

Social and Religious Reform Movements in Modern India

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(1) Raja Rammohan Roy and Brahma Samaj

Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833) is often called the **the 'father of Indian Renaissance'** and the **maker of Modern India**.

His writings: Gift to Monotheists (1809) and translated the Vedas and the five Upanishads into Bengali to prove his conviction that ancient Hindu texts support monotheism.

In 1814, he set up **the Atmiya Sabha** in Calcutta to propagate the monotheistic ideals of the Vedanta and to campaign against idolatry, caste rigidities, meaningless rituals and other social ills.

Strongly influenced by rationalist ideas, he declared that Vedanta is based on reason and that, if reason demanded it, even a departure from the scriptures is justified.

In his **Precepts of Jesus** (1820), he tried to separate the moral and philosophical message of the New Testament, which he praised, from its miracle stories.

Raja Rammohan Roy **founded the Brahma Sabha** in August 1828; it was later renamed **Brahma Samaj**.

The Samaj was committed to – “the worship and adoration of the Eternal, Unsearchable, Immutable Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe”.

Forms of worship: Prayers, meditation and readings of the Upanishads and complete absence of graven image, statue or sculpture, carving, painting, picture, portrait, etc.,

Long-term agenda of the Brahma Samaj – to purify Hinduism and to preach monotheism— was based on the twin pillars of reason and the Vedas and Upanishads.

The Samaj also tried to incorporate teachings of other religions and kept its emphasis on human dignity, opposition to idolatry and criticism of social evils such as sati.

Roy's progressive ideas met with strong opposition from orthodox elements like Raja Radhakant Deb who organised the Dharma Sabha to counter Brahma Samaj propaganda.

Truth and Virtue do not necessarily belong to wealth and Power and distinctions of big mansions.

– Raja Rammohan Roy

Features of Brahma Samaj

it denounced polytheism and idol worship;

it discarded faith in divine avatars (incarnations);

it denied that any scripture could enjoy the status of ultimate authority transcending human reason and conscience;

it took no definite stand on the doctrine of karma and transmigration of soul and left it to individual Brahmos to believe either way;

it criticized the caste system. His ideas and activities were also aimed at political uplift of the masses through social reform and, to that extent, can be said to have had nationalist undertones.

Raja Rammohan Roy's Efforts at Social Reform

He was a determined **crusader against the inhuman practice of sati**. He started his anti-sati struggle in 1818 and he cited sacred texts to prove his contention.

His efforts were rewarded by the **Government Regulation in 1829** which declared the practice of sati a crime.

He **condemned the general subjugation of women**. He **attacked polygamy and the degraded state of widows** and demanded the **right of inheritance and property for women**.

He supported **David Hare's** efforts to found **the Hindu College in 1817**, while Roy's **English school** taught mechanics and Voltaire's philosophy.

In 1825, he established a **Vedanta college** where courses in both Indian learning and Western social and physical sciences were offered.

He also helped enrich the Bengali language by compiling a Bengali grammar book and evolving a modern elegant prose style.

Rammohan was a gifted linguist. He knew more than a dozen languages including Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, English, French, Latin, Greek and Hebrew.

Roy brought out journals in Bengali, Hindi, English, Persian to educate and inform the public and represent their grievances before the government.

Roy condemned oppressive practices of Bengali zamindars and demanded fixation of maximum rents, abolition of taxes on tax-free lands, judicial equality between Indians and Europeans and that trial be held by jury.

He called for a reduction of export duties on Indian goods abroad and abolition of the East India Company's trading rights, the Indianisation of superior services and separation of the executive from the judiciary.

Roy had David Hare, Alexander Duff, Debendranath Tagore, P.K. Tagore, Chandrashekhar Deb and Tarachand Chakraborty as his associates.

Keshab Chandra Sen and the Brahmo Samaj

Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884) was **made the acharya by Debendranath Tagore** in 1858. He was instrumental in popularizing the movement, and branches of the Samaj were opened outside Bengal—in the United Provinces, Punjab, Bombay, Madras and other towns.

