

Handout 19: 19th c Socio-Religious Reform Movements

Nikhil Sheth

The socio-religious reforms movement which appeared in India in the 19th century is characterized as **Indian renaissance**. These movements played an important role in the emergence of a liberal and progressive new India. It is projected as the **harbinger** of modern age in India.

a person or thing that announces or signals the approach of another:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshub Chandra Sen, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, and Swami Vivekanand endeavoured to create a new India by liberating the masses from the clutches of **prevailing evils**. Defining moment of the 19th c was the creation of modern Indian man.

Reasons for emergence:

1. Response and reaction to the **evils prevailing** in India.
2. The role of **orientalists** in producing a knowledge of **India's past**
3. The role of **English education** and the impact of western **liberal traditions**
4. The role of Christian **Missionaries**
 - a. **Positive factor**: spread of education.
 - b. **Negative factor**: attack of Hinduism with efforts at **proselytization**
5. The role of **social legislations** under British government
6. Rise of new social **groups in India**

reform

1) Rise of intelligentsia
 2) language, literature, print media.
 western education
 Christianity
 reason + faith
 women question.
 state intervention.

renaissance
 reformation
 enlightenment

revival.

social and religious
 reform transform to
 political Gole.
 2) Christianity
 communal identity.
 3) revivalism
 urban -rural
 5 anticaste movements

social groups
 brahmo samaj
 ramkrishna mission
 atamiy sabha.
 pathana samaj

- 1) Hindu reform movements.
- 2) Hindu revivalist movements
- 3) Muslims reform+ revivalist movements
- 4) women's question
- 5) anti caste movements.
- 6) press.

Categories of Socio-religious Response to British Rule

The contact with the West evoked a chain of reactions among the intelligentsia. But the response from the intellectual world was not monolithic. Some were traditional intelligentsia trying to resist alien influences while others were reformists trying to modernize Indian society. Both of these spoke similar language but there were certain differences too. Roughly speaking, four major reactions of the period are easy to identify:

Radical reaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excessively westernized. Rejected the indigenous tradition and religion as inferior to the supposedly superior tradition of the West. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Henry Vivian Derozio Young Bengal Movement
critical Moderate reaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aimed at a synthesis of the best ingredients from both the Western and Eastern cultures. With the spirit of reason, they became critical of tradition and embarked upon the project of wholesale socio-religious reform. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rammohan Roy Brahmo Samaj Prarthana Samaj Gopal Krishna Gokhale Agarkar Aligarh Movement
Revivalist critical traditionalist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upheld their own civilization, valued their culture, and suggested only to eliminate the diseased, dysfunctional, irrational, obsolete or dead parts rather than borrowing uncritically from outside. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arya Samaj Bankim Chandra Ramakrishna Mission Aurobindo Theosophical Society
Orthodox or conservative traditionalist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anchored to the traditional culture and religion, it organised itself in defence of Hinduism. European ways were described as unworthwhile. Developed great pride in the ancient past of India, especially the high traditions of Hinduism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Radhakanta Deb Gurukul faction of Arya Samaj

These reactions, however, were not always mutually exclusive. Such reactions could be overlapping in character.

Nature and Character of the Reform Movement

Basic emphasis of Indian renaissance was on following Values:

- **Rationalism:**
 - It was applicable in every sphere of life e.g. child marriage was criticised not simply on the basis of moral & social values but also on the basis of human science. Likewise, Dadabhai Naororji made a criticism of colonial economy on the basis of thorough application of liberal ideas.
- **Humanism:**
 - Here humanism means the restoration of human dignity and to keep greater importance to human beings in relation to divine. Apart from that, it gives greater importance to this worldliness in comparison to other worldliness (life after death is other world).
 - Humanism believes that every person is born good only the circumstances make a person bad.
 - **Focus on improving this worldly life** was visible in the reform movements of 19th century. The reformers were disinterested in other worldliness; they did not invest their time and energy in unnecessary philosophical speculations.
- **Liberal and progressive**
 - The reformers wanted to liberate Indians from clutches of prevailing evils. They did not attack Hinduism as a whole but targeted only evils. Their intension was to recast old religion into new form, to create a new India society with forward looking outlook.
- **It was basically a social movement than a religious one.**
 - The basic concern of reformers was society not religion. But because the two were so much inter-woven, social reforms required religious reforms too.
 - Reform movements were **composite in character** because they targeted evils prevailing in **social, religious as well as political life**. RRM Roy was the first modern political agitator in India.
- **Mix of reform and revivalism**
 - English education in India initially attracted Indians to western liberal ideas. However, they soon realized the contradictions between British professed values and their actions, leading to a sense of reaction and a shift towards the traditional Indian model. Indian reformers were influenced by both western and traditional elements, with some emphasizing westernized ideas and others focusing more on traditional elements. The reformers' ideologies reflected a combination of both impact and reaction, with varying degrees of dominance for each influence.
- **Ideological challenge to the west**
 - The socio-religious reforms movement was inspired by western elements but it gave an ideological challenge to western elements itself. It tried to explore

weaknesses in the western model. Eg RRM wrote Precepts of Jesus wherein he exposed weaknesses of Christianity as well.

- **Religious universalism:**
 - It meant while working within the parameter of particular religious sect one has rise above sectarian boundary.
- **Assimilatory nature:**
 - They accepted good elements from everywhere. The positive elements were adopted from India's **past** as well as from **western** societies.
- **Democratic outlook:**
 - Reforms targeted **each section of population** so that every Indian could live a **dignified life**. This democratic **awakening** manifested itself initially in society and religion. Moreover, the reforms emphasized **equality of mankind**. They were **against discrimination** based on birth or any other ground.
- **Nationalistic outlook**
 - Nationalism was also dominant in the reform movements because the reformers targeted divisive socio-religious practices. They tried to bring Indian of different castes and communities together so that one India could be created.
- **Peaceful manner:**
 - Emphasize on **peaceful method** was another important identity of Indian socio-religious reform movements. Reforms propagated their message without attacking anybody, in **non-violent** manner.
- They represented **Indian renaissance**.
 - Renaissance means rebirth/restoration/revival of past but Indian renaissance was futuristic. The reformers were inspired by the vision of better and brighter future. This renaissance paved the way for the emergence of new India.

Bengal

(1) Young Bengal Movement

- **Henry Vivian Derozio** (1809-31) worked as a lecturer at Hindu college.
 - His outlook was shaped by the influence of French Revolution and English radicalism.
 - He was in favour of Indianization of services and emphasized women's liberation and western education. He also raised the issue of tenants' security.
- Young Bengal
 - A group of radical youths gathered under his magnetic leadership. He created a band of followers in Hindu college.
 - To promote free discussion and exchange of ideas, Derozio formed the **Academic Association** in 1828 in the Hindu College.
 - Another organisation setup was the '**Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge**' founded in 1838. Tarachand Chakravarty was the president of the society and it had 200 members.
 - The Derozians also published a magazine **Parthenon** (according to another view it was **Athenaeum**).
 - They were influenced by the writings of thinkers such as Mill, Bentham, Rousseau, Voltaire, and Thomas Paine.
 - They were encouraged to criticise and scrutinise the evil practices like idolatry, caste system, untouchability etc.
 - Later he was expelled from the college.
- They came to the realization that the conservative and superstitious practices of Hindu society were too primitive to withstand logical scrutiny. Motivated by their studies, they were determined to bring about a radical transformation in society. They attacked rituals & social taboos and pleaded for radical change in society. It promoted the spirit of secularism in Bengal.
 - Mere verbal criticism of the prevalent abuses of the Hindu society was not their only programme, they went much beyond it. Intoxicated by the spirit of European enlightenment, they decided to renounce Hinduism publicly. One member of the group wrote, "if there is anything that we hate from the bottom of our heart, it is Hinduism."
- Limitations: Derozio was inclined to take a sharp break from the past. The Young Bengal had indeed a revolutionary agenda, though in actual fact it failed to turn things upside down.



