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**Socio - Religious Reform Movements in the
19th and 20th CE India**

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India under East India Company's Rule

INTRODUCTION

- Indian Society in the 19th century was caught in a vicious web created by religious superstitions and dogmas. All religions in general and Hinduism, in particular, had become a compound of magic, animism, and superstitions. Social Conditions were equally depressing.
- The most distressing was the position of women. The introduction of western education and ideas had a far-reaching impact on Indian Society. Through the glasses of utility, reason, justice, and progress, a select group of individuals began to explore the nature of their own society.

Raja Rammohan Roy

- The central figure of this cultural awakening was Raja Rammohan Roy.
- Known as the “Father of the Indian Renaissance”, Rammohan Roy was a great Patriot, Scholar and Humanist.
- He was moved by a deep love for the country and worked throughout his life for the social, religious, intellectual and political regeneration of the Indians.

Social Reforms

- In 1814, Rammohan Roy settled in Calcutta and dedicated his life to the cause of social and religious reform. As a social reformer, Rammohan Roy fought relentlessly against social evils like Sati Pratha, Polygamy, Child Marriage, Female Infanticide and Caste Discrimination.

- He organised a movement against the inhuman custom of Sati and helped William Bentinck to pass a law banning the practice in 1829. It was the first successful social movement against an age-old social evil.
- Rammohan Roy was one of the earliest propagators of modern Western education. He looked upon it as a major instrument for the spread of modern ideas in the country.
- He was associated with the foundation of the Hindu College in Calcutta (which later came to be known as the Presidency College). He also maintained an English school in Calcutta at his own Cost.

Journalism

- Rammohan Roy was a pioneer of Indian journalism. He, himself, published journals in Bengali, Persian, Hindi and English to educate the public on various current issues. Samvad Kaumudi was the most important journal brought out by him.
- Rammohan Roy was a firm believer in internationalism. He held that the suffering and happiness of one nation should affect the rest of the world. He celebrated the success of the revolution in Spain in 1823 by hosting a public dinner.

Religious Reforms

- Rammohan Roy struggled persistently against social evils. He argued that ancient Hindu texts, the Vedas and the Upanishads, upheld the doctrine of monotheism. To prove his point, he translated the Vedas and five Upanishads into Bengali. In 1829 Rammohan Roy founded a new religious society known as the Atmiya Sabha which later on came to be known as the Brahmo Samaj.
- This religious society was based on the twin pillars of rationalism and the philosophy of the Vedas. The Brahmo Samaj emphasised human dignity, criticised idolatry and denounced social evils like Sati Pratha. The poet

Rabindranath Tagore has rightly remarked: “Rammohan was the only person in his time, in the whole world of men, to realise completely the significance of the Modern Age.”

Henry Vivian Derozio and the young Bengal movement

- The establishment of the Hindu College in 1817 was a major event in the history of Bengal. It played an important role in carrying forward the reformist movement that had already emerged in the province.
- A radical movement for the reform of Hindu Society, known as the Young Bengal Movement, started in the college.
- Its leader was Henry Vivian Derozio, a teacher of the Hindu College. Derozio was born in 1809. He was of mixed parentage; his father was Portuguese and his mother was an Indian.
- In 1826, at the age of 17, he joined the Hindu College as a teacher and taught there till 1831.
- Derozio was deeply influenced by the revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. He was a brilliant teacher and within a short period, he drew around him a group of intelligent boys in the college.
- Derozio was a poet, teacher, reformer and fiery journalist. He was perhaps the first nationalist poet of modern India. He was removed from the Hindu College because of his radicalism and died soon after at the age of 22.

Debendranath Tagore

- Debendranath Tagore, the father of Rabindranath Tagore, was responsible for revitalising the Brahma Samaj.

- Under him, the first step was taken to convert the Brahmo Samaj into a separate religious and social community. He represented the best in traditional Indian learning and the new thought of the West.
- In 1839, he founded the Tattvabodhini Sabha to propagate Rammohan Roy's ideas. He promoted a magazine to do a systematic study of India's past in the Bengali language.
- The Samaj, actively supported by Debendranath Tagore, supported the movements for widow remarriage, the abolition of polygamy, women's education and the improvement in the condition of the peasantry.

Keshab Chandra Sen

- Keshab Chandra Sen carried out an intensive programme of social reform.
- He set up schools, organised famine relief and propagated widow remarriage.
- In 1872 the Government passed the Native (Civil) Marriages Act legalising marriages performed according to Brahmo Samaj rites.

