

Contribution of Haji Muhammad Mohsin and Raja Ram Mohan Roy to the People of Colonial Bengal

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Abstract: Haji Muhammad Mohsin, a well-known Bengali Muslim benefactor, lived from around 1732 until November 29, 1812. The founding of the Hooghly Mohsin College and the Hooghly Imambara is his most significant achievement. Though these were established after his death, they were established with the surplus amount of Syedpur estate donated by him for philanthropic activities. He also helped thousands of victims during the Great Bengal Famine of 1770, which was a major contribution to his participation in the event. Apart from this, he donated all his property and made a wakf estate for this purpose. Hence, he is called Danveer. Another prominent figure in 19th-century Bengal was Raja Ram Mohan Roy, an Indian reformer who lived from May 22, 1772, to September 27, 1833. He was one of the founders of the Brahma Sabha, which was established in 1828 and served as the model for the Brahma Samaj, a social-religious reform movement on the Indian subcontinent. Akbar II, the Mughal emperor, bestowed upon him the title of Raja. His impact might be seen in the domains of public policy, education, religion, and politics. He gained notoriety for his attempts to outlaw child marriage and sati. He is popularly called the "Father of the Indian Renaissance." He came out of orthodoxy, removed the evils from society, and spent his whole life on his philanthropic activities. Through this study, attempts have been made to make a comparative study and make a historiographical representation of these two scholars of Bengal in parallel.

Keywords: Philanthropy, Renaissance, wakf estate, Brahma Samaj, reformation.

Introduction

18th century Bengal witnesses the transformation from prosperity to decline in the aspect of socio-economic status of the people lived in that period. In this stagnant period a dynamic figure Haji Muhammad Mohsin was born. In 1143 AH (1731–1732 AD), Mohsin was born in Bengal to Haji Faizullah and Zainab Khanam, who were Shia Muslims. Having received home education, he acquired knowledge via the study of the Quran, Hadith, and Fiqh. Later, he embarked on a journey to other Asian nations, stopping up in the areas that are now Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and the Arab Peninsula. Along with visiting Mecca, he also travelled to Medina, Kufa, Karbala, and other sacred sites. He was awarded the title Haji after completing the Hajj. After his return, Mohsin

assumed responsibility for overseeing his half-sister Munnujan's land. She was the widow of Mirza Salahuddin, who served as the Nawab of Bengal's Naib-faujdar, or deputy military governor, of Hooghly. Her mother Zainab left her a large wealth; Aga Motahar, her first husband, had land and assets in Hooghly, Jessore, Murshidabad, and Nadia. All of Munnujan's wealth was passed down to Mohsin at her death in 1803. In 1806, he established a waqf, or trust, with his whole wealth of 156,000 taka and left this money to charity. Three-quarters of his income were to go towards religious and educational initiatives, four-ninths towards pensions for the aged and crippled, and the last two-ninths towards the two trustees' expenditures. Another prominent figure in 19th century Bengal was Raja Ram Mohan Roy. In the Bengal Presidency's Hooghly District, in Radhanagar, Ram Mohan Roy was born. Krishnakanta Bandyopadhyay, his great-grandfather, was a Rarhi Kulin Brahmin. Kulin Brahmins, descended from the six generations of Brahmins brought from Kannauj by Ballal Sen in the 12th century, were known in the 19th century for living off dowries by marrying several women. These Brahmins were from the Rarhi area of West Bengal. Kulinism was synonymous with the dowry system and polygamy, two things that Rammohan opposed in his campaign. Tarini Devi, his mother, was of Shaivite descent, while her father, Ramkanta, was a Vaishnavite. He was a brilliant student of Arabic, Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit, as well as Persian and English. He broke with religious dogma and campaigned against the practice of satidaho, which involves burning the bride at the husband's pyre. Ram Mohan Roy was also a philanthropist who fought against the social evils that were against the interest of the people. In this article, the above mentioned two great men of Bengal are highlighted.

Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of this research article is to present Haji Muhammad Mohsin and Raja Ram Mohan Roy as philanthropists. When the former is a great social activist, the later was a great social reformer. They both came out from narrowness and did their humanitarian services. The people of this era as well as the coming generations should learn the lesson from their life and time. They will be inspired and perform their deed for the humanitarian services leaving aside the caste barrier and religious sentiment.

Methodology

To accomplish this article, deductive way of study has been followed based on secondary data such as books, research articles, visiting libraries and archives. Primary data have been also used as per the availability and necessity. Field visit has been also entertained to fulfil the purpose of the study.

