



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

History

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (19TH AND 20TH CENTURY)

KEY WORDS: Social, Religious, India

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: 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 abolition of castes and untouchability, purdahsystem, sati, child marriage, social inequalities and illiteracy.
Purpose of study: Purpose of this article is to know the social and religious movements in India. **Sources of data:** This article study on based of secondary data collected form journal, textbooks, and thesis.
Discuss of the paper: This article discuss with various social and religious reform movements in India.
Conclusion: Drawn a conclusion is based on a study of the social and religious reform movements in India.

INTRODUCTION:

Professional missionaries, polemical tracts, and new rituals of conversion, were only three of the components of religious innovation in South Asia during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Aggressive proselytism became the norm among sects and religions with new and refurbished forms of action, ranging from public debates on the meaning of scriptural sources to the use of printing to produce books, journals, and a thesis. Religious conflict was implicit in the competition for converts, and explicit in assassinations and riots. Sustaining religious pursuits were new organizations fashioned from the traditions of the subcontinent and modified by British culture. South Asians constructed religious societies fully equipped with elected officials, weekly meetings, annual published reports, bank accounts, sophisticated systems of fundraising, annual meetings, executive committees, subcommittees, by-laws, and constitutions. Religious societies founded and successfully managed a number of organizations including hospitals, schools, orphanages, and relief programmes. Conflict, competition, and institution-building emerged from, and rested on, adherents to diverse ideologies made explicit in speech and writing. For many, religion became a matter of creeds that were explained, defined, and elaborated. It was an age of definition and redefinition initiated by socio-religious movements that swept the subcontinent during the years of British colonial rule.

Before turning to a discussion of the past, it is necessary to consider the concept of 'socio-religious movements' as used here, and its three crucial dimensions. The term 'socio' implies an attempt to reorder society in the areas of social behaviour, custom, structure or control.

Discussion On Social And Religious Reform Movements In India:

Bengal and Northeastern India:

The first region under consideration is Bengal and its adjoining territory of Assam in the North-East. Bengal proper is a huge delta built up by the combined river systems of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. Bengal and its environs are ringed by mountains in the North and East, by the bay to the South, the hills of Orissa and Chota Nagpur to the South-West, and Bihar to the West. Divided by numerous rivers and consisting of swampy land with abundant rainfall, Bengal was developed late in the history of South Asia and remained at the edge of Hindu-Buddhist civilization. Eastern Bengal, Assam, and the hill tracts bordering Burma marked the end of one major civilization and the beginning of the South-East Asia cultural sphere.

The incorporation of Bengal into the expanding culture of north India brought with it Sanskrit, Hinduism, and the caste structure. Brahman priests ascended to the foremost position in society, but never with the same degree of dominance as in the central Gangetic Plain or in south India. The Kshatriya

(warrior) and Vaishya (merchant) castes were absent. Instead two smaller groups, the Kayasthas, a writer-clerk caste, and the Baidyas, once physicians and later landlords, marked the next levels below the Brahmans. Thus the mass of Bengalis were classed as Sudras or peasants; beneath them were the untouchables. Within this region Buddhism and, to a lesser degree, Jainism provided a longstanding challenge to Hinduism. In the surrounding hill tracts, the high civilization of the valleys and the delta faded away. Many of the tribes within the jungles and highlands had their own languages, deities, social structures, and tribal culture.

In the first decade of the thirteenth century, the Hindu-Buddhist world of Bengal was significantly altered by Islamic conquerors. The establishment of Muslim rule cut ties of political influence and economic support between Hinduism and the state. Over the centuries, Islam also changed the socio-religious composition of Bengal through conversion.

Uttar Pradesh and Bihar:

The vast northern plain of the Ganges-Jumna River system stretches from the banks of the Jumna River south-east to the edges of Bengal. To the North are the foothills and behind them the great barrier of Himalayan mountains. The southern borders of this plain are marked by another range of hills that merge into the Vindhya mountain chain, the line of demarcation between northern India and the Deccan plateau of the South. Within this geographic area evolved the Hindu-Buddhist civilization, beginning in the second millennium before Christ. After the conquest of northern India by Islamic armies, it also became the hub of Indo-Muslim civilization. This vast plain repeatedly provided the population and productivity needed to build and sustain major kingdoms and empires.

The population of the Gangetic basin reflects its history. Hindus live throughout the plains and foothills. Their society possessed a complex caste system encompassing all of the traditional varnas along with innumerable divisions of specific castes and sub-castes. Hindus predominated with 86 per cent of the population, while the largest minority were the Muslims with 13.7 per cent. The Muslim population, however, showed distinctly different characteristics from the Islamic community of Bengal. In the North-Western Provinces they accounted for 38 per cent of the urban population. More concentrated in the cities and towns of the West, Muslims encompassed over 50 per cent of the urban dwellers in the area of Rohilkhand. Bihar held an even smaller percentage of Muslims; nevertheless, it too had a significant concentration of them in its towns and cities.

