi-dimensional, social and cultural problems acquired predominance over economic and political ones in thinking. In a word, socio-cultural reform formed the major plank of the nineteenth century Indian intellectual movement.

During the first decades of the century, the movement, however, was a very small affair of a limited number of individuals whose passion for fighting social obscurantism could not pose a major challenge to the advocates of orthodoxy. The movement, however, maintained its momentum and reached its peak during the second half of the nineteenth century. In this Unit we will look beyond the strict chronological limits of this course and also consider developments in the later decades of the 19th century in order to present a total picture.

It is proposed to study here the basic features of the intellectual, social and religious movements oriented towards Reform in India during the nineteenth century. The emphasis is not, however, on the biographical sketch of individual thinkers and reformers, but on their ideas which formed the ideological backdrop of the movement.

7.2 BRAHMO SAMAJ

The Brahma Samaj literally denotes community of men who worship Brahman the highest reality. In reality Brahma Samaj does not discriminate between caste, creed or religion and is an assembly of all sorts and descriptions of people without distinction, meeting publicly for the sober, orderly, religious and devout adoration of “*the (nameless) unsearchable Eternal, Immutable Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe.*”

7.2.1 Origin

On 20th August 1828 the first assembly of the Brahma Sabha (progenitor of the Brahma Samaj) was held at the North Calcutta house of Feringhee Kamal Bose. This day was celebrated by Brahmans as Bhadratsab. These meetings were open to all Brahmans and there was no formal organisation or theology as such. On 8th January 1830 influential progressive members of the closely related Kulin Brahmin clan scurrilously described as Pirali Brahmin *i.e.* ostracised for service in the Mughal

Nizamut of Bengal, of Tagore (Thakur) and Roy (Bandopadhyaya) Zamindar family mutually executed the Trust deed of Brahma Sabha for the first Adi-Brahmo Samaj (place of worship) on Chitpore Road (now Rabindra Sarani), Kolkata, India with Ram Chandra Vidyabagish as first resident superintendent.

On 23rd January 1830 or 11th *Magh*, the Adi-Brahmo premises were publicly inaugurated with about 500 Brahmins and 1 Englishman present. This day is celebrated by Brahmos as *Maghotsab*.

In November 1830 Rammohan Roy left for England. Akbar-II had conferred the title of 'Raja' to Rammohan Roy.

With Rammohan's departure for England, the affairs of Brahma Sabha were effectively managed by Trustees Dwarkanath Tagore and Pandit Ram Chandra Vidyabagish, with Dwarkanath instructing his diwan to manage affairs.

By the time of Rammohan's death in 1833 near Bristol (UK), attendance at the Sabha dwindled and the Telugu Brahmins revived idolatry. The Zamindars, being preoccupied in business, had little time for affairs of Sabha, and flame of Sabha was almost extinguished.

7.2.2 Tattwabodhini Period

On 6th October 1839, Debendranath Tagore, son of Dwarkanath Tagore, established Tattvaranjini Sabha which was shortly thereafter renamed the Tattwabodhini Sabha. Initially confined to immediate members of the Tagore family, in two years it mustered over 500 members. In 1840, Debendranath published a Bangla translation of Katha Upanishad. A modern researcher describes the Sabha's philosophy as modern middle-class (bourgeois) Vedanta. Among its first members were the "two giants of Hindu reformation and Bengal Renaissance", Akshay Kumar Datta, who in 1839 emerged from the life of an "anonymous squalor-beset individual", and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, the "indigenous modernizer."

On 7th *Pous* 1765 *Saka* (1843) Debendranath Tagore and twenty other Tattwabodhini stalwarts were formally invited by Pt. Vidyabagish into the Trust of Brahma Sabha. The *Pous Mela* at Santiniketan starts on this day. From this day forth, the Tattwabodhini Sabha dedicated itself to promoting Ram Mohan Roy's creed.

In November 1855 Charles Dall- a Unitarian minister of Boston, arrived in Calcutta to start his mission and immediately established contact with Debendranath and other Brahmos. Debendranath's suspicion of foreigners alienated Dall and in 1857, Debendranath Tagore barred the entry of the Reverend from the Sabha premises for preaching the name of Christ who some people worship as God within. Debendranath then proceeded on spiritual retreat to Simla. Dall, immediately formed

a counter group "The friends of Rammohan Roy Society" and then got admitted a protégé to Sabha. The presence of Dall's protégé Keshab Chandra Sen (a non-Brahmin) into the Calcutta Brahma Sabha in 1857 while Debendranath was away in Simla caused considerable stress in the movement, with many long time Tattwabodhini Brahmin members publicly leaving the Brahma Sabha and institutions due to his high-handed ways. In September 1858, Debendranath returned to Calcutta to resolve the simmering disputes, but his conservative mind did not allow him to take decisive steps. He proceeded on a sea voyage to Ceylon accompanied by Sen and his second son Satyendranath but no concord was achieved. In 1859, the venerable and beloved Secretary of the Tattwabodhini Sabha Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar resigned from the Brahma Sabha in the face of Debendranath's vacillation. A meeting of the Tattwabodhini was promptly summoned with Debendranath resigning from the group he had founded. His third son Hemendranath Tagore then a boy barely 15 years in age, and the favorite pupil of Vidyasagar, was commonly acclaimed as Debendranath's successor to head the Tattwabodhini. In the course of time he would become known as the Maha-Acharya.

Disgusted by politics within the Tagore family and the support to K. C. Sen's faction by his own brother Satyendranath Tagore, Hemendranath took the bold decisions to expand his Sabha out from Calcutta. His close associate Pandit Nobin Chandra Roy who had joined the new institution of "Railways" in 1860 as its "Paymaster" for Upper India was tasked to spread Brahmoism there. With a predominantly monotheistic populace following Islam and Sikhism it was perceived as fertile soil for Rammohan's message. The Tattwabodhini decreed that the uncorrupted faith of the original 1830 Trust Deed would be known there as the Adi-Dharma to distinguish it from the distorted versions of the squabbling factions of Calcutta. The steps taken by Hemendranath Tagore, with the blessing of his father, was to institute in 1860 a suit before the Supreme Court to restore the title "Brahmo Samaj" to his faction. After losing in this suit in 1861, Keshub Sen's faction altered the name of their Samaj from "The Brahma Samaj of India" to "Navavidhan (the New Dispensation)". With victory in this suit and the promulgation of his *Brahmo Anusthan* in 1861, Hemendranath's *Samajists* are henceforth known as the "*Anusthanic Brahmos*" (Brahmos who follow the Code). The other factions were designated as "*Ananusthanic Brahmos*" (those who do not follow the Code). This distinction was again to be legally examined before the Privy Council of Great Britain in 1901 and in 1902 the Privy Council upheld the 1897 finding of the Chief Court of the Punjab that the Adi-Dharma (anusthanic Brahmos) were definitely not Hindus whereas the Ananusthanic Brahmos of Calcutta fall within Hinduism.

In 1861 the BrahmaSomaj (as it was spelled then) was founded at Lahore by Nobin Roy. It included many Bengalis from the Lahore Bar Association. Many branches

were opened in the Punjab, at Quetta, Rawalpindi, and Amritsar etc. Disagreement with the Tattvabodhini came to a head publicly between the period of 1st August 1865 till November 1866 with many tiny splinter groups styling themselves as Brahmo. The most notable of these groups styled itself "Brahmo Samaj of India". This period is also referred to in the histories of the secessionists as the "First Schism". Swami Vivekananda was influenced by the Brahmo Samaj of India, and visited the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj in his youth.

7.2.3 Social and Religious Reform

In all fields of social reform, including abolition of the caste system and of the dowry system, emancipation of women, and improving the educational system, the Brahmo Samaj reflected the ideologies of the Bengal Renaissance. Brahmoism, as a means of discussing the dowry system, was a central theme of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's noted 1914 Bengali language novella, *Parineeta*.

