



RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY AS GREAT REFORMER TOWARDS MAKING OF MODERN INDIA

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Abstract:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy proudly called the “Maker of Modern India”. He was social and educational reformer and a visionary who lived during one of India’s darkest social phases but tried his best to make his motherland a better place for the future generations. He formed Bramho Samaj, the renaissance movement of the Hindu religion which set the pace for Bengali enlightenment.. He was especially concerned about the practice of “sati” which required a widow to immolate herself at the pyre of her husband. Along with other reformers and visionaries he fought against the evil practices prevalent in the Indian society at his times and struggled to eradicate them. He also left a deep impact in the fields of politics and education. He worked on education, economics, literature, journalism, politics, economics concerns so that all-round development of India and the people of India which now marching towards the making of modern India.

Key words: Bengal Renaissance, free trade, sati, women empowerment,

Introduction

We can say that Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) has been universally acknowledged as the central figure in what is called ‘Bengal renaissance’, Calcuttan science and the phenomenon of ‘awakening’ in modern India. He was one amongst the many architects of his generation, undeniably the best, but not the only one. He told Alexander Duff (after 1830): “I began to think that something similar to the European renaissance might have taken place here in India.”¹ Raja Ram Mohan Roy was out of

¹ Biswas, 2011, pp 427, 428

proportions to his surroundings. He brought as a gift to his people a mind for comprehending the bests of east and west.²

In 18th century, the debasement of society was mostly due to religious fanaticism. Like the mechanical observances of rituals, torture of the priests and their misinterpretation of *Hindu Shastras*. As the people were not aware of the true meaning of their scripture and texts, they used to follow blindly the false sayings of the priests class. Priests on the other hand, because of their comfort, source of income and happiness encouraged the ignorant people to follow their scriptures blindly by concealing from them the true meaning of their texts. British Government was however very indifferent in the matter of degradation of the society and used to take a neutral position in the socio religious affairs.³

Social change in India was very slow process. It is based on the 'filtration theory', the filtration of changes in attitudes and modes of behaviour from the upper layers of society to the lower ones. It was only at the beginning of this century with the growth of organised reform groups that the social basis of Hinduism, the caste system, came to be questioned. Various social service institutions took up the cause of the less fortunate groups in society and sought to lift India from the morass of caste system. Prior to the nineteenth century, there were reform movements especially in the field of religion. The entire Bhakti movement by various saints was in a way a revolt against orthodox Hinduism.⁴ But it could not succeeded up to large extent due to various reasons.

The rigorous social, political and economical activities of Raja Ram Mohan Roy made him the pioneer of the Renaissance and modernity in Bengal and in India also. Through his independent, intellectual and radical views and activities almost in all elements of society, like religious and social reformation movements, education, law, tolerance, public opinion, civil liberty, rule of law, separation of power, freedom of press and economic thoughts altogether. By his works and contribution towards overall development of the country, he came to be known as the pioneer of liberalism in India.⁵

Literature Review

More than 150 sources like research papers, articles, books, biographies, reviews, etc were studied to understand the socio-economical culture in India in 18th century. The researchers like Bhattacharya (2006); Biswas (2011); Behera Arun K. (2012)Kadam (2012); Karmakar (2015); Mandal and Behera (2015); Thangamuthu (2016) performed the research on the life and mission of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. They concluded that he struggled for the eradication of evil customs in Indian society and wanted to reconstruct the India with new values, human rights, developmental tools, and gender equality. This work was continued by other reformers like, Pandita Ramabai,

² De, 2016, pp 59, 60.

³ Ibid

⁴ Heimsath, 1964, pp 1441.

⁵ Karmakar, 2015, pp 104.

Dayanand Saraswati, Ranade, Mahatma Fule, Savitribai Fule, etc. We can say this is the foundation of the making of modern India.

Methodology Adopted:

The data is collected from biography of Raja Ram Mohan Roy as primary source of data collection. The secondary source data is collected through books, journals, articles, reviews, critics and through internet.

