Conclusion:

It would be difficult to give an exact estimate of the impact of the process of social change on Indian society, as to whether it has resulted in producing a reformed, regenerated India or not, because of the vastness and extent of cultural diversity of Indian society. At times it appears that there is almost nothing in common between a citizen of India coming from one corner of India and another except that both share the same nationality. There is no homogeneity in the social-cultural beliefs and practices of the people of India. For example, the Namboodris and Parayas of Kerala, the Chitpavan brahmins and dalits of Maharashtra, the Maithal Brahmins and Adivasis of Bihar and the Rajputs and Bhils of Rajasthan hardly share the same ritual practices. The cultural diversity of India is qualified by intricacies and this makes it difficult to change Indian social behaviour and customs and also to assess the process of social change in quantitative terms.

However, it is well-known that the process of social reform, which began with the efforts of Raja Rammohan in the modern period, and continued till the twentieth century, can be said to have been sincere efforts to rid Indian society of the inhuman and inegalitarian, unjust practices, which were the vestiges of the medieval period. These efforts did bring about momentous positive changes in the social and religious practices of the people. These efforts also initiated the process of social legislation against inhuman social practices that were sanctioned under the name of religion and which went on for years together. The legislation against the practice of sati can be said to have been a great achievement towards constructive social change. Raja
Rammohan Roy had bitterly criticized this practice and appealed to the British for its banishment through the law. Even before India achieved freedom, she saw some revolutionary social changes; one of them was the famous temple entry proclamation in 1936, allowing free access to the Hindu untouchables into the Hindu temples. The awakening of Indian society as a result of the renaissance led to very significant social changes through the system of law. Laws were passed against sati, female infanticide, prohibition of widow remarriage, untouchability and dowry system. Along with these changes the British introduced a universalistic legal system, a system of education which gave importance to professionalism and merit and which was open to all, and with the freedom of the press, the avenue to voice public opinion non-violently and effectively opened up.

The coming of these changes amidst long years of decadence on almost all fronts - social, religious, economic and political, was a remarkable event in the history of the Indian reform movement. However, it has been observed that legislation alone is not sufficient to induce change in the social lives of the people. Deep-rooted beliefs and practices and the long-standing respect for traditions could not be uprooted by legislation. To bring real social change involves a progressive transformation in the attitudes, the hearts and minds of the people. The educated elites can understand the importance of changes brought through legislation, but the masses have to be gradually persuaded and even goaded to give up outworn social practices. Almost all the social reformers considered education as the means of bringing about effective social transformations in society.
This education was not supposed to be the outdated system of traditional education but the new system of education which opened Indian society to the ideas, values and developments in the Western world. The acquisition of education through the new system, made the educated class aware of the culture and values of the West through a study of its literature and philosophy, and of the scientific and technological development which had contributed to the advancement of the Western world, through a study of modern science.

Keeping the context of the Indian society in mind, the positive effects of this education were the creation of a spirit of revival within Indian culture. The educated class was inspired to study the cultural legacy of India with a renewed interest. The result was the realization that the liberal values of the West of freedom, equality and brotherhood were not of Western origin, but were already affirmed in our ancient scriptures as the principles of life and conduct. Thus, Indian society had the foundation to bring about its regeneration within itself. The reform movement manifested this foundation in efforts to bring about concrete social change. Raja Rammohan Roy had translated the Upanishads into a number of Indian languages simply to show that the inhuman practices advocated in the name of religion were not sanctioned by the highest religion and philosophy of India. Unjust social practices were mainly the result of false religious ideas and religion was an integral part of Indian social life. Therefore, the Indian reformers worked tirelessly for the deliverance of religion from the corruption that had set in it. They wanted religion to be the source of humanitarian values, by the practice of which inequalities would disappear and an egalitarian social order would come into shape. Also religion would be
restored to its essence and glory, that is, humanism, at the level of social life. In this way, keeping in mind the integral relationship between social practice and religion, a very constructive role was advocated for religion. As a social institution it was to play the role of a regulator of social life according to moral principles. The religious values of freedom and equality played the magnificent role of inspiring the struggle for national independence.

All the social reformers were one voice in proclaiming the value and necessity of education for all the people, especially the women. Only education was considered to bring the understanding and acceptance of egalitarian values. Women were expected to learn the way out of their oppressed social condition, and live as dignified human beings only through education. It was through this education that the people were expected to acquire the means of a decent livelihood and thereby improve their economic condition.

The Indian renaissance was invaluable in itself, but as said earlier, to change the hearts and minds of the people is not a quick process, and so the ordinary masses remained almost unaffected by the wave of positive reforms and continued to practice outworn practices.

