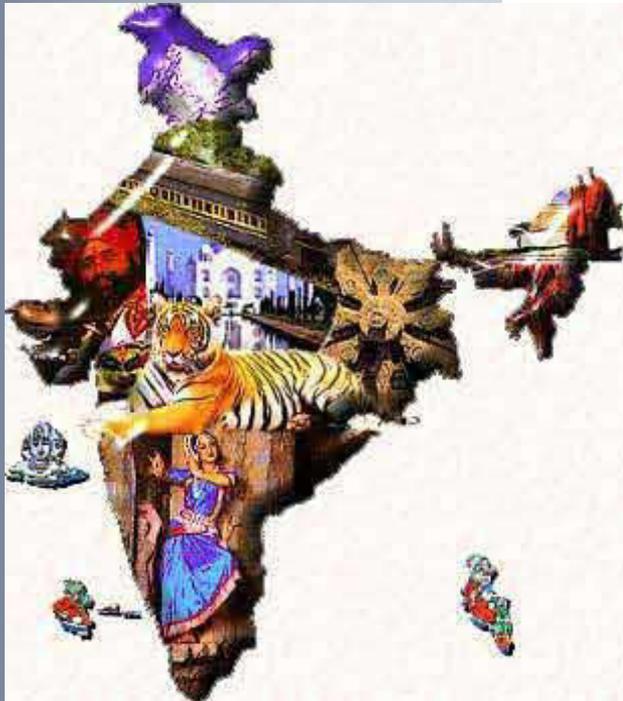


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Socio Religious Reform Movements

Raja Rammohan Roy and the Brahma Samaj

Raja Rammohan Roy established the **Brahmo Samaj** at Calcutta in 1828 in order to purify Hinduism and to preach monotheism. He is considered as the first 'modern man of India'. He was a pioneer of socio-religious reform movements in modern India.

Born in 1772 in the Hooghly district of Bengal, he inculcated a brilliant freedom of thought and rationality. He studied the Bible as well as Hindu and Muslim religious texts. He had excellent command over many languages including English, Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, French, Latin, Greek and Hebrew.

In 1815, he established the Atmiya Sabha. Later, it was developed into the Brahma Sabha in August 1828. Through this organisation, he preached that there is only one God. He combined the teachings of the Upanishads, the Bible and the Koran in developing unity among the people of different religions.

The work of the Atmiya Sabha was carried on by Maharishi Debendranath Tagore (father of Rabindranath Tagore), who renamed it as Brahma Samaj. He turned the Brahma Samaj into a leading social organisation of India. Raj Rammohan Roy is most remembered for helping Lord William Bentinck to declare the practice of Sati a punishable offence in 1829. He also protested against the child marriage and female infanticide.

He favored the remarriage of widows, female education and women's right to property. He felt that the caste system was the greatest hurdle to Indian unity. He believed in the equality of mankind. He did not believe in the supremacy of the Brahmin priests. He favoured inter-caste marriages.

He himself adopted a Muslim boy. In 1817, he founded the Hindu College (now Presidency College, Calcutta) along with David Hare, a missionary. He also set up schools for girls.

Rammohan Roy started the first Bengali weekly Samvad Kaumudi and edited a Persian weekly Mirat-ul-akhbar. He stood for the freedom of the press. Rammohan died in Bristol in England in 1833.

Henry Vivian Derozio and the Young Bengal Movement

Henry Vivian Derozio was the founder of the Young Bengal Movement. He was born in Calcutta in 1809 and taught in the Hindu College, Calcutta. He died of cholera in 1833. His followers were known as the Derozians and their movement the Young Bengal Movement. They attacked old traditions and decadent customs. They also advocated women's rights and their education. They founded associations and organized debates against idol worship, casteism and superstitions.

Swami Dayanand Saraswathi and the Arya Samaj

The **Arya Samaj** was founded by Swami **Dayanand Saraswathi** at Bombay in 1875. Born in Kathiawar in Gujarat, Swami Dayanand (1824-83) was a scholar, a patriot, a social reformer and a revivalist. He believed the Vedas were the source of true knowledge. His motto was "Back to the Vedas".

He was against idol worship, child marriage and caste system based on birth. He encouraged intercaste marriages and widow remarriage. He started the Suddhi movement to bring back those Hindus who had converted to other religions to its fold.

