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Pride of India- Raja Rammohan Roy

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Introduction

Besides being the wayfarer of India, this great personality Raja Rammohan Roy is also the Father of Indian Renaissance. He is a tireless social reformer who inaugurated the age of enlightenment and liberal reformist modernization in India. He was one of the founders of the Brahmo Sabha in 1828, the precursor of Brahmo Samaj a social religious reform in the Indian subcontinent. Raja Rammohan Roy appeared to be a man of Scientific temper, broad outlook and a harbinger of equality and humanism.

Life

Raja Rammohan Roy was born in British ruled Bengal to a elite but orthodox Hindu family on 22nd May, 1772 at Radha Nagar ,Hooghly District, Bengal Presidency.

His great grandfather Krishnakanta Bandyopadhyay was a Rarhi Kulin (noble) Brahmin. Among Kulin Brahmins (descendants of the six families of Brahmins who travelled from Kannauj in the 12th century) those from the Rarhi district of West Bengal were notorious in the 19th century for living off dowries by marrying several women. Kulinism was a synonym for polygamy and the dowry system, both of which Rammohan campaigned against. His father Ramakanto Roy, was a Vaishnavite Brahmin who held a position as a revenue collector during the Mughal administration. His mother Tarini devi was from a Shaivite Background. Roy had two siblings. One parent prepared him for the occupation of a scholar, the Shastri, while the other secured for him all the worldly advantages needed to launch a career in the laukik or worldly sphere of public administration. Torn between these two parental ideals from early childhood, Ram Mohan vacillated between the two for the rest of his life. Ram Mohan Roy was married three times. His first wife died early. He had two sons, Radha prasad in 1800, and Ramaprasad in 1812 with his second wife, who died in 1824. It is known that Roy's third wife had outlived him

Under his father's roof he received the elements of native education and also acquired the Persian and Arabic Language. He then went to Patna Madrasa where he Learned the Quran, the works of Sufi mystic poets and the Arabic translation of the works of Plato and Aristotle. In Banaras he studied Sanskrit and waded through the Vedas and Upanishads.

After returning to his village at the age of sixteen he drafted a rational critique on Hindu idol worship. From 1803 to 1814 he served the East India Company as the personal diwan or political agitator, first of Woodforde and then of Digby.

In 1814 he Resigned from his job and moved back to Calcutta in order to devote his life to religious, social and political reforms and serve as a great cause for the modern Indian Renaissance.

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 Mughal Emperor of Delhi, Akbar II. He was entitled as the 'Inaugurator of the Modern Age in India'. Rabindranath Tagore referred to Ram Mohan as 'a luminous star in the firmament of Indian history'.

Roy concluded that religious reform is both social reform and political modernization. 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. Pay back of one's wrongdoings must be done by himself through his own hardships. He believed in social equality of all human beings and thus was a strong opposer of the caste system. He was inspired and attracted to Islamic monotheism. He suggested that monotheism is also the fundamental message of Vedanta. His ideology of a 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 being an independent thinker believed that unless women were freed from unhuman forms of oppression like illiteracy, child marriage, sati, purdah, Hindu society will go on being a retrogressive society. He characterized sati as the violation of every humane and social feeling and as symptom of the moral debasement of a human race.

Ram Mohan Roy was greatly influenced by western modern thought and stressed on rationalism and modern scientific approach. Ram Mohan Roy's immediate diffidence was the religious and social degeneration of his native Bengal. He believed that religious orthodoxies and superstitions have become the causes of bedevilment of the mankind. The obnoxious customs have become detrimental towards the social life and sources of trouble and bewilderment to the people, instead of tending to the amelioration of the condition of society.

Contributions

Raja Ram Mohan Roy's first published work, Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhiddin (a gift to monotheists) published in 1803 exposed irrational religious beliefs and corrupt practices of the Hindus as the belief in revelations, prophets, miracles etc. It is written in Persian with a preface in Arabic.

In 1814, he founded Atmiya Sabha which was a philosophical discussion circle in Calcutta to campaign against idolatry, caste rigidities, meaningless rituals and other social ills, mainly aiming at eradicating social evils. At the association the used to conduct debate and discussion sessions on philosophical topics and also used to promote free and collective thinking and social reform. 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. From 1819, Ram Mohan increasingly turned against William Carey, a Baptist Missionary settled in Serampore, and the Serampore missionaries. With Dwarkanath's munificence, he launched a series of attacks against Baptist "Trinitarian" Christianity and was then considerably assisted in his theological debates by the Unitarian faction of Christianity.

