RAMMOHUN ROY
AND THE PROCESS OF MODERNIZATION
IN INDIA

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Contributions by

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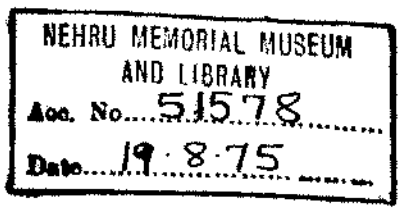

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PREFACE

This volume of essays owes its making to a symposium organized under the auspices of the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library in 1972, the year of the bi-centenary of the birth of Raja Rammohun Roy. Eight of the nine lectures in the symposium have been included in this book after those were revised by the contributors for publication. The paper of Pradyumna Bhattacharya on "Rammohun Roy and Bengali Prose" was written later at our request to fill in a serious gap in the symposium. The Introduction contributed by my former colleague Rajat K. Ray helps to tie up the papers on different aspects of Rammohun Roy's activities and thought and places them in their proper relationship.

There is a considerable amount of adulatory writings on Rammohun Roy; he also has his fair share of detractors. The object of this publication is neither to bring out another volume of eulogy nor to debunk "Rammohun Roy myth." The book has been planned as a scholarly and critical study of Rammohun Roy's ideas and achievements, keeping in view the political, social and economic conditions of Bengal in his age. It was felt that the bi-centenary of his birth could be best celebrated by promoting a scholarly and objective work based on a close examination of his writings and other sources. The present volume, it is hoped, will succeed to a large extent in providing an analysis of Rammohun Roy's achievements in the light of eighteenth and early nineteenth century traditions which were relevant to his activities and interests. The study is also valuable for the effort that has been made to evaluate the extent to which Rammohun Roy was really one of the first modern Indians and how well deserved was the title of "Father of Modern India" bestowed on him. The elements of modernity and break and continuity in his thought, particularly with reference to religious and social ideas, have been brought out very clearly. The volume also includes a historiographical study which helps to discover Rammohun Roy's favourable image at different times and explains how he became "Father of Modern India."

I am thankful to the contributors, an international group from India, Bangladesh, and the USA. for their generous help and co-operation in the preparation of this volume. To Barun De, I owe a special debt for advice and support in the organization of the symposium. The views and opinions expressed in the essays are, of course, those of the contributors.

I have received valuable help from my colleague S.R. Bakshi in seeing this book through the press. The index has been prepared by S.K. Sharma of our Library.

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INTRODUCTION

RAJAT K. RAY

WHEN the centenary of Rammohun Roy's death was celebrated in 1933 by eminent figures of the "Bengal Renaissance," such as Rabindranath Tagore, Brajendranath Seal and Ramananda Chatterjee, it still seemed possible, in the declining light of the afternoon of that "Renaissance" (the depression had set in by then), to take a heroic view of history, in which Rammohun Roy appeared as "a luminous star in the firmament of India's history," who shed radiance all over the land, rescuing it from the penury of self-oblivion.[1] In 1972, when the bi-centenary of his birth was celebrated in Calcutta and elsewhere, it no longer seemed possible, in the prevailing mood of frustration among India's intellectuals, to take such a heroic view of history, and the outcrop of writing on Rammohun Roy exhibited reactions ranging from the debunking of "the Rammohun myth" by Professor R. C. Majumdar[2] to the sombre and introspective review of the limits of the modernization process in colonized India and the constraints on the modernizing thought and activities of Rammohun Roy which characterizes the writings in this volume. The common theme which runs through the contributions on different aspects of Rammohun Roy's life and work is the theme of modernization of India. Because this process is still unfinished and is still very much to the forefront of the goals

[1]Rabindranath Tagore "Inaugurator of the Modern Age in India" in *The Father of Modern India, Commemoration Volume of the Rammohun Roy Centenary Celebrations, 1933*, edited by Satish Chandra Chakravarti (Calcutta, 1935).

[2]R. C. Majumdar, *On Rammohun Roy* (Calcutta, 1972).

set before our own generation, it is not surprising that the reassessment of the Raja's role in modern Indian history in the light of this current problem has revived old controversies about him.

In view of the current nature of the problem of modernization of India, it is no simple task, even after the long span of time which separates the present generation from Raja Rammohun Roy, to determine his role in this process with the kind of objective detachment that will come more naturally to historians when the process has reached a more conclusive stage. David Kopf's historiographical essay on the changing attitudes of successive generations of Bengal Renaissance leaders to their ancestor Rammohun brings to light the important point that the image of Rammohun Roy as co-founder of modern unitarian religion, champion of reformed Hinduism, social reformer and father of modern India was refashioned again and again throughout the nineteenth century to meet immediate ideological needs. As Kopf points out, the task of an objective assessment of the role of the Raja—his actual historical role as distinct from subjective perceptions of his achievements by later generations of Renaissance mythographers—has been complicated by the continual reshaping of his image in the historical consciousness of generations of nineteenth century Bengal Renaissance leaders, which has led imperceptibly to the merging of the period of Rammohun Roy with his shifting historical image after his death. Kopf's warning must be borne in mind that many generalizations about Rammohun Roy have no objective relevance to events during the age of Rammohun but were formulated after his death for various reasons.

However, the problem of modernization of India, to which all the essays in this volume are related in some way or other, was not a product of later preoccupations, but was a problem very much present in the mind of the Raja. To some of the authors in this volume, who exhibit a keen receptivity to the frustrations of unfinished modernization, the perspective on Rammohun Roy which is clear at the distance of two centuries after his birth, is the ambivalence in the position of the Raja and the nature of the Renaissance. This has led to a new questioning of the premature eagerness to find a father figure for modern India in Rammohun Roy and a radical break with the past in Bengal at the beginning of the nineteenth century—a tendency which characterizes the whole of the Renaissance mythography of Rammohun Roy analyzed by David

Kopf in his historiographical essay. Perhaps the most important methodological point which emerges from this new questioning attitude[3] is that a sharp tradition-modernization dichotomy is not intellectually conducive to appreciation of the complex processes of change in the colonial situation, of which the Raja was necessarily a part.

If tradition is taken to imply a coordinated and stable set of ideas and institutions, then the eighteenth century society in which Rammohun Roy was born was too fluid and too complex to be viewed in the light of such a simplistic concept. Nor was progress so unilinear in the nineteenth century as to justify the absolute tradition-modernization polarity so optimistically accepted by mythographers of the Renaissance.

The danger of too simple a view of "tradition" is strikingly illustrated by the startling conclusion of Ashis Nandy about the relative modernity of the supposedly traditional rite of sati. Certainly the rite of widow-burning was old, as old at least as the later Vedas. But archaeological findings and accounts of foreign travellers indicate that the rite took place mostly in the families of princes and chiefs in the various Rajput principalities of Central India and Rajasthan and in the kingdom of Vijayanagar in the south. From the decline of the Mughal empire to the establishment of British paramountcy in 1818, the practice of sati suddenly increased in certain parts of India. In areas exposed to Western influence, such as Bengal proper, or otherwise exposed to a high degree of social flux, such as the Banaras region under the newly risen Rajas of Banaras, sati became a popular custom. Information collected by district and police officers of the British government in the three Presidencies of Bengal, Bombay and Madras from 1815 to 1827 clearly revealed the wide regional variations in this matter.[4] In the whole of the extensive Madras Presidency during the years 1814-1819, the total recorded number of cases of widow burning fell far short of the number of such cases in the district of Hugly opposite Calcutta. In the south the rite prevailed mostly in the Telegu region of the Madras Presidency, where the Telegu culture of the Vijaya-

[3]Exhibited in this volume most prominently by Barun De, Asok Sen, Sumit Sarkar and Pradyumna Bhattacharya.

[4]This information is consolidated in the *Parliamentary Papers* of the relevant years.

nagar empire left this baneful heritage. Deep in the south it was hardly anywhere to be found, except in Tanjore, that ancient stronghold of land-holding Brahman mirasdars. It was wholly unknown in Malabar, and the practice had disappeared over large tracts in the south—Salem, Coimbatore, Madura, Tinnevelly—some time after the fall of the kingdom of Vijayanagar. In the Bombay Presidency again, cases of sati over four years (1814-1819) numbered well below a half of the average annual figure for the Calcutta Division. Nearly every case of sati occurred in the southern Konkan. It was almost unknown in Gujarat and very restricted in Maharashtra, where the Marathas and the Chitpavan Brahmans had never given it much countenance. In the Bengal Presidency, which at this time stretched to modern UP, widow burning was much more prevalent than in South or West India. More significant, however, was the fact that Calcutta and the region around it—the districts of Burdwan, Hugly, Nadia and 24 Parganas—provided 57 per cent of the "virtuous wives" (i.e. satis) who burned themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands in the whole of the Bengal Presidency between 1815 and 1826.[5]

Thus the region which had come under the most sustained Western influence was the region in which the rite of sati was popularized in the eighteenth century.[6] Sordid greed—desire to avoid sharing a dead man's possessions with his widow—was considered by Rammohun Roy as one of the causes that led to the increase of the rite of widow burning about a century before he started his agitation against it. But there was more to it than this: even poor families of low caste were adopting the rite, for it had become an aid in the process of Sanskritization of social groups of low ritual status. A detailed examination of the sati statistics consolidated in the Parliamentary Papers definitely shows that Ashis Nandy is factually incorrect in assuming that the rite was becoming popular,

[5]Calculated from annual statements on the number of satis in the *Parliamentary Papers* of these years.

[6]Within the Bengal Presidency, sati was also a popular practice in the city of Banaras and the contiguous districts of Gorakhpur, Ghazipur, Shahabad and Saran. Banaras society, as analyzed by Bernard Cohn, was a highly fluid society in the eighteenth century. It had a political system of balanced oppositions, each element in competition with others, cultivators, dominant lineage groups, tax-farmers and governments. The system no doubt favoured upward social mobility and Sanskritization, in which sati was an instrument.

not among the tradition-bound peasantry but among the new urban rich who had lost part of their allegiance to older norms and had not filled the void by a new ethic. Nandy does not sufficiently emphasize the motive, which he casually mentions in his list of causes of increase of sati, that "sati became a means of securing social status and renown for virtue." In his analysis this motive operated only with regard to "families deviating from paths of traditional virtue due to the seductiveness of the new system." But peasant families who continued to adhere to older norms showed themselves to be almost equally responsive to opportunities for upgrading their social status by adopting sati. The opportunity for upward social mobility had been vastly increased in the Calcutta region by the presence of the British. The rite of sati gained increasing popularity under these circumstances among lower castes in Calcutta, Burdwan, Hugly, Nadia and Twenty-four Parganas. About 55 per cent of the widows burnt in Bengal proper during 1815-1816 belonged to the ritually pure Brahman, Kayastha and Vaidya castes, but the rest came from lower groups, especially the up and pushing Sadgops, Telis, Kaivartas, Goalas, Namasudras, Sahas and Aguris.[7] The Calcutta Babus sought to demonstrate their ritual purity and allegiance to traditional high culture by practising sati on an unprecedented scale. As Nandy observes, "it was this *babu* culture which made a sadistic sport out of sati, and to the extent this culture was itself a product of western and modern encroachments upon the traditional life style, sati was the weirdest response to new cultural inputs and institutional innovations." Paradoxically, the rite of sati, regarded by the British as the most glaring abuse of 'traditional' Hindu society, was in its recrudescent form almost as much a product of colonial penetration as was the movement for its abolition, by leading which Rammohun Roy became famous as a reformer and modernizer.

If the spread of sati as a Sanskritizing rite is any indication of social mobility, then the conclusion seems to be inescapable that the caste structure of eighteenth century Bengal was remarkably fluid. This conclusion derives support also from Adam's reports on vernacular education in Bengal. Adam learnt with surprise during his inspection of vernacular schools in the backward district

[7]In the Madras and Bombay Presidencies, satis were almost without exception wives of deceased Brahmans.

of Murshidabad that there was a general tendency among lower castes to obtain instruction. Far from losing ground in indigenous vernacular education lower castes were eagerly acquiring the humble instruction from which they were traditionally debarred by the injunctions of the sacred texts.[8] There were indigenous mechanisms of change in traditional Indian society which operated independently of the Westernist trends of modernization. Even in the supposedly dark days following the disintegration of Mughal political culture, society never quite became the *Achalayatana* (house of immobility) that Rabindranath Tagore drew in his plays. This was the time when strong currents of change were operating in Islamic thought and theology under the influence of Shah Waliullah and his school. It has been speculated by more than one author in this volume that Rammohun Roy was influenced by the currents of change in Islamic thought before he made his acquaintance of Western philosophy.[9] Certainly his logical prose, which reflects in the clearest manner the modernity of his attitude, was not built out of void. Pradyumna Bhattacharya has quoted in this volume an important passage from a manuscript treatise on logic (*Bhasha Parichcheda*, 1774), which seems to indicate that he had his roots in the traditional prose of the Nyaya school of logicians. The awakening of modern Hindu and Muslim thought in India is all too often traced back to contact with British orientalism or English utilitarian ideas. The actual process was much more complex. Both Raja Rammohun Roy and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan received a traditional education in their youth and their early stirrings of thought did not reflect much Western influence. In his essay on the religion of Rammohun Roy, A.K. Majumdar traces the Muslim, Hindu and Christian influences on Rammohun's thought without adequately bringing out the chronological aspect of the intellectual influences imbibed by him and the relative importance of the different sets of religious doctrines with which he became acquainted in successive stages. It would be more on the mark to redefine these intellectual

[8]In the vernacular schools of Murshidabad, only 350 out of a total number of 1,080 pupils belonged to the Brahman, Kshatriya, Kayastha and Vaidya castes. The rest came from lower castes, Kaivartas, Suvarnabaniks, Gandhabaniks, Tantis, Sunris, Telis, Madaks, etc.

[9]Sumit Sarkar, "Rammohun Roy and the Break with the Past"; A. F. Salahuddin Ahmed, "Rammohun Roy and His Contemporaries."

influences as Perso-Arabic (which included, besides Islamic theology, secular, Aristotelian and other non-Islamic influences), Vedantic (as Majumdar points out, Vedantic monism of the Sankara school as opposed to Vaishnavism) and occidental (which included, besides missionary and unitarian doctrines, a whole range of secular thought). The three main influences in Rammohun's thought—Persian, Vedantic and occidental—were imbibed by him successively, strictly in that chronological order, a fact which cannot be too often emphasized.

Serious doubt has been thrown by the painstaking research of Brajendranath Banerji on the stories of Rammohun Roy's early education at Patna and Banaras, though it is clear from judicial records that he visited Banaras more than once at a later age. What is, however, clearly established about his early intellectual development is that he had developed close and friendly ties with the highly respectable Muslim scholars of the Sadr Diwani Adalat and the Fort William College in course of his business dealings in Calcutta at the turn of the century and had made a tolerably wide acquaintance with Perso-Arabic literature of a philosophical bent under their guidance. He had also wide contacts with European Company officials in Calcutta, but though he could speak English on common topics of discourse, he could not at this stage read the language with any facility. Soon after this he handed over his speculative business in Company securities and money-lending to an agent in Calcutta and commenced on his career as a diwan of more than one collector in several districts. It was in course of this peripatetic career that he published, while at Murshidabad in 1805, his first philosophical work in Persian that is available in print, the *Tuhfat-ul Muwahhiddin*. It was written at a time when he had no close acquaintance with Western ideas, or even Vedantic philosophy. The medium of expression and philosophical terminology in that early work leaves even its casual readers in no doubt as to the source of its inspiration. From early childhood a questioning attitude had been an essential ingredient of his personality, as might have been seen from his father's outburst against his eternal "but" (*kintu*), his counter-argument, his counter-conclusion, his counter-statement to oppose his father. But this duty of doubt could become the fully-developed *weltanschauung* of the *Tuhfat* only under the external influence of some training in philosophy. This external influence was the secularist, rationalist and deistic trend in the Perso-

Arabic literature of seventeenth and eighteenth century India. It was later on, when he went to Rangpur in 1807 as diwan to Digby, that he commenced his study of English seriously, learning Vedantic philosophy of the Sankara school at the same time under the able guidance of the Sanskrit scholar Harihara nanda Tirthaswami. By the time he settled in Calcutta in 1815, he had a commanding knowledge of philosophical works in Sanskrit. The Vedanta School was the formative influence in this phase of his thought. In the next phase he developed close contacts with free-thinkers, utilitarians, rationalists, unitarians and missionaries among the European inhabitants of Calcutta and gradually acquired mastery of contemporary Western thought. In Rammohun Roy's subsequent works the influence of English philosophers—Locke, Hume, Bentham—as well as Christian unitarians, was apparent. Kopf claims in his essay that Rammohun was using unitarianism in an Indian way in his crusade against idolatry and advocacy of monotheism, making a kind of cultural transference from the synoptic Gospels to Shankaracharya. A chronological study of his intellectual development seems to indicate otherwise. He made his acquaintance with Christian unitarianism after he settled in Calcutta, when the basic tenets of religion had already been fixed into his mind in successive contact with Perso-Arabic philosophical literature and Sanskrit texts of the Advaita school. As A.K. Majumdar points out in his essay, he "had already accepted the basic teachings of all the Semitic religions, that idols should not be worshipped, and that there is only one God." The world of thought of the Persianized literate of eighteenth century India, in which Rammohun matured intellectually before his contact with the West, was characterized by sufficient tension of doctrines, conflict of ideas and undercurrents of doubt to produce movements of reform from within.

Islamic theology was the main, but by no means the exclusive, element in this world of Perso-Arabic philosophical thought. Through the Arabic medium Rammohun Roy learnt Aristotelian logic. His acquaintance with Persian treatises on comparative religion by non-Muslim authors enabled him to pick up the comparative, sociological approach to established religions that he used with such devastating logic in the *Tuhfat*. In this respect the necessity of a systematic comparison of his *Tuhfat-ul Muwahhiddin* with the seventeenth century Persian tract *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*

has been emphasized, by more than one author in this volume,[10] The author of this work, Muhsin Fani, was an Iranian fire-worshipper who was compelled by circumstances to emigrate to Hindustan. He was apparently of the Zoroastrian persuasion and his account of the continuous undercurrent of Zoroastrian influence on Islam in Persia was perceptive. He compared in a remarkably scientific spirit what he considered the five main religions of his world—Magism (ancient religion of Iran), Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam—describing in a fairly competent manner the contending schools of philosophy within each faith. The *Dabistan* was a sufficiently well known work in the eighteenth century to come to the favourable notice of William Jones, and there is nothing improbable in the suggestion that Rammohun Roy, a widely-read scholar in Persian, was acquainted with its comparative method. A.K. Majumdar's observation that "the Raja was the first really earnest investigator in the science of comparative religion which the world has produced" needs to be reconsidered in the light of the growing scholastic awareness of the importance of the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*.

With ruthless logic Roy submitted each major religion to the cold light of reason in the *Tuhfat* and arrived in this manner at the principles that were common to all religions and were moreover socially necessary. The additions to these essential doctrines—the hundreds of useless hardships and privations regarding eating, drinking, good and bad omens—he condemned as destructive of social life itself. Fortunately, observed the young writer of the *Tuhfat*, there exists in every person an innate faculty of reason that enables him to distinguish truth from falsehood and to pay attention to the good of society. By looking at the excellent universe, without any training and simply by insight into it, anyone has the innate faculty of inferring that there exists one who governs the world. But this faculty is counterbalanced by the tendency of habit and training to profess the existence of a particular divinity with specific attributes. The attribution of human traits like anger, mercy, hatred and love to God produces a belief in the efficacy of rites, in disregard of the relationship between cause and effect. The universe is a system in which all parts are related to each other by a sequent relation of cause and effect. When through influence of

[10]See the articles of Sumit Sarkar and A. F. Salahuddin Ahmed.

whims people lose sight of this cause-and-effect relationship, and the cause of a thing remains hidden, the interested person ascribes it to his own supernatural power. Inductive reason is the only safeguard against people being deceived by the supernatural claims of established religions. Otherwise people begin to discover a cause-and-effect relationship between two things although there is no connection or sequence between the two. The young Rammohun denied that religion was a matter of faith outside reason and objected to the argument of God's power to bring about miracles on the ground that without the means of distinction between the possible and the impossible, the whole structure of syllogism and logical demonstration would collapse.

His emphasis on inductive reason and empirical proof at this state of his mental development was unlikely to have been derived from Locke, Newton and Hume. On the other hand there existed in Islamic theology rationalist schools of thought which had set out in the clearest possible manner the line of argument adopted by Rammohun Roy in the *Tuhfat*. But Islamic theology was beset by doctrinal disputes of rival schools and it is necessary to be more specific about the precise connections between Rammohun Roy and the preceding schools of Perso-Arabic philosophy. An attempt to pin down the source of his ideas from the internal evidence of his book seems to point to the Muta'zilite heresy of the eighth century, which stood for freedom of thought and primacy of reason, challenged the eternity of the Koran and conceived God as a unity without personal attributes. It is interesting in this connection to note that the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* contained a somewhat desultory discussion of the doctrines of the Muta'zilites so that Rammohun Roy might have come to know their doctrines indirectly through this work even if the works of the Muta'zilites composed a thousand years ago were not directly available to Perso-Arabic scholars in eighteenth century India.[11]

Like many medieval reform movements, Rammohun's early protest against idolatry might in course of time have been absorbed into the synthetic texture of medieval thought and culture without producing any permanent impact on the antiquated structure of

[11]The only English translation, defective and partial, of this work is David Shea and Antony Troyer, *The Dabistan or School of Manners* (New York and London, 1901).

eighteenth century Indian society but for his subsequent intellectual communion with the West. Nevertheless it is worthy of note that the hard rationalist deism of his *Tuhfat* was fundamentally more radical in its religious and social implications than his later theistic religion in Calcutta with all the limitations of the reform-from-within tactic. At the level of ideas as noticed by Barun De and Sumit Sarkar, a certain retreat is perceptible in his position during the Calcutta phase, although this was the period when he was able to institutionalize his ideas in a manner that was to leave a more permanent trace in the development of modern India. The contradictions of the modernization process in a colonial situation were perforce reflected in his historical role. His career exhibited this complex and inconclusive process of modernization, in which three separate strands might be detected by the discerning observer: the consolidation of the position of the traditional high caste rural gentry on the land, the transformation of a medieval literati into a modern intelligentsia, and the transition from Company monopoly to free trade imperialism (this was ultimately to lead to the failure of Indian capitalist enterprise after its brief development in partnership with the European free-traders).

1. THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE GENTRY

The Permanent Settlement, of which the family of Rammohun Roy was a conspicuous beneficiary, was declared by Lord Cornwallis with the idea of encouraging the growth of a class of capitalist landlords and entrepreneurs who would invest money in the improvement of agriculture. The conferment of exclusive ownership rights on zamindars at the expense of the peasants led, in the words of Asok Sen, to subordination of usufructuary interests to tributary privileges. That is to say, peasants continued to have possession of land, together with their functional role of taking investment decisions regarding its cultivation, but were subjected to the permanent taxing rights of a *rentier* social element which was very different from a land-holding class of capitalist entrepreneurs enjoying the power of resource allocation in agriculture. The beneficiaries of this process were naturally not the improving landlord class envisaged by Cornwallis, but were in fact the local high caste families (such as the family of Rammohun Roy), who had formerly existed as dependents of big zamindars and Rajas, supplementing the

income from their small subordinate interests in the land by the perquisites of office under the revenue establishment of the Mughal government.

Ramkanta Roy, father of Rammohun, was a disappointed small revenue official at Murshidabad who became a trusted agent of Maharani Bishnukumari of Burdwan and acquired a lucrative farm of three parganas of the Burdwan Raj. From this subordinate position as a dependent land-holder and zamindari official, Ramakanta Roy, along with his sons Jagamohun and Rammohun, rose to the status of an independent proprietor soon after the Permanent Settlement by buying up several mahals offered for sale. Although he subsequently became embroiled in a dispute with the Raja of Burdwan that resulted in his and Jagamohun's financial ruin, Rammohun Roy, who had separated his property, managed to become a middling land-holder in Burdwan by buying two taluqs, Govindapur and Rameshwarpur, assessed at Rs 9,789 and Rs 10,965 respectively, as well as four *patni taluqs* from the Raja of Burdwan yielding a profit of about Rs 5,000 annually. With the fall of the bigger Rajas from power after the Permanent Settlement, the Persian educated high caste landed and service families living under the rule of the magnates carved out of the principalities of their rulers small landed properties that gave these smaller gentry an independent position on the land. The rise of the gentry, so clearly exhibited in the career of Rammohun Roy, was not to be equated with the intrusion of a new social class in local systems of land control and was merely the formalization of the important position occupied in the Nawabi revenue-collecting hierarchy by the ritually pure families of traditional local importance. Barun De has called this group of people 'the new gentry', but his description of Rammohun Roy's family background as being based on the lower rungs of the Nawabi revenue bureaucracy, on land exploitation in collaboration with the East India Company and on the collapse of the political power of the local regional Rarhi lower castes during late Mughal rule indicates a clear line of continuity from the Mughal to the British period in the over-all position of this gentry.

In the Burdwan region, the rise of small high caste landholders like Rammohun Roy and his friend Rajiblochan Roy to independent positions of local influence, which encouraged them to defy the power of the Raja of Burdwan, was a new and significant fact

in this, that formerly this dependent social element was subject to the whims and caprice of the local barons. Maharani Bishnukumari, the patron of Ramkanta Roy, had herself expelled the land-holding family of the poet Bharat Chandra Roy from their ancestral village on account of a private grudge against his father. Such an event was no longer possible under the rule of the collectors, which Rammohun Roy manipulated with considerable skill against Maharaja Tejchand of Burdwan by placing his son in the collectorate as deputy sheristadar.[12] This positive social development, however, was preceded, as Barun De has pointed out, by the collapse of the political power of the lower castes, such as the Sadgops of Gopabhum and the Bagdis of Chitwa Barda.

2. THE EMERGENCE OF THE INTELLIGENTSIA

From the ranks of these smaller local gentry, who consolidated their position on land after the Permanent Settlement, were drawn those English-educated urban groups who led the nineteenth century movements in thought and social reform. The earliest and perhaps the greatest example was Rammohun Roy, who, after having acquired a substantial landed property in Burdwan during his service under Digby in Rangpur, moved into Calcutta permanently in 1815 in order to lead the intellectual life of a gentleman of leisure. Sociologically, the important development which took place after 1815 was the transformation of traditional groups of literati—Persianized Hindus like Rammohun Roy and Sanskrit pandits like Mrityunjay Banerjee—into a forward looking modern intelligentsia whose function was to interpret change, not to transmit tradition. Nowhere is the change more striking than in the transition from Mrityunjay's prose to Rammohun's prose, the contrast between which is sharply brought into focus by Pradyumna Bhattacharya. Rammohun gave to Bengali prose a modern social content, unlike his orthodox opponent Mrityunjay Banerjee, whose writings

[12]For facts relating to Rammohun Roy's local political and economic role in Burdwan, a subject unfortunately much neglected by historians in their preoccupation with his role in Calcutta, see Ramaprasad Chanda and Jatindra Kumar Majumdar, *Selections from the official Letters and Documents Relating to the Life of Raja Rammohun Roy*. vol. 1, 1791-1830 (Calcutta, 1938). See also Barun De's paper in this volume.

continued to reflect the typical historical and social consciousness of the eighteenth century Hindu literati produced by the Sanskrit schools of learning. Instead of spinning metaphysical cobwebs in his logic-based discourses, Rammohun employed his considerable power of reasoning for concrete social objectives, such as the abolition of sati.

Nevertheless, as noted by Charles Heimsath, the social impact of the emergence of the intelligentsia remained confined within certain limited circles in the age of Rammohun Roy and his successors. Social reform movements, as led by Rammohun and his intellectual disciples, meant the transformation of individual lives in the direction of rational and humane standards of belief and behaviour, and it was not until the coming of Gandhi that the individual's recasting of his own behaviour was raised to the level of ethical imperatives for the whole nation, welding the Indian people into a more morally independent, cohesive entity than it had ever been before, by reasoned appeals that created mass social consciousness. In this respect, the whole-time preoccupation of reformers like Rammohun Roy with the position of women (to be more specific, the position of women in respectable society), to the exclusion of other social needs, was perhaps significant. Heimsath implies that the upliftment of women, rather than other social needs, was emphasized by reformers like Rammohun Roy because of their stake in the existing social system. Rammohun's attack on caste was confined to one single translation of a Sanskrit text,[13] and by restricting the audience of Vedic ritual in the Brahmo Sabha to Brahmans only, Rammohun practically closed its door against the masses.[14]

In this context, Sumit Sarkar and Pradyumna Bhattacharya have drawn an illuminating contrast between Rammohun Roy and nineteenth century India on the one hand, and Martin Luther and reformation Europe on the other. Sumit Sarkar observes that Rammohun's Brahmo Samaj failed to make any attempt to line up with popular lower-caste monotheistic cults which had been fairly numerous in eighteenth century Bengal—in sharp and significant contrast to the Protestant Reformation on which Rammohun had sought to model himself. The social tendencies of reformation

[13]See Sumit Sarkar's essay in this volume.
[14]See A. K. Majumdar's essay in this volume.

Europe—incipient nationalism directed against the oecumenicity of the Papacy, the princely drive towards establishment of modern states based on territorial sovereignty, the bourgeois quest for hegemony over civil society—were all conspicuously absent in the colonized province of Bengal. Pradyumna Bhattacharya draws attention to the marked difference between the languages adopted by Rammohun and Luther. Whereas Luther, who came of a peasant stock, deliberately based the prose of his German Bible on the language of the peasantry, and drew his inspiration from popular idiom, metaphors and aphorisms current among artisans and peasants, Rammohun adopted a Sanskrit-based diction (called *sadhu bhasha* or purified Bengali) that was quite different from the easy language of common speech. He showed no enthusiasm for popular idioms and proverbs in his rather stilted, abstract prose. Why did this disjunction take place between written prose and ordinary speech in the days of Rammohun Roy? Pradyumna Bhattacharya's answer is that the cleavage cannot be explained in literary terms alone and on a speculative note he concludes: 'the estrangement of our prose from the "language of artisans, countrymen" mirrors the alienation and identity crisis of the newly emergent urban *bhadralok*.' While emphasizing the negative, alienating aspects of English education, however, Sumit Sarkar makes a few qualifications in favour of Rammohun Roy that may be pertinent with regard to Bhattacharya's criticisms. In the first place, the traditional Sanskrit and Persian oriented literati were quite as distant from the masses as were nineteenth century Calcutta intellectuals like Rammohun Roy. Rammohun, moreover, exhibited the elements of a mass approach in his translations of Sanskrit texts into Bengali, his promotion of Bengali journalism and his emphasis on Bengali as the medium of instruction. Unlike his contemporaries and rivals, Rammohun stood, not so much for English education, as for Western scientific knowledge, for the spread of which he encouraged the bringing out of Bengali versions of English scientific works.

3. THE STULTIFICATION OF THE BOURGEOISIE

The partial character of the modernizing movements led by Calcutta's intellectuals derived from the process of economic change—the victory of free trade imperialism over Company monopoly. In

the initial stages free trade imperialism made a partner of the native capitalist interests allied with it against the East India Company. Later its increasing weight began to smother the infant Indian enterprises it had fostered. Rammohun Roy, his friends as well as his opponents, were all caught up in this process of transition from the Company monopoly to free trade, a process which split respectable native society in Calcutta raggedly down the middle into two opposite parties. These parties have often been labelled conservatives and liberals; at a more sophisticated level, it has been suggested by Salahuddin Ahmed that the conservatives and the liberals were all landlords, but the second group derived the main part of their income from commercial and banking enterprises, while the first group had more links with land than with trade. Such a formulation tends to overlook the fact that Moti Lal Seal, a leading conservative of Radha Kanta Deb's party, was a commercial magnate with only secondary interests in land, while Prasanna Kumar Tagore, a progressive landlord associated with the party of Rammohun Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore, was first and foremost a landlord. What seems to have determined the alignments in Calcutta's respectable society was the differing pattern of links between Europeans and natives. Radha Kanta Deb's faction had close links with the European spokesmen of the East India Company—orientalists like H.H. Wilson—who often were the hidden force behind the activities of the orthodox Dharma Sabha. The liberals were closely associated with the European free traders in Calcutta —men influenced by utilitarian ideas. Rammohun Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore joined the agitation of the European free traders for the removal of restrictions upon European settlement in Calcutta, in contrast with the faction of Radha Kanta Deb who was inspired by advocates of Company monopoly to oppose the free entry of European settlers. The crucial factor in this matter was personal connections between European and native leaders of public opinion. The groups led by Radha Kanta Deb and Rammohun Roy were equally eager to enhance their power and influence in native society by seeking links with the ruling European circle, but the division within that circle produced different social and political ideologies among Indian collaborators in Calcutta. The alignment of Rammohun Roy's group with the free traders in Calcutta was largely determined by his personal friendship with many principal advocates of free trade, as well as by the extensive involvement

of Dwarkanath and Prasanna Kumar in indigo enterprises in the interior. Radha Kanta Deb, on the other hand, had access to top officers of the East India Company by virtue of his position as an established and wealthy landholder, and his group, although it included merchants like Moti Lal Seal and Radha Madhab Banerjee, apparently did not have indigo interests of any great importance.

The ideology and role of Rammohun Roy's group marked it out quite clearly as a *comprador* group which expected a dependent but nevertheless substantial development of Indian capitalism in collaboration with the free trader merchants and bankers. Such hopes were belied by the subsequent twist in the direction of Bengal's economy, which resulted in the founding and consolidation of a large colonial hinterland to meet the needs of the imperial British economy and the diversion of the investment preferences of the new urban rich to landed estates, usury and conspicuous consumption. Within the next generation, following the death of Dwarkanath Tagore, Bengali capitalists in Calcutta were squeezed out of entrepreneurial activities by big agency houses which no longer needed Indian partners in their battle against the East India Company. Rammohun Roy echoed a liberal free trader ideology first formulated in a rapidly industrializing Britain, but in a colonial context the same doctrines were bound to produce quite a different effect. As Asok Sen observes, Rammohun pleaded for conditions of more unencumbered private accumulation, for freer trade, for the elimination of the remaining monopolistic privileges of the East India Company, for more unrestricted entry of British capital and for land revenue reforms to help the process of building more wealth and prosperity. But what new property and its owners would do, depended basically on the structure of work, assets and preferences in which they went on functioning. The process of colonialisation was ruthlessly changing the same structure in a direction contrary to the needs of industrial accumulation. As a corollary of the process of colonialization Sen draws attention to the prevalence of unproductive over productive labour, which, in his view, was the most decisive phenomenon in the circumstances leading to the emergence of the Bengali middle classes, of their newly growing city of Calcutta and of their supposed renaissance pioneered by Rammohun Roy.

Sen perhaps overemphasizes the "deindustrialization of Bengal,"

a term also used by Dr. N. K. Sinha.[15] Artisan industries like cotton manufactures, of course, underwent a decline, but surely such handicrafts could not supply the basis for rapid industrialization of the country. Nor was the disappearance of urban Bengalis in the *comprador* type of trading and business activities as sudden and as complete as Sen seems to think. It is not correct to say that Dwarkanath Tagore's business enterprises were all liquidated in one generation and that only his zamindaris remained. The family letter books of the Tagores preserved in the Rabindra Sadan in Santiniketan reveal that his son Debendranath carried on an extensive manufacture of silk and indigo (though the coal and banking ventures did collapse), financing these enterprises by the rents from his landed properties.[16] In the interior local Bengali traders and landowners, not being hindered by the fierce racial competition of European managing agencies which discouraged Indian entrepreneurs in Calcutta, continued in the nineteenth century to invest their capital in risky enterprises, as for example the Sahana family of Bankura who branched out from agriculture and trade into mica-mining when an opportunity presented itself.[17] All this might point to the conclusion that there was development, but a limited development that was very different from industrialization of the type that occurs after a genuine take-off. Enterprising Bengalis were not absent, nor was capital wholly tied up in unproductive activities. The real problem was that all entrepreneurial activities tended to be subordinated to the import export bias of the economy and served only to strengthen the colonial aspect of the relationship between the economies of Britain and India. It will not do to assume, contrary to actual developments, the destruction of the industrial economy of Bengal during the life-time of Rammohun Roy and then to pose the question why in his so many writings there is no reference to the phenomenon of deindustrialization and the causes responsible for this calamity. The calamity was not apparent to Rammohun Roy because he genuninely believed that the country

[15]N.K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal 1793-1848*, vol. III (Calcutta, 1970), p. 1.

[16]Tagore Family Letter Books (manuscript), Rabindra Sadan, Santiniketan. See the letters of Debendranath Tagore in Bengali.

[17]See J. H. Broomfield, "The Rural Parvenu: a Report of Research in Progress," *South Asian Review* (April 1973).

was proceeding on the path of economic development, and while he could not possibly appreciate the limited character of this growth, "deindustrialization" is hardly a suitable term for it.

The process of modernization in India in a colonial context was thus beset by curious contradictions—contradictions that inevitably crept into Rammohun Roy's role in that process. The Derozians criticized him for these contradictions, but the process of imperial economic penetration was inescapable and the Raja and his friends were but its unconscious and helpless agents. In this context Sumit Sarkar pertinently observes that Rammohun's achievements as a modernizer were both limited and extremely ambivalent—inevitably so, as his times marked the beginning of a transition indeed from pre-capitalist society, but in the direction, not of full-blooded bourgeois modernity, but of a weak and distorted caricature of the same which was all that colonial subjection permitted.

