

Revision Notes

Class – 8 Social Science History

Chapter 8 - Women, Caste and Reform

- Women empowerment is one of the most used term these days. Today women are leading in all fields - whether it is the army or the medical sector or in the field of scientific research.
- But the situation was not same 200 years back. Women faced so much of humiliation in the past. Women had to go through a lot of adversities. Child marriages, polygamy, the humiliation of widows were quite common during that time. One of the practices of that time was the ‘Sati Dahan Pratha’ or in other words ‘Sati’ in which a woman had to die after the death of her husband in the same pyre.

CBSE Class 8 Social Science History Chapter 8 talks about such social evils and how society was freed from them.

- **Area of Concerns**

- ❖ The major area of concern was the gender discrimination in India at that time. Women were just treated same as commodities.
- ❖ Young girls were forced to marry with elderly men even before attaining 10 years of age. However maner time, the groom used to be a dying old men. After the death of the men, the widowed women were made to sit and die on the same pyre as that of their husbands’. This horrifying practise of burning innocent women to death was referred as ‘Sati Dahan Pratha’.
- ❖ People were also divided in terms of caste. The upper castes of the society was of Brahmins and Kshatriyas. The traders and moneylenders were referred as Vaishyas and were placed under the upper castes.

- ❖ The bottom-most caste were referred as the Shudras and artisans and peasants like weavers, potters came under this caste.
- ❖ The lower castes was treated as ‘untouchables’ by the upper castes. It was a discriminative practice within the religion.
- ❖ The reform again these was initiated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the situation had started to change.
- ❖ However, the reform was not so easy. It was achieved later through several movements against the supporters of these practices.

● **Beginning of the Era of Change**

- ❖ During the early nineteenth century, several debates and arguments were made regarding social customs and practices.
- ❖ New types of communications were published which included books, newspapers, magazines, leaflets and pamphlets.
- ❖ The new means of communication were quite easily accessible.
- ❖ Common people were now able to express their views.
- ❖ A new and reformed thought led towards the change.
- ❖ Some People like Raja Rammohun Roy came forward and led the movement towards change.
- ❖ Raja Rammohun Roy also played a very important role in expanding women education in India. He was the proposer of the expansion of western education and favoring women education in India.
- ❖ The movement against ‘Sati’ system was initiated by Raja Rammohun Roy which was later banned by William Lord Bentinck. This was the most famous movements in the history of India.

- ❖ Another reformer during this period was Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar who was the main architect of the Widow Remarriage Act. He gave several ancient Sanskrit texts in support of widow remarriage.
- ❖ In southern part, the movement against widow remarriage was carried out by Veersalingam Pantulu in India.
- ❖ Widow remarriage was supported by Swami Dayanand Saraswati also, who was one of the renowned social reformers and establisher of Arya Samaj.

● **Women Education in India**

- ❖ Reformers by now had realized the significance of women education.
- ❖ Several schools for girls were opened by Vidyasagar in Calcutta and by some other reformers in Bombay.
- ❖ The main idea for girls in attaining schools was the way of thinking of their family members. Most of the family members thought that the schools would take away their girls from them.
- ❖ However, the practice of going outside was still not supported by the family members of the girls. Due to this reason, girls were taught by either their father or husband throughout the mid-nineteenth century.
- ❖ Arya Samaj in Punjab and Jyotirao Phule in Maharashtra by now had opened several schools for girls.
- ❖ At that time teaching of women by women became popular.
- ❖ Begums of Bhopal helped in promoting education in India in the Muslim community.
- ❖ Several schools for girls were opened in Patna and Calcutta by Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain.

- ❖ Women education had gained an escalation after 1880. Since then, women had started to enter universities, and some of them even became doctors.
- ❖ In the beginning of 1900, women were presented with opportunities and were able to carry on with their education.
- ❖ The orthodox mentality of the family members of the women was the main problem of the women education in India.
- ❖ In the early twentieth-century, due to the political pressure groups were created by women to enact laws for female suffrage (the right to vote) and improved physical condition and education for women.

● **Caste and Social Reforms**

- ❖ The caste system is still persistent in several parts of India.
- ❖ Initially the caste system was reformed by Raja Rammohun Roy and Prarthana Samaj.
- ❖ Schools were established by the Christian Missionaries for the tribal groups and lower caste children.
- ❖ Demand for labor was increased as the cities expanded. Most of the laborers were from the lower castes. Few of these people went abroad to get rid of the oppression of the upper castes.
- ❖ There were movements in order to drive away from the inequality and caste-based society in India. The Satnami movement, initiated by Ghasidas, was one of a good example to these.
- ❖ Haridas Thakur's Matua Movement was another movement made to upgrade the social status of the Chandala cultivators.
- ❖ Each and every movement was led by non- Brahmin people. Their main agenda was to form a sense of self-esteem among the lower caste people.

- ❖ One of the most famous movements of lower castes was brought by Jyotirao Phule. His notable work in the movement was the book written by him named 'Gulamgiri' which was based on slavery. His moral idea was to connect with the people of lower castes in India and the black slaves in America.
- ❖ Another renowned activist of the anti-caste movement was B.R. Ambedkar. He was a part of several movements between 1927 to 1935 for entering in the temples by the lower castes.