

Vol 7 Issue 1 Oct 2017

ISSN No : 2249-894X

---

*Monthly Multidisciplinary  
Research Journal*

*Review Of  
Research Journal*

Chief Editors

---

**Ashok Yakkaldevi**  
A R Burla College, India

**Ecaterina Patrascu**  
Spiru Haret University, Bucharest

**Kamani Perera**  
Regional Centre For Strategic Studies,  
Sri Lanka

Review Of Research Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial Board readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

**Regional Editor**

Dr. T. Manichander

**Advisory Board**

Kamani Perera Regional Centre For Strategic Studies, Sri Lanka	Delia Serbescu Spiru Haret University, Bucharest, Romania	Mabel Miao Center for China and Globalization, China
Ecaterina Patrascu Spiru Haret University, Bucharest	Xiaohua Yang University of San Francisco, San Francisco	Ruth Wolf University Walla, Israel
Fabricio Moraes de Almeida Federal University of Rondonia, Brazil	Karina Xavier Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), USA	Jie Hao University of Sydney, Australia
Anna Maria Constantinovici AL. I. Cuza University, Romania	May Hongmei Gao Kennesaw State University, USA	Pei-Shan Kao Andrea University of Essex, United Kingdom
Romona Mihaila Spiru Haret University, Romania	Marc Fetscherin Rollins College, USA	Loredana Bosca Spiru Haret University, Romania
	Liu Chen Beijing Foreign Studies University, China	Ilie Pinte Spiru Haret University, Romania
Mahdi Moharrampour Islamic Azad University buinzahra Branch, Qazvin, Iran	Nimita Khanna Director, Isara Institute of Management, New Delhi	Govind P. Shinde Bharati Vidyapeeth School of Distance Education Center, Navi Mumbai
Titus Pop PhD, Partium Christian University, Oradea, Romania	Salve R. N. Department of Sociology, Shivaji University, Kolhapur	Sonal Singh Vikram University, Ujjain
J. K. VIJAYAKUMAR King Abdullah University of Science & Technology, Saudi Arabia.	P. Malyadri Government Degree College, Tandur, A.P.	Jayashree Patil-Dake MBA Department of Badruka College Commerce and Arts Post Graduate Centre (BCCAPGC), Kachiguda, Hyderabad
George - Calin SERITAN Postdoctoral Researcher Faculty of Philosophy and Socio-Political Sciences Al. I. Cuza University, Iasi	S. D. Sindkhedkar PSGVP Mandal's Arts, Science and Commerce College, Shahada [ M.S. ]	Maj. Dr. S. Bakhtiar Choudhary Director, Hyderabad AP India.
REZA KAFIPOUR Shiraz University of Medical Sciences Shiraz, Iran	Anurag Misra DBS College, Kanpur	AR. SARAVANAKUMARALAGAPPA UNIVERSITY, KARAIKUDI, TN
	C. D. Balaji Panimalar Engineering College, Chennai	V.MAHALAKSHMI Dean, Panimalar Engineering College
Rajendra Shendge Director, B.C.U.D. Solapur University, Solapur	Bhavana vivek patole PhD, Elphinstone college mumbai-32	S.KANNAN Ph.D , Annamalai University
Awadhesh Kumar Shirotriya	Awadhesh Kumar Shirotriya Secretary, Play India Play (Trust), Meerut (U.P.)	Kanwar Dinesh Singh Dept.English, Government Postgraduate College , solan
		More.....



## A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY REFORM MOVEMENT OF INDIA

**Satyam Tiwari**

Junior Research Fellow, Department of Political  
Science, University of Allahabad, Allahabad,  
India.

### ABSTRACT :

**T**his research paper is an attempt to understand the nature of eighteenth century social reforms in India and its response by the British. Paper will deal with the theoretical as well as the practical aspect of the reforms and its limitations too. Moreover the paper proposes to evaluate the contribution of social reforms on the overall status of women in India.

**KEYWORDS :** Feminist Critique ,Eighteenth Century Reform Movement ,softer and liberal .

### INTRODUCTION

British established their supremacy in India in the later half of 18th century. Although British were not the first outsiders but significant changes that affected the life of ordinary people first came with British rule. British conquest transformed the social setting in India. The new ruling class was more liberal in attitude. Though they introduced western education for preparing a class of people fit for the jobs of clerks and translators, western education made the Indian elite male aware of the western culture which

was softer and liberal in its approach toward women. It worked as an eyewash for this new elite class. Consequently we witness reform movements targeting social evils in the society. Moreover Colonial bosses, though politically motivated, too played an important role in these reforms.

