INDIGENOUS MOVEMENTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN INDIA

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Abstract

In the study of the indigenous movements, we will discover that India has been radically affected. But the change has not been disruptive and discontinuous. We can understand this kind of change as aprocess guided and controlled by 'selective affinity' to use a helpful category. The movements of the Indian Renaissance, Brahmo Samaj, Ramakrishna Movement, Servants of India Society, Non-Brahmin Movement, The Dalit Movement, and Peasants' Movement in which certain features of ideational, historical, material, social and personal factors mutually enforce the features that have the greatest desire to unite and thereby bring them into prominence. They lead to a reduction of difference between religions. This analysis could be made of the movements for social change in India. We will look at the movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries very briefly and thereby illusions the kind of social change which is going on in India.

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Introduction

In this study, I would like to examine and evaluate briefly some of the indigenous movements for social change in India in the 19th and 20th centuries. We need to look carefully at the scope and nature of these movements and then reflect on them from a historical perspective.

The Indian Renaissance

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was restlessness in the Indian reality. The country was in a deplorable condition. There was a 'somnolent stupor' in South India. The country had become a 'Sleeping Leviathan'.[1] The society was full of evil customs and superstitions. Certain inertia had set in. The people had become dehumanised and domesticated. They did not realise their condition of oppression-it was the old moribund society with its state of 'muteness'. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, 'The country is dead' and 'India is in purification'[2] They had lost their self-respect and dignity. The Indian masseshad been neglected, ignored and denied their basic human rights. In such a situation, it was realised that somebody was required 'to cross the Rubicon of orthodoxy and rejuvenate Hindu society and to give Hinduism a social purpose'. The South Indian society of the nineteenth century is very well described in the following words : "... our masses have been hypnotised for ages. To touch them is pollution, to sit with them is pollution. Hopeless they were born, hopeless they must remain".[3]

Basically, there are four reasons for the awakening. They were the various missionary movements, British colonialism, English education and the inherent vitality of Hinduism. According to Radhakrishnan, 'The Hindu religious revival is partly the result of Western research, partly reaction against Western dominance and partly the revolt

against Christian missionary propaganda'. The same reasons could be attributed to the social consciousness of the time. Radhakrishnan put it more positively when he said, 'The impact of Christianitybrought about a religious awakening among the Hindus'.[4]This is a particular perception of the scope and nature of change which has taken place in the country. But we need to look at this view from the perspective of the various movements which we will examine briefly.

These are some of the ways in which scholars have tried to explain the changes that have taken place since the beginning of the nineteenth century. They clearly recognise and explicitly acknowledge western impact and missionary influence in this resurgence. Long-lost motifs within Hinduism came alive during this period. Indian scholars began to emphasise those dormant motifs while de-emphasising some of the dominant motifs which had reigned supreme for centuries. As a result they were able to discover or recover social purpose which enabled social change during this period.

1. Brahmo Samaj

Raja Ram Mohan Roy is known as the Father of the Indian Renaissance and the founder of the Brahmo Samaj. This came into being in 1828 and was one of the early pioneer organisations which systematically and rationally pursued the matter of social service. The Trust Deed of the Samaj advocated the need for social service. In this way, Ram Mchan Roy became the pioneer and prophet of this movement for social change.[5] He became the spokesman and champion of the dumb millions of this country, particularly of Bengal.

He enunciated three simple unitarian truths to enlighten thepeople. The first was a liberal religion. The second was the idea of social reform in which all known penalised classes were to be elevated through education and the extension of civil rights so that all people could participate fully in the benefits of civilization. Finally, there was the idea of theistic progress or the notion of the perfectibility of humankind which, according to him, could be best achieved by associating social reform with rational religion. From this it is obvious that Ram Mohan Roy was eager to infuse the ancient religion of Hinduism with a social purpose and thrust and make the former a foundation for the latter.

