

Sub topic

1. Colonial Ideology of Indian Improvement / 'civilizing mission': Orientalists and the Anglicists (Utilitarian and Missionaries)

State of society and the inadequacies of the Social System:

1. The Judicial system introduced after 1858 recognized the Hindu and the Muslim laws on an equal footing related to the civil laws. Criminal jurisprudence followed the British system and the idea of equality before law.
2. The fact that natives among themselves were treated as equal before the law was itself revolutionary in traditional India where Hindus were continuing to pay the Jiziya tax till it was abolished by the British after 1858. Equality before law was also a novel ideas with in the Hindu Society that was used to caste based justice. The judicial system re-organized to give equality of legal status to all religious laws. However, the British did not interfere with the religious affairs of the Muslims.
3. The practice of Sati, or burning alive of the widow at the funeral pyre of her husband, was declared as illegal and a criminal offence by an Act of December 4th 1829. Hindu Widow Re-marriage Act 1856 made widow remarriage legal. Child marriage Prohibition Act 1930 fixed the minimum age for marriage. There were changes in conventional forms of marriages: self-respect marriage; registration marriage, and Tamil

marriage were progressive steps. Perpetual widowhood continued to prevail in Madras Presidency but other evils were eradicated to a substantial extent.

4. The restrictions on the movement of Christian missionaries were removed by the Act of 1813. As such they began their proselytizing work among the low castes and the poor. The beginning of English education and the propagation of the Gospel by the Christian Missionaries focused on the rigidities in the Hindu social order and called for its urgent reforms. This was the basis of the colonial ideology of Indian Improvement /‘civilizing mission’. The conversions into Christianity by the missionaries caused great alarm and Raja Ram Mohan Roy objected to it. His Brahma Samaj movement checked the ‘civilizing mission’ attempts substantially.
5. The attempts of the Hindu reformers to eradicate social vices such as the ‘sati’ and ‘child marriage’, and stop the conversion attempts by the Christian missionaries, provoked Hindu nationalists reaction and ultimately infused a strong revivalist movement. This resulted in the establishment of the Brahma Samaj, the Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission outside the orthodox limits of Hindu beliefs. The activities of these missions spread far and wide in the subcontinent. Several non-Brahman leaders of various heterodox sects also emerged. The Karta Bhajas, Balaramis, and Ramvallabhis openly abjured polytheism and idol worship and had even renounced caste distinctions.

6. In sum, the advent of Christianity was a very significant feature of the British rule because it highlighted the rigidity of the Hindu social structure. It resulted in abolition of social evils such as sati and female infanticide by making them unlawful. Movements against the caste system were started in all the regions of the subcontinent. Temples were opened to all, ceremonial inter-caste dining and inter - caste marriages were encouraged. These transformed the Hindu attitude towards religion and made it more rational and less ritualistic.