- Such startling demonstration of radicalism, which shocked the Hindu conservatives were too many. It couldn't maintain the balance between tradition & reforms and thus it couldn't get acceptance in Bengali society. Derozio was eventually removed from his position on the charge of misguiding the students.
- The Young Bengal movement was confined to a small section of the English educated middle class of Calcutta.
- Significance
 - The movement was not in vain. The Young Bengal radicals, under the influence of European reason, were able to raise new questions hitherto unasked. They could not supply the answers to the questions they raised, but, the points they raised were very important.
 - The Young Bengal radicals played a significant role in shaping a modern and better India, laying the foundation for its emergence. Their contributions to the Indian national movement in subsequent years were substantial.
- Though Derozio's family was from Portugal, he considered India as his motherland. He nurtured a deep sense of patriotism. He was perhaps the first modern nationalist poet in India. Two famous poems written by Derozio were – 'To India - My Native Land' and 'The Fakir of Jungheera'.

'The Fakir of Jungheera'

My country! In thy days of glory past
A beauteous halo circled round thy brow
and worshipped as a deity thou wast—
Where is thy glory, where the reverence now?
Thy eagle pinion is chained down at last,
And grovelling in the lowly dust art thou,
Thy minstrel hath no wreath to weave for thee
Save the sad story of thy misery!

(2) RRM Roy

"All modern reform movements educational, social and political have started from him and all Indian reformers of the present day are spiritually his children" – H.C. Zacharias in Renascent India

- He was the father of the socio-religious reforms movement. He is also considered as the first modern man in India.
- He taught his disciples and followers new ideas derived from Western thought but there was a constant attempt on his part to blend these Western thoughts with Indian tradition.
- He had multicultural impact on his personality. He studied Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and European literature. Firstly, he came under the influence of Arabic-Persian culture then that of Hindu-Buddhist culture and finally under the influence of western culture. He faced off with many evangelical missionaries and tried to improve the Hinduism in light of modern scientific temper and logical thinking.
- To start a crusade against the prevalent religious and social vices and injustices, Raja Ram Mohan Roy used four methods.
 - Establishment of religious associations
 - Publication of books and newspapers
 - Holding discussion and debates
 - Setting up educational institutions.
- **Religious Reforms – Vedanta**
 - He made a sincere attempt to lay a common foundation of a **universal religion** based on **the doctrine of Unity of Godhead**. He criticized idolatry, polytheism and clericalism.
 - **Scholarly work** to preach the idea of monotheism and meaningless rituals.
 - While in Murshidabad, in 1803-04 Raja Ram Mohan Roy wrote **Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin** (A Gift to Monotheists) in Persian with an introduction in Arabic.
 - In order to take the message of **Upanishads** to common masses, he translated them in colloquial Bengali. (Katha, Ken, Isa, Mundoka and Mandukya). He also published Gayatrir Artha (Meaning of the Gayatri) and Atmanantratma Vivek (translation of Shankracharya's work).
 - Through his book **Manazarat-ul-Adiyan** (Discussions on various religions), he tried to highlight the similarities among different religions.



- Although Vedic religion in India allowed the worship of multiple gods, Rammohan emphasized monotheism as a response to Christianity, highlighting a different tradition in Indian religious thought. Therefore, one can argue that his focus on monotheism was a result of **his encounter with Christianity**. To counter the challenge of Christianity, Roy produced **Precepts of Jesus** in 1820s, which portrayed Christ more as a moral human figure, rather than the religious. He denied divine Christ and the espoused of the ethical Jesus as a historic mortal. In contrast to orthodox Christianity of Trinitarianism he **acknowledged Unitarianism** as a more rational and responsible religion with its active involvement in social reform issues. Thus, he successfully defended Hinduism by combating the Christian missionaries intellectually.
- Though he gave due importance to holy text of all religions i.e., Rigveda, Upanishads, Bible and Quran, but he gave more importance to reason. He advocated for the use of **reason and critical thinking** in understanding religious and philosophical concepts. Any idea or belief which was not based on reason and rationality, he had no hesitation in rejecting it.
 - It was his firm confidence in the utility of 'reason' which forced him to oppose polytheism, idolatry, practice of Sati and other evils of Hindu society.
 - He applied the same yardstick for Islam and Christianity. He accepted many ideas and philosophies of Islam and in fact, was greatly influenced by it, but rejected the Islamic concept of 'blest' and 'cursed'.
 - Similarly, he rejected the ideas of 'Trinity' and 'Miracles', the fundamental principles of Christianity.
- At one level RRM was very keen to uphold the pristine Aryan Vedic religion but at another level he placed great stress on **individuality**. Atman for him was all about self, free-thinking individual with freedom to realize godhood.
- **Humanism** in Vedanta
- **Synthesis of East & West:**
 - His personality reflected the synthesis between oriental and western culture both.
 - He respected the traditional philosophy of the East, but at the same time, he believed that the western culture and education alone could infuse rational and scientific approach and bring forth the necessary regeneration of Indian society.
 - He continued with his indigenous dress, he used to wear sacred thread & even his concept of monotheism was equally inspired by Upanishadic philosophy. Likewise, he was inspired by the western concept of liberalism & Enlightenment.



