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# SOCIO RELIGIOUS REFORM MOVEMENTS

## **Introduction:**

By the first quarter of the nineteenth century, India had produced a small English-educated intelligentsia, closely associated with British administration or British trade. The ideas and the work of the Christian missionaries had already begun to have its impact. Bengal was the first province to be affected by the British influence and so it was here that several ideas of reform originated. British administration, English education, and European literature brought to India a new wave of thoughts that challenged traditional knowledge.

Rationalism as the basis for ethical thinking, the idea of human progress and evolution, the concept of natural rights associated with the Enlightenment, were the new ideas which led to what has been termed as Indian Renaissance. The spread of printing technology played a crucial role in the diffusion of ideas.

## **Emergence of Reform Movements:**

- The British characterized Indian society in the nineteenth century as being caught in a vicious circle of superstitions and obscurantism. In their view idolatry and polytheism reinforced orthodoxy impelling the people to follow them blindly. The social conditions were equally depressing. And the condition of women was deplorable. The practice of sati came in for particular condemnation.
- The division of society according to birth resulting in the caste system was also criticized. Most importantly, the British argued that without their intervention there was no possibility of deliverance from these evils for Indians. Needless to say, this was a self-serving argument, articulated by missionaries and Utilitarians to justify British rule.
- India was a much bigger, more complex and diverse country in the early nineteenth century. Conditions varied vastly across it. The social and cultural evils had been

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fought by Indian reformers through the ages. But the advent of the British with their Enlightenment ideas undoubtedly posed a new challenge.

- This chapter looks at how social reform movements emerged in various parts of the country. The development of the Western culture and ideology forced the traditional institutions to revitalize themselves. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the expression of protest and desire for change were articulated through various reform movements.
- These movements aimed at reforming and democratizing the social institutions and religious outlook of the Indian people. The emergence of new economic forces, spread of education, growth of nationalist sentiment, influence of modern Western thoughts, ideas and culture, and awareness of the changes taking place in Europe strengthened the resolve to reform.
- What gave these reform movements an ideological unity were rationalism, religious universalism and humanism. This perspective enabled them to adopt a rational approach to tradition and evaluate the contemporary socio-religious practices from the standpoint of social utility. For example, Raja Ram Mohan Roy repudiated the infallibility of the Vedas and during the Aligarh Movement, Syed Ahmed Khan emphasized that religious tenets were not immutable.
- As Keshab Chandra Sen said, 'Our position is not that truths are to be in all religions, but that all established religions of the World are true.' These movements enveloping the entire cultural stream of Indian society brought about significant practices in the realms of language, religion, art and philosophy.

These reform movements can be broadly classified into two categories:

1. Reformist Movements
2. Revivalist Movements

- Both the movements depended in varying degrees on an appeal to the lost purity of religion. The primary difference between them lay in the degree to which they relied on tradition or on reason and conscience. The social reform movements formed an integral part of the religious reforms primarily because all the efforts towards social ills like caste- and gender- based inequality derived legitimacy from religion.

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- Initially, the social reform movement had a narrow social base – they were limited to the upper and middle strata of the society that tried to adjust their modernized views to the existing social reality. From then on, the social reform movements began to percolate to the lower strata of society to reconstruct the social fabric.
  - Heated debates among the intellectuals expressed in the form of public arguments, tracts and journals played a big role in taking new ideas to large sections of the people, as well as to reformulate older ideas in a new form.
  - At the start, organizations such as the Social Conference, Servants of India and the Christian missionaries were instrumental in giving an impetus to the social reform movements along with many enlightened individuals about whom we dwell on in the following pages.
  - In later years, especially by the twentieth century, the national movement provided the leadership and organization for social reform.

