



Study of Social Reform Movements in India

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Abstract

When our sixty-five years as a sovereign, socialist, democratic republic come to an end, it is appropriate to take stock of our achievements and letdowns in various all aspects of our national life, in order to cement the successes and address the errors that have occurred, and to look forward to a brighter future in our nation's development. The excitement for social change decreased significantly as the political fight progressed, and it was purposefully disassociated from the political movement at this point. However, as the natural path of development and education extended across the world, the pace of demand for socio-religious changes intensified, as did the scope of its horizons. This is especially true of the role performed by liberation fighters, as well as “social and religious reformists, as well as organisations” and groups.

Key Words: Social, Reforms, Religious, Movements, India etc.

Introduction

As a result of the rise of “national consciousness” and dissemination of liberal ideals from the west amongst the Indian people under the British rule, “several social reforms and religious movements took place in India during” this period. Increasingly, the breadth and program of rebuilding in the social and theological domains of these organisations became more national in scope and focus. There are certain interconnections “between the way in which freedom movements began and the social and religious reforms” that followed, as well as the difficulties our “Indian leaders face in bringing people together who are divided along the lines of religion, language, caste, class, and culture” so that the concept of liability can be inculcated into them. There were a variety of variables that contributed to the mobilisation of the people for liberation movements, and one of the most effective was the introduction of “social, economic, and political reforms”. A broad definition of the Indian independence movement includes a wide range of national and regional campaigns, agitations, and endeavours that are based on both nonviolent and militant ideologies.



Inter-Relationship between Independence Movements and Social Reforms

“The Indian National Movement” was, without a question, one of the most significant mass movements that contemporary civilization has ever experienced. It was a movement that rallied millions of people from all social groups and beliefs into political action and brought a powerful colonial empire to its knees in the process. Diverse aspects of the “Indian National Movement, particularly Gandhian political strategy, are particularly relevant to these movements in societies” that are characterized by a democratic and primarily liberation-oriented political system and that generally operate within the confines of the rule of law. The outcome of the freedom movement is essentially one in which “state power was not seized in a single historical moment of revolution, but rather through prolonged popular struggle on a moral, political, and ideological level; and in which counts of hegemony were gradually built up over time through progressive stages” of development.

The “Indian independence movement is perhaps one of the best examples” of the formation of a massive movement with a common goal in “which diverse political and ideological currents could co-exist” and collaborate while also contending for overall ideological and political hegemony over it, and it is still considered to be one of the most important examples of this. When we examine the distinguishing characteristics of our independence fight, we can see that one of the most important aspects is the principles and contemporary ideals on which the movement was founded, as well as the wide “socio-economic and political vision of its leadership.”

It is now critical to draw connections between the “Indian struggle for independence” and the social reform movements in the country. It is vital to establish a link between these two features before proceeding to a more in-depth analysis of the whole notion. When the war for independence began, the leaders were confronted with the enormous challenge of mass mobilisation due to the divisions that existed among people on the “basis of caste, religion, race, class, culture, and so on.” All of the peoples must be blended in order for them to have a sense of belonging to a certain country. The popular appeal, which has encouraged all sections of society to unite not only against the exploitative British practises, but also against the economic, political, and social



degradations of Indians, as well as against the British practises, has served as the fundamental foundation for our national leaders.

Causes for the Socio-Religious Reforms Movement

Some of the causes can be summarized as mentioned below:

1. **Political Unity:** The expansion and consolidation of British control in India resulted in the political unification of the country. It resulted in a better grasp of many of the Indians' common challenges. Many young Indians were compelled to investigate the nature of British rule in order to discover the root reasons of their plight and degradation.
2. **Reaction against propaganda of Christian missionaries:** The Christian missionaries made all effort they could to propagate Christianity, particularly among the destitute and downtrodden people of the world. This was accomplished via the utilization of educational institutions, hospitals, charitable organisations, and government assistance. As a result, both Hindus and Muslims took efforts to protect their own religions.
3. **Contribution of foreign scholars:** Many foreign academics, such as Max Muller and William Jones, were instrumental in re-discovering India's history. They looked at the intellectual work done by Indians in the past. They brought to light a thriving cultural legacy that was even more advanced than western civilization. They translated a large number of literary and excellent literature. These masterpieces have gained widespread acclaim across the globe. It helped educated Indians to create a sense of pride in their heritage. They wished to prove the supremacy of Indian culture over western civilization. They were successful in their endeavor.
4. **Indian press:** Europeans were responsible for introducing the printing press to India. It made it feasible for a large number of newspapers and periodicals to be published. Books were also released in a variety of Indian dialects and languages. The majority of their material dealt with Indian culture. It undoubtedly contributed to opening the eyes of educated Indians to the wonders and splendor of the natural world. As a result, they began to strive for the advancement of Indian grandeur and culture.
5. **Western Education:** Spread of western education facilitated the spread of western concepts such as democracy, liberty and equality as well as nationalistic sentiment



among people all over the world. The workings of these principles were brought into intimate touch with the Indians who travelled overseas. As soon as they returned, they were overcome with sadness to see the lack of understanding of such principles among the Indians. They were the ones who dug the trenches for the dissemination of such notions.

- 6. Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883) and Arya Samaj:** The Arya Samaj was formed in 1875 by Mool Shanker, a prominent proponent of the religious reform movement in India from Gujarat, who was also known as Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883). Mool Shanker was born in 1824 and died in 1883.