The current assessments—critical as well as adulatory—of Raja Rammohun Roy's role in the modernization of India, both of which derive their roots from the 'Renaissance' consciousness of pre-independence Bengali intellectuals, have thus been quite fundamentally challenged in this volume. Whether Rammohun Roy created the Renaissance (i.e. the view taken by his admirers) or whether his predecessors and contemporaries should have the credit (i.e. the view taken by critics like R.C. Majumdar) is no longer seen to be the central question. The question which has become central to this reassessment relates to the nature of the Renaissance itself and to the limitations imposed on Rammohun Roy's modernizing role by objective circumstances. Such a reinterpretation raises important issues which need further exploration and directs our attention to fields in which more research must be undertaken. We need to know much more about the eighteenth century society in which Rammohun Roy grew up and the indigenous mechanisms of change within this society which were operating autonomously. Especially important in this respect are the intellectual influences of his youth. It is necessary to pin down these influences by chronological stages, especially by determining the exact points in time at which Rammohun Roy made his acquaintance with specific schools of thought embodied in Perso-Arabic, Sanskrit and English philosophical works available to him. Equally important is his economic and political background, and in this respect his place in the local gentry politics of Burdwan is an entirely unexplored field that

might well throw important light on his social role. Further research is also necessary into the connections of the parties led by Rammohun Roy and his opponents with hostile factions among Europeans in Calcutta in order to lay bare the nature of these alignments and antagonisms. For in these alignments and rivalries, surely, lay the origins of "modern" politics in India.

In spite of the limitations imposed by circumstances on his achievement, it will be a one-sided view that fails to take note of his personal greatness—the sweeping clarity of his thought, the striking modernity of his philosophical premises and social vision, the concrete achievements of his fruitful career in Calcutta that led to the emergence of a modern urban culture containing the seeds of future Indian nationalism. Not only did he stand far above his contemporaries—the Ram Ram Basus, the Mrityunjay Vidyalankars and the Radha Kanta Debs—in sheer intellectual grasp and magnitude of personality, but among his successors. Until the coming of Rabindranath Tagore, there was no comparable figure of greatness produced by Bengal, whose life work might be regarded as having the same immediacy of impact in the maturing of the modern age in India.

RAMMOHUN ROY AND THE BENGAL RENAISSANCE: AN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

DAVID KOPF

It is a truism that among the progenitors of modern India no other figure has so captured the imagination and been so revered for so long a time throughout the world than Rammohun Roy. Since 1870, when Keshub Chandra Sen visited England and greatly impressed thousands of Europeans about India's potential for modernizing her society and religion, a number of Indian national heroes have gained world-wide recognition. Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Rabindranath, Gandhi, and Nehru are among the list of deeply-admired fathers of modern India. But when one considers that Rammohun died in 1833, that he left no powerful organization behind him financially capable of distributing his work through the major languages of the world, that there were no advanced public media to convey his message and image to tens of thousands in South Asia and abroad, that he lived long before the Indian independence movement had become national and popular, then it is remarkable indeed not only that he achieved the reputation of greatness but that this reputation has persisted from generation to generation.

The historical problem of evaluating Rammohun's place in the Renaissance has been complicated by a continuous shift in his historical image in the minds of successive generations. Of all the major figures in the modern Indian intelligentsia, Rammohun Roy is perhaps the most universally appropriated by all the different religious communities of South Asia as well as by the non-theistic

Hindus and Muslims, Christians and Brahmos claim him as one of their own.[1] Others much less religiously inclined deny his theism and laud his humanism and rationalism.[2] And which other Indian intellectual besides Rammohun has been so warmly treated historically by nationalists, relativists and universalists?

The close bearing of the shift in Rammohun's historical image on the problem of a proper evaluation of his objective role in the Bengal renaissance suggests that the theme requires serious historiographical attention beyond simple bibliographical essays listing recent specialized and monographic studies. Though monographs are always needed since we have by no means exhausted our knowledge of Rammohun or the Renaissance, it is perhaps time that we pause and analyze the existing literature addressing ourselves to pertinent questions dealing less with the history of the period as such and more with the history of historical writings on the period. We have assumed that generalizations about Rammohun can be tested by unearthing facts dealing with his thought and activities during his own lifetime when actually many of those generalizations about Rammohun have no casual connection with events during the age of Rammohun but were invented for various reasons after Rammohun's death. If viewed as history rather than myth, great reformers from Jesus to Rammohun have seldom achieved charisma in their own lifetimes but have been kept alive by disciples who reinterpret the original inspiration for future generations, and if successful, win mass acceptance for the new reform ideology.

This hypothesis was put forward by the author as early as 1966 in a paper on revitalization and modernization in nineteenth century Bengal subsequently published in a volume, *Transition in South Asia*, published by Duke University.[3] Relying largely on Anthony

[1] Muslims believe that Rammohun's early ideas on ethical monotheism were derived from Islam and not the West; Christian intellectuals now acknowledge Rammohun as pioneer of indigenous Christianity in India; while Brahmos have characteristically sought to prove Rammohun as founder of their own society; Hindus, especially recently, tend to view him as founder of reformed Hinduism.

[2] For an excellent article defending this position see S. Sarkar, "Religious Thought of Rammohun Roy," *Bengal Renaissance and Other Essays* (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1970), pp. 77-97.

[3] D. Kopf, "The Brahmo Samaj Intelligentsia and the Bengal Renaissance: A Study of Revitalization and Modernization in Nineteenth Century Bengal," *Transition in South Asia, Problems of Modernization*, (ed. R.I. Crane) (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University, 1970), pp. 7-48.

Wallace's article "Revitalization Movements: Some Theoretical Considerations for their Comparative Study,"[4] an attempt was made to identify the Bengal Renaissance as a revitalization movement and the Brahmo Samaj as a key institution whose history provides what anthropologists call "a processual or generic structure to accommodate the stages in all revitalization movements."[5] By applying this school of anthropological thought to Bengal, it was demonstrated how Rammohun, an unusually sensitive individual of a society experiencing extreme cultural stress, gave birth to a new vision or "mazeway reformulation" designed to eradicate the "society's troubles" and produce a "new cultural system."[6] But as intimated above, it was after Rammohun's death that his vision gradually won wider acceptance as his disciples won more followers by proligerating the means of communication. This was the stage when Rammohun achieved his status as charismatic hero, a role which Brahmos were successfully able to routinize along with the ideological baggage contained in the new vision.

This article is an attempt to treat the problem of Rammohun and the Bengal Renaissance historiographically. For it is quite obvious that we could no longer separate the period of Rammohun Roy from his shifting image during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If later generations had not endowed Rammohun with charisma and reinterpreted his vision for mass consumption, his life would have passed into oblivion.

UNITARIAN IMAGE

On September 28, 1833, a funeral sermon was delivered for a Bengali by a prominent British Unitarian in the port city of Bristol on the west coast of England. Rammohun Roy had died a day earlier while visiting the Carpenter estate in Stapleton Grove. The Reverend Lant Carpenter who had known of Rammohun and his work for fifteen years[7] spoke with great depth of feeling about the career of

[4] The Wallace article appeared in *American Anthropologist*, LVIII (April 1956).

[5] Kopf, *Transition*, p. 22.

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 20-32.

[7] L Carpenter, *A Review of the Labours, Opinions and Character of Rajah Rammohun Roy* (Bristol: Brome and Reid, 1833), p. 6.

the "enlightened Brahmin from the British capital of Hindustan"[8] who was "undoubtedly a Unitarian."[9] "My heart is with the Unitarians," the Bengali had told Carpenter often.[10]

The Unitarianism which in Carpenter's mind bound the work of Rammohun to the aims and aspirations of his British counterparts was no Westerncentric sectarian faith propagated by self-righteous agents of the superior white race to the faceless multitude of heathen blacks. On the contrary, it was a cosmopolitan faith which challenged the orthodoxy of the establishment. Three simple though radical ideas for the time provided the link between the enlightened few in Calcutta and the enlightened few in England and the United States.

The first was liberal religion that meant the substitution of a rational faith for the prevailing popular religions of the world which were accused of curtailing the freedom of human beings by enslaving them to mechanical rituals, irrational myths, meaningless superstitions, and other-worldly beliefs and values. The second was the idea of social reform or emancipation in which all known penalized classes and groupings such as workers, peasants, and women were to be elevated through education and the extension of civil rights to participate fully in the benefits of modern civilization. Finally, there was the idea of theistic progress or the notion that the perfectability of mankind could best be achieved by joining social reform to rational religion.

"Though dead," said Lant Carpenter of Rammohun Roy, "he yet speaketh and the voice will be heard impressively from the tomb." That voice which still can be "heard by his intelligent Hindoo friends" shall continue to express the Unitarian credo:

> It may excite them to renewed and increased effort to carry on the work of intellectual and moral improvement among their countrymen: to diffuse the pure light of religion which his writings contain, among those who are yet debased and superstitious; to give the advantages of a wise education to the young and uninformed to rise themselves, and teach others to rise, above the narrow prejudices of caste and sex; and thereby weaken that

[8] Carpenter, *Funeral Sermon on the Death of Rajah Rommohun Roy* (Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, n.d.), p. 1.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[10] *Ibid.*

> thraldom which so much intercepts the progress of truth and virtue and elevate by knowledge... those who may thus be the friends and companions of the present generation, and whose early instruction and training will so much promote the welfare of the next....

One tragic aspect of Rammohun's death was that it precluded a meeting with the American Unitarians whom he most admired and with whom he had hoped to establish closer ties for coordinated Unitarian programmes on an international scale. One, William Ellery Channing, whom a Unitarian later called the "Rammohun Roy of America,"[11] was a leading spokesman of liberal Unitarianism in the United States since the revolt of 1815. According to Lucy Aiken, who corresponded with Channing from England and who had met Rammohun at various social gatherings in London, the latter had spoken to her on September 6, 1831, "of ending his days in America."[12]" "I have just seen the excellent Rammohun Ray, "she wrote, "and he speaks of visiting your country...and to know you would be one of his first objects."[13] After Rammohun's death, on October 23, 1833, she recorded sadly to Channing that "Ray has been frustrated of one of his cherished hopes, that of seeing you face to face, either in this or the other hemisphere...."[14]

These facts and a host of others about Rammohun's last decade or so of his life suggest first that he was closely associated with Unitarians if not a Unitarian himself, and that among the progressive associations of nineteenth century England and America it was the Unitarian which claimed him as one of their own and propagated his name as the great Asiatic reformer of the modern world. Consider his relationship with William Adam, called by orthodox Christians the second fallen Adam, whom he converted from Baptism to Unitarianism and with whom he started the Calcutta Unitarian Committee in 1822 or 1823.[15] When Adam left

[11] J. T. Sunderland, "William Ellery Channing," *Modern Review*, LIII (April, 1933), p. 731.

[12] *Correspondence of William Ellery Channing and Lucy Aiken (1826-1842)*, (ed. A. L. Le Breton) (London: Williams and Norgate, 1874), p. 88.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 87.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 184.

[15] See W. Adam, *The Principles and Objects of the Calcutta Unitarian Committee*, vol. CCVI of *India Office Library Tracts* (Calcutta: Unitarian Press, 1827).

India in 1839 he went on to America and Canada where he served as a Unitarian minister all the while pressuring the Unitarian Association to send a missionary to Calcutta to continue the work he, Rammohun and other Brahmos had started.[16] Consider that when a missionary did come finally (in 1855) in the presence of Charles Dall, it was in the name of Rammohun Roy that he justified his work in Calcutta and it was Rammohun's *Precepts of Jesus* which he held before the Bengalis as one of the greatest works of the whole nineteenth century which supported the tenets of the Unitarian faith.[17]

THE IMAGE OF RAMMOHUN AS CHAMPION OF THE VEDANTA

If Europeans and Americans thought Rammohun to be solely concerned with Christian Unitarianism, they were greatly mistaken. In fact, many of his tracts and pamphlets from the time he settled in Calcutta (1815) through the 1820s indicate that Rammohun was actually using Unitarianism in an Indian way in an effort to purify the Hindu tradition.[18] This is well elucidated in Rammohun's "Reply to Certain Queries Directed Against the Vedanta," printed in the *Brahmmunical Magazine* on November 15, 1823. One Dr. Tytler had accused Rammohun of reading into the Vedanta the sublime message of Christ.[19] Since only the Christian Scriptures were revealed, Rammohun's interpretation was a fraud. In reply, Rammohun with his customary analytical approach, proceeded to prove that the message of the Vedanta not only contained the unity of God but did so in a way superior to the Judeo-Christian Bible. Unlike the Bible, the Vedanta did not attempt to categorize the attributes of the Almighty, a gesture which Rammohun found both anthropomorphic and futile.[20] That Rammohun was now

[16] Minutes of Conversation with Reverend William Adam, October 11, 1861, in William Dall Papers (Andover Theological Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge), Miscellaneous Items, 1861.

[17] See especially, C. H. A. Dall, *Lecture on Rajah Rammohun Roy* (Calcutta: Central Press, 1871).

[18] See for example, R. Roy, *Abridgement of the Vedant*, 1815, reprinted in T. deBary, *Sources of Indian Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 573-75.

[19] *Reprint of a Controversy Between Dr. Tytler and Ramdoss* (Calcutta: Tattvabodhini Press, 1845), p. 2.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

using Unitarianism in an Indian way was evidenced by his attack on the Trinity. He argued that whereas Christianity required a blood sacrifice to expatiate the sins of man, the Vedanta taught that the "only means of attaining victory over sin is sincere repentence and solemn meditation."[21] In the following quotation it is clear that the Bengali reformer had made a kind of cultural transference from the Synoptic Gospels to Sankaracharya:

> The sin which mankind contracts against God by the Practice of wickedness is believed by us to be expiated by these penances, and not as supposed by the Queriest, by the blood of a son of man or son of God, who never participated in our transgressions.[22]

Equally interesting was Rammohun's use of the comparative religious approach which constituted another marked difference between himself and his Western Unitarian counterparts. A Channing or Tuckerman manoeuvered primarily in one religious tradition and aimed to reform it, whereas Rammohun was challenged by the need to reconcile at least two major faiths. In the process Rammohun was compelled to think comparatively or contrastively with the result that his vision sharpened in a refreshingly expansive manner leaving a narrow sectarian view of the universe behind forever. He could, for example, in the same reply to Tytler, rebuff his opponent for attacking popular Hinduism by pointing to the comparable malpractices in popular Christianity:

> A Hindoo would also be justified in taking a standard of Christianity the system of religion which almost universally prevailed in Europe previous to the 15th Century...and which is still followed by the majority of Christians with all its idols, crucifixes, saints, miracle, pecuniary absolutions from sin, trinity, transubstantiation, relics, holy water, and other idolatrous machinery.[23]

Rammohun could argue that in the same way the authentic Christian tradition was submerged and corrupted, so the authentic Hindu tradition was likewise submerged and corrupted. He willingly

[21] *Ibid.*, p.6.
[22] *Ibid.*
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

admitted that "our holy vedanta and our ancient religion has been disregarded by the generality of moderns."[24] This comparativist approach coupled with a modernist outlook placed the Hindu reformation movement on an Orientalist foundation by which indigenous traditions could be defended at the same time they were modified according to progressive values in contemporary Western societies. Though the foundation was a precarious one, it saved the Hindu reformation repeatedly from the snare of militant nationalism.

Rammohun's debate with Tytler was however typical in an era when Orientalist cultural policy generally favoured Indian values and attitudes. But in 1831 when Rammohun left for England, British cultural policy in India began to change radically. In 1835, with the triumph of Thomas Babington Macaulay's Westernizing alternative to Indian modernization (a subject I have dealt with in my earlier book) the official British Orientalist movement died in Bengal along with many of their experiments in changing Hinduism from within by updating Hindu traditions.[25] Macaulay, as generally known, penned a Minute on Education which contained one of the most perfect expressions ever recorded of what may be called the philosophy of secular Westernization.[26] The gist of what he advocated was that all cultural traditions except Macaulay's own Victorian English type were decadent and useless and that the only true passport to modernity for a culture like India's was the complete assimilation to British manners, customs and language. Macaulay's attitude was no mere academic argument without practical importance; he was supported fully by the Governor-General then, Lord Bentinck, whose tenure of office was 1829-1835.

During these very years, as has been shown by the author more elaborately elsewhere, a polarization of cultural attitudes materialized among the Bengali intelligentsia in response to the Westernizing cultural policy of the Government.[27] It was no accident that

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[25] See entire section V on "Macaulayism and the Decline and Fall of the Orientalist Movement, 1828-1835" in D. Kopf, British *Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 217-72.

[26] See chapter on "Macaulayism and the Defeat of the Orientalists" in Kopf, *ibid.*, pp. 236-52.

[27] See chapter on "Macaulayism and the Bengali Intelligentsia: The Seeds of Ambivalence and the Beginnings of Indian Nationalism" in Kopf, *ibid.*, pp. 253-72.

during this period the Young Bengal movement arose which responded favourably to Macaulayism but at the price of alienation. The older generation of intellectuals who had been reared by Orientalist contact shifted to a "nativist" position and by means of the sati abolition issue, organized India's first proto-nationalist movement, the Dharma Sabha, against foreign interference in the internal affairs of Hindus. Rammohun's Brahmo Sabha, which had superseded the Calcutta Unitarian Committee, stood somewhere in between young Bengal and the Dharma Sabha although it should be pointed out that Rammohun's successor, Vidyabagish, joined the Dharma Sabha against Bentinck on whether or not the government had the right to abolish sati.[28]

Secular Macaulayism remained a dream, however, mere wishful thinking in a colonialist atmosphere where modernism for India was never really seriously entertained either by the East India Company or by the British crown. The only fragment of Macaulay's Westernized programme that was retained was the stress on the English language which itself became the passport not so much to modernity as to available positions in the administration. But if secular Westernization proved a pipe dream (except among Indian voluntary associations dedicated to Western learning) religious Westernization did not.

Well-financed and well-organized mission societies in England imbued with the same inflated national pride as Macaulay, sent out their legions of inspired men to save the heathen from eternal fire and damnation. Like Macaulay they were convinced that Victorian England represented the apex of human development, but unlike Macaulay they believed that their own Western-centred orthodox trinitarian Christianity was the mainspring of that greatness.

Those who came to Bengal came mostly to Calcutta where they aimed to persuade the newly emerging Western-educated to embrace the revealed truth of Christian dogma. Being fairly well-educated themselves they employed a method and philosophy of elitist filtration with the strategy of ultimately converting the mass after first converting the intelligentsia. Being Westernizers, in distinct opposition to the earlier generation of Serampore missionaries who

[28] See part on Vidyabagish in *Freedom Movement in Bengal* (ed. N. Sinha) (Calcutta: Government of West Bengal, 1968), p. 24.

were Orientalists, they saw no need of learning Indian languages.[29] On the contrary, they carried on their debates entirely in their own native tongue, which was English.

From the point of view of mission history in Bengal, the era from 1830-1857 can properly be called the Age of Alexander Duff.[30] Not only was he one of the most intellectually gifted missionaries to serve in India, but he was certainly among the most effective in winning the mind of the Western-educated for Christ. As his name suggests, he was from Scotland[31] and a Presbyterian, as well-intentioned as Macaulay and equally inflammatory, but as a spokesman of the sacred rather than the profane. Theologically, he was exactly the stereotyped Calvinist whom Unitarians in the West struggled to depose from their exalted position, but in terms of educated impact in Calcutta, Duff was a rationalist and modernist, a rare combination which made him a formidable foe for non-Christian progressive Bengali intellectuals.

Duff was immensely successful in awakening the minds of Bengali youth and moderately successful in his subsequent attempt to convince the boys at Scottish Church College about the validity of the Christian gospel. Krishna Mohun Banerji, a former Derozian, was his earliest major convert in November 1832.[32] There then followed the conversion of the gifted Mohesh Chandra Ghose, who unfortunately died prematurely in 1837. Kailas Chandra Mukherji was another brilliant intellectual converted by Duff, but who died suddenly in 1845. There was Peary Mohun Rudra, who, like Krishna Mohun Banerji, later left the Presbyterians for the established church and carved out a distinguished career as an Anglican. The same may be said for A. C. Mazumdar who became very Westernized after five years in England. In 1843, Lal Behari De and Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the famous poet, were converted through Duff's influence. In 1844-45, Prosana Chandra Bannerji and Tara Charan Banerji, two brilliant Kulin Brahman students

[29] See chapter on "The College as Pivot of an Institutional Complex," and "The College as a Center for Linguistic Modernization," for Serampore Mission accomplishments in Indian languages in Kopf, *Orientalism*, pp. 67-94.

[30] N. S. Bose, *The Indian Awakening and Bengal* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1967), p. 116.

[31] L. B. Day, *Recollections of Alexander Duff and the Mission College* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1879), p. 10.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

at General Assembly's Institution created a sensation when they were baptized by Duff. One has only to consult the pages of Lal Behari De's *Recollections of Alexander Duff* to determine how impressive was the list of Bengali intellectuals won over by the Scottish missionary directly or indirectly between 1832-1855.

On another level, no less threatening in its consequences, Duff, his fellow missionaries, and their converts, launched a massive ideological attack on Hinduism. In actual fact, since the Christians sought to win over the Western-educated primarily, they conducted the verbal skirmishes and battles on a high intellectual plane. There were two important results of this manoeuver. In the first place, because there were so few Western-educated, they found themselves in a limited arena of encounter shut off from communication with the true spokesmen of status quo Hinduism. The orthodox pundits had neither the sophistication, the linguistic capacity nor apparently the inclination to defend their stystem. Secondly, it became more and more evident to missionaries that among the few available intellectuals willing and able to defend Hinduism, most of them were groping not for an alien ideology whose acceptance meant certain excommunication from family and community, but for a reformist faith rooted in the indigenous soil that could accomplish the same purpose.

Thus, throughout the 1830s though Rammohun Roy was only dimly recalled and imperfectly understood, he was not forgotten. Indeed, the stage was set, once the Hindus produced a leader and institution to continue Rammohun's unfinished task, for a sociologically interesting religious encounter. Two forces—the Brahmos (or the Vedantists, as they were then called) against the Christians —both dedicated to the eradication of the evils of popular Hinduism and both conducting this struggle outside the pale of the numerically populous Hindu society among the rural peasantry and their priests who were ignorant of the esoteric happenings in Calcutta.

In 1833 Krishna Mohun Banerji, most likely under Duff's guidance, published an attack on Rammohun Roy's "misinterpretation" of the Upanishads. Though immature and not at all representative of his later position, it is nonetheless important as setting a certain precedent in the manner the debate would be carried on for the next decade or so. "Much clamor has been raised about pure Hindooism as against popular Hindooism," Banerji wrote,

"as if they were capable of restoring it to holiness."[33] Rammohun Roy has deluded us into believing in the "divine origin of the Upanishads."[34]

Banerji was frankly amazed how Rammohun could choose the Vedic tradition as containing monotheism and morality on a par with Christian revelation.[35] Are not the Vedas saturated with idolatry?[36] His most serious challenge to Rammohun and the Vedantists was his assertion that monism and not monotheism was the culmination of the Vedic tradition and wisdom:

> The God of the Vedant ... is an infinite something but that something is neither a Creator nor a Moral Benefactor. He is not a moral Being at all and cannot therefore, be regarded with moral feeling. We may wonder at his immensity, and omnipotence and eternity, and invincibility, but we cannot thank, or love, or reverence him, because there is nothing in his nature, or in his acts that is fitted to excite these feelings. . . .[37]

Not until October 6, 1839 did Debendranath Tagore take action against the missionaries with the establishment of the Tattvabodhini Sabha. By that time the Christians had taken K. M. Banerji's lead and had shifted their artillery from popular Hinduism to reformed Hinduism or Vedantism. The objectives of the Tattvabodhini Sabha leave little doubt as to the reason why it was created. First, the Sabha gave expression to "grave concern about the terrible rapid progress of Christianity due to the ignorance of our countrymen about our holy religion."[38] Secondly, the Sabha to "bar this development" will perform the worship of God "according to the doctrines of the Vedant" and will publish Vedantic books.[39]

It is noteworthy that Debendranath decided to carry on Ram-

[33] K. M. Banerji, *Review of the Mundock Oopanishad by Ram Mohan Roy* (Calcutta: Enquirer Press, 1833), p. iv.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. v.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

[38] D. N. Tagore quoted in M. M. Ali, *The Bengal Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities* (Chittagong, Bangla Desh: Mehbub Publications, 1965), p. 17

[39] *Ibid.*

mohun's ideal through an independent association rather than immediately affiliate himself with the Brahmo Sdbha. Even when he did become a Brahmo in 1843, the Tattvabodhini Sabha continued to expand numerically and to function effectively as an autonomous body. Not until 1859 with the emergence of Keshub Chandra Sen was the *Sabha* discontinued and amalgamated with the Brahmo Samaj. In the early period it seems likely that Debendranath preferred to interpret Rammohun in his own way institutionally without becoming encumbered with the weaknesses and limitations of the Brahmo Sabha.

Over the next few years Debendranath built his Hindu reform association into a highly effective structure functioning in a variety of ways to combat the missionaries. In 1840 a Tattvabodhini school was set up to combat Duff's own school but conducted classes in the Bengali medium rather than in English.[40] Immediately Bengali textbooks in all subjects were published to assist in instruction.[41] A Tattvabodhini Press was established which had as its earliest main task the reprinting of all Rammohun Roy's works. Then in 1843 an organization newspaper was started called the *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, which had the negative function of combating missionary propaganda and the positive function of educating fellow Bengalis.

Meanwhile since its inception, the Sabha held weekly meetings to discuss religious and theological questions in an effort to clarify issues, resolve conflicts within the membership, and to arrive at conclusions about the "true sastra" of Hinduism.[42] That Debendranath intended to follow Rammohun's rational Unitarian faith seems evident from a statement made by him in 1843 on why he had started the Sabha:

> It was to counteract influences like these [missionary] and inculcate on the Hindu religious enquirer's mind doctrines at once consonant to reason and human nature, for which he has to

[40] B. N. Bandyopadhyay, *Akhoy Kumar* Dutt (Kalikata: Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1959), pp 13-14.

[41] D. K. Biswas, "Maharshi Devendranath Tagore and the Tattvabodhini Sabha" *Studies on the Bengal Renaissance*, ed. A. C. Gupta (Jadavpur, West Bengal: National Council of Education, Bengal, 1958), p. 40.

[42] Ali, *op. cit.*, pp. 17, 19.

explore his own sacred resources the Vaidanta, that the Society was originally established."[43]

These events did not go unnoticed by their Christian adversaries who after 1843 and the formal acceptance by Brahmos of the Vedanta as a revealed source, redoubled their efforts to expose what Duff called a dangerous form of "self-delusion."[44] Duff's attacks in the *Calcutta Christian Observer* and the newly-formed *Calcutta Review* during the period, were restatements of K. M. Banerji's arguments of 1832. Thus the Vedas were idolatrous and ritualistic while the Upanishads taught monism and not monotheism. The Reverend William Morton of the Church Mission Society warned Vedantists that there was no compromise with a system which through the ages has "debased the minds of men, deadened their consciousness, clouded their understanding, corrupted their hearts and countenanced every species of vice and immorality."[45] Lal Behari De, in a more conciliatory tone introduced a personal note on morality which missionaries would use to their advantage in later decades. De admitted that "I myself was a Brahmo though not in name yet in reality... but I enjoyed no peace of mind ... I could not be sure he would pardon my sins."[46]

In 1845, after a period of silence in the war of cultural and religious polemics, Debendranath Tagore and Rajnarian Bose collaborated in a tract against the missionaries called "Vedantic Doctrines Vindicated." Like Debendranath whose father, Dwarkanath, had been a long associate of Rammohun's, Rajnarian's father, Nanda Kishore Bose, was also among the earliest followers of Rammohun.[47] One might add that Nanda Kishore was among the first students of Rammohun's Vedantic Academy, that he accepted Vedantism as his religious orientation and that he served for sometime as Rammohun's secretary.[48] Though couched in the same religious and theological issues which Rammohun had employed

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

[45] Reverend W. Morton quoted in Ali, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

[46] G. Macpherson, *Life of Lal Behari Day* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1900), p. 55.

[47] J. C. Bagal, *Rajnarian Basu* (Sahitya-Sadhak-Charitmala series, Kalikata: Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1955), p. 6.

[48] R. Basu, *Atma-Carita* (Kalikata: Kuntaline Press, 1909), p. 7.

in his encounters with trinitarian Christians, Rajnarian departed radically from his mentor by infusing the tract with the defiant attitude of the cultural nationalist.

It may be recalled that Alexander Duff and K. M. Banerji had both raised the issue as to whether there was contained in the Vedic tradition a notion of a personal God analogous to Jehovah. The missionaries contended that even in the Upanishads the concept of God was so abstract as to be without analogy. This was the monotheistic-monistic issue. Duff's concept of Brahma, which Tagore and Bose were now prepared to refute, was of a Being who:

> . . .unencumbered by the cares of empire or the functions of a superintending providence, effectuates no good, inflicts no evil, suffers no pain, experiences no emotion; his beautitude is represented as consisting in a languid, monotonous and uninterrupted sleep—a sleep so very deep as never to be disturbed by the visitation of a dream.[49]

The Brahmo reply in *Vedantic Doctrines Vindicated* suggests the firebrand skilled debator, Rajnarian, who had first acquired the skill at Hare's School, developed it in subsequent encounters with Christians, and brought it to perfection later in life as a nationalist critic of Keshub Sen's universalism. In this tract of 1845 which was his first recorded encounter with the missionaries, he took a phrase like "cares of empire" and asked Duff whether God was a king or an emperor.[50] Rajnarian made capital of this ill-chosen expression charging that the Christian god was an "Oriental despot" unacceptable to freedom-loving Asians.

Rajnarian's second point was directed at Duff's depiction of Brahmo as a god who "effectuates no good and inflicts no evil." "What kind of God is this," he replied, "who is the author of evil?"[51] How can we possibly ascribe "the indiscriminate murder of millions" through "religious fanaticism or political hostility" to "our immaculate Creator?"[52]

The third point seems reminiscent of Rammohun Roy's debate

[49] R. Bose, D. N. Tagore, *Vedantic Doctrine Vindicated* (Calcutta: Tattva-Bodhini Press, 1845), p. 7.
[50] *Ibid.*
[51] *Ibid.*
[52] *Ibid.*

with Tytler in 1823 which interestingly enough was reprinted in 1845, the same year that the tract by Bose was published. Rajnarian took Duff to task for characterizing God as a Being which "suffers pain and experiences emotion." He accused Duff of "rushing headlong into the hideous errors of a reckless anthropomorphism."[53] Can there be a worse doctrine than that which denudes and degrades God by bringing the "Almighty Creator" to the level of man?[54]

The nationalist import of *Vedantic Doctrines Vindicated* lies in its point by point defence of a Hindu tradition against the pretensions of religious revelation and superiority by an alien faith. If in Rammohun's writings cultural nationalism never went beyond the point of proving that Hinduism was equal to Christianity, in Rajnarian's earliest polemical tracts, there was already the germ of a more defiant attitude that Hinduism was superior to Christianity. Of course, by Hinduism he did not mean the status quo popular form as much as he did long-lost traditions such as the Vedantic one. He wrote:

> The Vedanta, while it utterly rejects and condemns such degrading notions of the deity, conveys to our minds a far loftier, a more adequate, consistent, and ennobling idea of His attributes, by prescribing His worship as the Supreme Regulator of this boundless universe and as the glorious and beneficent originator of all earthly good.[55]

THE IMAGE OF RAMMOHUN ROY AS SOCIAL REFORMER AND UNIVERSALIST

The generation of Debendranath Tagore, with few exceptions, appropriated Rammohun Roy's Vedantism as their ideology of reformed Hinduism but little else. Their role as cultural nationalists against the challenge of trinitarian Christianity dampened their ardour for social reform compelling them to ignore this vital aspect of Rammohun Roy's revitalization programme. Until 1849, Rammohun's *Vedanta* became the revealed source of Brahmoism while at the same time only lip service was paid to social reform. Then in the 1850s as a result of the efforts of two non-theistic Brahmos,

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 8.
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] *Ibid.*, pp., 8-9.

Akhoy Kumar Dutt and Vidyasagar,[56] Rammohun's harsh criticism of the social evils in contemporary Hindu religion and society were revived along with his general scheme for eradicating them.

Vidyasagar's famous social action programme of the 1850s was largely based on Rammohun's domestication of Unitarian compassion in the West to suit the special historical circumstances in Bengal. If Unitarians increasingly worked to alleviate the sufferings of the industrial proletariat, Rammohun living in a society undergoing no industrial revolution, chose the Bengali Hindu woman in general as his "proletariat" and with extremely important implications for his successors, saw in her depressed condition the root cause of social immobility in India. He found her uneducated and illiterate, deprived of property rights, married before puberty, imprisoned in *purdah*, and murdered at widowhood by a barbaric custom of immolation known as sati. One has only to read Rammohun's works on social reform to realize that most of it deals with one aspect or another of man's inhumanity to women in Bengal. The conclusion was obviously that only by freeing women and by treating them as human beings could Indian society free itself from social stagnation.[57]

In 1855, the American Unitarian missionary, Charles Dall, arrived in Calcutta and revived the image of Rammohun as devoted follower of the ethical Christ as well as social reformer and liberal theist. Evidence seems to suggest that he had a profound impact on Keshub Chandra Sen, who was rapidly developing as charismatic leader of the younger generation of progressive Brahmos increasingly dissatisfied with Debendranath's social inaction and sectarian view of the Brahmo faith.[58] Dall supported their efforts while at the same time continually berating Debendranath for betraying the meaning and intent of Rammohun Roy's programme for the new India.[59]

[56] Akhoy Kumar was editor of the *Tattvabodhini Patrika* to 1855 and Vidyasagar was secretary of the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* until 1859. Both repudiated Tagore's spiritualism and were strongly deistic, rationalistic, and early proponents of the scientific method in India.

[57] Note the development of this argument from Rammohun in A. K. Dutt, *Dharma Niti* (Kalikata: New Sanskrit Press, 1875).

[58] See especially, C. H. A. Dall, *Brahmo Samaj of India led by Baboo Keshub Chunder Sen with Facts—Historical and Personal* (Calcutta: Central Press Co., 1874), p. 13.

[59] See Dall, on Rammohun, p. 3.

The younger generation wanted two types of reforms. The first was internal or the implementation of measures to compel Brahmos to live according to the spirit of their liberal, rational religion and ethics. The second or external type was the demand that the Samaj join other progressive groups in promoting social reform. Internally, they insisted through Keshub that ministers remove both their sacred threads and caste marks; that the ministry be earned by merit rather than be awarded for caste; that intercaste marriage be encouraged and child marriage discouraged; that Bengali and not Sanskrit be used in worship and that in every way so-called Brahmos were to be dissuaded from their hypocritical course of paying lip service to rational religion at Brahmo meetings but continuing to practise superstitions, Hindu rites and rituals in the privacy of their homes.

The external programme of the younger generation Brahmos was as extension of an idea germinated by Rammohun, developed by Akhoy Kumar Dutt, and embodied in a practical reform programme by Vidyasagar: that the true Indian proletariat enslaved by an oppressive Hindu social system were the women. With the exception of supporting Peary Charan Sircar's Temperance Society and supporting regular relief measures for the victims of famine, flood and disease, the younger Brahmos concerned themselves exclusively with female emancipation. Widow remarriage which had by the 1860s become virtually synonymous with the name of Vidyasagar, Kulin polygamy (which Vidyasagar again had taken the initiative in making a central issue), and support for the Bethune School for Hindu Girls (of which Vidyasagar had been first native secretary) were typical of what they considered radical social reform.

