

## 1857-1947 : Socio-religious reform Movements

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# SOCIO RELIGIOUS REFORM MOVEMENTS

## BRAHMO SAMAJ

Rammohan Roy established the Brahmo Samaj at Calcutta in 1828 in order to purify Hinduism and to preach monotheism.

The Samaj under him was based on the twin pillars of reason and the ancient Hindu scriptures (only the Vedas and the Upanishads), and incorporated the best teachings of other religions as well.

## Rammohan Roy (1772-1833)

Born in 1772 at Radhanagar in Burdwan district in West Bengal, he is unanimously considered as the first 'modern man' of India.

He was a pioneer of socio-religious and political reform movements in modern India.

He passed away at Bristol in England in 1833.

He was sent to England by the titular Mughal emperor (Akbar II) to plead with the British crown for a larger sum of pension.

## His religious ideas and reforms

He studied different languages (Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, English, French, Latin Greek, Hebrew, etc.) in order to study the various religious scriptures in their original.

He believed in monotheism (Doctrine of the Unity of God-head) and opposed idol worship.

In 1803 he published a Persian treatise called **Tuhfat-ul-Muwahidin** or '**A gift to monotheists**' wherein he explains his concept of monotheism.

He established the **Atmiya Sabha** in Calcutta (1815) in order to propagate monotheism and to fight against the evil customs and practices in Hinduism.

Later in 1828 he established the **Brahmo Samaj** at Calcutta in order to purify Hinduism and to preach monotheism.

He also published a book entitled **The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness** (1820), which embodied the moral and spiritual precepts of Jesus without the narratives of the miracles.

Further, he defended Hinduism and its Vedanta philosophy, as found in the Vedas and the Upanishads, from the ignorant attacks of Christian missionaries.

## His social ideas and reforms

He led a life-long crusade against the practice of **sati** and finally in 1829 he succeeded in persuading **Lord William Bentinck** to abolish it.

He championed women's rights, like right of inheritance and property, and attacked polygamy and the degraded state of widows.

He fought for the introduction and spread of modern education through the medium of English.

## His political ideas and reforms

He believed in the unification of divergent groups of Indian society in order to bring about national consciousness in India

He initiated public agitation on political questions like the need for reforms in the British administration, trade and economic policies etc.

He also pioneered Indian journalism in order to educate the public on current issues and to represent public opinion before the government.

## BRAHMO SAMAJ AFTER ROY

### Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905)

He established **Tattvabodhini Sabha** (1839) at Calcutta to propagate Rammohan Roy's ideas.

Formally he joined the Brahmo Samaj in 1843 and reorganized it.

He promoted systematic study of India's past through **Tattvabodhini Patrika** (a Bengali monthly).

He remained undisputed leader of Brahmo Samaj till 1866.

### Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-84)

He joined Brahmo Samaj in 1857 and became the right hand man of Debendranath.

During this time differences developed between the older and conservative section led by Debendranath and the younger and progressive section led by Sen over the issues of social reforms (particularly the caste system) and of the relationship between Hinduism and Brahmoism.

While the latter group stood for the complete abolition of the caste system and maintained that Brahmoism is different from Hinduism, the former group wanted to retain caste system, though criticizing its rigidity, and asserted that Brahmoism is Hinduism.

This led to secession of Sen's group from the parent body (which had come to be known as the **Adi Brahmo Samaj**) in 1865 and formation of a new organization, known as the **Brahmo Samaj of India**, by it in 1866.

He spread the message of Brahmo Samaj in other parts of India including Bombay and Madras.

He adopted a much more radical and comprehensive scheme of social reform and infused bhakti into Brahmoism.

Further, he formed the '**Indian Reform Association**' (1870) and persuaded the British government to enact the **Native Marriage Act of 1872** (popularly known as the **Civil Marriage Act**) which legalized the Brahmo marriages and fixed the minimum age for the groom and the bride at 18 and 14 respectively.

## Second schism in Brahmoism

The second schism in Brahmoism occurred in 1878 when a group of Sen's followers, under **Ananda Mohan Bose and Shivanatha Shastri**, left him and formed the **Sadharana Brahmo Samaj**.

