Chapter II

**Cultural Re-Orientation in India Under Colonial Rule: A Study of the Nineteenth Century**

(a) **Advent of British Rule and Socio-Cultural Setting in India**

An attempt will be made in the present chapter to analyze the process of cultural re-orientation in India under Colonial Rule. In the present study, however, it is proposed to confine the analysis to the nineteenth century period.

To begin with, the nineteenth century witnessed a strong wave of cultural regeneration and resurgence in India. The advent of British rule, the impact of renaissance and the activities of socio-religious reformers contributed largely to such a process. It may be observed that the first century of British rule (1757-1857) has been described by historians as the "Pre-Nationalist Era". This era is significant as it witnessed the remarkable outburst of intellectual activities and a radical transformation in terms of socio-religious ideas due to close contacts between the English and Indian societies. This period also coincided with the "Era of Renaissance", which witnessed the emergence of "modern ideas", development of "social protest" and "religious dissent". These aspects however, have been viewed by historians as a consequence of the introduction of European "ideas and institutions" in India.¹

The renaissance sought to project the "civilizing" aspects of British rule in terms of disseminating western knowledge, familiarity with European history and institutions as well as exposure to such lofty ideas as "liberty", "rationalism" and "humanism". Many of these assumptions are found in the writings of Indian historians. For instance, while some have viewed the "socio-religious movements" as the "contribution of missionaries to the Indian cultural life", others have ascribed the "development of modern ideas" exclusively to the "influence of western education".

Commenting on these aspects, Jawaharlal Nehru, a former Prime Minister looked upon India's contact with the Western World as a "unique phenomenon". This, in his view, was a contact between an industrial society committed to "scientific world view" and "progress" and an agrarian society wedded to "religious world view" and the "status quo".


change in the sphere of politics and economy, but in social structures, intellectual and emotional cultures as well.

A concomitant of such change was the large degree of socio-cultural regeneration and resurgence that took place in India during the nineteenth century. But unfortunately enough, the Indian historians have paid little attention to these aspects and showed greater concern to analyze aspects relating to imperial polity, colonial economy and rise of nationalism than towards the process of socio-cultural changes in India.\(^6\)

It may be highlighted that renaissance provided the stimulus behind the process of cultural awakening and resurgence as pioneered by liberal, humanitarian and rationalist thinkers belonging to the west. In particular, the impact of renaissance concerning women was quite significant. As observed by L.S.S.O'Malley:

"... The impact of west on Indian civilization has brought about changes that are more fundamental in case of women. To men, it brought a new conception of the world, of its material resources; ethical standards and political possibilities, but to women it brought slowly but potently a new conception of themselves. If men reassured themselves as citizens of new India, women revalued themselves as human beings in a new social order ..." \(^7\)

With these background developments an attempt will be made to analyze the factors contributing to the origin of socio-cultural awakening in India during the eighteenth century. To

---

6. For details see Indu Banga and Jaidev, Cultural Re-Orientation in Modern India (Shimla, 1995), p.13.
begin with, the nature of society and polity in the pre-colonial India was extremely "gloomy". As presented by Rev. W. Tennant:

"... It may justly be questioned whether in any instance, the annals of nations can present to our contemplation a great community plunged into an abyss of anarchy, equally deep and gloomy, as that by which India was overwhelmed after the decline and fall of the Mughal Empire ..." 8

The decline of Mughal power was accompanied by political instability, administrative inefficiency and social insecurity in eighteenth century. Such a scenario was characterized by historians as the "dark age" for India. Almost all historians, writing on the eighteenth century, sought to establish a direct link between political anarchy and socio-cultural developments that followed the disintegration of Mughal empire in India. As stated by Raghuvanshi:

"... Civilized life cannot flourish amidst conditions of insecurity and oppression. In the eighteenth century the break-up of the Mughal monarchy released forces of political disintegration and anarchical conditions which destroyed the creative and cooperative spirit of man. They caused deterioration in every phase of national life ..." 9

Another historian Ghulam Hussain characterized the eighteenth century as "an age of senseless, slothful princes and of grandees, ignorant and meddling". According to him, the world, "is overspread with blindness, and that the earth is totally


overwhelmed with an everlasting darkness". Contemporary observers like Abu Dubois, Alexander Dow and Forbes testified that "Indian creativity had sunk to the lowest level" in the eighteenth century.

It may be mentioned that while providing justification for the English conquest of India, several European scholars, such as Henry Beveridge, James Mill and James Marshman, referred to the "pre-Colonial political anarchy intellectual stagnation and cultural backwardness" that followed the decline and fall of Mughal empire. Some British scholars, such as L.S.S.O'Malley, B.T.McCully and Percival Spear, and some Indian historians, such as Jadunath Sarkar and Tarachand, have analyzed the factors relating to the "decline and decadence of pre-Colonial Indian society" in the nineteenth century. As stated by Percival Spear, the East India Company, completed its political and administrative sway over India upto the river Sutlez in 1818. But it found to its dismay that India was "socio-culturally" at its "lowest ebb" still in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

