

Raja Rammohun Roy: Pioneer of Indian Renaissance and Social Transformation

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Abstract

Raja Rammohun Roy was one of the foremost architects of the modern Indian renaissance whose reformist ideas laid the foundation for social, religious, and intellectual transformation in 19th-20th century India. His reforms emerged during a period marked by rigid social customs, religious orthodoxy, and widespread social inequalities. Deeply influenced by rationalism, humanism, and the ideals of the Enlightenment, Rammohun Roy advocated a reinterpretation of Hindu religious traditions through reason and ethical values. He strongly opposed practices such as Sati, child marriage, caste discrimination, and the denial of women's rights. His relentless campaign against the Sati system significantly contributed to its abolition through the Regulation XVII of 1829 under Governor General William Bentinck. Rammohun Roy also emphasised the importance of women's education, widow remarriage, and property rights for women, thereby initiating an early discourse on gender equality in colonial India. His intellectual contributions extended to the field of education, where he supported the introduction of Western scientific learning and English education alongside traditional Indian knowledge systems. Through newspapers such as *Sambad Kaumudi* and *Mirat-ul-Akbar*, he advocated freedom of expression and public awareness.

The reform movements initiated by Rammohun Roy not only challenged conservative social structures, but also inspired subsequent reformers and nationalist thinkers in India. His synthesis of Eastern spiritual traditions and Western liberal thought played a crucial role in shaping modern Indian society.

Key Words: Social Reform, Brahmo Samaj, Sati Abolition, Women's Rights, Religious Reform, Indian Renaissance, Rationalism.

Introduction

Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) occupies a towering position in the history of modern India. He is rightly regarded as the Father of the Indian Renaissance and the

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First Modern Man of India. At a time when India was suffering from social decay, intellectual stagnation, and moral degradation, Rammohun Roy emerged as a powerful reformer who sought to bring light, reason, and humanity into Indian society. His mission was not only to free India from oppressive customs, but also to harmonise the best elements of Indian tradition with the progressive ideas of the modern West. His work marked the beginning of a new age-an age of awakening, reform, and rational thought. Rabindra Nath Tagore clearly admits having received the basic ideals of his life from Rammohun Roy and describes the mission of his hero in the following characteristics: “Rammohun belongs to the lineage of India’s great seers who age after age here appeared in the arena of our history with the message of the Eternal man.”

Rammohun Roy’s reforms were multidimensional-social, cultural, religious, educational, and political. He believed that true progress of a nation lay in the moral and intellectual elevation of its people. Thus, he worked to eliminate inhuman practices like Sati, child marriage, and caste discrimination; advocated women’s rights and widow remarriage; promoted rational monotheism; and laid the foundation of modern education in India. His efforts culminated in the formation of the *Brahma Sabha* (later *Brahma Samaj*) in 1828, which became a powerful vehicle for social and religious reform in Bengal and beyond. Rammohun’s reformist activities did not emerge in isolation. They were deeply rooted in the historical circumstances of this time. To understand his contributions fully, one must first examine the context of India in the late 18th and early 19th centuries-a period marked by both decline and transformation.

Historical Background

The India into which Rammohun Roy was born was a country caught between two worlds-the decaying medieval order and the emerging modern era. Politically, the Mughal Empire had collapsed, and the British East India Company was gradually establishing its dominance over large parts of India. Economically, the old feudal system was disintegrating, and new colonial structures were taking root. Socially, Indian society was plagued by rigid caste hierarchies, superstition, priestly dominance, and numerous social evils that had reduced human dignity to a low ebb. Women, in particular, suffered under oppressive customs. The practice of Sati- the burning of widows on their husbands’ funeral pyres was widespread, especially among certain Hindu communities in Bengal and Rajasthan. Child marriage and the prohibition of widow remarriage condemned countless women to lives of misery and isolation. Illiteracy was rampant, and education was confined largely to the upper castes and the study of Sanskrit or Persian scriptures. The spirit of rational inquiry had almost vanished.

