

## Lesson- 7

# The East India Company and its Reforms in India.



### Learning outcomes :

Students will–

- ✦ get information on the reforms introduced during the times of Governor General Lord Cornwallis, Lord Hastings, Lord William Bentinck and Lord Dalhousie.
- ✦ get an idea of how these reforms influenced the social and economic life of the Indians.
- ✦ gain knowledge about the social, cultural and religious revival that took place in the 19th century India.

We have discussed in the earlier chapter how the British interfered in the political matters of India. You must realize by now that the rise of the British power in India was not a sudden event and that it had a long history behind it. The British had taken advantage of the internal quarrels and incompetence of the Indian rulers to slowly consolidate their power. The incompetence of the Mughal Emperor Farukhsiyar was one of the main reasons why the East India Company could establish political supremacy in India. And this was also possible because of the indirect help and cooperation received from many powerful Indians. This proved the political weakness and incompetence of the rulers.

When the East India Company had established themselves as a political power, India was divided into many small states with separate administrations. The socio economic systems of these states were also not favourable to the British. Therefore, they introduced a number of reforms to create a favourable environment for themselves. We will discuss about these reforms in administration, revenue, education, law, etc.

### Administrative Reforms :

The British had taken some measures to remove the corrupt practices prevalent in Indian administration. Governor General Lord Cornwallis had stopped the corrupt Company officials from conducting private business and taking bribes. He increased the salary of the Company officials and introduced their promotion on the basis of seniority. These reforms are known as **Cornwallis Code**. Secondly, the British wanted to introduce such reforms in the army that would serve their interest in India. Thirdly, they



Source: www.picryl.com

**Pic-7.1 Lord Cornwallis**



opened police stations and appointed police in provinces occupied by them to maintain peace and order. Cornwallis did not appoint any Indian to high administrative posts and trusted only the British. However, his successor Lord Moyra or Lord Hastings not only appointed the Indians but also promoted them to higher posts. He also allowed the local laws to be implemented in the British ruled areas if they did not harm the British interests. Lord Dalhousie's most important reform was the decentralization of power. He gave more authority to the chief administrators of the provinces.

The British also introduced a few changes in the legal system. Previously, different laws were followed in different parts of India. The East India Company made same laws compulsory. Lord Cornwallis also made a few changes for quick and efficient functioning of *dewani* and *sadar* courts. The High Court was established in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay during Lord William Bentinck's day and mother tongue was applied instead of Persian in the court. Lord Moyra or Lord Hastings appointed Indians in courts of law and increased the powers of the Indian *Munsifs* which had made him popular among the local people.

### Let us know :

- ✦ The first Indian postal stamp was introduced in 1854 A.D. during the time of Lord Dalhousie. He had also established the Public Works Department in every state of India. The present system of putting one department under one chief engineer started in those days itself.

### Activity :

- ✦ What were the important reforms introduced by the British in Indian administration?

### Revenue Collection :

Before the Company took over India followed a **Ryotwari system** of revenue collection. The farmer or the *rayat* could pay revenue to the king directly. When the English took over the administration of India, they introduced many reforms to run it smoothly. Lord Cornwallis' period is notable for his land reforms. He introduced Permanent Settlement instead of the existing system of yearly revenue collection. Under this settlement, the *zamindars* were the owners of the land but if they could not pay the revenue on time, their land went to the Company government. This system made the *zamindars* very powerful but brought great suffering to the farmers.

### Let us know :

- ✦ Permanent Settlement was introduced for the first time in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1793 A.D. In Assam Permanent Settlement was introduced towards the end of the year 1826 in the districts of Goalpara and Sylhet.

Governor General Lord Hastings had introduced another significant reform in the revenue system. In 1826 A.D. with the help of his efficient officer Robert Bard, Hastings brought the





**Pic-7.2 Lord Hastings**

villages in the borders of Assam under the revenue circle and allotted permanent land certificates to them. This encouraged the farmers to cultivate their lands which increased the revenue of the Company.

