

## Social and Religion Reforms

Dharma Sabha was formed in 1829 in Calcutta . The organization was established mainly to counter the ongoing social reform movements led by protagonists such as Raja Ram Mohun Roy and Henry Derozio. More specifically, the impetus of forming the organization came from a new law enacted by the colonial British rule which banned the practice of sati in the country; the focus of the new association was to repel the law which was seen as an intrusion by the British into the religious affairs of the indigenous people by some sections of the Hindu community. This Sabha again resisted the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act, 1856, passed by British India under pressure from Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar.

The organization soon morphed into a 'society in defense of Hindu way of life or culture'.

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

### **Satyashodhaksamaj**

Satyashodhaksamaj was founded with a purpose to give education to the lower casts. Scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and made them aware of the exploiting tradition of the society. It was founded by JyotiraoPhule in 1873 in Pune. Like every other society this society also imposed a ban on the admission of the high-class people, aristocrats, bureaucracy, and Brahmins. This society only admits in it the members of Shudra Samaj or the people of the lower caste. Upper caste members can only become members of the society by analyzing its actions and habit.

Through his writing and work, Jyotirao advocated against caste system and the illogical and orthodox status of Brahmin in it also wrote against the inequality in the religious books, orthodox nature of religion and its exploitation nature, blind and misleading rituals, and the misogynistic beliefs prevalent in the Hindu religion. JyotiraoPhule established the Satyashodhaksamaj by keeping certain thoughts and ideas in mind like ideals of human well-being, happiness, unity, equality, and easy religious principles and rituals. Phule had also started a newspaper: *Deena Bandhu*, provided the voice for the views of the Samaj.

The society attacked the Brahmins who considered themselves as the messenger of God and considered them as the medium of contact, between people and god and hence opposed the bureaucracy of Brahmins in their times. They rejected the Upanishads and Vedic culture and also rejected to respect the Aryan society; according to them, Aryan smaj is concentrated on destroying the non-Aryan samaj.

The movement was not stopped and kept alive after Phule's death by early Maratha ruler of Kolhapur princely state, ShahuMaharaj. Later followed by BhauraoPatil and Maratha leaders such as KeshavraoJedhe, Nana Patil, KhanderaoBagal and Madhavrao Bagal.

### **Wahabi/Walliullah Movement:**

- Shah Waliullah (1702-62) inspired this essentially revivalist response to western influences and the degeneration which had set in among Indian Muslims.

- He was the first Indian Muslim leader of the 18th century to organize Muslims around the two-fold ideals of this movement:
  1. 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)
  2. Recognition of the role of individual conscience in religion where conflicting interpretations were derived from the Quran and the Hadis.
- . The movement fizzled out in the face of British military might in the 1870s.

### **Namdhari or Kuka Movement**

**Namdhari** also called **Kuka**, an austere sect within Sikhism, a religion of India. The Namdhari movement was founded by Balak Singh (1797–1862), who did not believe in any religious ritual other than the repetition of God's name (or *nam*, for which reason members of the sect are called Namdharis). His successor, Ram Singh (1816–85), introduced the sect's distinctive style of wearing the turban (bound straight across the forehead rather than at an angle), of dressing only in clothing made from white handwoven cloth, and of frenzied chanting of hymns culminating in shrieks (*kuks*; hence the name Kuka). Under Ram Singh's leadership, the Namdharis sought a resurgence of Sikh rule in the Punjab. In January 1872, British police apprehended and executed by cannon about 65 Namdharis. Ram Singh was exiled to Rangoon, Burma (now Yangon, Myan.). Namdharis stress their identity as members of the Khalsa (the order of initiated Sikhs) but differ from the mainstream Sikh community in their equal regard for the AdiGranth ("First Volume"), the sacred scripture of Sikhism, and the DasamGranth ("Tenth Book"), a work compiled by the followers of the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh. They are also distinguished by their belief that the lineage of the living Gurus continued after Gobind Singh. The Namdharis maintain their own *gurdwaras* (houses of worship) and practice strict vegetarianism. They do not marry outside the sect, and they use fire in their marriage rituals.

### **Ram Mohan Roy: father of Indian Renaissance**

1. Title of Raja was given to him by Mughal Emperor Akbar – II.
  2. Established Brahma Samaj [initially the Atmiya Sabha] in 1828 to purify Hinduism and preach monotheism.
  3. He was called the first modern man of India. He was the pioneer of socio religious reforms.
  4. His Biggest Achievement - He helped Bentinck outlaw sati. He preached against female infanticide. He wanted equal rights for women and female education.
  5. **His second most important contribution** - He promoted western sciences and English education.
- 
1. Roy 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.
  2. 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.
  3. He stood for cooperation of thought and activity and brotherhood among nations. His understanding of the international character of the principles of liberty, equality and justice indicated that he well understood the significance of the modern age.

