

*Raja Rammohan
Roy*



M.H. SYED

Editors

M.A. Khan

N.P. Sharma





An Illustrious Life

The Backdrop

In nearly one hundred years before Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi was born in Kathiawar, Western India, another Mohan first saw the light of day in Radhanagar, Bengal, in Eastern India. Both grew up to be passionately religious men who gave their lives for the love of truth, justice and freedom, and in selfless service of their fellow men. Rammohan laboured for a rebirth of Indian culture and religion, while Mohandas Gandhi led his people to the promised state of Independence without violence and bloodshed.

The India which had been ruled by the Mughals through the Middle Ages was breaking up, and it now seems that a New India dawned with the birth of Rammohan. Rammohan's life and work was to stir up the intellectual and social life of India and thereby lay the foundations of the New Era.

The blaze of Mughal glory had died down in the second half of the eighteenth century. In the still-glowing embers of the Empire here and there stirred to life by the British takeover— the people of India lived in poverty and misery. They groaned under heavy burdens, and as subjects of foreign rulers they lost their love of life and their zest for creative living. People in one part of the

country did not know what was taking place elsewhere. Separated and ignorant, they were weak and the country fell an easy prey to adventurers, Indian and foreign.

The three main ports, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were becoming at this time centres of power and wealth. The foreign traders—the Dutch, the French and the English—were competing with each other to acquire not only a foothold on the mainland, but also to acquire vast territories by helping Mughal rulers or supporting rival chieftains against one another. Whoever successfully played this game shared the spoils in land and money, and gained favourable terms of trade. Fortune favoured the brave, but the wind of change was favourable to the British.

The East India Company which had been started in the 17th century with branches in Surat and Bombay in order to trade with India and the East, grew steadily in power. In the eighteenth century, under Robert Clive, it finally emerged victorious over the other foreign traders. This made the British masters of the whole country except for the princely states which one by one surrendered sovereignty to Britain. Calcutta, the chief town of Bengal and now the headquarters of the East India Company, became more important than Delhi. There, Mughal Kings who were controlled by the Company held court. Now they ruled in name only.

Meanwhile, Britain grew rich and powerful and was watched with envy by the neighbouring European lands as fabulous wealth flowed into it from the East. The British Parliament set up a Supreme Board of Control and the King of England appointed a Governor-General in Council of the Indian territories. (Calcutta remained the capital of India, Burma and Ceylon till 1912, when the Government of India moved to Delhi and made it the seat of the India-Empire.)

In those days the people of India cared little about who governed them—Rama or Ravana- the Nawab or the East India Company. The Company itself did not interfere in the day-to-day acts of the provincial chiefs of the Mughal Emperor, or that of the Maratha, Sikh or Burmese rulers. But in reality power was passing into the hands of the British Government, and basic decisions about India were being taken not even in Calcutta, but in London.

The Hindus and Muslims, Brahmins and outcasts, found no common cause of complaint against the foreigner as he seemed anxious to respect their religious views and practices and spare them from heavy taxation. The British in general, and the Company in particular, were careful not to do anything or to allow anything to be done, which would appear to be an attack on ancient social customs. This neutral position was a weak and a negative one, but was one which met with the least resistance or opposition.

It also gave the Company the opportunity to play off one group against another, to become the judge in internal disputes and thus acquire a better position.

The main source of wealth in those days was agriculture and textiles. There was also a vast amount of gold which had come to India in earlier times and which could be taken in exchange for imported goods brought from Europe.

Thus those who owned land or had the right to collect taxes from land were rich, as were the merchants in the import or export trade—acting as Agents for the Company, of course. Parliament had given the Company a monopoly on the Indian trade.

There was no Post Office, no Railways, no Courts or Government as we know it— and therefore almost no ‘middle class’, just small shopkeepers living on the goodwill of the large merchants.

Princes and their children were assumed to know how to govern. If they didn’t, so much the worse for their subjects. Only schools for religious training existed. The main way to ‘get ahead’ was by getting the favour of prince or zamindar. A man could remain a petty clerk, or become a minor nawab — all at the whim of a Prince. Rammohan’s forefathers were fortunate.

Birth, Parentage and Boyhood

Rammohan Roy came from a respectable Brahmin family whose original seat was in an obscure village in the Murshidabad district. His great grandfather, Krishna Chandra Banerjee, was a man of note. He, having done some good services to the local Government, was honoured with the *title* of “Roy,” and as this title was afterwards made hereditary, the family has since come

to be known as the "Roys," the humbler designation of 'Banerjee' being merged, as it were, in the prouder one of 'Roy.' Shortly after the receipt of this titular distinction, Krishna Chandra was invested with the powers of collecting the revenues of the districts of Hooghly and Burdwan, and as this important office necessitated the making of Khanacool Krishnagar, in the former district, his headquarters, he built a house at Radhanagar on the banks of the Kana Darkeswar, and removed there with his family.

Like Krishna Chandra, his son, was also a man of mark, he served under Sjraj-ud-dowla, and his official career was synchronous with that stirring "fateful" epoch, which witnessed the struggles of "a handful of merchants" with the Nawab—struggles which ultimately resulted in the establishment of the British Empire. Braja Binode had seven sons, of whom Ramkanta held the first place in the father's heart, though he occupied only the fifth in the family pedigree. The subject of this memoir was the son of this man Ramkanta and his wife, Tarini Devi, better known as "Phool Thakurani." Rammohan was born at the Radhanagar house in A. D. 1774, a year memorable in the annals of British India as in it were established both the Supreme Council and the Supreme Court—the highest Executive and the highest Judiciary. Rammohan was happy with his parents. His father Ramkanta was a small Zemindar and was held in esteem by people of the surrounding villages as well as of his own. His mother Phool Thakurani was a woman of great piety and remarkable firmness of character.

