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Hindu Religious Movements : A Sociological Perspective

The pre and post independent period of India witnessed the emergence of several religious movements. The basic questions underlying the present inquiry into this social phenomenon are the following. Are these religious movements merely the expression of religious sentiments of the epoch or are they also the product of an interplay of forces in the socio-economic, political and cultural spheres? These religious movements have given certain new values and practices, revived some ancient ones, rejected some others and positively discouraged some others. What were the forces that worked towards such a change in the society by making what was positive in the past something negative in the present and *vice versa*? What are the social functions, both intended and unintended, of these religious movements? At the very outset it has to be kept in mind that this inquiry deals only with the religious movements in Hinduism. Space does not allow us to do so for other religions.

Our methodology and approach to the problem studied is global, historical and dialectical. Every social reality is complex and multi-dimensional and hence the interplay of the socio-economic, political and cultural forces has to be searched for to have an analytical interpretation of social reality in question. Secondly, many of the forces operating today in the society result from the historical forces which can be unveiled by an analysis of the historical dimension. Finally, the forces interact mutually in a dialectical way rather than in a linear model and hence a dialectical approach has been selected. Thus this inquiry is sociologically analytical and interpretative.

1. Religious movements

Speaking of religious movements in Hinduism we can distinguish between those that emerged in the pre-independent period and in the post-independent period. Brahmosamaj (1828), Arya Samaj (1875), Ramakrishna Mission (1897), Hindu Mahasabha, Ananda Marg and

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (1925), emerged in the pre-independence period. Hare Krishna movement, Divine Light Mission, The Transcendental Meditation movement, The New Sanyasi movement or the Rajneesh movement, The Sai Baba movement, etc. belong to post-independent period.

Does each religious movement have an orientation different from another or can all of them be basically reduced to two or three orientations? What are the origins of these religious movements? What are their social functions both intended and unintended? To answer these questions we make an hypothesis that these religious movements are an outcome of the interplay of socio-economic, political and cultural forces effecting a cultural transaction between Hinduism and Christian and Western models of thought in a society in transition to answer the existential needs of the people.¹

2. Historical outlook of the socio—economic, political and cultural forces

2.1. Socio-economic and political forces

The Battle of Plassey in 1757 gave a full control of Bengal in the North to the British. Simultaneously Clive fortified the position of the British in some key places in the South like Madras. The East India Company under the guidance of British Parliament progressively completed the process of colonization in India. Consequently they introduced profound changes in the socio-economic and political spheres according to their logic of colonization.

The ownership of the arable and non-arable land was transferred from the village community to the colonial political power. Land was transformed into private property, a marketable commodity that

1. We make a distinction between Western and Christian patterns of thinking. Though Christian Religion originated in Palestine, the Orient, was philosophically and theologically structured in Europe, the Occident. Christianity, propagated in India was the Christianity as understood and practised in Europe except in a few places like Kerala, where Syrian and Oriental rites which are equally foreign to Indian culture, predominate. In certain centuries in Europe there has been an identity between the European and Christian models. In the 19th century that falls within the scope of our analysis, we cannot assert such an identity. Hence for practical purpose we always mention Western and Christian models of thinking.

could be bought, sold or mortgaged, thus a capitalistic logic was being implanted in the society. Cornwallis introduced in 1793 the Permanent Settlement Act creating three groups in the villages: big landlords and zamindars, small and marginal farmers and those totally dispossessed of land, working as landless labourers. The introduction of cash crops, like tobacco and cotton, that can only be sold in the market for cash and the introduction of land taxes to be paid in cash brought about the monetarization of economy in all the spheres of day to day life. This gave rise to a money-lending class and several intermediaries needed for the marketing of the produce.

Due to the shift of the ownership of land to the State, which became the ultimate controller, an enormous administrative structure with a vast bureaucratic agency was a demand. This new bureaucracy introduced a class of its own, with its own demands to equip itself towards this task.

