



THE INDIAN RENAISSANCE

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Abstract:- India has a long history of socio-religious reform movements, particularly, in the nineteenth century. The reforms by definition entail change or replacement of the institution, which have become functionally irrelevant either totally or partly, to the contemporary social order and are responsible for low quality of life, deprivation, unrest and misery to the sizeable sections of the society. The beginning of the social and religious reform movements in the nineteenth century, were clearly the outcome of coming in contact of two different societies- traditional orthodox society and the English educated young generation. A group of young people who came in contact with the new system of education became familiar with the liberal and rational thinking of Europe and they revolted against the tyranny of dogmas and traditional orthodox beliefs, customs, and age-old practices. There was the replacement of blind faith in current traditions, beliefs and conventions which were the characteristics of the medieval age, by a spirit of rationalism, which is distinctive feature of the modern age. In short, these reform movements brought a transition from the medieval age to the modern age. Keeping in view the importance of socio-religious movements, the topic "Indian Renaissance and Socio-Religious Movements" has been taken for this research.

Research Gaps

In the previous researches, social and religious reforms have been studied from the point of view of different scholars. No study has been conducted on the revival and restoration of lost individuality, the reconstruction of faith in man in the light of secularized view of life. To fill the gap, the present study would aim at the emancipation of the whole humanity from worldly miseries and the radical transformation of life.

Objectives of the Study

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

1. To make an assessment of Indian renaissance movement in India.
2. To explore and critically evaluate social reform movements in India.
3. To explore and evaluate religious movements in India..
4. To critically evaluate the impact of socio-religious reform movements on the Indian society.
5. 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 conditions of the period before Indian Renaissance, reveals the fact that it was passing through a socio-religious crisis of grave consequence, especially with the western invasion. Indian society was caught in a vicious web created by religious superstitions and dogmas. It is regarded as really a period of darkness in which the spirit of Indian heritage and culture was threatened with destruction by the transgression of western ideas and values. The abominable rites like animal sacrifice and physical torture had replaced the worship of God. The priests exercised an overwhelming and unhealthy influence on the mind of people. Social conditions were equally depressing. The social evils like child marriage, untouchability, Sati, general degradation of women – the most distressing - the birth of a girl was unwelcome, her marriage a burden and her widowhood inauspicious. Another debilitating factor was the division of people into endless castes and sub-castes that weakened the whole human society. It sought to maintain a system of segregation, hierarchically ordained on the basis of ritual stature, hampering social mobility and fostered social divisions. Bigotry, intolerance, mass

ignorance and communal rivalry shattered the entire structure of the country, as a result, mutual hatred and discontent sustained in the social life of the individual. Rejecting them as features of a decadent society, the reform movements sought to create a social climate for modernization.

The beginnings of the Hindu way of life which is now an integrated behavioural pattern go back to very ancient days and stem from widely different sources. They have latter commingled to from the Hindu social tradition but even that stage of fusion was reached so long ago that there has been ample time for that system to take root, and become hoary authentic and orthodox in its own right. This great principle of anonymity is at the root of lack of history in India. The sense of history, which is the desire not only to write history but also to wish to be participants in a record-worthy history was significantly absent and search as we may in Hindu literature we get no biodata regarding great men whose names alone have survived to reach us. The fact of the matter is that the literates in a society which had become almost inorganic in view of the extremely slow pace of change, could see no point of inengaging in an enquiry on the nature of and justification for social change which is the essence of historical investigation. Hinduism was culturally perfectly totalitarian and as so as in all totalitarian systems, the writing of the history was naturally different from what it is expected to be in the non-Hindu traditions of historiography; the system deprecated such interests. As in the modern totalitarian states history becomes the tool of another ideology; Hinduism produced semi-religious literature called the Itihasaa and the Puranas which twisted secular life out of historical shape and fitted it into a mythical pattern.