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar

- Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, a towering personality of the mid-nineteenth century, was born in a poor Brahmin family of Bengal in 1820. He was a renowned Sanskrit scholar and became the Principal of the Sanskrit College in 1851. The Sanskrit College conferred on him the title of 'Vidyasagar' because of his profound knowledge of Sanskrit.
- Vidyasagar was a staunch supporter of women's education and helped Drinkwater Bethune to establish the Bethune School, the first Indian school for girls, in 1849. As Inspector of Schools, Vidyasagar opened several schools for girls in the districts under his charge.

- Vidyasagar's greatest contribution lies in the improvement of the condition of widows. Despite opposition, Vidyasagar openly advocated widow remarriage.
- Soon a powerful movement in favour of widow remarriage was started. At last, after a prolonged struggle, the Widow Remarriage Act was passed in 1856.
- Through his efforts, twenty-five widow remarriages took place. He also spoke vehemently against child marriage and polygamy. He wrote a Bengali primer, 'Varna Parichay', which is used even today. Through his writings, Vidyasagar made the people aware of the social problems and thus helped the growth of nationalism in India.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa

- He was one of the greatest saints of modern India.
- Ramakrishna was born in a poor Brahmin family of Bengal. He showed a religious bent of mind from his childhood. He had no formal education but his discourses were full of wisdom.
- He believed that the service to man is service to God, for man was the embodiment of God on earth. As the man was the creation of God, man-made divisions made no sense to him.
- Ramakrishna Paramahansa was a great teacher who could express complicated philosophical ideas in a simple language for everyone to understand. He believed that religious salvation could be attained through renunciation, meditation and devotion.

Swami Vivekananda

- Narendra Nath Dutta, better known as Swami Vivekananda, was the most illustrious disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He was born in Calcutta in January

1863. He graduated from the Scottish Church College and was well-versed in Western philosophy. Vivekananda proclaimed the essential oneness of all religions.

- He condemned the caste system, religious rituals, ceremonies and superstitions. His brilliant speech on Hindu philosophy was well received. American newspapers described him as an 'Orator by Divine Right'. He delivered a series of lectures in the U.S.A., England and several other countries of Europe.

The Ramakrishna Mission

- In 1896, Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission to propagate social welfare. It laid emphasis not on personal salvation but based on social good and social service. The Ramakrishna Mission stood for religious and social reform based on the ancient culture of India. Emphasis was put on the essential spirit of Hinduism and not on rituals.
- Rendering social service was the primary aim of the Ramakrishna Mission. It believed that serving a human being was the same as worshipping God. The Mission opened a chain of schools, hospitals, orphanages and libraries throughout the country. It provided relief during famines, earthquakes and epidemics. A Matth or monastery was established in Belur near Calcutta. The Belur Math took care of the religious developments of the people.

Dayanand Saraswati and the Arya Samaj

- In 1863 Swami Dayanand started preaching his doctrine of one God. He questioned the meaningless rituals, decried polytheism and image worship

and denounced the caste system. He wanted to purify Hinduism and attacked the evils that had crept into Hindu society.

- Dayanand Saraswati believed that the Vedas contained the knowledge imparted to men by God, and hence its study alone could solve all social problems. So he propagated the motto “Back to the Vedas.” Asserting that the Vedas made no mention of untouchability, child marriage and the subjugation of women, Swami Dayanand attacked these practices vehemently.
- Dayanand began the Shuddhi movement which enabled the Hindus who had accepted Islam or Christianity to return to Hinduism, their original faith. Dayanand published his religious commentaries in Hindi so as to make the common people understand his preachings. Satyarth Prakash was his most important work.
- The Swami worked actively for the regeneration of India. In 1875, Swami Dayanand founded the Arya Samaj in Bombay. The Arya Samaj made significant contributions to the fields of education and social and religious reforms. After his death, his followers had established the Dayanand Anglo Vedic Schools first in Lahore and then in other parts of India. Gurukuls were also established to propagate traditional ideals of education. A network of schools and colleges both for boys and girls were also established by the Arya Samaj.

Jyotirao Govindrao Phule

- Jyotirao Govindrao Phule had a prominent role in bringing about reforms in Maharashtra.
- He fought for improving the condition of women, the poor and the untouchables.
- He started a school for the education of girls of the lower castes and founded an association called the Satyasodhak Samaj.

