CHAPTER III

REFORM MOVEMENTS

The various socio-religious reform movements which took place in India during the British rule had its roots far back in the previous centuries where reformers from all over India came forward denouncing the social and religious evils which had enveloped the society. In the social sphere, there were movements which combated the religious superstitions, and attacked idolatry, polytheism and hereditary priest hood. Islam's attack on caste and idolatry led to religious ferment which culminated in the Bhakti Cult, single minded direct devotion to God, and liberalism in religion. There emerged a succession of remarkable teachers such as Ramanuja, Kabir, Chaitanya and others, "who advocated reconciliation of the two religious beliefs". They also "raised their powerful voice against the vices prevailing in society, and made it incumbent on their

followers to desist from them".¹

The caste system was a special target of attack for the social reformers. Ramananda had an independent mind. He travelled far and wide and brought about a radical change in his outlook. The result of his extensive travelling, experiences and discussions with several schools of religious thought was that he made a bold departure from the doctrines of the school to which he belonged. He preached the worship of Vishnu to that of Ram and taught the doctrine of Bhakti to all, indifferent of any caste or creed. He denounced the regulations of Ramanuja with regard to the preparations and partaking of meals and propounded a new sect, wherein disciples of all walks of life and of all castes were admitted. He applied himself to the study of the "Shastras" to prove that the observance of caste rules was unnecessary for anyone who sought the service of God. He laid it down as a rule, that "all persons of any caste who accepted the tenets and principles of his sect might eat and drink together irrespective of caste"². Tulsidas and Kabir were both famous disciples of Ramananda.


2. Ibid, p.637.
Ramananda's teaching gave rise to two schools of religious thoughts, one which remained to the ancient beliefs and allowed only slight changes, and other which held independent views and attempted to create a religion which would be acceptable to men of all creeds especially the Hindus and Muslims. The former class was represented by Tulsidas and the latter by Kabirdas.

Tulsidas is unrivalled as a saint of Ram Bhakti. He went deep into the core of the human heart, but never exposed them fully before the common gaze. He was like a "natural perennial mountain spring which bubbles with the waters of pure sweet joy and slakes the thirst of those who are weary and heavy laden with the sorrows of the world".

Kabir whose teaching was a synthesis of the finest Hindu and Muslim sentiments, condemned rituals and caste. Delhi, the great old capital of India, was growing infamously weak in the 14th century as a result of unending feuds between rival Hindu and Muslim groups. Nothing could save the political situation except a new orientation of spiritual thought and living. Thus came into being the Bhakti Movement in India.

"The immortality of Kabir lies in the wonderful change he brought about in the thought and life of the two warring races, and the unity he achieved among them. Kabir combined the zeal of a reformer with a humility of a devotee. He regarded the spiritual basis of Hinduism and Islam as one, and revolted against the super structures of dogmas. He made a strong effort to unite Hinduism and Islam into one religion. He wrote strongly against some of the ritualism of both the Hindus and the Muslims.

Kabir rejected idol worship of the Hindus. Ramananda, who was Kabir's religious mentor, once gave him a few idols to wash in the Ganges. The idols were very dirty and Kabir struggled hard to clean them, but failed. He then addressed the idols and said:

"Ye are Gods, and it seems impossible for a mortal like me to wash you clean, so let me throw you in deep water, then wash yourself well......". Saying this, he threw the idols in different directions of the river. Then he began to meditate on the futility of idolatry, and composed the verses for singing. When Ramananda's messenger came to know what Kabir had done, he went away with rage. It was then that Kabir said:

"If by worshipping stones, God is gained, I would worship

the mountains. The flour mill stone is superior to that stone and people grind on it" 1. He renounced stone worship and in the "Shabdas" 2 he stated:

"O Saints, see the world has gone mad. If I tell the truth, they attack me, they believe in false hood. I have seen the religions, and those who obey the law. Forsaking the supreme spirit, they worship stones, they lack wisdom" 3.

Kabir was a strong opponent of caste and its manifold taboos. His philosophy maintained that caste would not determine a man. He decried the caste prejudices of the Hindus, and said that all men came from the same place, and landed at the same ghat, but in this world, they have been misled into various ways. Kabir repeatedly emphasised upon the point that the Hindus and Muslims were one. No caste barrier could separate them. According to his philosophy:

"The Hindu resorts to the temple and the Musalman to the mosque, but Kabir goes to the place where both are known" 4.

