

Socio-Religious Reform Movements

- In the first part of the nineteenth century, Indian society was caste-ridden, decadent, and strict.
- It followed some activities that were contrary to humanitarian emotions or beliefs but were nonetheless carried out in the name of religion.
- Some enlightened Indians, such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar, Dayanand Saraswati, and others, began to implement reforms in society in order for it to confront the challenges of the West.
- Reform movements may be roughly divided into two types:
 - Reformist movements
 - Revivalist movements
- Examples of reformist movements are Brahmo Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, and the Aligarh Movement.
- AryaSamaj and the Deoband movement are examples of revivalist movements.
- To differing degrees, both the reformist and revivalist movements relied on an appeal to the lost purity of the religion they wanted to improve.
- The only distinction between reform movements was the extent to which they relied on tradition vs reason and conscience.

Factors Influencing the Rise of Socio-Religious Reform Movements

- The presence of a colonial government on Indian territory; when the British arrived in India, they brought with them the English language as well as some contemporary ideals.
- These concepts, which included liberty, social and economic equality, fraternity, democracy, and justice, had a significant effect on Indian society.
- In the nineteenth century, Indian society was entangled in a terrible web of religious beliefs and social obscurantism.
- Women's Depressing Situation: The position of women was the most disturbing.
- Female new-borns were often killed upon birth.
- In society, child marriage was common.

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- Polygamy was common in various sections of the country.
- Widow remarriage was not permitted and sati pratha was often practiced.
- Education and Global Awareness: Beginning in the late nineteenth century, a number of European and Indian researchers began studying ancient India's history, philosophy, science, religions, and literature.
- The Indian people gained pride in their civilization as they gained a better understanding of India's former splendor.
- It also aided religious and social reformers in their fight against all kinds of cruel practices, superstitions, and so forth.
- **International / global Thinking:** The increasing tide of nationalism and democracy found expression in initiatives to reform and democratize the Indian people's social structures and religious viewpoints throughout the later decades of the nineteenth century.
- Factors such as the rise of nationalist feelings, the creation of new economic forces, the expansion of education, the influence of contemporary Western ideas and culture, and enhanced global awareness intensified the drive to reform.

Hindu Reform Movements in Eastern India (Bengal)

- Bengal was the centre of many reform organisations like Brahma Samaj.

(1) Brahma Samaj by Raja Ramohun Roy

- In 1828, Raja Rammohun Roy founded Brahma Sabha which was later renamed 'Brahma Samaj'.
- The Brahma Samaj made an effort to reform the Hindu religion by removing abuses and by basing it on the worship of one God and on the teachings of the Vedas and Upanishads even though it repudiated the doctrine of the infallibility of the Vedas.
- Brahmans were basically opposed to idolatry and superstitious practices and rituals, in fact to the entire Brahmanical system.
- The Brahmans were also great social reformers.

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- They actively opposed the caste system and child marriage and supported the general uplift of women, including widow remarriage, and the spread of modern education to men and women.
- The Brahma tradition of Raja Rammohun Roy was carried forward after 1843 by Devendranath Tagore and after 1866 by Keshub Chandra Sen.

(2) Tattvabodhini Sabha and Adi Brahma Samaj by Debendranath Tagore

- Debendranath Tagore, father of Rabindranath Tagore formed Tattvabodhini Sabha in 1839.
- He later gave a new life to Brahma Samaj when he joined it in 1842.
- He devoted himself to the systematic study of India's past with a rational outlook.
- He propagated Roy's ideas.

(3) Brahma Samaj of India by Keshab Chandra Sen

- Keshab Chandra Sen joined Brahma Samaj in 1858 and was made acharya by Debendranath Tagore.
- He was instrumental in popularising Brahma Samaj outside Bengal in the United Provinces, Punjab, Bombay and Madras.
- In 1863, Keshab was instrumental in the formation of Prarthana Samaj in Bombay which relied on education and persuasion and not on direct confrontation with Hindu Orthodoxy.
- Keshab Sen was a strong believer in religious universalism.
- He often stated that "Our position is not that truths are to be found in all religions, but that all established religions of the world are true".
- His radicalism brought him into opposition with Debendranath.
- In 1866, the Samaj was formally divided into Adi Brahma Samaj (headed by Debendranath Tagore) and the Brahma Samaj of India (headed by Keshab Chandra Sen)

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- In 1873 due to the inexplicable act of getting his own 13-year-old daughter married by following all Orthodox Hindu rituals, Brahmo Samaj of India was again split.

