



# The Greatest Religious And Social Reformer Of Nineteenth Century

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## Abstract :

Raja Rammohan Roy's name will never be forgotten by any Indian as the pioneer of 19th Century Renaissance in Bengal. He took the leading part to get the cruel inhuman Sati Dahan ritual banned. There were many ground breaking contributions of Rammohan in other fields also. It is tried here to discuss briefly on his contributions in religious and social reforms. Rammohan's education was started in Persian language. In addition he became adept in Sanskrit and Arabic languages in due course of time. He started to think on religions from his teen age. In addition to study the Vedic religion i.e Hindu religion, he had also studied the Islamic & Christian religions quite deeply and seriously. Rammohan's role to reform the Vedic religion is discussed here briefly. Rammohan was instrumental to get banned the cruel inhuman Sati ritual. He convinced the first Governor General of British India Lord Bentinck who on 4th December 1829, declared ban on Sati Dahan practice through an ordinance. Rammohan decided to go to England to talk with the parliamentarians there so that the bill for banning of Sati Dahan would not get struck in the parliament. The year was 1830. Akbar II was the Mughul Emperor in Delhi. But the East India Company had snatched many of his powers. The Emperor was passing a through a very difficult period. On hearing Rammohan's proposed journey to England he honoured Rammohan by conferring him with the title "Raja". Rammohan became Raja Rammohan Roy. He could not return to India as he took his last breath in Bristol, U.K. on 27th September 1833 after suffering from fever for ten days. His body was cremated in Bristol.

**Key Words :** Rammohan, Sati, Brahma Samaj, Bentinck

## Objective of the study :

The objectives of this study are

- (1) To analyze the tireless great effort Raja Rammohan Roy to reform the Vedic religion as well as to remove the evil customs and rituals those were in practice in the society during that era.
- (2) To clarify the philosophy of Raja Rammohan Roy

**Methodology :**

- (1) For the proposed study , two kind of sources Primary Sources and Secondary Sources are chosen. The books ‘Banglar Rishi’ & Bangalir Rashtrachinta are the two primary sources.
- (2) In the proposed study , both analytical and descriptive ways have been adopted.
- (3) Helps were taken to make the study from different periodicals.

**Introduction :**

The pioneer of modern Indian Renaissance , Raja Rammohan Roy’s name will remain in history for ever for taking leading part to abolish one of the most cruel social and religious ritual called Sati Dahi i.e sacrificing the life of an widow on the pyre of his dead husband . But apart from taking initiative to abolish the cruel inhuman social and religious custom, Rammohan’s contribution to other fields had also been immensely important . Glimpses of his contribution will be discussed here in this short writing.

**Initial Years of Rammohan’s Life :**

Rammohan was born in a Brahmin family in Radhanagar village of Hoogly District in today’s West Bengal to Ramkanta Roy and Tarini Devi on 22nd May 1772.

Rammohan spent first fourteen years of his life in his paternal home at Radhanagar village. He started his education in the Pathshala i.e Primary School in the village. At the same time one Moulavi was engaged to teach him Persian . Rammohan started to learn Arabic language also. In due course of time he had also learnt Sanskrit to become a prominent scholar of Sanskrit. At the age of only fourteen years Rammohan completed reading of the books of Aristotle and Euclid. Even he studied the Quran at this young age . Rammohan, being ever thirsty for knowledge had been deeply influenced after reading some Sufi books. In future, the poems of Hafiz, Moulana Rumi, Shameez Tariz and many other Sufi poets’ poems became his most favourites. He became greatly influenced by the subjects of Sanskrit Literature and Tantrik System after coming in contact with a prominent Sanskrit Scholar and teacher named Nanda Kumar Vidyalankar.

At the age of only sixteen or seventeen years Rammohan had to leave his paternal house. Religious thoughts started to evolve in his mind from his teen age. Rammohan felt that the Sanatan Vedic religion had been covered by some blind faiths, superstitions, customs and rituals. At this age Rammohan had written a book .

Rammohan might have joined some team of the Hindu Saints or Sanyasis to travel different pilgrimages of Indian Sub Continent. In such mission Rammohan might have reached Tibet after crossing the very difficult terrains of hill ranges. During his stay in Tibet , Rammohan fell in deep crisis for his life. The Tibetians became annoyed and angry with him because he protested on the very faith of the Tibetians who used to believe that their religious Chief, the Chief Lama was God. A large numbers of Tibetians planned to kill Rammohan . During this crisis hours a few Tibetan women gave him shelter to save his life. After returning to the country , Rammohan became busy in studying the Hindu religious texts and chapters.

