

CHARLES H. HEIMSATH

Indian Nationalism
and Hindu
Social Reform

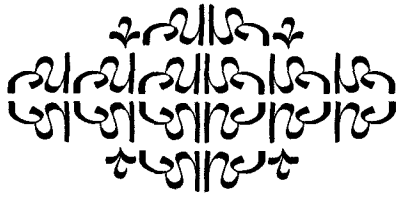


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INDIAN NATIONALISM AND HINDU
SOCIAL REFORM

Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform

BY CHARLES H. HEIMSATH



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*for my sons,
Carl and Peter*



PREFACE

FIVE YEARS AGO, while organizing a course on modern Indian history at Yale, I discovered that very little had been written on the social reform movement in 19th century India. Indeed, I was not then aware that the references to social reform by 19th century Indian writers in fact were indications of a true movement, "a series of actions or activities directed toward a particular end," with continuity at least up to the First World War. Initial investigation in the India Office Library in the summer of 1958, under a grant from the Stimson Fund at Yale, encouraged me to seek support for further work on the social reform movement, involving travel to India and time for research and writing in this country. Fortunately, the School of International Service of The American University was initiating its area studies program on South Asia and invited me to participate, with time off for another trip to India. The Rockefeller Foundation generously supplied funds for my travel and also stipends for research carried on in London and Washington. I wish to express my gratitude to Dean Ernest S. Griffith of the School of International Service and to Chadbourne Gilpatric and Kenneth W. Thompson of the Rockefeller Foundation, all of whom made it possible for me to undertake this study and complete it. Neither The American University nor the Rockefeller Foundation has had any control over the project and thus bears no responsibility for its results.

While in India I was able to interview many persons who had knowledge of the social reform movement. Without their guidance and insight my study would frequently have strayed from the proper course, and I am afraid that even with it I may have misjudged certain matters. Needless to say, many of those whom I interviewed may find themselves in disagreement with what I have written.

In particular I would like to acknowledge, with thanks, the kind attention which the following persons gave to me when I

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sought their help: Professor Nilakanta Sastri of the University of Madras; Swami Swahananda of the Ramakrishna Math; S.R. Venkataraman and K.L.N. Rao of the Servants of India Society; the statesmen and scholars, C.R. Rajagopalachari and Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar; Mona Hensman of Ethiraj College; V.K. Narasimhan of the *Hindu*; Professor Chandran Devenasan of Madras Christian College; Professor A.R. Desai of the University of Bombay; T.A. Kulkarni of the Gokhale Education Society; Professor N.R. Phatak, the biographer of Gokhale; Principal T.K. Tope of the Government Law College in Bombay; Professor G.B. Sardar of the Women's University in Poona; Laxman Shastri Joshi of the Pradnya Pathshala at Wai; Dr. Tara Chand, Director of the National Archives; P.M. Joshi of the Secretariat Record Office in Bombay; V.G. Dighe of the National Archives; Pundit Anandpriya of the Baroda Arya Samaj. Professor J.D.M. Derrett of the School of Oriental and African Studies kindly criticized Chapter VII in an earlier form. Selig Harrison read the chapter on nationalism and has provided a great deal of encouragement. Surjit Mansingh and Professors John R. McLane, Thomas R. Metcalf, and Baidya Nath Varma reviewed portions of the manuscript and made valuable suggestions. Dr. Horace Poleman of the Library of Congress advised me on transliterations. S. Natarajan, whose *A Century of Social Reform in India* has been of great value to me, kindly provided me with access to otherwise unavailable documents on the national social reform movement—his father was closely connected with this movement. Ravindra Tandon and Appa Ghatate helped me in various Hindi and Marathi translations.

Librarians provide the crucial link between a researcher and his materials, and I wish to thank all those who helped me, in particular Douglas Matthews of the India Office Library. Many thoughtful people at the British Museum Library, the New York Public Library, the Sterling Memorial Library at Yale, the Harvard College Library, the South Asia Regional Studies Library of the University of Pennsylvania, the Library of Congress, the Battelle Library at The American University, the International Aryan League Library in Delhi, and the Library of the University of Bombay deserve my sincere appreciation. I am grateful to Leda Natalia Heimsath, who provided valuable suggestions on the

P R E F A C E

organization and sequence of ideas while reading the manuscript before it was typed. I also wish to thank two expert typists, Grace Harry and Lois Stuart. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the encouragement given to me during three years of work on this book by R. Miriam Brokaw of Princeton University Press.

Despite all this help, I have not done everything that I set out to accomplish, and there are many inadequacies in this book. The subject-matter as I have handled it is far narrower than one might suspect. I have dealt, for the most part, with the social reform movement at the level at which it had some national significance; the multifarious local reform movements, many of them in the same tradition as the national movement, were only partially investigated. I suspect, from the scattered recorded evidence that I was able to get, that the local movements were, in kind, much like the nationally significant movement. I trust that this proves to be the case, when someone reviews all the local scenes more thoroughly, through the multitudes of vernacular sources that are in existence. I have surveyed the all-India movement first since it interests me more than any particular local social reform movement. I have not disregarded the uniquenesses of the regional movements, and much of the material I collected must be viewed in its local context. But I think that attempts should be made to perceive the unities in modern Indian intellectual life, despite the obvious differences in development between the major regions of India.

The balance which I have attempted to strike in the presentation of the various movements and specific crusades is one based on estimates of their relative importance for the social reform movement as a whole and for modern Indian history. Occasionally, as in the case of Dayananda Saraswati and the Arya Samaj, I have overemphasized somewhat—in terms of space devoted to the effort—these accounts, because other easily available sources have not adequately dealt with them. The Brahma Samaj and Bengali movements in general received less attention than they merit, because they have often been the subjects of serious studies.

Shortly after beginning the research for this book I concluded that it would greatly complicate the work if I included Muslim nationalism and Muslim social reform movements, because these

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were based on a modern intellectual tradition which had its origins and its development in semi-isolation from intellectual life among Hindus. I may later find myself in error, but I have now come to accept the view of Professor R. C. Majumdar, that Hindus and Muslims in 19th century India formed "two distinct communities" and that in social and cultural matters they "lived in two water-tight compartments as it were." The Muslim social reform movement is a separate subject for discussion, and it had almost nothing to do with the movement among Hindus, which is the theme of the present study.