As Ramkanta was in a well-to-do condition, he spared no pains to give an excellent education to his son. But in those days when education was at a low ebb the only places of instruction were the *Patshalas* of Hindu Pandits and Muktabs of Muslim Moulvis. Young Rammohan learned the elements of the Bengali language at the village Patshala. But mere knowledge of Bengali was not of much use in those days. Persian was still the language of the Court, and persons who wanted to make their sons cut a respectable figure in life never failed to educate them *in* Arabic as well as Persian—these two languages being related to each other as parent and child. Accordingly, Rammohan was placed under the care of the Moulvi of the village; and when it was found that he had acquired a fair knowledge of Persian, he was sent in

his ninth year to Patna, the chief seat of Arabic learning in Bengal. Here Rammohan stayed for a little more than three years, and, endowed as he was by nature with wonderful memory, and equally wonderful faculty of understanding, mastered Persian and Arabic within a comparatively short period. The knowledge which he had thus acquired was not of an ordinary kind; *it* was deep and extensive. He had read many of the eminent poets (*shairs*) and philosophers (*sufis*) of Persia and Arabia. Among the Persian poets, Hafiz and Sadi were his great favourites, and it was not unoften that he repeated some of their well-known sayings, more especially those of the didactic poet of Shiraz. But as his mind was cast in a philosophic mould, the mystical philosophy of the Sufis pleased him most, and this fondness became deeper still when, on studying later on the *Vedanta* and Yoga, he found its great resemblance with Hindu philosophy. He also read Aristotle and Euclid *in Arabic* in order to qualify himself in Grecian lore so far as it was then known in the East.

Having learned Persian and Arabic in conformity, with the usage of his paternal kinsmen who were all worldly men, he, agreeably to the usage of his maternal relations who were all priests by-profession, wanted to learn Sanskrit and the theological works written in it, which contained the body of Hindu literature, law and religion; and as Banaras (Kasi) has from remote antiquity been the chief seat of Sanskrit learning, he was in his fourteenth year sent to that holy city to study that language of languages. Rammohan commenced his study with a whole heart, and, as he was not sparing in his efforts to stock his mind with useful knowledge, he mastered the classical language of the Hindus with the same ease with which he had mastered that of the Muhammadans. Rammohan stayed at Banaras till his sixteenth year; and it was here that he imbibed the monotheistic tenets of the *Vedanta* and the *Upanishads*, which made him a determined enemy of idolatry. Thus, he returned home quite an altered man—one who was destined to upset the traditions of his family.

Early Life and Education

Roy was born in Radhanagar, Bengal, in August 1774 into the Rarhi Brahmin caste. His family background displayed religious diversity; his father Ramkanto Roy was a Vaishnavite, while his

mother Tarinidevi was from a Shivaite family. This was unusual for Vaishnavites did not commonly marry Shaivites at that time. Thus, one parent wanted him to be a scholar, a *sastrin*, while the other wanted him to have a career dedicated to the *laukik*, which was secular public administration. He wandered around Himalayas and went to Tibet.

Marriage and Children

Rammohan Roy was married three times by the time he was ten years old. His first wife died during his childhood. His second wife, who died in 1824, bore him two sons: Radhaprasad in 1800 and Ramaprasad in 1812. Roy's third wife outlived him.

Adieu to Home and Travels

Soon after his return home, Rammohan wished to give publicity to his views on religion. His study of the philosophy of the Sufis had made quite an impression on his mind, and when it was deepened and strengthened by his knowledge of Hindu philosophy, he became a thoroughgoing opponent of Hinduism as it was then in vogue. He wrote a work condemning idolatry as being opposed to the religion taught in the Vedas. This little book was written in Persian with an Arabic preface, and was very properly styled *Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin*. As the work called in question the validity of the idolatrous system of the Hindus, it gave great offence to the young man's father, Ramkanta, who was a bigoted Hindu, having deep regard for the gods and goddesses of the Hindu Pantheon. A rupture took place, in consequence, between father and son, and things soon took such a bad turn that Rammohan found his home too hot for him; and though not actually turned out of it by sheer force, he did not deem it safe to stay in it any longer. Accordingly, he left his paternal roof, and threw himself adrift on the world quite alone and unfriended. But he was not the man to despond and lose courage under circumstances however adverse. He did not loiter about his village but started at once on travels.

Rammohan Roy started on his travels with a view to add to his knowledge by acquainting himself with the manners, customs and religions of the people whose country he passed through. His

travels occupied about four years during which he visited several places, both within the bounds of Hindustan and outside it. Even distant Tibet was included in his programme, and he went there to obtain first-hand knowledge of the doctrines of Buddhism. From before that time India had been denuded of the Buddhists who, being unable to bear the violent onslaught of Sankaracharya, had left the country *en masse*. The doctrines of Buddhism, as they were taught at that reputed seat, did not, however, commend themselves to Rammohan Roy's mind and as he was a bold outspoken man, he did not make secret of his own religious convictions.