On this basis, he began to write and work consciously for educational, social and economic reforms. He realised that theadvent of the British Raj in various India adversely industries like affectedthe traditional textile industry, were captured or considerably reduced. The British crippled the industries by fully utilizing the raw materials available in India and subsequently selling the finished products at a high price. They also crippled the salt manufacture within the country by deliberately importing salt from Britain.With regard to education, he strongly advocated English education rather than the traditional or the conventional Sanskritic type.

Finally, he worked for the freedom of the press in India. In1823 John Adam took over as acting Governor-General and enacted the license system. He brought the Press Ordinance in March 1823 which was duly approved by the Chief Justice. Ram Mohan Roy reacted to this by appealing against it before the Supreme Court and the King-in-Council in London. Finally, he worked for the reformation of the Jury system. The Supreme Court of India which was established in 1774 excluded Indians. Agitation against this discrimination bore fruit and Wynn introduced the Indian Jury Bill and got it passed by Parliament in May 1826. In this connection he wrote to Mr. Crawford. The petitions and appeals of Ram Mohan Roy were finally taken seriously and his objections were taken care of.

2. Ramakrishna Movement

Swami Vivekananda, under the impact of Ramakrishna, his education and world-wide travel, started an organised movement to bring about socio-economic changes in his days. Ramakrishna, his guru, did not permit him to go into 'Nirvikalpa Samadhi' so that Vivekananda could engage seriously in the task of social uplift of the masses. His disciples thought that Vivekananda had gathered a whirlwind of spiritual rhapsody and ecstasy, and an avalanche of spirituality

fromRamakrishna which enabled him to shake the world to its foundations'.[6]

During his extensive travel in India, he became painfully aware of the stark and naked reality of the Indian people. He diagnosed the problem of India very well when he said, 'the people are neither Hindus nor Vedantins-they are merely don't touchists, their kitchen is their temple and cooking pots are their objects of worship'. During this time he realised the priority for India and advocated, 'Educate the masses, give them their rights'. For this purpose he was prepared to go to hell so that his vision of new India could become a reality. He began to feel for the people and worked for their awakening through education.

He returned to India from America and on Christmas Day 1899, he established the Ramakrishna Mission and Mutt. Through this institution he worked for the masses and practised Manava dharma'. The other monks of the order joined him in this stupendous task. For this he re-interpreted the Vedantic doctrine wherein he showed that social service is intrinsic to Hindu religion. It cannot be a peripheral concern. This became the basis of the work of Ramakrishna Mission. By 1956 there were one hundred and ten centres of the Mission all over the world.

After laying the foundation he began to oppose various evils affecting and afflicting Indian society. He was against caste and untouchability. He said : 'In religion there is no caste, the caste system is opposed to the religion of the Vedanta, but caste is simply the outgrowth of the political institution of India, it is a hereditary trade guild'.[7] For him this system was opposed to national consciousness. On many occasions he advocated the upsurge of Sudrahood or Sudra Raj. He was very much for individual liberty and worked for 'mukti'. This alone can be the presupposition of social and political liberty. To him, 'No nation and man can attempt to gain physical freedom without mental equality' He believed that this could be done through an extensive educational system for the people. For that reason, the Ramakrishna Mission has established innumerable educational institutions all over India for the uplift of the masses.

But in spite of his ardent love of the motherland, he believed that the basis of all systems, social or political, rests upon the goodness of man. In this sense he was fundamentally a gradualist. He believed in an evolutionary process and that national regeneration could come about through 'developing personality'. At other times he fervently expressed himself along socialist lines. He said, 'I am a socialist not because I think it is a perfect system but a half a loaf is better than no bread'. Obviously, Swami Vivekananda contradicted himself and was in a dilemma. For this reason he did not or rather could not work systematically and rationally for some of the ideas he espoused for socio-political-economic life in India. He believed in a democratic form of government. Economically he believed in a 'Proletocult' which sounds more Marxist in character. He did not want the poor to become poorer and the rich richer. Therefore it is not surprising that as early as 1893, in his famous Chicago address at the Parliament of Religions he said, 'You Christians who are so fond of sending out missionaries to save the soul of the heathen-why do you not try to save their bodies from starvation !'.[8]

Unfortunately he died in 1902 at the young age of thirty-nine without translating many of his dreams into action. But on the whole in his own way, he secularised and socialised Hinduism, making it an effective instrument for the social and political awakening of the people in India.