## **Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar**

- The great scholar and reformer, Vidyasagar's ideas were a happy blend of Indian and western thought.
- 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.
- 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 was one of the pioneers of higher education for women in India.

## **BalShastriJambekar**

- He attacked brahminical orthodoxy and tried to reform popular Hinduism
- He started the weekly Darpan in 1832, Students' Literary and Scientific Societies also called the GyanPrasarakMandalis.
- They had two branches — Marathi and Gujarati—and were formed by some educated young men in 1848.
- These Mandalis organized lectures on popular sciences and social questions. One of their aims was to start schools for girls.

## **Paramhansa Mandalis**

- The founders of these Mandalis believed in one God.
- They 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.

## **Social service league**

Narayan Malhar Joshi, a leading member of the Servants of India Society, founded the Social Service League in 1911. The objective of the movement was “to collect and study social facts and discuss social problems with a view to forming public opinion on questions of social service” and to secure for the masses a better quality of life and work. The League opened a number of day and night schools, libraries, dispensaries and started boys’ clubs and scouts corps.

## **Ramakrishna Paramhansa**

One of the most prominent religious figures of India during the nineteenth century, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa was a mystic and a yogi who translated complex spiritual concepts into lucid and easily intelligible manner. Born in a simple Bengali rural family in 1836, Ramakrishna was as simple yogi. He pursued the Divine throughout his life in various forms and believed in divine embodiment of the Supreme Being in every individual. Sometimes believed to be the modern day reincarnation of Lord Vishnu, Ramakrishna was the embodiment of spiritual salvation to troubled souls from all walks of life. He was a key figure in revival of Hinduism in Bengal at a time when intense spiritual crisis was gripping the province leading to predominance of young Bengalis embracing Brahmoism and Christianity. His legacy did not end with his death in 1886; his most prominent disciple Swami Vivekananda carried on his teachings and philosophy to the world through Ramakrishna Mission. In essence, his teachings were as traditional as ancient sages and seer, yet he remains contemporary throughout the ages.

## Swami Vivekananda

- Birth: He was born as Narendranath Datta on 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1863.
    - National Youth Day is held every year to observe the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.
    - In 1893, upon the request of Maharaja Ajit Singh of the Khetri State, he took the name 'Vivekananda.'
  - Contributions:
    - Introduced the world to the Indian philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga.
      - He preached 'neo-Vedanta', an interpretation of Hinduism through a Western lens, and believed in combining spirituality with material progress.
    - Laid the greatest emphasis on education for the regeneration of our motherland. Advocated a man-making character-building education.
    - Best known for his speech at the World Parliament of Religion in Chicago in 1893.
    - Spelt out the four pathways of attaining moksha from the worldly pleasure and attachment in his books - Raja-yoga, Karma-yoga, Jnana-yoga and Bhakti-yoga.
    - Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose had called Vivekananda the "maker of modern India."
  - Associated Organisations:
    - He was the chief disciple of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century mystic Ramakrishna Paramhansa and established the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897.
      - Ramakrishna Mission is an organization which works in the area of value-based education, culture, health, women's empowerment, youth and tribal welfare and relief and rehabilitation.
    - In 1899, he established the Belur Math, which became his permanent abode.
- Death: He died at Belur Math in 1902. Belur Math, located in West Bengal, is the headquarters of Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission.

## Reform Movements in Southern India

The Reform Movements in Southern India draws inspiration from the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj and other northern reforms movements. Chembeti Sridharalu Naidu, Narayan Guru, Kandukuri Veeresalingam were the most prominent leader of the Reform Movements in Southern India.

By drawing inspiration from the **Brahmo Samaj**, the *Veda Samaj* was established in Madras in 1864. It advocated discarding of caste distinctions and promotion of widow remarriage and girl education. Like the Brahmo Samaj, the Veda Samaj also condemned superstitions and rituals of orthodox Hinduism and propagated belief in one supreme God. *Chembeti Sridharalu Naidu* was the most prominent leader of the Veda Samaj. He translated books of the Brahmo Samaj in Tamil and Telugu. Later, the Brahmo Samaj of South India and its branches were established in some cities of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra. Soon after, branches of the Prarthana Samaj were also opened and the two Samajs worked together for promoting religious and social reforms.