His assertion of monotheistic doctrines gave offence to the Lama worshippers, so much so that in their fanatic fury they were resolved to lay violent hands on him, and they would certainly have executed their resolve but for the help which the poor Hindu received from a quarter whence it was least expected. Some kind-hearted women of the place readily came to his rescue and by their timely help saved him from imminent danger. This circumstance made a very deep impression on his mind, and ever after he became a warm friend and staunch advocate of the tender sex. No wonder that he laboured hard for the emancipation of women.

Restoration to Paternal Favour

While Rammohan Roy was thus touring far away from home, Ramkanta, whose fatherly feeling, swayed by religious bigotry, had proved unkind to his son, felt the separation very much, and his heart which was by no means hard and cruel, was moved. Misguided as he thought his son had been, Ramkanta sent out men after him, who, on finding him out, acquainted him with his father's wish. Rammohan Roy, who had not left home for good but still retained what is called in law *animus revertendi*, consented to return; and on his arrival at home was warmly received by Ramkanta. A reconciliation took place between father and son, and they became friends again. Knowing full well what the state of Rammohan's mind really was, Ramkanta, with a view to bind him hard-and-fast to the world, got him married. The ceremony was performed in the usual orthodox style, and the wedded couple commenced to pass their days in peace and comfort. But domestic happiness was not all to Rammohan Roy who constantly turned

to study, as the most exhilarating recreation of his life. He had, as we have seen, early acquired a fair knowledge of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian, besides his own vernacular; but as yet he was a perfect stranger to the language of the foreign rulers, and it was not till his twenty-second year that he commenced to learn English. For some years, however, he made little progress, in English as he was engrossed in the study of the Hindu Shastras which had gained such a firm hold on his mind. About this time this lifelong student was also initiated into some other foreign languages, namely Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

Rammohan was not satisfied merely with the study of the Hindu Shastras; in fact, this study was only the means to an end which was to hold controversies with the Brahmins, and to convince them of their errors. He carried on controversies with the priestly classes upon idolworship and Sati.

One very painful circumstance had turned the young man's attention to the latter subject. Rammohan had an elder brother named Jaga Mohan. When this man died, his wife who was devotedly attached to him, burned herself on his funeral pyre. This incident, so very shocking to human feelings, made a very deep impression on his mind, and it was one of the immediate causes which, in his maturer years, led him to put forth strenuous efforts for the suppression of that horrible, heartrending practice.

After he had commenced learning English, Rammohan Roy began to associate with Europeans, and soon after made himself tolerably acquainted with their laws and form of Government. He had from early youth entertained a strong feeling of aversion to the establishment of British power in India; but on coming into closer contact with the British people he gave up his prejudice against them and became strongly inclined in their favour, feeling persuaded that British rule, though a foreign rule, would lead more speedily and surely to the amelioration of his countrymen; and he came to know, and enjoyed the confidence of, several of the Europeans in their public capacity.

No wonder that he became and remained all through a warm and sincere advocate of British sway in India. But though he endeared himself to the foreign rulers, he continued to alienate his own countryman by his outspoken attacks on social evils.

Farewell to Home

Ramkanta, judging of others' mind by his own, had hoped that Rammohan, warned by his trials would come round to orthodoxy again. But in this he reckoned without his host. The young reformer, again, took up the cudgels against idolatry and several other practices, and renewed the fight with redoubled zeal and energy. Upon this, the leaders of Hindu society, finding their religion in danger, tried to put down the proud rebel, and they so far succeeded in their attempt that they brought about his expulsion from home. This melancholy event took place in the last year of the eighteenth century.

In Government Employ

When Rammohan Roy was thrown adrift on the world, he naturally sought for employment. He was then not alone but had, also, a family to support. In the very year *in* which he was cast out of his paternal abode, he had a son born to him. This was his first-born, who was named Radha Prasad, after Krishna's favourite wife, Radha. Fortunately for the discarded young man, it was not long before he got a clerkship in the Rangpore Collectorate. He afterwards served for some years in the ministerial department of Ramgurh and Bhagalpur until the exigencies of service brought him again to Rangpore. As Rammohan was a man of parts and diligence, his rise in the service was almost assured, and he at last rose to the very top by being made Dewan, as the ministerial head was then called.

The position of this officer was at that time much higher than it is now. He was the ministerial chief of the district and wielded very large powers. Such an officer had generally considerable influence over his Civilian master, and if the latter happened to be an ease-loving man, was often all in all. Rammohan Roy spent about a decade of his life as Dewan, and even after he had bade a long, long adieu to service, he was still called the Dewanji, until ennobled by the Emperor of Delhi *by* being created a Raja.

While at Rangpore, Rammohan Roy, busily engaged as he certainly was, did not altogether forget his favourite study of the Hindu Shastras. In the odds and ends of time, he not only conversed

with the Vedic Rishis, but also held controversies with the Brahmins on several religious and social subjects, more especially idolatry and widow-burning.

Early Political and Religious Career

Rammohan Roy's impact on modern Indian history concerned a revival of the ethics principles of the Vedanta school of philosophy as found in the Upanishads. He preached about the unity of God, made early translations of Vedic scriptures into English, co-founded the Calcutta Unitarian Society, founded the Brahmo Samaj, and campaigned against sati. He sought to integrate Western culture with features of his own country's traditions. He established schools to modernise a system of education in India.

During these overlapping periods, Rammohan Roy acted as a political agitator and agent, whilst being employed by the East India Company and simultaneously pursuing his vocation as a Pandit.