In 1866, Keshub Chandra Sen organised the more radical "Brahmo Samaj of India" with overtones of Christianity. He campaigned for the education of women and against child marriages. But he nonetheless arranged a marriage for his own underage daughter Suniti with the prince of Coochbehar. The Brahmo Samaj of India split after this act of underage marriage generated a controversy and his pro-British utterances and leaning towards Christian rites generated more controversies. A third group, "Sadharan (ordinary) Brahmo Samaj", was formed in 1878. It gradually reverted to the teaching of the Upanishads but continued the work of social reform. The movement, always an elite group without significant popular following, lost force in the 20th century.

After the controversy of underage marriage of Keshub Chunder Sen's daughter, the Special Marriages Act of 1872 was enacted to set the minimum age of 14 years for marriage of girls. All Brahmo marriages were thereafter solemnised under this law. Many Indians resented the requirement of the affirmation "I am not Hindu, nor a Mussalman, nor a Christian" for solemnising a marriage under this Act. The requirement of this declaration was imposed by Henry James Sumner Maine, legal member of Governor General's Council appointed by Britain. The 1872 Act was repealed by the Special Marriage Act, 1954 under which any person of any religion could marry. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 applies to all Hindus (including "followers" of the Brahmo Samaj) but not to the adherents of the Brahmo religion.

It also supported social reform movements of people not directly attached to the Samaj, such as Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar's movement which promoted widow remarriage.

7.3 ARYA SAMAJ

Arya Samaj is a monotheistic Indian Hindu reform movement that promotes values and practices based on the belief in the infallible authority of the Vedas. The Arya Samaj was established in Bombay on 10 April 1875 by Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883). An alternative date for the foundation of the samaj is 24 June 1877 because it was then, in Lahore when the *samaj* became more than just a regional movement based in Punjab.

7.3.1 Origin

Between 1869 and 1873, Dayanand began his efforts to reform orthodox Hinduism in India. He established Gurukul (Vedic schools) which emphasised Vedic values, culture, *Satya* (virtue) and *Sanatana Dharma* (the essence of living). The schools gave separate educations to boys and girls based on ancient Vedic principles. The Vedic school system was also to relieve Indians from the pattern of a British education. The first Vedic school was established at Farrukhabad in 1869. Fifty students were enrolled in its first year. This success led to the founding of schools at Mirzapur (1870), Kasganj (1870), Chhalesar (Aligarh) (1870) and Varanasi (1873).

At the schools, students received all meals, lodging, clothing and books free of charge. Discipline was strict. Students were not allowed to perform murti puja (worship of sculpted stone idols). Rather, they performed *Sandhyavandanam* (meditative prayer using Vedic mantras with divine sound) and *agnihotra* (making a heated milk offering twice daily).

The study of Sanskrit scriptural texts which accepted the authority of the Vedas were taught. They included the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Aranyaka*, *Kashika*, *Nirukta*, *Mahabhasya*, *Ashtadhyayi*, *Darshanas*.

After visiting Calcutta, Dayanand's work changed. He began lecturing in Hindi rather than in Sanskrit. Although Sanskrit garnered respect, in Hindi, Dayanand reached a much larger audience. His ideas of reform began to reach the poorest people.

In Varanasi, after hearing Dayanand speak, a local government official called Jaikishen Das encouraged Dayanand to publish a book about his ideas. From June to September 1874, Dayanand dictated a series of lectures to his scribe, Bhimsen Sharma. The lectures recorded Dayanand's views on a wide range of subjects. They were published in 1875 at Varanasi with the title *Satyarth Prakash* ("the light of truth").

While his manuscript for *Satyarth Prakash* was being edited in Varanasi, Dayanand received an invitation to travel to Bombay. There, he was to debate representatives

of the Vallabhacharya sect. On 20 October 1874, Dayanand arrived in Bombay. The debate, though well publicized, never took place.

Nonetheless, two members of the *Prarthana Samaj* approached Dayanand and invited him to speak at one of their gatherings. He did so and was well received. They recognized Dayanand's desire to uplift the Hindu community and protect Hindus from the pressures to convert to Christianity or Islam. Dayanand spent over one month in Bombay and attracted sixty people to his cause. They proposed founding a new *samaj* with Dayanand's ideas as its spiritual and intellectual basis.

On 11th December 1874, Dayanand arrived in Ahmedabad, Gujarat on the invitation of Gopal Hari Deshmukh. There, he debated with interested parties. On 31 December 1874, Dayanand arrived in Rajkot, Gujarat, on the invitation of Hargovind Das Dvarkadas, the secretary of the local Prarthana Samaj. He invited topics of discourse from the audience and spoke on eight. Again, Dayanand was well received and the Rajkot group elected to join his cause. The Samaj was renamed Arya Samaj (Society of Nobles). Dayanand published a list of twenty-eight rules and regulations for the followers. After leaving Rajkot, Dayanand went to Ahmedabad but his audience at a meeting on 27th January 1875, did not elect to form a new Arya Samaj. Meanwhile, the Rajkot group had become in a political row. On his return to Bombay, Dayanand began a membership drive for a local Arya Samaj and received one hundred enrollees. On 7th April 1875, the Bombay Arya Samaj was established. Dayanand himself enrolled as a member rather than the leader of the Bombay group. The Samaj began to grow.

7.3.2 After Dayananda

Dayanand died in 1883. The Arya Samaj continued to grow, especially in Punjab. The early leaders of the Samaj were Pandit Lekh Ram (1858 – 1897) and Swami Shraddhanand (Mahatma Munshi Ram Vij) (1856 – 1926). Some authors claim that the activities of the Samaj led to increased antagonism between Muslims and Hindus. Shraddhanand led the Shuddhi movement that aimed to bring Hindus who had converted to other religions back to Hinduism.

In 1893, the Arya Samaj members of Punjab were divided on the question of vegetarianism. The group that refrained from eating meat were called the "Mahatma" group and the other group, the "Cultured Party".

In the early 1900s, the Samaj (organizations inspired by it such as Jat Pat Todak Mandal) campaigned against caste discrimination. They also campaigned for widow remarriage and women's education. The samaj also established chapters in British colonies with an Indian diaspora such as South Africa, Fiji, Mauritius, Suriname, Guyana and Trinidad.

Prominent Indian Nationalists such as Lala Lajpat Rai belonged to Arya Samaj and were active in its campaigning. The British colonial government in the early part of 20th century viewed the Samajas a political body. Some Samaj is in government service were dismissed for belonging to the Samaj.

7.4 THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

The Theosophical Society was founded by *Madame Blavatsky and Col. Olcott* in 1875 in New York. It was only in 1879, that this ideology gained its roots in the Indian culture and Society. It was crystallised in the *Madras Presidency* with its headquarters in *Adayar*. The movement was popularised by *Annie Besant* in India. Theosophy was based on three principles:-

1. Universal brotherhood,
2. The study of comparative religion and philosophy, and
3. Investigations into the natural laws which seek to understand the unexplained mystic laws.

The Theosophists respected all religions. They were opposed to conversions and believed in the transmigration of soul and occult mysticism. Theosophical Society was an integral part of the revival of Hinduism in India which also brought about a certain degree of social solidarity. To quote Annie Besant “Without Hinduism, India has no future. Hinduism is the soil into which India’s roots are struck, and torn out of that she will invincibly wither as a tree torn out of its place.”

The theosophists also worked for the abolition of caste, untouchability and believed in the philosophy of assimilation. They genuinely worked towards social acceptability and integration of the marginalized sections. They tried to better the conditions of the socially excluded by encouraging them to take up mainstream education. In this regard, Annie Besant also set up several educational societies and propagated the need to spread modern education.

