

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

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Introduction

The Indian society in the first half of the 19th century was caste ridden, decadent and rigid. Therefore, a change was needed in the society; British government introduced certain modern ideas such as liberty, social and economic equality, fraternity and democracy which had a tremendous impact on Indian society.

Various socio-religious reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chand Vidhya Sagar, Dayanand Saraswathi and many others took steps to fight against the evil practices.

The ideas that all the reform leaders of the time had in common were:

1. One God and basic unity of all religions
2. Devalue priesthood, rituals and polytheism
3. Improve the status of girls and women
4. Foster feeling of self-respect, self-reliance and patriotism

Causes

- Degradation of the Vedic religion: The religion in the early Vedic period was quite simple and there were no unnecessary rites and rituals,

ceremonies and sacrifices in it. In course of time this simplicity of the religion disappeared and ideals of truth gave way to here say.

The priestly class in order to gratify its own needs and desires introduced so many rituals into the religion that people had to undergo these rituals right from cradle to the grave. The people were greatly dissatisfied with the weight of these rituals. Some of these sacrifices were so costly that they could not be performed by the common people.

- **Dominance of Priestly class:** The introduction of the new ceremonies and sacrifices in the religion led to the rise of the class of Priests. This class occupied an eminent position in the society. With a view to maintain their hold on society they introduced unnecessary rites and rituals. Thus, they came to dominate every aspect of the Aryans life from birth to death.

This class became so powerful that they exercised supervision over the rulers and advised them in matters of administration. They held many important positions in the government machinery. In course of time, when the people lost faith in the Vedic religion, they also lost faith in this class.

- **Sacrifices:**

In the course of time a number of sacrifices had been introduced in the Hindu religion. These were fully exploited by the priestly class. They not only made sacrifices of the animals, which were quite costly and useful but also that of human beings.

This greatly hurt the feelings of the people and created a spirit revolt in their mind. As most of the common people were unable to perform these costly sacrifices they not only turned against the system but also the Brahmans who worked out that system.

- **Caste System:**

The caste system which had grown quite rigid by this time also contributed to the discontent of the people. The Hindu society had come to be divided in the four water-tight compartment castes. The members of the higher castes ill-treated the members of the lower castes and deprived them even of basic human rights. The members of the lower castes were not only treated with contempt but also were not permitted to enter the temples or undertake tapasya. Naturally, there was great

resentment amongst the members of these classes and they wanted to bring about necessary changes in the social system based on rigid caste system.

- . Difficult Language of Vedas:

The spiritual unrest of the 6th century B.C. was also due to the difficult and complicated language of the Vedas which was beyond the comprehension of common people. All the religious works of the Hindus like Vedas, Upanishads.

Ramayana and Mahabharata had been written in Sanskrit which could not be followed by the common people. Naturally they had to depend on the Brahmans for the proper understanding of these works. The Brahmans fully exploited this weakness of the people and inter-pretred these works in a manner which suited them best.

- Other Causes:

In the course of time not only the Vedic religion had been reduced to ritualism but the Vedic hymns were also replaced by mantras. It was commonly believed that the mantras possessed divine powers and could cure people of diseases, bring victory or defeat in war, assure the destruction of its enemies, silent opponents etc. In fact, it was believed that there was hardly any phase of life which could not be effected by the mantras. Further, there were other theories of birth and death which confused people more..

Religious Movements in India

Brahmo Samaj: Brahmo Samaj, theistic movement within Hinduism, founded in Calcutta in 1828 by Ram Mohun Roy.

Arya Samaj: Arya Samaj, vigorous reform movement of modern Hinduism, founded in 1875 by Dayananda Sarasvati,

Ramakrishna Movement: the movement also known as Vedanta movement and was founded by Swami Vivekananda in the year 1897

The Satyashodhak Samaj: Satyashodhak Samaj was a social reform society founded by Mahatma Phule in Pune, Maharashtra, on 24 September 1873.

Prarthana Samaj: Prarthana Samaj, Hindu reform society established in Bombay in the 1860s by Atmaram Pandhurang.

Aligarh Movement: Sir Syed Ahmad Khan is best known for the Aligarh Movement, a systemic movement aimed at reforming the social, political and educational aspects of the Muslim community. He founded the Scientific Society in 1863 to translate major works in the sciences and modern arts into Urdu.

Shuddhi Movement: Shuddhi Movement was started by Arya Samaj in earlier part of 20th century to bring back the people who transformed their religion to Islam and Christianity from Hinduism.