

Reform, Resistance, and Relevance: Socio-Religious Movements in Colonial India

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Abstract: *Indian society in the nineteenth century was trapped in a vicious web of religious superstitions and social decay. The country was in a state of perpetual social and spiritual decline. Indian culture and civilisation were facing a severe identity crisis from the onslaught of an alien culture which has already tasted the fruits of enlightenment. There was an attempt by the colonial power to extend the process of subjugation from political to social and then cultural levels.*

With the advent of the Nineteenth century, the situation began to change with the emergence of new awareness and the generation of new ideas in Indian Society, often referred to as the Indian Renaissance. It was the time when the British rule had strengthened in India. The country was witnessing changes at the societal level, and medieval traditions and practices were beginning to lose their significance as they failed to adapt to the times. The society had degenerated and was crying for urgent reforms in the spheres of society and religion. The onus on the reformers was to reform society on modern and scientific lines, and this was attempted by redefining the religious and social practices prevailing in the country. The major problem in society was related to the deplorable condition of women. Society was plagued by several inhuman practices and customs that directly impacted the status of women in society. Women were victims of social practices like Sati, Child marriage, murder of girl child, social ban on Widow remarriage, etc. Above all, in the name of morality, they were also forced to confine themselves under the four walls of their house, observing the Purdah system.

Keywords: *Adoption, Artificial Intelligence, 21st Century Skill Acquisition, Business Education Programme.*

Introduction

The decline of the Mughal Empire after the death of Aurangzeb (1707) led to the loss of political unity in India. The triumph of the British in the Battle of Plassey (1757) and the subsequent period marked the consolidation of British hegemony in India. The 18th century was marked by a lack of nationalist aspirations

among Indians and a trend towards societal decay.

During this period, Tagore comments that India was in a deathlike sleep in which “her life was dried up and it showed all those dead and forgotten customs, superstitions and prejudices, all the ignorance and fear, all feuds, all bitterness and separateness, all

unreasonableness and far from the wide world. (Mukherjee & Ramaswamy 1994-95: 86)

Indian society in the nineteenth century was trapped in a vicious web of religious superstitions and social decay. The country was in a state of perpetual social and spiritual decline. Indian culture and civilisation were facing a severe identity crisis from the onslaught of an alien culture which has already tasted the fruits of enlightenment. There was an attempt by the colonial power to extend the process of subjugation from political to social and then cultural levels.

State of Indian Society: The Pre-Reform Era

The first governor general, Warren Hastings, adopted a non-interfering educational policy. He initiated the establishment of many centres for imparting traditional education to both Hindus and Muslims. So, this policy allowed these communities to remain immersed in their traditional sphere. The system of education that prevailed imparted only rudimentary knowledge of the Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian languages, as well as simple mathematical concepts.

Thus, the lack of modern scientific education created a situation of social degeneration, which was reflected in the widespread practice of blind superstition and inhuman customs. Polygamy, child marriage, sati, killing of female children, and the practice of untouchability were rampant in society. Furthermore, the worst sufferers of these evil

practices were women. Reasoning had lost all relevance in society, and its place was taken over by superstition and orthodoxy. The priestly class was using religion to exploit others. Idolatry, Polytheism and religious superstitions were the other ills plaguing the nation. The social problem was closely related to religion, as the society was highly religious. Since religion was marred by superstition, reforming society required reforming religion. However, superstition could only be countered with rationalism, which necessitated reform in education. Thus, religious and educational reform became two key factors in reforming religion and society. The British gradually introduced English education in India to develop a middle class that could assist them in administration. The class that benefited from English education recognised the differences that existed between Western and indigenous societies. On the one hand, there was a society that relied on the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. In contrast, its society was based on the exploitation of one class by another. Many reformers took the task of reforming the ills plaguing society through these new values and ideals. The implementation of these values also required adequate legislative support from the government, which was not forthcoming. The British government did not try to intervene in the religious and social affairs. They avoided intervention because they wanted to maintain

