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An Apostle of Women Issues: Revalidation Modernist Approach of Raja Rammohan Roy's Ideology

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Abstract

Women issues occupies a foremost place in the writings of Raja Rammohan Roy. His sincere and serious efforts to modernize brahminical order through his articles like 'The Missionary and The Brahmun' and 'A Vindication of Hindoo Religion Against the Attacks of Christian Missionaries', 'A Defence of Hindu Theism' and many more translations of Vedas and The Vedanta could not drive the countrymen so mightily as did his efforts to eradicate the practice of widow burning and advocacy of widow remarriage. Raja Rammohan Roy was in a true sense a modernist and a forebearer of Indian renaissance. Reason, rationality and a life long concern for human rights were the three pillars of his activity throughout his life. His sense of rationality did not lead him to attack religion as such but he tried to show that deviation from the classical religious concept of monotheism and the origin of various pseudo-religious puranic cults and dogmas were at the root of the contemporary social evils and that the only way to fight it out was through a process of mass awakening. In that sense, Rammohan was the first champion of women's rights in our country.

Keywords- Theological, Dichotomy, Monotheism, Harbinger, Modernity, Vindication

All sincere efforts to reform, be it religious, social, political, economic or of any other nature or description they are based on the belief in the ultimate victory of truth, justice and equality. It is very difficult to talk of woman or man without the ideological implications of multiple representations, images, reflections, myths and identifications. It transforms, deforms and alters each person's imaginary order in a country where all men are deemed as supreme creation of God, women are regarded as '*pujneeya*' but treated as slave deeming it fit that they should humbly accept and obey, without question the dictates of their masters (be their

An Apostle of Women Issues : Revalidation Modernist Approach of Raja Rammohan Roy's Ideology

BY

Dr. Shobha Bajpai

fathers, husbands or sons). In Indian social arena Raja Ram Mohan Roy emerged as a crusader and champion of women's cause without any dichotomy in his inner perception, rhetoric and outreach. The modernity of Raja Ram Mohan Roy is evident in three distinct areas, *first* in his writings on various social, economic and political issues. In these he is led by the belief that institutions are made by men and that they exist for men. This belief led him to propagate for extensive institutional reforms. *Secondly*, Ram Mohan was a passionate observer of the deteriorating conditions of the weaker section of society especially women and minorities and lower castes. He noted the emergence of middle class in society and observed that this would bring in a new change in the middle class, which would act as the harbinger of social reconstruction. *Thirdly*, Roy was instrumental in stimulating intellectual debates and discussions. He promoted an extensive use of the printing press and initiated what is known as the associational culture or multiethnicity. Reason, rationality and a life long concern for human rights were the three pillars of his activity throughout his life. His sense of rationality did not lead him to attack religion as such but he tried to show that deviation from the classical religious concept of monotheism and the origin of various pseudo-religious puranic cults and dogmas were at the root of the contemporary social evils and that the only way to fight it out was through a process of mass awakening through education and through an awareness of civil, social and economic rights. In order to popularize the true message of Hinduism, Rammohan was the first to translate the classics of Hindu religion into Bengali and English. In order to give the message that the essence of all the religions are the same, Rammohan gave original and unconventional interpretation of Hinduism, Islam Christianity- this originality of interpretation alienated and antagonized the conservative, dogmatic proponents of all the existing religions. Rammohan had to fight against all of them throughout his life. But he remained undaunted and carried the crusade. Rammohan raised the voice of revolt against all forms of social oppression and tyranny. His humanitarian concern was not limited within the boundaries of his country. Rammohan was a true internationalist- he raised his voice for freedom and democracy whenever these were trampled in any part of the world. He did not hesitate to raise his voice against the mighty British rulers whenever they tried to curb the freedom of the press or attempted to support superstitions and social prejudice in the name 'non-interference' against native religion.

