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## A General Survey of Socio-Cultural Reform Movements

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### Socio-Cultural Reform Movements and their Leaders

#### ■ Raja Rammohan Roy and Brahmo Samaj

Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833), often called the father of Indian Renaissance and the maker of Modern India, was a man of versatile genius.

Rammohan Roy believed in the modern scientific approach and principles of human dignity and social equality. He put his faith in monotheism. He wrote *Gift to Monotheists* (1809) and translated into Bengali the *Vedas* and the five *Upanishads* to prove his conviction that ancient Hindu texts support monotheism.

In 1814, he set up the **Atmiya Sabha** (or Society of Friends) in Calcutta to propagate the monotheistic ideals of the Vedanta and to campaign against idolatry, caste rigidities, meaningless rituals and other social ills. Strongly influenced by rationalist ideas, he declared that *Vedanta* is based on reason and that, if reason demanded it, even a departure from the scriptures is justified.

He said the principles of rationalism applied to other sects also, particularly to the elements of blind faith in them. In his *Precepts of Jesus* (1820), he tried to separate the

moral and philosophical message of the New Testament, which he praised, from its miracle stories. He earned the wrath of missionaries over his advocacy to incorporate the message of Christ into Hinduism.

He stood for a creative and intellectual process of selecting the best from different cultures, over which, again, he faced orthodox reaction.

Raja Rammohan Roy founded the **Brahmo Sabha** in August 1828; it was later renamed **Brahmo Samaj**. Through the Sabha he wanted to institutionalise his ideas and mission. The Samaj was committed to “the worship and adoration of the Eternal, Unsearchable, Immutable Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe”. Prayers, meditation and readings of the *Upanishads* were to be the forms of worship and no graven image, statue or sculpture, carving, painting, picture, portrait, etc., were to be allowed in the Samaj buildings, thus underlining the Samaj’s opposition to idolatry and meaningless rituals. The long-term agenda of the Brahmo Samaj—to purify Hinduism and to preach monotheism—was based on the twin pillars of reason and the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*. The Samaj also tried to incorporate teachings of other religions and kept its emphasis on human dignity, opposition to idolatry and criticism of social evils such as *sati*.

Rammohan Roy did not want to establish a new religion. He only wanted to purify Hinduism of the evil practices which had crept into it. Roy’s progressive ideas met with strong opposition from orthodox elements like Raja Radhakant Deb who organised the Dharma Sabha to counter Brahmo Samaj propaganda. Roy’s death in 1833 was a setback for the Samaj’s mission.

#### View

Raja Rammohan Roy and his Brahmo Samaj form the starting point for all the various reform movements—whether in Hindu religion, society or politics—which have agitated modern India.

—H.C.E. Zacharias

The features of Brahmo Samaj may be summed thus—

- it denounced polytheism and idol worship;
- it discarded faith in divine *avatars* (incarnations);
- it denied that any scripture could enjoy the status of ultimate authority transcending human reason and conscience;
- it took no definite stand on the doctrine of *karma* and transmigration of soul and left it to individual Brahmos to believe either way;
- it criticised the caste system.

His ideas and activities were also aimed at political uplift of the masses through social reform and, to that extent, can be said to have had nationalist undertones.

### **Raja Rammohan Roy's Efforts at Social Reform**

Rammohan was a determined crusader against the inhuman practice of *sati*. He started his anti-*sati* struggle in 1818 and he cited sacred texts to prove his contention that no religion sanctioned the burning alive of widows, besides appealing to humanity, reason and compassion. He also visited the cremation grounds, organised vigilance groups and filed counter petitions to the government during his struggle against *sati*. His efforts were rewarded by the Government Regulation in 1829 which declared the practice of *sati* a crime.

As a campaigner for women's rights, Roy condemned the general subjugation of women and opposed prevailing misconceptions which formed the basis of according an inferior social status to women. Roy attacked polygamy and the degraded state of widows and demanded the right of inheritance and property for women.

Rammohan Roy did much to disseminate the benefits of modern education to his countrymen. He supported David Hare's efforts to found the Hindu College in 1817, while Roy's English school taught mechanics and Voltaire's philosophy. In 1825, he established a Vedanta college where

### **Views**

I regret to say that the present system of religion adhered to by the Hindus is not well calculated to promote their political interests.... it is, I think, necessary that some change should take place in their religion at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort.

—**Raja Rammohan Roy**

courses in both Indian learning and Western social and physical sciences were offered. He also helped enrich the Bengali language by compiling a Bengali grammar book and evolving a modern elegant prose style.

Rammohan was a gifted linguist. He knew more than a dozen languages including Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, English, French, Latin, Greek and Hebrew. A knowledge of different languages helped him broaden his range of study.

As a bold supporter of freedom of the Press and as a pioneer in Indian journalism, Roy brought out journals in Bengali, Hindi, English, Persian to educate and inform the public and represent their grievances before the government.

As a political activist, Roy condemned oppressive practices of Bengali zamindars and demanded fixation of maximum rents. He also demanded abolition of taxes on tax-free lands. He called for a reduction of export duties on Indian goods abroad and abolition of the East India Company's trading rights. He demanded the Indianisation of superior services and separation of the executive from the judiciary. He demanded judicial equality between Indians and Europeans and that trial be held by jury.

Rammohan was an internationalist with a vision beyond his times. He stood for cooperation of thought and activity and brotherhood among nations. His understanding of the universal character of the principles of liberty, equality and justice indicated that he well understood the significance of the modern age. He supported the revolutions of Naples and

Spanish America and condemned the oppression of Ireland by absentee English landlordism and threatened emigration from the empire if the reform bill was not passed.

Roy had David Hare, Alexander Duff, Debendranath Tagore, P.K. Tagore, Chandrashekhar Deb and Tarachand Chakraborty as his associates.

### **Debendranath Tagore and Brahmo Samaj**

Maharishi Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905), father of Rabindranath Tagore and a product of the best in traditional Indian learning and Western thought, gave a new life to Brahmo Samaj and a definite form and shape to the theist movement, when he joined the Samaj in 1842. Earlier, Tagore headed the **Tattvabodhini Sabha** (founded in 1839) which, along with its organ *Tattvabodhini Patrika* in Bengali, was devoted to the systematic study of India's past with a rational outlook and to the propagation of Rammohan's ideas. A new vitality and strength of membership came to be associated with the Brahmo Samaj due to the informal association of the two sabhas. Gradually, the Brahmo Samaj came to include prominent followers of Rammohan, the Derozians and independent thinkers such as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Ashwini Kumar Datta. Tagore worked on two fronts: within Hinduism, the Brahmo Samaj was a reformist movement; outside, it resolutely opposed the Christian missionaries for their criticism of Hinduism and their attempts at conversion. The revitalised Samaj supported widow remarriage, women's education, abolition of polygamy, improvement in ryots' conditions and temperance.