This study extends to the First World War, the proper culmination of the 19th century in modern Indian life. The impact of Gandhi and the post First World War nationalist movement on the social reform movement was immense and requires separate analysis; to have dealt properly with Gandhi's thought and influence on social reform alone would have added more to the length of this work than I think is appropriate. I have included an Epilogue which suggests some of the developments in social reform after 1919, and I hope that a future study may present the contemporary period in its proper perspective.

The primary source materials on which this study is based are the writings and speeches of those Indians who took an interest in social reform questions. Of secondary importance are accounts of the social reform movements and the careers of the reformers. My main concern has been to expose the thinking of the modern social reformers, and to a lesser extent the ways in which their thinking was expressed in actions. I managed to survey a fair amount of the published record of the national social reform movement in India and in London; I rely especially heavily on contemporary pamphlets, many of which, however, are repetitive and therefore have not been included in the Bibliography. Apart from an effort to reinterpret the political nationalist movement largely on the basis of published works, I make no claim to have contributed to the study of Indian political developments in the 19th century. I leave this much-needed task to better qualified writers.

Chapter VII of this book, slightly reduced in length, appeared in the *Journal of Asian Studies* for August 1962, under the title,

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“The Origin and Enactment of the Indian Age of Consent Bill, 1891.”

I should like to make here one precautionary observation that should be kept in mind while reading what follows. Although one can discover social critics in any country at almost any time, 19th and 20th century India has had an overabundant allotment of this type of sincere but often irritating person. The self-deprecatory and chronically deflating pen—a modern Indian literary phenomenon—might well be the subject of a study in itself; Nirad Chaudhuri's *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* is probably the best example of this kind of writing in English. A subtle and important difference between Indians and others writing social criticism lies not so much in the quantity of the output as in the approach of the writers to their subject. In the West one is not surprised to read an outraged indictment of certain social usages from which the author stands apart as critical observer; it would be a surprise, however, and in fact would create uneasiness in the reader should he come across critic after critic who places himself firmly in the society he is abusing and indicts himself along with the group. This is the usual style of Indian social criticism, and one subconsciously begins to feel that matters are even worse than the criticisms suggest since the critics themselves are personally involved. One should remember that this is a stylistic trait. It may stem from unusual objectivity in self-analysis or from humility. In either case it is wholly admirable.

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INDIAN NATIONALISM AND HINDU
SOCIAL REFORM



INTRODUCTION

“NEITHER politics nor war provides a key to the meaning of Indian history,” writes Percival Spear; instead in society and culture are to be found the processes which give significance to India’s past, and its present.¹

The Indian social reform movement produced a multifaceted intellectual expression of the social and cultural transformations which took place under the impact of British rule. No other coherent body of thought so sensitively and profoundly exposed the mental processes of Indians as they formulated the ideas underlying the structure of their modern society as did the literature on social reform. The making of modern India, indeed, is recorded in that literature, with a richness of context and a reliable reflection of subjective truth that are nowhere else available. The intellectual history of the social reform movement is the main subject of this book.

In the 19th century—as today in India—the transformation of society began by individual revolts against prescribed ways of behaving. The established society recognized that fact, and all social rebels were derisively called reformers. When the all-India social reform movement—or movements, depending on the context—emerged in the second half of the 19th century some of its leaders were bothered by the loose definition of a reformer, which could include irresponsible iconoclasts as well as sober men holding positions of public trust. But no restrictive criteria were put forth, much less agreed upon, with which to judge whether or not a person was a true reformer, and in any province or town those known as reformers ranged from full-time social workers or teachers devoting their lives to the advancement of society, to exuberant students who lent their names and voices to any cause which offered a chance of challenging traditional authorities. Persons who publicly opposed the reform movement, often called

¹ P. Spear, *India: A Modern History*, p. 448.

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anti-reformers, were themselves sometimes leading exemplary lives according to the standard of the reformers. The problem of definition was never solved.²

For the present purposes of historical analysis of an intellectual movement, social reformers were all those who were advocates of alterations in social customs which would involve a break with traditionally accepted patterns; they were those who, convinced themselves that altered ways of thinking and behaving were positive values, sought to convince others to modify or entirely transform their ways of life. Some changes that they advocated were minor, for example, elimination of an obnoxious caste regulation, and would have occurred in any case by the slow erosion of outworn customs; yet those changes often came sooner because of a vocal and influential vanguard which popularized them. Other changes were of major proportions, for example, the breakdown of the caste system itself, and were advocated by men who held a broad view of the welfare of Indian society and preached on themes of universal ethics and the potentialities of all human beings.

If this definition were extended, as it properly could be, to the sociological realm, social reformers might include all social innovators, who through necessity, opportunism, or real conviction adjusted their behavior or ideas so as better to adapt themselves to the new standards presented and sometimes enforced by British rule. This study does not, however, intend to probe that vast and complex aspect of modern Indian life known as social change. Among other omissions in the chapters which follow, very little attention is given to legal codes and their enforcement, unless the enactment of a law had an important relationship to the reform movement. Also, there is far less discussion of the Western-sponsored movements for social reform in India than their importance might justify. Indian, not Western, social reformers created the movement which is described in this study. Studies of economic changes and the spread of education, both of which inevitably caused social changes, are also omitted. In short, the social reform

² As late as 1903 the *Indian Social Reformer* (ISR) raised the question: who are the social reformers—all those who claimed to be, or only those who belonged to a social reform association? (March 8, 1903, p. 257.)

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movement did not include all forces operating to produce social change; it was only one, distinct component of those forces.

As an intellectual phenomenon, whose behavioral consequences are difficult, if not impossible, to measure, the social reform movement in the 19th century was limited in its avowed leadership and most of its following to educated Indians. Educated men defined the ideals of reform, and those ideals accordingly reflected the particular needs and desires of their supporters. In India, social reform did not ordinarily mean a reorganization of the structure of society at large, as it did in the West, for the benefit of underprivileged social and economic classes. Instead it meant the infusion into the existing social structure of new ways of life and thought: the society would be preserved, while its members would be transformed. The accepted rationale of India's progress in modern times has been the idea of filtration of ideas and modes of behavior from the upper layers of society to the lower ones. Upper castes established the traditional social norms, and they were expected to act as the main purveyors of the reformed, modern ones. This essentially conservative and gradualist approach to social change was sincerely believed in by most of the social, as well as the political, reformers and was not adopted as an excuse for inaction. "The customs and institutions with which the social reformer proposes to deal," explained Chandavarkar, "are common to the higher classes of the Hindu society from whom the lower classes take their standard."³ In fact, many of the social reform causes had almost no meaning for lower caste groups at the time that they were undertaken; they were efforts entirely devoted to adjusting the ideas and behavior of high-caste, educated men and their families to the requirements of the Westernized culture which they desired to create for themselves.