The Prarthana Samaj

- In 1867, the Prarthana Samaj was started in Maharashtra to reform Hinduism and preach the worship of one God. Mahadev Govind Ranade and R.G. Bhandarkar were the two great leaders of the Samaj. The Prarthana Samaj did in Maharashtra what the Brahmo Samaj did in Bengal.
- It attacked the caste system and the predominance of the Brahmins, campaigned against child marriage and the purdah system, preached widow remarriage and emphasised female education.
- In order to reform Hinduism, Ranade started the Widow Remarriage Association and the Deccan Education Society.
- In 1887, Ranade founded the National Social Conference intending to introduce social reforms throughout the country.
- Ranade was also one of the founders of the Indian National Congress.

Reform Movements in South India

The Theosophical Society and Annie Besant

- Many Europeans were attracted towards the Hindu philosophy. In 1875, a Russian spiritualist named Madame Blavatsky and an American called Colonel Olcott founded the Theosophical Society in America. Society was greatly influenced by the Indian doctrine of Karma. In 1886 they founded the Theosophical Society at Adyar near Madras.
- Annie Besant, an Irish woman who came to India in 1893, helped the Theosophist movement to gain strength. She propagated Vedic philosophy and urged Indians to take pride in their culture. The Theosophists stood for the revival of the ancient Indian religion and universal brotherhood.
- The uniqueness of the movement lay in the fact that it was spearheaded by foreigners who glorified Indian religious and philosophical traditions.

- Annie Besant was the founder of the Central Hindu College in Banaras, which later developed into the Banaras Hindu University. Annie Besant herself made India her permanent home and played a prominent role in Indian politics. In 1917, she was elected President of the Indian National Congress.

Reform movements among the Muslims

- Movements for socio-religious reforms among the Muslims emerged late.
- Most Muslims feared that Western education would endanger their religion as it was un-Islamic in character. During the first half of the 19th century, only a handful of Muslims had accepted English education.
- The Mohammedan Literary Society, established by Nawab Abdul Latif in 1863, was one of the earliest institutions that attempted to spread modern education. Abdul Latif also tried to remove social abuses and promote Hindu-Muslim unity.

Syed Ahmad Khan

- The most important socio-religious movement among the Muslims came to be known as the Aligarh Movement. In 1862, he founded the Scientific Society to translate English books on science and other subjects into Urdu. He also started an English- Urdu journal through which he spread the ideas of social reform.
- Through his initiative was established the Mohammedan Oriental College which later developed into the Aligarh Muslim University. It helped to develop a modern outlook among its students. This intellectual movement is called the Aligarh Movement.
- Syed Ahmad Khan believed that the interest of the Muslims would be best served through cooperation with the British Government. It was only through the guidance of the British that India could mature into a full-fledged nation.

So he opposed the participation of the Muslims in the activities of the Indian National Congress.

Reform movements among the Parsis and the Sikhs

- The Parsi Religious Reform Association was started in 1851. It campaigned against orthodoxy in religion. Religious and social movements among the Sikhs were undertaken by various gurus who tried to bring about positive changes in the Sikh religion.
- Baba Dayal Das propagated the Nirankari (formless) idea of God. By the end of the 19th century, a new reform movement called the Akali Movement was launched to reform the corrupt management of Gurdwaras.

Women Reformers

Pandita Ramabai

- The British Government did not take substantial steps to educate women. Still, by the end of the 19th century, several women had become aware of the need for social reform.
- Pandita Rama bai had been educated in the United States and England. She wrote about the unequal treatment meted out to the women of India.
- She founded the Arya Mahila Sabha in Pune and opened the Sarda Sadan for helping destitute widows.

Sarojini Naidu

- Sarojini Naidu was a renowned poet and social worker. She inspired the masses with the spirit of nationalism through her patriotic poems. She stood

for voting rights for women and took an active interest in the political situation in the country. She also helped to set up the All India Women's Conference.

Characteristics of the Reform Movements

An analysis of the reform movements of the 19th century brings out several common features:

1. All the reformers propagated the idea of one God and the basic unity of all religions. Thus, they tried to bridge the gulf between different religious beliefs.
2. All the reformers attacked priesthood, rituals, idolatry and polytheism. The humanitarian aspect of these reform movements was expressed in their attack on the caste system and the custom of child marriage.
3. The reformers attempted to improve the status of girls and women in society. They all emphasised the need for female education.
4. By attacking the caste system and untouchability, the reformers helped to unify the people of India into one nation.
5. The reform movements fostered feelings of self-respect, self-reliance and patriotism among the Indians.

