

RAJARAM MOHAN ROY AND LIBERALISM

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Abstract

Liberalism is one of the dominant political ideologies in the nineteenth century in Europe and today globally. Locke, Bentham, Mill and all other liberalists seek to establish individual liberty and Rights of the individuals. These are the core political values of liberalism. However, in the history of Indian political thought Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a social Reformer, the father of India's renaissance the inaugurator of modern India and the prophet of humanity. He provided his liberal political views and argued it was the best ideology for the development and progress of India and its societies. He also speaks for the individual liberty, freedom of nations, right of the individuals and their education, faith in democracy and constitutionalism, international coexistence, liberal perception off law and legislation. All these made him a truly liberal thinker in India.

Key Words: Liberalism, Raja Ramm Mohan Roy, Liberty, Rights, education, Democracy, constitutionalism, international coexistence

Introduction

Rajaram Mohan Roy was born in a traditional brahmin family of Bengal was a social Reformer and he is also known as a great humanist and the first liberal thinker of modern India. He was well versed in Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, English and many other European languages. His political views were about liberty, freedom and progress. He firmly believed that liberty is the very essential thing for the development of individual. He supported the struggle for human freedom in India and around the world he stressed the liberty of thought. Rajaram Mohan Roy Known as the Father of Indian Renaissance, was the inaugurator of modern India and 'Prophet of humanity'. He had provided his liberal political view and argued it was the best ideology for the development and progress of India.

Basic ideas of Liberalism:

Liberalism is a dominant and old political ideology of the world. It is committed to freedom as a method and policy of the government It is an organizing principle in the society. It is a way of life for individual and the community. Generally, liberalism has been classified into classical liberalism, modern liberalism and contemporary liberalism. The theoretical bases of classical liberalism come from the 'Two Treatises of Government written by John Locke (1690), who is the father of western liberal ideology. Locke argued in his second treatise that the government aims to protect the life, liberty and private property of the individuals. These are natural rights and consequently should be protected by the natural laws. A limited constitutional government based on the consent of the people are the basis of his political liberal philosophy. From the economic perspective Adam smith in his book 'An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations'(1776) emphasized Laissez faire and sought to establish the limited role of the state . He argued state should not interfere with the economic activities of the individuals. Jermy Bentham based on his utilitarian philosophy argued in favor of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The state and its institutions take pleasure in the individuals as he was in favor of representative governments. however, after the second world war the great depression started, consequently many political scientists came up with their views on the positive role of the state in securing a dignified life to the individuals. They are known as modern liberals. The main proponents of modern liberalism are John Stuart Mill, T H Green, Hobbess house, Herald Laski etc. Andrew Heywood argued modern liberalism exhibits a more sympathetic attitude towards state as a unregulated capitalism merely produces a new form of injustice. J S Mill known as an individualist comes with the view of 'self-regarding and other regarding concept' and came up with the concept of 'collective

liberalism' and said 'will not force is the basis of state' and argued state is not an end in itself. Laski in his book 'A Grammar of politics' argued in favor of the service state. Mac Iver in his book 'The Web of Government' (1947), "The Modern State (1926) said the state is an agent of society creates rights of the people. However, J M Keynes in 1930s and William Beveridge in 1940s were strong supporters of this branch of liberalism. Keynes argued state control of the economy is not unwarranted as it adds power and prosperity to a liberal society. Beveridge opined ensuring the social security of the citizens is the main duty of the state. The contemporary version of the classical liberalism is neo liberalism, libertarianism or neo classical liberalism. In the second half of the twentieth century F A Hayek, Milton Friedman, Robert Nozick and others realized that the concept of welfare state, state intervention and its control on economic activities is inimical to individual liberty. Consequently, to restore individual liberty they sought to restore laissez-faire not only in economic activities but also in social and political activities. They have rejected the view of the positive role of the state. In the contemporary world privatization, liberalization and globalization have become the practical manifestation of liberal principles.