Punjab and North-West:

The Punjab encompasses the land west of the Sutlej to the Indus River, and from the Himalayan foothills south to the confluence of the Panjnad and Indus Rivers. North of the

Punjab are the foothills and the Himalayan mountains that include the Kashmir valley. To the West lies the edge of the Iranian plateau with its sharp hills, tribal groups, and key passes. To the South of eastern Punjab is Rajasthan with its dry, hilly topography that merges to the East with the great Indian desert. Beyond Rajasthan, at the lower end of the Indus River, is Sind, a semi-desert land at the edge of South Asia.

The Hindu-Buddhist cultures of the North-West extend back in time to the third millennium BC and were the first to be incorporated into the Islamic world, Sind in AD 712, and the Punjab by the end of the twenty century. Majorities of Muslims lived in Sind, western Punjab, and Kashmir. Hindus remained the majority in eastern Punjab, Rajasthan, and the Punjab hills. The religious structure of this region was given a new dimension when Guru Nanak founded Sikhism. In 1799, under the leadership of Ranjit Singh, they established a Sikh kingdom that ruled Punjab and Kashmir.

In 1803 British victories brought them to Delhi and the eastern border of the Sikh kingdom, as the lands between the Sutlej and Jumna Rivers came under British control. After 1818 the princes of Rajasthan accepted British supremacy, and in 1843 Sind was annexed to the Bombay Presidency. The two Anglo-Sikh wars led to the acquisition of the Jullundur in 1846, and of the entire Sikh kingdom in 1849. The British Empire expanded to its geographic limits with a fluctuating border in the trans-Indus territory. This vast surge of the British political sphere, the last such expansion in South Asia, was followed by a much slower uneven growth of the cultural milieu.

The Central Belt and Maharashtra:

Below the Gangetic basin and to the east of the Indus plain a series of steep hills and valleys run eastwards separating the northern subcontinent from its peninsular South. This central region of hills and jungles has impeded north-south movement, acting as a cultural and political barrier. On the western coast lies the Kathiawar peninsula and the immediate mainland attached to it. Together they comprise the region of Gujarat, which is partially isolated from the rest of the subcontinent. A narrow strip of land runs north and south connecting mainland Gujarat to the coast below it and through this coastal band passes the trade routes from the Gangetic plain. To the East are the Central Provinces containing a rich agricultural tract, Chhattisgarh, surrounded by hills, separated from the Deccan and the northern plains. The river valley and delta of the Mahanadi constitute the eastern region of this transitional belt, the area of Orissa. Bordered by hills to the North-West and South-West, Orissa is the site of a regional society created from a mixture of indigenous cultures, influenced from Bengal to the North, and the Telugu region to the South. Below this chain of hills is Maharashtra, an area composed of three geographic features: the Konkin coast, the western Ghats, an escarpment beginning at the Tapti River, and the Deccan, a dry inland plateau broken by numerous hills that extend south across the Godavari River, the linguistic border between the Deccan and the Dravidian South.

The culture and social system of Gujarat, the Central Provinces, and Orissa showed affinities with northern India. These areas had castes and sub castes representing all levels of the varna system. In Gujarat the two most powerful caste clusters were the merchants and members of the ruling elites, both Hindus and Muslims. A further feature of Gujarati society was the tight, hierarchical control maintained by elders within each caste. Gujarat was the home of a Hindu majority and small minorities of Jains, Muslims, and Parsis.

The Dravidian South:

The northern border of the Dravidian South begins on the east coast at the southern edge of Orissa, runs roughly along the northern lines of the Godavari River as it flows through the central Deccan, dipping south-west to Goa. The remainder of

peninsular India extends to the southernmost tip of the mainland. Little exists in the way of geographically defined sub-areas within this region except for the thin western coast that continues from Maharashtra to the Cape. The rest of the peninsula is comprised of the Deccan plateau as it is narrowed by the convergence of the Western and Eastern Ghats to just above the Cape.

Each cultural and linguistic subdivision of the South radiates out from a core and blends into the others without clearly defined borders. The areas of each of the four languages — Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam — roughly correspond to the four southern states of India: Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Karnataka, and Kerala. Tamil is the oldest of the Dravidian languages with literature from the first century before Christ. The Tamil region was a second source of high culture pre-dated only by developments on the Indus and Gangetic plains. The three other Dravidian languages are considerably younger. The literature of Kannada dates from the tenth century, Telugu from the eleventh, and Malayalam from the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. Each was influenced by Sanskrit and northern Brahmanical civilization, but still retained its own unique culture. A degree of unity exists between the four linguistic areas.

CONCLUSION:

Within nearly a century of British rule over the South Asian subcontinent, socio-religious movements reshaped much of the social, cultural, religious, and political life of this area. Three civilizations provided models for movements of dissent and protest that sought to 'purify' and restructure contemporary society. New associations, techniques, and forms of group consciousness came into being during these years as religious change encountered increased politicization and competing nationalism. The historic process of internal dissent and cultural adjustment was dynamic as the traditions of the past flowed into the colonial milieu, and were increasingly altered by that environment. There was no clear point of beginning or end of the transitional movements of pre-British history, as they reached forward into the colonial milieu linking that era with what went before.

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