

Chapter 3

The Attitude of the 19th Century Reformers and the Role of the British Government towards the Issue of Caste

3.1 Introduction

How far the impacts of Renaissance were truly realized and utilized in the context of caste and untouchability in the Indian society is still a matter of controversy. The pioneers of the so-called Indian renaissance as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Dayananda Saraswati, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Annie Besant, and Swami Vivekananda etc. were highly venerated and accredited. Could they really succeed in bestowing the true significance of 'Renaissance' in the India society? Could they really making revolutionary changes in the socio-religious upheavals to eradicate caste institution in perpetuity along with the pernicious and inhuman concept of caste and untouchability from the Hindu society? That is why; their role and contributions would be discussed categorically in the context of the Indian society from the epoch-making viewpoint of the Italian as well as European Renaissance. Besides, their attitudes towards the issue of caste and untouchability would be examined methodically to prove their honesty of purpose for bringing a radical change in the Hindu society or the greater interest of the Indian Nation. Therefore, it can be noted that the pioneer thinkers of the Indian Renaissance had to face numerous problems relating to the issue of caste and untouchability. They initially came forward to highlight the burning social issues, evils, superstitions and its inhuman nature and peculiarity regarding the institution of caste and untouchability that wrecked the rights and privileges of the lower strata of the so-called Hindu society. However, most of the Renaissance men of India failed to change themselves completely as per the specific required necessity of the trend of Renaissance in the Indian society. Even they did not succeed to abolish permanently these two institutions. They confined themselves only by ideal talking on these issues. In fact; the so-called 19th century Renaissance and Reformation Movement led by the emerging intelligentsia in Colonial India failed to bring radical change in the domain of Hindu society, polity, economy, religion etc. in connection with the protection of human rights and its privileges based on the principles of equality, liberty and

fraternity in all spheres of their individual as well as national life as a whole. The role and contribution of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Dayananda Saraswati, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Annie Besant and Swami Vivekananda etc. towards the issue of caste and untouchability may be mentioned in this connection.

3.2. Conceptualization of Italian and European Renaissance

Therefore, I have to denote the meaning of the term Renaissance, its features, and the novel mission of the Reformation Movement before going to elaborate the role and contribution of the above-mentioned personalities towards the issue of caste and untouchability in the domain of the Indian society. In fact, the term 'Renaissance'¹ generally means 're-birth', 'Risorgimento' etc. The greatness of which was mainly based on the principle of scientific rationalism, humanism, nationalism etc. The motto of it was to bring a radical change and an evolution into the minds of the humankind from the so-called traditional trend of darkness to modern concept of scientific rationalism. It stirred the mind set up of everyone to justify everything and to pay due attention before taking any decision or accepting any social customs or religious matter whatever may be that would be considered on the basis of scientific analysis, humanistic approach, rationalistic and logical point of view. It is very much interesting to learn that countless efforts have been made in order to find a true, precise and satisfactory definition of the term 'Renaissance'. We are far from getting such a much-awaited answer. It is a vague idea or an attitude, which first influenced in Italy and gradually spread in Europe. The concept of Renaissance stands for the rebirth of humankind from the shackles of medieval darkness. It generated a pledge to know the unknown, to explain the unexplained, to explore the unexplored. It radically affected every sphere of human life from medicine to astronomy and from art to architecture. Thus it will not be exaggeration to say that Renaissance produced a socially, economically, morally and uplifted human race through humanism, rationalism and the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. However, the idea of rebirth lies at the heart of all Renaissance achievements; artists, scholars, scientists, philosophers, architects, and rulers believed that the way to greatness and illumination was through the study of the Golden Ages of the ancient Greeks and Romans. The Italian Renaissance was one of the most colorful, vital, and exciting phenomenon in history. The Renaissance in Italy flourished in the 15th century and

spread throughout most of Europe in the 16th century. Italian life in the 14th and 15th centuries was lived among the vast ruins of the ancient Roman Empire. The cruelty and barbarism of Rome had long been forgotten, and the splendor of that lost civilization's ruins suggested a glorious, golden past. The Renaissance began in Florence, Italy in the late thirteenth century. It subsequently spread to the rest of Italy particularly Rome and then to northern Europe, where it developed somewhat differently. The best-known expressions of the bold new Renaissance spirit can be trace out in the painting, sculpture, and architecture of the period. New attitudes were also found in education, politics, and philosophy; in Northern Europe new ideas of social reform developed. It was basically an elitist movement. A negative development of the age was the deterioration in the power and position of women in society. Other artists during the Italian Renaissance period such as Giovanni Bellini began to express their art through secular and religious themes and ideas that were exhibited through landscapes and portraits as new styles, it was developed.

The characteristics of Renaissance were humanism, nationalism, a new approach to life, and a new spirit in art, architecture, literature and learning, the growth of the vernaculars, and scientific investigation. The Renaissance stood for humanism, the sympathetic and devoted study of humankind, instead of the theological devotion of the Middle Age. Patriarch was regarded as the Father of Humanism.

It laid emphasis on the importance of critical examination and evaluation of ideas and principles. Several Renaissance scholars such as Francis Bacon and Leonardo da Vinci were the products of this great movement. The Greeks and the Romans who had led richer and fuller lives than what was known in Western Europe during the previous one thousand years inspired these scholars. These scholars helped Europe to take giant steps in the fields of literature, art and architecture, painting, music and science, during the Renaissance period.

3.3. Was the Indian Renaissance the out come of Italian and European Renaissance?

There was a great controversy among the Indian scholars, historians, philosophers, sociologists, economists, educationists and social scientists etc. regarding the nature, character and features of the 'Indian Renaissance'. Most of the scholars in different

disciplines had differed in their respective approach to this issue. Some prominent scholars in different fields did not accept the theory of the 'Indian Renaissance' as because it failed to bring revolutionary changes in all spheres of individual or national life as like the concept of the 'Italian Renaissance'. They raised a provocative question that the emerging 19th century intelligentsia of India mainly worked for their class or caste interest not for the common interest as a whole. Not only that, but also they did not express their willingness to discard their age-old authoritative caste based socio-religious symbol of the 'sacred thread' either individually or collectively. It was an irony of fate that the so-called Indian renaissance was led by their thoughts and beliefs without considering the needs and demands of the common people of the so-called Brahmanical Hindu society. In fact, most of the emerging 19th century intelligentsia had come from the upper caste Hindu family except few exceptions. Almost they had strong economic background. The sons of the Zaminders, property owners and wealthy persons etc. got opportunity to take part in the Western education. They were very much influenced by the Western liberal ideas and thoughts. Not only that but also they were inspired by the thought-provoking and revolutionary influences and changes of the Italian and European Renaissance which stirred their mind set up at a large. But they did not cross the socio-religious barriers and limitations in case of the caste system and untouchability that were based on the strategy of inequality, injustice, disparity and inhuman nature which brought down the low strata of the Hindu society into the status and position of animals, beasts and slaves. It was generally said; What Bengal thinks today, India will think tomorrow? However, the 19th century Bengal intelligentsia did not capable to utilize the true concept of the Italian and European Renaissance in the context of the Indian society for the abolition of the caste institution and untouchability. They expressed their grievances against these two institutions only by ideal talking, not by launching a direct movement against these inhuman arrangements due to the pressure and vehement opposition of the Orthodox Hindus and their family convictions and personal limitations and inability. They realized the gravity and importance of its abolition from the Hindu society. The utmost necessity of the time was the abolition of these two institutions. In spite of that they did not dare to abolish these institutions from the Hindu society that had yet been creating numerous incurable socio-religious problems in the Hindu society. It is generally said that a new trend of development and radical change in all spheres of life was emerged in the context of society,

religion, culture, science, art and architecture etc. in the 19th century India especially in Bengal, which accelerated the process of eradication the darkness of the medieval age from the society and gave birth to the ideology of rationalism and humanism that is called 'Renaissance'. It played a vital role to make modern and progressive India. Raja Ram Mohan Roy had most probably compared the 19th century Bengal with the 16th century Renaissance of Europe. He told Alexander Duff as follows: 'I began to think that something similar to the European Renaissance might have taken place here in India.'² Even Bankim Chandra, Keshab Chandra Sen, Aurobindo, Bipin Chandra Pal etc identified the 19th century Bengal as the age of Renaissance. However, there was a great controversy among the historians and scholars on this issue. Obviously most of them accepted the view that the 19th century was the age of Renaissance in the context of Bengal as well as India. But it had several negative and positive outlooks. Binoy Ghosh said, 'The upper-caste Hindus who became bhadralok or 'babus', by their-caste and status and English education, were completely enslaved and logically made inferior through and through'³. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar pointed out that the Renaissance of Bengal was the out come of the Hindu nationalism⁴. Sumit Sarkar pointed out that the trend of renaissance of whole Bengal was nothing but a xerox copy of English renaissance. In India, full scale colonial rule lasted the longest, and there was ample time for the growth of dependent vested interests, the elaboration of a hegemonic infra-structure producing 'voluntary' consent side by side with more direct politico-military domination. The English-educated intelligentsia in its origins was very much a part of this system, nowhere more so than in Bengal (Rammohun Roy and the Break with the Past). He also remarked about the modernity of Rammohun that not of full-blooded bourgeois modernity, but of a weak and distorted caricature of the same which was all that colonial subjection permitted. Not only that but also he said about the role of Young Bengal that its impact on Bengali society as a whole, as distinct from its intelligentsia crust, was very nearly nil (The Complexities of Young India)⁵. Asoke Mitra said that the Zamindar community gained much profit by the exploitation of the poor peasants through the land revenue settlements of the British Government and transferred their wealth to Calcutta as there inhabitant, which ultimately hastened the process of cultural renaissance in the city of Calcutta. Suprakash Roy said that there was no similarity between the European Renaissance and the Bengal Renaissance. Its historical perspective was completely opposite to each other. But he also highlighted

the progressive outlook of the social reform movement. It was nothing but the effect of renaissance. He identified the property owners of the land revenue settlements into two categories; one was progressive and another was conservative. Raja Ram Mohan and his followers belonged to the progressive group and Radhakanta Deb and the Orthodox Hindus belonged to the conservative group. Prof. Sushaban Sarkar pointed out that the Bengal Renaissance had two trends; one was Western another was revivalism of the Golden past. However, the first phase was more important than the second one. Binoy Ghosh said, "What we call 'Bengal Renaissance' ... turned out to be nothing but a historical hoax" ⁶. It did not touch the major portion of the society except the nominal portion of the upper class society. But the Indian renaissance was nothing but a myth in the context of the Indian society. Aurobindo Podder wrote, 'A renaissance which assured the people neither recognition nor a place in the manifestation of its will was from its very inception, from both qualitative and quantitative considerations, a distorted sapless renaissance' ⁷. England having been its wet nurse, it was, as it were, an English renaissance in quite a different garb enacted on India, s soil. Prof. Barun De, Asoke Sen and Summit Sarkar highlighted the fact that the renaissance of the 19th century Bengal was emerged under the patronage of the British imperialism. The emerging 19th century intelligentsia was the pioneers of the Bengal renaissance and they were the supporters of the British imperialism. In fact, it had no connection with the common people. Some scholars did not completely deny its progressive trend. Amlan Datta stressed on the importance of the 19th century Bengal renaissance inspite of its numerous limitations. He also said that the Bengali was known only for this renaissance. It was emerged only by the role of the middle class service holders. There was a great controversy regarding the name of the pioneer of the 19th century renaissance. He also noted the name of Raja Ram Mohan Roy relating to the origin and growth of the 19th century renaissance and its results. However, David Kopf pointed out that the pioneer of the 19th century Renaissance of Bengal was the Western Britishers. To him, Warren Hastings was the pioneer of this renaissance and the emancipator of the Orientalists. He also noted the fact that Wellesley played a vital role for the Bengal renaissance by establishing the Fort William College. According to him, 'The Bengal renaissance was the child of eighteenth century cosmopolitanism and pragmatic British policy build around the need for an acculturated civil service class' ⁸. The 19th century intelligentsia of India was very much influenced by the thought-provoking trends and ideas of the European

Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment. The impacts of which inspired them to reform the religion and society. They wanted to break the so-called age-old superstitious traditions and customs. Prof. Dilip Kumar Biswas highlighted the fact that the revivalism of science, technology, art, architecture and literature etc. was held of both the cases of Italy and India in connection with the traditional past. The assimilation of the traditional culture and modern trend opened up a new dimension in all sphere of life⁹. David Kopf also said that 'The rediscovery and revitalization of a golden Hindu age was probably the Orientlist's most enduring ideological contribution to modern India's cultural image'¹⁰. He also pointed out on the line of Mirtunjaya Bidhalankar that the Bengal Renaissance was nothing but a trend of Hindu revivalism. He cited also the instances from the writings of Vidyasagar and Vivekananda in this perspective. According to Prof. Sushaban Sarkar there were two trends in Bengal Renaissance viz., Western trend and traditional revival trend. He ranked the contribution of westernism higher than that of traditionalism in the history of Bengal Renaissance. To him, Young Bengal was not only the representative of westernism but also they were radical. Bankim Chandra was comparatively conservative and the representative of revivalism. In comparison of these two aspects¹¹. He pointed out that 'It is permissible to doubt whether the change has been a gain our national life'. Even he highlighted the differences between the Italian renaissance and Bengal renaissance in his Bengali story 'Rabindranath O Banglar Nabajagaran' as follows;

Firstly, Italian renaissance brought radical change in the field of religion that hastened the process of the decline of the old society and economy and established a new lease of life in respect of agriculture, industry, trade and commerce. It ultimately opened up a new dimension in all sphere of human life. However, the Bengal intelligentsia did not try at all to establish a new set up of life in the society on the ruins of the traditional structures of the past.

Secondly, the Italian Renaissance was held under complete free and liberal environment whereas India had not been possessed such type of conditions.

Thirdly, the sources of the European renaissance were the thoughts and ideas of the Greeks. But the inspiration did not come from the traditional India but from the

Western renaissance. It can be stated that most of the 19th century intelligentsia were very much inspired and influenced by the thoughts and ideas of the Elizabethan England to Victorian England than Italian Renaissance except few personalities like Michael Madhusudhan Datta, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and Bankim Chandra etc.

Prof. Amallesh Tripathi said that 'Bengal went to school not at Athens of Pericles, not at Rome of Augustus but at England of Shakespeare, Milton and Byron, Bacon, Locke and Bentham, Gibbon, Hume and Macaulay, Burke, Spencer and Mill'¹². Some scholars pointed out very boldly that the possibility of European Renaissance was completely impossible in the Indian soil due to the existence of the caste system. Nehru remarked on the issue of 19th century Bengal Renaissance that that 'A number of very remarkable men rose in Bengal in the nineteenth century, who gave the lead to the rest of India in cultural and political matters, and out of whose efforts the new nationalist movement ultimately took shape'¹³. The main feature of the European Renaissance was the emergence of the bourgeois capitalism from feudalism. It completely brought the fundamental change of the social structure. The emerging wealthy trading class opened up a new dimension of life. As a result, the production system was completely changed. It transformed gradually the mind set up of the people by the way of scientific innovations and the development of rationalism and cottage industry turned into the labour based industry. Naturally, superstitions were abolished and a struggle was started to establish the ideology of unity and equality. In fact, the system of serfdom was gradually reducing in course of time on the ruins of the feudal system. But the social structure of Bengal was completely different. The Western educated 19th century intelligentsia of Bengal took the leading role to introduce Renaissance in Bengal with the help of the wealthy landlords and the Western educated middle class under the rule of the British administration. They had not taken any initiative to establish bourgeois capitalism instead of feudalism. Actually, there was no scope to establish such an environment in Bengal. However, these classes were basically the supporters of the British rule for their interest. Even Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Vidyasagar were depended upon the British government for their social reform works. Therefore, the perspective of Bengal renaissance was completely different in comparison with the European renaissance. In fact, we cannot identify the 19th century renaissance of Bengal in the context of a meaning of the term of renaissance as a revolutionary change. In spite of the numerous limitations of the

Bengal renaissance, the role and contributions of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar etc. can not be denied. Women emancipation, opposition of the caste system, spread of education etc. were their issues of discussion and protest. Young Bengal extended its helping hand to them on these issues. But they did not come forward to protect the interest of the poor peasants and the common people. They were indifferent towards these problems and the Permanent Settlements except by ideal criticism. Most of the leaders were either Zamindars or intermediaries. Even they did not support the peasant revolts of the 18th and 19th century. Not only that but also they did not take part in the revolt of 1857. The Hindus were the main architect of this movement. Naturally, they did not cross the barriers of the Hindu religion and society. A large part of the population belonged to the Muslim community. However, the so-called Hindu Renaissance did not touch the Muslim community at all. After all, it did not touch the nation as a whole. The so-called educated sections of the Hindu society were to some extent benefited by their movements. They did not alter the deteriorating conditions of the downtrodden classes of the Hindu society. Naturally, the so-called 19th century intelligentsia of India did not consider their hope and desire to live and let live as human being on equal terms and conditions based on the Western liberal thoughts and ideas. Therefore, the common people did understand the gravity of this movement. The anti-Sati movement was more or less successful but the widow remarriage movement of Vidyasagar was not popular. Polygamy was not prohibited. Actually, they wanted to bring some progressive reforms of the religion and society without changing its basic structures. They did not want at all to bring social revolution. They did not play the role of Chaitanya and Kabir in this perspective. Not only that but also Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Young Bengal did not emphasis on the issue of economic exploitation. Raja Ram Mohan welcomed the investment of the British capital as well as indigo cultivation of the Sahib. He was completely silent about the destruction of the 'native tatis' by the deindustrialization. Sushaban Sarkar pointed out that the impact of the 19th century Renaissance in Bengali literature, cultivation of science, painting, art etc. were an epoch making event. Rabindranath was influenced by the Western thoughts and cultures and the glorious traditional past. He combined the two very successfully in the context of literary development. The initial phase of Renaissance was started on the eve of his birth but the later part of the 19th century renaissance was completed by him. Apart from this, the name of Scientist Gajadish Chandra Bose (1858-1937), Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy (1861-1944),

Upendranath Bramachari (1875-1946) etc. may be mention in connection with the cultivation of science and their discoveries. Not only that but also Tagore family had a great contribution in the field of painting, art etc. The name of Gaganendranath Tagore (1867-1938) and Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951) may be mentioned in this regard. Gaganendranath Tagore was the pioneer of the 'Indian Society of Oriental Art'. Abanindranath Tagore was initially influenced by the Western thoughts but later he left it and adopted the Indian style in this connection. His two disciples viz, Nandalal Bose (1882-1966) and Jamini Roy (1887-1972) earned name and fame on these issues.

