

## RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY (1772 — 1833)

### Introduction:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a great socio-religious reformer. He was born in a Brahmin family on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1772 at Radhanagar, in Hoogly district of Bengal (now West Bengal). Ramakanto Roy was his father. His mother's name was Tarini. He was one of the key personalities of "Bengal Renaissance". He is known as the "**Father of Indian Renaissance**". He re-introduced the Vedic philosophies, particularly the Vedanta from the ancient Hindu texts of Upanishads. He made a successful attempt to modernize the Indian society.

### Life

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy was born on **22 May 1772** in an orthodox Brahman family at **Radhanagar** in Bengal.
- Ram Mohan Roy's early education included the study of **Persian** and **Arabic** at Patna where he read the Quran, the works of Sufi mystic poets and the Arabic translation of the works of Plato and Aristotle. In Benaras, he studied **Sanskrit** and read Vedas and Upanishads.
- Returning to his village, at the age of sixteen, he wrote a **rational critique of Hindu idol worship**.
- From 1803 to 1814, he worked for East India Company as the **personal diwan** first of **Woodforde** and then of **Digby**.
- In 1814, he resigned from his job and moved to Calcutta in order to devote his life to religious, social and political reforms.
- In November 1830, he sailed for England to be present there to counteract the possible nullification of the Act banning **Sati**.
- Ram Mohan Roy was given the title of '**Raja**' by the titular Mughal Emperor of Delhi, **Akbar II** whose grievances the former was to present

before the British king. In his address, entitled '**Inaugurator of the Modern Age in India,**' Tagore referred to Ram Mohan as '**a luminous star in the firmament of Indian history**'.

## **Ideology**

- Ram Mohan Roy was greatly influenced by western modern thought and stressed on rationalism and modern scientific approach.
- Ram Mohan Roy's immediate problematique was the **religious and social degeneration** of his native Bengal.
- He believed that **religious orthodoxies** have become causes of injury and detrimental to social life and sources of trouble and bewilderment to the people, instead of tending to the amelioration of the condition of society.
  - Raja Ram Mohan Roy concluded that religious reform is both **social reform** and **political modernisation**.
  - Ram Mohan believed that each sinner must make restitution for his sins and it is to be done through **self-purification** and **repentance** and not through sacrifices and rituals.
- He believed in **social equality** of all human beings and thus was a strong opposer of the caste system.
- Ram Mohan was attracted to **Islamic monotheism**. He said that monotheism is also the fundamental message of **Vedanta**.  
His idea of single, unitarian god was a **corrective to the polytheism** of orthodox Hinduism and to **Christian trinitarianism**. He believed that monotheism supported one **universal model for humanity**.
- Raja Ram Mohan Roy believed that unless women were freed from unhuman forms of oppression like illiteracy, child marriage, sati, purdah, Hindu society can not progress.  
He characterised sati as the **violation of every humane** and

**social feeling** and as symptomatic of the **moral debasement of a race.**

### **Contributions**

#### **Social reforms:**

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy conceived reformist religious associations as instruments of social and political transformation.  
He founded the **Atmiya Sabha** in 1815, the **Calcutta Unitarian Association** in 1821, and the **Brahmo Sabha** in 1828 which later became the **Brahmo Samaj.**
- He campaigned against the caste system, untouchability, superstitions and use of intoxicants.
- He was well known for his pioneering thought and action on the emancipation of women and especially on the **abolition of sati** and **widow remarriage.** He attacked **child marriage, illiteracy of women** and the degraded state of widows and demanded the right of inheritance and property for women.

#### **Abolition of Sati custom:**

Ram Mohan Roy was the man who boldly challenged evils like the Sati and caste systems. Rammohan Roy openly said that Sati system was more than murders according to all Shastra 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. It goes to his credit that he proposed to the Government of his times to legally abolish Sati which was a curse on the fair name of Hindu society. At that time the papers like "Samachar Darpan", 'Sambad Kaumudi', 'Bengal Harkara', 'Indian Gazette', 'Calcutta Journal', 'Friend of India' etc. protested against Sati. To establish the right of women in their paternal property,

Ram Mohan quoted the Yajnavalkya Smriti and said that women have rights in their paternal properties. With the earnest efforts of Ram Mohan , Bentinck prohibited Sati by “Bengal Sati Regulation – XVII” in 1829 A.D.

#### **Educational reforms:**

- Roy did much to disseminate the benefits of modern education to his countrymen. He supported **David Hare’s** efforts to find the **Hindu College** in **1817**, while Roy’s English school taught mechanics and **Voltaire’s philosophy**.
- In **1825**, he established **Vedanta college** where courses in both Indian learning and Western social and physical sciences were offered.

#### **Women Education:**

Equally able was the Raja’s advocacy of the education of Women. Although the concept had already been put forward by missionaries, it was the Raja who helped to popularize it among the Hindus. He said that the women of India were highly educated and that the education of women was in keeping with ancient religious traditions and beliefs. The Brahma Samaj did great service in removing the popular prejudices against the education of women that were the prevalent in the Hindu society and the credit for this goes mostly to Ram Mohan (Naik, J. P and Nurullah, S., 1974, pp.131-132).

#### **English Education:**

In field of education, Ram Mohan was one of the first thinkers in India to realize the value of Western Science, and thought. He created major opinion in favor of the English education that could generate a sense of unity among the Indian educated youths. His ideas of western education helped the Government of Lord William Bentinck to introduce European learning in India.

[www.historydiscussion.net](http://www.historydiscussion.net)).