### Activity :

- ✦ Find out about the current rules for collection of revenue, registration of land, mutation, land right from your parents and discuss with your teacher.

## Educational Reforms :

The earliest form of education in India was religious. Education was imparted in Sanskrit, Arabic and Parsi languages. The Hindu students studied in Sanskrit schools or *Gurukuls* and the Muslim students went to *Madrassa* and *Mukhtabs*. The British too took interest in Indian education. In 1781 A.D., Warren Hastings opened a *madrassa* in Calcutta and in the year 1792, a British official named Jonathan Duncan opened a Sanskrit college in Varanasi. Grammar and Astrology were taught in these institutions in the traditional manner.

This was the time when industrial revolution was taking place in England. To the imperialistic British, India was a profitable colony which they wanted to use to their benefit. For this, they needed to introduce western idea of education in the English language. They wanted the common Indians to learn the English language so that the Company government could employ them at a low salary. So, the reforms they had introduced were in their self interest. As time went by, the British began to stress on the use of the English language. During the time of Lord William Bentinck, English was made the compulsory medium of education. In this way, the British made the Indians turn towards western education as a result of which the study of traditional languages like Sanskrit and Parsi declined. The Governor General Lord Dalhousie introduced more reforms in Indian education. He implemented the suggestions given by the President of the Board of Control, Charles Wood in his famous **Wood's Dispatch**. Accordingly, Dalhousie established primary, high school and many colleges. Also, during his time, the study of the Sanskrit language and literature was revived. The names of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar of Bengal and Ananda Chandra Barua of Assam are associated with the development of the Sanskrit language and literature.



**Pic-7.3 Lord Dalhousie**



### Activity :

- ★ Find out how many primary, upper primary and middle level schools are there in your area. When were they established? Make a list of these schools.

The reforms introduced by the British governors had far reaching effects on the Indian economy and society. These reforms not only strengthened the British control over India but also brought about many changes. The goal of the East India Company was to earn profit and get control over the Indian sub continent. Before the East India Company had gained control, the Indian economy was feudalistic. The British, on the other hand, were capitalists who were only interested in their profit. So they broke the traditional system of Indian economy and introduced modern trade. This move harmed many and particularly destroyed the Indian cottage industry. However, it must be acknowledged that the British also contributed to the development in certain fields. The building of the railways is one such activity. Although the British had constructed railways to make their trade easier, it made communication better. Similarly, while the Permanent Settlement of Lord Cornwallis brought great suffering to the farmers, the reforms of Lord Hastings like land ownership given to the farmers, gave relief to these poor peasants. Again, Lord William Bentick permitted the trade of opium which made the Company richer but opened the door to the destruction of the Indians.

The East India Company played an important role in the reformation of religion and society of India. The western education helped in removing many of the prevailing

### Let us know :

- ★ In 1806 A.D. a district collector was the first to send a written request to Lord Wellesley to stop the custom of *sati*. In 1815 and 1817 A.D. during the time of Lord Hastings, this custom was declared illegal by a court of law without success. Lord William Bentinck stopped it in 1829 A.D. through his famous decree number 17.

superstitions of the times. In the beginning, the Company did not interfere in the social and religious beliefs of the Indians. However, the evil practices, superstitions carried on in the name of



**Pic-7.4 Lord William Bentick**

of religion forced them to take steps. Sir John Shore was the first to take action against these practices. In the late 18 century he stopped female infanticide in Rajputana, Central India and in Punjab. William Bentinck stopped the practice of *sati* in Bengal with the help of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Although many people had reacted negatively to these

reforms, the Company strictly implemented them. Bentinck also suppressed the fake believers of the goddess Kali who used to cheat the innocent people and also abolished slavery in India.



Thus, many steps were taken by the East India Company to reform the Indian society which gradually led them towards modern and progressive way of thinking.