He wrote the book Satyarth Prakash which contains his ideas. The Arya Samaj, though founded in Bombay, became very powerful in Punjab and spread its influence to other parts of India. It has contributed very much to the spread of education.

The first Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) School was founded in 1886 at Lahore. Many more schools came up in other parts of India in later years. The Arya Samaj had also spread nationalism. Hundreds of Arya Samaj patriots, including Lala Lajpat Rai, took part in the Indian freedom struggle.

Prarthana Samaj

The Prarthana Samaj was founded in 1867 in Bombay by Dr. Atmaram Pandurang. It was an off-shoot of Brahma Samaj. It was a reform movement within Hinduism and concentrated on social reforms like inter-dining, inter-marriage, widow remarriage and uplift of women and depressed classes.

Justice M.G. Ranade and R.G. Bhandarkar joined it in 1870 and infused new strength to it. Justice Ranade promoted the Deccan Education Society.

Swami Vivekananda and Ramakrishna Mission

The original name of Swami Vivekananda was Narendranath Dutta (1863-1902) and he became the most famous disciple of Shri Ramkrishna Paramahansa. He was born in a prosperous Bengali family of Calcutta and educated in Scottish Church College.

In 1886 Narendranath took the vow of Sanyasa and was given the name, Vivekananda. He preached Vedantic Philosophy. He condemned the caste system and the current Hindu emphasis on rituals and ceremonies. Swami Vivekananda participated at the Parliament of

Religions held in Chicago (USA) in September 1893 and raised the prestige of India and Hinduism very high.

Vivekananda preached the message of strength and selfreliance. He asked the people to improve the lives of the poor and depressed classes. He believed that service to mankind is service to God. He founded the Ramkrishna Mission at Belur in Howrah in 1897.

It is a social service and charitable society. The objectives of this Mission are providing humanitarian re

lief and social work through the establishment of schools, colleges, hospitals and orphanages.

Theosophical Society

The Theosophical Society was founded in New York (USA) in 1875 by Madam H.P. Blavatsky, a Russian lady, and Henry Steel Olcott, an American colonel.

Their main objectives were to form a universal brotherhood of man without any distinction of race, colour or creed and to promote the study of ancient religions and philosophies. They arrived in India and established their headquarters at Adyar in Madras in 1882.

Later in 1893, Mrs. Annie Besant arrived in India and took over the leadership of the Society after the death of Olcott. Mrs. Annie Besant founded the Central Hindu School along with Madan Mohan Malaviya at Benaras which later developed into the Banaras Hindu University.

Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

Pandit Ishwar Chandra was a great educator, humanist and social reformer. He was born in 1820 in a village in Midnapur, Bengal. He rose to be the Head Pandit of the Bengali Department of Fort William College.

He firmly believed that reform in Indian society could only come about through education. Vidyasagar founded many schools for girls. He helped J.D. Bethune to establish the Bethune School.

He founded the Metropolitan Institution in Calcutta. He protested against child marriage and favoured widow remarriage which was legalised by the Widow Remarriage Act (1856). It was due to his great support for the spread of education that he was given the title of Vidyasagar.

Jyotiba Phule

Jyotiba Phule belonged to a low caste family in Maharashtra. He waged a life-long struggle against upper caste domination and Brahmanical supremacy. In 1873 he founded the Satyashodak Samaj to fight against the caste system.

He pioneered the widow remarriage movement in Maharashtra and worked for the education for women. Jyotiba Phule and his wife established the first girls' school at Poona in 1851.

Muslim Reform Movements

The Muslim reform movements started a little later because they had avoided western education in the beginning. The first effort was in 1863 when the Muhammad Literary Society was set up in Calcutta. Its aim was to popularise the study of English and western sciences. It established a number of schools in Bengal.

Aligarh Movement

The Aligarh Movement was started by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-98) for the social and educational advancement of the Muslims in India. He fought against the medieval backwardness and advocated a rational approach towards religion.

In 1866, he started the Mohammadan Educational Conference as a general forum for spreading liberal ideas among the Muslims. In 1875, he founded a modern school at Aligarh to promote English education among the Muslims. This had later grown into the Mohammadan Anglo Oriental College and then into the Aligarh Muslim University.

The Deoband School

The orthodox section among the Muslim ulema organised the Deoband Movement. It was a revivalist movement whose twin objectives were

- (i) to propagate among the Muslims the pure teachings of the Koran and the Hadis and
- (ii) to keep alive the spirit of jihad against the foreign rulers.