Religiously, Hinduism had degenerated into ritualism and idolatry. The priestly class monopolised religious authority, and the original philosophical depth of Hindu scriptures was buried under layers of superstition and dogma. At the same time, Islamic influence had declined, and Christianity, carried by missionaries under British patronage, was beginning to spread. In this context, many Indians began to reflect on their own traditions and the need for reform.

Simultaneously, the British presence introduced Indians to Western Ideas-liberalism, human rights, equality, and scientific reasoning. English education, the printing press, and Christian missionaries exposed Indians to a world of new thought. The encounter between the East and the West produced a ferment of ideas, and out of

this intellectual awakening emerged the first generation of Indian reformers-foremost among them, Raja Rammohun Roy.

Early Life and Education

Rammohun Roy was born on May 22, 1772, in the village of Radhanagar in the Hooghly district of present West Bengal. His father, Ramakanta Roy, was a conservative Hindu of the Vaishnava sect, while his mother, Tarini Devi, was more liberal in outlook. This difference in parental temperament perhaps shaped Rammohun's balanced approach to tradition and reform later in life.

He received his early education in a traditional village school, where he learned Bengali and some Sanskrit. Later, he studied Persian and Arabic at Patna, acquiring deep knowledge of Islamic theology and philosophy. His acquaintance with Persian Sufi literature broadened his mind and instilled in him a spirit of tolerance and universalism. Subsequently, he also learned Sanskrit at Banaras, where he studied the Vedas, Upanishads, and various systems of Hindu philosophy.

In his youth, Rammohun wrote a controversial tract titled *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin* (A Gift to Monotheists) in which he rejected idolatry and argued for the worship of one God. The work reflected his early inclination toward rational religious and universal humanism-ideas that would later shape his entire career.

Rammohun served for several years in the British East India Company as a *Dewan* (revenue officer) under John Digby, which gave him financial independence and firsthand experience of British administration. During this period, he came into close contact with European officials and scholars, which strengthened his belief in the value of Western education and liberal thought.

Emergence as a Reformer

By the first quarter of the 19th century, Rammohun Roy had become convinced that India needed a thorough intellectual and moral regeneration. He observed that social evils were not only morally wrong but also impeded the nation's progress. His approach to reform was based on two fundamental principles-reason and human dignity. He believed that religion should be based on rational understanding and moral values rather than rituals and superstition. At the same time, he realised that social reform was essential for the upliftment of Indian society. He therefore launched a campaign against Sati, polygamy, caste discrimination, and other injustices. In 1814, Rammohun founded the Atmiya Sabha in Calcutta, which became a forum for discussing social and religious issues. It attracted several young intellectuals who shared his vision of reform. Later, in 1828, he established the Brahmo Samaj, a movement dedicated to the worship of one God and the promotion of social equality, education, and morality.

Through his writings, both in English and Bengali, Rammohun sought to awaken Indian consciousness. He translated the Upanishads into Bengali to make their teachings accessible to common people, wrote essays and pamphlets against social evils, and corresponded with British officials to demand reforms. His intellectual courage, logical reasoning, and mastery of multiple languages made him one of the most respected voices of his time.

Transition to the Reform Era: Social Reforms

The early 19th century saw Rammohun Roy emerge not merely as a critic of social evils but as a bridge between India's ancient spiritual heritage and modern rational

thought. His reforms were not aimed at destroying tradition, but at purifying it. He believed that the essence of Hinduism lay in its philosophical monotheism, as expressed in the Upanishads, and that the external practices of idol worship and ritualism were later corruptions.

Rammohun's method was evolutionary, not revolutionary. He sought to convince people through education, debate, and persuasion rather than force. His rationality was balanced by deep spirituality, and his Western outlook was harmonised with Indian values. This balance made his reforms acceptable to both traditionalists and modernists, and his legacy continued through later reformers like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshab Chandra Sen, and Swami Vivekananda.