Debendranath did not accept Sen's radical ideas, such as cosmopolitanisation of the Samaj's meetings by inclusion of teachings from all religions and his strong views against the caste system even open support to inter-caste marriages. Keshab Chandra Sen was dismissed from the office of acharya in 1865.

Keshab and his followers founded the **Brahmo Samaj of India** in 1866, while **Debendranath Tagore's Samaj** came to be known as the **Adi Brahmo Samaj**.

After 1878, the disgusted followers of Keshab set up a new organisation, the **Sadharan Brahmo Samaj**. The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj was started by **Ananda Mohan Bose, Shibchandra Deb** and **Umesh Chandra Datta**.

It reiterated the Brahmo doctrines of faith in a Supreme being, one God, the belief that no scripture or man is infallible, belief in the dictates of reason, truth and morality. A number of Brahmo centres were opened in Madras province.

In Punjab, the Dayal Singh Trust opened **Dayal Singh College at Lahore** in 1910 to implant Brahmo ideas.

(2) Prarthana Samaj

In 1867, Keshab Chandra Sen helped **Atmaram Pandurang** found the Prarthana Samaj in Bombay.

A precursor of the Prarthana Samaj was the **Paramahansa Sabha**, something like a secret society to spread liberal ideas and encourage the breakdown of caste and communal barriers. **Mahadeo Govind Ranade** (1842-1901), joined the samaj in 1870. Other leaders of the samaj were **G. Bhandarkar** (1837- 1925) and **N.G. Chandavarkar** (1855-1923).

The Prarthana Sabha was very attached to the bhakti cult of Maharashtra.

Four-point social agenda

- (i) disapproval of caste system,
- (ii) women's education,
- (iii) widow remarriage, and
- (iv) raising the age of marriage for both males and females.

Dhondo Keshav Karve and Ranade founded the **Widow Remarriage Movement** as well as **Widows' Home Association** with the aim of providing education and training to widows.

(3) Young Bengal Movement and Henry Vivian Derozio

A young Anglo-Indian, **Henry Vivian Derozio** (1809-31), who taught at the **Hindu College**, was the leader and inspirer of the progressive, radical, intellectual trend among the youth in Bengal trend.

Derozio inspired his pupils to think freely and rationally, question all authority, love liberty, equality and freedom, and oppose decadent customs and traditions.

The Derozians also supported **women's rights and education**. Also, Derozio was perhaps the **first nationalist poet of modern India**.

Derozio was removed from the Hindu College in 1831 because of his radicalism.

Reason for limited success – the prevailing social conditions at that time, which were not ripe for the adoption of radical ideas and no support from any other social group or class.

The Derozians lacked any real link with the masses; for instance, they failed to take up the peasants' cause.

Demands: induction of Indians in higher grades of services, protection of ryots from oppressive zamindars, better treatment to Indian labor abroad in British colonies, revision of the Company's charter, freedom of press and trial by jury.

Surendranath Banerjea described the Derozians as 'the pioneers of the modern civilization of Bengal, the conscript fathers of our race whose virtues will excite veneration and whose failings will be treated with gentlest consideration'.

(4) Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

Vidyasagar's ideas were a happy blend of Indian and Western thought. He believed in high moral values, was a deep humanist and was generous to the poor.

In 1850, he became the **principal of Sanskrit College** and opened the Sanskrit College to non-Brahmins.

Vidyasagar started a movement in support of widow remarriage which resulted in **legalization of widow remarriage**. He was also a crusader **against child marriage and polygamy**.

He did much for the cause of **women's education**. As government inspector of schools, he helped organize thirty five girls' schools many of which he ran at his own expense.

As **secretary of Bethune School** (established in 1849, Calcutta), he was one of the pioneers of higher education for women in India.