- **Reforms Programme:**

- The ideal of free-thinking individual which had in its center a deep faith in rationalism was employed to make an assessment of the social practices. He made an attack over **religious rituals** like idol worship & Brahmanic supremacy.
- He denounced the pathetic condition of women, widow marriage prohibition, practice of kulinism, and **Sati system**. He also demanded inheritance rights for women in property.
- **Anti-Sati campaign**
 - He argued that the practice of sati was designed more to secure the temporal happiness of the surviving relatives than the spiritual welfare of the deceased and his wife.
 - He asked his followers to go to this ancient Hindu scriptures to find out if had any legitimacy. Such a deep intellectual element assessment of a religious tradition became contingent on scriptural authority.
 - Organized anti-Sati vigilance party. Its members kept watch on different burning ghats to prevent sati. He could save atleast two women with his efforts.
 - Published many tracts and pamphlets against Sati.
 - He faced the challenges posed by the orthodox Hindus like Radha Kant Deb of Dharmasabha, Subramanya Shastri of Madras, Sankar Sastri of Madras Government College, and Mrityunjay Vidyalankar of Fort William College.
 - He not merely campaigned in favor of sati pleaded with the government for more direct intervention in social practices. He convinced the British Indian government of the necessity of abolishing Sati.
- **Journalism:**
 - He was the **pioneer of Indian journalism**. He brought journals in Bengali, Persian, Hindi and English to educate public opinion. In 1820, he founded a Bengal journal **Sambad Kaumudi**. It regularly editorialised against Sati, denouncing it as barbaric and un-Hindu. In 1822, he started **Mirat-ul-Akbar** to propagate his ideas on religion. But in 1823, the government passed a Press Ordinance, enforcing licensing regulation. In response, Raja Rammohan had to close down the newspaper.
- **Education:**
 - Roy believed education to be an implement for social reform. Hew was one of the earliest propagators of modern education.
 - 1817: **Hindu College** at Calcutta, in collaboration with David Hare
 - 1822: **Anglo-Hindu school** where western science, philosophy and literature were taught. Debendranath Tagore was a student of this school.
 - 1825: **Vedanta College** (his teachings of monotheistic doctrines were incorporated with modern western curriculum. Indian learning as well as western social and physical courses were included.)
- **Bengali:**

- He took keen interest in the development of Bengali language. He made some contribution by compiling a Bengali grammar and by authorizing pamphlets and journals. He wanted to make Bengali a vehicle of modern intellectual thought.
- **Institutional Work:**
 - In 1814-15, he started **Atmiya Sabha**, a philosophical discussion circle in Calcutta to propagate the monotheistic ideals of the Vedanta.
 - **Brahmo Samaj** (Brahmo Sabha in 1828, renamed as Brahmo Samaj in 1829)
 - It was started as a movement against the debased practices in Hindu religion and to make people aware of Vedic Hinduism
 - The Samaj had following provisions:
 - The Samaj was open for all caste and creeds for the worship of Brahma.
 - Idol, image, statute, painting or portrait of any sort was not admitted within the Samaj building.
 - Sacrifice or religious rituals inside the Samaj building, was also not allowed. The worship was performed through prayers and meditation and readings from Upanishads. Ram Mohan himself wrote a pamphlet **Anusthan** (1829) prescribing the mode of worship to be followed in the Samaj.
 - This movement remained confined to the educated middle class of Calcutta and it failed to bring any radical change immediately.
 - In Brahmo Samaj, after Raja Ram Mohan Roy, two different trends were visible. The first trend verges on traditionalism under the leadership of Devendra Nath Tagore while the second one reflected radicalism under Keshav Chandra Sen.