The introduction of modern industries into India, the destruction of the handicraft arts everywhere and the destruction of the foreign as well as internal trade to suit the colonial interests had introduced into the urban society a class of industrial bourgeoisie and *pétite bourgeoisie* and industrial proletariat and urban sub-proletariat. The freeing of labourers from the land by means of private property and making them landless labourers in the rural area was a necessary mechanism to create a huge labour force for the urban industrial sector and to facilitate the implantation of capitalism.

The introduction of new educational policy and the English education in 1835 by Macaulay served as a spring-board for all the new emerging classes: bureaucrats, industrialists and people in administrative as well as executive cadres in various levels. The new legal system introduced by the British making all citizens equal before law, irrespective of caste and creed was a fatal blow to the Hindu legal code based on caste to mete out justice according to different castes, on the basis that all men are unequal by birth. This new legal system gave an impetus to the emerging middle class and to the emerging non-Brahmin high castes towards their social mobility by removing all social obstacles through the new legal administrative system. The spread of education brought about also the absorption of Western culture and ideas which made several Indians consider several Hindu practices like *Sati*, child-marriage, untouchability etc., social evils.

These changes introduced in the society brought about several new constraints and contradictions in the functioning of the caste system and in the day to day life. For example, in the new legal system the basis was the equality of men before law while in the day to day life the force of caste belief posited a basic inequality of man because of *Varnāśrama dharma*.

New social classes were emerging in the society consisting of members from several castes due to their economic base and educational qualifications.

The migration of rural landless workers into urban areas and living in anonymity served as a constraint for the observance of purity — pollution principle of caste and for the observance of certain other caste practices. The new transport system, educational system and industrial working units brought people of different castes into close physical proximity, contact and relationship. Thus the social mobility made possible by new structures and opportunities and the new social constraints and contradictions towards the caste system made the caste hierarchy structured in a vertical position in terms of purity-pollution to change to a horizontal position of competing groups. Caste associations came up like mushrooms to translate this competitive phenomenon into social structures. All these had an eroding effect on the caste system affecting mainly the zone of untouchability. Caste hierarchy was not altogether abolished but was structured as high and low castes. The low castes would contain the Harijans, the renamed untouchables, who would be also termed later scheduled castes by the Government.

The 1857–1858 Mutiny gave faint hopes of a possibility of shaking off the colonial yoke. The starting of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and its steady growth, culminating in the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi gave high hopes of national freedom. The two World-Wars taught several lessons to the Indian intelligentsia. Finally, independence was achieved in 1947.

The post-independent period basically followed the capitalistic ideology. Hence the changes introduced in the society were along the same lines as initiated by the colonial rule. The only difference was that the indigenous bourgeoisie took control of the political power in place of the British. The Capitalistic logic was being more and more

implanted in the society. Eventually the constraints and contradictions emerging out of this were experienced in the day to day life of the people.

2.2. *Cultural forces*

Trends like Orientalism and Anglicism and new cultural practices emerged in the society. By *Orientalism*, we mean the movement of mostly European scholars to make efforts to discover the Indian cultural heritage by learning Indian languages, to master Indian literary classics and translate them into European languages. Besides, they also started interpreting the classical Indian texts by means of Western scholarship. Thus the European culture components were presented to the indigenous culture in such a way that they could be assimilated by the latter in an orthogenic self-transformation. The founding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1784) was the translation of this cultural current into an organization while the translation of several Indian classical works into different European languages was the concrete expression of this spirit. This was mostly from 1774 up to 1815.

This Orientalism could be understood as an extension of the spirit of humanism resulting from the Enlightenment in Europe. The rationalistic search towards a natural religion with a cosmopolitan spirit recognizing a basic unity of the human nature in all nations and in all times as propounded by David Hume and its classicism with a nostalgia for an idealized past as found in Voltaire and E. Gibbons formed the mental climate of that period.

This Orientalism created a new consciousness in the mind of the Hindu intellectuals. The colonial power, the spread of Western education, culture and religion created doubts in their minds about their religion and cultural heritage. Now that the European scholars themselves started to appreciate their cultural and religious heritage, to learn Indian languages, to study their sacred books and classics and to translate several into their own European languages, they regained the confidence of the validity of their philosophical, religious and cultural heritage. At the same time they were also imbibing the Western cultural impact in their day to day life and which helped them to recognize some of the evils of their social and religious practices such as child marriage, *Sati*, untouchability, etc. Besides,

they also came under the influence of Christian writers and Christian literature and religion. They began to feel that the Western pattern and Christian religion had something new and could add new dimensions to Indian cultural heritage.

