

INDIA'S SOCIAL REVOLUTION

BY DALJIT SINGH SADHARIA

THE most important event in recent Indian history is not the barbarous riots between the Hindus and the Mohammedans, or the appointment of a Parliamentary Commission to institute an inquiry into the working of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, but the social revolution. The impact of the West which is radically modifying governmental forms, political concepts, religious beliefs, and economic processes, is proving more potent in the range of social phenomena. The changes which during a decade or so have been taking place in the thot-life of India will make a deeper and far more permanent impression than any other event that has happened in Indian history for a thousand years. The old Indian social system based on caste, which has stood intact for centuries, is crumbling to pieces before the onslaughts of new forces and is fated to vanish into oblivion in the near future. A mighty social upheaval is sweeping over the country, the like of which India has not seen since the days of Gautama the Buddha. The East is no longer the East of yesterday, and such phrases as the "unchanging East" have lost all their meaning and have become obsolete. The East of today is changing at a pace of almost terrifying rapidity and the twentieth century will witness a radical transformation of Oriental society as a whole.

The present social convulsion in India is the direct outcome of secular English education and a contact with Western civilization. Before her contact with the West, India was in a state of inertia and stagnation, possessing neither the power nor the desire to emerge from the night of ignorance and superstition into the clear light of intelligence and progress. Religion had degenerated into a mere performance of sacrifices and oblations, and the masses had sunk

into the lowest depths of idolatry and degradation. The demoralizing doctrine of Karma, of Hinduism and the quiescent fatalism of Islam tended to freeze into passivity the vital energies of the Indian people and sentenced them to a virtual death. The introduction of English education disturbed this dangerous somnolence and kindled a new life into the withered and dry bones of Indian society. It set in motion intellectual currents and released the dormant spiritual and moral forces. As a result of English education a new class of Indians moulded by and saturated with European ideas came into being, and they went among their countrymen as heralds of a new gospel. They were determined to reconstruct India on European lines and to adapt English axioms and ideals to Indian life and institutions. Tho few in number, they became really a leaven that leavened the whole lump. From their ranks came all the political leaders who in 1885 organized the Indian National Congress, which is still the most powerful political body in the country; all the journalists who created an influential Indian press, both in English and vernacular, in its tangible form; all the social reformers who undertook to purge Indian society of some of its gross and barbarous practices; and all the religious teachers who addressed themselves to the task of purifying religion of its corruptions and of restoring it to its pristine purity. Ram Mohan Roy, the first great reformer of modern India, was greatly influenced by his English education and Western thot. He held that the regeneration of India could only be brought about by the introduction and assimilation of European culture. He became therefore the zealous supporter of English education and co-operated whole-heartedly with Christian missionaries like Carey and Duff and the British government to open schools for Western learning. He established a Hindu College in 1817 at Calcutta in co-operation with David Hare, an English philanthropist, and Sir Edward Hyde East, then a chief judge of the supreme court of Bengal, in which education in European letters and sciences was imparted to the Indian youth. His activities were not confined to the promotion of English education alone but extended to other spheres as well. He founded a theistic form of Hinduism in 1815 (Brahmo Samaj) on the pure and high ideals of the Upanishads and the Unitarian rationalism of Europe. The Brahmo Samaj denied the right of scriptures and priests to determine man's religious conviction or beliefs and repudiated the

claim of caste or custom to regulate his moral conduct and social relations. Ram Mohan Roy induced Lord Bentinck to abolish the horrible custom of widow-burning, advocated the civil rights of the Hindus, and assailed the idolatrous practices prevailing among his countrymen. He freed himself from religious superstitions and defied the Hindu orthodoxy by crossing the black waters to England. While there he suddenly died at Bristol in 1833, and the reform movement which he had initiated fell into desuetude. But again 1843 under the leadership of Devendra Nath Tagore, the father of Rabindra Nath, and Keshav Chandar Sen, the movement again received a new lease of life and became an important factor in Indian national life. It energetically took up the cause of social reform, condemned the restrictions of caste and the evil of child marriage, advocated female education, and favored the remarriage of widows. The Brahmō girls are well educated and freely mingle with their male companions. Tho the Brahmō Samaj has never been able to swell its ranks by any considerable number of the Indian people—its present membership includes only 4000 men and women—nevertheless it is the pioneer in social, religious, and spiritual advance.