Operating and remaining active in the first half of the nineteenth century, Rammohan was a true rationalist, a modernist, a champion of women rights and a life-long crusader against social oppression of any type. Calling Rammohan as the 'representative man', Amiya Kumar Sen observes "In the Raja, the spirit of self emancipation is clearly discernible in all matters to which he applied his discriminating intellect, keen social sense and encyclopedic knowledge. And he applied these qualities to all aspects of life. This is because, life for him, was an integrated whole" (Sen 1990:9(i))

An Apostle of Women Issues : Revalidation Modernist Approach of Raja Rammohan Roy's Ideology

BY

Dr. Shobha Bajpai

While talking about the seminal contribution of Rammohan Roy, Dr. Brajendranath Seal observed, “Rammohan Roy, the precursor and in a very real sense, the father of modern India, sought the universal religion, the common basis of the Hindu, Moslem, Christian and other faiths. He found that each of the national religions was based on this common faith with a distinctive historical and cultural embodiment. He was both a universalist and a nationalist at one and the same time” (Seal, 1937). As a propagator of universal religion, he declared, true religion consists in uniting the hearts of men without regard to their appearance and colour and without inspecting their beliefs and creed.

Rammohan, with his creative, enlightened and free mind was active on many fronts. Whatever he has analysed, his analysis has been rational and objective. The question is, is there a common thread which runs through all the different writings of Rammohan? Rammohan had a world view and this view was to look at the external world with a free mind, free from any superstitions. This rational mind and objective, unprejudiced analysis has alienated many of his contemporaries. He antagonised all existing religious establishments. While talking about and laying foundation of a universal religion, he antagonized the hard core Hindu fundamentalists by relentlessly fighting against Suttee, he alienated many by speaking out against injustice, inequality, and immorality, by working for an impartial judiciary, fair taxation, free up to date public schools and freedom of the press. (Robertson 1995: 172). As Rammohan wrote, nothing more impedes the cause of truth than prejudice instilled into minds blank to receive impressions. He appeals to common notions of justice as the basis for rejecting unreasonable doctrines. Rammohan’s critical and scintillating mind even would not accept ‘reason’ as the final arbiter. While talking about the ‘Synthesis’ of faith as a foundation of universal religion, Rammohan says, “I have often lamented that in our general researches into theological truth, we are subjected to the conflict of many obstacles. When we look to the traditions of ancient nations, we often find them at variance with each other, and when discouraged by this circumstance, we appeal to reason as a surer guide, we soon find how incompetent it is, alone to conduct us to the object of the pursuit. We often find that, instead of facilitating our endeavours for clearing up our perplexities, it only serves to generate a universal doubt...The best method perhaps is neither to give ourselves up exclusively to the guidance of the one or the other; but by a proper use of the light furnished by both endeavour to improve our intellectual and moral faculties. (Sen 1990:281)

With such a free mind and rational outlook, Rammohan wrote on various problems afflicting the humanity in general and the nation in particular. We intend to present here two or three aspects of Rammohan’s thought to show his essential humanism.

Rammohan’s nationalism is of a unique character. On the one hand, he swears in the name of British rule and of the benefits it has bestowed upon the native. But it is apparent that behind this mask of loyalty and reverence, there are the underlying notions of

An Apostle of Women Issues : Revalidation Modernist Approach of Raja Rammohan Roy’s Ideology

BY

Dr. Shobha Bajpai

expectations and criticisms which are very serious in nature. To a question regarding the natives' opinion about the existing form of government, Rammohan says "men of aspiring character and members of such ancient families as are very much reduced by the present system consider it derogatory to accept of the trifling public situations which natives are allowed to hold under the British government, and are decidedly disaffected by it" (Quoted in Robertson,1999:95).

Regarding the oppression of the zamindars on the ryots in charging excessive amount of rent Rammohan laments that while the 1793 Settlement had provided for a fixed amount of rent for zamindars, the same benefit has not been extended to the ryots. "I am at a loss to conceive why this indulgence was not extended to their tenants by requiring proprietors to follow the example of the government in fixing a definite rent to be received from each cultivator..."(Robertson.1999:185)

When the Press Censorship Bill was introduced in India, Rammohan, an ardent advocate of freedom of the press, made a blistering, through veiled, attack on the British Government by appealing to king against this measure which, as Ramchandra Guha said may be the first communication ever addressed to a British monarch by an Indian. As Rammohan says, it is well known that despotic governments naturally desire suppression of any freedom of expression which might tend to expose their acts to the obloquy which ever attends exercise of tyranny or oppression....they (Indians) must humbly enter their protest against the injustice of robbing them of their longstanding privileges, by the introduction of numerous arbitrary restrictions, totally uncalled for by the circumstances of the country....calculated to suppress truth, protect abuses and encourage oppression" (Guha 2010:38-39). Can there be a stronger indictment of colonial rulers? When in spite of these appeals, Press Censorship Bill remained , Rammohan stopped the publication of his 'Sambad kaumudi' as a matter of protest.