Rammohun was a firm believer in internationalism and in free cooperation between nations. He took a keen interest in international events and everywhere he supported the cause of liberty, democracy, and nationalism and opposed injustice, oppression and tyranny in every form.

- The news of the failure of the Revolution in Naples in 1821 made him so sad that he cancelled all his social engagements.
- He celebrated the success of the Revolution in Spanish America in 1823 by giving a public dinner.
- He condemned the miserable condition of Ireland under the oppressive regime of absentee English landlordism.
- He publicly declared that he would emigrate from the British Empire if Parliament failed to pass the Reform Bill.

(3) Evolution of Brahmo Samaj

The foundation of the Brahmo Samaj was the culmination of the religious thought and activities of Rammohan Roy. It also marked the beginning of the Brahmo movement.

The Brahmo Samaj in its early days confined itself mainly to spiritual and devotional work. As a social force it was virtually non-existent. After Rammohan's departure to England and then death in 1833 it began to languish. It was **Debendranath Tagore** who revived it afterwards in 1840s.

- Debendranath was a product of the best in the traditional Indian learning and the new thought of the West. He infused a new life into the Brahmo Samaj. He initially sought to popularise the ideas of Rammohan by founding the **Tattvabodhini Sabha** (1839), **Tattvabodhini school** (1840) and **Tattvabodhini Patrika** (1843). The Sabha aimed at the diffusion of the fundamental truth of all Shastras of the Hindus, and the truth about Brahma as inculcated in the Vedanta. In 1859, Tattvabodhini Sabha was dissolved into Brahmo Samaj.
- **Debendranath at the helm of Brahmo**
 - He boldly resisted the ultra-radical trend. Debendranath continued the same search for pristine Hinduism, but there was a difference. Unlike
 - Rammohan, who was more firmly embedded in Vedic religious thought, put great stress of rationalism to assess religious practices, he had imbibed some influence from Sufism and more tilted towards devotionalism and mysticism. He was also aware of the fact that Vedic religion had polytheistic content.
- An important dimension was his constant engagement with Christianity. He was willing to engage with Christianity and combat it by going back to this source of pristine Hinduism.
- The Brahmo movement had hitherto remained confined to Calcutta. It was during his time that the Brahmo movement began to spread out. Particularly it became strong in Eastern Bengal with the establishment of Dacca Brahmo Samaj.



Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905) was the founder in 1848 of the Brahmo religion. His efforts helped in the foundation of Bethune school, Shantiniketan, British Indian Association. Radhakanta Dev conferred on him the title of 'Protector of National Religion' who protected Indian youth from the influence of Christianity.

- The Brahmos by the 1850s had begun to acquire a distinct sectarian identity as well.

- When severe famine broke out in upper India (1860) Christian missionaries under Alexander Duff organised themselves for famine relief. Keshab too felt that it was his duty to serve the people.
- The volunteers of Brahmo Samaj established the Calcutta College in 1862 for educating the young men of Bengal. Keshab was opposed to the idea of a 'godless education' which was being imparted in government schools. He wanted intellectual progress alongwith religious development.
- They also performed intercaste marriages in 1861.
- Bambodhini Patrika (a journal for women) was started to encourage the female education.



KC Sen (1838-84) formed a reformist society **Sangat Sabha** from which many of the foremost Brahmos of later days drew their first inspiration. He was the editor of 'Indian Mirror', a fortnightly. He started a Bangla newspaper **Sulabh Samachar** in 1870.

