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Social And Religious Movements In Modern India

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Abstract

India in the 19th century witnessed a series of reform movements undertaken in various parts of the country. These movements were oriented towards a restructuring of the Indian society along modern lines. This was chiefly due to the exposure to the liberal western ideologies of democracy and individualism. When the British came to India, they introduced the English language as well as certain modern ideas. These ideas were those of liberty, social and economic equality, fraternity, democracy and justice which had a tremendous impact on Indian society. As a consequence, several individuals and movements sought to bring about changes in social and religious practices with a view to referring and revitalizing society. These social and religious reform movements arose among all communities of the Indian people. They attacked bigotry, superstition and the hold of the priestly class. They worked for the abolition of castes and unfouchability, the purdah system, sati child marriage, social inequalities and illiteracy. There were same enlightened Indians like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Mahatma Phule and many others who were willing of fight and bring reforms to society so that it could far the challenges of the west. Some of the reformers and their reformist movements are discussed as below.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833)

He was the father of Modern India's renaissance and a social reformer who inaugurated the age of enlightenment and liberal reformist modernisation in India. He was greatly influenced by, western modern thought and stressed on rationalism and modern scientific approach. He was impressed and admired the British system of constitutional government for the civil liberties it gave to the people. he founded *Atmiyo Sabha* (1814) in calcuta to campaign against caste rigidities, idolatry, meaningless rituals etc. In 1828 he founded *Brahmo Samaj* in

Calcutta. He started *Sambad Daumudi*, a Bengali weekly newspaper that regularly denounced sati as barbaric and against the tenets of Hinduism. His efforts led to the abolition of sati in 1829 by Lord William Bentinck. He was one of the few people in his time to realize completely the significance of modern age. Hence, he was called the 'Father of Modern India' in recognition of his poach. Making social, educational and political reforms.

Aatmaram Pandurang Tarkhadkar (1823-1898)

Aatmaram was influenced by Keshav Chandrasen and founded a new social organization called '*Prathna Samaj*' in Mumbai in 1867. Main aim of this samaj was to make people believe in one God. All the members of this samaj were the followers of the great religious tradition of the Marathi Saint like Namdev, Tukaram etc. Prathana Samaj gave priority to social reform as compared with the political changes already initiated by the British government. It supported education of girl child, widow remarriage and discouraged child marriage. Their comprehensive reform movements had led many impressive projects of cultural change and social reform in India, such as the improvement of the lot of women and depressed classes, and end to the caste system, abolition of child marriage and in infanticide, educational opportunities for women, and remarriage of widows.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883)

Swami DAYANAND Saraswati was a great thinker and social reformer, in 19th century, he saw the Indian Society in the grip of age – old customs, superstitions and beliefs. He propounded the slogan '*Back to the Vedas*' to help people get rid of the false beliefs and adopt an objective, rational and progressive way of life. He founded '*The Arya Samaj*' on April 7, 1875 in Bombay. The main aim of this Samaj was to eradicate ignorance, poverty, and injustice from this world. He encouraged education of women and promoted widow remarriage. He openly stood up against all the social evils such as discrimination on grounds of caste, creed, sex, economic status, social bigotry, male chauvinism and religious dominance of higher castes over the backward castes and classes. The Arya Samaj aims at making man a good Human Being and achieving the two fold development i.e. the spiritual upliftment and the social upliftment.

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule (1827-1890)

Jyotiba Phule founded a social reform society called '*Satyashodak Samaj*' on September 24, 1873 in Pune, Maharashtra. This Samaj endeavoured to mitigate the distress and sufferings of Dalits and women. The primary aim of this samaj was to promote education and social rights in the deprived group of the society. The Samaj Propagated that freedom was the basic necessity of every individual and no individual could express his ideas if he did not have freedom. It urged for the prohibition of liquor. It opposed gender inequality, denial of human rights. It opposed the exploitation of people, the practice of untouchability and started the movement of social justice. It advocated free and compulsory education in order to bring about reform in the social system. Phule gave stress on girls' education. Therefore. He started a school for girls. The main aim of phule was to liberate the so-called 'lower castes' from the exploitation and oppression of higher classes.

Conclusion:

These movements which started in the 19th Century help to create national awakening among the people of India. It attacks on rigidities of the caste system and finally create a sense of equality, indigenisation and co-existence of cultures and religions. It creates the feeling of sacrifice, service and rationalism for attacking the caste system and unfouchability, the reformers helped to unity the people of India into one nation. The reform movements fostered feelings of self-respect, self-reliance and patriotism among the Indians.

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