The multi-dimensional socio-political, educational and other factors like the influence of the Western education, establishment of new associations and societies in India, rise of Nationalism, establishment of Western political institutions, establishment of Indian National Congress, influence of the Western political literature, Social legislations etc. were more or less responsible for the conceptualization of Indian Renaissance movement.

The main motto of the Colonial Government was to create a class of civil servants to fulfill their administrative requirements by introducing English education in India. The following important features of the Western education were very much thought provoking to boost up the mind set up of the Western educated Indians such as intellectuals, rationalism, individualism, and critical attitude to scriptures, synthetic approach to religion, secularism, cosmopolitanism and humanism. The Western education had created revolutionary thinkers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Mahadev Govind Ranade and Vivekananda etc. The 19th century Renaissance thinkers of India imbibed all the thought provoking features of the Western education. Therefore, the impact of the Western education in the Indian society was very important for the new awakening and reconstruction of Indian thoughts.

The impact of the Western education accelerated the process of the formation of different associations and societies in India. The various aims of these organizations like Brahma Samaj of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Arya Samaj of Swami Dayananda, Satya Shodhak Samaj of Jotirao Fule etc. to reform the society, polity, religion and so

on. All these new associations and societies encouraged new thinking and reconstruction of social institutions on the pattern of ancient Indian specimen.

The rise of nationalism was the out come of Renaissance in almost all the colonial countries of the world including India. The eminent patriotic scholars' writers and poets played a vital role to create intense sentiments of nationalism and patriotism. The name of Bankim Chandra (patriotic novel Ananda Math), Aurobindo, Swami Dayananda, B. G. Tilak (the Kesari and the Maharashtra), Vivekananda, Tagore and Gandhiji may be mentioned in connection to nationalism and patriotism.

The establishment of different Western political institutions such as the Law Commission, the Supreme Court and others were responsible for the awakening of nationalism and reconstruction of Indian thought. Naturally, the Indian nationalists were demanding more and more political rights and equality before law. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dadabhai Nauroji, Surendranath Banerjee and Gokhale etc. demanded for the introduction of British type representative political bodies in India.

The foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 was the out come of Indian nationalism. The name of A. O. Hume and S.N.Banerjee were very important in this connection. The motto of Hume was to create a class of thinkers who could advise the British to introduce necessary reforms in India. This Congress organization ultimately became a platform for the demand of complete freedom from the British yoke. Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal etc. played a vital role on this issue. However, the rise and growth of the Indian nationalism heralded an epoch making event under the leadership of Gandhiji in 1920 whose ultimate demand was to obtain Purna Swaraj. The leaders of the Congress were active in social and political activities beyond their political demands. They tried to find out solutions relating to socio-political reforms of India based on the Western thoughts and Golden traditional past.

The Britishers introduced Western political literature in India. Some of which were imported from the West such as the works of Karl Marx, Lenin, Mussolini, Hitler, Spencer, Mill, Tolstoy and Ruskin etc. which stirred the mind set up of the Indian leaders like Surendranath Banerjee, Lala Lajpa Rai, and V.D.Savarkar etc. at a large. The name of Iqbal, Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore may be noted in this respect.

But the literature was produced by the Indian writers also introducing the life and works of the leaders of Western society to the Indian people.

All these above-mentioned factors hastened the process of intellectual awakening and a demand for social legislation in different fields. It is noted that most of the Renaissance thinkers were very much pained at the condition of women and low-caste people of India. Different social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and others demanded social legislation in every field of social life. They demanded the abolition of Sati custom, the emancipation of women and elimination of all the drawbacks of the downtrodden elements in the society. The Britishers were indifferent towards these demands but ultimately compelled to think that resulted in social legislation in different fields leading to social and political emancipation of the backward class. The most important among these movements were the Adi Brahma Samaj of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Brahma Samaj of Keshab Chandra Sen, Ramkrishna Mission of Vivekananda and Arya Samaj of Swami Dayananda etc. may be mentioned in this connection. In fact, these movements ultimately noted how the Renaissance thinkers led to a reorientation of the Golden past and worked out social implications of ancient ideals and principles.

3.4. Intellectual Dichotomy in Colonial India towards the Issue of Caste and Untouchability (Raja Rammohun Roy to Rabindranath Tagore)

The 19th century Renaissance and Reformation Movement failed to eradicate the problems of the Caste System and Untouchability from the so-called Hindu society. Most of the 19th century intellectuals continued the tradition of the Indian National Congress in this respect although there were a few exceptions who demanded the abolition of caste system, untouchability etc. They expressed their views and opinions theoretically in a very limited way and did not come forward spontaneously to launch a direct movement against the abolition of the Caste System and Untouchability from the Hindu Society. Realizing the importance of its abolition, they did nothing but ideal talking. They knew it very well that India cannot be developed as a 'Nation State' without its eradication. Even they differed in their respective approach to this issue. Naturally, they were unable to start a crusade that would radically reform the

Indian Society. The name of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Dayananda Saraswati, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Annie Besant, Swami Vivekananda and others may be mentioned in order to understand the truth.

a. Raja Rammohun Roy (1773-1833)

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was called the pioneer of modern India. He was born on 22 May 1772 in Radhanagar village of Bengal. He belonged to a Brahmin family. His family background displayed an interesting religious diversity. His father Ramkant was a Vaishnavite, while his mother Tarini was from a Shakta background. Therefore, he was very much influenced by the socio-religious environment of his family. However, he became the learned person under these unavoidable environments and ultimately he was identified as the great product of the 19th century Indian intelligentsia. His first published work was 'Tuhfat-ul Muwahhiddin (A Gift to Deists) and he exposed in it such irrational religious beliefs and corrupt practices of the Hindus as the belief in revelations, prophets and miracles, the seeking of salvation through 'bathing in a river and worshipping a tree or being a monk and purchasing forgiveness of their crime the high priests' and the 'hundreds of useless hardships and privations regarding eating and drinking, purity and impurity, auspiciousness and inauspiciousness'¹⁴. Raja Ram Mohan Roy highlighted the need in the introduction to his Bengali translation of the Sama Upanishad 'to correct those exceptionable practices which not only deprive Hindus in general of the common comforts of society but also lead them frequently to self-destruction'¹⁵. He identified himself with the victims of religious orthodoxies, which, he noted in Tuhfat, 'have become causes of injury and detrimental to social life and sources of trouble and bewilderment to the people, instead of tending to the amelioration of the condition of society'. Realizing the gravity of the situation, he said that 'many learned Brahmans are perfectly aware of the absurdity of idolatry, and are well informed of the nature of the purer mode of divine worship. But as in the rites, ceremonies, and festivals of idolatry, they find the source of their comforts and fortune; they ... advance and encourage it to the utmost of their power, by keeping the knowledge of their scriptures concealed from the rest of the people'¹⁶. However, Charles Heimsath pointed out about the importance of the Atmiya Sabha, Brahmo Samaj etc. for social reform that secular reformist crusades, usually for legislative social enactments or caste reform, succeeded in drawing

adherents, but alterations in personal and family lives in India required revising religious beliefs and practices. Raja Rammohun Roy foresaw this connection, as Gandhi did a century later¹⁷. Rammohun Roy adopted three policies to socio-religious reform;

Firstly; exposing and discrediting those religious dogmas and practices, which were irrational or contrary to social comfort.

Secondly; the promotion of modern Western education.

Thirdly; state action in support of both these programmes. He found many false and various objectionable dogmas and doctrines in Hinduism as well as in other religions. He said that these must be rejected for which he offered the following justification:

He also said, 'If mankind are brought into existence, and by nature formed to enjoy the comforts of society and the pleasure of an improved mind, they may be justified in opposing any system, religious, domestic or political, which is inimical to the happiness of society, or calculated to debase the human intellect'¹⁸. It was generally said that the 19th century Indian intelligentsia was also impressed by the concepts of social liberty and equality of the West. Raja Ram Mohan Roy felt that the same liberty and equality should be created in the Indian society for the greater interest of the Indian nation. Therefore, he tried his level best to do something better for the greater interest of the Indian society. Therefore, he raised voice against all sorts of exploitation imposed upon the common people from generation to generation in the name of God, religion, Sati system and Caste Institution etc. That is why; he worked hard to abolish their disabilities and bring out not only social reforms but also political reforms through the enactment of new social legislations. However, he did not overcome the so-called obstacles of the caste institution and untouchability owing to the pernicious attitude of the Orientalists thoughts and beliefs. Not only that but also he did not dare to discard the 'sacred thread' of the so-called symbol of the caste institution. His attitude towards the caste system was somewhat ambivalent. While he practiced some of the over, caste rules (e.g., the wearing of the sacred thread), he noted that God makes no distinction of caste and that 'our division into castes ... has been the source of want of unity among us'¹⁹. Prof. D. S. Sharma pointed out that Raja Rammohun Roy was a great champion of freedom and a lover

of humanity and that is why he pleaded for religious and social reforms.²⁰ He did not believe in the existing formalistic religion of the Hindus and introduced his conception of ideal and inspirational religion based on strict monotheism and humanism. In the words of Dr. Iqbal Singh: "For him the practical expression of such faith must always be in ethical conduct, in dedication for the good of the society. The devotion he claims, which is most acceptable to the Creator consists in promoting union of human hearts, with mutual love and affection for all one's fellow beings, without distinction of caste or creed, race or colour"²¹. Therefore, the intellectual dichotomy of Raja Ram Mohan Roy towards the issue of caste and untouchability did not influence significantly the spirit of Renaissance in the context of the Indian society at a large. His pioneering role to raise voice against the pernicious social issues and evils were just like an intellectual game. He knew it very well that the inhuman 'Sati' system was the out come of the socio-religious dogmas and believes of the so-called Orthodox Hindus. In fact, he was a genuine product of the Western education and Orientalists beliefs. Naturally, he played a vital role to synthesis these two ideologies and worked for the betterment of the Hindu society as a whole and ultimately he was known as the pioneer of the Indian Renaissance. Therefore, he became the Father and Patriarch of Modern India, an India with a composite nationality and a synthetic civilization; and by the lines of convergence he laid down, as well by the type of personality he developed in and through his own experiences, he pointed the way to the solution of the larger problem of international culture and civilization in human history, and became a precursor, an archetype, a prophet of coming Humanity. In fact, he was called the modern man of India for this reasons. He synthesized the Western liberal ideas and thoughts with the Indian traditional beliefs. His main motto was to develop India socially, spiritually, economically, educationally, culturally and so on. He was very much impressed by the Western liberal thoughts and beliefs. Therefore, he decided to apply these ideologies for the betterment of the Indian society. He earned name and fame for obtaining mastery over different subjects. His attitude towards the issue of caste and untouchability was outwardly good. He could not free himself from age-old socio-religious dogmas, traditional faiths and believes on the issue of caste and untouchability. He did not like to support the practice of priestly hypocrisy, idol worship, rituals, human and other sacrifices for yagya etc. in the field of religion. He advocated monotheism, or the worship of one God. Not only that but also he denounced that rituals, which were

meaningless and giving rise to superstitions. He published Bengali translations of the Vedas to prove his honesty of purpose on those points. The lower strata of the Hindu society were severely affected by the multidimensional socio-religious superstitions and age-old religious dogmas. Therefore, he determined to do something on the line of the Western liberal ideas and doctrine for the betterment of the Hindu society. In the field of Hindu society, Raja Ram Mohan Roy vehemently opposed all inequality, child marriage, sati, bigamy, caste discrimination and the rest of problems that beset Hindu society. Therefore, he involved himself to eradicate numerous social evils like sati, polygamy and child marriage etc. and demanded property inheritance rights for women. He realized the never-ending importance of the Western education and the synthesis between the ancient tradition and the Western liberal thoughts in this connection that would be helpful for the implementation for social reform. Therefore, he emphasized on the principles of equality, liberty, fraternity based on the Western educational thoughts and beliefs to abolish socio-religious superstitions from the so-called Hindu society. He took initiative to spread Western education in India for the sake of humanitarian ground because only it would open up the greatness of human mind that was urgently needed for the Hindu society. In fact, only the true concept of Renaissance and Reformation would uproot numerous socio-religious superstitions, evil customs and dogmas of the Hindu society. The role of education to build up strong human mind and its increasing confidence, efficiency in decision-making process, importance of self-respect of an individual and creating ability to judge any thing based on scientific rationalism and humanism was utmost urgent. That is why; he set up the Brahma Samaj campaign in 1828 to fight against social evils. His tireless effort towards the eradication of the burning social problems of Sati was really praised with noteworthy. He appealed to the Governor General Lord William Bentinck to ban the inhuman Sati System that was the curse of the Hindu social system and symbol of tyranny towards women. Under these unavoidable circumstances Lord William Bentinck, take necessary steps to make sati illegal through an act in 1829. In 1814, with the help of Young Indians, he set up the Amitya Sabha to propagate rational religious ideas. He started the Brahma Samaj movement, one of the first Indian socio-religious reform movements to fulfill his target. He left remarkable influence in the fields of politics, public administration and education as well as religion. He is well known to his efforts to abolish the practice of sati, a Hindu funeral practice in which the widow sacrifices herself on her husband's funeral pyre.

But the Brahma Samaj, which established by him ultimately came to be an important spiritual and reformist religious movement that has given birth to a number of stalwarts of the Bengali social and intellectual reforms. He is regarded as one of the most important figures in the Bengal Renaissance for these contributions to society. Therefore, he paid due attention to spread Western liberal education in India. He played a vital role to set up the Hindu College at Calcutta. He supported induction of western learning into Indian education. He also set up the Vedanta College, offering courses as a synthesis of Western and Indian learning. The name of his most popular journal was the Samvad Kaumudi, which covered different issues like freedom of press, induction of Indians into high ranks of service, and separation of the executive and judiciary. Not only that but also he realized the futility of the evil social customs that created numerous difficulties in social life of the Hindu society. He saw in British rule of India the best things that were beneficial to India. He adopted the West European philosophy of democracy, liberalism and humanism. He attacked some Hindu traditions and features among them caste system, child marriages, Sati - burning of the wife over her dead husband's pyre, idolatry and other beliefs. He tried to change the popular Hindu traditions and claimed that the popular Hindu traditions were different from the real Hindu beliefs. His organization 'Brahmo Samaj' tried to change the social order of India. He convinced the British in 1829 to abolish Sati system.