There were other issues equally important which by 1865 prompted Debendranath to drive Keshub and his faction out of the Brahmo Samaj. The exchange of letters between them that year are most revealing about key issues that divided the generations. In a letter by Keshub on August 1, a plea was made that Debendranath join the "tide of progress" before it was too late.[60] "You have given us leadership these past thirty years," wrote Keshub, and "we have accomplished much in the moral improvement of our character," in the "propagation of religion" and in the "reformation

[60] Letter from Keshub Chandra Sen to Devendra Nath Tagore, July 4, 1865, in Sophia Dobson Collet Collection (Sadharan Brahmo Samaj Library, Calcutta).

of society."[61] But the present disagreement, he continued:

> ... has sprung from the very tide of progress. It is indeed true that such a controversy is to be regretted but it is by no means a matter of astonishment. Such disputes and controversies—happen... in the time of transition.....when old and new ideas run against each other.... For unless the Brahmo Samaj keeps pace in the progressive spirit of the age, and is modified so as to suit the new ideas and new wants of society, it will suffer in estrangement, from the sympathy of progressive men and fail to accomplish its higher objectives.[62]

Debendranath's reply may have been conservative from Keshub's vantage point but it introduced a note of warning which, considering the extremely delicate and complex framework of pursuing a national identity under foreign rule, was rather perspicacious and almost prophetic. Debendranath started by saying that the impending rupture did not surprise him at all but "only speaks of the progress of the Samaj."[63] He was perfectly aware that in the course of time men's circumstances change and with that "change the old social arrangements." Otherwise how could there be progress? Debendranath felt that the real issue was possibly one of Hindu identity and that the older generation of Brahmos were being penalized somehow for being Hindus. Thus he felt it his duty:

> ... to avoid a clash between the older men who helped make the Brahmo Samaj what it is [yourselves are but the fruits of their zeal, agitation and patience]. If you can with the spirit of charity, tolerate them...and like elder brothers consent to take them with you as you go forward, there shall be greater progress.[64]

But it was the question of identity and community which most perturbed Debendranath. Sivanath Sastri, who was there at the time as a follower of Keshub but still sympathetic to Debendranath, said that Tagore "feared setting up an impossible gulf" bet-

[61] *Ibid.*
[62] *Ibid.*
[63] Letter from Devendranath Tagore to Keshub Chandra Sen, July 8, 1865, in Sophia Dobson Collet Collection.
[64] *Ibid.*

ween Brahmos and the Hindu Samaj. Most of the recommended reforms were in effect anti-Hindu and their acceptance would not only irritate the Brahmo congregation but "would violate the long cherished dream of Debendranath's" to preach Brahmoism in a national and acceptable form."[65]

To be sure, there were other threatening issues to Debendranath, such as the constitutional one. He was greatly disturbed at the results of the general meeting held on February 26, 1865, in which thirty-two Brahmos signed a petition demanding democratic proceedings to determine Brahmo policy, the election of all officers including ministers. The petition referred to a "Brahmo public" which could not be excluded from the decision-making process.[66] There was a key sentence from Keshub's petition which read:

> The Brahmo Samaj, whatever they believe is not a piece of property or a building but a community of which we are members and were therefore fully entitled to manage our own affairs.[67]

As for determining the most critical issue leading to the schism of 1866, Max Muller, the German Orientalist who played musical duets with Debendranath's father, Dwarkanath, and who corresponded regularly with both Debendranath and Keshub, saw the problem of national identity as paramount. "So far as I can judge," he wrote, "Debendranath and his friends were afraid of anything likely to wound the national feelings of the great mass of people." Said Muller:

> They wanted above all to retain the national character of their religion. A so-called universal form would make their religion appear grotesque and ridiculous to the nation. They pleaded for toleration of Hindu usages and customs which appeared to them innocent.[68]

[65] S. Sastri, *The New Dispensation and the Brahmo Samaj* (Madras: Viyavharathatunjinee Press, 1881), p. 9.

[66] Petition to Debendranath signed by 32 Brahmos, February 26, 1865, in Sophia Dobson Collet Collection.

[67] *Ibid.*

[68] F. M. Muller, *Biographical Essays* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884), p. 61.

In April 1865, K. M. Banerji, Rajnarian's Christian sparring partner, gave his comment on the impending split within the Brahmo Samaj. It was as I-told-you-so attitude about the denationalized character of the Brahmo faith. Taking the side of the older generation, he dismissed Keshub's "universalism" as a dangerous form of eclecticism: "rootless, fleeting and without fixed principles."[69]

On January 23, 1866, at the Magutsab festival, Keshub gave his last sermon from the pulpit of the Adi Samaj. Most interesting was his stress on universalism as against Debendranath's continual reference to Hindu identity. Keshub had extracted from Rammohun's works a universal religious ideal which he saw as the basis of the Brahmo faith. He was strongly opposed to the belief that Brahmoism was merely reformed Hinduism. Turning back to Rammohun's creed as contained in the trust deed for the Brahmo Sabha Keshub argued that:

> The Brahmo Samaj was established to bring together the peoples of the world, irrespective of caste, creed, and country, at the feet of the One Eternal God.[70]

At a general meeting of Brahmos on November 15, 1866, the formal break between generations occurred finally. The birth of the Brahmo Samaj of India at that meeting was anti-climactic but the resolutions passed by the Keshubites and subsequent debates are important for sharply defining the increasingly vital issue of nationalism and universalism between the two camps. One resolution in particular should be singled out in this regard, proposed by the Vaishnava Brahmo, Bijoy Krishna Goswami, on behalf of the Keshubites. It read:

> Men and women of every nation and caste who believe in the fundamental doctrines of Brahmo Dharma, shall be eligible as members of the Brahmo Samaj of India.[71]

[69] H. Das, "The Reverend Krishna Mohan Banerjea: Brahmin, Christian, Scholar and Patriot," *Bengal Past and Present*, XXXVII (January-June 1929), p. 136.

[70] K.C. Sen, *Conscience and Renunciation* (Calcutta: Nava-vidhan Publication Committee, n.d.), p. 2.

[71] General Meeting of the Brahmo Samaj, November 15, 1866, Brahmo Samaj Chronicles in Sophia Dobson Collet Collection.

Actually, Bijoy Krishna was not referring to Debendranath's book *Brahmo Dharma* because he immediately called for a new "compilation of theistic texts to be taken from all the Scriptures of the world."[72] It was in reply to Bijoy Krishna that Nabagopal Mitra, personal friend of the Tagores and ardent Adi Brahmo nationalist, raised his voice. This same Nabagopal Mitra whose many activities of a patriotic vein earned him the title "National Mitra" argued at the meeting that:

> If there was truth sufficient near home, why should we go abroad? There was all the truth which we require in the Hindu Scriptures and we need not therefore borrow anything from other Scriptures...."[73]

Bijoy Krishna's proposal in the meeting of November 15 for a compilation of scriptures from all the major religious sources led to the *Sloka Sangraho* which was subsequently used in Brahmo services.[74] Had Rammohun lived longer, he would probably have compiled a similar prayer book for his own Brahmo Sabha. The opening of the Keshubite mandir on August 22, 1869, boldly proclaimed the universalism and reformist intent of the newly-formed Brahmo Samaj of India. Keshub's declaration of principles were obviously an elaboration of Rammohun Roy's principles in the trust deed. "This building," Keshub declared, "is established with the object of paying reverence to all truths that exist in the world ... that all quarrels, all misunderstanding, all pride of caste may be destroyed, and all brotherly feeling may be perpetuated."[75] No idols were to be worshipped and no scripture was to be considered infallible. Furthermore:

> No sect shall be vilified, ridiculed, or hated. No prayer, hymn, sermon, or discourse to be delivered or used here shall countenance or encourage any manner of idolatry, sectarianism or sin. Divine service shall be conducted here in such a spirit and manner as may enable men and women, irrespective of distinctions of

[72] *Ibid.*
[73] *Ibid.*
[74] J. Das, "The Brahmo Samai," *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, p. 488.
[75] Keshub quoted in P.C. Mazoomdar, *The Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1887), p. 206.

> caste, colour, and condition, to unite in one family, eschew all manner of error and sin, and advance in wisdom, faith, and righteousness.[76]

Even the architecture of the mandir reflected Keshub's universalism. It was a blend of a Hindu temple, Christian church and Muslim mosque. In 1870 when an expanded edition of the *Sloka Sangraho* was published for the congregation the motto beautifully inscribed on the title page was "The Wide Universe was the Temple of God."

THE PERSISTENCE OF RAMMOHUN'S FAVOURABLE IMAGE

In the early 1880s following a second major schism in Brahmo ranks and the formation of the Sadharan Samaj,[77] Rammohun's life and work were reshaped into a fresh image. The Sadharans, who openly acknowledged their debt to Unitarianism,[78] who were avid social reformers,[79] who were rationalists philosophically[80] and constitutional nationalists politically,[81] selected precisely those things in Rammohun which tended to justify their own values and attitudes. It should come as no surprise that the evolving image of Rammohun as father of modern India came directly from Sadharan Brahmos such as Nagendranath Chatterji, Sivanath Sastri, the younger Bipin Chandra Pal and others who were among

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 208.

[77] The split occurred in 1878 largely over the issue of Keshub marrying his eldest daughter to the Maharaja of Cooch-Behar in violation of a Brahmo Act provision prohibiting child marriage. There were more underlying causes such as Keshub's opposition to nationalist agitation and his growing indifference to social reform.

[78] Theodore Parker was the most influential of American Unitarians in Bengal. His works were read in Bengali by young Sadharans.

[79] The Sadharan Samaj carried women's liberation to its ultimate conclusion. They encouraged higher education for their women and supported their efforts at professionalism.

[80] The Sadharan Samaj produced a core of superb professional philosophers such as Hiralal Haldar, Brajendranath Seal and Sitanath Tattvabhusan.

[81] The Indian Association which was the true precursor of the Indian National Congress was dominated in its executive committee by Sadharan Brahmos led, for the most part, by Ananda Mohan Bose.

the most progressive modernizers in South Asia at the time.[82] The same process was accentuated through definitive biographies of Rammohun by the Unitarian, Mary Carpenter, and by the Brahmo sympathizer, Sophia Dobson Collet.[83] Though the liberal and moderate Brahmos found themselves increasingly sandwiched between the emerging forces of British imperialism and Indian militant nationalism, they managed somehow to preserve their own image of Rammohun as a champion of Indian freedom on the one hand and as a champion of internal regeneration on the other.

This is very clear in *Rammohun Roy and Modern India* by Ramananda Chatterji, a work published during the height of Swadeshi in 1906. A devout Sadharan Brahmo and an equally devoted nationalist, Ramananda endowed Rammohun with the very qualities which men such as he admired in Indian national leaders. The book is divided into three parts: Rammohun as social reformer; Rammohun as political reformer; Rammohun and his views on the economic question. The first part is the familiar image of Rammohun's role as social activist whereas the second and third parts seem to suggest that Rammohun was progenitor of nationalist ideology and agitation in India—including, one might add—the economic drain theory.[84] Perhaps the leading idea in Ramananda's Brahmo nationalism, which he called creative nationalism and which he attributed to Rammohun, was that nationalism was nation building rather than hatred of the foreigner. Thus in complete opposition to the extremists, he argued that social reform rather than being antithetical to nationalism was in fact its most vital component.

The image of Rammohun as universalist was far from dead however and the excesses of nationalism, terrorism, and the First World War, did much to keep alive the noble sentiments of Brahmo Sabha trust deed, Keshub Chandra Sen's experiments in comparative

[82] Some of the more noteworthy Sadharan works on Rammohun include: N Chatterji, *Mahatma Raja Rammohun Ray-er Jibancharit* (1881); H.C. Sarkar, *The Father of Modern India* (1913);; B.C. Pal, *Raja Ram Mohan Ray, Eminent Theist of the World* (1909).

[83] M. Carpenter, *The Last Days in England of the Rajah Rammohun Roy* (Calcutta: Rammohun Roy Library, 1915);; S.D. Collet, *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy* (London: Harold Collet, 1900).

[84] R. Chatterjee, *Rammohun Roy and Modern India* (Allahabad: Panini Press, 1906), pp. 31-33.

religion, and many other sentiments and ideals promoting human brotherhood rather than diversity. The year 1933, when Rammohun's death centenary was observed, two excellent essays appeared—one by the greatest Brahmo philosopher, Brajendranath Seal, and the other by Debendranath Tagore's famous poet-son, Rabindranath. Both reinterpreted Rammohun to suit their own vision of a cosmopolitan world order and as an eloquent rebuttal to all parochial, sectarian, and nationalistic views of the early nineteenth century reformer. To Brajendranath, Rammohun's genius lay in his remarkable ability to synthesize, to blend harmoniously "the contradictory or conflicting in previous history."[85] According to Seal, he pointed the way "to the solution of the larger problem of international culture and civilization in human history, and became a precursor... a prophet of the coming Humanity."[86] As for Rabindranath, Rammohun typified the finest expression of Hindu Brahmoism, that reconciliation between national identity and universal good will:

> Rammohun was the only person in his time... to realize completely the significance of the modern age. He knew that the ideal of human civilization does not lie in isolation of independence, but in the brotherhood of inter-dependence of individuals as well as nations. His attempt was to establish our peoples on the full consciousness of their own cultural personality, to make them comprehend the reality of all that was unique... in their civilization, and simultaneously to make them approach other civilizations in the spirit of sympathetic cooperation.[87]

[85] B. Seal, *Rammohun, The Universal Man* (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1933), p. 1.

[86] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[87] R. Tagore, "Inaugurator of the Modern Age in India," *Rammohun Roy: The Man and His Work* (Calcutta: Rammohun Centenary Committee, 1933), pp. 4-5.

RAMMOHUN ROY AND THE BREAK WITH THE PAST

SUMIT SARKAR

On the bi-centenary of his birth, the title of "Father of Modern India" bestowed on Rammohun by many might appear utterly sacrosanct; an exploration of the assumptions lying behind such a statement still seems not unrewarding. If this ascription of parentage is to mean anything more than a rather pompous and woolly way of showing respect, the implication surely is that something like a decisive breakthrough towards modernity took place in Rammohun's times and in large part through his thought and activities. In this paper it is proposed to investigate, in the first place, the precise extent and nature of this "break with the past." Secondly, the unanimity with which a very wide and varied spectrum of our intelligentsia—ranging from avowed admirers of British rule through liberal nationalists to convinced Marxists—has sought a kind of father-figure in Rammohun and a sense of identification with the "renaissance" inaugurated by him remains a historical fact of considerable importance. The second part of this paper will try to analyse some of the implications of this well-established historiographical tradition based on the concept of a break in a progressive direction in Bengal's development at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

For the sake of clarity it would be convenient to begin by stating in a very schematic and somewhat provocative manner the propositions the writer intends to try and establish in the course of this paper.

I. Rammohun's writings and activities do signify a kind of a

break with the traditions inherited by his generation.

2. This break, however, was of a limited and deeply contradictory kind. It was achieved mainly on the intellectual plane and not at the level of basic social transformation; and the "renaissance" culture which Rammohun inaugurated inevitably remained confined within a Hindu-elitist and colonial (one might almost add comprador) framework.

3. What may be loosely described as the negative aspects of the break became increasingly prominent as the nineteenth century advanced. The Bengal Renaissance from one point of view may be presented not as a "torch-race," as Nirad C. Chaudhuri once described it, but as a story of retreat and decline. And perhaps a certain process of degeneration can be traced even in some of Rammohun's later writings.

4. The limitations and contradictions of Rammohun can be traced back ultimately to the basic nature of the British impact on Indian society. The conceptual framework required for the proper analysis of this impact is not the tradition—modernization dichotomy so much in vogue today in Western historical circles, but the study of colonialism as a distinct historical stage.[1]

5. With few exceptions, history-writing on Rammohun and on the entire Bengal Renaissance has remained prisoner to a kind of "false consciousness" bred by colonialism which needs to be analyzed and overcome, in the interests of both historical truth and contemporary progress.

1 ⟶ Extent & Nature of change

It is generally agreed[2] that Rammohun's true originality and greatness lay in his attempt to synthesize Hindu, Islamic, and Western cultural traditions; the precise character of this "synthesis," however, has often been obscured by the flood of laudatory rhetoric. Synthesis with us has often meant either eclectic and indiscriminate

[1]For a brilliant analysis of this important theoretical problem, see Bipan Chandra, *Colonialism and Modernization* (Presidential Address, Modern India Section of the Indian History Congress, Jabalpur Session, 1970).

[2]Thus Brajendranath Seal and Susobhan Chandra Sarkar are in perfect agreement on this point, despite their otherwise quite different attitudes— *Rammohun the Universal Man* (Calcutta, n.d.), pp. 2-3 and *Bengal Renaissance and Other Essays* (New Delhi, 1970), p. 5.

combination, or a kind of mutual toleration of orthodoxies. H.H. Wilson in 1840 quoted the Brahman compilers of a code of Hindu laws under Warren Hastings as affirming "the equal merit of every form of religious worship;...God appointed to every tribe its own faith, and to every sect its own religion, that man might glorify him in diverse modes..."[3] Ramakrishna Paramhansa was saying very similar things a hundred years later, and both Mughal tolerance and early British non-interference were grounded upon a politic acceptance of the need for a coexistence of orthodoxies. Such attitudes seem very attractive when compared to early modern European religious wars, but they also have certain fairly obvious conservative implications.[4] It needs to be emphasized that "synthesis" with Rammohun—at least in the bulk of his writings—meant something very different; it implied discrimination and systematic choice, directed by the two standards of "reason" and "social comfort" which recur so often in his works. This is the true Baconian note, struck for instance in the famous letter to Lord Amherst in 1823. Here, as elsewhere, panegyrists and debunkers alike have tended to miss the real point. The entire debate on the foundation of the Hindu College seems more than a little irrelevant, as the "conservatives" were also quite intensely interested in learning the language of the rulers on purely pragmatic grounds, and there is surely nothing "progressive" in English education per se. What remains remarkable is Rammohun's stress on "Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy and other useful Sciences"[5] a bias totally and significantly lost in the ultimate Macaulay-style literary education introduced in 1835 mainly under the pressure of financial

[3]Cited in K.K. Datta, *Survey of India's Social Life and Economic Condition in the 18th Century* (Calcutta, 1961), p. 2.

[4]Barun De has dealt with this ossifying role of both Mughal and early-British "toleration" in two very stimulating articles—"A Preliminary Note on the Writing of the History of Modern India" in *Quarterly Review of Historical Studies*, vol. III, No. 1, 2, (Calcutta, 1963-64) and "Some Implications of Political Tendencies and Social Factors in (Early) Eighteenth Century India" in *Studies in the Social History of India (Modern)* ed. by O.P. Bhatnagar (Allahabad, 1964).

[5]"Letter to Lord Amherst, 11 December 1823," *English Works of Rammohun Roy* (referred to henceforward as *EW*), vol. IV, (Calcutta, 1947), pp. 105-108.

needs![6]

It would be quite unhistorical, however, to attribute Rammohun's rationalism entirely to a knowledge of progressive Western culture. His earliest extant work, *Tuhfat-ul Muwahhiddin* (c. 1803-1804), was written at a time when, on Digby's testimony, Rammohun's command over English was still imperfect;[7] yet this "Gift to Deists" was marked by a radicalism trenchant enough to embarrass many later admirers.[8] Here the criteria of reason and social comfort are used with devastating effect to establish the startling proposition that 'falsehood is common to all religions without distinction'.[9] Only three basic tenets—common to all faiths and hence "natural" —are retained: belief in a single Creator (proved by the argument from design), in the existence of the soul, and faith in an afterworld where rewards and punishments will be duly awarded—and even the two latter beliefs are found acceptable only on utilitarian grounds.[10] Everything else—belief in particular Divinities or "in a

[6] "I am sure you will do all you can to educate the natives for office and to encourage them by the possession of it . . . . We cannot govern India financially without this change of system." (Ellenborough, President of the Board of Control, to Bentinck, 23 September 1830, quoted in A. F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal, 1818-1835* (Leiden, 1965), pp. 151-152. Financial economy demanded more employment of Indians on small salaries, but Orientalist educational policy could not produce this kind of cadre.

[7] In an introduction to an 1817 London reprint of two tracts of Rammohun, Digby stated that the "Brahmin . . . when I became acquainted with him, could merely speak it (English) well enough to be understood upon the most common topics of discourse, but could not write it with any degree of correctness." Rammohun seems to have perfected his knowledge of English only after entering the service of Digby. They met each other first in 1801, but Rammohun became his munshi only in 1805. S. D. Collet, *Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, edited by Biswas and Ganguli (Calcutta, 1962), pp. 23-24, 37-38.

[8] Collet dismissed it as "immature," (*op. cit.*, p. 19). Rajnarain Bose in his preface to the 1884 English translation of the *Tuhfat* rather condescendingly referred to it as an "index to a certain stage in the history of his (Rammohun's) mind. It marks the period when he had just emerged from the idolatry of his age but had not yet risen to . . . sublime Theism and Theistic Worship. . . ." Reprinted in *Tuhfat-ul Muwahhidin*, (Calcutta, 1949).

[9] *Tuhfat-ul Muwahhiddin* (Calcutta, 1949), Introduction.

[10] ". . . they (mankind) are to be excused in admitting and teaching the doctrine of existence of soul and the next world although the real existence of soul and the next world is hidden and mysterious for the sake of the welfare of the people (society) as they simply, for the fear of punishment in the next world . . . refrain from commission of illegal deeds." *Ibid.*, p. 5.

God qualified with human attributes as anger, mercy, hatred and love",[11] the faith in divinely-inspired prophets and miracles, salvation through "bathing in a river and worshipping a tree or being a monk and purchasing forgiveness of their crime from the high priests"[12] and the "hundreds of useless hardships and privations regarding eating and drinking, purity and impurity, auspiciousness and inauspiciousness"[13] is blown up with relentless logic, and shown to be invented by the self-interest of priests feeding on mass ignorance and slavishness to habit. Such beliefs and practices are condemned as both irrational and "detrimental to social life and sources of trouble and bewilderment to the people."[14] We have come perilously close, in fact, to the vanishing-point of religion, and the logic seems to have frightened even the later Rammohun himself. Prolific translator of his own works, he never brought out English or Bengali editions of the *Tuhfut*.

In Rammohun's later writings, too, the concepts of reason and social comfort or utility tend to crop up at crucial points in the argument. The illogicalities of the orthodox Christian doctrines of the Trinity and atonement through Christ are brilliantly exposed. The prefaces to the Upanishad translations and the *Brahma-Pauttalik Sambad*[15] ruthlessly analyze the irrationalities of contemporary Hindu image-worship, and religious reform is urged time and again for the sake of "political advantage and social comfort."[16] From 1815 onwards, Rammohun tried to anchor his monotheism on the Upanishads as interpreted by Sankara, yet there is never really any question of a simple return to the Vedanta tradition. Vedantic philosophy had been essentially elitist, preaching Mayabad and monism for the ascetic and intellectual while leaving religious practices and social customs utterly undisturbed at the level of everyday life. Rammohun's originality lay firstly in his deft avoidance of extreme monism. Mayabad in his hands gets reduced to the conventional idealist doctrines of dependence of

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 8. This is an assumption fairly common, incidentally, in later Brahmo upasana.
[12] *Ibid.*, p.8.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[14] *Loc. cit.*
[15] Almost certainly by Rammohun, according to Stephen Hay.
[16] Rammohun to Digby, 18 January 1828, *E.W.* IV, p. 96.

matter on spirit and the creation of the world by God,[17] and the Vedantic revival is thus reconciled with a basically utilitarian and this-worldly approach to religion. Even more striking is Rammohun's scathing attack on the double-standard approach so very common in our religious and philosophical tradition—this is bluntly attributed to the self-interest of the Brahmans:

> Many learned Brahmans are perfectly aware of the absurdity of idolatry, and are well informed of the nature of the purer mode of divine worship. But as in the rites, ceremonies, and festivals of idolatry, they find the source of their comforts and fortune, they...advance and encourage it to the utmost of their power, by keeping the knowledge of their scriptures concealed from the rest of the people.[18]

The 'purer mode of divine worship' should be open to householder and ascetic alike.[19] The practical relevance of all this for social reform becomes clear through a reading of Rammohun's tracts on sati, where concremation with its shastric promises of heavenly bliss is proved inferior to ascetic widowhood which may lead to 'eternal beatitude' and 'absorption in Brahma'.[20] Mrityunjoy Vidyalankar had anticipated this argument in 1817,[21] but the author of the *Vedanta Chandrika* obviously could not relate his humanitarian stand on a particularly gruesome abuse to a general philosophy.

[17] "The term Maya implies, primarily, the power of creation, and secondarily, its effect, which is the Universe. The Vedanta, by comparing the world with the misconceived notion of a snake, when a rope really exists, means that the world, like the supposed snake, has no independent existence, that it receives its existence from the Supreme Being. In like manner the Vedanta compares the world with a dream : as all the objects seen in a dream depend upon the motion of the mind, so the existence of the world is dependent upon the being of God...." *The Brahamanical Magazine*, No. 1, Calcutta, 1821; *EW*, II, p. 146.

[18] Preface to the *Translation of the Ishopanishad*, Calcutta, 1816—*EW II*, p. 44.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[20] *First and Second Conferences between An Advocate For, and An Opponent Of, The Practice of Burning Widows Alive* (Calcutta, 1818, 1820)-*EW III*, pp. 91, 111.

[21] The *Friend of India* of October 1819 summarized Mrityunjoy's arguments, quoted in Brajendranath Bandopadhyay, *Mrityunjoy Vidyalankar*, pp. 29-34 (*Sahitya Sadhak Charitmala*, vol I).

And surely only Rammohun in his generation could have written the deeply moving closing section of the *Second Conference* with its passionate repudiation of the unequal treatment of women as an universal social fact "What I lament is, that, seeing the women thus dependent and exposed to every misery, you feel for them no compassion, that might exempt them from being tied down and burnt to death!"[22]

In sheer intellectual power, Rammohun stands far above his contemporaries, and a comparison with Ramram Basu, for instance,[23] is utterly ludicrous. Yet certain limits and qualifications need to be emphasized.

In the first place, the uniqueness of Rammohun's rationalism cannot be taken as finally settled till much more is known than at present about the intellectual history of eighteenth-century India and particularly perhaps about its Islamic components. Brajendranath Seal found in the *Tuhfat* clear evidence of the influence of early Muslim rationalism (the Mutazalis of the 8th century and the Muwahhidin of the 12th);[24] what remains unexplored is the precise way in which this tradition was transmitted to the young Rammohun studying Persian and Arabic at Patna. A comparison of the *Tuhfat* with the *Dabistan-i Mazahib* of the mid-17th century —of which there does not exist as yet any adequate English translation—might prove quite illuminating. The "remarkably secular" character of much later Mughal historical writing[25] may be another significant pointer in this context. The Hindu intelligentsia of nineteenth-century Bengal (and may be Rammohun, too, to some extent, after he had mastered English) turned their backs entirely

[22] *EW*, III, p. 127.

[23] Such a comparison has been made by Brajendranath Bandopadhyay (*Sahitya Sadhak Charitmala*, vol. I) and more recently by David Kopf in *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Berkeley, 1969), Chapter XII, apparently on the strength of an invocation to Brahma at the beginning of Ramram Basu's *Lipi-mala* (1802).

[24] Brajendranath Seal, *Rammohun the Universal Man* (Calcutta, n.d.), p. 4. The detailed discussion of the same question in Nagendranath Chattopadhyay, *Mahatma Raja Rammohun Rayer Jivan-Charita* (3rd edition, Calcutta, 1897), chapter 17, is acknowledged by the author to have been entirely based on Brajendranath's ideas.

[25] Barun De, "A Preliminary Note on the Writing of the History of Modern India," *op. cit.*

on such traces of secularism, rationalism, and non-conformity in pre-British Muslim-ruled India—and their historians have by and large faithfully echoed the assumption of a completely new beginning with the coming of English education. An uncritical use of the renaissance concept is seldom a helpful analytical tool.

As has been implied already, a certain retreat from the fairly consistent and militant rationalism of the *Tuhfat* is evident in Rammohun's later religious and social tracts.[26] The slide-back took place at both the levels of social practice and intellectual argument, and can be explained partly—though not perhaps entirely—by Rammohun's reform-from-within technique. In 1819, private meetings of the Atmiya Sabha had freely discussed and criticized "the absurdity of the prevailing rules respecting the intercourse of the several castes with each other . . . the restrictions on diet . . . (and) the necessity of an infant widow passing her life in a state of celibacy."[27] But Rammohun in his published writings and public life paraded his outward conformity to most caste rules (even to the extent of taking a Brahman cook with him to England!), wore the sacred thread to the end of his days, limited his direct attack on caste to a single *Vajra-suchi* translation, and, concentrating all his social reform energies on the single sati issue, possibly even added to a slight extent to Vidyasagar's difficulties by hunting up all the texts glorifying ascetic widowhood. Such deviousness was perhaps not even tactically very wise, since the contradiction between theory and practice soon became the commonest orthodox charge against Rammohun, and one to which the reformer could only make the not-entirely satisfactory rejoinder that his critics were equally inconsistent.[28] On the conceptual level, the claims of reason are now

[26] For an analysis of the difference between the *Tuhfat* and the post-1815 religious writings, see Susobhan Sarkar, "Religious Thought of Rammohun Roy" in *Bengal Renaissance and Other Essays* (New Delhi, 1970).

[27] *India Gazette*, quoted by *Asiatic Journal*, 18 May 1819, J.K. Majumdar (ed.), *Raja Rammohun Roy and Progressive Movements in India* (Calcutta, 1941), p. 18.

[28] See for example, *Chari Prashna* (1822) and *Pashanda-Peeran* (1823) and Rammohun's replies, *Chari Prashner Uttar* (May 1822) and *Pathya-Pradan* (1823), published together in *Rammohun-Granthabali* (Calcutta, n.d.), vol. VI. The *Brahma-Paottalik Sangbad* (1820) also defends the observance of caste, diet and other social rules by the believer in Brahma as a matter of expediency even while emphasizing their relative unimportance. pp. 138, 158, 164.

balanced and increasingly limited by Upanishadic authority as well as by a conservative use of the social comfort criterion. Even in the *Tuhfat*, belief in the soul and in an after-life were accepted as socially advantageous although doubtfully rational. In the Introduction to *Kenopanishad* (1823), we get the following key passage:

> When we look to the traditions of ancient nations, we often find them at variance with each other; and when...we appeal to reason as a surer guide, we soon find how incompetent it is, alone, to conduct us to the object of our pursuit...instead of facilitating our endeavours or clearing up our perplexities, it only serves to generate a universal doubt, incompatible with principles on which our comfort and happiness mainly depend. The best method perhaps is, neither to give ourselves up exclusively to the guidance of the one or the other; but by a proper use of the lights furnished by both, endeavour to improve our intellectual and moral faculties, relying on the goodness of the Almighty Power....[29]

Collet's biography quotes Sandford Arnot as stating that

> As he (Rammohun) advanced in age, he became more strongly impressed with the importance of religion to the welfare of society, and the pernicious effects of scepticism .... He often deplored the existence of a party which had sprung up in Calcutta ... partly composed of East Indians, partly of the Hindu youth, who, from education had learnt to reject their own faith without substituting any other. These he thought more debased than the most bigoted Hindu....[30]

In sharp contrast to the sense of rational discrimination which had been the keynote of the *Tuhfat*, the later Rammohun also reveals a certain eclecticism, a desire to be all things to all people, so much so that in England both Unitarian and Evangelical Christians tried to claim him as their own. James Sutherland in 1830 described him "on questions of religious faith" as "in general too pliant, perhaps from his excessive

[29] *EW*, II, p. 15.
[30] Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

fear of giving offence or wounding the feelings of anybody"[31]—a contrast indeed with the young man who had written the *Tuhfat*.

While the *Tuhfat* was soon almost forgotten, the religious writings and activities of the later Rammohun did leave a permanent legacy in the shape of the Brahmo Samaj. Yet it can be questioned whether Brahmoism was ever anything more than a rather unsatisfactory half-way house. It leaves an impression of incompleteness even when considered in purely intellectual terms as a modernist critique of orthodox Hinduism. While fire was concentrated from the beginning on image-worship, caste was not attacked with anything like the same zeal till the 1860s, and the fundamental belief in Karma—perhaps an even more formidable barrier to radical social change—seems to have escaped serious criticism.[32] More important is the fact that Brahmoism—in spite of the retreat from unadulterated rationalism begun by the later Rammohun and continued on a greatly enhanced scale by Debendranath and Keshabchandra—still remained far too intellectual and dry a creed to be ever successful as a popular religion. It failed to make any attempt to link up with the popular lower-caste monotheistic cults which seem to have been fairly numerous in 18th century Bengal, particularly in the Nadia-Murshidabad region.[33] Rammohun did include a favourable reference to earlier monotheistic movements in his *Humble Suggestions* (1823),[34] but he or his followers never followed up the hint. Here as in so many other things English education placed an impenetrable barrier between the 19th century and the immediate pre-British past, which perhaps had contained certain healthy non-conformist elements along with much that was undoubtedly utterly ossified. In a conversation with Alexander Duff,

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 370.

[32] In the *Kavitakarer Sahit Vichar* of 1820 (summarized in Nagendranath Chattopadhyay, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-127) and the *Brahmanical Magazine*, No. II of 1821 (*EW* II), Rammohun came very near to an acceptance of the Karma doctrine—"The Supreme Ruler bestows the consequences of...sins and holiness...by giving them other bodies either animate or inanimate" (*EW*, II, p. 156). To the true Vedantist, of course, Karmaphal belongs to the subsidiary world of illusion, but then Rammohun never accepted the full monist logic.

[33] Kalikinkar Dutta mentions in particular the Karta Bhaja, the Spashtadayaka, and the Balarami sects. (*op. cit.*, p. 8).

[34] *EW*, II, p. 200.

Rammohun once made an interesting comparison between contemporary India and Reformation Europe;[35] we have only to pursue this optimistic analogy a little further to see how it breaks down at particularly every point. The Protestant Reformation had united the intellectual polemics of men like Erasmus with the less sophisticated but much more virile tradition of late medieval popular heresy. The Catholic heirarchy in 16th century Europe represented a highly organised and very often partly foreign system of exploitation, a kind of nodal point around which all the tensions of contemporary society had accumulated. Brahman oppression of lower castes, while far less systematic, was and is a reality; but it was hardly the most crucial problem for an Indian then being rapidly exposed to the full blast of colonial exploitation. Above all, the Reformation had succeeded not because its theology was intrinsically superior, but due to its linkage with a host of other factors—incipient nationalism directed against the Papacy, the princely drive to establish territorial sovereignty, the greed for church lands, the bourgeois quest for hegemony over civil society—all conspicuously and inevitably absent in colonial Bengal. To expect a European-style Reformation in such a context reveals a rather pathetic kind of false consciousness.

The negative, alienating, aspects of the English education which Rammohun and his generation so ardently welcomed are of course fairly obvious today. In fairness to Rammohun, certain qualifications should be made here. The traditional Sanskrit or Persian-educated literati were also utterly alienated from the masses; the 1823 letter pleaded for Western scientific values, and not necessarily for English as the medium of instruction; and there were elements of a kind of mass approach in Rammohun's pioneer translations of the shastras into the vernacular, his promotion of Bengali journalism, and the efforts by Atmiya Sabha members and Hindu College students to bring out Bengali versions of English

[35] "As a youth," he (Rammohun) said to Mr. Duff, "I acquired some knowledge of the English language. Having read about the rise and progress of Christianity in apostolic times, and its corruption in succeeding ages, and then of the Christian Reformation which shook off these corruptions and restored it to its primitive purity, I began to think that something similar might have taken place in India, and similar results might follow here from a reformation of the popular idolatry." Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

scientific and literary texts.[36] The seventh issue of the *Sambad Kaumudi* contained "An Address to the Hindoo Community, demonstrating the necessity of having their children instructed in the principles of the Grammar of their own language, previous to imposing upon the Study of Foreign Languages"[37] and in 1833 the students of Rammohun's Anglo-Hindu school started the Sarbatattva-deepika Sabha pledged to the use of Bengali alone.[38] Yet the general attitude of our intelligentsia towards Western culture and particularly the English language contrasts oddly with that displayed, for instance, by Sultan Mahmud II of the Ottoman Empire in an address to medical students in 1838: "You will study scientific medicine in French...my purpose in having you taught French is not to educate you in the French language; it is to teach you scientific medicine and little by little to take it into our language...."[39] In intellect and general culture Rammohun and other stalwarts of our renaissance were certainly far superior to this not-particularly enlightened Sultan; but colonial subjection often puts blinkers on and distorts the greatest of minds.

If the culture of the Bengal Renaissance was highly elitist in character, it soon became also overwhelmingly and increasingly alienated from the Islamic heritage. Rammohun himself had been deeply rooted at first in the composite upper-class Persian culture of the eighteenth century, as both the *Tuhfat* and the *Mirat-ul-Ukhbar* bear witness. Explaining Rammohun's exclusion from the committee which founded the Hindu College, Hyde East stated that the Orthodox Hindus "particularly disliked (and this I believe is at the bottom of the resentment) his associating himself so much as he does with Mussulmans... being continually surrounded by

[36] Rammohun is said to have written a geography textbook (Nagendranath Chatterji, *op. cit.*, pp. 325-26). The Atmiya Sabha member Brajamohan Majumdar was working on a translation of Fergusson's Astronomy on the eve of his death, S. Hay (ed), *A Tract Against Idolatry* (Calcutta, 1963), Introduction. Salahuddin Ahmed (*op. cit.*, chapter I) cites a 1832 reference in the Bentinck Papers to translations by Hindu College students.

[37] Summary in *Calcutta Journal*, 31 January 1882. J.K. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 288

[38] *Sambad Kaumudi*, quoted by *Samachar Darpan*, 19 January 1833. *Ibid.*, pp. 273-275

[39] Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford, 1968), p. 85.

them, and suspected to partake meals with them."[40] In 1826 Adam reports him as about to commence a life of Muhammad[41]—an interesting project which never materialized. A long 'historical' footnote to the *Ancient Rights of Females* (1822) blamed Rajput "tyranny and oppression" almost as much as Muslim misrule for the degeneration of India from a supposed golden age in which Brahmans and Kshatriyas had balanced each other.[42] Yet already in Rammohun there are also strong traces of that concept of Muslim tyranny—and of British rule as a deliverance from it and hence fundamentally acceptable—which soon became a central assumption of virtually every section of our intelligentsia, conservative, reformist, and radical alike. In the Appeal to the King in Council against the 1823 Press Regulation, it is stated that "under their former Muhammadan Rulers, the natives of this country enjoyed every political privilege in common with Mussulmans, being eligible to the highest offices in the state". But "their property was often plundered, their religion insulted, and their blood wantonly shed", till "Divine Providence at last, in its abundant mercy, stirred up the English nation to break the yoke of those tyrants and to receive the oppressed Natives of Bengal under its protection."[43] The basic theme, without Rammohun's qualifications, crop-up throughout the nineteenth century at the most unexpected of places: in the Derozian Mahesh Chundra Deb condemning the seclusion of women in Hindu society before the Society For Acquisition of General Knowledge[44] and in the rationalist Akshoy Kumar Dutt adversely comparing Muslim with British rule,[45] just as much as in Bankimchandra. An analysis of the ramifications of this concept, which research today is incidentally rapidly demolishing as in any way a just appraisal of late Mughal India, surely would be the most interesting and most neglected of themes. British historio-

[40] Letter of Hyde East to the Earl of Buckinghamshire (Fulham Papers), cited in Salahuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

[41] Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

[42] *EW*, I, p. 1.

