



SOCIAL MOVEMENTS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT- *The nature, ethos and the ideologies of the different reform movements in India can be broadly classified into the following: Reform from within the society - This type of movement is based on the ideas of creating awareness in the society or reviving the indigenous instinct of the people. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar were two great reformers in this category.*

Reform through legislation - This approach advocated that reforms cannot be effective until supported by the states. The advocates of this approach were Keshub Chandra Sen in Bengal, M.G. Ranade in Maharashtra and Viresalingam in Andhra Pradesh.

Reform through symbol of change - This movement was based on the non-conformist individual activity. The chief propounder of this approach was Henry Louis Vivian Derozio.

He formed Young ¹'Bengal Movement' which represented a radical stream within the reform movement. Reform through social work - The chief advocates of this approach were Swami

Vivekananda (Ramakrishna Mission) and Mahadev Govind Ranade (Prarthana Samaj²).

The nineteenth century witnessed a new vision also called Renaissance. The impact of British rule, religious superstition, prevailing social conditions, caste factor, rise of nationalism and democracy led to reforms. There was sociological and ideological base for the reforms. The social base was basically due to emergence of middle class and western educational intellectual - through renaissance, reformation and enlightenment. The ideological base was provided by the feelings of nationalism, universalism, humanism and secularism. Authority in religion was given up and truth in religion was searched. Universal theism of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and social reform movements played important roles.

Social equality and equal worth of individuals, which were humanistic and idealist, had major impact in shaping the social movements in India³.

Broadly social reform had a two-point agenda - (a) Improving status of women in society and (b) Removing caste inequalities.

1. Improving status of women in society:

(a) Abolition of Sati - With the efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Sati was abolished in 1829 in Bengal Presidency.

(b) Female Infanticide - Prevalent among upper class Bengalis and Rajputs. Bengal Regularization 1795, 1804 declared infanticide was equivalent to murder and 1870 Act made the

Kenneth W.Jonas, Arya Dharam.T.Fisher Publishers, London,1996,p.23¹

Ibid,p.24²

Myron Weiner, *The Politics of Scarcity*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1962, p-38³

registration of birth compulsory.

(c) Widow Remarriage - Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1822-1891), Principal of Sanskrit College at Calcutta was instrumental in passing the Act of 1856 which facilitated widow remarriage. Vishnurajagiri Pandit founded Widow Remarriage Association in 1850.

2. Removing caste inequalities: The various factors that played a vital role in reducing caste rigidities are as follows:

(a) Creation of private property in land.

(b) New industries and opening of new economy.

(c) Equality before law.

(d) Judicial functions of caste panchayats taken away.

(e) Education and recruitment open to all.

(f) Social reform movements.

(g) National movement.

(h) Congress government made efforts for upliftment of the depressed like free education for Harijans.

(®) Gandhiji founded All India Harijan Sangh in 1932.

0) Government of India Act 1935.

(k) Jyotiba Phule and Dr Ambedkar who opened All India Schedule Caste Federation in 1942.

(.) Self-respect movement.

(m) New Constitution and Directive Principles.

Prarthana Samai was founded by K.C. Sen in Bombay.

The main aim of this school was to encourage female education. He was the principal of Sanskrit College, 1850 and opened it to admit non-Brahmins. He introduced western thoughts in Sanskrit College, and started a movement in support of widow remarriage. The eminent Bengali novelist as well as the composer of the famous national song *Bande Mataram*, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) aroused a new consciousness in the nineteenth century Bengali society⁴. In 1872, he started the publication of a monthly magazine under the title *Banga Darshan* from Behrampur. His novel was *Anand Math*. The Ramakrishna movement was started to propagate Bhakti yoga by Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1834-86). He taught salvation by renunciation, meditation and Bhakti. He said all gods are same, though names are different. Vivekananda (1862-1902), his disciple, founded Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 with its headquarters at Belur. His speech at Chicago in 1893 is world famous. He never gave any political message. He was considered as the spiritual father of the modern national movement. Subhash Chandra Bose regarded him as the founder of modern India who possessed the heart of Buddha and the intellect of Shankaracharya. Dayananda Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj in Bombay on 10 April 1875. For the cause of national liberation Swami Dayananda stressed on swadeshi, swadharma, swabhasha and swarajya. Annie Besant, the famous Theosophist regarded Dayananda as the first person, who gave the slogan of Indian nationhood, emphasizing the superiority of Indian culture. He gave the slogan *Back to Vedas* - revival of Vedic learning. He was against orthodoxy, caste, untouchability and polytheism.