By the beginning of the 20th century some reformers, stimulated by the ideas of a truly national awakening, were advocating the uplift of lower castes and outcasts and were repudiating the caste structure of society itself. The introduction of these ideas into the programs of the Hindu social reformers was a significant shift away from the earlier preoccupation with the advancement of individuals or restricted groups. The ideas of uplift and rehabili-

³ N. G. Chandavarkar, *Speeches and Writings*, p. 54.

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tation, when translated into practical action, often produced programs of a social service nature, and among Indians it was the social reformers who were chiefly responsible for inaugurating the social service movement.⁴ The utopian idea of eliminating caste distinctions, reminiscent of the social messages of the medieval bhakti sects, however, could scarcely result in direct action comparable to the crusades for widow remarriage or even inter-caste dining. No reformer suggested practical ways of eliminating the caste system as a whole, although many of them regarded it as the main cause of India's social ills.

During the 19th century, social, religious, and political reform movements represented the primary areas of creative intellectual endeavor for most educated Indians. Relationships between these three great reform movements were various and shifting, and a proper understanding of one of them requires knowledge of the others as well. The first chapter of this book presents some of the main features of the social revolt, both its intensity and the direction of its attack on existing society. Chapter II shows the linkage between social and religious reform and presents the argument that the social revolt and the social reform movement, which in many ways was the constructive side of the revolt, were unique in India's history, unlike other movements for social change of which records exist. Chapter III provides a summary of the early political reform movements in the three Presidencies as a background to political nationalism. It lays no claim to originality and is included chiefly as a reminder that political thought and organizations were not neglected areas of expression for educated Indians.

The discussion of the social reform movement, beginning with Chapter IV, is organized as a three-stage development during the century which ended with the First World War. These same three stages might emerge from studies of the development of Indian thought in areas other than social reform. The first stage, covered in Chapters IV and V, had its beginnings in the urge of

⁴ "Social reform aims essentially at change—a change sometimes involving the basic values of a society, whereas social work [or service] primarily relates to welfare activities undertaken within the limits set by the existing values." *Social Welfare in India*, p. 4.

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individuals to reshape their personal lives, in large measure in accordance with standards adopted from Western thought. The preoccupation with individual revolt and reform covered many decades and was marked by relatively slow development of organized movements. The first important evidence that this first stage, a new epoch in Indian intellectual history, had begun was the career (1815-1832) and subsequent influence of Rammohun Roy in Bengal. Roy's Brahma Samaj established a standard for social reform movements in Bombay, Madras, and the Punjab, the most important of which rested firmly on religious reform premises.

Although Roy's ideas continued their attraction for Indian intellectuals throughout the century, a shift away from the individually oriented methods and scope of the Roy approach to reform began to take place in the 1880's. At that time, as individuals and small groups began to identify themselves with an Indian nation, the same methods and ethical ideals which prompted individual reform, methods and ideals still largely derived from the West, were applied to efforts to transform Indian society on a national basis. Simultaneously, the goal of national political advancement provided a secular basis for social reform which eliminated, for many Indians, the need to relate social to religious reformation.

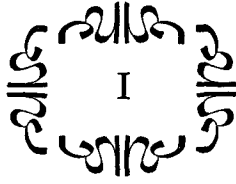
Evidences that a new stage in India's intellectual life was emerging multiplied in the 1880's with the founding of the Indian National Congress (Chapter vi); Malabari's marriage reform crusade, the first all-India social reform movement (Chapter vii); and the establishment of the National Social Conference (Chapter viii). The relationship of social reform to political reform in the context of nationalism was probably the most critical public issue during this stage of the social reform movement, and the decision reached about that relationship affected the future of both social and political reform in India (Chapter ix). The urge to unify for common purposes appeared also in the formation of subnational groups, such as provincial and caste organizations, and in the continued reform endeavors of the religious Samajes (Chapters x and xi). During this second stage, nationalism expressed the expectations of progress for the nation as well as the new desire for unity among scattered and culturally diverse individuals and groups. But those individuals and groups, with few exceptions imbued with West-

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ern ideas, were the self-appointed *representatives* of the nation, not the corporate nation itself, and their values were their own.

It might be argued that this second stage represents even today the spirit of Indian political life. But in the development of the social reform movement a third stage emerged during the latter part of the one-hundred-year period ending with the First World War. Corporate social values suited to the national society began to take precedence over the values of limited groups claiming to represent the nation, and Indian society (in fact, Hindu society), not transplanted Western society, was recognized as the proper vehicle for individual self-realization. An intellectual development was beginning in which social reform began to mean a regeneration of the traditional spirit of the nation—a regeneration, political as well as social, which was founded on religious revival. By the end of the third stage, criticism of society, frequently as harsh as in the earlier stages, was based on the failure of national social life to realize its own innate potentialities and not on its inferior performance in comparison to Western societies. Chapter XII describes the third stage.

Throughout these three stages, social reform ideas, the movement or movements embodying them, and the methods used by reformers reflected the intellectual temper of the age, and at the same time influenced contemporary thinking and the organized reform movements in the religious and political fields. Social reformers were never an isolated group, but were usually religious or political leaders as well. The integration of social, religious, and political changes by individuals and by society as a whole stands as a tribute to the versatility and adaptability of Indian minds and has made a crucial and unique contribution to the stability of the modern Indian nation.



