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## THE INDIAN RENAISSANCE: A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MAHARASHTRA

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### **Abstract:**

*This era of the nineteenth century with these reformers working strenuously for their aspired socio-religious change has come to be known as the era of Indian Renaissance<sup>1</sup>. British gradually interfered in the socio-religious matters of Indian society by enacting such Acts. Mahatma Jotiba Phoolle led his movement for the reconstruction of Hindu society on the basis of equality. Social conference attempting to such social reforms.*

**Keywords:** *Renaissance, scriptures, Annihilation, orthodoxy, victimized*

The British brought along with them a dawn of new era in India. Their English education, western thoughts and culture deeply influenced the Indian scholars. They started pondering on and analyzing their religion, social customs and practices. They felt the need of socio-religious change in India and practically set out to bring out such change with a high degree of zeal of a true reformer. This era of the nineteenth century with these reformers working strenuously for their aspired socio-religious change has come to be known as the era of *Indian Renaissance<sup>1</sup>*.

However, this era of Indian Renaissance was to a large extent confined only to the revival of Hindu ancient scriptures like *Vedas*, *Upnishadas* etc. and its reformation was confined only to the reform of Hindu family, especially, that of Brahmin and upper castes, and to customs like *Sati*, enforced widowhood, child-marriage, widow-remarriage etc. The reformers and their reform movements did not turn to the reform of the Hindu society in the sense of social reconstruction by eradicating the evil systems like Caste, Chaturvarnya and Untouchability, though some of them were against untouchability and caste system and attempted sympathetically, at very primary level, to correct these social evils.

The reformers had to face severe criticisms and furious reactions of the staunch orthodox Hindus, even for their attempts to bring about these reforms in Hindu family and customs, let alone the reform in the sense of eradication of caste, Varna and untouchability. That the severity was despicably bitter can be seen by the fact that no less a person than LokmanyaTilak was also against these social reform movements. Writing about LokmanyaTilak's strong opposition to such social reform R.G.Pradhan in his book '*India's Struggle for Swaraj*' clearly states, '*Mr. Tilak continued the work began by Vishnu Krishna Chiplunkar... He opposed the Age of Consent Bill, an extremely moderate piece of social legislation, particularly by a foreign government, and he led the agitation against it with an ability and vigor that at once marked him out as an outstanding popular leader... He strongly and persistently attacked social reform movement... He defended caste and Hindu social and religious order in general...In matters, social and religious, it (Kesari) stood for national revival, not reform, and vehemently opposed all causes and movements that went against the grain of Hindu orthodoxy.*'<sup>ii</sup>

Writing about how the political reformist suppressed social reforms and put an end to the social conference attempting to such social reforms, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in his '*Annihilation of Caste*', writes '*Under the*

*leadership of the late Mr. Tilak, the courtesy with which the Congress allowed the Social Conference the use of its pandal was withdrawn and the spirit of enmity went to such a pitch that when the Social Conference desired to erect its own pandal, a threat to burn the pandal was held out by its opponents. Thus, in course of time, the party in favour of political reform won and the Social Conference vanished and was forgotten*<sup>iii</sup>

The rule of Peshwa, the patrons of Brahmanism and orthodoxy, had come to an end in 1818. However, the age long orthodoxy and supremacy of Brahmins had remained intact which continued to dominate and direct every affair, activity and conduct in the society. The Shudras, Atishudras (the untouchables) and the women were living in a hell of socio-religious slavery. These classes of people were inhumanly subjected to innumerable disabilities and ignominies. Their natural rights, human rights and civil rights were cruelly confiscated. The untouchable had been almost reduced to sub-human level of existence. There was no way out of their age long servitude. Even the Britishers, who established their rule in India, initially adopted the policy of non-intervention. However, later they dropped this policy and gradually interfered in the socio-religious matters of Indian society by enacting such Acts as *Prevention of Sati Act* in 1829 and *Remarriage of Widows Act* in 1854 and opening the doors of education to all lower castes and untouchables.

On the backdrop of this emerged a fearless, courageous and aggressive social revolutionary, Jotirao Govindrao Phule who raised his revolutionary movement for the total eradication of caste, Varna, untouchability, the slavery of women and farmers, exploitation of workers and Brahmanic supremacy. During the period of such untoward and highly unfavorable conditions Jotiba led his movement for the reconstruction of Hindu society on the basis of equality. He was therefore called the father of social revolution in India.<sup>iv</sup>

Mahatma Jotiba Phule's thoughts and work inspired the Shudras, the untouchables, the non-Brahmins such as Chattrapati Shahu Maharaj, Narayan Meghaji Lokhande, Vitthal Ramaji Shinde, Bhaurao Patil, as well as the Brahmin. His revolutionary movement highly inspired and shaped the leadership of several fearless and devoted reformers who emerged from among the Shudras and the Untouchables such as Gopal Buva Walangkar, Shivram Janaba Kamble, Kisan Phagu Bansod, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Panjabrao Deshmukh and many others.

Mahatma Jotiba Phule is described as the '*father of social revolution in India*'. He not only worked for the eradication of caste system and untouchability and for the uplift of Shudras and untouchables but also for the eradication of evils and injustices inflicted on women, farmers and labours. His movement was all comprehensive and covered all those spheres and segments of society and social life which were victimized and badly degraded by the evils of Brahmanism. He attacked Brahmnism vehemently for its dehumanizing and degrading system and for its hypocrisy. His movement was for the awakening of multitude of the Shudras, untouchables and women who had been the victims of Brahmnism for ages. He strived to awaken them from their age long slumber. He infused them with confidence, self-respect and attempted to equipped them with the weapon of education and with the experience of organized movement. His contribution to the Dalit movement in fact, the raising of Dalit movement was but a part of his great revolutionary socio-religious movement.

### **Conclusion:**

Many social reformers tried to amend the society by advocating change. The most important reforms the contemporary Hindu society needed at this stage were establishment of the equality of men which involved the abolition of caste and the recognition of inter-caste marriages, the prohibition of child marriage, the legalisation of the marriage of widows, and the promotion of women's education,

the rejection of all irrational and cruel customs and all practices which degraded human beings. In other words, social reform is the refining and improvement of the individual and the remaking of the family, village, town and country into new form.

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