

CHAPTER – 9

Women, Caste and Reform

❖ Let's Recall

Question 1:

What social ideas did the following people support?

- (i) Raja Ram Mohan Roy
- (ii) Dayanand Saraswati
- (iii) Veerasalingam Pantulu
- (iv) Jyotirao Phule
- (v) Pandita Ramabai
- (vi) Periyar
- (vii) Mumtaz Ali
- (viii) Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar

Answer:

(i) Raja Ram Mohan Roy: Ban on Sati

(a) Abolition of Sati system: He focused his attention towards removing the evil practice of Sati.

(b) Idolatry: He criticized idol worship by the Hindus.

(c) Women Liberty: He worked to secure a place of honor for women in the Hindu society. He demanded for them the right of inheritance to property. To ensure a place of respect for women, he condemned the practice of polygamy.

(d) Advocate of Western Education: He supported the study of English literature. He was a great scholar having sharp intellect in the Vedas, Upnishads, Quran, Bible and several other holy scriptures. He very well realized the importance of English language.

(ii) Dayanand Saraswati: Widow remarriage

(a) Widow Remarriage: Dayanand supported widow remarriage.

(b) Educational Reforms: He supported the education of masses by setting up Gurukuls and Vedic schools.

(c) Child marriage: He opposed the practice of child marriage.

(d) Education of girls: He supported education of girls. He suggested for an educated man needs an educated woman.

(e) Arya Samaj: He founded Arya Samaj which worked for the uplift and emancipation of women.

(f) Shuddhi: Reconversion to Hinduism. This unique ritual was performed on those Hindus who were converted to other religion against their will.

(iii) Veerasalingam Pantulu: Widow remarriage

(a) **Widow Remarriage:** He supported widow remarriage and formed an association in the Telugu speaking areas of the Madras Presidency.

(b) **Literary Activities:** He was the father of renaissance movement in Andhra. He wrote the first novel in Telugu Rajasekhara Charitra. He was the first to render drama in Telugu.

(c) **Women Education:** He established schools for girls. He was the first to write in prose for women.

(iv) Jyoti Rao Phule: Caste Inequality

(a) **Untouchability:** He was against the caste inequality which gives superior status to Brahmans.

(b) **Education of girls:** Jyoti Rao Phule supported education for girls. He and his wife opened five schools for girls in and around Puna in 1848.

(c) **Slavery:** Low caste people were supposed to be served higher caste people. He argued that Brahmans were not superior, just because they were Aryans. He supported the idea that land belonged to indigenous people, the so called low castes.

(v) Pandita Ramabai: iii treatment of widows

(a) **Women Education:** She founded Arya Mahila Samaj to promote the cause of women's education. Pandita Ramabai worked for the upliftment of women's status in society.

(b) She wrote a book about the miserable lives of upper-caste Hindu women.

(c) **Sharada Sadan:** She founded a widow's home at Puna to provide shelter to widows who had been treated badly by their husband's relatives. Here, women were trained so that they could support themselves economically.

(vi) Periyar: caste inequality/untouchability

(a) One of the major areas of his focuses on up-gradation and upliftment of rural population.

(b) Periyar supported the idea that untouchables were the true upholders of an original Tamil and Dravidian culture which had been subjugated by Brahmans.

(c) He supported the idea that untouchable had to free themselves from all religions in order to achieve social inequality.

(d) He founded the self-respect movement.

(e) He did not support the authority of Brahmans over lower castes and the domination of men over women. Hence he was a critic of Hindi scriptures which supported these ideas.

(vii) Mumtaz Ali: Women's education

(a) Mumtaz Ali supported women's education.

(b) She, along with other reformers reinterpreted verses from Koran to support for women's education.

(c) Women were encouraged to read about religion and domestic management in language they could understand.

(viii) Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar: Widow remarriage

(a) **Widow Remarriage and women upliftment:** He carried a crusade for widow's remarriage. He also tried to legalize widow's remarriage. His suggestion was adopted by British officials and a law was passed permitting widow remarriage in 1856. He also opposed polygamy.

(b) **Child Marriage:** He raised his voice again child marriage.

(c) **Girls Education:** He opened girl's school which he ran at his own expense. Orthodox families criticized saying that after receiving western education, girls would not be able to perform their duties as mother and wives.

Question 2:

State whether true or false:

- (a) When the British captured Bengal they framed many laws to regulate the rules regarding marriage, adoption, inheritance of property etc.
- (b) Social reformers had to discard the ancient texts in order to argue for reform in social practices.
- (c) Reformers got full support from all sections of the people of the country.
- (d) The Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed in 1829.

Answer:

- (a) (True)

When the British captured Bengal they framed many laws to regulate the rules regarding marriage, adoption, inheritance of property because they consider Indian practices to be harsh especially for women and illegal.

- (b) (False)

The reformers worked for improving the status of women in the society using the knowledge of ancient texts. They didn't discard the ancient texts but they took verses from ancient texts to show that existing evil practices were against early traditions.

(c) (False)

No, Reformers in India did not get full support from all the sections of society because some of the people consider these changes to be against the Indian traditions.

(d) (False)

The child marriage restraint act was passed in 1929.

❖ LET'S DISCUSS

Question 3:

How did the knowledge of ancient texts help the reformers promote new laws?

Answer:

The reformers worked for improving the status of women in the society using the knowledge of ancient texts. They used these texts to convince people about the need for abolishing the certain social evils.

For example:

(i) Raja Ram Mohan Roy studied Hindu religious books and through his writings in different languages emphasized that widow-burning had no sanction in ancient text. He cited verses from ancient texts to show that existing evil practices were against early traditions.

(ii) Swami Dayanand quoted from Vedas that many social evils of today had no religious sanctions.