Nevertheless, these reformist activities can be considered intrinsically valuable because they initiated an actual process of progressive changes, which Indian society had never seen. They tried to prepare the society for accepting the new technological developments, which were necessary if India was to keep pace with world progress, and thereby achieve progress herself. They
revitalized Indian society by emphasizing the need and undisputed value of education and a humanistic religion and humanistic customs. If India was to be a free and great social democracy, and then the prerequisites were laid by the renaissance. Considering the positive value of social change through legislation, it can be said that many a times legislations act as powerful deterrents. They convey very strongly, that what is prohibited is punishable because it is against the welfare of society and the individual himself, that it is socially harmful and therefore wrong.

Swami Vivekananda endorsed the process of ongoing social change and enriched it with his enlightened vision of a regenerated India. His ideas became a source of inspiration for social reforms after him.

For the first time in India's history, the country produced a great teacher in Swami Vivekananda, who took India out of her isolation of centuries and brought her into the mainstream of international life. The beneficent results of this great step were evident as decades passed by. Swamiji had made a sound observation of Indian society in its length and breadth. That is why he spoke with great conviction when he suggested ways for the regeneration of Indian society. His own experience had developed the insight in him of how to revitalize Indian society.

Swamiji attributed the long stagnation of India's national life, to the sense of exclusiveness nurtured by the Indian people for centuries together. Living behind a wall of customs and never allowing ideas to go out or outside ideas to come in, thus, living in seclusion, had brought disastrous results. Such seclusion,
under false ideas of greatness, policy or holiness, is the cause of social decadence. The law of existence is give and take. Swamiji was of the opinion that if India is to survive and flourish, she must throw open her treasures to the world, and also be ready to receive what others have to give her.

Swamiji's vision was for a new India, a new society, unitary in character and universal in spirit, based upon the great unitary vision of the Indian sages, of the whole of mankind as one family. His domestic policy was to create a new Indian society inspired by the Vedantic vision of the dignity of man, his freedom and individuality, his strength and his capacity to love and serve other human beings. His vision was for a thoroughly egalitarian society, free from casteism and untouchability, free from the notions of high and low, realizing the vision of the Divine in every human being. But what Indian society actually represented was far from this vision. It was cut up into tiny bits, hostile to one another, exclusive of each other, and suffering.

The modern Indian renaissance in Swami Vivekananda can be said to have become an entirely positive force rooted in the spiritual core of the Indian tradition and responding to the positive elements in the dynamic culture of the modern West, and capable of achieving a dynamic synthesis of the East and West in modern India.

The Indian society of the present time can be said to have achieved immense and remarkable progress on almost all fronts, but to what extent Swami Vivekananda's ideas have succeeded in bringing positive changes is difficult to gauge. What is commendable and of perennial value for human society, is the
direction which Swamiji gave and the way he showed to bring a renewed dynamism in Indian society. Actual social situations may undergo change according to the modalities of time and place, but the principles of social regeneration advocated by him are of a universal nature, authentic and dynamic life-giving principles.

To secure his aim of delivering men and women from superstitions, fear, wickedness and narrowness and help them realize their inborn divine nature, Swamiji advocated an educational programme in which science and religion shook hands. He wanted Western science and Vedanta to combine, with the Indian ideal of self-control or brahmacharya as the guiding motto, and also shraddha and faith in one's self. Swamiji pointed out that physical science was important because it destroyed fear proceeding from the external world; and spiritual science was important because it destroyed the fear proceeding from within. Man's mind is the storehouse of many fears, some real and some unnecessary. These fears obstruct clear thinking and the achievement of our goals. Therefore, Swamiji advocated fearlessness as the precondition for the achievement of progress. Fear is the great enemy of moral life. Moral virtues and genuine goodness can flower and flourish only in a context of fearlessness.

Today fear has made nations enter the arms race, and that too of nuclear weapons. It is ironical that nations have thought of protecting themselves by creating fear. Fear of nuclear weapons is thought to protect people from war, but the device that is supposed to protect is one that has the potential to bring total destruction! Fear of failure of non-recognition, in the present
competitive social scenario, often makes people indulge in unnecessary actions, which ultimately creates inner tension and conflict. Social gatherings and outings may be ways of relaxing the mind but it is the inner self of man that needs to be calm and comfortable. Globalization, as a process which integrates nations and societies is surely a welcome development, because such integration brings real benefits for the social and economic improvement of societies. But this process has competition which breeds tension, conflicts and even hatred and animosity. These negative effects are the result of fear. Such a condition of society arises when the system of education is simply secular, points out Swamiji.

Swamiji had observed that secular education, narrowly conceived, makes for selfishness and exploitation. It ends up in bread-winning and money-making. Education is meant for the spiritual development and enrichment of man. It is that which is supposed to liberate the human spirit from the limitations of finitude. This is possible only when education is conceived on spiritual lines and imbued with spiritual purposes. Bread-winning does form an essential part of such education. Education so conceived cannot be confined to the period of formal schooling. It begins in early childhood and continues throughout life.