11. As cited in Ibid, p.28.
12. For details see Panikkar, op.cit., p.34.
Following the advent of East India Company, however, a great debate took place among its policy-makers as to what should constitute the nature of English interests in India. In this context, the "Conservatives" led by Governor General Warren Hastings and the "Orientalists" led by H.H. Wilson advocated the view that the East India Company should permit things to remain in India as they were under the "Mughal and general traditions". They also argued rather strongly for discouraging missionary activities in India.15 But this was contested to by two other groups namely, the "Evangelicals" and the "Radical and Utilitarians". As for the "Evangelicals", led by Charles Grant and Wilberforce, they argued rather powerfully that India was a land of "idolators", and that it was highly imperative to import Christianity from the West to emancipate the country. As for the Radicals and Utilitarians, led by James Mill, they believed passionately in the superiority of the Western World.16 There was also a third group, consisting of younger generation of British officials. Being imbued with liberal ideas from the West, they pleaded in favour of gradual change in the country with due regard for Indian sensitivities and susceptibilities. Mount Stuart Elphinston, Charles Metcalf and John Malcolm represented the view point of this group. They decided to join hands with Governor General Lord William Bentinck in pursuing reform proposals rather vigorously during the 1830s.17

15. For details see Ibid.
As regards the evolution of Indian society on the wake of British rule, it was caught up in a vicious web as created by "religious superstitions" and "social obscurantism". Hinduism became compound of magic, animism and superstitions as social evils such as "Sati", "Perpetual Widowhood", "Infanticide", "Purdah", "Early Marriage System", "Unequal Marriage", "Polygamy" and "Devadassi System" predominated the domestic scene in India. Women suffered terribly under the constant strifes of Indian society.  

To remove these social abuses and other heinous acts of moral degradation, efforts were initiated by Charles Grant, a British official working under the East India Company. He put forward the view that these aspects constituted the outcome of "dense and widespread ignorance", which could be mitigated through the spread of English education in India. But his efforts failed at the official level. His mission, however, was energetically carried forward by the Baptist Christian Missionaries, led by William Carry which successfully planted the foundations of English education in India. 

To elaborate, the Christian religion was brought to India by the Syrian Evangelist Apostle Thomas. But it was the Portuguese, who resorted to forcible conversions of Indian population after their occupation of Goa. As for the English Missionaries, they did not favour conversions, after settled

18. For details see S.C. Dube, Indian Society (New Delhi, 1990), pp.105-106.

down at Serampore in Bengal around 1793. But they resorted to religious propagation only after the East India Company consolidated its firm domination over India in 1813. But in general, the English Missionaries were quite liberal in their outlook and pursued the task of social reforms rather energetically. Infact, they became quite determined to put an end to such flagrant social abuses such as "polygamy", "Purdah", "Sati", "Child Marriage" and "Infanticide". Further, they applied strong pressures on both the English and Company governments for obliterating these social evils. These missionaries further castigated the practice of seclusion and masculine inflictions over women. They strongly encouraged female education in India and established a large number of educational institutions, orphanages and girls schools. Further, they took the task of imparting education inside the houses of upper class Indians through the "Governess" system.

The impact of missionaries brought a great change in the status of women, as they were imbued with Western culture, ideas and values. In course of time, their activities were supplemented by prominent social reformers, led by Raja Ram Mohun Rai during the first half of the nineteenth century.

20. For details see Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya, _Indian Women's Battle For Freedom_ (New Delhi, 1983), pp.35-36.
Though small in number, these reformers instilled a sense of high spirit and courage in the hearts of Indians to work for the emancipation of women. In the process, socio-cultural awakening among Indian people was aroused during the Pre-Nationalist Era.

It may be mentioned that Hinduism in the pre-Colonial period was set with "idolatory", "polytheism" and "superstitions". Its religious beliefs and practices were, however, challenged by a number of heterodox sects which existed in almost all parts of India. Prominent among them were the "Satnami", "Appapanthi" and "Shivanarayan" sects in Uttar Pradesh, the "Karthabajas" and "Balramis" in Bengal, the "Charandasis" in Rajasthan and the "Virabhramas" in Andhra Pradesh. All these sects severely denounced "polythiism", "idolatory" and "caste distinctions", and placed a high premium on "personal morality". While they adopted different methods of organisation and functioning, yet, they represented a major trend of protest and dissent movements against the Hindu superstitions and the tyranny of the priests.

In this context it may mentioned that a religious reform wave engulfed the "Lingayat" sect in Karnataka led by a Brahmin reformer namely, "Basa-Vanna" or "Basaveswara". Operating within a small geographic area, Basavanna was quite radical and

22. For details see Panikkar, op.cit., pp.4-5.
rather unequivocal concerning the rights of women. He firmly rejected many of the prevailing Hindu beliefs and customs to argue in favour of the individuality of women. Some of his bold ideas included the rights of woman to choose her own spouse, the remarriage of widows, and her right to divorce under certain conditions.23

With the advent of nineteenth century, however, a number of creative individuals sprung up from the ranks of Indian society to respond to the combined challenges of Christian religious ideas and Western rationalist thought. Armed with English education and a humanitarian outlook, these illustrious individuals became highly sensitive to the characterization of Hinduism as a "pagan and idolatrous religion laden with barbaric customs".24 Such a challenge was spearheaded initially in Maharashtra and Bengal under the leadership of M.G.Ranade, Raja Rammohun Ray and Keshub Chandra Sen. Such struggles were subsequently taken up by prominent Hindu revivalist leaders such as Dayanand Saraswati, Rama Krishna and Vivekananda. In fact, the mounting pressures of Western secular institutions and missionary activities was responsible for solidifying the Hindu platform under their powerful leadership.25

23. For details see Chattopadhyaya, op.cit., p.25.
25. For details see Ibid, p.37.
To conclude, the western ideas and culture created an immediate impact on the caste-ridden Hindu society during the eighteenth century. As a result, the quest for reforms emanated from liberal, humanitarian and rationalist ideas as disseminated during the era of renaissance. The spread of western education and the activities of Christian missionaries also contributed significantly to such a process.

