

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL REFORMS ON WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN INDIA – AN EMERGENCY FROM TIMES IMMEMORIAL

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Abstract

"We want the education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet." – Swami Vivekananda. The proverb is true in all respect from a holistic point of view. Education is a necessity which is extremely significant for the whole world especially the women. We still live in a male dominated society where women remain underprivileged from times immortal. But comparatively women have been able to overcome much hazards and obstacles to achieve a position in society today. They should be considered equal in all terms as men. We have to admit a fact that no country can be successful until and unless both the male and female counterparts have equal roles to play. Education gears up women with the required knowledge and skills which is needed to work, earn income and ultimately achieve financial independence. The employment opportunities are increased manifold, their potential to earn is enhanced and also a step towards reduction of the gender wage gap is evident. Here, in this paper we will take into account the social reforms of the 19th century and the influence it had on the education of women in India. And the effect of education which we observe today in the current scenario will also be upheld in this paper. We see that the social reform movements of the 19th century aimed at securing two major objectives: firstly they focused on eradicating social evils and superstitions triumphing in Indian society and secondly they wanted to secure civil rights which are equal for all. Then it was observed that India during the 19th century witnessed a series of reform movements across the country. And these movements were oriented towards restructuring of India through modern lines which will be discussed in this paper. Many reformers were seen actively participating in the movement against social evils like Sati, polygamy, purdah system, women education, widow remarriage, child marriage etc.. One prominent way which would lead the unprivileged class which were women which is apt till date is education because it rightly creates awareness about women rights and gives them a voice to stand against any odds in the society.

Keywords: Education, underprivileged, social reforms, woman rights, awareness.

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt in saying that education is the most powerful weapon by which the whole world can be changed for a better tomorrow. In most of the developing countries particularly, women cannot finish their schooling because either circumstances don't permit them to do so or society puts a barrier in front of them or by the result of any sort of violence, they are forced to focus on the household, they have to look after kids or child-rearing responsibilities take the forefront. They are caregivers in the home front. The social reformers of the 19th century believed in the principles of liberty, equality and freedom of all human beings irrespective of caste, creed, sex, colour or religion. They attacked a number of conventional, autocratic and hierarchical social institutions and thus launched several social reform movements for the liberation of Indian women from their manacles. The primary focus of these movements amongst many was women's education as well as social reforms. It was directed towards working actively for the overall progress and development of women and children. The social reforms fought vigorously for the elevation of the status of women. It also dealt with the evils of polygamy, early marriages and prohibition of divorce. It advocated complete equality of women in the matters of property and many more.

It is quite evident till today the reliance of women over men for financial help. In remote places even today girl's education is compromised time and again, they are still subservient to the male figures in their household. Simultaneously, we can even see progress in the status of women in the current times where women seek equal status as compared to men. So, we see that both the situations are prevalent but there is no doubt that the situation is improving day by day. We can still improve existing educational infrastructure and the quality of education so that the acceptors of education can make the most out of it. Primarily we see that the social reform movements of 19th century were primarily of two types. The reformist movements countered back with the time and scientific temperament of the modern era. Then, we have the revivalist movements which had the view that western thoughts was wreaking havoc for the Indian culture and ideologies. And thus the revival of Indian traditions were quite evident. So there are two types of movements at the forefront which were the

reformist movements and the revivalist movements. The desperate need of the hour were the social reforms which began prioritizing from the early 19th century. And it had come to a top-priority basically in contact with the liberal western culture and education. The Indian customs and traditions were weak and it needed quick swap from the decay it had within itself and it was quite perceptible to educated classes of the Indian origin who started to work exhaustively for their removal. The western thoughts and ideas proved to be an awakener for the Indian social scenario which is commonly called as the Renaissance. The principal lead of this major awakening was Raja Ram Mohan Roy. He was widely called as 'father of the Indian Renaissance.' He had dedicated his life towards his motherland, he was responsible for many positive changes in the society. He was a great scholar and was extremely humanitarian in nature.

OBJECTIVES

The principal objectives can be enumerated as follows:

- To delve deep into the effects of social reform movements of the 19th century.
- To see the influence of the social reforms on the education of women in India in the past times as well as the condition of women's education in the current times.

METHODOLOGY

The paper is mainly expository in nature. The information which has been collected are from various reports from national bureau on social reforms and also from research papers and historical sources. And also data has been collected from various authentic websites. Some journal and research articles related to the subject matter are also referred.