For India, this was a period of regeneration. Many cultured Indians came forward to take the society. Many progressive institutions like the *Brahmo Samaj*, *Prarthana Samaj*, *Arya Samaj* and Ramakrishna Mission were founded during this time. The Aligarh Movement also played an important role in the reformation of the society.

### Activity :

- ✦ What steps would you take to eradicate social evils like witch hunting, female infanticide, dowry system from our society? Discuss in groups and write.

### Brahmo Samaj :

Many educated Indians had helped the East India Company in their social reforms. The most prominent among them was Raja Ram Mohan Roy of Bengal. Ram Mohan Roy wanted to build a casteless society. He was also against idol worship. In 1828 A.D. he founded the *Brahmo Sabha* which came to be known as the *Brahmo Samaj* in 1830 A.D. Later, he was joined by Debendra Nath Thakur, father of *Kaviguru* Rabindra Nath Thakur. Ram Mohan Roy had helped William Bentinck in abolishing evil practices like *sati*, female infanticide etc. He worked for the education of women and widow remarriage. Ram Mohan Roy also tried to reform another bad practice. During those days the Hindus, who ate with the Christians or went abroad for higher education were declared as outcasts by the Hindu society which often forced these highly educated people to embrace christianity. Ram Mohan Roy brought them to the Brahmo Samaj and kept them within the Hindu religion. The Indian society therefore, remains grateful to this liberal and progressive Indian. Two other note-worthy personalities of Brahmo Samaj are Akshay Kumar Dutta and Keshav Chandra Sen. These men had introduced many revolutionary reforms in the Indian society.



Pic-7.5 Raja Ram Mohan Roy

### Prarthana Samaj:

Similarly in the year of 1867 A.D *Prarthana Samaj* was formed in Maharashtra. Formation of *Prarthana Samaj* was influenced by Keshab Chandra Sen's tour to Maharashtra.. Mahadev Govind Ranade later popularized it as a reform movement. This society was similar to the *Brahmo Samaj* but Ranade's followers went further than the *Brahma Samaj* in their reformation of the Hindu society. They tried to spread education among the illiterate people, established orphanages and worked to uplift the socially and economically backward classes.



## Arya Samaj :

You have read about the reforms initiated by the *Brahmo Samaj*. Another society very similar to the Brahmo Samaj was the



**Pic-7.6 Swami Dayanand Saraswati**

Arya Samaj. Arya Samaj was founded in 1875 A.D. in Punjab by social reformer Swami Dayanand Saraswati. Dayanand Saraswati too believed in God but not in idol worship. This society did not believe in the caste system. They opposed child marriage and supported widow remarriage.

They claimed that *sagar yatra* was not opposed to Hinduism. Just as Islam accepted people of other religions into their religion, Dayanand Saraswati also said that people from different religions could become Hindus by converting to Hinduism. He called this *Shuddhi*.

### Let us know :

- ★ Swami Dayanand Saraswati's actual name was Mul Shankar. He wrote a book on reformation of society called *Satyarth Prakash*.

## Ramakrishna Mission:

You must have heard the name of Ramakrishna Paramhansa. He was a priest in the Kali temple of Dakshineswar in Kolkata. Ramakrishna Paramhansa did not go to schools or colleges. He believed in idol worship but was against ceremonial rituals and believed that God could be found only through devotion. He wanted everybody to be tolerant towards other religions. Narendra Nath Dutta, famous as Swami Vivekananda realized the value of Paramhansa's teachings and became his disciple. In 1897 A.D. Swami Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission to spread Ramakrishna Paramhansa's teachings to the society.