[43] Collet, *op. cit.*, Appendix I B, pp. 431, 449.

[44] Mahesh Chundra Deb, "A Sketch of the Condition of the Hindoo Women (1839)," Gautam Chattopadhyay (ed.) *Awakening in Bengal* (1965), pp. 94-95.

[45] *Sangbad Prabhakar* 21.8-1247/1840/—Benoy Ghosh (ed.), *Samayik Patre Banglar Samajchitra* (Calcutta, 1962), vol. I, pp. 160-161.

graphy[46] certainly played a crucial role here, and with the rapid disappearance of knowledge of Persian, our Westernized intelligentsia became entirely dependant on it for knowledge of their immediate past. This is perhaps one 'contribution of British Orientalism' to the Bengal Renaissance which merits more attention than it has received in the past.

Consideration of Rammohun's attitude to British rule leads naturally to a discussion of his political and economic ideas. Two rather tentative suggestions may be made in this connection. In the first place, it is just possible that the pattern of retreat fairly evident in Rammohun's religious and social thought has its counterpart also in his political ideas. The *Autobiographical Letter* contains a tantalizingly brief reference to Rammohun's early travels being animated by "a feeling of great aversion to the establishment of the British power in India",[47] and a Bangladesh historian has recently speculated on the possibility of some connections with anti-British zamindar and even peasant groups in Rangpur.[48] The evidence here is admittedly still very scanty; certainly the Rammohun who is so much more familiar to us all somehow managed to combine an impressive interest in and sympathy for liberal and nationalist movements in England, France, Naples, Spain, Ireland and even Latin America with a fundamental acceptance of foreign political and economic domination over his own country. Within this basic framework, Rammohun did blaze the trail, of course, for several generations of moderate constitutionalist agitation, focussing on demands like Indianization of services, trial by jury, separation of powers, freedom of the press,

[46] For this, see J.S. Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India—The Assessments of British Historians* (OUP, 1970).

[47] The authenticity of this letter, published by Sandford Arnot after Rammohun's death, has been often challenged; but it is difficult to imagine what motive Arnot could have had in completely inventing the passage I am using. (Collet, *op.cit.* Appendix VIII, p. 497.) See also Victor Jacquemont's testimony. (1829): "Formerly when he (Rammohun) was young, he told me this in Europe, the ruler of his country, was odious to him. The blind patriotism of youth made him detest the English and all who came with them." J. K. Majumdar (ed.), *Indian Speeches and Documents on British Rule* (Calcutta, 1937), p. 41.

[48] Mufakharul Islam, *Rammohun Royer Agnyatatas—Itihas* (Dacca), Bhadra-Agrahayan, 1969.

and consultations with Indian landlords, merchants, and officials on legislative matters. His critique of the zamindari system and plea for an absolute ban on "any further increase of rent on any pretence whatsoever"[49] strikes a sympathetic chord in progressive hearts even today. Yet here too perhaps a tendency towards growing moderation and a kind of centrism may be traced. The *Bengal Herald*—of which Rammohun was a principal proprietor—on 9 May 1829 announced as its objective an opposition *"equally* to anarchy, as to despotism".[50] and by 1832 Rammohun was paying the price for this centrism in the shape of an attack from two fronts. His evidence before the Commons Select Committee was denounced as unduly harsh on zamindars by the Dharma Sabha organ *Samachar Chandrika*;[51] much more surprising—and little-known—is the whole series of articles in the *Bengal Hurkaru*,[52] violently attacking the reformer for being too soft in his critique of Company maladministration and far too tactful on the question of zamindari oppression of the peasants. "How could Rammohun Roy in these replies", it asks *"forget* the seventh Regulation of 1799 . . . the very plague-spot of our administration"? Rammohun

> went to England as a 'voice from India' to tell the wrongs, and the sufferings, and to assert the rights of her children, we find.. in these papers a mere Zamindar.[53]

The *Bengal Hurkaru* also attacked Rammohun for not being unqualified enough in his support for English colonization in India, and the newspaper was edited by James Sutherland, an ex-associate of James Silk Buckhingam of *Calcutta Journal* fame. This brings us to the second point: the need to analyse, in great depth than has been usual so far,[54] the close links between British free-

[49] "Questions and Answers on the Revenue System of India (1832)" *EW*, III, p. 45.

[50] Cited in J. K. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

[51] *Samachar Chandrika*, quoted by *Samachar Darpan*, 7 July 1832. *Ibid.*, pp. 490-93.

[52] *Bengal Hurkaru*, 20 and 22 June, 22 November 1832. *Ibid.*, pp. 483-88, 496-501.

[53] *Ibid.*, pp. 484, 488.

[54] See, however, Salahuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, chapters I and V for some discussion on this point.

traders—the carriers, very often, of Utilitarian ideas—and men like Rammohun or Dwarkanath who combined zamindari with money-lending and business enterprise.[55] With both groups, enthusiastic acceptance of the basic British connection was combined with a more or less sharp critique of many aspects of Company administration and economic policy. Rammohun and Dwarkanath took a very prominent part in the Town Hall meeting organized by free-traders in December 1829 which petitioned Parliament "to throw open the China and India trade, and to remove the restrictions against the settlement of Europeans in India"; they improved the occasion by a full-throated defence of indigo-planters.[56] The *India Gazette* of 2 July 1829, incidentally, had published a letter from an indigo-planter attacking zamindari oppression of peasants and demanding rent-reductions—to which a zamindar had replied four days later with a catalogue of mis-deeds associated with indigo.[57] In a speech in 1836, Dwarkanath declared that twenty years ago the Company had treated all natives as servants, but things had changed vastly for the inhabitants of Calcutta thanks to the British free-traders; he proceeded to repay that debt by joining in the protest against a 'black act' which had sought to curtail the right of European settlers in the mufassil to appeal to the Supreme Court against decisions of district tribunals.[58]

In a very interesting article on the 'Prospect of Bengal' published by the *Bengal Herald* of 13 June 1829, an English writer tried to teach his "Native friends" a few lessons in comparative social history. The growth of a "middling class" had brought about the English Revolution of the 17th century, while Spain and Poland still remained backward and miserable due to the absence of such

[55] Dwarkanath's multifarious business activities need no elaboration; Rammohun built up his fortune initially through money-lending and dealings in Company papers, from the proceeds of which he started purchasing land from 1799. (Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 14). He later developed close connections with agency houses and in a letter to the Court of Directors (23 July 1833) asking for a loan after the collapse of Mackintosh and Co., stated that the latter had been "My Agents as well in general pecuniary transactions as in receiving my rents and managing my landed property". (*EW*, IV, p. 129)

[56] Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 270; J. K. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 438-39.

[57] Quoted in Salahuddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

[58] Kishorichand Mitra, *Dwarkanath Tagore*, Bengali translation, ed. Kalyankumar Dasgupta (Calcutta, 1962), pp. 60-61.

a development. In Bengal after 1813, 'the lesser restrictions on commerce and greater introduction of Europeans' had vastly enhanced the value of land, and

> by means of this territorial value, a class of society has sprung into existence, that were (sic) before unknown; these are placed between the aristocracy and the poor, and are daily forming a most influential class.

The inflow of English manufacturers from "Liverpool, Glasgow, etc." was extremely welcome, since sooner or later "a reciprocity of trade must take place . . . if England expects that India will prove a large mart for her produce, she must remove the restrictive, almost prohibitory duties on Asiatic produce . . . ."[59] The Rammohun-Dwarkanath section of our intelligentsia seems to have swallowed in toto this free-trader logic, and visualized a kind of dependent but still real bourgeois development in Bengal in close collaboration with British merchants and entrepreneurs. The utter absurdity of this illusion is very obvious today. A single Dwarkanath did not herald a bourgeois spring, and the years from 1813 to 1833—coinciding almost exactly with the most active period of Rammohun's public life—saw the number of houses paying *chaukidari* tax in Dacca go down from 21,361 to 10,708.[60] The catastrophic decline in cotton handicrafts threw at least a million out of jobs in Bengal[61] in "a revolution . . . hardly to be paralleled in the history of commerce."[62] The founding-father of our Renaissance remained utterly silent about such developments.

Within the next generation, the Bengali 'middle class' was rapidly squeezed out of even comprador-type business activities, and left dependent on the professions, services, and land—almost entirely divorced, in other words, from productive functions, since thanks to the Permanent Settlement rent-receipts flowed in with a minimum of entrepreneurial effort. Bourgeois-liberal values remained bereft of material content. In Rabindranath's *Gora*—the best literary summation perhaps of the cultural world of 'renaissance' Bengal—

[59] J. K. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 434-37.
[60] N. K. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal*, vol. III (Calcutta, 1970), p. 4.
[61] *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.
[62] Proceedings of the Board of Trade, July 1828, cited in *ibid.*, p. 8.

none of the characters seem to have to work for a living; the contrast, say, with Dickens, where 'work plays an essential part in the characters' approach to life[63] is illuminating.

II

Rammohun's achievements as a modernizer were thus both limited and extremely ambivalent. What is involved in this estimate is not really his personal stature, which was certainly quite outstanding; the limitations were basically those of his times—which marked the beginning of a transition, indeed, from pre-capitalist society, but in the direction, not of full-blooded bourgeois modernity, but of a weak and distorted caricature of the same which was all that colonial subjection permitted.

This is emphatically not the conventionally accepted view of Rammohun or of the renaissance he inaugurated, and yet it will be obvious that this interpretation has been entirely based on published and fairly well-known material and has not involved any original research. That being so, a brief analysis of the assumptions underlying the established historiographical tradition seems called for.

From the Dharma Sabha down to R.C. Majumdar and David Kopf, Rammohun of course has had numerous critics and debunkers, but instead of exposing his real contradictions and limits, this criticism has in the main either picked on utterly irrelevant and trivial issues like the alleged Muslim mistress or the illegitimate Rajaram, or concentrated on trying to disprove Rammohun's claim to priority in such things as English education, campaign against sati, or monotheism-accepting by implication therefore their presumably revolutionary nature. The early attacks were clearly motivated solely by the desire to preserve the social and religious *status quo*. Attempts have been made occasionally to find proto-nationalists among the Dharma Sabha men,[64] but even at the height of the anti-sati agitation, the *Samachar Chandrika* declared:

None of our countrymen feel a pleasure in hearing any thing to

[63] Humphry House, *The Dickens World* (1961) p. 55.
[64] By David Kopf, for example, *op. cit.*, pp. 266-72.

> the disadvantage of the Honorable Company; they always pray for the welfare of the Government . . . . We have been subject to no distress under the government of the Company; it is only the abolition of Suttees which has given us disquietude . . . . [65]

If Rammohun was closely allied with British free-trader liberals, no less intimate were the links between *Samachar Chandrika* and *John Bull*, the Tory defender of Company interests founded by the Reverend James Bryce.[66]

Round about the turn of the century, Hindu revivalism did strike a rather temporary alliance with Extremist nationalism and this led sometimes to an interesting revaluation of Rammohun. While still clinging to the father-image, the highly revisionist Brahmo Bipin Chandra Pal argued that English education had little or nothing to do with Rammohun's achievements; he went on to present the latter as almost the first of the Hindu revivalists, who rightly rejected Western rationalism and instead tried to balance reason with shastric authority.[67]

That denigration or revaluation of Rammohun from the Hindu orthodox or revivalist angle has been motivated by a desire to validate a defence of the social *status quo* is fairly obvious; what requires closer analysis perhaps are the premises of the "progressive" hero-worship tradition particularly—though not exclusively—associated in the Bengal with Brahmoism. Several strands can be distinguished here. Full-throated admiration for Rammohun and the entire Bengal Renaissance had been connected occasionally with avowedly pro-British views. Jadunath Sarkar provided a classic instance of this, with his well-known purple passage at the end of the *Dacca University History of Bengal* (1948) on Plassey as

> the beginning . . . of a glorious dawn, the like of which the history

[65] *Samachar Chandrika* quoted by *John Bull*, 9 March 1830—J.K. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

[66] The strange but very significant alliance between the Hindu orthodoxy and the *John Bull* is vividly reflected in a large number of extracts published by J. K. Majumdar—cf. for example Numbers 34, 36, 39, 184 and 185.

[67] Bipin Chandra Pal, "Yuga-Prabartak Rammohun" in *Nabayuger Bangla* (Calcutta, 1955); a reprint of Pal's article in *Banga-bani* 1328-31 (1921-24).

of the world has not seen elsewhere...truly a Renaissance, wider, deeper, and more revolutionary than that of Europe after the fall of Constantinople ....

J. K. Majumdar, who edited three invaluable volumes of documents on Rammohun, also published in 1937 a collection of *Speeches and Documents on British Rule, 1821-1918* marked by a quite remarkably sycophantic principle of selection—Gandhi figures in it for example only as the recruiting-sergeant of 1918. Such attitudes, of course, had become relatively rare after the development of nationalism, but liberal patriots remained warm admirers of Rammohun as the pioneer of social reform and constitutionalist agitation.

The Marxist approach has been somewhat more ambivalent. From Rabindra Gupta (Bhowani Sen) in the Ranadive period to recent Naxalite iconoclasm, it has certainly included occasional violent attacks on the renaissance of the intellectuals, coupled with glorification of instances of popular or peasant resistance to British rule. By and large, however, writings of this type have been mainly on the agitational or journalistic level, and have confined themselves to liberally distributing labels like "bourgeois" or "feudal" without going into the trouble of detailed critical analysis. More serious Marxist history-writing, with some justice, has tended to dismiss such attempts as too immature and sectarian, but its own selective emphasis on certain "progressive" aspects (thus, in the case of Rammohun, instances of rationalism, internationalism, and sympathy for the peasantry are high-lighted while the pro-British stance is mentioned only in an under-tone) perhaps could do with a closer scrutiny. In certain periods in the history of the Left in India, this bid to link up with worthwhile elements of the nineteenth century cultural heritage surely had considerable immediate justification. The very influential *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance* (1946), for instance, was written at a time when the Communists were just breaking out of the isolation from the nationalist mainstream produced by the events of 1942, and when, in the words of its introduction, "disintegration threaten(ed) every aspect of our life"—the aftermath of famine and the shadow of the coming Partition of Bengal.[68] The *Notes* explicitly denied to itself the status

[68] S.C. Sarkar, *Bengal Renaissance and other Essays* (New Delhi, 1970), p. 3.

of a full Marxist analysis; the same historian later offered a much more critical estimate of the Bengal Renaissance in a review of Nirad Chaudhuri's *Autobiography* (1952) and by implication in an article on the Mutiny (1957), as well as a more rigorous analytical scheme in an article on Rabindranath (1961) interpreting Bengal Renaissance culture in terms of a conflict between two trends, "Westernist" or "modernist", and "traditionalist."[69]

The Marxist historian's preference for the 'Westernist' trend[70] is understandable, but the sense of discrimination shown in the article just referred to, should, be carried one step further. An unqualified equation of the "westernizers"—among whom Rammohun must surely rank as the first and perhaps the greatest—with modernism or progress almost inevitably leads on to a more positive assessment of British rule, English education, and the nineteenth-century panegyrists of both then is either warranted by the facts or is in conformity with the general Marxist assessment of colonialism. Marx did refer in an 1853 article to the "regenerating" role of British rule in India, but he immediately went on to emphasize that "the Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie" till the workers seize power in Britain or "till the Hindus themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether,"[71] and his few stray remarks on the benefits of the free press or Western education should be compared with the tremendous enthusiasm and even exultation with which he followed the events of 1857.

The key concept needing more precise definition in this context, is "modernization". Western historians of under-developed countries have become terribly fond nowadays of the "tradition"-"modernization" polarity, under cover of which the grosser facts of imperialist political and economic exploitation are very often quietly tucked away in a corner. In the post-1917 world, modernization clearly involves a choice between the capitalist and the

[69]Sarkar, *op. cit.*, part II, 5,7,8.

[70]"In today's battle over the shape of India's future, it is surely westernism rather than traditionalism which beckons us towards a better, happier life. Sarkar, "Rabindranath Tagore and the Renaissance in Bengal", *op. cit.*, p. 159.

[71]Karl Marx, *The Future Results of the British Rule in India* (1853), reprinted in *On Colonialism* (Moscow, n.d.), pp. 84, 88.

socialist paths of development; what is not so obvious is that even in the nineteenth century, when the bourgeois West seemingly offered the one model for progress, the precise pattern of "learning from the West" had varied considerably, and that a principal determinant here had been the degree of political independence an under-developed country had been able to retain. In countries which escaped political conquest either completely or for a fairly long period—Japan, of course, but also to a much more limited extent Ottoman Turkey and Egypt under Muhammad Ali—the pattern of modernist change was significantly different from that witnessed in British India. The interests of political survival in a Western-dominated world compelled the indigenous rulers to try to imitate Europe first of all in the fields of army and administration, then of economic life—the whole approach was far more pragmatic. The intellectuals learnt less of Shakespeare and Mill and very much more of modern technology and science—and from the very beginning attempts were made to assimilate the latter into the language of the country. Such a pattern, it is tempting to speculate, might have emerged in our country too, if, say, Tipu Sultan had somehow survived or the 1857 revolt been successful; there is no real reason to think that this would have been an unmitigated disaster.

A second kind of pattern can be traced in nineteenth century Russian history, where Westernizing reform from the top starting with Peter ultimately produced an intelligentsia of quite a remarkable kind. Attempts have been made to draw an analogy between the Westerner—Slavophil debate and the conflict of trends in nineteenth-century Bengal;[72] the differences are really far more significant. What was absent in India was first, the intellectual's agonized sense of alienation from the masses, culminating in the "going to the people" movement; and second, the remarkable jump to one or other form of socialist ideology, by-passing conventional bourgeois liberalism. The "advantages of backwardness" which Trotsky discerned in Russian history manifested themselves also in China, where, after the dismal failure of the Japanese-style "self-strengthening" movement, national renovation came under the leadership of a man who seems to have made the leap

[72]Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

straight from classical Confucian learning to Marxism. And perhaps the most telling object-lesson of all comes, in this as in so many other things today, from embattled Vietnam, which passed under full colonial control only in the 1880s, and where only thirty years—and no break at all in the tradition of resistance—separated the 1885 Scholars' Revolt from Ho Chi-Minh's embracing of Marxism in Paris.

In India, full-scale colonial rule lasted the longest, and there was ample time for the growth of dependent vested interests, the elaboration of hegemonic infra-structure producing "voluntary" consent side by side with more direct politico-military domination. The English-educated intelligentsia in its origins was very much a part of this system, nowhere more so than in Bengal; that it later turned to nationalist and even sometimes Marxian ways did not automatically imply that the old presuppositions had been entirely and consciously overcome. A critical re-examination of the Bengal Renaissance, of its limits and contradictions and hidden assumptions, has therefore an importance far transcending the purely academic.

RELIGION OF RAMMOHUN ROY

A. K. MAJUMDAR

As we approach the age at which Rammohun died, we begin to be immensely impressed by the magnitude of his success in his many-sided activities, his massive scholarship and his literary output, all accomplished against heavy odds, which only the most tremendous vitality could overcome with his serene composure, his sense of wit and humour (sometimes devastatingly sarcastic), and his steadfast faith in God.

For several thousand years, India has produced seers and saints, men of God. Rammohun did not belong to this category; he was an astute man of affairs, who knew how to grasp opportunities of enriching himself amidst the turmoils of a transitional period. He could move in any society at ease, and carry a delicate diplomatic mission with the dignity due to an ambassador of the descendant of Akbar the Great. Yet above all and amidst all this he was deeply religious.

Possibly it is necessary to quote Sir Brajendranath Seal to explain this intellectual phenomenon. Writing in 1903, Brajendranath said:

> For a right understanding and estimate of the Raja's thought and utterance, it is necessary to bear in mind the two essentially distinct but indispensable parts which the Raja played on the historic stage. There was Raja Rammohun Roy, the Cosmopolite, the Rationalist Thinker, the Representative Man with a universal outlook on human civilization and its historic march . . . the peer of the Humes, the Gibbons, the Voltaires, the Volneys,

> the Diderots or any Free-Thinker .... daunted by no speculative doubts, discouraged by no craven fears .... But there was another and equally characteristic part played by the Raja—the Nationalist Reformer ... the Renovator of National Scriptures and Revelations .... [1]

Writing in the same volume on "The Universal and National in Rammohun Roy," Bipin Chandra Pal pointed out:

> The universal and the particular are, in all rational systems of thought, regarded only as two moments of one complete whole. The universal is nothing unless it articulates itself through some particular; on the other hand, the particular loses all movement, that is all life, when it divorces the universal. The universal can only take legitimate shape among a people through the national and traditional institutions of the people; that is the one (and) only method of the realisation of universal ideals by a people .... This essential unity between the universal and the particular, between God and man, between humanity and nationality, between socialism and individualism, was the central truth of the system of Raja Rammohun Roy.[2]

Bipin Chandra's assessment is practically corroborated by the Raja himself in the *Tuhfat-ul Muwahhiddin* (A *Present To The Monotheist*) where he says:

> Although it cannot be denied that the social instinct in man demands that every individual of this species should have permanent regulations for the (different) stages of life and for living together, but social laws depend on an understanding of each other's meaning (or ideas) and on certain rules which separate the property of one from that of another, and provide for the removal of the pain which one gives to another. Making these the basis, the inhabitants of all the countries, distant islands and

[1] *TPR (Translation of several Principal Books, Passages, and Texts of the Vedas, and of some Controversial Works on Brahmanical Theology by Raja Rammohun Roy with an Introductory Memoir, Memorial Education,* (Calcutta, Society for the Resuscitation of Indian Literature, 1903) pp. lxxi-lxxii.

[2] *Ibid,* p. lxviii.

> lofty mountains have according to their progress and intellectuality, formed words indicative of the meaning and origin of faiths on which at present stand the governments of the world.

Later in the same work Rammohun states:

> . . . the Brahmins have a tradition from God that they have strict orders from God to observe their ceremonies and hold their faith for ever. There are many injunctions about this from the Divine Authority in the Sanskrit language, and I, the humblest creature of God, having been born amongst them, have learnt the language and got those injunctions by heart, and this nation (the Brahmins) having confidence in such divine injunctions cannot give them up although they have been subjected to many troubles and persecution and were threatened to be put to death by the followers of Islam.[3]

Rammohun had to make this declaration of faith, or nationality as he would have most probably termed it, for in the *Tuhfat* he was addressing the Muslims particularly, and intellectual honesty demanded that he should make his position free from any ambiguity. For, even during his life people doubted whether he was a Hindu, a Muslim, or a Christian, and he jocularly remarked to a friend just before his departure to England, that after his death the three communities would claim his body.[4] But these were surface manifestations hiding the most deeply rooted conviction that he was a Brahman, and all that this term connoted. But he was also a universal man even in religious matters, and that part of him is no less important than the other and his greatness lies in his having successfully harmonized these two dynamic aspects.

[3] *EWR* (*The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy with an English Translation of Tuhfat-ul Muwahhiddin*, published by the Panini Office, Allahabad, 1906. The Introduction to this work was written by Ramananda Chatterji, but not signed) pp. 947, 954.

[4] *CV*, (*The father of Modern India, Commemoration Volume of the Rammohun Roy Centenary Celebrations*, 1900, compiled and edited by Satish Chandra Chakravarty, Calcutta, 1935. Page references are to part 2 of this volume) p. 178.

II

Rammohun studied three religions carefully, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. He had also to study Judaism in connection with Christianity. Of other religions, it is said that he learnt Jainism from Jain Marwaris at Rangpur. But there is no trace of Jain influence in his writings, and it is almost unthinkable that he would have failed to use Jain logic, had it been made accessible to him. Marwari businessmen are not among the most capable exponents of Jain metaphysics and logic, and most probably those remained a closed chapter to Rammohun. What he saw was the austere habits of Jain householders, which he must have found forbidding, if not slightly repellant. In his introduction to his translation of the *Brahma-Sutra,* and elsewhere, Rammohun has referred with approval to "sects of Nanak, Dadu, and Shiva-Narayan," which shows that he knew something about Sikhism and the tenets of some other Indian sects. In the same introduction, he has also referred to the "Nirvan sect, mentioned in the *Sastras*," the meaning of which is not very clear. But he had no idea of Buddhism, for no one in India knew anything about it in those days. Even if Rammohun had been to Tibet, it is clear that he was unable to learn the fundamental tenets of Buddhism; and Tibetan Buddhism with its idol worship could have little attraction for him. This was a loss, for Rammohun might have been attracted by the teachings of Buddha, and in any case could have given a masterly exposition of Buddhism, for as Monier Williams has said, the Raja was the first really earnest investigator in the science of comparative religion which the world has produced.

We are, however, mainly concerned with the influence of Islam and Christianity upon Rammohun. The religion in which the Raja first received systematic instruction was Islam. He went to Patna at the age of nine or ten and after finishing his studies there, went to Banaras to learn Sanskrit. He returned home from Banaras in 1790, and it is usually held that he had spent four years at Patna and four years at Banaras.

Before leaving for Patna, Rammohun must have taken part in the religious ceremonies and rituals of his Vaishnava family, and had been certainly invested with the sacred thread. But even for a genius it would have been impossible to penetrate into the heart of Hinduism across the layers of rituals at the age of nine or ten.

Some of his biographers relate that at one time, "he would not take even a draught of water" without first reciting a chapter or so from the *Bhagavad* which he had committed to memory. It is difficult, to believe this story; for a boy of nine, this feat would be incredible and for Rammohun after his return from Banaras virtually impossible.

Rammohun was a tolerant man, even if judged by the most liberal standard, but there was one point on which he was absolutely uncompromising: he refused to countenance image worship in any shape or form, and we have to ascribe this stern attitude towards idolatry to the influence of Islam at a tender and impressionable age. Absolutely nothing is known of Rammohun's life at Patna or Banaras, and it is curious that he should have been sent to these distant places for early education. It is stated by his biographers, that these two places were selected because there were no competent teachers of Persian, Arabic, or Sanskrit available nearer home. It is, however, difficult to believe that in the 1780s there was no competent Arabic or Persian teacher in Murshidabad or Calcutta, and for Sanskrit, what had happened to Nadia, one of the greatest seats of Sanskrit learning in India and which must have been dear to Rammohun's staunch Vaishnava parents as the birthplace of Chaitanya.

Patna must have been selected by Rammohun's father for reason not known to us, but it is not difficult to imagine that here Rammohun came under the influence of some teachers of exemplary character who succeeded in instilling repugnance to image-worship[5]

[5] Maharshi Debendranath as a boy went to invite Rammohun to attend the Durga Puja. As he finished the recital of the formal invitation, "the Raja cried out with his usual earnestness, 'Ask *me* to the Puja.'?"The Maharshi related the story when he was very old, possibly 60 or 70 years after the incident but added: "That voice (Rammohun's) is still ringing in my ears. He was not offended with me—by no means. To me he was as sweet as usual, but he expressed his wonder that in spite of his crusade against idolatry, people should still ask him to the Puja." Later during the course of the same interview Debendranath repeated: "I have told you of the incident that occurred, when I went one day to invite him to the Puja festivities. The way in which he cried out—'Ask me to the Puja'—and the words that he uttered, his countenance aglow with deep emotion. These have had a wonderful influence upon me all my life. These words came to me even as the *mantra* of a spiritual master, as my *Guru-vakya* and

(*Contd. next page*)

in the heart of the Brahman lad. But Rammohun did not change his faith; he wore the sacred thread, the insignia of his caste till his death, and throughout his life recited the *gayatri*, and cherished the highest regard for this mystic formula.[6]

It would have been natural for Rammohun's parents to bring him back from Patna and arrange for his Sanskrit education nearer home; after all Rammohun's father, Ramkanta, did not intend his son to become a *pandit* any more than that he should become a *maulvi*, and as we have said, Rammohun could have received a first rate training in Sanskrit at Nadia. Yet he went to Banaras and remained away from his family for at least eight years; as no adequate reason for this long separation is available, we have to suggest a logical explanation.

We have compared Nadia with Banaras as seats of Sanskrit learning, but there was one difference. Nadia was famous for its study of *Navya-nyaya* (neo-logic), but it was dominated by the Vaishnavas, being the birth place of Chaitanya. Banaras was the stronghold of the *Advaitavadins* ever since Shankaracharya preached his famous doctrine at the beginning of the ninth century. In the beginning of the sixteenth century, the famous Vaishnava teacher, Vallabhacharya, was practically forced to leave Banaras, and Chaitanya, who visited this eternal city of the Hindus a few years after Vallabha's departure, was unable to secure any following at Banaras. Actually, Chaitanya is reported to have said that no one in Banaras was prepared to accept his wares even if he distributed them free. Still whatever little impression Chaitanya may have left

led me to give up idolatry. These words are still ringing in my ears, and they have been my guide all through this long life." (*TPR*, pp. xxviii and xxx).

What tremendous conviction must have been packed in that one short sentence to produce a lifelong influence on a boy. Rammohun was about Debendranath's age when he went to Patna, and he may have come under similar influence. But he never talked or wrote about his past.

[6] See Rammohun Roy, "Divine Worship by means of the Gayatri (1827)," *EWR*, pp. 78-86; Rammohun gave two translations of the *Gayatri*, the first one as he understood it, and the second a literal one in idiomatic English; these are: "(1) We meditate on the cause of all, pervading all and internally ruling all material objects, from the sun down to us and others; (2) We meditate on that Supreme Spirit of the splendid sun who directs our understanding." This article was an English translation from a Sanskrit article which was published with a Bengali translation in 1827; *RG, IV* pp. 37-42. Rammohun had also published a Bengali article entitled *Gayatrir Artha* in 1818; *ibid*, pp. 1-8.

behind him, was removed by another Bengali, Madhusudana Sarasvati (c. A.D. 1533-1640), the last of the great exponents of *Advaita* philosophy. Since then (and up to now) Banaras has remained the centre of *Advaita-vedanta* school in north India.

But Ramkanta was a staunch *Gaudiya Vaishnava,* and there could have been no reason for his preference of Banaras to Nadia as the place for his son's education. As it turned out, from Ramkanta's point of view, Banaras was the most unsuitable place for his son. It seems possible, therefore, that Rammohun himself selected Banaras. This would be natural, if at Patna he had become convinced of the futility of idol-worship which was performed with great pomp at his home in Bengal. Patna was comparatively free from the influence of the Bengali Vaishnavas, and someone in Patna might have imparted to him the basic principles of the *Advaita* doctrine, which were quite simple, and above all, did not involve any image worship. Rammohun's Persian teacher might have read Dara Shukoh's translation of the *Upanishads,* and explained its unitarian principles to the young aspirant. It is also not beyond the bounds of possibility that in spite of his young age, Rammohun was actually introduced to the *Upanishads* through Persian. In either case Rammohun would have wished to proceed to Banaras to probe deeper into the teaching of *Advaita,* and his father, who was busy and prosperous, possibly did not raise any objection, for Banaras was a sacred city to all Hindus.

By the time Rammohun returned to his home (1790), he was fully convinced that not only was the image-worship wrong, but that such worship was not sanctioned by all the Hindu scriptures. Rammohun, in one of his rare reminiscent moods, once told his friend, William Adam, that at this time, he used to get involved in arguments with his father and one day the injured parent had burst out in a tone of remonstrance: "Whatever argument I adduce, you have always your *kintu* (but), your counter-argument, your counter-conclusion, your counter-statement to oppose me."[7] In his *Autobiographical Sketch,* the authenticity of which is not beyond doubt, Rammohun has written: "When about the age of sixteen, I composed a manuscript calling in question the validity of the idolatrous system of the Hindoos. This together

[7] Quoted by Iqbal Singh, *Rammohun Roy* (Bombay, 1958), vol. I, p. 39.

with my known sentiments on that subject, having produced coolness between me and my immediate kindred, I proceeded on my travels."[8] This statement, even if true, does not explain the daily arguments, which we believe were largely made up of an endless dialogue between a *Vaishnava* and an *Advaitavadin*, which takes place even now. For, opposition to idolatry was a negative attitude, and Rammohun had to provide a substitute for image-worship in conformity with the tenets of Hinduism, and here the *Advaita* doctrine would have come in as an opportune substitute; for, though Ramkanta would have denounced the doctrine as false, it was unlike Islam, a Hindu doctrine.[9]

Rammohun's study of Christianity started much later. He became the private *munshi* of John Digby by the end of 1805, and Digby has recorded that at this time Rammohun could speak English "well enough to be understood upon the most important topics of discourse, but could not write it with any degree of correctness. But very soon he picked up English well enough to read, and write it much better than most of us." After Rammohun settled in Calcutta (1815), he equipped himself with a working knowledge of Hebrew, Greek and Latin in order to gain access to the original sources of Christianity. He might have discussed Christianity with Digby, but came into intimate contact with Christian missionaries after he finally settled at Calcutta.

The influence of Christianity on Rammohun was not inconsiderable, but it operated on him in a slightly different manner than Islam. Firstly, Rammohun had already accepted the basic teaching of all the Semitic religions, that idols should not be worshipped, and that there is only one God. But he had also questioned the doctrine of Prophethood, and was no more willing to accept Jesus than Mohammad as the revealer of the only true religion. Secondly, we have already seen that, in the *Tuhfat*, he had conceived of reli-

[8] *TPR*, pp. v-vi.

[9] The attitude of the *Gaudiya Vaishnavas* towards Shankara is somewhat ambivalent. They admit that Shankara was an incarnation of Siva, but he was born to delude the heretics and lead them to hell through the propagation of his mischievous doctrine. (It should be remembered that one of Chaitanya's rule was not to make any distinction between Vishnu and Siva). The same convention was used in the Puranas when Buddha was canonized as an incarnation of Vishnu.

gion on a social basis. This was made quite explicit in his introduction to his *Abridgment of the Vedant*, where he stated: "My constant reflection on the inconvenient or rather injurious rites, introduced by the peculiar practice of Hindoo idolatry, which, more than any other Pagan worship, destroys the texture of society, together with compassion for my countrymen, have compelled me to use every possible effort to awaken them from their dream of error...."[10] Few indeed among the perceptive people of the time could have failed to appreciate the Christian society as represented by the British society and their political institutions, and his enthusiasm in this regard was fully shared by the social and political reformers of the 19th century.

For Rammohun the main attraction of Christianity was, as he expressed it, that it tended 'to render our existence agreeable to ourselves and profitable to the rest of mankind.[11] Rammohun was attracted by the moral doctrines of the *New Testament*, which he compiled and published under the title of *The Precepts of Jesus*, but its more revealing subtitle was *The Guide to Peace and Happiness*. He seems to have appraised the worth of a religion by its effect on society, and for this utilitarian attitude was sometimes called a "religious Benthamite"[12] The fact seems to be, though Rammohun has nowhere avowed it, that he was pursuing the old Hindu ideal of happiness, which consisted in the fulfilment of *dharma* as well as the promotion of *artha* and the satisfaction of *kama*. At least his life is a shining example of the compatibility of the three *purusharthas* or goals of human life. In this context, his acceptance of Shankara's philosophy seems odd, because it was practically meant for monks, who desired the fourth *purushartha*, namely, *moksha*, release from human bondage. But before we discuss this aspect of Rammohun's religion, it is necessary to revert to his relations with Muslims, Christians, and Hindus.

[10] *TPR*, p. 3.

[11] Introduction to *The Precepts of Jesus*, *EWR*, p. 483.

[12] "For Rammohun Roy was a religious Benthamite, and estimated the different creeds existing in the world, not according to his notion of their truth or falsehood, but his notion of their utility; according to their tendency, in his view, to promote the maximization of human happiness, and the minimization of human misery. Kissory Chand Mitter, *Calcutta Review*, 1845, *CV*, p. 168.

III

Rammohun's relations with the Muslims always remained cordial. It is usually claimed that he finished his Islamic studies at Patna, that is between the ages of about ten to fourteen, which seems to be impossible even for a genius. It is more probable that having learnt Arabic and Persian at Patna, he kept up his studies and maintained close contact with the Muslim scholars of Bengal, particularly of Calcutta. Even when in 1809 Digby was unsuccessfully recommending Rammohun to the Board of Revenue for the post of Dewan of Rangpur, a Hindu and a Muslim Zamindar had come forward to stand security for him "to the amount of Rs 5000." When the Board turned down the proposal, Digby in a rejoinder pointed out that if the Board entertained any doubts as to Rammohun's ability, they could "refer... to the *Cazy-wul-Cozzat* in the *Sudder Dewanny Adawlut*, to the head Persian Moonshee of the College of Fort William, and to the other principal officers of those Departments for the character and qualification of the man I have proposed."[13]

Apparently Rammohun's friendship with these Muslim scholars was not disturbed by the publication of the *Tuhfat-ul Muwahhiddin* in 1803 or 1804. What effect this tract had on the Muslims is not known; possibly they ignored it. Actually, the *Tuhfat* is not anti-Islamic; it is a reasoned exposition of the fallacy of dogmatism common to all religions, and may be read with profit even today as the work of a rationalist, deist, and universalist. But the *Tuhfat* was not a declaration of faith, it is a record of the Raja's mental history and convictions of the period. Later he enriched the budding thoughts of the *Tuhfat*, and provided its skeletal ideas with a rich metaphysical body, but this short Persian tract with its Arabic preface always remained at the bottom of its author's deepest and most characteristic thoughts, and provides the key to his approach to religion.