(b) Socio-Religious Movements in the Nineteenth Century

The present section will deal with developments relating the impact of socio-religious reform movements on traditional society and culture of India during the nineteenth century. To begin with, it may be observed that the advent of British rule and the consequent dissemination of "colonial culture" and "ideology" prompted some serious-minded intellectuals to make an introspection into the strength and weakness of indigenous culture and institutions. Out of such processes emerged a commonly-shared conviction concerning an urgent need for socio-religious reforms in India. Armed with English education and a humanitarian outlook, some of these intellectuals spearheaded reform movements in Bengal and Maharashtra under the leadership of Raja Rammohun Ray, Keshub Chandra Sen and Mahadev Govind Ranade. These social reformers were subsequently joined by other prominent Hindu revivalist leaders namely, Dayanand Saraswati, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. In fact, the nineteenth century witnessed a "Cultural-ideological" struggle between the
backward elements of "traditional culture", on the onehand, and the dominating "colonial culture" on the other.

Kenneth W. Jones, a western scholar analyzed the evolution of socio-religious movements in India and categorized them under two major heads namely, "Transitional" and "Acculturative". Elaborating on the concept, Jones used the term "colonial milieu" to indicate that interactions between the indigenous South Asian and British cultures. According to him, the British conquest did not necessarily create the "colonial milieu" for all individuals or for a given region. Infact, such interactions were influenced by those human beings who felt it "expedient or necessary to become part of the new colonial world and its culture."

As regards the "transitional" category, the author traces its origin to the pre-colonial period and states that these movements evolved out of indigenous forms of "socio-religious dissent" with virtually no influence from the "colonial milieu". As for the "acculturative" category, it emanated from the "colonial milieu" and that its leaders were strongly influenced by western and especially English culture. Elaborating further, however, Jones found himself in a great dilemma as the "transitional" movements became "acculturative"

27. For details see Ibid, pp.3-4.
28. Ibid.
in course of time and that some indigenous roots were found in the "acculturative" movements. He resolved the conflict somewhat by concluding that the difference between the two categories remained "mainly at their points of origin".\(^{29}\)

Taking these categorization into account, while Arya Samaj and Kabirpanthi movements constituted the first category, Brahmo Samaj movement comprised the second category.

According to a prominent Indian sociologist, the socio-religious movements in the nineteenth century can be divided into two major categories. In the first category are those who advocate for reform and change in the socio-cultural practices of Hinduism on the pattern of "Vedic" traditions. They were "fundamentalist" in nature, who expressed a total aversion to any kind of deviation from the mainstream Hindu religious traditions as represented by the "Vedas". The concepts of "Vedic Infalliability" and "Back to the Vedas" were their most guiding principles.\(^{30}\) The Arya Samaj, Kabirpanthi and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movements were included in this category.

As regards the Brahmo Samaj, it constituted a pioneer movement in the second category. The movement was spearheaded by Raja Rammohun Ray of Bengal, described as the "Father of Modern Cultural Renaissance" in India. As for Rammohun, he emphasised for cultural synthesis between the Western norms and cultural themes as well as the traditional value system of Hindu

\(^{29}\) Ibid, p.4.

\(^{30}\) For details see Yogendra Singh, Modernization of Indian Tradition (Faridabad, 1977), p.43.
culture. In fact, he studied the "Vedas" and the "Upanishads" rather deeply along with other religious and cultural sources such as the "Medieval Sufism", "English Unitarianism" and "American Transcendentalism". It may be mentioned that while his ideology was deeply rooted in the ancient past and especially in the "Upanishads", he was not particularly inimical to the qualities and strength of Western cultural values.\(^{31}\)

Another scholar analyzed the socio-religious movements under the "Liberal Reformer" and the "Revivalist" groups. It may be mentioned that while both the groups acknowledged the coercive character of Hindu social institutions and customs, the "Liberal Reformers" opposed them on the ground that they contradicted the democratic principles of liberal philosophy. As for the "Revivalists", they regarded the prevailing Hindu social traditions as "deviations" from the customs and institutions of ancient Vedic society.\(^{32}\) As regards the "Liberal Reformers", being imbued with western liberal culture, they made a most scathing attack on the reactionary, authoritarian and hierarchical Hindu social institutions in India. They spearheaded major social reform movements in the nineteenth century with an emphasis on concepts such as "individual liberty", "equality for all" and "respect for the personality of the individual".\(^{33}\) While prominent leaders like

\(^{31}\) For details see Ibid.

\(^{32}\) For details see Neera Desai, *Women in Modern India* (Bombay, 1947), pp. 59-60.

\(^{33}\) For details see Ibid, p. 60.
Raja Rammohun Ray of Bengal and Mahadev Govind Ranade of Maharashtra belonged to the "Liberal-Reformer" category, other outstanding leaders of the period namely, Dayanand Saraswati of Arya Samaj and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda from Bengal could be included in the "Revivalist" group.

It may be highlighted that the spirit of reform engulfed the entire country during the nineteenth century. To begin with, Raja Rammohun Ray established the most prominent Brahmo Samaj in 1828 and thereafter set up several branches all over the country. Other prominent movements embracing the Hindu Community were "Paramahansa Mandali" and "Prarthana Samaj" in Maharashtra and the "Arya Samaj" in Punjab and North India. There were several other regional and caste movements like the "Kayasth Sabha" in Uttar Pradesh and "Sarin Sabha" in Punjab. The backward classes also engaged themselves in reform activities by starting the "Satya Sodhak Samaj" in Maharashtra and the "Shri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sabha" in Kerala. Further, the Muslims formed the "Adhmadiya and Aligarh" movements, while the Sikhs and the Parsees organised the "Singh Sabha" and the "Rehnumai Mazdeyasan Sabha". In fact general perspectives of these regional and caste movements were strikingly similar since they worked more or less as the "regional and religious manifestations of a common consciousness" in favour of reforms. As regards the prominent social reformers of the nineteenth century, mention can be made concerning the Brahmo Samaj leaders.