Anglicism designates a spirit quite contrary to the previous one. This trend emerged around 1815. It tried to degrade Indian cultural and religious heritage and wanted to impose the Western and Christian one under the guise of modernization. This was initiated chiefly in the person of James Mill, the chief Governmental consultant for British policies in India. His book *History of British India*, published in 1818, expressed this spirit of despising Indian religious and cultural heritage.

This spirit could be explained by the increasing impact of the industrial revolution tending towards new inventions and conveniences. These new inventions and technological improvements viewed the present and especially the future as a bright period promising new hopes. The past was devalued as lacking knowledge and proper technological facilities. Hence the philosophical climate shifted from enlightenment to utilitarianism. As capitalism was ushering in competition, profit-making became the principle value in day to day life. Thus cosmopolitanism gave way to nationalism; classicism, to progressivism; and rationalism, to romanticism. The past was barbaric, especially, the past exalted by Orientalists.

There were also other cultural forces at work in this period. In the British Parliament and administration the Evangelicals gained ascendancy along with the Radicals. The former believed that it was their duty to preach the Gospel of Christ in India whose light would dissolve the superstition and evil embedded in Indian society. As for the latter, they believed passionately in the superiority of the Western World. Hence both Evangelicals and Radicals believed in Westernizing India but the path the former chose was the Gospel of Christ as against reason and technology by the latter.

This period also saw an inflow of Christian missionaries. For along with the opening of the door to any private merchant to India in 1813 abolishing the trading monopoly of the Company, Wilberforce made efforts to open the country to missionary activity. He succeeded in obtaining the permission of free entry of Missionaries in to India but without the support of the Government. Several missions

were established especially by Protestant churches in the North of India. Several missionaries filled with the spirit of Anglicism and evangelical fundamentalism condemned Hinduism strongly, degraded its practices and beliefs as devilish and superstitious, and tried to convert great numbers of Hindus into Christians. Alexander Duff (1806–1878) was a classical example of this spirit. In several schools run by them Bible instruction became a part of the curriculum. Hence this period was marked by aggressive missionary preaching and by conversion of Indians in considerable numbers to Christian religion.

This was the socio-economic, political and cultural climate towards the end of the nineteenth century. The Hindu religion with its cultural practices, beliefs and values was respected for some time by Orientalists while later it was despised and degraded. There was an increasing number of fans of Western culture among the educated class who slowly gave up several Indian cultural practices and even ridiculed them. There was a gradual increase in conversions to Christianity. There were several existential needs, especially of the educated élite, which could not be satisfied by the then prevailing Hinduism. There was a relativization of both Hindu religion and its cultural heritage.

The Hindu intellectuals started to react to this situation. They started asking themselves: what is the reason for the success of Western ideas and manners? How can we compete with this new force from the West without at the same time betraying one's own culture and tradition? Can we borrow the opponent's ideas and fight against them? Can we revitalize Hinduism and give a better footing to it in the society? How can we revitalize Hinduism? How can we give a better self-image to a Hindu about his religion and cultural heritage? How can we make Hinduism itself an instrument of social reform? What are the new structures and organizations needed for a revitalisation process? These were the questions incubating in the minds of the Hindu intellectuals. The effort to find answers to the above questions resulted in several religious movements of this period each one initiated by a group or by individuals.

3. Religious movements: an answer to the then existing constraints and contradictions

Hinduism has a group of traditional as well as organic intellectuals (in the Gramscian sense) chiefly among the Brahmin caste. They

were trying to respond to the crying needs of the time. The response was mainly in the form of a religious and cultural transaction of Hinduism with Western and Christian models.