the existing socio-religious backwardness in India to maintain their cultural superiority over India, thereby giving justification to their 'civilising mission' and 'White men's burden'. Missionaries also thought that projecting the Hindu religion as a religion based on exploitation and backwardness would help them attract a substantial population of the lower class towards Christianity. Another important reason for the British non-interference in the socio-religious sphere was their reluctance to face the wrath of the orthodox upper class during the early period of the British Empire's consolidation in India. It was a means of avoiding social or religious opposition against the empire by adopting a non-interfering approach. However, it aimed to establish a social class in India that could become the voice of change. If the government met their demands, it could bring about socio-religious reforms in India. However, if the British government had proactively implemented these reforms, the orthodox class would have easily garnered anti-British support from society, citing interference with traditions and culture by a foreign power. So, the government did not follow a policy of either intervening in the socio-religious affairs or allowing missionaries to spread Christianity. But the missionaries silently followed the propagation of Christianity.

The Inevitable Response

India was subjugated not only politically and economically but also culturally, as the great civilisation was tamed, which called for a response from the society. The response was required because the challenges thrown by a modern West to the East, still struggling to overcome its period of 'Dark Ages', were enormous.

With the advent of the Nineteenth century, the situation began to change with the emergence of new awareness and the generation of new ideas in Indian Society, often referred to as the Indian Renaissance. It was the time when the British rule had strengthened in India. The country was witnessing changes at the societal level, and medieval traditions and practices were beginning to lose their significance as they failed to adapt to the times. The society had degenerated and was crying for urgent reforms in the spheres of society and religion. The onus on the reformers was to reform society on modern and scientific lines, and this was attempted by redefining the religious and social practices prevailing in the country. The major problem in society was related to the deplorable condition of women. Society was plagued by several inhuman practices and customs that directly impacted the status of women in society. Women were victims of social practices like Sati, Child marriage, murder of girl child, social ban on Widow remarriage, etc. Above all, in the name of morality, they were also forced to

confine themselves under the four walls of their house, observing the Purdah system.

The Genesis of Indian Renaissance: Reform, Revival, and Awakening

Towards the end of the 18th Century, the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1784) was an important event. A group of English scholars, led by William Jones, researched the knowledge hidden in Sanskrit literature and Indian civilization. They provided a wealth of interesting and stimulating facts about Oriental and Indian civilization, which were then unknown to educated Indians. The works of William Jones lifted the morale of Indians and revived their dipping national self-esteem.

The first significant attempt to spread English education in India was made by the Charter Act of 1813. This act, on the one hand, granted permission to Christian missionaries to propagate Christianity in India, and on the other hand, provided funds for education for the first time in India. The government had offered budgetary allocation for education because it wanted to help educated Indians develop the existing literature and promote modern science. Therefore, the British began to establish schools in various parts of India to achieve their objective. Christian Missionaries and Europeans, such as David Hare, began to open schools in various parts of India, where education was imparted in English. The Calcutta

School Book Society and the Calcutta School Society began establishing primary schools that imparted education in Indian languages. Reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy petitioned the Governor-General to introduce English and Western education in India. The government recognized the need to promote English education in India and established a committee for education under the Chairmanship of Lord Macaulay.

Macaulay's minutes of 1832 altered the previous practice of rulers not interfering in India's traditional educational system. It convinced the colonial powers to transform the Indian society on Western lines so that the subjugation would become entrenched. (Mehta: 2008:157). Macaulay believed that English education would help him create a class of Indians who would be British in their morality, wisdom, interests and beliefs. The introduction of English education transmitted the culture and temper of the European Renaissance to India—a new wave of ideas swept to India in the nineteenth century. The ideas of Mill, Carlyle, Paine, Burke, Bentham, Voltaire, and Newton spread to India and, over time, became household names among the educated masses.

The values of the French Revolution had a profound influence on the minds of the youth. The system of education introduced by the British led to a new awareness of the value of liberty, democracy and the rule of law in India.

People also started developing a hatred for the suppression meted out to them by a colonial power, and made the Indians realise that British colonialism in India should end.

Beginning of a new dawn

The beginning of the nineteenth century heralded the start of a new dawn in India. The movement, described as the “Indian Renaissance” or “Indian Awakening,” expanded in scope over half a century. This period heralded the phase of the great socio-religious reform movements in India. The 9th century witnessed various reform movements. A few notable movements include Arya Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, and the Aligarh Movement, among others. These movements opposed the multiple forms of exploitation of women carried out in the name of social and religious beliefs.