It is an established fact that Raja Rammohun Roy always tried to protect his class interest. He did not advocate the Caste discrimination, Sati system etc. except the Permanent Settlement. He strongly supported the British Government to introduce the Permanent Settlement. None but Ram Mohan Roy who was completely indifferent towards the problems and issues of the toiling masses relating to the Permanent Settlement. He did not express grievances against the ill-fated conditions of the poor peasants and workers. Their hungry and cry did not stir the mind set up of him. Therefore, the labourers were bound to remain in the same distress conditions as before. Not only that but also Raja Rammohun Roy did not raise voice against the over Caste rules like the use of 'Sacred Thread' and its discrimination. He did not arrange to launch a direct protest movement against all sorts of inhuman Caste rules that wrecked the freedom and rights of the common people of the so-called Hindu society in India. Even he did not convince the Orthodox Hindus to leave all sorts of

Caste discrimination to establish equal human rights for the protection of the lower strata of the Hindu society. Apart from these, it can be said that Raja Rammohun Roy's role towards the burning issues of the Sati's in the then Brahmancal Hindu society was really thought provoking and appreciating. However, the Sati system was prevailed among the so-called upper Caste Hindus. It did not disturb the normal life of the lower Caste Hindus. Practically speaking, this type of inhuman system like Sati was not prevailing among them. The barbaric mechanism of the so-called Sati system for the exploitation and deprivation of the upper Caste women was completely based on the negation of humanity. But this system was mainly limited only among the minor portion of the Hindu community. Therefore, it cannot be denied that the major portion of the Hindu communities were completely out of the space of the Sati custom of the Hindu society. That is why; the anti-Sati movement of Raja Rammohun Roy benefited the minor portion of the Hindu society. But a large portion of the Hindus, especially the lower Varnas (Castes) were greatly affected by the so-called Caste system of Manu (an ancient lawmaker) and untouchability. Raja Rammohun Roy did not come forward to start a direct movement to abolish these inhuman institutions in perpetuity except ideal talking. The hue and cry of the toiling masses against these institutions did not touch the heart and mind of Raja Rammohun Roy. Therefore, it can be said that Raja Rammohun Roy was very much conscious to protect his Caste or class interest in particular rather than to protect the common interest of the whole society in general. It is generally asserted that nothing is better than everything is. Was it true that Raja Rammohun Roy did not realize the cruelty of the institution of the Caste system and Untouchability? Actually, he could not apply the Western thoughts of liberty, equality, fraternity and so on to establish the true concept of human rights and its protection into the Hindu society. In spite of that, he held up before men a new faith which was universal in its sympathies, but whose cardinal principle was that 'the service of man is the service of God'²². However, he was moved by the consideration of humanity in solving social problems. He condemned the division of Hindu society into castes and sub-castes. Castes divided the Hindus in such a way that the community as a whole became weak. In a letter written on January 18, 1828, he wrote, "The distinction of castes, introducing innumerable divisions and subdivisions among them has entirely deprived them of patriotic feeling, and the multitudes of religious rites and ceremonies and the laws of purification have totally disqualified them from undertaking any difficult

enterprise”²³. He suggested for solving various social problems were inter-caste marriages, widow re-marriages and education for all, in the interest of a better-integrated humanity²⁴. His socio-religious activities bring out clearly that he was a great humanitarian. In the words of his biographer Miss Sophia Dobson Collett, “Rammohan stands in history as the living bridge over which India marches from her unmeasured past to her incalculable future. He was the arch, which spanned the gulf that yawned between ancient caste and modern humanity, between superstition and science, He embodies the new spirit, which arises from the compulsory mixture of races and faiths and civilizations . . . He embodies its freedom of enquiry, its thirst for science, its large human sympathy, its pure and sifted ethics, along with its reverent but not uncritical regard for the past”²⁵.

b. Pandit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar (1820-91)

Pandit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar left no distinctive mark in the field of caste and untouchability. He did not play a significant role to eradicate it from the so-called Hindu society. His attitude towards the issue of caste and untouchability was very much surprising. He did not come forward to launch a direct anti-caste movement to establish social justice. Being an orthodox Brahmin by caste, it was perhaps very much difficult for him to overcome the contemporary social customs and traditions. His pioneering work was completely based on widow re-marriage, female education and Bengali literature. But he did not work straightway to abolish caste and untouchability. His emergence in the 19th century India was an epoch-making event in the history of widow re-marriage and Bengali literature. Therefore, it can be said that his untiring efforts in this context made him successful to achieve his cherish dream. He was born in a learned Kulin Brahmin family in Birsingha village of Midnapore in West Bengal, 1820. But his real name was Iswar Chandra Bandyopadhyaya. The title ‘Vidyasagar’ means ‘ocean of knowledge’ was given to him as an honour of excellence. The name of his mother was Bhagavati Devi. He spent his childhood in extreme poverty. His untiring affords in education and ceaseless struggle for existence under this unfavourable economic background of his family built up his mind set up on a strong hold to fulfill his aims and objectives. He was influenced by the great trend of 19th Renaissance. Practically speaking, he had a great contribution in Bengali literature as well as women education. He was a Bengali polymath and a

pillar of the Bengal Renaissance. He was a philosopher, academic, educator, writer, translator, printer, publisher, entrepreneur, reformer, and philanthropist. He became renowned personality in Bengal as well as India for the modernization of the Bengali prose along with the introduction of the widow re-marriage and women education. He played a vital role in education, women emancipation, widow re-marriage etc. to bring a radical change in the socio-educational environment of Bengal as well as India. But his attitude towards the issue of Caste and untouchability was very much discouraging. He did not take initiative to launch a direct anti-caste and anti-untouchability movement to establish the human rights and privileges of the downtrodden sections of the so-called Hindu society. His pioneering work was based mainly on widow re-marriage and mass education. Therefore, he wanted to spread education among the people of the grass root level. Therefore, he did not want to confine the facilities of education within the circle of the limited opportunist classes. The extension of mass education was his principle motto. He preferred mother tongue as the medium of instruction of education. That is why; he wanted to open the gate of education for the common masses irrespective of caste, class, sex, Varna and religion. He did not hesitate to open the gate of Sanskrit College for the education of the non-Brahmin classes; i.e., the Kulin Kayasthas ²⁶. Not only that but also he took responsibility to write and publish books for the interest of the common people. He realized the importance of synthesis of the Western education and traditional education of India. Therefore, he introduced the Western modern thought of education into the traditional institution of India. In 1850, he became a Professor of Sanskrit College in Calcutta and ultimately became the Principal of this college. None other than the Brahmins was allowed to study in Sanskrit College. However, he changed that rule and opened the close-door of Sanskrit College for everybody. But it is known from a letter sent to the Education Department by Vidyasagar that he vehemently opposed to the demand of the Subarna Banik of Calcutta for their admission in the Sanskrit College due to their low Caste²⁷ position. As a reformer in widow re-marriage and educationist in Bengali literature, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar made his mark in Indian history. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and his fellow-worker, Akshay Kumar Datta played a vital role in the progress of literature. In 1846 appeared his first work in Bengali prose, the Twenty-Five Tales of a Fetal. This was succeeded by his Sakuntala in 1855, and by his greatest work, The Exile of Sita, in 1862. These were marked by a grace and beauty, which Bengali prose had never known before. In

fact, these three writers were generally recognized as the fathers of Bengali prose literature. Vidyasagar was a first-rate linguist. He reconstructed the Bengali alphabet and reformed Bengali typography into an alphabet of twelve vowels and forty consonants. Vidyasagar contributed significantly to Bengali and Sanskrit literature. In the final years of life, he chose to spend his days among the Santhāls, an old tribe in India.

He played a vital role for female education. It was quite possible for him to open 1200 government-aided schools for women education in those early days. He realized that there was no pace for women education in the society. Therefore, his tireless efforts to uplift the status of women in the society were praised worthy. He adopted some measures to establish some Girl's schools in different places of Bengal. There was no good Bengali textbook for basic Bengali education. Therefore, he took initiative to write Bengali books with basic language construct and fundamentals, like, Barnaparichay, Bodhoday, Kathamala etc. and then easy grammar books like Upakramonika and Byakaron Kaumudi. Not only that but also he introduced some basic books for Mathematical logic. That is why; Rabindranath Tagore called him as the 'Father of Modern Bengali Language'. Apart from these, he translated some masterpieces of Sanskrit and English literature into Bengali like betaal panchabingshati, Sanskrit Kathasarit sagar, shakuntala, bhranti bilaas , sitaar banabaas and some important edited books like raghubangsha, kumarsambhab etc. He gave equal importance to English, Sanskrit and Bengali. He did not fear to replace useless themes of Oriental Philosophy with useful Occidental themes.

Michael Madhusudhan Datta pointed out that 'Vidyasagar had the genius and wisdom of an ancient sage, the energy of an Englishman and the heart of a Bengali mother.' Dr. Amalesh Tripathi pointed out that Vidyasagar was a mixture of the traditional past and the Western liberal ideas. He treated Vidyasagar as the 'traditional modernizer' of India. He was very much conscious about the liberal thoughts and ideas of the Western education. He picked up the social reform work where Ram Mohan Roy left it. However, Ram Mohan was more influenced by the European Renaissance than Vidyasagar. But his contribution to the Bengali society was far more than just scholastic. His versatile knowledge in Bengali literature, Sanskrit and English opened up a new chapter in the history of education in Bengali. He

vehemently opposed widowhood, child marriage etc. He struggled for the introduction of widow remarriage, women education etc. He also did not like polygamy. His philanthropic role for the education of the non-Brahmin was encouraging. He was also known for his charity and philanthropy and was called as "Daya-r sagar" - ocean of kindness.

He was the great product of the 19th century Renaissance of Europe. But he could not bring radical change in the Hindu society except little exception in the case of widow re-marriage. He did not pay due attention to solve the issue of caste system and untouchability from the so-called Hindu society. Practically speaking, Vidyasagar did not move probably to eradicate the inhuman problems of these two institutions due to the following reasons;

Firstly, he belonged to a high caste Brahmin family. Naturally, the problems of the lower strata of the Hindu society did not stir the mind set up of him.

Secondly, the problems of the widow re-marriage basically confined within the circle of the upper caste Hindus, especially among the Brahmins.

Thirdly, he noticed it very clearly that the Orthodox Hindus had already forgotten about the genuine evidences of the Hindu Shastras regarding the issue of widow re-marriage in which it was vividly mentioned that the re-marriage of widows were permissible.

However, in course of time, the system of widow re-marriage was strictly prohibited by some how. Therefore, it became a bad headache of the 19th century Renaissance man like Vidyasagar and others to draw attention on the issue of widow re-marriage based on the evidences of the Hindu Shastras. That is why; Vidyasagar was very busy to protect his class interest. Although it cannot be denied, that Vidyasagar left marks on Bengali literature, language, women education and widow re-marriage etc. for the greater interest of Bengal as well as India. In fact, he earned name and fame in Bengal as well as India mainly for the re-introduction of widow re-marriage, women education and literary contributions in different dimensions.

It is generally said that the greatest achievement in the life of Vidyasagar was the introduction of widow re-marriage in the Hindu society with the active help of the British Government. Even he said that the ever first honest work of his life was the

introduction of widow re-marriage that was mentioned in a letter written to his brother Sambhu Chandra on 31st Sraban, 1277 Bangadha. He was very much shocked by the ill-fated conditions of the widows and numerous socio-religious dogmas of the Hindu society. His untiring efforts help him to find out the evidences of widow re-marriage from the Hindu Shastras in ancient days. After extensive research, he saw that widow re-marriage was completely based on the evidences of the Hindu Shastras. He cited the evidences from the 'Parasar Samhita'²⁸, one of the Shashtra of the Hindu religion, which clearly noted the fact that widow re-marriage was totally based on Hindu Shastras. Not only that but also Vidyasagar highlighted the fact that Rishi Boudhayan and Rishi Narad etc. mentioned this verse on the issue of widow re-marriage. Besides, widow re-marriage was recognized in the Agni Puran and other Puranas. On the other hand, widow re-marriage was normally prevailed among the Sudras and the lower caste people's in spite of the strict prohibition of widow re-marriage among the upper caste Hindus. Some scholar pointed out that Vidyasagar got inspiration from the social system regarding the widow re-marriage of the lower caste peoples. He explained clearly the verse of the Rishi Parasara on the issue of widow re-marriage and pointed out that widow re-marriage was admissible as per the instructive content of the Hindu Shastras if husband died, disabled, handicapped, flew away or fallen. Therefore, it can be said that it was not at all a difficult task for Vidyasagar, a renowned Sanskrit scholar to prove the content of widow re-marriage on that basis.

Not only that but also Vidyasagar played a vital role for the introduction of widow re-marriage to fulfill his novel mission. Therefore, he published a book on the issue of widow re-marriage in January 1855. He wrote numerous articles in support of the widow re-marriage in the Tattabodhuni Patrika. Ram Mohan did not generally want legal support to prohibit the inhuman Sati system. However, Vidyasagar realized it very clearly that without the active legal support of the British Government the previous custom of widow re-marriage could not be established. Realizing the futility of the movement Vidyasagar took drastic measures to collect the genuine consent of 1000 peoples and their signatures to strengthen his widow re-marriage movement. The name of Debendra Nath Tagore, Justice Darokanath Mitra, Akshay Kumar Dutta, Paricharan Sarkar and Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee etc. may be mentioned in this connection as the main signatories of the memorandum. Besides, the Zamindars of

Burdwan, Dacca, Nabodip, Pune, Sekendrabad, Bombay, Surat and Ahmedabad etc. sent their prayers for the re-establishment of the widow re-marriage system, which accelerated the process of the Widow re-marriage movement of Vidyasagar. However, it would be noted that a strong opposition group vehemently opposed the widow re-marriage movement. They collected 50-60 thousand peoples signature under the leadership of Radhakanta Deb who was against the widow re-marriage initiative. Under this unavoidable tussle between the liberal and orthodox groups on the issue of widow re-marriage, the British Government passed the historic Widow Remarriage Act XV in 1856 to fulfill the demands of Vidyasagar. However, with valuable moral support from people like Akshay Kumar Dutta, Vidyasagar introduced the practice of widow remarriages to mainstream Hindu society. In earlier times, remarriages of widows would occur sporadically only among progressive members of the Brahmo Samaj. The prevailing deplorable custom of Kulin Brahmin polygamy allowed elderly men - who might sometimes be in their advanced ages - to marry teenage girls or even prepubescent girls, supposedly to spare their parents the shame of having an unmarried girl attain puberty in their house. After such marriages, those girls would usually be left behind in their parental homes, where they might be cruelly subjected to Orthodox rituals. Many of those most unfortunate girls would then turn to prostitution. Vidyasagar took the initiative in proposing and pushing through the Widow Remarriage Act XV of 1856 in India. He had discovered that the ancient Hindu scriptures did not enjoin perpetual widowhood, and in 1855, he startled the Hindu world by his work on the Remarriage of Hindu Widows. Such a work, from a learned and presumably Orthodox Brahman, caused the greatest excitement, but Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar remained unmoved amidst a storm of indignation. Associating himself with the most influential men of the day, like Prosonno Kumar Tagore and Ram Gopal Ghosh, he appealed to the British government to declare that the sons of re-married Hindu widows should be considered legitimate heirs. The British government responded and the act was passed in 1856, and some years after Iswar Chandra's own son was married to a widow. In the last years of his life, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar worked against Hindu polygamy. That is why; he was well known for his charity and wide philanthropy for his educational and social reforms. Vidyasagar proposed the widow remarriage act in 1856. Widows could not marry again in those days. There was strong protest from the upper caste and Orthodox people of the society. He encouraged his son to get married to a widow.

Sometimes, he spent money from himself to get widows married. He wanted to stop the Hindu men from getting married to many women. Notwithstanding the miserable condition of Hindu widows, he introduced 'Hindu Family Annuity Fund'. In an unflinching manner, Vidyasagar championed the uplift of the status of women in India, particularly in his native Bengal. Unlike some other reformers who sought to set up alternative societies or systems, he sought, however, to transform Orthodox Hindu society from within.

In fact, the first widow re-marriage was arranged during the time of Vidyasagar in 7 December 1856 between the Srisachandra Vidyaratna of Khatura village in the district of 24 Paragana (South) and widow Kalimoti Debi of ten years old who was the daughter of Brahmananda Mukherjee of Palashdanga in the district of Burdwan. Ramgopal Ghosh, Digambar Mitra, Ramaprasad Roy, son of Rammohun Roy, Parichand Mitra, Kaliprasana Singh attended that widow re-marriage ceremony. Sibnath Shastri gave a detailed description about this widow re-marriage ceremony in a book namely, 'Men I have seen'. The second widow re-marriage incident was held between Madhusudhan Ghosh (Kulin) and the widow daughter (12 years) of Iswarchandra Mitra at Panihati village of the South 24 Paragana. The third and fourth widow re-marriage incident was happened in the family of Rajnarayan Bose. But he had to face numerous obstacles due to this case. However, the widow re-marriage trend was rapidly reduced largely in the decade of 1860. Under this unavoidable circumstances, Narayan the son of Vidyasagar had married widow Bhabasundari. But Vidyasagar had to face different troubles in his family. Vidyasagar wrote a letter to his brother Sambhuchandra and noted the fact that he was the pioneer of widow re-marriage and they had taken initiative for widow marriage. Therefore, he could not keep his prestige intact in the society of the Bhadrалoks if his son would marry virgin lady instead of widow woman. Narayan glorified his mission to marry a widow woman spontaneously. Brahma Samaj always supported the widow marriage movement of Vidyasagar. However, there arose a controversy later on in the Brahma Samaj regarding this issue and the revivalism of Hindu religion, both these factors accelerated the process of deteriorating condition of this movement. In fact, the impact of the widow marriage movement spread in other parts of the country like Maharastra and Pune etc. Widow marriage Association was formed in Maharastra in

1883 and the first widow re-marriage was held there in the same year. Dhando Keshsab Karve had married a widow Brahmin in 1893 in Pune.

However, his attitude towards the issue of caste and untouchability was very disappointing. He was very much silent towards these problems. That is why; it can be said that Vidyasagar did not individually as well as collectively overcome the social barriers of the caste system and the Himalayan hurdles of the untouchability of his age. He realized the inhuman nature, character and features of these two institutions. But he did nothing without ideal talking. It is an irony of fate that the lower stratum of the so-called Hindu society was not much benefited by the social reform policy of Vidyasagar like high caste Hindu. His benevolent activities were confined mainly within the 'Dwijia' circle as it did not touch the common interest of the common people of Bengal as well as India. In fact, there was no problem of widow re-marriage in the lower strata of the Hindu society. It was a genuine problem of the upper caste Hindu society.