**Rammohan : The Religions Reformer :**

Not only the Sanatan Vedic religion, Rammohan also studied very deeply the Islam and Christian religions also. While extensively learning Arabic and Persian in Patna after being greatly influenced by the Sufi culture and ideology, Rammohan gathered knowledge on Islam religion through studying Quran and other sixty books on Islam. It was said that in his later life, Rammohan’s faith on “Ekeswarvad” (only one God) arrived in his mind due to his deep and serious studies on Islam religion. During his service life,

Rammohan criticized the then customs and rituals of Christian religion which were not mentioned in the religious books and eventually earned the wrath of the Christian priests and got into conflicts with them.

After travelling different places in the country Rammohan stayed in Varanasi for a small period, he returned back to home and engaged himself in studying the Vedic religious books. He was driven out from his paternal house due to his stern criticism of prevailing blind, evil customs and rituals of Hindu religion. To earn the livelihood, Rammohan joined in East India Company's job as a Register or Serestadar in the year 1809. He started his job under Collector John Digby at Rangpur (falls in today's Bangladesh). In later years he was promoted to the post of Dewan. He developed a deep friendship with Digby. Rammohan started to learn English language when he was 22 years old. When he came to Rangpur for service, his age was 37. Rammohan's English was becoming more and more strong day by day. Digby used to bring many periodicals, magazines, books from England. Rammohan used to read those with great interest. His conception on Europe, the European society was becoming very clear. For the sake of his service, apart from Rangpur Rammohan also lived in different places like Bhagalpur, Ramgarh and in some other places for some periods. While living in Rangpur, he came in contact with many Islamic, Hindu, Jain and Buddhist scholars. In the mean time his first book in Persian language 'Tuhfat-UI-Muyhahidin' (A Gift to deists) had been published. In this book, he had shown the affects of Idolatry and many types of blind faiths, false and bad rituals of different religions.

In the year 1814 Rammohan came to Kolkata and started the reform works of Hindu religion. In Kolkata, Rammohan formed an organization named "Atmiya Sabha" in the year 1815. The main objective of this newly formed organization was to study and discuss religious matter. For arranging the sittings and meetings for Atmiya Sabha, he built a house at Maniktala area in Kolkata. Dwarakanath Tagore of Jorasanko, Prasanna Kumar Tagore of Pathurighata, Kalinath and Boikunthanath Munsii of Taki and other prominent native figures of the then Kolkata like Vrindavan Mitra, Kashinath Mullick, Kalishankar Ghoshal and many more famous persons became Rammohan's friends. The main objectives to form the organization called Atmiya Sabha were to study the Vedic philosophy, to worship 'Ekeswar Brahma' (one and only God Brahma) and to campaign and to spread awareness against Idolatry and blind superstitions. And thus Rammohan had created many enemies in the society. His family and relatives had already abandoned him and now the rich and famous influential fundamentalist Hindus started to go against him. Among them two prominent influential persons were Raja Radhakanta Dev and Mrityunjay Tarkalankar. This fundamentalist group started to campaign against Rammohan by calling him as an anti-Hindu and targeted him for trying to mislead the people of Hindu religion. But Rammohan tried to reform and uplift the Hindu religion as a more developed religion on the basis analyzing the philosophy of Vedas and Upanishadas and abolishing the practices of blind faith and superstitions. The members of the fundamentalist group even started to spread false news such as beefs were eaten by the members of Atmiya Sabha in their meetings. Due to such false campaign and out of fear, many of the members of Atmiya Sabha had left the organization. Rammohan did not become disheartened but continued to work for his mission.

Before resigning from the Company's job at Rangpur and settling permanently in Kolkata, Rammohan built a house in Raghunathpur. He built a stage in front of this house and by its side he got scripted three Vedic message – "Om, Tatsat, Ekomebadwitiom" and on everyday he used to meditate thrice by sitting on this stage. Rammohan's opponents tried to tease and insult him by singing a limerick in local language. that was –

"Surai Meler Kool  
(Betar) Bari Khanakool,  
Beta Sarbonasher Mool.  
Om Tatsat Boley Beta

Baniyechhe School.  
O Se Jeter Dafa  
Korley Rafa, Mojaley Teen-Kool.”

The meaning of this limerick was that – “The son of the Surai clan from Khanakool is the root cause for all the harms and damages. By uttering Om Tatsat he has started a school. He is responsible for loosing the honour of his caste and religion, earning bad names for himself, his ancestors as well as for his future generations to come.”

