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She is diligent at work with a vision to provide holistic education. Being an ardent reader band critic of literature she believes that literature has a great influence on both individuals and society and it can inculcate great qualities like leadership in the individuals. Leadership is not about glorious crowning acts. It's about keeping your team focused on a goal and motivated to do their best to achieve it, especially when the stakes are high and the consequences really matter. It is about laying the groundwork for others' success, and then standing back and letting them shine. This idea is the driving force behind this compilation.

The work aims at throwing light on the genesis of nationalistic ideology in the days of freedom struggle so that it becomes easier for the present generation to understand it's true spirit.

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Indian English Literature with
Freedom Struggle as Background

Dr. D. Uma Rani
G. Manibabu
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CHAPTER-20

LITERARY WORK WITH RELIGION AS A POWERFUL TOOL TO RAISE THE PEOPLE AGAINST COLONIAL RULERS

Roja Masanam

The Indian society, which you see in 2012, is very different from the one in the first half of the 19th century. Two major social causes prevented the society's progress. These were lack of education and subordination of women. Many sections of the Indian society were rigid and followed certain practices which were not in keeping with humanitarian values.

Lack of Education

Majority of people in those days were illiterate. All over the world education was in the hands of a very small number of people. In India also, education was limited to a handful of men belonging to the upper castes. Brahmins in India had access to the Vedas which were written in Sanskrit. It was a language known only to them. Religious texts were also controlled by these people. So they interpreted them in a way that benefitted them. Expensive rituals, sacrifices and practices after birth or death were outlined by this priestly class. It was mandatory

for everyone to perform these rituals in the belief of a better life after death. Nobody could question the Brahmin priests because nobody knew what was written in the scriptures. Similarly in Europe, the Bible was written in Latin. It was the language of the Church and their priests interpreted the religious texts accordingly. And that is why, as a reaction, Europe saw the Renaissance and the Reformation Movement about which you have read earlier in this book. Even ideas like liberty, equality, freedom and human rights were introduced in Europe by various revolutions which took place there.

Position of Women

Girls and women today have better opportunities for their development. They have more freedom to study and work outside of home. However, way back in the 19th century the life was much harder for majority of the women. Certain social practices like female infanticide, child marriage, sati pratha and polygamy were prevalent in some sections of Indian society. Female infanticide or killing of a girl child was a very common practice. Girls who survived were often married at a very young age and often to men who were much older. Polygamy, a practice of a man having more than one wife was an accepted norm among many castes and religion. In some parts of the country Sati Pratha was practiced in which a widowed woman was compelled to burn herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. Those women who could escape the practice of Sati had to live a very miserable life. Women had no right to property. They also had no access to education. Thus, in general, women had a subordinate position in the society. The fear of the invader and loss of family honor was one reason.

Socio – Religious awakening

Reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Jyotiba Phule, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan

and Pandita Ramabai understood that ignorance and backwardness in the society was responsible for hindering its progress and development. This realisation was reinforced when they came in contact with the Europeans and found that life was very different in other parts of the world. When the British missionaries started spreading Christianity, they criticized and questioned many of our social and religious practices. Many of their ideas were accepted by our reformers. The desire to reform the society was so strong that these reformers were now ready to face challenges as well as resistance from the orthodox Indians. They started several movements to bring desirable changes in the society.

The Caste System

Since ancient times, Indian society had a caste system which was originally occupation based. Over a period of time, interpretation of religious texts by the upper caste and lack of access to religious scriptures by the lower caste led to several superstitious practices in the name of religion. This also resulted in power being concentrated in upper caste and exploitation of the lower caste

Hindu society was based on the Varna system, that is, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. According to this system people were divided on the basis of their occupation. The people who were engaged in praying and worshipping the Gods were categorized as Brahmins. The people who were engaged in wars were called Kshatriyas. Those whose occupation was agriculture and trading were known as Vaishyas and those who used to serve the upper three Varnas were known as Shudras. This caste system, which was purely based on occupation, had become hereditary. A person born in a particular caste could not change his/her caste even though they might have changed their work. This created inequality in society. It also led to the exploitation of the lower castes. Therefore, caste system had become a major hindrance.

