

# CHAPTER-I

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### **SOCIAL PICTURE OF NINETEENTH CENTURY AND RENAISSANCE - A SHORT HISTORY**

Swami Vivekananda was a many- sided personality or rather 'a many- sided genius. The life and teaching of the Swamiji may be described as having a twofold import. First, he was a religious rejuvenator and reformer - 'a powerful preacher of the Vedanta'. Secondly he was a sociological thinker. For the Swamiji, however, there was no such duality in his role. Although some analysis of the character and also of the evolution of the Indian renaissance may be found necessary in comprehending the role of Swami Vivekananda in it.

#### **The Hindu Renaissance**

The renaissance came to India towards the middle of the nineteenth century. Till then priest craft reigned supreme and people continued to be exploited in the name of religion.

The mildly pro-Hindu policy of the British whetted the avidity of the Hindus for things from the west from the very beginning, but after the western contact, Bengali intellect began to measure the exotic commodities with the indigenous ones recovered from the depth of the past. Only then began the period of true renaissance in India. The contact with the west through 'new education' and Christian culture and a critical outlook against the prevalent superstitions of the Hindu life necessitated reformation and that spirit created an atmosphere which ultimately resulted in the renaissance. The three movements, viz: Socio religious, literary and national movements.

## **SURVEY OF THE INDIAN RENAISSANCE**

### **(A) THE SOCIO - RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT**

#### **Raja Rammohan Roy**

Raja Rammohan Roy has been called 'the father of the Indian Renaissance', 'the pioneer of Indian Renaissance', 'the messenger of the Indian renaissance' and so on. He was a brilliant master mind. The greatness of Rammohan Roy lay in overcoming the all- pervasive hold exercised by jumble on society and arriving at the rational creed of theism.

Rammohan Roy gave to his countrymen the basis of an eclectic religion. He was a universalist in religious matters. The religion he preached was neither tribal nor national in character. It was of a universal nature. Rammohan Roy tried to stop polygamy practiced by *Kulins* and fought for legal rights for Hindu women. Another important work of Rammohan Roy was to publish and translate into Bengali the work of Mrityunjayacharya named *Vajrasuchi*. It is a terrible polemic against caste system.

Rammohan Roy translated five Upanishads and established in 1820 a 'Veda School' for the study of the Vedas. In doing this he was anticipating the desire of Swami Vivekananda regarding the revival of our ancient scriptures and their study. The idea of starting this school was to preach Hindu monotheism.

In his political view Rammohan Roy was largely an upholder, rather a worshipper of western ideals, especially of those values that are associated with liberalism. In short, he stood for rights of men and women in particular and vehemently protested against any encroachment upon them. He had a liberal faith that human progress could be ensured by conscious human effort, but he lacked the optimist's belief of the Benthamite variety that this could be done by legislation alone.

## David Hare

To discuss the Young Bengal, a reference must be made to David Hare, (1775-1842) the agnostic Scottish watch-maker to whom the missionaries refused a Christian burial. He was guided by altruism pure and simple. His philanthropy and selfless service to the cause of suffering humanity in this country made abiding impression upon the minds of the Bengalis in the neighbourhood. But his altruism was mainly flown by education. The new education which was largely instrumental in ushering in the Renaissance in Bengal owes its origin very much to him. He established Hindu College, the Academic Association of the Derozians etc. He encouraged female education. To Swami Vivekananda, Hare was not only 'one of the educators of Bengal' but also one who made service his religion. Hare was therefore, in the Swamiji's eyes, a *Karmayogin*.

## The Derozians

The name of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio demands close attention in the history of this spread of education. Half-European and half-Indian by birth, he was still in his teens when appointment was given to him as teacher in the Hindu College. He was an intellectual prodigy and the Nineteenth Century Renaissance in Bengal owed much to him.

## **Iswarchandra Vidyasagar**

Pandit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar had a towering personality who had left an indelible impress on the Bengal Renaissance. Character, courage, discipline and wide human sympathy - which could be equated with humanism itself - made him what he was. He directed his attention to many social evils but his most memorable crusade was for widow-remarriage. Indeed he was incapable of group-action and had supreme faith in his own ability and also in his personal infallibility. This is a very important trait in a Renaissance personality, because it signifies the emancipation of the rugged ego of the individual.

## **Keshabchandra Sen**

Keshabchandra Sen formed a new organisation called the Brahmo Samaj of India in 1866. He made Brahmoism, especially, in its social implication, a great- force and not only all over Bengal but also other parts of India by undertaking missionary tours to Bombay, Madras and North Western provinces. His social reform movement included, besides widow- remarriage, female education, temperance and castelessness. He was regarded as the one who made the middle class Brahmo organisation broad based for the first time.

## Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna (1836-86) differs from the socio-religious personalities referred to above. In that he was farthest from a scholar; he was an illiterate person. Consequently he had no opportunity to turn either to Western Philosophy or the Vedas. But his spiritual experiences were rich and varied which convinced him that "all religions must be true, all being but different paths leading to the one goal which is to realize the absolute oneness of all things in the one Brahman." He taught nothing new, but he was 'the embodiment of all past religious thought of India.'