(4) Young Bengal Movement by Henry Derozio

- Henry taught at Hindu College from 1826-31.
- Inspired by French Revolution, he taught his pupils to think freely, rationally and question all authority.

(5) Ramakrishna Movement by Swami Vivekananda

- Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1834-86) was a saintly person who sought religious salvation in the traditional ways of renunciation, meditation and devotion (bhakti).
- He emphasised that there were many roads to God and salvation and that service of man was service of God, for man was the embodiment of God.
- Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) was his disciple.
- Vivekanda popularised Ramakrishna's religious messages.
- He tried to put it in a form that would suit the needs of contemporary Indian society.
- Vivekanda wrote in 1898; "For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam... is the only hope".
- At the same time, he was convinced of the superior approach of the Indian philosophical tradition.
- He himself subscribed to Vedanta which he declared to be a fully rational system.
- Vivekananda criticised Indians for having lost touch with the rest of the world and became stagnant and mummified.
- Vivekananda condemned the caste system and the Hindu emphasis on rituals and superstitions.
- He urged people to imbibe the spirit of liberty, equality and free-thinking.

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- Vivekananda was a great humanist. Shocked by the poverty, misery and suffering of the common people of the country, **he wrote:** “The only God in whom I believe, the sum total of all souls, and above all, my God the wicked, my God the afflicted, my God the poor of all races”
- To the educated Indians, **he said:** So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor, who having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them”
- In 1897, Vivekananda founded Ramakrishna Mission to carry on humanitarian relief and social work.
- It thus laid emphasis on social good or social service.

Hindu Reform Movements in Western India (Maharashtra)

- Religious reforms started in Bombay in 1840 by the ParmahansMandali which aimed at fighting idolatry and the caste system.
- Perhaps the earliest religious reformer in western India was Gopal Hari Deshmukh, known popularly as ‘Lokahitwadi’, who wrote in Marathi.
- He made powerful rationalist attacks on Hindu orthodoxy and preached religious and social equality.

Prarthana Samaj by Dadoba Pandurang and Atmaram Pandurang:

- Prarthana Samaj or “Prayer Society” in Sanskrit, was a movement for religious and social reform in Bombay, India, based on earlier reform movements.
- Prarthana Samaj was founded by the Dadoba Pandurang and his brother Atmaram Pandurang in 1863 when Keshub Chandra Sen visited Maharashtra, with an aim to make people believe in one God and worship only one God.
- It became popular after Mahadev Govind Ranade joined. Two of its great leaders were G Bhandarkar, the famous Sanskrit scholar and historian, and Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901).
- The main reformers were the intellectuals who advocated reforms of the social system of the Hindus in the light of modern knowledge.

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- It was spread to southern India by noted Telugu reformer and writer, Kandukuri Veeresalingam.
- One of the greatest rationalist thinkers of modern India, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, also lived and worked in Maharashtra at this time.

Arya Samaj By Swami Dayanand Dayanand Saraswati:

- The Arya Samaj undertook the task of reforming the Hindu religion in the west and north India.
- It was founded in 1875 by Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-83).
- Swami Dayanand believed that selfish and ignorant priests had perverted Hindu religion with the aid of the Puranas which, he said, were full of false teachings.
- For his own inspiration, Swami Dayanand went to the Vedas which he considered infallible, being the inspired word of God, and as the fountain of all knowledge.
- Some of Swami Dayanand's followers later started a network of school and colleges in the country to impart education on western lines. Lala Hansraj played a leading part in this effort.
- In 1902, Swami Shradhananda started the Gurukul near Hardwar to propagate the more traditional ideals of education.
- One of Arya Samaj's objectives was to prevent the conversion of Hindus to other religions.
- This led it to start a crusade against other religions.
- This crusade became a contributory factor in the growth of communalism in India in the 20th century.

Hindu Reform Movements in South India (Maharashtra)

- The Theosophical Society was a major Hindu Reform movement with roots in Maharashtra.

The Theosophical Society by Madam H.P. Blavatsky and Colonel S. Olcott

- The Theosophical Society was founded in the United States by Madam H.P. Blavatsky and Colonel S. Olcott, who later came to India and founded the headquarters of the Society at Adyar near Madras in 1886.
- The Theosophist movement soon grew in India as a result of the leadership given to it by Mrs Annie Besant who had come to India in 1893.
- The Theosophists advocated the revival and strengthening of the ancient religions of Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism.
- They recognised the doctrine of the transmigration of the soul.
- One of Mrs. Besant's many achievements in India was the establishment of the Central Hindu School at Banaras which was later developed by Madan Mohan Malaviya into the Benaras Hindu University.

