

Raja Rammohan Roy as a Pioneers of Bengal Renaissance

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Abstract: Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a great socio-religious reformer. He was born in a Brahmin family on 10th May, 1772 at Radhanagar, in Hoogly district of Bengal (now West Bengal). Ramakanto Roy was his father. His mother's name was Tarini. He was one of the key personalities of "Bengal Renaissance". He is known as the "Father of Indian Renaissance". He re-introduced the Vedic philosophies, particularly the Vedanta from the ancient Hindu texts of Upanishads. He made a successful attempt to modernize the Indian society.

Keywords: Renaissance, India, Vedanta

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INTRODUCTION

Renaissance marked the end of the feudal period or the dark ages. The period between 5th and 15th century A. D. is known as the feudal period or the dark ages. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru has aptly described the feudal period in his book *The Glimpses of World History*: "After the downfall of Rome the old order had collapsed. There was disorder and anarchy and violence and force everywhere. The strong seized what they could and held on to it as long as a stronger person did not come to throw them out. Strong castles were built and the lords of these castles went out with raiding parties and harried the countryside, and sometimes fought others like themselves. The poor peasants and workers on the land of course suffered the most. Out of this disorder grew up the feudal system". Famous artist Leonardo Da Vinci's description of coarse men aptly describes the feudal lords:- "Coarse people of bad habits and shallow judgments do not deserve so beautiful and instrument, such a complex anatomical equipment, as the human body. They should merely have a sack for taking in food and letting it out again, for they are nothing but an alimentary canal!"

The Renaissance movement challenged the feudal system. It was a system where the serfs were considered equal to animals. The feudal lords exploited them and the Church protected the interests of the feudal lords. Renaissance is a western concept. The French term renaissance means rebirth. European renaissance in 15th century signifies the rebirth of humanity. It started in Florence in 1498 and was a spontaneous moment of the people. It brought about changes in almost all fields of Human Endeavour such as art, literature, technology. Science forged ahead. The Church was demystified; there was a revolt against the Church. People started thinking independently and making experiments. Printing technology drastically changed the world. Copies of Bible were easily

available. Many people learned to read and write. The more people read, the more they thought. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru says "And the more one thinks the more one begins to examine existing conditions and to criticise them. And this often leads to a challenge of the existing order. Ignorance is always afraid of change. It fears the unknown and sticks to its rut, however miserable it may be there. But with right reading comes a measure of knowledge, and the eyes are partly opened."

Socio-Political Causes of Renaissance

The following were the most important socio-political causes of Indian renaissance movement:

Western Education

Almost all the important Renaissance thinkers including Bhandarkar, Ranadey, Chiploonkar, Tilak, Agarkar, Gokhale, to name only a few, had high academic degrees in Western education.

Though Macaulay aimed at creating a class of civil servants by introducing English education in India, the same education created revolutionary thinkers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Mahadev Govind Ranadey and Vivekananda. The most important characteristics of Western education were: intellectual bias, rationalism, individualism, critical attitude to scriptures, synthetic approach to religion, secularism, cosmopolitanism and humanism. All these characteristics were imbibed by the intelligentsia through the growth of Western education in India. Thus, the spread of education by the Britishers in India was undoubtedly the most important social factor responsible for the new awakening and reconstruction of Indian thought.

Establishment of new associations and societies

Western education and a more intimate contact with the Western society led to an intense urge for social and political reforms in India. This led to the establishment of dozens of associations and societies. Jaitrao Fule established Satya Shodhak Samaj with the purpose of reforms in Maharashtra. Prarthana Samaj was another important institution of social reforms in Maharashtra. In Bengal Brahmo Samaj was established by Raja Ram Mohan Roy mainly for intellectual awakening but also for social and political reform. Another important association was Ramakrishna Mission founded by Vivekananda in the name of his master Ramakrishna. Swami Dayananda established Arya Samaj which rapidly spread throughout the northern India and carried out reforms in almost all the directions. Besides, theosophical society established by Annie Besant was an important society for religious reforms in India. All these new associations and societies encouraged new thinking and reconstruction of social institutions on the pattern of ancient Indian specimen.

Indian approach to the economic problems

An important part of the revivalist tendency of the Renaissance period was an Indian approach to the economic problems. Eminent economic thinkers pointed out that India cannot solve its economic problems by an uncritical application of the doctrines of Smith, Ricardo and Mill. They, on the other hand, pointed out that solutions can be found in the procedures adopted by ancient Indian village republics. M.G. Ranadey, in *The Essays on Indian Economics* pleaded for an Indian approach to economic problems. This emphasis is the background of the economic programmes of reconstruction found in the thought of Rabindranath Tagore and M.K. Gandhi in 20th century.

Rise of nationalism

The Renaissance period witnessed a rise of nationalism in almost all the slave countries of the world including India. Illustrious poets and thinkers wrote works expressing intense sentiments of patriotism. Vishnu Krishna Chiploonkar was a powerful writer of Bengal. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee founded the *Banga-Darshan* in 1872 and published his famous patriotic novel *Ananda Matha*. This novel was highly acclaimed by Sri Aurobindo who was another great patriotic writer that India produced. Swami Dayananda also strongly advocated nationalism in most of his writings. The most important leader of the rise of nationalism in India, however, was B. G. Tilak, who, through his two famous weeklies, *The Kesari* and *The Maharashtra* took the leading part in spreading patriotic sentiments in the country. Vishnu Shastiy Chiploonkar was another great patriotic writer of Maharashtra. Other poets and writers praised national heroes in their writings and aroused national sentiments in the nation. Ram Das and Shivaji, Maharana Pratap and Guru Govind Singh were praised by these poets and writers.