Sati question was the first to get addressed by reformers as well as the British. In colonial period British extended the term, with the result it is now used for both the practice and the practitioner. Though practiced prominently in Bengal and Rajasthan, sati became a socially sanctioned custom and was on its peak in early 19th century. This brutal practice attracted a lot of criticism from western educated elite as well as British rulers. Raja Rammohun Roy successfully championed for the abolition of sati. He provided the evidences that sati was not an ancient practice and entered Indian society in Puranic age and afterwards. Ultimately sati system was declared invalid by Lord William Bentinck in 1829. British who wanted to justify their rule in India used the white men's burden theory and claimed to civilize India. Lata Mani has argued that British preoccupation with sati in early 19th century was less about burning women than it was about defining the parameters of colonial control. Another point is that since the official concern was to abolish it 'safely' it made the debate centered whether sati was scripturally sanctioned or not. Although reformers argued against sati but they articulated their argument on the basis of scriptures rather than as an issue of individual human rights. They defended the traditions from British criticism for being uncivilized. So ultimately we can agree with what Mani writes: tradition was thus not the ground on which the status of women was being contested. Rather the reverse was true: women in fact became the site on which tradition was debated and reformulated.

In the row of reforms rights of widow remarriage too was zealously advocated by such ardent social reformers like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in Bengal, and Malabari, poet Narmad, Justice Ranade and K. Natrajan in Bombay. It was finally legalized in 1856, despite harsh criticism by orthodoxy. Though the law was passed its impact

however was limited and contradictory. In Maharashtra, where the issue of widow remarriage had greater force, supporters for the cause were found to be at fault in a public debate in Poona in 1870 by the Shankaracharya of the Kabir Math and obliged to do penance. The widows who remarried were very few. The social acceptance of the act was very difficult. To ensure the upward mobility (through Sanskritisation process) mobile middle classes who earlier practiced widow remarriage now tried to prevent their widows from doing so. Moreover the nature of the legislation itself was conservative, which disinherited the widow who remarried of her right to property of her deceased husband; this dissuaded her from marrying. So the remarriage act did not change the status of widows. Though Vidyasagar did a lot of efforts but widow remarriage never received the approval of his society. Like Rammohun Roy, Vidyasagar too drew upon shastras to argue that widow remarriage was sanctioned by the scriptures, though his use of shastra differed from that of Roy.

Female infanticide too was prohibited in 1870 through legislation. But in actual practice, female infanticide received a fillip during the colonial rule due to the changing economy of colonial period like demand of state for timely revenue payments, increasing dowry demands, combined with parents wishing to have more sons to work on land or to join army.

The age of consent for the consummation of marriage was raised from 8 to 12 in 1892. Two well-publicised case of Rukhmabai and Phulmoni (1890), a child bride of Bengal who died as a result of brutal sexual intercourse by her thirty-five year old husband. The colonial British Indian government which faced the revolt of 1857 was in dilemma, whether to be liberal or not to disturb and intervene in social traditions of the subjects. Ultimately British govt. passed the act in 1892. However there were no convictions under the act until thirty years later. Till then new dynamics emerged in India and women' organizations like AISC started articulating opinion for further higher age of marriage, which was ultimately recognized legally by Sharda act which was passed in October 1929 and came into force. This act set the age of marriage 14 for girls and 18 for boys. The ecstasy soon faded away with Muslim leaders asking to amend the law to exclude Muslims. Moreover enforcement of the act was practically non-existent. Conviction was hard and the convict was often granted pardon.

Though the act was in the right direction but limited in its approach. At no time did AISC argue that the decision of whether or not to marry, whom to marry and when to marry should be a matter of individual right. Rather, they couched their support of a later age of marriage in terms of preparing a woman to fit for her biological roles. Women organizations too adopted a myopic vision and failed to foresee the very basic idea of individuality.

Women education too got an impetus under British rule. Earlier women education was seen as suspicious. It was a common belief that woman with the knowledge of letters will soon after marriage become a widow. Their morality was dubious too. With the introduction of English education some elite class women too got a chance to study. The earliest schools for girls were open in India through funding by the Church Missionary Society, and were the first tangible attempt to modernize Indian women. In case of female education, early supporters saw opportunities for social mobility as the demand for educated brides increased. Brahmo Samaj, the Bengal based society led the movement for female education. Arya Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Theological Society, Ramakrishna Mission too worked for female education. Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, Mataji Tapaswini, D K Karve, these three are particularly significant because of their effort to build schools distinct from those of the religious reform organizations. D K Karve contributed a lot to widow education. British Indian Government too supported female education. These educated females further led the task of popularising and expanding education. With the spread of education and liberal and rational ideas among the people, the practice of purdah began to diminish. M.G. Ranade, Gopal Hari Deshmukh and Karsandas Mujli were among the notable persons who worked for the betterment of women's status. In South India, R. Venkata Ratnam Naidu vehemently opposed devdasi system and Kandukuri Virasalingam Pantulu worked for marriage reforms.