Raja ram Mohan Roy and Liberty

Rajaram Mohan Roy had a passionate attachment to the concept of liberty. He argued the necessity of personal freedom and his private dialogue also referred to the idea of national emancipation. Liberty is the price less possession of a human being and hence Rajaram Mohan Roy can be portrayed as a magnificent champion of personal freedom.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Indian Liberalism

Raja Ram Mohan Roy had a keen appreciation of the uncompromising freedom of the creative spirit. He wanted his countrymen to inculcate a sturdy and robust sense of self confidence and was a crusader against unreason and superstition. He admired the English notion which not only enjoyed civil and political liberty but was interested in promoting freedom, social happiness and rationalism in the areas where their influence extended.

Being a champion of freedom and rights, raja Ram Mohan Roy was a great humanist and believed in cooperation, tolerance and fellow ship. He wanted that the traditional shackles which had so long imprisoned the mind and soul should be loosened and men must be free to build a society based on tolerance sympathy and independence

Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Religion

He was deeply influenced by the cultural values as preserved in the scriptures of the three main religions, viz, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. He felt that unless these values are revived and Hindu society was purged of all the dirt and filth spread in the name of customs and traditions. The Hindu as race should be destroyed. Love of all men irrespective of caste and creed, equality of all regardless of sex were the basic doctrines of Hinduism. He felt that revival of these values could not only bring a new life among the Hindus but could also guide the human race on the path of peace and universal brotherhood. That is why Ram Mohan Roy translated various sacred texts and reinterpreted them to defend his stand on religious and social problems. In doing so he declared his motives "In order to vindicate my own faith and that of our forefathers, I have been bring to the right endeavoring to convince my countrymen of the true meaning of our sacred books". He wanted to evolve a synthetic social philosophy on the bases of Vedanta and Islamic monotheism. He is sometimes branded as pro-Islam. But the faith is that he attached the greatest importance to the revival of ancient Hindu values through spreading Sanskrit education. The only point was that he was not dogmatic or sectarian. He wanted to borrow good things from all religions. His criticisms on existing social customs, political and economic systems was based on rational principles.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy's lifelong endeavor was to recreate human brotherhood and unity on a religious basis. He tried to rediscover the harmony and unity of all religions. In this regard he can rightly be considered as the last link in the long chain of religious teachers of India. A chain unbroken from the days of Kabir and Nanak to the days of his own. He gave moral and personal support to the fundamental doctrine of Kabir and Nanak. That is the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. His criticisms of dogmas, ceremonies and idol worship are simply furtherance of the ideals of medieval Indian saints. The only difference was that he wanted to combine those ideals with the modern values in order to make them applicable to existing conditions.

Social Reforms of Raja Ram Mohan Roy

The socio-religious reform movement starting from the early nineteenth century gradually spread to political and economic fields moreover the British rule in India ushered the contact between the Indian and western cultures. Through the growth of English education, the Indian mind became familiar with western liberalism, its love of liberty and fraternity. It is remarkable that almost all the contemporary humanist had their education through the medium of English and were well versed with the best of western culture. Raja Ram Mohan Roy made a sincere attempt to bridge the gulf between spirit and matter.

Born in an orthodox Brahmin family of Bengal Ram Mohan Roy was deeply influenced by the religious life of his parents during the early stage of his life. His education in Bengali, Persian Sanskrit and Muslim religious beliefs made him to acquire a firsthand knowledge of Hinduism and Islam. At Patna he studied western philosophy and literature. As a result of his wide study of Hindu scriptures, Ram Mohan understood the spirit of Hindu religion and social philosophy. At the age of sixteen he felt the existing Hindu religion presented a false picture of the ancient religion. So, he openly declared his opposition to the methods of religious observances, this led to his exile from home for two or three years. After serving the East India Company and Bengal Civil Service for a few years, he could not control the urge to help his country men in their social emancipation. From 1815 to 1833 he restlessly fought against the inhuman practices and the unification of the existing religions of the world, for peace and happiness of the entire human race.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a liberal political thinker who believed in religious tolerance and the liberty of human soul from religious orthodoxy. He was champion of liberalism in India, which he believed was a result of European renaissance and reformation.

Roy's Liberalism of religious aspects are found in the following areas

Religious tolerance: Roy Emphasized religious tolerance as an important element of liberalism. He believed that religious orthodoxies were harmful to society and instead of improving it, causes trouble to the society.

