

## CHAPTER 2

# NEW IDEAS

AND

## ATTEMPTS AT SOCIAL REFORM

IN THE BRITISH PERIOD



*Look at the above pictures. They show women and girls in different situations. Have you seen similar situations where you live?*

*Which of these sights do you think you could have seen 200 years ago?*

Many important changes have taken place in the situation of women since the time the British ruled India. Our ideas and beliefs, not only towards women but also towards caste and religion, have changed quite a lot. If we look at our long history we can clearly see that many attempts were made to question what was happening in our society

and to reform it. For example, in Class 6 we learned about the ideas and beliefs propagated by Gautama Buddha and Vardhaman Mahavir. In Class 7, we learned about saints like Kabir, Nanak, Mira and Tukaram, who tried to reform social practices and beliefs.

What is there in society that makes it necessary for people to try and reform it from time to time?

Here are some of the issues that were taken up by different movements for social reform:

- Unequal treatment of women.
- Worship of idols and practice of rituals.
- Practice of inequality and untouchability based on caste.
- Intolerance towards other religions

**Discuss this list in class and add more issues to it, if you like.**

**Also, discuss what you understand about these issues. Think of examples related to them. Do you find such things happening in your neighbourhood? What are the positive and negative influences of these issues on society?**

**Should such attitudes and practices be reformed or changed in some way? Discuss and write your conclusions.**

Let's see how new ideas spread during the time of British rule and what efforts were made for social reform.

## Demand for English Education

When the English began ruling India, they encouraged the growth of traditional *paathshaalas* and *madrasas*. In the *paathshaalas*, students studied the *shastras*, *puranas* and Sanskrit grammar, while in the *madrasas* the Quran and other religious texts were taught. Some Indians who came in contact with the English and knew about the education given in England were not happy with the way the English were encouraging traditional education in India. These Indians were people who either served the British government, or practiced law, or worked with English traders etc. They were

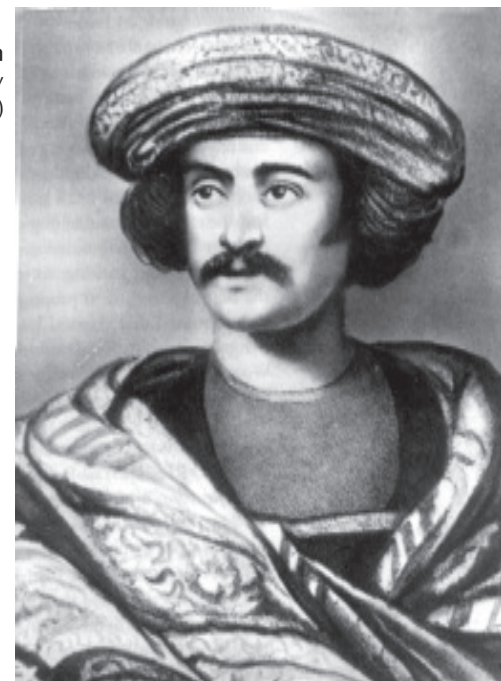
impressed by the ideas of the English and wanted English education to spread in India, so that Indians could learn new science and acquire knowledge to develop themselves like the English had done.

One of these persons was Raja Ram Mohan Roy. He belonged to a *zamindar* family of Bengal. When Ram Mohan Roy learned that the British government was setting up a Sanskrit *paathshaala* in Calcutta, he wrote a strong letter of protest, demanding English education.



Girls studying in a Madrasa in Bengal in 1829

Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833)



Here is what he wrote:

*“We have learned that the British government is opening a Sanskrit paathshaala under the auspices of pundits wherein such knowledge will be imparted as has already been existing in India. Such paathshaalas can only fill the minds of the youth with the minute rules of grammar and knowledge of another world and cannot offer anything that will be of practical use to the student or society.”*

*“As it is the objective of the government to improve the local peoples, it should encourage the study of mathematics, philosophy, chemistry, anatomy and other useful sciences. This task can be fulfilled by appointing persons educated in Europe and building a college equipped with books and instruments.”*

*Calcutta, 11 December 1823.*

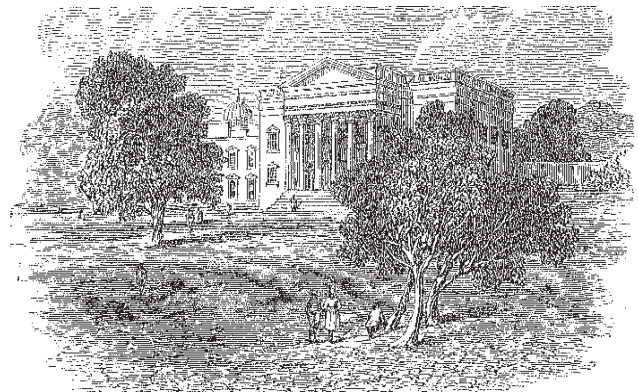
**Discuss Ram Mohun Roy's attitude towards learning that is useful for society. Do you think such a view was right for those times? Is it right for the present times? Discuss both the pros and cons of these questions.**

Like Ram Mohan Roy, thousands of other people in India put pressure on the British government to make immediate arrangements for English education in India. People had come to believe that it was a knowledge of science that had helped European countries advance more than other countries. They felt the reason for India's backwardness was the lack of good science education in the country. Many people felt such education was needed to remove the backwardness and keep pace with European countries.