S.Tagore says Rammohan's attitude to the British government was not static but underwent changes." It proceeded from ignorant aversion to conditional support and from conditional support through disillusionment to a vision of independent India". (Tagore, 2001:56)

Though Rammohan's approach was introducing 'constitutional reforms' within the British empire and ensuring civil and political rights for natives as much as the Englishmen enjoyed (he was disillusioned regarding this), it would be wrong to claim that Rammohan believed that British rule in India would continue indefinitely. As his English biographer observed, "The prospect of an educated India, of an India approximating to European standards of culture, seems to have never been long absent from Rammohan's mind; he did, however vaguely, claim in advance for his countrymen the political rights which progress in civilization inevitably involves." Collet further claims, 'Rammohan believed the Indian nation to be capable of improvement and progress just like any other civilized nation of the

An Apostle of Women Issues : Revalidation Modernist Approach of Raja Rammohan Roy's Ideology

BY

Dr. Shobha Bajpai

world.... His great admiration for the western civilization was never blind or uncritical; it did not for a moment destroy his faith in the potentialities of his countrymen or the legitimate pride he took in the great heritage of India's past." (Collet, 1988:246)

Rev. William Adam, Rammohan's close friend, described Rammohan's belief that England should improve the educational standard of India by introducing western system of education and by granting them civil and political liberty and to prepare them ultimately to take the government of their own country into their own hands (Halder, 1878:18-19). So the prospect of a future India, independent of British rule, was not foreign to his imagination.

It is true that Rammohan was a great admirer of western civilization. But he was never a believer in the inherent superiority of Europeans over Asiatics. His writings contain enough evidence of this. It is also true that Rammohan supported free trade and European colonization in the form of settlers ("Europeans of character and capital"), but Rammohan's interest was to press into service European capital and technology for the economic development of India. Rammohan, therefore, was far ahead of his contemporaries in his vision of future India.

As Rammohan was a unique type of nationalist his special interest in the international arena also set him apart from others. C. A. Bayly has recently pointed out, Roy 'was the first Indian to represent the growth of freedom in India as an essential part of a wider transnational quest of humanity for self realization'. (Bayly, 2007). His standard of evaluating any international event was whether the people were granted enough voice and freedom. The people of Naples forced a constitution from the reluctant hands of the rulers. They could not sustain it for long in view of the opposition of neighbouring autocratic rulers. But Rammohan did not lose his optimism as he commented, "Enemies to liberty and friends of despotism have never been and never will be ultimately successful." Rammohan had cosmopolitan sympathies for contemporary popular struggles all over the world. He welcomed the news of the liberation of the Spanish colonies of South America from the tyranny of Spain. As it has been told, he celebrated the occasion by entertaining a number of his European friends at a dinner party at his Calcutta residence. He greatly admired the ideals of the French Revolution, supported by the cause of the Greek war of independence against autocratic Turkish rule and was all along an enthusiastic supporter of the Reform agitation in England (Collet, 1988:164-66). He used to contextualize international events for India. The American revolution, to him, was an example of what can happen when people's voices are not heard. Canada provided a different example- it stayed within the British dominion as its voice were heard. Robertson has beautifully summarized this situation "The North American lesson was not lost on India. Canada was the model for Indians. Rammohan issued a prescient warning. His Britannic Majesty had a clear choice. He could rule his Indian subjects justly and enjoy their undying loyalty and admiration like the Canadians or he could have another revolution

on his hands. A generation later India revolted.” (Robertson, 1999:xxxv). Rammohan’s counseling had no impact on British rule.