Religious reforms among Muslims

- There were many prominent leaders like Sayyid Ahmed Khan and Muhammad Iqbal who influenced the Muslim population in India.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the Aligarh School

- The most important reformer among the Muslims was Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98).
- In his view, any interpretation of the Quran that conflicted with human reason, science, or nature was in reality a misinterpretation.
- All his life he struggled against blind obedience to tradition, dependence on custom, ignorance and irrationalism.
- Sayyid Ahmad Khan believed that the religious and social life of the Muslims could be improved only by imbibing modern western scientific knowledge and culture. Therefore, promotion of modern education remained his priority throughout his life.
- In 1875 he founded at Aligarh the Muhammedan Anglo-Oriental College as a centre for spreading western sciences and culture. Later, this College grew into the Aligarh Muslim University.

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- Sayyid Ahmad's reformist zeal also embraced the social sphere. He urged Muslims to give up medieval customs and ways of thought and behaviour.
- In particular, he wrote in favour of raising women's status in society and advocated the removal of purdah and the spread of education among women.
- He also condemned the customs of polygamy and easy divorce.
- He opposed communal friction.
- Appealing to Hindus and Muslims to unite, he said in 1883, "Now both of us live on the air of India, drink the holy waters of the Ganga and Yamuna. We both feed upon the products of the Indian soil."
- However, towards the end of his life, he began to talk of Hindu domination to prevent his followers from joining the rising national movement.

Wahabi Movement:

- It was Started by Syed Ahmed
- Syed Ahmed criticized Western influences on Islam and argued for the restoration of genuine Islam and Arabian culture as it was during the Prophet's time.
- Syed Ahmed was hailed as the ideal leader (Imam).
- A nationwide organization was established, with an extensive secret code for operating under spiritual vice-regents (Khalifas).
- The Wahabis played a significant role in instilling anti-British attitudes.
- A series of British military assaults on the Wahabi base at Sithana in the 1860s, as well as many court proceedings of sedition against the Wahabis, weakened the Wahabi resistance, while intermittent interactions with the government lasted until the 1880s and 1890s

Ahmadiyya Movement:

- It was started Mirza Ghulam Ahmad
- The Ahmadiyya are a Muslim group that emerged in India.
- It referred to itself as the standard-bearer of the Mohammedan Renaissance.

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- Like the Brahmo Samaj, it was founded on the ideas of universal religion for all humanity, rejecting jihad (holy war against non-Muslims).
- The initiative provided Indian Muslims with Western liberal education.
- The Ahmadiyya community is the only Islamic group that believes the Messiah, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, came to end religious strife and bloodshed and to restore morality, peace, and justice.

Deoband Movement:

- It was started by Muhammad Qasim Nanautavi, Rashid Ahmad Gangohi.
- Deobandis saw Islam as having two primary points: Shariat (law based on texts and religious knowledge) and tariqah (religious knowledge).
- As a result, they embraced Sufism and its different kinds of discipline, as well as the function of the ulama in interpreting Islamic law's four schools.
- While they accepted Sufism, the Deobandis rejected certain rites as well as the authority of pirs who claimed holiness via lineage rather than learning.

Barelvi Movement:

- It was started by Syed Ahmad Rai Barelvi
- Syed Ahmad Rai Barelvi was India's leading Wahhabi exponent, a firm proponent of puritanical extremism and physical jihadism.
- Sufi organizations and silsilas such as Naqsyabandiyah, Chishtiya, and Qadriyah first influenced him.
- For Indian Muslims, Syed Ahmad's Mujahidin movement is now gone, but his religious exhortations for jihad as "an act of devotion greater than spiritual prayer in merit and rewards" continue to impact millions.
- As a result, some extreme jihadist organizations have declared the resurrection of Rai Barelvi's Mujahidin movement in the subcontinent.

Muhammad Iqbal (1876-1938)

- Muhammad Iqbal was one of the greatest poets of modern India.

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- He profoundly influenced the philosophical and religious outlook of the younger generation of Muslims as well as of Hindus.

Religious Reforms among the Parsis

- The prominent figures among Parsis include NaorojiFurdonji, DadabhaiNaoroji, S.S. Bengalee etc.

RehnumaiMazdayasan Sabha or Religious Reform Association

- In 1851, the RehnumaiMazdayasan Sabha or Religious Reform Association was started by NaorojiFurdonji, DadabhaiNaoroji, S.S. Bengalee, and others.