### **Keshab Chandra Sen and the Brahmo Samaj**

The Brahmo Samaj experienced another phase of energy, when Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884) was made the *acharya* by Debendranath Tagore soon after the former joined the Samaj in 1858. Keshab (also spelt Keshub) was instrumental in popularising the movement, and branches of the Samaj were opened outside Bengal—in the United

### Views

Whoever worships the True God daily must learn to recognise all his fellow countrymen as brethren.

—Keshab Chandra Sen

Provinces, Punjab, Bombay, Madras and other towns. Unfortunately, Debendranath did not like some of Sen's ideas which he found too radical, such as cosmopolitanisation of the Samaj's meetings by inclusion of teachings from all religions and his strong views against the caste system, even open support to inter-caste marriages. Keshab Chandra Sen was dismissed from the office of *acharya* in 1865.

Keshab and his followers founded the Brahmo Samaj of India in 1866, while Debendranath Tagore's Samaj came to be known as the Adi Brahmo Samaj.

In 1878, Keshab's inexplicable act of getting his thirteen-year-old daughter married to the minor Hindu Maharaja of Cooch-Bihar with all the orthodox Hindu rituals caused another split in Keshab's Brahmo Samaj of India. Earlier, Keshab had begun to be considered as an incarnation by some of his followers, much to the dislike of his progressive followers. Further, Keshab had begun to be accused of authoritarianism.

After 1878, the disgusted followers of Keshab set up a new organisation, the **Sadharan Brahmo Samaj**. The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj was started by Ananda Mohan Bose, Shibchandra Deb and Umesh Chandra Datta. It reiterated the Brahmo doctrines of faith in a Supreme being, one God, the belief that no scripture or man is infallible, belief in the dictates of reason, truth and morality.

A number of Brahmo centres were opened in Madras province. In Punjab, the Dayal Singh Trust sought to implant Brahmo ideas by the opening of Dayal Singh College at Lahore in 1910.

**Significance of the Brahmo Samaj**

In matters of social reform, the Samaj attacked many dogmas and superstitions. It condemned the prevailing Hindu prejudice against going abroad. It worked for a respectable status for women in society—condemned *sati*, worked for abolition of *pardah* system, discouraged child marriage and polygamy, crusaded for widow remarriage and for provisions of educational facilities. It also attacked casteism and untouchability though in these matters it attained only limited success.

The influence of the Brahmo Samaj, however, did not go much beyond Calcutta and, at most, Bengal. It did not have a lasting impact.

**■ Prarthana Samaj**

In 1867, Keshab Chandra Sen helped Atmaram Pandurang found the Prarthana Samaj in Bombay. Earlier, the Brahmo ideas spread in Maharashtra. A precursor of the Prarthana Samaj was the Paramahansa Sabha, something like a secret society to spread liberal ideas and encourage the breakdown of caste and communal barriers. Mahadeo Govind Ranade (1842-1901), joined the samaj in 1870, and much of the popularity of and work done by the society was due to his efforts. His efforts made the samaj gain an all-India character. Other leaders of the samaj were R.G. Bhandarkar (1837-1925) and N.G. Chandavarkar (1855-1923). The emphasis was on monotheism, but on the whole, the samaj was more concerned with social reforms than with religion. The Prarthana Sabha was very attached to the bhakti cult of Maharashtra. The samaj relied on education and persuasion and not on confrontation with Hindu orthodoxy. There was a four-point social agenda also: (i) disapproval of caste system, (ii) women's education, (iii) widow remarriage, and (iv) raising the age of marriage for both males and females. Dhondo Keshav Karve and Vishnu Shastri were champions of social reform with Ranade. Along with Karve, Ranade

founded the Widow Remarriage Movement as well as Widows' Home Association with the aim of providing education and training to widows so that they could support themselves.

### ■ Young Bengal Movement and Henry Vivian Derozio

During the late 1820s and early 1830s, there emerged a radical, intellectual trend among the youth in Bengal, which came to be known as the 'Young Bengal Movement'. A young Anglo-Indian, Henry Vivian Derozio (1809-31), who taught at the Hindu College from 1826 to 1831, was the leader and inspirer of this progressive trend. Drawing inspiration from the great French Revolution, Derozio inspired his pupils to think freely and rationally, question all authority, love liberty, equality and freedom, and oppose decadent customs and traditions. The Derozians also supported women's rights and education. Also, Derozio was perhaps the first nationalist poet of modern India.

The Derozians, however, failed to have a long-term impact. Derozio was removed from the Hindu College in 1831 because of his radicalism. The main reason for their limited success was the prevailing social conditions at that time, which were not ripe for the adoption of radical ideas. Further, there was no support from any other social group or class. The Derozians lacked any real link with the masses; for instance, they failed to take up the peasants' cause. In fact, their radicalism was bookish in character. But, despite their limitations, the Derozians carried forward Rammohan Roy's tradition of public education on social, economic and political questions. For instance, they demanded induction of Indians in higher grades of services, protection of ryots from oppressive zamindars, better treatment to Indian labour abroad in British colonies, revision of the Company's charter, freedom of press and trial by jury.

Later, Surendranath Banerjea was to describe the Derozians as "the pioneers of the modern civilisation of

Bengal, the conscript fathers of our race whose virtues will excite veneration and whose failings will be treated with gentlest consideration”.

### ■ Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

The great scholar and reformer, Vidyasagar's ideas were a happy blend of Indian and Western thought. He believed in high moral values, was a deep humanist and was generous to the poor. In 1850, he became the principal of Sanskrit College. He was determined to break the priestly monopoly of scriptural knowledge, and for this he opened the Sanskrit College to non-brahmins. He introduced Western thought in Sanskrit College to break the self-imposed isolation of Sanskrit learning. As an academician, he evolved a new methodology to teach Sanskrit. He also devised a new Bengali primer and evolved a new prose style.

Vidyasagar started a movement in support of widow remarriage which resulted in legalisation of widow remarriage. He was also a crusader against child marriage and polygamy. He did much for the cause of women's education. As government inspector of schools, he helped organise thirty-five girls' schools many of which he ran at his own expense. As secretary of Bethune School (established in 1849), he was one of the pioneers of higher education for women in India.

The Bethune School, founded in Calcutta, was the result of the powerful movement for women's education that arose in the 1840s and 1850s. The movement had to face great difficulties. The young students were shouted at and abused and, sometimes, even their parents subjected to social boycott. Many believed that girls who had received Western education would make slaves of their husbands.

