

Raja Rammohan Roy: A Harbinger of Indian Liberalism

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Ram Mohan Roy's impact on modern Indian philosophy was a revival of the pure and ethical-principles of the Vedanta school of philosophy as found in the Upanishads. He preached the unity-of God, made early translations of Vedic scriptures into English, co-founded the Calcutta Unitarian Society and founded the Brahma Samaj. The Brahma Samaj played a major role in-reforming and modernizing the Indian society. He successfully campaigned against sati, the practice of burning widows. He sought to integrate Western culture with the best features of his own-country's traditions. He established a number of schools to popularize a modern system (effectively replacing Sanskrit based education with English based education) of education in India. He promoted a rational, ethical, non-authoritarian, and social-reform Hinduism. The contribution of Raja Ram Mohan Roy as a social reformer is unparalleled. His efforts to protest Hinduism and Indian-rights and his closeness with the British government earned him the title "The Father of the Indian-Renaissance".

Liberalism & Raja Rammohan Roy:

Liberalism as a political idea in India was developed by the English educated middle class, a product of the colonial education system. The colonial education was introduced with the aim of creating cultural and ideological hegemony for maintaining alien rule. The liberal critique of Indian-society and colonial state began with Renaissance. Raja Rammohan Roy, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Devendra Nath Thakur, Akshay Kumar Dutta, Jyotiba Phule, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, M G. Ranade, Dada Bhai Nauroji, Surendra Nath Banerjee, Pherozshah Mehta, Sir Syed-Ahmed Khan and others tried to set a liberal model for transforming Indian society and polity. The Indian liberal looked upon the colonial rulers to lead and guide the socio-political transformation. The English liberals like J.S. Mill and many others plea & for the continuation of colonial rule as it was essential for 'civilizing' the native and putting them 'on the path of progress'.

The liberals like Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Dadabhai Nauroji and others exhorted the colonial-rulers, through petitions for redressal. But even this concern eventually boiled down to the problems of the members of the educated middle class who had not found appropriate place in the administration. Dadabhai Naroji in a memorandum submitted in 1880 appealed to the 'manliness' and the 'moral courage' of Englishmen to pay attention to "the thousands that are being sent out by-the Universities ever year" and who "find themselves in a most anomalous position."

Similar conception of colonial rule found expression in the writings of Sir Syed Ahmed-Khan who projected the colonial rule as 'emancipatory', 'democratic' and 'progressive'. Its-continuance was desired to safeguard and enhance the interests of the Muslim community as Islam did not come into conflict with progress and reason symbolized by British rule. This can be compared with the logic of Renaissance thinkers who desired and justified the continuance of a representative system of government on the ground that "so long as differences of race and creed and distinction of caste form an important element in the socio-political life of India, the system of election cannot safely be adopted." This line of argument represented the interests of landed and-educated Muslim middle classes-community. We know how colonialism and colonial education hastened the emergence of new-social classes in India.

Socio-Political and Liberal Thought of Ram Mohan Roy:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a social thinker par excellence. His role in doing away with sati-among orthodox Brahmins was historical. By founding Brahmo Samaj, Roy sought to articulate his belief in the Islamic notion of 'one god'. In his conceptualization, social reform should precede-political reform for the former laid the foundation for liberty in the political sense. Given his priority, Roy did not appear to have paid adequate attention to his political ideas. Although he despised colonialism, he appeared to have endorsed the British rule, presumably because of its-historical role in combating the prevalent feudal forces. Not only was the British rule superior, at least, culturally than the erstwhile feudal rulers, it would also contribute to a different India by injecting the values it represented. His admiration for the British rule was based on his faith in its role in radically altering traditional mental makeup of the Hindus. The continued British rule, he further added, would eventually lead to the establishment of democratic institutions as in Great-Britain. Like any other liberal, Roy also felt that the uncritical acceptance of British liberal values was probably the best possible means of creating democratic institutions in India. In other words, he appreciated the British rule as a boon in disguise because it would eventually transplant democratic governance in India. The other area for which the role of Ram Mohan was decisive was the articulation of the demand for the freedom of press. Along with his colleague Dwarakanath Tagore he submitted a petition to the Privy Council for the freedom of press which he justified as essential-for Early Nationalist Responses democratic functioning of the government.