An account of the reform movements of the 19th century:



FIG -1. Socio-religious reform movements. Source: StudyIQ.com

The reform movements of the 19th century can be summarized as follows:

Some of the **reformist movements** of the 18th & 19th centuries are discussed below --

- **Brahmo Samaj** – It was founded in Calcutta in 1828 by Raja Ram Mohan Roy who was a pioneer in this field. As a social reformer, he fought relentlessly against social evils like Sati, polygamy, child marriage, purdah system. The society also strived for women rights like widow remarriage and education of women. The first successful social movement against an age-old social evil was against the inhuman custom of Sati. Ram Mohan Roy helped William Bentinck to pass a law banning the practice of Sati in 1829. The Brahmo Samaj emphasized on human dignity. They opposed the rigidity of caste system because it totally destroyed the unity of the country.



Fig-2. Social reform movements in India. Source: Slideshare.com



Fig- 3. Sati, Social reform movements in India. Source: Slideshare.com

- Aligarh Movement – In 1875 in Aligarh Sayyid Ahmed Khan founded Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College which later became Aligarh Muslim University and it offered modern education to Muslims.
- Prarthana Samaj – In the year 1863 in Bombay, Keshab Chandra Sen founded the Prarthana Samaj. They preached monotheism. Its activities are spread across South India through the efforts of the Telegu reformer, Veeresalingam. Chandrashekhar, a philosopher, was a great leader of Prarthana Samaj.



Fig-4. Famous Social reformers of India and their contributions. Source: Creator-Vajiram & Ravi

Some of the **revivalist movements** are discussed below –

- Arya Samaj – The social and religious reforms in North India was spearheaded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883) who founded the Arya Samaj in 1875. The society strove against idolatry, polytheism, rituals, priesthood, animal sacrifice, child marriage and the caste system. The reformers worked sweat and slave for a better change for the advancement in the position of women, to upgrade the women in the society, to show them a path for their refinement, they were always in the favor of social justice and equality. They condemned and criticized untouchability and the rigid caste system. The Arya Samaj had made noteworthy contributions which were remarkable in the fields of both social reforms and education. Swami Dayanand wanted to decontaminate Hinduism and strictly condemned the evils that had crawled into the Hindu society. After his death, he had few committed followers who established the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic schools primarily in Lahore and then in various parts of India. Gurukuls had a prominent and permanent place in the propagation of conventional education. Many schools and colleges for both boys and girls were opened by the Arya Samaj for the holistic development of the boys and girls.

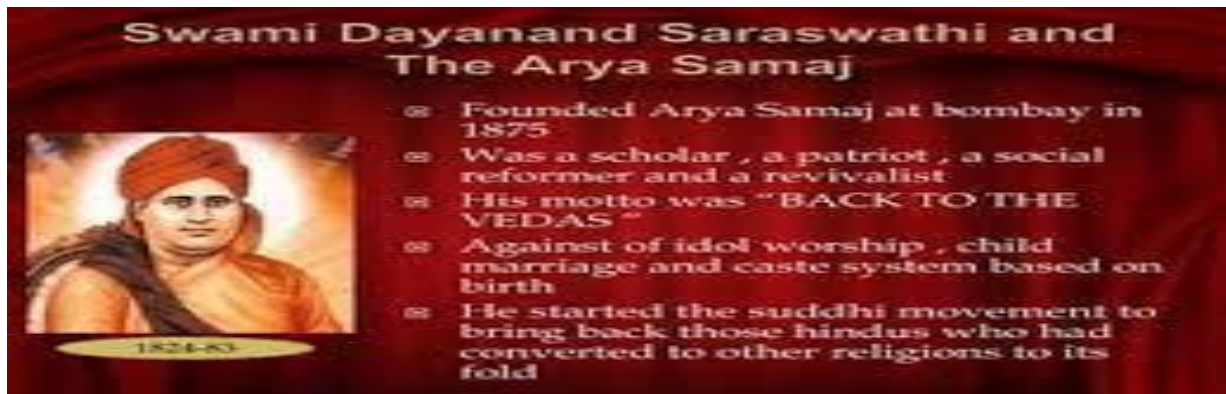


Fig -5. Socio religious movements in India. Source: Slideshare.com

- Deoband Movements -- It was a revivalist movement. This movement aimed at improving the education system and this movement especially focused on elevating and inspiring the Muslim community by educating them through religious education. In Uttar Pradesh, Saharanpur district, Rashid Ahmad Gangohi and Muhammad Qasim Wanotavi opened a school in a place called Deoband in 1866.