2. "Shabdas" means precepts.
He said:

Make thy mind thy kaaba,
The body its enclosed temple,
Conscience its primary teacher.
Then, O priest call men to pray to
that mosque,
Which hath five gates.
The Hindus and the Musalmans have the same Lord.  

Kabir had a strong conviction that all human beings are same and man made caste had no meaning at all. "If you say that I am a Hindu, then it is not true, nor am I a Musalman; I am a body made of five elements, where the Unknown (Gaitri) plays. Mecca has verily become Kasi and Ram has become Rahim".  

Kabir asked both the Hindus and the Muslims to have reverence for all living creatures and to abstain from bloodshed. He further denounced the supremacy of the Brahmans. He was of the view that with the artificial thread the Brahmans were prone to

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cause dissensions in the society. He said to the Brahmans:

"Wearing the artificial thread you cause dissensions in this world. Worship Him who holds the bow in his hand (Rama)." 1

He vehemently criticised the Brahmans by directly hitting at them:

"........By wearing the sacred thread you become a Brahman. What do you make your wives wear? They are Sudras, and they place the food before you, and why you, a pande, partake of it?" 2

Kabir was of the opinion that with their false vanity, the Brahmans had lost their identity. They have forgotten the very essence of Brahma:

"Hear all the doctrines of the Brahmans without Hari, a boat full of them has sunk into water. Being Brahman, they do not know the Brahma." 3

Kabir did not believe in giving charities to the Brahmans.


2. Ibid, p.68.

3. Ibid, p.69.
He opined:

"Give not your alms to him in charity,
Whom men call Brahman, but who rogue may be;
The fellow goes with all possessed to hell,
And takes with him the laymen blind as well". 1

Kabir also preached the supremacy of "Guru" or mentor. He felt that man in general could go the easier way in order to attain the Almighty through the Guru. In his opinion, it is the Guru who treads the path for the common man. In fact, he has esteemed the mentor more than the Almighty:

"Before me Hari stands, the Guru Stands
Whom shall I bow to with these folded hands,
My heart unto my Guru doth incline,
Who showed the way to God, O Guru mine". 2

Thus with his manifold preachings Kabir brought a change in the social structure of the then India.

Guru Nanak (1469-1539), a contemporary of Kabir and the Mughal ruler Babur founded the Sikh faith. Principally, a social


2. Ibid, p.83.
and religious thinker, Nanak lived in a period of Indian History filled with political upheavals, atrocities and lawlessness. He condemned formalism and ritualism in religion and tried to blend the mystical ideas of the Hindu and Muslim faiths in Sikhism. When Nanak came to the limelight, the condition of India was deplorable. Idolatry prevailed all over the country. A complication of various systems and intricate methods of stone-worship, priestly bigotry, selfish motives and the oppressive system of caste had confused and puzzled the mankind as a whole. In the midst of such disorder, Nanak took up the task to rekindle the light which had long been lost into oblivion.

The spirit of Nanak's teachings was the observance of the Universal brotherhood of man and fatherhood of the Lord God, who was omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. He realised that in order to heal the wounds of the society it was essential to end the conflicts of religion. He never recognised any caste, class distinction and addressed all classes alike, whether Hindus or Muslims or any other caste. Guru Nanak wrote:

"Castes are nonsense, names are nonsense,
All creatures have one shelter - that of God”. ¹

Like Kabir, Nanak preached the unity of Godhead, with vehemence the formalism of both Hindu and Islam. He wrote:

"Religious consisteth not in mere words;
He who looketh on all men as equal is religious,
Religion consisteth not in wondering to tombs
or places of cremation..........
Abide pure amidst the impurities of the world
Thus shalt thou find the way of religion”. ²

Nanak scrupulously abstained from the influence of wealth and even rejected the offers of jagirs and assignments of land revenue free. Once when Nanak was offered three wells for the maintenance of a public kitchen, he rejected the offer with the remark:

ਲੋਗੇਂ ਕੋਲ ਸੁਧਾਰੀਆਂ ਦੀ, ਇੱਕਾਰ ਲੋਗੇਂ ਨਾਈ ।
ਇੱਕਾਹ ਲੋਗੇਂ ਨੀ ਤਲਾਵਾਂ, ਜਗ ਕਚਾ ਨਹੀं ਰਹਾ ਦੀ ॥


"There is only one kitchen of the Lord and none other. No other kitchen can work, nor can it remain for long in the world". ¹

Nanak deprecated the practice of Sati. In his several hymns, Nanak disapproved of this custom, since in his opinion the "Widow who follow-eth her husband and dieth had no pure love". The Guru contended "that the concremation of the widows was useless and did not serve any purpose". ² If a widow loved her husband, his death is a torture to her. On the other hand, if a widow had no love for her husband, his death was of no concern to her. Thus, it was useless to cremate the widow by force. In his hymns, Nanak thus brought forward the futility of woman sacrificing before her husband's pyre, in order to attain salvation.