Raja Rammohun Roy's greatest and most enduring contributions were his social reforms, which sought to liberate Indian society from oppressive customs and restore human dignity. His reformism was grounded in deep moral conviction, rational inquiry, and a universal sense of justice. He firmly believed that true religion must promote human welfare and equality. Thus, he considered social reform to be a sacred duty. Among all his campaigns, Rammohun Roy's struggle against the practice of Sati remains his most celebrated achievement. Sati involved the self-immolation of widows on their husband's funeral pyres, often under societal pressure rather than free will. Rammohun was horrified by the cruelty of the practice and viewed it as a violation of both human rights and true Hinduism. He began his campaign in 1818 by writing a series of essays and petitions that exposed the moral and scriptural fallacies supporting Sati. He argued that the Vedas and the Upanishads never sanctioned such an inhuman act. In his tract *A Conference between an Advocate for and an Opponent of the Practice of Burning Widows Alive* (1818), he used logical reasoning and scriptural references to show that Sati was a later distortion of Hindu customs, not an essential religious duty.

Rammohun Roy personally visited cremation grounds to rescue widows and provide them shelter, an act of great courage given the social hostility he faced. His writings and activism created a wave of moral awakening in Bengal. Eventually, his sustained efforts bore fruit when Governor General Lord William Bentinck passed Regulation VII of 1829, officially banning Sati throughout British India.

This legal abolition was a historic victory of humanitarianism and reason. Rammohun Roy's contribution was so significant that many British officials and Indian reformers credited him as the moral force behind the law. The courage and intellectual strength he displayed in this movement made him the symbol of India's awakening conscience.

Rammohun Roy's reformism extended beyond Sati. He was one of the earliest champions of women's rights in modern India. He advocated the right of widows to remarry and supported women's inheritance rights. He believed that the subjugation of women was the primary cause of India's moral and social decay. He argued that women were intellectually equal to men and must be given opportunities for education and participation in public life. His writings in Bengali newspapers like *Sambad Kaumudi* consistently highlighted the plight of women and urged society to treat them with respect and equality.

Raja Rammohun Roy also opposed polygamy and child marriage, which were widespread among upper caste Hindus. He maintained that these practices were

incompatible with both reason and morality. His advocacy for monogamy and moral marriage based on mutual respect reflected his progressive vision for Indian society. His defence of women's rights was not merely rhetorical; it was philosophical. He viewed gender equality as essential to national regeneration, emphasising that no society could progress while half its population remained oppressed and illiterate.

Rammohun Roy was a strong critic of the caste system, which he regarded as a major obstacle to India's unity and progress. He believed that caste divisions were socially destructive and morally indefensible. In his religious and social gatherings, he deliberately encouraged people from different castes to interact and worship together. Through the Brahmo Sabha, he sought to establish a community where social equality and human dignity were upheld regardless of caste or creed. Although he did not advocate complete abolition of caste in the early stages, his teachings clearly undermined the foundations of caste hierarchy. By emphasising the spiritual equality of all human beings, Rammohun laid the groundwork for later anti-caste movements in India.

Religious Reforms

Raja Rammohun Roy's religious reform was as revolutionary as his social activism. By the end of the eighteenth century, Hinduism in Bengal and many other regions had sunk into ritualism and idolatry. Priestly domination, caste exclusiveness, animal sacrifice, and blind faith had replaced the philosophical subtlety of *the Upanishads*. Religion had become a mechanical repetition of ceremonies without moral or spiritual significance.

At the same time, India was facing the intellectual challenge of the West. Christian missionaries, armed with the Bible and modern education, criticised Hindu customs as barbaric and idolatrous. Islamic monotheism, once a source of cultural synthesis, had lost much of its vitality. In this atmosphere of stagnation, there arose a new class of educated Indians who, influenced by Western rationalism, began to seek a reinterpretation of their faith. Rammohun Roy was the earliest and most brilliant representative of this awakening.