Not only would the freedom of press provide a device for ventilation of grievances, it would also enable the government-to adopt steps for their redressal before they caused damage to the administration. Viewed in the liberal mould, this was a remarkable step in that context for two reasons: (a) the demand for-freedom of press was a significant development in the growing, though limited, democratization-among the indigenous elites in India, and (b) the idea of press freedom, if sanctioned, would act as a-safety valve for the colonial ruler because of the exposition of grievances in the public domain(Pantham 1986).

Ram Mohan Roy had played a progressive role in a particular historical context While-conceptualizing his historical role, Ray appeared to have privileged his experience of British-colonialism over its immediate feudal past. By undermining the obvious devastating

impact of foreign rule on Indian Society, politics and economy, he also clearly supported one system of-administration over the other rather consciously, simply because of his uncritical faith in British enlightenment in significantly transforming the prevalent Indian mindsets. One may find it difficult-to digest his invitation to the British planters in India despite their brutalities and ruthlessness vis-a--vis the Indian peasants if discussed in isolation. But this was perfectly rationalized if one is drawn-to his argument justifying the continuity of the empire on the basis of its economic strength. The-more the planters acquire wealth argued Roy, the better would be their defence for continuity in India. Given his historical role, it would not be wrong to argue that Ram Mohan Roy discharged his-responsibility in tune with the historical requirement of his role in the particular context of India's-growth as a distinct socio-political unit. It would therefore, be historically inaccurate to identify him as a pro-imperial thinker simply because nationalism did not acquire the characteristics of the later period. Since his ideas whether supporting the British or criticizing the past rulers were both historically conditioned and textured, he authored his historical role in the best possible way reflecting the dilemma of the period and the aspiration of those groping for an alternative in social and political doldrums of incipient colonialism.

The Hinds Vedanta and Upanishad had described clears about birth, life and death. According to him there is the Creator who creates and describes everything on earth. He is the-Supreme Being without any beginning and without description or shape. Ramnmohan pointed out the value of those beliefs and wanted religion to rest on purity, virtues and ethics. In 1928 Rammohan founded the Brahmo Sabha which was renamed as Brahmo Samaj in 1830. Brahmo Samaj became one of the most important agents of religious and social change in the nineteenth century in India. The main aim of the Samaj was to foster the idea of brotherhood of men since all men are the creation of the eternal being. It advocated for the promotion of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue and the strengthening of the bonds of union between man of all religious beliefs. The immobile structure of the Indian society, with blind beliefs like Sati system, polygamy, caste excesses, untouchability and the oppression of women divided the Indian society and kept them from acting together as a united nation. Rammohan started Champaign against these wrong doings of the Hindu society. Rammoban Roy openly said that Sati system was more than-murders according to all Shastras as well as to the common science of every nation. He protested against the Sati system inside and outside his home. Consequent upon this the orthodox community rose up in protest and social boycott was organized against him. His life was threatened. On the support of Rammohan Roy, Lord Bentinck finally decided to abolish Sati system in 1929. In the field of education, Rammohan was one of the first thinkers in India to realize the value of Western Science and thought. He created major opinion in favour of the English education that could generate sense of unity among the Indian educated youths. Rammohan's idea of western-education helped the Government of Lord William Bentinck to introduce European learning in India. Bentinck could ignore the group of orientalists of India who were pleading in favour of oriental languages to be used as medium of instructions in schools and colleges. Rammohan also-tried his best for the poetical awakening among Indians. He first realized the value of free press and free opinion. He first published a weekly to ventilate the views of the people on social, political, economic problems both national and international. Through the

publication of a comparative study-of national problem with international issues, Indians could understand their defects. With the result they tried to work for the motherland jointly.

Champion of Liberalism:

Rammohan became the pioneer of Indian nationalism by preaching the sensitive value of unity among men. The aim of his reform movement was to liberate the individual from social tyranny and from mental ignorance. Breaking the orthodox belief to cross the sea and to lose the caste Rammohan Roy was the first Indian to go to England crossing sea in 1830. Fighting in favour-of the abolition of Sati, the introduction of Western Education in India and to introduce measures to-put an end to the false beliefs among Indians, he died there is 1833.