Rammohun's conclusion in the *Tuhfat* is a quotation from Hafiz, in which the great poet entreats his fellowmen not to injure one another. This is followed by Rammohun's assurance that he will give details of his thoughts in another work entitled *Manzurat-ul*

[13] *Selections From Official Letters and Documents Relating to the Life of Raja Rammohun Roy*, vol. I, ed. by R. P. Chanda and J. K. Majumdar (Calcutta, 1938), Nos. 71 and 72, pp. 42-43.

Adyan (discussion of various religions). But most probably the *Manzurat* was never written, in any case, no copy of it has yet been found. Possibly, Rammohun's mind was at this time diverted to an unexplored field by his old friend, Hariharananda.

Rammohun's relation with the Christians was not as happy as it was with the Muslims; here he gave up his neutral attitude, and though, he gained a few Christian adherents, he antagonized a large section of them.

The controversy started with the publication of *The Precepts of Jesus* (1820). Since Rammohun had deliberately excluded the miracles attributed to Jesus, some missionaries began to criticize him in rather intemperate language. Here one has to point out, that controversy with Rammohun was a dangerous game, and no one who indulged in it escaped unscathed. Rammohun published three *Appeals to the Christian Public in Defence of the Precepts of Jesus*, which covers about 325 printed pages in very small type. This was followed by *A Letter on the Prospects of Christianity and the Means of Promoting Its Reception in India*, *A Vindication of the Incarnation of the Deity as the Common Basis of Hindooism and Christianity*, and *A Dialogue Between A Missionary And Three Chinese Converts*.

The *Appeals* show Rammohun's erudition and grasp of Christian theology, which no other Indian has managed to acquire; actually none has ever attempted. The 'Letter on the Prospects of Christianity' was a reply to the questionnaires sent to Rammohun by the Rev. Henry Ware of Cambridge (USA) which mainly dealt with the conversion of Indians. Rammohun, in spite of his attitude towards idolatry, was opposed to conversion, and explaining the causes which prevented conversion said: "... the doctrines which the Missionaries maintain and preach are less conformable with reason than those professed by Moosulmans, and in several points are equally absurd with the popular Hindoo creed. Hence there is no rational inducement for either of these tribes to lay aside their respective doctrines, and adopt those held up by the generality of Christians."[14] Rammohun's answers were as usual incisive, and his prediction about the prospects of Christianity in India has been borne out by posterity.

[14] *EWR*, p. 881.

A Vindication of the Incarnation of the Deity consists of a series of letters between Rammohun and R. Tytler, a Surgeon in the Hon. E.I. Co's service. Tytler wanted to prove the superiority of Christianity over Hinduism, while Rammohun held quite logically that if Jesus, the son of Joseph of the House of David of the Tribe of Judah, could be Divine, so could Ram, the son of Dasarath, off-spring of Bhagirath of the tribe of Raghu; and if manifestation of God in flesh is admitted it has to be without any "restriction to a dark or fair complexion, large or small stature, long or short hair."[15] This should have finished Dr. Tytler, but being a stupid man, he began to indulge in personal vilification, but Rammohun had the last word.

These unmerited attacks probably infuriated Rammohun, for in the same year (1823), he published *A Dialogue Between A Missionary and Three Chinese Converts,* in English and Bengali. In about three pages, Rammohun lampoons the Christian dogma of Trinity, and as a piece of satire it can hardly be matched. Though the letter to Rev. Ware was written about a year later, the *Dialogue* was Rammohun's final thrust at his Christian antagonists, or the Trinitarians as he called them.

Of these works on Christianity, *The Tytler Controversy* is of some significance, not because of its inherent importance, but because it revealed a trait in Rammohun's character: his defence of 'national religion' against onslaught by Europeans. He had begun by praising Christianity for its social value, and ended by isolating the doctrine from its white followers. This attitude was not without its importance on the future development of Hindu society, which became progressively westernized and at the same time more and more intensively nationalist.

We had to violate the chronological order of Rammohun's publications in order to give an account of his writings on Christian theology, before taking up the main theme of his religious activities, the reform of Hinduism. Rammohun published the translation of the *Brahma-Sutra* in 1815, that is, five years before *The Precepts of Jesus;* he also translated the *Kena* and the *Isa* in 1816, and *Katha,* the *Mundaka* and the *Mandukya Upanishadas* in 1817; he also published the text and translation of Shankaracharya's *Atmanatma-*

[15] *Ibid,* p. 892.

viveka, in 1819. Besides these, he published small articles like 'The Meaning of Gayatri' etc., which are important, but it is not possible to give a complete list of his writings here.

The most important works were the translations, in which the Raja invariably followed Shankara's commentary. This was partly due to his conviction, but must have been also in some measure at least, due to his training at Banaras. We have mentioned above his quarrel with his father, and it has to be added that their differences became so acute that Rammohun left home and started his own career. The older biographies state that at this stage Rammohun spent eight years at Banaras, but what seems to be more probable is that he went there several times and spent altogether a few years in that city, which was the only holy place Rammohun ever visited. As Rammohun never cared for sanctified places, his attraction must have been for the course of training in *Advaita-vedanta,* available there.

The translations of the *Upanishads* appeared both in English and Bengali more or less simultaneously. Much better translations of these works are available now, but considering that these were pioneer ventures, and so far as Bengali was concerned, in a language of which the structure of the prose sentences had to be developed and explained, Rammohun's performance was one of the most remarkable intellectual feats in modern India.

Rammohun's labours brought him deserved fame even during his lifetime, but his attempts to reform the Hindu religion hardly yielded any perceptible result. The number of his adherents or the members of the Brahma Samaj also known as the Brahma Sabha, which was inaugurated on 20 August 1828 could be counted on fingers, and the situation did not improve even after he opened the 'First Temple of Universal Worship of The One Without a Second' on 23 January 1830. By the end of the same year (15 November), Rammohun left for England and slowly the Sabha became moribund for lack of members till Debendranath resuscitated it to form the foundation of his Adi Brahma Samaj. It is not necessary to go into the history of the Brahma Samaj here, but it may be pointed out that though all the three Samajs claim descent from Rammohun, his connection with them, if any, was at best dubious. Even so, after enjoying a brief spell of popularity, the influence of the Brahma Samaj waned, and with the death of Rabindranath, it has practically ceased to exist as a force in our national life.

There were several reasons for the virtual extinction of the Brahma Samaj as a movement which cannot be discussed here, but we have to ask ourselves whether Rammohun ever intended to start a definite movement of this nature. His Atmiya Sabha and the Brahma Sabha were in the nature of discussion groups or prayer groups without aiming to invest its members with a separate religious identity. If Rammohun had intended to start such a movement, he would not have left for England within ten months of opening of the Sabha. Actually, on 9 January 1830, that is, two weeks before the opening of the Temple of Universal Worship, Rammohun was writing to the Governor-General for his recognition as the Ambassador of the Mughal Emperor and of the personal title, *Raja* conferred on him.

The opening of the Temple of Universal Worship was the last significant act performed by Rammohun in India, and symbolizes the end of his spiritual journey. In the *Tuhfat*, he pointed out the contradictions inherent in every religion, and now in his famous Trust Deed of the Temple, he afforded the followers of all religions an opportunity to resolve their differences by praying under the same roof. But Rammohun could not have failed to perceive the future of the Brahma Sabha; it was apparent that Muslims and Christians would not come to offer their prayers in the Sabha's hall, and by restricting the audience of Vedic recital only to the Brahmans, Rammohun had practically closed its door to the masses, after having thoroughly antagonized the orthodox section of the Hindus.[16]

Details of Rammohun's controversy with orthodox *pandits* are available, thanks to the printing press introduced by the missionaries. But how or why the trouble started is not very clear. Rammohun's earliest critic was Shankara Shastri, the head English Master in the College at Fort St. George, Madras, and he was followed by Mrityunjaya Vidyalankar, the head *pandit* of the Fort William College, Calcutta. Since both the critics were connected with the Government, it has been suggested that they were instigated by the British officials to oppose Rammohun's reformist movements.[17]

[16] I have discussed the problem in my book *Bhakti Renaissance*. Bombay, 1965, pp. 60-68, and in my article "Impact of Sankaracharya on Indian Thought," *The Visvabharati Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1971-72, pp. 33-36.

[17] Iqbal Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

This assumption seems to us to be somewhat far-fetched, for more valid motives may be attributed to the orthodox *pandits* for their hostile attitude.

Shankara Shastri's criticism is not available to us, but Rammohun has quoted passages from the Shastri's letter for the purpose of his reply which is entitled *A Defence of Hindu Theism* (1817).[18] Though Rammohun begins his defence by insinuating that the real author of the letter was an Englishman, it seems that in spite of his respectful references to Shankaracharya, Shankara Shastri was a Vaishnava, who alone could account for Rammohun's uncalled for vulgar diatribe against the worship of Shiva, Kali, and particularly of Krishna, which would have landed him into trouble if written today. No wonder then that the publication of the *Defence* should have roused the active hostility of the Bengali *pandits*.

Rammohun had already outraged their sense of propriety by his way of life. He dressed like a Muslim, ate what was called—'Muslim food', and had openly denounced idol worship; and if his writings are any guide, his language was not always marked by moderation, specially when he was aroused. Mrityunjaya was the man who first challenged him in Bengal, and though Rammohun claimed the friendship of the head Persian *maulvi* of the same institute, it appears that he and Mrityunjaya were not on speaking terms.

Besides Mrityunjaya, several other *pandits* attacked Rammohun in print, and all of them were thoroughly discomfited. There is no need to go into the details of these controversies, which were not always of an edifying nature. Rammohun not only returned blow for blow, but with added punch. All his adversaries sadly misjudged his intellectual capacity and forensic skill.[19] Rammohun was one of the greatest controversialists of modern India, and seems to have thrived on disputes. If Mrityunjaya Vidyalankar had criticized Rammohun on purely academic level, their dialogue might have provided us with a better insight into contemporary Hindu religion

[18] *EWR*, pp. 89-100.

[19] Rammohun's evidence before the Parliamentary Committee on Revenue System in Bengal would have been a remarkable performance even for a trained British lawyer.

and philosophy. But in an evil moment, Mrityunjaya began and ended his long tract by attacking Rammohun personally, and got the reply, he deserved. Vidyalankar retired from the contest, but the debate was continued by Utsavananda Vidyavagish, Goswami, Kavitakar, Subrahmanya Shastri and Kasinath Tarkapanchanana of the Fort William College. Kasinath wrote anonymously, but his identity was detected by Rammohun, which is evident from the bitter personal invectives he hurled against Kasinath. Some of these disputes were carried out in Sanskrit, so that Rammohun can claim to be the only person in history to have used four languages to confound his opponents.[20]

This was a great intellectual performance by any standard, which also explains a paradox of Rammohun's life: his limited success as the promulgator of a new creed compared to the cataclysmic impact which he produced on the Hindu mind. His sharp attack on superstitions, accumulated during centuries of somnolence, galvanized the Hindus into a new phase of life, but he failed to generate any emotional fervour among his countrymen. For, Rammohun could only address the intellect and was either disdainful or incapable of appealing to the heart. Rammohun is said to have been a lover of Sufi poems, and he has quoted from Hafiz, but no trace of Sufi-ism can be found in the songs, which he composed, numbering about thirty. These songs were versification of his ontological ideas for the purpose of setting them to music. Their literary worth can be guessed from the discreet silence maintained by all his admirers (including of course Rabindranath) on the merits of the Raja's poems. It cannot be argued that Rammohun was plunging in an uncharted sea, as in the case of Bengali prose, for Bengal had a rich heritage of lyrical literature.[21] Indeed an unwary reader of his *Brahma sangits* may be led to the conclusion, that the Raja was not only the father of Bengali prose, but of devotional songs as well.

[20] In addition the preface to *Tuhfat* was written in Arabic, and the *Appeals to Christians* contained liberal quotation from the Hebrew Bible and from the Quran in Arabic.

[21] It is remarkable that Rammohun never attempted to translate Hafiz, though he performed the more difficult task of translating the *Brahma-sutra*. Debendranath, who did not know Persian, had some lyrics of Hafiz translated into Bengali.

IV

At an early stage of his life, Rammohun was deeply impressed with the solemn and unostentatious mode of Islamic prayer, the beauty of monotheism, and the noble purity of Shankara's Advaita doctrine. The rest of his life was spent in formulating a metaphysical framework which could reconcile the tenets of monotheism and the doctrine of monism. This he was unable to do.

In a tract called the *Religious Instructions Founded on Sacred Authorities*, Rammohun wrote in 1829, that worship of the Supreme Being "signifies the contemplation of his attributes. This worship was to be performed by bearing in mind that the Author and Governor of this visible universe is the Supreme Being, and by comparing this idea with the sacred writings and with reason." He added that it was also necessary to regulate the senses, and imperative to read the sacred texts. The texts, from which quotations are appended to this tract, are: *Mahanirvana-tantra, Gaudapada-karika*, the *Gita* (17.26; 3.42; 9.23), the *Brahma-sutra* (1.1.2; 4.1.5; 4.1.11), Manu (1.11; 4.24; 12.92; 100), *Vishnu-Purana* (1.2.10-11), passages from several *Upanishads*, and a few passages from Shankara's Commentary on the *Brahmasutra*.[22]

This presentation of faith was, however, an inadequate return for a life long labour. Indeed the "Religious Instructions" could have given valid grounds for accusing Rammohun of 'religious dilettantism' if his sincerity had been less pronounced. Rammohun was attempting to propagate religion as a particular metaphysical idea which was not intended to be the substitute for religion. Commenting on the first aphorism of the *Brahma-sutra*, Shankara says that an aspirant for the knowledge of Brahman must possess four qualifications the second of which is "the renunciation of all desire to enjoy the fruit (of one's action) both here and hereafter," which clearly shows that Shankara's doctrine was meant for monks who

[22] *EWR*, pp. 136-41. The quotation from *Gaudapada* is apparently defective, but the second line of the verse practically agrees with *Gaudapada*, 3.17, the meaning of which is: "The dualists obstinately cling to the conclusions arrived at by their own enquiries (as being the truth); so they contradict one another, but the *Advaitin* finds no conflict with them." Rammohun would have unreservedly agreed with this view.

had no worldly desire.[23] Rammohun condenses in one sentence Shankara's long discussion on the first aphorism covering nearly three pages and merely states that "a man becomes qualified to receive the supreme knowledge after his mind becomes purified."[24]

The ancient view was that a man could adopt *sannyasa* after having fulfilled his obligations as a householder by performing Vedic sacrifices. Shankara does not deny this, but adds that this rule is not applicable to those who are endowed with the four qualifications laid down by him. Still the point is debatable[25] and Subramanya Shastri raised it, but instead of referring to Shankara's commentary on *Brahma-sutra* 1.1.1, Rammohun burked the issue by referring to the commentaries on 3.4.36 and 3.4.30, the first of which permits widowers or poor men to acquire *Brahma-vidya* even if they have not performed Vedic sacrifices. But Rammohun had two wives living and he was a rich man, and it is difficult to see how he could take shelter under this aphorism. However, even more surprising is his reference to *Brhama-sutra* 3.4.30 (*api cha smaryate*), which must have been due to oversight on his part. For, commenting on this *sutra*, Shankara has quoted passages from scriptures, strongly denouncing drinking by a Brahman. Rammohun was notorious for his drinking habit,[26] of which Subramanya Shastri may have been ignorant, but it must have been known to the Bengali *pandits*, who had accused Rammohun of drinking which he did not deny. It is a sad commentary on their

[23] The other three qualifications were: "the discrimination between what is eternal and what is non-eternal; the acquirement of tranquillity, and other means (which are: discontinuance of religious ceremonies, patience in suffering, attention and concentration of mind, and faith), and the desire for final release; *Brahma-sutra* 1.1.1. Shankara's commentary on *atha* (then).

[24] This is our translation from Rammohun's *Vedanta-grantha* in Bengali. (*Rammohun Granthavali* (*Bengali Works of Rammohun*), edited by Brajendranath Bandopadhyaya and Sajanikanta Dos, Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, Calcutta. This is a collection of 7 volumes published at different dates, and paginated separately). p. 1. It is sometimes supposed that it is the Bengali version of his English *Abridgement of the Vedanta*, but the two works are quite different.

[25] Shankara had difficulty in maintaining his position; see his commentary on *Brahma-sutra*, 3.4. 25-6.

[26] Shivnath Sastri, the founder of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj, has accused Rammohun for having indirectly introduced the habit of drinking in Bengali society by setting an example. (Shivnath Sastri: *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Bangasamaj*, 1957, ed. p. 86).

scholarship that they did not pull up Rammohun for his inadvertence.

Rammohun did not accept the Vedic deities as gods, any more than the images, but for several reasons he did not have to denounce Vedic rituals openly. He, however, believed in the *Mahanirvana-tantra*, which may be described as the ritualistic counterpart of *Advaita-vedanta*, and is free from any grossness which is associated with some *tantras*. This aspect of Rammohun's religious life is not well-known. However, about two decades after Rammohun's death, Debendranath came across a *tantrik sadhu* in Delhi, who stated that Rammohun had been initiated into their faith by Hariharananda Tirthaswami. This uncorroborated testimony is not improbable, for Hariharananda was Rammohun's life-long companion. Secondly, if Debendranath entertained serious doubts about the veracity of this statement, he could have it contradicted by Hariharananda's brother, Ramchandra Vidyavagish who was first employed by Rammohun and then by Debendranath as the minister of the Samaj. It is also interesting to note that at Mathura, Debendranath went to visit a *tantrik sadhu* who had a set of Hindi translation of Rammohun's works. Debendranath stated: "All the different religious sects claim Rammohun Roy for their own."[27] Debendranath may have disbelieved the genuineness of such claims, but the fact that they were made reveals the surprising fact that Rammohun had some followers among the traditional *sadhus*.

But Rammohun did not belong to any sect. In spite of his declared adherence to some selected tenets of Hinduism, he maintained to the end his faith in the essential truths of Christianity and Islam, but as he had discarded some elements of Hinduism so did he always reject some dogmas of Christianity and Islam; and practically at the end of his life, he was appropriately described publicly as neither a Hindu, nor a Muslim nor a Christian.[28] He saw truth in all the three religions, and as has been truly said, "he was the mediator of his people, harmonizing in his own person often by

[27] For references and details see my article in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* vol. 37, no. 1, 1971-72 pp, 27-29.

[28] This was stated in a petition to the Government by some inhabitants of Berhampore in 1831. The document is reproduced in Appendix X of *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy* by Sophia Dobson Collet, edited by D.K. Biswas and P.C. Ganguli, Calcutta, 1962, p. 505.

means of his own solitary sufferings, the conflicting tendencies of immemorial tradition and of inevitable enlightenments."[29]

Raja Rammohun Roy died with the mystic symbol *'om'* on his lips. Commenting on the *Brahma-sutra* (1.3.13), Shankara says that release from evil and emancipation by degrees is the fruit of meditation on the highest Brahman by means of the syllable *om*. And in the *Gita* (VIII. 13) Krishna says: "The man who gives up his life uttering the sacred syllable *om*, reaches the highest goal."

Kalidasa writes that the kings of the Raghu dynasty gained knowledge in childhood, enjoyed the pleasures of life in youth, adopted the ascetic life in old age, and in the end cast off their bodies by *yoga* or meditation.[30] Possibly, it would not be too great an exaggeration to say that this Bengali Brahman, named after the most illustrious of the Raghavas, had followed their example in life and death.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 378.

[30] *Saisave'bhyasta vidyanam yauvane visayaisinam.*
Vardhake munni-vrttinam yogen ante tanu-tyajam (*Raghuvamsam*, I. 8).

RAMMOHUN ROY AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

A. F. SALAHUDDIN AHMED

Rammohun Roy heralded the dawn of modern age in India. His rational, pragmatic and liberal attitude particularly in religion and politics was often misunderstood by his contemporaries. But they never failed to recognise his greatness. Shortly after his death in England, a Unitarian clergyman, Rev. Scott Porter, who knew him personally, described Rammohun Roy as "one of the most extra-ordinary men whom the world has witnessed for centuries: whose freedom, vigour, and independence of thought, commanded the admiration even of his adversaries."[1]

Rammohun was born in a conservative Brahman family of West Bengal. He received the traditional education which was common

[1]Rev. J. Scott Porter, *A Sermon occasioned by the Lamented Death of the Rajah Rammohun Roy Preached on Sunday, November 10th 1833 in the Meeting-House of the First Presbyterian Congregation, Belfast* (Belfast, 1833), p. 46. Rammohun Roy had died on 27 September 1833 at Stapleton Grove, near Bristol after a brief illness. Rev. Scott Porter came to know Rammohun during his stay in London and became so close to him that the Raja had placed his adopted son for his education in the care of the clergyman and another English gentleman named Davison. According to Scott Porter Rammohun Roy had become a Unitarian Christian. This was of course not true. After Rammohun's death his body was interred privately in a lonely spot at Stapleton Grove without any religious ceremony usually associated with Christian burial. It was apprehended that the Raja's "enemies in India might avail themselves of the fact of his being buried with Christians, or with Christian rites, to renew their hitherto unsuccessful endeavours to deprive him of caste, and embarrass his children in their succession to property. *The Bristol Mirror*, 12 October 1833.

in eighteenth century India. During his boyhood and early youth he had acquired remarkable proficiency in several Oriental languages such as Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, besides Hindi and his mother tongue Bengali. He became well-versed in Hindu religious scriptures and through his close contact with Muslim scholars and officials of the revenue and judicial departments of the East India Company's Government, gained considerable knowledge of Islamic theology and jurisprudence. He was also acquainted with the rudiments of ancient Greek philosophy and science such as Aristotelian logic and Euclid's principles which he learnt through Arabic medium.

The intellectual climate of late eighteenth century India was favourable for the growth of new ideas. With the collapse of the central political authority of the Mughals the old social and economic structure which that authority sustained began to show signs of decay. The process of disintegration had also affected the realm of thought. Old values and tradition began to be re-examined and revaluated. Shah Waliullah of Delhi (1703-62 A.D.) initiated an intellectual movement which aimed at revitalizing Islamic religion and society in India in the light of contemporary challenge. Islamic religious beliefs and practices were subjected to close and critical examination. Although the Muslim mind could not emancipate itself completely from the age-old religious dogma, an element of rationality has always remained an important, though not essential, part of the Islamic intellectual heritage. Through contact with Muslim scholars during the formative period of his life, Rammohun Roy had imbibed the spirit of Islamic rationalism without however accepting Islamic religious dogma.[2] Similarly, although he had studied Sanskrit and had acquired a profound knowledge of Hindu religious scriptures, he refused to accept what appeared to him to be the irrational aspects of Hindu religion. The activities of the Christian missionaries greatly contributed to the growth of this critical outlook. In 1792, Charles Grant, a former official of the English East India Company, had written a remarkable tract entitled *Observations on the state of society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, particularly with respect to Morals; and on the Means of improving it*, in which he had drawn a lurid picture of

[2]For influence of Islam on Rammohun's religious thought see Nirmal Mukherjee, "Rammohun, Islam and Deism," *Humanist Review* (Bombay), July/September 1969.

Indian society and emphasised the need of spreading Western education and Christianity among the Indian people.[3] Since then Christian missionaries had become active in India despite the fact that for political reasons the East India Company's Government did not encourage missionary activities.[4] The missionaries naively believed that everything in Indian society and religion was bad and that Christianity was the only true religion that could bring salvation to the poor people of India. The typical Christian missionary attitude towards Indian religions was reflected in the remarks made by the Lord Bishop of Winchester: "Not only must the Christian religion be proved true, but the system of the Mussulman or of the Hindu, must be declared false."[5] In fact, the missionaries had launched indiscriminate attacks upon Indian religions through various kinds of publications.

The missionary challenge produced two distinct kinds of reaction in Indian society. One kind of reaction was to strengthen the forces of conservatism and revivalism. The other reaction was manifested in the attempt to reform and reconstruct the old religious system in accordance with contemporary needs and in the light of contemporary criticism. It was the latter kind of reaction that Rammohun Roy's great movement represented.

The intellectual world of Rammohun was in a state of ferment. A comparative study of Islamic and Hindu theological scriptures, and acquaintance with the works of the Sufi mystic poets of Persia, together with a knowledge of Aristotelian logic learnt through Arabic medium, had enabled him at an early age to develop a somewhat revolutionary approach towards the traditional religions.[6] He began his quest for harmony in religious thought through a comparative study of various religious creeds. Rammohun's early works were written in Arabic and Persian. His first treatise was devoted to discussions on various religions. It was entitled *Manazaratul Adyan*. This work was never printed and is lost. Rammohun

[3]Although written in 1792 this tract was printed in 1797 for private circulation. Later it was printed in Parliamentary Papers in 1813 and 1832.

[4]It was feared that Christian missionary activities might injure religious feelings of the Indians and might encourage anti-British movement.

[5]*Report of the Society For the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (London, 1829), p. 11.

[6]Nagendranath Chattopadhaya, *Mahatma Raja Rammohun Rayer Jibancharit* (Calcutta, 1881), pp. 14-15.

merely mention sit in his *Tuhfat-ul Muwahhiddin* (A Gift to Monotheists), a tract written in Persian with an Arabic preface. It was published in 1803-1804 at Murshidabad where he was living at that time. In this remarkable work Rammohun emphasised the view that falsehood was common to all religions without distinction and maintained that a realization of one Universal Supreme Being could be attained by individuals "through their innate natural faculty without the instrumentality of prophets, religious authority, and traditional revelation."[7] In fact, several years before the publication of the *Tuhfat*, Rammohun had renounced traditional Hindu worship and was often critical of the age-old Hindu customs and rituals.

At an early age Rammohun had come to acquire independent property of his own and was engaged in business enterprises. The fact that at a comparatively young age he was able to pursue an independent career, gave him freedom to choose his ideas. He had also gained the acquaintance with not only the leading Indian scholars of the day who were associated with the College of Fort William and the Sadar Diwani Adalat in Calcutta; he came in close contact with European officials and merchants many of whom held liberal and radical views associated with the French Revolution. Rammohun had already learnt English, and through his contacts with English friends had become acquainted with contemporary European thought.[8]

[7]Nirmal Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, p. 260. It is believed that the ideas contained in the *Tuhfat-ul Muwahhiddin* were influenced by the views expressed in a seventeenth century Persian work known as *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*. (Ajit Roy, "Rammohun Roy's *Tuhfat-ul Muwahhiddin* and the seventeenth century Persian tract *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*," paper read at the 28th International Congress of Orientalists, Canberra, 6-12 January 1971.

[8]Rammohun was associated with John Digby, an English civil servant for about ten years (1805-1814) as his personal *Diwan* or manager. During this period Rammohun was able to improve his knowledge of English considerably. He soon imbibed the current European ideas through the English newspapers of which he became a regular reader. While Digby was in England on leave, he published from London in 1817, Rammohun's translations of the *Kena Upanishad* and *Abridgment of the Vedanta*. In his introduction, Digby referred to Rammohun Roy's enthusiasm for "continental politics" and his admiration for revolutionary France and for Napoleon. But later on, according to Digby, Rammohun changed his opinion, having realised the evils of Napoleon's rule. S. D. Collet, *Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, second edition (Calcutta, 1914), p. 15

How did Rammohun's contemporaries react to his bold and unorthodox views, particularly religious views? As he himself informs us:

> Rammohun Roy . . . who, although he was born a Brahmun, not only renounced idolatry at a very early period of his life, but published at that time a treatise in Arabic and Persian against that system; and no sooner acquired a tolerable knowledge of English, than he made his desertion of idol worship known to the Christian world by his English publication—a renunciation that I am sorry to say, brought severe difficulties upon him, by exciting the displeasure of his parents, and subjecting him to the dislike of his near, as well as distant relations, and to the hatred of nearly all his countrymen for several years.[9]

By the middle of 1814 Rammohun settled down in Calcutta and a new phase of his career began. He had now decided to devote his life to the cause of social and religious reform. Within a year of his arrival in Calcutta, Rammohun had established the Atmiya Sabha (society of friends), a private association of like-minded individuals. Its members met regularly at his residence to discuss religious and social problems of the day. Soon Rammohun was able to gather around him a small but influential circle of friends, both Indian and European. Among his close Indian friends were Dwarkanath Tagore and Prasanna Kumar Tagore, two leading and wealthy zamindars who had close commercial links with European traders. Although they did not fully share Rammohun's radical views on religion, they whole-heartedly supported him in all his endeavours for promoting social reforms and Western education. The English friends of Rammohun included James Young, a leading Calcutta merchant who was a disciple of Bentham, James Silk Buckingham, the radical editor of the English newspaper, the *Calcutta Journal*, and David Hare, the great philanthropist. It was James Young who through his letters had introduced Rammohun Roy to Jeremy Bentham. The philosopher had developed so much regard for

[9] "An appeal to the Christian Public." This tract was published by Rammohun Roy in 1820 under the pseudonym "A Friend to Truth". K. Nag and D. Burman (eds.) *The English Works of Rammohun Roy* (Calcutta, 1945-48) Vol. V, p. 58.

Rammohun that in a letter addressed to him he described Rammohun Roy as "Intensely admired and dearly beloved collaborator in the service of mankind."[10] By 1822 Rammohun's social and political outlook seems to have been greatly influenced by English Philosophical Radicalism. "Rammohun Roy," Jeremy Bentham exultingly noted, "has cast off thirty-five millions of gods and had learnt from us to embrace reason in the all-important field of religion."[11]

While Rammohun's attacks on Hindu idolatry and his criticism of Hindu social practices like sati, alienated him from Hindu society, many Christians fondly believed that he was on his way to embrace Christianity. It was reported that when Rammohun Roy was introduced to Bishop Middleton, the first Lord Bishop of Calcutta, the latter, believing that Rammohun had become a Christian, congratulated him on "embracing the purer faith." To this Rammohun is said to have made the characteristic reply: "My Lord, you are under a mistake—I have not laid down one superstition to take up another."[12] In fact, the expectations of the Christian missionaries and clergymen were aroused by Rammohun Roy's keen interest in Christianity. He had read the Bible with great care and, in order to understand it properly, he read it in original Hebrew and Greek. It was believed that he had learnt as many as ten languages—Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Hindi, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, English and French—"most of which he could write and speak fluently."[13] Rammohun believed that every religion had to be re-interpreted and revaluated in accordance with the needs of the age. Therefore, he thought there was no need for him to give up Hinduism and accept Christianity or any other religion. He would accept the universal moral teachings of every religion but without its dogma, and superstition. Thus, for instance, Rammohun believed in the moral teachings of Jesus Christ but not in his divinity. In 1820 Rammohun had published a tract in English, Bengali and Sanskrit called *The Precepts of Jesus—the Guide to*

[10] J. Bowring (ed.) *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* (Edinburgh, 1843), vol. X, p. 589.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 571.

[12] *The India Gazette* (Calcutta), 8 October 1829.

[13] *Anglo-India; Social, Moral and Political, Being a Collection of Papers from the Asiatic Journal* (London, 1838), vol. III, p. 257.

Peace and Happiness, which contained selections from the teachings of the Bible. It involved Rammohun in a bitter controversy with the Christian missionaries of Serampur whose feelings were scandalized by such unorthodox interpretation of Christianity. The controversy was largely carried on in the press for several years.

Rammohun's views on Christianity corresponded largely to those of the Unitarians. In fact, a Baptist missionary William Adam, who was collaborating with Rammohun in preparing a Bengali translation of the Gospels, was converted to Unitarian Christianity under the influence of Rammohun. Rammohun helped Adam in establishing the Calcutta Unitarian Committee in 1821 of which he himself along with his friends, Dwarkanath Tagore and Prasanna Kumar Tagore, and also his eldest son, Radhaprasad Roy, became members.[14] During the next few years Rammohun was closely associated with the Unitarians, even attending their prayer meetings. A 'Unitarian Press' was established in Calcutta at his own expense and he and his friends liberally contributed to the Unitarian Mission in Calcutta. In fact, many Unitarians had come to believe that Rammohun had become a Unitarian Christian, and this belief persisted even after his death.[15]

Rammohun did not hesitate to cooperate with Christian missionaries in their efforts to promote education among Indians even though behind such endeavours was the desire to propagate Christianity. Thus he gave active support to the great Scotts missionary Alexander Duff, in establishing a school in 1830 and even procured students for it. He took so much interest in this school that he was personally present on its opening day. According to an account, when the Rev. Duff after reciting the Christian prayer, presented the students with copies of the Bible, the students immediately raised a murmur. Rammohun, it is stated intervened saying: "Christians like Dr. Horace Hayman Wilson have studied the Hindu Shastras and you know that he has not become a Hindu.

[14]S. D. Collet, *Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, second edition, (Calcutta, 1914), p. 74.

[15]"Death of Rajah Rammohun Roy—This learned Indian, who some years ago abjured the Brahmanical for the Christian religion, died yesterday at Stapleton near this city, where he was on a visit. We understand he professed the Unitarian creed." *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* (Bristol), September 28, 1833. Also Rev. J. Scott Porter, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.

I myself have read all the Quran again and again; and has that made me a Mussalman? Nay, I have studied the whole Bible, and you know I am not a Christian. Why then do you fear to read it? Read it and judge for yourself."[16]

Rammohun's religious views had taken some definite shape by 1828 when he established the Brahma Sabha (later Brahmo Samaj) or Society of God. This new-born society, Rammohun believed, would develop into a universal religion.

The eclectic attitude of Rammohun Roy was not shared by his contemporaries. We have already noted how Christian missionaries resented Rammohun's interpretation of Christianity. They denounced him as a 'heathen'. The Hindus in general were bitterly opposed to Rammohun for his attacks on idolatry and also his criticism of what he considered to be the evil and irrational aspects of Hindu religion and society. Sir Edward Hyde East, Chief Justice of the Calcutta Supreme Court, who took an active part in the establishment of the Hindu College in 1816, noted that some influential Hindu leaders complained to him that Rammohun had "chosen to separate himself from us and to attack our religion."[17]

While Rammohun's views against the system of idolatry brought upon him the wrath of the orthodox Hindus, his advocacy of strict monotheism brought him into close contact with the Muslims. Many Hindus strongly suspected that Rammohun had secretly married a Muslim lady and that Rajaram Roy who was known to be the adopted son of Rammohun, was actually his own son by his Muslim wife. A contemporary newspaper, *Samachar Chandrika*, organ of the conservative Hindus, makes oblique reference to this suspicion.[18] According to Sir Edward Hyde East, orthodox Hindus "particularly disliked (and this I believe is at the bottom of their resentment) his (Rammohun Roy's) associating himself so much as he does with Mussalman not with this or that Mussalman as a

[16]S. D. Collet, *op. cit.* p. 163.

[17]*Fulham Papers, 1813-1826.* (Archives of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, London.) These papers contain copy of a letter written by Sir Edward Hyde East to Earl of Buckinghamshire, President of the Board of Control.

[18]*Samachar Chandrika*, 8 November 1830, quoted in Brajendranath Bandopadhaya (ed.), *Sangbadpatre Sekaler Katha*, vol. II, third edition (Calcutta, 1950), pp. 672-76. Also see Sushil Kumar Gupta, *Unabingsa Satabdite Banglar Nabajagaran 1801-1860* (Calcutta, 1959), p. 54.

personal friend, but being continually surrounded by them, and suspected to join in meals with them."[19]

Rammohun Roy, however, had not ceased to be a Hindu. In fact, he ably defended Hinduism from the attacks of the Christian missionaries.[20] But the Hinduism of Rammohun as we have noted, was of a different kind. It was Hinduism reformed and reoriented to meet the contemporary challenge.

Bengali Hindu society at the time of Rammohun Roy was sharply divided into three distinct groups. The group led by Rammohun Roy consisted of Zamindars with commercial interests. They opposed the monopoly of the East India Company and had close links with the movement of the English free traders. Although holding large landed properties, they did not consider land as the chief source of wealth and began to invest in commercial and banking enterprises in close collaboration with English merchants. They had imbibed a liberal outlook and strongly supported the cause of Western education which, they believed, would promote social progress. They believed in reforming Hinduism from within rather than destroying it.

Opposed to the Rammohun's school of thought were the numerous sections of conservative Hindus who were determined to uphold the social and religious *status quo*. They saw nothing wrong in Hindu religion and society, and were opposed to any move to bring about reform or change. However, they had developed a somewhat practical attitude towards life. During the days of Muslim rule Hindus had not hesitated to learn Persian and Arabic which had brought them material gain. Even during the early part of the nineteenth century this practice continued. As Rammohun Roy himself noted that in his time "the Mussulmans, as well as the more respectable classes of Hindus chiefly, cultivated Persian literature, a great number of the former and a few of the latter also extending their studies likewise to Arabic."[21] After British

[19] *Fulham Papers*.