The reform movements spread to both Hindus and Muslims. It was a time when the influence of the West and modernity was directly or indirectly observed among religious groups. The reform movement succeeded in creating an age of rationalism in society. The development of reasoning led people to question traditions and beliefs based on superstition.

Now, let us examine some of the crucial socio-religious reform movements carried out by individuals and their social, religious, and political impact on society in the nineteenth century.

Raja Rammohan Roy’s Vision and the Brahmo Samaj: Foundations of India’s Social Renaissance

Ram Mohan Roy wore many hats during his lifetime. He was a social thinker par excellence, a prolific writer, and was at home in multiple languages, including Hindi, Sanskrit, English, Persian, Arabic, Urdu, Hebrew, Latin, Greek, and French. He drew inspiration from the French Revolution and the freedom movements in Ireland, Spain, Naples, and Latin America. Roy did not give much attention to his political ideas, as nationalism was still in its infancy, and the task of social and religious reform was his primary agenda. Although he despised colonialism, he endorsed British rule in India. He endorsed British rule because he found it culturally superior to the erstwhile feudal rulers in India. He believed that British rule would pave the way for the establishment of democratic institutions similar to those in Britain. Ram Mohan Roy was a vocal advocate for press freedom. Along with his colleague, Dwarka Nath Tagore, he submitted a petition to the Privy Council for the freedom of the press. He found it essential for the democratic functioning of the government. (Chakravarty & Pandey 2011: 10)

Ram Mohan Roy was a born rebel. Despite being born in an orthodox Brahmin family, he dared to write a rational critique of Hindu idol worship. (Pantham 2012: 33) This infuriated his

father, and he had to leave home. His wanderings to places like Tibet and Banaras secured him the knowledge of Buddhism and Hinduism.

He captured the degenerate features of Bengal society in his first published work, *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhiddin* (A Gift to Deists). He was concerned with sectarian religious dogmas and practices. Ram Mohan identified the role of the priestly class in perpetuating those irreligious dogmas and irrational doctrines because they were the direct beneficiaries of this system. For him, religious reform was paramount, as it would lead to achieving the twin tasks of social reform and political modernisation. (Pantham 2012:37)

To achieve his task, he founded the Atmiya Sabha in 1815, the Calcutta Unitarian Association in 1821, and the Brahmo Sabha in 1828, which later evolved into the Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmo Samaj was a significant step towards the purification of our culture. The Brahmo Samaj rose above religion, caste, and creed, opposing idolatry and preaching monotheism. The Samaj opposed the rituals and ceremonies prevalent in religion.

Ram Mohan strategised the ill plaguing India in three crucial ways:

- 1) He had to reinvent the classical scriptures to fight the existing dogmas and irrational practices. The way he achieved this aim was by translating the

Vedas and Upanishads into Hindi, Urdu and Bengali.

- 2) He was a modernist, and he promoted modern Western education to uplift the outlook of the masses.
- 3) His firm belief in the reformatory and modernising aspects of British rule made him seek state action to achieve his programs.

Ram Mohan's views on modern Western education and socio-religious reform differed from those of other contemporary conservative Bengali intellectuals. Roy promoted Western education for its scientific and emancipatory ideas, while conservatives like Radhakant Deb favoured it for its use in enhancing employability under British services. This group of people, on the one hand, endorsed British education, and on the other hand, supported the colonial practice of non-interference in the socio-religious orthodoxies of the native people.

Roy's study of religion made him one of the fiercest critics of Polytheism and idolatry. He was attracted to Islamic monotheism and was convinced that Monotheism is also the fundamental message of Vedanta. Since Indian society was marred by religious sectarianism, his idea of monotheism aimed to reconcile the societal differences rooted in sectarianism. He believed that monotheism supported a single universal order for humanity, while polytheism justified sectarian moralities. Over time, his

conception of the fundamental unity of all religions has been endorsed by several thinkers, including Vivekananda, Tagore, Gandhi and Radhakrishnan. He was opposed to rituals and ceremonies, questioning their use because they were performed with the expectation of worldly or otherworldly rewards. He also opposed Christian trinitarianism. In 1820, he expressed his views on Christianity through his publication of 'The Precepts of Jesus' Guide to Peace and Happiness. He rejected the divinity of Christ but acknowledged his moral teachings, which preached love and harmony to humanity.