Today though a lot needs to be still done in rural areas and smaller places in the name of educational facilities and infrastructure, Indian society can boast of some of the best institutions that impart secular education and value-based education at the school and higher levels. The area of education is an ever-expanding one, with new specializations and courses
coming up year after year. This shows the tremendous value assigned to education. It is true that education has helped man to come out of the hold of outworn customs and inhuman practices. It has fostered an attitude of rationality and criticism, by which the consciousness of man has been able to recognize the unnecessary elements which are hindrances to progress, and discard them from one's social practice. Man has learned to think as an individual. Thus, education has brought independence, economic improvement and thereby an improvement in the material conditions of human life and freedom. Education has helped men and women to acquire self-reliance and dignity and has helped Indian society to become self-sufficient in many ways. India has made noteworthy progress and is still progressing in the areas of industrial development, space technology, medicine, communications and education itself. Independent India stands as the largest democracy of the world. This may sound as a cliché, but it is one that makes us aware of our concrete achievements from time to time. However, Indian society has still to incorporate spirituality as an essential and universal element in its system of education. Indian society has succeeded in producing excellent specialists in different fields but the spiritual orientation is wanting.

It is because of the lack of spiritual orientation and the right understanding of the meaning of education that even in apparently sophisticated homes, with well-educated members, the hold of outdated customs still persists. We cannot say that caste distinctions, outworn traditions, communal tensions have vanished. Women are still degraded though they may be educated and economically independent. They are still considered simply important support systems of the family and
their salary is essential for running the house well. They are yet to be accepted as independent, dignified human beings universally.

Our democratic system contains people who simply believe in revelling in positions of power and authority. They do not have a dint of spiritual orientation or sympathy for the citizens they represent. For them politics is a profit-making venture like business. On the other hand, there are people who consider politics as the medium through which progressive changes can be secured. However, the negative influence of complacent, non-working people often slows down the pace of progress.

The element of rationality has become a part of religious beliefs and practice. This has led to a thoughtful elimination of most of the evil practices associated with religion. Religion has still not become an active force of integration. It still continues to divide people. It still breeds fanaticism and communal conflict. May be the teaching of the basic principles of the great world religions to students and the youth would bring the awareness about the similarities amidst the different religions and convey the much-needed message of their underlying unity. It was Swamiji's conviction that if children grew up with this sense of the unity of all religions and thereby of all mankind, they would work dynamically to bring harmony in society.

Swami Vivekananda has brought out the practical relevance of education, as a process which dispels three kinds of darkness - physical darkness, which obstructs man's physical movements and which can be removed by securing health and wealth, mental darkness, proceeding from ignorance about the physical
and social world and their laws, which can be removed by secular education; and lastly spiritual darkness, proceeding from ignorance about the laws that govern the spiritual world, the inner world of man. Spiritual darkness can be removed by religion alone, which comprises spiritual knowledge accompanied by striving or sadhana, which is the essence of religion. Education achieves its ultimate purpose when it can remove the obstruction of worldliness in the path of sadhana. Education was rightly conceived by Swamiji as a movement from darkness to light.

Swami Vivekananda's efforts to reform the religious consciousness of the Indian people are like an eternal guiding star. There is much to learn regarding religious reform from the impact his message made on the people of America. For centuries the idea of religion in the West was vitiated by too much of hostility and too much of persecution. As a result, in the modern period, the Westerners began to forsake religion itself. Into that dismal atmosphere Swamiji Vivekananda brought the eternal message of India beginning from Rig Veda up to our own time - that Truth is One. We approach that truth in different ways. That is how India was taught the profound message of harmony, cooperation and good-will in the world of religion. This message has inspired not only the saints and sages of India, but also the common people and the political state. It is this spirit of Indian culture, Indian spirituality that Sri Ramakrishna experimented with, re-authenticated and gave forth as a great positive message for the modern world, which we can extend to our time - the message of harmony. It is this message that has made India a land of active toleration. This was the message and vision that Swamiji took to the West. Swamiji's message made Americans
realize that their religious ideas must be as broad and generous as their socio-political ideas. The achievement of harmony at the individual social and political levels is absolutely necessary for peaceful co-existence which nations are so eagerly striving for today. Peace is such an esteemed value that there is a Noble Prize for peace. This shows the universal value of harmony. If the West could learn this lesson from Swamiji, surely Indian society should learn it more eagerly and sincerely.

Though India may have failed to work out all the humanistic and social visions of our philosophy, the basic foundations are entirely sound because they are entirely human and entirely universal. It is for this that India is respected by thinking people abroad, for her age-old culture and spirituality.