The basic attitude to life of the Hindu which was set his goals and limited his achievements is that the individual shall be subordinate to the group. This was defended by metaphysics, made part of the education and the religion of the people: conformity to it was required if one were to be respectable. It was the underlying principle in all social institutions and was enshrined in the literature and art of the people. At the highest point of Hindu religion, the individual is called upon to give up Ahankara and Mamakara; to some extent the suppression of the ego and elimination of selffishness are proclaimed as moral ends by other societies, too. But more than elsewhere it has been driven deep into the inner consciousness and sense of property of vain worldly-minded men perhaps required this teaching, it has also led to the elimination of self-respect, legitimate pride of achievement, notions about dignity of personality etc., so that the individual has always receded to the background and allowed his work alone to survive him. The individual had little incentive for achievements for their sake not as duty done in the sense in which Karma is prescribed by the Gita but as a matter of personal honour and commitment to quality unassociated with religious or quasireligious considerations of any sort. The 'fame' which the Hindu aspired to is usually posthumous fame which will relate to his work and not to his personality.

The Indian movement was started in the 19th century. And during these centuries many new factors and many forces came into play in the historical arena. Furthermore, the historical development of Europe had been considerably different from that of India. However, even keeping in mind these historical differences, one cannot but discern a striking similarity between the European Renaissance and the Indian one. In this regard, one should also note that in Europe what a host of outstanding men tried to achieve, in India Rammohun attempted single handed. The many-sided movement that Rammohun started was, like its European counterpart, a revolt against mediavalism in every aspect of our life. Even though it was a crusade for the supremacy of reason over dogmatic worship of authority, yet it did not mean the total rejection of the Hindu Shastras. What Rammohun insisted on was their fresh evaluation in the light of human reason. He launched a formidable onslaught against pseudo-religious Puranic cults and dogmas, which had crept into Hinduism in much later periods of its history, and attempted to link Hinduism with its original classical concepts of monotheism. And in order to bring the original Hindu Scriptures to his countryman who did not know Sanskrit, Rammohun was the first to translate the classics of Hindu religion into Bengali and English. Rammohun unequivocally asserted man's intellectual freedom, rejected the claim of asceticism as the only means of realising God, and recognised feelings and emotions as vital factors of life. And finally, he raised the standard of revolt against social oppression and tyranny. Furthermore, as the Indian Renaissance followed in the 19th century, Rammohun developed two fundamental concepts which could not germinate in the womb of the 15th century Europe; first comparative study and synthesis of three world religions – Hinduism, Islam and Christianity; and, secondly, unqualified support to democratic struggles for freedom of the oppressed people all over the world. Thus the Indian Renaissance truly served the historical need of the epoch. In order to resuscitate the inner meaning of classical Hinduism, the methodology that Rammohun followed was that of the Mimamsa School of Philosophy. This school enunciated that for arriving at truth one should start with a particular sloka of a Shashtra, challenge its validity, re-examine it, and then arrive at a conclusion. According to Rammohun, the scriptures are not the ultimate authority. Man's highest realisation is built on neither supernatural nor metaphysical foundations but rests on man's own consciousness. In his formative years, Rammohun was greatly influenced by 8th century Arabian free-thinkers – the Mutazilas. This rationalist movement, founded by two famous Arabian Islamic scholars – Wasil B. Ata and B. Ubaid – flourished in both Basra and Baghdad. The teachings of the Mutazilas were widely disseminated in Syria, Egypt and Spain. The Mutazilas believed in the strictest form of monotheism, denied any resemblance between God and His creatures, emphasised that all human action resulted from man's free will, and rejected anthropomorphism or avatarvad. Divine attributes were admitted but were not considered as entities added to the divine being but were identical with the Being. They also believed that those nations that did not derive a divine scripture from God could also acquire wisdom and properly perform their duties so as to reach self-realisation. Under the influence of the Mutazilas, Rammohun became a rationalist free-thinker. Nowhere is the rationalistic mental make-up of Rammohun more clearly exhibited as in the Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhiddin written by him in Persian with an introduction in Arabic, published in 1803. We will deal extensively with the contents of this brochure with the purpose of presenting the fundamental religious thoughts of Rammohun, who seemed at that early age to have arrived at the concept of a universal religion based on monotheism. The basic points that Rammohun makes in this brochure are that religion experience must be analysed by reason; that it is necessary to study comparatively principles of religious doctrines by different nations; and that superstitions are born of ignorance. He also emphasises that even God cannot perform miracles, as He cannot transgress his own law; and that God does not make His law known through his prophets, but His message can be received by every individual by his natural sense and knowledge. He emphasises his belief in innate faculty existing in the nature of mankind which, before or after assuming the doctrines of any religion, makes an enquiry into the nature of religious doctrines