Other Important movements –

- The Theosophical Movement – Though Annie Besant's name is most associated with this society, it was actually founded by Madam Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott in New York (later shifted to Madras) in 1875. The religious philosophies were prominent and the studies relating to ancient Hindu, Buddhist and Zoroastrian ideologies were encouraged. As exemplified in Vedas and Upanishads, the notion of universal brotherhood were propagated across. Occultism was also stressed upon. She disseminated Vedic philosophies and spread the culture among various people and pleaded Indians to be proud of their rich cultural heritages and treasure it.
- Ramakrishna Mission – The mission was founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1897 in Belur near Calcutta to promote the teachings of Vivekananda's guru Ramakrishna Paramhansa. It opposed the caste system and untouchability. It laid emphasis on the universal brotherhood of all religions and propagated Vedanta. Several schools, colleges, hospitals, libraries, orphanages etc... were unfurled all across the country. During natural calamities like earthquakes, epidemics and famines, it provided much needed relief to the victims of the same. A math or monastery was opened near Calcutta in Belur which was known as the Belur Math. It took utmost care in developing the religious interests of the people.
- Satyasodhak Samaj – This society was founded by Jyotirao Govindrao Phule on 24th September, 1873 in present day Maharashtra. Idol worship was stumped. The rigidity of the caste system was also present thus, the samaj opposed it vehemently. It advocated rational thinking and rejected the priesthood. Jyotirao Phule is said to have used the term 'dalit' for the oppressed castes. He passionately led to improve the status of women, the poverty-stricken people and the untouchables. He opened a school for the basic education imparted to girls of the lower castes and established an association known as the Satyasodhak Samaj. There was no bar to join the association and all people willing to join from various castes and religion were welcome.
- Young Bengal Movement -- This movement was started by Henry Louis Vivian Derozio in Calcutta in 1820. Derozio taught in an Anglo-Indian college in Calcutta as he was a teacher there. He motivated and inspired

young students to radically think over. He condemned and attacked the existing religious practices of orthodox Hinduism. He encouraged free thinking and propagated the virtues of equality, justice, liberty and freedom.

- Widow Remarriage Associaton – Pandit Vishnu Shastri founded Widow Remarriage Association in 1860.

As an end result of the movements, we see that the reformers attempted to improve the status of girls and women in society. They all emphasized the need for female education. Female education was promoted too in this era. Schools for girls were set up. This led to a slow but steady development for girls, a much needed change for us.

Women's education in current times:



Fig-6. Women Education. Source: Feminism in India

In comparison to the 19th Century, India underwent a series of positive changes regarding women's education amongst all obstacles and odds prevalent in current times. Women have reached to new heights of success. The Indian women have empowered themselves financially, psychologically and socially. Gender equality is observed today in almost all professional fronts. Women have excelled themselves in various streams of education. From politics to space science, they have equally excelled as men. We are proud of all the Indian women who made India proud for their contributions in various fields. In politics too, we have seen women play a significant role. We see that women have a reservation in the number of allotted seats in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. We see many women MPs and MLAs carrying out their responsibilities in a disciplined and systematic way which is commendable. We even see many women in administrative services such as IAS, IPS, IRS, IFS and many more. Women have even come forward in the sectors of aviation, they have become pilots, air hostess and many more such positions in the aviation industry. We have seen time and again that women have occupied the prestigious positions of both the President and the Prime minister in India, also they have engaged themselves in positions of Chief Minister of various states as well. The democratic system of voting has resulted in electing women in countless state legislative assemblies and national parliament for many years. Women are always deserving to get an equal opportunity as their male counterparts and an equilibrium and parity should be maintained between both the genders. Men and women should be treated equally and no priority should be made on the basis of gender. Even women play the roles of a homemaker, a mother, a wife etc. perfectly. Thus we see that women play multiple roles in our society. They should be honored and respected for their contribution in home as well as in society.