Reforms Marching Towards Modern India:

Socio-religious Reforms:

His vision was that the entire human society was a big family. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, today's concepts of national integration and international understanding are arising. In the context of equalisation, universalization and eradication of caste system, Raja Ram Mohan Roy's *Brahmo Samaj* movement is still significant today. Even after so many years of Indian independence, our present society is still buried under the heaps of superstitions, ignorance, prejudices and oppressions. In the context of moral degradation and social oppression, there has again arisen the need of propagating Raja Ram Mohan Roy's ideas for reconstructing the Indian society. So, it is very significant to find out the relevance of his ideologies in the context of the present day.⁶

From the very causes of that horrible rite of *Sati*, discussed above, one could easily predict, how distress and miserable the condition of the women was in 19th Century Bengal. They were not entitled to the acquisition of knowledge; they were deprived of exercising all sorts of talents and capabilities and were not given any economic freedom and independency. British Government was however very indifferent in the matter of degradation of the society and used to take a neutral position in the socio religious affairs. Though the matter of *Sati* came into the notice of the British Government early in 1772, only in 1813, company's instructions were drawn up in this regard which sanctioned the practice of *Sati* if it was approved by the *Hindu* religion and law, but where the same religion and law forbidden the practice, the practice would be banned.⁷

All his reformatory activities were guided by a consistent philosophy guided by "*lokasreya*" or public good. The main essence of Raja Ram Mohan Roy's religious beliefs was the doctrine of universal religion. His idea of one universal religion and one eternal God were reflected through his *Brahmo Samaj*. His philosophy was "a fundamental unity in the midst of diversity." He realised that the individual's progress could be secured by the progress of the society. He wanted to give a widest awareness and publicity to social matters, so that the people of India should be aware of the ill effects of that fearful customs.^{8,9}

⁶ De, 2016, pp 60.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ De, 2016, pp 60.

⁹ Karmakar, 2015, pp 104.

Champion of Women Liberty:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy advocated the liberty of Women. He was determined to give women her proper place in the society. Besides abolishing Sati, he advocated in favor of widow remarriage. He also told that like the sons, daughters have also their right over parental property. He also influenced the British government to bring necessary modification in the existing law. He raised voice against child-marriage and polygamy. He was the advocate of women education. Thus, he advocated women's liberty out and out and awakened those.^{10 & 11}

Economic:

Though he himself belonged to a Zamindar background, yet he wanted the liberation of the poor tenants who were exploited by the Zamindars and their agents. Raja Ram Mohan Roy wanted the revenue to be fixed with the cultivators in Bengal. He opposed the heavy export duties imposed on Indian goods⁴.

Like several contemporary liberal thinkers, Rammohun championed the idea of free trade, the entry of foreign capital, abolition of all restrictions over European settlers and land revenue reforms to help the process of building more wealth and prosperity in India.¹²

Political:

With the glorification of ancient Indian culture, the Brahma Samaj as an institution helped in developing confidence among Indians in their own religion. This confidence helped in the reconstruction of Indian nationalism. Roy also believed in the freedom of man and opposed the racial superiority of Europeans. Though he did not demand independence for India, yet he fought for the civil liberties of the people.¹³ Raja Rammohan Roy is called as the Father of Indian Renaissance due to his mass awakening and rational thinking. The Brahma Samaj worked as a pioneer in revitalizing the Hindu society. Of course, the focus of the activities of the Brahma Samaj was confined to Bengal. But it had a number of branches established in distant provinces like Punjab, Madras, Uttar Pradesh etc. He paved the way on which other Hindu social and religious reformers could tread.¹⁴

Opposition to Caste System:

The caste system was a very ugly practice prevailing in Indian society right from the later Vedic age. Indian society was fragmented by the name of different castes. The higher castes like Brahmins and Kshatriyas looked down upon the Sudras, Chandalas and other aboriginals. Roy opposed this ugly system of the Indian society. To him everybody was a son or daughter of the God. So, there is no difference among men.¹⁵

There should not exist hatred and animosity among them. Everybody is equal before God. Thus, ignoring differences among themselves they should embrace each other ignoring differences. Then, the

¹⁰ Kadam, 2012, pp 3.

