

# Religious Reform Movements in India

Amrinder Singh Research scholar (History department ) (Desh bhagat university mandi  
Gobindgarh),

**Abstract:-**In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were many evils in the Indian society and religion e.g. the custom of Sati, child marriage and rigid caste system etc.. The English people took advantage of weakness and drawbacks of people of India and they made Indians, Christians therefore in India so many religious and social movements came and speed of social culture and religion awakening the main purpose of these movements was to eliminate the evils which were prevalent in India. Among these main movements like BrahmoSamaj, AryaSamaj, Ramkrishan mission etc. these movements were inspired by religions in fact the old religions had prepared splendid background of these movements these movements developed also cultural awakening along with society and religion.

## Objectives

The following have been set out as the objectives of the present study:

1. To explore and critically evaluate religious reform movements in India.
2. To explore and evaluate religious movements in India..
3. To critically evaluate the impact of religious reform movements on the Indian society.
4. To study the contribution of various social and religious reformers of India.

## Hypotheses of the Study

Following are the tentative hypotheses of the study:

1. The main objective of the Indian renaissance movement was to face the challenges posed by the importation of western ideas and values on Indian culture and outlook.
2. The Indian renaissance movement tried to modernize Hinduism by discarding the irrational rituals, false doctrines and monopolistic priest craft.
3. The Indian renaissance movement has universal rather than sectarian outlook.
4. The advancement of English education and scientific knowledge exercised a fruitful influence in stimulating the process of social reforms.

## Research Methodology

In the completion of the study archival method will be adopted. The information relevant to this research work would be based on both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources would include Reports published by the Government of India, works of social and religious reformers, Constituent Assembly Debates and the like. The secondary sources would include books authored by eminent writers and research articles contributed in national and international journals of repute.

**Introduction:-**The urgent need for social and religious reform that began to manifest itself from the early decades of the 19th century arose in response to the contact with Western culture and education. The weakness and decay of Indian society was evident to educated Indians who started to work systematically for their removal. They were no longer willing to accept the traditions, beliefs and practices of Hindu society simply because they had been observed for centuries. The impact of Western ideas gave birth to new awakening. The change that took place in the Indian social scenario is popularly known as the Renaissance.

The Indian society in the nineteenth 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. The abominable rites like animal sacrifice and physical torture had replaced the worship of God. The faithful lived in submission, not only to God, the powerful and unseen, but even to the whims, fancies, and wishes of the priests.

Filled with the desire to adapt their society to the requirements of the modern world of science, democracy, nationalism, thoughtful Indians set out to reform their traditional religions, for religion was in those times a basic part of people's life and there could be little social reform without religious reform.

#### *Roy As a Religious Reformer*

Roy was quite sure that unless the Hindu society underwent a religious and social transformation, it would not become fit for political progress. According to him, the then prevailing religious system of the Hindus was ill-suited for the promotion of their political interests. Hindus must accept some changes in their religion at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort. Reinterpretation of Hinduism, to Roy, was thus the starting point for the programme of socio-political reform. Roy sought to combine the deep experiences of spiritual life with the basic principle of social democracy. To him, this purity was well reflected in the Vedas and the Upanishads. Roy preached monotheism and a collective prayer from the platform of the *BrahmoSamaj*.

Roy devoted all his energies to fighting sectarianism and other medieval tendencies prevailing in the Hindu society. He was a firm believer of the *Advaita* philosophy which left no scope for such tendencies.

The primary concern of Roy was to review and re-evaluate the religion. He was of the opinion that rationality and modernity needed to be introduced in the field of religion. The socio-political progress of this country, according to him, depended mainly on the 'successful revolution in the religious thought and behaviour. He hoped that the universal religion for mankind could be established by combining the best elements of all religions. Roy, thus attempted a spiritual synthesis, stressing the unity of all religious experience. He became a confirmed monotheist. In 1828 he established the *BrahmoSamaj* which acted as a forum for religious and philosophical contemplation and discussion. "The name *BrahmoSamaj* is a Bengali phrase which may be translated 'society of Brahman' Brahma being objective formed from Brahman".<sup>1</sup> *BrahmoSamaj* supported that there is one God and also laid more emphasis to preach monotheism, and that true worship depended on intense devotion.

