

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS REFORMS

We learn about the following in this chapter:

- The founders of the Brahmo Samaj and its reforms
- The establishment of the Arya Samaj and its reforms
- The reforms of the Prarthana Samaj
- The teachings of the ‘Satyashodhak Samaj’.
- Aligarh movement
- The teachings of the Ramakrishna Mission

The 19th Century in Indian history is referred to as the period of ‘Indian Renaissance’. Indians came into contact with Western civilization. As a result, they got the advantage of English education. Rationalism grew among Indians. It is a well-known fact that this rational attitude stimulated the Indians to question superstitions and the contradictions in their traditions, and also become aware of their own interests. However, modern researchers are of the opinion that even in the pre-British period, in spite of the absence of the English language, Indians had a scientific outlook and were rational.

Western thought introduced the ideas of democracy, freedom, equality and nationalism to Indians. Many who were enlightened by Western education, tried to bring in reforms. In this context, Raja Ram

Do you know this?

The British and Indian scholars who were influenced by the Western philosophers, called the 19th Century period ‘a period of Renaissance’. They adopted the same criteria in research about Indians as were used during the creation of European history.

These writers firmly believed that India too, like Europe, needed a period of Renaissance to write history. Recent research has confirmed this fact. Many European principles relating to documentation of history have affected the writing of Indian history.

Mohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Mahadev Govinda Ranade, Jyotiba Phule, Swami Vivekananda, Annie Besant, Syed Ahmed Khan and other worked towards social reform.

Brahmo Samaj

Ram Mohan Roy was one of the important person in establishment of Brahmo Samaj. He has been called 'The Father of Indian Renaissance'. He had received excellent education. He was well-versed in many languages like Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, English, French, Greek, Latin and others. He had studied the culture and principles of religions like Hinduism, Islam, Sufi, Christianity and Buddhism. Raja Ram Mohan Roy studied the Upanishads and questioned the practice of idol-worship. He argued that modern science and English education were essential for an Indian revival. He opposed exploitation of women. He led an organized attack against the practice of sati and child marriage. Orthodox Hindus condemned him for such acts. Ram Mohan Roy supported the Prohibition of Sati Act which was introduced by Lord William Bentinck. He tried to develop rationalism among people through journalism. Towards that end, he started a newspaper in Bengali called 'Samvada Kaumudi'.

Brahmo Samaj was in the forefront of the social and religious reformation in the 19th Century. It attempted to bring in reforms in the traditions and customs in Hindu religion. It opposed idol-worship and polytheism, and encouraged monotheism. It condemned performance of yagas and rituals, and opposed the priestly class. Since English education exposed Indians to Western political thought, it enabled the development of nationalism among Indians.



Ram Mohan Roy

Activity: Make a list of the measures the government has taken to eradicate child marriage.

Arya Samaj

Arya Samaj was established by Dayananda Saraswati. He travelled throughout the country giving lectures and emphasized that the Vedas were the source of truth and knowledge. In this context, he advised people to 'Return to the Vedas'. He condemned idol worship and the caste system. He maintained that caste should be decided based on the ability and not on the birth of the person. He rejected the innumerable meaningless practices and dominance of the priestly class. He encouraged widow marriage. He urged people to use swadeshi goods. He propounded his teachings in a book called 'Satyarth Prakash'. 'Purification Ritual' was the main activity of Arya Samaj. The Samaj established schools and colleges in many places. The principles of Swarajya and Swadharma advocated by Dayananda Saraswati inspired people to take part in the freedom movement. Dayananda Saraswati who was a great patriot, proclaimed that 'India should be for Indians'.



Dayananda Saraswati

Do you know this?

Purification Movement

The caste system and rigid beliefs of the Hindu religion had pushed people towards other religions. In this context, with an intention to integrate the Hindu society, Dayananda Saraswati reinterpreted the Vedas and advocated caste and gender equality. He began a Purification Ceremony to bring back to the Hindu religion all those who had got converted to other religions. Those who came back underwent the Purification ritual and were accepted by Hinduism. Thus he strengthened the Hindu religion.