### ■ Balshastri Jambhekar

Balshastri Jambhekar (1812-1846) was a pioneer of social reform through journalism in Bombay; he attacked brahminical orthodoxy and tried to reform popular Hinduism. He started

the newspaper *Darpan* in 1832. Known as the father of Marathi journalism, Jambhekar used the *Darpan* to awaken the people to awareness of social reforms, such as widow remarriage, and to instil in the masses a scientific approach to life. In 1840, he started *Digdarshan* which published articles on scientific subjects as well as history.

Jambhekar founded the Bombay Native General Library and started the Native Improvement Society of which an offshoot was the Students Literary and Scientific Library. He was the first professor of Hindi at the Elphinston College, besides being a director of the Colaba Observatory.

### ■ Paramahansa Mandali

Founded in 1849 in Maharashtra, the founders of the Paramahansa Mandali—Dadoba Pandurang, Mehtaji Durgaram and others—began as a secret society that worked to reform Hindu religion and society in general. The ideology of the society was closely linked to that of the Manav Dharma Sabha. Besides believing that one god should be worshipped, the society also said real religion is based on love and moral conduct. Freedom of thought was encouraged as was rationality. The founders of the mandali were primarily interested in breaking caste rules. At their meetings, food cooked by lower caste people was taken by the members. These mandalis also advocated widow remarriage and women's education. Branches of Paramahansa Mandali existed in Poona, Satara and other towns of Maharashtra.

### ■ Satyashodhak Samaj and Jyotiba or Jyotirao Phule

Jyotiba Phule (1827-1890), born in Satara, Maharashtra, belonged to the *mali* (gardener) community and organised a powerful movement against upper caste domination and brahminical supremacy. Phule founded the Satyashodhak Samaj (Truth Seekers' Society) in 1873, with the leadership of the samaj coming from the backward classes, *malis*, *telis*,

*kunbis, saris and dhangars*. The main aims of the movement were (i) social service, and (ii) spread of education among women and lower caste people.

Phule's works, *Sarvajanik Satyadharma* and *Gulamgiri*, became sources of inspiration for the common masses. Phule used the symbol of Rajah Bali as opposed to the brahmins' symbol of Rama. Phule aimed at the complete abolition of the caste system and socio-economic inequalities; he was against Sanskritic Hinduism. This movement gave a sense of identity to the depressed communities as a class against those brahmins who used religion and the blind faith of the masses to exploit the masses for personal monetary gain.

Phule, a firm believer in gender equality, was a pioneer in women's education; he with the help of his wife, Savitribai, opened a girls' school at Poona; he was a pioneer of widow remarriage movement in Maharashtra and also opened a home for widows in 1854. Phule was awarded the title 'Mahatma' for his social reform work.

#### ■ Gopalhari Deshmukh 'Lokahitawadi'

Gopalhari Deshmukh (1823-1892) was a social reformer and rationalist from Maharashtra. He held the post of a judge under British raj, but wrote for a weekly *Prabhakar* under the pen name of *Lokahitawadi* on social reform issues. He advocated a reorganisation of Indian society on rational principles and modern, humanistic, secular values. He attacked Hindu orthodoxy and supported social and religious equality. He wrote against the evils of the caste system. He said, "If religion does not sanction social reform, then change religion." He started a weekly, *Hitechhu*, and also played a leading role in founding the periodicals, *Gyan Prakash*, *Indu Prakash* and *Lokahitawadi*.

#### ■ Gopal Ganesh Agarkar

Gopal Ganesh Agarkar (1856-1895) was an educationist and social reformer from Maharashtra. A strong advocate of the power of human reason, he criticised the blind dependence

on tradition and false glorification of the past. He was a co-founder of the New English School, the Deccan Education Society and Fergusson College. He was a principal of Fergusson College. He was also the first editor of *Kesari*, the journal started by Lokmanya Tilak. Later, he started his own periodical, *Sudharak*, which spoke against untouchability and the caste system.

### ■ The Servants of India Society

Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915), a liberal leader of the Indian National Congress, founded the Servants of India Society in 1905 with the help of M.G. Ranade. The aim of the society was to train national missionaries for the service of India; to promote, by all constitutional means, the true interests of the Indian people; and to prepare a cadre of selfless workers who were to devote their lives to the cause of the country in a religious spirit. In 1911, the *Hitavada* began to be published to project the views of the society. The society chose to remain aloof from political activities and organisations like the Indian National Congress.

After Gokhale's death (1915), Srinivasa Shastri took over as president. The society still continues to function, though with a shrunken base, at many places in India. It works in the field of education, providing ashram type of schools for tribal girls and *balwadis* at many places.

### ■ Social Service League

A follower of Gokhale, Narayan Malhar Joshi founded the Social Service League in Bombay with an aim to secure for the masses better and reasonable conditions of life and work. They organised many schools, libraries, reading rooms, day nurseries and cooperative societies. Their activities also included police court agents' work, legal aid and advice to the poor and illiterate, excursions for slum dwellers, facilities for gymnasia and theatrical performances, sanitary work, medical relief and boys' clubs and scout corps. Joshi also founded the All India Trade Union Congress (1920).

### ■ The Ramakrishna Movement and Swami Vivekananda

The didactic nationalism of the Brahmo Samaj appealed more to the intellectual elite in Bengal, while the average Bengali found more emotional satisfaction in the cult of *bhakti* and *yoga*. The teachings of **Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836-1886), a poor priest at the Kali temple in Dakshineswar, on the outskirts of Calcutta (who was known in childhood as Gadadhar Chattopadhyay) found many followers. Ramakrishna experienced spiritual trances (ecstasy) from a very early age. He is considered to have attained the highest spiritual experience available to Hindus. He did not write books, but his conversations with people formed the basis of what were considered his teachings. He spoke simply, in the form of parables and metaphors, drawn from the observation of ordinary life and nature. But what he said was of universal relevance. Two objectives of the Ramakrishna movement were—(i) to bring into existence a band of monks dedicated to a life of renunciation and practical spirituality, from among whom teachers and workers would be sent out to spread the universal message of Vedanta as illustrated in the life of Ramakrishna, and (ii) in conjunction with lay disciples to carry on preaching, philanthropic and charitable works, looking upon all men, women and children, irrespective of caste, creed or colour, as veritable manifestations of the Divine. Paramahansa himself laid the foundations of the Ramakrishna Math with his young monastic disciples as a nucleus to fulfil the first objective. The second objective was taken up by Swami Vivekananda after Ramakrishna's death when he founded the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897. The headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission are at Belur near Calcutta. The two are twin organisations, though legally and financially separate.