In 1792, the British Baptist shoemaker William Carey published his missionary tract "*An Enquiry of the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of Heathens*". In the following year, William Carey landed in India to settle. His objective was to translate, publish and distribute the Bible in Indian languages and propagate Christianity to the Indian peoples. He realised the "mobile" (i.e. service classes) Brahmins and Pundits were most able to help him in this endeavour, and he began gathering them. He learned the Buddhist and Jain religious works as a means to improve his argument in promotion for Christianity in the cultural context. In 1795, Carey made contact with a Sanskrit scholar, the Tantric Hariharananda Vidyabagish, who later introduced him to Rammohan Roy; Roy wished to learn English.

Between 1796 and 1797 the trio of Carey, Vidyavagish and Roy fabricated a spurious religious work known as the "Maha Nirvana Tantra" (or "Book of the Great Liberation") and attempted to portray it as an ancient religious text to "the One True God", which was actually the Holy Spirit of Christianity masquerading as Brahma. The document's judicial sections were used in the law courts of the English Settlement in Bengal as Hindu Law for

adjudicating upon property disputes of the zamindari. However, British magistrates and collectors began to suspect it as a forgery; its usage, as well as the reliance on pundits as sources of Hindu Law, was quickly deprecated. Vidyavagish has a brief falling out with Carey and separated from the group but maintained ties to Rammohan Roy. The Maha Nirvana Tantra's significance for Brahmaism lay in the wealth that accumulated to Rammohan Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore by its judicial use, and not due to any religious wisdom within.

In 1799, Carey was joined by missionary Joshua Marshman and the printer William Ward at the Danish settlement of Serampore.

From 1803 till 1815, Rammohan served the East India Company's "Writing Service", commencing as private clerk "munshi" to Thomas Woodforde, Registrar of the Appellate Court at Murshidabad, whose distant nephew, also a Magistrate, later made a living off the spurious Maha Nirvana Tantra under the pseudonym Arthur Avalon. In 1814, Raja Rammohan Roy formed *Atmiya Sabha*. *Atmiya Sabha* tried to initiate social and religious reforms in the society. Raja Rammohan Roy campaigned for rights for women, including the right for widows to remarry, and the right for women to hold property. He actively opposed Sati system and the practice of polygamy.

Roy resigned from Woodforde's service due to allegations of corruption. Later, he secured employment with John Digby, a company collector, and Rammohan spent many years at Rangpur and elsewhere with Digby, where he renewed his contacts with Hariharananda. William Carey had, by this time, settled at Serampore and the trio renewed their association with one another. William Carey was also aligned with the English Company, then headquartered at Fort William, and his religious and political ambitions were increasingly intertwined.

The East India Company was taking money from India at a rate of three million pounds a year in 1838. Rammohan Roy estimated how much money was being driven out of India and where it was headed towards. He predicted that around half of the total revenue collected in India was sent out to England, leaving India to fill taxes with the remaining money.

At the turn of the 19th century, the Muslims, although considerably decreased after the battles of Plassey and Buxar, still posed a political threat to the Company. Rammohan was now chosen by Carey to be the agitator among them.

Under Carey's secret tutelage in the next two decades, Rammohan launched his attack against the bastions of Hinduism of Bengal, namely his own Kulin Brahmin priestly clan (then in control of the many temples of Bengal) and their priestly excesses. The social and theological issues Carey chose for Rammohan were calculated to weaken the hold of the dominant Kulin class, especially their younger disinherited sons forced into service who constituted the mobile gentry or "bhadrak" of Bengal, from the Mughal zamindari system and align them to their new overlords of Company. The Kulin excesses targeted included child marriage and dowry. In fact, Carey tried to convert Raja to Christianity and appointed a religious priest to try convert Raja, although the priest later accepted Hinduism.

Settled in Calcutta

When Rammohan Roy found that he had amassed money more than sufficient for the fulfilment of the great object he had in view, he resigned his appointment and came down to Calcutta with the purpose, as he said, of "engaging in religious culture and in the investigation of truth." This turn in his life took place in the year 1814, when he had attained his fortieth year. He had made enough of money by strenuous efforts, and, as money is said to draw in more money, it was soon after he had settled down in Calcutta, supplemented by a considerable portion of the property left by his father. This accession was made in consequence of a reconciliation with his mother, Tarini Devi, who had all along managed the family property in pursuance of the arrangement which had been made by her husband Ramkanta.

A few days after coming to Calcutta, Rammohan Roy purchased a garden with a house attached to it, built in the European style in Upper Circular Road, at the eastern extremity of the City. He had before, while serving at Rangpore, purchased a Zemindari yielding an income of Rupees ten thousand a year.

In this way he realised his long cherished desire of retiring from service and consecrating the latter portion of his life to philosophy and religion. His love of retirement amounted almost to a passion, and he used to say that a man after acquiring competence should spend his life in the enjoyment of philosophic ease. "Old as I am," he once said to a friend, "I wish I may retire to a solitary cave and there apply myself to the study of the Vedanta and Masnavi." But with all his love of retired life, he never neglected the call of duty which the then miserable condition of his country imperatively made on him, and, as he was right earnest in his love of mankind, readily responded to the call.