34. For details see Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherji, Aditya Mukherji, K.N. Panikkar and Sucheta Mahajan, India's Struggle For Independence: 1857-1947 (New Delhi, 1999) Twentythird impression, pp.82-83.
namely, Raja Ramohun Ray (1774-1833), Devendranath Tagore (1817-1905), Keshub Chandra Sen (1838-1884), Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901) of "Prarthana Samaj" in Maharashtra, Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883) of "Arya Samaj", Akshya Kumar Dutt and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) of Bengal. B.M. Malabari of Maharashtra, Bankim Chandra Chatterji and Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) (a prominent disciple of Ramakrishna and the founder of Ramkrishna Mission in 1897), Dhondo Keshav Karve (1858-1962) and Gopal Hari Deshmukh and Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915) in Maharashtra. The prominent social reformers in the women category included Pandita Rambai Saraswati (1858-1922), Ramabai Ranade (1862-1924), Anandibai Joshi (1865-1887) and Annie Besant (1847-1933), the Organiser of the Theosophical Society at Madras in 1897.

It may be mentioned that Allan Octavian Hume was an Englishman, who founded the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1885. He pledged a special concern for political enfranchisement of women. While addressing the first session of INC at Bombay on 28 December 1885, Hume urged the Indian leaders to include women in the organizational fold. It was, due to his personal efforts that two women from Bengal (Swarnalata Devi and J.Ganguli) got invitation to attend the Congress session as

delegates in 1900, marking the beginning of a new era for Indian women.  

It may be mentioned further that a social organization called the "Namdhari" sect was founded in 1847 by a reformer called Buluk Singh in the North Western Frontier Province with headquarters at Rawalpindi. While the organization was not quite successful in attracting people to its fold, it however, campaigned primarily to raise the status of Indian women. In fact, one woman leader of this sect named Hookmee worked energetically by visiting many districts of Punjab to preach the doctrines of the Namdhari sect.  

The wave of social reforms also touched the Muslim Community in India. It may be mentioned that barring the high level elites, the mass of Muslim women were generally illiterate. In fact, any advocate of women's education was branded as an "apostate" in Muslim society. It was Sir Syed Ahmed Khan who asserted that the Muslim women could not be excluded from higher education and that "Purdah" and early marriage should be abolished. He was also a firm supporter of modern education among Indian Muslims. He also started a magazine called "Tahazibul-Akhaq" (Reform of Morals) to propagate his ideals before

following his example, the Begum of Bhopal and a number of enthusiasts established schools for Muslim girls at Lucknow, Bhopal and Aligarh.  

At this stage it may be relevant to highlight the role of some prominent social reformers in the nineteenth century. To begin with, the Brahmo Samaj movement in Bengal was spearheaded by Rammohun, Keshub Chandra and Devendranath Tagore. Rammohun was the first Indian reformer, who began to think in terms of regenerating the Hindu society and its religion by championing the cause of women. The abolition of Sati was his greatest personal achievement. He successfully persuaded Governor General William Bentinck to do away with the cruel practices in November 1929. He protested against other social evils such as early marriage and polygamy and strongly supported measures like female education, widow remarriage and inter-caste marriages. In 1818, he founded the Brahmo Samaj to carry out his reform activities on a solid basis. He was assisted in his efforts by Devendranath Tagore, who joined the organization in 1843. In 1854 he established the "Society of Friends" for organizing social upliftment activities such as female education, remarriage of Hindu widows, prevention of early marriage and polygamy. As for Keshub Chandra Sen, he joined the Brahmo Samaj in 1857. He took great interest in the welfare of women by starting a number of girl schools. He

38. For details see Chattopadhyaya, op.cit., pp.32-34 and Sharma, op.cit., p.29.
founded the "Society of Theistic Friends" in 1863, whose membership was confined to women only. He also started the first monthly magazine for women called Bamobodhini and organized prayer meetings exclusively for women called "Brahmika Samaj". He also took active interest in the passage of "Native Marriage Act of 1872" which forbade early marriage between boys under eighteen and girls under fourteen. 39

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar of Bengal was a great Sanskrit scholar and social reformer who attacked the system of early marriage and polygamy. In 1849 he founded the "Hindu Balika Vidyalaya" for promoting education among the girls of high families. His crowning achievement was the passage of "Widow Remarriage Act" on 26 July 1856. He wrote a book on Marriage of Hindu Widows, where in he advocated for giving property rights to the widows. 40 Akshya Kumar Dutt was another reformer of Bengal, who was an "agnostic". He refused to be drawn into any discussion on supernatural questions. 41

M.G. Ranade was another great reformer who established the "Prarthana Samaj" for women. He was a firm supporter for the cause of women and worked actively for "Widow Marriage Association", founded by Vishnu Shastri. According to him,

39. For details see Sharma, op.cit., pp.21-23.
41. Bipan Chandra et al, India's Struggle For Freedom, op.cit., p.83.
the improvement in the status of women was not an "innovation" but a restoration of the position as enjoyed by them in the golden past.  