The causes for this split were the question of management of the Samaj and the violation of the Native Marriage Act by Sen himself.

He gave his eldest daughter in marriage to the ruler of Cooch Behar, but neither of them had attained the marriageable age under the Act.

## MANAV DHARMA SABHA

**Durgaram Manchharam** (1809-78) was a leading figure among the small group of educated Gujaratis who in the 1830s became strong critics of contemporary society.

Participants in this group were Dadoba Panderung, Dinmani Shankar, Dalpatram Bhagubai, and Damodar Das.

They founded the Manav Dharma Sabha at Surat in 1844 and held meetings every Sunday that were open to anyone who wished to attend.

As part of its programme, the Manav Dharma Sabha challenged magicians and the reciters of incarnations to demonstrate their skills.

They also criticized caste, but took no direct action against this institution.

The Manav Dharma Sabha had only a short career as an active organization.

It began to Shatter in 1846 when Dadoba Panderung returned to Bombay, and ceased to function in 1852 when Durgaram Manichharam left for Rajkot.

Although its life was severely limited, this Sabha was directly linked to later developments in Maharashtra and

# PARAMAHANSA MANDALI

Its history was closely linked to the Manav Dharma Sabha and to the leadership of **Dadoba Panderung** (1814-82).

Dadoba outlined his doctrines in Dharma Vivechan (1848).

He listed seven principles that became the basis for the new association. They are:

God alone should be worshipped;

Real relation is based on love and moral conduct;

Spiritual religion is one;

Every individual should have freedom of thought;

Our daily words should be consistent with reason;

Mankind is one caste; and

The right kind of knowledge should be given to all.

These principles denied the polytheism of popular Hinduism, the caste system and the Brahmanical monopoly of knowledge.

In 1849, Dadoba and his friends organized the Paramahansa Mandali at Bombay, a radical socio religious society that met in secret.

**Ram Bal Krishna Jayakar** became president of the Mandali.

All members were required to pledge that they would abandon caste restrictions.

Each initiate had to take food and drink prepared by a member of the lower castes.

The group soon came to an agreement on two major principles:

First, they would not attack any religion; and

Secondly, they rejected any religion which claimed infallibility.

Branches of this organization were established in Poona, Ahmednagar, and Ratnagiri.

Its insistence on remaining a secret organization illustrated an unwillingness to openly challenge Hindu orthodox.

Yet the ideas seen in the Manav Dharma Sabha and the Paramahansa Mandali appeared once more in the form of a new socio-religious movement.

## PRARTHANA SAMAJ

An off-shoot of the Brahmo Samaj, it was founded in 1867 in Bombay by **Dr. Atmaram Pandurang** (1823-98).

In 1870 M.G. Ranade and R.G. Bhandarkar joined it and infused new strength in it.

It was reform movement within Hinduism, and concentrated on social reforms like inter-dining, inter-marriage, remarriage of widows, and uplift of women and depressed classes.

## ARYA SAMAJ

The Arya Samaj was founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati at Bombay in 1875.

The most distinctive feature of Arya Samaj was the Shuddhi movement, which means the reconversion of those Hindus who had once been willingly or forcibly converted into the fold of Hinduism.

It was considered by the Arya Samajists a potent instrument for affecting socio-religious and political unity of India.

The Arya Samaj, though founded in Bombay, became very powerful in Punjab and spread its influence to other parts of north India like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat etc.

## Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-83)

Originally known as **Mul Shankar**, Dayanand was born in 1824 in the town of Tankara in Gujarat.

He spent 15 years (1845-60) as a wandering ascetic and later received education from **Swami Birajananda** at **Mathura**.

# His religious and social and reforms

He considered the Vedas as eternal and infallible.

He was against idolatry, ritual and priesthood.

In his opinion priests had perverted Hinduism with the help of the **Puranas** which **were full of falsehood**.

He attacked child marriages and caste system based on birth; encouraged inter-caste marriages and widow remarriage; favoured the spread of western sciences; and organized social services during natural calamities, etc.

He wrote three books, viz. **Satyartha Prakash** (in Hindi), **Veda-Bhasya Bhumika** (Partly in Hindi and partly in Sanskrit) and **Veda Bhashya** (in Sanskrit).