Monotheism: Roy was attracted to Islamic Monotheism and believed that it was the fundamental message of Vedanta. He believed that monotheism supported a universal model for humanity.

Self-Purification: Roy believed that sinners should make restitution for their sins through self-purification and repentance, not through sacrifice and rituals. In 1814, he founded Athreya Sabha in Calcutta to campaign against idolatry, caste rigidities, meaningless rituals and other social ills.

Roy was also a champion of other liberal ideas

Individual liberty: Roy believed in the liberty of human soul from religious orthodoxy.

Equality: Roy campaigned for equality of men and women, between different castes, creeds and nationalities.

Freedom of press: Roy fought for the freedom of Press in and outside India

Natural rights: Roy believed in the sanctity of natural rights such as right to life, right to property, right to free speech and right to form associations

Roy's Liberalism across the world:

In Britain it was Ram Mohan - Marshman debate between unitarians and trinitarians. The unitarians were the British protestant variety of rationalist and dissenting religious grouping. Their shifting and heterodox nature along with unitarian values, defies a simple definition. The denominations positive principle included freedom of conscience, rationalism and spirit of tolerance, The negative element in its defining principles included opposition to the divinity of Jesus, doctrine of atonement and eternal punishment. Due to its pluralist and individualist nature the unitarians faced hostility and threats of persecution. This is what perhaps propelled them to civic and electoral politics Ram Mohan Roy's embrace of unitarianism was part of the transnational spread of the sect in Britain, Colonial Bengal and North America. As much as he criticized the distortion in Hinduism brought by the priestly class, Ram Mohan Roy also engaged in the debates against Trinitarians who believed in the holy trinity and divinity of Jesus. The debates against both Hindu and Christian orthodoxy brought him renown in the west. Ram Mohan Roy's emphasis on the scriptural authority, deployment of print capitalism and his railings against the orthodoxy led many western to compare him to Martin Luther.

Transnational Constitutional Liberalism:

Between 1820 and 1823, Ram Mohan Roy hosted several public celebrations in the Calcutta Town Hall for the success of the Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Liberal revolutions. In the post Napoleonic war years, across the globe liberals were railing against the old despotism. The reverberations of liberal revolutions and constitutionalism in Cadiz (1812) and Lisbon (1822) also reached the shores of colonial India, particularly in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. Ram Mohan was a participant in August 1822 celebration meeting in Calcutta for the second anniversary of the proclamation of constitutional government in Portugal. The meeting also made reference to the 'les liberals of France' and Greek nationalist Alexander Ypsilanti.

Ram Mohan's involvement with the global liberal constitutional movement was reciprocated as well. Around 1820, the Spanish liberals reissued the original Cadiz constitution of 1812 which they dedicated to Ram Mohan Roy. Apart from the mutual display of solidarity there was another common stand Iberian Liberal movement and Ram Mohan Roy's constitutional liberalism. In both instances Liberals resorted to historicism to find prehistory of their liberal constitutional visions in the past. The Iberian liberals went back to classical figures like Cato and Brutus. Ram Mohan Roy's historicism deriving from the Itihasa tradition which gave agency to Indians.

During his stay in Britain, the liberal in Roy contributed to the Whig reformist agenda in a way that overturned the subordinated dynamics of the colonized. His visit to Britain coincided with the reform debates culminated in the Reform Act of 1832. In Manchester, writes historian Lynn Zastupil, he addressed a crowd of factory workers and called on them to support the Whig Ministry and reform. Excited by the liberal movement of France 'three Glorious Days', Roy visited two French frigates anchored in Cape town which flew revolutionary flags. Later in Britain C A Bayly mentioned the way Ram Mohan Roy watched the passage of the reform bill with trepidation, stating in 1832 that if it failed in Parliament, he would sever all ties with Britain.

After the success of the reform act of 1832 However Ram Mohan Roy soon became disappointed with the Whig liberalism, particularly with the issue of Irish Coercion Bill. He found a new beacon of liberty in young republic across the Atlantic. Roy had plans to visit the United States which did not come to fruition though. He died in 1833 in Bristol. Nevertheless, Ram Mohan Roy's image that he as a liberal reformer served as inspiration for the American abolitionists.