Swami Dayanand Saraswati was a great scholar of Sanskrit and of Hindu scriptures. He opposed the prevailing social evils and strongly advocated for the "Vedic" ideals. He supported the liberal education for women by urging them to emulate their Vedic predecessors. He also advocated for abolishing the system of early marriage, Purdah and dowry. He argued for widow re-marriage and women's education. He also laid stress on marriage through consent between the concerned partners and on "brahmacharya". He pleaded for women's right of divorce and over their claim on property. He expounded his ideology through his work, *Satyarth Prakash* and other writings. He strongly believed in the revival of ancient Indian culture and urged for the revival of ancient Vedic educational institutions namely, the "Gurukul" system. While expounding his ideology, however, he often became some sort of a "thundering" and "controversial" philosopher. For instance, he stood firmly behind the Vedas and responded to the missionary attacks on Hinduism by administering "sledge-hammer" blows on the Christian religion. He also pronounced himself as a "sworn enemy" of the Islamic religion. Further, he decided not to have any trucks with the Brahmo leaders, as they did not share with him concerning the "divine origin", the infallibility of the Vedas" and the doctrine of "re-birth".

42. For details see Sharma, op.cit., p.26.
Besides, he felt absolutely no sympathy for the post-Vedic development of Hinduism. He established the Arya Samaj at Lahore on 24 June 1877. In fact, his socio-religious ideology comprised the twin planks of reform and education as the means of all-round progress in the "Aryavarta" (land of the Aryas). He advocated for reforms in respect of religious practices such as idol worship, pilgrimages, mediacy of priests and "gurus". He laid special stress on such values as "self-effort", "prudence", "valour" and active involvement in the pursuit of worldly goals including the attainment of India's independence. In the process the Arya Samaj movement came to be regarded as "Hindu Revivalism". In fact, the Arya Samaj, like the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal functioned both as a "regenerative" as well as a "catalytical" force upon the society in North India stretching from Punjab to Bengal. A certain "aggressiveness" and "militancy", however, crept into the organization which paved the way towards an intolerance of both Muslims and Christians in India. Dayanand Saraswati was portrayed by some his followers as the "Luther of India".

Swami Vivekananda was a great disciple of Rama Krishna of Bengal. He attended the "World Parliament of Religions" at Chicago in 1893. He was a great advocate for the upliftment of

---

43. For details see the Cultural Heritage of India (Calcutta, 1983), vol.IV, reprint, pp.634-639.
44. Indu Banga and Jaidev, op.cit., p.30.
45. Percival Spear, op.cit., p.165.
women and founded the Ramkrishna Mission in 1897 to propagate the ideals of his "Guru". Gopal Krishna Gokhale was another reformer who advocated for the spread of education for women. He established the "Servants of India Society" at Bombay. Dhande Keshav Karve was another great reformer who took keen interest in the cause of Hindu widows. He established the Hindu Widows Home Association on 14 June 1896 and three other institutions for the welfare of Hindu Women namely, "Anath Balakashram", "Mahila Vidyalaya" and "Nisham Karm Math". His greatest contribution, however, was in the field of female education.

It may be mentioned that the two most outstanding intellectual and ideological strands in the nineteenth century were "rationalism" and "religious universalism". Prominent reformers namely, Rammohun, Akshay Kumar, Keshub Chandra, Devendra Tagore, Mahadev Ranade and Sayyid Ahmed were greatly influenced by the rationalist ideas. While Rammohun held that "rational explanation" was the only basis of "truth, Akshay Kumar maintained that "pure rationalism is our teacher". As for Keshub Chandra, he totally rejected the authority of the scriptures. Ranade believed that "conscience" and "reason"

47. For details see Sharma, op.cit., pp.27-28.
48. For details see Ibid, p.28.
should become the "supreme" if not the "sole" guide of personal conduct. According to Sayyid Ahmed, "rationality" constituted the guiding principle in religious matters.  

But the spirit of "rationalism", as advocated by Rammohun Roy, went through a process of decline and retreat on account of a split in the ranks of Brahmo Samaj and the launching of Arya Samaj movement in the late nineteenth century. As for Dayanand, he not only recognised "divine revelation" and the "infalliability of the Vedas" but also believed in their "universal and eternal relevance". Also, according to him, the role of reason was limited only to that of "an aid in understanding and interpreting the Vedas". As for Ramakrishna, he accepted and justified all rituals and practices of traditional religion. His prominent disciple Vivekananda described the Vedas as the "knowledge of God". Thus, spiritual sanctions and religious faith in the process replaced the earlier emphasis on "rational explanation and demonstrability".

As regards the idea of "religious universalism", it was advocated by Ramamohun and Keshub Chandra, after both of them made an exhaustive study of the Hindu, Muslim and Christian scriptures. The most striking feature of such a thought was the universal outlook based on the "unity of God and monotheism". Ramamohun believed that "there was only one universal theism, the

50. For details see Bipan Chandra et al., op. cit., pp. 85-86.
51. For details see Panikkar, op. cit., pp. 26-27.
Hindu, Islam and Christian theism being its national embodiment*. It was with such an universal outlook that he attacked both "Hindu polytheism" and "Christian trinitarianism". Similarly, Keshub Chandra employed the concept of "Fatherhood of God" to imply "Brotherhood of Man". Thus, both Rammohun and Keshub Chandra employed the concept of "religious synthesis", as the hall-mark of their ideologies. 52