Religious Reforms among the Sikhs

- Religious reforms among the Sikhs started at the end of the 19th century when the Khalsa College was started at Amritsar. But the efforts gained momentum after 1920 when the Akali Movement arose in Punjab.

Akali Movement (PUNJAB)

- The main aim of the Akalis was to purify the management of the gurudwaras or Sikh shrines. These gurudwaras had been heavily endowed with land and money by devout Sikhs.
- The Sikh masses led by the Akalis started a powerful satyagraha against the mahants and the Government which aided them (1921).

Sikh movements:

- It was started by Thakur Singh Sandhawalia and Giani Gian Singh.
- The Sabha's goals were to restore Sikhism to its original purity, to print historical religious literature and magazines, spread information, to sing Punjabi, to return Sikh apostles to their religion, and enlist Englishmen in the Sikh educational program.
- Later, the Amritsar Singh Sabha was imitated by a newer, more democratic institution, the Lahore Singh Sabha.

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- After a time, the Singh Sabhas were swamped by other organizations like Khalsa Diwani and, in 1920, a fight for control over Sikh places of worship.

Nirankari Movement:

- It was started by Baba Dayal Das
- The Nirankaris emphasized appropriate religious practice, producing hukamnamas to clarify what was acceptable and establishing a network of worship centers staffed by their own priests.
- They did not clash or fight the British but grew as a result of British control in Punjab, which liberated them from the restraints of the Sikh government.
- As a result, the Nirankaris became a permanent subgroup of the Sikh faith, assisting in the clarification of the lines that separate Sikhs from Hindus.

Namdhari Movement:

- It was started by Baba Ram Singh
- Initially, the movement followed a series of ceremonies fashioned by Guru Gobind Singh's foundation of Khalsa.
- With the exception of the Kripan, the Namdharis were compelled to wear the five Sikhism insignia (sword). They were, however, forced to carry a Lathi (bamboo staff).
- The Namdharis repudiated the worship of gods, goddesses, idols, cemeteries, tombs, trees, and snakes, as well as popular saints and ceremonies performed by Brahman priests.
- The Namdharis also opposed the authority of the hereditary caretakers of Sikh Gurdwaras (places of worship).

Socio Religious Reform Movements in South India:

SNDP (Sree Narayana Guru Dharma Paripalana Movement):

- It was started Sree Narayana Guru, Dr. Padmanabhan Palpu
- Sree Narayana Guru Dharma Paripalana Movement (SNDP) was a Kerala-based regional movement founded by Shree Narayan Guru Swami.

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- This movement was fueled by antagonism between the lower and upper castes.
- He maintained mirrors instead of idols in one of the temples he dedicated at Kalavancode.
- This represented his message that the divine existed inside every one of us.
- In Kalady, he also established an Advaita Ashram.

Vokkaligara Sangha:

- In Mysore, the Vokkaligara Sangha started an anti-Brahmin movement in 1905.
- It is an Indian caste from the state of Karnataka.
- As a warrior and farmer community, they have traditionally wielded tremendous demographic, political, and economic dominance in Old Mysore.

Justice Movement:

- It was started C.Natesanar , T.M.Nair, P. Tyagaraja
- It started in the Madras Presidency to secure jobs and participation in the parliament for non-brahmins
- In 1917, the Madras Presidency Association was created to urge that the lower classes be given distinct representation in the legislature.

Self-Respect Movement:

- It was started by THANTHAI PERIYAR [E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker]
- It was an egalitarian movement that advocated for the abolition of Brahminical rule, equal rights for backward groups and women in society, and the resuscitation of Dravidian languages such as Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam.
- The Self-Respect Movement's aims have been articulated and stated in two booklets, "NamathuKurikkol" and "TiravitakkalakaLateiyam.'
- The movement seeks to eliminate societal structures in which one class of people claims to be superior to another and some males claim to be of higher birth than others.

Social reform movements to uplift women and backward castes

- The major effect of national awakening in the 19th century was seen in the field of social reform.
- The newly educated persons increasingly revolted against rigid social conventions and outdated customs.
- In the 20th century, and especially after 1919, the national movement became the main propagator of social reform.
- Increasingly, the reformers took recourse to propaganda in the Indian language to reach the masses.
- They also used novels, dramas, poetry, short stories, the Press and, in the thirties, the cinema to spread their views.
- The social reform movements tried in the main to achieve two objectives
 - Emancipation of women and extension of equal rights to them and
 - Removal of caste rigidities and in particular the abolition of untouchability.