Sukhdev Singh, *The Making of the Middle Classes in the Punjab*, ABS Publications, Jalandhar, 2008, p.52⁴

He started the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) school first at Lahore in 1886. Sri Narayana Guru Dharma Paripalana movement focused on the Ezhavas of Kerala in 1902. It focused on admission, appointment, and access to temple and political representations. Indian National Conference was founded by M.G. Ranade in 1887 at Madras. Theosophical movement started by Madam Blagalsky and Thomas Alcott was founded in 1875 at USA. In 1882, it shifted its headquarters to Adyar. Annie Besant became its president in 1907 after the death of Alcott. She came to India in 1893 and laid foundation of Central Hindu College in Banaras in 1898. It became Banaras Hindu University in 1916.

Many Indians realized that the reform of social institutions and religious outlook of people was a necessary pre-condition for the growth of national unity. Through successive movements they carried forward the pioneering work started by a few enlightened Indians. This was a difficult task as orthodox elements formed large and strong groups in the country. During the second half of nineteenth century only, two important laws were passed by the British government. One of these passed in 1872, sanctioning inter-caste and inter-communal marriages. The other was passed in 1891AD aimed at discouraging child marriage⁵.

India also witnessed several peasant movements. The history of peasant movements can be traced to colonial period when the economic policies, the new land revenue system, the colonial administrative and judicial system and the ruin of handicrafts leading to the overcrowding of land, transformed the agrarian structure and impoverished the peasantry. In the zamindari system, peasants were left to the mercy of the zamindars who exploited them in the form of illegal dues. The British government levied heavy land revenue in the Ryotwari areas. Peasants were forced to borrow money from the moneylenders and they were reduced to the status of tenants at will, share croppers landless labourers while their lands, crops and cattle passed into the hands of landlords, traders, moneylenders and such. When the peasants could take it no longer, they resisted against the oppression and exploitation through uprisings.

Peasant movements occupy an important place in the history of social unrest in India, though the aims and objectives of these movements differ in nature and degree from region to region. It is in this sense that these movements also aimed at the unification of the peasants of a region, development of leadership, ideology and a peasant elite. Through these movements emerged a new power structure and peasant alliance. The genesis of peasant movements rest in the relationship patterns of different social categories existing within the framework of the feudal and semi-feudal structure of our society: la the pettins denturerae, period, the nature and objectives of the peasant movement⁶.

The Indian society during the nineteenth century suffered from a number of social evils including the caste system, untouchability, illiteracy, *Sati*, child marriage, polygamy, superstitions, infanticides the human sacrifice. A number of social reform movements including the Brahmo sala), At samal. Ramakrishna Mission and Theosophical Society were

H.R. Mehta, *A History of Growth and Development of Western Education in the Punjab, (1846-84)*, Lahore: ⁵ Govt. Printing 1929, Pp. 8-9.

Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikh*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1963, p-18⁶

directed against these social evils. Reform Movements were started mainly to eradicate three major social evils.

1. The caste system and untouchability: It was the most inhuman and degrading social evil responsible for social disintegration and imbalances in Indian society. All the social reformers condemned it as an inhuman institution as it meant exploitation of lower caste people at the hands of so called higher caste people.
2. Deplorable condition of women: In the traditional Indian society, women were the worst sufferers. The 'Sati' and Purdah' system, child marriage, female infanticide, illiteracy, deplorable plight of widows (who were not allowed to remarry) and their subjugation to males, were the main features of oppression of women. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayanand and Annie Besant struggled to improve the deplorable conditions of women. Legislation for widow remarriage was a great achievement in this direction.
3. Child marriage: It was a big social evil, having a bad effect on the health of the married children. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshub Chandra Sen, Mahadev Ranade and Swami Dayanand made a special drive against this social evil. Due to their untiring efforts, the marriageable age of girls was raised to 10 years by law.