Contribution of the reform movements

- Many reformers like Dayanand Saraswati and Vivekananda upheld Indian philosophy and culture. This instilled in Indians a sense of pride and faith in their own culture. Female education was promoted. Schools for girls were set up. Even medical colleges were established for women.
- The cultural and ideological struggle taken up by the socio-religious movements helped to build up national consciousness. They, thus, paved the way for the growth of nationalism.

Conquest of Bengal, Hyderabad, Punjab, Awadh, Mysore

Hyderabad

- Hyderabad was founded by Nizam ul Mulk Asaf Jah in 1724. He was a noble of the Muhammad shah the Mughal emperor. His repeated attempts of reforming the administration were rejected by the emperor and so he moved back to the south to form his state.
- He formed an efficient administration. He followed a tolerant policy against all religions. He forced the powerful zamindar lobby to respect him. He successfully resisted Maratha's from his land. However, he failed to rid the revenue system of corruption due to his untimely death. After him, the Hyderabad state too was in a state of turmoil.

Bengal

- Murshid Quli Khan too declared independence from the central authority after it grew weak. He however sent tributes to the Mughals. He suppressed the powerful zamindars and organized an efficient administration.
- He was tolerant and secular. He introduced agrarian reform but collected revenue cruelly. He promoted trade and industry. The Nawabs however were short-sighted with regards to the English East India Company.
- They forced it to obey the laws of the land but didn't take these trading companies as threats to the kingdom.
- They also failed in two more aspects: building a strong army and checking corruption amongst local officials. Both these factors led to the defeat of Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah at the hands of the English East India Company in 1857.

Awadh

- Saadat Khan Burhan ul Mulk was the founder of Awadh. He was a far-sighted and able ruler. He too was disillusioned by the central government and chose to fortify his feudal area. He had to wage continuous wars against the big zamindars who had fortified their areas. He successfully suppressed them and brought relief to the farmers. He was secular towards all religions.

Mysore

- The end of the Vijaynagar Empire gave a new lease of life to the Mysore kingdom. Minister Nanaraj and Devraj captured power and King Krishna Raj became a mere puppet. Haider Ali was an ordinary soldier in the Mysore army. He took advantage of the opportunities that came his way and rose in rank.
- He learned western military tactics from French experts and applied them in battles. Soon he defeated Gnanaraj and became king. Though he was illiterate he was an efficient administrator. He extended his power in Mysore and soon made it into a powerful kingdom. He fought the Nizam of Hyderabad, Marathas and the British repeatedly and defeated them.

First Anglo Mysore War

- The English East India Company allied with Nizam of Hyderabad in 1766 to attack Haider Ali. But he fought back and threatened to attack Madras. So a treaty was signed where conquered territories were handed back and mutual cooperation against each other's enemies was assured. But when the Marathas attacked Haider Ali the British didn't help hence he mistrusted them. The British had secured the support of Marathas after the first Anglo

Maratha in 1782. Haider Ali inflicted defeats on them and forced them to surrender in large numbers.

Second Anglo Mysore War

- The British under Hastings bribed the Nizam and he withdrew from the alliance with Haider Ali. Hastings also diverted the army from the Maratha war against Haider Ali and finally defeated him. This was the second Anglo Mysore war. His son Tipu sultan succeeded him after his death in the Second Anglo Mysore war. Finally, as the war was a stalemate peace treaty was signed in 1784.

Third Anglo Mysore War

- The treaty of 1784 had only postponed hostilities to the future. Tipu had attempted to establish contact with Turkey and France by sending envoys there. The third Anglo Mysore war resulted in Tipu defeat in 1792. He had to pay a huge indemnity and surrender his sons to the British as hostages. It destroyed Tipu's dominant position in the south and established British supremacy there.

Fourth Anglo Mysore War

- Wellesley knew Tipu would never accept this treaty and fought the fourth Anglo Mysore war in 1799 and defeated Tipu. When Tipu was finally defeated in 1799 even the British were amazed at his revenue administration. He was accused of being orthodox but he had given large donations to the building of temples too.

Sikh Wars

- Two campaigns were fought between the Sikhs and the British. They resulted in the conquest and annexation by the British of Punjab in northwestern India.
- The first war was precipitated by mutual suspicions and the turbulence of the Sikh army.
- The Second Sikh War began with the revolt of Mulraj, governor of Multan, in April 1848 and became a national revolt when the Sikh army joined the rebels on September 14.
- Indecisive battles characterized by the great ferocity and bad generalship were fought at Ramnagar (November 22) and at Chillianwala (Jan. 13, 1849) before the final British victory at Gujrat (February 21). The Sikh army surrendered on March 12, and Punjab was then annexed.

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