The British government also realised that it needed people educated in English, who appreciated the ideas and attitudes of the English, if it wanted to rule India for a long time. How else could it handle such a vast

administration? The English knew that they could bring some people from England to India and make them government officers, but it would be too expensive to appoint English officers and servants for all the jobs, big and small. So, at least for the posts of clerks, workers and junior officers, they needed Indians with some English education. Keeping this in mind, the British government made a plan to spread English education in India. It was an Englishman named John Macaulay who drafted this plan. That is why it is called Macaulay's Education Policy.

As a result of the new policy, many people in India started opening English schools and colleges with government help.



Serampore College, opened to educate Indians in the English way

English, Indian languages, science, geography, history and arithmetic were the subjects taught in the schools imparting English education. Some of these schools were set up by Christian missionaries, in order to spread Christianity as well as education.

The British had to educate some Indians in English so that they could work as government clerks and junior officers.





Can you see the English influence in the style and subject of this painting?

***Why did some Indians want English education? Why did the British government want to provide English education? Did they both have the same reasons for spreading English education?***

### The Impact of English Education

Can you imagine what effect an English education could have had on the minds of students who went to study in the new schools and colleges?

One such student, Ruchi Ram Sahni, who studied in the college at Lahore, wrote about his experience:

*“I am, of course, grateful to my teachers. But I also want to add that on coming to the Government College at Lahore I found such a treasure of knowledge spread before my eyes as I had scarcely seen before. To all intents and purposes, all the books of the college were contained in the fifteen almirahs kept in a big hall. However, to a person who had never seen a library, and who was thirsting for knowledge, the small library of the government school and the big library of the government college were like an ocean filled with valuable pearls - into which anyone could dive and fetch pearls of knowledge.”*

After their classes, students would take books from the library to read. Among these were many important books written in England and Europe. Filled with curiosity and a craving to understand the new world of Europe, students would try hard to read books written in English, even though these books were not in their courses.

For example, the works of John Stuart Mill championed the cause of equality in society and criticised the domination of men over women. Sahni wrote about his experience of reading Mill’s books:

*“Together, Gurudatt and I would read John Stuart Mill’s little book, line by line, para by para. We would try and understand its meaning, we would discuss and debate over it. There were times when we would not be able to do more than a sentence or two because either we would not have been able to grasp the real meaning of the author, or the whole time would pass by in discussing how far we ourselves could put into practice what was written in the book.”*

***Do these lines remind you of any experiences you have had with books? Share your experiences in class.***

# The Study of Ancient Texts and Their Impact

People were greatly affected by English thoughts and manners and by the advancements in science and technology. But there was also another strong influence on their thinking. A deeper knowledge of ancient Indian texts and scriptures was helping people to look more closely at the social and religious practices that were widespread in those days. In the early days of British rule, many ancient *shastras* and *puranas* were translated from Sanskrit. These became available in English and other Indian languages. This was also the time when large numbers of printing presses were being set up. Many essays and booklets written to explain and analyse these texts were printed. Many literate people could study them, and discuss them with other people.

People thus came to know that what they practiced as religion had not always been the same. For instance, they realised that the *vedas* and *upanishadas* did not emphasise the worship of idols or the importance of temples.

Many followers of the Sikh religion were also questioning why they should follow the rites and rituals that the priests made them practice, if they were not part of the original teachings of Guru Nanak as contained in the *Adi Grantha*.