Hence we can conclude that Rammohan Roy was a true champion of liberalism and republicanism . In "The Makers of Modern India" Ramachandra Guha calls him the first liberal Indian whose ideas influenced the formation of Indian Republic after Independence. Guha shows that he can also be regarded as a pioneer in journalistic works as he was the founder and editor of two newspapers, the Samvad Kaumudi for common folk and Mirat UI Akbar (Mirror On-Intelligence) for the erudite. His modernity confronted head on the Middle Age as early as 1820 he talked of the Freedom of Press. Rammohan Roy therefore symbolizes religious cultural eclecticism and cosmopolitanism. However Rammohun's brand of liberalism was not bereft of limitations.

It will surely not be in a hyperbole to regard Raja Rammohan Roy as one of the most outstanding personalities of the 19th century, as a pioneer of modernity, and a visionary of Liberal-Democracy not just of Bengal or India but of the whole world. He is universally acknowledged as the prime crusader against the infamous practice of Sati, and pioneer of the progressive Atmiya Sabha.

Like Rousseau.,Voltaire and Montesquieu, Ram Mohan Roy had a passionate attachment to the concept of liberty. He urged the necessity of personal freedom. Liberty is a priceless possession of the human being and hence Ram Mohan was a champion of personal freedom. But liberty is also needed for the nation. Roy had a passion for liberty and equality, yet he showed his respect for property and believed in the freedom of contract indeed, he pleaded for state intervention in suppressing evil practices in society and held that it was the duty of the state to protect tenants against the oppression of the landlords. Like John Locke, Thomas Paine and Grotius, Roy accepted the immutable sanctity of natural rights. He believed not only in the natural rights of life, liberty and pursuit of property, but also championed the moral rights of the individual. His theory of natural rights, however, was constructed in the prevailing Indian conditions.

Thus although an-exponent of the theory of Natural Rights and freedom, he also advocated state legislation for social-reform and educational reconstruction. As a champion of freedom and democratic rights and a believer in parliamentary democracy, Roy wholeheartedly supported the reform Bill agitation in England.

In his opinion, the struggle between the reformers and anti-reformers was nothing but a liberty and tyranny throughout the world, between justice and injustice and between right and wrong. It should be remembered that Ram Mohan Roy championed the struggle for freedom and democratic rights, not for Indians alone but for the entire human beings in the world. Ram Mohan Roy had a keen appreciation of the uncompromising freedom of the creative spirit. He wanted the people of India to develop a sense of self confidence, and was crusader against unreason and superstition. He admired the English people who not only enjoyed civil and political liberty but was interested in promoting freedom, social happiness and rationalism in the areas where their influence extended. Bipin Chandra Pal while assessing the contribution of Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Indian freedom wrote Raja was the first to deliver the message of political freedom to India. Raia Ram Mohan Roy felt quite happy to hear the news of the introduction of constitutional government in Portugal. He supported the struggle for freedom of the Greeks against the Turks. Again, Roy was opposed to the British occupation of Ireland. He collected funds for the relief of the famine stricken people of Ireland.

Conclusion:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy is regarded as the father of Modern India and Indian renaissance. He was a social reformer par excellence. Most of the reform movements that have revolutionized in Hindu society can be traced to his great son of India. He was himself the victim of social evils, and throughout his life he worked for the social and religious uplift of his community. His role in doing-away with the evil practice of sati among the orthodox Brahmins was historical by founding Brahma Samaj Roy sought to articulate his belief in the Islamic notion of one God. In his conceptualization, social reform should precede political reform, for the former laid the foundation for liberty in the political sense.

Ram Mohan Roy was a multifaceted personality with foresight and vision. He was bold, sincere and honest and had the courage to preach his convictions. He was interested in the emancipation and empowerment of women and was earliest feminist in modern India who revolted against the subjection of women and preached against the modern encroachments on the ancient rights of Hindu females. He was also a model social reformer who was highly critical of the prevailing social evils in the traditional Hindu society. He was a prophet of universalism, a keen and ardent champion of liberty in all its phases and a political agitator for the freedom of the press and the right of the tenants. He has been called the father of modern India, the first earnest minded investigator of the science of comparative religion and the harbinger of the idea of universal humanism. He stands in history as the living bridge over which India marches from her unmeasured past to her incalculable future.

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