Brahmo Sectarianism

1866 Schism	
Debendranath's faction Adi Brahmo Samaj	Keshub Chandra Sen's faction Brahmo Samaj of India (Bharatvarshiya Brahmo Samaj)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DNT preferred slow and cautious social transformation and not radical social reforms. He was willing <u>to maintain the connection with the mainstream Hindu society.</u> • He wanted the Samaj to concentrate more on <u>intellectual work rather than direct action.</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KCS wanted to adopt a more radical position on the <u>social</u> issues of caste and women than Tagore. Due to his effort, Brahmo Marriage Act, 1872 was passed which abolished early marriage (14 for girls, 16 for boys), sanctioned widow remarriage and intercaste marriage and polygamy was made penal. • The membership of the Samaj was open to all irrespective of caste, creed, colour, or sex. He wanted <i>to make Brahma Samaj different from Hinduism.</i> • He also wanted to spread fast in Bombay and Madras presidencies. He also toured north India in 1868, and argued that to regenerate the country, religion should be made the basis of all reform movements. He felt that only when the Bengalis,

	<p>Punjabis and Madrasis would combine and work together, the suffering and distress of India would end. Keshub, thus, initiated an all India movement for social reform.</p>	
<p>It was later revived by Rabindranath Tagore when he took over its leadership in 1911.</p>	1878 Schism	
	Nava Vidhana of KCS	Sadharan Brahmo Samaj
	<p>KCS tried to blend features of Vaishnava religion with Brahmo religious practice. He tried to build bridges with mainstream Hindu society. He became a devotee of Ramakrishna and tried to bring in Guruhsip. He started Kirtans practice.</p> <p>KCS also allowed his daughter to be married to the prince of Cooch Behar even though she was a minor. It was against the Brahmo Marriage Act 1872.</p>	<p>Shivanath Shastri and Bijoy Krishna Goswami found KCS's leadership as inadequate. These <u>more radically inclined</u> Brahmos refused to accept KCS's leadership.</p> <p>Anand Mohan Bose was very active as the first president. It became more anti-caste in attitude.</p> <p>The Sadharan Samaj gradually reverted to the teaching of the Upanishads and carried on the work of social reform.</p>

(4) Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891)

- The unfinished crusade which Rammohan launched against the oppression of women, was later carried on by Vidyasagar.
- Vidyasagar had a very ambitious educational project which included women's education and mass education but the campaign for widow remarriage was certainly the main item on his agenda. He is chiefly remembered for his role in a **long struggle in favour of widow remarriage.**
 - He started to **write in the Tattvabodhini Patrika** to arouse public opinion.
 - He made an **intense study of the Shastras** and discovered a particular sloka in *Parashar Samhita* to support widow remarriage.
 - He also wrote a **book** on widow remarriage which was published in 1853.
 - A **petition** was sent to the legislative council by Vidyasagar and others demanding legalisation of widow remarriage.
 - **The Act** legalising widow remarriage was finally passed on in **1856** by Dalhousie.
 - But after 1857 when the British tried to trade on a more conservative path. They were not very keen anymore to enforce this law, they wanted to soft-pedal.
 - In this context that the ICV tried to mobilize opinion in favour of widow remarriage and for the same reason he had earned the hostility of the conservative social leaders.
- **Press** – he helped in the starting of a newspaper **Somprakash** in 1858 along with Dwarkanath Vidyabhushan. It was the **first Bangla newspaper to indulge in political discussions.**
- He realised that education would be the chief instrument required for the emancipation of women. Thus, he laboured hard for **female education.**
 - He was associated with the foundation of the Hindu female school which subsequently came to be known as the **Bethune Female School**. (1849)
 - He also established other schools in the interior for the spread of women's education.
- Vidyasagar was a prolific and vigorous writer.
 - His efforts to simplify and modernise **Bengali prose** were significant. He also rationalised and simplified the Bengali **alphabet and type.**



After Vidyasagar's death, Rabindranath Tagore reverently wrote about him: "One wonders how God, in the process of producing forty million Bengalis, produced a man!"

Bombay Presidency

Reform movements were strong in the Bombay-Poona cultural belt.

- **Balshastri Jambhekar (1810-46)**

- Started Darpan (1832) the first vernacular newspaper in the western India. He specifically dealt with the issues of widow remarriage in his newspaper leading to public debate.
- As a professor in Elphinstone college, he pupiled future leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji and Atmaram Pandurang.
- He understood the importance of public libraries started some of them in Bombay. He founded 'The Bombay Native General Library'. The **Students' Literary and Scientific Society** was its offshoot. It was formed in 1848 by the educated youths of Maharashtra. One of the chief aims of society was women's education.