Since the first generation of English-educated Indians and Ram Mohan Roy, India has undergone a unique transformation, and tremendous are the changes which have taken place in the country. The British government has introduced all the paraphernalia of scientific civilization and has created a unity which India has never known before in the modern sense of the term. All the heterogeneous nationalities, races, tribes, castes, creeds, and different provinces have been brought under one firm political control, and law and order, the security of life and property, have been established. Improved means of communication and transportation have annihilated distance and have reduced the inconveniences of travel. The old physical barriers which kept the people apart and hindered the mutual exchange of ideas, have been surmounted, and India has ceased to be a mere geographical entity. The black waters of the ocean no longer segregate India from other nations, and multitudes travel to and fro thru the land by railway train, bicycle, and motor car.

Education, law, government, telegraph, telephone, post office, and the English language have welded an amorphous aggregate of

Indian populations differing widely in race, creed, and religion into one composite whole, and India is fast becoming a nation. Politically Lahore is a suburb of Calcutta. Thru the press, thru itinerant orators who traverse the land, thru social and political gatherings, and thru private correspondence from one end of the country to the other, new ideas are widely diffused and a common national consciousness is being created. Every year numerous men and women congregate at places of pilgrimage such as Benares, Puri, Hardwar, and Amritsar, where they listen to the popular orators and carry with them on their return new impressions even to the dark corners of the land. The press, the theatre, the cinema, and the highly colored advertising boards are highways into the minds of the masses and create a thousand points of contact with modern civilization. Material things are as potent in changing the habits, customs, and views of life as are new ideas. The English language has given India a linguistic unity and has broken down her intellectual isolation. It has brought the Indian people into close touch with the rest of the world and serves as the vehicle of European culture. Every year Indian students resort to the universities of Europe and America for higher education, especially in science and industry, and freely mingle with the people of other nationalities without regard to caste regulations. On their return they are not obliged to undergo degrading expiatory rites to be taken back into Hindu society, as was the case thirty years ago, but are admitted without any burdensome restrictions. They are indeed highly respected and have usurped the prestige of the old-fashioned Hindu pandit and Mohammedan mullah in the eyes of the masses. Indian princes, businessmen, and tourists frequent Paris and other big cities of the Western world and come in contact with the good and evil, wholesome and unwholesome features of modern life. This contact of India with the rest of the world is a fact of portentous political and social importance, and only an Indian can realize its real significance.

The result of all this and of English education is, that old Indian ideals are rapidly disintegrating and the old social barriers are greatly relaxing. The caste system among the educated classes has practically become a dead letter. The Indian students do not observe the rules of caste and are free from the religious prejudices of their fathers. In schools and colleges Hindu, Sikh, Moham-

medan, and students of other communities freely associate without any restraint. They live in the same hostels, play their games together, share each other's ideas and aspirations and sit at the same tables for their meals. The majority of the Indian students are secularists, indifferents, and freethinkers in religion. The English secular education has given a death blow to religious superstitions and has destroyed old antiquated beliefs and ideas. Freethinking students are neither Hindu, Mohammedan, nor Sikh, and religion, whether Hinduism, Mohammedanism, Sikhism, or any other religious ism, is to them nothing but a bundle of absurdities, a survival of a primitive state of society, and an anachronism in this age of science and progress. Many of them have Europeanized themselves, have adopted European form of dress, customs, manners, and views of life. They do not rack their brains over the hymns of the Vedas and the texts of the Koran but are students of Kant, Darwin, Spencer, Comte, and other European rationalists, and are interested more in the doctrines of nationalism, of the French Revolution, and of Karl Marx than in the contemplative philosophy of ancient India. It is not the lives of Indian saints, but those of Mazzini and Fichte that furnish their ideals and fire their imagination. The dramatic awakening of the East, the diplomatic policies of modern governments, and the latest developments in international politics are the subjects which command their attention and engross their thought. And they are probably India's most valuable asset and her future builders. They are free from religious obscurantism, which is the sole bar to Indian unity and is responsible for present communal bloodshed and riots. They transcend the barriers of caste, race, creed, and above all of religion and are thus the creators of common Indian nationality.