The Brahma Samaj

Raja Ram Mohan Roy is considered to be the father of modern Indian renaissance. He was born in an orthodox and well-to-do Brahmin family in a village in the Burdwan district of West Bengal in 1772, and died in 1833. Besides English and Bengali, Ram Mohan Roy acquired knowledge of Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. He also knew Hebrew, Latin and Greek. He made a deep study of Hindu and Muslim laws, literature and philosophy. He believed in the progressive reform of religion and a writer with a liberal outlook. Ram Mohan Roy did not believe in worshipping the images of god⁷.

The fourth phase in the Brahma Samaj emerged when some of the followers of Keshub Chandra

Sen left him and founded the Sadharan Brahma Samaj on 15 May 1873, Saliers of Kesho's Chandra, Started with three distinguished men as its leaders on 15 May 1876, 79 Sadhatanerahme Samal was. Umesh Chandra Datta. The new organization were Ananda Mchare

Following reasons: (a) the demand for the introduction of a new constitution was nor accepter. "b) There was disagreement on the question of adesha or Divine Command and (O) Keshub Ghandra Sen's daughter was married to the prince of Cooch Bihar, in violation of the Native Marriage Act of 1872.

The founders adopted a new Constitution based on universal adult franchise. The old organization went into oblivion. The new Samaj is active even today, with its branches all over the outal). it has followed the path of constitutionalism and radical reformism. Its program include the removal of the *purdah* system, introduction of widow remarriage, abolition of polygamy and early marriage and provision of higher education for women. It has attacked

Sarup Singh, *The Forgotten Panth*, Sikh Religious Political Party, Amritsar, 1945,p-36⁷

rigidities based on the caste system. Inter-caste relations, such as eating and drinking water, have been encouraged by the Samaj, Emphasis on monotheism continues to be its primary ideal.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy - Raja Ram Mohan Roy is the first great social and religious reformer of the nineteenth century. He symbolized, as it were, the nascent spirit of new India. Raja Ram Mohan Roy had to fight hard against the social and religious decadence and ignorance and superstition in India.

He struggled hard to modernize India both intellectually and spiritually. He gave a modern meaning and purpose to the ancient and medieval elements of Indian polity; he brought about a synthesis of the East and the West, which led to a cosmopolitan humanist culture. He was both oriental and occidental in his outlook. He is called the first oriental-occidentals in modern India. He tried to combine the best in Indian culture with the best in western culture. He was against idol worship and the ritualism due to which Hinduism had degenerated. He sought to put his ideas of reforming Hinduism into practice first through the Amiya Sabha and later the Brahmo Samaj. He advocated a synthesis of all religions. His work as a social reformer especially in the abolition of Sati and the upliftment of women is remarkable. He was also the first great Indian reformer to advocate a plan for breaking down the barriers of the caste system by introducing inter-caste marriage. While he welcomed western education and scientific outlook, he was no less a patriot. He was an ardent advocate of liberty and freedom of the press⁸.

Indeed, very aptly has Miss Collets written, whatever future the destinies may have in store for India that future will be largely shaped by the life and work of Ram Mohan Roy⁹. He is the first thinker of modern India who urged social and religious reforms on rational principles. He stands in history as the living bridge between India's past and her bright future. His pace as the first builder of a new and nascent India is indisputable. He headed the intellectual movement generally known as the Indian Renaissance or the re-establishment of the glory of ancient Indian culture. When he came on the stage of Indian history, ancient Indian values had been replaced by formalism in religious and social life of the people. Religion had assumed the shape of either extreme asceticism or excessive ritualism with no urge to life or inspiration in it and no positive criterion of truth. It was perhaps the darkest age in the modern Indian history, an age in which an old society and polity had crumbled and no new one had yet been built in its place'. India then needed religion with a wholesome basis and practicability.