7.4.1 Contribution of Annie Besant

Annie Besant had joined the Theosophical Society in 1889. She was a firm believer in the teachings of Vedas and Upanishads. She considered the Indian soil to be so liberating and enlightening at the same time that she took the nation as her own and made it her permanent abode. She was a protestor against the prevalent evils of the then Indian Society like child marriage, unacceptability of widow remarriage etc. in her attempt to bring education at every doorstep, she started the *Banaras Central School*. It was around this very nucleus that the present Banaras Hindu University

culminated. South India also saw a wave of her efforts in various Schools and colleges being established.

She was also known for impactful writing. Education, philosophy, politics were among the prime concern which she developed on and worked by the means of the Theosophical Society. She also started the home rule league in 1916 similar to the Irish League Movement in her attempt to spread the vision of the Society she vehemently worked for; She published two journals called the "*The New India*" and the "*Common Weal*". The Theosophical Movement had more appeal among intelligentsia than the masses and made its own mark in the nineteenth century. It came to be allied with Hindu renaissance.

7.4.2 Features of Theosophical Society

- A special relationship could be established between a person's soul and God by contemplation, prayer, revelation, etc.
- The Society accepted the Hindu beliefs in re-incarnation, Karma and drew inspiration from the philosophy of the *Upanishads and Samkhya, Yoga, and Vedanta* School of thoughts.
- It called for universal brotherhood without distinction or race, creed, sex, caste, or colour.
- The Society sought to investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man.
- The movement aimed at the quest of the Hindu spiritual wisdom through Western enlightenment.
- The movement revived and strengthened faith in the ancient doctrines and philosophies of the Hindus.
- To study and preach Aryan philosophy and religion.
- The Upanishads revealed the truth of the absolute: the universe and life.
- It was cosmopolitan enough to appreciate all forms of religion and all modes of worship.
- Apart from philosophical and spiritual discourse, which the Society carried on, its valuable contribution to the Hindu awakening came from its literary and research activities.
- Hindu scriptures were published and translated.

- The Society encouraged reforms and framed educational schemes to work them out.

7.5 ALIGARH MOVEMENT

The Aligarh Movement was the push to establish a modern system of education for the Muslim population of British India, during the later decades of the 19th century. The movement's name derives from the fact that its core and origins lay in the city of Aligarh in Northern India and, in particular, with the foundation of the Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College in 1875. The founder of the oriental college, and the other educational institutions that developed from it, was Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. He became the leading light of the wider Aligarh Movement.

The educational reform established a base, and an impetus, for the wider Movement: an Indian Muslim renaissance that had a profound implications for the religion, the politics, the culture and society of the Indian sub-continent.

One of indirect consequences of the awakening is the notion that without this revival of a Muslim self-consciousness and self-confidence, directly attributable to the Movement, there could or would have been no Pakistan Movement in the run up to Indian Independence.

7.5.1 Education

Aligarh Muslim University is the creation of the movement. The Aligarh Movement had a profound impact on the Indian society, particularly on the Muslim society compared to the other powerful but less adaptable movements of the 19th century. It influenced a number of other contemporary movements to a great extent that it caused the emergence of other socio-religious movements during the 19th century. The impact of Aligarh Movement was not confined to the Northern India only, but its expansion could be seen on the other regions of the Indian sub-continent during the 20th century.

The Aligarh Movement has made a weighty and lasting contribution to the political emancipation of Indian Muslims.

The Deoband school was opposed to the movement as Aligarh Movement.

The Aligarh Movement introduced a new trend in Urdu literature. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and his association left the old style of writing in the Urdu language, which was rhetorical and academic, and started a simple style which helped Muslims to understand the main purpose of the movement. Sir Syed Ahmed was the central figure behind this awakening.

Check Your Progress

1) Write a note on the origin and development of Brahma Samaj.

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2) Discuss the Principles of Arya Samaj.

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3) Explain the role of Annie Besant in the development of the Theosophical Society.

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4) Critically examine the Aligarh Movement for the establishment of modern education system.

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7.6 LET US SUM UP

We have observed in this unit how significant developments were taking place in the 19th century India. These ideas contained, in themselves, the possibilities of the

reconstruction of the Indian society. They dealt with a variety of social, cultural and religious issues and practices. Education was assigned a very major role in the spread of these ideas. The upliftment of the position of women, restructuring the linkages between religion and society and retaining an important link with the past were some of the major characteristics of the reform movement. However, in terms of its spread and penetration, the movement failed to reach out to the large sections of the rural population and remained confined to the educated urban middle class. There also existed certain inherent constraints in the society and polity, which prevented these ideas from an irresistible social force. Limitations apart, one significant achievement of the reform movement lay in its contribution towards nationalist thinking. Although the reform movement did not directly focus on the political issues, it created a space for them and for the subsequent Indian National Movement.

7.7 KEY WORDS

Deoband School : the leading Muslim theological centre (madrasah) of India. It was founded in 1867 by Muhammad Abid Husayn in the Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh.

Vedanta : a Hindu philosophy based on the doctrine of the Upanishads, especially in its monistic form.

7.8 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISE

- 1) See sec. 7.2 ,
- 2) See sec. 7.3,
- 3) See Sub-sec. 7.4.1,
- 4) See sec. 7.5

SUGGESTED READING:

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Mani, B.R. 2005. *Debrahminising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society*. New Delhi: Manohar Publisher.

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UNIT 8 : GROWTH OF PRESS AND EDUCATION

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 History of the Indian Press
 - 8.2.1 The Censorship of the Press Act, 1799
 - 8.2.2 Licensing Regulations, 1823
 - 8.2.3 Liberation of the Indian Press, 1835
 - 8.2.4 The Licensing Act, 1867
 - 8.2.5 The Registration Act, 1867
 - 8.2.6 Vernacular Press Act, 1878
 - 8.2.7 The Newspapers Act, 1908
 - 8.2.8 The Indian Press Act, 1910
 - 8.2.9 The Indian Press (Emergency Powers) Act, 1931
 - 8.2.10 The Press Enquiry Committee
 - 8.2.11 The Press (Objectionable Matters) Act, 1951
- 8.3 The Spread of English Education
 - 8.3.1 Colonial Education
 - 8.3.2 Indigenous Education
 - 8.3.3 Debate over Education Policy
 - 8.3.4 Development of English Education
 - 8.3.5 An Appraisal
- 8.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.7 Key Words
- 8.8 Answer to Check Your Progress Exercise

8.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to know about;

- origin and growth of Indian Press,
- government policies on press in the colonial and post-colonial period,
- growth and popularity of the western education system in India, and
- government policies for the development of education in the colonial and post-colonial period.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The establishment of British territorial control over India brought changes in different spheres of life. Growth of press and education were such areas where lot of changes came with the transfer of power to the British. Why and how did the changes come? What was the impact of these changes? These are some of the major questions that have been discussed in this unit.

8.2 HISTORY OF THE INDIAN PRESS

The first press in India was established by the Portuguese in 1550, first book was published by Portuguese missionaries (1557). The next was established by British in 1684. James Augustus Hickey is considered as the "father of Indian press" as he started the first Indian newspaper from Calcutta, the 'Bengal Gazette' or the 'Calcutta General Advertise' in January 1780. "The Bengal Gazette" newspaper is also sometimes known as Hickey's Gazette. This paper attacked both Warren Hastings and Chief Justice E Impey. It criticised government policies and the Governor-General hence the paper was closed in just two years in 1782. But soon other news paper were started. The first Indian to publish a newspaper was Gangadhar Bhattacharya who brought out the Bengal Gazette in English. In 1818 Digdarshan was started as the first Bengali weekly by Marshman from Srirampore. On December 4th 1821 Raja Rammohan Roy started Samvad Kaumudi and Persian weekly Mirat-ul-Akhbar in 1822.