An outstanding leader of the reform movements in southern India was Kandukuri Veeresalingam. He was born in 1848 in an orthodox Brahmin family in Andhra. He was influenced by the ideas of

the Brahmo Samaj, particularly those of Keshab Chandra Sen and dedicated himself to the cause of social reforms. In 1876, he started a Telugu journal which was almost exclusively devoted to social reforms. His greatest contribution was to the cause of emancipation of women. This included promoting girl education and widow remarriages.

Many reformers in southern India concerned themselves with the reform in certain practices connected with Hindu temples. They advocated ending of the system of *Devadasis* who were attached to the temples. They also demanded that the wealth of the temples should not be amassed by the priests but that the public should exercise control over it. In many temples, people of the so-called lower castes were not allowed to enter and sometimes even some roads adjoining the temples were barred to them. The reformers launched powerful movements for temple-entry and against other evil practices which had become associated with temples. Many reformers in southern India concerned themselves with the reform in certain practices connected with Hindu temples. They advocated ending of the system of *Devadasis* who were attached to the temples. They also demanded that the wealth of the temples should not be amassed by the priests but that the public should exercise control over it. In many temples, people of the so-called lower castes were not allowed to enter and sometimes even some roads adjoining the temples were barred to them. The reformers launched powerful movements for temple-entry and against other evil practices which had become associated with temples.

### **Social and Religion Reforms**

The process of reawakening, sometimes, but not always follow the intended as the 'Renaissance', did not always follow the intended line and gave rise to some undesirable by-products as well, which have become as much a part daily existence in the whole of the Indian subcontinent as have the fruits of these reform movements.

Basically, there were two kinds of reform movements in the 19th century in India:

1. **Reformist**

These movements responded with the time and scientific temper of the modern era.

2. **Revivalist**

### **Religion as a tool to Reform**

The religious reform was a pre requisite for social reforms as social life of both Hindus and Muslims were influenced by religious tenets. Hinduism was dominated by superstitions and priests. Idolatry, animal sacrifice, physical torture was common to appease god. Social life too was depressing. Sati, female infanticide, child marriage and social boycott of widows were common. Caste system had created divisions in the society making it difficult to support a united mass movement. Untouchability was prevalent too.

Reformists sought to create a climate of modernization. They used faith to challenge such practices. They referred to the period of past where no such practices existed but they used it as only an aid and an instrument. Thus they wanted to prove that no practice like sati, child marriage etc. were sanctioned by religion.

### **Factors Which Gave Rise to Reform Movements in India**

## **1. Social Base**

## **2. Ideological Base**

The dawn of the nineteenth century witnessed the birth of a new vision—a modern vision among some enlightened sections of the Indian society. This enlightened vision was to shape the course of events for decades to come and even beyond.

This process of reawakening, sometimes, but not with full justification, defined as the 'Renaissance', did not always follow the intended line and gave rise to some undesirable by-products as well, which have become as much a part of daily existence in the whole of the Indian subcontinent as have the fruits of these reform movements.

### **1. Social Base:**

The social base of this quest was the newly emerging middle class and traditionally as well as western- educated intellectuals, but there was a significant contrast between the broadly bourgeois ideals derived from a. growing awareness of contemporary developments in the West, and a predominantly non-bourgeois social base.

The nineteenth century intelligentsia searched for its model in the European 'middle class', which, as it learnt through western education, had brought about the great transformation in the West from medieval to modern times through movements like the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment and democratic revolution or reform.

Yet its own social roots lay not in industry or trade, increasingly controlled by British managing agency firms and their Marwari subordinates, but in government service or the professions of law, education, journalism or medicine—with which was very often combined some connection with land in the shape of the intermediate tenures.

### **2. Ideological Base:**

The important intellectual criteria which gave these reform movements an ideological unity were rationalism, religious universalism and humanism. Social relevance was judged by a rationalist critique. Raja Ram Mohan Roy upheld the principle of causality linking the whole phenomenal universe and demonstrability as the sole criterion of truth.

Akshay Kumar Dutt, while proclaiming that "rationalism is our only preceptor", held that all natural and social phenomena could be analyzed and understood by purely mechanical processes.

This perspective enabled them to adopt a rational approach to tradition and evaluate the contemporary socio-religious practices from the standpoint of social utility and to replace faith with rationality.

For instance, in the Brahmo Samaj the repudiation of the infallibility of the Vedas was the result, while the Aligarh movement emphasized reconciliation of Islamic teachings with the needs of the modern age. Syed Ahmed Khan went to the extent of emphasizing that religious tenets were not immutable.