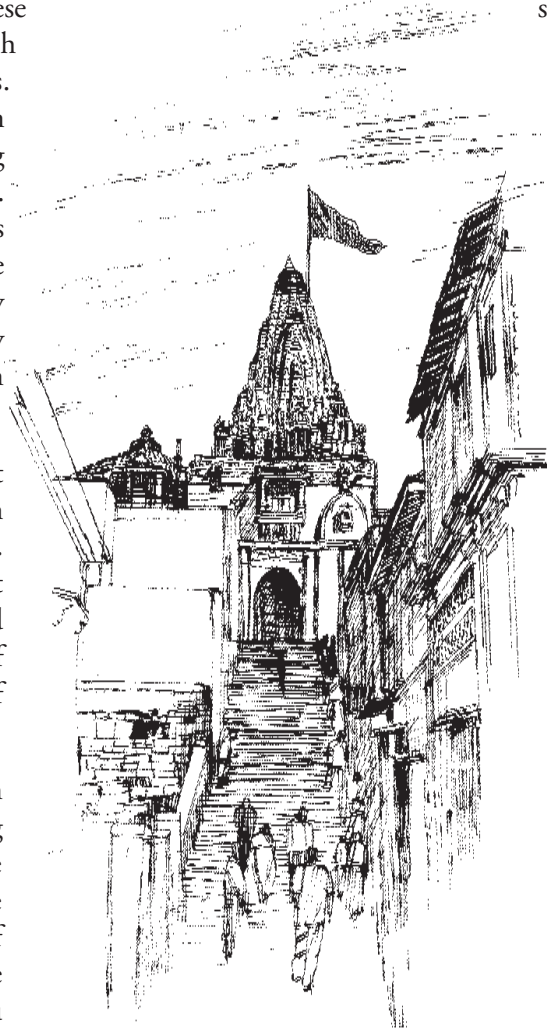
Many Muslims began realising that many of their religious practices, such as the worship of saints at their graves or *mazaars*, were not important in the Quran.

On the whole, it was a time of ferment, of questioning and re-examination. This feeling was spurred on by the criticisms of Indian religious practices by English officials and Christian missionaries. The worship of idols, the importance of elaborate rituals and other superstitious beliefs were strongly criticised by them. English officials wanted to frame new laws to curb what they felt

were wrong practices in Indian society. Christian missionaries felt that it was their duty to save the Indian people from ignorance and misery by converting them to Christianity.

In this atmosphere created by English dominance, a feeling was growing among the more educated Indians that there was no reason to follow social and religious practices exactly as they were. Some said that many such practices were not even part of the earliest religious texts and tenets, nor were they suited to the present times. They felt they were living in an age of 'rationality', where progress in science and technology was important. This meant that people could question, discuss, and change their own beliefs. They said that people should work for the common social good. Thus

they wanted to continue to practice only those religious and social customs that were rational and for the common good.



**What impact did a study of the ancient religious texts have on people's thinking?**

# Campaign to Reform Society

People began asking many kinds of questions. For instance:

*“How can God reside in idols and temples? Has anyone seen God? How can God have a colour, shape or size?”*

*“What is the meaning of all these rules about caste and untouchability?”*

*“All human beings are equal. They are all children of God. Then why should we believe in differences of caste?”*

*“Aren't women also human beings like men? So why is there such cruel behaviour towards women in our religion and society? If we call ourselves civilised, why should we continue to accept the cruelty that is practised against women?”*

In this atmosphere, many educated Indians began coming together to oppose the wrong practices in their society. Some people adopted Christianity. Others thought about adopting Christianity but then decided not to become Christians. One such person was Moro Vitthal of Maharashtra. He wrote: “When I was a student, I lost my faith in the Hindu religion and my mind started leaning towards the Christian faith. But I thought that before adopting the new religion, I should compare it with the older one. Thus, when I studied Christianity, I found that, as in Hinduism, there are many superstitions in Christianity too. Then, I felt that no religion is the gift of God.

“The truth is that the fundamentals of all religions are alike and these we can discover through our own wisdom. This natural religion is found in every place and it must, therefore, be the true religion.

Its essence is that ‘God is one and we should have faith only in Him. Doing good to others is the greatest act of piety. Doing harm to others is the greatest sin.’ On determining these common religious principles, we gave up our plan to become Christians.”

Quite a number of Hindus went through similar experiences. They did not become Christians. But they did not remain traditional Hindus either. They formed organisations to work according to their new religious ideas. For example, the Brahmo Samaj was formed in Bengal and Paramhans Mandali was formed in Maharashtra.

People found that there were many poet saints from earlier times who had talked about the wrongs and ills of society and religion. They had tried to teach people to live according to new ideas and feelings. Sant Ramdas, Raidas, Nanak, Kabir, and Tukaram - they all opposed caste discrimination, brahminism, idol worship and ritualism. They taught people to worship only one universal God, in a direct manner, and to believe in the equality of all human beings.

The social reformers tried to spread ideas of social change taken from the teachings of these saints. For example, reformers of the Prarthna Samaj in Maharashtra propagated the teachings of Sant Tukaram.

***Here is a verse written by Kabir. Discuss its meaning in your class.***

मोंको कहाँ ढूँढे रे वन्दे, में तो तेरे पास में।  
ना में देवल ना में मसजिद, ना कावे कैलास में।  
ना तो काउन क्रियाकर्म में, नहीं जोग बैराग में।  
ना में छगरी ना में भेंडी, ना में छुरी गँडास में।  
नहीं खाल में नहीं पूँछ में ना हड्डी ना माँस में।  
में तो रहौं सहर के बाहर मेरी पुरी मवास में।  
खोजी होय तो तुरतै मिलिहौं, पल भर की तालास में।  
कहैं कवीर सुनो भई साधो, सब साँसन की साँस में।

**Why did many Indians decide not to adopt the Christian faith? But, at the same time, why could some people not accept the traditional Hindu faith?**

**Was it a good idea to form new religious organisations? What do you think?**

You can imagine how much resistance there was in society to people who promoted new religious ideas! Let's look at some examples.