THE SOCIAL REVOLT IN MODERN INDIA

INDIVIDUAL outrage against particular social customs and religious beliefs has always been a feature of Indian society, despite the high value that has always been placed on continuity, order, and the wisdom of social precedent. Long before modern times and Indian exposure to Western civilization, flexibility in customs, mobility in social relationships, and many cases of collective revolt against traditional social standards were already in existence in India. For a Hindu, an outright revolt could take the form of excluding oneself from normal social and religious requirements by adopting the role of a sannyasi, or wandering ascetic; caste laws then no longer applied, and unorthodoxy in religious beliefs and behavior was tolerated—or even revered, if it caught the popular imagination. Social and religious rebellions against the traditional authority of Brahmin priests and other high castes created new movements whose doctrines and practices differed from orthodox Hinduism; the medieval bhakti, or devotional, movements represented that form of rebellion, as did Sikhism in its early stages. Social revolts with more indirect impacts periodically emerged throughout India in the form of efforts to improve the positions of certain castes in their relations to other castes. Mobility within the caste system has always existed as a result of rebelliousness and a group's desire for change and betterment.

The special character of the 19th and 20th century revolt lay in this: much of it originated from secular motives based on rational-

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istic critiques of society and led to secular, as well as religious, movements for social reform; it applied to all parts of India almost simultaneously; it gained the support of the political authority of the state, which resulted in legislation and administrative action; and finally, it persisted and, as a stated or implied premise of all nationalist thought, it succeeded in producing general Indian acceptance of the social ideals of the rebels—ideals which are in ascendancy today.

Indian criticisms of their own social practices and the religious beliefs which supported them was not a passing phase in response to Western rule. The suggestion of certain nationalist writers that those criticisms resulted from a temporary intoxication due to alien influences must be dismissed. Almost every Indian leader from Rammohun Roy to Jawaharlal Nehru frankly expressed at one time or another his dissatisfaction and even contempt for certain practices or failings among his own people. There have been periods when such ideas were acceptable or even laudable as evidence of a genuine concern for the welfare of the nation, and there have been times when a man risked censure and even bodily attack for expressing them. But never in the century preceding Independence was there so general and complete a tolerance of existing social conditions or so universal and unqualified a repudiation of the doctrines of reform that powerful voices were not being raised in favor of major social changes which would bring India into a closer approximation of modern society. Virtually all of the outstanding nationalist leaders who identified themselves with the revival of genuine Indian values in reaction against excessive Westernization were themselves endowed with Western training, from which the bulk of their aspirations for Indian society was derived. The vociferousness of the pleaders in behalf of traditional India could not conceal a great selectivity when they described the Indian society of traditional eras.

The beginnings of the 19th century social revolt, easily identified with the thought of Rammohun Roy (1772-1833), established the tone and substance of what was to follow. Roy vividly described the degraded state of society and acknowledged without embarrassment the virtues of Western learning, liberal legal and social insti-

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tutions, and the Western social ethic. His revolt against living Hindu society and his appeal to Indians to purify their religion and reconstitute their social institutions echoed throughout the century after his death from the lips and pages of his followers, acknowledged or not, whose ideas were affected in some way by this "first modern Indian." Both Roy's proposal for a new Indian religious life and his assessment of the benefits of British rule rested on his conception of a renovated Indian society. It was impossible for him to envisage a reformed Indian religion unless it carried the message of social advancement, and both religious and social reform were prerequisites to any enhancement of India's political stature.

In a famous letter written in 1828, Roy stated his convictions on Indian political advance. "I regret to say," he wrote, "that the present system of religion adhered to by the Hindus is not well calculated to promote their political interest. The distinction of castes, introducing innumerable divisions and subdivisions among them has entirely deprived them of patriotic feeling, and the multitude of religious rites and ceremonies and the laws of purification have totally disqualified them from undertaking any difficult enterprise. . . . It is, I think, necessary that some change should take place in their religion, at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort."¹ Roy found "Hindus in general more superstitious and miserable, both in performance of their religious rites, and in their domestic concerns, than the rest of the known nations on the earth."² They were "with few exceptions, immersed in gross idolatry, and in belief of the most extravagant description respecting futurity, antiquity, and the miracles of their deities and saints."³ Apart from the few, like himself, who could perceive the essential truth embedded in Vedic scriptures and separate that from the false accumulations of the ages, the great majority of Hindus accepted the literal teachings of idolatrous Brahmins, and "therefore continue, under the form of religious devotion, to practice a system which destroys, to the

¹ Rammohun Roy, *English Works* (J. C. Ghose, ed.), pp. 929-30.

² Letter to John Digby, *ibid.*, p. 929.

³ From "An Appeal to the Christian Public in Defense of 'The Precepts of Jesus,'" *ibid.*, p. 559.

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utmost degree, the natural texture of society, and prescribes crimes of the most heinous nature. . . .”⁴

Rammohun Roy’s contributions to the making of modern India lay not only in his iconoclasm and in his intellectual evocations of the new era, but also in his practical work to reestablish the “natural texture of society.” He founded the Brahmo Sabha (later Samaj) for the consolidation and spread of the religious tenets and forms of worship which he and a courageous group of followers held suited to India’s heritage and contemporary needs. His own translations and abridgements of Hindu scriptures and the original religious writings from his pen became texts for the theistic movements which grew up in the decades to follow. Probably stimulated by evidence produced by the Christian missionaries of Serampore, in Bengal, on the extent of the practice of suttee,⁵ Roy began a campaign in 1818 against that evil which culminated in a Government regulation prohibiting the custom in 1829. For Roy, English education was the portal opening the way to Indians to advance toward equality with Westerners, and he provided crucial support for private and governmental efforts to introduce higher education along European lines. He could not have been expected to inaugurate a political movement at a time when the government itself was hardly consolidated in the country. Nevertheless, his political writings on judicial reform, civil rights, the separation of administrative powers, freedom of the press, and other liberal doctrines, became standard works for the political reform movement one half century later.

In terms of practical endeavor the English-educated group of Bengalis following Roy failed even to maintain the momentum initiated by him except in the educational field, where they had the growing support of the government. But that diversified group, whether liberal or radical in politics,⁶ Brahmos (i.e. Brahmo Samajists) or not in religion, were usually rebels in society. Most extreme were the students of the Hindu College at Calcutta who

⁴ Preface to the “Katha Upanishad,” *ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵ *Sati* (Sanskrit) means a virtuous woman, or a faithful wife; it acquired the meaning of a widow who was cremated on the funeral pyre of her dead husband, in theory willingly; it also referred to the custom of widow-burning.

⁶ See B. Majumdar, *History of Political Thought . . .*, for descriptions of those men.

