



## **Social Reformers of India and Their Contributions.**

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The present paper gives an insight about the Indian social reformers who have taken painstaking efforts for the upliftment of women in India which is also an explanation to the world that Indians are not behind anything in any matter. This is an attempt through this paper to take a review of historical development in the field of feminism.

#### Savitribai Phule

A Dalit woman and a pioneer of the Indian feminist movement, Savitribai Phule championed the cause of education for women in India. She was the country's first female teacher who went on to establish several schools for women of all castes. Along with her husband Jyoti Rao Phule, Savitribai campaigned to abolish caste and gender discrimination and set up 'Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha' to prevent female infanticide. She worked with other women to uplift the victims of rape and prevent killings of widows. Today, every educated, privileged Indian woman should be deeply grateful to Savitribai Phule and her associates.

#### Tarabai Shinde

A feminist activist and an associate of Savitribai, Tarabai Shinde's thoughts and opinions remain controversial to date because of their progressive and non-conformist nature. She was an ardent critic of the inherent patriarchy of Hindu scriptures and worked extensively to highlight the disparities between men and women. While she shared the same views on gender and caste-based discrimination as Savitribai's, she also believed that women all around the world are similarly oppressed. Her first published work was her Marathi book named "Stri Purush Tulana" which is frequently cited among the Indian feminist circuit to date as it is deemed as one of the first modern feminism texts in India.

#### Ramabai Ranade

Ramabai Ranade decided to devote her life to the emancipation of women. Fortunately, her husband was encouraged her to study and widen her horizon of knowledge. She went on to establish Seva Sadan in Pune and Mumbai which focused on teaching women various life skills. Seva Sadan continues to educate girls to this date. She was also the president of All India Women Conference and was the first Indian woman to address a public gathering in English. She had devoted her life to make women independent, financially and otherwise.

#### Raja Ram Mohan Roy



At the beginning of the 19th century, India was plagued by various social evils such as Sati pratha, the Caste system, Religious superstitions, etc. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the first to recognize these inhuman practices and decided to fight against them same. He is considered the architect of the Indian Renaissance and the father of modern India.

#### **Work and Reforms:**

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was very open-minded and was of a very questioning brain. Western progressive thoughts very much influenced him. He was also well versed in the teachings of various religions. He was influenced by the monotheism of Islam, the Mysticism of Sufi philosophy, the Ethics and morals of Christianity, and the Vedanta philosophy of Upanishad.

His main focus was on the evils which had surrounded the Hindu society of the times, such as:

- He criticized the idol worship of Hindus and tried to prove his point through the verses of the Vedas.
- But the main contribution for which Raja Ram Mohan Roy is still remembered was his relentless efforts to abolish the practice of Sati Pratha.

Ram Mohan Roy got involved in fighting against it when his elder brother died, and his sister-in-law was made a Sati. He began a movement to abolish this barbaric custom, and for that purpose, he persuaded the British Government to pass an Act repealing Sati Pratha; the Bengal Sati Regulation Act, 1829 was given by Lord William Bentinck, the then Governor-General of Bengal. On August 20, 1828, Raja Ram Mohan Roy established the Brahma Samaj, which later became the Brahmo Samaj, an organization and a movement with the objectives of promoting monotheism criticizing idol worshipping; opposing widespread Brahmanism, and uplifting the pitiful condition of women, On, etc.

#### **Mahatma Jyotiba Phule**

Jyotirao Govindrao Phule was born April 11, 1827, in Satara, Maharashtra, in a family of vegetable vendors. He could not complete his education due to his family's poor condition but later completed it with the help of a few persons who had recognized his potential.

#### **Works and Social Reforms:**

- His first and foremost work was in the field of women's education, and his first disciple was his wife herself, who always shared his dreams and supported him all through life.
- To fulfill his ideals and aspirations of creating a just and equitable society, in 1848, Jyotiba opened a school for girls; it was the first girls' School ever in the country. His wife, Savitribai, taught there as a teacher. But for trying to educate girls, a highly unthinkable act at that time, Jyotiba was forced to leave his home. However, such threats and societal pressures would not deter him from doing his work, and he kept creating awareness among people about social evils.