## Resistance to Social Reform

Members of the Paramhans Mandali held secret meetings in Bombay where they would eat food together. By eating together they wanted to break the caste differences that existed among them. They could not do this in the open. That's why they met secretly in a rented room. But when the landlord came to know about what they were doing, he refused to let them have the room on rent any longer.

The members of the Mandali felt that they could come out in the open to spread their beliefs and ideas only if they had more than a thousand members.

**Do you think they were wise to think in this way? Why?**



People who belonged to the Brahmo Samaj preached in open gatherings. They said there are good points in all religions – and that Christ and Mohammed were both great saints. On hearing this, people attending the meetings would get up and run out saying: “Arrey arrey, these Brahmo Samaj-walas are actually Christians!” “Arrey, they are actually Muslims! ...”

So we can get some idea about how difficult it was for the social reformers to spread their ideas to other people. Many parents were even afraid to send their children to English schools. Newspapers carried letters appealing to the people not to send their children to learn English because they believed that these children would lose faith in their religion and reject the caste system.

**Why do you think some people wanted to preserve the caste system in society?**

**If you were in a gathering of the Brahmo Samaj, would you have got up and left? How should we and how do we respond to ideas that are different from ours?**

**Do parents still hesitate to give their children an English education today? Discuss the reasons for the changes in attitude towards English education that have taken place in many sections of society.**

In those days, it seemed like a war was being fought between those who held traditional beliefs and those who believed in new ideas. To a great extent, this kind of clash continues even today.

There were proper *shastrarthas*, or learned debates, in those days. People with traditional ideas and those with new ideas would collect in a public spot and debate with each other and the public would listen to them. The views of both sides would also be printed in the form of booklets and distributed.

Let's take a look at a *shastrartha* in which those who supported traditional religion are arguing that the custom of *sati* is right.



## A *Shastrartha* on the Custom of *Sati*

*This debate on sati took place between Pundit Tarkalinkar and Ram Mohan Roy. Tarkalinkar favoured sati while Ram Mohan Roy wanted to abolish the custom.*

*Tarkalinkar: "Rishi Angira said that the woman who desires to go to heaven should burn in the funeral pyre of her husband."*

*Ram Mohan: "But Manu and Yagyavalkya said that after her husband's death a woman should live a plain and simple life. They did not say that a widow should become a sati. Besides, you people tie a woman to her husband's funeral pyre and arrange loads of wood over her so that even if she wants to, she cannot get up and run. When you set the pyre on fire, you keep the woman pressed down with bamboo sticks. This is nothing short of murdering the woman. In which shastra do you find anything written about forcibly burning a woman?"*

*Tarkalinkar: "This isn't written in any shastra, but it is a very ancient tradition in our country. For that reason, sati must be practiced."*

*Ram Mohan: "Sati did not exist in our country in every time or place. And then, think about this - theft and murder too have been happening in society from very olden times. Will you consider them right? Even though they are ancient, we oppose crimes such as theft and murder. In the same way, the custom of sati is murder - an inhuman crime. Therefore, it should be stopped."*



***Ancient traditions do not say only one thing. There are many variations. Are there any such variations mentioned in the above conversation?***

***Should the rules be different for women and men when it comes to the right to live? A husband is not expected to burn himself on his wife's pyre when she dies. So is the***



# New Rights for Women

## Laws for Widows

Due to the efforts of Ram Mohan Roy, the British government passed a law in 1829 abolishing the custom of *sati*. But there were many other customs that were unjust to women. For example, in the castes that were called high, widows were not permitted to marry again, while widowers could re-marry. A widow had to wear white clothes, cut her hair and could not be invited to attend auspicious functions.

Like Ram Mohan Roy, many other social reformers raised their voices for the welfare of widows. They demanded that widows should be allowed to marry again and that a law should be passed to this effect. Among those who launched this campaign, the most prominent was Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar

The question of widows remarrying became a very important issue of social reform because, in those days, most girls were married off when they were still children. If they became widows in their



childhood itself, they were forced to spend the rest of their lives as widows, in sorrow and rejection.

In 1856, a law was passed to allow widowed girls to marry again.

## Female Infanticide

Another important issue that was taken up by the social reformers was female infanticide. In some provinces, a girl's life was considered so worthless that people followed the custom of sometimes killing a female infant at birth if the parents had wanted a son.

The English government took action against this custom and made it illegal to kill a newborn female infant.

In this way, the government put legal restrictions on some major acts of cruelty towards girls and

women. Along with the government officials, Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Keshubchandra Sen, Mahadev Govind Ranade and many other social reformers tried to ensure that these laws were implemented. Slowly, many people began

to support them, though there was no shortage of people to oppose them.