The trend of widow re-marriage movement was matured under the leadership of Vidyasagar. In fact, widow re-marriage was normally prevailed in the ancient period. It was gradually prohibited in the medieval period among the upper castes. But it was not completely abolished in the course of time. Joy Singh, the king of Jaipur, Rana Jalim Singh and Parsuram Vhao, the high official of the Peshwar court took active part for the introduction of the widow re-marriage in the Mughal age. A Telegu Brahmin wrote a book before Vidyasagar in 1837 in support of the widow re-marriage in the 19th century. A high caste Brahmin of Nagpur delivered his lectures in favour of widow re-marriage in 1841. This movement was started in Bangladesh before Vidyasagar. Many articles were published in favour of widow re-marriage in different news journals. Nilkomal Banerjee, Brajanath Mukherjee, Kalikrishna Mitra and some other reputed personalities tried to introduce widow re-marriage. However, they failed. In fact, the base of this movement was prepared under these environments. Besides, the support of Young Bengal, Brahma Samaj and the role of the 19th century intelligentsia accelerated the process of the widow re-marriage movement in the time of Vidyasagar. But it can not deny that this movement would not succeed under the leadership of Vidyasagar without the active help of the British Government. He solely struggled for widow re-marriage with few hands in Bengal.

However, he was very much shocked and disheartened by the inhuman role and behaviour of man. He noted the fact that the Orthodox mentality of the Hindu religion was the main obstacle of his progressive social reform works. In fact, his widow re-marriage mission was partially successful. But he did not eradicate Kulinism and polygamy with the help of the British Government. He failed to introduce laws by the British Government to ban these inhuman customs. He played a vital role for the spread of women education. However, he did not give any attention to the education of his daughter. Prof. Asoke Sen wrote – ‘Vidyasagar had no sufficient means to link up tradition and modernity in any meaningful sense of that convergence ... Vidyasagar was a victim of the illusions which he shared with his stage of history, about the prospects of modernization under colonial rule’²⁹. However, he was completely indifferent and silent regarding the Revolt of 1857 and Indigo Revolt that was really a tragedy in the life history of Vidyasagar. But he advocated labour-rights and agriculture to boot up the mind of the common people regarding these honourable works as others. In fact, he failed to deal the emerging socio-economic and religious problems of the then Indian society excluding the case of widow re-marriage, female education and literary development in Bengali.

c. Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883)

The emerging 19th century intelligentsia of India created a changing environment in the domain of the Hindu society and religion under the influence of the European Renaissance. The changing socio-religious trends of the Hindu society mainly organized by different Renaissance men from Raja Ram Mohan Roy up to the death of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. However, the emergence of Swami Dayananda Saraswati heralded a new epoch of Hindu revivalism on the line Vedic traditions. He was the pioneer of the Hindu revivalism movement. He pointed out that the Vedic culture was the Civilization of humankind for the good of the entire human community. He treated the Vedas as ‘India’s Rock of Ages’. He believed that the Hindu religion and the Vedas on which it was based were eternal, unalterable, infallible and divine. Therefore, he raised a slogan ‘Go back to the Vedas’ and ‘the Vedas are the sources of all knowledge’. He rejected the authority of the later Hindu scriptures like the Puranas, which in his view were responsible for the evil practices of idol worship and other superstitious beliefs in the Hindu religion. His slogan ‘Back

to Vedas' was inspired to revive the true Vedic religion. He founded the Arya Samaj with a motto of social reforms. It stood for the fourfold Varna system to be determined by merit and not by birth. The Arya Samaj stood for equal rights of man and woman in social and educational matters. It opposed untouchability, caste discrimination, child marriage and supported widow re-marriage and inter-caste marriages. He provided the Arya Samaj with a code of social conduct and moral values. The Arya Samaj played a very progressive role in the earlier stages of national awakening when it attacked religious superstitions, the supremacy of the Brahmins, polytheism, untouchability and when further it adopted the programme of mass education, elimination of sub-castes, and equality of men and women. Swami Dayananda Saraswati was born at a time when Hindu society was suffering from many social evils and in fact had completely degenerated itself. Religion was being wrongly interpreted and in fact, many of those who claimed to know religion did not know as to what religion essentially meant. The society was also suffering from such evils as caste system, child marriage etc. So he came forward to challenge the social evils and to interpret religion in its true form. He followed the path of his Guru Virjanand whose only mission in life was to rid the Hindu society of its evils. Swami Dayananda Saraswati came from a deeply religious family. He was born in 1824. The religious orthodoxy of his father Karsanji Lalji Triwari and the tender humanitarian outlook of his mother made young Dayanand a true devotee of the existing religion.

Munshi Ram Jigyasu pointed out that 'Dayanand's profound scholarship, his magnetic powers of persuasion, his powers of bombardment of an impregnable orthodox position with bombs carefully selected from the armoury of sastric learning, his fiery eloquence inspired by righteous indignation and a heart aglow with unselfish love of humanity which transfused his words and made them scalding and scorching, and above all his infinite pity for his suffering fellowmen carried all before them'³⁰. Through the book 'Satyarth Prakash' Dayanand tried to highlight the fact that the Vedas presented a scheme of life for the acceptance of humankind. Tarachand, his biographer, pointed out that 'The Rishi holds out a promise that through the Veda the world's good shall be promoted. Through the teachings of the Veda peace shall come on earth and happiness rule every home. Through the Veda shall be hastened the advent of the Golden Age, the age of which the poets have sung. The philosophers dreamt and to which the prophets have pointed'³¹. The sole aim of his book

'Satyarth Prakash' was to create environment for human welfare. However, the ill-fated conditions of the downtrodden classes shocked him very much. Realizing the inhuman nature and treatment of the so-called Hindu society towards the lower castes peoples, Swami Dayananda Saraswati decided to address the problems of them. In fact, they were condemned by the Hindu society. Doors of knowledge had been closed to them. There was no provision by the social laws, whereby they could attend schools and colleges. They had a lower status than men in the Hindu Society. The great teaching of Hindu religion that all were equal without distinction of sex had been ignored. Swami Dayananda Saraswati did not like caste system. He openly condemned this system. He noted clearly that it was not with the sanction of any religion but it was a subsequent arrangement brought about by certain selfish people to suit the convenience³². That is why; he said that caste system should only be based on the functions that one actually performed in his life rather than on birth, as presently was the case. He believed in the inherent right of every individual to the choice of his profession. What pained him was that in caste it was not the profession but birth, which was coming to the forefront. As a social reformer, Swami Dayananda raised his voice in favour of the widows. The society had put an unnecessary bar on widow re-marriage. It had made the life of thousands of Indian women quite miserable. This restriction was promoting moral degeneration. The society was rapidly becoming corrupt. So he pleaded that there should be widow re-marriage because a woman was widowed not because of her fault but because what lay in store for her. He said that woman should be given their due and rightful place in the society. Therefore, all-social bondage imposed upon woman should be removed. They should be properly educated. There was no harm in mixing of girls and boys in a healthy atmosphere. They should be given their due place socially, economically and politically. Dayananda pointed out that 'If the people of India came to know of their past history there shall be a social revolution and every one shall be filled with great energy. He, therefore, asked that let each and every Indian study the history of India with attention and care'³³.

It is the duty of each member of Arya Samaj to look after the physical, social and religious welfare of all. Education should be widespread and illiteracy should be wiped out. Each individual is free to think in terms of his personal welfare but in collective welfare, all are bound to each other. He made it obligatory on the part of

Arya Samajists to stand for widow re-marriage and to oppose child marriage or caste system and other evils or similar institutions vehemently that had corrupted the Hindu society. Therefore, it can be said that his attitude towards the issues of caste and untouchability was very much liberal and democratic than Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Vidyasagar. He prayed to God to inspire the souls of men for evolving one great religion on the earth. He wrote in his book 'Satyarth Prakash' that "The object aimed at by this criticism (of various religions) is to contribute to the elevation of the human race and to enable all men to sift truth from falsehood."³⁴ Not only that but also he interpreted the Vedas, Shastras, Upanishads and Bhagavadgita to understand castes. Realizing the futility of castes he was dead against any differential or preferential treatment being given to any person due to his birth in high or low castes. He noted the fact that there was no such thing as caste by birth. His interpretation of the last three mantras of the Rigveda shows that he was against untouchability and denial to the Sudras right of free association with others, of participating in social and religious ceremonies and of reading the sacred texts of the Vedas (Rigveda, m.10; su 191, mantra 2,3,4.)³⁵. In support of his views against untouchability and denial of equal rights to the Sudras, Dayanand gave references from the Yajurveda (the sixth mantra of the 40th chapter) and the Atharvaveda (kanda 19, Sukta 15, mantra 6). He established that from the Vedic times down the advent of the Muhammadan invasion there was no such class of people as bhangis for removing the night soil. He clearly noted the fact that the disorganized Hindu society could not be made to work out the high ideals in social, religious and political life unless the untouchability based on birth was not removed, unless Sudras were not given full rights of social equality³⁶. Inspired by the teaching of Swami Dayanand, his disciple Swami Shradhanand and others organized the 'Dalitoddhar' (uplift of the depressed classes) and 'Achhut-Shuddhi' (reform of the untouchables) movements. The ground prepared by Swamiji and his disciples became the foundation of Gandhiji's movement for the uplift of the Harijans. In fact, Dayanand suggested guna (character), karma (action) and swabhav (nature) as criteria rather than birth as the basis of caste. According to him, the caste of a person was to be determined by his character, by the actions he performed in society and by his nature. He said that a chandala had every right to become a Brahmin if his character (gun) and action (karma) justified it. To him, 'a Brahmin who is disqualified for his work, becomes at once a Sudra and a Sudra who qualifies for it, becomes at once a Brahmin ...' He actually played a vital role to open the flood

gates for a social revolution in Hindu society. He denounced untouchability as inhuman and tried to prove that it was contrary to the dictates of Vedic religion. To him, a Sudra who was clean in body and mind had the right to be a dwija, twice-born. Therefore, it can be said that his role towards the issue of caste and untouchability was very much liberal and democratic to establish the concept of social justice.

d. Jyotiba Govindrao Phule (1828-1873)

Jyotiba Govindrao Phule organized a powerful non-Brahmin movement in different parts of Maharashtra in the last phase of the 19th century. He was born in 1828 in a Mali family. He came from a Sudra caste. He realized the utility of organizing a united low caste political movement in India. He really understood it very well that politics is the key factor of all sorts of power and position. That is why; he encouraged the low born peoples to be united under a united low caste front to occupy the state-power to destroy the caste based power and position of the so-called higher castes. He declared that without capturing politically the state-power, the ill-fated poor conditions of the Sudras that were created by the Brahmins and Dharma Shastras's sponsored could not be permanently eradicated. But, Jyotiba Phule was the first historic Sudra in colonial India. He heralded an epoch making event in Indian history to raise a united voice of the Sudras, Untouchables and the toiling masses of India against the age-old oppression, tyranny, and exploitation done by the Brahmins, Priest-hood and socio-religious ordinances prepared and imposed by the so-called Manu and other ancient law-makers relating to the inhuman concept of the Caste Institution, Untouchability, pollution, purity, impurity, touchable untouchable etc. Jyotiba Phule dedicated his whole life for serving the poor and untouchables to develop their socio-spiritual, political, economic, educational etc. status and position in the society. He realized it very well that they could not progress themselves due to the lack of education, consciousness etc. His education, his personal experiences and association with the Christian missionaries, made him critical of the prevailing Hindu religion and customs. That is why; he launched a direct reform movement to establish the human rights, status and position of the Sudra society against the supremacy of Brahmanism in the so-called Hindu society. Jyotiba Phule strongly criticized the autocrat Brahmins. He identified the Brahmins who were and are the main source of obstacles that did not help to establish the fundamental rights and

privileges of the toiling masses, ill-fated poor, untouchables and low caste peoples in India. That is why; he launched a plan to the over-all development of the caste-stricken peoples of India. Therefore, he asked the common people to liberate themselves from the age-old and traditional yoke of the so-called Hindu Shastras written by the privileged Brahmin caste. His main target was to liberate the helpless, untouchables and ill-fated caste-stricken citizens of India from the yoke of the higher caste peoples. He realized it very well that it was not possible without capturing the state power politically. So his intention was to destroy the authority and supremacy of the higher caste peoples in colonial India.

Besides, he was a great supporter of the re-marriage of widows. However, he strongly opposed to the Sati system and child marriage. He preferred women emancipation. He favoured Western education. He demanded free education for the children and compulsory education for all especially, for the Depressed Classes and untouchables. Dhananjay Keer was a biographer of Jyotiba Phule. He narrated Jyotiba Phule as the 'Father of Social Revolution'³⁷ in Maharashtra. He pointed out that Maharashtra had to be freed from the tyrannized yoke of Peshwas. But the ill-fated caste-stricken peoples were severely exploiting by the privileged Brahmins and the intellectuals in Maharashtra. Jyotiba Phule was a great democratic personality in India who not only fought for the rights and privileges of lowborn peoples but also fought for the equal status and privileges of the Muslims and Christians. He praised the greatness of the British Government for the introduction of Western education and the creation of job opportunities in India. He launched a direct social movement for the development of man. The Satya Shodhak Samaj played a vital role to implement his cherish dreamt. His movement was limited within the protest of the anti-serfdom policy and the welfare measures of the toiling masses.

Jotirao Phule was a militant advocate of their rights. He was very much inspired by the ideas of the book of Thomas Paine viz., 'The Rights of Man'³⁸. He was very much aware of the iniquities of the caste system for the first time in a wedding of one of his Brahmin friends where he was insulted and abused by the relatives of his friend due to his low status in the caste society. That is why; he decided after that incident to defy the caste system and came forward directly to serve the Sudras and women who were deprived of all their rights as human beings under the caste system. He realized

the necessity of education and gave top priority to spread education among the lower classes and women in the society. His reform movement was started with the establishment of a girl school. The foundation of evening schools for adult education accelerated the progress of his reform movement. In 1854, he opened a school for the Untouchables. He had a violent dislike of the Brahmin priesthood. Jyotiba Phule made up his mind set-up to educate his wife Savitribai and opened a girls' school in 1848. In spite of the constant opposition of the Brahmins and the high caste peoples, Phule succeeded in achieving his dream. However, it was temporarily closed later on due to the want of money and the opposition of the Brahmins. The untouchables were admitted as students in this school. The orthodox opponents threatened the teachers to leave the school. Even they threw stones on Savitribai who taught the girls in the schools. Jotirao re-opened this school once again. Govande and Valvekar helped him in this connection. He also founded a coed school for the lower classes, especially the Mahars and Mangs. He realized the importance of primary education that was neglected among the common masses in Bombay Presidency. That is why; he noted that 'a good deal of their poverty, their want of self-reliance, and their entire dependence upon the learned and intelligent classes' could be attributed to the 'deplorable state of education among the peasantry'³⁹. He blamed the British Government for spending major portion of revenue to the higher classes. Naturally, they got chance of access to all the avenues of knowledge, influence and higher offices. Therefore, the Brahmins occupied most of the important posts under the British Government. Therefore, he encouraged the lower classes to resist the tyranny of the Brahmins. He denounced the Brahmins as cheats and hypocrites.

Apart from this, Jotirao Phule founded an orphanage⁴⁰. It was possibly the first such institution for the orphans. He came forward to save the life of the widows who gave birth to illegitimate children and left them on the streets. It was held due to the ban of widow re-marriage in the upper castes Hindus. He gave assurance to the pregnant widows that the orphanage would take care of their children. A Brahmin widow gave birth to a boy in 1873 and Jotirao Phule adopted him as his son. He made no distinction between non-Brahmins and untouchables. To liberate the depressed classes and make them conscious of their rights by educating them, he founded the Satya Shodhak Samaj in 1873. The main motto of establishing the Satya Shodhak Samaj was to create a united front of the Dalits to fight to finish the concept of

Brahmanism, Priesthood, caste, untouchability, inequality and disparity and to establish the concept of human rights, liberty, equality and fraternity. Jyotiba Phule was very much influenced by the the-then socio-religious and political environment of Mharastra as well as India. Gopalhori Deshmukh wrote different types of essays and articles against the socio-religious superstitions, prejudices and religious dogmas. He propagated these essays continuously through the journal of 'Pravakar', 'Lokhhitbadi' that had severely stricken the very base of these prejudices. Even the role of Pandit Bishnu Shastri was very important in this context. He strongly advocated widow re-marriage and propagated it in Maharashtra. He was called the 'Vidyasagar of Maharashtra'. Apart from these, Arya Samaj passed opinions against the Caste system from Bombay. Under these environments, Jyotiba Phule played a vital role to introduce an anti-caste movement in Maharashtra. He pointed out that all sorts of superstitions and orthodoxy were the brainchild of the Brahmins. Some scholars pointed out that he was completely anti-Brahmins due to different reasons. They were the symbols of the landlord system, Mahayani system and tyranny of the Peshwas in Maharashtra. That is why; Jyotiba Phule severely attacked them by the propaganda of the exploiter Brahmins. Therefore, the movement of Jyotiba Phule hastened the process of deterioration of Brahmanism in India. He was the first man among the Indians who played a positive role for the betterment of ignorant low caste peoples in India. He encouraged them to fight against the injustice, inequality, disparity and anti-humanity. He boosted up their mind for self-respect, self-reliant and self-depended. Most of the social reform movements either led by the Brahmins for the benefit of their classes or non-Brahmins for their interests centered around the cities. However, his movement was almost village centered. A large number of branches of this organization were established in different parts of South India. The most important among these branches were Maharashtra, Vidharva, Nagpur etc. Even the numbers of followers of this organization were increased rapidly. Dinmitra (poor's friend), a Marathi paper, played an important role to preach its subjects. He raised a violent protest movement against the Caste System and tyrannized oppressions done by the upper caste Hindus upon the low caste peoples in India. As a result of it, anti-caste movement transformed into an economic and political movements in India. The followers of the Satya Shodhak Samaj organized a peasant movement at Satara of Maharashtra against the landlords, money lenders during the Non-Cooperation movement. Therefore, it can be said that the Satya Shodhak Samaj

really brought the attention of the British Government as well the Indian political leaders to think for the betterment of the oppressed toiling masses in India. This movement was spread rapidly under the leadership of Mukundo Rao Patil after the death of Jyotiba Phule. The cause of the poor was so dear to him that when he met the Duke of York, he presented himself in a lion-cloth as the true representative of the poverty-stricken Indian peasant. Not only that but also he published 'Slavery' in 1873. He highlighted the ill-fated conditions of the toiling masses in this book. The Sudras and Ati-Sudras were suffering hardships and were leading miserable lives. His main target was to uplift them socially, educationally, politically and economically. He described vividly in the book of 'Slavery' the shameless manner in which the Bhats oppressed the helpless Sudras and Ati-Sudras through the four poems composed by himself. He remarked about the necessity of opening schools for girls and boys of the Sudras as follows:

"Let there be schools for the Sudras in every village, but away with all Brahmin school masters! The Sudras are the life and sinews of the country, it is to them alone, and not to the Brahmins that Government must ever look to tide them over their difficulties, financial as well as political. . . ."⁴¹

Physical slavery (slavery of the body) was bad enough but mental slavery (slavery of the mind – psychological and spiritual) slavery was most degrading and demoralizing, for its victims. Jotirao hit the nail on the head on this count also. He revolted against the unjust caste system under which millions of people had suffered for centuries. He upheld the cause of the untouchables and took up the cudgels for the poorer peasants. He arranged to give access to the untouchables to a small bathing tank near his house in 1868. He traced out the origin of the Brahmin domination in India and pointed out that their main object in fabricating these falsehoods was due to dupe the minds of the ignorant and to rivet firmly on them the chains of perpetual bondage and slavery, which their selfishness and cunning had forged. Besides, he criticized the authority of the 'Manawa Dharma Shastra' for making the Brahmins Almighty as the God. He denounced the rules and regulations of Manu, the pioneer of the hereditary caste institution in the so-called Hindu society. To him, the Brahmins were really the great culprit to humankind. But in the course of time the depressed and down-trodden masses in India were freed from the physical slavery of the Bhats

as a result of the advent of the British rule in India. Jotirao Phule said that his main object was to tell the Sudra brethren through the book of 'Slavery' "how they had been duped by the Brahmins, but to open the eyes of the British Government to that pernicious system of high class education which had hitherto been so persistently followed, and with broad universal sympathies, are finding to be highly mischievous and pernicious to the interest of the Government"⁴². Not only that but also the Sudra brethren should place before the Government the true state of their fellowmen due to emancipate themselves from Brahmin thralldom. According to Ambedkar, "Mahatma Phule-The Greatest Shudra of Modern India who made the lower classes of Hindus Conscious of their Slavery to the higher classes and who preached the gospel that for India social democracy was more vital than independence from foreign rule".⁴³ Jotirao Phule highlighted the pitiable condition of the masses in 'The Ballad of the Conquered Slaves (Sections 3 and 4) and exhorted them to take education at any cost. In 'The Untouchables' Apologia', he noted the visit of Her Majesty to India (particularly to Bombay Presidency as it than was). When Queen Victoria visited the poor hovels of the untouchables outside the village limit in Bombay Presidency, Mahars and Mangs told her about their sub-human conditions under the British Raj they requested Her to arrange public utility works, liberal educational reforms and to introduce modern agricultural methods. Therefore, it can be said that Jotirao Phule possibly the first Indian who directly launched an anti-caste movement to establish the concept of Social Justice in the Indian society. Practically speaking, he was first Indian Sudra⁴⁴ who fought for the civil rights and privileges of the depressed classes in India against the Brahmins and encouraged them to be united to capture the state power for the destruction of the opportunist groups as well as privileges sections of the society. He introduced a new chapter in the history of the lower caste people's movement in India.

e. Sri Narayan Guru 1856-1928

The emergence of Sri Narayana Guru in the social horizon of Kerala as the undisputed spiritual leader of the downtrodden people when they were oppressed and tyrannized by the caste discrimination and the so-called divine supremacy of the Savarnas over the Avarnas who were definitely below the rank of the Sudras. Sri Narayan Guru was the pioneer of the lower caste movement in South India. He was a

great a champion of the humble and the downtrodden sections in India. He had to fight all sorts of social, religious, economic and other inequalities and injustice that were imposed upon the Avarnas by the Savarnas for their privileges⁴⁵. The case of the Nambudiris in the socio-religious matter may be noted to make out the real conditions of the Avarnas in the Keralian society. The Nambudiris or Kerala Brahmins enjoyed superior position in the Savarna caste hierarchy in Keralian society. Next in the rank was The Kshatriyas and the Sudras or Nairs had the lowest caste position in the society. The Avarna hierarchy had Ezhava (Thiyya or Chovan) at the top followed by Pulaya, Paraya, etc. with the Nayadi occupying the last rung. The Avarnas were below the rank of Sudras. The differentiation of Savarna and Avarna was so deeply felt that professional castes like tailor, barber, washerman, etc. existed separately for Savarnas and Avarnas. But surprisingly Kerala has no Vaisya caste. The Nambudiris represented the highest rank. Even the Kshatriya was not allowed such privilege as to enter the inner sanctum of temples. The Nambudiris followed the rule of primogeniture according to which the eldest son of the family inherited the property. Moreover, only the eldest son was allowed to marry, that too from within the caste. For the convenience of the younger sons, a peculiar system called Sambandham - a morganatic marriage-with Nair or Kshatriya women was devised. By this system, the woman was not given the social status of a wife, nor could the children inherit the paternal property. The children were forbidden to touch their father, lest they pollute him. The matriarchal system of the Nair families was quite convenient to the Brahmins, as the maternal uncle became the guardian of the children, thus cleverly eliminating the responsibility of the father to provide for the wife and children. Prof. S. N. Sadasivan referred to this arrangement as a sexual luxury without the social obligation. The Nairs were quite convinced that it was the duty of the Nair men to serve, and the duty of the Nair women to please the Brahmin. Even Kshatriya families believed that the seed of a Nambudiri could produce better and more efficient Kings. It took hundred of years and generations for the community to realize and react against this sexual exploitation. But the Nambudiris failed to remedy the miseries of this system. Many a woman had to suffer compulsory maidenhood all her life because only one man from a family could marry. Alternatively, she had the choice to become one of the several wives of a Nambudiri who could be old enough to be her father or grandfather. Young widows among Nambudiri women were quite common. There were nearly three hundred compulsory taxes imposed on the Avarnas exclusively,

some of which will look ridiculous and nonsensical to the modern mind. These taxes appear laughable, but the implied humiliation and tragic fate of the people who had to bear them was breath taking. On realizing the illegitimacy, impropriety and inhuman nature of these taxes, Rani Gauri Laxmibai of Tranvancore issued a proclamation in 1851 and sought to abolish them. However, the social humiliations continued to be in force, because there was a firm belief that the lower castes defiled the higher in a spiritual or ritualistic sense. Hence, the principle of untouchability and inapproachability was maintained very strictly. Even Savarnas were victims of this vile system. Since the Nambudiris were alledged to be the highest and most sacred, even the Kshatriyas were regarded as polluting the Nambudiris by touch and approach. The Kshatriya was therefore compelled to keep a distance of two feet away from the Nambudiris and the sanctum sanctorum of the temple. Similarly, the distance to be observed⁴⁶ by the others was:

Nair..... 16 ft.
 Ezhava 32 ft.
 Pulaya64ft.
 Paraya64ft.
 NayadiNot to come within the sight of a Brahmin.

Apart from these, the following severe inhuman humiliations⁴⁷ were imposed upon the Avarnas:

- i. The sight of a Nayadi at a distance would force the Brahmin to undergo ritual purification.
- ii. The use of public highways was restricted.
- iii. Anyone to pass within polluting distance of a Savarna would be cut down at once.
- iv. To recognize such castes, they were required to remain naked above the waist. This applied to women too.
- v. The proper salutation of an Avarna female to persons of rank was to uncover her bosom.
- vi. The use of footwear, umbrellas, fine clothes and jewelry were forbidden to the Avarnas.
- vii. The holding of umbrellas in public places was prohibited to all castes except Brahmins and kings. The others were expected to protect themselves with plantain leaves.

viii. Restrictions were imposed about the type of house an Avarna could build for himself. The area, the height of the house, the number of windows and ventilators, were also restricted.

ix. While talking to the caste superiors, the Avarnas were forced to use a special idiom like the following examples:

- a. when referring to oneself, he should not say 'I', but should say, 'your slave'
- b. they were to commence speaking, 'your slave has permission to observe....'
- c. while speaking, he must place his hand over his mouth, lest his breath go forth and pollute the person he was addressing,

Therefore, it can be said that the Savarnas had monopolized all social, economic and political opportunities of the state in the beginning of the nineteenth century. They had taken care to see that the Avarnas did not get any opportunity worth the name for individual or communal development.

However, the emergence of Sri Narayan Guru stirred the very foundation of the above-noted Caste based socio-religious conditions in Kerala and heralded a new epoch making event in the history of the low caste movement in India. He was born on 22 August 1856 in Kerala. His nickname was 'Nanu'. He was known as Nanu Asan. He was one of the best scholars and reformers of his age. Narayan Guru was very much influenced by his family environment. Madan Asan was his father and Kutti Amma was his mother. Madan Asan was a farmer and the village schoolmaster and his wife Kochupennu was a kind-hearted pious woman. The father of Sri Narayan Guru was not only a farmer but also Asan too. Asan means 'Acharyan'-a teacher. He was well versed in Sanskrit and studied Astrology and Ayurveda, the system of Indian medicine. The people of the village highly respected him. He used to help the rustics by advising them on many matters. He was well versed in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the two great Epics of the Vedic age. He used to give talks on the subjects of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in a very simple language once a week before the village people, sitting in the verandah of his house. The people of the village used to gather and listen to him with great interest. Even Sri Narayan Guru attentively listened to those episodes with great interest. Sometimes he had to give the talks in absence of his father on those subjects before the village

peoples. His mother was very much intelligent and full of kindness. She was ever calm in her work. So Sri Narayan Guru was very much influenced by his parents and family environment. Once Nanu Asan left home due to fulfill his ambition. But he had to return home to see his father, who was on his deathbed. It was a great joy to the father to see his son after a long time. He was proud of his son who had become an Asan too. He addressed him as a Vidwan (scholar). He also desired to be fed with his sacred hands.

But Sri Nanayan Guru launched a ceaseless struggle to establish the social rights of the lowborn peoples in South India. He fought for socio-religious equal rights and privileges against the caste system. He belonged to the Ezhava Sect⁴⁸ that was the largest community in Kerala among the untouchables. The untouchables had the rights only to worship Goddess Kali and Chamunda. But Sri Narayan Guru founded the Shiva temple⁴⁹ for the untouchables. Therefore, the untouchable got the opportunity to worship God Shiva. In course of time near about 60 temples of God Shiva were established in South India for the untouchables, as they were not allowed to enter inside the Savarna temples. Therefore, Sri Narayana Guru tried to emancipate them in this way. It was a surprising matter that Sri Narayan Guru established a temple where he wrote the gospel of life in the words of truth, duty, kindness and love⁵⁰ instead of installing God or Goddess idol in the temple, 1922. He worked for the welfare of the toiling masses in India who were severely tyrannized by the so-called caste system and its Brahmin thinkers. Many anti-caste Sanghas were established in different parts of India like, Cochin, Kalikot, and Tribankur to preach the ideology of Sri Narayan Guru. Therefore, the social movement of Sri Narayan Guru played a vital role in creating a consciousness for democratic environment in the near-future politics of Kerala. He preached the gospel of brother-hood for all. That is why; his ceaseless struggle and fighting spirit against the ill effects of the caste system was very important that prevailed in the so-called Hindu society in those days. Sri Narayan Guru did not care for the rules of untouchability in the childhood because he did not find any logic in it. He used to mingle freely with the untouchables who worked in their farm and then threaten to touch the elders in the house with his 'polluted' hand. Some scholars pointed out that Sri Narayana Guru was a great saint and reformer who led a quiet but significant social revolution in India. He was a champion of the ill-fated untouchables in India. His prime object was to establish the

concept of 'One Caste, One Religion, and One God for all men'⁵¹. He lived with the poor and ate the food given by the untouchables. He discussed religion with Christians and Muslims. He found that 'Varna' and caste system and its direct offshoot untouchability were absolutely baseless, artificial and arbitrary. They were against the spirit of Advaita and offended human dignity. They had to be broken down. People should not think, say or ask about caste. On further meditation he arrived at the logical conclusion that there is only one caste i.e. humanity, one religion-Humanism and one God-the Universal Spirit. He was firmly convinced of this principle. This principle became the dynamic centre from which he would act. It was not an easy task to make the poor ignorant people realize the presence of the universal spirit within them. He also understood that the social degradation of the Avarnas started when they were denied entry into the temples and with the denial of education. The Avarnas were not allowed even to come near the compound wall. However, offerings from them in the form of cash or kind were always accepted. Such shameless exploitation of the people by their caste superiors was to be met with in a telling manner. That is why; he consecrated a Shiva temple at Aruvippuram, about 40 km south of Trivandrum in 1888. It was an open challenge to Brahmin priesthood. In a caste-ruled society, an Avarna Hindu, an untouchable, had performed the installation of a deity defying all codes and norms. The Brahmin priesthood could not take it very easily. Their authority had so far been unchallenged. Therefore, a great Brahmin scholar questioned the right of an Avarna, an Ezhava to install a deity. The answer given by the Guru has become famous: "This is not a Brahmin Shiva this is an Ezhava Shiva"⁵². The revolutionary spirit that prompted this reply needs no explanation. Without distinction of caste or birth, without hatred of other religions, we all live here in brotherhood! This is the ideal that is here; Let everyone of you know this "This is a model abode, where all men shall live without caste distinctions and religious rivalries."⁵³

'Gurukulam' and a Sanskrit school were also started at Aruvippuram to give religious training to the young men of the lower strata of society through lessons in scriptures. This was the beginning of a Movement for Social Reform by Sri Narayana Guru. 'Untouchability', animal sacrifice to please the gods, and the evil of drink existed in Travancore (Kerala) State also, as in all the other parts of India. The people forgot the fact that 'all are men'. But Sri Narayana Guru freely mingled with the

people, and tried to make them understand their follies. He argued with them in a gentle manner. He won their hearts and worked hard to put an end to the practice of animal sacrifice. He made them pull down the temples meant for such sacrifices. He had new temples and schools built on the very spot by them. In this way, the compassionate Sri Narayana Guru travelled for over fifteen years in the land of Malayalam. He tried to wipe out the superstitious beliefs and practices of the lowly and the lost in society. In short, he tried to transform the very way of life that the people followed. He also taught them the need to lead a life of cleanliness, keeping their houses and surroundings free from dirt. He taught them the way to lead a good life.

Many young men were attracted to mission taken up by the Guru. They founded an institution called 'Sree Narayana Dharmapariपालana Yogam'. Very soon, Varkala also became a place of pilgrimage. The Guru started a Sanskrit school there. Poor boys and orphans were taken under his care. They were given education. They were also taught some useful art. There was no caste distinction at all. The Guru himself was absorbed in some work during the greater part of the day. In 1913, the Guru founded an Ashram at Alwaye. It was called 'Advaita Ashram'. This was an important event in the life of the Guru in his spiritual quest. That Ashram was dedicated to a great principle - 'Om Sahodaryam Sarvatra' (all men are equal in the eyes of God). This became the motto of the new Ashram. The worship of God in a very simple manner, and the equality of all in the eyes of God - these principles he had practiced. His main aim was to dispel all superstitious beliefs and practices. The members of the Narayana Dharma Pariपालana Yogam worked for this aim. They thought of securing the right of temple entry to people of all castes. They tried to organize this Reform Movement on the lines of Satyagraha taught by Mahatma Gandhi. However, it was only in 1936 that the Travancore State Government issued an order in the name of the Maharaja and gave the right of entry to temples to the Harijans also, for the first time in the whole of India. On 20 September, the Guru passed away in 1928 at Varkala.

Apart from these, Narayana Guru wrote a number of books both in Sanskrit and in Malayalam. 'Jati Mimamsa' (an enquiry into caste), a poem in five stanzas is of great significance. It discussed concisely the Guru's philosophy of life. The first stanza is in Sanskrit. The rest of the stanzas are in Malayalam. According to his philosophy the

recognition of any difference among human beings in respect of caste is meaningless and absolutely unjust. His aim was to build a society without caste distinctions.