Rammohan Roy was, so to say, a born reformer, and before he left Government service, he had formed the resolution to reform the social and religious life of his country. Now that he had got the sinews of war, he gave full and free vent to the workings of his mind, and proceeded to give his thoughts and feelings a permanent, tangible shape and form. The prevailing Hindu religion being mixed up, as it very largely was, with gross superstitions and shocking ceremonials, he tried to separate the essentials from the excretions.

This, he saw, he could do only by laying bare before the people the real nature and character of the Hindu religion as taught in the Vedas, and the Upanishads. But as these authorities were locked up in Sanskrit of which people were mostly ignorant, it became necessary for him to translate, at least, some parts thereof into the current vernacular, and for wider circulation into the language of the rulers as well, which had become the language of the educated in Bengal.

To England

Now that he had accomplished the dear object of his life and established the Brahma Samaj on a firm and permanent basis, Rammohan was on the lookout for an opportunity to go to the "Far West," which he had so ardently longed to do; and as good luck would have it, a glorious opportunity presented itself ere long for the due fulfilment of his desire. The Emperor of Delhi—now reduced to a mere shadow of a sovereign,—having taken

umbrage at some acts of the powerful East India Company prejudicial to his interests, wanted to send an ambassador to His Majesty the King of England, for the purpose of having his grievances removed, and as Rammohan Roy was, by his ability and experience, eminently fitted to go on such an important mission, he was selected by His Majesty, who, to add dignity and importance to the person of his representative, conferred upon Rammohan Roy the title of Raja. Besides representing the Imperial grievances, Rammohan Roy had two other objects in view, namely, first, to be present at the approaching discussion in the House of Commons for the renewal of the East India Company's Charter; and secondly, to present memorials in favour of the abolition of the Sati rite, which he took with him from India, and to counteract the agitation carried on by powerful leaders of orthodox Hindu society.

Rammohan Roy sailed for England on the 15th November 1830, accompanied by his foster-son, Raja Ram Roy, and two Hindu servants, Ram Ratan Mukherji and Ramhari Das. They sailed in the *Albion* which was bound for Liverpool. At the time of which we are speaking a voyage to Europe was a very long and tedious affair, and *it* was, therefore, no wonder that the ship did not reach its destination till April 1832, that is, nearly a year and a half after. The voyage was anything but peaceful. While the ship was steering its course over the Indian Ocean, it was overtaken by a terrible storm and was thereby placed in such a critical position that most of the crew and the passengers had given up all hope of life. But, at last, the storm subsided.

The dreaded "Kalapani" (*Black Water*), against the crossing of which Hindu custom and superstition had placed an almost insuperable barrier, was passed in safety. Surely; this was no ordinary feat for a Hindu of rank and position like Rammohan Roy, and we cannot but admire his moral courage in having performed it in the face of such serious opposition. By this time Rammohan Roy had established his reputation as a scholar, philosopher, and reformer. He had written Bengali works on the *Vedanta*, translated into English some of the *Upanishads*, defeated some very noted Christian Missionaries in religious controversies, and established the Brahmo-Samaj or Theistic Church. He had,

given his strong support to the Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck for the abolition of *Sati* or the burning of Hindu widows on the funeral pyre of husbands. He had also won the warmest regard of that Prince of Indian Missionaries, Dr. Alexander Duff, and, as a matter of fact, won a very high repute. When such a remarkable man, "the great Apostle of the East," whose name and fame had long preceded him to Europe, reached the shores of England on the 8th April, it is not surprising that he should have received a cordial welcome from the great men of that land of freedom. The Raja landed at Liverpool and took up his lodgings at one of the hotels there. His arrival in England excited considerable interest. No sooner was his advent known in that famous City than almost every man of distinction in the place hastened to call on him. One of the first visits he received was from the three sons of Roscoe the celebrated historian of the Medici. They came, not merely on their own account but to convey to him the "affectionate greetings" of their distinguished father, whom paralytic affection had for years confined to his apartments. Rammohan Roy lost no time in calling on the old man, who, though forbidden by his doctor to receive any visitors made an exception in favour of the great Indian with whom he had before corresponded. The interview was deeply affecting, as *it* was their first and last meeting on this side of Eternity. Rammohan Roy heard of Roscoe's death while residing in London.

The first public place he attended at Liverpool was Mr. Grundy's Unitarian Chapel. The sermon was proper to the occasion, in exposition of the duty of unlimited charity in our judgements of the creeds of other men, and of their principles of belief. He listened to it with the utmost attention and afterwards expressed himself to be very much pleased with it. After the sermon was over, the congregation, instead of dispersing, thronged up every avenue to *get* a near view of him; and *it* was not till they had heard him address them in their own language and shaken hands with him that they would be prevailed upon to allow him to return.

After staying a few days at Liverpool, Rammohan Roy started for London. On his way thither, he halted at Manchester to see the great factories.

On the very night he reached London, Mr. Bentham, the great philosopher and law reformer, leaving his lonely hermitage, where he had ensconced himself in order that he might consecrate, to quote his own words, "every moment of his life to the service of mankind," came all the way round to see him. Thus, a very warm friendship sprang up between these two great minds, which lasted until it was dissolved by death.

The Englishman was proud of his Indian friend and gladly addressed him as an intensely admired and dearly beloved fellow servant in the service of humanity. But the venerable founder of the Utilitarian School was not the only great man that paid the Raja the honour of a visit. In fact, many of the distinguished Londoners honoured him and sought his friendship.