We would like to make it clear here that the Hinduism as practised in the pre-British and post-British periods is not the same. In our discussion, we call the former the non-transacted Hinduism and the latter, the transacted one. This is a very important distinction to be maintained in Hinduism, just as the Christianity as practised in the Middle Ages is not the same in the pre-Vatican and post-Vatican periods. The crucial period of transaction in Hinduism was the middle of the 19th century and this continues even today.

We would also like to add that already in the 16th century Hinduism had come into contact with Islam. But the Muslim rulers did not fundamentally touch the socio-economic fabric of the Society. The basic life pattern of everyday was not altered as was done during the British period. Hence the interactions between Hinduism and Islam did not take place on any profound level but only in certain cultural aspects. Further, the antagonistic relation between these two religions also served as a major block towards a healthy interaction. The fundamental changes introduced by the British in socio-economic, political and cultural fields by the introduction of the capitalistic system did demand substantial exchanges and interactions resulting in a religious and cultural transformation in Hinduism.

The response can be classified into three main orientations. We make an hypothesis here stating that all the Hindu religious movements of the pre and post-independent periods can be categorized in these three orientations each one causing certain minor alterations. We shall analyse those orientations.

We are deliberately omitting the Theosophical Movement. It was started by a Russian, Madame Blavatsky in New York in 1875, brought to India in 1882 by Olcott and continued by an English lady Mrs. Annie Besant. It tried to absorb Hindu intellectuals but with little success. The basis of this movement in the beginning was occultism².

2. See D. S. Sarma, *Studies in the Renaissance of Hinduism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries*, Banares: Banares Hindu University, 1944, pp. 194-227

3.1. *Raja Ram Mohan Roy - Brahma Samaj*

Roy was born in an orthodox Brahmin family in 1772 at Radhanagar, a Bengal village north of Calcutta. He learnt Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit to a proficient degree in his younger years. Later he also learnt English, Greek and Latin. He joined the services of East India Company and rose very high in the Bengal Civil Service. Having established a good economic base, he retired at forty-two and settled at Calcutta, the then political and intellectual capital of India. He was well acquainted with several Western writers like Montèsquieu, Blackstone and Bentham.

Roy assimilated several elements from the western and christian models and reformulated Hinduism by a new reinterpretation of the *Vēdas*. Roy first adopted a Western world-vision. Seeing the world in terms of life or no life is the Hindu world-vision. Life has to be experienced and it is this experience that helps the understanding of life. God, being the source of all life, can be known and understood only by experiencing Him. As the experiential approach is considered, the most valuable one in knowing God, the Hindu sacred scriptures contain varieties of such experiences in different personalities. There was no preoccupation with internal coherence and logical deductions. All these occupy only a secondary place of importance at all. At the popular level, this experiential approach gave rise to belief in several gods and to superstitious practices.

Roy adopted a Western World-vision of seeing the universe as consisting of object or non-object that has to be mastered, rationally directed and brought under control by man. God, who is the creator of this world, was hence rationally deducted. Doctrinal preoccupation, internal coherence and logical deductions dominated this approach. Roy tried to interpret the *Vēdas* with this rational approach and established that the *Vēdas* teach monotheism. When he found contradictory statements he rejected them on the ground that they were later additions and corruptions of the text of the *Vēdas*. Thus he submitted the *Vēdas* to the test of reasoning and reinterpreted them to suit the modern needs and exigencies.

His contact with sufism, and Islamic sect, in his teenage years convinced him of monotheism and he published in 1803 a book in Persian entitled "A Gift to Monotheists." Now his further contacts

with Western and Christian models made him fight against polytheism and idolatry. The belief in Monotheism would rationally lead him to make God the basis of morality and ethics and thus defend the equality of men and universal brotherhood. Naturally, in principle, he denied the caste-system and its ideology in terms of *karma* and *samsara*.

He also translated these ethical principles into action. He opposed vehemently child-marriage and *Sati*. He advocated the betterment of the status of women and widow marriage. He encouraged the western educational system and himself ran several schools. He installed a press of his own and edited newspapers in English and Bengali in order to propagate his new vision and conscientize the people, especially the elite, towards his new vision.