Social revolutions begin with the educated classes and the light of culture travels from the top to the bottom. The new ideas spread from the top downward, and when they reach the lower strata of society, they become dynamic and lead to upheaval. This is especially true of Asia in general and India in particular, where the old Punjabi saying "The people follow the faith of their leaders" is still true, but with this difference, that the so-called higher circle of intelligence is no longer limited to the leading politicians, lawyers, Brahmans, and members of the upper classes, but also includes the lower grades of society such as Sudras and the sweepers; because in

modern times, thru the ever increasing thirst for knowledge, Indian society has attained to a degree of intelligence which quietly advances in the path of modern culture, gradually freeing itself from the bonds of the old conservative way of thinking, religious superstitions, and benumbing traditions, and inaugurating a new and promising epoch in the intellectual life of the Indian world.

The most far-reaching change that has taken place in Indian society is unquestionably the elevation of the depressed classes. Numerous societies and organizations are working for the uplift of the untouchables and for their economic amelioration. The Christian Church has gathered into its fold four million out-castes and has done wonders to raise them from their degradation and servitude. The baptized pariah Christians are admitted into the ranks of upper classes of Indian society, and no discrimination is observed against them. Among them at the present day are many hundreds of university graduates, and they are occupying positions of influence and approved efficiency in every honorable walk of life, some of them having risen to be principals of colleges or leaders at the bar, and to occupy many of the highest positions in the revenue and juducial departments of government. Under the new reform scheme three Indian Christians have occupied ministerial offices under provincial governments. Two Indian Christians are filling the high office of judge in provincial high courts. One Indian Christian is officiating at present as a member of the viceroy's executive council. Besides these conspicuous examples, Indian Christians all over India are entrusted with responsible positions in various departments and activities of government, education, and industry. They are even employed as teachers by the Sikhs and the Arya Samajists in their educational institutions and instruct the sons of haughty Brahmans and the proud Sikh noblemen. Every year an increasing number of Christians are being sent to the Indian National Congress. They are indeed becoming the leaders in Indian political and social life, and last year an All-India Conference of Indian Christians passed resolutions demanding the removal of disabilities of Christians, the revision of the Christian marriage act, and the abolition of communal representation. The caste system, in other words, has become practically obsolete and has ceased to exist in its rigid form.