On the world outlook of Rammohan, Brajendranath Seal commented thus, “He was the peer of the Voltairs and the Volneys, the Diderots and the Herders across the seas; and he had seen and travelled beyond them all, a modern Ulysses, voyaging in the land of the setting sun, and descending- not once, not twice but many times – into the dark underworld, to bring messages from the old prophets in the night of Ages.” (Seal 1935:45). His severe devotion to international causes won him the admiration of even Jeremy Bentham. To Bentham, Rammohan and Del Vale, the revolutionary of Guatemala, were ‘kindred souls’. Commenting on this aspect of Rammohan’s interest, Duttagupta writes “with his thoroughbred international outlook, Rammohan anticipated much of what in modern sociological parlance is known as the sociology of International Relations. Liberty, peace and conflict resolution were the keynote of Rammohan’s world view (Duttagupta, 1972:60).

Championing the cause of women and propagating gender equity-

Rammohan Roy has been rightly remembered as a life long crusader against the brutal and inhuman widow burning system of the Hindus. While this is absolutely true, Rammohan, in course of his polemical writings against the supporters of the system, advanced a number of reasons for women’s subjugated status in our society. The logic forwarded by him and the tone and tenor of his argument hardly distinguishes him from a hard core feminist of today. In that sense, Rammohan was the first champion of women’s rights in our country. Widow burning was the cause and effect of a number of other social evils which was the result of a wrong interpretation of Hinduism. So Rammohan’s larger objective was to ponder over how best their lot can be improved and how to ameliorate their condition.

In a pamphlet entitled, ‘Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females according to the Hindu Law of Inheritance’, Rammohan had shown how the practice of debarring women from inheriting a part of their father’s property was the result of deliberate distortion of traditional Hindu law. The objective of this writing, Rammohan mentions, is to show ‘the interest and care’ which our ancient legislators took in the promotion of the comfort of the female part of the community and to compare the laws of female inheritance which they enacted and which afforded that sex the opportunity of enjoyment of life with that which moderns and our contemporaries have gradually introduced and established...” (Robertson 1999:147). In ancient Hindu law, ‘the mother had an equal share with her son in the property left by her deceased husband, in order that she may spend her remaining days independently of her children.’ From this right of inheritance, the modern Dayabhaga System of law, deprives women from property inheritance and leaves her entirely dependent on her sons and other male members. As a consequence, Rammohan says, ‘a woman who is looked up to as the sole mistress by the rest of a family one day, on the next becomes dependent on her sons, and subject to the slights of her daughter-in-law.’ One

An Apostle of Women Issues : Revalidation Modernist Approach of Raja Rammohan Roy’s Ideology

BY

Dr. Shobha Bajpai

reason why many of the widows voluntarily burn themselves is the prospect of such dependence, the insults and slights to which they will be daily subjected to as witnessed by them for other widows in society.

Not only this, the divestment of property rights for women has also resulted in the 'evil practice' of polygamy- which is another institution subjecting women to all sorts of misery, deprivation and humiliation. Rammohan says, "These restraints on female inheritance encourage, in a great degree, polygamy, a frequent source of the greatest misery in native families; a grand object of Hindoos being to secure a provision for their male offspring, the law, which relieves them from the necessity of giving an equal portion to their wives, removes a principal restraint on the indulgence of their inclinations in respect to the number they marry." Writing to Bentinck, Rammohan explained the real reason for the popularity of widow-burning in Bengal. It was not religious devotion, but unbridled greed. Noting that the Dayabhaga, the Hindu code of Bengal' grants widows a share in the marital property, he argued that relatives pressurize widows to commit suicide. By contrast, in areas where Mitakshara is prevalent, where widows have only limited inheritance rights, widow-burning is 'comparatively very rare.' (Anand, 1989:75) He declares that the polygamy among Brahmins is 'directly contrary to the law given by the ancient authors.' No wonder, S N Tagore, while commenting on this aspect of Rammohan, says, "It will also appear from a study of this tract that he was opposed to polygamy, Kulinism and the practice of selling girls in marriage (Tagore 2001:95).

