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## **The Legacy of Pandita Ramabai: A Sociological Study**

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**Citation of Article:** Tribhuwan, P. S. (2024). The Legacy of Pandita Ramabai: A Sociological Study. International Journal of Classified Research Techniques & Advances (IJCRTA) ISSN: 2583-1801, 4 (3), pg. 121-125. [ijcerta.org](http://ijcerta.org)

**DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15326937**

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**Abstract:**

*Pandita Ramabai Saraswati (1858–1922) was a social reformer, a pioneer in the field of education of women; who confronted every rule, tradition that restricted the life of an upper-caste Hindu woman in 19th century India. Pandita Ramabai is celebrated as a pioneering social reformer, women's rights activist, and educationist in India. Her contributions to women's education and social reforms, particularly regarding the emancipation of women, remain monumental. Pandita Ramabai defied the socio-cultural norms of her time and dedicated her life to improving the conditions of women, especially widows. Ramabai left a profound legacy through social reforms, activism.*

**Keywords:** Pandita Ramabai, Kedgaon, Mukti, Mukti Mission India, empowerment, women's education, emancipation.

**Introduction:**

Born in 1858 to a Marathi Brahmin family, Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, originally named Rama Dongre, grew up in a household where her father, a Sanskrit scholar, imparted his knowledge to her. Consequently, Ramabai received her early education in Sanskrit under her father's guidance. Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) was a prominent Indian social reformer, writer, and educator who made significant contributions to the rights and education of women in India. Her life and works are notable for their advocacy of women's rights, education, and social reform during a time when Indian society was deeply patriarchal and conservative. Ramabai's profound knowledge and interpretations of various Sanskrit texts earned her the esteemed title of 'Saraswati,' highlighting her intellectual prowess and expertise in the subject matter.

Renowned reformer Keshub Chandra Sen gave her a copy of the Vedas. Pandita Ramabai had a strong thirst for knowledge and was a multilingual scholar. In addition to Sanskrit, she was proficient in languages such as Marathi, Bengali, English, Greek, and Latin. During Nineteenth century, many reform movements were started in India when reformers took up the cause of women. At this time, when most of the women reform movements were dominated by men, Pandita Ramabai (1858- 1922) was distinctively eminent social reformer of the time as she pioneered early feminism in India and struggled throughout her life for emancipation of Indian women. With her exceptionally learned background, she became a pillar of women's educational rights and social

reform in the Indian society. Pandita Ramabai is one of the few early voices of women in colonial India. Her motto was to ensure self-reliance for women. In order to empower women, she endeavored to create female reform consciousness. Through her writings in Marathi as well as English, she has always dealt with the issues related to women's education and self-reliance. Pandita Ramabai was known for her activities towards women's emancipation, freedom and education.

### **Key Aspects of Her Work:**

#### **1. Education for Women:**

Ramabai was a strong proponent of women's education. She founded the Shreyas Samaj and the Arya Mahila Samaj, which aimed to promote women's education and welfare. She established the Mukti Sadan in Pune, a home and school for widows, where they could receive education and vocational training.

#### **2. Literary Contributions:**

- Ramabai wrote extensively against the oppression of women. Her notable works include "The High-Caste Hindu Woman" (1888), which is a critical examination of the social conditions faced by upper-caste Hindu women.
- She was also an accomplished writer in Marathi and English, and her literary works often addressed themes of social injustice and the need for reform.

#### **3. Advocacy for Widows:**

As a widow herself, Ramabai understood the hardships faced by women who lost their husbands. Her writings emphasized the need to uplift widows and provide them with societal acceptance and opportunities.

#### **4. Theosophy and Hindu reform:**

- Ramabai was influenced by her interactions with various religious and social reform movements, including Theosophy, which helped her to broaden her perspectives on spirituality and social justice.

#### **5. Public Speaking:**

- She toured extensively to speak on issues concerning women's rights, women's education, and social reform, inspiring many and drawing attention to the plight of women in Indian society.

#### **6. Legacy:**

- Ramabai is remembered as a pioneer of women's rights in India. Her efforts laid the groundwork for future generations of women reformers and educators.
- Her life story and works continue to inspire many in the realm of feminism and social reform in India.

### **Some key aspects of her contributions include:**

1. Education for Women: Ramabai strongly believed in the importance of education for women. She founded the Mukti Sadan, a rescue home for widows, and established a school for girls in Pune, aiming to provide them with education and vocational training.

2. Literary Contributions: She wrote several important works, including "The High Caste Hindu Woman," which criticized the societal norms that oppressed women, particularly focusing on the hardships faced by widows in Hindu society.
3. Advocacy for Social Reform: Ramabai was a vocal advocate for social reform, particularly concerning women's rights, widow remarriage, and the upliftment of marginalized communities. She worked to challenge and change the traditional practices that limited women's lives.
4. Religious and Philosophical Influence: She was also involved in religious discussions and took a keen interest in the social aspects of religion. Her perspective on spirituality and women's rights influenced many contemporaries and later generations.
5. Recognition: Pandita Ramabai is remembered as one of the early feminists in India who laid the groundwork for subsequent waves of women's rights activism. Her legacy continues to inspire various movements for gender equality and education in India.
6. Arya Mahila Samaj: In 1882, Ramabai founded the Arya Mahila Samaj in Pune. The Arya Mahila Samaj was instrumental in organizing efforts to uplift women, advocating for education, and challenging regressive practices like child marriage. It encouraged women to learn, engage in public life, and seek independence.
7. Sharada Sadan: In 1889, Pandita Ramabai established the Sharada Sadan, which was a residential school for child widows. This institution offered not only academic education but also vocational training, enabling women to gain economic independence.
8. Medical Education: Before the English Education Commission, she begged for changes to the curriculum for Indian women's education. This led to the establishment of Lady Dufferin College as the first institution for Indian women to get medical education.