Many of the intellectuals abandoned, though in varying degrees, the principle of authority in religion and evaluated truth in any religion by the criteria of logic, reason or science. Swami Vivekananda held that the same method of investigation which applies to other sciences should form the basis on which religion is to justify itself.

- **Jagannath Shankar Seth and BhauDaji**

They are among the active promoters of girls' schools in Maharashtra. Vishnu Shastri Pandit founded the Widow Remarriage Association in the 1850s. Another prominent worker in this field was Karsondas Mulji who started the SatyaPrakash in Gujarati in 1852 to advocate widow remarriage.

### **Veeresalingam Pantulu**

Veeresalingam Pantulu was deeply influenced by reformists like Keshav Chandra Sen. He had enormous respect for the ideas and activities of 'Brahma Samaj'. Veeresalingam soon opened a girl's school at Dhavaleswaram as he genuinely felt the need for encouraging women's education. Next was a widow's home. He started the first theist high school, the Hithakarini School at Rajahmundry in 1908. In the same he donated his wealth and property to Rajahmundry Widow's home and school.

Since Pantulu's main focus was social reform so after quitting his job in 1876 he started a monthly magazine in Telegu called *Vivekavardhini*.

As soon as it gained popularity, Kandukuri Veeresalingam established a printing press at Rajahmundry itself. Through the publication, Veeresalingam raised voice against bribery, superstitious beliefs and child marriage which were prevalent in society then. The magazine also included several articles on empowering women. Apart from women related issues, he fearlessly exposed rampant corruption amongst government officials.

Another magazine called "*Satihitabobhini*" was launched which mainly wrote about the condition of women in Indian society. Veeresalingam focused on bringing about positive changes in Telugu society.

### **Campaign for widow remarriage and girl's education**

In 1878, the 'Rajahmundry Social Reform Association' was founded that emphasized on widow remarriage. People opposing widow remarriage failed to prove their point and resorted to physical violence against Veeresalingam. But, he did not relent. In fact he asked his followers to visit different parts of the Andhra Pradesh and find young men who were willing to tie the knot with widows. After tremendous efforts Veeresalingam was successful in arranging the first widow remarriage in 1881. During his lifetime he got forty widows remarried.

### **The Age of Consent Act-1891**

The Age of Consent Act, 1891, also known as Act X of 1891, was a legislation enacted in British India on 19 March 1891 which raised the age of consent for sexual intercourse for all girls,

married or unmarried, from ten to twelve years in all jurisdictions, its violation subject to criminal prosecution as rape. The act was an amendment of the Indian Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure, Section 375, 1882, and was introduced as a bill on 9 January 1891 by Sir Andrew Scoble in the Legislative Council of the Governor-General of India in Calcutta. It was debated the same day and opposed by council member Sir Romesh Chunder Mitter on the grounds that it interfered with orthodox Hindu code, but supported by council member Rao Bahadur Krishnaji Lakshman Nulkar and by the President of the council, the Governor-General and Viceroy Lord Lansdowne.

While an 1887 case in a Bombay high court of a child-bride Rukhmabai renewed discussion of such a law it was the death of an eleven-year-old Bengali girl Phulmoni Dasi due to forceful intercourse by her 35-year-old husband in 1889 that drove intervention by the British. The act was passed in 1891.

## **Sarda Act**

The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 was also known as Sarda Act. The act was passed on 28 September 1929. As per the act the age of marriage for girls was fixed at 14 years and for boys it was 18 years. Later through an amended it was changed to 18 for girls and 21 for boys. The name Sarda was derived from its sponsor Harbilas Sarda.

## **Bethune school**

Bethune set up his Hindu Female School, a secular native female school, in 1849. He did it with the support of such people as Dakshina Ranjan Mukherjee, Ramgopal Ghosh, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Madan Mohan Tarkalankar. The School was built first on a piece of land donated by Dakshina Ranjan at Mirzapur in Calcutta. It was renamed as Bethune School on 7 May 1849 which started functioning with twenty-one girls on its roll. Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar was the Secretary of the Managing Committee and also one of its chief patrons. Bethune donated all his movable and immovable property to the school. After the death of John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune on 12 August 1851, the school was shifted to a new building on the West of Cornwallis Square, where its foundation stone was laid on 6 November 1850. As soon as the school was established the orthodox society reacted sharply against the development. The school went through a rough time until it was amalgamated with Banga Mahila Vidyalaya, initially established as Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya by Annette Akroyd, and some Brahmo gentlemen, including Dwarkanath Ganguly. A number of bright students joined the institution – Kadambini Bose, Sarala Das, Abala Das, and Subarnaprabha Basu, all of whom were prominent figures later. Bethune School was an eye-opener for the Bengali upper middleclass and led to the opening of other such schools. In 1894, out of 138 students in Bethune School, 70 were Hindus, 55 Brahmos and 13 Christians. It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that prejudice against women's education had almost gone. Bethune set up his Hindu Female School, a secular native female school, in 1849. He did it with the support of such people as Dakshina Ranjan Mukherjee, Ramgopal Ghosh, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Madan Mohan Tarkalankar. The School was built first on a piece of land donated by Dakshina Ranjan at Mirzapur in Calcutta. It was renamed