### **Brahmo Samaj (1828)**

- Raja Rammohun Roy, was a man of versatile genius. He established the Brahmo Samaj in August, 1828. The Brahmo Samaj was committed to “the worship and adoration of the eternal, unsearchable, immutable Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe”. His long term agenda was to purify Hinduism and to preach monotheism for which he drew authority from the Vedas.
- He emphasized human dignity, opposed idolatry and social evils such as sati. A retired servant of the East India Company, he was conversant in many languages including Persian and Sanskrit. His ideas and activities were aimed at the political uplift of society through social reform. He was a determined crusader against the inhuman practice of Sati.
- His tract written in 1818, *A Conference Between an Advocate for and an Opponent of the Practice of Burning Widows*, cited sacred texts to prove that no religion sanctioned the burning alive of widows. His efforts fructified and the Company through an enactment of law (1829) declared the practice of sati a crime.



The overall contribution of Brahmo Samaj can be summed up as follows :

1. It denounced polytheism, idol worship, and the faith in divine *avatars* (incarnations)
  2. It condemned the caste system, dogmas and superstitions.
  3. It wanted the abolition of child marriage, *purdah* system and the practice of sati
  4. It supported widow remarriage
- Inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution, Rammohun Roy left for Europe and died in Bristol. After his death there was a steady decline but for the new lease life given to it by Devendranath Tagore (father of Rabindranath Tagore).
  - After him the organization was taken forward by Keshab Chandra Sen from 1857. The strength of the organization is known from the number of branches it had in 1865, 54 Samajas (fifty in Bengal, two in North West Province, one each in Punjab and Madras).
  - In course of time, the Brahmo Samaj broke into two namely Devendranath Tagore's, 'Brahmo Samaj of India' and Keshub Chandra Sen's 'Sadharan Brahmo Samaj'.
  - In Tamilnadu, Kasi Viswanatha Mudaliar was an adherent of the Samaj and he wrote a play titled *Brahmo Samaja Natakam* to expound the ideas of the Samaj. He also wrote a tract in support of widow remarriage. In 1864, a Tamil journal titled *Tathuva Bodhini* was started for the cause of the Brahmo Samaj.
  - The Brahmo Samaj met with great opposition from orthodox elements in Bengal society such as the Hindu Dharma Sabha. However, there were also reformers such as Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, who advocated the same ideas but drew on Hindu scriptures as authority.
  - Even though the Brahmo Samaj did not win many adherents, it had a big impact on the intellectuals. In the early stages, many young men seized of the radical ideas avidly propagated them. Tagore's family was a Brahmo family and its influence can be seen in his writings and ideas.

## ◆.....◆ **The Prarthana Samaj (1867)**

- An off-shoot of the Brahmo Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, was founded in 1867 in Bombay by Atmaram Pandurang (1823– 98). The Prarthana Samaj as an organization never had any great influence but its members, like M. G. Ranade (1852-1901), R. G. Bhandarkar, and K.T. Telang, were among the great leaders of nineteenth century Maharashtra and they became the founders of the social reform movement in later years.
- Prarthana Samaj was similar to Brahmo Samaj, but it was consciously linked with the *bhakti* tradition of the Maharashtrian saints. The Prarthana Samaj continued its work mainly through educational work directed at women and workers at the lower level. It concentrated on social reforms like inter-dining, intermarriage, remarriage of widows, and uplift of women and depressed classes.
- The National Social Conference organized at the initiative of M.G. Ranade met each year immediately after the Indian National Congress (1885) annual sessions. Justice Ranade was an erudite scholar with a keen intellect and under his able guidance the Prarthana Samaj became the active centre of a new social reformation in western India.
- He was one of the founders of the Widow Marriage Association and was an ardent promoter of the famous *Deccan Education Society*. Its object was to impart such education to the young as would fit them for the unselfish service of the country. When Ranade died in 1901, his leadership was taken over by Chandavarkar.

## **Arya Samaj (1875)**

- The founder of the Arya Samaj was Dayananda Saraswati (1824–83). Dayananda, a Gujarati, left home in his youth to become an ascetic. For seventeen years he wandered around India. In 1863 he became a wandering preacher, and five years later he added the establishment of schools to his activities.
- In 1872 he met the Brahmos in Calcutta. In 1875 he founded the Arya Samaj and published his major work the *Satyarth Prakash*. In his view, contemporary Hinduism had become degenerate. Therefore he rejected puranas, polytheism, idolatry, the role of Brahmin priests, pilgrimages, many rituals and the prohibition



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on widow marriage. As a good Sanskrit scholar, he made a call to “Back to the Vedas”.