Though social reform movement addressed the plight of Indian Hindu women but it may be termed as limited. Modern Feminist scholarship has reinvented the colonial period and presented some vital critique of it. Janaki Nair comments on the "limited operation of 'Modernisation' paradigm". She argues: "the agenda of modernization to which both colonialists and nationalist discourse laid claim, did not, indeed could not, include

wider transformation of Indian society.” Lata Mani rightly argues focus was not on the specific problem, but what constituted the authentic tradition. They though tried to do away with social evils and promote women but failed to identify and address the patriarchal constructs of the society, which were still unquestioned. Another critique of social reform movement is offered by Radha Kumar who opined that the focus of social reform movements reflected the upper castes who constituted the bourgeoisie.

So, whatever arguments the reformers put were according to the scriptures. At least at that time they did not and were not in position to question male bias of the scriptures itself. The basic premise they held was whether the tradition in question is sanctioned in earlier religious literature or is mere later interpolations which crept in the society. They opened schools but most of the time the reason had been creating a pool of ‘good’ housewives and the curriculum too was designed in that way. Moreover it cannot be denied that they dealt with the women’s question through the lense of nationalism and not individual rights. British response too was quite measured and suited to their administrative needs more than anything else. The practical aspect of the acts too had been weak under social pressure. Still the reform movement played a very vital role and paved way for further developments. In the mean time women themselves realized need for their own organisations and we see the upsurge of women organizations. In this context three major organizations were, the Women’s Indian Association (WIA), the National council for Women in India (NCWI) and the All India Women’s Conference (AIWC). Although these organizations were formed and run by elite women but no doubt they worked for improving women’s social, educational, economic and political status.

## REFERENCES

- Banerjee-Dube, Ishita (2015). A History of Modern India. Delhi: Cambridge University Press
- Desai, A R (1948). Social Background of Indian Nationalism. Reprint 2012. Mumbai: Popular Prakashan
- Forbes, Geraldine (2009). Women in Modern Indian (Fifth Reprint). Cambridge (U.K.): Cambridge University Press.
- Gupta, Charu.(ed.)(2012). Gendering Colonial India: Reforms, Print, Caste and Communalism. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan
- Nair, Janaki (1991). “Reconstructing and Reinterpreting the History of Women in India,”. JWH, 3, no.I (spring 1991), p.132.
- Kishwar, Madhu P.(1985). “Gandhi on Women”. Economic and Political Weekly. 20(41)(October 12): 1753-58. Retrieved from URL <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4374920>.
- Kumar, Radha.(1993). The History of Doing. New Delhi: Kali for Women. Ch. 2
- Mani, Lata (1989). “Contentious Traditions: the Debate on Sati in Colonial India,” in Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History, ed. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid. Delhi: Kali for women.
- Mani, Lata. (1986). Production of an Official Discourse on “sati” in Early 19th Century Bengal. Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 21, No. 17 (Apr. 26, 1986), pp. WS32-WS40. Retrieved from URL <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4375595>.
- Menon, Nivedita(1999). Gender and Politics in India. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sen, Asoke(1977). Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and his Elusive Milestones. Calcutta: Riddhi

# Publish Research Article International Level Multidisciplinary Research Journal For All Subjects

Dear Sir/Mam,

We invite unpublished Research Paper, Summary of Research Project, Theses, Books and Books Review for publication, you will be pleased to know that our journals are

## Associated and Indexed, India

- ★ Directory Of Research Journal Indexing
- ★ International Scientific Journal Consortium Scientific
- ★ OPEN J-GATE

## Associated and Indexed, USA

- DOAJ
- EBSCO
- Crossref DOI
- Index Copernicus
- Publication Index
- Academic Journal Database
- Contemporary Research Index
- Academic Paper Database
- Digital Journals Database
- Current Index to Scholarly Journals
- Elite Scientific Journal Archive
- Directory Of Academic Resources
- Scholar Journal Index
- Recent Science Index
- Scientific Resources Database

Review Of Research Journal  
258/34 Raviwar Peth Solapur-  
413005, Maharashtra  
Contact-9595359435

E-Mail-ayisrj@yahoo.in/ayisrj2011@gmail.com