



## Socio-Religious Reform Movements: Part II

### [Socio-Religious Reform Movements: Part I](#)

#### What was the Wahabi/Walliullah Movement?

- The teachings of Abdul Wahab of Arabia and the preachings of **Shah Waliullah** inspired this essentially revivalist response to Western influences and the degeneration which had set in among Indian Muslims and called for a return to the true spirit of Islam.
- He was the first Indian Muslim leader of the 18th century to organise Muslims around the two-fold ideals of this movement:
  - **Desirability of harmony among the four schools of Muslim jurisprudence which had divided the Indian Muslims** (he sought to integrate the best elements of the four schools),
  - **Recognition of the role of individual conscience in religion** where conflicting interpretations were derived from the Quran and the Hadis.
- The teachings of Waliullah were further popularised by **Shah Abdul Aziz and Syed Ahmed Barelvi** who also **gave them a political perspective**.
  - Un-Islamic practices that had crept into Muslim society were sought to be eliminated.
  - Syed Ahmed called for a return to the pure Islam and the kind of society that had existed in the Arabia of the Prophet's time.
  - India was considered to be **dar-ul-Harb (land of the kafirs)** and it needed to be converted to dar-ul-Islam (land of Islam).
- Initially, the movement was directed at the Sikhs in Punjab but after the British annexation of Punjab (1849), the movement was directed against the British.
- During the 1857 Revolt, the Wahabi's played an important role in spreading anti-British feelings.
- The Wahabi Movement fizzled out in the face of British military might in the 1870s.

#### What was Titu Mir's Movement?

- **Mir Nithar Ali**, popularly known as **Titu Mir**, was a disciple of **Sayyid Ahmed Barelvi**, the founder of the Wahabi Movement.
- Titu Mir adopted **Wahabism and advocated the Sharia**. He **organised the Muslim peasants of Bengal against the landlords**, who were mostly Hindu, and the British indigo planters.
- The **movement was not as militant as the British records made it out to be**, only in the last year of Titu's life was there a confrontation between him and the British police.

#### What was the Faraizi Movement?

- The movement, also called the **Faraizi Movement** because of its **emphasis on the Islamic pillars of faith**, was founded by **Haji Shariatullah in 1818**.
- Its **scene of action was East Bengal**, and it aimed at the **eradication of social innovations or un-Islamic practices** current among the Muslims of the region and draw their attention to their duties as Muslims.
- Under the leadership of **Dudu Mian**, the movement became revolutionary from 1840 onwards.

- He gave the **movement an organisational system from the village to the provincial level** with a khalifa or authorised deputy at every level.
- The **Faraizi** organised a paramilitary force armed with clubs to fight the zamindars who were mostly Hindu, though there were some Muslim landlords too, besides the indigo planters.
- **Dudu Mian asked his followers not to pay rent.**
- The organisation even **established its own Law courts.**
- Dudu Mian was arrested several times, and his arrest in 1847 finally weakened the movement. The movement survived merely as a religious movement without political overtones after the death of Dudu Mian in 1862.

## What was the Ahmadiyya Movement?

- The Ahmadiyya forms a **sect of Islam which originated from India**. It was founded by **Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in 1889**.
- It was based on **liberal principles**. It described itself as the **standard-bearer of Mohammedan Renaissance**, and based itself, like the Brahmo Samaj, on the principles of universal religion of all humanity, opposing jihad (sacred war against non-Muslims).
- The movement **spread Western liberal education** among the Indian Muslims.
- The Ahmadiyya community is the **only Islamic sect to believe that the Messiah had come in the person of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad** to end religious wars and bloodshed and to reinstate morality, peace and justice.
  - They believed in **separating the mosque from the State** as well as in human rights and tolerance.
  - However, the Ahmadiyya Movement, like **Bahaism which flourished in the West Asian countries, suffered from mysticism.**

## What was the Aligarh Movement?

- **Sir Syed Ahmad Khan** is, first and foremost, known for his pioneering role in transforming the educational opportunities for Muslims.
- He realised that Muslims could only make progress if they took to modern education. For this he started the Aligarh movement.
  - It was a systemic movement **aimed at reforming the social, political and educational aspects of the Muslim community.**
  - The **movement undertook to modernise Muslim's education by adapting English as a medium of learning and western education** rather than just focusing on traditional teachings.
- He **wanted to reconcile Western scientific education with the teachings of the Quran** which were to be **interpreted in the light of contemporary rationalism and science** even though he also held the Quran to be the ultimate authority.
  - He said that **religion** should be adaptable with time or else it would become fossilised, and that **religious** tenets were not immutable.
  - He **advocated** a critical approach and freedom of thought and not complete dependence on tradition or custom.
- Sir Syed established the **Scientific Society in 1864**, in Aligarh to translate Western works into Indian languages to prepare the Muslims to accept Western education and to inculcate scientific temperament among the Muslims.
  - The **Aligarh Institute Gazette**, a magazine published by Sir Syed was an organ of the Scientific Society.
- In 1877, he founded the **Muhammadan Anglo Oriental College** on the pattern of Oxford and Cambridge universities. The college later grew into **Aligarh Muslim University**.
- The Aligarh Movement **helped in the Muslim revival**. It gave them a common language— **Urdu**.
- Sir Syed also **pushed for social reforms and was a champion of democratic ideals and freedom of speech.**

- He was **against religious intolerance, ignorance and irrationalism**. He denounced purdah, polygamy and easy divorce.
- **Tahzebul Akhlaq (Social Reformer in English)**, a magazine founded by him, tried to awaken people's consciousness on social and religious issues in a very expressive prose.