[20] Between 1821 and 1823 Rammohun had published a journal in English and Bengali called *The Brahmanical Magazine or the Missionary and the Brahman, Being a Vindication of the Hindoo Religion against the Attacks of Christian Missionaries*.

[21] Written evidence of Rammohun Roy on the condition of India before the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Affairs of the East India Company, *Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons* 1831, vol. 320A, p. 739.

rule had been firmly established, many practical-minded Hindus realised that a knowledge of the language of the new masters would bring them many benefits. The East India Company's policy of non-interference with regard to Indian religion and society also admirably suited their interests. Hence even the conservative sections of the Hindu community showed much enthusiasm in seeking English education. But while they were anxious to learn the English language they would have nothing to do with Western thought. They were afraid of any idea that would threaten to subvert the religious and social structure of traditional Hinduism. Hence they were bitterly opposed to the activities of Hindu reformers like Rammohun Roy, who had been greatly influenced by Western liberal ideas.

The contradiction between the acceptance of Western education on the one hand, and opposition to Western thought on the other, was reflected in the attitude of Raja Radhakanta Deb (1784-1867). The religious and social outlook of Radhakanta was so much at variance with his enthusiasm for the cause of education, particularly English education, that a contemporary described him as "an anachronism."[22] An accomplished scholar in Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic, he had also acquired a fairly good knowledge of English. Bishop Heber, who had a personal acquaintance with Radhakanta Deb, described him as "young man of pleasing countenance and manners, speaks English well and has read many of our popular authors particularly historical and geographical."[23] Radhakanta always showed marked interest in promoting education, particularly English education, among the Hindus. He, with his father, Gopimohan Deb, stood at the forefront of all educational movements in the country, beginning with the establishment in 1816 of the Calcutta Hindu College. In fact, Radhakanta was an active director of the Hindu College for over thirty years. But despite his valuable contribution to the cause of educational improvement, Radhakanta Deb was almost a blind champion of Hindu conservatism. He became the leader of a party of orthodox Hindus who fanatically defended the social and religious *status*

[22] *The Calcutta Review*, 1867, vol. XIX, pp. 90, 323.

[23] R. Heber, *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India from Calcutta to Bombay; with an account of a Journey to Madras and Southern India* (London, 1828), vol. I, p. 92.

quo and were bitterly opposed to people like Rammohun Roy who advocated reform of Hindu religion and society.

There was yet another group which was opposed to both the conservatism of Radhakanta Deb and the reformism of Rammohun Roy. By 1830 Bengali Hindu society was in a state of ferment owing to the growth of a new and radical movement which threatened to subvert the whole fabric of Hindu society and religion. This radical movement was started by a new generation of youngmen who had been educated at the Hindu College and had imbibed the contemporary rationalism of Europe through study of European history, literature and philosophy. This movement was largely initiated by a brilliant Anglo-Indian teacher of the Hindu College, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831). A free thinker and a rationalist, who, had he been born in Europe, would have been regarded as a typical product of the age of enlightenment. Derozio was appointed a teacher of the Hindu College in May 1826 at the very young age of seventeeen. The subjects he taught were English literature and history, and his mode of teaching was as unconventional as were his ideas. In fact, Derozio's activities as a teacher were not confined to the class-rooms. He was ever willing to converse with his students even outside the College premises, frequently at his own residence, on any matter which aroused their interests. Through these methods Derozio was able to promote a critical outlook among his students who began to express doubt and discontent with the existing order.

Derozio actively promoted radical ideas among the young Hindu students. Influenced by the philosophy of Hume and Bentham and radical thinkers like Thomas Paine, they had begun to measure everything with the yardstick of reason. Towards religion their attitude was Voltairean. They did not hesitate to denounce openly the Hindu religion.

These young radicals who regarded themselves as true 'liberals', were not only bitterly critical of the views and manners of the orthodox Hindus; they were equally vehement in their attacks on Rammohun Roy and his followers, whom they characterized as "half-liberals."[24] Derozio justified this epithet by a reference to the contradictions in the ideas and practice of Rammohun Roy and

[24] *The Englishman* (Calcutta), 1 June 1836.

his friends. As Derozio noted:

> What his (Rammohun Roy's) opinions are, neither his friends nor foes can determine. It is easier to say what they are *not* than what they are .... Rammohun, it is well-known, appeals to the *Veds*, the *Koran*, and the *Bible*, holding them all probably in equal estimation, extracting the good from each and rejecting from all whatever he considers apocryphal .... He has always lived like a Hindoo .... His followers, at least some of them, are not very consistent. Sheltering themselves under the shadow of his name, they indulge to licentiousness in everything forbidden in the shastras, as meat and drink; while at the same time they feed the Brahmins, profess to disbelieve Hinduism, and never neglect to have poojahs at home.[25]

In fact, Derozio's disciples regarded Rammohun's opinions as vague and confused and leading to no where. They roundly condemned his followers as mere opportunists whose sole motive was to acquire wealth and position.[26]

This impetuous criticism of those who did not agree with them, this somewhat naive attitude towards their elders, did not carry the radicals very far. Hindu society was up in arms against them and was determined to crush out this heresy from its bosom. Derozio was dismissed from the Hindu College in April 1831, and shortly afterwards died. Derozio's death gave a severe blow to the cause of the radicals. They were suddenly deprived of a leadership which, though it had come from outside the fold of Hinduism, had given them a new vision and a conviction in justification of their movement. No wonder therefore, that this radical movement petered out not however without leaving some permanent impact on the social outlook of the Hindu community.

The radical movement was an extension of the movement for reform and change which Rammohun Roy had initiated. The conflict between the followers of Rammohun Roy and those of Derozio was a conflict between two generations. While Rammohun and his followers were men of mature age and experience, the

[25] *The East Indian*, October 1831, quoted in the *India Gezette* (Calcutta), 5 October 1831.

[26] *The Englishman*, 1 June 1836.

radicals were mostly youngmen who had not yet passed the age of adolescence. The reform movement in Bengal was greatly weakened owing to the dissensions amongst these two groups. Contemporary European sympathizers, while lamenting this unfortunate division amongst "the common friends of liberty and knowledge", put the blame squarely on the shoulders of the radicals.[27] As compared to Rammohun Roy's followers, the radicals were mere boys and hence were not taken seriously by any section of the people. Nevertheless, the point of view of the radicals could not be entirely overlooked. Rammohun Roy, and his friends had sought a compromise between traditional Hinduism and Western ideas, between old and new. It was evidently an uneasy compromise which resulted in a contradiction between thought and action. This was reflected in the personal life of Rammohun Roy. Thus while theoretically denouncing caste prejudices and rituals, he actually observed them, at least in public. This contradiction was also apparent in the conduct of his friends and followers. Thus Prasanna Kumar Tagore (1801-1868) who publicly denounced idolatry in his journal, the *Reformer*, himself used to perform the *Durga Puja* at his residence with the usual pomp and ceremony. As we have noted, the reformers of Rammohun Roy's school did not believe in a complete break with traditional Hinduism; they wanted to change it from within. They believed in reform, not in revolution. Nevertheless, Rammohun's ideas continued to exercise considerable influence upon Hindu religious thought. In the field of social reform, Rammohun's contribution was undoubtedly great. His criticism of the practice of sati, for instance, prepared the minds of many for its eventual abolition.

Both the traditionalists and the reformers, however, represented the economic and social interests of the land-owning upper and the educated middle classes. They catered for the *babus* and not the masses. They showed, however, marked degree of unanimity of opinion in defending their economic interests and class privileges associated with the Permanent Settlement.[28] Both the groups were

[27] *The Bengal Hurkaru* (Calcutta), 25 October 1831.

[28] Though a strong supporter of the Permanent Settlement, Rammohun Roy did not hesitate to point out its evils particularly those relating to the interests of the peasantry. He feelingly described the wretched condition of the

(*Contd. next page*)

ardent supporters of the British Raj believing that under the circumatances of the time there was no better alternative to it. In their political views, however, Rammohun Roy and his friends were more advanced. They ardently supported the cause of liberalism and keenly followed through the newspapers the post-Napoleonic revolutions in Europe. According to some English contemporaries Rammohun was "a republican" in politics and "he never allowed any opportunity to pass of expressing his hearty approbation of all liberal institutions."[29] However, James Sutherland, editor of the *Bengal Hurkaru*, who travelled with Rammohun Roy to England, believed that though not a republican in politics he "admired republicanism in the abstract, and thought that in America it worked well."[30] Although Rammohun was dismayed at the collapse of liberal uprisings in many parts of Europe during the period immediately following the overthrow of Napoleon, he confidently believed that: "Enemies to liberty and friends of despotism have never been and never will be, ultimately successful."[31]

agricultural population and appealed to the Government to do something to improve its condition. "I am satisfied," he pointed out, "that an unjust precedent and practice, even of longer standing cannot be considered as the standard of justice by an enlightened Government." First Paper on the Revenue System of India, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 1831, vol. V, Appendix 39(A), pp. 724-25.

[29] *The Times* (London), 3 October 1833, quoted in the *India Gazette* (Calcutta), 11 February 1834.

[30] *India Gazette* (Calcutta), 18 February 1834.

[31] Rammohun Roy to James Silk Buckingham, 11 August 1822. K. Nag and D. Burman (eds.) *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy* (Calcutta, 1945-48), vol. IV, p. 89.

THE BENGAL ECONOMY AND RAMMOHUN ROY

ASOK SEN

1. THE BIOGRAPHICAL PROBLEM

Like many other pioneers in history, Rammohun Roy had to fight a lonely and heroic struggle for most of the changes he tried to bring to emerging middle class life and society in Bengal of his times. The scanty biographical materials we have, do not enable us to make a depth-study of that quality of loneliness, of the mental and moral development which went to build the personal fundament of his work and ideals. For example, some more knowledge of his boyhood reactions to orthodox upbringing in a Vaishnav household, a household that had found its means of wealth and influence in revenue farming under the early rule and administration of the East India Company, should probably give us a more meaningful understanding of Rammohun's quest for religious reformation and its positions on monotheism, idolatry and futile rituals.

The article was written in October 1972, when the writer was working on a Senior Fellowship of the Indian Council of Social Science Research.

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True, some anecdotes[1] are reported about his desire to become a *Sanyasi* at the age of fourteen, about his inability to sit through the *Yatra* (or popular play) of *Man Bhanjan* where Krishna is seen in a state of abject, tearful supplication to Radhika, or about his inevitable counter-arguments in homely discussions with his father. But these are too meagre information to furnish us with the context of Rammohun's maturing boyhood and youth.

Back to home after his early education in Persian and Sanskrit, obtained in Patna and Banaras respectively, Rammohun is said to have felt seriously alienated from the idolatrous religion of his family. The 'autobiographical letter' published posthumously by Sandford Arnot, his secretary in England, tells us:

> When about the age of sixteen, I composed a manuscript calling in question the validity of the idolatrous system of the Hindoos. This, together with my known sentiments on that subject, having produced a coolness between me and my immediate kindred, I proceeded on my travels, and passed through different countries, chiefly within, but some beyond, the bounds of Hindoostan, with a feeling of great aversion to the establishment of the British power in India.[2]

Later, in the same letter, we are told that Rammohun got rid of his aversion to the British power, since he had found Europeans to be "more steady and moderate in their conduct." Again, we don't have the data to assess the experience behind Rammohun's developed conviction about the civilizing role of the English in India. In all his notable deeds and observations Rammohun never appeared to question the validity of the growing British empire in India. Obviously, that "great aversion" to British rule at the age of sixteen must have yielded to more overriding priorities of the systems and guidelines of religious reforms, social thought and action which Rammohun himself built up with great intellectual

[1] Dilip Kumar Biswas and Prabhat Chandra Ganguli (eds.), Sophia Dobson Collet, *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, 3rd edition, (Calcutta, 1962), Chapter I.

[2] *Ibid.*, Appendix VIII, p. 497. The authenticity of this letter has been doubted by Collet. But Max Muller's position is quite reasonable: "to reject the whole as fabrication would be going much too far."

zeal and capability and tried thereby to set the perspectives of development before the nascent Bengali middle class.

No doubt, one such priority was laid in the search for a meaningful religion of man free from the constraints of ritual-bound, idolatrous Hinduism of those days. Further, in the sphere of his spiritual sojourn, Rammohun came to reveal a path remarkably different from the traditional Indian models of saintly renunciation. His was not the mission and commitment of a nineteenth century Kabir. In his case, the ethos of world-affirmation proved to be of decisive significance. Thus, back from his travels in 1792, he was found to be on cordial terms with his father, and, in the next few years of his life, Rammohun could combine the serious study of Vedas and other Sanskrit classics with successful business in Company's paper and money-lending, the latter being aimed at earning a livelihood for himself independently of his father's patrimony. Indeed, though not deprived by his father of the due share of his inheritance, Rammohun was subsequently caught up in prolonged legal disputes over real estates and even in a case of alleged embezzlement of government funds by his son. A good amount of able research[3] has been meant to prove that those cases were got up by Rammohun's religious and social enemies (including among them his orthodox Hindu mother) to give him endless hazards and mental trouble. These facts of Rammohun's life are mentioned to indicate how very deviant from the norms of world-abstaining religiosity was the career of this religious reformer.

One can appreciate how difficult and complex must have been the process of development enabling Rammohun to reach what he could accept as the right choices of life and to create an ideology capable of making his facts and ideas amenable to one another. But very little is known about this process of development. There arises the problem of scanty biographical materials mentioned in the beginning of this paper. Perhaps, this may be the reason why even Tagore's character-study of Rammohun,[4] though immensely

[3] (*a*) *Ibid.*, Chapter II and Supplementary Notes.
(*b*) Ramaprasad Chanda and Jatindra Kumar Majumdar (eds.), *Selections from Official Letters and Documents relating to the Life of Raja Rammohun Roy*, vol. I (Calcutta, 1938).

[4] Rabindranath Tagore, *Bharatpathik Rammohun Roy* (in Bengali) (Visva-Bharati, Calcutta, 1961).

rich in the virtuosity of the poet's prose-style and full of lofty spiritual affirmation, lacked the concrete, human vividness of his potrayal[5] of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. While remembering the description[6] of Rammohun, Tagore had heard from his father, the poet writes about the constant shadow of a "deep, sober and noble sadness," looming over the face of Rammohun. It would really be a great help to our estimate of Rammohun, if we had known more of his stubborn non-conformism, of his furious inviolacy, and also of his gathering life-experience to come to terms with the most complicated transition of his place and time. All this might have been enveloped in that "deep, sober and noble sadness" Tagore found to be so impressive in the description given by his father.

In explaining that sadness, Tagore wrote much more about Rammohun's far-reaching perspective and resolution and much less about any agony of defeat or disappointment. This may raise certain doubts. The question may be asked: why should the knowledge we have of Rammohun's life and activities, of his magnificent comprehension of intellectual, social, educational and religious reforms be not adequate for a complete estimate of this great pioneer of our modernity and enlightenment? One can recall his ceaseless campaign against the practice of sati. There was his endeavour to introduce the system of modern education. Nor can we forget the part he played in the birth and progress of rational Bengali prose. And, above all, there is no gainsaying the strength of his endless efforts to found a religion conceived to be in agreement with "the very modern concepts of social comfort, compassion and social texture."[7] Further, the greatest virtue of Rammohun's religious thought was laid in its potential, though never realized, for leading to a permanent accord between the Hindus and Mussalmans of India.

All this took place however against the dark background of and often in close fraternity with the beginnings of "England's work in India," the founding and consolidation of a large colonial hinter-

[5] Rabindranath Tagore, *Rabindra Rachanabali* (in Bengali), vol. IV, (Visva-Bharati, Calcutta, 1940), pp. 476-511.

[6] Rabindranath Tagore, *Bharatpathik Rammohun Roy*, p. 8.

[7] Susobhan Chandra Sarkar, *Bengal Renaissance and Other Essays* (New Delhi, 1970), p. 95.

land to meet the needs of the imperial British economy. It was around the year of Rammohun's birth that Warren Hastings assumed direct control over the administration of Bengal on behalf of the East India Company. And the year of his death coincided with the new Charter Act that put an end to most of the remaining restrictions on this country being turned into an open avenue for British trade and investment. Indeed the Act of 1833 simply continued the process that had started twenty years earlier and came to mark the beginning of new job opportunities for the Bengali middle class towards the consolidation of colonial rule and administration. The sixty-one years of Rammohun's life between 1772 and 1833 passed continuously through the sordid experience of policies and practice of early British rule resulting in the veritable collapse of our production economy. Thus, the era of our renaissance and enlightenment, beginning with the pioneer work of Rammohun Roy, was, in a very basic sense, the period of a great calamity for the land of Bengal.

Indeed, in his letter of 25 September 1835, written from England to Dewan Ramcomul Sen, H.H. Wilson, the leading orientalist of those days found right words for the description of this calamity. "In her commerce alone she is seriously injured; her manufactures are annihilated, her raw produce burthened in England with heavy duties, and English manufactures forced upon her duty-free. There is no equity in this, and it would not be endured. It could not have happened if the Government of India had been independent."[8] And, further, "It must be owned that the people of England, the mercantile and Parliamentary people at least, are too greedy for their profits to treat Indian Commerce with justice, but it is very much your own fault. You submit too quietly. There is a moral as well as a physical force. You employ neither."[9]

The dimensions of that calamity will be spelled out in the next section of this paper. In reference to the sordid futility of his circumstances then, one feels like enquiring whether the sense of that calamity was perpetually reflected in the "deep, sober and noble sadness" which Tagore so emphasizes in his portrayal of Rammohun. This is where the available biographical materials on Rammohun come to be extremely inadequate. Despite his own very

[8] Peary Chand Mitra, *Life of Dewan Ramcomul Sen* (Calcutta, 1880), p. 19.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

voluminous writings, we know very little of the probable helplessness and agony of the man who was ordained by history to be the first protagonist of the tragedy of the Bengali middle class, a class cut off from the role of leadership in the sphere of social production and originally built up as the vehicle of respect for and acquiescence in British rule over India. No doubt, such respect and acquiescence were among the forces which made the British empire in India possible.

2. ON IDEOLOGY AND EMPIRE

The fact of tragedy, mentioned above, contained within itself a good many apparent ironies of words and deeds. It was as if actions took place in circumstances which eluded the agents' grasp and led to results contrary to their intentions. There appears the tendency to make an issue of whether British rule deliberately and effectively inhibited the process of socio-economic development of India, or the consequences followed unintended by the rulers. What is relevant however is that the debates and controversies of the different schools of British thought on how to ensure good government in India, their ideological content, had to be subservient to the more primary object of the Empire to make money from that country and to use that money for advancement in English social order.[10] The very fact of the Empire therefore led to the reversal of intentions supposed to be contained in the various ideologies. Or perhaps, to speak more plainly in terms of actual history, one can even characterize those ideologies as attempts merely to rationalise the fact of the Empire and of the shifts and turns in its predominant modes of exploitation.

These ideologies, refer to the enormous volume of theoretical and history writings throughout the nineteenth century on the subject, aim, and rationale of British rule in India. That, in itself, opens up a vast area of research and some good work is already there to help our understanding of the dimensions of the problem. To assess the significance of some major social, economic and political developments during Rammohun's life-time and his reactions thereto, it will be necessary to consider the ideological

[10] Francis G. Hutchins, *The Illusion of Permanence, British Imperialism in India* (Princeton, 1967), p 107.

forces behind those changes. Before proceeding to that part of the argument, we should take note of a basic anomaly of those ideologies; again a phenomenon inherent in the building of imperial rule and the false consciousness of do-gooding mentioned above.

The economy, society and politics of Britain in the last decades of the eighteenth century had been passing through the initial throes of her industrial revolution and had started coming to terms with the hegemony of industrial capitalism. This had also marked the beginning of a new attitude to colonial territories, of establishing such relationship with the underdeveloped overseas world that would eventually open up larger markets and avenues for British commodities and investment. The preliminary steps to a new colonial policy were taken in the attempts to forge ways of British Parliamentary control over the East India Company's administration in India, as embodied in the Regulating Act (1773) and the Pitt's India Act (1784). The main features of this phase of the new imperial policy come out clearly in the following estimate of Henry Dundas, the President of the Board of Control for many years:

> It may be suggested that Dundas by his administrative skill contributed to Conservative Imperialism, traditions not dissimilar from the Burkean idea of trusteeship: non-interference with native societies, an economical but bold foreign policy at the outposts, a capacity to be constantly aware of the balance-sheets of imperial power. These would be the salient attitudes held by the men who fashioned the Second British Empire in India and the tropics in the nineteenth century.[11]

The elements of critical importance for ideological factors lay however in the views, knowledge and convictions the rulers would accept as the bases of "trusteeship" or as the traditional mores of native society. Perhaps, among all examples of bourgeois transition in Europe, the case of England was most distinguished by the role of its rising bourgeoisie in working out significant changes in society and its production system before the achievement of political

[11] Barun De, *Henry Dundas and the Government of India, 1771-1801*, Mimeographed D. Phil. Thesis (Nuffield College, Oxford, 1961), pp. 443.

power. Thus, the bourgeois seizure of political power in seventeenth century England largely followed upon its emerging leadership in the sphere of social production. It was in this context of such a long history that Britain arrived at her industrial revolution in the late eighteenth century. The whole apparatus of her understanding of social and political changes was rooted therefore in the reality of a rising middle class and a mutable aristocracy whose goals of enrichment had not been divorced from the logic of developing social production. To submit a rather broad generalisation, this was a principal feature of the evolution of English social, political and economic thought from the reformation to the industrial revolution.

On the contrary, this is the crucial point on which the efforts of British imperial ideology, of its conservatism, liberalism, evangelism, or orientalism turned out to be so many futile exercises to fulfil the aims of good government in India, or that of her effective modernization. The real forces of modernization could never spring from the exigencies of imperial statecraft. The need was for the growth of forces within a society free from the structural and institutional impediments of colonial transformation. The repeated efforts to administer to existence of a class of enlightened gentleman farmers, or English yeomanry, or a pace-setting liberal intelligentsia, were not in keeping with the basic historical experience from which such categories and ideals were being continuously borrowed. That such goals had no possibility of coming through in the midst of the other necessary constraints of the colonial society, should be clear from a few examples discussed below.

Whether or not a government is good, even a good government is no substitute for self-government. This is a basic point of the very ethos of modernity. Obviously, therefore, it would be impossible for British policy in colonies to rise to the level of ideological and policy levels at work at home. Such a convergence of levels would lead to the very liquidation of the empire. In interpreting then the aims and deeds of imperial policy in India, whether we should put emphasis on the element of ideological delusion, or on the acquisitive motive of foreign rule, will depend on the questions to which answers are sought.

The approach we take makes no difference however in the consequences of imperialism and "it should be noted that examination as to whether some policy came up to some level or not is not quite

adequate in this case, for even when a policy was advocated or shaped according to some home model, or to some modern European doctrines—such as those of *laissez faire*, division of labour, or theory of rent,—it was often by the nature of things not comparable with the "level" at work at home, nor was it necessarily on its way to reaching the theoretical goal contemplated in Europe. In India under British rule, often a doctrine played a different role, a policy took a different meaning from the beginning."[12]

Rammohun's ideals of modernity and his determination to lead his land away from medievel decay, were considerably exposed to the influence of that colonial beginning and its necessary ineptitude, both material and ideological, for sound and sustained modernization. His interpretation of Vedanta was notable for its intellectual vigour and humanism. It derived the rational bases of world-affirmation from the tradition of Indian philosophy. The same breath of humanism made him a fearless fighter for service to humanity and against so many dastardly social practices of his days. But the most severely deterimental to the cause of modernization was the political economy of British colonialism. Being very much a creature of the dispensations of British rule and administration, the new Bengali middle class came to be a participant in the building of the structure of colonial political economy.

Rammohun's ideas in this critical sphere were largely locked up in a sense of identity with the forces of empire. True, his life and times gave him little opportunity to look beyond the false premises of that identity. And so Rammohun's strivings to break away from the past and to commit himself to the trust of a new order could not attain either the convincing time perspective or the coherent image of a society treading on the path of modernization. His religion of world-affirmation could not find its secular fulfilment in a sense of 'calling' organic to the needs of material progress of society and environment. All this becomes more clear from an appraisal of the major economic trends of Rammohun's times.

[12] Matsui, "On the Nineteenth Century Indian Economic History—A Review of a "Reinterpretation," in *Indian Economy in the Nineteenth Century: A Symposium* (Delhi School of Economics, 1969) p. 29.

3. THE PROCESS OF COLONIZATION

(*a*) *Rights and New Property—The Fate of the Productive Principle.* The Permanent Settlement of 1793 was an institutional measure of great significance, both on short- and long-term considerations. It had come to influence much of the pattern and content of the subsequent development of the Bengali middle class. The name and role of Cornwallis used to be invariably associated with the beginning of this new system of property and land revenue, Rammohun himself wrote[13] of that "straightforward honest statesman" who introduced "these changes approximating to the institutions existing in England" and "calculated to operate beneficially, if regularly reduced to practice." Before dwelling upon that practice and its results, a few words on the background and objective of the Permanent Settlement may suitably come under our consideration.

Without minimising the executive role of Cornwallis, it should be made clear that he largely carried out a predetermined plan of the Court of Directors of the East India Company and "that equally erroneous is the idea that he was sent out to impose in Bengal a system of landed property based on English notions of ownership."[14] The aims of the Settlement rested on some broad economic grounds as follows:

> the Court of Directors . . . regarded Bengal, Behar and Orissa as a vast estate, of which one-third of the cultivable land lay waste. They could not reclaim the land themselves. They did not believe that any inducement short of a permanent tenure and a fixed assessment would tempt private individuals to reclaim it. After long deliberation they decided that it was good policy to surrender their claims to any future increase of revenue, whether from such reclamation or from other sources connected with the land, in order to encourage the great work of extending and

[13] Susobhan Chandra Sarkar (ed.), *Rammohun Roy on Indian Economy*, compiled on behalf of Socio-economic Research Institute (Calcutta, 1965), pp. XII-XIII.

[14] W.W. Hunter, "A Dissertation on Landed Property and Land Rights in Bengal at the end of the Eighteenth Century" in *Bengal Manuscript Records*, vol. I (London, 1874), p. 25.

improving the cultivated areas of Bengal. They thought they would find themselves repaid by the general increase of revenue to be derived from the growth of population and the material development of the country. They were convinced, to use their striking words, that the magic touch of property would set a certain productive principle in operation, which would abundantly recompense them in future for the sacrifices they had then made.[15]

It is noteworthy that the idea of "the magic touch of property" leading to a "a certain productive principle" was common in those days to all British thinkers tending to look beyond the purely mercantilist approach to colonial territories. As early as 1772, Henry Pattullo published his Physiocratic model[16] on the development of agriculture in Bengal and tried to exhort policy-makers with the words: ". . . the Company have it still in their power to transform fifteen or twenty millions of mankind, from desponding slaves into industrious subjects; and will thereby gain the double advantage of establishing a solid revenue, with reasonable advance to the bargain. Their fidelity and attachment would thereby likewise be forever secured against all enemies, in defence of property."[17] And further, "Sensible also of the great advantage of property, however small, with fixed family residences and the conveniences of British furniture and way of living, they (the people of Bengal) will without doubt relish them, and thereby open a new branch to the Company, of carrying thither British commodities, while they again will find sufficient returns for all, in the growing produce of their country."[18]

Thus, one of the earliest pleas for a permanent settlement of lands in Bengal lost sight neither of the aim of stabilising the empire, nor of the economic objective of promoting a market for British manufactures. It must be admitted however, particularly in the light of the valuable research[19] made in this field, that the early physiocratic model of Pattullo and more so the later writings

[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

[16] Pattullo, *An Essay Upon the Cultivation of the Land and Improvement of the Revenues of Bengal* (London, 1772).

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[19] Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal* (Paris, 1963).

and zealous campaigns of Philip Francis and Thomas Law, on the same doctrinal lines, endeavoured to evolve a coherent policy for the development of capitalist enterprise in Bengal's agriculture. And so the eventual form and consequences of the Permanent Settlement as a semi-feudal system of land-ownership came to be really "mocking its own original image as visualized by Philip Francis and Thomas Law."[20]

We have noted that in their recommendations for and approval of the Permanent Settlement, the Court of Directors took a fairly long view of improvements and depended on the magic touch of property to operate a certain productive principle for the achievement of the same. How futile those expectations turned out to be were revealed in the evidence of E. Colebrooke before the Select Committee of 1831-32:

> The errors of the permanent settlement in Bengal were two-fold: first, in the sacrifice of what may be denominated the yeomanry, by merging all village rights, whether of property or occupancy, in the all-devouring recognition of the zemindar's paramount property in the soil; and, secondly, in the sacrifice of the peasantry by one sweeping enactment, which left the zemindar to make his settlement with them on such terms as he might choose to require. Government, indeed, reserved to itself the power of legislating in favour of the tenants; but no such legislation has ever taken place; and, on the contrary, every subsequent enactment has been founded on the declared object of strengthening the zemindar's hands.[21]

That things moved inevitably in this direction may be cited as one glaring instance of the irony of words and deeds, of the ideological delusions of colonial policy we have discussed in the previous section. Not that the Permanent Settlement failed to extend the area of cultivation significantly. Nor did it fail to convert Bengal and particularly her new middle class into loyal supporters of the English rule, or for that matter into a real stronghold of men and resources to be used for the expansion of the British empire over

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

[21] Hollinberry, *The Zemindary Settlement of Bengal*, vol. I (Calcutta, 1879), Appendix IV, p. 55.

the whole sub-continent of India. The "magic touch of property" could attain those goals of colonial policy. But it failed miserably in one sphere, the sphere one would consider to be extremely vital for the building of the bases of a viable economy. The "magic touch of property," as it had been administered, could never bring in operation "a certain productive principle" about which the Court of Directors made so eloquent anticipations.

This was the purport of several evidences[22] before the Select Committee of 1831, recording repeatedly that there was a "vast increase in cultivation," but "little, if any, improvement. . .in the system of agriculture," and "that permanent settlement enabled the zemindars, by ousting the hereditary cultivators in favour of the inferior peasantry, to increase the cultivation by a levelling system." Giving a cogent historical review of the consequences of the Permanent Settlement, the West Bengal Census Report of 1951 states: ". . .Zemindars in the nineteenth century had their waste lands reclaimed almost *gratis*, that is, whatever capital they expended in settling reclaimers to start with they realized with interest either through dispossession of the reclaimers, or through enhanced rents and various *abwabs* connected with improvement and *baze zama*. This applies as much to reclamation of waste lands as to such improvements as irrigation tanks and canals, drainage channels, embankments, culverts, bridges and bazars."[23] Moreover in course of the nineteenth century, the zamindars became more and more pure rentiers and performed no economic functions towards the improvement of agriculture.[24]

The sources of this failure to bring any productive principle into operation can be assigned principally to several factors. Firstly, we may take note of the nature of property right conferred on zamindars. Traditionally, all land-rights in this country, whether the tributary privileges of the monarch and of the zamindars as the former's agents of revenue collection, or the usufructuary interests of cultivators of the soil, had their validity not so much in the idea of any exclusive personal ownership, as in a structure of claims governed by customs and admitting of the co-existence of those various interests and the continuance of production and

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 66.
[23] *Census of India, 1951*, vol. VI, Part IA, p. 446.
[24] *Ibid.*

revenue. This was a system subject indeed to various degrees of heterogeneity and arbitrariness, but not to any developed concept of exclusive personal ownership.

The big change in 1793 introduced a definitely articulate system of private property in lands. The zamindars were admitted to a complete proprietory title, saleable, heritable and subject only to payment of a fixed land tax. There was nothing unusual about the English solution being couched in Lockean regard for property[25] as a natural human right. But the other emphasis of Locke on labour as the historical basis of "authority to appropriate" was missed in the colonial exigencies of building up a stable and secure revenue system. It was beyond the capacity of the then available apparatus of Company's administration to cope with the task of direct settlement with ryots. The nature of zamindary property led inevitably to extreme subordination of usufructuary interests to tributary privileges, a state of things thoroughly inimical to the advance of the production system. Thus emerged a form of landed property whose ways of enrichment would come to be divorced from any worthwhile economic function. This was the primary blow administered by the Permanent Settlement to the principle of productivity.

Secondly, we should take note of how the subsequent enactments worsened the adverse effect of the Permanent Settlement on the position and rights of the ryots. The initial idea of Cornwallis to secure the rights of tenants through the granting of *pattahs* proved to be unworkable in the conditions and conventions of the rural society of Bengal. At the time of the Permanent Settlement the fixed revenue demand was placed at nearly 90 per cent of the rent collected from ryots. The rural economy and the state of the population had not yet fully recovered from the great famine of 1770 and in many cases the economic rent was tending to be lower than the customary rates which were taken as the bases of assessment for the purpose of the settlement. In this situation, the failure to execute the *pattahs* led to continuous uncertainty of revenue collection and Regulation IV of 1794 was promulgated empowering zamindars to recover rent at the rates mentioned in leases, although the ryots might not have accepted those rates.

[25] Ainslie Thomas Embree, "Landholding and British Institutions" in Frykenberg (ed.), *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* (Wisconsin, 1967), p. 39.

There followed acute despair, distress, and even cases of refusal to pay any rents on the part of the ryots. Many old zamindar families could not cope with this situation in terms of their flexible and patriarchal conventions of rent collection and had to lose their estates under the mandate of the "Sunset Law." Moreover, the power of alienating estates granted to zamindars under the new settlement, also led to the ruin of many families of the older aristocracy burdened with huge debt and having little aptitude and ability for more 'business-like' management of estates. And "within ten years that immediately followed the Permanent Settlement, a complete transformation took place in the construction and ownership of the estates which formed the subject of that settlement."[26] The pious intention of Cornwallis to safeguard the interests of ryots had to give way to the more pressing requirement of regular revenue yield. The need arose for increasing the attractiveness of landed property as a rent earning asset. No wonder that the notorious *Haptam* (Regulation VII of 1799) was enacted amidst the financial pressures of the war with Tipu Sultan. It gave the landlords unrestricted right of distraint of all personal property of the ryots and, in some cases, to arresting their persons for arrears of rent without sending any notice to any court or public officer. With this kind of strengthening of zamindars' position, land became an extremely covetable asset. Thus opened up the ways of transforming the wealth of indigenous commercial accumulation of those *banians* and *mutsuddis* of the earlier trade and plunder of the East India Company into zamindary estates, giving them the status of a new aristocracy, but with little logic and concern for the development of the country's production economy. Land values went up in consequence.

Many more regulations followed (e.g., Pancham Regulation V of 1812, Patni Taluk Regulation of 1819, Regulation XI of 1822) during Rammohun's life-time and each of them helped in some way or other to add to the attractiveness of the landed asset for a class of pure rentiers. For example, the Patni Taluk Act legalised a hierarchy of subinfeudation extremely detrimental to the interests of actual tillers and went to dilute the very responsibility of the

[26] J. Macneill, "Official Memorandum of the Revenue Administration of the Lower Provinces of Bengal," quoted by Guha, *Land System in Bengal and Behar* (Calcutta, 1915), p. 114.

zamindars for revenue collection. Again, the Regulation of 1822 gave auction purchasers the right to enhancement of rents and eviction applicable over all excepting the *Khudkhast* tenants. The scope for legal disputes over the identification of the latter category enabled the landlords to exercise the newly acquired right even more extensively.

(*b*) *Rammohun's Parliamentary Evidence—Plea for a Reform of the Permanent Settlement.* It was against the background of such consequences of the Permanent Settlement that Rammohun Roy submitted his evidence[27] on the Revenue System of India, to the Select Committee of the House of Commons in 1831. It was given in the form of written answers to questions formulated by the Board of Control. The questions did not cover all the dimensions of the problem raised above. This could not but impose some restrictions on the analysis we can obtain from the answers given by Rammohun who himself came from the landed gentry and acquired, on his own, sizable real estates since the introduction of the Permanent Settlement. The answers given by him allude to the serious problem of rack-renting. The whole evidence is full of his compassion for the miserable state of the ryots. He clearly emphasized the incapacity of cultivators for any accumulation, a problem of substantial bearing on the advance of the production system.

In addition to his answers to the questionnaires posed by the Board of Control, Rammohun also submitted a short paper on the revenue system. This paper was advanced "to admit the settlement to be advantageous" to both government and landlords, "though not perhaps in equal proportion."[28] The recommendations made by Rammohun turned, in the main, upon no further enhancement of rents, security of tenants, and also on the grounds for some reduction in the level of revenue demand on zamindars. The latter course might become necessary in cases where the existing level of rents paid by ryots, being already too high, should admit of a reduction. Rammohun argued that the consequent problem of shortfall in revenue might well be met by the levy of luxury taxes and feasible reduction in the expenses of the revenue

[27] Sarkar (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 1-19.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

establishment, an idea linked up with his plea for the appointment of native officers at the junior levels of revenue administration.