Paramahansa sought salvation through traditional ways of renunciation, meditation and *bhakti* amidst increasing

westernisation and modernisation. He recognised the fundamental oneness of all religions and emphasised that Krishna, Hari, Ram, Christ, Allah are different names for the same God, and that there are many ways to God and salvation: "As many faiths, so many paths." Paramahansa's spirituality and compassion for the suffering humanity inspired those who listened to him. He used to say, "Service of man is the service of God."

Incidentally, Ramakrishna was married to Saradmani Mukherjee, later known as Sarada Devi. Ramakrishna considered Sarada as the embodiment of the Divine Mother. It was as 'holy mother' that the disciples also knew her as. She played an important role in the work of the math and encouraging the young disciples in their mission.

### Swami Vivekananda

Narendranath Datta (1862-1902), who later came to be known as **Swami Vivekananda** spread Ramakrishna's message and tried to reconcile it to the needs of contemporary Indian society. He emerged as the preacher of neo-Hinduism. Certain spiritual experiences of Ramakrishna, the teachings of the *Upanishads* and the *Gita* and the examples of the Buddha and Jesus are the basis of Vivekananda's message to the world about human values. He subscribed to the Vedanta which he considered a fully rational system with a superior approach. His mission was to bridge the gulf between *paramartha* (service) and *vyavahara* (behaviour), and between spirituality and day-to-day life.

Vivekananda believed in the fundamental oneness of God and said, "For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam, is the only hope."

Emphasising social action, he declared that knowledge without action is useless. He lamented the isolationist tendencies and the touch-me-not attitude of Hindus in religious matters. He frowned at religion's tacit approval of the oppression of the poor by the rich. He believed that it

### Views

No other religion preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism and no other religion on earth treads upon the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism.

—Swami Vivekananda

A country where millions have nothing to eat and where few thousand holy men and brahmins suck the blood of the poor and do nothing at all for them, is not a country but a living hell. Is this religion or a dance of death?

—Swami Vivekananda

Forget not that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate, the cobbler, the sweeper are thy flesh and blood, thy brothers.

—Swami Vivekananda

was an insult to God and humanity to teach religion to a starving man. He pointed out that the masses needed two kinds of knowledge—secular knowledge about how to work for their economic uplift and the spiritual knowledge to have faith in themselves and strengthen their moral sense. He called upon his countrymen to imbibe a spirit of liberty, equality and free thinking.

At the **Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893**, Swami Vivekananda made a great impression on people by his learned interpretations. The keynote of his opening address was the need for a healthy balance between spiritualism and materialism. Envisaging a new culture for the whole world, he called for a blend of the materialism of the West and the spiritualism of the East into a new harmony to produce happiness for mankind. Vivekananda gave several lectures on Vedanta in the USA and in London before returning to India in 1897.

In India he delivered a series of lectures, the focus of which were to infuse into the new generation a sense of pride in India's past, a new faith in India's culture, and a rare sense of confidence in India's future; to bring about a unification

of Hinduism by pointing out the common foundation of its sects; to make the educated people see the misery of the downtrodden and work for their uplift by the application of practical Vedanta principles. His emphasis was not only on personal salvation, but also on social good and reform.

In 1897 he founded the Ramakrishna Mission. Vivekananda was a great humanist and used the Ramakrishna Mission for humanitarian relief and social work. The Mission stands for religious and social reform. Vivekananda advocated the doctrine of service—the service of all beings. The service of *jiva* (living objects) is the worship of *Siva*. Life itself is religion. By service, the Divine exists within man. Vivekananda was for using technology and modern science in the service of mankind.

Ever since its inception, the Mission has been running a number of schools, hospitals, dispensaries. It offers help to the afflicted in times of natural calamities like earthquakes, famines, floods and epidemics. The Mission has developed into a worldwide organisation. It is a deeply religious body, but it is not a proselytising body. It does not consider itself to be a sect of Hinduism. In fact, this is one of the strong reasons for the success of the Mission. Unlike the Arya Samaj, the Mission recognises the utility and value of image worship in developing spiritual fervour and worship of the eternal omnipotent God, although it emphasises on the essential spirit and not the symbols or rituals. It believes that the philosophy of Vedanta will make a Christian a better Christian, and a Hindu a better Hindu.

It was in 1898 that Swami Vivekananda acquired a large piece of land at Belur where the Ramakrishna Math was finally shifted and registered as such. The monastic order is

#### **View**

So far as Bengal is concerned Vivekananda may be regarded as the spiritual father of the modern nationalist movement.

—Subash Chandra Bose

open to all men without discrimination on the basis of caste or creed.

### ■ Dayananda Saraswati and Arya Samaj

The Arya Samaj Movement, revivalist in form though not in content, was the result of a reaction to Western influences. Its founder, Dayananda Saraswati or Mulshankar (1824-1883) was born in the old Morvi state in Gujarat in a brahmin family. He wandered as an ascetic for fifteen years (1845-60) in search of truth. The first Arya Samaj unit was formally set up by him at Bombay in 1875 and later the headquarters of the Samaj were established at Lahore.

Dayananda's views were published in his famous work, *Satyarth Prakash* (The True Exposition). His vision of India included a classless and casteless society, a united India (religiously, socially and nationally), and an India free from foreign rule, with Aryan religion being the common religion of all. He took inspiration from the Vedas and considered them to be 'India's Rock of Ages', the infallible and the true original seed of Hinduism. He gave the slogan "Back to the Vedas".

Dayananda had received education on Vedanta from a blind teacher named Swami Virajananda in Mathura. Along with his emphasis on Vedic authority, he stressed the significance of individual interpretation of the scriptures and said that every person has the right of access to God. He criticised later Hindu scriptures such as the *Puranas* and the ignorant priests for perverting Hinduism.

Dayananda launched a frontal attack on Hindu orthodoxy, caste rigidities, untouchability, idolatry, polytheism, belief in magic, charms and animal sacrifices, taboo on sea voyages, feeding the dead through *shraddhas*, etc.

Dayananda subscribed to the Vedic notion of *chaturvarna* system in which a person was not born in any caste but was identified as a brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya or shudra according to the occupation the person followed.

The Arya Samaj fixed the minimum marriageable age

at twenty-five years for boys and sixteen years for girls. Swami Dayananda once lamented the Hindu race as “the children of children”. Intercaste marriages and widow remarriages were also encouraged. Equal status for women was the demand of the Samaj, both in letter and in spirit.

The Samaj also helped the people in crises like floods, famines and earthquakes. It attempted to give a new direction to education. The nucleus for this movement was provided by the Dayananda Anglo-Vedic (D.A.V.) schools, established first at Lahore in 1886, which sought to emphasise the importance of Western education. Swami Shraddhanand started the Gurukul at Hardwar in 1902 to impart education in the traditional framework.