He was the greatest champion for the emancipation of women. His efforts are considered special in the abolition of Sati, also known as Widow Burning. The condition of women was deplorable. They were deprived of education, Property Rights, Child marriage was rampant, they had to observe the purdah system, and they were victims of the barbaric custom of Sati. Roy considered these to be an attack on the progress of the Hindu society. In his words, Sati was 'moral debasement of the race'.(Bishop 1982:7) He did not find any rationalism in the idea of atonement of a wife for a husband's sin. As a result of his campaign, Sati was banned by William Bentinck in 1829. He also advocated widow remarriage, female education and the right of women to own property. He founded an English School in 1816. In 1825, he started the Vedanta College, where the study of Western

knowledge was combined with that of Indian learning.

After the death of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the influence of the Brahma Samaj declined. In 1843, Devendranath Tagore undertook the task of reviving the Samaj. He began training Brahma Samaj members to disseminate the Samaj's message throughout the country. To promote the ideals of Samaj, he started '*Tatwaprabodhini*' magazine with A.K. Dutt. He prepared the codes of customs and books for prayers. During his time, the Samaj expanded to different parts of India, including Punjab and East Bengal. Over time, the Samaj began to be dominated by people who prioritised reason and logic over the authenticity of the Vedas.

In 1857, Keshav Chandra Sen joined the Brahmo Samaj. His efforts led to the progress of the Samaj's activities. He established the Sangat Sabha in 1860. He took an all-India tour in 1864. It was a first-of-its-kind tour in modern India aimed at fostering unity of thought. His efforts led to the formation of the Veda Samaj in Madras and the Prarthana Samaj in Maharashtra. Keshav Chandra's new ideas and thoughts diverged from those of Sen. So, he left the Samaj in 1865. He formed Bharatiya Brahma Samaj, while the Samaj, led by Devendranath Tagore, began to be called Aadi Brahma Samaj. Another division of the Samaj occurred when Sen's daughter and the Prince of Cooch Behar were married before they reached

adulthood. People who emerged from the movement formed the *Sadharan Brahmo Samaj*.

The Samaj spread to many parts of India and contributed to fighting the practice of untouchability, promoting intermarriage to break the shackles of caste. They played a significant role in the passage of the Widow Remarriage Act in 1856 and contributed to the establishment of women's educational institutions, such as Bethune College.

Arya Samaj: Reviving Vedic Ideals and Reshaping Indian Society

Swami Dayanand Saraswati established the Arya Samaj in 1875 and was a great social reformer. There was no European thought or influence on Swami Dayanand. In that sense, he was different from Roy, although their goals were common. Dayanand found the Vedic message most suitable to inspire the moribund nation, which was plagued by several ills that could easily be cured. Dayanand's ideas were published in '*Satyartha Prakash*' in 1875. In this book, he asserts that the empirical world is not an illusion but has an independent and objective existence. His refutation of Advaita and Nirguna Brahmin separated him from Roy and Vivekananda.

He further related human action to reward and punishment by God. This was an effort made by Dayananda to tap into religious sentiments for meaningful social activities. He understood that the British had vanquished India due to the divisive nature of Indian society. (Chakravarty & Pandey 2011:14-15) He saw that society was crippled because of problems like child marriage. For him, untruthfulness and neglect of the Vedas were the prime reasons for the degradation of our society. Hence, the first and foremost task was to grasp the substance of the Vedas that made the Hindus a distinctive race. (Jones 1994)

His ideas stood out in those historical times because he was referring to Hindus to return to their roots. He gave Hindus a sense of identity through the Vedas, which, until then, as a community, had remained essentially fractured and lacked a response to the superiority of the foreign rulers. He called for the purging of the degenerate practices of Hindus, which were leading to their downfall. He opposed the prevailing caste practices of Hindu society. He educated them about the social hierarchies of Vedic times, which were based on the merit, ability, and temperament of the individual, rather than one's birth.

