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Homogeneity of religion

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Abstract
In multicultural India, the issues involved are inextricably knitted into a complex tissue of history and fiction. Nationwide 'communal' solidarities are being forged for self-defence or self-assertion and their legitimation is backed by distinctly selective perceptions of the past. It is interesting to see how religious identities were not only the formal beliefs that distinguish the group of people with rest but are also the historical process to make one religion rigid and narrow. This process fuelled up in 19 centuries under colonial rule with the rise of various socio-religious movements that reshaped much of the social, cultural, religious, and political life of this area. This sectarian religious movement tends to modify society under the shed of broader religious authority, and then built an organizational structure it maintained over time.

Keywords: Homogenization of religion, sectarian reform movements, revivalist movement

Introduction

The process of homogenization of religious identity under British rule was achieved through two distinct movements- the one 'transitional' and the other 'acculturative' [1]. Here the former arose from the indigenous form of social-religious dissent whereas later was a product of cultural interaction with Colonial Power. The revivalist movement under three main traditions of protest present in the sub-continent manifested themselves in both transitional and acculturative movements. I have tried to discuss a few of the many such movements under Hinduism-Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj, Ramkrishan Mission-attacks the power of Brahman priests, the rituals they conducted, idol worship, the limited and subordinate role of women, polytheism, and the caste system. Islam-Deobandi movement, Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah, Aligarh movement-stands for the return to purity and rejection of erroneous customs and innovations, Sikhism-sought to remove various 'false' customs and forms of worship and demands the revival of Nirankaris, Namdharis, Singh Sabha. Whether it was acculturative or transitional all the movements despite their proposing different solution seeks its identity in its glorious past and tends to assimilate heterogeneous identities and beliefs.

India witnessed in 19 century the emergence of modern monolithic Hinduism which was constructed by lumping together all smaller religious communities and their identification. This whole transformative process of integrating numerous local or regional traditions into a pan-Indian Brahmanic cultural pattern was carried out through the help of Sanskritization [2]. It has been said that this process of assimilation of many variant sects such as Shaivism or Vaishnavism within Sanatana Dharma fired up with its encounter with the orientalists, British officials who increase the deeply engraved insecurities by conducting census and publishing and broadcasting it throughout the country. Various socio-religious reform within colonial milieu and indigenous dissents came forth as a result of these rising insecurities and to find their distinct identity and position in the history which according to most of them has been lost and get polluted. The Hindu socio-religious movements, the Brahmos, the Ramakrishna Mission, and the Arya Samaj drew symbols, concepts, and scriptural legitimization for the long history of protest within their religious heritage as well as limited elements of western civilization.

Brahmo Samaj founded by a brahman Raja Rammohun Roy became one of the first acculturative attempts of interpreting and reestablishing Hinduism. Roy's adherence to theism and his rejection of idolatry, Brahman priests, and their rituals, sketched the basic outlines of his reconstructed Hinduism; for, to him, God and his existence were proven by the complexity of reality.

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[1] Kenneth W. Jones, Socio-Religious Reform Movements, page 3
[2] Vasudha Dalmia, Representing Hinduism, introduction

Roy substituted scriptures for priests as the sources of proper knowledge led to stimulation of the translations of the Upanishads and Vedanta (sacred text which was strictly limited to upper caste). After Roy, the samaj was revived by Debendranath Tagore who although accepted Vedanta but unlike Roy emphasized the superiority of Hinduism. Thus, contributing to the process of homogenization of religion. Soon the Brahmo Samaj divided over generational and ideological lines. This drift away from Brahmo ideals toward a revival of orthodox Vaishnava *bhakti* paralleled Keshab Chandra Sen's path as well as the rise of nationalism and the emergence of another socio-religious movement that combined a defense of Hinduism, social service, and restructuring of ancient monasticism [3]. Concerned with defending Hinduism and remaining within it, the Adi Samaj drifted back towards contemporary Hinduism [4]. Thus, the Brahmos provided a new Hinduism and a model of a religious organization to others within the colonial milieu.