After the death of Dayanand (1883), serious differences arose between two sections of the Arya Samaj over the question of the system of education to be followed, resulting in a **split** in **1892**.

One section, known as the Gurukula section led by **Swami Shraddhanand**, advocated the adoption of the ancient system of Hindu education and established institutions for boys only, the most important among them being the one at Hardwar.

The other one, called the College section led by **Lajpat Rai and Hans Raj**, stood for the spread of English education, and established a number of Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) schools and colleges both for girls and boys, the most important being the one at Lahore.

## RAMAKRISHNA MISSION AND RAMAKRISHNA MATH

The former is a social service and charitable society, formed by Swami Vivekananda in 1897 at **Belur**, with the objective of carrying on humanitarian relief and social work through the establishment of schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages etc.

The latter is a religious order or trust, founded by Vivekananda in 1887 at **Baranagar**.

Belur has become the headquarters of both the Mission and the Math since 1898.

## Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886)

Originally known as **Godadhar Chattopadhyay**, he was born in 1836 in Kamarpukur village in Hooghly district in West Bengal.

He became a priest in the temple of Goddess Kali at **Dakshineswar** near Calcutta (1856).

He sought religious salvation in the traditional way of renunciation, meditation and devotion.

He emphasized that there were several roads to god and salvation and that service of man was service of god.

## Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)

Originally known as **Narendranath Datta**, he was born in 1863 in Calcutta.

His first visit to Ramakrishna, his future guru, was in 1881.

He established a monastery at Baranagar (1887) after the death of his guru.

He made an extensive tour of India which brought him into close contact with the people and enabled him to realize the true condition of India.

He also attended the **World Parliament of Religions (1893) at Chicago** (USA) and raised the prestige of India and Hinduism very high.

From USA, he visited Europe and returned to India in 1897.

Meanwhile he started publishing two papers the monthly **Prabudha Bharata** in English and the fortnightly **Udbodhana** in Bengali.

Later he made his second visit to USA in 1899 and also spoke at the Congress of the History of Religions at Paris (1900).

He returned to India in 1900 and soon expired in 1902 due to ill-health.

## His socio-religious ideas and reforms

He popularized his guru's religious message and tried to put it in a form that would suit the needs of contemporary Indian society.

Further, he condemned the caste system and current Hindu emphasis on rituals, ceremonies, etc, and urged the people to imbibe the spirit of liberty, equality and free thinking.

He proclaimed the essential oneness of all religions.

Vedanta according to him was a fully rational system.

## THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

Founded in **New York** (USA) in **1875** By **Madam H.P. Blavatsky** (1831-91), a Russian lady, and **H.S. Olcott** (1832-1907), an American colonel, with three main subjects:

To form a universal brotherhood of man.

To promote the study of ancient religions and philosophies.

To make a systematic investigation into the mystic potencies of life and matter, called **occultism**.

They arrived in India in 1879 and established their headquarters at **Adyar**, near Madras in **1882**.

Later **Annie Besant** arrived in India in 1893 and succeeded to the presidentship of the society after the death of Olcott in 1907.

The society under Besant concentrated on the revival of Hinduism and its ancient ideas.

In order to provide Hindu religious instruction, she founded the **Central Hindu School** at **Varanasi** (1898), which was later developed into the Benaras Hindu University by Madan Mohan Malavia.

## YOUNG BENGAL MOVEMENT

Its founder was **Henry Vivian Derozio**, who was born in Calcutta in 1809 and who taught at the Hindu college between 1826 and 1831.

His followers were known as the Derozians and their movements as the Young Bengal movement.

### Their socio-religious views

They attacked old traditions and decadent customs.

Also advocated women's rights and their education and educated the public on the current socio-economic and political questions through the press and public associations.

They carried on public agitation on public questions like freedom of the press, trial by jury, protection of peasants, etc.

## OTHER HINDU REFORMERS AND SOCIAL WORKERS

### Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

He contributed to the uplift of India women by struggling in favour of widow remarriage.

His efforts bore fruit in **1856** when the British passed the **Hindu Widow's Remarriage Act**).