## What was the Deoband Movement?

- The Deoband Movement was **organised by the orthodox section among the Muslim ulema as a revivalist movement** with the twin objectives of **propagating pure teachings of the Quran and Hadis** among Muslims and **keeping alive the spirit of jihad against the foreign rulers**.
- The Deoband Movement was begun at the **Darul Uloom (or Islamic academic centre), Deoband, in Saharanpur district (United Provinces)** in 1866 by **Mohammad Qasim Nanotavi** and **Rashid Ahmed Gangohi** to train religious leaders for the Muslim community.
- In contrast to the Aligarh Movement, which aimed at the welfare of Muslims through Western education and support of the British government, the **aim of the Deoband Movement was moral and religious regeneration of the Muslim community**.
- On the political front, the Deoband school **welcomed the formation of the Indian National Congress** and in **1888 issued a fatwa (religious decree) against Syed Ahmed Khan's organisations, the United Patriotic Association and the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental Association**.
  - Some critics attribute Deoband's support to the nationalists more to its determined opposition to Syed Ahmed Khan than to any positive political philosophy.
- **Mahmud-ul-Hasan**, the new Deoband leader, gave a political and intellectual content to the religious ideas of the school.
  - He worked out a synthesis of Islamic principles and nationalist aspirations.
  - The Jamiat-ul-Ulema gave a concrete shape to Hasan's ideas of protection of the religious and political rights of the Muslims in the overall context of Indian unity and national objectives.
- **Shibli Numani**, a supporter of the Deoband school, favoured the inclusion of English language and European sciences in the system of education.
  - He founded the **Nadwatul Ulama** and **Darul Uloom** in Lucknow in 1894-96.
  - He **believed in the idealism of the Congress and cooperation between the Muslims and the Hindus of India** to create a state in which both could live amicably.

## What was Religious Reform among the Parsis?

- Religious reform began among the Parsis in Mumbai in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1851, the **Rahanumai Mazdayasnan Sabha or Religious Reform Association** was founded by **Nauroji Furdonji, Dadabhai Nauroji, S.S. Bengalee** and others.
- They started a journal called **Rast Goftar**, for the purpose of social-religious reforms among the Parsis.
- They also **played** an important role in the **spread of education**, especially among girls.
- They campaigned against the **entrenched orthodoxy in the religious field** and initiated the **modernization of Parsi social customs** regarding the **education of girls' marriage** and the **social position of women** in general.
- In course of time, the Parsis became socially the most westernized section of Indian society.

## What was Religious Reform among the Sikhs?

- Religious reform among the Sikhs was started at the end of the 19th Century when the **Khalsa College** started at Amritsar.
  - Through the efforts of the **Singh Sabhas (1870)** and with British support, the Khalsa

College was founded at Amritsar in 1892.

- This college and schools set up as a result of similar efforts, promoted Gurumukhi, Sikh learning and Punjabi literature as a whole.
- After 1920 the Sikh momentum gained momentum when the **Akali Movement** rose in Punjab.
  - The chief object of the Akalis was to improve the management of the Gurudwaras or Sikh Shrines that were under the control of priests or Mahants who treated them as their private property.
- In 1925, a law was passed which gave the right of managing Gurudwaras to the **Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee**.

## What was the Theosophical Movement?

- A group of westerners led by **Madame H.P. Blavatsky and Colonel M.S. Olcott**, who was inspired by Indian thought and culture, founded the **Theosophical Society** in New York City, United States in 1875.
  - In 1882, they shifted their headquarters to Adyar, on the outskirts of Madras (at that time) in India.
- The society **believed that a special relationship could be established between a person's soul and God** by contemplation, prayer, revelation, etc.
- It **accepted the Hindu beliefs in reincarnation and karma**, and **drew inspiration from the philosophy of the Upanishads and samkhya, yoga and Vedanta schools of thought**.
- It **aimed to work for universal brotherhood of humanity** without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.
- The society also **sought to investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man**.
- The Theosophical Movement came to be allied with the Hindu renaissance.
  - It **opposed child marriage and advocated the abolition of caste discrimination, uplift of outcastes, improvement in the condition of widows**.
- In India, the movement became somewhat popular with the **election of Annie Besant (1847-1933) as its president** after the death of Olcott in 1907.
  - Annie Besant had come to India in 1893.
  - She laid the foundation of the **Central Hindu College in Benaras in 1898** where both Hindu religion and Western scientific subjects were taught.
  - The college became the nucleus for the formation of **Banaras Hindu University** in 1916.
  - **Annie Besant also did much for the cause of the education of women**.
- **Significance:**
  - The Theosophical Society **provided a common denominator for the various sects and fulfilled the urge of educated Hindus**.
  - However, to an average Indian the **Theosophist philosophy seemed to be vague and lacking a positive programme**, to that extent its **impact was limited to a small segment of the westernised class**.
  - As religious revivalists, the **Theosophists did not attain much success**, but as a **movement of westerners glorifying Indian religious and philosophical traditions, it gave much needed self-respect to the Indians fighting British colonial rule**.
  - Viewed from another angle, the **Theosophists also had the effect of giving a false sense of pride to the Indians** in their outdated and sometimes backward looking traditions and philosophy