Looking at the basic foundations of Indian society, it was a challenge of the modern period - to change the pattern of the economically and socially weak India into the pattern of the eternal India. India required to change her body-politic to fit in with the ever-healthy eternal soul of India.

Swami Vivekananda was the first to emphasize the need to cultivate the scientific spirit and temper by our Indian people. He raised his voice on behalf of the confluence of these two energy streams - physical science and the science of spirituality, as both have the common goal of total human development. Through this confluence Swamiji evolved a rational, universal, practical and comprehensive spirituality which he called Practical Vedanta. The central truth of the Vedanta, the humanism which Swamiji derives from it is the profound message out of which alone can come fruitful and happy inter-human relationships, which is the
most urgent need of the modern scientific age. The basis of humanism is the actual realization of the unity of all beings which comes through spiritual orientation and development. When it is proclaimed that Indian culture is spiritual, it should be understood that it does not mean that every Indian is spiritual. It means that it has a spiritual direction. It shows the path to spiritual development which is ultimately regarded as the highest value. This value translates into renunciation and service at the level of social life. The spiritual direction of Indian culture is revealed in its four cardinal virtues of dharma, artha, kama and moksha wherein moksha is the ultimate and highest value.

The wisdom of India and the eternal message of human dignity and freedom of the Shruti constituent of the Indian tradition has found expression in the Preamble of the secular constitution that free India proclaimed for herself in 1950. The Constitution proclaims India as a sovereign, democratic republic; abolishes inequalities of caste and untouchability; gives freedom to every religion to express its highest and best, and promises all-round redemption of the millions of the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes and the backward sections of our immense population.

Even though it contains noble ideals, the Indian Constitution is only a document. It contains a vision and a resolve and many promises. But their implementation depends upon hard, efficient and co-operative work done by the alert citizens of India. This requires to grasp India in her wholeness, in her completeness, in her tremendous spiritual vision and human cultural experiment from the most ancient times to the present time.
Greatness to a democracy can come when pressing human problems have been solved and human development has been achieved. According to Swami Vivekananda the ability to solve the nation's problems can come when the Vedantic strength and character-efficiency and the modern scientific and practical strength and efficiency combine in the mind, heart and character of everyone of us. Then we shall be able to catch up with our national problems and solve them steadily. The democratic state offers the best opportunity for the mighty work of social transformation.

The reformist activities of the renaissance period were eminent precursors to the process of social change that went on and is still going on in Indian society. Through the various five-year plans for development, India has been able to tackle and even solve many of her problems effectively. This process is still going on as India is a developing country. The leaders of the renaissance period never strove to take India on the road of political aggression and expansionism. They were cultural leaders with universal vision and sympathies. India's expansion was ideological not physical. It was philosophical and spiritual. Thus, the renaissance leaders gave Indian society a direction for progress which could never age with time.

Swami Vivekananda gave the message that the problems of poverty and general backwardness can be successfully tackled only by a politics of service. Such a politics is inspired by a sense of national vision and dedication. Therefore, it has to be seen that democracy expresses itself not only in the constitution of the state but also in its administration in the functioning of its political parties and social groups and in the awareness of its
citizens. Political democracy becomes a sham if it doesn’t strive to transform itself, into economic and social democracy. This penetration of the democratic spirit and value into the nation is what strengthens democracy and that is achieved by constant vigilance on the part of the citizens. Indian society has worked hard to become an egalitarian democracy at the social and economic levels. In a vast country like India though much has been achieved the process of achieving the goals of democracy is an ongoing process. Only recently an enactment was passed granting the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education. Thus, the process of change and development ought to be continuous, otherwise society will stop progressing.

It can be said that in Swami Vivekananda, Indian society saw a personality with extraordinary power of vision and deliberation, who laid the moral and spiritual foundation of both the national and the international order. In his message of man-making education, man-making religion and the philosophy of Practical Vedanta and integral humanism Indian society has received the inspiration not only for her own rejuvenation from time to time, but for the rejuvenation of the entire human society.

Today the message of renunciation and service is lived by the numerous monks of the Ramakrishna order. They work tirelessly in society in the most remotest and dangerous areas of India in times of natural calamities and otherwise, without any fanfare or publicity. Quietly they do concrete social work.

Educational institutions that impart value-based education have been set up along with hospitals that are well-equipped. The Ramakrishna Order is not a religion but it is a living example of
the freedom of practice that true religion, inspires, that is, selfless service to humanity, irrespective of differences of caste, creed and religion. The Ramakrishna Order is carrying out such work in India and in the major countries of the world, through its Ramakrishna Maths and Memorials. In this way, the message of Swami Vivekananda has transgressed all boundaries, even that of nation. It has inspired many individuals and families to contribute selflessly to bring some betterment in society. Monks however cannot do all the work and therefore it is necessary that the knowledge of their efforts becomes a source of inspiration for the people of society to do the same.

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