(5) Balshastri Jambhekar

Balshastri Jambhekar (1812-1846) was a pioneer of social reform through journalism in Bombay; he **attacked brahminical orthodoxy** and tried to **reform popular Hinduism**.

Newspaper: Darpan (1832).

Known as the **father of Marathi journalism**. In 1840, he started **Digdarshan** which published articles on scientific subjects as well as history.

Jambhekar founded the **Bombay Native General Library** and started the **Native Improvement Society** of which an offshoot was the **Students Literary and Scientific Library**.

He was the first professor of Hindi at the **Elphinston College**, besides being a director of the Colaba Observatory.

(6) Paramahansa Mandali

Founded in 1849 in Maharashtra as a secret society that worked to reform Hindu religion and society in general.

Founders – **Dadoba Pandurang, Mehtaji Durgaram** and others

The ideology of the society was closely linked to that of the **Manav Dharma Sabha**. The founders of the mandali were primarily interested in breaking caste rules.

(7) Satyashodhak Samaj and Jyotiba or Jyotirao Phule

Jyotiba Phule (1827-1890), born in Satara, Maharashtra, belonged to the mali (gardener) community and organised a powerful movement against upper caste domination and brahminical supremacy.

Phule **founded the Satyashodhak Samaj** (Truth Seekers' Society) in 1873, with the leadership of the samaj coming from the backward classes, malis, telis, kunbis, saris and dhangars.

Aim: (i) social service, and (ii) spread of education among women and lower caste people.

Books: Sarvajanik Satyadharm and **Gulamgiri**

Phule used the symbol of **Rajah Bali** as opposed to the brahmins' symbol of Rama. Phule aimed at the complete abolition of the caste system and socio-economic inequalities; he was **against Sanskrit Hinduism**.

He was a firm believer in gender equality, was a pioneer in women's education; he with the help of his wife, **Savitribai**, opened a girls' school at Poona; he was a pioneer of widow remarriage movement in Maharashtra and also opened a home for widows in 1854.

Phule was awarded the title '**Mahatma**' for his social reform work.

Lack of education lead to lack of wisdom, which leads to lack of morals, which leads to lack of progress, which leads to lack of money, which leads to the oppression of the lower classes. See what state of the society one lack of education can cause!

– Mahatma Jyotirao Phule

(8) Gopalhari Deshmukh 'Lokahitawadi'

Gopalhari Deshmukh (1823-1892) was a social reformer and rationalist from Maharashtra.

He wrote for a **weekly Prabhakar** under the **pen name of Lokahitawadi** on social reform issues.

He said, "If religion does not sanction social reform, then change religion."

He **started a weekly, Hitechhu**, and also played a leading role in founding the periodicals, **Gyan Prakash, Indu Prakash and Lokahitawadi**.

(9) Gopal Ganesh Agarkar

Gopal Ganesh Agarkar (1856-1895) was an educationist and social reformer from Maharashtra. He criticized the blind dependence on tradition and false glorification of the past. He was also the **first editor of Kesari**, the journal started by Lokmanya Tilak.

Periodical: Sudharak, which spoke against untouchability and the caste system.

(10) The Servants of India Society

Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915), a liberal leader of the Indian National Congress, founded the Servants of India Society in 1905 with the help of **G. Ranade**.

Aim: to train national missionaries for the service of India; to promote, by all constitutional means, the true interests of the Indian people; and to prepare a cadre of selfless workers who were to devote their lives to the cause of the country in a religious spirit.

In 1911, the **Hitavada** began to be published to project the views of the society. After Gokhale's death (1915), **Srinivasa Shastri** took over as president.

(11) Social Service League

Founder: Narayan Malhar Joshi (Bombay)

Aim: to secure for the masses better and reasonable conditions of life and work

Joshi also founded the **All India Trade Union Congress (1920)**.

(12) The Ramakrishna Movement and Swami Vivekananda

The teachings of **Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836- 1886) found many followers on the outskirts of Calcutta.