We get no idea however about Rammohun's appraisal of the problems arising from subinfeudation, growing questions of tenancies inferior to *Khudkhast* ryots, and other critical aspects of the regulations subsequent to the Permanent Settlement. The question posed by the Board of Control had little to ask about those problems; and in his own paper, Rammohun made no reference to them except in one general statement: "Subsequent Regulations... considerably enriched, comparatively, a few individuals, the proprietors of land, to the extreme disadvantage, or rather ruin of millions of their tenants; and it is productive of no advantage to government."[29] One may feel particularly curious to know about Rammohun's views on the growth of *Patni taluks*, the new development then taking place in a district with which he was quite familiar and where Rammohun himself had considerable experience of owning and expanding landed agricultural property. But the evidence and the short paper do not satisfy that curiosity. We may note however that Rammohun was among the landlords who made a petition against Regulation III of 1828, which led to confiscation of large areas of revenue-free lands. Further, while in England, Rammohun published a pamphlet on this "issue in order to draw the attention of the British public to what he thought was a violation of common justice and a breach of a national faith on the part of the British Government of India."[30]

(*c*) *The 'Bengal Hurkaru' on Rammohun's Landlord Character.* It is noteworthy that Rammohun's evidence was subjected to sharp criticism by the *Bengal Hurkaru*.[31] Some of the points raised by that contemporary paper should help us to find out the critical gaps in Rammohun's evidence. Let us therefore cite a few examples. There were three questions relating to the action taken against ryots for their failure to pay rent. The questions and answers were as follows.[32]

Question: In the event of the tenants falling into arrears with

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

[30] Jatindra Kumar Majumdar (ed.), *Raja Rammohun Roy and Progressive Movements in India*, A Selection from Records, 1775-1845 (Calcutta, 1941).

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 483-88.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 483.

their rent, what means do the proprietors adopt for realizing it?

Rammohun's answer: They distrain their moveable property, with some exceptions, by the assistance of the police officers, and get it sold by means of the judicial authorities.

Question: When a cultivator fails to pay his rent, does the proprietor distrain or take possession of the tenant's moveables by his own power, or by applying to any legal authority?

Rammohun's answer: Already covered in the above reply.

Question: Does the legal authority seize upon both the moveable and immoveable property, and the person of the tenant for his rent?

Rammohun's answer: 1st, on a summary application to the police, the moveable property of the tenant, with some exceptions, is distrained by the help of the police officers; 2ndly, by the ordinary judicial process, the immoveable property of the tenant may be attached, and his person arrested for the recovery of the rest.

In its issue of 20 June 1832, the *Hurkaru* comments[33]: "How could Rammohun Roy in these replies, *forget* the seventh Regulation of 1799?... How could Rammohun Roy *forget* to state that it is through, and by, a frightful power (arrest; and imprisonment of an unfortunate ryot worth perhaps 100 rupees at the suit of his Zemindar worth a lac) and no other, that rents are raised; that *Moroosi* (hereditary) pottahs are forcibly taken from Kodkasht ryots, and *Meadee* pottahs (pottahs for a term of years) substituted for them; so as eventually to make the whole of their tenants almost tenants at will, and enable the Zemindars, through the authority of the gulled Cornwallis Government, who supposed they would 'endeavour to promote the welfare and prosperity of their tenantry, to rack them to their last rupee'."

And, "How could Rammohun Roy go so far into details as to say that the property is distrained on 'application to the police?' When he *must* know that all applications of the kind if we were rightly informed, must be made to the Dewanee Adawlut through this very regulation, and not to the Foujdary; and why did he gloss over the nature of this *application* which is neither more nor less

[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 484-85.

than what we have described it, an 'application' for an order for instant arrest—the grounds of which are to be looked into another day." Moreover, it was observed that in his suggestions for improving the state of the cultivators, Rammohun passed over all the evils arising from the source of these regulations and "it is plain that, like the 'non-misericordo' evidence of a certain member of the Sudder, which we regret not having had time to comment upon when it reached this country, there was much which he could not, or did not, or would not, recollect; we leave it to those who are acquainted with the man and the matter, to say which."

In his short paper on the Revenue system, Rammohun went to explain the causes of augmentation in the price of land. Rammohun, in his answer, attributed this phenomenon to the cultivation of wastes and the rise of rents and concluded by saying "and not from any other cause that I can trace."[34]

The *Hurkaru* on 22, June 1832, further observed that Rammohun only faintly alluded to this rise of rents being obtained by extortion from the people and wrote:

> We will tell him the other cause; that cause which he must, and we add, he *Does* know as well as any Zemindar and Izaradar in the country. *The facility with which exactions to the amount of at least 40 to 60 per cent beyond the legal jumma are wrung from the unfortunate ryot.* This is the *other* cause, and it is one fully adequate to account for the rise in the value of estates. The Izaradar well knows that armed with the seventh Regulation of 1799 (complaints under it have a cant-name amongst the ryots) —none dare resist him; and he claims one exaction after another; we could name them, if necessary; till the screw of oppression has reached its utmost turn; and the Zemindar, while he is 'deeply compassionating' the situation of the cultivators, is farming out his villages at a rent, which *he knows*, includes both the legal jumma the *illegal* exactions, and the profits of the Izaradar.[35]

While the tenor and tone of *Hurkaru's* criticism left room for guessing that, in his evidence, Rammohun did not expose all that

[34] Sarkar (ed.), *op. cit*, pp. 21-22.
[35] Majumdar (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 487.

he knew as a practising landowner himself, the strictures[36] of the *Samachar Chandrika* on the same evidence tried to establish that the views expressed therein were detrimental to the interests of zamindars. In short, Rammohun appeared to be in favour of continuance of the Permanent Settlement with necessary reforms to alleviate the pressing miseries of the ryots and to remove a few anomalies of the revenue demand on the zamindars. There were forces in Bengal expecting him to recommend more radical changes. And, "Rammohun's way of expressing his opinions in favour of the ryots sorely disappointed the *Hurkaru*, which expected that the denunciation of the system which was responsible for the miserable lot of the ryot should be something very strong and pungent. It had high expectations of Rammohun in the matter." Remarking on the point the paper held that Rammohun belonged to the hammers, but his evidence would be taken for that of the anvils at home.[37] We have no reasons however to look for more radicalism in Rammohun's views on the revenue system and landed property. Moreover, the experience of the Ryotwari System in the South must have already worn out much of one's confidence in the superiority of an alternative arrangement inside the colonial framework.

(*d*) *Agriculture and the Rest of the Economy.* The more pertinent question would arise from the changing wider context in which the reformed revenue system was expected to do good to all, or at least to that ideal subject of the "greatest number". Even the best conceived land law would entail, for its successful working, some definite process of interaction with the rest of the economy. To discuss the truth of the matter in the non-agricultural sphere of activity, we should do well to begin with what Lord Moira wrote in 1815 about a central issue of land relations evolving under the Permanent Settlement:

> It has been urged, however, that, though the rights of the former cultivating proprietors have passed away *sub silentio*, still, as the zemindar and his tenants have reciprocal wants, their mutual necessities must drive them to an amicable adjustment. The

[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 490-93.
[37] *Ibid.*, ci.

> reciprocity is not, however, so clear. The zemindar certainly cannot do without tenants, but he wants them upon his own terms, and he knows that if he can get rid of the hereditary proprietors who claim a right to terms independent of what he may vouchsafe to give, he will obtain the means of substituting men of his own; and such is the redundancy of the cultivating class, that there will never be a difficulty of procurring ryots ready to engage on terms only just sufficient to secure bare maintenance to the engager.[38]

That redundancy of the cultivating class had little relationship to any population explosion. What we know about the rates of population growth in the nineteenth century does not admit of any such inference. The problem originated in the severe breakdown of indigenous industries during the early nineteenth century. It caused a terrible disruption of the overall activity balance of Bengal's economy, colossal unemployment and increased pressure on land. And the realization of 'a certain productive principle' in the agricultural sector, to recall that pious intention of the Court of Directors at the time of introducing the Permanent Settlement, could never come through in the context of turning the same land into a market for British industrial commodities. There we have to appreciate the perfect validity of the comment on the nature of the rule of property for Bengal in 1793: "It was precisely the plan 'of carrying thither British commodities' which was eventually to turn his (Pattullo's) physiocratic utopia into the quasi-feudal settlement of Lord Cornwallis."[39]

(*c*) *The British Industrial Revolution and the De-Industrialization of Bengal.* Since the eighties of the eighteenth century, the forces of the industrial revolution in England had begun casting their impact upon the investment policy of the East India Company.[40] British cotton manufacturers came to have increasing interest for the exclusion of Indian piece goods from Britain and, so far as possible, from markets which were supplied from Britain. It started

[38] Hollinberry, *op. cit.*, Appendix X, pp. 241-42.

[39] Ranajit Guha, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

[40] Narendra Krishna Sinha, "Administrative, Economic and Social History: 1757-1793" in Narendra Krishna Sinha (ed.), *The History of Bengal (1757-1905)* (University of Calcutta, 1967), p. 115.

with printed calico in 1782. Next year started the manufacture of *muslin* in Manchester. In 1786, cotton yarn disappeared from Company's investment. By 1806, the situation deteriorated to such an extent that in his Report on the *External Commerce of British India,* Larkins observed: "the weavers finding no employment for their looms, many of them have been necessitated to quit their homes and seek employment elsewhere; most of them take to the plough, some remain in their own districts, while others migrate into distant parts of the country."[41]

To sum up the direction of British tariff legislation during the latter half of the eighteenth century:

> Thus when the English East India Company obtained the *Diwani* grant of 1765, the Indian silk and cotton manufactures paid an import duty of approximately 45 per cent *ad valorem,* which exceeded by more than 100 per cent the duty on the raw materials imported from India for the textile industries of England. More duties were imposed on Indian goods by the British Parliament from 1797 onwards. The eighteen per cent *ad valorem* duty on plain *muslins* and on *muslins* and calicoes, stitched or flowered, went above thirty five per cent *ad valorem* in 1805; and on *dimities* and plain white calicoes the duty was enhanced from forty per cent before 1797 to more than sixty-six per cent in 1805. There was maximum increase of duties in 1813 when an *ad valorem* duty of more than forty per cent was charged on *muslin,* plain, flowered or stitched, and on dimity the duty rose to slightly over eighty-five per cent.[42]

It should be obvious therefore what kind of free trade vis-a-vis India, was being sponsored in their own land by the forces of the English industrial revolution. On the other hand, with the progress of that revolution, the colonial market became a profitable proposition for the selling of cheaper machine-made goods. The plea for

[41] H.R. Ghosal, "Industrial Production in Bengal in the Early Nineteenth Century" in B.N. Ganguli (ed.), *Readings in Indian Economic History,* Proceedings of the First All-India Seminar on Indian Economic History, 1961, Delhi School of Economics, p. 128.

[42] K.K. Datta, *Survey of India's Social Life and Economic Condition in the Eighteenth Century, 1707-1813* (Calcutta, 1961), p. 112.

the removal of restrictions on private trade in India, profusely covered with all the ideological overtones of the doctrine of *laissez faire*, was inextricably connected with that desire for carrying British manufactures to the colonial market. No wonder then that "the opening of the East India trade to private enterprise by the Charter Act of 1813, and the termination of the Napoleonic War in 1814-15, encouraged the import of British machine-made cloths to India."[43] Further

> By the Charter Act of 1813 British imported goods paid 2½ per cent but no corresponding reduction was made in internal duties. Cotton piecegoods in the Bengal Presidency still paid 17½ per cent—5 per cent on the raw material, 7½ per cent on the yarn, 2½ per cent on the plain and 2½ per cent on the dyed cloth. This was in effect an encouragement of English at the expense of local Indian manufacturer. It is no wonder that Indian piecegoods lost their home market so very rapidly in this unequal struggle. The anomaly of foreign goods enjoying a preference in the home market undoubtedly helped to bring this about. The total displacement of Bengal piecegoods in the Indian market and the foreign market has been estimated by Trevelyan at a crore and eighty lakhs. This happened between 1813 and 1833.[44]

Between 1815-16 and 1832-33, the annual value of Bengal cotton goods exports fell from nearly Rs 1.5 crores to Rs 8 lakhs; the annual value of British imports into the country rose from barely Rs 2 lakhs to about Rs 43 lakhs, and that of English twist imported from little more than Rs 1 lakh in 1824-25 to about Rs 24 lakhs in 1832-33. Trevelyan commented: "The trifling quantity of piecegoods which Bengal still exported is for the most part made from English twist."[45] There was a clear admission of the complete collapse of the cotton industry in the Governor-General's report of 1832: "Cotton piece-goods, for so many ages the staple manufacture of India, seem thus for ever lost."[46]

[43] Ghosal, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
[44] Sinha (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 117-18.
[45] *Ibid.*, p. 117.
[46] Ghosal, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

The fate of other industries was not much different.[47] Silk had a short span of growth. But eventually it also had to die out in the face of British competition and the policy of differential duties favouring British manufactures. The initial promise of sugar was frustrated by lack of investment necessary to pull up the standard of production. Saltpetre monopoly was abandoned after 1814. It was no longer profitable to the Company. Private trade also declined since the late twenties of the eighteenth century. The indigenous manufacture of salt was crippled by Company's monopoly and a pernicious tax, which acted against any improvements in the methods of production. Eventually then, "The ardour for free trade continued. The interest of British salt manufacture and shipping trade was paramount and the inexorable economic law was thus allowed to operate."[48] Noteworthy again is the fact that the progress of ship-building in Bengal received a serious blow in 1814, when a ban was imposed on Indian shipping in Indo-British trade. In 1813, there were Bengal ship-owners like Ramdulal Dey, Panchoo Dutta, Ramgopal Mullick, Madan Dutt. But, "Lack of encouragement, advent of steamships, restriction of ship-building, gradually led to the complete disappearance of 'country' shipping in Bengal."[49]

This decline of industries had considerable influence over the course of development of the new Bengali middle class. Faced with so many odds and unequal competition in the sphere of industrial ventures, the native riches went to be invested in land. We have noted already how the distraint regulations subsequent to the Permanent Settlement helped to increase the attractions of landed property as a rent-earning asset. Thus, "There was no appearance of entrepreneurs willing to risk their capital in small industrial enterprises. 'Native' trading capital was diverted to land and to rural money lending."[50] Again, "during these years, 1757-1785, the principal businessmen in Calcutta were mostly higher caste Hindus. .... This class of people gradually disappeared from business at the beginning of the nineteenth century. They withdrew

[47] Sinha (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 119-21.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 121.
[49] *Ibid.*
[50] Narendra Krishna Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, vol. II, (Calcutta, 1962), pp. 224.

from commerce, became owners of Calcutta house property, landowners in rural areas and occasionally appeared as *mahajans* or money-lenders."[51] These were the circumstances in which the fabulous wealth of Ramdulal Dey found its only outlet either in conspicuous unproductive expenditure or in real properties and *zamindaris*.[52] The story of the liquidation of Dwarkanath Tagore's business enterprises in course of only one generation and of the maintenance of the *zamindaris* alone also fits in with this context.[53]

The deindustrialisation, we are talking of, led to the decline of old cities like Murshidabad and Dacca. In its place emerged Calcutta, the city of the *nouveau riche*, that is of imperial administration and commerce, of absentee landlords, money lenders and real estate speculators. The bases of that city were in course of time a little more broadened to include the whole host of professionals and tertiary workers like lawyers, teachers, doctors, administrators and clerks—all those auxiliaries of the developing empire and the need of which impelled Macaulay to be so obdurate about the efficacy of his education policy. None of those professions however could restore to the land what it had lost in the industrial collapse and agricultural chaos brought about by the course of events since 1793. And to use the vocabulary of the father of English *laissez faire*, the prevalence of unproductive over productive labour was the most decisive phenomenon in the circumstances leading to the emergence of the new Bengali middle class and its supposed renaissance pioneered by Rammohun Roy.

(*f*) *Rammohun's Panaceas and Their Anomalies: The Self-Defeat of an Enriching Middle Class.* Indeed, the period between 1800-1833 witnessed the destruction of the industrial economy of Bengal. This was also the most active period of Rammohun's life, of his work in the sphere of religious, social and educational reforms. One wonders then why, in his so many writings touching on such a wide variety of themes, there is little reference to this phenomenon of deindustrialization and the causes responsible for that calamity. It appears that *Sambad Cowmoody*, his own paper gave little importance to the increasing plight of the country's weavers

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 225.

[52] Benoy Ghose, "The Economic Character of the Urban Middle Class in the Nineteenth Century" in Ganguli (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 139-40.

[53] *Ibid.*, pp. 140-42.

and spinners. Some vital questions are thrown up in this sphere; the questions we cannot really square up with what Rammohun wrote about the benefits of expanding British trade, about the identity of his country's interests with the liberal stances of the British industrial revolution, or even about the prospects of his reformed Permanent Settlement. This was the sphere again where the attempt to rationalize the civilizing effects of English rule would turn out to be most untenable.

There is however one observation where Rammohun gave us a glimpse of his reactions to the displacement of industrial workers. In his evidence on the salt monopoly, Rammohun supported the import of cheap and finer English salt. On the ensuing problem of the unemployed Rammohun held that they could be gainfully diverted to "agriculture and other occupations as gardeners, domestic servants and daily labourers."[54] Let us not conclude that the same would be Rammohun's remedy for the growing number of unemployed cotton weavers and spinners. Rammohun made no clear observation on that most critical experience of his times. Moreover, the salt workers were in great misery under Company's monopoly. The benefits that might accrue to consumers in result of imports, were also having Rammohun's priority consideration. But it does at the same time follow that Rammohun was not showing full awareness of 'the redundancy of the cultivating class' Moira so sharply emphasized in 1815; nor did he have the apprehensions that a student of Adam Smith might own as regards the consequences of reallocating labour from industry to such unproductive activities like that of gardeners and domestic servants.

As has been said already that it is not our purpose to derive by implication what Rammohun thought about the general deindustrialization of the economy. Nor is there much point in stressing that either he had not read Adam Smith, or had missed a very basic principle of the institutional and allocational norms of the doctrine of *laissez faire*. But certain anomalies of the whole situation and Rammohun's reactions thereto do come out when we try to piece together some of the most relevant facts of the age. The production economy was in a severe crisis. The working peasantry in agriculture was passing through acute distress, a phenomenon posing great obstacles to the progress of the production system. Industry was

[54] Sarkar (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 82.

facing complete ruin. Moreover, the ruin of the latter was definitely connected with the growing problems of the former; and it was in this process of interaction that the over-all crisis of the production economy came to be so disastrous in its origin and far-reaching in its consequences.

It was in this background that the new middle class and its bases of property and professions were taking shape. The foreign rulers thought of using the magic touch of property to operate a certain principle of productivity. Rammohun also had great confidence in the salutary workings of the new institutions and enrichment to attain the greatest good of the greatest number. His arguments on the modification of the ancient laws of inheritance took care to ensure the conditions of more unencumbered private accumulation. He spoke for free trade, the elimination of the remaining monopolistic privileges of the East India Company, the entry of foreign capital and land revenue reforms to help the process of building more wealth and prosperity.

But the new ways and means of wealth-making were getting increasingly divorced from the logic of survival and growth of the production economy; a phenomenon crystallizing in the course of development of the new middle class and, apropos, in the significant changes in the structure of the economy during the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Rammohun's zeal for alliance with the forces of the English industrial revolution looks particularly naive and misdirected in the face of that problem. And in the light of the subsequent development of the plantation economies, later history can only appreciate the element of self-defeating irony in Rammohun's plea for European colonization to induce foreign capital, skill and enterprise into his motherland.

Indeed, much of what Rammohun said on this subject of European colonisation was closely connected with the problem of capital shortage then being faced by the Agency House business in Bengal. The fact of deindustrialization was changing the pattern and content of the country's trade relations. During the period 1824-30, bullion imports into Bengal fell down very sharply mainly because of the decline in the exports of cotton and the steep rise in British imports of piece-goods into this country. In consequence "India, from the most ancient times rich enough in natural production and manufactures to obtain from the rest of the world a large supply of bullion, has of late seen many of her manufactures swept away by the

overwhelming stream poured into her markets from Great Britain."[55]

The Agency Houses acted as the characteristic unit of private British trade with the East, both China and India. They started as organizations of private trade. The disposal of British exports on a consignment basis through the Agency Houses became an essential method of British sales to the East.[56] The instruments of such "consignment trade" worked out the initial process of destruction of our indigenous industries. The same process however brought about some new problems of finance and investment in the next emerging phase of the Agency House business. The concern for freedom to extend opium and indigo cultivation was very much a creature of this context. Those articles of commercialisation of agriculture inside the colonial frame-work were really the principal means of investment of capital as a medium of remittance to England. The increase in exports of indigo between 1800 and 1830 reached the very high figure of 200 to 300 per cent. The whole of this flourishing business was controlled by only six big Agency Houses.[57]

Thus, within the decadent framework of Company's monopoly, the Agency House business also shaped into another form of quasi-monopolistic business.[58] The extent of speculation was quite rampant among them. Moreover, their stock and resources were subject to the hazards of sudden transfer of capital to Britain. For example, "One of the important causes of the fall of Palmer and Co in 1830, which had a tremendous impact on the business and mercantile relations of Bengal, was the sudden demand from the House of Cockerell and Trail, the 'biggest creditor' of Palmer & Co, to liquidate immediately half of the debt."[59]

Obviously, the plea for European colonisation was necessary to protect the Agency Houses from the mounting crisis of finance and investment. But its bearings on the indigenous economy would depend largely upon the directions in which more and more capital would be employed by the Agency Houses. The enthusiasm Rammohun showed for the grant of more facilities to private traders.

[55]Letter of 15 April, 1835 of Court of Directors (Financial), quoted in Benoy Chowdhury, *Growth of Commercial Agriculture in Bengal*, vol. I (Calcutta, 1964), p. 70.

[56]Chowdhury, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

[57]*Ibid.*, p. 83.

[58]*Ibid.*, p. 104.

[59]*Ibid.*, p. 85.

for European colonization and for the promotion of indigo cultivation under the financial support of Agency Houses failed to reckon again fully with the problem of directing resources to lines of investment conducive to industrial recovery. Already it should have been apparent that the kind of growth of commercial cultivation was exposing peasant producers to excessive indebtedness and thus to loss of their lands. And the demand for these commodities was entirely export oriented. Indigo was meeting largely the remittance gap created by the reversal of market for industrial commodities. All this could have no sound implications for the larger perspectives of sustained economic growth.

Indeed, the activity of the Agency Houses was setting the pattern of expanding British business in colonial Bengal. They went for the direction of resources to meet the remittance gap in conformity with what British industries would prefer as imports from Bengal and what would *ipso facto* be the lines of production permissible under the logic of colonial usefulness. Thus, the kind of commercialisation of agriculture sponsored and financed by the Agency Houses was inseparably connected with the development of colonial resources to suit the needs of the British economy.

Again, the Agency Houses came to stand as the vital link between the peasant producers in the Bengal villages and the external world market. The indigo factories supported by advances from the Agency Houses, were making elaborate use of the "putting out" system and could therefore throw up very little potential for breaking the agrarian economy away from its semi-feudal structure of production. The linkages of this pattern of commercialisation saw that the Agency Houses, both in their original and immediately successive forms "become the principal holders of produce, and are thereby enabled to establish a virtual monopoly, which, by a mutual understanding amongst the body, gives them an uncontrolled power of regulating the rates of exchange, as well as the prices of produce, a state of things which, however beneficial to the parties, is most prejudicial to the general interests of the country."[60] Thus, their instruments of profit maximization were

[60]John Crawfurd, "A Sketch of the Commercial Resources and Monetary and Mercantile System of British India, with suggestions for their improvement, by means of Banking Establishment (1837)" in K.N. Chaudhuri (ed.), *The Economic Development of India under the East India Company*, (1814-1854), (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 285-86.

engrossed in a wide nexus of market imperfections at all levels of the Agency House business.

The supporters of European colonization in India took little cognizance of this emerging scheme of investment-preferences which formed a necessary element of the process of deindustrialization of Bengal. Rammohun's support and arguments in favour of colonization also suffered from the same delusion. Bentinck hoped even for rescuing India's cotton manufacture with the aid of colonized British capital and enterprise. All this however was really counting for a feast without the host. With all the freedom of movement and settlement, the flow of British capital to India would be governed by the structure of incentives and gains inherent in the whole complex of colonial relationship. This was fully in evidence in the later history of the managing agency system of India, the system that had grown up on the collapse of the older Agency Houses.

No wonder then that George Thompson whom Dwarkanath Tagore selected as the teacher for the "infant bourgeoisie" of nineteenth century Bengal, was really an "unconscious agent of Manchester and the Manchester School"[61] and for him "India was essentially a land of raw materials."[62] This will be evident from his following remarks in a Calcutta speech: "Let me ask, if there is any natural obstacle to the supplying of Great Britain with the rice, the cotton, the tobacco, and the sugar, which are now obtained from other nations, most of them altogether foreign, and some of them are eager and impatient competitors in the race of manufacturing industry. I feel confident, that the answer from every gentleman present would be, 'there is none.' Indeed, Sir, your own publications answer for you."[63] Thompson's confidence was not different from Rammohun's earlier identification of his country's interests with the forces of the English industrial revolution. Not that East India Company's old policy of primitive accumulation offered any right alternative. But what new property and its owners would do, depended basically on the structure of work, assets and

[61]N.C. Sinha, *Studies in Indo-British Economy Hundred Years Ago* (Calcutta, 1946), p. 46.

[62]*Ibid.*, p. 47.

[63]Edward Thompson, *Calcutta Addresses*, p. 150, quoted in N.C. Sinha *op. cit.*, p. 49.

preferences in which they went on functioning. The same structure was being ruthlessly changed in a direction contrary to the needs of industrial accumulation. That was very much a creature of the impact of the British industrial revolution on colonial policy.

But with perhaps all the genuineness of his intentions, with all the magnanimity of his love for his people, with all the motives of modernity in his support for the regenerative role of the British in India, Rammohun could not break through the false premises of a perspective which went to believe: "Divine Providence at last, in its abundant mercy, stirred up the English nation . . . to receive the oppressed Natives of Bengal under its protection."[64] That was the anomaly of Rammohun's position, particularly when so much was happening in his environment, in the production economy of his own land to raise doubts about the validity of those premises. The fruits of enlightenment came through a process of defoliation which had blighted all the trees of meaningful social production throughout the land. The new Bengali middle class had to be observers of, nay, even participants in the same process. That was the tragedy of the nineteenth century Bengal Renaissance.

4. A COUNTRY DISINHERITED—THE ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY

Thus we are back to the theme of tragedy noted in the very beginning of this paper. One may say this was inevitable. Rammohun, like any other individual, however great he might have been, had no opportunity to choose his circumstances in history. He wanted to make the best possible use of those circumstances. Did not even Marx speak of British conquest of India as the "unconscious tool of history" to break that country away from her Asiatic past? But Marx, I believe, would never recognize much of progress in a kind of liberal enlightenment going with the severe breakdown of the production economy. His reasoning therefore found it logical to welcome the event of 1857 as the first national revolt of the Indian people against the "unconscious tool of history."

Again it is never our object to minimise the enormous confusion which Rammohun tried to clear up to evolve the first steps of his

[64] J.C. Ghose (ed.), *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, vol. II (Calcutta, 1901). This passage occurs in the *Petition against the Press Regulations, 1833*, p. 288.

country's modernization. We have only tried to emphasize some basic weaknesses inherent in that path of modernization, weaknesses which are so often ignored in our self-consciousness about our modernity, about its origin and the experience of subsequent history. The category of renaissance is known to be linked up, among other things, with a rediscovery of tradition. Rammohun thought and worked on a magnificent scale for such a suitable rediscovery for his times. The tradition was no doubt embedded in Vedas, in Vedanta, in Sanskrit and Persian classics and Rammohun devoted great care to discover from them what would be relevant to his life and his times.

But no Renaissance can really come through without enlivening as well what is of significance in the tradition of work and production of the country. A large part of our tradition was undoubtedly contained in the mores of work and life of our working peasantry, in the crafts, skills and enterprise of our industrial activity which had earlier held out so much attraction for the "civilizing" English and other European nations. Not that a transformation could be painless; nor should one say all this out of any pure nostalgia for the older modes of production. The modes might necessarily change, but not without new modes to crystallize the mind and energy for advancing social production. This is where the identity and responses of the new Bengali middle class had gone seriously wrong from its very origins of modern history. We have said before that the trees were blighted; there were no signs of planting anew. Rammohun's search for tradition and modernity was also merged in the overwhelming constraints of that world of mistaken identity and responses.

Rammohun must have thought of surmounting this problem with the help of new education opening up the potential for more fruitful professions and enterprise. That made him so zealous a campaigner for an "enlightened system of instruction, embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry and anatomy, with other useful sciences." But "Divine Providence" that had stirred up "the English nation to receive the oppressed Natives of Bengal under its protection" would work its "invisible hand" in this sphere as well. Consequently, Rammohun's ideal of education was swamped by the Macaulayean strategy of training up natives with the capacity not only for giving *salams* to Britishers, but also for purchasing suitable quantities of British manufactures.

We are not ready for the exercise of historical hind-sight to speculate upon what else might have been possible in the development of nineteenth century Bengal. For us, the inevitability of all this, even if it was so, cannot take the load off from the burden of the tragedy that was the necessary consequence. The full sense of that tragedy, its complete realisation should help us to prevent perhaps the originally inevitable from becoming a perpetual course of our life and culture, a problem that has not at all left us even after twenty-five years of independence. And it is with the same sense of tragedy and against the background of our own contemporaneity that we can look for the meaning of Rammohun's deep sadness, we mentioned earlier in this paper. To be great in his life and in his times, one can humanly perceive, Rammohun might have felt that sadness to be quite inevitable again. As for so many other things, we are grateful to Tagore for suggesting to us the importance of this aspect of Rammohun's demeanour and personality.

A BIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC IDEAS OF RAMMOHUN ROY

BARUN DE

I. THE RAMMOHUN LEGEND

During the last one and a half centuries Rammohun Roy has commanded considerable respect, amounting to veneration. This is the result of a mythology which has been created by accretions of liberalism. These have been published since his death till Independence, and are still the stock-in-trade of modern liberals of the Nehru school. The mythology started by fervent believers in the validity of the Bengal Renaissance, beginning from Kissory Chand Mitra and Pearychand Mitra; transfigured in the philosophical generalisations of Acharya Brajen Seal (vide *Rammohun the Universal Man*) and in the poetic and spiritualist history of Rabindranath Tagore (vide *Bharat Pathik Rammohun*) and then translated into historical prose by Brahmo followers of Tagore (such as Amal Home and J. K. Majumdar) during the 1930s and 1940s.

The actual apotheosisation of Rammohun began in England and in New England (USA) among the Unitarians, who were still eager for India's conversion from idolatry to Christian monotheism.

The writer is most grateful to Dr. Rajat Ray of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library for assistance in writing of the paper. His gratitude is also due to Prof. Asok Sen and Dr. Sumit Sarkar who participated in the clarification of his ideas.

People who nurture this hope have always considered Rammohun as a fetish for the future, a fetish that is far from the reality of Rammohun's robust faith in Upanishadic religion. But the fetish of Unitarianism has not been abandoned by the Anglicised element in contemporary Brahmo orthodoxy. After his death in a Unitarian household in Bristol, Lant Carpenter (*Review of the labours, opinions and character of Rajah Rammohun Roy,* 1833) saw Rammohun as a herald of the breakdown of Hindu orthodoxy and of religious stubbornness against Westernisation. This apotheosisation was carried to its peak in the mid-nineteenth century by two spinster English women—Miss Mary Carpenter, the daughter of Lant Carpenter (*The Last Days in England of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 1866), and Miss Sophia Dobson Collet (*Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 1900).

In India, the context of Westernisation heralding a new age was set in the 1840s when there was a brief flirtation between the young Bengal radicals ('the Chuckerbuttee faction') of the Society for Propagation of General Knowledge (led by Tarachand Chakravarti, who had been an intimate of Rammohun), the Tagores whom Young Bengal had earlier criticised and who were the direct heirs of Rammohun's tradition, and the British free-trade businessmen and lawyers such as Turton and Theobald.[1] Kissory Chand Mitra, who sympathised with these trends, wrote in 1845 in Volume IX of the *Calcutta Review,* a seminal statement of the Rammohun myth. For instance, on the latter's literary style, he comments in patent hyperbole:

> Though he had received his early Bengali education from a gurumahoasay, yet he not only attained, by dint of self-study, a knowledge of Bengali—which, to say the least, was unrivalled by his contemporaries—but afterwards brought the language itself to a very high stage of improvement. We confess that it is as yet destitute of a literature, yet it must be admitted that it is far more adapted to be a living *national* language (than) Sanskrit,

[1] A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal, 1818-1835* (Leiden, 1965), p. 75; S. R. Mehrotra, *The Emergence of the Indian National Congress* (Delhi, 1971), pp. 28-29.

so-called because of its being a *finished* language....All this was known to Rammohun Roy. He therefore undertook to create a Literature in Bengali and his exertions were crowned with a success that exceeded the most sanguine expectation. The Bengali has been so vastly improved by his careful cultivation, by his taste and genius, that it can be now successfully devoted to the communication of Western knowledge to the children of this great country.[2]

On the other hand, there has always also been a tradition of Rammohun critique in which the wheel has come full circle from 1822 to 1972: from the slanderous attacks of Harimohan Tagore of Pathuriaghata (in *Pasandapidana*) and of Bhabanicharan Bandopadhyay of the *Samachar Chandrika* to Prof R.C. Majumdar's anti-establishment feelings. This is based on the distaste felt by Sanskritisers to Westernising trends in Bengal life, which have drawn inspiration from the image of Rammohun as that of a figure of progressive force, of attack on mediaevalist ritualism and on social obscurantism, of the desire for secularisation of literary style and female uplift. The latter is an image which is accepted by scholars who identify themselves with politically "progressive," i.e. secular, socialist and democratic movements, and consequently the latter image has been unquestioningly accepted by the public at large. At the beginning of the year 1972, which the Government of India chose to treat as his birth bicentenary, Prof R.C. Majumdar was given an opportunity by the Asiatic Society of Bengal to deliver two lectures (ostensibly the first B.B. Majumdar Memorial Lectures) to attack the Government's decision, and to predict a spate of

[2] In fact, as has been shown by Dr. S.K. De in his *Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (1757-1857) (1919; republished Calcutta, 1962) Rammohun was never such a seminal figure in the modernisation of Bengali as Kissory Chand made him out. In 1830, just after Rammohun left for England, Kashiprosad Ghose in an article in the *Calcutta Literary Gazettee* had referred to Mritunjoy Vidyalankar (author of the *Rajavali*), Haraprashed Roy (author of *the Purusapariksa*), and Falix Carey's abridgment of Goldsmith's *History of England* as the foundation of Bengali prose. In general, Kissory Chand's hyperbole started a trend of Rammohun-adulation which has been both followed and criticised till the present day.

Rammohun-eulogy from those who wished to identify with it (vide *On Rammohun Roy,* Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1973). This slim volume has quite usefully exposed the element of what Dr. Majumdar was the first to call "Rammohun-myth" in the contemporary popular evaluation of the Raja; especially, Lecture II "Raja Rammohun Roy's contribution to the Renaissance in Bengal in the Nineteenth Century." Note his comment that "The object of this lecture is not to review the life or make an assessment of the personality of Raja Rammohun Roy," but that he is estimating the Raja's "contribution to the all-round development of Bengal in the 19th century." It appears that Dr. Majumdar has not identified the Raja's opinions or objectives by reference to the Raja's own writings, which are after all the primary sources, but he takes the opinions of Kissory Chand Mitra or Sivanath Sastri, or the contemporary historian Dr. Nemaisadhan Bose as the authority for judging the Raja's significance. Having negatively demonstrated the weak factual basis of these authorities, he triumphantly proceeds to attack the Raja's reputation as well as the stereo-types of the Raja. Whether his attack on contemporary historians may be justifiable is a matter of taste; but it must be said that Dr. Majumdar's shafts against the Raja's importance as a precursor of Indian liberal nationalism are no more accurately aimed than the mythology which he rebuts.

The validity of the liberal and semi-mythological interpretation of Rammohun Roy can be examined from one angle; i.e. his secular thought. It is difficult to disentangle Rammohun's spiritual from his secular thought; the essential element of rationalism in Rammohun made him relate spiritual matters to social life, and relate social behaviour to the traditional Hindu idea of *Dharma* (cf. his *Chari Prasner Uttar,* 1821). In the sort of study we suggest, only that lement of secular thought need be emphasised where this interrelation is least marked, i.e. his views on political and economic matters. The writer does not have the necessary competence to study the Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian texts, which Rammohun reinterpreted and reformulated. Without such knowledge it would be difficult to construct a psycho-biographical model of Rammohun's behaviour and thought on such matters. At least a survey of his strictly secular thought might lead to the construction of a framework, which can be further approximated to reality, when more fundamental work has been done, on the texts which Rammohun studied

in their 18th century variants; and on the biographical sources, which are, as in the case of so much else with Rammohun, elusive and scanty.

Let us first briefly summarise some of the formative influences on his thought, in so far as they can be reconstructed from the elusive and scanty sources.