In an anonymous pamphlet delivered as the speech to the United States Congress against slavery, the author assumed the identity of Ram Mohan Roy and paid a moving tribute to the reformer Raja; 'In closing this address, allow me to assume the name of one of the most enlightened and benevolent of the human race now living, though not a white man, Ram Mohan Roy. Historian Nico Slate argues that the pamphlet writer used the examples of Indians to disprove arguments that legitimated slavery based on race. Roy's connections with Iberian liberals, French revolutionaries, British Whigs and American abolitionists were indicative of a transnational liberal public sphere that had space for a Bengali Brahmin hailing from colonized Bengal. Roy was an active participant in this global sphere in his later years.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy as an Indian Liberal:

Concept of freedom is the core of liberal thinking. Roy regarded human being as a rational creature, entitled to freedom. He argued that freedom is the most valuable asset of man. In fact, it is the essence of the human quality. No restrictions on man's freedom can be allowed except in the interest of the wider freedom of the larger society. Freedom of thought and expression is the fundamental freedom of a human being. State's interference in this sphere cannot be justified under any circumstances. But in this sphere state's interference might become necessary at times in the interest of the individual himself. When the state acts as the guardian of freedom, it must ensure that a person does not obstruct other's freedom while exercising his own freedom.

However, if individual is incapable of exercising his freedom in a particular society, the state should step into play a positive role to create favorable condition for freedom. In such cases Roy commended the ancient Indian principle of 'Lok Samgraha' which required the state to promote public welfare. Roy asserted that in a backward country like India, government was obliged to undertake the expansion of education and reform of law. Hence Roy came out to be a champion of welfare state as a modern liberal.

The petitions submitted by Roy in the British government particularly focused on civil liberties and individual rights. Broadly speaking these included the following.

1. Right to life, liberty and property for men as well as women
2. Freedom of thought, speech and expression.
3. Freedom of conscience, involving freedom to profess, practice and propagate any religion.
4. Freedom to form associations including the right to form political parties and
5. Right to warn, disobey and resist the government in a peaceful and constitutional manner.

6. Roy's insistence on these freedoms proves him to be an ardent liberal.

Rationale of Social Reform

Roy argued that the state was obliged to abolish inhuman social practices and enable individual to exercise their freedom. Hence apart from enacting necessary laws, it was necessary to augment the provision of education which alone would lead the people from darkness to light and motivate them to get rid of social evils. Roy particularly raised the demand of modern education which would include the study of mathematics, chemistry, anatomy and other natural sciences. If the British government could assume the responsibility, it would be instrumental in leading India on the path of freedom and social progress.

He vigorously fought against all evil practices in religious and social spheres then prevalent in Hindu society. In 1828 he founded the famous Brahmo Samaj (society for the followers of the Absolute) which aimed at cleansing the Hinduism and persuading the Hindus to believe in monotheism. This new school of thought urged on its followers to abandon dogmatism and assimilate the rational teachings of other religions.

He criticized the caste system and superiority of Brahmins. He advocated inter caste dining as well as inter caste marriages in order to promote social equality.

It was only due to ceaseless effort of Raja Ram Mohan Roy to convert public opinion and to convince the ruling authorities that the cruel and barbarian practice was legally abolished by the British government in 1829. Then Roy denounced those irrational beliefs which obstructed the progress and modernization of society. For example, he repudiated the superstition whereby the foreign oppression of peasants by the landlords, and called for the fixation of maximum rent to save the peasants from ever increasing demand of land lords. He wanted abolishment of the trade rights of the East India Company and advocated free trade. He insisted on the abolition of heavy export duties on Indian goods. He had liberal perception of law and judicial administration. The rule of law and separation of power were his liberal ideas.

Conclusion: Based on the above discussion it is clear he was a true liberalist., not only theoretically but also practically as he was seeking to establish the availability of liberal values in Indian society during that time. He understands India's future progress and development would happen if a western type of liberal government was established. However, in his vision of education, abolition of the sati system, the rights and individual liberty of the women and more broadly in the emancipation of women, the role of Ram Mohan Roy in Indian society was immensely important in the transition process from middle age to modern India during that time. He was the inaugurator of Modern India through his liberal ideologies.

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