#### *Raja Rammohan Roy's Views on Rituals and Ceremonies*

For Roy, rituals and ceremonies were not important in the social reformation. He also championed the fact that the acquisition of the knowledge of the God was not dependent on the exercise of rites and rituals. Enlightenment of the spiritual life of the *Hindu* was dependent on the worship of the Supreme Being, not on the outward conformity of the rituals. He thoroughly studied various sacred books of India and realized that how the popular Hinduism had been corrupted from the earlier forms of *Hindu* faith and practice. He wanted to purify and elevate the minds of the *Hindus* and for that made *Hindus* aware of the misinterpretation of their *Shastras*. So, he opined that those useless mechanical rites were to be eliminated and man must enquire into the true nature and requirements of their religious doctrines and must free them from meaningless rites, ceremonies, superstitions and rituals.

Rammohan Roy wrote that every action had a cause and effect relations. He believed in socially useful rituals. He believed in simplicity and significance in the rituals and customs. He was very much opposed to socially destructive rituals which, he believed were responsible for destroying social happiness. He accepted those symbols, customs and traditions which belonged to truth and always rejected those symbols which were sufficient to degrade the truth, reason and intellectual faculties of the individuals.

Roy carried a struggle against the religions and social evils. He strongly opposed the worship of idols and rigidity of caste which were common among the Hindus in the region of Bengal. He published translation of *Vedas* and of certain Upanishad in Bengali and English. "He believed that the philosophy of *Vedanta* was based on this principal of reason. In any case one should not hesitate to depart from holy books, scriptures and inherited traditions of human reason if such traditions are proving harmful to the society.

#### *Atmiya Sabha and Raja Rammohan Roy*

Among a series of social efforts and social contributions for uplifting the intellectual and spiritual condition of the people and purification of the minds of the Hindus, by the establishment of a friendly association of like-minded people, *Atmiya Sabha* deserved to be mentioned. At that time, the society was degraded where the position of women was so miserable.

Roy started his public life in 1815 with the establishment of the *Atmiya Sabha*. This *sabha* vehemently protested against the prevalent practice of selling young girls to prospective husbands due to some pecuniary interests, in the name of the Kuleen tradition. *Atmiya Sabha*, which was a *Hindu* institution of learned men believing in one only God. *Atmiya Sabha* dealt with all kinds of social

absurdities which were enjoyed in the then society in terms of polytheism and idolatry, apart from religious principles. He was an adherent advocate of monotheism and national religions of the *Hindus* and wanted to establish the *Hindu* scripture and doctrines in their original pristine and genuine meaning. *AtmiyaSabha* was established for reforming society by discarding all social, religious and educational undesirable and unreasonable beliefs and practices. The meetings of *AtmiyaSabha* seem to have been discontinued after 1819.

As regards the causes of Raja Rammohan Roy's association with Unitarian Christianity, it can be said that

1. Raja Rammohan Roy mastered the comparative religion and came to the conclusion of unity of Godhead of the *Vedanta* and the stand of monotheism of the *Muslim* scripture.
2. He had a profound faith in the ethical teachings of Christ and wanted teaching in the non-sectarian manner. At the same time he preferred European Science and technology, which he wanted to be taught by the Unitarian teachers from the West. By that, the Indian masses would be familiar with the ethics of Christ and could teach the Indian students European Science.

### **BrahmoSamaj and Raja Rammohan Roy**

The BrahmoSamaj was the earliest movement of the modern type in India which was greatly influenced by modern western ideas. It was one of the most influential religious movements which is responsible for the making of modern India. The BrahmoSamaj played a notable role in the Indian renaissance.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy spent whole life for his daring religious outlook. In 1829 Roy founded BrahmoSabha to purify Hinduism from the evils of orthodoxy, superstition and ritualism. Later it was called BrahmoSamaj. "The name BrahmoSamaj is a Bengali phrase which may be translated 'society of Brahman' Brahma being objective formed from Brahman".<sup>7</sup>

*BrahmoSamaj*, literally a Society of God, was founded by Raja Rammohan Roy for spreading true and just notion of God through the mode of common worship irrespective of caste, colour, creed or religion and is an assembly of all sorts and description of people without distinction, meeting publicly for the sober, orderly, religious and devout adoration of "the unsearchable Eternal, Immutable Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe."

BrahmoSamaj supported that there is one God and also laid more emphasis to preach monotheism or belief in one God, and that true worship depended on intense devotion.