Call for equality for women led Rammohan to denounce caste system. On caste, Rammohan says, "I regret to say that the present system of religion adhered to by Hindus is not well calculated to promote their political interest, the distinction of castes introducing innumerable divisions and sub divisions among them, has entirely deprived them of patriotic feeling." (Sen, 1990:384) Rammohan also advocates widow remarriage – a phenomenon in Rammohan's writings, which has not been discussed much. Realizing that the rigid Hindu system would not permit widow remarriage – it was left to Vidyasagar to prove that widow remarriage is permissible in Hinduism – Rammohan proposed the adoption of the Saiva marriage as mentioned in the Mahanirvana Tantra, One sloka there mentions, 'There is no discrimination of age and caste or race in Saiva marriage. As enjoined by Siva, one should marry a woman who has no husband or who is not 'Sapinda', that is, who is not within the prohibited degree of marriage." While commenting on this area, N. C. Sengupta says, 'The Mahanirvana Tantra, however, recognizes two kinds of Saiva marriages – temporary and permanent. And the Raja pitched upon this fact as showing the validity of marriage recognized by the Smritis... The point to note about this controversy is the way in which the Raja uses his Shastric authority for his law...His objective in pitching upon Saiva marriage was clearly the freedom of choice of the bride which it gave, for this the form of marriage the

Tantras did not recognize the barriers of caste or even widowhood.” (Sengupta, 1934). Can we conceive of a more modern mind today – two hundred years after Rammohan?

To come back to that pamphlet on women’s rights mentioned earlier, Rammohan meets point by point the slander against women as made by the supporters of the Satidaha System. As Rammohan says, the points made against women are that 1) they are by nature of inferior understanding 2) they have no resolution or strength of mind, 3) they are unworthy of trust as they are subject to passions and void of virtuous knowledge. Death is preferable to these women after the death of their husband, as, other wise, as young widows, they may be “guilty of such acts as may bring disgrace upon her paternal and maternal relations and those that may be connected with the husband.”

Regarding the point that women are of inferior understanding, Rammohan says that, taking advantage of their physical strength, men have unilaterally imposed their diktats on women. ‘They have denied to them those excellent merits that they are entitled to by nature and afterwards they are apt to say that women are naturally incapable of acquiring those merits.’ Women has been denied the right to get education, ‘If after instruction in knowledge and wisdom, a person can not comprehend or retain what has been taught to him, we may consider him/ her as deficient; but as you keep women generally void of education and aquirements, you can not, therefore, in justice pronounce on their inferiority.’ Has there been a stronger voice for the indictment of patriarchy?

Regarding the contention that women do not have strength of mind, Rammohan gives the example of the voluntary Satis who ignore the prospect of painful death merely by their strength of resolution. How many men can conquer the spectre of death? Regarding women’s trustworthiness, Rammohan says that men should better not mention about their own trustworthiness. ‘The number of the deceived women would be found ten times greater than that of betrayed men (in the hands of women)’. Of course, one charge can be brought against women – they render their trust to men too easily and too readily, ‘from which they suffer much misery, even so far that some of them are misled to suffer themselves to be burnt to death.” (Robertson 1999:144).

Rammohan has eloquently discussed the domestic drudgeries to which women are subjected to – unilaterally by men. Women are recognized as a half of her husband – sometimes, a ‘better half’ but ‘they are treated worse than inferior animals’ ‘For the woman is employed to do the work of a slave in the house, such as, in her turn, to clean the place very early in the morning, whether cold or wet, to scour the dishes, to wash the floor, to cook night and day, to prepare and serve food for her husband, father, and mother-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law and friends and connections....If in the preparation or serving up of the rituals they commit the smallest fault, what insult do they receive from their husband, their mother-in-law and the younger brother of their husband.” (Robertson, 1999:145). Rammohan laments that even after women are subjected to so much misery and deprivation, there is no

An Apostle of Women Issues : Revalidation Modernist Approach of Raja Rammohan Roy’s Ideology

BY

Dr. Shobha Bajpai

compassion for them among men and that, even after that, after the death of their husband, they are tied down and burnt to death. He believed that a society is to be judged not by percepts but by practices – by the way it treats its most vulnerable members. In protecting the rights of women, a just society protects everyone.