The Prevalent Religious Practices

Most of the social practices were done in the name of religion. Hence, social reform had no meaning without religious reform. Our reformers were deeply rooted in Indian tradition and philosophy and had a sound knowledge of the scriptures. They were able to blend positive Indian values with western ideas and the principles of democracy and equality. On the basis of this understanding, they challenged the rigidity and superstitious practices in religion. They cited the scriptures to show that the practices prevalent during nineteenth century find no sanction in them. The enlightened and the rationalistic amongst them questioned the popular religion which was full of superstitions and was exploited by the corrupt priests. The reformers wanted society to accept the rational and scientific approach. They also believed in the principle of human dignity and social equality of all men and women.

SOCIO RELIGIOUS REFORMERS OF THE 19TH CENTURY

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was born in a Brahmin family of Bengal. He knew many languages and had read Quran, Bible and the New Testament along with Hindu scriptures in great depth. Liberal education exposed him to different cultures and philosophies. Deeply moved by the plight of his brother's widow, who had been forced to commit Sati, he was determined to uproot this social practice. This led him to challenge other unfair social and religious practices prevalent at that time. He founded Brahma Samaj in 1828. He was the first person to take an initiative to challenge the practice of Sati and it soon became his life long crusade .

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

A great scholar and reformer, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar dedicated his entire life to the cause of social reforms. The first Hindu

Widow Remarriage Act was introduced in 1856 owing to his relentless efforts. He also protested against child-marriage and campaigned against polygamy. Though he did not concern himself much with religious questions, he was against all those who opposed reforms in the name of religion.

Though he was a Sanskrit scholar, his mind was open to the best in Western thought. His major contribution was in the field of education. He encouraged the study of Sanskrit and Bengali literature. He also introduced the study of Western thought in the Sanskrit college to inspire the Indians to shake off their age-old beliefs and modernize their ideas. He believed that condition of women could be improved only through their education. His efforts in this direction were praise worthy. He helped in opening approximately 35 girls' school in Bengal. He was a champion of women's education. The admission of non-Brahmin students in the Sanskrit College was made possible through his efforts.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati

The Arya Samaj founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875 undertook the task of reforming Hindu religion in North India. He considered Vedas to be infallible and the foundation of all knowledge. He rejected all those religious thoughts which were in conflict with the Vedas. He believed that every person had the right to have direct access to God. It started the Shuddhi Movement to bring back those Hindus who had converted to Islam and Christianity. Satyarth Prakash was his most important book.

Arya Samaj advocated social reform and worked to improve the condition of women. It fought untouchability and the rigidities of the hereditary caste system and promoted social equality. The use of Hindi language in which he wrote and preached made his ideas accessible to the people of Northern India. Arya Samaj also had a

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major role to play in the national movement as it inculcated a spirit of self respect and self reliance among the people. The role of Arya Samaj was commendable in promoting education among the masses. Some of Swami Dayanand's followers later started a network of schools and colleges called D.A. V. (Dayanand Anglo Vedic) in the country to impart education on western lines without compromising on the Vedic teachings. They encouraged teaching of English and modern science along with Sanskrit and Vedic education.

Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Swami Vivekananda

Paramhansa (1836-1886) highlighted the essential unity of religions and the need to lead a spiritual life. He believed that the different religions of the world are only different ways to reach the same god. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) was his foremost disciple.

Vivekananda was the first spiritual leader who thought beyond religious reforms. He felt that Indian masses needed secular as well as spiritual knowledge to empower them to believe in themselves. Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna mission after the name of his guru Ramakrishna Paramhansa. Through his speeches and writings, he brought out the essence of Hindu culture and religion. He believed in the spirit of Vedanta and the essential unity and equality of all religions. He laid stress on the removal of religious superstitions, obscurantism, and outdated social customs. He tried to remove caste rigidities, and untouchability. He motivated the people to respect women while he himself worked for women's upliftment and education. Vivekananda attached primary importance to the removal of ignorance among the people.