Indian leaders of the nationalist movement now frankly recog-

nize the fact that the position of the out-castes is a disgrace to Indian society, and a fatal obstacle to social progress. They have fully realized that it is absurd to talk of a united India as long as fifty million people are held down in subjection and are consigned to unspeakable oppression. Lajpat Rai has declared caste to be "a disgrace to our humanity, our sense of social justice, and our feeling of social affinity." Tagore says, "The regeneration of the Indian people, to my mind, directly and perhaps solely depends on the removal of this condition of caste." "Untouchability" says the Forward of Calcutta, a powerful organ of Swarajist opinion, "is the greatest obstacle to our nation-building, and is a slur on humanity. From the standpoint of national reconstruction, of our political and social regeneration, untouchability is a curse and a standing monument to our weakness. No chapter in the census reports of India, not even the alarming death-roll or the dark figures measuring the depth and extent of our ignorance is more appalling, or gives a greater sense of shame and waste than that of the depressed classes, or we should say oppressed classes." Moti Lall Nehru, Madan Mohan Malaviya, and other responsible Indian leaders have denounced untouchability in strong terms and have demanded its abolition. Mahatma Gandhi has attacked caste and has set a noble example of human brotherhood to his countrymen by adopting a lowest class girl as his daughter. The majority of Indians now agree with him that all social distinctions among all the Indian communities must give way, so that all may make common cause for the attainment of Swaraj and the creation of a united Indian nation. All the important political parties have pledged to the elevation of the depressed classes, and the Indian National Congress passed a resolution last year granting them equal rights with the higher classes. The Liberals have placed the uplift of the untouchables in the very forefront of their programme and have promised to bring it about by giving them special educational facilities. The Nationalists have emphatically declared against caste distinctions and have granted full rights of citizenship to the depressed classes. The enlightened Queen of Travancore has thrown open public roads to untouchables, and the Gaekwar of Baroda allows the pariahs to send their representatives to his imperial legislative councils. The latter has established many separate schools for the education of the lowest classes of his subjects and has sought in

every way to ameliorate their economic and social conditions. The King of Mysore disregards all class distinctions, and those who are qualified to fill positions in government service are eligible to the highest offices in the State. Several other native States have also now taken measures to improve the lot of the pariahs and to raise them in the social scale.

Numerous native organizations are working for the reclamation of the untouchables, and there is at present fierce competition among the Hindus, Mohammedans, Sikhs, Christians to take them into their fold. Political motives lie behind their activities. Now that the principle of community representation has been introduced, every community naturally wants to attach these millions to their group. The Hindus are afraid that if they do not concede them equal rights, they are liable to fall into the hands of other communities and the political power of the Hindu community would be seriously weakened. The Arya Samaj, the most influential reforming society within Hinduism, is particularly alive to this danger and is outflanking the Christian missionary bodies by sweeping out-castes into its fold. It is strongly nationalistic, violently anti-Christian, and is stoutly opposed to caste, child marriage, and to idolatry in religion in any form. It has met with a surprising success and at present is spreading like wildfire all over the Punjab and the United Provinces. Its present membership is counted at 120,000, of whom two thirds are directly recruited from the lower classes. It has raised their social status among the higher classes of Hindus and has thrown open to them its schools, places of worship, and charitable institutions. The Sikhs also have gathered nearly 20,000 of the out-castes in the last twenty years. The Mohammedans alone are said to be gaining some 50,000 every year from the low-castes. The Deva Samaj, an atheistical society in the Punjab, has founded several schools for the education of the pariahs and tries in every possible way to improve their wretched conditions. Among its missionaries and preachers are men of the depressed classes and it has persuaded the Hindus to grant them equal rights, to allow them to choose their occupations, and to participate in religious and social expressions. Now all leaders of Hinduism proclaim universally in favor of social reform, intercaste dining, and intercaste marriage. Banquets where people of all castes eat together and where a common cup is passed around from which the high

caste drink after the outcaste has drunk, are no longer startling, but are becoming of common occurrence. It will not be too rash to say that in the next fifty years the outcastes will be assimilated or merged into the upper classes and the curse of caste will disappear. Fifty years, half a century, is, one might say, no more than a second in the life time of a nation, and far too small a period to bear convincing evidence in a social evolution such as India is passing thru. But in this fast-living age of steam and electricity, and of democracy and popular rights, fifty years represent far more change than many hundreds of years under the old regime, and the present short period of time is equal in point of events to the preceding much greater one. The spread of education, the rise of the humanitarian and nationalist movement, recognition of legal equality between the Sudra and the Brahman by the British government, the development of industries, railways, and foreign hostile criticism, are some of the most important forces working for the destruction of caste.