The Banning of Satipratha System

If, for a single reason, Rammohan will ever be remembered by Indians for his role as a modernizer, it is his active role in putting an end to the cruel system of Satidaha. It caused a flutter in the academic circle, when, R. C. Majumdar, the famous historian, stated that the chief credit for the abolition of cruel Sati rite must be given to Lord William Bentinck and not to Rammohan Roy.”(Majumdar 1977:51). Majumdar cites two reasons for this conclusion.

One was a letter written by Bentinck on 12 June, 1829 to Astell, Chairman of the Board of Directors, East India Company before he became the Governor General of India. He wrote, “There can not be a man more anxious for the abolition of that horrible rite than myself. I do not believe that among the most anxious advocates of that measure any one of them could feel more deeply than I do, the dreadful responsibility hanging over my happiness in this world and the next, if, as the Governor-general of India, I was to consent to the continuance of that practice for one minute longer. I determined therefore, before I came to India that I would virtually take up that matter and that I would come to an early determination upon it.” Majumder says that this letter shows that anyway Bentink would have put an end to it. But while this letter is true, objectively Rammohan’s role could never be denied. Referring to this controversy, the Bengal Harkara, in an editorial stated, “Let us not, therefore, offer our exclusive praise and gratitude either to Rammohan Roy or to Lord William Bentinck. The former would never have succeeded in his patriotic and enlightened labours without the cooperation of the latter nor would Lord Bentink have ventured on so desirable a measure, if the minds of the natives had not been prepared to abandon the worst of superstitions by the unwearied labours of their distinguished countrymen”(Tagore 2001: 93). While the premises of Majumder are true, his conclusions are wrong. It has been rightly mentioned that before Lord Bentinck finally enacted the law, he carefully considered the likely reaction of the native soldiers (the Sepoy Mutiny was only 30 years away), the attitude of the Judiciary and the attitude of the native population.

The second point, mentioned by Majumdar, deserves more serious consideration. Majumdar writes, it was revelation to many when I pointed out that Rammohan Roy, when consulted by Bentink, opposed the idea of legislation prohibiting the sati rites’. It is true that Rammohan opposed the idea of legislation initially. But it is also true that when, after this legislation, the conservatives led by Radhakanta Deb appealed to the House of Commons for banning of this law, Rammohan, in an anti suttee petition to the House of Commons said, that this barbarous and inhuman practice has been happily abolished by the Government of

An Apostle of Women Issues : Revalidation Modernist Approach of Raja Rammohan Roy’s Ideology

BY

Dr. Shobha Bajpai

the Right Honourable Lord William Cavendish Bentinck, who has thus conferred inestimable benefit on the native population of India". When the same petition was being heard by the Privy council and when Rammohan came to know that Lord Marquis of Lansdowne was going to support the petition, Rammohan wrote in an inimitable satire, "R.R(Rammohan Roy) will not fail to be present there to witness personally the scene in which an English Gentleman of highly liberal education professing Christianity, is to pray for the reestablishment of suicide and in many instances, actual murder"(Robertson1999:271).

The three tracts which Rammohan wrote for 'conscientizing' the people about the evils of *sati* deserves mention here. The first one 'Translation of a Conference between an Advocate for and an Opponent of the Practice of Burning Widows Alive' was translated in English in 1818. The second on 'A second Conference between an Advocate for and an Opponent of the Practice of Burning Widows Alive' was written in 1820. The third one, 'Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments of the Ancient Rights of Female' was written in 1822. In all these tracts, Rammohan advocated for the abolition of this cruel institution taking extensive help from religious literature with the point of view that this murderous system was a later day deviation and that there is no support for this in the classical religious texts. Rammohan was also instrumental in publishing 'Sambad Kaumudi' a Bengali weekly in which also there was a crusade against *sati*. All these tracts and pamphlets were written originally in Bengali. This came out of Rammohan's firm belief that the real root of the abolition of a system lies in the mind of the people. He wanted to awaken the people against the system.