He also opposed child marriage and polygamy, and campaigned in favour of education of women.

He evolved a new technique of teaching Sanskrit and a modern prose style in Bengali.

He also admitted non-Brahmin students into **Sanskrit College** at **Calcutta** (of which he became the principal in 1851) and introduced the study of Western thought in it.

### Gopal Hari Deshmukh

A champion of new learning and social reform in Maharashtra, he was popularly known as **Lokahitwadi**.

He made powerful rationalist attacks on Hindu orthodoxy, and preached religious and social equality.

### M.G. Ranade

One of the prominent members of the Prarthana Samaj as well as the source of inspiration for the foundation of the Deccan Education Society (1884) by Agarkar.

He inaugurated the Indian National Social Conference in 1887.

Gokhale acknowledged him as his guru

# Gopal Ganesh Agarkar

He founded the **Deccan Education Society** at **Poona** in 1884 in association with B.G. Tilak, V. Chiplunkar and Madhavrao Namjoshi.

## Jyotiba Phule

Belonging to a low caste from Maharashtra and being aware of the degraded position of the untouchables and non-Brahmins, he waged a life-long struggle against upper caste domination and Brahmanical supremacy through his **Satyashodak Samaj (1873)**.

He pioneered the widow remarriage movement in Maharashtra and worked for the education of women.

## Tulsi Ram

Popularly known as **Shiva Dayal Saheb**, he founded the **Radha Soami Satsang** in 1861 at Agra, with the aim of propagating a monotheistic doctrine.

According to him, the only means of salvation was the practice of **surat sadyoga** (union of the human soul with the spirit-current or word) under the guidance of a Sant Satguru or sincere lover of the Supreme Being.

His teachings were embodied in two books; each named **Sarr Bachan** (Essential Utterance).

The sect recognizes no God of the Hindu Pantheon, nor any temples or sacred places except those sanctified by the presence of the guru or his relics.

## Shivnarayan Agnihotri

An active member of the Lahore branch of the Brahmo Samaj.

Due to differences with the other leaders of the Samaj, he left it and founded the **Deva Samaj in 1887** at Lahore with aims similar to those of the Brahmo Samaj but with an additional element, namely the predominance of the guru.

The religious text of this Samaj was **Deva Shastra** and the teaching Devadharm.

The guru, claiming supernatural powers, was practically regarded and worshipped as god by his disciples.

## Gopala Krishana Gokhale

He founded the **Servants of India Society** in 1905 at Bombay with the aim of training Indian in different fields for the service of their motherland.

Earlier he was an active member of the Deccan Education Society (founded by G.G. Agarkar in 1884 at Poona) but left in after some time due to serious differences with Tilak who was also one of its members.

## N.M. Joshi

Initially a member of Gokhale's Servants of Indian Society, he founded the **Social Service League** at Bombay in 1911 with the aim of securing for the masses better and reasonable conditions of life and work.

He also founded the **All India Trade Union Congress** in 1920 at Bombay, but left it in 1929 when it showed leaning towards the Soviet Union, and started the **Indian Trades Union Federation**.

## H.N. Kunzru

He founded the **Seva Samiti** at Allahabad in 1914 with the objective of organizing social service during natural calamities, and promoting education, sanitation, physical culture, etc.

He was also a member of the Servants of India Society earlier.

## Shri Ram Bajpai

Another member of the Servants of India Society, he founded the **Seva Samiti Boy Scouts Association** in 1914 at Bombay on the lines of the world-wide Barden-Powell Organization, which at that time banned Indians from joining it.

in India.

## Viresalingam Pantulu

He was the most prominent social reformer of south India in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

He founded the **Rajahmundry Social Reforms Association** in Andhra Pradesh in 1878 with the principal objective of promoting widow remarriage.

## MUSLIM REFORM MOVEMENTS

### Aligarh Movement

It was a movement started by **Sir Syed Ahmed Khan** (1817-98) for the social and educational advancement of the Muslims in India.

Other prominent members of the movement were Altaf Hussain Hali, Dr. Nazir Ahmad, Nawab Mushin-ul-Mulk, Chirag Ali, etc,

Sir Syed fought medieval obscurantism through his journal **Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq**, and advocated a rational approach towards religion.