Dayanand's primary task was to strengthen the moral foundation of the Hindu society, which was weakening due to its inherent weaknesses. He was a reformer like

Ram Mohan Roy, as he also had no interest in politics. This is why he succeeded in establishing the Arya Samaj, which functioned in a strictly non-political manner. It could also be seen in the light that such an organisation, which was in its infancy, could not have carried political overtones because of the might of the empire. He fulfilled his historical role by staying away from politics and articulating a nationalist response that drew on the Vedas (Purohit 1986: 47).

The Arya Samaj tried to establish the superiority of the Vedic religion. Slowly and steadily, the Arya Samaj attracted a large number of youths from the country and gave rise to many political leaders in India's movement for independence. Arya Samaj was the most powerful and influential movement of the reform era. It raised its voice against Child marriage, the purdah system, untouchability, the prevailing notion of crossing the sea, etc. It supported girls' education and Widow remarriage. He opposed Sati by calling it barbaric and stressing the equality of men and women. He also declared that women and men should have equal rights to study the Vedas. Arya Samaj appealed for doing away with Idol worship, division of society into castes and classes and the ritualistic traditions of Hinduism. It preached that God is formless and should not be worshipped in any form through an Idol. He attempted to base Hinduism on logic

and reason, rather than obsolete traditions rooted in superstition. He stated that the Vedic religion was the true religion, as the Vedas were considered infallible and a source of divine knowledge imparted to humanity. He fiercely criticised the orthodoxy that existed in any religion.

The Shuddhi movement, started by Dayanand, antagonised orthodox Islamic groups and Missionaries. It opened doors for people of other religions to join or rejoin the Hindu fold. He stated that Vedic religion is the essence of all the world's religions, and every religion is directly or indirectly influenced by it. Some people were leaving the Hindu fold and getting converted to Christianity or Islam because many ills had engulfed the Hindu society. People who found it difficult to continue with the Hindu tradition of Untouchability or Widow remarriage were leaving the Hindu fold because such ills did not exist in Islam and Christianity. Swami Dayanand attacked the roots of these issues and tried to strengthen the Hindu society. Many people returned to the Hindu faith due to the efforts of the Arya Samaj. Still, in doing so, they weakened Indian nationalism because many Muslims began to see Arya Samajists as their enemies, and the British used it to increase the distrust between the two communities. The Samaj gave a new sense of identity to the Hindu religion, which began to question and oppose. But in re-establishing the Hindu religion, he

became a critic of other religions and followed an aggressive approach towards them. In 'Satyarth Prakash', he made a severe critique of different religions. So, we could also say that his aggressive stance towards other religions worked towards sowing the seeds of communalism in our Independence movement. The Cow Protection Program became an issue of discord between Hindus and Muslims and also led to riots. Although the program found support from many quarters, the aggressive nature of the appeal by some enthusiastic Arya Samajists led to tension between the two communities.

His transformation can best be understood through Bankim's thought, evident in his early and later writings. In his early days, he demonstrated an acceptance of the most radical currents of European thought. The positivism of Comte had a significant influence on him. In his later writings, he is seen reconciling post-Enlightenment European rationality with the patriotic urge to assert the cultural and intellectual identity of colonised people.

He identifies a lack of solidarity as the primary reason for India's subjection. For him, the diverse nationalities living in this country, who are separated by language, habit, race and religion, have made national solidarity completely absent in this country. He views the British rule as an opportunity to foster national solidarity. In brief, he explains India's subjection

in terms of its culture (Pantham 2012:68-69). He describes the cultural value and its relation to power. For the West, Knowledge is power, while for us, knowledge is salvation. He makes an assessment that, throughout history, some cultural values have been more advantageous than others in terms of power, and those cultures that fail to engage in rational evaluation of power in material life are relegated to subjection. He considered religion to be the most potent weapon for political and moral awakening. He tried to instil the faith that love for humanity is the most incredible devotion, and love for one's country is the biggest duty of an individual. He made an effort to uplift the Hindu religion and combined the idea that the root of religious upliftment is political upliftment.