Sri Narayan Guru firmly believed that the community needed economic power, and it would come only through industry and commerce. Therefore, it can be pointed out that the Reformation Movement of Sree Narayana Guru was totally different from all the others. The leaders of Brahma Samaj and Prarthana Samaj were mostly born in high caste, well-to-do families; and had enjoyed the privileges of modern westernized education. They had been inspired by the ideas of western humanism reflected through the slogans of liberty, fraternity and equality. Sri Narayana Guru was born in a low-caste family, and never had the privilege to learn English, nor did he come in touch with Western civilization. His education was purely traditional, Sanskrit-based. But Narayana Guru also preached human equality, and worked for liberty from serfdom of downtrodden people. His ideals of liberty and equality were based on spiritualism and godliness. His firm conviction was that 'All are one.' When he preached his dictum, 'Ask not, say not, think not caste,' the people had reached such a social level, that they could ignore caste and live. Therefore, it can be noted that the role of Sri Narayan Guru for the upliftment of the low caste peoples in India heralded an epoch making chapter in the history of India.

f. Ramkrishna Paramhansa (1835-1897)

The emergence of Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deb under the caste based unavoidable socio-religious and cultural environments were an important event in the history of Bengal. He did not create an epoch-making role to ban the Caste system and Untouchability from the so-called Hindu society. He was a great saint in Bengal as well as India who was a great worshiper of 'Ma Kali'. But he did not launch a direct movement to abolish the age-old evil traditions and superstitions like Caste system and Untouchability from the Hindu society. His nickname was Godadhar. Sri Ramakrishna emerged in Bengal under these unavoidable caste based socio-religious and cultural environments. Sri Ramakrishna was born in an orthodox Brahmana family. His father followed all the principles that were prescribed by the scriptures. He spent most of his time in spiritual activities and scriptural study. At the same time, he also strictly observed all the social rules of a Brahmana. Though poor, he did not accept anything from a non-Brahmana, not even from those Brahmanas who accepted

gifts from Sudras. His family members were also not allowed to do so. His adherence to Brahmanic rules and his renunciation and asceticism made him so distinguished that everybody in the village had great respect for him. Nobody bathed in the pond before he took his bath, nor would anybody pass him by without showing him proper respect. But Dr. Krishna Verma highlighted the attitudes of Sri Ramakrishna towards the issue of caste and untouchability in his article, 'Sri Ramakrishna and the Caste System' in a different way. But he did not pay due attention to show the dichotomy of Sri Ramakrishna on that particular issues. Many scholars pointed out that the most serious social problems in India were the existence of the caste system and untouchability, which gauged the progress of the Indian Nation. The social condition in medieval Bengal was categorized into two principal caste divisions i.e., Brahmanas and Sudras. There were no significant Kshatriya or Vaishya castes. Vaidyas, Kayasthas belonged to the Sudra caste. They considered themselves superior to these people like goldsmiths, blacksmiths, weavers, peasants, washermen and fishermen who belonged to the Sudra caste also. But the cobblers, tanners, burning-ghat workers and sweepers were known as untouchables. The Kayastha Zamindars or goldsmiths were economically very strong than the Brahmanas. However, the social position of the Brahmanas was much higher than the Sudras. The Sudras had to show respect to them in every way, and they had authority over them in all religious and social activities that a non-Brahmana wanted to perform. The staunch Brahmanas did not perform priestly activities in a non-Brahmana house and accept anything from them. A Brahmana woman must have to use the suffix Devi (divine person) before mentioning her name, whereas a non-Brahmana woman must have to use dasi (servant) for the same.

His Attitude towards Other Castes

In those days, only Sudra woman could function as a midwife in the Brahmana house. It is also noted in the caste rules that without performing the upanayana, sacred thread ceremony of a boy of the Brahmana family after reaching a certain age, none could obtain the position of a full-fledged Brahmana. The boy was given the Gayatri mantra at that time. The boy could enjoy the right of religious activity by maintaining these caste based socio-religious rules and customs. Not only that but also completing these formalities to become a Brahmana, the boy has to live as a brahmacharin for a certain

period. He had to manage his food by begging at that time and sleeping on the floor. The Brahmana woman had the privilege to give the first alms to a brahmacharin. The first lady who gives him alms was known as his bhiksha-mata, the 'alms-giving mother'. Dhani Kamarini⁵⁴, a blacksmith woman, had a secret desire to become Sri Ramakrishna's 'bhiksha-mata'. But it was not permissible by the caste rules. However, Sri Ramakrishna somehow knew it and promised her to become his 'bhiksha-mata'. That is why, he took his first alms from a Sudra blacksmith woman and making her the 'bhiksha-mata' to keep his word by violating the so-called caste rules and traditional believes of his family in this regard.

Sri Ramakrishna sometime played a very exceptional role towards the low strata of the society. He usually heard from the village blacksmiths that dal (lentils) cooked by them had some special taste. Therefore, he was very much interested to taste it. But he knew it very well that it was not permissible for a Brahmana to take cooked food from a non-Brahmana family. Under this unavoidable circumstance, he came forward to ask a blacksmith woman, most probably Dhani, to cook dal for him and ultimately he tasted that dal and remarked as follows: 'I ate the dal but it smelt of the blacksmith.'⁵⁵

Not only that but also Sri Ramakrishna never hesitated to take food from Chinu Shankhari, an old man of the village belonged to the lower artisan caste in Bengal. In fact, Shankharis are those who cut conch-shells and make conch bangles. Besides, it is noted in the Ramakrishna Punthi that Gadadhar ignored caste distinctions and came forward to fulfill the desire of a certain Khetir Mata to feed Sri Ramakrishna at her home who belonged to the carpenter caste⁵⁶.

In the nineteenth-century Bengal, all non-Brahmanas were termed as Sudras. But Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa had 16 Sannyasin disciples, out of which nine were non-Brahmanas. Among them, eight were Kayasthas and one belonged to a shepherd family. Apart from this, he had twenty-five intimate householder disciples. The names of them were noted in the Sri Ramakrishna Bhaktamalika. Among them, nineteen were non-Brahmanas. Most of them were Kayasthas while some belonged to the Vaidya caste and some to the Vaishya caste. From this point of view, it can be

noted that Sri Ramakrishna did not count the caste parameter in the context of choosing his disciples. In spite of his orthodox family background and tradition, he discarded the narrowness and psychological egos of caste superiority by the way of love and devotion to God. But the orthodox Hindus objected to his eligibility for Sannyasa when Vivekananda obtained high esteem in the society. They pointed out that a Sudra had no right to Sannyasa⁵⁷.

Sri Ramakrishna maintained purity of mind and devotion to God, which were the only criteria for judging a man. In his estimate, Kayasthas Narendranath (Swami Vivekananda) and Kayasthas Rakhhal Chandra (Swami Brahmananda) were spiritually much higher than many Brahmanas. By the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, Latu, the shepherd boy of Chapra who was a domestic help at Ramchandra Datta's house, was transformed into Swami Adbhutananda, a great Sadhu. Adhar Sen and Mani Mallick belonged to the caste of a Subarna-banik and a Teli respectively who were the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna who used to visit their houses and take food there by violating the caste rules. Once, on the occasion of Durga Puja, Sri Ramakrishna went to Adhar's house who was a lower caste people. Kedar Chatterjee, an orthodox Brahmana devotee, went there to meet his Master Sri Ramakrishna. In spite of his unwillingness, Mr. Kedar followed his Master, took part in dinner together there with the other devotees, and later broke into tears before him for his hesitation. But Sri Ramakrishna told him at that time, 'One can eat food even from an untouchable if the untouchable is a devotee of God'⁵⁸.

Secondly; the conversation also revealed Sri Ramakrishna's high esteem for a devotee. Repeatedly we heard him say, 'Devotees do not belong to any caste'; 'Blessed is he who feels longing for God, though he eats pork. But shame on him whose mind dwells on "woman and gold", though he eats the purest food - boiled vegetables, rice, and ghee'⁵⁹.

We also find Sri Ramakrishna saying, 'Hazra said that a man could not be liberated unless he was born in a Brahmin body. "How is that?" I said. "One attains liberation through bhakti alone. Shabari was the daughter of a hunter. She, Ruhidas, and others belonged to the Sudra caste. They were liberated through bhakti alone."⁶⁰

Rani Rasmani, a very rich lady of the Kaivarta caste, was founded the famous Dakshineswar Kali temple. But no Brahmana agreed to officiate as priest in a temple constructed by a Kaivarta Rani as she belonged to Sudra caste. Ultimately, Ramkumar who was the elder brother of Sri Ramakrishna was agreed to engage his brother to do that work. But Sri Ramakrishna refused to take food from low caste Kaibarta family. His elder brother convinced him through arguments that there was no harm in taking food at such a holy place like the temple of the Divine Mother situated on the bank of the Ganga. So he started living in the Kali temple complex and gradually began taking food there too. Reason always had great appeal for him. After some time he was entrusted with decorating the image in the Kali temple, and later became the priest there. Sri Ramakrishna was not a social reformer but a master of spirituality. In the Gospel, where his words were recorded, we find very few references to the caste system. Whenever the topic of caste came up, he discussed it from the spiritual point of view.

The evils of the caste system were a topic of hot discussion. Ashwini Kumar Datta once categorically asked Sri Ramakrishna, 'Do you observe caste?' The answer that Sri Ramakrishna gave was as significant as it was interesting:

'How can I say yes? I ate curry at Keshab Sen's house. Let me tell you what once happened to me. A man with a long beard brought some ice here, but I did not feel like eating it. A little later, someone brought me a piece of ice from the same man, and I ate it with great relish. You see, caste restrictions fall away of themselves. As coconut and palm trees grow up, the branches drop off themselves. Caste conventions drop off like that. But don't tear them off as those fools do.'

The last sentence is very important and shows how much Sri Ramakrishna was against anything artificial. Nothing should be done forcibly. If one has not risen above the feeling of superiority or inferiority regarding one's caste or social position, mere eating together or marrying in a different caste will not help. Outwardly, one may make a show of equality but inside there will be hatred and jealousy. Sri Ramakrishna was very much against any type of hypocrisy'.

According to Sri Ramakrishna caste distinctions can be removed only through bhakti, devotion to God. Intense love for God melts away all distinctions. In Sri Ramakrishna's language:

The caste system can be removed by one means only, and that is the love of God. Lovers of God do not belong to any caste. The mind, body, and soul of a man become purified through divine love. Chaitanya and Nityananda scattered the name of Hari to everyone, including the pariah, and embraced them all. A Brahmin without this love is no longer a Brahmin. And a pariah with the love of God is no longer a pariah (155). This, however, is the last word about the caste system. The superiority or inferiority of a man does not depend on his caste or his position in society. It depends upon his mental purity.

Apart from these, it can be said that once he received the invitation of Rani Rashmani and stayed thereafter. He took meals there as he liked. He worshiped there the Goddess 'Ma Kali' in a temple established by Rani Rashmani and said 'Ma Kali' during his prayer 'Seshkale Amake Kaibarther Vat khayali Ma. Ar katodin khayabi Ma'. Godadhar expressed his grievances several times regarding this matter and ultimately took decision to move Brindaban for staying there with Ghangamoni. He drank the water of the river Ganga repeatedly to purify himself and said 'Aktu Suddha Hayenei Ma'⁶¹. One day Puran Dasi Bhagabati of Mathurbabu touched the legs of Sri Ramakrishna Deb to know her best regards but Sri Ramakrishna Deb suddenly said, "Mago Amar Pai Sing Maccher Katter Jala Anubhav Hoschhe; Gangajal Neye Ayare ... Pata Suddha Kori. Gobindo Gobindo Bole Tini Paye Gangajal Dhalte Thaken." Under this situation, Puran Dasi Bhagabati feared at that moment. In spite of that Ramakrishna Deb asked in anger, "Amoni Amar Paye Hat Diye Pronam Korli? Torato Asprisha Ta Janis Na?"⁶² One day Madhusudhan went to meet Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deb and took part in discussion with his well-known friends who were the devoted disciples of Ramakrishna Deb. His friends prayed to Ramakrishna Deb with delightfully after the discussion with Madhu to say something about Madhu. But Ramakrishna Deb rapidly expressed his unwillingness

to talk with Madhu as he belonged to the Mlecche caste by saying “Akjan Mleschher Sathe Ami Ki Kotha Kobo?”⁶³

Another incident may be mentioned to highlight the anti-lower caste mentality of Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deb. This was happened when the never-ending canceristic disease seriously attacked Swami Ramakrishna. He was advised by the doctor to take complete rest in bed and instructed to take hot Payesh to relieve from canceristic pains and inflammation. Naturally, required nursing was inevitable for him. Latu and Gopal played a vital role in this connection. Ramakrishna Deb noticed suddenly when he used to take sit for meal that Latu and Gopal who were the Sudras, stood behind his bed by touching. Ramakrishna Deb became very angry at once and said Naren, “Oder Bichhana Chhere Dite Bal Naren!” Naren did not like this attitude of his Guru Ramakrishna Deb and replied him, “Keno Chharbe? Apanito Dhora Chhoar Opar, Abar a Adesh Keno”. He told Naren very sadly, “Brahmaner Sarir Tai Balchhi, Brahmaner Sanskar Jabar Nay re . . . !”⁶⁴

Some scholars made it clear that Sri Ramakrishna expressed his views towards the issues of the caste system and untouchability from the spiritual point of view. But his remarks regarding the case of Rani Rashmani, Laltu, Gopal and Madhu in the context of caste and untouchability were really self-contradictory and self-explanatory to understand the mentality of Sri Ramakrishna. Practically speaking, he never spontaneously came forward to eradicate the institution of the caste system and untouchability that gauged and wrecked the human rights and privileges of the lowborn peoples in India. He was mainly convinced by the traditional beliefs and faiths in these contexts. Therefore, he failed to find out any practical measures to eradicate these inhuman barriers permanently except the idle talking of the spiritual and emotional point of views. He was staunch Brahmin. Therefore, he could not do anything for the betterment of the toiling masses without propagating the spiritual and mechanical devices of Brahmanism that was completely responsible for the rise and growth of the caste system and untouchability.

The emerging 19th century Renaissance men of India like Ram Mohan, Vidyasagar and others came forward to reform the Hindu society on the basis of the evidences of the Hindu Sastras and the principles of humanism. The main motto of the Brahmo

movement was to eradicate all sorts of the socio-religious evils and superstitions from the Hindu society. On the other hand, a new trend of revivalism of the Hindu religion based on the Golden Vedic traditions and cultures was emerged in a different way under the leadership of Swami Dayanand Saraswati and others. Another principal object was to remove the Hindu society from the curse of the Caste system and Untouchability. However, they did not success at all. The emergence of Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deb in Bengal under these unavoidable socio-religious environments did not create an epoch-making role to ban the Caste system and Untouchability from the so-called Hindu society. It is generally highlighted that Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deb was a great saint in Bengal as well as India who was a worshiper of 'Ma Kali'. But he did not remove himself from the age-old evil traditions and superstitions like Caste system and Untouchability.

g. Vivekananda: (1863 –1902)

Vivekananda was better known as Narendranath Dutta who was born in Shimla Pally, Calcutta, on January 12, 1863. His nickname was Bile. He did not believe anything without its evidence. The name of his parents was Vishvanath Datta and Bhuvaneshwari Debi. His mother was a religious woman. In fact, Vivekananda belonged to a Kayastha family. Even when he was young, he questioned the validity of superstitious customs and discrimination based on caste and religion. But his attitude towards the issue of caste was based on the principle of 'Varna Theory' of the Rig Vedic society. He did not believe in the modern hereditary caste system of the so-called Hindu society. But he played a very controversial role towards the issue of caste and untouchability. He vehemently opposed to the tyranny of the priestly class and ritualism. He was the great upholder of the early Vedic Varna system as like Swami Dayanand. The European Renaissance man as like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Vidyasagar did not influence him. He explained the root of the Hindu Caste System and its greatness in a different manner. His vision and mission was to develop India spiritually. The teachings, i.e., "Jiva is Shiva" (each individual is divinity itself) of his Guru. Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa greatly influenced the mind set up of Vivekananda which he coined the concept of *daridra narayana seva* - the service of God in and through (poor) human beings. He had no faith in a social reform programme that created an elitist group. Once he pointed out that he did not believed in a God or religion, which could not wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread

to the orphan's mouth. Besides, the reform movements like Sati-abolition and widow re-marriage would not succeed as they were confined only to the upper one percent of the population. He treated every man a traitor who had been educated at the expenses of the ill-fated hunger and ignorant toiling masses but paid no heed to them. He also pointed out that the new India was to arise from the farmer's plough, the fritter-seller's oven, from the huts, from the forests, from the peasants and the working classes. In fact, he offered a synthesis between the old and the new. He played a self-contradictory role towards the issue of caste. Once he pointed out that "Kick out the priests who are always against progress, because they would never mend. Their hearts would never become big. They are the offspring of centuries of superstition and tyranny. Root out priestcraft first... The Brahmanas suck the blood of these poor people, without even the least effort for their amelioration – is that a country or hell? Is that a religion or the devils dance?"⁶⁵ Vivekananda said, "Priestcraft is in its nature cruel and heartless. That is why religion goes down where Priestcraft arises."⁶⁶ He also said, "I must tell you that I am neither a caste-breaker nor a mere social reformer. I have nothing to do directly with your castes or your social reformation..."⁶⁷ Not only that but also he did not like untouchability. He expressed his grievances towards the issue of untouchability and said that "Touch-me-not-ism' is your creed and the kitchen-pot your deity, you cannot rise spiritually. . . Don't touch us! Don't touch us! Is there any compassion or kindness of heart in the country? Only a class of 'Don't – touchists'; kick such customs out!"⁶⁸ Vivekananda knew it very well that liberty of thought and action is the only condition of life, of growth and well-being. So he said, "What it does not exist, the man, the race, the nation must go down. .. Caste or no caste, creed, any man, or class, or caste, or nation, or institution which bars the power of free thought and action of an individual-even so long as that power does not injure others – is devilish and must go down"⁶⁹.