Dayananda strongly criticised the escapist Hindu belief in *maya* (illusion) as the running theme of all physical existence and the aim of human life as a struggle to attain *moksha* (salvation) through escape from this evil world to seek union with God. Instead, he advocated that God, soul and matter (*prakriti*) were distinct and eternal entities and every individual had to work out his own salvation in the light of the eternal principles governing human conduct. Thus he attacked the prevalent popular belief that every individual contributed and got back from the society according the principles of *niyati* (destiny) and *karma* (deeds). He held the world to be a battlefield where every individual has to work out his salvation by right deeds, and that human beings are not puppets controlled by fate.

It should be clearly understood that Dayananda’s slogan of ‘Back to the *Vedas*’ was a call for a revival of Vedic learning and Vedic purity of religion and not a revival of Vedic times. He accepted modernity and displayed a patriotic attitude to national problems.

**The ten guiding principles of the Arya Samaj are—**

(i) God is the primary source of all true knowledge; (ii) God, as all-truth, all-knowledge, almighty, immortal, creator of Universe, is alone worthy of worship; (iii) the Vedas are the

books of true knowledge; (iv) an Arya should always be ready to accept truth and abandon untruth; (v) *dharma*, that is, due consideration of right and wrong, should be the guiding principle of all actions; (vi) the principal aim of the Samaj is to promote world's well-being in the material, spiritual and social sense; (vii) everybody should be treated with love and justice; (viii) ignorance is to be dispelled and knowledge increased; (ix) one's own progress should depend on uplift of all others; (x) social well-being of mankind is to be placed above an individual's well-being.

The Arya Samaj's social ideals comprise, among others, the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of Man, equality of the sexes, absolute justice and fair play between man and man and nation and nation. Dayananda also met other reformers of the time—Keshab Chandra Sen, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Ranade, Deshmukh, etc. The work of the Swami after his death was carried forward by Lala Hansraj, Pandit Gurudutt, Lala Lajpat Rai and Swami Shraddhanand, among others.

The Arya Samaj was able to give self-respect and self-confidence to the Hindus which helped to undermine the myth of superiority of whites and the Western culture.

In its zeal to protect the Hindu society from the onslaught of Christianity and Islam, the Samaj started the *shuddhi* (purification) movement to reconvert to the Hindu fold the converts to Christianity and Islam. This led to increasing communalisation of social life during the 1920s and later snowballed into communal political consciousness.

### ■ Seva Sadan

A Parsi social reformer, Behramji M. Malabari (1853-1912), founded the Seva Sadan in 1908 along with a friend, Diwan Dayaram Gidumal. Malabari spoke vigorously against child marriage and for widow remarriage among Hindus. It was his efforts that led to the Age of Consent Act regulating the age of consent for females, Seva Sadan specialised in taking care of those women who were exploited and then

discarded by society. It catered to all castes and provided the destitute women with education, and medical and welfare services.

[Behramji Malabari acquired and edited the *Indian Spectator*.]

### ■ Dev Samaj

Founded in 1887 at Lahore by Shiv Narayan Agnihotri (1850-1927), earlier a Brahmo follower, Dev Sadan is a religious and social reform society. The society emphasised on the eternity of the soul, the supremacy of the *guru*, and the need for good action. It called for an ideal social behaviour such as not accepting bribes, avoiding intoxicants and non-vegetarian food, and keeping away from violent actions. Its teachings were compiled in a book, *Deva Shastra*. Agnihotri spoke against child marriage.

### ■ Dharma Sabha

Radhakant Deb founded this sabha in 1830. An orthodox society, it stood for the preservation of the *status quo* in socio-religious matters, opposing even the abolition of sati. However, it favoured the promotion of Western education, even for girls.

### ■ Bharat Dharma Mahamandala

An all-India organisation of the orthodox educated Hindus, it stood for a defence of orthodox Hinduism against the teachings of the Arya Samajists, the Theosophists, and the Ramakrishna Mission. Other organisations created to defend orthodox Hinduism were the Sanatana Dharma Sabha (1895), the Dharma Maha Parishad in South India, and Dharma Mahamandali in Bengal. These organisations combined in 1902 to form the single organisation of Bharat Dharma Mahamandala, with headquarters at Varanasi. This organisation sought to introduce proper management of Hindu religious institutions, open Hindu educational institutions, etc. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya was a prominent figure in this movement.

### ■ **Radhaswami Movement**

Tulsi Ram, a banker from Agra, also known as Shiv Dayal Saheb, founded this movement in 1861. The Radhaswamis believe in one supreme being, supremacy of the *guru*, a company of pious people (*satsang*), and a simple social life. Spiritual attainment, they believe, does not call for renunciation of the worldly life. They consider all religions to be true. While the sect has no belief in temples, shrines and sacred places, it considers as necessary duties, works of faith and charity, service and prayer.

### ■ **Sree Narayana Guru Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Movement**

The SNDP movement was an example of a regional movement born out of conflict between the depressed classes and upper castes. It was started by Sree Narayana Guru Swamy (1856-1928) among the Ezhavas of Kerala, who were a backward caste of toddy-tappers and were considered to be untouchables, denied education and entry into temples. The Ezhavas were the single largest caste group in Kerala constituting 26 per cent of the total population. Narayana Guru, himself from the Ezhava caste, took a stone from the Neyyar river and installed it as a Sivalinga at Aruvippuram on Sivaratri in 1888. It was intended to show that consecration of an idol was not the monopoly of the higher castes. With this he began a revolution that soon led to the removal of many discriminations in Kerala's society. The movement (**Aruvippuram movement**) drew the famous poet Kumaran Asan as a disciple of Narayana Guru. In 1889, the Aruvippuram Kshetra Yogam was formed which was decided to expand into a big organisation to help the Ezhavas to progress materially as well as spiritually.

Thus the Aruvippuram Sree Narayana Guru Dharma Paripalana Yogam (in short SNDP) was registered in 1903 under the Indian Companies Act, with Narayana Guru as its permanent chairman, and Kumaran Asan as the general

secretary. (In the formation of SNDP, the efforts of Dr Palpu must be acknowledged. He had started the fight for social justice through movements like Ezhava Memorial, Malayali Memorial, etc.)

Sree Narayana Guru held all religions to be the same and condemned animal sacrifice besides speaking against divisiveness on the basis of caste, race or creed. On the wall of the Aruvippuram temple he got inscribed the words, "Devoid of dividing walls of caste or race, or hatred of rival faith, we all live here in brotherhood." He urged the Ezhavas to leave the toddy tapping profession and even to stop drinking liquor.

The SNDP Yogam took up several issues for the Ezhavas, such as (i) right of admission to public schools, (ii) recruitment to government services, (iii) access to roads and entry to temples, and (iv) political representation. The movement as a whole brought transformative structural changes such as upward social mobility, shift in traditional distribution of power and a federation of 'backward castes' into a large conglomeration.