(iii) Mumtaz Ali reinterpreted verses from Quran to condemn the illiteracy among women and advocated for their education.

Question 4:

What were the different reasons people have for not sending girls to school?

Answer:

Initially, people were skeptical about girl's education so, they did not want to send girls to school mainly because of these reasons:

(i) They thought that education would pollute the minds of girls.

(ii) They feared that schools would take girls away from home, prevent them from doing their domestic duties.

(iii) They believed that girls should stay away from public places. They feared that passing through public places would have corrupting influence on them.

Question 5:

Why were Christian missionaries attacked by many people in the country? Would some people have supported them too? If so, for what reasons?

Answer:

Christian missionaries opened schools for tribal and lower caste children. Caste system wasn't followed by these schools so; these schools became the main reasons for attack on Christian missionaries by some orthodox people.

(i) Christian missionaries were attacked by many people in the country because:

- (a) They did not like the activities of missionaries.
- (b) Many Hindu nationalists felt that Hindu women were adopting western ways of living and that this would corrupt Hindu culture and erode family values.
- (c) Caste based segregation was not being followed in the schools which were run by the Christian missionaries.

(ii) Some people had supported them too for reasons such as:

- (a) The people who supported the Christian missionary's ideas were mainly the social reformers in India.

(b) Social reformers found some practices of missionary's very helpful in the upliftment of the society.

(c) Christian missionaries began setting up schools for tribal groups and lower caste children. These children were equipped with some resources to make their way into a changing world.

(d) Christian missionaries supported women's freedom and social equality. They condemned Sati system.

Question 6:

In the British period, what new opportunities opened up for people who came from castes that were regarded as "low"?

Answer:

The new opportunities opened up for the people of lower castes during the British period. Schools were set up for them and reforms were taking place for their empowerment. Education gave them a tool to change their world.

Reformers were working hard to eradicate inequality in the society like:

(i) Raja Ram Mohan Roy through his writings was criticizing the caste-system.

- (ii) The Prarthana Samaj adhered to the tradition of Bhakti that believed in spiritual equality of all castes.
- (iii) Many reformers of this period violated caste taboos on food and touch.
- (iv) Christian missionaries began setting up schools for tribal groups and lower caste children.
- (v) The poor from villages and small towns, many of them from low castes, began moving to cities where there was demand for new labour. Some went to work in plantations in Assam, Mauritius, Trinidad and Indonesia.
- (vi) New locations gave them new opportunities in job as well as in getting rid of the oppression they were facing at the hands of upper-class people back in their villages.
- (vii) The army also offered job opportunity.

Question 7:

How did Jyoti Rao Phule the reformer justify their criticism of caste inequality in society?

Answer:

Jyoti Rao Phule did not like the caste-based system. He saw using Rama as a symbol of oppression stemming from the Aryan conquest. He developed his own ideas about the injustices of caste society.

(a) Phule's critical of the caste system began with his attack on the Vedas, the most fundamental texts of upper caste Hindus.

(b) He opposed the idea that Brahmans were superiors, just because they were Aryans. He argued that Aryans were foreigners, who came from outside the subcontinent, and defeated and subjugated the true children of the country those who had lived here before coming of the Aryans.

(c) He said that the "upper" castes had no right to their land and powers in fact; the land belonged to indigenous people, the so-called low-castes.

(d) He proposed that Shudras and Ati Shudras should unite to challenge caste discrimination.

(e) He wrote a book named *Gulamgiri* meaning slavery. In this book he openly thanks Christian Missionaries for making the lower caste realize that they are worthy of all human rights too.

Question 8:

Why did Phule dedicate his *Gulamgiri* to the American movement to free slaves?

Answer:

Phule dedicated his book '*Gulamgiri*' to the American movement to free black slaves. As ten years before he wrote his book in 1873; the American Civil War had been fought leading to the end of slavery and racial discrimination in America. He mainly dedicated this book to those Americans who had fought to free slaves. He did this in order to establish a link in between the condition of lower caste in India and the black slaves in America.

In this book he also openly thanks Christian Missionaries for making the lower caste of India realize that they are worthy of all human rights too.

Question 9:

What did Ambedkar wanted to achieve through the temple entry movement?

Answer:

Temple entry movement was started by Ambedkar in 1927 because Brahmin priests were outraged when the Dalits used water from the temple tank. The Dalits were not allowed entry into the temples. It was like denying them one of the basic rights that is equal access to public place.

Through three temple entry movements between 1927 and 1935, he wanted to make everyone see the power of caste prejudices within society. By these temple entry movements, he wanted to regain self-respect for the Dalits.

Question 10:

Why were Jyoti Rao Phule and Ramaswamy Naicker critical of the national movement? Did their criticism help the national struggle in any way?

Answer:

Jyoti Rao Phule and Ramaswamy Naicker were critical of the national movement as they could barely see any difference between the preachers of anti-colonialism and the colonial masters. Both, according to them, were outsiders and had used power for subjugating and oppressing the indigenous people.

(i) Jyoti Rao Phule was critical of the anti-colonial nationalism that was preached by upper-castes leaders. He wanted Indians to know that the unity between high and low in entire country was only way they could progress.

(ii) Ramaswamy Naicker also became critical of the national movement when as member of the Congress he attended a feast organized by the nationalists. He found the seating arrangement followed by caste distinctions. He left in disgust. He founded the Self-Respect Movement for untouchables.

Hence, their assertions helped national struggles as they continued beyond the colonial period and are still going over the years. Their ideas were respected at many places and people united for a stronger national movement. The forceful speeches, writings and movements of lower-caste leaders did lead to rethinking and some self-criticism among upper-caste nationalism leaders.