The main intention of the said *BrahmoSamaj* was to worship of one true God promoting a sense of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue, and strengthened the bond of unity between men and men.

The work of the new *Samaj* was started on 20 August, 1828. On the occasion, *Pandit Ramchandra Sarma* was the chief priest who preached a sermon on the spiritual worship of God after reciting the sacred texts from various *Hindu* books. It was believed that the sermon was written by Raja Rammohan Roy himself. The main essence of the discourse was —God is one only without an equal, in who abide all worlds and their inhabitants. Thus he who mentally perceives the Supreme spirit in all creatures, acquires perfect equanimity, and shall be absorbed into the highest essence, even into the Almighty.<sup>8</sup>

Raja Rammohan Roy described that sermon as simple, comprehensive and capable of distinguishing the religious belief and worship. The Trust deed explained the object of the BrahmoSamaj as "The worship and adoration of the eternal, unsearchable Immutable being who is author and preserver of the Universe". The Samaj declared its opposition to idol worship, priest-hood and sacrifices of any kind. The worship was performed through prayers and meditation and readings from the Vedas and the Upanishads.

### **The ideals of Brahma Samaj were:**

- The ideals of BrahmoSamaj had their origin in the synthesis of the Vedic religion and the Christian humanism.
- It advocated that there is one God, who is present everywhere, and is without shape and form. His worship lies in intense devotion.
- It believed in the brotherhood of man and treated all men as equal. It started a magazine entitled *Samvad Kaumudi*, to teach people love of mankind.
- It supported the introduction of English in schools with the belief that the study of English would open the door to modern sciences.

- It condemned social evils such as casteism, untouchability, child marriage and the Sati system. It was due to the efforts of Raja Ram mohan Roy that Lord William Bentick abolished Sati system in 1829 by declaring it an offence.
- It advocated freedom of the press and condemned any restriction imposed on it by the Government.
- It supported widow-remarriage and the education of girls. Raja Ram mohan Roy was the first to agitate for getting women their rightful place.

The chief objects of this institution are to deliver the *Hindus* from the thralldom of superstition and idolatry, to lead them to the worship of one God, and to improve their moral character by instructions calculated to raise their ideas from groveling objects., which only appeal to the senses, to those which are of a mental nature, and which raise the soul to a Being who is a Spirit, and who wishes that all who worship him should worship him in spirit and in truth.<sup>9</sup>

Religious, Moral and Social, Kolkata: SadharanBrahmoSamaj, 1983.

The *BrahmoSabha* was based on the idea of Unitarianism and for the worship of Divine unity. It was a congregation of non Sectarian monotheistic worship. Raja Rammohan Roy belonged to no existing sect; nor did he seek to found a new sect or originate a new creed, however refined and unexceptionable.

Roy actually wanted to unite people of different classes and communities through a monotheistic flavour. That notion of united worship was really praiseworthy and significant. But the truth must be the eternal scripture and was considered as sacred to the *Brahmos*. In *BrahmoSamaj*, the concepts of God, scripture and truth all were based on the idea of universality that meant knowledge in on true God.

The very basis of the social ideals of the *BrahmoSamaj* was humanity, irrespective of the class, colour and creed and the divine principle of brotherhood of humanity. There was no room for caste system, social inequalities and social disabilities in *BrahmoSamaj*. *BrahmoSamaj* had always recognised equality to the womankind, equal rights of men and women. Women under that *Samaj* was free from all kinds of degradation, disabilities and were subject to social liberty and religious culture. *BrahmoSamaj* emphasised on women emancipation, justice, righteousness and love. The religious basis of *BrahmoSamaj* was spiritual worship of the spirit, God.

## AryaSamaj

### DayanandSaraswati&AryaSamaj

The propaganda and activities of the Christian missionaries were deeply increased with religious fervour and were thus trespassing the cultural space of Hindus. The Indian middle class was brought up on the Western mode of education and they were impatiently waiting for an opportunity that will meet the challenge of missionaries effectively as well as consolidate Hinduism while addressing the economic and educational demands of society. In these signs of Swami Dayanand's ideology provided an ideal alternative and *AryaSamaj* developed as most permanent socio-religious movement in Northern India.<sup>12</sup>