#### ■ **Vokkaliga Sangha**

The Vokkaliga Sangha in Mysore launched an anti-brahmin movement in 1905.

#### ■ **Justice Movement**

This movement in Madras Presidency was started by C.N. Mudaliar, T.M. Nair and P. Tyagaraja to secure jobs and representation for the non-brahmins in the legislature. In 1917, Madras Presidency Association was formed which demanded separate representation for the lower castes in the legislature.

#### ■ **Self-Respect Movement**

This movement was started by E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, a Balija Naidu, in the mid-1920s. The movement aimed at nothing short of a rejection of the brahminical religion and culture which Naicker felt was the prime instrument of

exploitation of the lower castes. He sought to undermine the position of brahmin priests by formalising weddings without brahmin priests.

### ■ Temple Entry Movement

Significant work in this direction had already been done by reformers and intellectuals like Sree Narayana Guru and N. Kumaran Asan. T.K. Madhavan, a prominent social reformer and editor of *Deshabhimani*, took up the issue of temple entry with the Travancore administration. Nothing transpired. In the meanwhile, Vaikom, in the northern part of Travancore, became a centre of agitation for temple entry. In 1924, the Vaikom Satyagraha led by K.P. Kesava, was launched in Kerala demanding the throwing open of Hindu temples and roads to the untouchables. The satyagraha was reinforced by *jathas* from Punjab and Madurai. Gandhi undertook a tour of Kerala in support of the movement.

Again in 1931 when the Civil Disobedience Movement was suspended, temple entry movement was organised in Kerala. Inspired by K. Kelappan, poet Subramaniam Tirumambu (the 'singing sword of Kerala') led a group of sixteen volunteers to Guruvayur. Leaders like P. Krishna Pillai and A.K. Gopalan were among the satyagrahis. Finally, on November 12, 1936, the Maharaja of Travancore issued a proclamation throwing open all government-controlled temples to all Hindus.

A similar step was taken by the C. Rajagopalachari administration in Madras in 1938.

### ■ Indian Social Conference

Founded by M.G. Ranade and Raghunath Rao, the Indian Social Conference met annually from its first session in Madras in 1887 at the same time and venue as the Indian National Congress. It focussed attention on the social issues of importance; it could be called the social reform cell of the Indian National Congress, in fact. The conference advocated inter-caste marriages, opposed polygamy and *kulinism*. It

launched the 'Pledge Movement' to inspire people to take a pledge against child marriage.

### ■ Wahabi/Walliullah Movement

The teachings of Abdul Wahab of Arabia and the preachings of Shah Waliullah (1702-1763) inspired this essentially revivalist response to Western influences and the degeneration which had set in among Indian Muslims and called for a return to the true spirit of Islam. He was the first Indian Muslim leader of the 18th century to organise Muslims around the two-fold ideals of this movement: (i) desirability of harmony among the four schools of Muslim jurisprudence which had divided the Indian Muslims (he sought to integrate the best elements of the four schools); (ii) recognition of the role of individual conscience in religion where conflicting interpretations were derived from the *Quran* and the *Hadis*.

The teachings of Waliullah were further popularised by Shah Abdul Aziz and Syed Ahmed Barelvi who also gave them a political perspective. Un-Islamic practices that had crept into Muslim society were sought to be eliminated. Syed Ahmed called for a return to the pure Islam and the kind of society that had existed in the Arabia of the Prophet's time. India was considered to be *dar-ul-Harb* (land of the *kafirs*) and it needed to be converted to *dar-ul-Islam* (land of Islam). Initially, the movement was directed at the Sikhs in Punjab but after the British annexation of Punjab (1849), the movement was directed against the British. During the 1857 Revolt, the Wahabi's played an important role in spreading anti-British feelings. The Wahabi Movement fizzled out in the face of British military might in the 1870s.

### ■ Titu Mir's Movement

Mir Nithar Ali, popularly known as Titu Mir, was a disciple of Sayyid Ahmed Barelvi, the founder of the Wahabi Movement. Titu Mir adopted Wahabism and advocated the Sharia. He organised the Muslim peasants of Bengal against the landlords, who were mostly Hindu, and the British indigo

planters. The movement was not as militant as the British records made it out to be; only in the last year of Titu's life was there a confrontation between him and the British police. He was killed in action in 1831.

### ■ Faraizi Movement

The movement, also called the Fara'idi Movement because of its emphasis on the Islamic pillars of faith, was founded by Haji Shariatullah in 1818. Its scene of action was East Bengal, and it aimed at the eradication of social innovations or un-Islamic practices current among the Muslims of the region and draw their attention to their duties as Muslims. Under the leadership of Haji's son, Dudu Mian, the movement became revolutionary from 1840 onwards. He gave the movement an organisational system from the village to the provincial level with a khalifa or authorised deputy at every level. The Fara'idis organised a paramilitary force armed with clubs to fight the zamindars who were mostly Hindu, though there were some Muslim landlords too, besides the indigo planters. Dudu Mian asked his followers not to pay rent. The organisation even established its own Law courts.

Dudu Mian was arrested several times, and his arrest in 1847 finally weakened the movement. The movement survived merely as a religious movement without political overtones after the death of Dudu Mian in 1862.

### ■ Ahmadiyya Movement

The Ahmadiyya forms a sect of Islam which originated from India. It was founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in 1889. It was based on liberal principles. It described itself as the standard-bearer of Mohammedan Renaissance, and based itself, like the Brahmo Samaj, on the principles of universal religion of all humanity, opposing *jihad* (sacred war against non-Muslims). The movement spread Western liberal education among the Indian Muslims. The Ahmadiyya community is the only Islamic sect to believe that the Messiah had come in the person of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad to end religious wars.

and bloodshed and to reinstate morality, peace and justice. They believed in separating the mosque from the State as well as in human rights and tolerance. However, the Ahmadiyya Movement, like Baha'ism which flourished in the West Asian countries, suffered from mysticism.

### ■ Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and the Aligarh Movement

The British view on the revolt of 1857 held the Muslims to be the main conspirators. This view was further strengthened by the activities of the Wahabis. But later, an opinion got currency among the rulers that the Muslims could be used as allies against a rising tide of nationalist political activity represented, among others, by the foundation of the Indian National Congress. This was to be achieved through offers of thoughtful concessions to the Muslims. A section of Muslims led by Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) was ready to allow the official patronage to stimulate a process of growth among Indian Muslims through better education and employment opportunities.