***If you had lived in those times, would you have supported or opposed these new laws? Give reasons for your views.***

***Are these unfortunate customs found even today?***

## Women's Education

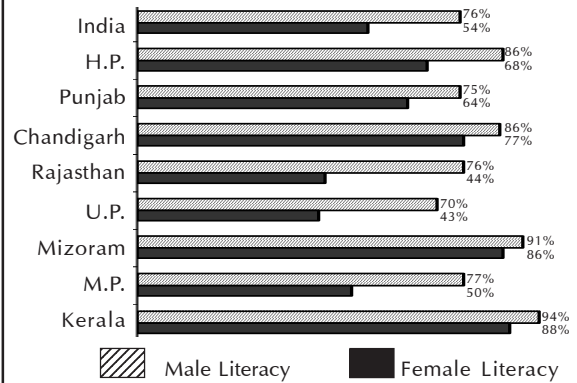
Apart from curbing many of the unfortunate customs against women, the social reformers also launched a campaign for educating women. People like Vidyasagar felt that women's lives were

important. They felt that women should also have the right to develop their intelligence. Accordingly, they should be provided with modern education.

As a result of the efforts of these social reformers, many schools were opened for girls. However, there were many people who strongly resisted these efforts to spread education among girls. They felt that if girls became educated they would not remain under the control of their husbands and

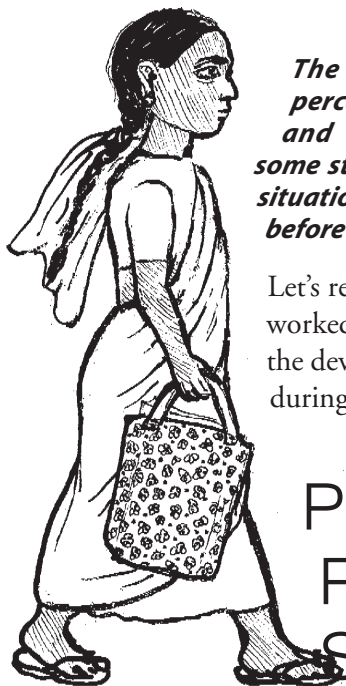
would not do household chores. Some people even felt that the husband of an educated woman would die at an early age. People even socially boycotted those parents who were courageous enough to send their daughters to school. Nevertheless, many families began opting for social change and slowly girls began to study in schools and colleges.

### Female and Male Literacy Rates in 2001



However, even today, fewer girls are educated by their parents than boys.

**Are girls and boys given equal opportunity and encouragement to be educated in your home? If there is any difference, how do your family members justify it? Do you think this is correct?**



*The graph here shows percentage of literate men and women in India and some states. Do you think the situation is better today than before?*

Let's read the story of a girl who worked with great courage for the development of women during the time of the English.

## Pandita Ramabai Saraswati

Ramabai was born in 1885. Her father, Anantha Shastri, was a traditional brahmin of Maharashtra. However, he began teaching his wife Sanskrit. There was so much opposition to this move that Anantha Shastri had to leave his village. He went with his family to a forest where they built a hut to live in. It was here



that Ramabai was born. Anantha Shastri also taught his daughter Sanskrit. He taught her the shastras and puranas. When Ramabai was 16 years old, both her parents died. Orphaned, Ramabai and her brother wandered from place to place, but no one offered them shelter. Not only did people avoid them but, in fact, they blamed the educated girl for her misfortune, as if she had committed a grave sin or crime.

After wandering around like this for some time, Ramabai reached Kolkata. She found a great welcome awaiting her in the city. Many people in Kolkata were influenced by Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar and others. So they held new ideas about women and welcomed Ramabai. She delivered many lectures in Sanskrit, discussing the importance of improving the condition of women. The people of Calcutta conferred upon her the titles of 'pandita' and 'saraswati'. She came to be known as Pandita Ramabai Saraswati.

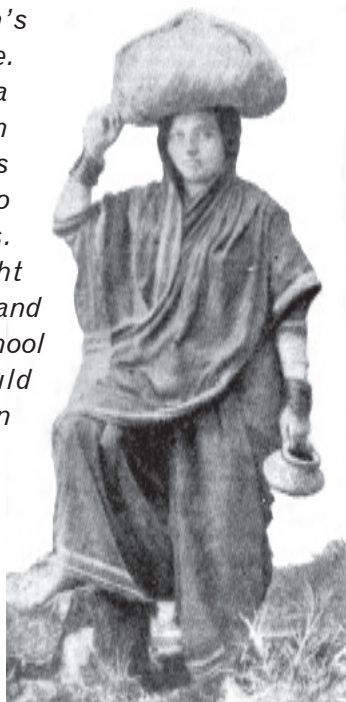


Sharada Sadan when it began in 1889

Ramabai later adopted the Christian faith.