The *AryaSamaj* had a far more momentous impact on the Hindu society than the *BrahmoSamaj*, the *PrathanaSamaj*, the *DevSamaj*, the *Ramakrishna* mission and other other such movements which had preceded it.<sup>13</sup>

The greater success of the *AryaSamaj* was due to its relatively more radical ideology and more aggressive approach in comparison with those. Ravinder Kumar described the relations of emerging Punjabi middle class with *AryaSamaj* in the folloing words:

“ Dayanand's teachings provided the Hindu middle classes with a firm sense of identity- Dayanand postulated the existence of a dualistic world of mind and matter.... If the world of our experience was real, than religion demanded of the individual social activism instead of social passivity; and it was only through involvement in the phenomenal world that one could pursue the good life. The ‘this-worldly ‘ attitude of the *AryaSamaj* and its belief in an intimate relationship between Man and God in an environment of limited material possibilities-all this combined to meet the ideological needs of an emerging Punjabi middle class.<sup>14</sup> The origin of the *AryaSamaj* is embedded in the personality of its founder Swami Dayanand.

On 10 April, 1875 DayanandSaraswati founded the *AryaSamaj* at Bombay. It was a Hindu reforms movement, meaning "society of the nobles". The purpose of the *Samaj* was to move the Hindu religion away from the fictitious beliefs. 'Krinvan to



VishvamAryam" was the motto of the Samaj, which means, "Make this world noble". This new organisation prepared a list of twenty-eight principles and regulations which expressed Swami Dayanand's ideas as well as his programme for the reform of Hindu society. Although the Bombay AryaSamaj continued to exist, but it was North India that Swami Dayanand found the greatest acceptance of his message.<sup>15</sup>

The ten tenets of the AryaSamaj are as follows:

1. God is the primary source of all true knowledge and all that is known by its means.
2. God is all truth, all knowledge, all beatitude, incorporeal, almighty, just, merciful, un-begotten, infinite, unchangeable, beginning-less, incomparable the support and lord of all, all pervading, omniscient, imperishable, immortal, fearless, eternal, holy, and creator of the universe. He alone is worthy of being worshiped.
3. The Vedas are the books of all true knowledge. It is the paramount duty of all the Aryas to hear, read and to recite them to others.
4. All persons should remain ever-ready ready to accept truth and to renounce untruth.
5. All actions ought to be performed in conformity with virtue; that is, after due consideration of right and wrong.
6. The chief object of the AryaSamaj is to do good to mankind world, that is, to ameliorate physical, spiritual and social condition of all men..
7. All ought to be treated with love, justice and with regard to their merit.
8. Ignorance ought to be dispelled and knowledge must be diffused.
9. No one ought to remain contented with his personal progress one should count the progress of all as one's own.
10. In matters, which affect the well being of all, the individual should subordinate his personal likings.

These ten founding principles of the AryaSamaj was the pillar on which Maharishi Dayanand sought to reform India and asked people to go back to the Vedas and its undiluted spiritual teaching. The Samaj directs its members to condemn ritualistic practices like idol worship, pilgrimage and bathing in holy rivers, animal sacrifice, offering in temples, sponsoring priesthood etc.

#### Principles of AryaSamaj:

1. Acceptance of the Vedas as the only source of truth.
2. Opposition to idol worship.
4. Opposition to the **theory of God-incarnation** and religious pilgrimages.
5. Recitation of the mantras of the Vedas and performance of 'Havan' and 'Yajna'.
6. Faith in female education.
7. Opposition to child-marriage and polygamy.
8. Propagation of Hindi and Sanskrit languages.

#### Shudhi Movement

Repression and discrimination against minorities is as old as recorded history itself. Historically, most of the conversions of Hindus in India to Islam started during the Mughal Empire. Islam did this by adopting coercive methods. Many people were beheaded for refusing to accept Islam as their faith. The incident of a young lad named BalHakikatRai who refused to accept Islam was beheaded in front of his mother. Sikh Gurus like Guru ArjanDev, Guru TegBahadur, and four Sahibjadas of Guru Gobind Singh and many Sikh followers and their siblings also suffered the same fate for refusing to convert to Islam.

The AryaSamaj started the Shudhi movement to prevent low caste Hindus from embracing Christianity or Islam and to uplift them as integral part of Hinduism. The idea of Shudhi movement was the brain child of Swami Dayananda. "Shudhi" is a Sanskrit word and it means cleansing, purifying and freedom from defilement and purification.