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.

In order to promote English education among the Muslims, he founded in 1875 a modern school at Aligarh, which soon developed into the **Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College** (1877) and later into a full-fledged university.

In 1866, he founded the **Muhammadan Educational Conference** as a general forum for spreading liberal ideas among the Muslims.

But unfortunately, this movement in the later stages became anti-Congress and anti-Hindu, and pro-British due to some misconceived fears of Hindu domination.

### Deband Movement

It was the movement that began after the foundation of the **Dar-ul-Ulam** (name of the institution) at **Deoband** in 1866 by **Maulana Husain Ahmad** and others with the aim of resuscitating classical Islam and improving the spiritual and moral conditions of the Muslims.

The liberal interpretation of Islam of its founders created political awakening among its followers, and some of them like **Maulana Abul Kalam Azad** played an important role in the national movement.

### Ahrar Movement

It was a movement founded in the 1910 under the leadership of Maulana Muhammad Ali, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Hasan Imam, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan and Mazhar-ul-Haq in opposition to the loyalist politics of the Aligarh movement.

Moved by modern ideas of self-government, its members advocated active participation in the nationalist movement.

### Ahmadia Movement

Also known as the **Qadiani movement**.

It was founded by **Mirza Gulam Ahmad** (1837-1908) at **Qadian in Punjab**, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Its objective was to reform Islam and defend it against the onslaughts of Christian missionaries and the Arya Samajists.

It gave religious recognition to modern industrial and technological progress.

It has become the most closely knit and the best organized Muslim group in India.

## OTHER MUSLIM REFORMERS

### Muhammad Iqbal (1873-1938)

He emphasized the need for a reconstruction of Muslim religious thought in the light of the problems posed by the modern world.

Criticized those ascetic elements of religious thought which made man parasitic and indolent, and preached a life of self-assertion and self-realization.

Influenced the contemporary Muslim religious attitude through his poetry.

He founded the institution of **Nadwah-ul-Ulama** at Lucknow in 1894 with the objectives of recasting Muslim educational system, developing religious sciences, reforming Muslim morals and putting an end to theological controversies within Islam.

## Syed Nazir Husain

He founded the sect of **Ahl-i-Hadis** (People of the hadis) in Punjab in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This group considered only the hadis (sayings of the Prophet) and the Quran as the only and the ultimate authority on Islam, and refused to recognize any of the existing four schools of jurisprudence.

## Abdullah Chakralavi

He founded the sect of **Ahl-i-Quran** (People of the Quran) in Punjab in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Its members, also known as the `Chakralavis`, considered only the Quran as the ultimate authority on Islam.

## Ahmad Riza Khan

He founded the Barelwi school in Punjab in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Its members, known as `Barelwis`, preached the revival of many old Islamic practices and vehemently opposed the Deoband school and its preachings.

## PARSI REFORM MOVEMENT

The refugee Zoroastrians from Iran, known as Parsis, are said to have reached Gujarat in 936 AD.

Their temples and Domas (towers of silence), where the dead were exposed, were closed to non-Parsis.

Over the period the Indian Parsis retained a limited contact with those followers of Zoroastrianism still living in Iran, known as the `**Gabars**`.

In 1746 the Indian Parsis got divided into two groups, when a group of them decided to accept the Irani calendar and came to be known as the `**Kadami**` (ancient section) as opposed to the `**Shahanshahis**` (royalists), who retained the calendar used in Gujarat.

This major division of the community lasted into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Besides the Parsi religion was frequently targeted by the Christian missionaries.

In this background, **Naroji Furdunji** edited in the 1840s the **Fam-i-Famshid**, a journal aimed at defending the cause of Zoroastrianism.

He also wrote a number of pamphlets and published the book, **Tarikha Farthest** (1850), in which he convincingly argued that Zoroaster pre-dated Jesus Christ.

All these events led to the formation of a socio-religious movement designed to codify the Zoroastrian religion and reshape Parsi social life.

In 1851, a small group of educated Parsis from Bombay founded the **Rahnumai Mazdayasnan Sabha** (Parsi Reform Society), with funds provided by K.N. Kama.

