



# **Social Reform Movements in Bengal**

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## **Abstract :**

Issues such as child marriage, ban on widow marriage, sati practice, untouchability, polygamy, veil system were covered in India. Some of these problems were imposed on the people as customs and traditions due to religious approval. So people started giving more importance to rituals, rituals and other practices. At that time, the level of education was very low and therefore they believed everything that the religious leaders told them. It made the life of a common man miserable. With the establishment of British rule and the spread of English education in India, many social reformers were influenced by Western philosophy and began to question and question some of the undesirable practices of Hinduism. Those social reformers wanted to bring about reforms in Hinduism and at the same time to get rid of the evil practices that were being practiced in the name of religion. The purpose of the present study is to present the work done by the social reformers during the social problems in Bengal. What the social reformers in Bengal have done is to bring the work to the fore.

## **Keywords:**

Movement, social reform, liberalism, nationalism.

## **Introduction:**

If we look at the history of social work, it can be seen that charitable organizations came forward to solve various problems in the society. Various welfare schemes were created to meet the needs of the needy. Based on them people also got relief but in reality many were deprived of various benefits, some are still deprived even today. Due to weakness, his voice could not reach the right place. As a part of the social system, they could not oppose anyone. They were suffering from oppression, extortion,



torture. Against this background, people who are bored with progress and have the mindset to do something for change, people who have courage came forward and started asking their questions. Those who took the initiative received encouragement and support and such work transformed into various movements.

The British entered India for trade and became the rulers. They also had his own objective of reforming India. They also tried to bring about educational reforms in India. Their work had a great impact on Indian intellectuals and they started working from the point of view of social transformation. During that time, many beliefs, customs and traditions had a tremendous influence in Indian society. Common people were the victims of this. Traditional practices like child marriage, polygamy, female infanticide, sati practice existed. It was necessary to change the society in relation to all these practices.

In the improvement of the country of India, along with the power factor, the social factor has an equal share. In fact, social causes should play a major role. The rulers operated the existing system and system, but efforts were made to change the social system by various movements that were part of the social cause. Some movements were public in nature, others private, motivated by specific goals. Even if the movement is different, the ultimate goal of every movement is the same, social development, social progress. Across the country, there were movements among various sections of society to bring about change regarding the issue.

Bengal was the first province of India where western education started. Western ideas and Western social and cultural values first came to Bengal. Hence, the emergence of humanist ideas first took place in Bengal. Social and religious reforms took place in Bengal through liberalism and utilitarianism, and through them ideas, sentiments and political awareness of nationhood were born. In Bengal, religious reforms led to social reforms. Both these types of movements were closely related in Bengal and not in the movement in Maharashtra.

### **Self-meeting**



Raja Rammohan Roy founded Atmiya Sabha in 1815. The discussion and work about the practice of sati was also done through this meeting. In 1818, Rajaram Mohan Rai first wrote about sati. There was a lot of controversy about this practice at that time. Through the newspaper Samvad Kaumudi, Rajaram Mohan Rai worked to create public opinion against the practice of sati. Through the newspaper Samachar Chandrika, Bipinchandra Banerjee and others took up the task of advocating the practice of sati. After such an ideological war, finally in 1829, William Bettinck declared the practice of sati against the law in Bengal. Bettinck passed the law considering that there is no such thing as the destruction of sati practice through the improvement of society and it may take a very long time. Moreover, Sati is not a part of Hindu tradition. As this school of thought came forward around this time, the prohibition of sati was not meant to interfere with the customary practices of the local people. As this became clear, the government took the initiative in making this law. This law was strongly opposed by the antiquarians but ultimately the law remained in the society. Prominent among the opponents of the Act was Radhakant Deb. But this Radhakant on the other hand was an advocate of women's education. These opponents also felt that the prohibition of sati would lead the society to resist other impending changes. Atmiya sabha means society of friends.

### **Brahmo Society**

The Brahmo Samaj started a social and religious movement that led to the revival of Bengal in the 19th century. The meaning of Brahmo society is the worship of one true Brahma, the society of worshipers. (The society of worshipers of one true God.) Brahm is the one who worships Brahma, the supreme power in the universe, and society is the community of people. Through this organization, he tried to create unity among different communities of all religions and make them realize that we are all children of the same Lord. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and his followers used to attend prayers in Christian churches. Some followers of Raja Rammohan Roy wanted to have their own place of worship. Finally he rented a building from Ramkamal Basu and started a prayer place there. The place of worship, started in Calcutta on 20 August 1828 and publicly inaugurated on 23 January 1830, was named Brahmo Sabha and later renamed as Brahmo Samaj. The preceding day is celebrated as Bhadratsav and the



following day as Maghotsav. These are two important festivals of the Brahmo community.