Though many of the proud Lords wanted only to lionise him, yet there were not a few who appreciated him, and sought his company with a view to acquiring information regarding India. Among these were Mr. (afterwards Lord) Brougham, Sir Henry Strachey and Sir Charles Forbes. With Brougham, then only known as the great advocate of popular education and of the abolition of slavery, Raja Rammohan Roy lived on terms of the closest intimacy.

But not only was the Raja honoured by the learned, he was also honoured even by Royalty itself. He was duly presented to the King, who gave him a cordial reception, and at the grand ceremony of the Coronation, he was given a seat by the side of the Ambassadors of the Crowned Heads of Europe. On the opening of the London Bridge, he was invited by His Majesty to the grand dinner party which was given in celebration of that event. The Court of Directors, though they refused to recognise his embassy and his title, treated him with honour. They entertained him at a public dinner on the 6th July, in the name of the Honourable East India Company at the London Tavern.

The Raja, active and energetic as he certainly was, quite busied himself while in England. He gave his evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Revenue and Judicial systems of India, presented petitions to the said House in the matter of the abolition of the Sati rite, and had the satisfaction of

being present there, when the appeal against such abolition was rejected on the 11th July, 1832. Thus, he succeeded in attaining the two minor objects of his mission, though he failed to achieve the main one, for which he had gone, namely, the restoration of some provinces in the vicinity of Delhi to the Emperor; but this failure, it may be observed, was mainly due to the weakness-and indecision of the aggrieved party himself.

While in England, Raja Rammohan Roy was taken care of by some English families, not only as a distinguished guest but also as a friend. Of these families, the most notable was the family of his most intimate friend, David Hare, who has done more for the mental and moral improvement of the natives of India than any other foreigner. There he became acquainted among others with Dr. Lant Carpenter, afterwards wrote an excellent memoir of him..

This Dr. Carpenter was the father of Miss Mary Carpenter, whose name has almost become a house hold word in this distant land. She was then quite in her prime, and as she was well able to appreciate real sterling merit wherever it was found, began to cherish deep regard for Raja Rammohan Roy, so much so that she there and then conceived a very strong desire to see the wonderland which had given birth to such a great personality. But this desire she could not fulfil until the year 1866; and though her stay in Bengal was not long, she had done excellent work among the people.

Middle "Brahmo" Period

Commenting on his published works, Sivanath Shastri wrote that Roy was part of a second appeal to the Christian Public. Brahminical Magazine Parts I, II and III, with Bengali translation and a new Bengali newspaper called Samvad Kaumudi, was processed in 1821. In 1822, A Persian paper called *Mirat-ul-Akbar* contained a tract entitled "Brief Remarks on Ancient Female Rights"; a book in Bengali called Answers to Four Questions was released the same year. The third and final appeal to the Christian public took place in 1823. Roy wrote a letter to Rev. H. Ware on the "Prospects of Christianity in India" and an "Appeal for Famine-Smitten Natives in Southern India" in 1824. A Bengali tract on the qualifications of a God-loving householder, a tract in Bengali on

a controversy with a Kayastha, and a Grammar of the Bengali language in English were written in 1826. A Sanskrit tract on "Divine Worship by Gayatri" with an English translation, the edition of a Sanskrit treatise against caste, and the previously noticed tract called "Answer of a Hindu to the Question" was released in 1827. A form of divine worship and a collection of hymns were composed by Roy and his friends in 1828. In 1829, "Religious Instructions founded on Sacred Authorities" was published in English and Sanskrit; a Bengali tract called "Anusthan" was also published that year. A petition against Suttee also took place in 1829. In 1830, Roy was in charge of a Bengali tract, a Bengali book concerning the Bengali language, the trust deed of the Brahmo Samaj, an address to Lord William Bentinck congratulating him for the abolition of Suttee, an document in English of the arguments regarding the burning of widows, and a tract in English on the disposal of ancestral property by Hindus.

Last Days

After a short sojourn in France, where he was the recipient of Royal favours, the Raja's health began to fail. He had been invited to visit Bristol and to take up his residence at the house of Miss Castle—a ward of Dr. Carpenter—in the neighbour-'hood of that city. In broken health he started for Bristol, accompanied by Miss Hare, the daughter of his esteemed friend, David Hare, who had resided with her uncle in Bedford Square, in the early part of September, to spend a few weeks at Stapleton Grove, intending to proceed thence to Devonshire, to pass the winter there. Nine days after his arrival, he was attacked with fever. Drs. Pritchard and Garrick attended upon him. Medicine afforded him, however, only temporary relief. His fever returned with redoubled vigour, and grew into what the native physicians would call *Bihar*. The delirium was followed by a stupor from which he never recovered.

The Demise

In 1830, Rammohan Roy travelled to the United Kingdom as an ambassador of the Mughal Emperor Akbar II, who conferred him title of Raja to convince British government for welfare of

India and to ensure that the Lord Bentick's regulation banning the practice of Sati was not overturned. Roy also visited France.

Roy died at Stapleton, which was then a village to the north east of Bristol but currently a suburb, on September 27, 1833. His cause of death was meningitis; he was buried in Arnos Vale Cemetery in southern Bristol.