8.2.1 The Censorship of the Press Act, 1799

Every newspaper should print the names of printer, editor and proprietor. Before printing any material it should be submitted to the secretary of Censorship. Lord Wellesley brought out this legislation in apprehension of French Invasion of India. In 1807 this act was extended to cover journals, pamphlets and books as well. Lord Hastings abolished this act

8.2.2 Licensing Regulations, 1823

John Adam acting Governor General reversed the policies of Lord Hastings by passing stringent regulations in 1823. Following were the main features of the regulations,

- Every publisher should get a license from the government
- Defaulters would be fined Rs 400 and the press would be ceased by the government
- Government has right to cancel the license

Under these regulations many vernaculars including Ram Mohan's Mirat-ul-Akhbar ceased publication. Charles Metcalf abolished the Act. Due his liberal policy Metcalf is called the liberator of the Indian Press,

8.2.3 Liberation of the Indian Press, 1835

Act Metcalfe governor- general (1835-36) repealed the obnoxious 1823 ordinance and earned the epithet, “liberator of the Indian press”. The new Press Act (1835) required a printer/publisher to give a precise account of premises of a publication and cease functioning, if required by a similar declaration. The result of a liberal press policy was a rapid growth of newspapers.

8.2.4 The Licensing Act, 1867

Due to the emergency caused by the 1857 revolt, this Act imposed licensing restrictions in addition to the already existing registration procedure laid down by Metcalfe Act and the Government reserved the right to stop publication and circulation of any book, newspaper or printed matter.

8.2.5 The Registration Act, 1867

This replaced Metcalfe’s Act of 1835 and was of a regulatory, not restrictive, nature. As per the Act,

- (i) every book/newspaper was required to print the name of the printer and the publisher and the place of the publication; and
- (ii) a copy was to be submitted to the local government within one month of the publication of a book.

8.2.6 Vernacular Press Act, 1878

A bitter legacy of the 1857 revolt was the racial bitterness between the ruler and the ruled. After 1858, the European press always rallied behind the Government in political controversies while the vernacular press was critical of the Government. There was a strong public opinion against the imperialistic policies of Lytton, compounded by terrible famine (1876-77), on the one hand, and lavish expenditure on the imperial Delhi Durbar, on the other. The Vernacular Press Act (VPA) was designed to ‘better control’ the vernacular press and effectively punish and repress seditious writing.

The Provisions of the Act included the following:

- 1) The district magistrate was empowered to call upon the printer and publisher of any vernacular newspaper to enter into a bond with the Government undertaking

not to cause disaffection against the Government or antipathy between persons of different religions, caste, race through published material; the printer and publisher could also be required to deposit security which could be forfeited if the regulation were contravened, and press equipment could be seized if the offence re-occurred.

- 2) The magistrate's action was final and no appeal could be made in a court of law.
- 3) A vernacular newspaper could get exemption from the operation of the Act by submitting proofs to a government censor.

The Act came to be nicknamed "the gagging Act". The worst features of this Act were -

- (i) discriminator between English and vernacular press,
- (ii) no right of appeal.

Under VPA, proceedings were instituted against Som Prakash, Bharat Mihir, Dacca Prakash and Samachar. (Incidentally, the Amrita Bazar Patrika turned overnight into an English newspaper to escape the VPA.). Later, the pre-censorship clause was repealed, and a press commissioner was appointed to supply authentic and accurate news to the press. There was strong opposition to the Act and finally Ripon repealed it in 1882.

In 1883, Surendranath Banerjea became the first Indian journalist to be imprisoned. In an angry editorial in The Bengalee Banerjea had criticised a judge of Calcutta High Court for being insensitive to the religious sentiments of Bengalis in one of his judgements. Balgangadhar Tilak is most frequently associated with the nationalist fight for the freedom of press. Tilak had been building up anti-imperialist sentiments among the public through Ganapati festivals (started in 1893), Shivaji festivals (started in 1896) and through his newspapers Kesari and Maharatta.

He was among the first to advocate bringing the lower middle classes, the peasants, artisans and workers into the Congress fold. In 1896, he organised an all Maharashtra campaign for boycott of foreign cloth in opposition to imposition of excise duty on cotton. In 1896-97 he initiated a no-tax campaign in Maharashtra, urging farmers to withhold the payment of revenue if their crop had failed. In 1897, plague occurred in Poona. Although Tilak supported government measures to check plague, there was large-scale popular resentment against heartless and harsh methods such as segregation and house searches.

The popular unrest resulted 'in murder of the chairman of the Plague Committee in Poona by the Chapekar brothers. The government policies on tariff, currency and famine were also behind this popular resentment.

The Government had been looking for an opportunity to check this militant trend and hostility in the press. They decided to make Tilak a victim to set an example to the public. Tilak was arrested after the murder of Rand on the basis of the publication of a poem, 'Shivaji's Utterances', in Kesari, and of a speech which Tilak had delivered at the Shivaji festival, justifying Afzal Khan's murder by Shivaji.

Tilak's defence of Shivaji's killing of Afzal Khan was portrayed by the prosecution as an incitement to kill British officials. Tilak was held guilty and awarded rigorous imprisonment of eighteen months. Simultaneously several other editors in Bombay presidency were tried and given similar harsh sentences. There were widespread protests against these measures. Overnight Tilak became a national hero and was given the title of 'Lokmanya' (respected and honoured by the people)—a new leader who preached with his deeds.

In 1898, the Government amended Section 124-A and added another Section 153-A which made it a criminal offence for anyone to bring into contempt the Government of India or to create hatred among different classes, that is, *vis-a-vis* the English in India. This also led to nation-wide protests. During Swadeshi and Boycott Movements and due to rise of militant nationalist trends, several repressive laws were passed.

8.2.7 The Newspapers Act, 1908

The act empowered the Magistrate to confiscate the assets of the press and it's concerning property which published any material exciting the public to resort to violence. The Newspapers, however were allowed to appeal to High Court in 15 days. Under this Act as many as 7 presses were forfeited.

8.2.8 The Indian Press Act, 1910

This Act revived the worst features of the VPA—local government was empowered to demand a security at registration from the printer/publisher and forfeit/deregister if it was an offending newspaper, and the printer of a newspaper was required to submit two copies of each issue to local government free of charge.

Tilak as the leader of militant nationalists was tried on charges of sedition and transported to Mandalay (Burma) for six years. This led to countrywide protests. In Bombay, textile workers and railway workshop workers took on the Army in streets and went on strike for days. Lenin hailed this as the entrance of the Indian working class on the political stage.

8.2.9 The Indian Press (Emergency Powers) Act, 1931

The impact of the Gandhian Movement provoked the government to issue a fresh press ordinance in 1930 which the provision of Press Act 1910. By the provisions of this act the provincial Government were given sweeping powers to suppress the press. In 1932 the provisions of this Act were further amplified in the form of the criminal Amendment Act.

During the Second World War, pre-censorship was reinforced and amended under the Press Emergent Act in 1931 and the official Secrets Act. The Congress was banned and its activities were declared illegal and so were the press promulgating national feelings. The 1947 Indian Press inquiring committee was set up to assess the laws related to newspaper

8.2.10 The Press Enquiry Committee 1947

Press Enquiry Committee, 1947 was set up to examine press laws with reference to the Fundamental rights formulated by the Constituent Assembly. It recommended repeal of Indian Emergency Powers Act, 1931, amendments in Press and Registration of Books Act, modifications in Sections 124-A and 156-A of IPC, among others.

8.2.11 The Press (Objectionable Matters) Act, 1951

The Act was passed along with amendment to Article 19 (2) of the Constitution. The Act empowered the government to demand and forfeit security for publication of “objectionable matter”. Aggrieved owners and printers were given right to demand trial by jury. It remained in force till 1956.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Write a note Liberation of the Indian Press 1835.

