

Rammohan Roy: Progressive Role as a Social Reforms and Movements for Social Justice

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ABSTRACT: Rammohan Roy was a social thinker par excellence. In 1828, he setup the Brahma Samaj, a reformist movement of the Hindu religion that aimed at fighting social evils that were prevalent in the society. Rammohan was opposed superstitious practices, customs such as Sati, polygamy, child marriage, idolatry, the rigidity of the caste system and propagated widow remarriage and sought property inheritance rights for women. He stressed on rationalism and modern scientific approach and also believed in social equality of all human beings. Rammohan started many schools to educate Indians in Western scientific education in English and he was against the perceived polytheism of Hinduism. He advocated monotheism as given in the scriptures. Thus, his progressive role in fighting Sati, the governor of the Bengal Presidency Lord William Bentinck formally banned the practice on December 4, in the year 1829.

KEYWORDS: Progressive, Reforms, Movement, Social Justice, Sati, Polygamy, Fighting etc.

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I. INTRODUCTION

“.... enlightened men in all countries feel a wish to encourage and facilitate human intercourse in every manner by removing as far as possible all impediments to it in order to promote the reciprocal advantage and enjoyment of the whole human race.”

Rammohan Roy

Rammohan Roy (1772 – 1833) was the pioneers of Bengal Renaissance. He was born in British-ruled Bengal to a prosperous family of the Brahman class (varna). Little is known of his early life and education, but he seems to have developed unorthodox religious ideas at an early age. As a youth, he traveled widely outside Bengal and mastered several languages—Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, and English, in addition to his native Bengali and Hindi.

During the last years of the 18th century, Rammohan began lending money to Englishman who worked in Calcutta for the British East India Company bonds. In 1805 he was employed by John Digby, a lower company official who introduced him to Western culture and literature. For the next 10 years Roy drifted in and out of British East India Company service as Digby's assistant.

Rammohan continued his religious studies throughout that period. In 1803 he composed a tract denouncing what he regarded as India's superstition and its religious divisions, both within Hinduism and between Hinduism and other religions. As a remedy for those ills, he advocated a monotheistic Hinduism in which reason guides the adherent to “the Absolute Originator who is the first principle of all religions.” He sought a philosophical basis for his religious beliefs in the Vedas (the sacred scriptures of Hinduism) and the Upanishads (speculative philosophical texts), translating those ancient Sanskrit treatises into Bengali, Hindi, and English and writing summaries and treatises on them. The central theme of those texts, for Roy, was the worship of the Supreme God who is beyond human knowledge and who supports the universe. In appreciation of his translations, the French Société Asiatique in 1824 elected him to an honorary membership.

Thus, in 1815 Rammohan Roy founded the short-lived Atmiya-Sabha which is called Friendly Society to propagate his doctrines of monotheistic Hinduism. He became interested in Christianity and learned Hebrew and Greek in order to read the Old and New Testaments. In 1820 he published the ethical teachings of Christ, excerpted from the four Gospels, under the title *Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness*. This present study is confined to make a conceptual analysis on Rammohan's social reforms and movements for social justice towards it.

II. METHODOLOGY

The present study attempts to analyze Rammohan Roy : Progressive Role as a Social Reforms and Movements for Social Justice. It discusses the major concepts of Social Reforms and Social Justice created by him. The researcher used historical method of research for the study. Both primary and secondary sources were explored for collecting relevant data of the study. Authenticity and validity of the content were established through external criticism of data. Interpretation of the data was done through content analysis to establish facts and for determining trends that data suggested.

III. DISCUSSION

Social Reforms and Movements :

Rammohan Roy, who regarded education as an effective vehicle to achieve social reform and a strong advocate of introducing western learning in India. He was instrumental in setting up several institutions including the Hindu College in Calcutta in 1817, in collaboration with David Hare. Rammohan founded the Anglo-Hindu School and four years later the Vedanta College in order to teach his Hindu monotheistic doctrines in 1822. When the Bengal government proposed a more traditional Sanskrit college, in 1823, he strongly protested that classical Indian literature would not prepare the youth of Bengal for the demands of modern life. He proposed instead a modern Western curriculum of study. Roy also led a protest against the outmoded British legal and revenue administration in India.

In 1823, when the British imposed censorship upon the Calcutta (Kolkata) press, Roy, as founder and editor of two of India's earliest weekly newspapers, organized a protest, arguing in favour of freedom of speech and religion as natural rights. That protest marked a turning point in Roy's life, away from preoccupation with religious polemic and toward social and political action. In his newspapers, treatises, and books, Roy tirelessly criticized what he saw as the idolatry and superstition of traditional Hinduism. He denounced the caste system and attacked the custom of suttee (ritual burning of widows upon the funeral pyres of their deceased husbands). His writings emboldened the British East India Governing Council to act decisively on the matter, leading to the prohibition of sati in 1829.

Rammohan Roy in 1828, he setup the Brahma Samaj (Society of Brahma) that was a reformist movement of the Hindu religion that aimed at fighting social evils that were prevalent in the society. He opposed superstitious practices, customs such as Sati, polygamy, child marriage, idolatry, the rigidity of the caste system and propagated widow remarriage and sought property inheritance rights for women. Thus, his progressive role in fighting against Sati, the governor of the Bengal Presidency Lord William Bentinck formally banned the practice on December 4, in the year 1829.

He believed that individual freedom did not simply imply the country's independence from foreign rule. If our social structure is infested with deep rooted injustice, individual freedom would become in fruituous even after the independence of our country. No country would deserve political self – rule if it does not grant the right to self – determination to the individual. Such a country should undertake social reform before attaining national independence. In Roy's view, this applied to his contemporary India also.

Roy argued that India's ancient culture, which was based on the teachings of Vedas and Upanishads, was really great. But his contemporary India was alienated from its culture legacy. It was dominated by the irrational beliefs and practices like polytheism, Child marriage, ban on widow-remarriage, the custom of *Sati*. (which required a widow to be burnt alive on the funeral pyre of her dead husband), caste system and adherence to superstitions. Under this circumstances, there was little scope for the individual to exercise his free will or his right to self- determination. It was therefore imperative to liberate India form the bondage of irrational beliefs and practices which required a rigorous effort on the part of the state.

IV. FINDINGS

Raja Rammohan Roy was serious concern about the plight of women in his contemporary society and led a vigorous campaign for their emancipation. He refuted the notion that women were intellectually and morally inferior to men. He insisted on modern education for women and their role in social reconstruction. Roy advocated women's right in family property. He condemned those evil practices which were responsible for the plight of women. He opposed infanticide and he also tried convince the people that Hinduism does not allow a woman to be burnt alive as a proof of her chastity, human reason, too, does not approve this practice. A woman cannot be held responsible for the natural death of her husband; burning of an innocent women amounts to violation of human dignity. Roy argued that life is the gift of God; society has no right to destroy it. A widow, like a widower, should have the freedom to remarry. If that is not feasible, she cannot be prevented from leading a pious life.

V. CONCLUSION

In summing up it can be said that Rammohan Roy was the founder of colonial liberalism in India. He sought the help of British rulers in introducing many important social reforms in India. The credit of abolition of the inhuman practice of *Sati* in Bengal goes to Roy. He denounced those irrational beliefs which obstructed the progress and modernization of society. He also opposed various practices involving social and economic injustice and raised his voice against the oppression of peasants by the landlords, and called for the fixation of maximum rent to save the peasants from ever-increasing demands of land lords. He wanted abolition of the trade rights of east India Company, and advocated free trade. So, at the end we can say that Raja Rammohan Roy was an ardent champion of universalism.

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