Ramakrishna was not interested in formulations of theology; for him religion meant experience - realization. He was not an abolitionist; he did not seek to reform Hindu Society; the sole aim of his teaching was to make others realize divine potentialities in themselves. Thus in his hands, philosophical apotheosis of man, which is the very definition of Renaissance, received its final emphasis in the Indian Renaissance movement.

## B. THE LITERARY MOVEMENT

### Bankimchandra Chatterjee

The literary movement endorses in no less measure the view that the Indian Renaissance in its genesis and first stages of development was essentially both Bengali and Hindu in character. Here also the credit of pioneering goes to Raja Rammohan Roy. And the chief architect of the literary renaissance was Bankimchandra Chatterjee, who was called the greatest intellect and literary man of the period.

Bankimchandra was one of the pioneers of Neo-Hinduism. He, in the words of Bipin Chandra Pal, "Openly attempted 'a re-examination, a re-interpretation and a re-adjustment' of our old theology and ethics in the light of the most advanced modern thought and in accordance with new rules of literary criticism and scriptural interpretation that had been so powerfully influencing current religious life and thought in Christendom itself".

Bankimchandra's contribution to the national movement was no less significant. Indeed his literary pursuit was represented by and large a national movement. Through his quasi-historical novels he sought to give and did actually give Bengalis a sort of their own history and aroused in them a kind of pride in their past.

## **Michael Madhusudan Dutta**

Michael Madhusudan Dutta (1824-73), who was denationalized and outlandish Neo-Derozian, first struck the note of humanism in literature. Revivalism through literature also owed a lot to Michael.

### **C. NATIONAL MOVEMENT**

Flow of national consciousness in the life of the Indian people is perceivable practically from the beginning of their contact with the west, but what has been designated by Tagore as the 'national movement that was not fully political' took shape only after the great revolt of 1857.

## **Surendranath and Tilak**

Surendranath first organized a student's movement and then through the India Association, established in 1876, started the campaign for political emancipation. Through this association, the country was able to demonstrate that her people, notwithstanding their differences in other fields, 'could combine and unite for the attainment of their common political ends'<sup>1</sup>. It has been said that

Surendranath 'opened the way for the united political efforts of an awakened India.'

Unlike Surendranath, Bal Gangadhar Tilak had a political outlook from his college days. Immediately after coming out of college he, with a few friends, started two newspapers the Mahratta in English and Keshari in Marathi. He wrote trenchant articles in his papers. He adopted other methods for providing a common national platform for all classes of Hindus. He was after Purna Swaraj and nothing less and in his opinion, things like social reform would not take long in coming once Swaraj was won. As a political leader Tilak was the first to look to the masses and the common millions and his forum was the village Mandap.

## **MUSLIM RE-AWAKENING AND CRISIS** **IN THE INDIA RENAISSANCE**

The Hindu national renaissance came to face the challenge from Islamic revivalism, and brought about by the Aligarh Movement. The movement fostered a common ideology for the Indian Muslims and provided them with a common intellectual background.

Under Sir Syed Ahmed the Aligarh Movement regarded the Congress as inimical to true Muslim interests and helped to develop considerable anti-Hindu bias among the Muslims. This resulted in growing alienation of the Muslims from the Hindus. Thus it stood in the way of unity of the national movement, and the Indian renaissance came to face a crisis.

### Swami Vivekananda

Vivekananda came with a message and a mission, each projected into the other, each coloured by the other in such a way as to make an amalgam which not only more than restored the Renaissance to its original character, described as 'preservation by reconstruction', but sought to provide for it, in all its aspects, a super scheme of unity.

In the traditional Indian thought freedom is viewed as personal liberation or salvation. In a masterly way Vivekananda incorporated into it the Western idea of Social and Political liberty. Neo-Vedanta therefore stands for all-round freedom - 'Physical and Mental, Material and Psychological as well as Political and Social'. It is thus 'a sense of the whole, an integrity of life,' that Neo-Vedanta Philosophy primarily seeks to convey. Synthesis of values, recognition of universalism in theological, cultural, social and political outlook, uplift of the masses etc., follow from this as natural corollaries.

Thus it is individual perfection which forms the bedrock of Neo-Vedanta scheme of unity and it implies an upheaval in the realm of spirit or a spiritual revolution. Leaders of the Indian renaissance beginning from Rammohan wanted to build up a strong, vigorous social order characterized by freedom, equality and justice. This, they realized, could be done only on the basis of a rational, living faith – a national religion. Rammohan endeavored to create it through a sort of Vedantism which sought to work out a synthesis between the Sankara and Ramanuja schools. Swami Vivekananda also proposed Vedanta for the purpose, and in this matter he was eloquent in acknowledging his debt to Rammohan. But Raja Rammohan's Vedanta and the Swamiji's Vedanta are two quite different things. The Raja Rammohan's Vedanta was, in the words of B.C. Pal, 'a pure, rational, regulative principle, the Swamiji's was on the other hand, a liberating gospel in full sense of the term'.

## Reference

1. Surendra Nath Banerjee, *A nation in making. Advaita Ashrama*, pp.42 ff.