Prarthana Samaj

Prarthana Samaj was established by Atmaram Panduranga in Mumbai. It was founded on the principle that service to mankind

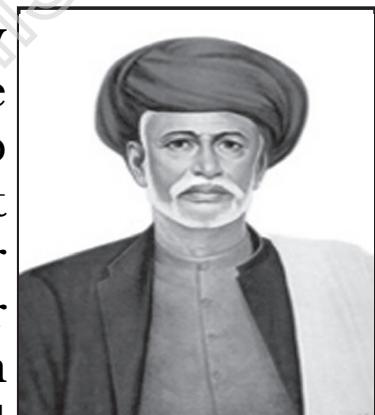
is service to God. It gave priority to spread of education. Through the Deccan Education Institution, it aimed to develop the educational field. It encouraged widow marriage, female literacy, intercaste marriage, eating together by people of all castes, and opposed child marriage, caste system, idol worship and purdah system. It maintained that all religions were paths towards the Truth and hence needed to be respected. During the Indian Renaissance, orphanages, national schools and shelter homes for women were established.

M.G.Ranade popularized Prarthana Samaj. He believed that progress in the political and economic fields was impossible without reform of the society. He propagated Hindu-Muslim unity. Ranade was active in the National Congress party. He started a high school for education of the girl child.

Satyashodak Samaj

Satyashodak Samaj was established by Jyotiba Phule. He believed that freedom was the basic necessity of every individual and that no individual could express his ideas if he did not have freedom. Satyashodak Samaj urged for prohibition of liquor. It vehemently opposed gender inequality, denial of human rights, exploitation of people and practice of untouchability. It started a movement for social justice. Jyotiba Phule established a school for girls. He condemned the slavery being forced on shudras and casteless classes including dalits, and denounced the people responsible for such slavery. He advocated free and compulsory education in order to bring about reform in the social system.

Activity: Learn from your teacher about the various projects of the Karnataka Government that encourage women's education.



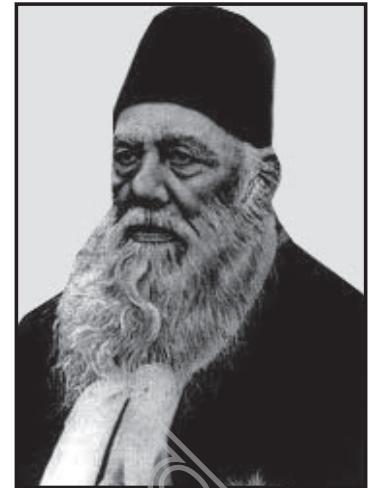
Mahatma Jyotiba Phule

Shahu Maharaj who was deeply influenced by Satyashodhak Samaj, opened many branches of the Samaj and continued its activities. It began struggles on behalf of farmers. This movement spread to all villages. Phule

wrote in detail about exploitation in his book ‘Ghulamagiri’ ('Slavery'). Phule’s wife, Savitribai Phule too worked hard through the Satyashodhak Samaj, for women’s education. Later, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar was influenced by Phule’s principles.

Aligarh Movement

The Aligarh Movement aimed at promoting harmony of Eastern and Western ideas through transformation of the Muslims in their political, social, educational, religious and philosophical beliefs. The leadership of this movement was borne by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. With an intention to provide modern education to the Muslim community, he started ‘The Anglo-Oriental College’. Later on, this college was renamed ‘Aligarh Muslim University’. Its main objective was to provide religious education along with western education, and to create a modern society through western education. Sir Syed remained outside the National Congress and brought the Muslim community together. He supported female literacy and condemned polygamy and ideas against widow marriage.



Sir Syed Ahmed Khan

Ramakrishna Mission

Ramakrishna Paramahamsa was a priest at the Dakshineshwar Kali Temple. His thought was source of Indian culture. He considered all religions to be equal. He believed that spiritual realization was more important than any religion or God. He believed in idol-worship. He was a selfless devout person. Swami Vivekananda was his favorite disciple.