She remained unmarried till the age of 22, when she married a man of her own choice. In those days, it was unheard for a woman to remain unmarried till the age of 22 and to marry a man of her own choice.

Ramabai devoted her whole life to helping women. She continued doing this work even after she was widowed. She travelled alone to England and America to learn about the women's organisations there. On her return to India she started an ashram and school known as Sharada Sadan to educate widows. Women were taught many kinds of skills and vocations at this school so that they could stand on their own feet.



Ramabai went to Vrindavan in the guise of a pilgrim to rescue young widows.

Ramabai felt it was very important for women to stand on their own feet. She often said that women bear everything silently because they have to depend on men.

"Men behave with us women like they behave towards animals. When we make efforts to improve our situation it is said that we are revolting against men and that it is a sin. In fact, the biggest sin is to endure the ill deeds



of men and not oppose them," she said.

This was how Ramabai began one of her lectures at a meeting: "Respected members of the audience. You should not be surprised at my weak voice. When the women of India have never been given the opportunity to speak, how can their voice be strong?"

Her complaint was that just as no one lends an ear to Indians in England, no one lends an ear to women in Indian society.

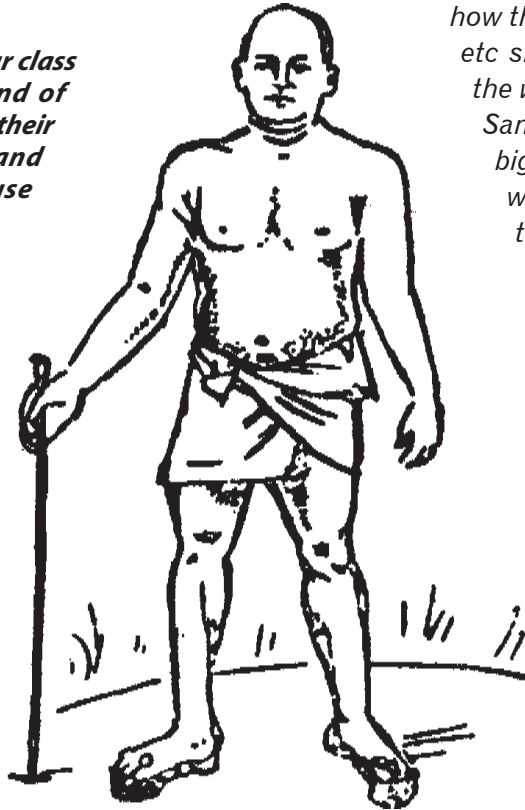
**Do you think that the complaints made by Ramabai on behalf of women were justified?**

**Would some girls in your class like to narrate the kind of difficulties they face in their school, home and neighbourhood because they are girls?**

## Swami Dayananda Saraswati

Dayanand was a sanyasi. He said the culture of the aryaans in the vedic age was free of the ills we see in our culture today. For instance, in the vedic age, customs like idol worship, child marriage, untouchability, restrictions on widow remarriage, etc did not exist. All these ills crept in at later stages in society and were then written in scriptures like the puranas. So he launched a campaign for the adoption of the vedic culture of the aryaans. He formed an organisation known as the Arya Samaj to pursue this objective.

This organisation became very popular in Punjab. It also had an influence in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.



Swami Dayananda Saraswati

The Arya Samaj prepared a book titled *Sanskar Vidhi*. The book explained in detail how the rituals for birth, marriage, death etc should be conducted according to the vedic method. Branches of the Arya Samaj were opened in many places - big and small towns - and members were enrolled. The Arya Samaj tried to help people to understand the vedic practices themselves and adopt the rites in their own lives. Slowly, large numbers of people began supporting the Arya Samaj.

Naturally, the orthodox Brahmins strongly opposed the Arya Samaj. They actively protected the orthodox Hindu religion, which they called *sanatana dharma*. They began forming organisations called *Sanatana Dharma Sabhas*.

While the Arya Samaj continued to face a lot of opposition regarding religious rituals, another of its programmes met with great success. This was the opening of Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College and School in Lahore. Its objective was to educate children in modern English

knowledge and science while also providing them with a good education in Sanskrit and the vedas. This fulfilled both the desires of people - that their children



should get an English education and acquire new knowledge that would help them get jobs, and at the same time, they should learn about their own

religion.