The AryaSamaj as a whole opposed conversion of Hindus to Islam and Christianity and was the most profound reform movement in the late 19th century India and AryaSamaj therefore advocated re-conversion of recent converts back to Hinduism. AryaSamaj launched Shuddhi movement to bring non-Hindus back to Hinduism this process was called *Shuddhi*. In Lahore, grand work was done

among Hindu sweepers and Chamars. In this respect the SuddhiSabha was largely instrumental in removing the blot of untouchability from the Indian society.<sup>18</sup>

This *shuddhi* offensive was thus seen as a grave challenge by Muslim leaders, and did not sit well with Muslims who responded to it by advocating a grand community-wide effort of Islamic reform, reaching out to the Muslim groups, seeking to draw them back into the fold of Muslim community. So on 23 December 1926 he paid the ultimate sacrifice when he was assassinated by a Muslim fanatic.

But on 23 December 2011, on the Shardhanabdbalidan Divas, a mega Shudhi event was organized where thousands of Hindu converts returned to their faith.

The AryaSamaj played a significant role in bringing the socio- religious changes in pre-independent India. Though Dayananda was criticized as a conservative and sectarian activist who claimed the superiority of Hinduism over and above of all other religions, yet he was one of the makers of modern India.

### Phule on Religion

Phule should be regarded as the greatest critic of Hinduism or the Brahmanical religion in the nineteenth century. He ridiculed the Hindu faith in the multiplicity of Gods and Goddesses, the story of incarnation, the fables concerning the indulgence of Gods in the pains, pleasures and passions like the mortal men.<sup>20</sup> In this sense he was great iconoclast. According to him, these aspects of Hinduism served as the foundation of superstitions, caste and sectarian dogmas and a number of other evils that degenerated the social fabric of Hindu society and paved way for the slavery of the large bulk of the people. According to Phule the myriad superstitions were promoted in the name of religion by the Brahmins in order to exploit masses. Phule ruthlessly exposed the exploitation strategy of the Brahmins. Every event in the life, like the birth of a child, marriage, occupying the new house, death, new year day, ordinary calendrical festivals in Hindu religion, the annual as well as the monthly fairs at Pandharpur and Jejuari etc. were used for exploitation of the common people. The ignorance and superstition among the masses helped the Brahmins in grasping superior social and religious status in society.

Phule criticized and under-estimated the work of the saints like Mukundraj, Dnyaneshwar and Ramdas because they recognized the importance of rituals and traditional ways of life.<sup>23</sup> Any religion worth its name must essentially flower itself out into a well developed conception of morality. Morality based on the principles of truth and equality of all men should be the essence of any religion.. So no creed that does not naturally bloom into a rational conception of social morality should be called a religion. It is dogma.

Phule rejected the concept of 'fortune'. It was the result of fruit of our own doings and the cumulative effect of the various forces working in the society. He regarded this notion as detrimental to the development of man and society. It absolutely rejects the role of human will power and action and efficiency and leads to an inactive and passive life. Phule however, should not be viewed as opponents of religion. What he opposed was the irrationality and inequality that were preached in the name of religion. According to Brahmins theft was the Dharma of the thieves; falsehood was the Dharma of liar; cheating the ignorant was the Dharma of clever; exploiting the Shudras was the Dharma of Brahman.<sup>24</sup>

He rejected the need of the institutions like priesthood. One of the conditions for the membership of the '*Sarvajanik Satya Dharma*' was to promise that for no religious functions would be employed and intermediary between him and God. It would create inequality. How one can be so pure as to make others pure by offering *teertha* (*teertha* is wash water of tumb) According to Hindu tradition, the devotee is expected to wash the feet of the priest and drink the wash water as holy. Phule gave moral and social connotation to the religious concept like sin and virtue. Sin consisted in violating the dictates of one's own conscience and acting otherwise, virtue meant following the dictates of one's own conscience, honesty. He asserted know others from yourself think of others as you would of yourself.