- In 1851, **Jotiba Phule** and his wife **Savitribai Phule** started a girls' school in Poona. Phule also led a crusade against untouchability and the exploitation of the lower castes by the upper castes.

- **Jagannath Shankar Seth and Bhau Daji**

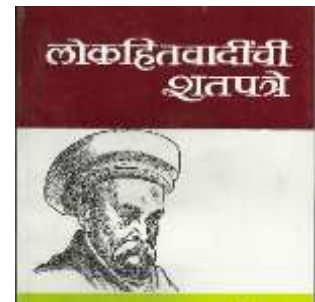
- Among the active promoters of girls schools in Bombay.

- **Vishnu Shastri Pandit** formed the *Widow Remarriage Association* in the 1850s.

- **Karsondas Mulji** (1832-71) started the **Satya Prakash** in Gujarati in 1852 to advocate widow remarriage.

- **Gopal Hari Deshmukh** (Lokhitavadi, 1823-92)

- He championed the cause of new learning and social regeneration. He was popularly known as **Lokhitavadi** for writing **Shatapatre** in the weekly named **Prabhakar**.
 - He promoted education of women, and wrote against arranged child marriages, dowry system, and polygamy, opposed caste system and religious orthodoxy.
 - Deshmukh founded a public library in Pune.
- He argued with courage in 1840s that “Brahmins should give up their foolish concepts; they must accept that all men are equal and that everybody has a right to acquire knowledge...”.



- **Vishnushatri Chiplunkar (1850-82)** started the monthly **Nibandhamala** in 1874.
 - Subjects included contemporary status of the vernacular language, propriety of using foreign words in Marathi, state of India, freedom of press, apart from social reform.
- **Behramji Malabari (1853-1912)**, a Parsee social reformer, sought to abolish the brutal practice of child-marriage.
 - His efforts led to the Age of Consent Act of 1891.
 - He founded **Seva Sadan** in 1908. It specialized in taking care destitute women with education, medical and welfare services.



This agenda of social reform in the Western India was complemented by the work of some scholars, who drew inspiration from Orientalist scholars and undertook painstaking examinations and translations of Sanskrit texts in order to rediscover glories of Indian civilization.

- **Kashinath Trimbak Telang (1850-93)**
 - A Bombay High court judge
 - Translated Bhagvad Geet in English – considered as a standard translation
 - Mudrarakshasa of Vishakhadatta
- **Vishwanath Narayan Mandlik (1833-99)**
 - Student at Elphinstone college
 - Translation of Yajnavalkya Smriti and Manu Smriti in English
 - Founded **Native Opinion**, a bi-weekly journal in 1864
- **Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar (1837-1925)**
 - Student at Elphinstone college
 - Historian as well as orientalist scholar
 - Social reformer – Girl's education

Manav Dharma Sabha (Surat, 1844-50s)

- Founded by Mehtaji Durgaram Mancharam, Karsondas Mulji, Dadoba Pandurang Tarkhadkar.
- Public meetings to spread monotheism, discourage idolatry, oppose caste system, support widow remarriage and stop superstitions.

Paramhansa Mandali (1849)

- It followed the iconoclastic radical tradition of the Derozians in Bengal.
- To avoid confrontation with society, it operated like a secret society.

- Revelation of its membership in 1860 led to its demise.

Prarthana Samaj (Bombay, 1867)