Roy was particularly attracted by the person of Christ and his teachings. He says, "No other religion can produce anything that may stand in competition with the precepts of Jesus much less than can be pretended to be superior to them." "There is nothing so sublime as to precepts taught by Christ and there is nothing equal to the simple doctrine he inculcated."³

He also saw that Christian ideals are realized to an efficient degree through the organization called church. In order to translate his vision concretely, to carry out and to continue his ideals and the reforms based on them, he founded in 1823 the Brahmo Samaj.

Roy's effort consisted in reinterpreting Hinduism to suit the needs of the time. He had to purify Hinduism from certain practices that were by the test of reason, irrational and superstitious. All the same he remained a staunch Hindu basing himself on the *Vēdas* which he interpreted in a new way. He did not hesitate to borrow from other cultural patterns, what was necessary to revitalize Hinduism. At the same time he harboured no feelings of antagonism towards other religions and cultures, but even showed his appreciation of them. This was the first orientation of the emerging religious movement. His effort was to show that Hinduism is on par with all great religions and is valid for Indians.

3. S. J. Samartha, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ*, Madras: C.L.S., 1974, p. 32

3.2. Dayananda Saraswathi—Arya Samaj

Dayananda was a Brahmin, born in 1824 in Kathiawar, Gujarat. A major turning-point occurred at the age of fourteen when he felt an aversion for idolatry during the night vigil on *Shivaratri*, after seeing a mouse running over the idol of shiva. To avoid marriage he ran away from home at nineteen to become a *Sanyasi* of the Saraswathi order. He spent the next fourteen years as a wandering ascetic. He knew Sanskrit but not English. In 1875 he founded the Arya Samaj and died in 1883 of suspected poisoning by his Hindu adversaries.⁴

Dayananda attempted to re-define the content of the *Vēdas* by establishing a new canon of the *Vēdas* which he held as infallible and authoritative. He deplored the previous interpretations as wrong and corrupt and gave his own interpretation stating that the *Vēdas* advocate monotheism and was against idolatry.

He rejected the caste-system and child-marriages as things which had no basis in the *Vēdas*. He accepted the ideological elements of the caste-system such as *dharma*, *karma* and *samsāra*. He administered the rite of *Upanayana* (the sacred thread ceremony) to several untouchables and raised them to high caste level with the right to enter the temple. This practice only served to reinforce the caste-system while he orally rejected it.

Like Roy he too saw the usefulness of an organization and started the Arya Samaj. The way he conceived his Samaj and its ramifications had been a close resemblance to the organization of the church with its central authority and network of parishes and sub-centres. He also gave a missionary character to Hinduism. He made it obligatory for all members of the Samaj to read, teach, recite and listen to recitations of the *Vēdas*. "Back to the *Vēdas*" was his battle-cry to all Hindus. He gave an even more aggressive character to Hinduism. He advocated *Sanghatan*, meaning union: no Hindu should take lying down the insults hurled against his religion by the preachers of other religions, nay more, a Hindu should cultivate a militant spirit and go and meet the enemy and attack him in his stronghold.⁵ The *Shuddhi*

4. Theodore de Barry (ed), *Sources of Indian Tradition Vol. II*, London: Columbia University Press, 1963, p. 76.

5. D. S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-184.

movement, whereby non-Hindus are converted and brought back to the Hindu fold from Islam or Christianity, was initiated by him.

The orientation of Dayananda consisted in fighting against certain practices and beliefs of Hinduism considered irrational and superstitious by reinterpretation of the *Vēdas* and incorporating into them the western and Christian models. The distinguishing character of this orientation is the addition of a missionary and militant character to Hinduism whereby Hinduism is extolled as the best possible religion not just valid for Indians but a must for them.

3.3. *The Ramakrishna Mission*

The Ramakrishna Mission was inspired by Ramakrishna Paramahansa and organized by Narendranath Datta, known as Swami Vivekananda. Ramakrishna was born in 1836 in Kamarpukur Bengal. He was a *Purohit* in the Kali temple at Daksineswar. He very much wanted to have a vision of Kali and was supposed to have realized it. He was also supposed to have had the mystical experience of Rama, Krishna, Tantric Sadhana, Mohamed of Islam and Jesus Christ. He married Saradamani, a girl of five. His holy life and his simple teachings in terms of parables and stories attracted the learned as well as the simple ones.