The Sikh Guru resolutely set themselves against the evil practice of infanticide. They made it clear that among the obligations set forward in the sikh Baptism was to dissociate with all those inhuman/.

people who killed their daughters. "The practice of infanticide is most strenuously forbidden by the followers of the Sikh Guru. There were several passages in the "Adi Granth" in which the slayers of daughters are enumerated among the most heinous criminals. An obligation not to kill their daughters is specially imposed on all the Sikhs at the time of Baptism; and they are even forbidden to associate with those who do so. The practice of infanticide is denounced in all "Rabind Namas" or rules for the guidance of Sikhs. They thus succeeded to a certain extent to stop this practice.

The Guru also tried to elevate the position of women and remonstrated with those who disrespected the female sex. They were of the view that for the woman folk this Universe is created, and in order to respect humanity one ought to respect the female sex:

"Why call her bad from whom are born kings?"

Like Kabir, the Sikh Guru prohibited the usage of wine among his followers. The Guru opined:

2. Ibid, p.638.
"Men holy, clever and great have degraded themselves, to the level of brutes by the use of wine. It will hold men captive even without fetters".  

Guru Teg Bahadur, the nineth Guru preached against tobacco:

"Save the people from the vile drug and employ thyself in the service of Sikhs and holymen. Rely on the Guru who is the protector in both worlds".

The Sikh Guru propounded several social reforms and attempted to transform its very form. Nanak also did away with the birth, marriage and death ceremonials then in vogue among the Hindus. The attempt to forbid child marriage brought about several opposition from the high born Kshtriyas who conspired together and propagated an agitation against this movement. They even complained to Akbar and asked them to stop this practice but failed altogether.

Ram Das, the fourth Guru began the construction of the Golden Temple at Amritsar as a central place, where the people from

2. Ibid., p.17.
all walks of life could assemble on a common platform. He thus taught the people to sit together and to foster and engender brotherly love which was so essential to strengthen the national tie.¹

Guru Govind, on his succession to Guru Tej Bahadur, took up several measures to attain his mission. He set himself to punish the oppressor. He made no distinction between class and caste of people. He meted equal treatment to both Hindus and Muslims. He preached against idol worship, and called upon the people to worship one Lord who would suppress evil and help to redeem lightening among the people shrouded in darkness. In his "Bichitra Natak" he has stated:

अब रखना बेशी तुम करो ।
शिक्षत अब उसीकाल सहीरो ॥
दुस्त में आये उहावत उल्लप्ता ।
संकल मल्लवच कोरी रुज जाता ॥

"Thou, O Lord protect me now,
Bless the righteousness and destroyeth the vicious
All the wicked who are or may be born
All the melachaas destroy in the field of battle".²

Thus the preaching of the Sikh Gurus were mostly confined to instill unto the Sikh minds a spirit of meekness, humility and surrender to the will of God. Although they were not fully successful in their mission, nevertheless, they prepared the way for a religious revolution which continues till the present day.

Bengal, an outlying province of the Mughal Empire, was cut off from the centre. During the early medieval period many debased forms of worship and of tantric philosophy and practices flourished among the Hindus. The power of the Brahman had become oppressive. The lower strata of society groaned under the autocracy of the higher, who shut the portals of learning against the inferior classes.¹

At this juncture, Bengal witnessed the rise of Sri Chaitanya, a great scholar who became a man of faith and emotion, established a form of Vaishnavism based on faith, and influenced greatly the people of Bengal.²

Chaitanya inculcated a novel idea of love for Krishna in the hearts of all living being. He gave utmost importance to spiritual love.