as Bethune School on 7 May 1849 which started functioning with twenty-one girls on its roll. Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was the Secretary of the Managing Committee and also one of its chief patrons. Bethune donated all his movable and immovable property to the school. After the death of John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune on 12 August 1851, the school was shifted to a new building on the West of Cornwallis Square, where its foundation stone was laid on 6 November 1850. As soon as the school was established the orthodox society reacted sharply against the development. The school went through a rough time until it was amalgamated with Banga Mahila Vidyalaya, initially established as Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya by Annette Akroyd, and some Brahmo gentlemen, including Dwarkanath Ganguly. A number of bright students joined the institution – Kadambini Bose, Sarala Das, Abala Das, and Subarnaprabha Basu, all of whom were prominent figures later. Bethune School was an eye-opener for the Bengali upper middleclass and led to the opening of other such schools. In 1894, out of 138 students in Bethune School, 70 were Hindus, 55 Brahmos and 13 Christians. It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that prejudice against women's education had almost gone.

## Modernization

Blind adherence to western ideology wasn't practices but reform indigenous culture. Thus **modernization not westernization was the aim.**

### Abolition of Sati

- Influenced by the frontal attack launched by the enlightened Indian reformers led by Raja Rammohan Roy, the Government declared the practice of sad or the burning alive of widows illegal and punishable by criminal courts as culpable homicide.
- The regulation of 1829 was applicable in the first instance to Bengal Presidency alone, but was extended in slightly modified forms to Madras and Bombay Presidencies in 1830.

### Female Infanticide

- The practice of murdering female infants immediately after birth was common among upper class Bengalis and Rajputs who considered females to be an economic burden.
- But it was mainly due to the efforts of Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-91), the principal of Sanskrit College, Calcutta, that the Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act, 1856, which legalised marriage of widows and declared issues from such marriages as legitimate, was passed by the Government.
- Vidyasagar cited Vedic texts to prove that the Hindu religion sanctioned widow remarriage.
- Jagannath Shankar Seth and BhauDaji were among the active promoters of girls' schools in Maharashtra. Vishnu Shastri Pandit founded the Widow Remarriage Association in the 1850s. Another prominent worker in this field was Karsondas Mulji who started the Satya Prakash in Gujarati in 1852 to advocate widow remarriage.

### Child Marriage

- The Native Marriage Act (or Civil Marriage Act) signified the coming of legislative action in prohibiting child marriage in 1872. It had a limited impact as the Act was not applicable to Hindus, Muslims and other recognised faiths.
- The relentless efforts of a Parsi reformer, B.M. Malabari, were rewarded, by the enactment of the Age of Consent Act (1891) which forbade the marriage of girls below the age of 12.
- The Sarda Act (1930) further pushed up the marriage age to 18 and 14 for boys and girls respectively. In free India, the Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act, 1978 raised the age of marriage for girls from 15 to 18 years and for boys from 18 to 21.

### **Factors which Undermined Caste Rigidities under British rule**

- The pressure of British rule in India unleashed certain forces, sometimes through direct administrative measures and sometimes indirectly by creating favourable circumstances.
- . For instance, the creation of private property in land and free sale of land upset caste equations.
- A close interlink between caste and vocation could hardly continue in a state of destruction of village autarchy. Besides, modern commerce and industry gave birth to several economic avenues while growing urbanisation and modern means of transport added to the mobility of populations.
- The British administration introduced the concept of equality before law in a., uniformly applied system of law which dealt a severe blow to social and legal inequalities, while the judicial functions of caste panchayats were taken away.
- The administrative services were made open to all castes and the new education system was on totally secular lines.
- But the struggle against caste could not be successful during the British rule. The foreign government had its limitations—it could not afford to invite hostile reaction from the orthodox sections by taking up any radical measures. Also, no social uplift was possible without economic and political upliftment.
- All this could be realised only under the government of a free India.