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2) Discuss the significance Vernacular Press Act, 1878

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8.3 THE SPREAD OF ENGLISH EDUCATION

The British were more successful in the introduction of modern education. Of course the spread of modern education was not solely the work of the government: the Christian missionaries and a large number of enlightened Indians also played an important part. For the first 60 years of its dominion in India the East India Company- a trading, profit-making concern-took little interest in the education of its subjects. There were, however, two very minor exceptions to this policy.

8.3.1 Colonial Education

It is essential to understand the dynamics of relationship between education and colonialism in order to understand the development of education under colonial rule. Authors like Martin Carnoy and others have argued that education in a colonial country is designed by the colonial rulers to legitimise their domination and to serve their own economic needs.

Economic and political control over the colonial country is essential for the survival of colonial rule and education is used to achieve this goal. Attempt is made to develop through education a new set of values and justification of the colonial rule. Thus education loses its independent identity and becomes subordinate to political power. Colonial education no doubt brings changes and cultural transformation in a colonial country. New ideas and experiments undoubtedly enrich the existing knowledge. But the colonial country has to pay a heavy price for it. The ultimate outcome of this policy might be different but the desired objective is to control' not to 'change' the colonial country.

In the background of this view of many social historians regarding the dynamics of relationship between colonial rule and education we shall look at the development of English education in India. However, before we come to the beginnings of English

education, let us take a look at the indigenous system of education in the early 19th century.

8.3.2 Indigenous Education

The information that we gather from early British records gives us a very rough idea about indigenous system of education in late 18th and early 19th century India. There were 'Madrastas' and 'Maktabs' for the Muslims and 'Tols' and 'Patshalas' for the Hindus. These ranged from the centres for higher learning in Arabic and Sanskrit to lower levels of institution for schooling people in Persian and Vernacular languages. Lack of scientific and secular learning was one of the major limitations of the centres for higher learning in those days. However, many Hindus attended Persian schools because Persian was then the court language and there were also Hindu teachers in Persian schools. Whether it was a 'Tol' or a 'Madrasta' there were certain common features in the indigenous system of education.

- Schools were generally run with the help of contribution from Zamindars or from local rich men.
- In the curriculum the main emphasis was on classical language like Sanskrit, Arabic or Persian and subjects of classical Hindu or Islamic tradition like Grammar, Logic, Law, Metaphysics, Medicines, etc.
- Though Sanskrit learning was the exclusive domain of the Brahmans, from the reports available of the early 19th century we find that the non-upper castes and the scheduled castes had also representation in the lower level schools.
- Women were generally debarred from the formal education system.
- In the absence of printing press till 19th century oral tradition and memory of the teachers formed the basis of knowledge and information, supplemented with hand written manuscripts.
- The state had little or no role in school education though kings would patronise people famous for their learning.

Besides the centres for higher learning which were basically the domain of upper castes there was a large number of elementary schools. Most of the villages in India had this kind of elementary schools. These were each run by an individual teacher with the monetary help of the village Zamindars or local elite. These schools used to teach the students elementary arithmetic and basic literacy to meet the needs of day-to-day life. Students from different sections of society, except the very backward disprivileged castes, attended these schools.

Thus the education system that existed in India in the early 19th century had its own merits and demerits. The elementary schools provided the opportunity for basic education to rural people and its curriculum was secular in approach and responsive to practical needs. Probably in the higher centres of learning (Tols and Madrasas) too

much emphasis on niceties of grammar, philosophy and religion narrowed down the scope of expansion of secular and scientific knowledge. The colonial rulers discarded the indigenous system and replaced it by a system of education of their own. The potentiality that the indigenous system had as a means of mass education, was destroyed. In the following section we would see how controversies started among different groups about what should be the role of the East India Company in the development of education in India.

8.3.3 Debate over Education Policy

Till the second half of 18th century the English East India Company did not face any dilemma about its role in the promotion of education in India. It was basically a commercial corporation, so its basic objectives was trade and profit. Before acquisition of territorial power the Company had no role in education, however, there were attempts by the missionaries to establish charity schools and to promote learning. But things began to change with the British occupation of Eastern India in the second-half of 18th century. Within the official circle as well as outside of it there was a growing debate about what should be the role of the company in the promotion of learning in India.

Immediately after the acquisition of political power in India the company officials wanted to maintain, neutrality or non-intervention in the sphere of religion and culture of the indigenous society. The reason behind it was partly the fear of adverse reaction and opposition to their role by the local people. However, constant pressure from different quarters, the Missionaries, the Liberals, the Orientalists, the Utilitarians compelled the company to give up its policy of neutrality and to take the responsibility of promotion of learning.

The second important point around which the opinions were sharply divided was whether the company should promote western or oriental learning. In the initial stage the company officials patronised oriental learning. It cannot be denied that some of the Englishmen had the genuine desire to acquire and promote oriental learning.

In this context we may mention the establishment of the 'Calcutta Madrasa' by Warren Hastings (1781), the Benares Sanskrit College by Jonathan Duncan (1791) and the 'Asiatic Society of Bengal' by William Jones (1784). Those who were in favour of continuation of the existing institutions of oriental learning and promotion of Indian classical tradition were called 'Orientalists': The argument put forward by the Orientalists was that generally there was a prejudice among Indians against European knowledge and science, so there might be complete rejection of western knowledge. Some of them were also interested to explore the classical tradition and culture of ancient Indian civilization. The orientalist wanted to teach the British officials the local language and culture so that they would be better at their job. This

was the prime objective behind the foundation of the Port William College at Calcutta in 1800. The other motive was to develop friendly relations with the elites of the indigenous society and to understand their culture. This was the main reason behind the establishment of the 'Calcutta Madarsa' and Benares Sanskrit College'.

There was a strong opposition to this Orientalist approach by different groups in England *i.e.* the Evangelicals, the Liberals and the Utilitarians. The new cultural ethos that developed in England with the Industrial Revolution was highly critical of the company's monopoly trade. Post-industrial Revolution saw little of value beyond modern western culture. The Evangelicals had a firm conviction in the superiority of Christian ideas and western institutions. Two great exponents of the Evangelical view were Charles Grant and William Wilberforce.

Others who did not share Evangelical faith also were convinced of the superiority of western knowledge and one of the chief promoters of this idea was Thomas Babington Macaulay. He recommended that western learning should be promoted in India through English language and this should be the objective of education policy in India. James Mill, the chief advocate of Utilitarianism in India, was highly critical of Indian religion and culture. Instead of support to oriental institutions, he had emphasised Western education. But he believed that education alone was not sufficient to bring desired transformation in India; legislative and administrative reforms were also essential for this purpose.

In brief, all of these groups who may be called 'Anglicists', in general believed that Indians were in a backward stage and Western education given through English language alone was the remedy. But education was expensive. Therefore it was better to educate a group of people who would gradually educate the rest of the society. Education would filter down from the elites to the masses. In this way it would help to develop new cultural values and knowledge in India. This was after called the 'filtration' theory.

The missionaries had a completely different logic for supporting the introduction of English education in India. The motive of the missionaries was to get access to the indigenous society through education and to propagate new cultural values which would help them in conversion of people to Christianity.

The response of Indians to this debate over education policy was a mixed one. Ram Mohan Roy and others favoured introduction of Western education with the belief that it would help Indians to assimilate the knowledge of western science, rationalism, new ideas and literature. This would help in the regeneration of the country. Some other people believed that knowledge of Western education, specially the knowledge of English, would help them in getting jobs and coming close to the ruling elite. So they were in support of Western education. In opposition to this there

were many conservatives who were staunch supporters of Indian classical language and culture. They had the apprehension that introduction of Western education would lead to the collapse of indigenous society and culture.

Thus, there were different shades of opinion among the Europeans as well as Indians about the role of the company in the development of education in India. Let us see in the next section what major developments took place in Indian education during 1757-1857.