Socio-Religious Reform Movements in Modern India

- **Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883) and Arya Samaj**

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Dayanand Saraswati was the leader of the most prominent religious and social reform movement in northern India, which began in the 1920s. He believed that the Vedas included all of the wisdom that had been transmitted to man by God, and that the Vedas contained the principles of contemporary science as well. Specifically, he condemned idolatry as well as ritual and priesthood, and he was especially critical of the established caste system and “popular Hinduism as expounded by the Brahmins. He favoured the study of western science” above other disciplines. With all of this theory in hand, he travelled across the nation, eventually settling in Bombay in 1875 and founding the Arya Samaj.

The Arya Samaj attempted to instil in the people of India a sense of self-respect and self-reliance via many means. This aided in the promotion of nationalism. One of its primary purposes was to discourage Hindus from converting to other faiths, which was also one of its primary objectives. A purification procedure called suddhi was also advised for Hindus who had converted to other faiths such as Islam or Christianity, according to the scriptures.

- **The Ramakrishna Mission and Swami Vivekananda**



“Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya (1836-86) was a poor Brahmin priest” who eventually became known as Ramakrishna Paramahansa: "Ramakrishna Paramahansa" means "Ramakrishna Paramahansa" in English. His schooling did not extend beyond the primary level, and he did not have any official training in philosophy or Shastras, either. He committed his life to the service of God. He thought that there were numerous paths to “God, and that the service of man was the service of God”, since man was the physical manifestation of the divine. As a result, sectarianism was completely absent from his teachings. He recognized humanity's divinity and saw his devotion to humanity as a method of achieving redemption via the service of others.

Swamiji Narendra Nath Datta (1863-1902) was the most ardent disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and he was responsible for spreading the word of his Guru Ramakrishna all over the globe, with a particular emphasis on North and South “America and Europe.” He was pleased of “India's spiritual legacy”, but he also thought that no person or country could survive by isolating himself or herself from the rest of the world's community of people. It is he who attacked the caste system and rigorous rituals, as well as centuries-old fallacies, and who promoted liberty, free thought, and equality.

Vivekananda was, without a doubt, a nationalist to the very core of his being. He had a strong belief in the progress of Indian culture, as well as a burning desire to restore all that was good and wonderful about her, in order to serve her in any way he could in order to assist her in her upward march. Swami Vivekananda emphasized Ramakrishna's message on the underlying oneness of all faiths, which he believed to be true. He advocated for the “Vedanta philosophy”, which he regarded to be the best logical system available.

The main characteristic of “Vivekananda's social philosophy” was his concentration on the up-liftment of the people as the most important goal of society. Service to the destitute and underprivileged was the ultimate kind of religion in his eyes. In order to organize this kind of service, he established the “Ramakrishna Mission in 1897”. Up to this point, our Mission has played a significant role in delivering social services in times of national crisis, such as famine, floods, and disease outbreaks. It is responsible for the operation of several schools, hospitals, and orphanages.

- **Religious Reform among Sikhs**



The Khalsa College in Amritsar, which was established at the end of the nineteenth century, was the beginning of religious reform among the Sikhs. The “Khalsa College was established in Amritsar in 1892 as a result of the efforts of the Singh Sabhas (1870)” and with the assistance of the British. This institution, as well as the schools that were established as a consequence of similar initiatives, served to promote Gurumukhi, Sikh learning, and Punjabi literature in general.

When the Akali Movement arose in Punjab around 1920, the Sikh movement gathered steam and gained strength. It was the primary goal of the Akalis to reform the administration of “Gurudwaras, or Sikh Shrines”, which were under the jurisdiction of priests or Mahants who handled them as if they were their own property. In 1925, a legislation was established that granted the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee the authority to manage Gurudwaras across the country.

Impact of These Reform Movements

They aimed to please the traditional top class of society, which they called the orthodox upper class. As a consequence, just two significant pieces of legislation were approved. Some legislative reforms were implemented in order to improve the position of women. Take, for instance, Sati, who was ruled unlawful (1829). Infanticide has been deemed unlawful. The remarriage of widows was made possible by a statute established in 1856. In 1860, a legislation was introduced that increased the marriageable age of females from nine to 10.

Marriages between members of different castes and communities were permitted by a legislation established in 1872. The second piece of legislation, approved in 1891, was intended to discourage underage marriage. “The Sharda Act, which was enacted in 1929, was intended to discourage child marriage. It said that a girl under the age of 14 and a guy under the age of 18 could not be married. During the twentieth century, and particularly after 1919, the Indian national movement rose to prominence as the leading proponent of social change. In order to reach the majority of the population, the reformers increasingly turned to propaganda in the Indian language. Besides novels, plays, short tales and poems, they also relied on the press and, throughout the thirties (1930s)”, the film to convey their viewpoints.



Conclusion

Many philosophers and reformers have come up in India in order to bring about changes in our society. They believed that society and religion were inextricably connected. Both required to be altered in order for the nation to experience healthy growth and development. As a result, our reformers took the initiative to enlighten the Indian populace. The majority of the social behaviours were carried out in the guise of religious beliefs. As a result, social transformation was meaningless in the absence of theological reform. All of our reformers came from families that were strongly entrenched in Indian culture and thought, and they were well versed in the scriptures. They were able to successfully combine good Indian ideals with western concepts, as well as the democratic and egalitarian principles. They opposed the rigidity and superstitious behaviours that were prevalent in religion on the basis of this knowledge. They quoted the scriptures to demonstrate that the activities that were popular throughout the nineteenth century were not sanctioned by the divine authorities. Many of the more intelligent and rationalistic among them questioned the popular religion, which they said was full of superstitions and was being used by dishonest priests. The reformers wished for society to embrace the reasonable and scientific attitude advocated by the reformers. They also adhered to the principles of human dignity and social equality for all men and women, regardless of race or gender. All socio-religious reformers, whether Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, or Parsis, strove to extend modern education across their own societies. These individuals thought that educational opportunities were the most efficient means of reawakening and modernizing our society.

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