### **Social Reform:**

Pandita Ramabai strongly opposed the prevailing socio-cultural norms and orthodoxies of her time and advocated for socio-religious reforms, especially concerning women's rights and the upliftment of marginalized communities. Her work extended beyond education to addressing issues such as child marriage, widowhood, and the rigid caste system. Ramabai established the Mukti Mission in 1889, which provided shelter and care for widows, orphans, and those suffering from social ostracism.

Pandita Ramabai was a pioneering advocate for women's education and social reform in 19th-century India. Through the establishment of institutions like the Arya Mahila Samaj and the Sharada Sadan, Ramabai championed education for women, including child widows. Her efforts extended beyond education to address broader social issues, such as child marriage, widowhood, and the rigid caste system...

She became a living legend during her life time with her courage, intellect and hard work. She became a pillar of women's educational rights and social reforms. She believed that only through the power of education can women be empowered and emancipated. Breaking the glass ceiling in a male-dominated world, Ramabai contested patriarchy in her educational and social

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activities, thereby becoming a champion of the women's cause in her time. In this article an attempt has been made to focus on the life and contribution of Pandita Ramabai for the emancipation of Indian women.

Pandita Ramabai also Promoted Education for girls, Indian feminism and Widow remarriage. During her travels, Pandita Ramabai had interactions with Christian missionaries, which influenced her religious beliefs. She embraced Christianity and became a devoted Christian. In her book titled The High Caste Hindu Woman, published in 1887, Ramabai highlighted social evils of the time such as child marriage, the plight of child widows and the oppression of women in British India. Pandita Ramabai immense contributions have been recognized and honored posthumously. Apart from the commemorative stamp issued by the Indian government in her honor, her life and work have been studied, documented, and celebrated by scholars, historians, and women's rights activists. Pandita Ramabai, at 23, travelled to Pune and founded Arya Mahila Samaj to promote women's education and liberation from the oppression of child marriage. When the then-Government of India formed a commission to investigate the education sector

She joined the Brahmo Samaj (a reformist Hindu association) and in June 1880 married a man of much lower caste than hers. Her only child, Manorama, was born in April 1881. Less than a year later her husband died of cholera, leaving her in the unenviable situation of a high-caste Hindu widow. Through the influence of Nehemiah Goreh's apologetical writings she became intellectually convinced that whatever was true in the Brahmo theology was actually Christian in origin, and in 1883, during a visit to England, she was baptized in the chapel of the (Anglican) Community of St. Mary the Virgin in Wantage, England, some of whose members she had met in Poona (Pune).

She was in Europe to pursue a medical degree, which in the end her deafness made impossible. From 1883 to 1886 Ramabai was in the formal sense an Anglo-Catholic, lecturing and studying social reform and education. In 1887 she published her first English book, The High-Caste Hindu Woman, a merciless indictment of Hindu India's treatment of its women, which was persuasive because it was written from the inside.

Two years later she returned to India, and with American support, opened a non-proselytizing institute for the education of young Hindu widows. This was the Sharna Sadan (Abode of wisdom) in Bombay. It soon moved to Poona. The more famous orphanage, Mukti (Salvation) opened at Kedgaon in 1898. In the meantime, Ramabai herself had passed through a second conversion, this time an evangelical one, and for the remainder of her life her Christianity was close to the Keswick "holiness" pattern. A Pentecostal-style revival began at Mukti Bible translation. Because her health was poor, the running of Mukti was left mainly to others. Her daughter Manorama died in 1921, and Ramabai herself died the following year.

### **Conclusion:**

Pandita Ramabai relentlessly advocated for women's education. She believed that education was the key to empowering women and freeing them from the oppressive traditions that kept them subjugated. To further her goal, she established many institutions for women's welfare and travelled across India giving lectures on women's rights.

Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922) was a prominent Indian social reformer, educator, and feminist who played a significant role in advocating for women's rights and education in India. Born into a Brahmin family, she was a child widow and faced many challenges due to her gender and social status. Despite these obstacles, Ramabai became highly educated, mastering in Sanskrit.

Conclusion Pandita Ramabai is one of the most noteworthy women India has ever produced. A true Mahatma (“Great Soul”) seldom surfaces in any age. Her title “Pandita” was hardly enough. Scholars had exclaimed, “We do not feel that you belong to this world, since the great Pandits have been dazzled and amazed by your superhuman ability. The very Goddess of Learning—‘Saraswati’—has come down amidst us in human form.” After turning to Christ, she was publicly shunned by Hindu elites and became a nonperson. To study the works of Pandita Ramabai is to explore a significant chapter in the history of women's rights in India. Her contributions go beyond mere advocacy; they comprise a holistic approach to improving the lives of women through education, social reform, and literary expression. Her life and work resonate in contemporary discussions about gender equality and social justice in India and beyond. Ramabai's life and work have left a lasting impact on Indian society, emphasizing the importance of education and social reform in improving women's position in society.

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