From Satya Shodhak to Social Revolution: The Legacy of Jyotiba Phule

Jyotiba Phule hailed from a low caste and understood the prevailing social inequalities faced by low-caste Hindus. He attempted to establish a framework for the liberation of the Sudras from the oppressive and unjust social system. He was influenced by Thomas Paine and believed in the equality of all people, regardless of gender or social status. Like Dayanand, he believed that social organisation should reflect an individual's merit rather than enforcing birth as the criterion for occupation and religious status. He published a play, Tritya

Ratna, in 1855 which depicted the exploitation of the superstitious peasant family by a cunning priest and their subsequent enlightenment by a Christian Missionary (Chakravarty, Pandey 2011:16-17) He through the play depicted the oppressive nature of Hinduism, impoverishment of shudras and conversion as a practical device to get out of the exploitative system. He believed that access to education and English literacy had provided vital resources to the Brahmins as a social group. This has catapulted the Brahmins' importance in the social hierarchy, as they have redefined their roles according to the day's requirements.

He attempted to envision a society free from Brahminical exploitation. He considers the British rule as a blessing in disguise because it struck at the foundation of the caste hegemony of the Brahmins. He opposed the Brahman discourses and Hinduism, as well as its scriptures. For him, the Brahmins have distorted the shrutis and smritis to rationalise their hegemony. He found literacy, primarily English education, to be the most helpful tool in eradicating the Brahmanical domination. It had the potential not only to alter the existing social order but also to promote gender equality. He vigorously pursued the task of women's literacy, and on his behest, an exclusive girls' school was opened in 1842. He tried to fulfil his objectives by establishing *Satyashodhak Samaj* in 1873. The Samaj extensively worked for girls'

education, widow remarriage and prohibition. It also led to vigorous debates on the nature of the Hindu society. He was largely successful in providing a critique of the prevalent Brahminical practices and values, which were being justified in the name of religion and religious texts. He even went to the extent of criticising various socio-religious organisations, including Prarthana Sabha, which he said was used by the Brahmins to confuse between Sudras and Ati-Sudras. He criticised Sarvajanic Sabha and even the Indian National Congress because these organisations, according to him, were monopolised by Brahmins and did not work in their interests.

M.G. Ranade and the Making of Modern India's Reformist Thought

He is credited with presenting his idea in the liberal mould. He was instrumental in the establishment of Poona *Sarvajanic Sabha* and Prarthana Samaj. He favoured an interventionist state instead of a laissez-faire state. He attempted to capture the essence of a transitional economy that was transitioning from a semi-feudal stage to a commercial order. He believed in the equality of all and, following the theistic doctrine, argues that Women and Men are equal as children of God. Everyone occupies an equal level before God, and since God is the common father, all men are brothers. He was a critic of the caste system but justified the bhakti movement. The Bhakti Marg rejected the idea

that Brahmins are the creation of God and that other castes should serve them. In this, the low caste were free to attain salvation through faith and love. Here, members of the weakest of the castes could become saints. Ranade considered the caste system a blot in the Indian social system. It has encouraged discrimination, isolation and exclusiveness. He preached to establish fraternity and recognise the essential equality between man and man.

Ranade gave instances from the Vedic ages and ancient India to establish equality between men and women. Women participated as equals in the religious rites and deliberations of the state during Vedic times. The institution of marriage recognised female liberty and the dignity of women. He argued that the dignity and status of women should be re-established by reforming the marriage and family system and by allowing them to avail themselves of the benefits of education. Ranade emphasised the need for social and religious reform, but he always believed in the natural dependence of the social, economic, and political spheres of society. He understood that institutions like the family should be reformed first; otherwise, there would be no meaning to political freedom, as we would fail to preserve it. He favoured a gradual process of societal transformation based on the liberal values of liberty and equality. He was a firm believer in tradition, and his views aimed to restore the dignity and freedom of the ancient

period. In his idea of elitism, he assigned greater roles to the educated class. He believed that this class would be the agent of change. He found that it was in the state's interest to provide sound and valuable education to the elite of the rising generation. Brahmins, the educated middle class, and Zamindars were included under the category of elites. He wanted exceptional representation for this class in the scheme of extending self-rule. His justification for aristocracy has been controversial and has been severely criticised by Phule and others.

