

**DR. SARVAPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN AND CONTEMPORARY INDIAN  
RENAISSANCE**

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**ABSTRACT**

The Indian Renaissance of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is one of the most interesting periods of Indian history, culture, arts, philosophy, economics etc. Even Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was a great social reformer in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But in this paper, I will try to establish how much impact Indian philosophy had on the period of the Indian renaissance and how much contributions of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan in the Indian renaissance. The Indian Renaissance gave rise to the study of English literature, thoughts, philosophies, and historical books. Also, this paper presents such a modern socio-culture of philosophical reality as the Indian renaissance, which is closely related to Indian philosophy. And it gives a new dimension to philosophy and socio-culture and creates awareness among people.

**Keywords:** *Renaissance, Indian Philosophy, socio-culture.*

**Introduction and Background:**

We know that the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century is marked by Indian Renaissance. The British conquest was indeed a turning point in India as the Renaissance movement gradually unfolded itself at that time. The Indian Renaissance of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is one of the most interesting periods of Indian history. We can say, the term 'Renaissance' is a borrowed term because the Renaissance took place in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries in West when religion came into conflict with science and the blind customs and religious dogmas gave way to literated intellectual and scientific spirit of the West. For the Indian Renaissance was not simply a revival of India's past, but a creative response to the intrusion of external forces as well. Moreover, the thinkers of the Renaissance had to deal with the new

conditions created by modern science and technology. The Renaissance in India then was a movement which confronted the threefold challenge of the past, the modern and the alien. India repeatedly became vulnerable to foreign invasions. The intermingling of cultures resulted from the foreign invasion and their settlement in India led to the emergence of a composite culture of India. Yet there is an essential unity in the vast diversity of India. Various centres of learning, such as Taxila, Nalanda and Sarnath flourished here, while Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism with their different sects also came into existence. However, the religion and the culture of India or to say Hinduism came under severe test after the invasion of Islam in the 11th century. Until the entry of the Europeans in India, hoarders of invaders entered India and savaged the country. In spite of many invasions and dynastic changes, the life of the people flowed in one continuous process of gradual change. The scientific and mechanical basis of Indian civilisation has also undergone a radical change but the outlines of Indian culture are still preserved.

The emergence of reform movements in the 19th century marks the beginning of a new era in Indian society. Western education and Industrial Revolution brought about a new awakening in the minds of the Indian intelligentsia. The enlightened and educated Indians developed consciousness about the pristine glory of Indian culture and realized that the existing social evils such as the 'Sati' 'child marriage, restrictions on widow remarriage and many other evil practices were leading to human degradation. On the other hand, the proselytizing zeal of the Christian missionaries, the political unification and the economic exploitation of the people at the hands of the British made Indian society still more vulnerable. In such circumstances, various social and religious reformers rose to the occasion to meet the challenge of the times. They were trying to go back to the truth revealed by Vedas and Upanisads and popular practices as mentioned above were being abolished. The articles of belief which formed the fundamental structure of Hinduism and Indian philosophy, in general, were under radical change. And we can say, that was the beginning of the Indian Renaissance. During this time we

see, the beginning of radical thinking is found in Brahma Samaj. Where Brahma Samaj played a crucial role in the development of every major religion, social and political movement in India. The monotheism of Brahma Samaj gives us in a nutshell the change in the concept of God.

### **Renaissance and Indian philosophy:**

Indian philosophy is a salient feature of modern Indian thought that modern thinkers from Vivekananda to Gandhiji and Sri Aurobindo have written commentary on the sacred works of Indian Philosophy. As Indian thought expressed in the Texts and Scriptures is cryptic and synoptic, so it requires illustrations and expressions. At times, it is called theological analysis and Indian Philosophy as distinct from Western thought is not entirely separate from theology. Religion is a part of Philosophy and belief as well as statements regarding the reality, man, nature, self and God and other religious matters are viewed together with secular problems which at times is called Metaphysics.