On the 29th of May 1843, remains were removed to the cemetery of Arno's Vale near Bristol, where a tomb was erected over his grave in the early part of the following year by his friend, Dwaraka Nath Tagore, with the following inscription:—

Beneath this stone rest the remains of Raja Rammohan Roy a conscientious and steadfast believer in the unity of *the* Godhead, he consecrated his life with entire devotion to the worship of the Divine Spirit alone To great natural talents he united a thorough mastery of many languages and early distinguished himself as one of the greatest scholars of the day. His unwearied labours to promote the social, moral and physical condition of the people of India, his earnest endeavours to suppress idolatry and *Sati* rite, and his constant zealous advocacy of whatever tended to advance the glory of God and welfare of man live in the grateful remembrance of his countrymen. This tablet records the sorrow and pride with which his memory is cherished by his descendants.

The noble tribute to the great deceased is not in any way over-coloured; it represents the real state of things and portrays the Raja in his true colours.

The Legacy

Rammohan Roy was a remarkable writer. Indeed, he wielded a powerful pen and always used it for noble causes. But powerful as his pen was, it was not confined to one language but extended to several others as *well*. Sanskrit, Bengali, Persian, Arabic and, last though not least English, all came within its range. But his mother-tongue was the one in which he wrote the largest. He wrote several works in that language and gave it a form and finish

which has since become a thing of beauty. He wrote in many languages and on all subjects of varying interest. Songs and poems, political and religious discourses, problems of education and sociology, legal and theological controversies, all alike engaged the multiform energy of this great pioneer of modern civilization in India.

High Thinking and Simple Living

Rammohan's was the vision of a statesman. "From personal experience, I am impressed with the conviction that the greater our intercourse with European gentlemen, the greater will be our improvement in literary, social and political affairs," he writes. He wrote many other pamphlets on public questions and in all of them he stood for "Liberty, national well-being and international 'unity". It was his hope that India in time, would lead the rest of the countries of Asia.

An English writer comments, "The prospect of an educated India, of an India approximating to European standards of culture, seems to have never been long absent from Rammohan's mind; and he did, however vaguely, claim in advance for his countrymen the political rights which progress in civilization inevitably involves. Here again Rammohan stands forth as the tribune and prophet of New India."

"Now in his prime, Rammohan had organised the Hindu theistic movement. He had given permanent literary expression to the reformation of Hinduism, by selecting or indicating the order of Scriptures pointing to the one true God. He had seen the Brahma Samaj and his pioneering services in that line were a great service to the nation. He had launched Dr. Duff's great educational enterprise. The cause of English education which he championed was now on the eve of official victory. And he had witnessed the abolition of *suttee*."

How did he live, this great thinker, reformer, writer who had achieved so much for his countrymen within one short lifetime? Mr. G.N. Tagore whose father was an intimate friend and disciple,

said that Rammohan Roy was an early riser, and regularly took his morning walk. He used to oil his body every morning before bathing. Two big men would oil and shampoo him, while at the same time he would read every day parts of the Sanskrit grammar *Moogdhabodha*. After his bath he would have his breakfast in the Indian fashion, sitting on the ground. He usually breakfasted on fish and rice and perhaps milk, too. He never took any food between his morning and evening meal. He generally worked till two and then went out to see his European friends in the afternoon. His evening meal was between seven and eight and that was in the English fashion but the dishes were Muhammadan, like *Pilau*, *Kofta*, *Korma*, etc.

Another, slightly different account of Rammohan's typical day, based on the account of an old and faithful servant is: "He used to rise very early, about 4 a.m., to take coffee, and then to have his morning walk, accompanied by a few persons. He would generally return home before sunrise, and when engaged in morning duties, Gokaldas Napit (his secretary) would read to him newspapers of the day. Tea would follow, then gymnastics. After resting a little he would attend to correspondence; then have his daily bath and eat breakfast at 10 a.m. Then he would hear newspapers read; an hour's siesta on the bare top of a table; getting up he would pass his time either in conversation or in making visits. Tiffin at 3 p.m.; dessert at 5 p.m. Evening walk; supper at 10 p.m. He would sit up to midnight conversing with friends. He would then retire to bed again eating his favourite cake, which he called 'Halila'. He would when engaged in writing be alone." Truly, he lived a life of high thinking and simple living!

Tributes to Life and Work

The obituary was like a fanfare of trumpets announcing his deliverance from mortal coils. From his grave across the seas, he calls to his countrymen to lift their gaze beyond the horizons of their own land... to "rid themselves of darkness and prejudice and to accept the Truth and walk the way of Truth into the ever expanding freedom and fullness of life". His many gifts of intellect, his modesty, his delicacy of feeling and courtesy towards women in particular were recalled by all.

During his life time, Miss Carpenter spoke of Rammohan as "a person of extraordinary merit. With great intelligence and ability, he unites modesty and simplicity which win all hearts". Another lady who had named one of her children Rammohan, and who had made him the child's godfather, said, "For surely never was there a man of so much modesty and humility. I used to feel quite ashamed of the reverential manner in which he behaved to me. Had I been our Queen, I could not have been approached and taken leave of with more respect."

Here is the Court Journal, dated October 5, 1833:

"The Raja, in outer mien was cast in nature's finest mould; his figure was manly and robust; his carriage dignified, the forehead towering, expansive and commanding; the eyes dark, restless, full of brightness and animation, yet liquid and benevolent, and frequently glistening with a tear when affected by the deeper sensibility of the heart; the nose of Roman form and proportions; lips full and indicative of independence, the whole features deeply expressive, with a smile of soft and peculiar fascination which won irresistibly the suffrage to whom it was addressed. His manners were characterised by suavity blended with dignity, varying towards either point according to the company in which he might be placed. To ladies his politeness was marked by the most delicate manner, and his felicitous mode of paying them a compliment gained him very many admirers among the high-born beauties of Europe. In conversation with individuals of every rank and of various nations and professions, he passed with utmost ease from one language to another, suiting his remarks to each and all in excellent taste and commanding the astonishment and respect of his hearers.