Rammohun's religious thought was eclectic and universal. Three main influences shaped his outlook: Firstly, from the Upanishads he drew the concept of a single, formless, eternal God who is the source of all existence. He saw in them a rational spirituality free from idol worship and priestly mediation. Secondly, his early education in Persian and Arabic at Patna acquainted him with the Quran and with Sufi mysticism. The strict monotheism and emphasis on the unity of God in Islam reinforced his conviction that polytheism was a corruption of true religion. Thirdly, Contact with European missionaries and liberal thinkers exposed him to the moral teachings of Jesus and the humanitarian ideals of Enlightenment Europe. He admired Christianity's emphasis on love, forgiveness, and service, though he rejected its dogmas and miracles.

The earliest expression of Rammohun's reformist spirit appeared in his Persian treatise *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin* (A Gift to Monotheists, 1803). In it he denounced idolatry and ritualism as the result of ignorance and priestly manipulation. He argued that God is one and formless, that truth can be realised through reason and reflection, and that blind adherence to external symbols only degrades human spirituality. Later, in his Bengali and English writings, he continued this rational critique. He maintained

that the great Hindu scriptures, especially the Vedas and Upanishads, never prescribed image worship. The degeneration of Hinduism, he said, it had occurred when people began to personify divine attributes into deities and sought material benefits through ritual sacrifice. By returning to the philosophical monotheism of the Upanishads, Indians could rediscover the moral essence of their faith. Rammohun's campaign against idolatry was conducted not in the spirit of iconoclasm but of purification. He never advocated the destruction of temples or images: instead, he appealed to reason and scriptural authority to show that true religion lay in inner realisation and ethical conduct. To make the spiritual message of the Upanishads accessible to educated Indians and Europeans alike, Rammohun undertook a pioneering series of translations: *Vedanta Sara* (1815) and *Ishopanishad* (1816), *Kena and Katha Upanishadas* (1817-1819), *Mundaka Upanishad* (1819). Each translation was accompanied by a lucid preface or commentary emphasising the monotheistic and rational aspects of the text. He translated into English and Bengali, often with Persian renderings, to reach both Indian and European readers.

In these works, Rammohun presented Hinduism not as a collection of superstitions but as a profound philosophical system compatible with modern reason. He wrote that 'the ancient sages of India enjoined the worship of the one eternal being, which pervades all things,' and that idolatry was contrary to their intention.

By reintroducing the Upanishads to educated Indians, he reconnected them with the spiritual grandeur of their heritage and prepared the ground for later reform movements such as the Arya Samaj and the Ramkrishna Mission.

Rammohun's ideas found organisational expression in 1828, when he founded the *Brahmo Sabha* in Calcutta. The word Brahman derives from Brahman, the Supreme Spirit. The Sabha's aim was to promote the worship of one God, the study of ethical religion, and the eradication of social and religious evils. In 1830, the group moved into a new building, the Brahmo Mandir, and formally adopted a Trust Deed, drafted by Rammohun himself. The deed laid down the principles of the movement: 1. worship of one eternal, formless, omniscient, and beneficent God. 2. no representation of God by image, statue, or picture. 3. no rituals, sacrifices, or offerings of any kind. 4. No distinction of caste, creed, or nationality among worshippers. 5. Promotion of moral living, charity, and the pursuit of truth. Weekly services consisted of prayers, readings from various scriptures-including the Upanishads and moral passages from the Bible-and hymns in Bengali and Sanskrit. The atmosphere was simple and spiritual, devoid of priestly mediation. The Brahmo Sabha thus became the first organised theistic reform movement in modern India. After Rammohun's death, it was revived and expanded by Debendranath Tagore and later by Keshab Chandra Sen, evolving into a dynamic force for social and religious change.

Rammohun Roy's engagement with Christianity was another dimension of his religious reform. He deeply admired the ethical teachings of Jesus but rejected the dogmatic and supernatural elements of Christian theology. In 1820, he published *The Precepts of Jesus: The Guide to Peace and Happiness*, a compilation of moral teachings extracted from the Gospels. Rammohun's purpose was twofold: to demonstrate that the essence of Christianity lay in moral conduct rather than miracles, and to encourage inter-religious respect. He praised Jesus as a great moral teacher who preached love, compassion, and forgiveness. However, he denied the doctrines of the Trinity, the

divinity of Christ, and vicarious atonement as contrary to reason. This publication provoked a sharp controversy with missionary leaders like Rev. Joshua Marshman and Rev. William Ward of Serampore. They accused him of distorting Christianity, while Rammohun Roy defended his position through a series of rational pamphlets—*Appeal to the Christian Public* (1821), *Defence of the Precepts of Jesus* (1822), and others. In these, he argued that reason was the final test of revelation and that all religions should be judged by their moral fruits, not their dogmas. Through these debates, Rammohun established himself as a champion of religious freedom and rational faith. He demonstrated that Indians could engage with Western thought on equal intellectual terms without surrendering their independence.