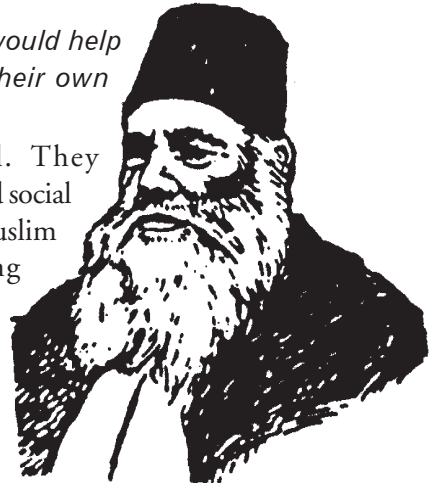
**Even after the propagation of the ideas of the vedic culture, why did the orthodox pundits and people continue to oppose the social reformers?**

## Muslim Reform Movements

Just as reformist Hindus had to struggle against brahmins and *pundits*, so too did reformist Muslims have to struggle against their religious leaders, like the *maulvis*. Most *maulvis* were against the English and they opposed English education strongly.

Despite the opposition of the *maulvis*, some Muslims did acquire an English education. They made efforts to spread new ideas among the people. Among those who pleaded for new ideas and English education were Sir Syed Ahmed Khan

and Dr Iqbal. They strongly opposed social practices like Muslim women wearing the *burqa*. Some reformers went to the extent of defiantly getting their daughters to take off their *burqas* and come out in the open.



Sir Syed Ahmed Khan

Like the Hindus, the Muslims too were concerned about preserving their religion. They made efforts to establish institutions where people could get a modern education while learning the basic tenets of their religion. Among the major institutions opened for Muslims were Aligarh Muslim University, Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia and the

Unani Ayurvedic College.

Efforts were also made to promote the education of Muslim women. One such effort was by a Bengali woman named Begum Rokeya, who started a girls' school. She wrote a very interesting book in 1905 called *Sultana's Dream*. What was Sultana's dream? It was a dream of an ideal society where women were rulers, science was encouraged, the environment was protected and cared for and men were kept in

*pardah*!

**What is your dream about a good society? Is it different from Sultana's dream?**

## The Reform Movement Among Non-brahmin

## Castes

You saw that the social reformers were opposed to caste discrimination, untouchability and ritualism. But these reformers belonged to the castes that were considered high. Around the same time, there were also many social reformers from the castes that were considered to be low. They came forward and attempted to uproot the caste system and the beliefs in ritualism.

Many children of the so-called low castes had begun to get educated in the schools run by Christian missionaries. These schools did not discriminate against children coming from the so-

called lower castes of society.

Unlike the earlier rulers, whether Hindu or Muslim, who tried to

stand by caste rules observed by their subjects, the British government refused to propagate discrimination among people on the basis of caste. It refused to implement such rules through its courts.

In such an atmosphere, many educated people emerged from the so-called low castes and threw themselves with great courage into the work of social reform. Major social reform movements took place in Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

Let's learn more about such movements from the efforts launched under the leadership of Jyotiba Phule of Maharashtra.



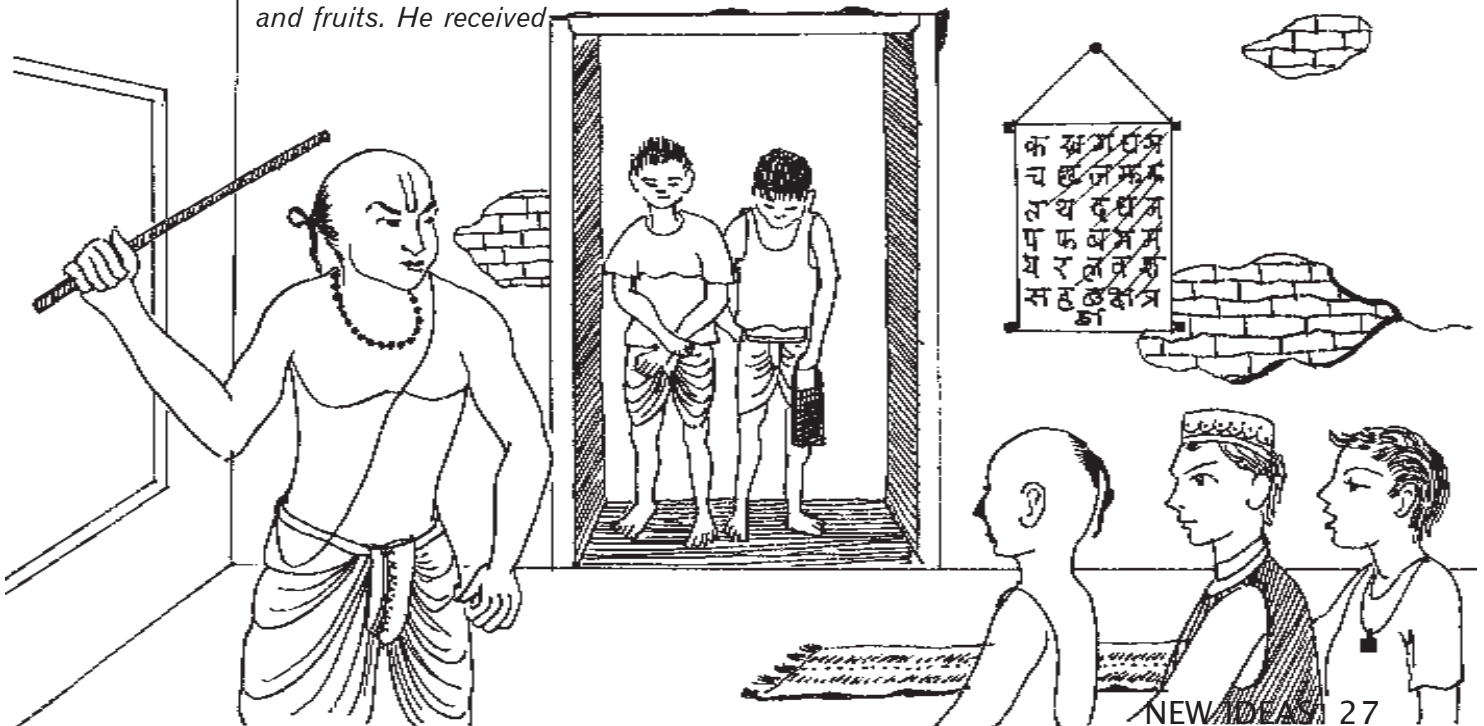
a few years of education in a Christian school. When he grew up, he and his wife wanted to open a school for girls of the mahar and maang castes. His father was angered and threw them out of his house.