**Furdunji Naoroji** became its president and **S.S. Bengalee**, the secretary.

In 1850, S.S. Bengalee began publishing a monthly journal, **Jagat Mitra** (Friend of the World), to further the acceptance of his ideas among literate Parsis.

In 1851, he started another journal, **Jagat Premi** (Lover of the World), for spreading knowledge of ancient Iran.

The Sabha also issued its own Journal, **Rast Gofar** (The Truth Teller), as the main voice of their movement.

The leaders of the Sabha criticized elaborate ceremonies at betrothals, marriages and funerals.

They opposed both infant marriage and the use of astrology.

But the activities of the Sabha divided the Parsis into two groups – those who advocated radical change, and those who wished only limited alternations in customs and rituals.



In 1863 M.H. Kama founded the orthodox journal, **Suryodaya** (Sunrise), edited by M.B. Minocheer.

This division between radical and orthodox Parsis continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## SIKH REFORM MOVEMENT

### Nirankaris

**Baba Dayal Das** (1783-1855) was the founder of this movement of purification and return.

In the 1840s, he called for the return of Sikhism to its origins and emphasized the worship of God as nirankar (formless).

Such an approach meant a rejection of idols, rituals, associated with idolatry, and the priests who conducted these rituals.

Stressing the importance and authority of Guru Nanak and of the Adi Granth, he prohibited eating meat, drinking liquor, lying, cheating, using false weights, etc.

Before his death Dayal Das named his son **Baba Darbara Singh** (1814-70), as his successor.

Determined to cut all ties with Hinduism, Darbara Singh began to issue hukamnamas (statements describing both doctrine and approved rituals).

Under him the Nirankaris had their most rapid period of expansion; for in fifteen years he opened forty new subcentres.

**Rattan Chand**, younger brother and successor of Darbara Singh, also established new centres and appointed **biredars** (leaders) for each congregation or sangat.

The biredars oversaw these groups and were charged with reciting the hukamnamas every fifteen days.

Thus they provided a tie between the head of the Nirankari movement and its members.

Between 1909 and 1947, **Baba Gurdit Singh**, son and successor of Rattan Chand, headed the movement.

The Nirankaris laid emphasis on Guru Nanak and on Sikhism before the establishment of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur.

In this they pursued a path open to both orthodox sikhs, kesadharis, and to the non-baptised ranks of the sahadharis, but drew members mainly from the urban non-Jat section of the Sikh community.

Their dependence on Guru Nanak and early Sikhism for their model of 'pure' religion separated them from another movement, the Namdharis.

### Namdharis

**Baba Ram Singh** (1816-85) was the founder of this movement.

In 1841, he became a disciple of Balak Singh of the Kuka movement.

Before his death, Balak Singh chose Ram Singh as his successor.

In 1857, Ram Singh formally inaugurated the Namdhari movement with a set of rituals modeled after Guru Gobind Singh's founding of the Khalsa.

To initiate followers into the new community, Ram Singh used a recitation of gurbani (hymns from the Granth Sahib), ardas (the Sikh prayer), a flag, and baptism.

Every baptised Sikh was required to wear the five symbols (kakka).

Instead of the sword, Ram Singh required them to keep a lathi.

In addition the Namdharis wore white clothes with a white turban and carried a rosary to further set them apart from all others.

The Namdharis were to abandon the worship of gods, goddesses, idols, graves, tombs, trees, and snakes.

They were also told to abstain from drinking, stealing, adultery, falsehood, slandering, backbiting and cheating.

Further, the consumption of beef was strictly forbidden, since protection of cattle remained one of the Namdharis most ardently held values.

## SINGH SABHAS

### Amritsar Singh Sabha

Shaken by Namdhari unrest, the speeches of Shradha Ram of Arya Samaj, and by Christian conversions, a small group of prominent Sikhs decided to form the Singh Sabha of Amritsar, which held its first meeting on 1 October 1873.