Nothing is more marked in contemporary India than the striking development of a social conscience and the rapid growth in social service among the educated classes. Growing numbers of students are now devoting themselves to education, sanitation, to famine relief, and to many other forms of social service. Mr. Gokhale's Servants of India Society is typical of the new social movement. Here the ablest Indian graduates prepare themselves by five years of post-graduate study and practical service for a life-work of public usefulness. The Vedic Mission, the Ramkrishna Mission, and numerous other smaller organizations, found scattered all over India, aim to elevate the moral and social status of the people. The missions run day and night schools, boarding-houses for homeless laborers, industrial schools, free libraries, co-operative credit societies, for the benefit of the helpless poor. The Society for the Improvement of the Backward Classes of Bengal and Assam alone, according to last year's report, conducts 406 schools in 20 districts with an enrollment of 16,274 boys and girls. The Prarthana Samaj, the Theistic Church of western India, maintains schools for the low-castes, and endeavors to better their conditions by providing suitable work for them, by remedying their social disabilities, and by preaching to them ethical ideals, personal character and good citizenship. The workers of the Samaj besides teaching in the schools, minister to the various needs of the poor people by

arranging lectures, games and excursions, giving medical relief, holding Sunday classes, visiting the poor in homes, distributing clothes, and dispensing other charities in times of emergency. There are numerous other religious and social conferences and organizations working for the regeneration of the country and for the promotion of temperance among the people. Social service indeed has become such an integral part of Indian life that it is unusual to find any Indian college that has not its night schools for the depressed classes and its band of volunteers to serve in times of calamity or distress.

By far the most significant and far reaching feature of the Indian social revolution is the rise of the feminine movement. Hitherto the women of India have been a drag on progress, and their dangerous conservatism has retarded any genuine social reform. But now they are caught in the tide of change which is sweeping over the land. They are entering into the student world, legal world, and the political world and there is no opposition to them on the part of men. The men of India are quite generous and outspoken in their praise of the resourcefulness, the sincerity, the reasonableness, and the persistence of the women advocates. The intense nationalism has made men see that the prosperity of their country demands that their womenfolk be educated and be encouraged to participate in all walks of national life. Indian women are now on district boards, municipal corporations, legislative councils and the senates of universities. There are women lawyers in Calcutta and women journalists in Bombay, Madras, Dehli, Poona, Lahore, and in other principal cities. There are several well conducted women's magazines whose management is wholly in the hands of women editors. Many very effective writers have appeared among the women of India who express ideas in their language with remarkable ease and discuss the current problems very intelligently. Sarala Devi of the Punjab, Mrs. Moti Lal Nehru, Dr. Ammal, and a host of others are as influential leaders in Indian politics as their husbands. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, a brilliant Indian poetess and orator, presided over the deliberations of the Fortieth session of the Indian National Congress held at Cawnpore in 1925, and there were several hundred women present, some of them taking an active part in the debate. Maharani of Baroda, Begum of Bhopal, and Rani Sahib of Sangli speak at meetings where men are

present and are leading a general movement against child marriage, caste system, untouchability, polygamy, and other social evils. Maharani of Baroda has strongly pronounced against the custom of wearing the veil and has demanded its abolition. The Indian Moslem women among whom this custom is absurdly rigid, forcibly tore down the curtain separating them from men at an Aligarh College examination. Indian women, especially educated women, have now cast aside their veils and have freed themselves from the shackles of seclusion and demoralizing Oriental traditions.