"It was in argument, however, that the superiority of his mind showed best. He seemed to grasp the truth instinctively, and called in strong language, raillery, sarcasm and sometimes a most brilliant wit to aid him in getting the better of his opponent; if precedent was necessary, a remarkable retentive memory and extensive reading in many languages supplied with a copious fund; and at times with a rough, unsparing

and ruthless hand he burst asunder the meshes of sophistry, error and bigotry, in which it might be attempted to entangle him”.

A friend speaks of his natural and inherent genius, “his powerful understanding and determined will, a will determined with singular energy and unshakeable self-direction, to lofty and generous purposes.”

Of his life and work, no record is truer and no estimate more just than the following words from his English biographer, “Rammohan Roy stands in history as the living bridge over which India marches from her unmeasured past to her incalculable future. He was the arch that spanned the gulf that yawned between ancient caste and modern humanity, between superstition and science, between despotism and democracy, between immobile custom and a conservative progress, between a bewildering polytheism and a pure, if vague, theism. He was the mediator of his people, harmonising in his own person, often by means of his own solitary sufferings, the conflicting tendencies of immemorial tradition and of inevitable enlightenment... He embodies the new spirit which arises from the compulsory mixture of races and faiths and civilizations — he embodies its freedom of enquiry, its thirst for science, its large humane sympathies, its pure and sifted ethics; along with its reverent but not uncritical regard for the past, and prudent, even timid disinclination towards revolt. But in the life of Rammohan Roy we see what we hope yet to have shown us in the progress of India, that the secret of the whole movement is religious.

“If we follow the right line of his development we shall find that he leads the way from the Orientalism of the Past, not *to*, but *through* Western culture, towards a civilization which is neither western nor eastern, but something vastly larger and nobler than both. He preserves continuity throughout, by virtue of his religion, which again supplied the motive force of his progressive movement. The Power that connected and restrained, as well as widened and impelled, was religion. Rammohan thus presents a most instructive

and inspiring study for the new India of which he is the type and pioneer... There can be little doubt that, whatever future the destinies may have in store for India, that future will be largely shaped by the life and work of Rammohan Roy—and not the future of India alone. We stand on the eve of an unprecedented intermingling of East and West. The European and Asiatic streams of human development, which have often tinged each other before, are now approaching a confluence which bids fair to form the one ocean, river of the collective progress of mankind.”

Impact of His Mission

Rammohan Roy was in the beginning concerned purely with the search for Truth, but when he had found it in a purified Hinduism allied to Unitarian Christianity, he found there an imperative that he serve his fellow man. And so the rest of his life was devoted to social reform. But campaigning for the rights of women, or for modern European-style education, meant clashing with the ‘religious’ views of many traditional Hindus.

This only accelerated Rammohan’s efforts to preach his new view of Truth. Thus the Brahmo Samaj which he founded was a grouping of persons who were equally concerned about the spiritual and material reform of the Hindu way of life.

After Rammohan’s death, his Calcutta friends and especially Dwarkanath Tagore and Devendranath Tagore and the other Samajists continued the pattern he had set of emphasising for all people the true basis of all religion—the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. Under Keshab Chandra Sen, the Samajists were deeply involved with social work projects including famine relief and women’s education. In 1872 the Civil Marriages Act was passed, resulting from the efforts of Sen and others.

Meanwhile, in the West of India, Bombay was becoming a government and business centre, and there were to be found many gentlemen to whom the writings and example of Rammohan Roy were a call to action. A counterpart of the Brahmo Samaj, was formed in Bombay under the name Prarthana Samaj. Justice

Ranade, one of the founders, also helped establish the Widow Marriage Association in 1861. Already, in 1849 efforts at caste reform in Maharashtra had commenced with the forming of the Paramhansa Sabha.

Changes had also taken place in the extent and direction of Western influence on India. In England when the Liberals came into power in 1832, new and broad-minded ideas in politics were freely expressed from the seats of power. A concern for the welfare of the people in the colonies, in Africa and the East, including India, was voiced in Parliament. Missionary societies started schools and colleges to carry the message of Christ to the people of India, and to bring the light of knowledge to them. Ideals like “the greatest good for the greatest number” were in the air. Even East India Company’s attitude changed. From being careful not to interfere, the Company began to employ members of missionary societies as interpreters and chaplains and as unofficial ambassadors and advisers.

Growing British power all over India led to the last convulsion of the Indian feudal system—the Revolt of 1857.

The final defeat of the Princes created a new situation in which only those who had understood the thinking of Rammohan Roy were able immediately to extend their bridge-building activity, linking ancient spiritual ideas with Western logic and science and social values.

During this time, the Muslim reformer, Sir. Syed Ahmed Khan was trying to bring Islamic life under the influence of the liberal and democratic traditions of the West. In 1875 he founded the college that later became Aligarh Muslim University.

The Ramakrishna Mission (started by Swami Vivekananda in 1897), Gandhi’s crusade in the 1920s and 1930s for a moral revival in India to fit her for Independence, these were further steps along the path laid out by Rammohan Roy. In his efforts to interpret the East to the West and the West to the East he had great successors—Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.