A central principle of Rammohun's religion was universalism—the belief that the truth is one, though sages call it by different names. He saw the various religions of the world as different expressions of the same moral and spiritual reality. He once wrote, "I consider all the religions of the world as so many paths, suited to the capacities and tastes of different nations, to lead mankind to the great goal—virtue and happiness." This universal outlook made him one of the earliest advocates of inter-faith dialogue. The Brahmo Sabha services included readings from the Hindu, Christian, and Islamic scriptures, symbolising his conviction that all faiths shared a common ethical foundation.

Rammohun's tolerance was not mere sentimentality; it was grounded in intellectual humility and humanistic ethics. He believed that intolerance arose from ignorance and that the true purpose of religion was to unite, not divide, humanity. In this sense, his thought anticipated the later universalism of figures such as Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore.

Rammohun's religion was both ethical and rational. He insisted that morality must be the core of religious life. He wrote, "The practice of virtues is the true worship of God." Religious rituals or doctrines had value only if they promoted compassion, honesty, and social welfare. His rationalism was equally strong. He believed that reason is God's greatest gift to man and that no revelation could contradict reason. Blind faith and superstition, he said, degraded human dignity. In this respect, he was a child of both the Upanishadic tradition of inquiry and the Enlightenment's spirit of rationality. Yet his rationalism was not atheistic. He rejected materialism and believed deeply in a personal, moral God. For him, reason and faith were complementary—reason purified faith from superstition, and faith gave reason a moral direction.

The religious reforms of Rammohun Roy had far-reaching consequences for modern India. After Rammohun's death in 1833, Debendranath Tagore revived the Brahmo Sabha and gave it a stable theological foundation through the *Brahma Dharma*. He continued Rammohun's emphasis on monotheism and ethical living.

Keshab Sen introduced new elements such as social reform and universal theism, carrying Rammohun's message to the masses. His movement inspired branches across India. Although Dayananda Saraswati differed in approach, his return to the Vedas and rejection of idolatry echoed Rammohun's pioneering efforts. The later harmony of the religious philosophy of Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Swami Vivekananda can be seen as a broader, spiritual continuation of Rammohun's universalism. Through these successors, Rammohun's vision of a rational, ethical, and universal religion became one of the defining features of India's modern spiritual identity.

Rammohun's religious reform was not without critics. Orthodox Hindus accused him of betraying the faith and adopting Christian ideas, while some British missionaries saw him as an insincere syncretist. Even within the Brahmo Samaj, later generations debated whether his reliance on reason diluted the emotional and devotional aspects of religion. Nevertheless, these criticisms overlook the historical context. In an age when religion was a tool of oppression and superstition, Rammohun restored to it a moral and intellectual dignity. His aim was not to destroy faith but to make it compatible with reason and humanity.

Reforms in Education

Rammohun Roy considered education the most powerful instrument for social transformation. He believed that ignorance was the root cause of superstition, social backwardness, and intellectual stagnation. According to him, without education, neither social reform nor national progress could be achieved. His educational reforms were revolutionary because they introduced a modern outlook into a traditional educational system that had become outdated.

Rammohun felt that the traditional educational institutions such as *tols*, *pathshalas*, and Persian *madrastas* had become detached from practical life and modern scientific advancement. He argued that the existing system failed to equip students with knowledge useful for contemporary society. Traditional education encouraged memorisation of ancient texts but neglected science, mathematics, economics, and rational inquiry. As a result, Indian society remained intellectually stagnant while Europe progressed rapidly through scientific discoveries and modern education. Rammohun therefore advocated a complete reorientation of education toward practical knowledge and scientific learning.