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan believed that the religious and social life of the Muslims could be improved only by imbibing modern western

scientific knowledge and culture. His major concern was the removal of social and educational backwardness among the Muslims. He worked hard to raise the status of the Muslim women. He was against the purdah system, polygamy, easy divorce and lack of education among the girls. Though he was opposed by the orthodox Muslims, he made commendable efforts to promote women's education. He tried to interpret the Quran in the light of reason and spoke out against fanaticism and ignorance. He also initiated social reforms for the upliftment of Muslim society. Throughout his early life, he advocated the study of English language even against the opposition of the orthodox Muslims. He considered that only modern education could lead Muslims towards progress. He established an English school in Ghazipur (present day Uttar Pradesh) in 1864. He started the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College (M.A.O.) at Aligarh in 1875 which later developed into the Aligarh Muslim University. It provided education in humanities and science through English medium. He also established a scientific society for translating English books. He also published a journal for spreading awareness among the Muslims towards social reforms especially towards modern education. He started the Mohammadan educational conference for spreading liberal ideas among the Muslims. The movement for reform started by him is known as the Aligarh Movement which proved to be an important step towards social and political awakening among the Muslims.

Jyotirao Govindrao Phule

Jyotirao Govindrao Phule from Maharashtra worked to attain equal rights for peasants and the lower caste. He and his wife, Savitribai Phule, are most known for their efforts to educate women and the lower castes as well as the masses. He first educated his wife, after which both of them opened a school for girls in India in August 1848. He took up the cause of women and started a girls' school in Poona

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(Pune) in 1851. He is also remembered for his efforts towards promoting widow remarriage. In September 1873, Jyotirao along with his followers formed the Satya Shodhak Samaj (Society of Seekers of Truth) with the main objective of liberating the lower castes and protecting them from exploitation and atrocities. He was popularly known as Jyotiba.

Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade

Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade established the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha and the Prarthana Samaj in 1867 in Bombay to bring about religious reforms. It sought to remove caste restrictions, abolish child marriage, the shaving of widows' heads, the heavy cost of marriages and other social functions; encourage education of women and promote widow remarriage. Like Bramho Samaj, it advocated the worship of one God. It condemned idolatry and the domination of the priestly castes in religious matters. He introduced vernacular languages in the University curriculum which made higher education accessible to Indians. He attempted to reform the rigid traditions in the society without destroying the social atmosphere of India's rich cultural heritage. He was also a founding member of the Indian National Congress.

Pandita Ramabai In Maharashtra

, Pandita Ramabai, a renowned social reformer, fought for the rights of women and spoke against the practice of child marriage. She promoted girls education and started the Arya Mahila Samaj in 1881, in Pune, to improve the condition of women, especially child widows. In 1889, she established the Mukti Mission, in Pune, a refuge for young widows who had been deserted and abused by their families. She also started Sharda Sadan which provided housing, education, vocational training and medical services to widows, orphans and the visually challenged. She also wrote many books showing the hard life of women, including child brides and child widows. The Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission is still active today.

Annie Besant

Annie Besant was a member of the Theosophical Society and came to India for the first time in 1893. This movement was led by Westerners who glorified Indian religious and philosophical traditions and encouraged vernacular languages and literary works to instill a sense of pride in Indian heritage and culture. It aroused political awakening and helped Indians recover their self-confidence and get a sense of pride in their own country. The society also preached the universal brotherhood of man. It made immense contribution towards the development of Modern India. Annie Besant became the President of the Theosophical Society in 1907. Besant opened a college for boys, the Central Hindu College at Banaras based on Theosophical principles with the aim to build a new leadership for India. The students studied religious texts along with modern science. The college became a part of the new University, the Banaras Hindu University from 1917.

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