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“adopted an aggressive attitude to everything Hindu and openly defied the canons of their inherited religion, while some of them offended public opinion by their youthful exuberance, such as drinking to excess, flinging beef-bones into the houses of the orthodox, and parading the streets shouting ‘we have eaten Mussalman bread.’ Some of them embraced Christianity. . . .”⁷ Reviewing that period, Satyavrata Mukerjee later wrote: “There was a rush for everything English, and English ideals dominated our lives and thoughts. . . . Irreligion was fearfully rampant. The Trinitarian orthodoxy of Christian bigotry as well as the exploded farrago of Hindu dogmatism were alike unsuited to the rationalist temper of the age. Immortality, licentiousness, riotous living were the order of the day. Denationalising emasculation was the prevailing characteristic. It was said of the new Bengalee of the age, that he delighted in wounding the religious susceptibilities of his countrymen, and ‘in cutting his way to salvation through ham and beef and wading his way to liberalism through tumblers of beer.’”⁸

Bombay did not lag far behind Calcutta in producing young rebels, chiefly the products of the Elphinstone Institution, founded in 1827 to promote English education, on the model of the Hindu College. The Bombay Students’ Literary and Scientific Society sponsored lectures, many of whose themes were as rebellious as those heard in Bengali student groups. One young speaker began by announcing: “My chief and most important object, is to denounce some of the most pernicious Customs of our people, particularly of the Hindus, my own section.”⁹ The Bombay social revolt, however, from those early years took a form which differed from the Bengal revolt. Despite proclamations of rebellion, secrecy in breaking caste laws and an outward guise of conformity with tradition marked the judiciousness of the Bombay approach to social dissent, in contrast to publicity-conscious Bengal, where

⁷ K. A. N. Sastri, *History of India*, III, 368-69. See also “Derozio and Young Bengal,” in A. Gupta, *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*.

⁸ S. Mukerjee, “Studies in Bengalee Literature I,” *Hindustan Review*, May 1907, p. 480.

⁹ Bhaskar Damodhar, Second Normal School Scholar, Elphinstone Institution; in “The Students’ Miscellany . . .,” p. 8. Most of the speakers who followed were Parsis.

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rebels and orthodox alike conspired to make every social deviation a notorious cause. As succeeding chapters show, Bombay's social revolt developed more surely than Bengal's into movements for general social reform.

By mid-century the social revolt spanned the subcontinent among English-educated men and made them receptive to the first social reform crusade with more than a local following. Pundit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891), a Bengali follower of Rammohun Roy, illuminated to all who could read or cared to listen the social state of Hindu widows, a subject which had received little or no attention from Roy. "Woman!" he wrote in 1856, "in India, thy lot is cast in misery!"¹⁰ Indeed, the entire society seemed rotten to the reformer's sensitive perception: "How miserable is the present state of India! It was once known to nations as the land of virtue. But the blood dries up to think that it is now looked upon as the land of depravity. . . . From a view of its present degradation it is vain to look for a speedy reformation."¹¹ The crusade for emancipation of Indian women became the first tenet of the social reform movement everywhere in India. Their generally inferior status, their enforced seclusion, especially in Bengal and northern India, their extremely early marriage, and their lack of education everywhere were facts documented by Vidyasagar and reformers throughout the country. As higher educational opportunities expanded and hundreds of graduates found themselves without any feminine companionship on an intellectual level, the situation became intolerable, at least for some Indians, on personal, as well as abstract moral, grounds. The example of the educated and cultivated European wife suggested the direction in which Indians might direct their own women's progress. The Bombay Parsi, Framji Bomanji, whose community was one of the first to adopt Western modes of behavior, wrote in 1863: "We want the English language, English manners, and English behavior, for our wives and daughters; and until these are supplied, it is but just that the present gulf between the Englishman and the Indian should remain as wide as ever."¹²

¹⁰ Vidyasagar, *Marriage of Hindu Widows*, p. 94. (See also Appendix 1 of this study.)

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 93.

¹² Bomanji, *Lights and Shades of the East*, p. 94.

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English education had virtually displaced traditional instruction in all important urban centers when the Universities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras were founded in 1857. Western ideas and ethical standards were spreading gradually throughout British India as the administrative and economic outposts of British influence grew into a network of culture contact points, and the Christian missionaries moved quietly into even remote regions. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 made personal connections with Britain and Europe comparatively easy for the wealthy or for those who could obtain sponsorship for their travel. Scores of men returned from England and hundreds of other vigorous Indians spread dissatisfaction with their society throughout the land. While concentrating their attacks on the treatment of women and on marriage customs, reformers took up other causes which their newly gained intellectual and social perspectives demanded: the anti-rational bases of many religious rituals; unjustifiable caste restrictions on inter-dining, diet, and overseas travel; malpractices in the management of temples and religiously sanctioned prostitution; the degrading treatment of low castes and untouchables; and infanticide. The Brahmo Samaj became a refuge for many men who needed the support of numbers or the sanction of religion for their reformed ideas and behavior. Other Samajes were established in Bombay, Madras, and the Punjab. But some reformers preferred to remain nominally Hindus while undertaking major changes in their personal lives.

In the second half of the century and in the decades when Indians were striving to create a nationalist movement, the social revolt grew in intensity and led to social reform endeavors which were based on an urgent concern for the progress of the nation. Keshub Chandra Sen (1838-1884), the leader of the Brahmo Samaj and its greatest missionary, dreamed of a great national awakening which would combine religious and social reform. Sen viewed contemporary Indian life with an eye common to many of his educated countrymen. "What we see around us today," he said, "is a fallen nation—a nation whose primitive greatness lies buried in ruins. Its national literature and science, its theology and philosophy, its industry and commerce, its social prosperity and domestic simplicity and sweetness, are almost numbered with

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the things that were. As we survey the mournful and dismal scene of desolation—spiritual, social and intellectual—which spreads around us, we in vain try to recognize therein the land of Kalidas—the land of poetry, of science, and of civilization.”¹⁸ Sen’s personal revolt and his constructive reforming efforts were the last of the great Bengali assertions of the religious and social needs of all Indians, until Vivekananda appeared at the end of the century. While Bengalis after 1880 appeared temporarily exhausted by the unsettling jolts to which their society had been subjected since Rammohun Roy, elsewhere educated men pressed the attack against social degeneracy and useless religious orthodoxy. Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) in northern India launched the most vigorous campaign against the Brahmin priesthood and the social customs which it supported that the 19th century witnessed in any part of the country, and the Arya Samaj was founded to continue his reformation.