One of Rammohun Roy's most significant contributions was his strong support for English education and Western sciences. He recognised that the West had made remarkable advances in fields such as physics, chemistry, mathematics, medicine, and political philosophy. He believed Indians must access this knowledge to modernise society. In 1823, when the British government proposed spending funds on a Sanskrit college in Calcutta, Rammohun submitted a famous memorial to Lord Amherst. In this petition, he criticised the decision to spend public money solely on traditional Sanskrit education. He argued that such education would keep Indians confined to outdated knowledge. Instead, he urged the government to promote instruction in mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, anatomy, modern sciences, and political economy. His argument reflected extraordinary foresight. He understood that modern scientific education would produce critical thinkers capable of reforming society.

Rammohun did not merely advocate reform in theory; he actively helped build institutions. In 1817, he supported the establishment of Hindu College in Calcutta along with David Hare and Edward Hyde East. The institution introduced students to Western philosophy, literature, science and liberal political thought. It produced a generation of enlightened Indians who played a major role in the Bengal Renaissance.

Rammohun founded the Anglo-Hindu School to promote English education combined with Indian philosophical studies. This institution represented his educational philosophy: a synthesis of East and West. He believed Indians should preserve their spiritual heritage acquired scientific and rational knowledge from Europe. Thus, education should not destroy Indian culture but enrich it.

In 1826, he established Vedanta College in Calcutta. This institution was unique because it combined: study of Vedanta philosophy, modern scientific subjects, Western logic and rational thought. This reflected his belief that India's future depended on balancing ancient wisdom and modern knowledge.

Rammohun believed education had moral and social purposes beyond literacy. He wanted education to cultivate rational thinking, moral responsibility, freedom from superstition, and social awareness. He also emphasised the need for female education, believing women's upliftment was impossible without access to knowledge. Though women's education expanded significantly under later reformers, Rammohun laid the ideological foundation. Thus, his educational reforms transformed learning from a ritualistic exercise into a tool of enlightenment and progress.

Reforms in Journalism

Rammohun Roy is widely regarded as one of the founders of modern Indian journalism. He understood the immense power of the press in educating people, shaping public opinion, and promoting reform. He used journalism as a weapon against social evils, religious orthodoxy, administrative injustice, and intellectual backwardness. For him, a free press was essential for public awakening. Rammohun recognised that reform movements would not succeed unless ideas reached the public. Since newspapers were emerging as powerful media under colonial rule, he used them strategically. His journalism aimed to spread rational ideas, educate common people, criticise harmful customs, and encourage debate and discussion. He made journalism a platform for social and political consciousness. In 1821, Rammohun launched the Bengali weekly *Sambad Kaumudi*. It became one of the most influential newspapers of its time. Its major themes included the abolition of Sati, women's rights, educational reform, social justice, and administrative accountability. Through *Sambad Kaumudi*, Rammohun reached educated Bengali society and encouraged public discussion on critical issues. The paper played a major role in building support for the abolition of *Sati*.

In 1822, he founded the Persian journal *Mirat-ul-Akbar* (Mirror of News). Since Persian remained influential among intellectual and administrative circles, this journal expanded his reach beyond Bengali readers. It covered social reform, political developments, government policies, and international affairs. This journal reflected Rammohun's cosmopolitan outlook and broad intellectual interests.

One of Rammohun Roy's greatest contributions to journalism was his defence of freedom of the press. In 1823, the colonial government imposed strict press regulations requiring newspapers to obtain licenses. Rammohun strongly opposed this censorship. He argued that freedom of the press was essential because it prevented abuse of power, encouraged accountability, enabled public discussion, and protected civil liberty. He submitted petitions against the restrictions, arguing that suppressing the press would harm both rulers and subjects. This made him one of India's earliest defenders of civil liberties and democratic rights.

