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## Notes

### The Status of Women During The British Rule

The British remained the rulers of India for over 150 years. During the British rule a number of changes were made in the economic and social structures of our society though the quality of life of women during this remained more or less the same, some substantial progress was achieved in eliminating inequalities between men and women in education, employment, social rights and so on.

During this time some social evils such as child marriage, *Sati* system, *Devadasi* system, prohibition on widow remarriage were controlled or removed. Some social reformers with the help of the British government together took several measures to improve the status of women.

The British and their western culture and lifestyles, values also made an impact on the Indians. The western ways of life, their values, liberal principles, rationalistic attitude towards problem, the right to question and criticise, social equality influenced the Indians.

Role of social reformers and reform movements for the emancipation of women

A number of reforms led the way in launching social movements to improve the position of women like **Raja Ram Mohan Roy** who played an important role in getting the *Sati* system abolished. He also raised his voice against child marriage, *pardah* system and inheritance of women. **Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar** launched a movement for the rights of widows to remarry and for the education of women. This resulted in British government introducing the Widow Remarriage Act in 1856. **Maharshi karave** took up the problems of widow remarriage and education of women. He established the S.N.D.T University for women in

Poona (Pune) in 1916. **Maharshi Dayananda Saraswathi** started the '**Arya Samaj**' and advocated equal rights to women. **Swami Vivekananda** launched the '**Sri Rama Krishna Mission**' that gave importance to the education and economic independence of women.

### **Women's education during British**

The education of women was neglected for about 200 years during this time only those girls belonging to rich, Royal classes, coming from affluent and influential families and those belonging to dancers families and if this is could get some education the vast majority of women remained totally illiterate There was no need felt for educating the women as they were expected to depend on the males in the family.

The idea of giving education to women emerged during the British. The first girl school was started in Bombay in 1829. The Hunter education Commission of 1882. The universities of Calcutta Bombay and madras did not give admission to girls until 1875. it was only in 1882 that the girls were allowed to go for higher education.

### **Role of women leaders and women's organisation**

Some notable women leaders who took interest in women's education and welfare were Ramabai of Karnataka, Ramabai Ranade of Maharashtra, Bengali writer Toru Dutt, the first Indian female politician Kamaladevi Chatterjee, etc.

Some women's organisation that worked to create awareness amongst women were:

(i) 'Arya Mahila Samaj' and 'Sharada Sadan' that were started [in 1887] by Pandit Ramabai Ranade and Bhandarkar gave utmost importance to female education:

(ii) 'Bharat Mahila Parishad' which was started in 1904 had the main objective of struggling for the emancipation of women.

(iii) 'Bharat Stree Mahamandal' was founded in 1910 to promote the general welfare.

(iv) Women's Indian Association 1917 started by Annie Besant, strengthened and developed by the joint efforts of Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, and Margaret Cousins, fought for the political and educational rights of women.

(v) All-India Women's Conference established in 1947 through the efforts of Margaret Cousins and others had the following main aims: improving the style of life of women, achieving economic self-dependence, availing of educational opportunities for women, obtaining equal political rights for women, improvement of family happiness, etc. [By 1975, this organisation had 500 branches and more than 3.25 million members through out the nation. (vi) Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust which was started after the death of Kasturba Gandhi, has been dedicated itself to the task of uplifting women.

These women organisations and the women leaders behind them had two main purposes (i) Upliftment of women so as to enable them to play a more important and constructive role

in society: (ii) to struggle for equal rights for men and women, that is, extension of civil rights enjoyed by men in the political, economic and familial spheres to women also.

### **Women in Employment Sector**

By the end of the 19th century sizeable number of educated Indian women entered for the first time the field of salaried professions. It was, indeed, a revolutionary development at that time. The Education Commission of 1882 had recommended the employment of women teachers in the schools and the appointment of women as inspectors of the girls' schools. It also recommended that special stipends should be given to widows who came for teaching. Accordingly, a large number of women became teachers. Many women entered the newly opened schools and colleges to qualify themselves as nurses and doctors. By the end of the 19th century, women were very much attracted towards two professions namely: (i) medical, and (ii) teaching professions. In course of time, women entered other professional fields to work as clerks, accountants, receptionists, typists and in such other capacities.

"Home Rule Movement" was arrested. Indian women had led processions to temples to offer their prayers for her release. Annie Besant in her presidential address at the Calcutta Session of the Indian National Congress had said that the strength of the Home Rule Movement was rendered even greater by the admission to it of a large number of women. Mahatma Gandhi rendered a signal service to the advancement of women's movement

by making thousands of them, of all classes, to come out of their homes and participate in the political movement. He had realised that freedom movement would become a success only with the participation of women on a mass scale. He was able to persuade a large number of them to plunge into freedom struggle. In the satyagrahas, processions, protest meetings, demonstrations and public meetings led by him, women used to take part in a large number. For example, in the Salt Agitation of 1930, more than 17,000 women took part. In the 'Quit India' agitation of 1942 and in the *Seva Dal* Camps, women participated in a huge number.

### **Enactment of Social Legislations**

The British followed the policy of non-interference in the religious and social life and activities of people. But they were compelled to take up some social legislative measures in order to do away with some of the social evils. The enacted laws pertaining to women were related to three areas namely, (i) marriage, (ii) property and (iii) employment. Laws Relating to Marriage: The marriage laws concentrate on the age of marriage, remarriage, dissolution of marriage, form of marriage and freedom in mate selections. The important legislations enacted were: The Prevention of Sati Act 1829, The Widow Remarriage Act 1856, The Special Marriage Act 1872, The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 [Note: These Acts have already been explained in Chapter 4.]

(ii) Laws Relating to Property and Employment: The Married Women's Property Act 1874, and The Hindu Women's Right to Property Act 1939. The legislations cited above,

contributed to improve women's status to a large extent. The legislations had their own limitations for they were extremely meagre and touched only the fringe of the problem. They were lopsided and had less precision and accuracy. The machinery to implement the legislation was costly, inefficient and complicated. Hence, it might be said that legislation had not been effective in wiping out the hardships suffered by women.