
SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of the British as a power to reform within India, by the start of the nineteenth century. Western influence became more evident in Indian culture too. There was quite a reformation in Indian society and religion. Indian culture was liberalized of some of the social and religious conventions, and its new outlook now contained a more westernized, logical and scientific approach, rationality of thought, self-introspection and a sense of nationalism. Many leaders and religious societies came into being and some of the most prominent ones are discussed in the following sections.

Dr Atmaram Panduranga and the Prarthna Samaj

The activities of the Paramahansa forum were confined to social reforms only. It was the Prarthna Samaj which came into being in 1867 under Dr Atmaram Panduranga and had prominent followers like M. G. Ranade, Bhandarkar and Pandita Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886), Ramabai who fought against superstitions and casteism. It condemned child marriage and encouraged educating women. The administration of this society brought out a paper called Subodha Patrika to spread its philosophy.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Brahmo Samaj

Ram Mohan Roy lived during the nineteenth century. He was a religious and social reformer and founder of the Brahmo Samaj (1829). Through this society, he abolished idol worship, caste system and several complicated rites and rituals. He was fluent in Bengali, Arabic, Sanskrit and English. His earliest brush with social reform came when he wrote an article in a Bengali magazine condemning idol worship. His father Ramakant Roy, was annoyed with his outburst against religious conventions and told him to leave home. He joined the East India Company in 1805, and during his 10 years of service, he was exposed to the Western culture and Christianity. He retired in 1815, settled in Kolkata and became an active social activist. He was instrumental in getting an ordinance prohibiting Sati passed in 1828, during Bentinck's tenure. He knew that an armed rebellion against the British was not possible and so strived hard to bring a

socio-political awakening in the people of India. Understanding the need of learning the English language and Western sciences, he toiled hard to create opportunities for Indians. In 1823, he agitated against the government, protesting the imposition of a ban on printing presses and newspapers. He started his own paper called 'Lotus of Enlightenment' (Sambad Kaumudi). He was conferred with the title 'Raja' and sent to England on pension; by the Mughal emperor, Akbar II, in 1831 as an ambassador from his court. Raja Ram Mohan Roy worked hard to convince the British government to think of the Welfare of Indian society and secured many privileges for Indians. He died in Bristol in 1833. Brahmo Samaj was later renamed as Adi Brahmo Samaj under the leadership of Devendranath Tagore, and Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, under the leadership of Keshab Chandra Sen, in 1836.

Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Mission

Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886), a priest at a temple in Dakshineswar near Kolkata, emphasized that there are many roads to God and salvation and that service to man was service to God. His great disciple, Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) popularized his religious message by travelling all over India. He founded the Ramakrishna Mission in 1896, a centre for religious and spiritual guidance that has attracted people from all walks of life.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati and the Arya Samaj

The Arya Samaj was founded in 1875 by Swami Dayananda Saraswati in order to reform Hindu religion in North India. He was born in Tankargaon in Gujarat. His early name was Mula Shankur and he became an atheist after a series of deaths in his family. He later came in contact with Swami Veerajnanda Saraswati who gave him the name Dayananda Saraswati. He believed that there was only one God and that God should be worshipped in spirit and not in the form of idols and images. He also wrote Satyarth Prakash. The Arya Samaj mooted a slogan 'Go back to the Vedas' and emphasized that the Hindu religion can be improved if it relied solely upon the principles of the Vedas. He established the Arya Samaj in Mumbai and Lahore that later attracted many followers from all over India. His followers started many schools and colleges that became centres to inculcate the spirit of

nationalism among people and paved the way for Indian independence. The Arya Samaj believed in celibacy, asceticism, a casteless society and social service. It introduced several reforms to eradicate untouchability, child marriage and illiteracy. Lala Lajpat Rai and Swami Sharadananda contributed to Arya Samaj towards the end.

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and the Muslim Movements

In India two major reform movements came into being for bringing about a spiritual reawakening among the Muslims - the Aligarh Movement, which started in Arabia with the Wahabi Movement, and the Deoband Movement, which came into being at Deoband in Saharanpur District, in Uttar Pradesh. The Aligarh Movement can be classified into four different movements, which were named after their leaders: (i) Shah Abdul Aziz (Delhi), (ii) Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (Bareilly), (iii) Sheikh Karamat Ali (Jaunpur) and (iv) Hazi Sheriatullah (Faridpur). Among them Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) is of prime significance. He stressed upon English education among Muslims. In 1875, he opened the Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh.

The Wahabi Movement

Abdul Wahab started a movement in Arabics which was called the Wahabi Movement. A similar movement was carried on in India against the English, the Sikhs and the Hindus between 1820 and 1870. It was under the able leadership of Haji Shariatulla (from Faridpur in Bengal) that the movement started gaining momentum. He brought about sense of oneness among the various Muslim ryots and zamindars and cultivated a sense of nationalism among them. The Wahabis declared that land belonged to God and British did not have the right to collect taxes. They agitated against the Sikh and Hindu rulers also. Towards the end, the Wahabi Movement got able support from Bahadur Shah (Delhi), Amir Khan (Tanka in Rajasthan), Nawabs of Kurnool and Rampur and Muslim leaders of Bangalore and Peshawar. Viceroy Mayo was killed in Andaman by a Wahabi activist Sher Ali. However, in 1870, the movement met a grim end at the hands of the British who captured their leaders and sentenced them to rigorous imprisonment.

The Deoband Movement began in 1867, with an aim of uniting all Muslims, to preach the basic principles of Islam and the philosophy of Shavaliulla (a great theologian) and to educate Muslims. The prominent leaders of this movement are Rashid Ahmed Ganguli (1882-1905) and Muhammad Qasim,

Nanautavi (1837 -1880). They opened many schools and colleges in the Saharanpur district. The difference between the Aligarh and the movements is that the Deoband agitation patronized the Congress agitation, but the Aligarh Move stayed away from the national agitation and argued that the Muslims have to cooperate with the English in their own interest.

Indian National Social Conference

The Indian National Social Conference was founded by Mahadev Gobind Ranade and Raghunath Kao. It held first session in 1887. Its main focus was on the abolition of polygamy and kulinism and it encouraged inter-caste marriages. The conference is sometimes referred as the social reform cell of the Indian National congress. Through social conference movement, Ranade and Raghunath Rao directed their social reform efforts against child marriage, the shaving of widows' heads, and heavy expenditures in marriages and other social functions. Both of them rigorously advocated and supported widow remarriage and female education. They also encouraged the acceptance of change, believing traditional social structures like the caste system should accommodate change, thereby preserving India's ancient heritage.

Dayal Das and the Sikh Movement

In 1890, the Khalsa College was established in Amritsar by Dayal Das who led the Sikh Movement. It opposed child marriage and Devadasi system. It condemned idol worship and other superstitions. The Sikhs who did not participate in the mutiny were propelled to join the Indian army

Dr Annie Besant and the Theosophical society

In 1875, the Theosophical Society was founded in New York by Madam H. P. Blavatsky (Russian) and Henry Olcott (American). The society, which emphasized on the importance of human values like justice, morality, piety and charity, played an active role in Indian spiritual spheres. It opened its first branch in Adyar in Chennai in 1882. Dr. Annie Besant (1846-1933) was an English citizen, who came to India in 1893, and involved herself in the Hindu revival movement, under the Theosophical Society. In 1916 she actively participated in the Home Rule Movement and through her writings tried to kindle political awareness among the Indians. The Theosophical Society became very popular under her leadership.

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