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## RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY ON PAVING THE WAY FOR WOMEN'S EDUCATION

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### **Abstract:**

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the greatest feminist of India during his times. He was determined to give women her proper place in the society. Besides abolishing Sati, he advocated widow remarriage. He believed in equality of the sexes and on women's right over parental and marital property and strongly advocated education of women. He was responsible for freeing women from various social evils like polygamy, child marriage, purdah, illiteracy and sati. He relentlessly fought for women's rights in the Dharma Sabha's of the Hindus that the ancient Vedic shastric laws never sanctioned the malpractices that were done to women at that time. He also influenced the British government to bring necessary modification in the existing law. Due to his efforts, Sati pratha was banned, women got inheritance rights and education of women were highlighted as an important as education of men. He was the pioneer of women's education and their empowerment. This paper tries to review and analyse the contribution of Raja Ram Mohan Roy in the area of social reforms with reference to the condition of women at that time and how he paved the way for education of women.

**Key Words :** Polygamy, child marriage, purdah, sati pratha, rights of women and women's education.

### **Introduction**

Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1722-1833) was the father of the Indian Renaissance Movement and the greatest feminist of India. He was the founder of Brahma Samaj, a reporter of the Jana Jagaran, the founder of the Indian language press, a social reformer and a freedom fighter. British Government gave him the title 'The Father of the Bengal Renaissance'. He was given the title of 'Raja' by the titular Mughal Emperor of Delhi, Akbar Shah II. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was called 'Bharat Pathik' by Rabindranath Tagore.

He was a very well-read man and he studied various languages like English, French, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit which influenced his thinking about God. He translated religious scriptures like the Vedas, Upanishads and Quran into English.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy supported various social reforms like education of women, widow re-marriage, inter-caste marriage, property rights for women and he fought against social evils like female infanticide, child marriage, polygamy and sati.

### **Raja Ram Mohan Roy On The Then Status Of Women**

According to Raja Ram Mohan Roy, in ancient India, all men and women were treated equal. He advocated equality between the two sexes and declared that women were not inferior to men morally and intellectually. Raja Ram Mohan Roy believed that unless women were freed from inhuman forms of oppression like illiteracy, child marriage, sati, purdah, Hindu society cannot progress.

Roy argued that under the circumstances' prevalent in Bengal at that time, high caste and upper class widows had three choices: First, to live a miserable life of slaves and to serve others. Secondly, live an immoral life for their maintenance and independence. Thirdly, to die on the funeral pyre of their dead husbands which, brought respect to their families.

### **Raja Ram Mohan Roy on Polygamy**

The Bengali society that he lived in at that time was peculiar. The reputation of a family depended on the character of marriages made by its female members. A kulin Brahmin family (those with titles Mukherjee, Chatterjee, Banerjee, Ganguly) could lose its rank by wrong marriage of their daughter, whereas a non-kulin girl could bring honour to her family by marrying into a good kulin house. The result was polygamy.

In most parts of Bengal kulin boys of ten started their careers as professional bridegrooms and before they turned twenty usually they married many wives of ages from five to fifty. Matrimony became a sort of profession among the kulins. The outcome of this system was that it left a large number of women unhappy and barren. They were barren because they were widows or married to husbands with whom they did not generally cohabit.

His attacks on polygamy were based on the shastras. The shastras allowed polygamy with many restrictions, but the practice in Bengal was not according to the Shastric laws. According to the ancient Hindu shastras, a man had to apply to the courts with reasons why he needed a second wife, if his first wife was alive and only with the consent of law could he re-marry.

### **Raja Ram Mohan Roy On Property Rights Of Women**

An important aspect of the social reform movement was securing property rights for Hindu women. In the existing practice the Hindu widow had no claim or right on her husband's property except the right to maintenance as a result of which she was at the mercy of her husband's relatives.

In 1822, Raja Ram Mohan wrote a pamphlet called 'Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Female's'. In the pamphlet Roy mentioned the ancient India law to show that the shastras approved of women's right to inherit property. All widows, whether they had

sons or not, were allowed to have a share of the dead husband's estate or property. All daughters also had a right to inherit their father's property and wives had to be provided with maintenance.

Raja Ram Mohan requested the British government to pass a law to remove these barriers to inheritance and bring economic freedom and self reliance to widows. As a result of such efforts, the Special Marriage Act of 1872 with its provision for divorce and succession to property to women was passed. The Married Women's Property Act of 1874 widened the scope of stridhan (women's property) and expanded the right to own and acquire property by women. It also gave a widow the right to her husband's share of the property and a share equal to that of a son.

### **Raja Ram Mohan Roy on Abolishing Sati Pratha**

Growing up Raja Ram Mohan Roy had witnessed the heinous tradition of Sati where widows as young as 12 years of age were forced to jump on their dead husband's pyre. He promised to abolish the tradition and to do so he visited cremation grounds to persuade widows against immolation. From 1818 onwards, he formed watch groups to protect women, sought the support of other elite Bengali classes, and published articles to show that the practice of widow burning or sati had no sanction in ancient Hindu shastras or texts. Lord William Bentinck passed the Sati Regulation Act of 1829 banning the practice of Sati in India and the practice of sati was illegal and punishable by law. While the British government abolished Sati by passing a law, Raja Ram Mohan Roy was responsible for implementation of it in the grassroots.

