

History Part – 29

29] Social and Religious Reform Movements in the 19th Century

Notes

- In the 19th century India witnessed a strong wave of reformation activities in religion and society.
- The Indians were inspired by the western ideas of reason, equality, liberty and humanity.
- These socio-religious reform movements were called as the Indian Renaissance movement.

Raja Rammohan Roy and the Brahmo Samaj

- Raja Rammohan Roy established the Brahmo Samaj at Calcutta in 1828 in order to purify Hinduism and to preach monotheism.
- He is considered as the first 'modern man of India'. He was a pioneer of socio-religious reform movements in modern India.
- Born in 1772 in the Hooghly district of Bengal, he inculcated a brilliant freedom of thought and rationality.
- He studied the Bible as well as Hindu and Muslim religious texts. He had excellent command over many languages including English, Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, French, Latin, Greek and Hebrew.

- In 1815, he established the Atmiya Sabha. Later, it was developed into the Brahmo Sabha in August 1828. Through this organisation, he preached that there is only one God.
- He combined the teachings of the Upanishads, the Bible and the Koran in developing unity among the people of different religions.
- The work of the Atmiya Sabha was carried on by Maharishi Debendranath Tagore (father of Rabindranath Tagore), who renamed it as Brahmo Samaj.
- He turned the Brahmo Samaj into a leading social organisation of India. Raja Rammohan Roy joined the service of East India Company in 1805 and continued till 1814.
- Raja Rammohan Roy is most remembered for helping Lord William Bentinck to declare the Sati prohibition act in 1829.
- He also protested against the child marriage and female infanticide. He favored the remarriage of widows, female education and women's right to property.
- He felt that the caste system was the greatest hurdle to Indian unity. He believed in the equality of mankind. He did not believe in the supremacy of the Brahmin priests.
- He favoured inter-caste marriages. He himself adopted a Muslim boy.

- In 1817, he founded the Hindu College (now Presidency College, Calcutta) along with David Hare, a missionary.
- He also set up schools for girls. Rammohan Roy started the first Bengali weekly Samvad Kaumudi and edited a Persian weekly Mirat-ul-akhbar.
- He stood for the freedom of the press. Rammohan died in Bristol in England in 1833. After the death of raja ram mohan roy , the work of the bhramo samaj was carried by Keshab Chandra sen and Devendranath tagore.
- Due to the efforts keshab Chandra sen an act was passed in 1872 which abolished polygamy and child marriage.
- It encourages the study of English language and the western science in india.

Henry Vivian Derozio and the Young Bengal Movement

- Henry Vivian Derozio was the founder of the Young Bengal Movement. He was born in Calcutta in 1809 and taught in the Hindu College, Calcutta.
- He died of cholera in 1833. His followers were known as the Derozians and their movement the Young Bengal Movement.
- They attacked old traditions and decadent customs. They also advocated women's rights and their education.
- They founded associations and organized debates against idol worship, casteism and superstitions.

Swami Dayanand Saraswathi and the Arya Samaj

- The Arya Samaj was founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswathi (original name - mul Shankar) at Bombay in 1875.
- Born in Morvi state in Kathiawar in Gujarat, Swami Dayanand (1824-83) was a scholar, a patriot, a social reformer and a revivalist.
- He mastered Sanskrit and became the disciple of Swami Virjanand.
- He believed the Vedas were the source of true knowledge. His motto was “Back to the Vedas”.
- He was against idol worship, child marriage and caste system based on birth.
- He encouraged inter-caste marriages and widow remarriage. He started the Suddhi movement to bring back those Hindus who had converted to other religions to its fold.
- He wrote the book Satyarth Prakash which contains his ideas. The Arya Samaj, though founded in Bombay, became very powerful in Punjab and spread its influence to other parts of India. It has contributed very much to the spread of education.
- The first Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) School was founded in 1886 at Lahore. Many more schools came up in other parts of India in later years.
- The Arya Samaj had also spread nationalism. Hundreds of Arya Samaj patriots, including Lala Lajpat Rai, took part in the Indian freedom struggle.

- He was the first indian who preached the gospel of ‘swadeshi’ and ‘india for indians’.
- He is often described as the “martin luther of Hinduism”.

Prarthana Samaj

- The Prarthana Samaj was founded in 1867 in Bombay by Dr. Atmaram Pandurang. It was an off-shoot of Brahmo Samaj.
- It was a reform movement within Hinduism and concentrated on social reforms like inter-dining, inter-marriage, widow remarriage and uplift of women and depressed classes.
- Justice M.G. Ranade and R.G. Bhandarkar joined it in 1870 and infused new strength to it. Justice Ranade promoted the Deccan Education Society.

Swami Vivekananda and Ramakrishna Mission

- The Ramakrishna mission was named after the sri Ramakrishna paramahansa and the mission was founded by swamy Vivekananda , the chief disciple of shri Ramakrishna on may 1 , 1897.
- Ramakrishna was born in an orthodox bhramin family in Bengal in 1836.
- He married saradhamani and he was a devotee of goddess kali.
- He was a priest in the Dakshineswar kali temple.
- He died in 1886.

