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Hinduism in the modern age (19-20 century)

Reformation

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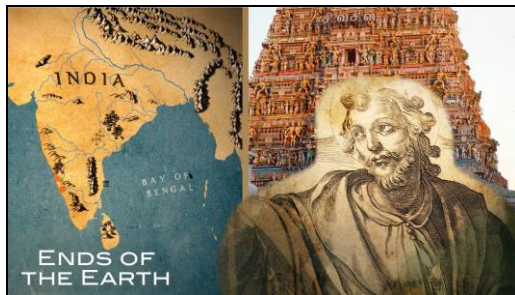
The rise of Colonialism

- The Portuguese promoted Roman Catholicism (1498 onwards) and made converts, most of whom were of low caste; the majority of caste Hindus were unaffected.
- Small Protestant missions operated from the Danish factories of Tranquebar in Tamil Nadu and Serampore in Bengal, but they were even less influential.
- The British East India Company, conscious of the disadvantages of Christian missionary activity from its territories.
- Indeed, the company continued the patronage accorded by indigenous rulers to many Hindu temples and forbade its Indian troops to embrace Christianity.
- The growing evangelical conscience in England brought this policy to an end with the renewal of the company's charter in 1813. The company's policy then became one of strict impartiality in matters of religion, but missionaries were allowed to work throughout its territory. Thus, Christian ideas began to spread.

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ENDS OF THE EARTH

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- St. Thomas the Apostle is believed to have traveled to India and preached the gospel there.
- According to the early historians and records St. Thomas is recognized as the founder of the Church of the Syrian Malabar Christians, or Christians of St. Thomas, in India

Encyclopaedia Britannica

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Hindu reform movements
Brahmo Samaj

- The pioneer of reform was Ram Mohun Roy His intense belief in strict monotheism and in the evils of image worship began early and probably was derived from Islam, because at first he had no knowledge of Christianity.
- He later learned English and in 1814 settled in Calcutta (Kolkata), where he was prominent in the movement for encouraging education of a Western type. His final achievement was the foundation of the Brahmo Samaj ("Society of God") in 1828.

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- After Roy's death, Debendranath Tagore (father of the greatest poet of modern India, Rabindranath Tagore [1861–1941]) became leader of the Brahmo Samaj, and under his guidance a more mystical note was sounded by the society.
- Tagore also promoted literacy and vigorously opposed idolatry and the practice of *Suttee*. In 1863 he founded Shantiniketan ("Abode of Peace"), a retreat in rural Bengal.

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- The third great leader of the Brahmo Samaj, Keshab Chunder Sen , was a reformer who completely abolished caste in the society and admitted women as members.
- As his theology became more syncretistic and inclusive , a rift developed, and the more conservative faction remained under the leadership of Tagore.
- Keshab's faction, the Brahmo Samaj of India, adopted as its Scripture a selection of theistic texts gathered from all the main religions. At the same time, it became more Hindu in its worship, employing the *sankirtana* (devotional singing and dancing) and *nagarakirtana* (street procession) of the Chaitanya movement, an intensely devotional form of Hinduism established by the Bengali mystic and poet Chaitanya.
- In 1881 Keshab founded the Church of the New Dispensation (Naba Bidhan) for the purpose of establishing the truth of all the great religions in an institution that he believed would replace them all. When he died in 1884, the Brahmo Samaj began to decline.

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- Arya Samaj**
- A reformer of different character was Dayanand Sarasvati , who was trained as a yogi but steadily lost faith in Yoga and in many other aspects of Hinduism.
 - After traveling widely as an itinerant preacher, he founded the AS in 1875, and it rapidly gained ground in western India. Dayanand rejected image worship, sacrifice and polytheism and claimed to base his doctrines on the four Vedas as the eternal word of God.
 - Later Hindu scriptures were judged critically, and many of them were believed to be completely evil.
 - The Arya Samaj did much to encourage Hindu nationalism , but it did not disparage the knowledge of the West, and it established many schools and colleges. Among its members was the revolutionary Lala Lajpat Rai

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- Ramakrishna Mission**
- The most important developments in Hinduism did not arise primarily from the new *samajs*. Ramakrishna , a devotee at Dakshineswar, a temple of Kali, north of Kolkata (Calcutta), attracted a band of educated lay followers who spread his doctrines.
 - As a result of his studies and visions, he came to the conclusion that "all religions are true" but that the religion of a person's own time and place was for that person the best expression of the truth.
 - Ramakrishna thus gave educated Hindus a basis on which they could justify the less rational aspects of their religion to a consciousness increasingly influenced by Western values.

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Ramakrishna Mission



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- Among the followers of Ramakrishna was Narendranath Datta, who became an ascetic after his master's death and assumed the religious name Vivekananda.
- In 1893 he attended the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, where his powerful personality and stirring oratory deeply impressed the gathering.
- After lecturing in the USA and England, he returned to India in 1897 with a small band of Western disciples and founded the Ramakrishna Mission, the most important modern organization of reformed Hinduism. Vivekananda, more than any earlier Hindu reformer, encouraged social service.
- Influenced by progressive Western political ideas, he set himself firmly against all forms of caste distinction and fostered a spirit of self-reliance in his followers. With branches in many parts of the world, the Ramakrishna Mission has done much to spread knowledge of its version of Hinduism outside India.

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Theosophical Society

- Another movement influenced in part by Hinduism is the Theosophical Society.
- Founded in New York in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky of Russia, it was originally inspired by Kabbala (Jewish esoteric mysticism), Gnosticism (esoteric salvatory knowledge), and forms of Western occultism.
- When Blavatsky went to India in 1879, her doctrines quickly took on an Indian character, and from her headquarters at Adyar she and her followers established branches in many cities of India.