- He wanted to shape society on the basis of the Vedas. He disregarded the puranas. Like the other social reformers, he encouraged female education and remarriage of widows. Swami Dayananda’s sphere of influence was largely in the Punjab region where the trading community of Khatri experienced great mobility in colonial times. However, in the Punjab region, there was much communal conflict among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs.
- Dayananda’s *Shuddhi* (purification) movement i.e., conversion of non-Hindus to Hindus was controversial and provoked controversies especially with the Ahmadiya movement. Arya Samaj is considered to be a revivalist movement. Dayananda’s influence continued into the twentieth century through the establishment of Dayanand Anglo Vedic (DAV) schools and colleges.

### **Ramakrishna Mission (1897)**

- As we saw above, the early reform movements in Bengal were radical, questioning and criticising tradition very strongly. In response to this emerged the Ramakrishna Mission as an important religious movement. Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836–1886), a poor priest in a temple at Dakshineswar near Kolkata, had no formal education but led an intense spiritual life. He had a deep faith in the inherent truth of all religions and tested its belief by performing religious service in accordance with the practices of different religions.
- According to him ‘all the religious views are but different ways to lead to the same goal.’ In a backlash, the later generation of Western educated intellectuals were drawn to Ramakrishna’s broad view, mysticism and spiritual fervour. He expounded his views in short stories and admirable parables which were compiled by an admirer as *Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna).
- The most famous among his disciples was a young graduate of the Calcutta University named Narendranath Dutta, afterwards famously called Swami Vivekananda (1863 1902). Emphasising practical work over philosophizing he established the modern institution of the Ramakrishna Mission. He carried Ramakrishna’s message all over India and the world. His learning, eloquence,



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spiritual fervour and personality gathered round him a band of followers across the country, many of whom also joined the national movement.

- He attended in 1893 the famous, 'Parliament of Religions' at Chicago, and made a deep impact on those congregated there. The Mission opened schools, dispensaries and orphanages and helped people during their time of distress caused by calamities.

### **Theosophical Society (1886)**

- Even as Indian intellectuals felt challenged by western Enlightenment and rationalistic movements, there was a strain of thinking in the West which looked to the East for spiritual salvation. From this idea emerged the Theosophical Society, founded by Madam H.P. Blavatsky and Colonel H.S.Olcott in the United States of America in 1875.
- They came to India in 1879 and established their headquarters at Adyar in 1886. Under the leadership of Annie Besant, who came to India in 1893, the Theosophical Society gathered strength and won many adherents. The Theosophical Society started associations across south India.
- Though involved in many controversies, the Society played an important role in the revival of Buddhism in India. Iyothethoss Pandithar, the radical Dalit thinker, was introduced to modern Buddhism through his interaction with Colonel Olcott who took him to Sri Lanka. There he met many Buddhist monks including the renowned revivalist Anagarika Dharmapala and Acharya Sumangala.

### **Satya Shodhak Samaj (1873)**

- While the movements discussed above were largely focussed on upper castes there were some exceptional movements which mobilized lower castes and articulated their perspective. The most important among them was Jyotiba Phule, who belonged to the Mali (gardener) community. Born in 1827, he received initial education in a mission school but had to discontinue it in 1833.
- Jyotiba Phule waged a life-long struggle against upper caste tyranny. In his quest for the truth, Phule read the Vedas, the Manu Samhita, the Puranas, and the thought of Buddha, Mahavira and the medieval Bhakti saints extensively. He also

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acquainted himself with Western thought, and Christian and Islamic religions. Phule judged the whole culture and tradition through the spirit of rationality and equality. While the principle of equality called for a total rejection of caste system, authoritarian family structure and subordination of women, the principle of rationality demanded the removal of superstitions and ritualism.