For him the most important thing is the deep experience of God, and once one realizes it the external beliefs and practices would matter little and would take on a new sense. Thus he practised idolatry and child-marriage-very much opposed by Roy and Dayananda-but in a totally different manner.

In his attitude towards different religions he was both against the militant spirit of Arya Samaj and the reformatory character of Brahmo Samaj. He had a basis in Hinduism with an ecumenical spirit, showing the complementary character of all religions. Thus he would first break the sectarian spirit within Hinduism by validating by his mystical experience the different sectarian gods and cults and, secondly, he would try to destroy the inter-religious rivalry by realizing a mystical experience of Mohammed and Jesus Christ. Along with this mystical experience he would introduce the idea of social service to mankind by reinterpreting the *advaitic* principle of the basic unity of God and creatures to be the basis for all social service. Love

of one's neighbour was the only form of adoration of God for Ramakrishna.

Narendranath Datta (1863–1902), who came from a Kayastha family of lawyers, was one of Ramakrishna's chosen disciples, who would give a rational and systematic exposition of Ramakrishna's experiences and of his spirit and vision. Vivekananda founded in 1897, the Ramakrishna Mission. The teachings of Ramakrishna and his experience during his tour in Europe and America in 1893 to the First World Parliament of Religions at Chicago and in 1899 to speak on Hinduism gave him further perspectives for his orientation and a transactionary character. Thus he translated into institutions and practices the whole spirit and vision given by Ramakrishna in all its dimensions. He firmly organized a structure and personnel to do the work.

He established a monastery (*math*) at Belur near Calcutta in 1899 wherein friends and followers of Ramakrishna came together to live a monastic celibate life as a community, assuming new names and consecrating themselves to the service of mankind. This monastery was built with the money contributed by his devoted English admirer Miss Henrietta F. Muller and by his American follower Mrs. Ole Bull.⁶ Linkage of sanyasthood, celibacy and community life, assuming a new name and consecrating oneself to the service of mankind shows the transactionary character with Western and Christian models.

It is worth quoting S. J. Samartha concerning the impact of the personality of Christ on the founding members: "Swami Gambhirananda frankly points out that the ideal which Swami Vivekananda and his brothers put before themselves at the very inception of their vocation was the ideal of Christ and his disciples. Of that evening when the Ramakrishna Movement was inaugurated he writes: The meditation lasted long. Then Narendra . . . began to relate the life-story of Jesus Christ. He ran through all the anecdotes beginning with the immaculate conception and ending with the resurrection, emphasizing at every turn the life of renunciation that Jesus lived. Then the brother-disciples were introduced to the apostolic world, in which the grand message of

6. Haridas Bhattacharya (ed), *The Cultural Heritage of India Vol. IV*, The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, reprint 1975, p. 721

redemption was carried to the ends of the earth by St Paul and others. And in an inspired voice he exhorted them to be apostles themselves to carry abroad the new message for the uplift and salvation of mankind, till they rose up in one body with the blazing fire in front and shining stars above as their witness, to pledge themselves to a life of renunciation. The very air was filled with spiritual vibrations, and strangely enough, they recollected at the end of it all, that it was the eve of Christ's nativity. It is a remarkable coincidence that the Ramakrishna movement was thus inaugurated on Christmas eve."⁷

The third orientation, namely, the Ramakrishna movement, consists mainly in showing Hinduism as a religion that cannot only borrow from other cultural elements but can also contribute to other religions. It can in a special way contribute to the spiritual awakening of the West that was turning materialistic. The foreign tour of Swami Vivekananda gave this contributory character to the movement, and his Western admirers and supporters even financially would start a two-way communication between Hinduism and the West. To realize this end this movement established centres in Europe and America. In short, Hinduism was shown as a universal religion valid not only for Indians but to the entire world and especially to the materialistic West.

4. Other Hindu religious movements

These three major orientations were followed in one way or another with certain minor alterations by the succeeding religious movements. We shall briefly point out how the new religious movements fall in line with the above orientations.