He said that "The present religion of the Hindus is not in the Vedas, nor in the Puranas, nor in Bhakti, nor in Mukti – religion has entered into the cooking-pot. The present religion of the Hindus is neither the path of knowledge, nor that of Reason – it is 'Don't-touchism' ... 'Don't-touchism' is a form of mental disease. Beware!"⁷⁰

It is very interesting to note that Vivekananda expressed his grievances against the Priesthood but ultimately by the introduction of 'Kumari-Puja' in the Mahastami in

the Durga Puja, he re-established the supremacy of the so-called Brahmanism, Priesthood and the superstitious concept of the Caste System. Not only that but also he advocated the pernicious method of the caste system on the line of birth circle that was institutionalized by Manu, the so-called ancient lawmaker of the Hindu Sastras. First of all, he should/ would not use the term 'caste' instead of 'class' in the context of the 'Varnashrama Dharma' as because it was completely based on the division of labour on the basis of three Gunas i.e., Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas that were the only parameters of the upward mobility and downward mobility of an individual from one class circle to another class circle. Besides, he did not free himself from the age-old superstitious conviction, which was mentioned very clearly in his book viz., 'Caste, Culture and Socialism' that 'The Brahmin, by his very birth, is the Lord of the universe. Even the most wicked Brahmin must be worshiper priestcraft is the bone of India... The priest knows the gods and communicates with them; he is, therefore, worshipped as a god.'⁷¹ Once he wanted to ban priest and priesthood because they could not avoid their responsibility for all the irrational developments in the Hindu Society in the form of regulations about food, marriage, untouchability, etc. that created numerous socio-religious problems in the so-called Brahmanical Hindu religion. However, he said, 'all caste either on the principle of birth or of merit is bondage' which was self-contradictory, self-explanatory, indecisive, inclusive and unscientific attitude of Vivekananda towards real context of the Varna theory of the Rig Vedic society. His unscientific and multi-dimensional attitude towards the issue of caste as follows was really discouraging and disappointing;

"Caste is a natural order...Caste is good. That is the only natural way of solving life."⁷² This argument of Vivekananda was nothing but an expression of Orthodox Hindus towards the issue of caste. As because he did not overcome the psychological limitations relating to caste due to his profound believe in the Hindu caste philosophy. Otherwise, he did not think it. He did not mind about the unnatural existence of the caste system in the so-called Hindu society, which wrecked the power, position, status, privileges, liberty to live honourably etc. of the lower strata in Hindu the society and brought them into the position of animal, beast and slave. There was no existence of caste system as such the so-called Hindus at all in the world society. However, the opinion Vivekananda relating this issue created numerous contradictory and unscientific outlooks, which did not help us to solve the

problems of caste in the Hindu society. Not only that but also his argument for caste was really ridiculous and illogical. He said, "It is owing to caste that three hundred millions of people can find a piece of bread to eat yet."⁷³ In fact, he had perhaves forgotten about the several thousand millions of people who lived and enjoyed beyond the Hindu caste institution more or less all sorts of privileges, liberty etc. in the society. Not only that but also Vivekananda did not mention about them who managed to find out their livelihood freely in their own way beyond Hindu caste system?

He gave top priority to the Vedic Varnashrama system that was completely based on the theory of Karma (action), virtuous deeds and the principal of three Gunas i.e., Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas and emphasized for the abolition of the present day hereditary caste system. But this Varnashrama system was based on the principle of class not on caste. Only the Purusha Sukta, the interpolated verses of the later Vedic period mentioned the concept of caste in the context of the creation of the human beings in the universe. Vivekananda perhaves missed the term class and used the term caste in the perspective of the Vedic Varnashrama system that was fundamentally opposite to each other. That is why, he wrongly pointed out that "Caste should not go; but should only be readjusted accordingly . . . It is sheer nonsense to desire the abolition of caste."⁷⁴ Besides, his following explanation regarding the Indian caste and the European caste was not logically justified. As there was no such caste concept like the so-called caste system of the Hindus at all, which was completely based on hereditary birth circle that was introduced by Manu, the ancient lawmaker of the Hindu Sastras rather than class in Europe:

"Indian caste is better than the caste which prevails in Europe or America . . . , it is absolutely good." Not only that but also, his following attitudes towards the basis of the Indian social order can not be logically and scientifically approved:

"What is the basis of the India's social order? It is the caste law. I am born for the caste; I live for the caste. . . . Born in the caste; the whole life must be lived according to caste regulation. . . . It is the caste that determinates all that."⁷⁵

He gave the following instruction for the solution of the Indian caste problem was nothing but an idealistic approach only:

“In the beginning of the Satya-Yuga (Golden Age) there was one caste, the Brahmanas; and then by difference of occupation they went on dividing themselves into different castes; and that is the only true ...The solution of the caste problem in India, therefore, assumes this form – not to degrade the higher castes, not to crush out the Brahmana.”⁷⁶

He wrote a constitution for Ramkrishna Math-Mission in which he mentioned in article no. 19 “Only the Hindu boys of good family will be admitted in this mission”⁷⁷. His explanation regarding the priest and the so-called Brahmana was self-contradictory. He noted them as a medium of communication between man and God. Another point was that Vivekananda himself highlighted the matter that human body is itself a temple and a living place of God. To serve Jiva means to serve God itself. The following statement of him was really very important:

“God is present in every Jiva (individual man); there is no other God besides that. ‘Who serves Jiva, serves God indeed.’”

The attitude of Vivekananda towards the issue of caste and untouchability was discouraging. He was a great upholder of the so-called Hindu Caste System. He vividly narrated the utility and its inevitability to protect our society and when this necessity for self-preservation will no more exist, they will die a natural death. Not only that but also he pointed out that the existence of the institutions of caste system and untouchability were utmost necessity to protect us as a nation. He said that there was no caste in religion. A man from the highest caste and a man from the lowest may become a monk in India and the two castes become equal. Caste is a social custom, and all our great preachers have tried to break it down. From Buddhism downwards, every sect has preached against caste, and every time it has only riveted the chains. Beginning from Buddha to Ram Mohan Ray, everyone made the mistake of holding caste to be a religious institution and tried to pull down religion and caste altogether, and failed. That is why, his argument towards the reforms of the Hindu society in connection with caste and untouchability was astonishing as follows:

In religion, there is no caste; caste is simply a social custom⁷⁸. Reform does not mean wholesale breaking down. .. In fact, a person belonged to the lower or higher strata of the so-called Hindu society could change his profession as he liked during the Vedic age and enjoyed the privileges to become a Brahmana, Kshatriya and Vaishya. But it was completely depended upon his requisite qualifications. That is why; Viswamitra and Parashurama enjoyed the opportunity to become a Brahmana and a Kshatriya respectively. Even the following argument of Vivekananda can not be accepted as because every caste rules were made for the undue privileges, status, position and superiority of the so-called Dwijas (twice born), especially the Brahmanas but the exploitation, humiliation, suppression, negation of humanity imposed upon the lower strata of the Hindu society in the time of Manu, the so-called law maker of the Hindu Sastras:

“In the land of Bharata (India), every social rule is for the protection of the weak. Such is our ideal of caste, as meant for raising all humanity slowly and gently towards the realization of the great ideal of spiritual man, who is non-resisting, calm, steady, worshipful, pure and meditative.”⁷⁹

h. Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920)

Tilak was not a social reformer in the sense in which Rammohan Roy is entitled as a social reformer. He was a Puritan. He favoured re-marriages of widows, advocated female education, opposed untouchability and condemned discrimination that based on castes and creeds. He was a great lover of ancient Indian tradition and culture. He pointed out that there could be no social reform without political reform, no national education without a national government. His declaration of sympathy for the poor and the depressed classes was of course appreciating. But he was not in favour of violent social reform. He played a vital role in awakening the national spirit through the Shivaji and Ganapati festivals which gave birth of Muslim communalism. He was a militant nationalist. But he did not give emphasis on radical social reforms. His approach was totally based on Indian tradition and socio-cultural heritage. Prof Dev Raj Bali pointed out in his book, ‘Modern Indian Political Thought’ that Tilak was a social reformer. His declaration of sympathy for the poor and the depressed classes was much appreciated. But he was not in favour of violent social reform. He also pointed out that Tilak wanted genuine reform of the society and not blind imitation of

the West. He was a lover of peace, lover of Indian culture and tradition and wanted reform with respect for Indian tradition. He wanted social reform movement that would not run counter to the religions and patriotic susceptibilities of the Indian people. He also said that all reforms grow from within and unless people are sufficiently prepared by the assimilation of liberal ideas it was useless to march ahead. Tilak pointed out that we should not want to anglicize our institutions and to denationalize them in the name of social and political reforms. He refused to be hoodwinked by the outbursts of the reformers that social reform was the necessary antecedent of political progress. He was opposed to the proposition that social reformism was the necessary antecedent for obtaining political right from the British rulers. He wanted political rights because only after obtaining them the proper atmosphere could be created for the development of the comprehensive activities of the nation. Meantime, by the teachings and precepts the consciousness of the nation was to be gradually prepared for the acceptance of social transformation. Therefore, it can be said that Tilak's attitude to social reform was dictated by his comprehensive conception of politics and culture. But he was a nationalist and his purpose of organizing festivals was to awaken the national spirit. He said that religious education was necessary because the study of high principles kept us away from evil pursuits.

He highlighted the necessity of the divine arrangement of the caste system. He strongly advocated the inevitability of the caste system to maintain statuesque in the arena of social discipline. His caste philosophy was not fundamentally different of his predecessors. He said that caste system played a vital role in respect of social control. He supported the physical structure of the caste system that was helping to each caste to become expert on a particular work. The hereditary experience of a particular work ultimately accelerated the pace of development. He identified the Indian caste system as a secular and social organization that was based on the distinction of occupation etc. Prof. V.P.Verma said that Tilak had identified three purpose of the caste system.

Firstly, it had preserved the knowledge of industrial arts.

Secondly, it had checked the abuse of despotic political power.

Thirdly, it had kept up feeling of morality, self-respect and superiority amongst the people.

Tilak was a conservative social reformer. Once he said, "I am a liberal Hindu. We have always been advocates of reform, reform we say, but not of rebellion or licence."⁸⁰ According to V.S.Patil, "Tilak had sympathy towards untouchable and he work for the eradiction of untouchability"⁸¹. Tilak asked wealthy class and especially the social reformers to donate one percent of their annual income for the social reform works. He donated Rs. one lakh for the social reform works of the race in 1916.

j. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

Rabindranath Tagore obtained the Nobel Prize for the writings of 'Gitanjali', which earned name and fame for him and his country. He developed a positive view of life and love of humanity under the inspirations of the liberal ideas and philosophical traditions of the Upanishads and the humanist tradition and the teachings of Goutam Buddha. He pointed out that the teachings of Goutam Buddha would cultivate our moral power to the highest extent in the field of our activities, which would not found to the plane of our narrow self⁸². Besides, Rabindranath Tagore realized the importance of love for all humankind irrespective of caste, creed and sex by the interpretation of the idea of divine manifestation in Kabir's poems through which Kabir raised his voice against all kinds of dogmas and superstitions of Hinduism. Therefore, he highlighted the social structure of the Hindu society of his time, noted its age-old evils, and gave proposals for remedies. However, his attitude towards the issues of the caste system and untouchability was mainly based on the principal approach of humanism and synthetic. Varnashram system was the backbone of the Hindu society. He noted very clearly on the basis of this system that "The Indian mind has ever been oriented towards that transcendentalism which does not hold religion to be ultimate but rather to be a means to a farther end. This end consists in the perfect liberation of the individual in the universal spirit across the furthest limits of humanity itself."⁸³ He was a great admirer of the Varnashram system. But he condemned the term 'dwija'. He also criticized the use of this term in a narrow sense for Brahmins. He said that it should be used for all classes. Knowledge channels should be properly utilized and opened to all classes. But the caste based Indian society has suppressed rights of a section of class. So he condemned everything based on supernatural powers. He "was a severe critic of caste system"⁸⁴. He also pointed

out that the caste system and their attendant practices of untouchability were among the darkest blots of Indian society.”⁸⁵

Tagore strongly condemned caste system along with untouchability practiced in the Hindu society. He highlighted the malady in all its details. He noted in details the feelings of the untouchables, their disabilities through his dance drama ‘Chandalika’ and his novel ‘Gora’ and proposed remedy. That is why; he made solid efforts for the removal of untouchability. He made a Scouting Team named ‘Brati Balak’ for fighting untouchability. He noted social evils prevalent in rural India by the novel ‘Gora’. He said, “Gora saw the image of his country’s weakness, naked and unashamed, ... The tradition which merely divided men into classes and separated class from class ...only put obstacles at every step”⁸⁶ Paresh Babu in Gora noted the wrath of untouchability as follows:

“There is no harm in a cat sitting by and eating right besides you. But if certain men so much as enter the room, the food has to be thrown away. How can one not condemn the caste system which has resulted in this contempt and insult of man by man?”⁸⁷ He pointed out that the intolerable aversion of man for man in our country and how it divided and sub-divided our people shocked him. That is why; he wanted the society in which the distinctions of caste, untouchability and religions should go. He said in the words of Gora, “Today give me mantra of that deity who belongs to all, Hindu, Mussulman, Christian and Brahma alike – the doors of whose temple are never closed to any person of any caste, whatever, He who is not merely the God of the Hindus but who is the God of India herself.”⁸⁸

Rabindranath Tagore highlighted the age-old socio-religious problems of the Sudras and the untouchables by his article named ‘Sudra Dharma’ in 1925. His main motive behind this article was to draw attention to the countrymen regarding the inhuman nature, character, illogical, and unscientific bases of the caste system and untouchability that were against the ideas of liberty, equality, fraternity and the progressive trend of the nation as well as the country. He did not favour the socio-religious division of Varna based on different professions. Not only that but also, he highlighted the irrelevant content of the Sastras as follows: Sadharme Nidhang Sreyo: Parodharmo Vayabhaya: that compelled every man to stay within their Varna circle

until death. Therefore, it is illogical and unscientific⁸⁹. Man can work repeatedly as a mechanical instrument for the same Varna very easily without the versatile manifestation of his knowledge for the benefit of the nation as a whole⁹⁰.

Therefore, it can be pointed out from the above noted discussions that the 19th century Renaissance and Reformation Movement failed to eradicate the problems of the Caste System and Untouchability. Most of the 19th century intellectuals continued the tradition of the Indian National Congress in this respect although there were a few exceptions who demanded the abolition of caste system, untouchability etc. They expressed their views and opinions theoretically in a very limited way and did not come forward spontaneously to launch a direct movement against the abolition of the Caste System and Untouchability from the Hindu Society. Realizing the importance of its abolition, they did nothing but ideal talking. They knew it very well that India can not be developed as a 'Nation State' without its eradication. Even they differed in their respective approach in this issue. Naturally, they were unable to introduce a crusade that would radically reform the Indian Society. The name of Raja Rammohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Dayananda Saraswati, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Annie Besant, Swami Vivekananda and others may be mentioned in order to understand the intellectual dichotomy towards the issue of the caste system and untouchability.

3.5. The Role of the British Government towards the Issue of Caste

The role of the British Government can categorically be analyzed in order to understand their attitude towards the issue of caste and the problem of untouchability. Their imperialist rule from the battle of Plessey to the independence of India was very important in this connection. The first phase began with the grant of Diwani in Bengal Bihar and Orissa to the East India Company of the British Crown. The main motto of this Company was to extend their monopoly business in India. As a result, India ultimately came under their direct economic preview. The Company consolidated its power and position to bring the Bombay and Madras Presidency within their direct politico-economic rule. However, the company did not adopt any welfare measures in connection with the caste system and untouchability for the greater benefit of the toiling masses in India. It was natural as because the Company came India for economic gain. The Company got chance to establish its imperialist

rule with the help of the British Government. Naturally, a large conquered territory of India came under the Company rule. It severely exploited India. But the British Government introduced the Regulating Act of 1773 by which the Governor-General-in-Council were empowered to make rules, ordinances and regulations for the better Government of the Company's entire territories. It was the beginning of the law making power of the Government in India. Therefore, it can be said that the issue of caste and untouchability was not a matter of headache to the Company as well as the British Crown in this phase. But it was noted in the Bengal Judicature Act of 1781 that the rules and forms of the Supreme Court were to respect the religion and usages of the people of India. Therefore, it was vividly clear that the British Government adopted completely inactive decisions relating to the Caste System and untouchability. They firmly took the decision not to interfere on this issues that would create problems of their administrations. Even the Company got privileges for another 20 years in India by the Charter Act of 1793. Charter Acts were passed after every 20 years, i.e., 1793, 1833 and 1853. However, the Charter Act of 1813 opened India to all British citizens for trade and commerce. The Governor General of India was given full authority by the Charter Act of 1833 to 'superintend, direct and control' Government of the remaining parts of India in all matter, relating to the civil, military and revenue administration. A duty was laid on the Governor-General-in-Council to pass legislation for improving the condition of Indians without injuring their sentiments. The Indian Slavery Act and much later progressive legislation were the results of this policy. A Law Member, for purely legislative purposes, was added to the Governor-General's Council. Practically speaking, the British Government did not adopt any radical measures to change the ill-fated social conditions of the downtrodden relating to Caste and Untouchability as it was not possible for them without directly interfering for eradicating the unscientific and divine superstitions of the Brahmanical Hindu social norms and ordinances. Their main object was to rule India with full economic gain without disturbing their existing socio-religious conditions from the imperialistic point of view. But a provision was included in this Act to make legislation for improving the conditions of the Indians that was a pioneering work on behalf of the British Government towards the benefit of the Indians, irrespective of caste, class, creed, religion, sex etc. Even the Board of Control was authorized by the Charter Act of 1853 to make rules and regulations governing appointments to the services in India. As a result, the Indian Civil Service Examination was thrown open

to the public and entry to that service was made possible through an open competition irrespective of caste, class, sex and religion. Therefore, the greatness of the British Government towards the lower strata of the Hindu society was vividly mentioned. But the Government of India Act was passed by the British Parliament in 1858 after the suppression of the Revolt of 1857. As a result, the East India Company was abolished. The Act transferred the Government of India from the Company to Crown and India was henceforth, to be governed directly in the name of the Crown. The various changes introduced by the Act were formally announced in India by a Proclamation of Queen Victoria on November 1, 1858.