This was the reason why Rammohan was initially hesitant about the success of a coercive legal measure to put an end to the system. As it has been said "Roy fought against the practice of *sati* on three fronts. The first and the most important was that of public opinion. Roy, through writings, speeches, agitation and discussion prepared the minds of the people in the form of the abolition of *sati* and explained how the practice had no support in any of the religious texts and hence governmental action in the matter could not be an interference in religious affairs". The second front was influencing the government to take some initiative in the matter and the third cause was an enquiry into the causes that provoke women to commit *sati*. It was, as a result of the cumulative effort of all these endeavors that the Bill against *sati* was passed. It is also noteworthy to mention that when Rammohan submitted an anti-suttee petition before the House of Commons against the initiative taken by Radhakanta Deb and others to ban the Act, he mentioned, among other arguments, that "the regulation prohibiting the practice has been received with gratitude by many, while the majority of the native population have remained passive and acquiescent although nearly a twelve month has elapsed since the abolition took place" (Robertson1999:167). Rammohan's credit lies in the fact that he prepared the native mind against such cruel rites and this was done with the help of religion itself.

An Apostle of Women Issues : Revalidation Modernist Approach of Raja Rammohan Roy's Ideology

BY

Dr. Shobha Bajpai

The Harbinger of Modernity

With his rational outlook, a pervasive humanism, a cosmopolitan bent of mind and a deep thirst for education and knowledge, Rammohan's chief aim was to conscientize human mind about his environment and to propagate for changes in outlook and institutions which do not stand the scrutiny of reason. He lived in an age where social awareness ran high among the conservatives too. Much of the writings are in the nature of a call for debate and are of a polemical nature wherein he substantiated his logic and argument by providing a new interpretation of India's religion and tradition by drawing heavily from the norms, institutions and practices from the West. No wonder, Rammohan was a passionate supporter of introducing the western system of education in our country as this type of education only can free man of the shackles of conservatism. In a letter written to William Pitt, while advocating the need for modern education, Rammohan says, " (if) the improvement of the native population is the object of the government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry and Anatomy, with other useful science(s)..." (Quoted in Guha 2010:45)

That Rammohann was the first 'modern man' of a modern India, can be substantiated by Rammohan's contribution in three distinct areas. First, his writings on various social political and economic issues afflicting mostly contemporary India where Rammohan establishes a point of view with logic, arguments, facts and comparative data from out of his encyclopaedic knowledge and interest. Through all these writings, Rammohan was led by the belief that institutions are made by man and that the only test of their validity is their reliability and utility for mankind. So his writings were not abstract or theoretical only. These were 'action-oriented' and 'goal-oriented.' So Rammohan 'turned gradually from theory to practice, from doctrine to institutions, from polemics to reform' (Seal 1935). With reference to these writings, Rammohan declares, "...should my labour prove in any degree the means of diminishing the extent of those evils, I shall ever deem myself amply rewarded" (Quoted in Robertson 1999:52). He mercilessly criticizes effects of baneful institutions which are all the sources of prejudice and superstition and of the total destruction of moral principles as countenancing criminal intercourse, suicide, female murder and human sacrifice". Side by side with that he advocates for the development of alternative institutions like a free press and a free judiciary, western education and an improved technology, ensuring of civil and political rights for citizens, and a new society based on the principles of equity and equality.

Rammohan could also identify the modus operandi of the different classes and their historical role. He noticed the close relations of reciprocity and understanding between the settlement enabled affluent classes of zamindars and the English rulers, the deteriorating condition of the ryots and the indifference of the British rulers to their plight. Most importantly, Rammohan mentions, the emergence of the middle class and the historic role they are going to play in social reconstruction. In his paper 'The Bengal Herald' dt,

An Apostle of Women Issues : Revalidation Modernist Approach of Raja Rammohan Roy's Ideology

BY

Dr. Shobha Bajpai

June 13, 1829, he welcomed the emergent middle class in the country: "A class of society has sprung into existence, that were before unknown, these are placed between aristocracy and the poor and are daily forming a most influential class. It is the dawn of a new era. Whenever such an order of men have been created, freedom has followed its trains". Rammohan's appeal was to this educated intelligent rising middle class people who could act as the harbinger to social reconstruction and change.