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, such a perspective began to change as religious "universalism" gave way to religious "particularism". This change was at first expounded by Bankim Chandra Chatterji, another prominent reformer of Bengal. According to him, "great principles of Hinduism were good for all ages and for all mankind". Dayanand Saraswati also did echo similar feelings when he idealized the Vedas as the "only revelation of God and the source of all knowledge, science and religion of mankind". Dayanand further symbolized Hinduism based on Vedic percepts as the only religion with universal application. As for Vivekananda, though he pleaded for "religious harmony", yet his ideal was a religion based on the findings of the Vedic scriptures. Also, he strongly believed that Hinduism was the "mother" of all religions since it preached the principles of "universal tolerance" and "acceptance". Thus, the "universal theism" of Rammohun was changed to a "Hindu-Centric theistic" ideals. 53

52. For details see Ibid, pp.29-30.
53. For details see Ibid, pp.31-32.
Apart from these reformers there were several Europeans who discarded the western civilization to become partners in Indian Culture. Prominent among them were Annie Besant, who joined the Theosophical Society of India and Noble (Sister Nibedita), who became the prominent disciple of Vivekananda.\(^54\)

To conclude, the nineteenth century witnessed the role of prominent reformers who responded rather effectively to the combined challenges on Hinduism by the Christian religious ideas and the western political thought. Such challenges were initially spearheaded by the Brahma and Prarthana Samaj movement. They were joined in such efforts by leaders of "Hindu Revivalist" movements in India. Prominent ones in this regard included Rammohun \(\text{father of Modern India}\), Ranade \(\text{Pioneer Maharashtra Leader}\), Devendranath \(\text{Recreator of Brahma Samaj}\), Keshub Chandra \(\text{Indianization of christianity}\), Dayanand \(\text{Vedic Revivalist}\), Ramakrishna \(\text{Mystic and Spiritual Teacher}\) and Vivekananda \(\text{Hindu Missionary to the West}\). Their combined efforts brought about a powerful wave of socio-cultural regeneration and resurgence in the nineteenth century.

(c) **Cultural Re-Orientation in India During The Nineteenth Century**

An attempt will be made in the present section to analyze the process of cultural re-orientation in India during the nineteenth century. It may be observed that cultural re-orientation in all spheres of Indian life was one of the most

\(^54\). For details see Stephen Hay, *op.cit.*, p.37.
significant developments in the nineteenth century. To begin with, the advent of British rule and the impact of renaissance brought an unprecedented change in the realms of politics and economy as well as in the spheres of social structure and intellectual and emotional cultures. A major wave of "cultural regeneration and resurgence" resulted in the process. Such an aspect, however, did not receive the adequate attention of historians working on Modern India. They in fact devoted a greater attention towards analyzing developments pertaining to imperial polity, colonial economy and the rising tide of nationalism than for socio-cultural changes in India. It may be observed in this context that aspects of politics cannot be fully comprehended without an adequate understanding of socio-cultural changes in India. Thus, the present study relating to socio-cultural changes in India acquires a great deal of significance.

As regards the nature of colonial re-orientation in Colonial India, some historians have offered different perspectives. For instance, according to K.N. Panikkar, "the cultural and ideological struggle in Colonial India have been expressed through a variety of socio-cultural movements and individual initiatives" in the nineteenth century. Such a process, according to him, "was not a unilinear and undifferentiated progression" and that it was "riven with

---

contradictions, contentions and ruptures" within Indian society. He concludes his observations by stating that while the impact of social consciousness as generated by "intellectual-cultural" renaissance was quite "significant", it did not "necessarily merge with nationalism".  

Another group of historians led by Bipan Chandra, however, held a different view. According to them, the socio-cultural regeneration in the nineteenth century was "occasioned by the colonial presence, but not created by it". They hold the view that the "cultural-ideological" struggle as represented by the socio-religious movements in the nineteenth century eventually paved the way towards "nationalist consciousness" in India. Further, according to them, such a struggle was instrumental in bringing about the "initial intellectual and cultural break-through" in Colonial India. These scholars concluded by stating that the "dual struggle" was part and parcel of the resistance movements against "colonial culture and ideological hegemony" and that out of such struggle emanated the "modern cultural traditions" in India.  

A detailed examination of both the perspectives, however, indicate an altogether different conclusion. To begin with, a comparative analysis of both the views indicate that they were not diametrically opposed to one another. Secondly,  

56. For details see Panikkar, op.cit., p.VIII.  
57. For details see Bipan Chandra et al, op.cit., pp.82-90.
the special focus on movements such as "socio-cultural" and "socio-religious" by both the views were indeed identical. For instance, the "intellectual-cultural renaissance" of the nineteenth century as highlighted by Pannikkar culminated in the evolution of "modern cultural traditions in India" as advocated by Bipan Chandra. In fact, while Panikkar basically highlighted on the Indian scenario as prevalent in the first half of the nineteenth century, Bipan Chandra focussed his attention on socio-cultural developments as it evolved in the second half of the century. However, the "dual struggle" ([colonial-ideological]) as pioneered by socio-religious movements eventually culminated in the cultural transformation of India towards the close of the nineteenth century.