- Phule held radical views on social, religious, political and economic issues. He considered the caste system as an antithesis of the principle of human equality. He sought to raise the morale of the non-Brahmins and united them to revolt against the centuries old inequality and social degradation.
- Towards this end Phule founded the *Satya Shodak Samaj* (Society for Seeking Truth) in 1875. His most important book is *Gulamgiri* (Slavery).
- Phule looked upon education of the masses as a liberating and revolutionary factor. Since women and deprived and downtrodden were the worst sufferers in the society, Phule argued that women's liberation was linked with the liberation of other classes in society. Equality between classes as also between men and women was stressed by Phule. During marriages he asked the bridegroom to promise the right of education to his bride.
- Phule also tried to translate his ideas into actual struggles. He urged the British Government to impart compulsory primary education to the masses through teachers drawn from the cultivating classes. He started a school for girls in Poona in 1851 and one for depressed classes with the assistance of his wife Savitri.
- He also started schools for the "untouchables" and founded a home for widow's children. In his work we find the beginnings of the later day non-Brahman movement of Maharashtra.

### **Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922)**

- Pandita Ramabai was foremost among the Indian leaders who worked for the emancipation of women. She came from a learned family and was a great scholar of Sanskrit and addressed many learned groups in different parts of the country. She was given the title of "Pandita" and "Saraswati" for her deep knowledge of Sanskrit.
- After the death of her parents she and her brother travelled to different parts of the country. They went to Calcutta in 1878. Two years later her brother also died. A

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little later in 1880 she married a Bengali belonging to a family of lower social status. Thus, even at that time she was bold enough to marry a man of a different caste and different language.

- After the death of her husband two years later she returned to Poona and started the Arya Mahila Samaj with the help of leaders like Ranade and Bhandarkar. 300 women were educated in the Samaj in 1882.
- Ramabai started the Sharada Sadan (shelter for homeless) for the destitute widows with the help of Ranade and Bhandarkar. But soon she was accused of converting Hindu women to Christianity and hence had to shift her activities to Khedgoan near Poona. She established a Mukti Sadan (freedom house) there. Soon there were 2000 children and women in the house. Vocational training was given make them self-reliant.

### **Sri Narayana Guru**

This movement emerged in Kerala and was born out of conflict between the depressed classes and the upper castes. It was started by Sri Narayana Guru (1854- 1928) spearheading a social movement of the Ezhavas of Kerala, a community of toddy tappers.

The Ezhavas were the single largest group in Kerala constituting 26% of population. A great scholar in Malayalam, Tamil and Sanskrit, Sri Narayana Guru established the Sri Narayana Guru Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam in 1902.

The SNDP Yogam took up several issues such as

1. right of admission to public schools.
  2. recruitment to government services.
  3. access to roads and entry to temples; and
  4. 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 classes' into a large conglomeration. As a response to the prohibition on Ezhavas into temples, Sri Narayana Guru established new temples, and empowered the community to modernize itself. Great personalities such as the poet Kumaran

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Asan Dr. Palpu and Sahodaran Ayyappan emerged from the movement, and made a lasting impact in the democratization of Kerala Society.

- Even though the Guru himself was not directly involved in the movement, the Vaikom Satyagraha, organized to protest against the ban on the entry of Ezhavas on the temple streets of Vaikom made a deep impact on subsequent temple entry movements.

## **Islamic Reform Movements**

- The Revolt of 1857 and its brutal suppression by the British had an adverse impact on the Muslims of South Asia. While they were viewed with suspicion by the British for the 1857 insurgency, the Muslims themselves withdrew into a shell and did not use the opportunities opened up by colonial modernity.
- Consequently, they lagged behind in education and attendant employment opportunities. In this context, a few decades later some reform movements emerged among the Muslims.

### **Aligarh Movement (1875)**

Aligarh Movement was started by Syed Ahmad Khan in 1875. He wanted to reconcile Western scientific education with the teachings of the Quran. The Aligarh movement aimed at spreading

1. Modern education among Indian Muslims without weakening their allegiance to Islam, and
  2. Social reforms among Muslims relating to purdah, polygamy, and divorce. Syed's progressive social ideas were propagated through his magazine *Tahdhibul-Akhluq* (Improvement of Manners and Morals). Syed Ahmad Khan's educational programme emphasized from the outset the advantages of the use of English as the medium of instruction.
- In 1864 he founded a Scientific Society of Aligarh for the introduction of Western sciences through translations into Urdu of works on physical sciences. The same year he founded a modern school at Ghazipur. In 1868 he promoted the formation of education committees in several districts, to initiate modern education among the Muslims.