- In 1851, he started a bigger and better school for girls, which became very popular; there was no discrimination on the lines of religion, caste, or creed, and everyone was welcomed to study there.
- Jyotiba was also against child marriages and supported widow remarriage greatly; he was very sympathetic to the cause of distressed women and opened a home for such poor and exploited women where they could be taken care of.
- Jyotiba was also actively involved in the emancipation of so-called lower castes, especially the Untouchables; in fact, he was perhaps the first person who gave untouchables the name Dalit as signifying someone who is broken, depressed, or exploited and is outside the so-called Varna system.
- To uplift the so-called lower caste people and untouchables, September 24, 1873, he formed the Satyashodhak Samaj (the Society of Truth Seekers), the main objective of the Samaj was to create a just and equitable social order free of discrimination based on caste, religion or gender. Satyashodhak Samaj was also opposed to religious dogmas and superstitions such as idolatry, the need for priests and irrational rituals, etc. Thus, Jyotiba Phule devoted his whole life to the weaker and depressed section of society; in his thinking and works, he was well ahead of his times.

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar was born April 14, 1891, in Mhow, a military cantonment town of the then Central Province of India. His father, Ramji Maloji Sakpal was a Subedar in army and his mother Bhimabai Sakpal was a house wife.

Ambedkar was treated as untouchable in the School, and other Dalit children; we're not allowed to sit with other so-called higher caste children or drink water from common water vessels. Ambedkar was very meritorious in their studies and, after completing his early education in Bombay, moved to the United States for post-graduation and research; he did his post-graduation and Ph.D. from Columbia University, New York City. He further studied at the London School of Economics and completed his master's and doctorate there.

Work and Social Reforms:

Thus, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, despite several odds, got the best education from very good institutions in the world because of his talent and merit only. He also received a degree in Law.

- His major contribution to eradicating social evils was fighting for the rights of the untouchables and so-called lower caste people. When preparing the Government of India Act, 1919, he advocated for separate electorates for untouchables and other lower caste people. He demanded reservations for such communities.
- Ambedkar started several publications such as Mook Nayak, a weekly; Bahiskrit Bharat, a periodical to create awareness and to fight for the rights of untouchables and lower castes.
- He founded Bahishkrit Hitakarni Sabha July 20, 1924, in Bombay to create socio-political awareness among untouchables and make the Government sensitive towards their issues; he called upon the Dalits and untouchables to "Educate, Agitate and Organize" for their rightful place in society.



- He started to launch public movements against discrimination faced by untouchables, such as opening the public water resources for untouchables and burning Manusmriti, an ancient Hindu text which gives sanction to the caste system and the rights of lower caste people to enter Hindu temples.
- In 1932, after the Third Round Table Conference in Britain in which Dr. Ambedkar participated, the British announced the infamous Communal Award, according to which there was a provision of a separate electorate in British India for different communities; thus, Untouchables were also considered as a separate electorate; it meant that for the election to the seats reserved for the untouchables only persons who could vote were untouchables.
- Gandhiji and other Congress leaders vehemently opposed the scheme as being communal and divisive, dividing Hindus into two separate groups. But Dr. Ambedkar was in its favor as he believed that by having a separate electorate, more and more legislatures of the 'Depressed Class' would be elected.
- After long and tedious discussions between Ambedkar and Congress leaders, Poona Pact was reached September 25, 1932, according to which the system of separate electorate was abolished, but reservation of seats for the Depressed Class remained the same; hence, now untouchables would not be separate from Hindus, but seats would be reserved for them. It was a major step in recognizing the political rights of untouchables within the fold of Hindu society.
- Similarly, the Constitution of India in 1950 gave reservation benefits to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, who were earlier referred to as 'Depressed Classes.'
- Dr. Ambedkar's biggest contribution to the making of modern India was his momentous effort as the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee; the most important feature of the Constitution of India is its special focus on socio-political and economic justice and equality; he forcefully advocated for the rights of women and SCs, STs and OBCs; special provisions were added for their upliftment and for eradicating various discriminations faced by them.
- Later in his life, Dr. Ambedkar converted to Buddhism after getting fed up with Hinduism's caste system, superstitions, rituals, and discriminatory practices. Therefore, all through his life, socially and politically, Babasaheb kept fighting against the prevailing social evils of our country; his contribution towards making the downtrodden people acquire self-respect and their rightful place is immeasurable.



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