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He preached that spiritual love could alone lead a man to perfection. In the vast literature of the Vaishnavas, he led stress on "Prema" or "Spiritual love". The "Chaitanya Charitamrta" says: "An earthly passion is "Kama" and no "Prema". The former limits his vision to a narrow place, nay darkness; it does not allow a person to see beyond his self, while the latter (Prema) is like the glorious sun illuminating the truth of this universe".1

Chaitanya led great stress on religious hymns. He believed that men, while chanting religious hymns in praise of Krishna, would forego all evil deeds which they would have otherwise indulged in. He was a social reformer of a different order. His religious hymns were so enchanting that even the Qazi could not avoid being attracted. Qazi Bar-Bahauk was the then administrator of Nabadwip. Although he did not disfavour the Hindus as such, yet he could not digest the increasing popularity of the Vaishnava cult. He ordered that all hymns of the Chaitanya cult be stopped. Chaitanya went to the Qazi with the disciples and convinced the latter to order the revival of the hymns of the Krishna cult on the streets of Nabadwip. "O Lord, please do me a favour. Order every

where in the city of Nabadwip that no one should ever prohibit the chanting of the religious hymns of Kirtan" (Translation). The Qazi who was already impressed with Chaitanya's preachings withdrew his orders instantly. He said:

"I promise that my orders will be such that no one of my descendants will ever forbid the Kirtan, or the religious songs sung by you" (Translation). Thus with the immense personality, he even brought the Muslim subjects into its fold.

Chaitanya believed that image of his Krishna flashed from all directions, and those who had already attained true love, and

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1. আমার একটি দান খুলি কৃপা করে দাত ।
   আদেশ পাচার কর নবদ্বীপে কেটে বনে
   কর্ণন ও কর্ণল বন্ধ না করে ।


2. আজি অপর করে বলথি আদৈব বংলের
   কেটে তাজায় প্রচিতি কর্ণল বন্ধ করে না ।

had a concrete vision could have a clear sight of God. Chaitanya taught men to sacrifice for the cause of others. One should be a true embodiment of religious meekness. He tried to deviate men from animosity, selfishness and jealousy. He asked the men to be like a tree which underwent all pains, yet gave fruits and shelter to all:

"The tree does not want a drop of water from anyone, though it dries up. It does not speak of the wrongs it suffers, but gives shelter even to one who cuts it with its axe. It exposes itself to sun and rain only to give fruits and flowers to others". Chaitanya's views were so vivid that scholars, poets and ascetics all gathered round him, for they found a store of that joy which they defined as heavenly.

Chaitanya laid an axe at the very root of the caste system, though like some aromatic plants it had the power in India to revive

2. Ibid, p.xii.
and multiply where it is cut and it is not a thing to be easily destroyed. Chaitanya took up matter like this and expressed himself:

"Even if a Mucchi (Cobbler) is devoted to God,
A thousand times do I bow to him".  

He again said;

"Lord preaches that a person who can partake dom's meal (Low-caste) can encounter the Lord Krishna everywhere".  

At Nadiya, before the Sanyasis, Chaitanya often took the low-caste people to his home. He never hesitated to do menial jobs which as a Brahman he should not have done. When the people forbade him to do so, he always told them that such jobs would help him to get a closer vision of God. He believed that Krishna saw no

1. 'gfjr ieBc l
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Ibid, P. 160.

2. Ibid, P. 160.
 distinction of caste. Those who could attain perfection could come closer to God.¹

One of the greatest contributions of Chaitanya's preachings was the unification of Hindus and Muslims. The Mohammedans, who were great iconoclasts at first, gradually succumbed to the religious influences of the Hindus. Not only many of them became staunch Vaishnavas, but many began to worship the Goddess Kali, Sitala Devi, Saraswati, Shiva etc.²

Shamsher Gazi, the hero of "Shamser Ghazir Gaan" is said to have once had a dream wherein he found the Goddess Kali, worshipped in the family of the Tipperah Raj, appearing before him and saying "Listen to me, O Ghazi, see I have come to grant you a boon. You will win your battles easily, if you would only worship me

¹. कি রা পূর্দ্ব, কিমা ফের্দ্যোর নৃগী কেন হয় ।
   আই কৃষ্ণ নেতা তোমাই পূর্দ্ব হয় ॥
   Roy, S.N. : Bharater Sadhak, III Vol., Calcutta, 1967,
   p.125.

sacrificing a human being at my alter”.\(^1\)

The Goddess is said to have appeared again. The Ghazi hesitatingly told the Goddess: "You are the Goddess of the Hindus. I being a Mohammedan, how can I worship you?" The Goddess, however, it is said, persuaded him to worship her with the help of a Hindu Brahman. Shemsher Ghazi did as he was told, and it is said that he was successful all through his life.\(^2\)

Chaitanya thus propounded a theory which taught men to attain God the easier way. Although his social reforms did bring some reformations, nevertheless, certain social conventions were so deep rooted that they took several centuries to reform, and to bring an authentic transformation on the social structure of India.