Check your Progress 2

1) Make an assessment of the indigenous system of education in 100 words.

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2) Write in 50 words about the attitude of Indians to the promotion of western learning.

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3) Read the following sentences and mark right (√) or wrong (×)

- i. In the indigenous system of education mass education was neglected.
- ii. Women in general were deprived of education in the indigenous system.
- iii. In the beginning the company officials avoided any intervention in indigenous education.
- iv. The Anglicists wanted to promote western education because they wanted to modernise India.

8.3.4 Development of English Education

As, we have seen in the earlier section, the beginning of English education can be traced only to the early 19th century. Before that the efforts made by the missionaries or by individuals were very limited in nature. We may mention in this connection Schwartzs schools in Tanjore, Ramnad and Shivganga, the Baptist Missionaries in Serampore, the London Mission Society, the American Methodists in Bombay, etc. They had pioneering contribution in modern education. These missionary activities and the mounting pressure by some Englishmen like Charles Grant and William Wilberforce compelled the Company to give up its policy of non-intervention in education. For the first time the British Parliament included in the Company's charter a clause that the Governor-General in Council is bound to keep a sum of not less than one lakh of rupees per year for education. But the company used this fund mainly to promote and encourage Indian language and literature. The importance of the Charter Act of 1813 was that the Company for the first time acknowledged state responsibility for the promotion of education in India.

In 1823 a General Committee of Public Institution was set up to look after the development of education in India. Most of the members of this committee belonged to the Orientalist group and they strongly advocated the promotion of oriental learning rather than the promotion of Western education. However, as we have discussed in the earlier section, different sections both in England and in India created mounting pressure on the Company to encourage Western education. Macaulay, the President of the General Committee of Public Instruction and Lord Bentinck, the Governor General, took the side of the Anglicists and Bentinck gave his ruling that "the great object of the British Government in India was henceforth to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India; and that 411 the funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone".

Some of the important points of the resolution that Bentinck announced in 1835 were as follows:

- Persian was abolished as the court language and was substituted by English.
- Printing and publication of English books were made free and available at a comparatively low price.
- More fund was provided to support the English education, while there was curtailment in the fund for the promotion of oriental learning.

Auckland who came after Bentinck as the Governor-General also believed in the need for the promotion of English education in India. He recommended the opening of more English colleges in Dacca, Patna, Benares, Allahabad, Agra, Delhi and Barreilly. The General Committee of Public Instruction was abolished in 1841 and

its place was taken by a Council of Education. The next major landmark in the development of English education in this period was the Wood's Despatch of 1854. Sir Charles Wood, the president of the Board of Control, in 1854 laid down the policy which became the guiding principle of the education programme of the government of India. The Despatch categorically declared:

"The education that we desire to see extended in India is that which has for its object the diffusion of the improved arts, science, philosophy and literature of Europe, in short of European knowledge".

The major recommendations of the Despatch were as follows

- the creation of a department of public instruction in each of the five provinces of the company's territory,
- the establishment of university at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras,
- the establishment of a network of graded schools-high schools, middle schools and the elementary schools,
- the establishment of teachers training institutions,
- the promotion of vernacular schools,
- the introduction of a system of grants-in-aid for financial help to the schools, etc.

In 1847 three universities were established in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. The establishment of universities and the opening of education departments in the provinces provided a basic structure to modern education in India, in fact Wood's Despatch provided the model for the further development in education in India.

Along with this official initiative to promote western learning in India, there was initiative by the missionaries and some individuals to promote Western education. In Bengal some of the important colleges were established by the Christian missionaries. These missionary institutions did play a role in spreading western knowledge, though their basic object was to attract people to Christianity. Besides the missionaries some individuals played a significant role to promote English education in Calcutta. The Native School and Book Society of Calcutta was established to open schools in Calcutta and to train up the teachers for the indigenous schools. The establishment of Hindu College (later Presidency College) in Calcutta by David Hare and a group of local Hindu notables facilitated the promotion of secular education among Indians. David Hare was against the teaching of religious ideas and Sanskrit and Arabic languages. J.E.D. Bethune who was an ardent advocate of women's education founded a girls' school in Calcutta. Among the Bengalis, Vidyasagar supported the promotion of women's education. All these institutions obtained a positive response from the local people who strongly pleaded to the British for further expansion of educational opportunities.

Similarly in Bombay and Madras also missionary schools were established. In Bombay notable developments were the Native Education Society and the Elphinstone Institution which played a role similar to the Hindu College of Calcutta. In Madras the Christian College was founded in 1837 and the Presidency College in 1853. In Uttar Pradesh the first English-medium college was founded at Agra in 1823. Thus by 1850s we find that in most of the provinces in India the basis of modern education was laid down by the British.

8.3.5 An Appraisal

The above discussion shows how gradually the English education developed. The government promoted this system while neglecting the indigenous system of education in the 19th century. The spread of English education in India was a long process and before 1857 its spread and depth were limited. Nonetheless the changes that came in education up to 1857 deserve a close scrutiny. There was no doubt that the new education broadened the horizon of knowledge. Specially the establishment of printing press and easy availability of books removed the traditional barriers and made education accessible to more people. The ideas of the western thinkers influenced the younger generation of the indigenous society and they began to question the existing traditional values. A new spirit of rationalism developed.

However, these positive contributions have to be balanced against the grave limitations of the education system that developed under colonial sponsorship. The English education system totally ignored the importance of mass education. In the indigenous system the elementary schools provided basic education to a wide section of society. But in the new education the emphasis was to educate a selected few. The Anglicists idea of filtering down education from elites to masses did not work in practice. This system did not provide equal access to education to all and this led to the perpetuation of the backwardness of socially backward castes and communities. The existing divisions in the society widened.

Secondly, in spite of advocacy of western science and technology, in the curriculum of schools and colleges the emphasis was on western literature, philosophy and humanities. Technology and natural science were neglected and without such knowledge the intellectual advancement as well as economic development of a country was hampered.

Another aspect of this new education was the subordination of education to political power. Whether it was Orientalist or Anglicist the basic object of their education policy was to strengthen colonial rule. The Orientalists wanted to do it through indigenisation and the Anglicists wanted to do it through westernization. The basic purpose of the education policy was inseparable from the political interests of the colonial government.

Thus we have seen that education became an issue of debate among various schools of thought. The education policy in the first half of 19th century was a product of this clash of opinions. On the whole, the colonial administration was keen to promote an education policy which served its own interests.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Discuss the official policy of education from 1835 to 1857. Answer in 100 words.

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2) Write a critical note on the effect of English education in India. Answer in 100 words.

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8.6 LET US SUM UP

Growth of press played an important role in the building up of an increasingly strong national sentiment and consciousness among the Indian people, in the development and consolidation of their growing nationalist movement, in the creation of national and provincial literatures and cultures, and in the forging of bonds of fraternity with other progressive peoples and classes in the outer worlds.

During the British rule gradually the indigenous system of education was replaced with a new system of education. There were many who tried to promote oriental

learning but the Anglicists prevailed over such Orientalists. New schools and colleges were established to promote learning. New social, political and economic ideas came through the channel of western education. But the education policy ignored scientific and technical education. Moreover, the beneficiaries of this education was mainly the upper crust of society. So the transformation that came with the English education was very limited in nature.

8.7 KEY WORDS

Anglicist:	The Company officials who were in favour of promotion of western education in India were called Anglicists.
Evangelicals:	There was a group of Protestants in England who believed in the supremacy of the Christ and individual initiative. They visualised the progress of human being only through faith in Christ and the Christian culture.
Liberals:	In 19 th century England a new political party emerged, called Liberal party Members of this party who were called liberals believed in toleration and advocated freedom of thought and expression.
Orientalists:	The company officials who advocated for the promotion of Indian, culture, tradition and languages were called Orientalists.
Utilitarianism:	A family of consequentialist ethical theories that promotes actions that maximize happiness and well-being for the affected individuals.
Vernacular:	The language or dialect spoken by the ordinary people in a particular country or region.