Swami Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Mission: A New Paradigm of Socio-Religious Awakening in India

It was established as a religious organisation, but it had a significant impact on the society and polity of India. Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa was the founder of the Ramakrishna Order of Monks and the spiritual founder of the Ramakrishna Movement. He preached that different religions are different paths towards a single destination. He, like Swami Vivekananda, said that we should refrain from aping the cultures of the West. The Ramakrishna Mission was founded on May 1, 1897, by Swami Vivekananda, his chief disciple. He tried to restore the pride of place of Hinduism in India, which was struggling to find its feet in the light of the Western onslaught. The Ramakrishna Mission continues to disseminate

the principles of Vedanta worldwide through its branches and centres.

Vivekananda provided new vigour, pride and direction to society and religion through his teachings. His great oratory at the World Religious Conference in 1892, preaching the purity and rationality of Vedanta, earned him worldwide fame. People from foreign shores came to India to become his disciples. He was the soul of the movement. His speeches, which discussed the lofty ideals of Hinduism, raised awareness of the greatness of their culture. His teachings were directed to educate people to take pride in their culture and preserve their civilisation, which seemed to be falling apart. He said that Western civilisation is based on consumerism and self-aggrandisement, but Hindus should also have knowledge of modern education and modern means of work. In changed circumstances, development can only be attained by adapting to the needs of the times. He said that India could conquer the world spiritually by its spiritual message of the Vedanta.

He gave the message of self-reliance and self-confidence to the Indians. His teachings generated a new lease of life among the people of this country. He gave a call to eradicate all differences based on caste, community and untouchability. He equated the service of the poor and destitute to the service of God. His vision for India was that of a strong and

developing nation. The organisation engaged in many philanthropic activities, catering especially to the needs of the destitute.

Annie Besant, Theosophical Society, and India's Socio-Religious Transformation

The Theosophical Society was formed in New York City, United States, in November 1875 by H. Blavatsky, H.S. Olcott and others. The society headquarters were established in India in 1882. Mrs. Annie Besant popularised the society throughout the length and breadth of India. She won the support of large sections of people, including orthodox Brahmins, by her splendid presentation of Indian philosophy. She performed a remarkable transformation in religious life in India, particularly among Hindus. It promoted universal brotherhood, attracting many intellectuals to it. She translated the Geeta and wrote short commentaries on the Mahabharata and the Ramayana.

The society established several schools and colleges. In 1898, Annie Beasant founded the Central Hindu School and College in Benaras. A few years later, she started the Hindu School for Girls. The society performed tireless work for the upliftment of Women and pleaded for radical changes in the social condition. They opposed child marriage, the issue of widow remarriage, untouchability and other existing vices in the culture.

Muslim Reform Movements: Reconciling Tradition and Modernity in India

The reform movements also took place among the Muslims. Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan was the pioneer of the Muslim reform movement. The main movements that began in the 19th century were the Bahá'í movement, the Aligarh movement and the Ahmadi movement.

Sayyid Ahmed and Ismail Haji maulvi Mohammed were the prominent leaders of the Bahavi movement. The movement stressed the purity and unity of Islam. Since the movement was an orthodox movement, it could achieve the desired success. Sir Sayyid Ahmad started the Aligarh Movement. He is considered one of the architects of modern India. The 1857 revolt was one of the turning points of Indian history. Sir Sayyid foresaw the imperative need for the Muslims to acquire proficiency in the English language and modern sciences. He recognised the critical role of education for the empowerment of the poor and backwards Muslim community. He established several schools for the education of Muslims. He established the Scientific Society in 1863 to foster a scientific temperament among Muslims and to make Western knowledge accessible to them in their language. The most respected and crucial educational centre for Indian Muslims was initially founded as the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh in 1875 by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, which was subsequently

elevated to the status of Aligarh Muslim University. Sir Saiyad had a broader vision and put forward the need of the hour to equip Muslims in India with modern education, thereby improving their social and economic conditions. He was one of the first to provide a fresh perspective on Islam and contribute to its development. He initiated the All-India Muslim Educational Conference in 1866, which revived the spirit of Muslims at the national level. The Aligarh movement played a crucial role in establishing several educational institutions for Muslims, awakening them from their long-standing slumber and infusing them with social and political awareness.