¹¹ Chapter 4, pp 135-138.

¹² Karmakar, 2015, pp 104.

¹³ Biswas, 2011, pp 431.

¹⁴ Heimsath, 1964, pp 1441.

¹⁵ Chapter 4, pp 140.

true purpose of God will be materialized. By advocating this equality among men. Ram Mohan became the eyesore of many higher caste peoples.¹⁶

Love for Liberty and Constitutionalism:

Liberty and constitutionalism were the two important aspects upon which Raja Ram Mohan emphasized. He preferred a constitutional form of Government for every nation. Despotism or autocracy, he hated from the core of his heart. He told that a constitutional government could only give guarantee of Individual freedom. When the people of Naples broke the shackles of Austrian despotism. He wrote — “..... Enemies to liberty and friends of despotism have never been and never will be ultimately successful.” Thus, he advocated individual liberty.¹⁷

Advocate of Western Education:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a great scholar having sharp intellect in the Vedas, Upanishads, Quran, Bible and several other holy scriptures. He very well realized the importance of English language. He could visualize the need of a scientific, rational and progressive education for the Indians.¹⁸

During his time, when controversy was going on between the orient lists and occident lists, he sided with the latter and advocated in favor of the introduction of the English system of education. He liked Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Botany, Philosophy. At the same time he also desired that the Indian Vedic studies and philosophical systems were to be studied and analyzed properly^{19 & 20}

Economic Ideas:

Ram Mohan’s economic ideas were tinged with liberalism. He wanted the state intervention to protect the property of the individual. His article ‘Essay over the Rights of the Hindus over Ancestral Property was a pointer in this direction. One’s claim over the ancestral property was to be maintained.²¹ Further, he advocated that the peasants should be protected by the government from the tyranny of the landlords. He was well aware of the dangerous consequences of the permanent settlement of 1793 introduced by Lord Cornwallis. So, he wanted the British authority to intervene in the affairs of the Zamindars to protect the peasants.²²

He advocated the right of Hindu women over property. As a liberal economic thinker he was deeply concerned with the economic strangulation of the poor in the century. That is why he had resented strongly against the existing revenue system of the country whose first prey were the landlords.²³

Literature and Journalism:

Roy was a great champion of the freedom of the Press. His efforts to liberate the Press were made with the aim of education Indians about the affairs of the nation in their true perspective. He himself

¹⁶ Chapter 4, pp 134.

¹⁷ Heimsath, 1964, pp 1442.

¹⁸ Mandal and Behera, 2015, pp 92.

¹⁹ Biswas, 2011, pp 435.

²⁰ Mandal and Behera, 2015, pp 92.

²¹ Karmakar, 2015, pp 103, 104.

²² Ibid.

²³ Kadam, 2012, pp 2.

published newspapers in English, Bengali and Persian for the purpose of creating mass consciousness as a veritable check against the British authoritarianism.²⁴ Besides being a great social reformer Roy also made a valuable contribution to Bengali literature and he is regarded as the father of Bengali prose. He was the first to realize the value of the newspapers as an instrument for diffusing intellectual light. His earliest books on Bengali prose were Vedanta Grantha and Vedanta - Saar which were published in 1815 and 1816 respectively.²⁵

Conclusion:

After the discussion made in the paper it is concluded that, Raja Ram Mohan Roy is the first thinker of modern India who urged social and religious reforms on rational principles. History will remember him as the living bridge between India's past and bright future. He fought against the social evils / bad customs and supported the socially depressed persons.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy headed the intellectual movement generally known as the Indian Renaissance or the re-establishment of the glory of ancient Indian culture. He was the first builder of a modern India. Thus we can see that in the context of present situation his contributions, thinking and activities are still significant to the society for moving and influencing the new generations in India. The history has yet to be written. But when it comes to be written, the name of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, would occupy a brilliant chapter in it. We can dream and march towards modern / new India by vision shown by him.

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²⁴ Behera, 2012, pp281, 282.

²⁵ Thangamuthu, 2016, pp 2611.