3. Servants of India Society

Now we move to the western part of India where the Servants of India Society came into existence. It was founded in 1905 by Gopal Krishna Gokhale. He was very much influenced in his thought and action by people like Madhav Govind Ranade and G. R. Agarkar. Gokhale had joined the Deccan Education Society of Agarkar and Tilak. Ranade had founded the Sarvajanik Sadha, which at that time, was the chief political association of India. Gokhale himself was the Secretary of this organisation. Ranade had evoked the 'Shivaji spirit' and was the moving force

behind the social conference between 1887 and 1900. Ranade was a social reformer who had a tremendous impact on Gokhale. Gokhale was basically a moderate and a realist which become obvious in 1907.[9]

He illustrated this conviction by the kinds of programmes and reforms which he initiated. He had submitted a scheme of reform called 'Gokhale's Political Testament' to Lord Willingdon. Later the Montague-Chelmsford Reform incorporated some of those ideas. He presented the Indian problem very well and understood her plight deeply. In one of his memoranda he stated: A kind of dwarfing and stunting of the race is going on under the present system of government. We must live all the days of our life in an atmosphere of inferiority and thetallest amongst us mustbend in order that the exigencies of the system may be satisfied... till at last our lot as hewers of wood and drawers of water in our owncountryis stereotyped.[10]

4. Non-Brahmin Movement

In this section we will concentrate on what happened in Tamil Nadu. The pioneer and prophet of the non-Brahmin movement for social change is E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, popularly known as 'Periyar'. The Dravidian Association was formed in Madras in 1910 by Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar. In 1919 the Dravidian Association was changed to 'South India Liberal Federation'. This brought into being the Justice Party which fought for the non-Brahmins against the domination of the Brahmins. A survey in 1912 showed that there were only 3.2% Brahmins in the Madras Presidency but they occupied 55% of the important positions in the Government.

EVR was an iconoclast from the beginning. He had strong views about the rights of women and was very much averse to caste regulations He got his niece remarried soon after the death of her husband. In those days enforced widowhood was widely prevalent. In 1924-25 he took an active part in the satyagraha in Vaikom, Kerala.[11] He came to be known as the 'Vaikom hero', the title conferred on him by the people as an expression of gratitude in recognition of his successful fight for securing for the untouchables the right to walk on the streets of the Kerala town.

In the beginning of his public career, he worked and gave leadership to the Congress party in Tamil Nadu. He was initiated into the party by men like C. Rajagopalachari and Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu. He even went on to become the Secretary and President of the Congress party in his state. But gradually he became quite disenchanted and disillusioned with the party because of the ascendency of the Brahmins in it. He became aware of casteism and caste conflict in the party. The parting of ways came to Conjeevaram session of the Congress party in 1925.[12] In the same yearhe founded a dynamic social movement called the Self-Respect Movement. It called for a radical change in the religious, social and civil life of the people.

He became a crusader for rationalism which holds the key for development and progress of the country. It is this rational frame of mind which can destroy this caste-ridden society. in his meetings he used to display the following words : "There is no God; He who invented God is a fool; He who preaches God is a rogue, He who worships God is a barbarian... Caste is a curse which must be abolished; to abolish caste, religion must be abolished; To abolish religion, God must be abolished".[13]

EVR saw an intrinsic relationship between God, religion and caste. He realised that traditional caste-structure dominated by the Brahmins was the root cause of exploitation, inhumanity and slavery of the Indian mass. Consequently he believed and worked fervently for the abolition of the system which would then bring about social liberation and justice. For this reason, of the five foundational principles of the Self - Respect Movement, abolition of God, religion and Brahmin formed three. He repeated them several times in his long life and even in his last lecture in 1971. He had once said that 'If you see a snake and a Brahmin, kill the Brahmin first'. Such was the resentment he harboured against the Brahmins! It has been rightly noted by Swaminathan, 'As Mahatma Gandhi was rousing the political

consciousness of the masses, Periyar was awakening the dormant social consciousness of the people of South India'.