Before Rammohun, political discussion among Indians was limited. Through journalism, he created a culture of public opinion. His newspapers encouraged Indians to think critically about society, governance, and rights reform. Thus journalism became an instrument of nation building.

Political Reforms and Political Thought

Although remembered mainly as a social and religious reformer, Rammohun Roy was also one of India's earliest modern political thinkers. His political ideas anticipated many principles later associated with liberal democracy and constitutional governance.

Rammohun was deeply influenced by European liberal thought, especially ideas concerning liberty, equality, human rights, rule of law, and constitutional government. Yet he adapted these ideas to Indian realities. He believed good governance should protect life, liberty, property, and human dignity. His political philosophy reflected both Enlightenment rationalism and Indian ethical thought. Rammohun criticised several aspects of British administration in India. He demanded fair governance, judicial reforms, reduced corruption, and greater accountability. He argued administration should serve public welfare rather than narrow colonial interests. He also criticised excessive taxation and administrative inefficiency that burdened common people.

Rammohun advocated an independent and fair judiciary. He wanted equality before law, separation of executive and judiciary, and protection of civil rights. He believed arbitrary power led to injustice and corruption. These demands were highly progressive for the early 19th century.

Rammohun believed Indians should have greater participation in governance. Though he did not demand complete independence, he argued that administration would improve if Indians were included in decision-making. His demands included inclusion of Indians in higher offices, consultation with educated Indians, and representation in governance. This early political consciousness helped shape later nationalist demands.

Rammohun Roy strongly defended civil liberties. He supported freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, and freedom of the press. He believed rights were essential for human dignity. In many ways, he anticipated constitutional values later embedded in independent India.

Rammohun also expressed concern about economic exploitation under colonial rule. He criticised heavy land revenue, economic inequality, and exploitative taxation. He argued policies should protect peasants and encourage economic welfare. His economic views reveal his broader commitment to justice and public welfare.

He had a global political vision. He followed international events and admired constitutional struggles worldwide. He supported movements for political liberty, constitutional reform, and human rights. His outlook transcended narrow nationalism and embraced universal liberal values.

Conclusion

In 1830, Rammohun Roy travelled to England as the representative of the Mughal Emperor Akbar II to plead for the Emperor's pension and to advocate Indian causes. Even there he continued his religious mission. He visited churches, met Unitarian ministers, and attended philosophical gatherings. His discussions with Unitarians in London and Bristol confirmed his belief that his own theistic worldview was in harmony with global currents of liberal religion. He died in Bristol in 1833, far from his homeland, but his tomb became a symbol of India's encounter with modernity. British liberals mourned him as a champion of truth and reason; Indians remembered him as the prophet of a new faith.

In retrospect, Rammohun Roy was not merely a reformer; he was a nation builder and visionary humanist. He perceived that social progress and religious reform were inseparable, for one without the other would leave society half reformed. His approach to change was evolutionary-based on reason, dialogue, and moral persuasion rather than confrontation. The seeds he sowed in the early 19th century eventually blossomed into India's larger reformist movements led by figures such as Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshab Chandra Sen, Swami Vivekananda, and Mahatma Gandhi.

Thus, he occupied a unique and permanent place in the history of modern India as one of the earliest and most influential architects of socio-religious transformation. His reforms marked the beginning of a new intellectual and moral awakening in Indian society at a time when the country was burdened by deep-rooted social evils, religious orthodoxy, and intellectual stagnation. More than a mere reformer, Rammohun Roy was a visionary who recognised that the regeneration of India required both social reconstruction and religious purification. His reformist mission was therefore comprehensive, touching every aspect of public and private life and laying the foundation of what later came to be known as the Indian Renaissance.

Ultimately, the greatness of Raja Rammohun Roy lies in his unwavering faith in the power of truth and reason to transform society. He showed that meaningful reform begins with courage-the courage to question inherited customs, challenge injustice, and imagine a better future. His life stands as a testimony to the enduring power of ideas in shaping civilisation. In every sense, Raja Rammohun Roy was the harbinger of modern India, whose social and religious reforms continue to inspire generations in the pursuit of justice, enlightenment, and human progress.

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