We know that the 19th and 20th Centuries of the Renaissance of India were preceded by a dark period in which nothing creative in religion, literature or art was done. But from the 19th Century onwards, we see a faint glimmer caused by the agitation led by Rammohan Roy and his Brahma Samaj. Also, the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century can be said as a period of twilight in which new forces of a far-reaching character begin to shape themselves. They had been able to view their religion apart from the mythological, ritualistic and sociological forms in which it was embedded. The success of Swami Vivekananda in carrying the message of Hinduism to the Western nations was due primarily to their ability to interpret the Vedanta as a religious philosophy independent of the Indian caste system or mythology or rites or ceremonies. They made the Hindus understand that what really matters in religion is its philosophy based on spiritual experience and not the particular deities in which it embodied itself in the past. So social reform formed a large part of the renaissance movement. The movement has made India pay more attention to life on earth and to the well-being of society and

has tried to rescue us from a philosophy of inaction which had taken hold of the people in the preceding period of decadence. The leaders of the renaissance movement had laid emphasis on social service and pointed out that spirituality does not consist in turning our back on poverty, ignorance and misery in the world in a vain attempt to save our souls, but that it consists in fully facing them and fighting against them. However, thinkers and leaders of the Indian renaissance regarded the traditional Indian philosophy with high respect but at the same time, they could not afford to overlook the scientific facts and the empirical attitude of the present day. Where Shankaracharya is a commentator on the Vedanta Sutra and yet he is one of the most original thinkers. Similarly, the thinkers of the Indian renaissance also tried to reinterpret some of the ancient ideas derived chiefly from the Upanisads and yet they develop some refreshingly new and rational demonstrations. Thus they can be said both interpretative and creative.

Generally, every philosophy bears the mark of its origin as British Philosophy which is regarded as empirical. Similarly, Indian Philosophy is not merely metaphysical speculation but has its foundation in immediate perception. As philosophy aims at knowledge of the truth, it is termed in Indian literature the vision of truth (darsana). Every Indian School holds in its own way, that there can be a direct realisation of truth (tattva-darsana). Indian philosophy is marked by a striking breadth of outlook in searching for truth. Each philosophical school takes care to learn the views of all the others. In the same way, the thinkers of the Indian Renaissance are able to deal even with difficult problems of Western philosophy with surprising skill. Their openness of mind, and willingness to listen to what others have to say has a definite moral for contemporary Indian thinkers. So they tried to be integral and synthetic. They comprehend the principles of ancient and medieval systems and add their own thoughts on them. that time they assimilate Western thoughts only to the extent they are capable of absorbing them into their philosophical systems.

**SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY**  
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Contemporary Indian thinkers consider themselves to be close to the empirical and matter-of-fact attitude of the present times. They rely on reason and experience and ask people to seek the truth in their own minds. They accept the reality of the world and also the bodily aspect of man. This life is considered as the only field for action. They appear to be in agreement with some of the prominent issues with respect to monism, reality of the world, integral nature of man, dignity of man-ness, reality of human freedom, etc. But all of them relate philosophy not to a life of escape, but to this very life. They assert that even after realizing moksha, the work of the individual is not over, he has to continue to be in the world, living in the midst of fellow men, helping them in making their lives healthier and purer. No man, they say, can be saved unless the race is saved. They cannot afford to overlook the demand that philosophy has to be made closer to life. For them, philosophy broadly speaking is an attitude, a way of thinking and reflection with the help of which muddler, ambiguities, vagueness, etc., can be cleared and insights can be gained.

From the beginning of the 19th Century, great Indian thinkers have been striving to study the roots of Indian culture on the one hand and to find the norms to change the aspiration and living conditions of the vast masses who have been living and working in utter ignorance and poverty on the other. These have been the twin aims of great figures like Raja Rammohan Roy, Lala Lajpat Rai, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and others. They are all, in a particular sense humanists. They believe that philosophy is essentially tied up with life. They relate philosophy not to a life of escape, but to this very life and command very strongly humanitarian work and service. Another important factor which the thinkers of the Indian renaissance embraced is education. They see education as the process which both individual transformation and national regeneration can be achieved. They realise that the entire education system is needed to be overhauled. For them, education is a means to create a better society, to eradicate the prevailing ill practices of our society and to improve the morality of the general people. A true education must aim at and help the

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individual ultimately to be a 'total man' and to achieve perfection within himself. The thinkers of the Indian renaissance try to offer privileges to people from every strata of the society. Their aim is to purify Indian traditions, religion and customs and not to overthrow them which they had inherited and inspire others to think in terms of universal love.