Objectives of the Ramakrishna movement:

(i) to bring into existence a band of monks dedicated to a life of renunciation and practical spirituality, from among whom teachers and workers would be sent out to spread the universal message of Vedanta

(ii) lay disciples to carry on preaching, philanthropic and charitable works, looking upon all men, women and children, irrespective of caste, creed or color, as veritable manifestations of the Divine.

Paramahansa laid the foundations of **the Ramakrishna Math** as a nucleus to fulfill the first objective.

The second objective was taken up by Swami Vivekananda after Ramakrishna's death when he founded the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 (headquarters at Belur near Calcutta).

He used to say, '**Service of man is the service of God.**'

Swami Vivekananda

Narendranath Datta (1862-1902), who later came to be known as Swami Vivekananda emerged as the preacher of **neo-Hinduism**.

Certain spiritual experiences of Ramakrishna, the teachings of the Upanishads and the Gita and the examples of the Buddha and Jesus are the basis of Vivekananda's message to the world about human values.

Mission: to bridge the gulf between **paramartha** (service) and **vyavahara** (behaviour), and between spirituality and day-to-day life.

Vivekananda believed in the fundamental oneness of God and said, 'For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam, is the only hope.'

He pointed out that the masses needed two kinds of knowledge – secular knowledge about how to work for their economic uplift and the spiritual knowledge to have faith in themselves and strengthen their moral sense.

At the **Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893**, he envisaged a new culture for the whole world and called for a blend of the materialism of the West and the spiritualism of the East into a new harmony to produce happiness for mankind.

Vivekananda advocated the **doctrine of service**—the service of all beings.

Forget not that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate, the cobbler, the sweeper are thy flesh and blood, thy brothers.

– Swami Vivekanand

(13) Dayananda Saraswati and Arya Samaj

The Arya Samaj Movement, revivalist in form though not in content, was the result of a reaction to Western influences.

Its founder, **Dayananda Saraswati or Mulshankar** (1824-1883) has wandered as an ascetic for fifteen years in search of truth. The first Arya Samaj unit was formally set up by him at Bombay in 1875 and later the headquarters of the Samaj were established at Lahore.

Book: Satyarth Prakash (The True Exposition). He took inspiration from the **Vedas** and considered them to be '**India's Rock of Ages**', the infallible and the true original seed of Hinduism.

He gave the slogan "**Back to the Vedas**". He criticised later Hindu scriptures such as the Puranas and the ignorant priests for perverting Hinduism.

Swami Dayananda once lamented **the Hindu race** as '**the children of children**'.

He strongly criticized the escapist Hindu belief in **maya (illusion)** and the aim of human life as a struggle to attain **moksha (salvation)**.

Instead, he advocated that God, soul and matter (prakriti) were distinct and eternal entities and every individual had to work out his own salvation in the light of the eternal principles governing human conduct.

The Arya Samaj fixed the minimum marriageable age at twenty-five years for boys and sixteen years for girls.

The ten guiding principles of the Arya Samaj are – (i) God is the primary source of all true knowledge; (ii) God, as all-truth, all-knowledge, almighty, immortal, creator of Universe, is alone worthy of worship; (iii) the Vedas are the books of true knowledge; (iv) an Arya should always be ready to accept truth and abandon untruth; (v) dharma, that is, due consideration of right and wrong, should be the guiding principle of all actions; (vi) the principal aim of the Samaj is to promote world's well-being in the material, spiritual and social sense; (vii) everybody should be treated with love and justice; (viii) ignorance is to be dispelled and knowledge increased; (ix) one's own progress should depend on uplift of all others; (x) social well-being of mankind is to be placed above an individual's well-being.

The Dayananda AngloVedic (D.A.V.) College was established in 1886 at Lahore. The work of the Swami was carried forward by Lala Hansraj, Pandit Gurudutt, Lala Lajpat Rai and Swami Shradhanand.