### **Educational Work**

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a scholar and had knowledge of many languages. He was greatly influenced by western education. During this period, English education was spread by the insistence of local people and the efforts of missionaries. For the Christian missionaries, English education was a means of conversion. The Charter Act of 1813 accelerated the work of Christian missionaries. Schools of English education began to proliferate. In 1800, such a school was established at Bhawanipur, Calcutta. In 1818, the Baptist Mission College Calcutta opened. In 1823, Sanskrit College, in 1825 Raja Rammohan Rai established Vedanta College. There were opponents to these educational reforms. The purpose of English education was to create a class that was Indian by blood and color but whose likes, opinions, values and intellect were like those of the English. The medium of higher education became English. Calcutta University was established in 1857. It was during this period that conversion accelerated in Bengal. In 1832, Krishnamohan Bandopadhyay, Maheshchandra Ghosh became Christians. The Dharmasabha started opposing the conversion. The Dharmasabha was also opposed to the Brahmin community.

### **Champion of women's right**

Raja Ram Mohan Roy started campaigning for many of their rights, including widow remarriage and the right of women to own property. Rishikrishna Mallik refused to swear by Ganga water in court. Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay decided to marry a widow and Radhanath Sikdat refused to marry a minor girl. Motilal Sale gave a reward of ten thousand to the one who married a widow during this period. King Rajaballabh of Vikrampur tried to marry his widowed daughter. In 1840, some widow marriages took place. But this marriage was not legal. Plays and writings on widow marriage were done during this period. In 1855, Vidyasagar filed an application in the court to pass the Widow Marriage Act, which was countered by the reactionaries in the same way. After this, the Hindu Widow Marriage Act was passed in 1856. The first such legal widow



marriage took place in 1856. At that time, child marriages were very common and the number of widows was very large. Vidyasagar proposed that the marriage of girls under the age of twelve should be made illegal. After this, the Age of Consent was passed in 1891. As there was a shortage of grooms from the caste, the caste Brahmins began to marry more than once and depend on the wealth received from their wives. This was called oligarchy. Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar attacked this practice. He raised his voice against the practice of polygamy. In Calcutta in 1849 Hindu Balika Vidyalaya was established by Vidyasagar and Dinkwater brothers. There was a demand for a new law to validate the marriages performed by the Brahma Samaj. In 1872, the Civil Marriage Act was passed. Originally called the Brahma Marriage Act, it was decided that the age of a girl should be at least 14 years and the age of a boy should be at least 18 years at the time of marriage. In 1893, a school for the deaf and dumb was established. A school for the disabled was established. After 1955 polygamy declined. At the end of the 19th century, the feeling of nationalism grew in Bengal and political awareness arose. Bankimchandra Chatterjee, Romeshchandra Dutt wrote novels, stories. Hinduism was revived in the teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Ramakrishna used tantric mantras, Vaishnavism, Muslim and Christian religions, etc. with great success. Each path was appropriate in its own way. There was no need to reform religion. All these ways were valid. One can reach God by worshiping one God or thirty three crore Gods. This teaching of Ramakrishna was presented by Vivekananda in 1893 at the Dharma Parishad Conference in Chicago. Ramakrishna Math was established in 1897. Through this work of public service, charitable service, public welfare, removal of people's sufferings was done.

### **Conclusion:**

The work done by the social reformers on the social problems in Bengal in the present study is of an unforgettable nature. If these social reformers had not done such social work at that time, such life-threatening customs and traditions would have remained in the society even today. During that time, he gave more emphasis on Brahma Samaj, self-meeting, women's rights, opposition to polygamy, opposition to undesirable social practices, elimination of ignorance, promotion of scientific education,



support for women's education, equality. Raja Rammohan Roy impressed the public with his modern ideas. And that gave a new direction to the transformation. It was due to his thoughts that laws such as Sati Prohibition Act, Widow Remarriage Act, Inter Caste Marriage Act etc. were passed. Through the Brahmo community, he created awareness among the people against the social and religious undesirable practices of the society. New Enlightenment philosophy and science made it possible for Indians to evaluate their traditions and customs and the narrow view of the religious class. Raja Rajaram Mohan Roy suggested to worship one God without any external rituals and celebrations. He emphasized that prayer and worship are the only means of devotion to God. The work of giving women a place of respect in the society, condemning the practice of sati, trying to abolish pada system, encouraging widow remarriage, promoting the English education system etc. had a great impact on the Hindu society. Eradication of superstitions and bad practices can only be done through education. Rajaram Mohan Roy believed that people's ignorance can be removed only through education. He believed that education was a tool for social improvement.

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