Syed Ahmed Khan, born in a respectable Muslim family, was a loyalist member of the judicial service of the British government. After retirement in 1876, he became a member of the Imperial Legislative Council in 1878. His loyalty earned him a knighthood in 1888. He wanted to reconcile Western scientific education with the teachings of the *Quran* which were to be interpreted in the light of contemporary rationalism and science even though he also held the *Quran* to be the ultimate authority. He said that religion should be adaptable with time or else it would become fossilised, and that religious tenets were not immutable. He advocated a critical approach and freedom of thought and not complete dependence on tradition or custom. He was also a zealous educationist—as an official, he opened schools in towns, got books translated into Urdu and started the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College (later, the Aligarh

Muslim University) at Aligarh in 1875. He also struggled to bring about an improvement in the position of women through better education and by opposing *pardah* and polygamy, advocating easy divorce, and condemning the system of *piri* and *muridi*. He believed in the fundamental underlying unity of religions or 'practical morality'. He also preached the basic commonality of Hindu and Muslim interests.

Syed Ahmed Khan argued that Muslims should first concentrate on education and jobs and try to catch up with their Hindu counterparts who had gained the advantage of an early start. Active participation in politics at that point, he felt, would invite hostility of the government towards the Muslim masses. Therefore, he opposed political activity by the Muslims. Unfortunately, in his enthusiasm to promote the educational and employment interests of the Muslims, he allowed himself to be used by the colonial government in its obnoxious policy of divide and rule and, in later years, started propagating divergence of interests of Hindus and Muslims.

Syed's progressive social ideas were propagated through his magazine *Tahdhib-ul-Akhlaq* (Improvement of Manners and Morals).

The Aligarh Movement emerged as a liberal, modern trend among the Muslim intelligentsia based in Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, Aligarh. It aimed at spreading (i) modern education among Indian Muslims without weakening their allegiance to Islam; (ii) social reforms among Muslims relating to *pardah*, polygamy, widow remarriage, women's education, slavery, divorce, etc. The ideology of the followers of the movement was based on a liberal interpretation of the *Quran* and they sought to harmonise Islam with modern liberal culture. They wanted to impart a distinct socio-cultural identity to Muslims on modern lines. Soon, Aligarh became the centre of religious and cultural revival of the Muslim community.

### ■ The Deoband School (Darul Uloom)

The Deoband Movement was organised by the orthodox section among the Muslim ulema as a revivalist movement with the twin objectives of propagating pure teachings of the *Quran* and *Hadis* among Muslims and keeping alive the spirit of *jihad* against the foreign rulers.

The Deoband Movement was begun at the Darul Uloom (or Islamic academic centre), Deoband, in Saharanpur district (United Provinces) in 1866 by Mohammad Qasim Nanotavi (1832-80) and Rashid Ahmed Gangohi (1828-1905) to train religious leaders for the Muslim community. In contrast to the Aligarh Movement, which aimed at the welfare of Muslims through Western education and support of the British government, the aim of the Deoband Movement was moral and religious regeneration of the Muslim community. The instruction imparted at Deoband was in original Islamic religion.

On the political front, the Deoband school welcomed the formation of the Indian National Congress and in 1888 issued a *fatwa* (religious decree) against Syed Ahmed Khan's organisations, the United Patriotic Association and the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental Association. Some critics attribute Deoband's support to the nationalists more to its determined opposition to Syed Ahmed Khan than to any positive political philosophy.

Mahmud-ul-Hasan, the new Deoband leader, gave a political and intellectual content to the religious ideas of the school. He worked out a synthesis of Islamic principles and nationalist aspirations. The Jamiat-ul-Ulema gave a concrete shape to Hasan's ideas of protection of the religious and political rights of the Muslims in the overall context of Indian unity and national objectives.

Shibli Numani, a supporter of the Deoband school, favoured the inclusion of English language and European sciences in the system of education. He founded the Nadwatal Ulama and Darul Uloom in Lucknow in 1894-96. He believed

in the idealism of the Congress and cooperation between the Muslims and the Hindus of India to create a state in which both could live amicably.

### ■ Parsi Reform Movements

The Rahnumai Mazdayasnan Sabha (Religious Reform Association) was founded in 1851 by a group of English-educated Parsis for the “regeneration of the social conditions of the Parsis and the restoration of the Zoroastrian religion to its pristine purity”. The movement had Naoroji Furdonji, Dadabhai Naoroji, K.R. Cama and S.S. Bengalee as its leaders. The message of reform was spread by the newspaper *Rast Gofar* (Truth-Teller). Parsi religious rituals and practices were reformed and the Parsi creed redefined. In the social sphere, attempts were made to uplift the status of Parsi women through removal of the *purdah* system, raising the age of marriage and education. Gradually, the Parsis emerged as the most westernised section of the Indian society.

### ■ Sikh Reform Movements

The Sikh community could not remain untouched by the rising tide of rationalist and progressive ideas of the nineteenth century.

The **Singh Sabha Movement** was founded at Amritsar in 1873 with a two-fold objective—(i) to make available modern western education to the Sikhs, and (ii) to counter the proselytising activities of Christian missionaries as well as the Brahmo Samajists, Arya Samajists and Muslim maulvis. For the first objective, a network of Khalsa schools was established by the Sabha throughout Punjab. In the second direction, everything that went against the Gurus’ teachings was rejected, and rites and customs considered to be consistent with Sikh doctrine were sought to be established.

The **Akali movement** (also known as Gurudwara Reform Movement) was an offshoot of the Singh Sabha Movement. It aimed at liberating the Sikh gurudwaras from the control

of corrupt Udasi mahants (the post having become hereditary). These mahants were a loyalist and reactionary lot, enjoying government patronage. The government tried its repressive policies against the non-violent non-cooperation satyagraha launched by the Akalis in 1921, but had to bow before popular demands; it passed the Sikh Gurudwaras Act in 1922 (amended in 1925) which gave the control of gurudwaras to the Sikh masses to be administered through Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) as the apex body.

The Akali Movement was a regional movement but not a communal one. The Akali leaders played a notable role in the national liberation struggle though some dissenting voices were heard occasionally.

### ■ The Theosophical Movement

A group of westerners led by Madame H.P. Blavatsky (1831-1891) and Colonel M.S. Olcott, who were inspired by Indian thought and culture, founded the Theosophical Society in New York City, United States in 1875. In 1882, they shifted their headquarters to Adyar, on the outskirts of Madras (at that time) in India. The society believed that a special relationship could be established between a person's soul and God by contemplation, prayer, revelation, etc. It accepted the Hindu beliefs in reincarnation and *karma*, and drew inspiration from the philosophy of the *Upanishads* and *samkhya*, *yoga* and Vedanta schools of thought. It aimed to work for universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour. The society also sought to investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man. The Theosophical Movement came to be allied with the Hindu renaissance. It opposed child marriage and advocated the abolition of caste discrimination, uplift of outcastes, improvement in the condition of widows.