(14) Seva Sadan

A Parsi social reformer, **Behramji M. Malabari** (1853- 1912), founded the Seva Sadan in 1908 along with a friend, Diwan Dayaram Gidumal.

It was his efforts that led to the **Age of Consent Act** regulating the age of consent for females. Seva Sadan specialised in taking care of those women who were exploited and then discarded by society.

(15) Dev Samaj

Founded in 1887 at **Lahore** by **Shiv Narayan Agnihotri** (1850- 1927).

Its teachings were compiled in a book, **Deva Shastra**. Agnihotri spoke against child marriage.

(16) Dharma Sabha

Radhakant Deb founded this sabha in 1830. An orthodox society, it stood for the preservation of the status quo in socio-religious matters, opposing even the abolition of sati.

(17) Bharat Dharma Mahamandala

Other organizations created to defend orthodox Hinduism were the **Sanatana Dharma Sabha** (1895), the **Dharma Maha Parishad** in South India, and **Dharma Mahamandali** in Bengal.

These organizations combined in 1902 to form the single organisation of Bharat Dharma Mahamandala, with headquarters at Varanasi.

This organization sought to introduce proper management of Hindu religious institutions, open Hindu educational institutions, etc. **Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya** was a prominent figure in this

(18) Radhaswami Movement

Tulsi Ram known as **Shiv Dayal Saheb**, founded this movement in 1861. The Radhaswamis believe in one supreme being, supremacy of the guru, a company of pious people (satsang), and a simple social life.

(19) Sree Narayana Guru Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Movement

The SNDP movement was an example of a regional movement born out of conflict between the depressed classes and upper castes.

It was started by **Sree Narayana Guru Swamy** (1856- 1928) among the **Ezhavas of Kerala**. The Ezhavas were the single largest caste group in Kerala constituting 26 per cent of the total population.

Narayana Guru, took a stone from the Neyyar river and installed it as a **Sivalinga at Aruvippuram** on Sivaratri in 1888.

The movement (**Aruvippuram movement**) drew the famous poet **Kumaran Asan** as a disciple of Narayana Guru.

In 1889, the **Aruvippuram Kshetra Yogam** was formed. Thus the Aruvippuram Sree Narayana Guru Dharma Paripalana Yogam (in short SNDP) was registered in 1903 under the Indian Companies Act.

Sree Narayana Guru held all religions to be the same and condemned animal sacrifice besides speaking against divisiveness on the basis of caste, race or creed.

The SNDP Yogam **took up several issues for the Ezhavas**, such as (i) right of admission to public schools, (ii) recruitment to government services, (iii) access to roads and entry to temples, and (iv) political representation.

The movement as a whole brought transformative structural changes such as upward social mobility, shift in traditional distribution of power and a federation of 'backward castes' into a large conglomeration.

(20) Vokkaliga Sangha

The Vokkaliga Sangha in Mysore launched an **anti-brahmin movement** in 1905.

(21) Justice Movement

Started by – **N. Mudaliar, T.M. Nair** and **P. Tyagaraja** to secure jobs and representation for the non-Brahmins in the legislature.

In 1917, **Madras Presidency Association** was formed which demanded separate representation for the lower castes in the legislature.

(22) Self-Respect Movement

This movement was started by **V. Ramaswamy Naicker** in the mid-1920s.

Aim: rejection of the brahminical religion and culture which Naicker felt was the prime instrument of exploitation of the lower castes

(23) Temple Entry Movement

K. Madhavan, a prominent social reformer and editor of **Deshabhimani**, took up the issue of temple entry with the Travancore administration. Vaikom became a centre of agitation for temple entry.

In 1924, the Vaikom Satyagraha led by **P. Kesava**, was launched in Kerala demanding the throwing open of Hindu temples and roads to the untouchables. Gandhi undertook a tour of Kerala in support of the movement.

Again in 1931 when the **Civil Disobedience Movement** was suspended, temple entry movement was organized in Kerala.