The other major area of influence of Rammohan was in the sphere of stimulating intellectual debates and discussion through printing press and the development of associational culture. With the increasing popularization of the printing press, printed literature grew and the consumers of this growing literature were Bengali as well as British. Guha has stated, this emerging intelligentsia read books as well as newspapers, which by early nineteenth century had become a part of the public sphere in Bengal. As Guha has mentioned. In 1817, a Calcutta School Book Society was established whose members included Bengali, Hindus and Muslims, as well as Europeans. In its first four years, the Society had printed and distributed some 1,25,000 copies of books published in half-a-dozen languages (Guha 2010:25). Such literati societies in Calcutta included, among others, the Brahma Samaj, the Academic Association, the Tattwabodhini Sabha, the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge, the Dharma Sabha, the Bengal British India Society and the Bethune Society.

It goes to Rammohan's credit that he was the initiator and a person who provided momentum to this intellectual exercise. He was the editor or founding member of three newspapers, One in the Persian, the Bengali Sambad Kaumudi and the English Bengal Herald. He was the founder and patron of the 'Atmiya Sabha'—a forum for stimulating intellectual discussion in all the spheres of society. As Robertson points out. (These endeavours) served not only as a grass roots literacy campaign but also created a new empowered class of employable world conscious, self-confident Bengalis equal to Europeans in India" (Robertson 1999:xxxii).

This intellectual endeavour of Rammohan continued after his death. The 'Tattwabodhini Sabha' (1839-1854), which was the largest and the most important cultural organization of Bengal, came into existence with the declared objective of revitalizing the 'religion of Rammohan Roy' and other movements initiated by him. The Tattwabodhini period which was indeed the 'most productive period of Bengal'. There was not a single great figure of any historical importance who can be said to be completely free from Rammohan's influence. The journal published by the Sabha, viz Tattwabodhini Patrika was published in five languages—in Bengali from Calcutta, in English from Madras, in Hindi and Urdu from Bareilly and in Tamil also from Madras (Tagore 2001:97).

Regarding this influence N.K. Bose writes, "the Tattwabodhini Sabha and the Tattwabodhini Patrika were destined to play a significant part in the moral and intellectual

An Apostle of Women Issues : Revalidation Modernist Approach of Raja Rammohan Roy's Ideology

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reconstruction of Bengal. The journal published information on science, history and social affairs, answered charges by Christian missionaries; and although it played a defensive role, it made people proud of their civilization in its reformed version and rendered satisfied pride, the basis of an acceptance of the best which the West had to offer” (Bose,1959:47).

In 1828, Rammohan founded the Brahmo Samaj (the society of god), which preached the worship of one God on the basis of what its founder claimed were the original teachings of the Vedas and which was deadly against any form of idolatry. The orthodox Hindus immediately derided him as sinful atheist. But contemporary history will show the tremendous influence of the Brahmo Samaj movement on contemporary society either in the form of determined support or in the form of fierce opposition. The lingering effect of the Brahmo Samaj movement was so great, that even after about 100 years of its foundation, Mr Thomson writes in the Census Report of 1921, “though the number of progressive Brahmos is small and increased but little in the last 20 years, thousands of intellectual Hindus of Bengal have been so profoundly influenced by the monotheistic ideas of the Brahmo Samaj as really to be Brahmos at heart, through they have not actually joined the Samaj” (Quoted in Tagore2001:98). The Brahmo Samaj movement was the first organized attempt for reforms in Hindu religion. Who can deny the tumultuous uproar it created through Rammohan, Debendranath Tagore and Keshab Chandra Sen on the subsequent social movement?

It is another story that the dream Rammohan had of a future India – rational and resurgent-did not fully materialize. The modernism or new awakening that began with Rammohan and his interpretation of Vedanta practically gave way to Hindu revivalism and the avatarbad of Keshab Sen or Sri Ramkrishna (Habibullah, 2006:62). The new economy which Rammohan thought would be developing, actually did not come about so immediately. The colonialist rulers did not deserve the immense faith which Rammohan had on their inherent goodness. But historical forces cannot be shaped by the efforts of a single individual. But that he made efforts for modernization can not be denied nor can it be denied that as the first modern man Rammohan has a decisive influence in setting the course of modernization of India.

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