In Bombay Presidency, especially in Poona, a school of thought developed with a constructive program for social and political advancement which dominated the course of the nationalist movement for several decades. Its beginnings were marked by social and religious criticism of a high intellectual caliber—unprejudiced, for the most part, by personalized philosophies of spiritual salvation. Sardar Gopal Hari Deshmukh, “Lokahitwadi” (1823-1892), almost matched Dayananda’s vitriolic condemnations of the traditional Brahmin monopoly of education and religious life. As early as the 1840’s he had written—in Marathi, not in English—that “The priests are very unholy because they repeat things without understanding their meaning and profanely reduce knowledge to such repetition. The Pundits are worse than priests, because they are more ignorant and also are haughty. . . . Who are the Brahmins and in what respects do they differ from us? Have they twenty hands and do we lack something in us? When such questions are now asked the Brahmins should give up their foolish concepts; they must accept that all men are equal and

¹⁸ Sen, “The Improvement of Indian Women,” in *Transactions of the Bengal Social Science Association*, quoted in McCully, *English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism*, pp. 251-52.

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everybody has a right to acquire knowledge."¹⁴ His attacks continued and were joined by the vigorous newspaper editor, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar (1857-1895), who also wrote in Marathi so that his words would have the greatest possible effect. Agarkar urged reason as the only proper guide to conduct and accepted the challenge of a minority faction at that time, led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, which feared that social reform would weaken political nationalism. Calling attention to certain educated Indians who claimed that India's traditions were necessarily superior to all others, Agarkar wrote, "It is a shame that people like us whose eyes are open, who know that there are other countries beside India and who know that there exist great philosophies beside those found in Sanskrit books, should also become so narrow-minded and act like blind people."¹⁵

In the mainstream of the national social reform movement, whose course was defined in the 1880's in Bombay, were the Maharashtrian Brahmins, Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901), Kashinath Trimbak Telang (1850-1893), Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar (1837-1925), and Narayan Ganesh Chandavarkar (1855-1923). Ranade, considered a moderate reformer, provided the intellectual standard for social criticism which marked the proceedings of the National Social Conference. With an underlying moral concern reminiscent of Keshub Chandra Sen, he asked the Conference in 1893, "Are we or are we not conscious that many of us, under the narcotic influence of custom and usage, too often violate the feelings of our common human nature and our sense of right and wrong, stunt the growth of our higher life, and embitter the existence of many of those who depend on us . . . ? Are we prepared to point out any single hour of the day when we do not unconsciously commit injustice of a sort by the side of which municipal injustice is nothing, when we do not unconsciously sanction iniquities by the side of which the most oppressive tyrant's rule is mercy itself? . . . we should take due care to set our house in order, as no mere whitewashing and no plaster-

¹⁴ Deshmukh, *A Collection of Essays* (in Marathi), pp. 44-45, quoted by D. K. Bedekar in a review for *Quest*, 1960.

¹⁵ *Sampurna Agarkar*, 2, 72.

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ing would remove these hidden sources of our weakness. The whole existence must be renovated. The baptism of fire and not of water must be gone through by those who seek a renovation of heart such as this."¹⁶

Four years later at the Twelfth Social Conference, Ranade again adopted the stern tone of moral outrage: "All admit that we have been deformed. We have lost our stature, we are bent in a hundred places, our eyes lust after forbidden things, our ears desire to hear scandals about our neighbors, our tongues lust to taste forbidden fruit, our hands itch for another man's property, our bowels are deranged with indigestible food. We cannot walk on our feet but require stilts or crutches. This is our present social policy, and now we want this deformity to be removed. . . ."¹⁷ Telang echoed Ranade's judgments: "Our system is to a great extent become petrified . . . the moral conceptions which once informed it have long since vanished and . . . we are now hugging the mere outer shell."¹⁸ Bhandarkar reduced many of society's ills to the absence of a "corporate consciousness." Sadly he admitted that ". . . we Indians are devoid of sympathy for our fellow creatures. Our benevolence is active where particular individuals have to be helped. Our feelings are stirred at the sight of individual human beings in distress. But we are devoid of the sense of public duty. . . . We cannot yet work with perseverance for objects that are to benefit not certain specific individuals, but the body public."¹⁹ And Chandavarkar perhaps summed up the spirit of revolt: ". . . in all conscience, there is very little fun in the kind of death-in-life that we have been living for nearly two thousand years."²⁰

The doctrines of social utility, societal evolution, and the inevitability of progress brought greater understanding of Indian social problems, but they also produced discouragement. When educated Indians examined the record of social advance since Rammohun Roy they usually found it barren of substantial signs of advancement. Clinging to the idea that the course of European progress

¹⁶ Ranade, *Miscellaneous Writings*, pp. 124-25.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 196.

¹⁸ Telang, *Selected Writings and Speeches*, II, 549.

¹⁹ Bhandarkar, *Collected Works*, I, 479.

²⁰ Chandavarkar, *Speeches and Writings*, p. 97.

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must also apply to India—the categories of social analysis laid down in the West were accepted as universal—Indians sought some explanation for the apparently halting pace of social progress in India. Some turned immediately to India's political subservience to explain its social backwardness, and when that explanation blinded a man to all other factors which might account for India's condition, then the social reform movement lost a supporter and political agitation (usually the extremist variety) gained one. Most leaders of the reform movement, however, had the courage not to resort to self-deception; instead they probed relentlessly into the causes of India's social plight.

The reasons for India's alleged decline had been set down by Rammohun Roy and Keshub Chandra Sen as false religion and by Dayananda Saraswati as the hypnotic control over society of corrupt Brahmins. The western Indian reformers, with fuller awareness of social processes, cited a variety of causes. "Now what have been the inward forms or ideas which have been hastening our decline during the past three thousand [sic] years?" asked Ranade. He replied: "These ideas may be briefly set forth as isolation, submission to outward force or power more than to the voice of inward conscience, perception of fictitious differences between men and men due to heredity and birth, passive acquiescence in civil wrongdoing, and a general indifference to secular well-being, almost bordering on fatalism."²¹ Bhandarkar made constant reference to the caste system as the root of all India's ills, and Chandavarkar was inclined to agree. For the latter, caste, even in its Vedic, or "purified" form, was a formula for social disruption, weakness, and immorality. "It is not in discouraging union alone," he wrote, referring to India's perennial problem of unity, "that the baneful influence of caste morality has been felt. Even if a man be a liar, a forger, or a thief, or has been guilty of some offense affecting his moral character, or leads a life of vice, he remains a member of his caste provided he conforms to caste rules. His society has no punishment to mete to him, and he is as good for its purposes as the best of men. There is in fact no moral indignation felt when a man has been guilty of sin . . . so long as his act does

²¹ *Miscellaneous Writings, op.cit.*, p. 192.