Ramakrishna Paramahamsa

Swami Vivekananda established Ramakrishna Mission in order to propagate the ideals of his teacher, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. The main objective of this organization was to spread the message of equality of all religions and to put that into practice.

Ramakrishna Ashram has many branches all over the world. The mingling of ancient, modern and western thinkers can be seen here.

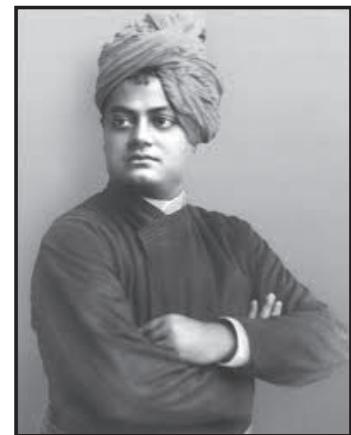
Swami Vivekananda was a revolutionary monk who opened the eyes of Indians to the importance of loving life. He stressed the significance of the individual, his presence and ability. He maintained that apart from prayer and practice of yoga, social service was also necessary for achievement of salvation (moksha). Ramakrishna Mission is continuing to nurture culture through education and social service. Vivekananda emphasized that nation and religion were like the two faces of a coin. Many national leaders including Gandhiji were inspired by the philosophy of Vivekananda.

In 1893, at the Chicago Conference of World Religions, Swami Vivekananda upheld the greatness of Indian by advocating tolerance of all religions, and maintaining that all religions were true. In this manner, he introduced Indian culture to the world. He was a role model to the youth.

Theosophical Society

The founders of Theosophical Society (Brahma Vidya Samaj) were Madame Blavatsky and Colonel H.S.Alcaren. This society was founded on the principles of establishment of universal brotherhood, comparative study of ideology, and exploration of natural principles and the latent energy of the individual.

Annie Besant, an Irish lady started the activities of Theosophical Society in India and gave it new vitality. She aroused pride in Indian culture through her lectures. She attempted to establish equality, universal brotherhood and harmony in society. Annie Besant gave her full support to the freedom struggle. She started a newspaper called 'New India'. In 1916, she started Home Rule movement. She was the President of the Congress Session in



**Swami
Vivekananda**



Annie Besant

Do you know this?

Home Rule

Ireland was under the control of Britain. The Irish people began the 'Home Rule Movement' in order to obtain the right to carry on the administration of their country themselves. Influenced by this, Annie Besant started the movement in India too. In 1916, two Home Rule Leagues came into existence. One began under the leadership of Tilak and had Poona at its centre. It had its branches in Maharashtra, North Karnataka, Central provinces and Berar areas. The second League began under the leadership of Annie Besant and had Madras as its centre. Tilak brought out the newspapers 'Maratha' and 'Kesari', while Annie Besant started 'New India', 'Commonwealth' and 'Young India', and propagated their ideas.

1917. She contributed immensely to Indian philosophy and the Independence struggle.

EXERCISES

I Fill in the blanks with suitable words:

1. The 19th Century is called the period of _____.
2. Raja Ram Mohan Roy started the newspaper _____.
3. The founder of Prarthana Samaj was _____.
4. _____ propagated that freedom was the basic necessity of every individual.
5. Swami Vivekananda's guru was _____.

II Discuss the following in groups and write the answers:

1. What are the preachings of the Brahmo Samaj?
2. Analyse the call of Dayananda Saraswati to return to the Vedas.

3. Explain the reforms propagated by Satyashodhak Samaj.
4. Analyse the objectives of the Aligarh Movement.
5. Explain the vision of Ramakrishna Mission.
6. Swami Vivekananda was a great inspiration to the youth. Explain.
7. Which are the reforms brought about by Annie Besant?

III Activities:

1. Visit Ramakrishna Ashram and collect information about the views of Swami Vivekananda.

IV Project Work:

1. Visit libraries and read books of social reforms. With the help of your teacher, collect information from the internet on the subject.
2. Learn from your teacher about the organizations working towards social reform.

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