The activities of Atmiya Sabha had to be stopped for two years as Rammohan’s nephew filed a case in the court against him for bringing the charge of depriving him from paternal properties. At last Atmiya Sabha was closed in 1824. During this period, without becoming disappointed Rammohan continued to work day and night for his mission to reform the Hindu religion. Sanatan Vedic religion had been well acquainted with the “Ekeswarvad” (existence of one God) since long past. Rammohan’s conflict with Hindu fundamentalist did not happen on the theory of Hinduism, but happened on its applications and practices. “At that time, it was forbidden for women and lower caste people (Shudras) to read the Holy Religious Books (Shruti). Rammohan raised his voice against such system. Not only this, he dared to publish the parts of the holy religious books in print to make his activities more aggressive.”<sup>5</sup>

“He had dared to publish the holy oral tradition of Hindu religion, which had been the rights of the only upper caste people, in addition he had translated the Sanskrit holy books in the so called “Mlechcha Bhasa” (forbidden language) as termed in those days, i.e in English as well as in Bengali and Hindi so that the common people could read these. The fundamentalist Hindu religion of that period could not tolerate such bold mentality of Rammohan.”

In the year 1828 Rammohan formed an organization called “Brahma Sabha.” The members of this organization used sit on every Saturday for religious discussions and performing Vedic songs. In the year 1830, a piece of land was purchased near Chitpur Road in Kolkata by collecting money from people as contributions and the construction works for the new house for “Brahma Sabha” had been started. In due course of time Brahma Sabha had been renamed as Brahma Samaj. To counter the Brahma Sabha, leaders of the the fundamentalist Hindu group formed an organization called “Dharma Sabha.” Two main leaders of this organization were Raja Radhakanta Dev and Mrityunjay Tarkalankar. Dharma Sabha had started hate campaigns against the Brahma Samaj and more specifically against Rammohan Roy. Their mouth piece publication “Samachar Chandrika” started to publish all negative and condemnation writings against Rammohan. To fight against the false propaganda being spread by the fundamentalist group, Rammohan started to write in the paper “Sambad Koumudi”, with analytical and logical points for self defense.

Due to restless efforts of Rammohan, Lord Bentinck’s Govt at last announced ban on the Sati ritual by making a law in the year 1829. Members of the Dharma Sabha became furious with this development. They started non stop hate and condemnation campaign against Rammohan. Rammohan’s life fell in danger. Attempts to kill Rammohan were tried twice, but failed in both occasions. At that time referring to this incident Maharshi Devendranath Tagore wrote, “At that time Dharma Sabha had been tremendous powerful and the period had been full of crisis for the Brahma Sabha. Some people said that Brahma Sabha would be burnt out, some others said that they would kill Rammohan. But he used to arrive in serious mood at the Samaj and did meditation whether anybody gave him company or not, it did not matter to him. Like the way the pilgrims of Ganga or Jagannath usually come on foot i.e. walking, Rammohan also used to come to the Samaj by walking from Maniktala with his friends. Used to return home by horse pulled coach. His attitude was highly respectable.”

Rammohan not only studied the Vedic religion i.e Hindu religion, he also studied the Islam and Christian religions quite deeply . To spread awareness among the people, he published some booklets appealing not to accept the wrong interpretation of Quran and the mystical matters of Bible. As a result the fundamentalist Islamic and Christian groups went against him . Rammohan used to emphasize on the main philosophical aspects of the religions. He had been very much reluctant to accept the superstitions, illogical blind faiths and the magical stories of the religions and thus preferred to delete those directives from the religions. The Christian priest Adam , coming under the influence of Rammohan’s logical theory , opined for curtailing the “Trinitarianism” of Christian religion . This “Trinitarianism” means God or father, child or son and the holy soul. Rammohan helped Adam while he established the European Mission .

Kerry and Marshman , the Christian missionaries from Srirampur strongly opposed the doctrine of Rammohan. Rammohan replied to them by publishing a booklet titled as “A Friend Of Truth”. Debate continued among them through the periodicals , published materials . But ultimately Marshman failed to nullify the logics and justifications laid down by Rammohan . It is to be mentioned here that with tremendous and dedicated efforts Rammohan learnt the Hebrew and Greek language , only to read the original Bible. The book on Christian religion which Rammohan wrote was titled as – “ Percepts of Jesus - Guide to Peace and Happiness.” In addition to taking up the mission to remove superstitions, evil practices, rituals from the religions, his efforts was to unite all the religions of the world in a brotherly relationship.