On November 12, 1936, the Maharaja of Travancore issued proclamation throwing open all government-controlled temples to all Hindus.

A similar step was taken by the **Rajagopalachari** administration in Madras in 1938.

(24) Indian Social Conference

Founded by – **M.G. Ranade** and **Raghunath Rao**

It could be called the **social reform cell of the Indian National Congress**.

The conference **advocated inter-caste marriages, opposed polygamy and kulinism**. It launched the '**Pledge Movement**' to inspire people to take a pledge against child marriage.

(25) Wahabi/Walliullah Movement

The teachings of **Abdul Wahab** of Arabia and the preaching of **Shah Waliullah** (1702-1763) inspired this essentially revivalist response to Western influences.

The degeneration which had set in among Indian Muslims called for a return to the true spirit of Islam.

Two-fold ideals of this movement:

- (i) desirability of harmony among the four schools of Muslim jurisprudence which had divided the Indian Muslims (he sought to integrate the best elements of the four schools);
- (ii) recognition of the role of individual conscience in religion where conflicting interpretations were derived from the **Quran** and the **Hadis**

The Wahabi Movement fizzled out in the face of British military might in the 1870s.

(26) Titu Mir's Movement

Mir Nithar Ali, popularly known as Titu Mir, was a **disciple of Sayyid Ahmed Barelvi**, the founder of the Wahabi

Titu Mir adopted **Wahabism** and advocated the Sharia. He organised the Muslim peasants of Bengal against the landlords, who were mostly Hindu, and the British indigo planters.

(27) Faraizi Movement

The movement, also called the **Fara'idi Movement** because of its **emphasis on the Islamic pillars of faith**, was founded by **Haji Shariatullah** in 1818.

The movement survived merely as a religious movement without political overtones after the death of **Dudu Mian** in 1862.

(28) Ahmadiyya Movement

The Ahmadiyya forms a sect of Islam which originated from India.

Founded by – **Mirza Ghulam Ahmad** in 1889.

It was based on liberal principles. It described itself as the standard-bearer of **Mohammedan Renaissance**, and based itself, like the Brahma Samaj, on the principles of universal religion of all humanity, opposing jihad.

The Ahmadiyya community is the only Islamic sect to believe that the Messiah had come in the person of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad to end religious wars and bloodshed and to reinstate morality, peace and justice.

They believed in **separating the mosque from the State** as well as in **human rights and tolerance**.

(29) Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and the Aligarh Movement

A section of Muslims led by **Syed Ahmed Khan** (1817-1898) was ready to allow the British patronage to stimulate a process of growth among Indian Muslims through better education and employment opportunities.

Syed Ahmed Khan was a **member of the judicial service** of the British government. After retirement, he became a **member of the Imperial Legislative Council** in 1878. His loyalty earned him a knighthood in 1888.

He wanted to reconcile Western scientific education with the teachings of the Quran. He advocated a critical approach and freedom of thought and not complete dependence on tradition or custom.

He opened schools in towns, got books translated into Urdu and **started the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College (the Aligarh Muslim University)** at Aligarh in 1875.

Magazine: Tahdhib-ul-Akhlaq (Improvement of Manners and Morals)

Aim: (i) **modern education among Indian Muslims** without weakening their allegiance to Islam; (ii) social reforms among Muslims relating to **purdah, polygamy, widow remarriage, women's education, slavery, divorce,**

(30) The Deoband School (Darul Uloom)

The Deoband Movement was organized by the **orthodox section among the Muslim ulema**. The Deoband Movement was **begun at the Darul Uloom** (or Islamic academic centre), Deoband, in Saharanpur district (United Provinces) in 1866 by **Mohammad Qasim Nanotavi** (1832-80) and **Rashid Ahmed Gangohi** (1828-1905) to train religious leaders for the Muslim community.

Aim: moral and religious regeneration of the Muslim community

Deoband school **welcomed the formation of the Indian National Congress**.