- During his visit to Europe in 1869–70 he developed the plans of his life-work, a major educational institution for Indian Muslims. In order to promote English education among the Muslims, he founded in 1875 a modern school at Aligarh, which soon developed into the Muhammedan Anglo–Oriental College (1877). This college was to become the Muslim University after his death.
- It became the nursery of Muslim political and intellectual leaders. In 1886 Syed Ahmad Khan founded the Muhammedan Anglo Oriental Educational Conference as a general forum for spreading liberal ideas among the Indian Muslims. He rejected blind adherence to religious law and asked for a reinterpretation of the Quran in the light of reason to suit the new trends of the time.
- He attempted to liberalize Indian Islam and made it amenable to new ideas and new interpretations. In this mission he had to face the brunt of vehement attacks of orthodox theologians.

### **Ahmadiyya Movement (1889)**

- The Ahmadiyya movement founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (1835–1908) in 1889 established a different trend. While emphasizing the return to the original principles enunciated in the Quran, Ghulam Ahmed became controversial when he claimed to be a Messiah, which was considered heretical by mainstream Islam.
- But he won many converts. His primary work was to defend Islam against the polemics of the Arya Samaj and the Christian missionaries. In social morals the Ahmadiya movement was conservative, adhering to polygamy, veiling of women, and the classical rules of divorce.

### **The Deoband Movement (1866)**

- The Deoband movement was organised by the orthodox section among the Muslim ulemas as a revivalist movement with the twin objective of propagating the pure teachings of the Quran and Hadis among Muslims. The movement was established in Deoband in Saranpur district (by Mohammad Qasim Nanotavi (1833-1877) and Rashid Ahmed Gangohi (1828–1905) to train religious leaders for the Muslim community.



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- In contrast to the Aligarh Movement, which aimed at the welfare of Muslims through Western education and support of the British Government, the aim of the Deoband Movement was religious regeneration of the Muslim community. The instruction imparted at Deoband adhered to classical Islamic tradition.
  - The seminary at Deoband was founded in 1867 by theologians of the School of Wali-Allah. Muhammad Qasim Nanotavi took a prominent part in counter polemics against the Christian missionaries and the Arya Samajists.
  - The principal objectives of the seminary at Deoband were to re-establish contact between the theologians and the educated Muslim middle classes, and to revive the study of Muslim religious and scholastic sciences. As a religious university Deoband soon became an honoured institution, not only in Muslim India but also in the world of Islam at large.

### **Nadwat al-‘ulama**

A school less conservative than Deoband and more responsive to the demands of the modern age was the Nadwat al- ‘ulama,’ founded in 1894 at Lucknow by the historian Shibli Nu‘mani and other scholars. The school aimed to offer an enlightened interpretation of religion in order to fight the trends of agnosticism and atheism which had followed the advent of modern Western education.

### **Farangi Mahal**

The third famous traditional school is the much older one at Farangi Mahal in Lucknow. Farangi Mahal accepted Sufism as a valid experience and a valid field of study. Another traditionalist movement was the *ahl-i-hadith* or of the followers of the dicta of the Prophet.

### **Parsi Reform Movements**

- Zoroastrians, persecuted in their Persian homeland, migrated in large numbers to the west coast of India in the tenth century. As a trading community they flourished over the centuries. A close-knit community it too was not left untouched by the reform movements of the nineteenth century.
- The Rahnumai Madayasan Sabha (Religious Reform Association) was founded in 1851 by a group of English educated Parsis for the “regeneration of the social



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conditions of the Parsis and the restoration of the Zoroastrian religion to its pristine purity”. The movement had Naoroji Furdonji, Dadabhai Naoroji, K. R. Cama and S.S. Bengalee as its leaders. The message of reform was spread by the newspaper *Rast-Gofar* (Truth Teller).