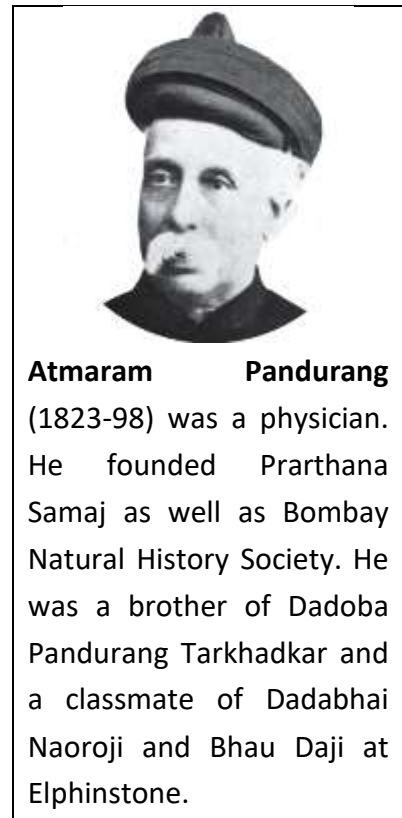
- Progress of Western education created a critical group looking for reform. Two visits of Keshub Chandra Sen to Bombay in 1864 and 1867 had a profound impact.

- Personalities

- Founder president was **Atrnaram Pandurang**
- Ram Krishna Gopal Bhandarkar and Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901) were the true guiding spirits of the Samaj.
- Other people associated: N.G. Chandavarkar, K.T. Telang

- Philosophy

- Prarthana Samaj, often referred to as '**Protestant Hinduism**', emerged as a sister organization of the Brahmo Samaj.
- **Like Brahmo** movement, the Prarthana Samaj also preached monotheism, denounced idolatry and priestly domination. It sought to gain support for abandoning caste, introducing widow remarriage, abolishing purdah and child marriage, and encouraging female education.
- But **unlike Brahmos (esp Sadharan Brahmos)**, it was not very keen to alienate the mainstream society. It rather developed a cautious approach, syncretism and connected itself to the **Maharashtrian bhakti tradition**. *Modernisation was to be accommodated within the cultural space of tradition, without signalling a sharp break*. It made Prarthana Samaj relatively **more acceptable** to the larger society.
- The Prarthana Samajists concentrated more upon **social reform as their 'actual work'** rather than the 'faith'. They kept alive the great ideals of popular saints of Maharashtra like Namdev, Tukaram and Ramdas and encouraged the society to rise above superstitions and malpractices. They emphasized the belief that God can be realised only by **serving man**. Thus, they connected the spiritual teachings of religion with practical duties in life. Their efforts included promoting social cohesion through communal dining and inter-caste marriages, advocating for widow remarriage, establishing night schools for the underprivileged, and creating shelters and missions for marginalized groups in society.
- But there was one thing in common with Brahmo Samaj. Most of the **early leaders of modern nationalism** in the Western India came from the Prarthana Samaj. It was from within this reform movement the early nationalists had their early training.



Atmaram Pandurang (1823-98) was a physician. He founded Prarthana Samaj as well as Bombay Natural History Society. He was a brother of Dadoba Pandurang Tarkhadkar and a classmate of Dadabhai Naoroji and Bhau Daji at Elphinstone.

- **Spread**

- Branches were opened in Poona, Surat, Ahmedabad, Karachi, Kirkee, Kolhapur and Satara.
- Because of their good work and a neutral stand, the Prarthna Samaj movement spread in the South too. This was also due to the efforts of Viresalingam Pantulu. But its effect was more felt in the Bombay Presidency, where it was responsible for the growth of nationalism.

- **Schism**

- Eventually in the 1880s, the Prarthana Samaj initiative was to a large extent undermined by the **Arya Samaj's challenge** in the region. It encountered its initial crisis due to its cautious approach. In 1875, Swami Dayanand Saraswati visited Gujarat and Maharashtra, presenting the potential for a more radical and assertive religious movement. Some members of the Samaj, led by S.P. Kelkar, were drawn to the Swami's Aryan ideology and decided to separate.
- Although the dissident group eventually re-joined the Prarthana Samaj, this event signalled the **start of a distinct form of religious politics in western India**, characterized more by cultural chauvinism than by reformist ideals. In the 1890s the challenge against reformism became more pronounced by the sanatanists.



Rao Bahadur Justice MG Ranade (1842-1901) was a social reformer, economist and pioneer of political activity in the western India. He formed **Poona Sarvajanik Sabha** in 1870. He was also editor of **Induprakash** journal. Aurobindo Ghosh wrote his series New Lamps for the Old in Induprakash.



Success and failure of Socio-Religious Reform Movements

