



Contribution of Raja Ram Mohan Roy : Social & Political Concerns

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Abstract:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was an educational, a socialist and a religious reformer. He challenged and transformed Hindu culture on his own new thoughts. He is called as The father of Modern India, the maker of Modern India and also famously known as "Father of the Bengal Renaissance." His domain and fields include socio-religious works, public administration and politics. He was a philosopher, a thinker and a strategist. He advocated education especially Medicine, Science and Technology and English. He founded Brahmo Samaj and seriously advocated abolition of Sati. Through Brahmo Samaj, he wanted to expose the religious hypocrisies. He fought for the rights of women. He did not believe in Idol Worship and all those rituals which are superstitious and doesn't have any scientific base or proof. The modern India now is the results of the contribution made by him through his hard work.

Keywords: Reform, Sati, Social Transformation, Nation builder, Female education, Bramho samaj.

Introduction

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a key social reformer of modern India and a vital personality of Indian Renaissance period. Due to his contribution to social reforms he was also called the "Father of Modern India". He established the Atmiya Sabha and Brahma Samaj which played an important role in abolition of Sati and child marriage. He was a scholar and a great educationist who had detailed knowledge of Sanskrit, Persian, English, Arabic, Latin and Greek. He supported English as a medium of teaching in India as he believed that teaching through English language was superior to traditional Indian education system. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the first Indian who formed a reformist movement

in India. He wanted to modernize India at the earliest, therefore, he was called as 'representative of the modern age'¹.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was born in 1772 A.D. at Badha Nagar, a small village in Bengal in a noble Brahmin family. He was so intelligent since his childhood. He was forced to leave the house at the age of seventeen due to anti-idol worship. He learnt French, Arabic, Persian English Latin, and Greek, languages. As regards idol worship, his thinking was just contrary to his father. He studied the philosophies of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and Sufism. He went to England and was deeply influenced by the English people and their culture.² He studied Buddhism in Tibet. But no language or literature or religious philosophy impressed him so much as the English language. He served in the East India Company for some time. The women of his family- became annoyed with him due to his independent thinking.³

Great Educationist

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a great scholar and independent thinker and a multilingual person. He believed that scientific education was prime necessity for upliftment of Indian society. He advocated the induction of western learning into Indian education system. He promoted study of English, Science, Western Medicine and Technology in India. Keeping this great purpose in his mind he set up the Hindu College at Calcutta jointly with David Hare, in 1817, Anglo-Hindu school in 1822 and he assisted Alexander Duff in establishing the General Assembly's Institution in 1830. Besides these he founded the City College, Vedanta College, and English Schools in Calcutta. He used his own money in welfare of education system in India. He wrote books in different language like Hindi, Bengali, Sanskrit, Persian English and other languages which he has learnt throughout his life. He makes remarkable reformation in education also. He translated ancient Indian works on religion and philosophy into Bengali. His contribution towards the propagation of education among all people was responsible to criticize him by the orthodox people of Indian society. But he continued his work among all criticism because of the dream of constructing scientific India and Society.⁴

Social reformer:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was in favor of abolishment of all social evils such as superstitions, blind faith and custom evils prevailing at that time in the Indian society. He vehemently opposed sati custom, an old Hindu ritual where widows of Indian husbands would immolate themselves in their husband's funeral pyre. He was assisted by Lord William Bentinck in his initiative to eradicate the Sati system by passing an Act in 1833. He also fought for abolishment of child marriages, cast system, female infanticide, polygamy, etc. To fight against the traditional system of

¹ Mandal and Behra, 2015, 92.

² Chapter 3, 21 & 22.

³ Chapter 4, 126 & 127.

⁴ Ibid.

evil customs he established Atmiya Sabha in 1814. Later in 1828, this association was renamed as Brahma Samaj. It is noted that Brahmo Samaj was one of the first Indian socio-religious reform movements. He assisted for the improvement of women and also for their equal right. Brahma Samaj worked towards bringing unity among different castes and creeds and fought castism and gender inequality. Brahmo samaj believed in one God. He himself believed in establishing humanitarian principles to Hindu Religion, some of them similar to Christianity, which could legitimize Hindu religion. Brahmo Samaj didn't believe in the multiplicity of gods and goddesses, idol worship or caste distinction. He wanted to establish equality in the country by forming one society.⁵

Religious Reforms:

The religion of Raja Ram Mohan Roy was not based on the principle of any parietic religion but it was the mixture of the elements of Hindu Vedanta, Sufism and Christianity because according to the principles of Brahmo Samaj, the soul has been accepted alone so there was no possibility of any difference between Indian and other religions ². The Brahmo Samaj was not at all free from the foreign influence because the principal founder of this faith was himself influenced by the western culture and education. He wanted to bring all the people of India in one roof of Bramho Samaj. He studied became scholar in three Vedanta Shastras, namely the Upanishad, the Brahma Sutras with Sankara's commentaries and the Gita. Those researches helped him to build his own personal religion and philosophy.⁶

Political activist:

Ram Mohan Roy was an independent thinker and repeatedly promoted freedom of thought. He put his efforts to oblige the British authority to appoint qualified Indians in the administrative services. He was associated with East India Company where he started his career as a private clerk and promoted to high offices in the revenue department. He visited England in a very opportune time when the charter of East India was to be renewed. He en-cash this opportunity to implement new provisions for better administration of the country. His two papers on Indian Revenue and Judicial systems are masterpieces which has an exhaustive content with accuracy and insightfulness. He advocated substitution of English in place of Parsi language in courts of law, Indian personnel in civil services, separation of offices of judges and revenue commissioners. At that time, Roy was an ambassador of the Mughal emperor Akbar II, who conferred on him the title of Raja to convince the British government for welfare of India and to ensure that the Lord Bentinck's regulation banning the practice of Sati was not overturned.⁷

⁵ Chapter 3, 21.

⁶ Karmakar, 104.

⁷ Ibid

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.⁸

Other Reforms:

Originally, Brahmo Samaj was a reformatory institution. It openly condemned the bad traditions which were common in the society. The evils like sati system, child marriage, infanticide, pardah system, caste system, drinking and untouchability were in rise during that period and they were sapping the vitality of India.⁹

As a result of constant opposition of the Brahmo Samaj, later by orthodox people of the society, an act was passed against the sati system, caste system, and child marriage infanticide and were declared illegal. Due to continuous follow-up and agitation by the Brahmo Samaj activists widow remarriage and inter caste marriages began to take place.¹⁰

As a journalist:

Ram Mohan Roy worked towards independence of news media. He agitated and fought for a removal of restrictions imposed on Press in 1835. Thus, Charles Metcalfe removed all the restrictions and gave autonomy to the newspapers in publication and management. He edited the periodical named Sambaed Kumauni and Mirat –ul- Akbar. Roy published magazines in English, Hindi, Persian, and Bengali languages. The Brahmonical Magazine in English was started in 1821 and became popular in short period. Also, the notable magazine were the Sambad Kaumudi, published in 1821 and Mirat-ul-Akbar in Persian language in 1822. He worked for freedom of press and passed a resolution.^{11, 12}

National Reforms:

It is the man who has to take initiative for women empowerment. The efforts for the upliftment of conditions of Indian women have been noticed before and after British rule in India.¹³ A socio-religious movement towards socio-religious reforms contributed important role in making of the nation and towards nation building.¹⁴

Major contributions:

Law of Female- Raja was one of rare scholars of his time to criticize the crucial aspect of society due to its essence of orthodoxy circle. He raised his voice for abolition of female discrimination and for establishing gender equality. He wrote an essay in 1822 entitled “Modern

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Karmakar, 104, 105.

¹⁰ De, 60, 61.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Behera, 2012, pp 281.

¹³ Thangamuthu, 2001, pp 2613-2614.

¹⁴ Kadam, 2012, pp 2.

Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of female” contain detailed study of Hindu law of inheritance. He was the fighter as a shoulder for the achievements of the women rights.¹⁵

Humanism and universal religion- He implemented scheme of fundamental spiritual synthesis enforcing unity of religious experience and customs based on worship of monotheism. Like David Hume to aspired for doctrine of universal sympathy, toleration and love of humanity.¹⁶

Conclusion:-

From the above discussion it is concluded that, Roy was a social, religious, economical and political reformer. Above these all he was educational thinker. Education is an overall key for the development of human being and the nation. Hence he contributed in the field of education. He was committed towards patriotism. He started reformations from Bengal and dreamed towards modern nation, India through Bramho Samaj. He believed that without social upliftment the nation cannot be built-up. He also believe in middle path between eastern and western culture. The foundation of modern India was laid by him thus, it will be easier for the coming reformers after him to build the nation. The modern India is possible only because of the work done by Roy and other reformers in British India.

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¹⁵ Thangamuthu, 2001, pp 2613-2614.

¹⁶ Heimsath, Oxford University Press, 1964, pp 1441.