The Sufis were a sect of Muslims who were a product of the impact of Iranian and Arabic Culture. "They extolled the individual

\(^1\) Ibid, p.102-103.
\(^2\) Ibid, P.102-103.
mystic over the rigid formalism of Islam. They believed in the essential unity of all religions and preached for spiritual perfection through seven stages. These were the prayer to God (Ibadat), Love of God (Ishq), renunciation of all worldly desires (Tarq), knowledge of God (Marefat), ecstasy of contemplation of God (Wajd), union with God (Wasl), and the absorption in the Eternal Being (Finnah Fillah). Their movement thus represented a reaction against "the worldliness, luxury and eternal piety of the period which followed the Muslim conquests".

The Muslim conquests in India brought in their wake a large number of Sufis. Originally the Sufis in Northern India accompanied the Muslim raiders and after the political conquests of a particular region they preached Islam and joined hands with the rulers to consolidate Muslim power, and to convert Hindus to Islam. Their patience, tolerance, sympathy and friendly spirit brought several Hindu followers closer to them, though they were mostly from the lower and depressed classes of the Hindus.

Later on, many Sufis gave up their evangelistic zeal and instead, devoted themselves to a comparative study of the religious and philosophies of India. Dara Shikoh and Abul Fazl fall under this category.

The early Sufis were simple and pious people who lived a life of discipline and poverty (fakr), and devoted themselves in meditation and in search of truth. It was first a woman Rabia-al-Adawiyaa, popularly known as Rabia-al-Basri, who gave a new dimension and preached divine love of God without expecting any return. She said:

"O, God, if I worship Thee in fear of Hell, burn me in Hell; and if I worship Thee in hope of paradise, exclude me from paradise, but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, withhold not thy Everlasting Beauty". ¹ Thus her philosophy marked a transition from an ascetic quietism to an advanced form of a doctrine which was easily accessible to all.

The Sufis believed that God was the supreme Being, and the only real agent of man. Sachal, one of the greatest Sufis of Sind expressed the idea in a beautiful song:

''Open your eyes, behold the show;
All is the picture of the Lord.
Here, there, and everywhere is that
Heart ravisher all around''.

Guru Arjun Singh, whom the Sufis include in their fold, has the same idea in his "Sukhmani Ashtapadi".

''The cause of cause is our God,
There is none other.............''.

Prof. H.L. Chopra has given a vivid description. He is of the view that although Sufis believed that their chief mentor was God, yet they were not prepared to attribute the evil to his name. Chopra thus explained that the Sufis had also propounded a theory which could transform the evil into goodness. The Sufis explained the whole situation, with a beautiful illustration. A pool of standing water becomes dirty when dirt is thrown into it. It takes the colour of whatever it comes in contact with and retains it. But if the same water gets connected with a perennially flowing stream

2. Ibid., p.598.
it becomes sooner or later purified. Thus the Sufis opined that so long as an individual remained individual, and considered himself responsible for all his actions that appear to flow from him, the activities leave their traces. But if the individual becomes one with the Universal life, the activities also become the same, and ceases to have a moral colouring.

Mansur-ul-Hallaj was one of the earliest Sufis to visit India. However Alibiu Uthman-al-Julabi-al Mujuiri, was the first Sufi known to have made India his home, and in the middle of the 11th century he wrote his first treatise in Persian on mysticism. Later several Sufis came in large numbers with Muslim conquerors and began to preach Sufism.

The latter Sufi saints promulgated a doctrine on the same line. They believed in the attainment of God, and union with the Divine-Being by adhering to the mystic path "tariqua" or "suluk". They preached that this world was fiction, unreal, and an illusion. They thus taught the doctrine of "Wahdat-al-Wujud" or unity of Being.

2. Ibid, p.599.
Thus like the Vedanta philosophy the Sufi philosophy stressed the need of "Know thyself".¹

The Sufis were also influenced by Hindu doctrines to a great extent. The two philosophies merged into one another thus rendering Hindu Muslim unity. In fact, Sufism could be regarded as "Vedanta in Muslim dress". "It is indeed a remarkable illustration of cultural integration that through Sufism, Indian monotheism should have found its way into Islamic Philosophy".²

Several mystical practices also had its parallel from Hindu Philosophy. The "paspanfas"³ has been derived from Yogic breathing exercises. The Sufi "Zikr" is similar to Hindu "Japa" and the "Tasbih" (rosary) is similar to the Hindu "Mala".