with a sense of impartiality and justice, and also expresses a hope that man will be able to distinguish the truth from the untruth, and would ultimately turn to One Being who is the foundation of the harmonious organisation of the universe. Blind belief and inability to enquire into the cause and effect were something quite foreign to this nature. He could not accept that bathing in a river or worshipping a tree or purchasing forgiveness from the high priest could lead to purification from the sins and bring ultimate salvation. Such beliefs, he thought, had come to be held by the people through the influence of habit and custom, and failure to enquire into the sequence between the cause and effect. He argued that had there been any real effect of those imaginary things, it must have been common to all nations of different persuasions, and should not have been confined to one particular nation's belief and habit. Rammohun did not accept the dogma of supernatural power, or miracles. He thought that in this world things were mutually related to one another by a sequent relation of cause and effect, and that the existence of everything depended upon certain causes, we might see that in the existence of any one thing in nature, the whole universe was connected. He also distinguished between a tradition which produced positive belief, and a tradition believed blindly by the followers of a religion. He says that to the followers of religions, tradition is a report coming down from those persons to whom falsehood cannot be imputed. But whether such people existed in ancient times or not is not really known. Besides, contradictions are found in affirmation and negation of prophecy and other good attributes of the leaders of different religions, and these contradictions are proved by traditions. Therefore, Rammohun concludes in taking for granted the truth of traditions, there would be admission of contradictions. Rammohun also challenged the common belief that God's guidance would be made known through the medium of prophecy. He said that some people argued that the Creator had opened the way of guidance to mortal being through the medium of prophets or leaders of religion, and that the same people believed that the existence of all things in a creation, whether good or bad, was connected with the Great Creator without any intermediary agency. Hence, it was, he said, to be seen whether the sending of prophets and revelation to them from God were immediately from God or through intermediate agency. In the first case, there was no necessity of an intermediate agency for guidance and there did not seem any necessity of instrumentality of prophets. And in the second case, there would be a series of intermediate agencies which would not lead to any conclusion. Hence, Rammohun concluded, that advent of prophets and revelation like other things in nature depended upon external causes without reference to God. In other words, prophecy depends on the invention of an inventor. Rammohun also had accepted the Brahma Sutra as the Vedanta. Therefore, his Vedanta Sar expressed the essence of Vedanta. Rammohun published his Vedanta Sar in three languages – Bengali, Hindi and English. The Vedanta Sutra, with Shankara's commentary, was translated and published by him into Bengali in 1815. The Vedanta Sar in Bengali and the Vedanta in English were published in 1816; and Isha and Kena Upanishads in Bengali and English in 1816; the Katha and Mandukya Upanishads in Bengali in 1817. This was for the first time that the Upanishads, the Vedanta Sutra and other important Hindu Scriptures were translated into Bengali and in English. Soon after his death, the Asiatic Journal of December, 1833, in an article entitled "Rammohun Roy", wrote:

"The work by which he made known distinctly his sentiments on this vital point was a "Translation of an Abridgement of the Vedanta or the Resolution of All the Vedas", which appeared first in an English press at Calcutta in 1816. Translations and abridgements had been published by him previously in Hindustanee and Bengali and distributed amongst the natives free of costs. In the introduction to this work, he states that his objects in publishing it were to convince his countrymen of the true meaning of their sacred books and thereby enable them to contemplate with true devotion the unity and omnipresence of God and to prove to Europeans that 'the superstitious practices which deform the Hindu religion have nothing to do with the pure spirit of its dictates'. The light Rammohun obtained

from his study diffused over the ancient theological writings of his race enabled him to recognise their pure original dogma the existence of one God, maker and preserver of the universe.”`

The Vedanta was followed by a translation into Bengali of the principal chapters to the Vedas with a view, as Rammohun says in the introductions, to “explaining to his countrymen the real spirit of the Hindu scriptures which is but the declaration of the unity of God”. Later, these works were translated into English in 1816, 1819 and 1823. The publication of these works led to a series of controversies with Pandits of the orthodox school, staunch champions of idolarity. Criticisms and controversies followed. But Rammohun was not to be silenced. The next four or five years saw Rammohun vigorously engaged in refuting with consummate skill the attacks of the orthodox Pandits. These debates and disputations have a unique power of persuasion and earnestness, which most people found impossible to resist.