### **Raja Ram Mohan Roy on Religious and Social Reforms**

Raja Ram Mohan Roy believed in social equality of all human beings and was a strong opposer of the caste system. He was against Hindu idol worship. He said that monotheism (the belief that there is only one God) is the fundamental message of Vedanta.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy founded several reformist religious associations for social change. He founded the Atmiya Sabha in 1815, the Calcutta Unitarian Association in 1821, and the Brahmo Sabha in 1828. He founded these social organizations to fight against idol worship, caste rigidities, meaningless rituals and other social evils like child marriage, illiteracy of women, purdah system, dowry, polygamy, female infanticide, the degraded state of widows and sati.

Later in 1828, the Brahmo Sabha was renamed as Brahmo Samaj. Its chief aim was the worship of the eternal 'One God' and it disallowed idol worship. It was against priesthood, meaningless rituals and animal sacrifices. It focused on prayers, meditation and reading of the scriptures. It believed in the unity of all religions.

### **Raja Ram Mohan Roy on Economic and Political Reforms:**

Press freedom: Ram Mohan Roy supported through his writings, the movement for free press in India. When press censorship was relaxed by Lord Hastings in 1819, Ram Mohan Roy found three journals - The Brahmanical Magazine (1821); The Bengali weekly, Sambad Kaumudi (1821); and the Persian weekly, Mirat-ul-Akbar. Ram Mohan Roy published the Sambad Kaumudi, a Bengali weekly newspaper that actively campaigned for the abolition of the Sati, inheritance of property for women and

inter-caste marriages. The efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy resulted in the freedom of Press and autonomy to newspapers in 1835.

Political activities: Raja Ram Mohan Roy was deeply unhappy by the fact that India was under British rule. But he was convinced by the fact that political freedom if gained through struggle would be meaningless if Indian is not free from the social evils.

### **Raja Ram Mohan Roy on Woman's Education:**

Ancient India had many learned women. There were two types of scholarly women - the Brahmadhinis, or the women who never married and who studied the Vedas throughout their lives; and the Sadyodvahas who studied the Vedas till they married. Lilavati, Bhanumati, Gargi Maitrayee were learned women in Ancient India who had thorough knowledge of all the Sastras/ancient texts. He supported equality between the two sexes and declared that women were not inferior to men, morally and intellectually. So Raja Ramhohan Roy was a great supporter of women's education and he strongly believed that women should not be in purdah or confined to their homes but should get equal education as men so that they could stand against the atrocities against them and also fight various social evils. In 1822, Roy founded the Anglo-Hindu school where both boys and girls could study together. The Brahmo Samaj found by him in 1828, did immense work for the propagation of women's education and encouraged families to send their girls/ women to school.

### **Raja Ram Mohan Roy on Educational reforms:**

Ram Mohan helped the British Government to promote a more liberal system of education in India.

1. Raja Ram Mohan Roy made the newspapers and his books, a medium to propagate his ideals. He also made a great contribution in the development of Bengal. Urdu, Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit and English language and literature and wrote books in all these languages.
2. He wrote books in different languages like Hindu, Bengali, Persian, English and other languages. Some of the books written by him are Vedanta Gantha (1815), History of Indian Philosophy (1829), Gaudiya Vyakaran (1833). Bengali Grammar (1826), The Universal Religion (1829) etc. He translated ancient Indian works on religion and philosophy into Bengal.
3. He made his newspapers 'Saimbad Kaumudi' and 'Miratul Akhbari' vehicles to carry his thoughts to the people. He was also in favour of making all education and literature free from any restrictions.
4. Roy believed education to be an instrument for social reform and social change.
5. He supported English as a medium of teaching and supported the introduction of western learning into Indian education.
6. In 1817, in collaboration with David Hare, he set up the Hindu College at Calcutta. In 1822, Roy founded the Anglo-Hindu school, and by the Vedanta College in 1826; where he insisted that his teaching of monotheistic doctrines be incorporated with modern western curriculum.
7. His emphasized on the study of modern Indian languages. Ram Mohan contributed a style and standard which facilitated the development of Bengali prose as well as novels, stories and polemical

/critical Bengali literature. He wrote books in Bengali on grammar, geography, astronomy and geometry.

8. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was one of the earliest Indians to realize that India's greatest need was a synthesis of eastern and western cultures. He promoted study of English, science, western medicine and technology in India.
9. He was strongly against social evils such as child-marriage, casteism, polygamy and exploitation of women. He was shocked to see the miserable condition of Hindu widows many of whom were young ladies.
10. His Brahma Samaj did a great service in removing the prejudices against the education of women that were prevalent in the then Hindu society during his time.

### **Conclusion**

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the greatest feminist during his times in India. He crusaded against Hindu brutal and inhuman customs as sati pratha where widow emulates herself on her husband's pyre, polygamy, child marriage and caste system. His efforts were also instrumental in eradicating the purdah system. He advocated the liberty and rights of women, fought for property/ inheritance rights for women, was in favour of widow remarriage and education of girls. Thus we see that Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the pioneer in his times for freeing women from all sorts of social evil so that women in those times could avail the opportunity to education and empower themselves.

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