In India, the movement became somewhat popular with the election of Annie Besant (1847-1933) as its president after the death of Olcott in 1907. Annie Besant had come

to India in 1893. She laid the foundation of the Central Hindu College in Benaras in 1898 where both Hindu religion and Western scientific subjects were taught. The college became the nucleus for the formation of Benaras Hindu University in 1916. Annie Besant also did much for the cause of the education of women.

The Theosophical Society provided a common denominator for the various sects and fulfilled the urge of educated Hindus. However, to an average Indian the Theosophist philosophy seemed to be vague and lacking a positive programme; to that extent its impact was limited to a small segment of the westernised class. As religious revivalists, the Theosophists did not attain much success, but as a movement of westerners glorifying Indian religious and philosophical traditions, it gave much needed self-respect to the Indians fighting British colonial rule. Viewed from another angle, the Theosophists also had the effect of giving a false sense of pride to the Indians in their outdated and sometimes backward-looking traditions and philosophy.

## Significance of Reform Movements

### ■ Positive Aspects

The orthodox sections of society could not accept the scientific ideological onslaught of the socio-religious rebels. As a result of this, the reformers were subjected to abuse, persecution, issuing of *fatwas* and even assassination attempts by the reactionaries.

However, in spite of opposition, these movements managed to contribute towards the liberation of the individual from the conformity born out of fear and from uncritical submission to exploitation by the priests and other classes. The translation of religious texts into vernacular languages, emphasis on an individual's right to interpret the scriptures

and simplification of rituals made worship a more personal experience.

The movements emphasised the human intellect's capacity to think and reason.

By weeding out corrupt elements, religious beliefs and practices, the reformers enabled their followers to meet the official taunt that their religions and society were decadent and inferior.

The reform movements gave the rising middle classes the much needed cultural roots to cling to, and served the purpose of reducing the sense of humiliation which the conquest by a foreign power had produced.

A realisation of the special needs of modern times, especially in terms of scientific knowledge, and thus promoting a modern, this-worldly, secular and rational outlook was a major contribution of these reform movements. Socially, this attitude reflected in a basic change in the notions of 'pollution and purity'. Although traditional values and customs were a prominent target of attack from the reformers, yet the reformers aimed at modernisation rather than outright westernisation based on blind imitation of alien Western cultural values. In fact, the reform movements sought to create a favourable social climate for modernisation. To that extent, these movements ended India's cultural and intellectual isolation from the rest of the world. The reformers argued that modern ideas and culture could be best imbibed by integrating them into Indian cultural streams.

The underlying concern of these reformist efforts was revival of the native cultural personality which had got distorted by various factors over the years. This cultural ideological struggle was to prove to be an important instrument in the evolution of national consciousness and a part of Indian national resolve to resist colonial cultural and ideological hegemony. However, not all these progressive, nationalist tendencies were able to outgrow the sectarian and obscurantist

outlook. This was possibly due to the divergent duality of cultural and political struggles, resulting in cultural backwardness despite political advancement.

### ■ Negative Aspects

One of the major limitations of the religious reform movements was that they had a narrow social base, namely the educated and urban middle classes, while the needs of the vast masses of peasantry and the urban poor were ignored.

The tendency of reformers to appeal to the greatness of the past and to rely on scriptural authority encouraged mysticism in new garbs and fostered pseudo-scientific thinking while exercising a check on the full acceptance of the need for a modern scientific outlook. But, above all, these tendencies contributed, at least to some extent, in compartmentalising Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Parsis, as also alienating high caste Hindus from low caste Hindus.

The emphasis on religious and philosophical aspects of the cultural heritage got somewhat magnified by an insufficient emphasis on other aspects of culture—art, architecture, literature, music, science and technology. To make matters worse, the Hindu reformers confined their praise of the Indian past to its ancient period and looked upon the medieval period of Indian history essentially as an era of decadence. This tended to create a notion of two separate peoples, on the one hand; on the other, an uncritical praise of the past was not acceptable to the low caste sections of society which had suffered under religiously sanctioned exploitation during the ancient period. Moreover, the past itself tended to be placed into compartments on a partisan basis. Many in the Muslim middle classes went to the extent of turning to the history of West Asia for their traditions and moments of pride.

The process of evolution of a composite culture which was evident throughout Indian history showed signs of being arrested with the rise of another form of consciousness—

communal consciousness—along with national consciousness among the middle classes.

Many other factors were certainly responsible for the birth of communalism in modern times, but undoubtedly the nature of religious reform movements also contributed to it.

On the whole, however, whatever the net outcome of these reform movements, it was out of this struggle that a new society evolved in India.

### Summary

#### ● Reform Movements: Among Hindus

##### **Bengal**

Raja Rammohan Roy and Brahmo Samaj  
Debendranath Tagore and Tattvabodhini Sabha  
Keshub Chandra Sen and Brahmo Samaj of India  
Prarthana Samaj  
Derozio and Young Bengal Movement  
Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

##### **Western India**

Bal Shastri Jambekar  
Students' Literary and Scientific Societies  
Paramhansa Mandalis  
Jyotiba Phule and Satyashodhak Samaj  
Gopalhari Deshmukh 'Lokahitawadi'  
Gopal Ganesh Agarkar  
Servants of India Society

##### **Southern India**

Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Movement  
Vokkaliga Sangha  
Justice Movement  
Self-respect Movement  
Temple Entry Movement

##### **All India**

Ramakrishna Movement and Vivekananda  
Dayananda Saraswati and Arya Samaj  
Theosophical Movement

**● Among Muslims**

Wahabi/Waliullah Movement  
Ahmadiyya Movement  
Syed Ahmed Khan and Aligarh Movement  
Deoband Movement

**● Among Parsis**

Rahnumai Mazdayasnan Sabha

**● Among Sikhs**

Singh Sabha Movement  
Akali Movement

**● Positive Aspects**

Liberation of individual from conformity out of fear psychosis.  
Worship made a more personal affair  
Cultural roots to the middle classes—thus mitigating the sense of humiliation; much needed self-respect gained  
Fostered secular outlook  
Encouraged social climate for modernisation  
Ended India's cultural, intellectual isolation from rest of the world  
Evolution of national consciousness

**● Negative Aspects**

Narrow social base  
Indirectly encouraged mysticism  
Overemphasis on religious, philosophical aspects of culture while underemphasising secular and moral aspects  
Hindus confined their praise to ancient Indian history and Muslims to medieval history—created a notion of two separate peoples and increased communal consciousness  
Historical process of evolution of composite culture arrested to some extent