Movements to uplift Women

- Emancipation means being free from restraint, control, or the power of another.
- It is true that occasionally women of the character and personality of Razia Sultana, Chand Bibi, or Ahilyabai Holkar arose in India. But they were exceptions to the general pattern, and do not in any way change the picture.
- After the 1880s, when Dufferin hospitals (named after Lady Dufferin, the wife of the Viceroy) were started, efforts were made to make modern medicine and child delivery techniques available to Indian women.
- Women played an active and important role in the struggle for freedom.
- They participated in large numbers in the agitation against the partition of Bengal and in the Home Rule movement.
- Sarojini Naidu, the famous poetess, became the president of the National Congress.
- Several women became ministers or parliamentary secretaries in the popular ministries of 1937.

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- They started many organisations and institutions for this purpose, the most outstanding of which was the All-India Women's Conference founded in 1927.
- The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 made the daughter an equal co-heir with the son.
- The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 permitted the dissolution of marriage on specific grounds.

Movements to uplift Backward Caste

- The caste system was another major target of attack for the social reform movement.
- The Hindus were at this time divided into numerous castes.
- The untouchables suffered from numerous and severe disabilities and restrictions.
- He could not enter the Hindu temples or study the shastras.
- In some parts of the country, particularly in the south, their very shadow was to be avoided.
- An untouchable's dress, food, place of residence, all were carefully regulated.
- He could not draw water from wells and tanks used by the higher castes;
- He could do so only from wells and tanks specially reserved for untouchables.
- In modern India, it became a major obstacle to the growth of a united-nation-feeling and the spread of democracy.
- However, the British rule had many elements which gradually undermined the caste system.
- The urbanisation and the introduction of modern industries, railways and buses made it difficult to prevent mass contact among persons of different castes, especially in the cities.
- Modern commerce and industry opened new fields of economic activity to all.
- The growth of the national movement too played a significant role in weakening the caste system.
- Leaders like Gandhi kept the abolition of untouchability at the forefront of all public activities.

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- In 1932, Gandhiji founded the All-India Harijan Sangh for the purpose. His campaign for the “root and branch removal of untouchability” was based on the grounds of humanism and reason.
- In Maharashtra, Jyotiba Phule led a lifelong movement against Brahmanical religious authority as part of his struggle against upper caste domination.
- B.R. Ambedkar, who belonged to one of the scheduled castes, devoted his entire life to fighting against caste tyranny,
- He organised the All India Scheduled Castes Federation for the purpose.
- Several other scheduled caste leaders founded the All-India Depressed Classes Association.
- In Kerala, Sri Narayan Guru organised a lifelong struggle against the caste system.
- The Indian Constitution, in 1950, provided the legal framework for the final abolition of untouchability.

The Impact of Socio-Religious Movements on Indians

- There were positive and negative impacts of the socio-religious movements in India.

The positive aspects of the socio-religious movements in India

- The religious reform movements of modern times had an underlying unity.
- Most of them were based on the twin doctrines of Reason (Rationalism) and Humanism, though they also sometimes tended to appeal to faith and ancient authority to bolster their appeal.
- They opposed the ritualistic, superstitious, irrational and obscurantist elements in Indian religion.
- **Swami Vivekananda once said:** “Is religion to justify itself by the discoveries of reason through which every science justifies itself”
- Justice Ranade came to the conclusion that society as a living organism is constantly changing and can never go back to the past.

- The best of reformers argued that modern ideas and culture could be best imbibed by integrating them into Indian cultural streams.
- The religious reform movements helped many Indians to come to terms with the modern world.
- These movements led to the emergence of Indian nationalism and eventually the freedom struggle.

The negative aspects of the socio-religious movements in India

Two negative aspects of the religious reform movements may also be noted.

- **Firstly**, all of them catered to the needs of a small percentage of the population—the urban middle and upper classes.
- The second limitation, which later became a major negative factor, was the tendency to look backwards, appeal to past greatness, and rely on scriptural authority. Appeals to past greatness created false pride and smugness, while the habit of finding a ‘Golden Age’ in the past acted as a check on the full acceptance of modern science and hampered the effort to improve the present.
- The evil aspects of this phenomenon became apparent when it was found that, along with a rapid rise of national consciousness, another consciousness – communal consciousness – had begun to rise among the middle classes.
- Many other factors were certainly responsible for the birth of communalism in modern times; but undoubtedly, the nature of the religious reform movements also contributed to it.