EVR started various journals through which he propagated his ideas-Kudiarasu (People's Government), Puratchi (Revolt), Pakutharivu (Discernment), and Viduthalai (Liberty). Through these journals he criticised vehemently the Brahmins and Brahminism of the time. He was strongly opposed to child-marriage, the dowry system and enforced widowhood. He even went to the extent of advocating the abolition of marriage itself. The most effective weapon of mass education about the dispensibility of the Brahmin priests in crucial functions, was the self-respect marriages. This became a mass movement in Tamil Nadu and a means of mass education and action for social change.

He founded the Dravida Kazhagam in 1944 by converting the Justice Party. C. N. Annadurai's Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam came into existence as an off-shoot of the D. K. in 1949. Both parties were opposed to caste and managed to oust the Brahmin Chief Minister of the time, C. Rajagopalachari. Both parties continued for a long time to battle against social evils and economic disparities. This Movement made quite a departure from the three Movements we dealt with earlier. Both Raja RamMohan Roy and Swami Vivekananda re-interpreted Hinduism and made this modified Hinduism a basis for socio- economic transformation. But EVR had not only become anti-Brahmin and an atheist but a communist. He was of the opinion that religion, particularly Brahminism, was a positive hindrance to social change. Secondly, as against the previous three movements, EVR's movement was very radical and revolutionary in character.

5. The Dalit Movement

This movement is in continuity with EVR's movement, in its radicality and particularity. It indicates our deep social malaise. The organisation comprises people from the Untouchable jatis whom Gandhi designated as 'Harijans'; Discrimination and consequent deprivation has persisted to this day in India. For centuries a vast section of our people has been marginalised and domesticated. Previously they were referred to as 'Mlechhas' or outcastes. In 1932 they were called 'Depressed Classes'.[14] Dr. Ambedkar, the Father of the Indian Constitution, was himself an Untouchable and preferred the terms 'Protestant Hindus' or 'Non-Conformist Hindus' for the group.

The Dalit Panthers stand within the revolutionary tradition of Mahatma Phooley and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Jotirao Phooley has been called the 'Father of the Indian Social Revolution'. In the 19th century he started his movement for the education of untouchable girls and demanded radical reorganisation of Hindu society on the basis of individual liberty and social equality. He fought a relentless battle against Brahmins through many activities and writings. He called his organisation *Satya Sodhak Samaj*. Dr. Ambedkar assumed the leadership of the revolt of the Depressed Classes in 1920's. He began to write about it in his paper called *Mook Nayak* and founded the 'Bahiskhrita Hitakarini Sabha'. He said that the caste system deadens paralyses and cripples the people. Ithas ruined the Hindu race and has destroyed, demoralised and devitalised the Hindu Society. But he discovered to his utter dismay that at the root of the Hindu social system lies the Dharma which is prescribed in the Manusmriti. Therefore he thinks that we have to destroy such a religion if we are to abolish the caste system. Like Periyar and Phooley, Ambedkar blamed the Brahmins for the condition of slavery obtaining in society. Once Dr. Ambedkar wrote to Gandhi about temple entry : If the Hindu religion is to be a religion of social equality, then an amendment of its code to provide temple entry is not enough. What is required is to purge it of its doctrine of *chaturvarna.*

From this perspective, the Dalit Movement preferred the British rule to Brahmin rule, but later Ambedkar realised that only within a free state would it be possible to work for political power for the group. After Independence he wanted to conceive of democratic nationalism in terms of anti- Brahminism. In 1936 Ambedkar founded the Independent Labour Party on the fundamental assumptions that Brahminism

and Capitalism are the twin enemies of the working class in India. He was closer to the Communists than the Congress Party. But he was also disappointed with the Communist Party because he realised the omniscient character of Brahminism. Dr. Ambedkar, like Phooley, emphasised mass education and direct action to restore the self-respect of the untouchables. He realised that a power struggle was necessary.