Swami Vivekananda who established the Ramakrishna Mission out of all odds in 1897 viewed Hinduism as divided between its glorious past and a degenerate present. Based on Universal religion Vedanta which is an expression of Hindu spiritual supremacy Ramakrishna mission provides a platform to its adherents to find salvation through social service and at the same time prove the superiority of the beliefs. Later the pieces of an acculturative socio-religious movement left by Vivekananda at his death had been fashioned into an effective blending of the Hindu monastic tradition, and contemporary professionalism that managed a wide range of institutions. The figure of Ramakrishna, as seen through the writings of Swami Vivekananda, attracted young men whose abilities created this system of *maths* and missions that spread throughout South Asia and then to various regions of the world. Theirs was a doctrine of religious piety and social service that is the most dramatic expression of a Hindu social gospel.

"Back to Vedas" a popular slogan depicting the Hindu revivalist movement spread throughout the country during 19 and 20 centuries. The founder of Arya samaj Dayananda Saraswati introduced the purified form of Hinduism in contrast to the one who adheres to polytheism, idolatry, customs, etc. Dayananda divided the entire Hindu civilization into two parts before and after Mahabharata and accordingly categorized the scriptures into arsha (Vedas) and un-arsha (non-Vedas). Here the former is pure and later has been polluted [5]. The process of textualization to distinguish it from other religions could be seen in the rewriting of a lengthy statement of belief to ten simple principles that became the universal creed of samaj. The Dayananda Anglo-Vedic Trust and Management Society was the first centralizing organization within the Samaj, with representatives from many branch samājes- open schools colleges which earlier had the same curriculum as govt school but later it was demanded to strictly focus on Aryan ideology with the addition of Sanskrit and Vedic scriptures led to the division of the samaj into moderates and militants [6]. Here former came to end eventually while

later adopted proselytism and preaching-Ved prachār from its contemporary rival religions. Aryas to develop their ritual of conversion, shuddhi. Aryas also used shuddhi to purify untouchables and transform them into members of the clean castes [7]. With ved-prachar militants, Aryas also open schools for girls not that they were that concerned about girls' education but to prevent them from converting into Christianity. In the process, Aryan Hinduism had become a creedal religion, repeatedly defined and explained through a system of proselytism and conversion.

With the decline of the Mughal empire especially there was this political and social vacuum created which led to chaos among the Muslim community of the sub-continent. To gain its lost pride and to again purify the corrupted community many social reform movements arose. To take the Islamic reform movements as a whole-takes into account the perspective of the participants who themselves saw this unity. It subsumes movements that may or may not be violent; that may take place in any social milieu; that may happen in any period in history. What unites them is an acceptance of the period of the life of the Prophet and the first decades of Islam as providing the fundamental examples of behavior and belief; all seek self-consciously, by a wide variety of means, to relive that pristine time [8]. A cluster of terms describes these movements, of which two particularly recur. They all dealt expect Sayyid Ahmad Khan with the loss of Islamic political power by creating an Islamic community that would retain its cohesion through an appeal to the individual's conscience, rather than state authority

Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah was founded by Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi. He like his contemporary dreamed of recreating an Islamic state, one that would follow a purified form of the religion and re-establish Islam to its proper position of political and cultural supremacy [9]. He rejected the intermediary between God and man and asked his listeners not to seek aid from saints, apostles, imams, and fairies and aimed at restoring Islam to political Dominance through the use of force and with the help of Muslim. This helped mobilize the various Muslim community into one umbrella of Islam. Soon after his death, the movement got divided into two groups' imammadhi and Ahl-i-Hadith.

Another important Islamic Revivalist movement originated in Delhi was the Deoband seminary movement who was founded by Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi. They institutionalized the organization borrowed from the colleges. Deobandis conceived of Islam as having two points of focus, *shari'at* (the law, based on scriptures and religious knowledge), and the *tarīqah* (path, derived from religious experience). Thus, they accepted Sufism with its forms of discipline and the role of the *'ulamā* in interpreting the four schools of Islamic law [10]. They followed the syllabus of Farangi Mahall and elevated the hadith as their prime source of educational value.

In a time when the contemporary Islamic reform movements were strictly closing themselves from the outer colonial influence, the Sayyid Ahmad khan founded the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College and Aligarh

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[3] Kenneth W. Jones, Socio-Religious Reform Movements, p41
[4] ibid p35
[5] Kenneth W. Jones, ARYA DHARM: HINDU CONSCIOUSNESS IN 19TH-CENTURY PUNJAB. First Published 1976 by University of California Press, MANOHAR 1989, p31
[6] Ibid chap3