The new Deoband leader Mahmud-ul-Hasan (1851-1920) sought to impart a political and intellectual content to the religious ideas of the school. The liberal interpretation of Islam created a political awakening among its followers.

Sikh Reform Movement

Punjab also came under the spell of reforms. Baba Dayal Das founded the Nirankari Movement. He insisted the worship of God as nirankar (formless). The Namdhari Movement was founded by Baba Ram Singh. His followers wore white clothes and gave up meat eating.

The Singh Sabhas started in Lahore and Amritsar in 1870 were aimed at reforming the Sikh society. They helped to set up the Khalsa College at Amritsar in 1892. They also encouraged Gurmukhi and Punjabi literature. In 1920, the Akalis started a movement to remove the corrupt Mahants (priests) from the Sikh gurudwaras.

The British government was forced to make laws on this matter. Later, the Akalis organised themselves into a political party.

Parsi Reform Movement

The Parsi Religious Reform Association was founded at Bombay by Furdunji Naoroji and S.S. Bengalee in 1851. They advocated the spread of women's education. They also wanted to reform their marriage customs. Naoroji published a monthly journal, Jagat Mithra.

The momentum gathered through these reform movements and went a long way in uplifting the entire community. By the middle of the twentieth century most of them were highly placed in various capacities and have made a significant contribution to India's development.

Saint Ramalinga

Saint Ramalinga was one of the foremost saints of Tamil Nadu in the nineteenth century. He was born on October 5, 1823 at Marudhur, near Chidambaram. He was the last son of his father, Ramayya Pillai and mother, Chinnammayar. Developing a deep interest in spiritual life, Ramalinga moved to Karunguli in 1858, a place near Vadalur where the Saint later settled down.

His divine powers came to be recognised at the early age of eleven. In 1865 he founded the Samarasa Suddha Sanmargha Sangha for the promotion of his ideals of establishing a casteless society. He preached love and compassion to the people.

He composed Tiru Arutpa. His other literary works include Manu Murai Kanda Vasagam and Jeeva Karunyam. His language was so simple as to enable the illiterate people to understand his teachings. In 1870 he moved to Mettukuppam, a place three miles away from Vadalur.

There he started constructing the Satya Gnana Sabai in 1872. He introduced the principle that God could be worshipped in the form of Light.

Sri Vaikunda Swamigal

Sri Vaikunda Swamigal was born in 1809 at Swamithoppu in the Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu. His original name was Mudichoodum Perumal but he was called Muthukkutty.

He preached against the caste system and untouchability. He also condemned religious ceremonies. Many came to his place to worship him and slowly his teachings came to be known as Ayyavazhi. By the midnineteenth century, Ayyavazhi came to be recognized as a separate religion and spread in the regions of South Travancore and South Tirunelveli.

After his death, the religion was spread on the basis of his teachings and the religious books Akilattirattu Ammanai and Arul Nool. Hundreds of Nizhal Thangals (places of worship) were built across the country.

Self-Respect Movement and Periyar E.V.R.

Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy was a great social reformer. In 1921, during the anti-liquor campaign he cut down 1000 coconut trees in his own farm. In 1924, he took an active part in the Vaikom Satyagraha. The objective of the Satyagraha was to secure for untouchables the right to use a road near a temple at Vaikom in Kerala.

E.V.R. opposed the Varnashrama policy followed in the V.V.S. Iyer's Seranamadevi Gurugulam. During 1920- 1925 being in the Congress Party he stressed that Congress should accept communal representation.

Subsequently in 1925, he started the "Self-Respect Movement". The aims of the 'Self - Respect Movement' were to uplift the Dravidians and to expose the Brahminical tyranny and deceptive methods by which they controlled all spheres of Hindu life. He denounced the caste system, child marriage and enforced widowhood.

He encouraged inter-caste marriages. He himself conducted many marriages without any rituals. Such a marriage was known as "Self- Respect Marriage." He gave secular names to new born babies. He attacked the laws of Manu, which he called the basis of the entire Hindu social fabric of caste. He founded the Tamil journals Kudiarasu, Puratchi and Viduthalai to propagate his ideals. In 1938 at Tamil Nadu Women's Conference appreciating the noble service rendered by E.V.R. he was given the title "Periyar". On 27th June 1970 by the UNESCO organisation praised and adorned with the title "Socrates of South Asia".

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