To elaborate, the nineteenth century witnessed a "cultural-ideological" battle between the "backward" elements of traditional culture and the fast "hegemonizing" western colonial culture and ideology. The initial colonial reforming efforts comprised the removal of idolatry, polytheism and priestly monopoly of religious knowledge and the simplification of religious rituals. Their social implications, however, contributed to the liberation of the individual from "conformity born out of fear" and from "uncritical submission to the exploitation of priests". Also, the dissemination of knowledge through translation of religious texts into vernacular languages constituted "an important initial breach in the stranglehold of misinterpreted religious dogmas." In fact, the simplification of
rituals made religious worship an intensely personal experience without any mediation on the part of intermediary priests.\footnote{58}

Simultaneously, the challenge from the colonial culture and ideology prompted the Indian reformers to make attempts at reinvigorating the traditional institutions and culture. Being deeply disturbed by cultural intrusions from the colonial quarters, these reformers voiced a powerful concern in favour of indigenous culture following the advent of British rule in India. Two features characterized such a concern during the first half of the nineteenth century namely, the creation of an alternate "cultural-ideological system" and regeneration of "traditional institutions". The ingredients of such a concern was reflected through the efforts of Raja Rammohun and Brahmao Saraj such as the cultivation of Vernacular languages, the creation of an alternate system of education, the regeneration of Indian art and literature, the emphasis on Indian dress and food, the defence of religion, the revitalization of the Indian system of medicine, the potentialities of pre-colonial technology and the reconstruction of traditional knowledge.\footnote{59}

A more definite articulation in this regard, however, emanated in the second half of the nineteenth century as pioneered by "Hindu Conservatives" and the "Revivalists" led by Dayanand Saraswati of Arya Samaj. Strongly native in tendency, these reformers were clearly influenced by an urgent need to

\footnote{58. For details see Ibid, p.87.}
\footnote{59. For details see Ibid, p.89.}
defend indigenous culture against colonial cultural hegemony. Their attempts, however, were not altogether retrogressive as they resorted to energetic efforts in favour of the revival of cultural personality as distorted if not destroyed by colonial domination. Such a process inevitably paved the way towards the formation of nationalist consciousness in India towards the fag end of the nineteenth century.  

With this theoretical background, an attempt will be made to analyze the evolution of socio-cultural changes in India during the nineteenth century. To begin with, two most important factors which influenced the process of socio-cultural changes in Colonial India were literature and religion. As regards literature, the educational policy of the British was designed to discourage "indigenous education" and to promote western education, which included studies on English literature, natural and life sciences, engineering and medicine, law and social sciences. But there was no debate among English Officials as to how the Indians could be best educated. The educational system was primarily designed to serve the administrative needs of the English government and to inculcate the "colonial ideology" in the minds of native Indians.  

Against the ideological influences of such a colonial system of education, the Indian intellectuals formulated an

---

60. For details see Ibid, p.90.
alternate plan based on science and mass education through the medium of the "Vernacular languages". As for Rammohun, Akshya Kumar Dutt, Vidyasagar and Sayyid Ahmad Khan, they all put strong stress on such an approach. The importance of a scientific outlook and acquisition of scientific knowledge was also emphasized rather vehemently by Vidyasagar, Ranade, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Veeresalingam (a Telegu social reformer), Keshub Chandra and Dayanand. But the British government practically showed no interest to encourage the higher pursuit of scientific studies. Following this, several attempts were initiated by some prominent Indians which culminated in the formation of the Society For Translating European Sciences at Calcutta in 1825, Mechanical Institute at Calcutta (with Tarachand Chakrabarty of Young Bengal as its President) and the National Institution for the Cultivation of Sciences. Also Sayyid Ahmad Khan established the Scientific Society at Ghazipur in 1863 to make improvement on the method of agriculture in India. The significance of mother-tongue, Vernacular and mass education was highlighted by several reformers namely, Akshay Kumar, Vidyasagar, Dayanand, Keshub Chandra, Ranade, Veeresalingam, Sayyid Ahmad Khan as well as radical members belonging to "Young Bengal".

63. For details see Panikkar, op.cit., pp.10-11.
64. For details see Bela Dutta Gupta, Sociology in India (Calcutta, 1972), pp.XV-XVII.
65. For details see Panikkar, op.cit., pp.13-18.
Several reformers reflected on the changes brought following the advent of British such as the "rule of law", "security to life and property" and "opportunity to acquire the arts and sciences of Europe." More important for them was the vision of a political future for India based on British Liberal and constitutional principles. Rammohun, Lokitawadi, Keshub Chandra were major advocates of such ideals. But since the political as well as administrative reality in India was quite antithetical to such ideals, several reformers made scathing attack on the colonial government. For instance, Rammohun castigated the inadequacies of the judicial and revenue administration along with the radical members of "Young Bengal" like Rasik Krishan Mullick and Dakshina Ranjan Mukherji who denounced the police system. Keshub Chandra and Veeresalingam also severely deplored the English activities in India.

It has been mentioned earlier that two most important intellectual stands of the nineteenth century were "rationalism" and "religious universalism". But as events unfolded in India "religious universalism" was replaced by "religious particularism" in course of time. Such a process, however, hampered secularism in India and led to the rapid growth of communalism in the twentieth century.

66. For details see Panikkar, ibid, pp.21-22.
68. For details see Ibid, pp.31-32.
While religion in the eighteenth century was characterized by "obscurantist and superstitious practices", the reform movements restored its "pristine purity". Also, in place of "intellectual stagnation and ignorance" in the eighteenth century, western education brought "enlightenment" leading to political and social progress in the nineteenth century. As described by R.C. Majumdar:

"... A new ideology suddenly burst forth upon the static life, moulded for centuries by a fixed set of religious ideas and social convention. It gave birth to a critical attitude towards religion and a spirit of enquiry into the origins of state and society with a view to determining the proper scope and function ..." 69

It may be mentioned that the province of Punjab witnessed several indigenous movements in the sphere of religion. These included indigenous movements such as the "Nirankari", "Namdhari" and "Singh Sabha" movements among the "Sikh community, the "Ahmadiya" movement among the Muslims and the "Dev Samaj" movement among the Hindus. The outside influence for these movements emanated from the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj and the movement of Sayyed Ahmad Khan. While the least influential among them were the "Ahmadiya", the "Nirankari", the "Namdhari", the "Brahmo Samaj" and "Dev Samaj" movements, the most influential ones were the "Singh Sabha", the "Arya Samaj" and the movement of "Sayyed Ahmad Khan". However, a common point among the three prominent movements was their "partial acceptance of western ideas" as well as their "cultural resistance" to the west as represented

through the advent of British rule and the activities of Christian missionaries in India.  