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not come within the idea countenanced by society of sin. . . . Public opinion has never been strong in cases where it ought to be strong for the healthy growth of society; and the hypocrite and the rake are tolerated, whereas however pure and moral a man may be, he is done in the eyes of his caste, if he ventures to break through one of its rules."²² Thorough and reasoned denunciations of the caste system and appeals for the uplift of low castes and outcastes were added to the enumerations of India's social ills by most reformers toward the end of the century.

Acknowledgment of social ills, reformers realized, was only half of the battle. What was urgently required to solve them was a courageous determination to persist in great enterprises, a quality that many saw lacking in Indian culture. Dr. Mahendra Lal Sircar pointed to the audience at the 1890 Social Conference in Calcutta and said, ". . . there you are—a race, degenerated, paralysed in all your energies."²³ G. Subramania Iyer, editor of the *Madras Hindu*, cited the "law of life" which was "ceaseless activity, perpetual struggle, rivalry, defeat or success," in an address in 1897. But, he argued, Hindu sages have recommended "a condition of absolute quietude for individuals. Starvation of the external as well as the internal senses, their severance from their respective objective relations, self-contemplation, quietude, and nirvana. . . ." Whatever value that condition may have for individuals, "no community has yet reached that higher plane where nirvana is the goal. Nor do we, Hindus of modern days, aspire for it. We cherish an aspiration to rise to the same level of material and moral condition as other nations. We feel humiliated at our poverty, at our helplessness, at our defeats. . . ."²⁴ Bhandarkar, who was never optimistic about the success of reform in his own day, concluded in 1893 that "The half-hearted and lethargic manner in which all our movements, political, social, religious and economical or industrial, are conducted and the fact that we do not find a succession of resolute or zealous workers in connection with them show that the new civilization with which we have come into contact has not, except in very rare cases, produced more than a skin-deep

²² *Speeches and Writings, op.cit.*, pp. 208-09.

²³ Chintamani, *Indian Social Reform*, III, 141.

²⁴ *ibid.*, IV, 344-45.

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improvement in us."²⁵ And C.Y. Chintamani, a Madras reformer and editor, criticized his countrymen's desire for repose and willingness to let others do the work. He tried to stir some activity into his readers by placing before them the example of Teddy Roosevelt and his "strenuous life."²⁶

There was no doubt in the minds of the social rebels and reformers of the 19th century, with the notable exception of Dayananda Saraswati, that their dissatisfaction and their ideals of progress were the direct result of India's contacts with the West, especially with Britain. That contact, it must be emphasized, was not with a civilization which merely excelled in material prosperity, physical resources, and human vigor; but one which itself was experiencing in the 19th century a far-reaching social reformation, based on political reforms and economic changes, which excited Europeans and Americans with its revolutionary implications no less than it did Indians. Among the early reformers, the fact that they placed heavy reliance on the inspiration of the West presented no serious obstacle to their social criticisms or their advocacy of alien ethical and social doctrines. Like Rammohun Roy, Keshub Chandra Sen regarded India's contact with Christian civilization as the surest means of its moral regeneration. British rule, the agency of that contact, Sen felt, should thus be considered a chapter "of ecclesiastical history." "The book which treats of the moral, social, and religious advancement of our great country with the help of Western science, under the paternal rule of the British nation, is indeed a sacred book. . . . Who can deny that Victoria is an instrument in the hands of Providence to elevate this degraded country in the scale of nations. . . ." He advised his educated countrymen "to be loyal to the British Government, that came to your rescue, as God's ambassador, when your country was sunk in ignorance and superstition and hopeless jejuneness, and has since lifted you to your present high position."²⁷

Ranade looked with favor on the "disciplining process" which he found characteristic of British rule and which he hoped would create in Indians "love of order and regulated authority," love of

²⁵ *Collected Works, op.cit.*, 1, 468.

²⁶ "The Strenuous Life," in *The Voice of Progress*, 1, 7, 3-7.

²⁷ Speech of March 3, 1877. K. C. Sen, *Lectures in India*, 1, 323-24.

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“municipal freedom, science and research, adventurous discovery,” as well as “aptitudes for mechanical skills, and chivalrous respect for womankind.” He concluded that “Neither the old Hindu nor the old Mahomedan civilisation was in a condition to train these virtues in a way to bring up the races of India on a level with those of Western Europe, and so the work of education had to be renewed, and it has been going on for the past century and more under the *pax britannica* with results—which all of us are witness to in ourselves.”²⁸ Chandavarkar was equally frank in stating his preferences for the Western social order: “The progress of the Western nations, more especially of the Anglo-Saxon race, marks the lines on which the progress of our own country should be directed. The Hindu civilisation based on the ancient Aryan institutions is doomed.”²⁹

In an illuminating analysis of the impact of British rule on Indian society Dewan Narendra Nath, President of the Lahore Social Conference in 1893, cited the almost unprecedented confrontation of two great civilizations, in a relationship of ruler and ruled, one he called “progressive” and the other “defunct and stationary.” He observed the immense difficulties in the transferring of ideas and institutions from the one to the other. India was “not a barbarous nation” and therefore could not easily give up its rich and complex culture: “we have not only to put on a new garb but to take off the old one as well.” With assurance that Western ideas and customs would ultimately prevail in India, Narendra Nath proceeded to explain that intellectual acceptance of Western ideas did not imply ease in adopting them in practice. “A foreigner is astounded, when an intelligent Hindu who is able to talk with sense and ability on all the topics of the day, declines to accept a cup of tea from him. . . . The Hindu understands that abstinence from eating and drinking with foreigners is a practice which should be abandoned. . . . [But] the foreigner has no idea of the fate which awaits his friend for breaking his caste rules. To the Hindu it means excommunication or social death—nothing short of a kind of martyrdom. . . . Excommunication or cessation of commensality and intermarriage is a punishment quite unknown

²⁸ *Miscellaneous Writings, op.cit.*, p. 226.