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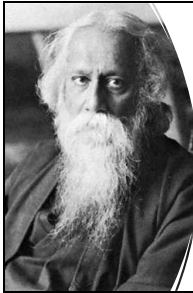
- After surviving serious accusations of charlatany leveled against its founder and other leaders, the society prospered under the leadership of Annie Besant, a reform-minded Englishwoman.
- During her tenure the many Theosophical lodges founded in Europe and the United States helped to acquaint the West with the principles of Hinduism, if in a rather peculiar form.

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Aurobindo Ashram

- Another modern teacher whose doctrines had some influence outside India was Shri Aurobindo. He began his career as a revolutionary but later withdrew from politics and settled in Pondicherry, then a French possession.
- There he established an ashram and achieved a high reputation as a sage.
- His followers saw him as the first incarnate manifestation of the superbeings whose evolution he prophesied.
- After his death, the leadership of the Aurobindo Ashram was assumed by Mira Richard, a Frenchwoman who had been one of his disciples.

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Other reform movements

Rabindranath Tagore
Numerous other teachers have affected the religious life of India. Among them was the great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, who was influenced by many currents of earlier religious thought, both Indian and non-Indian. Tagore was particularly popular in Europe and the United States about the time of WW I, and he did much to spread Hindu religious thought in the West.

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Independence

- The Hindu revival and reform movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries were closely linked with the growth of Indian nationalism and the struggle for independence.
- The Arya Samaj strongly encouraged nationalism, and, even though Vivekananda and the RM were always uncompromisingly nonpolitical, their effect in promoting the movement for self-government is quite evident.
- Religion and politics were joined in the career of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, an orthodox Maharashtra Brahmin who believed that the people of India could be aroused only by appeals couched in religious terms.
- Tilak used the annual festival of the god Ganesha for nationalist propaganda. His interpretation of the Bhagavad-Gita as a call to action was also a reflection of his nationalism, and through his mediation the Scripture inspired later leaders, including Gandhi.

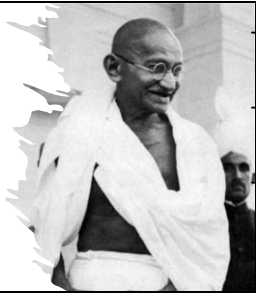
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- Hindu religious concepts were also enlisted in the nationalist cause in Bengal. In his novel *Anandamath* (1882), the Bengali writer Bankim Chandra Chatterjee described a band of martial ascetics who were pledged to free India from Muslim domination under the Mughal empire.
- They took as their anthem a stirring devotional song written in simple Sanskrit—"Bande Mataram" ("I Revere the Mother")—whose title referred both to the fierce demon-destroying goddess Kali and to India itself. This song was soon adopted by other nationalists.
- Vivekananda emphasized the need to turn the emotion of *bhakti* toward the suffering poor of India. During his short career as a revolutionary, Shri Aurobindo made much use of "Bande Mataram," and he called on his countrymen to strive for the freedom of India in a spirit of devotion.
- The *bhakti* of the medieval poets poets was thus enlisted in the cause of modern independence.

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Gandhi Ji


- Much influenced by the *bhakti* of his native Gujarat and fortified by similar attitudes in Christianity and Jainism, Gandhi, the most important leader in the movement for independence, appeared to his followers as the perfect example of the Hindu tradition.
- His austere, celibate life was one that the Indian laity had learned to respect implicitly. Gandhi's message reached a wider public than that of any of the earlier reformers.




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Post Independence

- Increasing nationalism, especially after the division of India into India and Pakistan in 1947, led to a widening of the gulf between Hindus and Muslims.
- In the early 1970s Indian scholars painted the relations of the two religions in earlier centuries as friendly, blaming alien rule for the division of India.
- In Pakistan the tendency has been to insist that Hindus and Muslims have always been "two nations" and that the Hindus nevertheless were happy under their Muslim rulers. Neither position is correct. In earlier times there was much mutual influence.
- But the conservative element in Indian Islam gained the upper hand long before British power was consolidated in India.



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One of the pioneers of nationalism, Tilak, glorified the Maharashtrian hero Shivaji as the liberator of India from the alien yoke of the Mughals; and Bal Gangadhar Chatterjee's militant ascetic, who pledged to conquer and expel the Muslims, sang a battle hymn that no orthodox Muslim could repeat.

British rulers of India did little or nothing to lessen Hindu-Muslim tension, and their policy of separate electorates for the two communities worsened the situation.

Many leaders of the Indian National Congress movement, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, carried their Hinduism lightly and favoured a secular approach to politics; the majority, however, followed the lead of Gandhi.

Although to the right of the Congress politically, the Hindu Mahasabha, a nationalist group formed to give Hindus a stronger voice in politics, did not oppose nonviolence in its drive to establish a Hindu state in India.

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Hinduism outside India

Since the latter part of the 19th century large Hindu communities have been established in eastern and southern Africa (particularly in South Africa), Malaysia, the islands of the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean, and some islands of the West Indies. Members of these communities have adhered to their religion faithfully for several generations.

In the late 20th century they were aided by Hindu missionaries, chiefly from the Arya Samaj or the Ramakrishna Mission. Since WW II, many Hindus also settled in the UK, and after 1965 many began settling in the USA.

Although the earliest migrants were comparatively uneducated, many of the migrants of the late 20th century were highly skilled and well-educated professionals.