8.8 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISE

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sub-Sec. 8.2.3
- 2) See Sub-Sec. 8.2.6

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sub-Sec. 8.3.2
- 2) See Sub-Sec. 8.3.3
- 3) i) × ii) √ iii) √ iv) ×

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Sub-Sec. 8.3.4
- 2) See Sub-Sec. 8.3.5

SUGGESTED READING

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UNIT 9 : ISSUES OF CASTE AND GENDER: JYOTIBA PHULE- WOMEN QUESTION AND ISSUES, DEPRESSED CLASS

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Early Life
- 9.3 The Historical Context
- 9.4 Phule's Gender Reforms
- 9.5 Social Reform Activities
 - 9.5.1 Views on Religion and Caste
 - 9.5.2 Sathyashodhak Samaj
- 9.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.7 Key Words
- 9.8 Answer to Check Your Progress Exercise

9.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to know about;

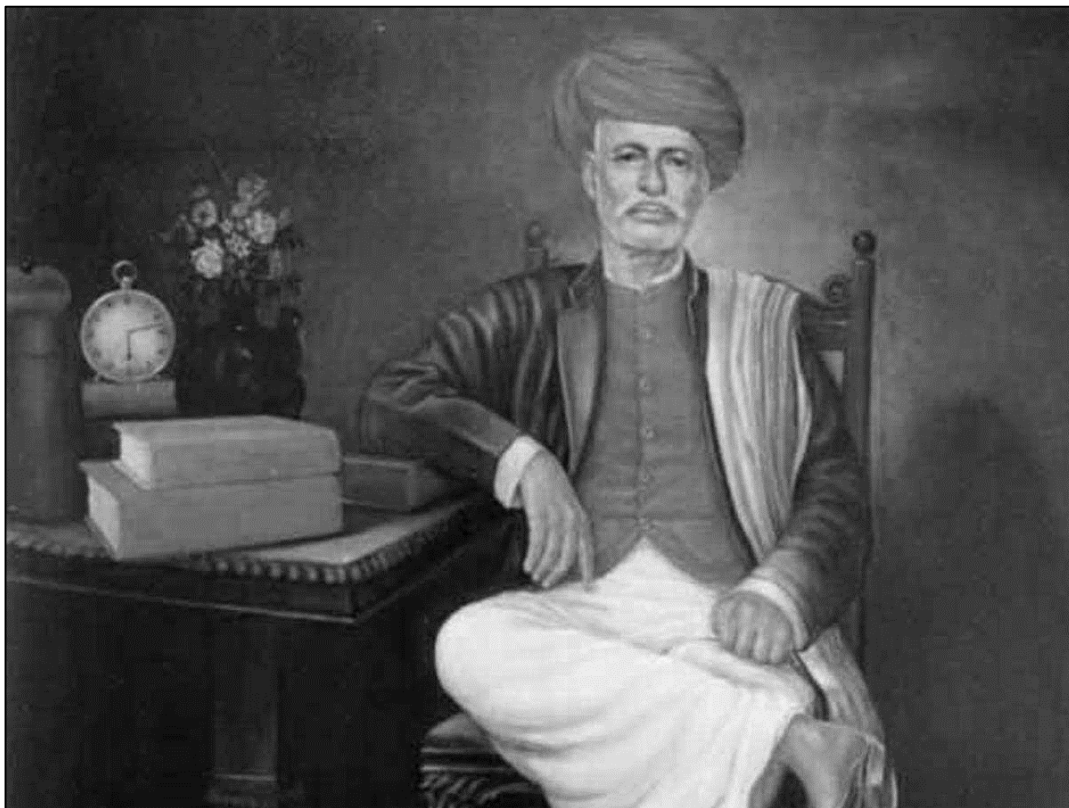
- Mahatma Jotirao Govindrao Phule's early life and education,
- his social reform activities against caste discrimination and depressed class, and
- his role in women education and empowerment.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Jyotirao Govindrao Phule, also known as Jotiba Phule is regarded as the foremost reformer, social activist and a pioneer of women education in India during the 19th century. Jotiba Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule, played an important role in women empowerment and welfare then. The relentless efforts of Mahatma Jotiba Phule in removing the evils of the caste system that had degenerated from its original concept, made him an icon of social justice for the Depressed Classes. Noted that Ambedkar always used the word Depressed Classes to describe those belonging to his community. Phule's reforms contributed to removal of untouchability, caste discrimination and women empowerment. He and his supporters founded *Satyashodhak Samaj* (Truth-seekers' Society) in Pune. It was a social reform society that fought for equal rights for the depressed classes. Soon, people from all sections of society joined and worked for upliftment of the backward classes.

9.2 EARLY LIFE

Phule was born in 1827 into a family that belonged to the agricultural caste, traditionally occupied as gardeners and considered to be one of the Shudravarna in the ritual ranking system of Hinduism. The original surname of the family had been Gorhe and had its origins in the village of Katgun, in present day Satara District, Maharashtra. Phule's great-grandfather worked as a chaugula, a lowly type of village servant, in that village but moved to Khanwadi in Pune district. He prospered there but his only son, Shetiba, who was of poor intelligence, subsequently squandered what had been gained. Shetiba moved himself and his family, including three boys, to Poona in search of some form of income. The boys were taken under the wing of a florist, who taught them his trade. Their proficiency in growing and arranging became well known and they adopted the name of Phule (flower-man) in place of Gorhe. Their fulfilment of commissions from the Peshwa, Baji Rao-II, for flower mattresses and other goods for the rituals and ceremonies of the royal court so impressed him that he granted them 35 acres (14 ha) of land on the basis of the inam system, whereby no tax would be payable upon it. The oldest brother machinated to take sole control of the property, leaving the younger two siblings, Jyotirao Phule's father, Govindrao, to continue farming and also flower selling.



Mahatma Jyotirao Govindrao Phule

Govindrao married Chimnabai and had two sons, of whom Jyotirao was the younger. Chimnabai died before he was aged one. The Mali community did not set much store by education, and after attending primary school to learn the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, Jyotirao was withdrawn from school. He joined the menfolk of his family at work, both in the shop and the farm. However, a Christian convert from the same Mali caste as Phule recognised his intelligence and persuaded Phule's father to allow Phule to attend the local Scottish Mission High School. Phule completed his English schooling in 1847. As was customary, he was married young, at the age of 13, to a girl of his own community, chosen by his father.

The turning point in his life was in 1848, when he attended the wedding of a Brahmin friend. Phule participated in the customary marriage procession, but was later rebuked and insulted by his friend's parents for doing that. They told him that he being from a lower caste should have had the sense to keep away from that ceremony. This incident profoundly affected Phule on the injustice of the caste system.

9.3 THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The turn of the 19th century saw a spurt of social reforms ushered in by men, beginning in Bengal and spreading to other parts of India, including Maharashtra. The British had taken over Poona in 1818 marking the end of the Peshwa rule of the Brahmins. An important aspect of the reforms was the upliftment of women. The abysmally low status of Indian women and the cruel practices like sati, enforced widowhood, infant marriage and purdah grabbed their attention.

Around the time that young Jotirao was growing up, the social reform movement was gathering tempo. The reform movement was largely an upper-caste phenomenon and the subject of their concern, however limited, was the upper-caste woman. Nevertheless, it had the potential to go beyond its immediate class\caste interests and it did, ushering in the entry of non-Brahmin reformers led by Jotirao Phule.