The education of Indian women is advancing with great rapidity, and the schools and colleges for women are springing up all over the country. There are two higher institutions in Madras, one at Lucknow, and one at Lahore. Calcutta and Bombay have women's colleges and the Hindu University at Benares and the Muslim University at Aligarh have thrown open their doors to young women. There are a number of national schools and colleges for girls and young women, some of which are coeducational. Women's societies, such as the Nari Shiksha Samiti, of which there are over a hundred in Bengal alone, are very active in organizing primary education for girls in villages, and in training women teachers. Professor Karve maintains a university at Poona in Maharashtra strictly on national lines, and the Arya Samajists and the Sikhs have high schools for young girls at Jullundur, Dehra Dun, and Ferozepore in the Punjab. Twenty years ago it was rare for any Indian girl to take anything beyond a grammar school education, the number of girls in high schools was a matter of especial notice and the women in colleges were wholly unknown. Today the number of girls in high schools runs into the thousands and of women in colleges into the scores. Indian young women are now studying law, medicine, arts, and pedagogy. There is also an increasing demand that women should be given special training in the fields of social and political sciences, and of social ethics, civics and child welfare, in order to equip them for more efficient work in the service of their less fortunate sisters. Many women have already earned merit in the fields of politics, law, medicine, teaching, journalism, and have achieved high literary distinctions.

The spread of education among the Indian women is creating in them a desire for freedom and is making them profoundly self-assertive. They are demanding the right to select their own hus-

bands and live their own lives. Sarojini Naidu married a non-Brahman in Madras, and Sarala Devi espoused a man of different caste from her own in the Punjab against the wishes of their relatives and friends. Two years ago a Mohammedan college girl married a cultured Hindu, and last year (December, 1927) a Hindu educated lady selected a Mohammedan as her bridegroom. Inter-marriage between castes and sub-castes is now becoming a thing of daily occurrence, and religious orthodoxy dares not raise its voice in protest. In the next twenty years marriages between Hindus and Mohammedans, between Christians and Sikhs, and between other different Indian communities will be fashionable, and the old wall of communal distinction will disappear. The rise of the woman movement is a unique phenomenon in recent Indian history and in itself constitutes a mighty social upheaval.

Apart from the elevation of the depressed classes and the stirrings among women, industrialism is bringing about revolutionary changes in the structure of Indian society. A great industrial revolution has been precipitated in India following her participation in the Great War. It is similar to that which took place in England when machinery was first introduced in that country, and it has raised grave social, moral, and religious problems. Factories and mills have sprung up with astonishing rapidity and have ushered in a new regime. In 1923 there were six thousand factories and mills, and they are on the increase. India has its trade unions, an industrial proletariat, a class of factory workers, now numbering about a million and a third, and their number rapidly increasing. Industrialism has broken down and is breaking down the old village organization. Peasants are swarming in upon the cities, and the pastoral life is slowly giving way. Many have been compelled to leave their occupations on account of foreign competition while others are leaving their ancestral acres of their own accord to seek higher wages in the cities. The middle classes are also leaving their villages and getting scattered all over the country to earn a living. The Brahmans go to the cities to seek government posts or professional careers, and they are no longer the priests or the teachers. The old type of Indian family life is now being slowly dissolved. Modern industrialism sends the father to one factory, the mother to another, and the children to different cities and provinces in search of opportunity. Industrialism in fact is working a complete

revolution in the habits and ideals of the Indian people and is fraught with serious consequences for the future of India and England.

India is on the threshold of tremendous changes and is in the throes of a great upheaval. She is now fully exposed to all outside influences, and the new forces in a thousand subtle ways are penetrating into her social structure. The Great War, and what followed after, compelled her to throw in her lot unreservedly with the general destinies of the modern world and to break radically with her past traditions. Modern ideas are coming into collision with the old and bursting the old bottles. Revolutionary theories of social and sexual relationships, of industrial development and of communistic utopias have produced a ferment which is gradually affecting all classes of society and overthrowing a philosophy of life and a social system backed by the traditions of four thousand years. Ideas today rule the world and are the most potent force in changing the habits, customs, beliefs, and the views of life of the people. Revolution is after all nothing but a passage of ideas from theory to practice. The revolutionary changes in Turkey and China and the Russian catastrophe are reacting on the Indian situation and making their influence felt. The India of caste system, of seclusion, static contemplation, otherworldliness, conservatism is passing fast, and the new India of social equality, restless activity, and commercialism is coming into existence. The present political of caste, and the rise of the common man are simply the forerunners of a colossal social revolution.