Jyotiba had a deep understanding of the problems of castes that were considered low. He wrote many plays and

books about these problems. In his writings he showed how brahmins secretly told people of the mali and kunbi castes not to send their children to school, and how the patels treated people of these castes badly. He wrote about how brahmin teachers beat the children belonging to the castes considered as shudras, so that they would flee the school and never return. He also told how brahmin priests forced the poor to pay absurd and unnecessary expenses, and how the officials in government offices and municipalities, who were brahmins, troubled the needy farmers of other castes in many ways.

## Jyotiba Phule

Jyotiba Phule belonged to the mali (gardener) caste and sold vegetables and fruits. He received



Jyotiba Phule founded an organisation called Satyashodhak Samaj to build a new society based on truth. The samaj undertook the following main tasks:

- Demanding and setting up schools, colleges and hostels for the children of castes considered low so that the children of these castes could acquire an education and rise in society. The teachers and instructors in these institutions would also belong to the so-called low castes.
- Organising essay, debate and public speaking competitions for students belonging to the castes thought of as low, so that their hesitation and shyness might be broken and they may be enabled to put forth their views in front of others as strongly as people from the so-called high castes.
- Encouraging and helping those belonging to the castes considered low to conduct all their religious ceremonies without the brahmins. People could perform the rites themselves or keep a priest belonging to their own caste and give him the *dakshina*.



In 1884, a newspaper printed the news that the shudras of 40 villages in Junnar conducted 300 marriage ceremonies without the brahmins. So frustrated were some brahmins by this

This campaign was quite successful. For example, a news item published in 1873 says that 700 people of the *mali*, *kunbi*, *kumhar*, *badhai* and other castes launched a campaign to free themselves from the brahmins and they began conducting the *shraddha* ceremonies for their ancestors without the brahmins.

protest that they actually went to court to claim their right to *dakshina*. But they lost their case.

These movements popularised ideas about the rights of the castes that others considered low and the need for their development. Later, leaders like Dr B.R. Ambedkar also fought to remove the injustices being done to these castes.

**Do you think programmes such as the ones**

**started by the Satyashodhak Samaj, are necessary even today? Which of their original tasks do you think are still relevant?**

## After Independence

Many changes took place in our society as a result of the efforts of the social reformers. But we cannot say that the reforms were totally successful. Even today, we can see much around us that the reformers wanted removed during the time of the English. Even today, people are trying to reform society in one way or another.

**What efforts do you see today to reform the following - the condition of women, caste discrimination, religious ritualism?**

Due to the social movements begun in the time of the English, equal rights have been given to women and men in the Constitution of independent India. People of all castes and religions are considered equal. Many systems have been created to eradicate the injustices done to the so-called low castes. For example, the system of reservation has been introduced.

To accept these ideas in the Constitution and law is one thing. But to really carry them out is another. Even today, there are many who struggle to put into practice the ideas of equality, rationality and justice.

## Exercises

- 1. What kind of people wanted to spread English education in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? Why did they want to do this?**
- 2. Why did the English government want to spread English education in India?**
- 3. What impact did English education have on students?**
- 4. What reforms did members of the Paramhans Mandali want that sparked off strong opposition?**
- 5. What was the treatment meted out to widowed women during the times of the English?**
- 6. Is it necessary to educate women in order to improve their situation? Explain why or why not. Write your own views.**



You have read about how some people were raising issues of women's rights more than 100 years ago. This picture, drawn in Bengal in the Kalighat style, shows a woman being mistreated by her husband. Have you ever seen cases of women being mistreated these days?