God is the creator of the universe. Phule held that since all are created equal therefore, all are entitled to enjoy equal rights. Equality means nobody has right to dominate or subjugate other or even to regard him as low. Everybody has right to live and to live freely and to enjoy the fruits of his honest labour. He has also freedom of expression qualified only in one way that it should not hurt others. Everybody being equal, has the right to practice the religion and cherish ideas political and otherwise as per his own conviction or

faith. He has the right to enjoy political freedom. Polygamy is the anti-thesis of the equality of men and women. So everybody must regard all persons other than one's wife or husband as brothers and sisters. Equality demands the ends of discrimination in schools, or in the administrative services. Justice must be done at all. It is respectful to eat the bread of one's labour. No work of profession is bad or low. What is to live on others' toils by cheating and deceiving others in name of religion or otherwise. One should not believe in such persons neither should they be supported.<sup>28</sup>

Other principles of truth are related to moral principles like not to tell lies, not to commit theft, to avoid use of narcotics and intoxicating drugs, respecting parents and elderly persons, not to hurt animals. The concept of liberty and equality are central to the new religion. The first principle that should guide right behavior is to accept that all men and women are born free and, hence entitled to equal enjoyment of all rights.

His concept of liberty was profound. It included the liberation of men from the fettered of astrology, fortune, fear of another world war and rebirth as also from such conceptions as salvation of souls etc. Phule wanted to be free from nonsense customs and traditions which restricted from freedom his own conscience and reason. Phule disapproved astrology, fortune, concepts of heaven and hell and rebirth as they made men meek, submissive and passive to the social and natural forces. He rejected the concepts of sin and virtue or rather freed these conceptions from their traditional religious connotation and interpreted them as some intelligible phrases expressing some social attributes.

Phule was a great humanist. Man must be recognized as man whatever his race, religion or creed. As a man, he is entitled to some fundamental rights and pleasures of life. Thus his humanism consisted of freedom, equality and internationalism. Phule's humanism was universal and recognized no barrier to the essential equality of man. This universal humanism in the Indian situation expressed itself in the form of the downtrodden classes like the Shudras, Ati-Shudras and the women. All these along with the depressed classes like Negroes in America, according to him, belonged to one human family and were entitled to equal rights, for liberty and happiness.

### **Swami Vivekananda**

#### *Vedas and Upanishads- Way for Salvation*

Vivekananda believed that the source of Hindu religion and culture were Vedas. He was more attracted by the philosophy of the Upanishads because it prepared the way for human salvation. No other literature in the world presents such a clear philosophy for the liberation of man from worldly bondage. The principles of Upanishads inspired him very much and helped in moulding the character and philosophy of Vivekananda. He was also inspired from the teachings of Gautama Buddha who renounced the world not for his own salvation but for the salvation of the whole mankind which was suffering from all kinds of misery.

#### *Vedanta- Heart of Religion*

The heart of religion was Vedanta. It was revealed by intuition, experience and actual realization by seers and prophets. It is their recorded thoughts and feelings that are to be found in the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagwad Gita and other works. Sri Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of the religion these scriptures contain. In Vedanta, Vivekananda found most suitable philosophy for establishing an understanding of harmony between different religions. He treated Hinduism not as an ordinary religion. According to him it was the very manifestation of the divinity already in man. The arguments of Vivekananda clearly stated the point "every soul is a sun covered with clouds of ignorance. The difference between the soul and soul is owing to the difference in the density of these layers of clouds. This is the conscious or unconscious basis of all religion and this is the explanation of the whole history of human progress, either in the material, intellectual or spiritual play."<sup>33</sup>

#### *Establisher of Religious Harmony*

Vivekananda stood and worked for the spiritual integration of mankind. He said, "our minds are like vessels and each of us tries to arrive at a realization of God. God is like the water that fills the different vessels of different shapes. In each vessel the vision of God takes a different form. Yet, he is one, he is God in every sense."<sup>34</sup> By this expression Vivekananda was presenting a very valuable lesson before humanity. He was presenting the fact that the apparent contradictions in different religions are not real. The message of Vivekananda was for the unity of human society, which would have made much progress in history, if there was no sectarianism, fanaticism and violence in the name of religion.

*Concept of Universal Religion*

The Universalism of Buddhist principles attracted the attention of Vivekananda and like Buddha he also becomes a world spiritual leader. “All his work in east or west was to summon men and women to the spiritual heritage. All the activities of Vivekananda had one single objective. His primary object was to give to man the priceless gift of self-knowledge. The way he developed the spiritual self-confidence makes him a unique personality in human history. His conception of religion were revolutionary one in the sense that it differed from the conceptions of other stages of the past and present. Instead of playing the role of a unifying factor religion divided people. This happens because of the ritualistic domination of religion. He stood for the fusion of all religion into one universal religion. Man has to accept the variations in religion and beliefs as a sign of life and an essential trait of mankind. To make the people understand this feature of religion, he spoke and acted to explain the conception of religion to people.