- Parsi religious rituals and practices were reformed and the Parsi creed redefined. In the social sphere, attempts were made to uplift the status of Parsi women through education, removal of the purdah, raising the age of marriage and the like. Gradually, the Parsis emerged as the most westernised section of the Indian society. They played a key role in the nationalist movement and in the industrialization of India.

### **Sikh Reform Movement**

The Sikh community could not remain untouched by the rising tide of rationalist and progressive ideas of the nineteenth century. The Singh Sabha Movement was formed in 1873, with a two-fold objective

1. to make available modern western education to the Sikhs
  2. to counter the proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries as well as Hindu revivalists.
- A network of Khalsa Schools was established throughout Punjab. The Akali movement was an offshoot of the Singh Sabha Movement. The Akali movement aimed at liberating the Sikh Gurudwara from the corrupt control of the Udasi Mahants (priests).
  - The Government passed the Sikh Gurudwara Act in 1922 (amended in 1925), which gave control to Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) as the main body.

### **Reform Movements in Tamilnadu**

As we saw earlier, the reform movements of the north India had its own impact on Tamilnadu. Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj had their branches. Keshab Chandra Sen visited Madras and lectured here. But Tamilnadu also saw its own reform movements.

### **Vaikunda Swamigal (1809-1851)**

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- The Sri Vaikunda Swamigal's cult, which survives to this day, was organized in the 1830s. Born in a poor family (1809) at Sastankoil Vilai (now known as Swamithoppu), a village then in south Travancore (the present day Kanyakumari district), Muthukutti, spent his childhood in the village *pial* school, learning religious and moral texts.
  - He also learnt the Bible and became well-versed in Christian theology. At the age of twenty two, Muthukutti, cured of a skin disease, after a holy bath in the sea during his visit to the Murugan temple at Tiruchendur (Thoothukudi district), claimed that Lord Vishnu had given him a rebirth as his son. On his return from Tiruchendur, assuming the new name of Sri Vaikundar, he practised austerities for two years. Soon his fame spread far and wide.
  - In his preaching Vaikundar attacked the traditional caste-ridden Travancore society and its ruler for collecting excessive taxes from the lower caste people. He was arrested and jailed by the Raja of Travancore for his "seditious speeches". When he was released from jail (1838) he became more popular among the people.
  - His followers called him *Aiya* (father) and his cult came to be known as *Aiya Vazhi* (path of the father). His teachings were compiled as a text called *Akila Thirattu* which is recited religiously to this day. Vaikunda Swamy instructed his followers to give up worship of pudams. He also exhorted them not to offer animal sacrifices to their deities. He advocated vegetarianism.
  - As a symbol of protest, Vaikunda Swamy urged his followers to wear a turban, a right which was permitted only to upper castes in those days. As a part of his effort to practice equality, Vaikunda Swamy regularly organized inter-dining through his Samathuva Sangam, among different castes. In his feeding centres called Nilal Tangals, caste-based restrictions were broken down. The Vaikunda Swamy cult posed a serious challenge to the spread of Christianity in south Travancore even after his death in 1851.

### **Vallalar Ramalinga Swamigal (1823–1874)**

- Ramalinga Swamigal was born in a modest family near Chidambaram and spent his early life in Madras. He never had formal schooling, but exhibited great scholarship. Inspired by the Saiva Tevaram and Tiruvasagam hymns, he began to

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compose moving poems on his own. In his time, Saiva religion was in the grip of Saiva monasteries such as those at Thiruvaduthurai, Dharumapuram and Thiruppanandal.

- Ramalinga Swamigal's poems expressed radical ideas and condemned bigotry and irrationality. He underwent certain mystical experiences which he expressed in his poems. This was resented by the orthodox elements in Saiva religion. He established the Sathya Dharma Salai at Vadalur where he began to feed poor people, especially in the context of the 1860s famine and pestilence, irrespective of caste and creed.
- He founded the Sathya Gnana Sabhai to organize his followers. This brought him into conflict with established Saivite orders, and matters came to a head when his followers published his poems under the title of *Tiruvarutpa* (Songs of Grace) in 1867.
- Orthodox Saivites under the Sri Lankan reformer Arumuga Navalar criticized this as blasphemous and launched a tract war. But ultimately, Ramalinga Swamigal's contribution was recognized and his writings inspired universal ideas, and undermined sectarianism in Saiva religion.