The Hindu Mahasabha, the Ananda Marga and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (R.S.S.) belong to the orientation given by the Arya Samaj. Their ideology is *Akhand Bharat* and *Hindu Rashtra*. They continue even today the missionary as well as the militant spirit given by Dayananda.

The Here Krishna Movement has its aim the spreading of Krishna consciousness in the entire world. It was installed in Europe and America since 1965. The Divine Light Mission wishes to teach and spread the meditation of Guru Maharaj Ji who teaches by experience how to realize true peace. He who practises his meditation ex-

7. S. J. Samartha, *op. cit.*, pp. 49f

periences profound peace by which one is supposed to solve the problems of dependence on drugs. This movement has also been established in America and Europe since 1971. As for the Transcendental Meditation, we quote W. Haack, who states its aim as follows: "The Transcendental Meditation is a new Hinduism. It is the enunciation of a new spiritual age. It wishes to bring to the conscience of the sick West the salvific forces of the self-realization by oneself through meditation, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi has founded a movement of spiritual regeneration."

These three follow the orientation of the Ramakrishna Mission. Further, they cater chiefly to America and Europe. The same could be said of the Rajneesh movement. He started to cater to the West in the Indian set-up but recently abandoned it and installed himself in America. As for the Sai Baba movement, it has the orientation of Ramakrishna Mission showing the complementary character of all religions with the implementation of some social services. While Ramakrishna showed his dynamism by his mystical character Sai Baba shows it by his magical character.

5. The social functions of these movements

These religious movements had as their function, answering to the existential needs of people. In this context we see how the pre-independent ones catered to the needs of the Indian public, chiefly Hindus, and continue to do so. The post-independent ones mostly try to cater to the Western and American public. This is one of the reasons why they did not have any appeal to the Indian public, except to a small Westernized group. This is also why the new religious movements that installed themselves in Europe are considered by the majority of the Indian public as commercial ventures of certain religious leaders. Thus we hear the expressions: our false *sanyasis* and *gurus* sell religion like hot cakes abroad. Consequently, there is a frustration expressed by Westerners who try to convert followers to these movements in India itself. These religious movements installed in the West create also a counter-culture in their respective societies.

In the Indian set-up the pressing need of the period was to make Hinduism relevant and palatable to the educated Hindus and to make Hinduism a living religion. These movements did fulfil this function. Consequently, this diminished the attraction to other religions,

especially Christianity, and gradually arrested the process of conversion among the élitist and educated groups and the high caste who absorbed the transacted Hinduism. But this new Hinduism or culturally transacted Hinduism does not seep down to the popular milieu and poor classes who are still subjected to the constraints and contradictions of the system. Hence they are attracted to other religions—chiefly to Christianity. Even conversions to it seems to persist in these groups. Unable to adopt the same approach as the above to these groups, the Hindu intellectuals who either dominate or influence the political scene adopt politico-legal measures such as laws against conversions, denying privileges offered to Hindu Harijans to the converts, increasing the privileges to Hindu Harijans etc., to stop the attraction and conversion to other religions.

The militant character of certain religious movements, the pacific character of some others and the preoccupation with establishing centres abroad are best explained by the orientations that came up during the pre-independent period. Thus, today, Hinduism can have multiple faces whereby it can at the same time be accused of intolerance as well as praised for its tolerance and cultural heritage. Thus contradictory trends co-exist in these movements. For example, certain leaders who accuse other religions of receiving money from abroad for their support, themselves witness today the same phenomenon in Hinduism.

These are some of the social functions one can see today. We would like to conclude our analysis by pointing out that these religious leaders who initiated these movements do not create world-visions but express the collective and mental production of a group. The structures of consciousness are thoroughly social. These are leaders those who articulate most clearly the efforts of a collective subject to cope with or to transcend its environment. These religious movements are hence expressions of social consciousness.

8. F. W. Haack, *Des Sectes pour less Jeunes?*, Belgium: Editions Marmie, 1980, p. 14

9. *Ibid*, pp. 46-47

10. *Ibid*, pp. 82-83