Alike the Bhakti philosophy the Sufis also believed in the total submission to the Guru. According to them, it is the Guru, or the religious mentor, who would alone guide the human being from the struggling path towards enlightenment. One of the strong

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2. Ibid, p.47.
3. Yogic Exercises.
stones of the sufistic edifice is the relationship of Murshid (teacher)\(^1\) and Taalib (disciple)\(^2\). Of all the relationship known to the human mind, the aforesaid relations according to the Sufis, is the best and everlasting. Shah Latif, the Sufi poet said:

"Guru and Govind both are standing before me,
To whose feet shall I attach myself,
I am ready to be sacrificed for that Guru,
Who made known to me the name of Govinda".\(^3\)

The Murshid thus acts as a perfect administrator. He arranges circumstances for one's growth, and develops the seeds which he sows on the soils of the human being.

The Sufis have further preached that a good man can only be proved when he goes hand in hand with a man with evil motives. The Murshid always called upon the people to place others at a much higher position than themselves. They advised the people:

1. "Murshid" is the person who is able to satisfy the seeking impulse.
2. "Taalib" literally means a seeker.
"Become your enemies friends" and also "They rebuke you; you must not speak in return".¹

The Sufis have also shown due reverence and respect to all religious leaders. According to the Sufis, Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, had the same importance to them as Lord Krishna of the Mahabharata.² The Sufis condemned religious bigotry and fanaticism and preached the essential unity of all religions. In India, the Sufis approximated the Hindu practices of meditation and asceticism. Thus the Sufis' manifold preachings brought the Hindus and the Muslims into closer ties.

Sufism thus aided the reapproachment between Hindu and Muslim beliefs and culture in the Bhakti Movement. Sufi thoughts were influenced by Indian thought, particularly in the 17th century. Dara Shikoh stands out amongst those who sought to harmonize Hindu and Muslim mystic philosophies, abandoned dogma, preached simple faith and stressed the fundamental unity of faiths. The Sufis thus with their doctrine of love and oneness with the Supreme Being tried to weld the Hindu and Muslim faiths into one string.


The religious life of the period was in a deplorable condition. The growth of Islam in India was largely due to the pioneering efforts of some of the earlier Sufi Saints. The central phenomenon in the political history of the 18th century India was the gradual disintegration of the Mughal Empire. It was a period of transition and transformation of the medieval society which was dying, yet the modern age had still to arrive. "Moral and Ethical values were thrown to the winds, larger national interests were neglected, for the sake of personal gratification".

At this juncture of political and social upheaval, the Muslim community could not sit idle. The Muslim Intelligentsia also took up the gauntlet of several reforms and thus Wahabism was born. The Muslim rulers were the champions of Islam. Yet they were more or less guided by political and military considerations. It was thus felt that Muslims had deviated from the real spirit of Islamic religion. Like other religions, Islam too had its share of Revivalist Movement both in and outside India. "The Revivalist urge consisted primarily of the belief in the coming of a Messiah promised by God, who would make a clean sweep of existing political,

2. Ibid., p.4.
social and religious evils of the times, and restore Islam to its primitive glory.\(^1\)

The first man who took a keen interest in the manifold affairs of the state in India was Syed Ahmed Sarhindi, a contemporary of Akbar. On account of the absence of sufficient communication he could not make his movement a very popular one. His movement for the first time objected against the prevailing evils and demanded an immediate reformation of the Islamic Society. The 18th century witnessed the decadence of the Ottoman and the Mughal Empire. This decline led some Muslim Intellectuals to probe deep into the causes of the serious malady. Muhamad-bin-Abdul Wahab of Arabia, and Shah Waliullah Dihlavi of India were the two prominent thinkers who wanted to regenerate Islam. The prevailing socio-religious degradation and the increasing loss of political force to the non-muslims were the two forces behind the rise of the Wahabi Movement.\(^2\)

The Wahabis strongly believed in Monotheism. It implied that God, the Almighty is the creator of all other Beings. He is unequal in his attributes. This was followed by the belief of "Ijtehad"

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2. Ibid., p.15.
that is the right of interpretation of the Scripture in the new context. They stressed upon the desirability to exercise the right of interpretation. They wrote several treatises on the subject criticising the advocates of slavish imitation.