A young Raja Ram Mohan witnessed the horrendous death of his sister-in-law through sati. The seventeen-year-old girl was dragged into the pyre where Ram Mohan Roy witnessed her terrifying and catastrophic end. He tried to protest but to no avail. She was burned alive. Those fickle minded people incanted "Maha Sati! Maha Sati! over her gut-wrenching painful screams. This incident left a deep imprint on his mind. And so, in the later years he took great actions on the emancipation of women and with the help of Lord William Bentinck he worked on the abolition of sati, a formidable ritual which required the wife to sacrifices herself by sitting atop her deceased husband's funeral pyre. He also campaigned against various kinds of social evils other than Sati like the purdah system, caste system, untouchability, polygamy, child marriage etc. He even demanded property inheritance rights for women.

In 1828, he set up the Brahma Sabha, a movement of reformist Bengali Brahmins to fight against social evils. Brahma Samaj believe that the most fundamental doctrines of Brahmoism are at the basis of every religion followed by a man. Brahma Samaj believed in the existence of One Supreme God—"a God, endowed with a

distinct personality & moral attribute equal to His nature, and intelligence befitting the Author and Preserver of the Universe," and worship Him alone. Brahmo Samaj believed that no fixed place or time was required to worship the Almighty. It is said, "We can adore Him at any time and at any place, provided that time and that place are calculated to compose and direct the mind towards Him."

Being an active educationist Roy believed education to be the primary element for social reform. He did much to promulgate the benefits of modern education to his countrymen In 1817, in collaboration with David Hare, he set up the Hindu College at Calcutta .In 1822, he found the Anglo-Hindu school, and four years later in 1826 he proposed that his teachings of monotheistic doctrines be incorporated with "modern, western curriculum" at the Vedanta college. In 1830, he helped Rev. Alexander Duff in establishing the General Assembly's Institution (now known as Scottish Church College), by providing him with the venue vacated by Brahma Sabha the first. He supported the fusion of western and Indian education. His most popular journal was the Sambad Kaumudi. It covered topics like freedom of the press, induction of Indians into high ranks of service, and separation of the executive and judiciary. When the English East India Company inhibited the publishing procedures of the press, Ram Mohan submitted two memorials against this in 1829 and 1830 respectively. He also worked on various other literary projects like Mirat-Ul-Akbar, a Persian paper consisting of brief remarks on Ancient Female Rights, the Brahmanical Magazine, a book in Bengali called Answers to Four Questions in 1822, a sanskrit tract on "Divine worship by Gayatri" with an English translation of the same, etc. 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 the Indian people. Through the columns of his esteemed dailies and activities, he supported the movement for free press in India.

Roy condemned and extremely opposed the oppressive practices of Bengali zamindars and demanded the fixation of 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 also demanded the abolition of the East India Company's trading rights. He insisted on the Indianization of superior services and separation of the executive from judiciary. He strived really hard for the equality between Indians and Europeans.

Death

In 1833 Roy came to Bristol to visit his monotheist friend, Dr Lant Carpenter, where he left a deep impression on Lant's daughter and future social reformer, Mary Carpenter. While in Bristol Roy preached at the Lewins Mead Meeting House. In mid-September he became ill and was diagnosed with meningitis. He left us on 27 September, 1833 at Stapleton, then a village to the north-east of Bristol . Ram Mohan Roy was originally buried on 18 October 1833, in the grounds of Stapleton Grove, where he had lived as an ambassador of the Mughal Empire. Nine years later he was reburied in a grave at the new Arnos Vale Cemetery, in Brislington, East Bristol on 29 May 1843.

Conclusion

Ram Mohan Roy's impact on modern Indian history was the revival of the pure and ethical principles of the Vedanta school of philosophy as found in the Upanishads. The age that commenced with Ram Mohan depicted a kind of Rebirth which was marked with freshness, vitality and excitement which was intellectual and religious. He preached the unity of God, made translations of Vedic scriptures in English, cofounded the Calcutta Unitarian Society and founded the Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmo Samaj played a major role in reforming and modernizing the Indian society. He sought to integrate Western culture with the best features of his own country's traditions. He promoted a rational, ethical, non-authoritarian, this-worldly, and social-reform Hinduism. His writings also sparked interest among British and American Monotheists. He became recognized for his daring to challenge the ageold Hindu traditions. He tried to change the society and worked for raising the status of then India. He was truly a pioneer and shall be remembered by us for an eternity.

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