Ram Mohan Roy was deeply influenced by the religious life of his parents during the early stages of his life. His education in Bengali, Sanskrit, Persian and Muslim religious beliefs equipped him with first-hand knowledge of Hinduism and Islam. At Patna, he studied western philosophy and literature. As a result of his wide study of the Hindu scriptures, Ram Mohan understood the spirit of Hindu religion and philosophy. When he was hardly 15, he wrote a pamphlet in Bengali in which he denounced idol worship. The result was that he was turned

Teja Singh, *Essays in Sikhism*, Sikh University Press, Lahore, 1944,p-45⁸

Ibid,p.46⁹

out from his family and he had to live in exile. From 1805 to 1814 he was in the service of the East India Company after which he settled in Calcutta¹⁰.

Ram Mohan Roy wanted the Brahmo Samaj to be a tolerant body, devoted to the promotion of piety, virtue and benevolence, and the strengthening of the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds. Its governing idea was to strengthen the social solidarity of the current religions of the day. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was essentially and fundamentally a social and religious reformer. Ram Mohan Roy was moved by the considerations of humanity in solving social problems. He condemned the division of Hindu society into castes and sub-castes. He was the first great Indian reformer to advocate a plan for breaking down the barriers of the caste system by introducing inter-caste marriages, and he cited authorities from the Hindu scriptures in support of his view. He justified widow remarriage, inter-caste marriages and inter-racial marriages on the basis of the Satya tradition.

The second great reform with which the name of Ram Mohan Roy will always remain associated is the abolition of the cruel and barbarous practice of Sati, which means the burning of a widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband. This inhuman custom had prevailed in the country for many centuries; and the few fitful attempts made to abolish it before the advent of the British regime had ended in failure. In 1811, his brother Jag Mohan Roy died and his widow was forcibly burnt alive. The Arya Samaj, the Brahmo Samaj, and other religious reform movements of the Hindus had for their aim a consolidation of the Hindu society on a reconstructed, rational basis. Their leaders strove in the direction of the democratization of the Hindu social system. They stood against gross social injustices from which the depressed Hindus were suffering and generally preached their abolition in the very name of the Hindu Shastras by reinterpreting them.

The non-religious social reform movements condemned untouchability and other social injustices in the name of individual liberty and equality of human rights without trying to secure.

Even those Hindus who, like Savarkar, stood for the Hindu Raj advocated the elevation of the status of the depressed classes. This was due to the fact that they felt alarmed at the numerical loss which the Hindu community had been experiencing due to the steady conversion of the untouchables to Islam and Christianity, which guaranteed them more social equality¹¹.

Thus, a movement to elevate the depressed classes, to improve their miserable economic conditions, to spread education among them, to extend to them the freedom to use public wells, schools, and roads, and to enter public temples, also to secure for them special political representation, steadily grew in the country and gathered momentum. The Mahad Satyagraha for the right of water led by Dr Ambedkar was one of the outstanding struggles of the untouchables to win equal social rights. It was a slow process however. The depressed classes formed the most poverty stricken strata of the Indian society. Literacy among them was also on a very low level.

Lal Singh, *Punjabi Suba Convention of Sikh Intelligentsia*, Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee, Delhi, 1961, p.50

J. Arnold Toybee, *A Study of History*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1957, p-77¹¹

The All-India Harijan Sevak Sangh founded by Gandhi in 1932, and other bodies, were doing extensive work of social reform and educational character for the depressed classes. The Harijan Sevak Sangh started numerous schools for the Harijans including residential vocational schools. In addition, scavengers' union cooperative credit societies, and housing societies, were formed. The Congress governments, which functioned for a few years in various provinces, from the year 1937, did useful work for the elevation of the depressed classes. The Congress government of Bombay passed the Bombay Harijan Temple Worship (removal of Disabilities) Act permitting the trustees, if they wished, to admit the Harijans to the temples, even if the current custom or the instrument of trust debarted them. Free education for the Harijans, from the primary class to the university level, was introduced in their provinces by the Central Provinces and Bihar Congress governments. In other Cronsress-soverned provinces, similar facilities were arranged. A number of Satyagraha movements of the Harians also took place wherein they disobeyed the ban on their temple entry and strove to enter dentemples. Those movements, reinforced by growing popular sympathy for their democraf dellands, secured for the untouchables the right to temple entry in a number of places. The rulers of states like Travancore, Indore, Aundh and Devas themselves took the initiative in opening all stale temples by proclamation.