Swami Vivekananda was a divinely inspired leader who successfully infused a new hope of love, peace and progress for humanity. He had a vision about all the common people of India and he was of the opinion that a true religion must give a helping hand to the meanest and the most down-trodden who were suffering due to poverty and ignorance. He deviated from the general philosophical approach of Indian sages, it is rightly said that “Vivekananda was a man who was proud of the past but did not want to live in the past.”<sup>37</sup>

He taught the human race what the external truth is and also the path to attain it.

The modern renaissance leaders of nineteenth century had remarked that Sri Ramakrishna Parmahansa was, the God, devotee, Sakhi, Siva, Visnu, Allah and Jesus. This all in one form was experienced in abstract and reality by all who had approached him. The most remarkable thing is that the religion of the great philosopher is reality in sense, only a brave and purified heart can say so.

**Universal Religion**

The religion which lays importance on thoughts will be brilliant and not concrete. The action or deed based on religion gives prominence to deed. The real or factual religion is the experience one gets when thought, emotion and action are combined. He wanted to revive the Indian culture and traditions by discarding the conventional methods.

The life, teachings and messages of Sri Ramakrishna Parmahansa is very useful in the realm of philosophical thoughts and practical approach. He always laid emphasis on the welfare of human and leading them on the right path. He always expostulated that one should always stick on to the life of spirituality and thereby realize the self. The things which stand as boulders in the spiritual practices are three wealth, women and wine. If the lust and desire are conquered and chained, one is sure to be free from all evils and reach the summit of self-realisation. When mind is pure, the darkness of ignorance is removed.

The most prominent necessity of a human is to obtain the bond with the Divine. If one is able to reach this liberated stage; he should be able to help others to reach the stage of liberty. The real and true religion is the relation with Isvara. First, one must know oneself only then he will be able to know God. The Lord who resides in all should be served and not the God elsewhere. To him all the Divine powers dwell in human beings. He had great respect for women and there was no gender difference for him. It was he who had unfolded the actual intention of all customs and practices of India. He was the practical image of all the rites and rituals of religions which existed in India. The main treatise or lesson which was taught by Sri Ramakrishna Parmahansa was humanity. He was of the opinion that mutual respect and cooperation will surely be able to put an end to the war between faiths. He was a man of universal outlook and besides religious tolerance he also taught dynamic acceptance.

According to him, humanity is to know God in all his dimensions, one must experience truth by practicing other faiths. The magna- carta of religions is the Vedic dictum, : truth is one sage call it variously.”

The great teachings and motto of Sri Ramakrishna like the universal temperament of love and harmony, peace and enlightenment, renunciation and service, has left great and un-eraseable impression in the minds of all Indians.

**MahadevGovindRanade**

BrahmoSamaj was the first missionary movement in modern India and Keshab Chandra the first missionary to tour the country for propagating the new faith. In 1864, during his visit to Bombay, he felt the need of religious and social reform and resented proselytisation by Christian missionaries. Societies to combat the spread of Christianity were formed like the “ParamhansaSabha.” In



1867, as a result of Keshab Chandra Sen's visit, the PrarthanaSamaj(Prayer Society) was established. The Samaj started its missionary work in 1882.

The chief architect of the Samaj was M. G. Ranade, a man of the highest intellectual stature in the India of the nineteenth century.<sup>46</sup> All these years that he lived in Bombay as High Court judge, Ranade was closely associated with the PrarthanaSamaj.

Ranade was a theologian-as was inevitable for a man possessing his richness of inner religious life and his keenness of intellect. He was a convinced Theist. In his "Philosophy of Indian Theism." He vigorously propounds the Theistic interpretation of the universe as against materialism, egoism, pantheism and agnosticism.