CONCLUSION

All the cultural changes which occurred in the 19th century in india are usually collectively designated a Renaissance . This nomenclature is unfortunate ,for the reason it reminds one automatically of the European Renaissance of the later it reminds one automatically of the European Renaissance of the later medieval period and there is little in common between the two. In Europe the pre-Christian theological discipline. Machiavelli , Roger Bacon and Wycliffle among others , in different ways were the starting points of this great move for ‘liberation’ from the papal religious authority. The widening horizon envisaged by the world-discovering voyages and the new philosophers like Francis Bacon and the scientists like Galileo, Harvey and Newton made the Renaissance . The Christian religion thus weekend had to face the Reformation, too . Blow came after blow . The Industrial Revolution brought about by modern science and technology introduced an era of daily explicable miracles in the place of the very infrequent and inexplicable religious miracles of the past. Darwin and Marx between themselves went beyond the Humanism of Renaissance art and letters, and sowed seeds of doubt about the most sacred ideas of the past in the minds of the following generations. The new paganism had come to prosper. So in Europe the age of science and reason, logic and discovery, humaint literature and art preceded and followed the age of Christian faith. Thus the later medieval period of European traditions saw a rebirth of the ancient period.

But in India there was no renaissance in that sense. The old value relevant to the Hindu way of life were a continuning system; they were never upest or forgotten ; in fact they were carefully remembered and cherished and occasionally modified only to ensure continuance. The art and letters of ancient India, till the West came in massively to pose an unprecedented threat, were harnessed to the overriding purpose of upholding Hindu context . The situation really is that a fully operating and thoroughly integrated social system geared to spiritual values is suddenly faced with the problem of blinding the people to the prospects of as yet unheard of material prosperity. The situation has no semblance to the European Renaissance.

This new situation was entirely the product of Bristish advent in this country . The British also encouraged it to some extent. The english language and its literature carried the germs of the new western, non-Hindu ideas and mounted an undeclared offensive on Hindu orthodoxy. The orthodox tried to beat a retreat to a safe line of defence and beat back this new cultural vandalism but could not ; modification of the social system, reinterpretation of the sacred texts and denunciation of western values were all tried in turn. The sole aim of all these manoeuvres was to save as much of their way of life as they couls after the inconvenient and embarrassing jetsom had been sacrificed. But with every concession, unlike in the past.Hinduism weakened and the opposing forces triumphed. But there was another and a subtle force operating to the disadvantage of the new values and ergo in support of

Hindu orthodoxy. It was political opposition to the foreign ruler eroding the area of foreign culture which normally and otherwise seemed desirable and therefore acceptable. The English and their language and many other things associated with them represented a whole complex of thought, actions and institutions which together constituted a negation of Hindu values. With the departure of the British, the need to reemphasise the superior value of indigenous ways became a sentimental necessity and it was a point of national honour to wean the wavering admirers of the exotic and glamorous western culture from their misplaced affections and re-dedicate them to their rightful path of devotion to the native values. This has however happened behind an elaborate façade of modernism. This adoption of westernism is a hallmark of all nations which are currently emerging into nation statehood in Asia, Africa and elsewhere. But in the case of India the difference is, two conflicting value systems are juxtaposed: the private lives of the people being guided by one and their public life by another. This cannot go on indefinitely; the latter is eroding the former in all superficial areas of social life; the former is resisting the latter in the basic thoughts and actions of the people in their personal and family contexts. The nature of this conflict and the area of resistance need to be identified and clarified at greater length.

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