Jotirao began to apply the principles of human rights discourse to the caste and gender-stratified Hindu, brahmanical social order. He realized that education was key to the liberation of what he termed as the Shudras, ati-Shudras and women, as these sections had been deliberately and forcibly kept away from education by the brahmanical caste order.

9.4 PHULE'S GENDER REFORMS

The first gender-sensitive act of Jotirao was to encourage his young wife Savitri to read and write. He taught her and his aunt Sagunabai while he was still studying in

the missionary school. Savitri was a bright and eager student, and went on to acquire a teacher's training certificate.

The Phules started their first school for girls on 15 May 1848 at Bhidewada, Poona. Savitribai was its headmistress. The school brought together girls of all castes under one roof. The first batch had 25 girls. In the same year they also set up a school for untouchable girls. Savitribai, along with Sagunabai, Fatima Sheikh and some male colleagues, taught in these schools. In the next four years, the Phules set up no less than 18 schools for women.

On the occasion of one of the annual examinations of his schools, Jotirao wrote, "To educate women and to cultivate their intelligence, to give them respect that they deserve and to take responsibility of their wellbeing is against the religious beliefs of Hindu people ..." Here, he links education with respect and dignity and squarely blames the Hindu religion for suppressing women's right to education.

In a letter dated 5 February 1852 and addressed to the then governor of Bombay, he says, "We are deeply impressed with the necessity and importance of ameliorating the condition of the Natives and enlightening minds through the means of female education and under this conviction have instituted a seminary with a view of promoting this beneficent object". Jotirao was convinced that the overall improvement of society hinged on the education of women. In contrast, other reformers of his time wanted, at best, limited education for women to enable them to be better wives and mothers. For Jotirao, education was an inalienable part of women's human rights. Elsewhere he says, "... If men do not come in the way of basic human rights of women, a free world would come into being and all men and women would be contented and happy."

After a spate of schools, the Phules turned their attention to other social evils. Child marriage was the norm in society, particularly among the "upper" castes. Young girls were married to old men and more often than not became young widows. Widowhood spelt the death of their social and sexual life but ironically increased their vulnerability to sexual exploitation by the males in the family. They faced further disgrace if they happened to become pregnant as a result. This often left them with no choice but to take their own life, or their infant's life, or both.

Moved by this state of affairs, the Phules opened their own home to pregnant child widows in 1863. They put up huge posters at the Brahmanwada, directly appealing to the young widows not to lose heart if they found themselves pregnant. They were invited to the Phules' residence to deliver their child after which they could stay back or walk away. The Phules' non-judgmental and empathetic approach made them stand out among their fellow reformers and earned them the ire of the brahmanical orthodoxy. Savitribai personally helped in delivering babies of more than 35

Brahmin women. The Phules also extensively wrote about the social evil of child marriages.

9.5 SOCIAL REFORM ACTIVITIES

In 1848, aged 23, Phule visited the first girls' school in Ahmadnagar, run by Christian missionaries. It was also in 1848 that he read Thomas Paine's book *Rights of Man* and developed a keen sense of social justice. He realised that lower castes and women were at a disadvantage in Indian society, and also that education of these sections was vital to their emancipation.

To this end and in the same year, Phule first taught reading and writing to his wife, Savitribai, and then the couple started the first indigenously-run school for girls in Pune. In his book *Gulamgiri*, Phule says that the first school was for Brahmin and upper caste girls, however Phule's biographer says it was for low caste girls. Ostracised for this by their family and community, their friend Usman Sheikh and his sister Fatima Sheikh provided them their home to stay. They also helped to start the school in their premises. Later, the Phules started schools for children from the then untouchable castes such as Mahar and Mang. In 1852, there were three Phule schools in operation but by 1858 they had all ended. Eleanor Zelliott blames the closure on private European donations drying up due to the Mutiny of 1857, withdrawal of government support, and Jyotirao resigning from the school management committee because of disagreement regarding the curriculum. He championed widow remarriage and started a home for pregnant widows to give birth in a safe and secure place in 1863. His orphanage was established in an attempt to reduce the rate of infanticide. Phule tried to eliminate the stigma of social untouchability surrounding the lower castes by opening his house and the use of his water-well to the members of the lower castes.

9.5.1 Views on Religion and Caste

Phule recast the prevailing Aryan invasion theory of history, proposing that the Aryan conquerors of India, whom the theory's proponents considered to be racially superior, were in fact barbaric suppressors of the indigenous people. He believed that they had instituted the caste system as a framework for subjugation and social division that ensured the pre-eminence of their Brahmin successors. He saw the subsequent Muslim conquests of the Indian subcontinent as more of the same sort of thing, being a repressive alien regime, but took heart in the arrival of the British, whom he considered to be relatively enlightened and not supportive of the *varnashramadharm*a system instigated and then perpetuated by those previous invaders. In his book, *Gulamgiri*, he thanked Christian missionaries and the British colonists for making the lower castes realise that they are worthy of all human rights.

The book, whose title transliterates as slavery and which concerned women, caste and reform, was dedicated to the people in the US who were working to end slavery.

Phule saw Rama, the hero of the Indian epic Ramayana, as a symbol of oppression stemming from the Aryan conquest. His critique of the caste system began with an attack on the Vedas, the most fundamental texts of upper-caste Hindus. He considered them to be a form of false consciousness.

He is credited with introducing the Marathi word dalit (broken, crushed) as a descriptor for those people who were outside the traditional varna system. The terminology was later popularised in the 1970s by the Dalit Panthers.

At an education commission hearing in 1884, Phule called for help in providing education for lower castes. To implement it, he advocated making primary education compulsory in villages. He also asked for special incentives to get more lower-caste people in high schools and colleges.

9.5.2 Sathyashodhak Samaj

In 1873, Jyotiba Phule laid the foundation of *Satyashodhak Samaj* (Truth seeker's society). He presented a socio-cultural analysis that was highly critical of caste based domination. He advocated social democracy and justice. Phule also criticized age-old 'Chaturvarnya' theory of gradation and separation of man based on birth. In spite of difficult situations and continuous disapproval, the Phule duo continued social reform. The sole purpose of the formation of "*Satyashodhak Samaj*" was to eradicate caste discrimination and liberate lower castes from upper caste domination. Jyotirao Phule invented the term 'Dalit' for the untouchables. It must however be mentioned that B.R. Ambedkar always said he belonged to the Depressed Classes. The word Dalit entered the national discourse in the 1990's. Many believe it was done at the behest of the Church to encourage conversions. Membership to the "*Satyashodhak Samaj*" was given to everyone regardless of their caste and religion. By 1876 '*Satyashodhak Samaj*' had 316 members. In 1868, Jyotirao showed his embracing attitude by making a common bathing water tank near his house and sat to dine with people of all castes.

Check Your Progress

- 1) Write a short note on the early influences in the life of Jyotiba Phule.

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2) Discuss the social reform activities of Jyotiba Phule in five lines.

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3) Give an account on the gender reforms of the Phule couples.

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9.6 LET US SUM UP

Mahatma Jyotirao Govindrao Phule’s work extended to many fields including eradication of untouchability and the caste system, and women's emancipation. Phule, along with his followers, formed the Satyashodhak Samaj to attain equal rights for people from lower castes. People from all religions and castes could become a part of this association which worked for the upliftment of the oppressed classes. Phule is regarded as an important figure in the social reform movement in Lagrange. He and his wife, Savitribai Phule, were pioneers of women education in India. He is mostly known for his efforts in educating women and lower caste people. The Phule couple were partners in every sense of the term. It is impossible to divorce Jotirao’s theory from practice, his work from that of Savitribai’s, their work from their life.

9.7 KEY WORDS

Ostracised : exclude from a society or group.

9.8 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISE

Check Your Progress

1) See sec. 9.2

2) See sec. 9.5

3) See sec. 9.4

SUGGESTED READING:

Chandra, B. 2009. *History of Modern India*. New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan.

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