Unlike the exponents of the Bhakti Movement, the Wahabis did not believe in the theory of intermediaries. They disbelieved in the very theory that there were certain saintly persons who were close to God. The Wahabi theory bore a new look. They believed in action. According to them, God could be attained by all who could render active service and support to the Islamic faith. "Passive belief in the principles of Islam is not enough".¹

The Wahabis condemned many of the existing religious and social taboos, which were shaking the very foundation of the society. They opposed to the "tomb worship", exaggerated veneration to Pirs, excessive dowries in marriages and the general show of pomp on festive occasions, such as circumcision and "Milad" (celebrations of prophets birth day) and prohibition of widow remarriages.²

Syed Ahmed also set an example by disregarding the social conventions of Islam regarding widow remarriage. He married the widow

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2. Ibid., p.17.
of his elder brother, who had died sometime ago. "This act was the first of its kind among the higher classes of Muslims in India, and it was an act of courage born out of conviction."  

Bihar also tread forward in the path of Syed Ahmed. The Sadiqpur family of Bihar are said to be the pioneers in this field. The reformers occupied their views in the "Sirat-i-Mustaquim" which was regarded as the social and religious manifesto of the movement. "With its compilation the views of Syed Ahmed crystallised into well formulated theories." Several missionary tours were set up by him, which propagated his principles. Religious discussions were held and subjects of reformation were discussed. This helped him largely to come into close contact with the masses, and also to observe the various evils which had hampered the progress of Muslim society. No doubt, these were the years of silence, yet they were solid organisational years.

Syed Ahmed selected the border areas for his activities, because he was keen to fight the English, whom he believed to be traders


2. The Sadiqpur family were active participants to remove the social evils from society. They forwarded several reformatory measures, notable among them was widow remarriage.

3. Ibid, p.29.
and vendors of goods. He repeatedly referred to this fact. In one his letters to Sikandar Jah of Hyderabad, he wrote, "Since some years past, through the command of God, the Indian polytheists and European infidels have gained predominance over the territories of various persons of rank and honour. The grandeur and glory of men of learning and integrity have been ruined."  
It is however significant that in all his letters, there is hardly any hostile reference to the Hindus or one indicating the movement to be directed against them as such. On the contrary, he wrote a letter to Hindu Rao assuring him that the powers of the various religious chiefs would be restored. Thus Syed Ahmed always realised that true reforms can only be justified when the land would be cleared off by the alien enemies. The Hindus in their turn contributed to the funds raised by the Wahabis. In a meeting in Bombay held by the Wahabis it was sighted that the audience were mainly Hindus.  

Inspite of several reforms, the Wahabis emphasised on the cultivation of five essentials of Islam, "Prayer, Fast, Haj, Zakat and

1. The Sadiqpur family were active participants to remove the social evils from society. They forwarded several reformatory measures, notable among them was widow remarriage, p.326.  
2. Ibid, p.327.
Jehad". They strictly adhered to the essentials of Syed Ahmed who always preached humility, contentment and perseverance and condemned greed, jealousy and pride.

W. Hunter in his Thesis criticised the Wahabi Movement. But in later years, his theory was repudiated by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. In his Review, Syed Ahmed refuted Hunter's views. He maintained that the propounders of the Wahabi Movement were neither anti-English, nor anti-Government. In fact, the Wahabis believed that the future of the Indian Muslims lay not in keeping aloof from the Western ideals but to adapt themselves to their new environment. Although Syed Ahmed believed in assimilation, yet his policy had a political motive also. His movement was not only to eradicate the social evils, but also to get rid of any foreign yoke which might hamper India's progress. "The establishment and continuance of a political movement and western ideas ran counter to his school of thought and hence this was a peculiar interpretation of the nature of the movement". It is thus clear that because of this policy the English authors called the Wahabi Movement anti English. H.W. Bellew in his report on the Yusuffzais wrote about Syed Ahmed,

"For a brief period he enjoyed a very successful career while stirring up the Kings and people of the different adjacent Sunni Muhammadan Governments to flock to his standard which was unfurled to re-establish the Empire of Islam and to rid the Indian peninsula of its infidel people - the British and the Sikhs.\(^1\)

A modern writer while examining the nature of the Wahabi Movement opined: "The popular basis of the Wahabi Movement stands vindicated by all its well-knit and integrated organisation drawing recruits and money from the whole expanse of the country extending from Dacca to Peshawar.\(^2\) Yet he also believes that of all the Movements which started during the British regime in India, the Wahabi Movement was the most radical of all.