Mirza Ghulam Ahmed Qadri founded the Ahmadiyya movement. The Ahmadiyas emphasised the belief that Islam is the final dispensation for humanity as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, and it is essential to restore it to its true essence and pristine form, which had been lost through the centuries. It was a movement towards the revitalisation of Islam.

Critical Appraisal

The source of influence on the Indian Renaissance was the idea of modernity, embodied in modern education, the values of liberty, equality, and faith in British rule, which would lead to the amelioration of the Indians' lot and eventually pave the way for the establishment of a democratic government in

India. Ram Mohan Roy was an exponent of this stream of influence.

The ideas of Schelling, Fichte, Kant, and Herder, all from Germany, were another source of influence. The reaction against British rule led people to reject British ideas of individualism, materialism, and laissez-faire. For them, German ideas of community, duty, and nation were appealing. (Mehta 1998: 159). They desired social reforms and democratic norms, but these were secondary to the need for preserving Indian identity. Their ideas call for upholding traditional values and protecting people from economic and political domination. They rejected English interference in the country's social life. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Vivekananda were the exponents of the idea who influenced the philosophy of nationalism later developed by Bipan Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh.

The Indian traditional thought was the third noteworthy influence on the Indian Renaissance. The fundamental contributions came from those who positively interpreted traditions. The research conducted by Orientalists such as William Jones and Max Müller instilled a profound sense of hope and admiration for the country's cultural traditions. These thinkers drew inspiration from the Vedic and classical ages. The Gita and its philosophy of action, performed with equanimity in the service of others, becomes a strong reference

point. They realised that the medieval religious outlook had weakened India. These thinkers succeeded in altering the medieval worldview that equated every human action with fate. They also emphasised the importance of this life, without denying the importance of soul development, and shifted the emphasis to highlight the significance of enterprise in the service of the community. The writings of Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee laid great optimism about transforming life in this world itself. They were convinced that India was destined to be a great nation, and it was up to the people to expedite the process.

The socio-religious reform movement left a deep imprint on Indian society. However, the movement also has inevitable consequences, which have had a profound and lasting impact on Indian politics and culture. The movement weakened inter-religious tolerance, leading to an increase in inter-religious bitterness. The idea of the reform movement promoted communalism, which reached its culmination in the form of the division of India and Pakistan. If we analyse the reach of the movement, we could say that it failed to reach the common mass, and it was mainly confined to the literate class. The common masses were not touched by the waves of reforms and continued to observe the old, traditional way of their social and religious life.

The movement in Bengal was confined to a small class identified as 'Bhadralok'. Zamindars, as a social class, were the biggest beneficiaries of this movement, as they were closely connected to the British. Brahmins, Kayasthas, and Vaishyas were among the most significant beneficiaries of the caste system in Hinduism. The reformers could never connect with the common masses due to their approach or the language they used, which was not comprehensible to the illiterate or ignorant masses of the country. However, the strength of the reform movement lies in identifying a reference point in our history where Indians under foreign occupation led the cause of reform. This led to the flowering of the idea of democracy and liberty, leading to the era of national movement in this country. The nationalists were influenced by various streams of the reform movements that occurred throughout the country.

Conclusion

It was observed that India was facing a significant challenge in the form of the intrusion of colonial culture and ideology. So, an attempt was being made to reinvigorate the traditional culture. All intrusions into the cultural realm were felt with great intensity. So, the defence of indigenous culture developed. The creation of an alternative cultural and ideological system, along with the regeneration of traditional institutions, were the high points of the 19th-

century reform movement. The perpetual social distinction based on caste was strongly felt, and it was deemed to require urgent reform. It stifled patriotic feelings and undermined democratic ideals. It was noted that no reform would be complete without changes in the domestic condition. It was realised that no country could make significant progress if its womenfolk continued to remain ignorant and exploited. The reformers aimed at modernisation rather than Westernisation. A blind imitation of the West was never promoted as part of the reform. We can say that the cultural-ideological struggle represented by the socio-religious reform movement was an integral part of the evolution of national consciousness in this country. Out of this reform came a new India ready to take on the might of the British Empire.

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Received: 03 July,2025; Accepted: 22 August,2025. Available online: 28 August, 2025

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