**Thakur Singh Sandhwalia** became its president and **Giani Gian Singh** its secretary.

The aims of the Sabha were:

Restoring of Sikhism to its past purity;

Publishing historical religious books, magazines and journals;

Propagating knowledge using Punjabi;

Returning Sikh apostates to their original faith; and

Involving high placed Englishmen in the educational programmed of the Sikhs.

It was joined by members of the landed gentry, the aristocracy, and by various types of temple servants – pujaris (who conducted rituals), granthis (who recited the Sikh scriptures), mahants (who administered the gurudwaras), gianis and descendants of the gurus.

One of the main activities of the Sabha was the preparation of a definitive text of the **Dassam Granth**.

When this task proved very demanding, a separate organization, the **Gurmat Granth Pracharak Sabha**, was founded to finish it.

The Sabha published numerous tracts and books and in 1894 organised the **Khalsa Tract Society** to popularize Punjabi, the Gurmukhi script, and to issue monthly tracts on the Sikh religion

## Lahore Singh Sabha

Soon the Amritsar Sabha was emulated and rivaled by a new organization, viz. the Lahore Singh Sabha, which held its first meeting on 2 November 1879.

The latter was led by Professor Gurmukh Singh and Bhai Ditt Singh.

It announced goals similar to those of the former.

The first president of the Lahore Sabha was **Diwan Buta Singh**, and **Bhai Gurmukh Singh** served as its secretary.

Difference between the two societies soon came to the forefront.

The Lahore Sabha was more democratic and accepted members from all castes including untouchables.

Their programme of purifying Sikhism directly opposed the vested interests of the Amritsar Sabha.

Ditt Singh, coming from a low-caste, wanted to remove the evils of caste system and the institution of guru from the Sikh community.

His tract, **Sudan Natak**, ridiculed the religious establishment and resulted in a court case.

The Lahore Sabha expanded with local branches in many of the Punjab towns.

The Amritsar Sabha developed its own societies, but its growth was far slower than the Lahore society.

## Other Sabhas

### Khalsa Diwan

In 1880 a General Sabha was founded at Amritsar to provide a central organization for all Singh Sabhas.

On 11 April, 1883 this was renamed the **Khalsa Diwan**, Amritsar.

It included 36 to 37 different Singh Sabhas as well as the Lahore association.

But this effort at unity was short-lived.

In 1886 the Lahore Singh Sabha created its own Khalsa Diwan (Sikh Council).

Only the Sabhas of Faridkot, Amritsar, and Rawalpindi allied with the original Diwan; the rest turned to the Lahore leadership and to its radical ideology of social and religious change.

The Lahore Khalsa Diwan received assistance from the **Maharaja of Nabha** as its patron, while **Sir Attar Singh** served as its president and **Bhai Gurmukh Singh** as its secretary.

The Singh Sabhas continued to expand, new branches were founded that, at times, created their own distinct ideas and programmes.

It was aggressive in its missionary zeal and extreme in its ideology.

In time it developed into the **Panch Khalsa Diwan** and competed with other Khalsa Diwans.

The low-caste Sikhs, particularly the Rahtias (untouchable weavers) from the Jullundur Doab, demanded that the Singh Sabhas remove their social and religious liabilities, caste system.

Since the Singh Sabha leaders did not respond to their pleas, they turned to the Arya Samaj, which welcomed them and conducted public ceremonies of Shuddhi for Rahtias.

Thus, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Singh Sabhas were overwhelmed by other organizations.

In the first decade they were supplanted by the Khalsa Diwans and then in the second decade by the struggle for control over the Sikh places of worship.

## Akali Movement

The next important Sikh reform movement was the Akali movement in the 1920s.

The main aim of the Akalis was to purify the management of the Sikh gurudwaras or shrines by removing the corrupt and selfish **mahants** (priests) from them.

Their movement led to the enactment of a new **Sikh Gurudwara Act** by the British in **1925**, and with the help of this Act and sometimes through direct action, they removed the mahants from the gurudwaras and managed them through the **Shiromani Gurudwaras Prabhandhak Committee (SGPC)**.

## Nature and Limitations of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Renaissance

### Nature and Character

The socio-religious ferment that characterized this period was religious in character.

Secularization was not yet a stance, although a few anticipated it.

The leaders couched their appeals in religious language and were heard as spiritual persons.