6. Peasants' Movement

Today all over India there are movements for the liberation of the peasants who have been caught in the clutches of landlords and money-lenders for centuries. We must realise that India is still primarily rural and agricultural in character. Bonded labour, child labour and landless labour are widely prevalent. They are constantly discriminated against and exploited by ruthless landlords. In this sense our society continues to be semi-feudal and semi-colonial in character. The vast majority of the Indian population belongs to this agrarian sector. Yet it is the most unorganised sector of the country without much collective bargaining power. Entrenched reactionary forces and lot of vested interests have preventedpoor farmers in particular from coming together to fight for their own cause. Consequently they are disorganised and without direction. But increasingly they are forming themselves into groups in different states to improve their conditions.

We will look at some of the peasant movement, which have taken place after Independence. We can define a peasant movement as a 'relatively organized and continuous collective action involving violence, or the threat of violence, for securing more share in the control or ownership of land and its produce and to abolish injustices which have arisen thereof'. In Bengal, at Naxalbari the agrarian system of jotedari-adhiars was prevalent. This is a semi-feudal system where the adhiars or cultivators are under the complete jurisdiction of the jotedars or landlords, known as zamindars in other parts of India. The adhiars either were not paid for the work done or a meagre sum was given to them. With the system of sharecropping, more deductions were made on what the adhiari received. Thus what he actually took home was grossly insufficient for his minimum needs. In such an oppressive condition, people like Kanu Sanyal raised the slogan of 'land to the tiller' or 'the one who owns the plough owns the land'.[15]

Gradually the poor peasants became politicised and became members of Krishak Sabha, which was indirectly affiliated to the Communist Party of India. 1951-1954 was the organizational phase during which time peasantry of Naxalbari advanced through clashes; between 1954-1957 the workerpeasant alliance was achieved and between 1957-1962 the party was able to formulate and carry out its programmes designed to restore land to the tiller.

During this time, a rift developed in the leadership of the movement. Compared with Kanu Sanyal, Charu Mazumdar was more militant and wanted an armed revolt to liberate the peasants from this oppressive and exploitative system. The actual Naxalite peasant uprising took place in March-April 1967. During this time, there were more than a hundred cases of forcible cultivation, dehoarding and confiscation ofpaddy stocks from the jotedars. During this period the peasants's revolt took the form of guerrilla warfare andaimedat the seizure of state power. Thus the Naxalite Peasants's Movement became a political party called C.P.I. (Marxist-Leninist) whichwasquitemilitantand violent in character. This movement essentially became a class struggle.

n April 1951, Acharya Vinoba Bhave, following Gandhian principles and strategy, started the Bhoodan Movement to solve the problems of the peasants. Some rich farmers in the Telengana area donated land to him which he distributed to the poor peasants. He and his followers took the risk and walked through the terrifying areas and as a result they were able to win the hearts of many hard-core people. There have been similar peasants' movements in Tamil Naduand Karnataka which it is not possible for me to narrate here. But the above two examples of Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal illustrate for

us the nature and scope of the peasants' movements in India.

It indicates here some of the recurring problems people face with regard to movements which we have described in this paper but with a particular reference to these movements. The first issue that we need to raise is how far these movements have a mass base and whether there is enough local leaders. Secondly, the issue of leadership needsto be raised with regard to these movements. Urban based leadership, with its sophisticated ideology, claims superior knowledge and status. Such leadership insists that others in the movements follow the direction that they give. In the meantime, the rural-based or indigenous leadership is undermined although it may be more democratic one, involving the largest possible number of people. Very often such leadership becomes elitist in nature and hierarchical in its functioning. This creates a dichotomy between theleader and the mass. This is where much of the effectiveness and efficacy of these movements are destroyed.

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