- The original name of Swami Vivekananda was Narendranath Dutta (1863-1902) and he became the most famous disciple of Shri Ramkrishna Paramahansa.
- He was born in a prosperous Bengali family of Calcutta and educated in Scottish Church College. In 1886 Narendranath took the vow of Sanyasa and was given the name, Vivekananda.
- Vivekananda proclaimed “Renunciation and service” as the two fold national ideals of modern india and Ramakrishna mission strives to practice these ideals.
- The service activities are based on the message of “Jeeva is shiva” form.
- According to swami Vivekananda “Service to poor is service to god”
- He preached Vedantic Philosophy. He condemned the caste system and the current Hindu emphasis on rituals and ceremonies.
- Swami Vivekananda participated at the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago (USA) in September 1893 and raised the prestige of India and Hinduism very high in which he started the speech with sisters and brothers of universe.
- Vivekananda preached the message of strength and self- reliance. He asked the people to improve the lives of the poor and depressed classes. He believed that service to mankind is service to God.

- He founded the Ramkrishna Mission at Belur in Howrah in 1897. It is a social service and charitable society.
- The objectives of this Mission are providing humanitarian relief and social work through the establishment of schools, colleges, hospitals and orphanages.
- The Ramakrishna mission played an important role in the installation of photovoltaic lighting system in the sundarbans of the western region.
- In a speech he made in 1993 , fedrico mayor , director general of UNESCO , stated , “I am indeed struck by the similarity of the constitution of the Ramakrishna mission which Vivekananda established as early as 1897 with that of UNESCO drawn up in 1945”

Theosophical Society

- The Theosophical Society was founded in New York (USA) in 1875 by Madam H.P. Blavatsky, a Russian lady, and Henry S Olcott, an American colonel.
- Their main objectives were to form a universal brotherhood of man without any distinction of race, colour or creed and to promote the study of ancient religions and philosophies.
- They arrived in India and established their headquarters at Adyar in Madras in 1882.

- Later in 1893, Mrs. Annie Besant arrived in India and took over the leadership of the Society after the death of Olcott.
- Mrs. Annie Besant founded the Central Hindu School along with Madan Mohan Malaviya at Benaras which later developed into the Banaras Hindu University.
- Annie besant started a newspaper called “New india” and spread the theosophical ideas.

Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

- Pandit Ishwar Chandra was a great educator, humanist and social reformer.
- He was born in 1820 in a village in Midnapur, Bengal. He rose to be the Head Pandit of the Bengali Department of Fort William College.
- He firmly believed that reform in Indian society could only come about through education.
- Vidyasagar founded many schools for girls. He helped J.D. Bethune to establish the Bethune School.
- He founded the Metropolitan Institution in Calcutta. He protested against child marriage and favoured widow remarriage which was legalised by the Widow Remarriage Act (1856).
- It was due to his great support for the spread of education that he was given the title of Vidyasagar.

Samarasa suddha sanmarga sangam -1865

- Samarasa suddha sanmarga sangam was founded by ramalinga adigal popularly known as vallalar.
- Saint Ramalinga was one of the foremost saints of Tamil Nadu in the nineteenth century. He was born on October 5, 1823 at Marudhur, near Chidambaram.
- He favoured the casteless society to be guided by god whom he belived to be in the form of “Arul perum jothi”
- St.Ramalinga had the view that love is the master key to spirituality.he showed his compassion and mercy not only on human beings but also on plants , insects , birds and animals.This is callrd jeeva karunya(mercy to life) and he also said that vaadiya payirai kandapothellam vaadinan
- He opposed superstitious beliefs and rituals.He emphasized on being vegetarian.
- He forbade the killing of animals for the sake of food
- One of the primary teachings of vallalar is service to mankind is the path of moksha.
- In 1872 , he established sathya gnana sabai hall of true wisdom forum and ensuring it was entirely secular.

- He was the last son of his father, Ramayya Pillai and mother, Chinnammayar. Developing a deep interest in spiritual life, Ramalinga moved to Karunguli in 1858, a place near Vadalur where the Saint later settled down.
- His divine powers came to be recognised at the early age of eleven. In 1865 he founded the Samarasa Suddha Sanmargha Sangha for the promotion of his ideals of establishing a casteless society.
- He preached love and compassion to the people. He composed Tiru Arutpa. His other literary works include Manu Murai Kanda Vasagam and Jeeva Karunyam.
- His language was so simple as to enable the illiterate people to understand his teachings. In 1870 he moved to Mettukuppam, place three miles away from Vadalur.
- There he started constructing the Satya Gnana Sabai in 1872. He introduced the principle that God could be worshipped in the form of Light.

Jyotiba Phule

- Jyotiba Phule belonged to a low caste family in Maharashtra.
- He waged a life-long struggle against upper caste domination and Brahmanical supremacy.