The Kabirpanthi movement, which owed its origin to the medieval period, represented a powerful religious movement in northern India during the nineteenth century. It was founded by Kabir, the most outstanding socio-religious reformer of the "nirguna" Bhakti movement. He was one of the central personality in the religious history of medieval India who successfully provided a religious "synthesis" between Islam and Hinduism. His chief work was Bijaka. It was divided into three major sections, which contained many themes including "Hindu Vedantic philosophy". His practical teachings laid stress on strict moral conduct. He was a non-believer nothing to do in superstitions. While Kabir's language was always sweet and serene but in the sphere of social reform, it was both "strong" and "provocative".

Following his death, however, the sect of Kabir, described as Kabirpanthis, was divided into twelve schools. While his Muslim disciples organized themselves at Maghar (UP) by establishing a monastery, the Hindu supporters organized a "Kabir Chaura" at Benaras. As regards his impact during the nineteenth century, his verses constituted the "folk wisdom" of the common people and that his followers/both Hindu and Muslims.

70. For details see J.S. Grewal, op.cit., pp.18-21.
71. For details see Cultural Heritage of India (Calcutta, 1983), vol.V, p.493.
made strong claim on him by worshipping his poetry for intense "devotionalism". Also, because of his outright rejection of caste, and his scathing criticism of prejudices concerning both Hinduism and Islam as well as his insistence on "inner devotion" as opposed to outside observances, Kabir was hailed rather highly in modern India. For instance, prominent leaders like Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi considered him as the "authentic" voice of the Indian people.

It may be observed that there was the formation of a "Community of Intellectuals" who engaged themselves in a series of struggles over socio-cultural issues. For instance, beginning from the debate over the abolition of "Sati" in Bengal (during the early part of the nineteenth century) till the national controversy over the Age of Consent Bill during the closing decades of that century, these intellectuals participated actively in debates and discussions over a number of public issues such as the "Anti-Conversion Petition", the "Anti-Idolatry Memorial", the "Lex Loci Act", the "Widow Marriage" and "Civil Marriage Act" etc. These intellectuals further organised socio-cultural organisations and voluntary associations, which indeed reflected the initial "intellectual ferment" of Colonial India. Prominent among these were the "Academic Association and the Society for the Acquisition of General

---

Knowledge" in Calcutta, the "Students Literary and Scientific Society", and "Dynyanprasarak Sabha" at Bombay and Literary Society" in Madras.73

There were also grew a large number of voluntary associations as organised by Colonial officials. The Indian intellectuals participated actively in such organisations. They served as channels of dissemination of "colonial culture and ideology" in India and that they also made inter-communal interactions possible. For instance, there was the "Calcutta School Book Society", formed in 1818, which included four Hindus as well as four Muslims. Besides, there were other public societies of specialized interest such as the "Horticultural Society" and the "Photographic Society" of Calcutta. But participation of Indian members in these bodies was one of subordination to the English members. For instance, Rajendralal Mitra in the Photographic Society was asked to retire from the society for criticising the activities of non-official Europeans in India and that Rangopal was removed from the Horticulture Society for opposing the views of English men. Notwithstanding these developments, the Europeans, however, took keen interest in establishing and promoting "native" libraries with active participation of Indians.74 Thus, these institutions provided a useful platform for intellectual exchanges between the English and Indians. These developments also promoted debates on socio-

73. For details see Panikkar, op.cit., pp.87-88.
74. For details see Ibid, pp.88-89.
cultural issues. For instance, the reformer Rammohun and the conservative Radhakant Deb engaged themselves in open confrontation over the issue of Sati. Also Vidyasagar and Debendranath in Bengal as well as Vishnu Shastri Pandit and Veeresalingam in Madras debated strongly over the Widow Remarriage Issue.\(^75\)

To conclude the legacy of cultural transformation and resurgence paved the way towards the origin of women's movement in India. As mentioned earlier, the male reformers took the lead in initiating movements for arousing socio-cultural consciousness among women. Infact, such efforts were supplemented later on by the activities of some prominent women reformers namely, Pandita Ramabai Saraswati (1850-1922), Ramabai Ranade (1862-1924), Anandibi Joshi (1865-1887) and Annie Besant (1847-1933). These activities led to the formation of women's organizations to take up their cause. Prominent among them were the Ladies Association at Calcutta in 1886 by Swarna Kumari Devi under the influence of Brahmo Samaj. Its objective was to promote friendly relationship and the spirit of service among Indian women. It also provided for the training of poor girls to become school teachers. Also, the prominent woman reformer Pandit Ramabai Saraswati established the "Sharada Sadan" at Poona in 1892 to provide both employment and education to women. Also, Shri Mahipatram Rupam was founded at Ahmedabad in 1892 to help the poor women and the widows. It also provided shelter to the illegitimate children and pregnant mothers.\(^76\)

\(^75\). For details see Ibid, pp.89-91.

\(^76\). For details see Neera Desai, Women in Modern India, op.cit., p.59 and 114.
Following these developments, however, vigorous attempts were made to promote female education and widow re-marriage, as well as to prevent child marriage etc. Pioneers in this regard were the male reformers. But there were a few women among them as well. Due to their combined efforts, however, socio-cultural awakening was aroused among Indian women during the nineteenth century.

***