In religion, to use Browning's words, we have a "reach that exceeds our grasp" and many of our deepest tenets are incapable of explicit proof." All the proof we can attain to in religious matters", he says, "is that of practical moral conviction". "it is just possible that practical or moral conviction is all that is needed and therefore attainable by the human mind in its search after the Absolute, and in that case the demand for logical proof may itself be a unreasonable demand." He is ready to let the practical consequences have the last word, as when he says: "Belief in the moral government of a Perfect Being, and in the immortality of the soul have made civilized man what is at present found to be, and whatever may be the case with a few great thinkers, mankind generally can only be saved by this saving faith."<sup>48</sup>

### **Religion as the Basis of Social Reform<sup>53</sup>**

The mission of the BrahmoSamaj is essentially a religious one. They possess a steady religious principles and a strong sense of moral obligations affords the best proof that the task of regulating the social life of large population belongs to them. Hence, social reformation must be based upon religion. It is true that the reformation of social customs and usages may, to a great extent, be accomplished independently of religion: but it is not true that social reformation can be thorough and complete without religious advancement.

Social reformation must, therefore, be preceded by and bases upon religious reformation.... The Samaj does not seek to destroy caste as an institution distinct from Hinduism by setting up a purely secular movement to oppose its law and principles. It seeks to establish the equality of man on religious grounds, and thus indirectly, abolish caste distinctions. It wages a purely religious war with all evils, theological and social.

### **Religion as a Social Mission<sup>54</sup>**

The AryaSamajmovement, with which the Arya Kumar Sabhas are so closely connected, has humanitarian as well as national mission. The AryaSamaj is humanitarian in so far as it aims at making of men and women better, merely truth loving and nobler. The Samaj believes in certain truths which it preaches in all its sincerity to mankind in general without any distinction of creed, colour, or nationality. The major mission of the Samaj is reforming and regenerating the people who have from times immemorial believed in the teaching of the Vedas. As these people are Hindus, the AryaSamaj has a special obligation towards them, in this sense, the mission of the AryaSamaj is 'national'. What is needed is that the beauties of the Hindu social culture should be explained with special emphasis on the abuses which have crept in the later days of darkness and ignorance, and which require to be purged out.

### **REFERENCES**

1. James Hasting, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 2, New York; Charles Scribners, p. 812.
2. Collet, Sophia Dobson, *Life and Letters of Raja Ram Mohan Roy*, Calcutta; SadharanBrahmoSamaj, 1988, p. 265.
3. Iqbal Singh; *Rammohun Roy A Biographical inquiry into the making of modern India*. op. cit. p. 189.
4. BipinChandra; *Modern India*, NCERT, New Delhi, 1990, p.95.
5. Collet, op. cit. p. 139.
6. Nag, Kalidas and Burman, Debajyoti; *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*. Translations of Upanishad, op. cit., p. 194.
7. James Hasting, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 2 (New York; Charles Scribners, 1~67), p. 812. .Quoted in Mini Thakur, *Raja Ram Mohan Roy: His Social, Political and Economic Ideas*, Deep& Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1987, p. 31.
8. Collet, Sophia Dobson. (1988). *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*. First Regular Campaign, Calcutta: SadharanBrahmoSamaj, p. 222.

9. Majumdar, J.K; *Raja Rammohun Roy and Progressive Movements in India. Vol I.*
10. Tagore, Saumendranath; *RajaRammhun Roy.* BrahmoSabha , New Delhi: Publication Division, 1974, p.48.
11. J.T.F. Jordens; *DayanandaSaraswati: His Life and Ideas*, Delhi, 1978, pp. 180-181.
12. Ravinder Kumar; *Essays in the Social History of Modern India*, New Delhi, 1983, p. 110.
13. Charles H. Heimsath; *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reforms*, Princeton, 1964, p. 114.
14. Ravinder Kumar; *Essays*, op. cit; p. 139.
15. Kenneth W Jones; *The AryaSamaj in British India*, op. cit; p. 29.
16. J. T. F. Jorden; *DayanandSaraswati*, op. cit; pp. 178-180.
17. Ibid. p. 173; also see LalaLajpatRai; *The AryaSamaj*, op. cit; pp. 101-102.
18. Dhanpati, Pandey; *Builders of Modern India* , op. cit; p. 104.
19. A. C. Turnes; *Census of India*, 1931, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Vol. XVIII, Part-I Report, Allahabad, The Superintendent ,Printing and Stationery, United Provinces, 1933.
20. Phule; *BrahmanancheKasab*, inKeer and Malshe (eds.) *Mahatma PhuleSamagraVangmaya*, 1869, op. cit, p. 49.