### **Contributions of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan:**

In the 19th to 20th centuries, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan sketches the lives of fourteen individuals who influenced Indian life and altered the course of its history. among these are social reformers like Swami Dayanand and Raja Ram Mohan Roy, political thinkers and activists like Lala Lajpat Roy, Tilak and Gokhale and a giant among scientists, Jagadis Bos. All of them had one thing in common, they broke the barriers tradition and normalcy and stove for noble ideals... They dreat and had the courage and tenacity to turn their dreams into reality. That's why Dr. Radhakrishnan says that "the truly great are not the men of wealth, of possessions, not men who gain name and fame, but those who testify to the truth in them and refuse to compromise whatever be the cost. They are determined to do what they consider to be right. We may punish their bodies, and refuse them comforts but we can't buy their souls, we cannot break their spirits. such men deserve our admiration." Radhakrishnan is counted among India's best scholars of comparative religion and philosophy. His defence of Hinduism against 'uninformed Western criticism' has been highly influential in India as well as the Western world. He is also credited for having made Hinduism more readily accessible to the Western audience. His philosophy was grounded in Advaita Vedanta, reinterpreting this tradition for a contemporary understanding. He defended Hinduism against "uninformed Western criticism" contributing to the formation of contemporary Hindu identity. He has been influential in shaping the understanding of Hinduism, in both India and the west, and earned a reputation as a bridge-builder between India and the West. The life of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and his contribution are great assets to the school of Indian modern philosophy. He was a man of knowledge and educationist, and he contributed a lot to

## SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PEER REVIEWED

the field of education. He was a renounced scholar from Indian soil. We as Indians still remembered him and celebrate his birthday on 5th September as a teacher's day. Through him, we respect all the teachers and especially observed this day. He is a role model for every Indian and even though he dies but still lives in the heart of every teacher and student. Radhakrishnan, highlighting the fact that the task of philosophy is to focus on human experience states that philosophy is not a deductive development of conclusions from set dogmas. But the explication of the presuppositions of experience. Radhakrishnan deeply feels that philosophers should be active advocates of specific ideals. He challenges philosophers to change the world as well as interpret it. With Radhakrishnan, philosophy is not only a way of thought but a way of life.

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan in his book 'Living with a Purpose Turning Dreams into Reality' write that, Raja Rammohan Roy stood for equality against caste, for science against superstition, for democracy against dictatorship, for the religion of truth and not a religion of superstition. He was also for freedom from political subjection, by a political tyrant. His contributions to Bengali prose, to the freedom of the Indian press and to the love of Humanity, and the way in which he appealed to the French minister and the British legislators about freedom for India, are well known. There is no question that the great ideals for which Raja Rammohan Roy stood – a religion of truth, social equality, and unity of mankind—are still our distant goals. We have not realized them. So the message that Raja Rammohan Roy gave us, a message which still has validity, as the ideals for which he lived and died are yet unrealized. They have to be implemented by every one of us. He was, of course, subjected to persecution, to suffering. That is the lot of all great men. Let me assure you that the world is shaped by the genuine souls who contradict the world most: it is these people who convert the world.

Also, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan writes about Swami Dayanand Saraswati in his book 'Living with a Purpose Turning Dreams into Reality' Among the markers of modern India, the chief place will be

## SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PEER REVIEWED

assigned to Swami Dayanand Saraswati. At a time when there was spiritual confusion in our country when many of our social practices were in the melting pot when we were overcome by superstition and obscurantism, this great soul came forward with staunch devotion to truth and a passion for social equality and enthusiasm and worked for the emancipation of our country in all its dimensions—religious, political, social and cultural.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, it can be said that the influence of European science, philosophy, and education and its meeting with historical situations gave creative birth to the modern renaissance in India and many other parts of India. If we can understand the march of events during the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the present century, then it constitutes the cream of knowledge and a new inspiration. That's why we say that the galaxy of thinkers who produced the enlightening literature is a marvel of modern Indian education and philosophy.

Finally, we can say that the renaissance in India introduced a radical change in an educational institution. Modern change in Hinduism and India at large came through education. Of course, it was Christian indoctrination but eventually, it was beneficial to Hinduism. Even India became enlightened from an educational point of view. The status of women, the value of child education, the relationship between man and woman, the value of a property and social customs were distinctly changed.

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SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PEER REVIEWED

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