Results and Findings

At first focus has been made to highlight the life and time of Haji Muhammad Mohsin as well as his humanitarian services. Haji Mohammed Mohsin was the Great Saint of Bengal in the 17th century. He was born in Hooghly in 1730 A.D. His wisdom, devotion, and generosity have helped to preserve his legacy. He has a difficult and precarious existence. It's fascinating to learn about his family's journey from Persia to India, where they accumulated enormous wealth and acquired a number of priceless assets that ultimately served as the cornerstone for the establishment of the illustrious Wakf that bears his name. Agha Faizullah, the paternal grandfather of Haji Mohamed Mohsin, was a merchant prince from Persia who came to India in the early 1700s to seek his fortune. He was known to the Persians for his spirit of adventure and settled in Murshidabad, where he conducted a vast trade. His attention was then drawn to the thriving port of Hooghly, and as it was a handy commerce hub, he took refuge there. His son, Haji Faizullah, with whom he had just parted, also went to join their father. The name of his well-known grandson, Haji Mohammed Mohsin, is glowing in all its majesty and lonely splendour in Hooghly.

During the latter years of the emperor's reign, a rich and well-known Persian businessman called Agha Motahar arrived in Hooghly and began a significant salt trade after earning a position at the court of Aurangzeb. Here, our main interest is in the fortunes of this magnificent guy. With the assistance of his subordinates, among whom was his sister's son, Haji Faizullah, he managed his company so efficiently that he quickly rose to the position of one of the province's richest men. As his assets increased, he broadened the scope of his operations and designated Haji Faizullah as his surat agent. Agha Motahar used his enormous wealth to buy multiple homes in different mahals. Like a devout Muslim of the Imamia sect, he had attained the pinnacle of material affluence and is now focused on achieving spiritual blessedness, which is the culmination of our existence on Earth. Along with his religious and altruistic deeds, he also secured permission to restore Murshid kuli Khan, the viceroy of Bengal's exquisite Imambarah, achieving the goal he had long loved. He maintained a large staff of attendants and servants. He had set aside a piece of his land called Sobhna for the observance of his religious ceremonies, particularly the Moharrum mourning days. He had three wives; the third, Zainab Khanam, gave birth to a daughter called Marium Khanam, also known as Munnu Jan Khanam. The father's whole emotions were focused on this one kid. When he passed away at the age of 78, his daughter was just seven years old. He left all of his belongings to her and named his sister, Sonhaji Faizulla, as his daughter's guardian. After five months, Haji Faizulla, who had been in Surat at the time, returned and assumed responsibility for Munnu Jan Khanam and her belongings. He did a very good and honest job managing the properties. The renowned Haji Mohammed Mohsin was the sole child of his joyful marriage to the then-young Zainab Khanam, whom he married out of concern that she might later marry someone else and cause problems for him and her daughter.

In the final and lasting testament to his sister's love, Haji Mohammed Mohsin received all she had left to him in her will. Haji Mohammed Mohsin thus became the legitimate heir to this enormous inheritance, which he dedicated to God, at the age of 73. However, in contrast to common mortals, his immense fortune did not alter him. He continued to be the very devout man that he was, leading the simple life of a scholar and wanderer. He never married, even though his sister really begged him to. His solitude provided him with plenty of opportunity to develop these qualities and ready his mind to receive those impressions, which were mirrored in the world in exquisite prismatic diffraction. His circle of love and generosity was only expanded by his fortune. It provided him with the chance to assist the suffering human race in a more effective and humane way. Not only did he assist people who approached him, but he also went door to door looking for the hungry widow, the troubled orphan, and the indigent gentleman. The underlying theme of his life was love for other people, and he taught us this by observation and example rather than via theory. Similar to his father and sister, he was now eager to redirect his charitable giving into a more beneficial avenue by pledging his assets to the Prophet and the blameless Imams, to whom he owed all of his compassion and generosity. Looking about and thinking about his impending demise, he signed a trust document on April 20, 1806 A.D., designating all of his income for the Prophet's and Imams' fathea, Moharrum's expenses, and all other feast days and festivals that have been a custom of this illustrious family since Agha Motahar's time. On the walls of the Hooghly Imambarah, which faces the Hooghly River, is an inscription of a copy of the deed, which is written in both Persian and English and contains the donor's explicit statement of intent and goal for establishing this bequest. After providing some background information about the founder of the property that was the subject of the endowment, as well as the founder's full intention and desire to maintain and carry on with the usages and charitable expenses of the Fathea, etc. (Marasim wa Akhrajat i Hussainiah), of the Hazrat (whom be blessing and reward), and of the sinless Imams (on all of whom be the blessing God), the deed continued by stating that the entire income of the property after paying the government revenues was to be divided into 9

equal shares. (i) Three portions were to be used for the upkeep of the Imambarah and the cemetery, as well as for the Ashra of Moharram-al-Haram (ten days of holy Moharrum) and all other feast days and festivals. (ii) Two shares in an equal amount should be given to the two mutawallis nominated to oversee the endowments' religious and zamindari activities as compensation;(ii) Four shares to be distributed for the institution, respectable men, peadasan, and other individuals' monthly stipends. Even after the death of Haji Muhammad Mohsin, so many educational institutions like Hooghly Mohsin College, Hooghly Madrashah, Brajalal College , hospitals etc were set up , infrastructure development has been done , scholarship has been provided and other charitable activities have been done and till now this wakf estate has been working well for humanitarian services.