## What was the Significance of Reform Movements?

- The orthodox sections of **society could not accept the scientific ideological onslaught of the socio-religious rebels**. As a result of this, the reformers were subjected to abuse, persecution, issuing of fatwas and even assassination attempts by the reactionaries.



- However, in spite of opposition, these movements **managed to contribute towards the liberation of the individual** from conformity born out of fear and from uncritical submission to exploitation by the priests and other classes.
- The **translation of religious texts into vernacular languages**, emphasis on an individual's right to interpret the scriptures and simplification of rituals made worship a more personal experience.
- The movements emphasised the **human intellect's capacity to think and reason**.
- The reform movements gave the **rising middle classes the much needed cultural roots to cling to, and served the purpose of reducing the sense of humiliation** which the conquest by a foreign power had produced.
- A **realisation of the special needs of modern times**, especially in terms of scientific knowledge, and thus promoting a modern, this-worldly, secular and rational outlook was a major contribution of these reform movements.
- Socially, this attitude reflected a **basic change in the notions of 'pollution and purity'**.
- The reform movements **sought to create a favourable social climate for modernisation**. To that extent, these movements **ended India's cultural and intellectual isolation** from the rest of the world.
- This cultural ideological struggle was to **prove to be an important instrument in the evolution of national consciousness** and a part of Indian national resolve to resist colonial cultural and ideological hegemony.
- However, not all these progressive, nationalist tendencies were able to outgrow the sectarian and obscurantist outlook.
- This was possibly due to the divergent duality of cultural and political struggles, resulting in cultural backwardness despite political advancement.

## What were the Limitations of Reform Movements?

- One of the major limitations of the religious reform movements was that they had a **narrow social base**, namely the **educated and urban middle classes**, while the needs of the vast masses of peasantry and the urban poor were ignored.
- The tendency of reformers to appeal to the greatness of the past and to rely on scriptural authority encouraged mysticism in new garbs and **fostered pseudo-scientific thinking** while exercising a check on the full acceptance of the need for a modern scientific outlook.
- These tendencies **contributed, at least to some extent, in compartmentalising Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Parsis**, as also alienating high caste Hindus from low caste Hindus.
- The **emphasis on religious and philosophical aspects of the cultural heritage got somewhat magnified** by an **insufficient emphasis on other aspects of culture**—art, architecture, literature, music, science and technology.
- The Hindu reformers **confined their praise of the Indian past to its ancient period and looked upon the medieval period of Indian history essentially as an era of decadence**.
  - This tended to create a notion of two separate peoples, on the one hand, on the other, an **uncritical praise of the past was not acceptable to the low caste sections of society** which had suffered under religiously sanctioned exploitation during the ancient period.
  - Moreover, the past itself tended to be placed into compartments on a partisan basis.
- Many in the Muslim middle classes went to the extent of turning to the history of West Asia for their traditions and moments of pride.
- The **process of evolution of a composite culture which was evident throughout Indian history showed signs of being arrested** with the rise of another form of consciousness, communal consciousness—along with national consciousness among the middle classes.
  - Many other factors were certainly **responsible for the birth of communalism in modern times**, but undoubtedly the nature of religious reform movements also contributed to it.
- On the whole, however, whatever the net outcome of these reform movements, it was out of this struggle that a new society evolved in India.

## Mains Question

**Q.** Discuss the significance and limitations of Socio-Religious Reform Movements in India.

**Q.** Theosophists also had the effect of giving a false sense of pride to the Indians in their outdated and sometimes backward looking traditions and philosophy. Evaluate

## Prelims Question

**Q.** Annie Besant was

1. Responsible for starting the Home Rule Movement
2. The founder of the Theosophical Society
3. Once the President of the Indian National Congress

Select the correct statement / statements using the codes given below.

- (a) 1 only  
(b) 2 and 3 only  
(c) 1 and 3 only

**(d) 1, 2 and 3**

**Q.** Consider the following statements:

1. Shah Abdul Aziz and Syed Ahmed Khan popularized the ideas of the Wahhabi Movement in India.
2. Wahabi Movement was a revivalist movement which tried to purify Islam by eliminating all the un-Islamic practices.
3. Wahabi's played an important role in the revolt of 1857 in spreading anti-British feelings.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 3 only  
**(b) 2 and 3 only**  
(c) 2 only  
(d) 1 and 2 only