By and large, they stayed away from politics. Only a few had opposed British rule and preached overthrowing the British rule.

The economic ideas of the reform leaders represented the traditional outlook.

They never possessed radical economic ideas, for the time was not ripe to breed such ideas.

A lot of difference can be observed in the approach and methods of the leaders in carrying out the reform movement.

Roy broke away from the mainstream of traditional Hindu society.

Ranade followed the path of gradual reform within Hindu society.

Dayanand displayed an attitude of intransigence and rigidity towards foreign influences.

### Achievement of Renaissance

One should give credit to the 19<sup>th</sup> century reformers for initiating social and religious awakening in India.

It was due to their work that great self-respect, self-confidence and pride were fostered among Indians.

The problems of women were highlighted by almost all the reform leaders. Though the result was not spectacular, the road was laid in the proper form.

During the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, much attention was paid to the problem of depressed classes in society.

### Limitations of Renaissance

At the same time, the religious reform movement was concentrated upon and benefited only a microscopic minority of the Indian populations.

Further, it started tending to look backward appeal to past greatness and to rely on scriptural authority.

The supremacy of the human reason and scientific outlook was undermined, barring a few thinkers.

The neglect of medieval Indian history showed serious repercussions both socially and politically in later periods.

For instance, **Radhakanta Deb** organized the **Dharma Sabha** to protest against reforms of Roy, Sayyid Ahmed Khan was attacked by the conservatives of Deoband Movement.

Rise of revival during the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the form of Theosophical society, also contributed to the declining zeal of the reform movements.

The upsurge of militants nationalism, with its revivalist undertones, strengthened this trend.

These movements were carried under constraints inherent in a colonial society.

They tended to lean more on alien rulers for help in their efforts to achieve their ends.

Also the reformers lacked mass support as their ideas and programmes never went beyond the reach of middle classes and their problems.

On top of all this, feudalism, though moribund, continued to be a major force and its ideology did not show signs of a real break-up.

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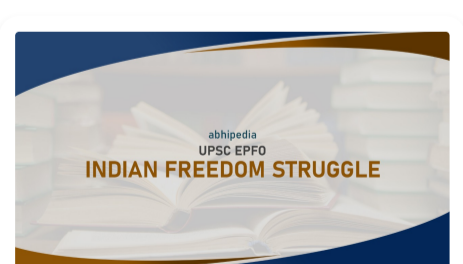
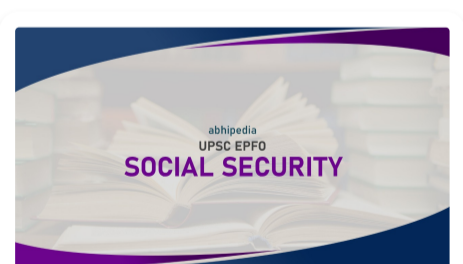
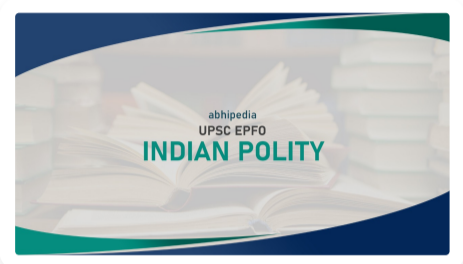
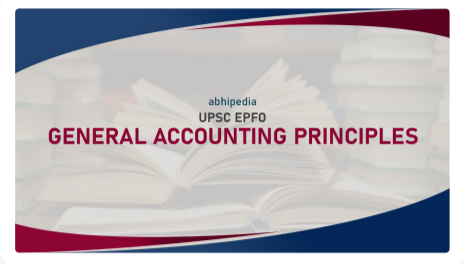
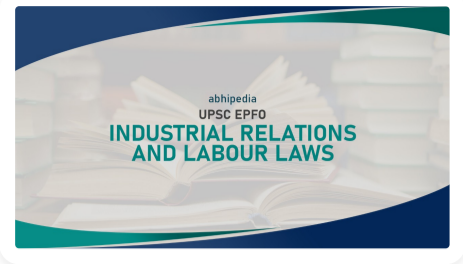
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