Fig-7. Girl's education overview. Source: World Bank

<https://www.gapbodhitaru.org/>

CONCLUSION

Girl education was considered unimportant in the previous times. But over the years people have realized its significance. It is now considered as the awakening of girls or women in the modern era. Education broadens the thought of a woman, thus it helps in the good upbringing of the coming generations. An educated woman is always better operational to contribute to the family earnings. Empowering girls have a far reaching effect not only on the current generation but it has positive impact on all generations to come. The family, society as a whole are benefitted with educating them, empowering them to be the best version of themselves. It leads to their growth financially, socially, psychologically, we can see gender equality, better health achievement is possible, poverty is much reduced, improved family planning, literacy is enhanced, the importance of a healthy lifestyle, healthy diet, healthy environment are understood and as an end result the world becomes a better place to live in. Even it is seen that crime rates become low if proper education is evident. It is also observed that mortality rate of a girl child is always high, so saving a girl child is not only our social and moral responsibility, it is an ethical imperative. Girl's education helps in lessening of inequality in our community. Education can help empower marginalized females and becomes an aid in building a better future for themselves as well as their families. She can impart education to other members of the families along with other good qualities or virtues which may be a help in living her life more virtuously. Education always becomes a helping hand in becoming a person specially women more productive in her work. We shouldn't forget that males and females are two sides of a coin which needs equal opportunity to contribute for the development of a country. Empowerment of women helps to make society and more specifically the world a better place to live in. It will lead to all moving forward on way to inclusive participation. If women are educated, they become empowered in the true sense which even leads to improved health conditions, financial sustainability and ultimately poverty reduction. Women deserve to get equal rights and they must get it and further it is a game-changer for all those women who suffer from various gender discrimination issues.

To conclude, women can be powerful actors for peace, security and prosperity. Investing in women's leadership is smart security as well as smart development. Till date, there are many women's movement in India which evolved over time, with each phase addressing different aspects of their lives. It can effectively transform women's lives by taking economic empowerment programs to scale. The status and prominence of women in India has enhanced meaningfully in current times, but still much remains unexplored. It is essential to recognize the achievements made so far and continue to work towards a more equitable and impartial society for women.

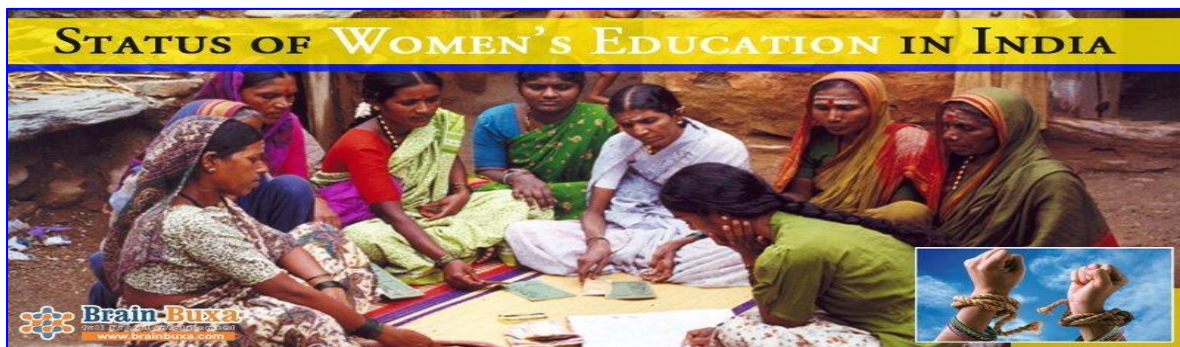


Fig-8. Status of Women's education in India, Education Article Blog. Source: brainbuxa

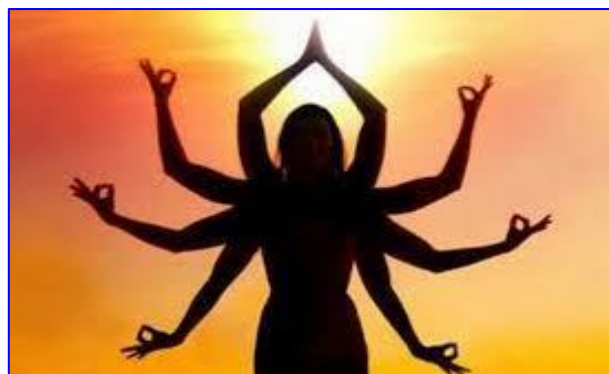


Fig-9. Empowering women in the real sense



Fig-10. Status of women from past to future

Source: Divya Jyoti Jagrati Sansthan Source: Apeksha Srivastava, Medium. Com

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