Now let us have look on the contribution of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Raja Ram Mohan Roy is recognised as the founder of the Modern Indian Renaissance. Of his deeds, the most conspicuous was the eviction of the savage and brutal Sati Pratha. His efforts have aided in the elimination of child marriage and the purdah regime. Bengali culture was saddled by a number of evil customs and laws in the late 18th century, sometimes referred to as the "Dark Age." Rigid moral rules and extensive rituals were enforced, most of which were incorrectly translated and adapted from ancient civilizations. Common behaviours that were detrimental to women in society were child marriage, polygamy, and Sati. The most pernicious of these customs was the Sati Pratha. At their husbands' funeral pyre, widows would self-immolate as part of a ceremony. Although women were allowed to participate in the practice in its original form, it soon became mandatory, particularly for households belonging to the Brahmin and upper castes. In order for the much older men to benefit from the karmic fruits of their wives' Sati sacrifice, young girls were wed to them in return for a dowry. The ladies often needed to be coerced or even drugged into compliance since they did not want to be subjected to such acts.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy voiced his opposition to this savage custom. He submitted his thoughts to the higher-ups of the East India Company and talked candidly. The Governor-General, Lord Bentinck, expressed empathy with Roy's thoughts and goals. As a result, the Bengal Sati Regulation, also known as Regulation XVII, A.D. 1829 of the Bengal Code, was enacted in spite of strong opposition from the mainstream religious community. The legislation forbade the practice of Sati Daha in Bengal Province, and anybody found engaging in it would be subject to legal action. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's legacy will be one of strong support for women, not only for his role in bringing a stop to the Sati practice but also for his advocacy of equal inheritance rights for women and his outspoken opposition to child marriage and polygamy. He was also a strong opponent of the inflexible caste divisions prevalent in his period.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy tried to make reformation in education also. Despite having a great respect for old literature like the Vedas, Upanishads, and Quran, he became aware of the gaps in his understanding of science and reasoning. He demanded that an English education system be implemented in the area, teaching scientific courses like physics, chemistry, mathematics, and even botany. He and David Hare co-founded Hindu College in 1817, which went on to become one of the premier educational institutions in the world and produced some of the brightest minds in the nation. This laid the foundation for the transformation that would take place in India's educational system. He established the Anglo-Vedic School in 1822 and the Vedanta College in 1826 with the goal of fusing old philosophical teachings with contemporary rational courses.

Raja Ram Mohn Roy made a significant further contribution when he established the reformist Brahmo Samaj movement in Calcutta in 1828. With the primary goals of transforming Indian society and bringing the actual teachings of the Vedas, Upanishads, and other Hindu texts to the general public, it was the first reform movement in India. In the 1840s, a number of well-known

figures, including Debendranath Tagore and Keshub Chunder Sen, were involved with the Samaj. The movement, which opposed the dowry system and the repressive caste system as well as introduced educational reforms to educate the people, was essential to modernising Indian culture. One of India's most progressive reformist groups, Brahma Samaj, promoted women's emancipation by opposing child marriage, the Sati polygamy custom, and the way Indian widows were treated. Along with advocating monotheism, the Samaj opposed idolatry and polytheism in the Hindu faith. They forbade criticising the teachings of other faiths and drew inspiration from them.

Conclusion

This sums up Haji Mohammed Mohsin's motivation for donating all of his possessions, which was not only in accordance with the Imamiah faith in permanent appropriation—for the sake of God, his religion, and his own salvation—but also the fact that he was a true lover of mankind. We have also seen how Haji Mohammad Mohsin's trust property has been handled for humanitarian services. Then should we not call him a real social activist? On the other hand, Raja Ram Mohan Roy spent his whole life in social reformation, educational reformation, and religious reformation. In that period, was it so easy to stand against the existing social customs? Haji Muhammad Mohsin, instead of a luxurious life with a vast property, spent a life like a saint and donated all his property for the wellbeing of the people. Is it not a great sacrifice? These two are our assets, and if we call the former a pioneer of philanthropy, the latter is obviously a pioneer of social reformation.

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