### **Buddhist Revivalism and Iyothethoss Pandithar (1845-1914)**

- As we saw in an earlier lesson, Buddhism had been practically wiped out in the Tamil country by the beginning of the second millennium. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was a revival of Buddhism. The publication of the complete edition of Jeevaka Chintamani (1887) and Manimekalai (1898) were landmarks in the recovery of heterodox traditions.
- But the most important figure was Iyothethoss Pandithar (1845– 1914). A native doctor by profession, he was an erudite scholar. He also came under the influence of Colonel Olcott of the Theosophical Society. In the 1890s he began a movement among the Adi Dravidars arguing that they were the original Buddhists who had been consigned to 'untouchability' due to their opposition to Vedic Brahminism.
- He reread classical Tamil and other texts to make his case. He also encouraged the conversion to Buddhism. He found the greatest following in north Tamilnadu and among the working classes of the Kolar Gold Fields. In this movement,

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M. Singavelu and Prof P. Lakshmi Narasu also played an important role. Pandithar ran a weekly journal called *Oru Paisa Tamilan* (later *Tamilan*) from 1908 until his death.

## **Christian Missionaries**

- The official religious policy of the East India Company was one of neutrality towards the native religions. Their reason for continuing this policy was the belief that the earlier Portuguese rule had come to an end because of their attempts to forcibly convert people to Christianity.
- As a result of this concern, the Company government prohibited the entry of missionaries into the territories under their control. In 1793 two English missionaries, William Carey and John Thomas, both Baptists, set out to India with the intention of starting a mission.
- In view of the ban on missionary activity they settled down in the Danish Colony of Serampore, north of Calcutta. Carey, along with two other missionaries, Joshua Marshman and William Ward established the Serampore Mission in 1799.
- The Serampore missionaries were the first evangelical Baptist missionaries in India. They were followed later by other missionary groups belonging to different Protestant denominations. Before the arrival of the Serampore missionaries, several centuries earlier, there were Christian missions in the Portuguese territory of Goa, and also on the Malabar Coast and the Coromandel Coast.
- The work of the earlier missionaries was limited both geographically and in terms of the number of conversions to Christianity. Thus major attempts at proselytization began during the nineteenth century. The missionaries organized schools for the socially and economically deprived and pleaded for their economic improvement through employment in the state service.
- They also fought for their 'civil rights' that included access to public roads, and permission for the women of these groups to wear upper garments. The missionaries gave shelter to orphaned children and other destitute widows in their missions and provided education for them in their boarding schools.
- Particularly after the famines which were quite common during the nineteenth century, about which we discussed in the previous lesson, the missionaries

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organized relief. Providing shelter and succour gave these an opportunity to convert people to Christianity.

- In Tirunelveli district many villages took to Christianity during famines, especially in the last quarter of nineteenth century. The same phenomenon was witnessed in Andhra where Malas and Madigas embraced Christianity in a big way.
- The Company government did little to provide modern education for the native population. For a long time, the provision of elementary school facilities to the native population, especially in the interiors for the disprivileged and the poor people, was a responsibility willingly accepted by the Christian missionaries. It must be noted that the Christian Missionaries took the initiative of establishing Hospitals and Dispensaries.

### **Significance of the Reform Movements**

- The orthodox sections of the society could not accept the scientific and ideological onslaught of the socio-religious reformers. As a result of this, the reformers were subjected to abuse, persecution, issuing of fatwas and even assassination attempts by the reactionaries. However, in spite of opposition, these movements contributed towards liberation of the individual from the conformity born out of fear.
- 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 movements emphasised the human intellect's capacity to reason and think.
- By weeding out corrupt elements in religious practices, the reformers enabled their followers to counter the official taunt that their religions and society were decadent and inferior. It gave the rising middle classes the much needed cultural roots to cling to.

### **Questions :**

1. Write a short note Emergence of Reform Movements?
2. Write a note on (a) Arya Samaj (b) Theosophical Society.
3. Describe the Islamic Reform Movements.