[7] Kenneth W. Jones, Socio-Religious Reform Movements, p101
[8] Barbara Metcalf, Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900 introduction
[9] Kenneth W. Jones, Socio-Religious Reform Movements, p53
[10] Ibid p95

movement to expose Islam to modernity. Extremely disheartened by the condition of his fellow members in the revolt of 1857, Sayyid Ahmad Khan decided to revive Islam who has lost its prestige in India. In the nineteenth century, Sir Sayyid lamented, the Muslim nation was decaying rapidly and the greatest obstacle to its renaissance was its lack of social solidarity [11]. He was influenced by Sufiism and Waliyu'llahism so it was not a simple imitation of western ideas. He denied the efficacy of prayer, for, logically, in such a system nothing could change the predetermined course of events. Sayyid Ahmad believed he had in all this defined true Islam; but he took his standards for analyzing his religion from outside-and sought approval for his work from outside, as well [12]. In his study of the British Parliament, Sayyid Ahmad Khan had come to believe that only culturally homogeneous nationalities, though they may be divided into political and economic issues, are capable of administering parliamentary democratic institutions [13]. Cultural heterogeneity, he believed, would only choke democratic processes.

Sikhism also sees the rise of revivalist sectarian movements that too in a time when there was a huge debate related to its definition. Harjot Oberoi in his work shows how the religious identity changes historically by citing an example of Sikh traditions that changed from ambiguous and fluids to distinct and separate religious culture. Various movements like Nirankaris, Namdharis, and Singh sabha originated in the Punjab region adds to the process of homogenization and unification by strictly demarcating it from other contemporary religions.

Founded by Baba Dayal Das, Nirankaris was a movement of purification and return. Evident itself in its name this movement strictly rejects idols and sees God as 'Nirankar' (formless). Drawing on Sikh traditions Nirankaris focused on Guru Nanak on Sikhism. The Nirankaris thus became a permanent subsection of the Sikh religion and in doing so helped to clarify the lines dividing Sikhs from Hindus [14].

Namdharis was a transitional movement founded by Baba Ram Singh. The teachings of Ram Singh and his *guru,* Balak Singh, promised a return to purified Sikhism, not of Guru Nanak, but Guru Gobind Singh. Both leadership and membership. The Namdhari vision of a restructured Sikhism, however, called for a total reshaping of the Sikh community into a militant, religious-political dominion that threatened established religious authority and brought them into direct conflict with the British-Indian government [15].

By the closing decades of the nineteenth century the Singh Sabha, a wide-ranging religious movement, began to view the multiplicity in Sikh identity with great suspicion and hostility. The social and cultural forces unleashed by the Raj helped the Singh Sabha's powerful project to recast Sikh tradition and purge it of all its diversity [16] Like any other religious organization of its time Sabha too intended to restore Sikhism to its past purity, to publish historical religious books, magazines, and journals, to propagate knowledge using Punjabi, to return Sikh apostates to their original faith, and to involve highly placed Englishmen in the educational program of the Sikhs. The Singh Sabha published numerous tracts and books and in 1894 organized the Khalsa Tract Society to popularize Punjabi, the Gurmukhi script, and to issue monthly tracts on the Sikh religion. Representing the Sikh community Singh sabha attempted to unify the religion by creating calendars featuring dates of birth and deaths of 10 gurus and preparing the definitive text of the Dassam Granth [17]. The shabha expanded all over Punjab. The major Sikh acculturative movement, the Singh Sabha, was bifurcated between a pre-British elite centered in Amritsar and a new rising group at Lahore. The Singh Sabhas continued to expand, new branches were founded that, at times, created their distinct ideas and programs. Throughout 1898, 1899, and 1900, the lawsuit and the question of Sikh identity were argued in public meetings, in the press, and through numerous publications. The more radical Sikhs claimed that Sikhism was separate from Hinduism, while others maintained it was a subdivision of Hinduism.

Conclusion

These sectarian reform movement of 19 centuries created a competitive sense among the broader religious community. They redefine their religious identity and which got solidified through the rise of media that in turn took the form of communalism. Communalism, a base for religious nationalism, was the product of existing divisions within South Asia, exacerbated and given institutional form through the dynamics of socio-religious movements and British colonial policy [18]. The socio-religious movements examined in this study acted as vehicles of protest and dissent that expressed tensions within the pre-British world and within the colonial milieu. All these movements irrespective of what they pose the right path to attain salvation and peace ultimately narrowed down to homogenized religious identity. In a way, the region behind this lumping of small identities could be seen in rising Nationalism.

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17 Ibid chap4
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