Inspite of everything, Syed Ahmed was deeply moved by the evil aspects of the socio-religious conditions then prevailing in India, and also the foreign domination which was a definite threat to India. He rose from his humble rank in life to fight against the removal of the evils. His motives were sincere and selfless. In fact, he seems, in many respects, to be some what of an Indian Garibaldi.\(^3\)

The Faraizi Movement took its full form in Bengal, along with the Wahabi Movement. The founder of the Faraizi Movement, Haji Sharitullah started the movement to reform the Muslim Society in 1802. His movement was similar to that of Muhammad-bin Abdul Wahab of Najd. It denounced the un-Islamic innovations, customs and rituals and declared Bengal a Dar-ul-Harb. "It inculcated a spirit of uncompromising puritanism among its followers who were characterised by a strict adherence to the commands of God as given in the Quran alone".

The Muslim peasantry of East Bengal were oppressed and tortured by the English Indigo planters who had by then become the newly created class of landed proprietors. It was Dudu-Mian who championed the causes of this peasantry class. He united the entire oppressed class and formed a well knitted organisation. He appointed "Khalifas" in several districts of Barasat, Jessore, Pabna, Malda and Dacca. They in their turn, strengthened the organisation and also made the peasants realise the high handedness of the English planters. Dudu-Main with his wonderful strategy successfully boycotted the English Court of Law. He persuaded the Indians to form their own panchayats and adjudge the disputes arising out of their

lands. "To the simple and oppressed peasants the doctrine of the social equality of all men as well as the repudiation of exorbitant and illegal cases, as preached by Dudu Mian was warmly welcomed".¹ Gradually Dudu Mian succeeded in bringing most of the Indigo planters and the peasants by his side. He protected them against the levy of unjust cesses. This annoyed the Zamindars, who instituted several criminal proceedings against Dudu Mian.

In its later stages, the Faraizi Movement got merged with the Wahabi Movement. This was led by Mir Nisar Ali, popularly known as Titu Mir, who alike Dudu Mian fought for the cause of the oppressed peasants. He also propagated several reforms to improve the conditions of the masses. This was resented by the Zamindars, whose vested interests were being attacked. Some of the Zamindars were more alarmed and aggrieved of the Mir's teachings, since it denounced some of their cherished social practices and customs. The Zamindars thus tried their level best "to check the growth of an association which treated them with scant respect and exhibited a power of combination which might thereafter affect their interests."²

² Khera, P.N. : British Policy towards Sind upto the Annexation 1843, Lahore, 1941, p.25.
Sri Krishna Dev Roy, a Zamindar of Poorna village, had imposed a collective fine on some villages which resulted in a scuffle. The employees of the Zamindar, who had gone to do the collections, oppressed and beat several followers of Titu Mir. The Zamindar also in his turn, fraudulently exercised his powers to arrest those who had failed to pay their arrears. Not only that, he instituted fictitious suits against the peasants, produced them in Company's court and had them arrested in execution of his decrees. This behaviour led the leaders realise the gravity of the situation. They strengthened the Movement by forming a militant class. A new ray of hope could be seen and the Indians rose against the oppression with a new vigour.

The English, however were surprised at the audacity of the Indians. The British Government criticised the short sighted attitude of the Company who regarded the movement of Syed Ahmed in 1829 as nothing important or worth taking notice of. The people openly helped the Syed with men and money from Bengal, and joined in open rebellion within 80 miles of Calcutta. Yet the disturbance was treated by the English as "inexplicable and the rebels were treated as men devoid of intelligence, incapable of any design".  

The rising was essentially an effort of an oppressed peasantry who were harassed by the newly created classes of landed proprietors. Sri S.B. Chaudhuri in his highly informative study of the nature of the various anti-British Movements in India, said about the Faraizi Movement that "In its social and economic aspects the Faraizi's were on the side of the helpless peasants whom they helped to resist tyranny". ¹

A salient feature of the Movement was that it made an attempt to inculcate a spirit of passive non-cooperation among the masses by refusing to take service under the English and refusing to go to the English Courts. "It was a significant beginning of a principle on the basis of which a magnificent structure was to be raised in the subsequent history of India's Freedom Movement". ²