- In 1873 he founded the Satyashodak Samaj to fight against the caste system. He pioneered the widow remarriage movement in Maharashtra and worked for the education for women.
- Jyotiba Phule and his wife established the first girls' school at Poona in 1851.

Muslim Reform Movements

The Muslim reform movements started a little later because they had avoided western education in the beginning. The first effort was in 1863 when the Muhammad Literary Society was set up in Calcutta. Its aim was to popularize the study of English and western sciences. It established a number of schools in Bengal.

Aligarh Movement

- The Aligarh Movement was started by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-98) for the social and educational advancement of the Muslims in India.
- He fought against the medieval backwardness and advocated a rational approach towards religion.
- In 1866, he started the Mohammadan Educational Conference as a general forum for spreading liberal ideas among the Muslims.

- In 1875, he founded a modern school at Aligarh to promote English education among the Muslims.
- This had later grown into the Mohammadan Anglo Oriental College and then into the Aligarh Muslim University.
- He propagated his views and ideals of his society through the newspaper called Tahzil-ud-Akhlaq and he also said that the hindus and muslims are two eyes beautiful bird that was india.

Sikh Reform Movement

- Punjab also came under the spell of reforms. Baba Dayal Das founded the Nirankari Movement.
- He insisted the worship of God as nirankar (formless). The Namdhari Movement was founded by Baba Ram Singh.
- His followers wore white clothes and gave up meat eating. The Singh Sabhas started in Lahore and Amritsar in 1870 were aimed at reforming the Sikh society.
- They helped to set up the Khalsa College at Amritsar in 1892.They also encouraged Gurmukhi and Punjabi literature.
- In 1920, the Akalis started a movement to remove the corrupt Mahants (priests) from the Sikh gurudwaras.

- The British government was forced to make laws on this matter. Later, the Akalis organised themselves into a political party.

Parsi Reform Movement

- The Parsi Religious Reform Association was founded at Bombay by Furdunji Naoroji and S.S. Bengalee in 1851.
- They advocated the spread of women's education. They also wanted to reform their marriage customs.
- Naoroji published a monthly journal, Jagat Mithra. The momentum gathered through these reform movements and went a long way in uplifting the entire community.
- By the middle of the twentieth century most of them were highly placed in various capacities and have made a significant contribution to India's development.

Sree Narayana Guru

- Sree Narayana guru was a great social reformer from Kerala
- In 1903 sree Narayana guru dharma paribalana yogam was started to work for the social economic and educational development of the ezhava community and other backward people
- He condemned animal sacrifices, casteism and other social evils.

Sripade B V Sadhu Maharaja

- Sripade B V Sadhu maharaja belonged to the royal family of mungir , became a Vaishnava even though his family had previously been devoted to worshipping lord shiva.
- He constructed a temple in honour of sri chaitanya called the prema mandir in mungir

Dr.B.R.Ambedhkar

- Dr.B.R.Ambedhkar is viewed as the messiah of dalits and downtrodden in india
- He was the chairman of the drafting committee that was constituted by the constituent assembly in 1947 to draft a constitution for the independent India
- He was the first law minister of independent India. For his service to the nation Dr.B.R.Ambedhkar was bestowed with bharath ratna in 1990 posthumously.
- Dr.B.R.Ambedhkar was born on April 14,1891 in Mhow (presently in Madhya Pradesh). In July 1924, he founded the Bahiskrit Hitkaraini Sabha (Outcastes Welfare Organisation).
- The aim of the sabha was to uplift the downtrodden socially and politically in the Indian Society.

- In 1927 he led the Mahad March near Bombay, to give the untouchables the right to draw water from the public tank the “Mahad” publicly.

Self-Respect Movement and Periyar E.V.R.

- Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy was a great social reformer. In 1921, during the anti-liquor campaign he cut down 1000 coconut trees in his own farm. In 1924, he took an active part in the Vaikam Satyagraha.
- The objective of the Satyagraha was to secure for untouchables the right to use a road near a temple at Vaikom in Kerala. E.V.R. opposed the Varnashrama policy followed in the V.V.S. Iyer’s Seranamadevi Gurugulam.
- During 1920 - 1925 being in the Congress Party he stressed that Congress should accept communal representation. Subsequently in 1925, he started the “Self-Respect Movement”.
- The aims of the ‘Self -Respect Movement’ were to uplift the Dravidians and to expose the Brahminical tyranny and deceptive methods by which they controlled all spheres of Hindu life.
- He denounced the caste system, child marriage and enforced widowhood. He encouraged inter-caste marriages.
- He himself conducted many marriages without any rituals. Such a marriage was known as “Self- Respect Marriage.” He gave secular names to new born babies.

- He attacked the laws of Manu, which he called the basis of the entire Hindu social fabric of caste.
- He founded the Tamil journals Kudiarasu, Puratchi and Viduthalai to propagate his ideals.
- In 1938 at Tamil Nadu Women's Conference appreciating the noble service rendered by E.V.R. he was given the title "Periyar".
- On 27th June 1970 by the UNESCO organisation praised and adorned with the title "Socrates of South Asia".