Apart from these, the Indian Council Acts of 1861, 1892 and 1909 were passed respectively with a motto of legislation. The Indian Council Act of 1861 was an important landmark in the Constitutional History of India. Indians were given privileged to be nominated for the first time to the Supreme Legislative Council for the purpose of legislation. However, the greatest evil of the Minto-Morley Reforms Act of 1909 was the grant of separate electorate to Muslims. But the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 (The Government of India Act) provided for the establishment, for the first time in India, of a Public Service Commission. The Communal or Separate Electorate, injected into body politic of India under the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909, was further extended to the Sikhs, Europeans, Anglo-Indians and Christians in Provinces where the influence of these Communities could be weighty. Therefore, it can be said that the British Government introduced these policies to 'divide and rule' India to fulfill their target without considering the basic needs and demands of the Depressed Classes and the untouchables.

In fact, the British did little to modify India's socio-religious customs in the initial phase. They adopted then 'hands off policy' to produce planned social change. They promised complete religious neutrality and freedom of worship to the people. Some exceptions were that the civil statutes (for example, Removal of Caste Disabilities Act) and courts sometimes regulated marriage and that the criminal courts, in stead of the caste councils, decided cases of assaults, adultery and rape. In spite of the legislation of inter-caste marriage by the Special Marriage Act of 1872, these never became numerically important. The British transferred the judicial powers of the caste councils to the civil and the criminal courts which affected the authority which

panchayats held over their members. Therefore, it can be said that the British Government passed some Acts (Caste Disabilities Removal Act of 1850, Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 and the Special Marriage Act of 1872) under the pressure of the emerging 19th century intelligentsia to remove some of the social disabilities of untouchables. All these legislations were passed by the British Government purely for administrative reasons and not because it wanted to eradicate the caste system. Some scholars pointed out that most of the activities of the British Government were dictated by prudence of administration and not by a desire to reduce the rigidity of caste. But the British Government did not implement uniform rules over the three Presidencies. In Bengal one of the Regulations, while recognizing the integrity of caste institution, permitted suits for restoration of caste to be entertained by the ordinary courts⁹¹. Even cases of expulsion from different associations were of an entirely different nature from excommunication from caste. But in the case of Bombay Presidency it was completely different in nature as the pertinent regulation mentioned that 'no court shall interfere in any caste question, beyond the admission and trial of the alleged injury to the caste and character of the plaintiff arising from some illegal act of the other party'⁹². The social privileges in the context of caste were totally brought within the jurisdiction of the caste. It was held only when a complainant alleged that a legal right either of property or of office was violated by his exclusion from the caste that a suit might be entertained by a court of law⁹³. The establishment of British courts, administering a uniform criminal law, removed from the purview of caste, many matters that used to be erstwhile adjudicated by it. Naturally, the British courts played a vital role to take decision in case of assault, adultery and rape. As a result, the caste council had lost its former importance in proportion. Although the intention of the British Government was not to interfere in case of civil law, such as marriage, divorce, etc. that were guiding by the caste norms but various decisions of the High Courts set aside the authority of caste.

The Bombay authority deputed two officials, like Borradaile and Steele to make compilations of the various usages and customs of the many castes of the Presidency. They made it. But the same compilations were not prepared in other provinces. It was mentioned in the clauses of the Widow-Remarriage Act of 1856 that while legalizing the marriage of a Hindu widow, this Act deprived such a re-married widow of all her rights and interests in her deceased husband's property. But the court had taken a

reasonable decision later on and had decreed that this Act would only applied to those widows who could not, without the aid of the Act, remarry according to their caste-usage. Naturally, widows of castes allowing remarriage forfeited their rights and interests in their deceased husband's property only when caste-usage enjoined such forfeiture⁹⁴. The Bombay High Court gave a verdict in 1876 that 'Courts of law will not recognize the authority of a caste to declare a marriage void, or to give permission to a woman to remarry'⁹⁵. But certain decisions of the High Courts had emboldened the non-Bramanic castes to dislodge the Brahmins from their monopoly of priesthood. It was generally held in Bengal and in North India that that anyone could perform priestly service who was deputed by the householder and got some fees from him. Even there was no office of priest⁹⁶.

The non-Brahmin castes of Maratha country when launched a reform movement to perform their religious rites without the aid of the Brahmin priests who lodged a complain against them for violating their hereditary rights. But the Bombay High Court gave a verdict on this issue where it was clearly noted that people could engage any priest whom they liked and they were not compelled to call the hereditary priest to perform their religious services. But the Madras High Court gave a verdict on the same issue with few exceptions. It was noted here that the hereditary priest must be paid some fees by way of compensation⁹⁷. The Castes-Disabilities Removal Act of 1850 stirred the very foundation at the integrity of caste. It was noted in this Act that a person did not forfeit his ordinary rights of property by loss of caste or change of religion. Normally, the marriage between the two different castes was strictly prohibited and it was treated invalid unless specially sanctioned by customs. But the British Courts had given varied decisions relating to this issue. The Court did not declare a marriage null and void that was held between a Sudra Hindu and a Christian woman in Madras⁹⁸.

Apart from this, the Special Marriage Act of 1872 gave an opportunity for the Indian to make a valid marriage with a person belonging to any caste or creed. Social reformers continued their agitation to liberalize the marriage law. The British administrators ultimately came forward to placing untouchables on a footing of civil equality as they were devoid of many civil rights. The Bombay Government considered the case of a Mahar boy who was denied admission into the Government

School at Dharwar. The Government announced in a press-note in 1858 that “although the Governor-in-Council does not contemplate the introduction of low-caste pupils into schools, the expenses of which are shared with Government by local contributors and patrons who object to such a measure, he reserves to himself the full right of refusing the support of Government to any partially aided school in which the benefits of education are withheld from any class of persons on account of caste or race and further resolves that all schools maintained at the sole cost of Government shall be open to all classes of its subjects without distinction.”⁹⁹

Another press-note of 1915 referred to the “familiar sight of Mahar and other depressed class boys in village schools where the boys are often not allowed to enter the school room but are accommodated outside the room on the verandah.” As a result, the Government declared that no grants would be paid to any aided educational institution, which refused admission to the children of the Depressed Classes in 1923. Therefore, the depressed class students got opportunity to sit in their classes like the caste Hindus in the Local Board, Municipal schools and in the Central Division of the Presidency. The Government of Bombay came forward to enforce the right of the Depressed Classes on equal treatment in the eyes of law. But the Madras Government codifying a law for empowering village Magistrates to punish the offenders of the lower castes by imprisonment though the Government pledged itself in 1914 to discontinue this inhuman practice¹⁰⁰.

Under these unavoidable circumstances, a Bill was introduced in the Madras Legislative Council to open all public roads, streets, pathways etc. for giving entry to any public office, place, well, tank etc. to all classes of people including the Depressed Classes¹⁰¹. Even the Depressed Classes got special opportunity to represent themselves in local and Legislative bodies by nomination. The British Government introduced uniform laws. They did not recognize any kind of disabilities as lawful that was imposed upon the non-Brahmin castes. First all Brahmins were greatly benefited by English education. Their antipathy towards the lower strata of the Hindu society, role of the sympathetic officers of the British and the constant demand of the reformers to abolish all sorts of disabilities imposed upon the depressed classes and untouchables greatly influenced the British Government to take special measures to save the life of these half-submerged castes. As a result,

Chatfield, the Director of Public Instruction in Bombay granted some special privileges to these castes in 1878. He adopted some special measures to consider the fees of the students of that caste in primary schools and made arrangement for scholarships for those boys in secondary schools and colleges. The non-Brahmin leaders strongly demanded special representation for their castes both in the services and in administrative bodies. The Maharaja of Kolhapur raised this demand once again when Mr. Montague came to India. The main motto of Mr. Montague was to consult the Government of India along with the people of India relating to the future form of constitution of the Government. He reframed the reformed constitution and it was declared that non-Brahmins were provided with special representation through mixed electorates. Naturally, the Hindu population was categorically divided into three sections in the Bombay Presidency such as; Brahmins and allied castes; the intermediate classes formed by Marathas and others and the backward classes including the so-called untouchables¹⁰² Even the Finance Department of the Bombay Government adopted a resolution in this connection dated 17 September 1923. It was clearly resolved here to prohibit recruitment from the advance caste of Brahmins and others to the lower services until the members of the intermediate and backward castes or classes filled up a certain proportion of the posts¹⁰³. The Census of 1901 was prepared under the guidance of Sir Herbert Risley that played a vital role in this connection. The British government did not recognize caste as a unit empowered to administer justice. Even they did not set aside the customs of a caste in respect of civil law unless they opposed to public policy. Naturally, it retained its cultural integrity. However, Mr. Middleton, one of the two Superintendents of Census operations of 1921 said about the effects of the British administration on caste in the Punjab. He expressed the following views:

‘I had intended pointing out that there is a very wide revolt against the classification of occupational castes; that these castes have been largely manufactured and almost entirely preserve as separate castes by the British Government. Our land records and official documents have added iron bonds to the old rigidity of caste. Caste in itself was rigid among the higher castes, but malleable amongst the lower. We pigeonholed every one by caste, and if we could not find a true caste for them, labeled them with the name of a hereditary occupation. We deplore the caste-system and its effects on social and economic problems, but we are largely responsible for the system which

we deplore. Left to themselves such castes as Sonar and Lohar would rapidly disappear and no one would suffer... Government's passion for labels and pigeon-holes has led to a crystallization of the caste system, which, except amongst the aristocratic castes, was really very fluid under indigenous rule... If the Government would ignore caste it would gradually be replaced by something very different amongst the lower castes."¹⁰⁴

The Bombay Government submitted a memorandum to the Indian Statutory Commission (1928) and complained that the District School Boards where the non-Brahmins have had a majority, 'have almost in every case attempted to oust the Brahmins regardless of all consideration of efficiency.' But the British Government tried to find out the causes of the revolt of 1857 in the hereditary pattern of the caste system. They noticed that the Bengal Army was made of higher castes Brahmins and the Rajputs. Many higher officers of the British Government realized the necessity of recruiting different castes in the Army. Major-General H.T. Tucker emphasized on keeping the country under British domination through the policy of divide and rule. His policy was to divide different bodies and separate various castes for the recruitment into the Army. Sir Lepel Griffin, a higher officer of the British Government pointed out that caste was useful in preventing rebellion¹⁰⁵. Roman Church accommodated caste in its practical programme with a motto of propagating its faith in India inspite of the opposition to the humanitarian principles of the Church. As a result, Pope Gregory XV played a vital role to sanction caste rules in the Christian Churches in India¹⁰⁶. The dichotomy of higher-caste social reformers and militant role of Jotirao Phule and humanitarian approach of Sri Narayan Guru forced the British Government to re-think about the curse of caste and untouchability created by the Brahmins. Montague and Chelmsford had to grant some demands like, the representation for all classes of the Hindus in all the local bodies, the services and institutions of them in their political reforms in India¹⁰⁷.

Apart from these, the establishment of the British paramountcy in colonial India ushered new social, economic and political conditions in India. It had far-reaching consequences. The economic foundations of the caste were deteriorated in a large scale by the new economic forces and forms. The process of industrialization in colonial India created new vocations and modern cities that stirred the very

foundations of the caste system in India. The introduction of a network of railways and buses played a vital role to undermine the hereditary professions of castes and exclusive habits of their followers. Naturally, the people of different castes had to move from one place to another willingly or unwillingly for their works by trains or buses. As a result, different castes were more or less bound to travel together in trains or buses for their livelihood that reduced caste tension. They were forced to adjust with different castes in respect of occupations, industrial sectors and means of communications. The people got opportunity to move town for joining to other vocations by leaving their hereditary professions. They got greater options with the creation of the right to own property in land. The proportionate industrial development in the colonial India and the deteriorated rural economy forced the farmers to move to cities where they became factory workers or domestic servants that broke the very basis of caste system. None was able to follow caste-dictated functions under these unavoidable circumstances. Economic necessities and ambitions bound the educated Brahmins to become a leather trader or a merchant, or a clerk who would have been identified with horror before the British came in India¹⁰⁸. Necessity to associate with the members of other castes at social functions and different industrial sectors hastened the process of breakdown of the caste integrity. Even the Brahmins bound to take meals from hotels or restaurants with a Sudra or low caste people, as there was no other option to them. Naturally, the peoples of different castes were forced to rub their shoulders with the lower castes or untouchables during their journey by trains or buses. The paraphernalia of modern social existence did not recognize caste or communal divisions. The British Government played a vital role by introducing a uniform system of law in colonial India that dealt a severe blow to the social and legal inequalities and disparities rampant in the Hindu society. The concept of equality before law, irrespective of caste, class, creed or religion was established with a new ideas. The people of India ultimately divided into different categories like, capitalists, merchants, land labourers, doctors, lawyears etc. this horizontal division on new class lines rapidly weakened the old vertical caste-lines. Even the lower castes, untouchables and upper castes peoples fought unitedly for their common interest to increase wage and improving their working conditions. Besides, the British Government adopted a liberal and secular education policy for India. As a result, it made accessible to anyone, irrespective of caste, class, creed or religion. The emergent 19th century intelligentsia was the

product of the liberal education policy of the British Government who prepared the ground of anti-caste revolt in India.

Under these unavoidable circumstances, Ambedkar – the leader of the Depressed Classes tried to transform these classes into a political army and pressed their political claims which were conceded in the Constitution of 1935 in the form of special representation of these classes. He fought for equal social rights to the untouchables. He criticized the role of the British Government on the issue of untouchability. He submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission on 29 May 1928 relating to the safeguards for the protection of the Depressed Classes as a minority in the Bombay Presidency. Ambedkar demanded protection through the educational benefit of the Depressed Classes, unrestricted recruitment of them in the army, navy, police force and effective representation of them in the Local Bodies. But the Simon Commission strategically under-evaluated the needs and claims of the Depressed Classes. Ambedkar complained against the attitude of the Simon Commission. He urged for equal citizenship, eradication of untouchability and caste discrimination. He advocated the demand of Dominion Status of the Indian nationalities. Realizing the gravity of their demands, the Government of Britain extended its helping hand to solve their age-old problems by declaring the 'Communal Award'. Ambedkar, the leader of the Indian Dalits, got opportunity to raise their age-old oppressed, suppressed, tyrannized and exploiting conditions in the Round Table Conferences and gained some special concessions for the Depressed Classes relating to the arrangement of separate electorate system for them inspite of the constant opposition of the Indian National Congress under Gandhiji. However, Gandhiji opposed it and signed the Poona Pact of 1932 with Ambedkar. Therefore, it cannot be denied that the Government of Britain ultimately came forward to save the life of the Depressed Classes by the 'Communal Award'. Their liberal educational policy opened the age-old closed door to all irrespective of their caste, class, creed and religion. The common people of India were satisfied with the practical concept of equality before law that they did not enjoy before their establishment in India.

3.6. Conclusion

Therefore, it can be concluded that the impact of the Italian and European Renaissance greatly influenced the 19th century *Intelligentia* of India. Most of them belonged to the upper caste Hindus. So they could not dare to break the existing Caste rules. Naturally, they failed to start a crusade against the Caste System and Untouchability. But they expressed their views theoretically in a very limited way relating to these issues. So the 19th century intellectual dichotomy was very much astonishing and discouraging. They did nothing but ideal talking. They knew it very well that these two Institutions had snatched away the rights and privileges of the low born peoples and they were brought forcefully to remain in a very distressed condition in the society. That is why, the 19th century Renaissance and Reformation Movement failed to eradicate the problems of the Caste System and Untouchability from the Indian society. The name of Raja Rammohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Dayananda Saraswati, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Swami Vivekananda and others may be mentioned in order to understand the real truth. Jyotibe Phule, Narayan Guru and other low born social reformers realized it that problems of the Caste System and Untouchability would not be solved by the caste Hindus as it protects their Class interest. So they raised voice against the evils of the Caste System and Untouchability and launched a direct crusade to reform the Hindu society on the basis of the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity with a motto to eradicate these two Institutions from the Indian society. Ambedkar was a true follower of this movement. He explained logically the exploitative content of these two Institutions and fought for their abolition. But Gandhiji profoundly believed in the Caste System and he was an ardent follower of it. Even the colonial Government was very conscious to take any action in this context due the fear of unrest. But they utilized it as a weapon against the Nationalist Movement. In spite of that they ultimately decided to solve these problems by declaring the 'Communal Award' of 1932 with a motto to render Social Justice among the Depressed Classes. But Gandhiji and his Congress did not tolerate it. He vehemently opposed it. Therefore, it can be pointed out that the role and position of Gandhiji against the 'Communal Award' of 1932 disheartened Ambedkar who save the life of Gandhiji for the sake of humanity by signing the 'Poona Pact' of 1932.

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