### **Literature:**

Ram Mohan`s contributions to other aspects of social and literary life were highly valuable. True it is that, Mrityunjoy Vidyalankar, Ram Mohan Bose, Rajiblochan, Carey etc. had preceded him in the field of Bengali prose literature, yet it must be admitted that Ram Mohan contributed a style and standard which facilitated the development of Bengali prose as a vehicle of stories, novels as well as polemical literature (Banerjee, J. P., 2004).

### **Language:**

The great contribution of Ram Mohan Roy to the system of modern education was his emphasis on the study of modern Indian languages. He himself gave a great lead in the matter by writing books in Bengali on Grammar, Geography, Astronomy and Geometry and he is considered as the father of modern literary Bengali prose. His advocacy of the study and development of modern Indian languages.

### **Economic and Political Reforms:**

- **Civil liberties:** Roy was impressed and admired the British system of constitutional government for the **civil liberties** it gave to the people. He wanted to extend the benefits of that system of government to Indian people. **Press freedom:** Through his writings and activities, he supported the movement for **free press in India.**

When press censorship was relaxed by Lord Hastings in **1819**, Ram Mohan found three journals- **The Brahmanical Magazine** (1821); The Bengali weekly, **Samvad Kaumudi** (1821); and the Persian weekly, **Mirat-ul-Akbar.**

- **Taxation reforms:** Roy condemned oppressive practices of Bengali zamindars and demanded **fixation of minimum rents**. He also demanded the **abolition of taxes on tax-free lands**.  
He called for a **reduction of export duties on Indian goods** abroad and the abolition of the East India Company's trading rights.
- **Administrative reforms:** He demanded the **Indianisation of superior services** and **separation of the executive from judiciary**. He demanded equality between Indians and Europeans.

### **Religious reforms**

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy's first published work **Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhiddin** (a gift to deists) published in 1803 exposed irrational religious beliefs and corrupt practices of the Hindus as the belief in revelations, prophets, miracles etc.
- In 1814, he founded **Atmiya Sabha** in Calcutta to campaign against idolatry, caste rigidities, meaningless rituals and other social ills.
- He criticized the ritualism of Christianity and rejected Christ as the incarnation of God. **In Precepts of Jesus** (1820), he tried to separate the moral and philosophical message of the New Testament, which he praised, from its miracle stories.

### **Brahmo Samaj**

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy founded **Brahmo Sabha** in **1828**, which was later renamed as **Brahmo Samaj**.
- Its chief aim was the worship of the eternal God. It was against priesthood, rituals and sacrifices.
- It focused on **prayers, meditation and reading of the scriptures**. It believed in the unity of all religions.
- It was the **first intellectual reform movement in modern India**. It

led to the emergence of **rationalism and enlightenment** in India which indirectly contributed to the nationalist movement.

- It was the forerunner of all social, religious and political movements of modern India. It split into two in 1866, namely **Brahmo Samaj of India** led by **Keshub Chandra Sen** and **Adi Brahmo Samaj** led by **Debendranath Tagore**.
- **Prominent Leaders:** Debendranath Tagore, Keshub Chandra Sen, Pt. Sivnath Shastri, and Rabindranath Tagore.

### **Synthetic approach :**

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a man who loved Western culture and very thoroughly studied Western literature . He was loved by British liberals. Even his Majesty the King gave him audience. However, he upheld the great flag of Indian culture and civilization which he felt was the noblest. He did not borrow his ideas blindly from Western political philosophers. Nor did he try to establish the supremacy of Western over Indian culture. He simply and clearly drew his inspiration from Indian religious books thereby establishing the values and worth of Indian spiritualism.

We are more concerned here with the work of Raja Ram Mohan Roy as an educationist, and it is in this field that we find his most signal services to his country. He was one of the earliest Indians to realize that India`s greatest need was a Synthesis of Eastern and Western cultures. At the same time, he understood that the Indian mind had rusted very considerably on account of its isolation and realized that contact with Western Literature and Science alone could regenerate oriental culture, correct its follies and contribute to it the essential qualities which are lacked. (Naik, J. P & Nurullah, S., 1974).

### **Regeneration of women:**

Raja Ram Mohan Roy felt that the treatment which was being given to the women in India was unjustified. Not only did he plead for women's share in the ancestral property but he wholly supported many of their other causes. He stood for female education and also widow re-marriage. In order to give the women their rightful place in the society he stood against polygamy and also for inter-caste marriages. He was a symbol of Indian spirituality and had deep faith in that. He studied Indian religion in proper sense of the term. He believed that the ancient Indian religion in its true sense stood for religious toleration, universal brotherhood, humanism and liberalism. He very boldly said that untouchability or caste system or idol worship were only such institutions which were subsequently introduced in religion by the selfish people and thus not part of original and pure Hindu religion.

### **Literary Works of Raja Ram Mohan Roy**

- Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin (1804)
- Vedanta Gantha (1815)
- Translation of an abridgement of the
- Vedanta Sara (1816) Kenopanishads (1816)
- Ishopanishad (1816)
- Kathopanishad (1817)
- A Conference between the Advocate for, and an Opponent of Practice of Burning Widows Alive (Bengali and English) (1818)
- Mundaka Upanishad (1819)
- A Defence of Hindu Theism (1820)
- The Precepts of Jesus- The Guide to Peace and
- Happiness (1820) Bengali Grammar (1826)
- The Universal Religion
- (1829) History of Indian
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Philosophy (1829)  
Gaudiya  
Vyakaran  
(1833)

### **Conclusion**

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was one of the few people in his time to realise completely the significance of modern age. He knew that the ideal of human civilization does not lie in isolation of independence, but in the brotherhood of inter-dependence of individuals as well as nations. His attempt was to establish Indian people in the full consciousness of their own cultural personality, to make them comprehend the reality that was unique in their civilisations in the spirit of sympathetic cooperation.