All this created a wave of nationalism and patriotism very much explicit in the writings of contemporary Indian political thinkers including Vivekananda, Tagore and Gandhi.

The growth of Hindi literature

An important social factor in the new awakening and reconstruction of Indian thought was the growth of Hindi language and literature. This is so since the rise of a nation is very much dependent on the growth of a national language. Hindi was propagated as the national language of India and as a popular vehicle for the communication of national and patriotic sentiments. Among the noteworthy writings of this period were Premeagar of Lallulal, Nasiketopakhya of Sadal Misra and Bharat Durdasha of Bharatendu Harischandra. Swami Dayananda Saraswati wrote his famous *Satyartha Prakash* in Hindi. Most of the prose and poetry works of his period expressed patriotic and nationalistic sentiments.

Establishment of Western political institutions

The most important political factor responsible for new awakening and reconstruction of Indian thought was the introduction in India of Western political institutions such as executive council, the law member, the Law Commission and the Supreme Court etc. These political institutions aroused nationalism in Indian political thought and Indian nationalists started demanding more and more political rights and equality before law. There was a growing demand for the introduction of British type representative political bodies in the country by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dadabhai Nauroji, Surendranath Banerji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and other Indian political leaders.

Establishment of Indian National Congress

The most momentous event in the history of Indian nationalism was the establishment of Indian National Congress by A. O. Hume in 1885. Though Hume established Indian National Congress with the purpose of creating a class of thinkers who could advise the British to introduce necessary reforms in India, gradually Indian National Congress became a platform for the demand of complete freedom from the British rule. The most important contribution in this direction was made by B. G. Tilak, Lala Lajpatrai and Vipin Chandra Pal. After the extremists were separated from the main organisation they carried on their activities separately. In 1920 the same Indian National Congress which was a beginning of political activity in Renaissance period became the herald of Indian Nationalism under the leadership of M. K. Gandhi who demanded Purna Swarajya. Along with presenting political demands before the Britishers, leaders of Indian National Congress were active in social and political reforms activities. Each one of them intensely thought over the social and political problems of the country and tried to find out solutions on the basis of

suggestions from the West and inspirations from the ancient Indian literature.

Rise of new economic class

No country can progress in thought or in practice without the indigenous economic support. The British rule in India gradually encouraged Indian people to carry on trade and commerce on capitalistic basis. This led to the rise of a new economic class which gradually became the economic base of social and nationalistic movements. It was this class which contributed generously to the funds of Brahma Samaj, the Arya Samaj and the Indian National Congress. It can be said without exaggeration that without the economic support of this class modern Renaissance could not get a momentum in the country.

Western political literature

Besides the introduction of Western political institutions, the Britishers introduced Western political literature in India. While some of the literature was imported from the West such as the works of Karl Marx, Lenin, Mussolini, Hitler, Spencer, Mill, Tolstoy and Ruskin etc., literature was produced by Indian writers also introducing the life and works of the leaders of Western society to the Indian people. The important among these writers were Surendranath Banerji, Lala Lajpatrai and V. D. Savarkar. Among the later writers were Iqbal and Sri Aurobindo and the celebrated Nobel prize-winner Rabindranath Tagore.

Social legislations

All the above factors led to an increase in intellectual awakening and a demand for social legislation in different fields. Almost all the Renaissance thinkers were pained at the condition of women and low-caste people in India. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Swami Dayananda, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, M. G. Ranadey and Telang demanded social legislation in every field of social life. They demanded the abolition of Sati custom, the emancipation of women and elimination of all the drawbacks of the down-trodden elements in the society. Before this demand the Britishers were almost cool to social reform in India. But the demands raised by these eminent leaders gradually resulted in social legislation in different fields leading to social and political emancipation of the backward class.

The above socio-political factors created a new awakening in the country. This awakening resulted in several social and political reform movements.

Relevance of Raa Ram Mohan Roy in Present Time

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the first Indian who founded a reformist movement in India.
- Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a learned and educated person, so he made development of education and literature the aim of his life.

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy made the newspapers and his books, a medium to propagate his ideals. He also made a tremendous contribution in the development of Bengal.
- He made his newspapers 'Sainvad Kaumudi' and 'Miratul Akhbari' vehicles to carry his thoughts to the people.
- True it is that, the credit of initiating Bengali prose literature is not only Rammohan's due, Carey and few others had preceded Ram Mohan. Yet it must be admitted that he had initiated a style, standard and momentum which helped the growth of story, novel and essay forms rapidly.
- Roy believed education to be an implement for social reform.
- He insisted that his teaching of monotheistic doctrines be incorporated with "modern, western curriculum". He supported induction of western learning into Indian education.
- He was a scholar and a great educationist who had detailed knowledge of Sanskrit, Persian, English, Arabic, Latin and Greek.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussions, he was not only a social, political, economical, religious reformer but also a great „educational thinker or reformer`. His contribution particularly in the field of education is very praiseworthy and notable. His ideas of reforms in education still very much significant. Ram Mohan Roy came with his scientific temper, broad outlook, championship of freedom, liberal and fundamental reforms and harbinger of equality and humanism. Now he is no more in the world but his remarkable spot in the field of education till remembering every Indians.

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