Mahmud-ul-Hasan gave a political and intellectual content to the religious ideas of the school. He worked out a synthesis of Islamic principles and nationalist aspirations.

Shibli Numani favoured the inclusion of English language and European sciences in the system of education. He founded the **Nadwatal Ulama** and **Darul Uloom** in Lucknow in 1894-96.

He believed in the idealism of the Congress and cooperation between the Muslims and the Hindus of India to create a state in which both could live amicably.

(31) Parsi Reform Movements

The **Rahnumai Mazdayasnan Sabha** (Religious Reform Association) was founded in 1851 by a group of English educated Parsis for the “regeneration of the social conditions of the Parsis and the restoration of the Zoroastrian religion to its pristine purity”.

The movement had **Naoroji Furdonji**, **Dadabhai Naoroji**, **R. Cama** and **S.S. Bengalee** as its leaders. The message of reform was spread by the newspaper **Rast Goftar** (Truth-Teller).

Aim: to uplift the status of Parsi women through removal of the purdah system, raising the age of marriage and education. Gradually, the Parsis emerged as the most westernized section of the Indian society.

(32) Sikh Reform Movements

The Singh Sabha Movement was founded at Amritsar in 1873.

Two-fold objective: (i) to make available modern western education to the Sikhs, and (ii) to counter the proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries as well as the Brahmo Samajists, Arya Samajists and Muslim maulvis

The Akali movement (also known as **Gurudwara Reform Movement**) was an offshoot of the Singh Sabha Movement. It aimed at liberating the Sikh gurudwaras from the control of corrupt Udasi mahants.

The government tried its repressive policies against the non-violent non-cooperation satyagraha launched by the Akalis in 1921, but had to bow before popular demands;

It passed the **Sikh Gurudwaras Act** in 1922 (amended in 1925) which gave the control of gurudwaras to the Sikh masses to be administered through **Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee** (SGPC) as the apex body.

(33) The Theosophical Movement

A group of westerners led by **Madame H.P. Blavatsky** (1831- 1891) and **Colonel M.S. Olcott**, who were inspired by Indian thought and culture, founded the Theosophical Society in **New York** in 1875.

In 1882, they shifted their headquarters to **Adyar**, on the outskirts of Madras in India. The society believed that a special relationship could be established between a person's soul and God

In India, the movement became somewhat popular with the election of **Annie Besant** (1847-1933) as its president after the death of Olcott in 1907.

She laid the foundation of the **Central Hindu College** in Benaras in 1898. The college became the nucleus for the formation of **Benaras Hindu University** in 1916.

Significance of Reform Movements

Positive Aspects

Liberation of the individual from the conformity born out of fear and from uncritical submission to exploitation by the priests and other classes.

The translation of religious texts into vernacular languages, emphasis on an individual's right to interpret the scriptures and simplification of rituals made worship a more personal experience.

The reform movements gave the rising middle classes the much needed cultural roots to cling to, and served the purpose of reducing the sense of humiliation which the conquest by a foreign power had produced.

A realization of the special needs of modern times, especially in terms of scientific knowledge, and thus promoting a modern, this-worldly, secular and rational outlook.

Socially, this attitude reflected in a basic change in the notions of 'pollution and purity' and aimed at modernization rather than outright westernization based on blind imitation of alien Western cultural values.

Ended India's cultural and intellectual isolation from the rest of the world.

Negative Aspects

They had a narrow social base, namely the educated and urban middle classes, while the needs of the vast masses of peasantry and the urban poor were ignored.

The tendency of reformers to appeal to the greatness of the past and to rely on scriptural authority encouraged mysticism and fostered pseudo-scientific thinking.

Insufficient emphasis on other aspects of culture—art, architecture, literature, music, science and technology.

Compartmentalizing Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Parsis and also alienating high caste Hindus from low caste Hindus.

Rise of another form of consciousness – communal consciousness – along with national consciousness among the middle classes.

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