²⁹ *Indian Social Reform, op.cit.*, I, 112.

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in the West, and the European has no idea of the moral courage which a Hindu requires in order to break his caste rules."⁸⁰

The struggle required to adopt "reformed" customs, much more difficult than the intellectual acceptance of new ideas, was a persistent theme in the literature and speeches on social reform. The south Indian, Professor M. Rangachariar of the Madras Hindu Association, wrote in the early 20th century, "It must be within the every-day experience of every man, who has to any appreciable extent received Western education in India, that moment after moment he is slowly building up his own life as the result of a continuous struggle going on within him between the old and the new."⁸¹ Vamanrao Madhav Kolhatkar, a social reformer in the Central Provinces, contrasted the popularity and support given to those who worked for political reform to the "jeer and ridicule" directed at the social reformers, "which frightens away many a man who would otherwise willingly work for the cause we have at heart." Whereas, he pointed out, most public figures must bear criticism from the outside, the reformers "have to meet and face . . . opposition proceeding from our own dear and near ones—parents, wives, daughters, sisters, brothers, neighbors, friends and countrymen—with whom we have to journey in this pilgrimage of life. . . ."⁸² A British resident noted, "A Hindu reformer may preach anything he likes without necessarily incurring any censure, but no sooner he carries out his theories into practice, out he goes from his community. The Brahmo is more of an outcaste in the eyes of his neighbors than is the Christian in South India, who keeps caste."⁸³

The sanction of active social disapproval of variations in established customs, often backed by religious censure from Brahmin priests, was so painful to experience or even to anticipate that many devoted reformers hesitated or back-tracked in the face of it. Gopal Hari Deshmukh, despite the vigor of his attacks against Brahmin priests, submitted to their demand that he go through a penance

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, III, 152-54.

⁸¹ B. Subba Row Pantulu, *Hindu Social Progress*, p. 78.

⁸² *Indian Social Reform, op.cit.*, III, 197-98.

⁸³ Alfred Nundy, "A Silent Revolution in India," *East and West*, II, 996-1,007.

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ceremony, including taking *prāyaścitta*,⁸⁴ for having attended the remarriage of a Hindu widow. Deshmukh's reasons for doing penance illustrated the problem: his daughter's mother-in-law threatened to obtain a new wife for her son if the reformer did not submit to social and religious requirements.⁸⁵ Not only were the social reformers singled out for their violations of orthodox behavior, but anyone, notably an English-educated man, might be made to suffer for his infractions of caste regulations and established norms. When Surendranath Banerjea returned from England in 1871 the orthodox ban on overseas travel was still firm, and, in his words, "the whole attitude of Hindu society, of the rank and file, was one of unqualified disapproval. My family was practically outcasted. We were among the highest of Brahmins; but those who used to eat and drink with us on ceremonial occasions stopped all intercourse and refused to invite us."⁸⁶ Lokamanya Tilak, whose stated devotion to orthodoxy often conflicted with his reformed behavior, in 1891 attended a tea party given by Christian missionaries and was forced thereafter to take *prāyaścitta*.

Toward the end of the century overt acknowledgments of the superiority of Western social customs, if not Western religious and ethical ideals, were decreasingly apparent in the speeches and writings of the reformers. Uncertainty about how much of the Western example should be followed had plagued many Indians for nearly a century, causing in some of them psychological dilemmas which could not be resolved. Trying to hold on to domestic values and foreign ways of life simultaneously could be a discomfiting and unsettling experience. The ideas of nationalism forced most Indians around the turn of the century to modify their receptivity to Western ideas, at least on the surface, because excessive Westernization began to be ridiculed and condemned as unpatriotic. The return to native intellectual resources—never more than a partial return for most nationalists—stimulated the reformers' efforts to find traditional shastric, scriptural, justifications for their doctrines. Indeed, discovery of sacred literary authorizations for

⁸⁴ A penance for having offended against religious customs, involving imbibing (sometimes symbolically) five products of the cow.

⁸⁵ *Indian Social Reform, op.cit.*, I, 306.

⁸⁶ Banerjea, *A Nation in the Making*, p. 25.

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reformed customs, though never free from challenge, gave some relief to those who had regarded the conflict between Indian and Western values as irreconcilable.

But in no sense did a transfer of allegiance from Western to Indian social and ethical ideals result in increased satisfaction or complacency among reformers. The cultural and religious revival which began in the late 19th century did not mark the end of the social revolt. In some ways—especially by the reintroduction of religious doctrines into the social reform movement, from which they had been virtually eliminated during the secular nationalist period of the 1880's and 1890's—revivalism added an urgency to the need for reform which rationalism had not instilled. India's essential spirit had been smothered by the centuries' accumulation of the refuse of degraded customs and untruths, and Indians must restore *it*, the reformers argued, not build afresh on alien foundations. Not an evolutionary progress toward a new society based on "social efficiency," but a regeneration of purified Hindu society based on a spiritual revival should occur at once.

The revered exponent of those ideas in their most forceful form was Swami Vivekananda, who felt wounded when he witnessed the malaise of his own society and would not remain mute in deference to his listeners' patriotic sensibilities. Personally above any suspicion of short-selling Indian culture in order to gain temporary advantages from an adherence to Western ways, Vivekananda wrote perhaps the most biting, articulate, and bitter condemnations in recent times of the physical misery and misguided beliefs of most Indians. Against images of the palaces of old India and the beauty of the natural environment, Vivekananda described the condition of his people: "Moving about here and there emaciated figures of young and old in tattered rags, whose faces bear deep-cut lines of the despair and poverty of hundreds of years; cows, bullocks, buffaloes common everywhere—aye, the same melancholy look in their eyes, the same feeble physique; on the way-side, refuse and dirt;—this is our present day India! Worn-out huts by the very side of palaces, piles of refuse in the near proximity of temples, the Sunniasin clad with only a little loin cloth, walking by the gorgeously dressed, the pitiful gaze of lustreless eyes of the hunger-stricken at the well-fed and the amply-provided;—this is