### **Rammohan, the Great Social Reformer :**

It has already been mentioned about the initiative taken by Rammohan to ban the ancient old cruel inhuman practice of Sati ritual and his success to get the new law becoming effective. Rammohan’s name had entered in the book of World History for ever for his great initiative and efforts to get the cruel Sati ritual banned. He was deeply affected on hearing an incident of Sati Daha while he was a teen. If any woman’s husband died , she was forcefully put on the pyre of her dead husband by the family members, relatives and other people of the society to kill her by burning alive along with her dead husband’s body. It was used to be said in that era that the wife would also go to havean with her husband ! This cruel inhuman evil practice had been maintained in the name of so called religious binding. After attaining the matured age, Rammohan became determined to get this cruel system banned for ever by any means. First he tried to convince all by saying that there was no such directive at all in the religion for the widow to go on the pyre of her dead husband . But nobody gave him ears. He realized that without the Government’s directive this cruel system could not be stopped. He took initiative to build up public opinion against Sati Daha. He got only a few educated, conscious , kind hearted, responsible persons by his side in this mission. Lord Hastings rule was there in Bengal up to 1820. He did not give much importance to ban Sati Daha by introducing new law. Lord Armherst rule started in the year 1820. He too did not take any initiative to stop this cruel evil practice. In the year 1828 , Lord William Bentinck arrived in Kolkata as the new Governor General. Rammohan developed a close relationship with Bentinck. Rammohan requested him to introduce a law to ban the Sati Daha system. Bentinck became a bit afraid. He thought that the vast Hindu population would become angry and it would be difficult to rule by making large section of people annoyed with the Company’s rule. Rammohan had assured and explained him by referring to different Hindu religious books that it would not go against the Hindu religion in any way. Bentinck took the opinions of his army in this regard. At last , by considering all aspects, on 4th December 1829 , Bentinck declared ban on Sati Daha practice through an ordinance. It shook the Hindu society. The leaders of the Dharma Sabha started to take utmost effort to resist the ordinance .converting into a law in the British parliament. If the ordinance was passed in the British parliament , it would become a law. Rammohan became alert and he thought that no chances should be left open so that the fundamentalists became successful in blocking the ordinance

becoming a law . Hence, he decided to go to England to talk with the parliamentarians there so that the bill for banning of Sati Daha would not get struck in the parliament.

The year was 1830. Akbar II was the Mughul Emperor in Delhi. But the East India Company had snatched many of his powers . The Emperor was passing a through a very difficult period. On hearing Rammohan's proposed journey to England he honoured Rammohan by conferring him with the title "Raja". Rammohan became Raja Rammohan Roy. On some day of November 1830 ignoring the objections of his relatives, prominent persons of Bengal , he sailed for England boarding on a ship named Albion. After four months and twenty three days the ship reached at Liverpool .port.

In September 1831 Rammohan met the Royal King of England. The King honoured him by arranging his seat in the same row with the ambassadors of other countries assembled in the Royal Hall. Rammohan started to visit the British parliament regularly and continued to discuss with many parliamentarians and influential persons there. Rammohan visited France in the year 1832. The French King felicitated him very warmly and invited him for dinner party. In the mean time the banning of Sati Daha bill had been passed in the Commons house of the British parliament . Rammohan did not wait for seeing the bill to be passed in the Lords house of the parliament because by then he had become confident that the opposition groups would not be able to do anything to stop the bill. No need to mention that their desire had not been fulfilled. Rammohan started for Bristol. But this Great son of the country could not return to his motherland . Raja Rammohan Roy took his last breath in Bristol on 27th September 1833 after suffering from fever for ten days. His body was cremated in Bristol.

Apart from getting the cruel Sati Daha ritual banned , Rammohan's great contributions were there for the upliftment and development of the women. During his time it was a normal practice for a Hindu male to do multiple marriages . Rammohan started campaign to raise the awareness among the people to stop this system. He also raised his voice against dowry system. Particularly the elderly people from higher castes, used to give marriages of their teen aged daughters with the old men, sick men on receiving huge money from the groom's side. Referring to different religious books like Manu Sanhita etc. and doing deep analysis , Rammohan established the fact that there was no directive in the religion for old and sick men to marry teenager girls and he proved such activities were illogical and inhuman.

In that era , wives did not have rights over the properties of their husbands. In the absence of husbands, their lives had become completely dependent on their sons. Rammohan started a strong movement against this social system. He opined that an wife had equal rights over the properties of her husband like the rights of her sons.

## Conclusion :

Rammohan Roy was the pioneer of nineteenth century Renaissance of Bengal as well as the Indian sub continent. He fought from the front to pull out the Indian society from the mentality of medieval era to the path of modern civilization. Later the great men like Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Jagadish Chandra Bose and many more stepped forward on the way shown by Raja Rammohan Roy.

In conclusion , again reference of Rabindranath Tagore is to be brought . In Tagore's language - , " The foundation of present day society of Bengal had been laid down by Rammohan .We all are the heirs of his properties, residing in the building constructed by him"

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