Source: via Wikimedia Commons

**Pic-7.7 Swami Vivekananda**

## The Aligarh Movement :



**Pic-7.8 Sir Syed Ahmed Khan**

In the 19 century, western education had reached the Muslims also. In North India, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Nawab Abdul Latif and Syed Amir Ali took the lead in attracting the Muslim community to the English language and the new western thought. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan took the initiative to establish a college named **Anglo Oriental College** for the young Muslim men and women in Aligarh. Special importance was given to the subject science in this college. Now we know this college as the **Aligarh Muslim University**. Due to the efforts of these social reformers, many changes were made in the Muslim society. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan created a mass awareness against the purdah system, child marriage and polygamy practised in the Muslim society. This

reformist movement had begun in the city of Aligarh and so this movement is known as the Aligarh Movement.



At the beginning of their rule, the East India Company did not receive the same kind of response from the Muslims as the Hindus on spread of western education and western policy. Towards the end of 18 century and early part of 19 century, the Wahabi movement emerged in India. The conservative Muslims resented the British design of reorganization of society on western ideas. The believers of wahabi faith amongst the Muslims encouraged such resentment. However in later years under the able leadership of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, renaissance dawned even amongst the Muslim communities.

### Activity :

- ★ What changes were brought about by the Aligarh Movement in the society?



**Pic-7.9 Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar**

In addition to the above mentioned organizations, a few person also undertook social reformation activities individually. Among those few individuals, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar's name can be mentioned here. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar of Bengal tried to spread the importance of women education for development of a society. As a result of his efforts many women got opportunity to educate themselves while at home in the mid of 19 century. Raj Sundari Devi of Kolkata showed her keen interest towards getting education. She wrote an autobiography named *Amar Jiban* in Bengali. It is the first autobiography written by an Indian women. On the other hand, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar took special measure for widow re-marriage and made his son marry a widow so that he could stand as an example in the society.

In this way renaissance ushered in India also. The East India company contributed a lot for reformation in the field of administration, socio-economic development as a result of which India also moved ahead towards modernity gradually.

### Let us remember :

- ★ The Governor General of East India Company undertook reformation measure in the field of administration, judiciary, socio-economic and education in India.
- ★ Lord Cornwallis introduced Permanent Settlement in India.
- ★ Permanent Settlement made the zamindars the sole owner of land.
- ★ During the time of Lord Hastings, provision of Land Right (patta) was introduced in India.
- ★ Lord Dalhousie initiated Primary, High English Schools and College Education in India.
- ★ Sanskrit literature was revived in the days of Lord Dalhousie.
- ★ Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Ram Krishna Mission and Aligarh Movement contributed significantly in social development of India.

### Exercise:

1. Answer the following questions-

- (a) By what name do we know the working agenda of Lord Cornwallis?
- (b) Who had introduced the Permanent Settlement in India?
- (c) Which Governor General had started the procedure of allotting land ownership to Indians?
- (d) Who initiated modifications in the education system based on Wood's dispatch?
- (e) Who was the first woman autobiographer of India?

2. Match the two columns given below:

A	B
Raja Ram Mohan Roy	Prarthana Samaj
Ramakrishna Paramhansa	Brahmo Samaj
Sir Syed Ahmed Khan	Arya Samaj
Govind Ranade	Aligarh Movement
Dayanand Saraswati	Ramakrishna Mission

3. Tick the correct answer-

- (a) The East India Company established itself as a strong political force during the reign of Mughal emperor Farukhsiyar/ Bahadur Shah II.
- (b) Warren Hastings/ Lord Hastings founded a *madrasa* in Calcutta in 1781 A.D.
- (c) The East India Company had formed its army to safeguard its interests/to annex new states.
- (d) The Anglo Indian College was established by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan/ Nawab Abdul latif.
- (e) Dayanand Saraswati/ Raja Ram Mohan Roy wrote the book Satyarath Prakash.

4. Write short notes on -

- (a) Raja Ram Mohan Roy    (b) Sir Syed Ahmed Khan    (c) Swami Vivekananda
- (d) Dayanand Saraswati    (e) Debendra Nath Thakur

5. Write within fifty words-

- (a) Who introduced the Permanent Settlement in India? What were the terms and conditions?
- (b) Legal system introduced by the British in India.
- (c) What were reforms undertaken by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar?