II. SOCIAL CONTEXT OF RAMMOHUN'S IDEAS

Childhood and youth in the late eighteenth century. Rammohun came of a devout Vaishnava family, but his mother Tarini Devi was originally a Sakta who embraced the religion of her husband. As a child, Rammohun was highly literate with a marked Vaishnava bent in ecstacy and piety, which he was later to condemn on the part of the ordinary Hindus; he was perhaps affected by his mother's tensions between her parental religion and her later domineering Vaishnava religiosity, and by his own three marriages in childhood. It is certain that he retained an abiding dislike for blood rituals; and his concern for the females was not common in a polygamous society. Rammohun seemed to have travelled widely. It is not certain whether he studied in Tibet, Patna and Varanasi. But his connection with Hariharananda Tirthaswami, a Tantrik with whom he was closely associated in Rangpur, was productive of his intimate acquaintance with Hindu philosophy. At the same time, he was trained in parental zamindari business, while his father was profiting from the Decennial Settlement. In the 1790s he made a trip to Patna and Banaras, and returned by 1800 to money-lending business at Jorasanko in North Calcutta. By 1800, Rammohun's dual worlds of religion and business had definitely been established. In this respect, he was a true member of his family, which had successfully combined business with piety from the intervening period between the decline of the Mughals and the rise of the British.

"Respectability" of Rammohun's social background. It is important to note in this connection that Rammohun belonged to a 'respectable' family, whose social rise was a relatively recent phenomenon. His family background had been based on the lower rungs of the Nawabi revenue bureaucracy, on land exploitation in collaboration with the East India Company and on the collapse of the political power of the local regional Rarhi lower castes, such

as the Sadgopas of Gopabhum or the Bagdis of Chitwa Barda.[3] Rammohun's respectability was partly gained from his father's and brother's participation in the Company's destruction of the old Mughal economy and its last rural gentry. This explains most of his disaffiliation from the Mughal tradition and his attachment to the Permanent Settlement by the British. The fact that his relatives were themselves ruined must have been ascribed by him to the rules of the game of exploitation of landed property and to the process of decay of the earlier landed families which had lived by the same rules of the game. Rammohun's views show no sympathy for the lower caste gentry of "Goallabhum" and Chitwa Barda, the Sadgopas and the Bagdis, whose rise has been chronicled by Hiteranjan Sanyal and Aniruddha Ray and who had collapsed under the racking revenue assessments of the 18th century Company officials.[4] Rammohun was a beneficiary of the destructiveness as well as neo-stability of the Permanent Settlement.

His contacts with English 'gentlemen' of Fort William College and Sadar Dewani Adalat, gave him in addition a strong base of operations in Calcutta, and very possibly led him to read H.T. Colebrooke's comments on the distinction between ancient Hinduism and its modern degenerate form, as well as Colebrooke's *Remarks on the Husbandry and Internal Commerce of Bengal*. His wealth and estates were gained first from money-lending in Calcutta and then from his emoluments as the private Dewan of first Woodforde (in Dacca and Murshidabad), and then Digby. It was thus that he gained the title of Dewanji used for him in religious discourses. He was not accepted by the Company as an official Dewan; yet he served

[3] The estates of Rammohun Roy's father, Ramkanta Roy, included *Mahals* granted to him in "Goallabhum" or "Gopabhum" north-east of Burdwan, the base of the previously powerful landed Pallava Gopa and Sadgopa peasant castes, and Bhursut to the south-east of Burdwan with its Sanskrit learning. Rammohun's elder brother Juggomohun held some *parganas* in Chitwa Barda, the centre of the late seventeenth century Bagdi rebellion against Aurangzeb under Sobha Singh. R.P. Chanda and J.K. Majumdar, *Selections from the Official Letters and Documents Relating to the Life of Raja Rammohun Roy*, vol. I, (1791-1830) (Calcutta, 1938) nos. 21, 42, 46 and 47.

[4] Aniruddha Ray, "Saptadash Shatabdir Suba Banglar Shesh Bidroha," *Itihasa*, Dacca Itihas Parishat, fourth year, 2nd-3rd number, B.S. 1377, pp. 104-139; Hiteranjan Sanyal, "Continuities of Social Mobility in Traditional and Modern Society in India: Two Case Studies of Caste Mobility in Bengal," *Journal of Asian Studies*, February 1971.

Englishmen in different districts of Bengal and Bihar in a private capacity, learning to be a subject of the British Empire and thus learning to claim English equality with the Company's officials. He found an outlet to affronts to his racial pride by petitioning the Governor-General in 1809, a tradition of petitioning the highest authorities of the Empire which was later built into his political thought. He was careful to underline his 'respectability' in this petition to Minto, and his respectability was mentioned also in early press notices about him in Evangelical newspapers from 1816 to 1818.[5]

Trip to Bhutan, 1814-1816. Not much is known about his career in service before he settled in Calcutta. He was not mentioned in the Company's official records of the Bhutan border demarcation mission, but was treated with honour by the Devaraja of Bhutan. Mufakhkharul Islam's hypothesis in *Itihasa* (journal of East Pakistan) that Rammohun Roy in Rangpur had contacts with descendants of the peasant rebels of the 18th century is plausible but not proven. Rammohun Roy was to mention later in a letter to a British friend, his ambivalence to British rule in his youth. Apparently this ambivalence gave way to a more positive acceptance of British rule during his career in Calcutta.

Rammohun's group in Calcutta from 1816. By 1816 he had finally settled in Calcutta as a leisured gentleman able to devote full-time attention to reformist activities. His *Atmiya Sabha* was criticised by the anti-Rammohun faction (vide *Pasandapidana*) as a group of rich gentry, who were led like sheep (*Gaddarika-balikabat*) by a pseudo-intellectual. His eulogists also referred to his wealth and respectability; he himself did not deny the *coterie* imputation, but dismissed it as irrelevant. This group, comprised of new enterprising landlords, pleaders and publicists, were not necessarily all beneficiaries of the Permanent Settlement. However, their wealth had increased by collaboration with British rule. They were prone to ideas which were dependent on British dominance, but the

[5] *Government Gazettee* (Calcutta, February 1816), *Missionary Register* (London, 1816), and *Calcutta Journal* (October, 1818) quoted in J.K. Majumdar, *Raja Rammohun Roy and Progressive Movements in India* (Calcutta, 1941) and to the Rt Hon'ble, Lord Minto, Governor-General, etc. etc. the Humble petition of Ram Mohun Roy (cf. Brajendranath Banerjee, *Ramamohana Raya*, in Bengali, 4th edition, B.S. 1353, Sahitya Salhak Charitamala, 16, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta).

dominance that they wanted, was of liberalism and free trade. So the interests of Rammohun's group of friends were contradictory to the Company's restriction system, but were not contradictory to greater Parliamentary control.

Gentry politics in Burdwan during Digby's collectorship in the 1820s. At the same time Rammohun Roy continued to be active in the local politics of Burdwan. Rammohun's father and elder brother had been ruined by Maharaja Tejchandra of Burdwan in the late 1790s. When Digby, who relied heavily for revenue accounting expertise on his old Dewan, Rammohun, was posted to Burdwan after his return to India, he brought Rammohun's son Ramaprasad Roy into his office. The latter and the son of Rammohun's friend, Rajiblochan Roy, used their office to carry on a faction-political war against Maharaja Tejchandra's *zamindari* officials. In this faction-vendetta, Dwarkanath Tagore, also a talukdar of Burdwan, took the side of Digby and the Roys. However, in the long run, the new gentry's aspirations to local political power in Burdwan were counteracted by the weight of the Presidency higher officials being thrown on the Maharaja's side.[6] Nevertheless these aspirations continued to find vent through the 19th century, as evidenced by the Jal Pratapchand controversy.

Agency houses and free trade. In Calcutta, where his political activities were much more successful, Rammohun established links with private traders like J.S. Buckingham, who started the *Calcutta Journal,* publicists like Sandford Arnot and business agents like Rickards. His money was invested in the Agency House of Mackintosh and Company. Prof. Salahuddin Ahmed in his *Social Policy and Social Change in Bengal, 1818-1835*, suggests that these contacts of Rammohun represented free trade interests, which were opposed to the Company's monopoly. Rammohun himself was one of the very few Indians who joined in the formation of one of the first political associations in India, the Commercial and Patriotic Association of the 1820s which was sponsored by East Indians, notably Rickards. Rammohun's first political activities were affiliated to the free trade liberalism of the agency houses and private lawyers. This cause was taken up by the newspaper, *Bengal Hurkaru* of Sutherland, who became the publicist of the Buckingham School. The *Hurkaru* followed the *Calcutta*

[6] Chanda and Majumdar, *op. cit.*, part III.

Journal's tradition of considering Rammohun to be the vanguard of Indian liberal reform till 1832.

Rammohun's role as a publicist and propagator of western education. Rammohun was thus an intellectual intermediary between European and native society in Calcutta. Though, as R.C. Majumdar has shown, he was not among the group that founded the Hindu College, which represented Hindu orthodox response to English education, his contribution to the spread of Western ideas is undeniable. His Anglo-Hindu Seminary was more strictly a Westernising educational institution, and it had Hare's patronage, practically as much as the Hindu College had. Rammohun's pamphlets and petitions began the trend of politicisation of the Calcutta intelligentsia which was carried on by Derozio and David Hare. However, by 1829-30 Rammohun had been left behind by the younger generation; on the one hand he was criticised as a trimmer and moderate by Young Bengal,[7] and on the other, when he gave evidence about the Bengal ryots in England, the *Hurkaru* stopped supporting him and criticised him as a "mere zamindar."[8] It was in these circumstances that Rammohun died in England in 1833.

III. RAMMOHUN'S IDEAS

Thoughts on women. Rammohun's social ideas had an obviously Western bias, as contrasted with the ideas of his more orthodox opponents. Nevertheless some of his ideas were not unprecedented in Hindu society. His most radical ideas related to the position of women in respectable society, and here his early emotions concerning blood rituals might have been a driving power quite as effective as his mature and rational thoughts which came to fruition in contact with the West. He emphasized the degraded condition of womenfolk, due to modern legal corruptions. His interpretation reminds one of early European sociological writings of the 18th century, but was not necessarily derived from European thought.

On the role of the Government. Similarly his political attitudes were not without precedents among traditional interpreters of Hindu law, the Pandits. He was in favour of State interference in

[7] See quotation from Derozio in Salahuddin Ahmed's paper in this volume; p. 100.

[8] See Asok Sen's paper in this volume; pp. 105-135.

the interpretation of law for the purposes of desirable social change. This need not be identified with an imitation of Benthamism, but rather with the traditional Hindu attitude of leaving legal interpretation to the Supreme jurisdiction of the Ruler, whoever the ruler might be. This attitude had led 18th century Pandits to rewrite the Shastras for the benefit of the Company's judges.[9] Here Rammohun was not departing from 18th century Indian tradition. Where he departed from tradition, was in relying on Colebrooke's English translation, as much as he relied on the texts themselves.

His attitude to the British State. Like other legal interpreters of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, conservative or moderately reformist, Rammohun accepted British Rule as a *fait accompli*. He went further and historically rationalised it, reminding the British rulers in the petition on the Press Regulation of 1822 that Bengalis had offered flowers to their gods, at the time of Wellesley's victories. Rammohun was no more pro-British than any of his contemporaries. Nor we need think that his contemporaries were any more in favour of the current ruling class than Hindu Pandits had been under the Mughal rulers.[10] However, he was more consistent than those Pandits, since he accepted British Rule as a regenerative force.

Also he was the first of the Indian legal interpreters to appeal to British Parliament, against the Company for the institution of more rapid social and economic change. Even here, he was in the line of 18th century Indian envoys from Shah Alam at Allahabad, and from Raghoba to the British Crown who appealed against the Company to the Crown. But what made Rammohun a significant 19th century Indian was his rationalisation of Indian petitions with the Whig philosophy of the Reform Bill era, which he espoused. This linkage of Parliamentary control with social reform, created the tradition of 19th century Indian liberalism. However, Rammohun's work was successful only because it was carried on in the 1830s and 1840s by his principal co-adjutors, Dwarkanath and Prasanna Kumar Tagore, and built into the British Indian Association's political premises. In this sense Rammohun is a link with

[9] J.D.M. Derrett, *Religion, Law and the State in India* (London, 1968); R.S. Sharma, "Ancient Values and Modern Reforms in the Nineteenth Century Hindu Society" in Bisheswar Prasad (Edited), *Ideas in History* (Delhi, 1968).

[10] Dev Raj Chanana, "The Sanskritist and Indian Society," *Enquiry*, New Series, vol. II, no. 2, (Monsoon, 1965).

the 18th century, and not necessarily a break with the past. His originality lay in his remarkably international vision.

Rammohun and despotism. From his close acquaintance with contemporary political events on the international scene, he derived a pervasive fear of despotic authority. He constantly justified his petitions and his appeals to Parliamentary good sense, by emphasising the need to mobilise public opinion against arbitrary use of powers by local officials. But his sharpest strictures against despotism were reserved for the Muslim power in India. While he was not particularly critical of the Mughals specifically, he constantly compared Muslim rule unfavourably with British Liberalism and peaceful rule. This comparison may, or may not have been tongue-in-cheek; but it certainly was the first in the lineage of a Bengali enlightened Hindu postulating a model of "Muslim Tyranny,"[11] which Mill had immortalised in his *History of British India.* This tradition continued till the times of R.C. Dutt as well as that of Moreland.

Rammohun's conception of economic prosperity. True to the premises sketched above, Rammohun believed in unfettered power for enterprising landlords. His criticisms of British rule were similar to criticisms of arbitrary authority and despotism which were made by all English Whigs in Parliament in the 18th century. Like the Whigs, he believed in the self correcting authority of the natural landlord over his subjects on the soil. Like them also, he believed in their capacity to improve the conditions of the peasantry and also the need for injection of new doses of British mercantile capitalist enterprise. It was in this context that, quite consistently with his logic, he supported the Jorasanko Tagores in their acceptance of the need for European colonisation.

His appreciation of economic circumstances in Bengal. Rammohun was criticised by the *Bengal Hurkaru* for misreading the economic situation of the ryots, who under the Permanent Settlement were subject to the *laissez faire* principles of British land ownership, but were also doubly subject (in an "overdetermined" sort of way) to a type of land-lordism which was sheltered by the state and could thus take the form of rack-renting landed authority. He was also criticised by his orthodox opponent, the *Samachar Chandrika,* for neglecting the interests of the traditional landlords.

[11] See Tanika Sarkar's article in *Presidency College Magazine,* 1972.

On both counts, his ideas seem to be more consistent with the liberal premises of imperial and metropolitan free trade than with conditions in Bengal.[12] In these circumstances, his economic ideas were not in keeping with the economic trends as they actually developed in early 19th century India, which became increasingly colonialised as an economy peripherally dependent on a British mercantile bourgeoisie, which had shaken off mercantile capitalism and was becoming industrially capitalist. So his ideas failed to have any impact when, after his death, (*a*) the Managing Agency System operated as a strong pillar of raw material export from India to Britain, or at best as a financial instrument of Indian subsidiary processing; and on the other hand; (*b*) the peasant economy of Bengal became more and more alienated from its own 'production principle' under these new stresses.

IV. EVALUATION OF RAMMOHUN'S IDEAS

It has been seen that Rammohun's premises and social context created the consistency within which his strictly secular ideas were developed. It has also been seen that this consistency was in keeping with the main trends in the premises of the culture-brokers of Calcutta in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. However, Rammohun in his acceptance of the full logic of liberalisation, was distinct from the Tarkapanchananas or Vidyalankars, who confined themselves to maintaining contemporary Hindu orthodoxy. A second element of novelty was his clear acceptance of the methods of publicisation of knowledge and of its use for limited reformist political activity (which became common with French Revolutionary propaganda, and then with the English Whigs of the pre-Reform Act era). Yet this political and economic thought hardly presented any solution to the problems of any group in India, beyond that of the *literati* and cultured elite of the capital city.

Hence his ideas could be idolised by an urban middle class in the 19th and 20th centuries, who were concerned only with their own rise to political and social power, without any serious affiliation to the broad majority of the population in the countryside. As such, Rammohun's political and economic ideas merit veneration only by those who worship the history of India's liberalism. Yet,

[12] See Asok Sen's paper in this volume, pp. 103-135.

it is also possible to place them in the stark perspective of the failure of the Indian liberal bourgeoisie to solve the problem of mass poverty, which has been created by the imperialism from which Rammohun could hardly break away. This is a perspective which is as dark as that of 18th century India against which Rammohun has been glorified by Brajendranath Seal, Rabindranath Tagore, Susobhan Chandra Sarkar and others. In the last resort, the *Hurkaru* had a point in 1832, when it said about his evidence to the House of Commons Committee: "One must be hammer or anvil in this world," says an old Spanish proverb; "Rammohun Roy, it is clear, belongs to the hammers and . . . is taken for the anvils."

This is true of all path-breaking liberals down till the present day.

RAMMOHUN ROY AND SOCIAL REFORM

CHARLES H. HEIMSATH

In exploring the relationship between Rammohun Roy and social reform in India we are in the broadest sense opening the topic of the place of the intellectual in the modernisation of society. And a popular and disturbing topic this is today—at least among intellectuals themselves! There is a frightening awareness in a country like India, and in the West to a lesser extent, that social changes are taking place without any intellectual guidance: they are autonomous creations resulting from economic and political power given to the "masses" (in Ortega y Gasset's sense).[1]

Persons capable of articulating the ideas that characterise a society's movement, if they don't provide guidance, at the very least strive to predict the future on the basis of clear perceptions of the current scene. The perplexed body of Indian intellectuals today is apparently powerless to affect the changes taking place around them, except occasionally in a diluted way through an unusually successful government programme. Aware that big things are happening in India, they realise nevertheless that the scale is too vast for anyone's perception; so prediction is out, except in technical categories such as demography or the spread of computerisation. Thus, intellectuals, or the intelligentsia, regard wistfully the contrasting posture adopted by Rammohun Roy.

I

Roy confidently surveyed the social scene in early 19th century

[1]Ortega y Gasset, *Revolt of the Masses* (New York: Norton, 1932).

Bengal and felt no hesitation in identifying the ills of the "patient," India, which lay, so to speak, in his intellectual lap. Having located the trouble—the contamination of the original Hindu religious ideas by centuries of ignorant and sometimes vile accretions—Roy with splendid assurance provided a "cure," which he was confident would serve as a guide to the future leaders of the society. He prescribed liberal doses of reason applied selectively to India's Vedic heritage, so as to highlight monotheistic, non-idolatrous precepts and ethical reinforcements to the scriptural base of his religion. Roy thus set out to "awaken" his countrymen from "their dream of error."[2]

India today does not bear examining so easily, refuses to lie prostrate and be viewed pathologically by any self-proclaimed healer of its soul. Today's spokesmen for the old Enlightenment tradition —Indian, and foreign as well—still go through the verbal motions of taking the pulse and deploring the condition of the "patient," and then prescribing utilitarian solutions, more technocratic than spiritual. Some are morally concerned men and women, others are demonstrating their social scientific grasp of the problems facing the society. But who is listening? Who is following?

A reasoned appeal to his fellow men, in the style of the European Enlightenment, came easily for Rammohun in the social context of the 19th century, where men of learning were expected to provide philosophical leadership for the rest of society. The reformers who followed Roy continued to assume that men were listening when they castigated existing conditions and defined the appearance of a reformed India of the future. The truth, they felt sincerely, would prevail; it needed merely to be enunciated fearlessly. Roy's Brahmo Samaj, while acting as a refuge for rebellious and frustrated intellectuals who needed congregational support for their aberrations from established customs, also held aloft an open, if naive, offer to all Indians to foresake their erring and dissolute ways and return to the truth. In the 19th and in the 20th century, until Gandhi opened his dialogue with the masses and for the first time on a national scale evoked a response, the belief persisted among educated people that men and women of philosophical vision could lead India into the modern world. This certainty, which Jawaharlal Nehru shared to an extent, gave intellectuals an important place in the social

[2]*The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy* (Allahabad, 1906), p. 5.

history of their times. The people at large had not begun to be heard, and therefore the intellectual leaders found unchallenged opportunities to voice the people's aspirations. Today we envy their stronghearted confidence, but we also question their effectiveness as a "modernising elite" (in contemporary social scientific jargon).

II

Before confronting more directly the sociological problem of elite group influence on modernisation, it will be desirable to depict modern Indian social reform, which at least until the First World War was synonymous with modernisation. (After the War modernisation also took on popular meanings which overshadowed but didn't eliminate, social reform, e.g. industrialisation, education, democracy.) Social reform in modern India at first meant the transformation of individual lives in the direction of rational and humane standards of belief and behaviour, as opposed to community attachment to customary rules whose moral content supposedly derived from transcendental sanctions. Modern social reform movements can be distinguished from those which had earlier often refreshed Hinduism and Islam, on the basis of their separate derivations of values: on the one hand, from individual free inquiry, and on the other, from spiritual authority, often of a *guru* or *pir* whose humanitarian precepts rested on intuition and whose influence depended entirely on religious attraction.[3] India's modern social reformers were those who advocated alterations in social customs, on the basis of reasoned approaches to religion and morality, which would necessitate breaks with traditionally accepted patterns of behaviour. They recognised that India could not become a modern nation without philosophical and social transformations that would support

[3] The author has discussed the contrast between modern social reform and the perennial efforts to refresh Hinduism through movements based on intuitive moral appeals and *bhakti* in his *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform* (Princeton, Princeton University Press; Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1964), chapter II. Amitabha Mukherjee carried the discussion of the traditional reformist movements within Hinduism much farther in his *Reform and Regeneration in Bengal 1774-1823* (Calcutta, Rabindra Bharati University, 1968), p. 128f. Mukherjee pointed out that Rammohun Roy's rational approach to religious reform, devoid of emotion, precluded any popular acceptance of his religious beliefs and practices. p. 201.

modern political and economic institutions. Other modern nations had also experienced such transformations. India's 19th century social reformers were the first spokesmen for India's modern culture, however one may wish to define that term.

The maturing of the social reform movement at the end of the 19th century raised the individual's recasting of his own behaviour to the level of ethical imperatives for the nation. A reconstructed nationalism demanded a moral upheaval of the whole society that would bring about a vigorous mass culture capable of placing India on a par in all respects with modern states. After the First World War Gandhi gave impetus to a nationalism that incorporated social regeneration; by welding the Indian people into a more morally independent, cohesive nation than they had ever been before, he advanced the cause of modernity. Gandhi was a thoroughly modern social reformer and political leader: he led Indians out of narrow community and family involvements into broader participation in national society for the purpose of mobilising the corporate strength of an entire people. His specific goals, which included spinning, and cow protection and prohibition, were not "modern" in the sense of "Western," but they were "modern" in the sense of reasoned appeals that created mass social consciousness, empathy among Indians of all communities.

Until the Gandhian Congress pre-empted all other national leadership, at least for Hindus, the social reformers, whether or not they acknowledged it, followed the guidelines of Rammohun Roy in carrying the intellectual burden of advancing modernity. Ignoring for a moment the disputes over goals and strategies that characterised the social reform movement, one can distinguish three touchstones of conviction shared by all the reformers—and by many more who claimed to oppose social reform but actually encouraged it. First, rationalism. Roy's profoundest contribution to 19th century intellectual life. Who speaks here?—"There is an innate faculty existing in the nature of mankind that in case any person of sound mind, before or after assuming the doctrines of any religion, makes an enquiry into the nature of the principles of religious doctrines . . . he will be able to distinguish truth from untruth. . . ."[4] It was Roy, intoning the 18th century European philoso-

[4]Rammohun Roy, quoted in Saumyendranath Tagore, *Raja Rammohun Roy* (New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 1966), p. 10.

phers' challenge to established authority and their formula for future human advancement. India's modern culture, along with the social reform movement, rises from this new faith in man's "innate" capacity to reason, whether in religious and social affairs or in economic and political and scientific pursuits.

Second, humanism, ignited by man's spiritual perceptions and fuelled by reasoned awareness of social utility. Roy's belief in individual worth was doubtless kindled by his religious studies, which included Islam and Christianity. He modernised the universal human claim to dignity by clothing it in the Benthamite jargon of "comfort" and "happiness." Roy's castigation of the inhuman treatment of women and the lower castes and his plea for higher ethical standards among Hindus formed the basic tenets of the reformers' programme in the modern era.

A third touchstone for reformers may be crucial in precluding a violent revolution, and in guiding India's development towards patterns not known elsewhere in the world. This facet was what later reformers called "reform from within," or the application of new ideas to old values. Roy, who eschewed conversion to Christianity and managed to blend Indian and Western modes of life, exemplified this remarkable dimension. Whether a Keshub Chunder, or a Dayananda, or a Tilak, or a Ranade, or a Gandhi, reformers of various dispositions—and their intellectual opponents as well—selected some Indian traditions as vehicles for transforming the others. Roy provided one formula, the Brahmo Samaj, and many more styles of reform followed, each suited to its own time, locale, and the predispositions of its leaders. Reformers, however Westernised, seldom failed to phrase their lessons in the manner of Rammohun, who quoted a respected Indian authority when he wanted his point to sink in. Vasishtha, he said, advised: "If a child says something reasonable it should be accepted, but if Brahma Himself says something unreasonable it should be discarded as a piece of straw."[5] Roy's decision to discard much of what the pandits insisted were essential Brahmanic Hindu practices resulted from reasoned criticism, but he managed to find orthodox authorities for the main goals he cited for a reformed society. It was impossible to recast the endless byways of Hindu thought and custom to conform to reason; it was simpler to scrap everything except the Vedas

[5]Quoted *Ibid.*, p. 14.

and Upanishads, which could be more easily reinterpreted to suit immediate social needs.

Rationalism, humanism, and "reform from within" have been criteria for all modernising movements in India. Roy's influence on the social reformers in particular stemmed from the example of his chosen instrument for social transformation, the Brahmo Samaj. Rammohun Roy was a man of religion; but one is not sure, after reading biographies and his own writings, whether he was a devoted spirit or an Enlightenment rationalist who posited God's existence because he was convinced of His truth. He made his name through controversies and expositions on religion and philosophy, and he set up the Brahmo Samaj to consolidate and spread new religious tenets and forms of worship which he and his followers thought would help regenerate Indian life. Though not a social reform body, the Samaj's members and associates from Roy's time onward included the most vigorous social reformers in eastern India. They agitated for governmental support for social changes, and they lived openly reformed lives. The influence of their movement, through fluctuations of leadership and organisational splits, lay in its religious character.

Religious reform equalled social reform. This legacy of Roy set a powerful example for reformers everywhere, many of whom adopted the religious samaj form for promoting social change. Secular reformist crusaded, usually for legislative social enactments or caste reform, succeeded in drawing adherents, but alterations in personal and family lives in India required revising religious beliefs and practices. Roy foresaw this connection, as Gandhi did a century later; Indians could not leave religion behind but needed its continued support—were perhaps in special need of it—when they broke community regulations and charted new courses for themselves and their families. Religious beliefs and practices, it should be stressed, were reformed, not ignored, in India's modernisation.

Among the specific religious prescriptions offered by Roy for the reform of Brahmanism stood the doctrine of a single, transcendent, theistic God, which Rammohun argued figured in the teachings of the Vedas. All reformist religious bodies followed Roy's theological direction toward monotheism, both because it seemed agreeable to reason and because it reinforced a supposedly objective, universal moral order that devotion to numerous divinities with separate attributes tended to undermine. There was nothing new

in the conjunction of monotheism and social reform, incidentally; many of the strongest movements within Hinduism for expurgation of religious and social "errors" began with evocations of one God.

There was a certain austerity about Rammohun Roy's teachings, for which the Brahmo Samaj leaders, Debendranath Tagore and Keshub Chunder Sen, later compensated by their mystic and emotional devotionalism. The Brahmo Samaj remained, however, a body of people who tried to order their lives according to reason applied to contemporary conditions. The other Indian samajs—Prarthana, Arya—tried to avoid a sharp rationalist break with customary religion, but they too tended to encourage an individual's break with popular practices based on legendary or superstitious beliefs. Thus, religious and social reformers found themselves semi-isolated from the rest of the society, particularly from their own caste groups. Brahmos in fact became virtually a new caste, in the usual sense of inter-marriage. It is not certain that Roy intended or foresaw this development. In a rigorously organised society such as India, where adoption of a novel procedure is bound to contradict an explicit injunction embedded in scriptural authority, innovation (or reform) means isolation for a time and afterwards limited comradeship with others who have made the same moves. Many a social reformer had to answer the agonising question, when he contemplated a serious breach of caste law, "whom will your daughters or your sons marry?" Modernisation must come slowly under such a regime. Here is the main weakness, and at the same time the main strength, of Indian (Hindu) society.

The Maharashtrian social reformer, Mahadev Govind Ranade, presented a philosophy of social change based on gradual accommodation of innovations, into which Roy and the Brahmos fitted as a sort of perennially propounded thesis, the response to which inevitably led to regenerations in Hindu society.[6] Ranade was pretty close to expounding a theory of social change that would interest contemporary social scientists. "Reform from within," "reform along national lines," and "lines of least resistance" became his slogans as he led the National Social Conference until his death in 1901. More vigorous leaders criticised his gentleness and the personal compromises he made for the sake of conservative relatives. Ranade

[6] Heimsath, *op. cit.*, chapter VIII.

and Roy understood that Indian society moved not through revolutionary spurts but evolutionary adjustments, and that changes reverberated outward from a tiny core of innovators by personal attraction, rather than by edicts of leaders of a corporate social body or by mass rebellion. Up to the present day Roy and Ranade and their many followers have been proved right in judging the manner in which Indians accept changes, whether in social behaviour or other areas of life.

The early 19th century social reformers in Bengal saw the position of Hindu women as the greatest abuse in society, and their crusade against sati and in support of widow marriage and female education occupied most of their attention. As the social reform movement spread to other provinces the objective of women's emancipation prevailed. These causes rightly focussed on one major disability in Indian society, but there were many others, having to do with inter-caste relations, for example, which only gradually found prominent positions in social reform agenda. In reviewing Roy's career and the history of the social reform movement the writer has not discovered the certain causes for his and later reformers' great interest in women; Gandhi took up the same concern, and he is given justifiable credit for involving educated women in public affairs on a very large scale. Many excellent reasons come to mind for social reformers' emphasis on women. Which of them motivated Roy and the other reformers is not clear. It may be provocative to point out, however, that many reformers worked for emancipation of women from higher castes, not those from low castes. Was this because the high caste Hindu (or aristocratic Muslim) woman was more abused than those of lower status? Dr. Ashis Nandy's provocative suggestion that Roy's pre-occupation with the status of women stemmed from the power of the female in Bengali culture and the influence of Roy's mother within her family seems attractive.

Much of the personal charm of Roy and some of his reformist followers, at least for a Western student of Indian history, lies in the extrovert personality type that these men exhibited. A contemporary scholar's psycho-analytical approach to the Bengali intellectuals exaggerates the point, but it needs nevertheless to be made, namely that Roy's non-conformism "may be called hendonism, a sort of going out into the world instead of withdrawing into the cocoon of one's self. This new spirit, no doubt, militated strongly against the

old introvert-masochist outlook."[7] Reformers in the modern tradition must be iconoclasts, at least to a limited extent, and they were far more uninhibited than others in expressing their dissatisfaction with the environment they lived in. They were activists, in a society which squashes activism in any way that it can. They stuck out their necks. Rammohun demonstrated how that should be done with dignity and without rebellious rancour. In their enthusiasm for adopting certain Western ideas and customs social reformers towards the end of the century became self-conscious and were made to feel guilty; political nationalism had challenged them to stand up for the motherland and not betray her weaknesses.

Nowadays Roy's invitation to British colonists to settle in India to tone up the local moral fibre appears incredible to everyone imbued with nationalist and anti-colonialist dogmas. Roy felt more secure. He knew he was not selling out the Indian heritage because he liked Englishmen and admired European culture. Even in recent times he has been accused of being corrupted by an overdose of foreign influences. Gandhi and some Indian leaders today appear less confident than Rammohun in exposing the intellectual influences that have figured in their lives, perhaps because of an uneducated public's demand for nativistic official postures. "Tilak and Ram Mohan," said Gandhi, "would have been far greater men if they had not had the contagion of English learning."[8] In this context it will be of interest to investigate what he said about Swami Vivekananda, who more than Rammohun urged Indians to emulate the vigorous ways of Westerners, in this case the Americans.[9] Rammohun Roy and the 19th century reformers had a characteristic assertiveness about the truth regardless of its national origin that is not seen today, at least not very clearly, since national leaders found it necessary to prop up what they officially proclaim as the national heritage in order to create pride in being Indian.

Surprisingly, in some ways, what has been called official Indian

[7] Arabinda Poddar, *Renaissance in Bengal: Quests and Confrontations 1800-1860* (Simla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1970), p. 47.

[8] Speech at mass meeting, Cuttack, March 24, 1921; *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 19 (Delhi, The Publications Division, 1966), p. 477.

[9] "Ay, you may be astonished to hear that as practical Vedantists the Americans are better than we are," said the Swami and then went on to explain why. Speech at Lahore, Nov. 12, 1897; *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 10th edition, vol. III (Almora, Advaita Ashrama, 1970), p. 428.

culture—by which is meant the Hindu cultural tradition as interpreted and propagated by the National Congress—while incorporating many of the social ideals of Roy, has ignored their foundation in a syncretic rationalist religion. Since Tilak's day popular Hinduism has become an attribute of nationalism, and national leaders have not indulged in public speculation on universal philosophical questions. (Gandhi's method of dealing with great moral issues was intuitive, based on his keen perception of men's psychology, not a reasoned employment of abstract ethical principles.) Modern Indian religion and culture's debt to Islam and Christianity finds weak recognition today. Roy's inspiration came partly from the teachings of these religions, and he acknowledged that. Some later reformers continued to point to Christian ethical principles in offering their prescriptions for society, but scarcely any of them gave an intellectual nod to Islamic thought. Dayananda Saraswati and some militant Hindu bodies attacked both Islamic and Christian thought and their tangible influences in Indian life, while simultaneously upholding the principles of theology and humanism for which these creeds stood and were best known. Social reform doctrine today is weaker than it was in the 19th century for its lack of the strong religious underpinnings that Roy and the social reformers once gave it. Popular Hinduism in most of its guises cannot bear the intellectual weight of a convincing doctrine of national reformation that Roy's religion did.

III

The social reform movement's intellectual debt to Roy personally was constantly acknowledged by most reformers. It was a debt, however, due more to the temper of the age that Roy admirably represented than to Roy himself. Without Rammohun's example the social reform movement and much more would certainly have gone forward. Roy's career exemplified the imagination and energy of the early generations of Indian-British interaction in Bengal: it did not bring it into existence. In addition to the social reformers, Western-educated Bengalis then, and those in other provinces later in the century, believed that they were all participants in India's re-awakening from ages of moral and intellectual darkness. Though the social reformers of the 19th century claimed credit for driving the entering wedge of enlightenment into the decayed body of

Hinduism and thereby revealing the core of truth which could nourish the nation's rebirth, in fact those ranged against them were engaged in a similar enterprise. The Orientalists in Bengal, for example, produced much of the work on which Rammohun based his vision of the glories of classical Hindu literature. Theirs was an influence for general enlightenment, though they often opposed specific governmental social reform, such as abolition of sati [10]

At the other end of the century Bal Gangadhar Tilak's almost violent attacks on social reforming ex-colleagues could not conceal the fact that he and some of his family had adopted a style of life that any reformer would have been proud to claim as his own. It was not against social reform that Tilak really fought, but against the means chosen by the social reformers to try to bring it about, namely government edict. There was also a strong element of personal animosity among erstwhile academic colleagues in Poona that led to the famous Tilak-Ranade contest over the 1891 Age of Consent Bill and over the National Social Conference's relationship to the Indian National Congress.

At about this time the Arya Samaj, despite its doctrinal split, was vigorously expanding its reformist activities in northern India through education, propaganda, and direct conversions. Attacking idolatry, polytheism, Brahman-sponsored religious rites, and all superstitious practices; and supporting adult and inter-caste marriages, female education, uplift of lower castes (in the 20th century), and a great variety of social welfare work, the Arya Samaj was acknowledged by professional social reformers as the most effective body of its kind in India. But Dayananda had specifically rejected the example of the Brahmo Samaj in formulating his programme for reform and thus appeared to break with the Rammohun Roy tradition. His "revivalism" is sometimes made to seem

[10] David Kopf's work, *British Orientalism and Bengal Renaissance* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969), illuminates this point. Classicists opposed Roy's eagerness for Western ideas and the early Brahmo Samaj's discarding of much of the rich post-Vedantic Hindu heritage. But "every dynamic classicist is invariably an antitraditional rebel." (p. 287) After examining Bengal's intellectual life before and during Roy's time Kopf judges that "Not only does the evidence seem to reduce Rammohun's contributions as an original thinker, but it appears also to controvert the view that he was the earliest 'liberal' David, locked in combat with 'conservative' Brahmin Goliaths bent on preserving a diseased social system...." (p. 198).

anti-modern and opposed to the free acknowledgement by Roy's followers of their intellectual debt to Western ideas. Dayananda called the Brahmo Samaj, then led by Keshub Chunder Sen who was enamoured of Christ's teachings and was moving in the direction of mysticism, a "denationalised" movement, partly because of the Westernised way of life of the Brahmos he met. But in fact, there was "no fundamental difference between Dayanand and Ram Mohan Roy," wrote his biographer, Har Bilas Sarda. "No reformer or religious teacher born in India during the eighteenth or nineteenth century stands nearer to Dayanand than Raja Ram Mohan Roy."[11]

The mid-century Brahmo Samaj had moved several stages, through several leaders, away from the original teachings of Roy, and Dayananda, though alien to the cosmopolitan life of the Calcutta intelligentsia at any period, in fact came closer to Roy in his teachings than any major reformer of the 19th century. In their rationalism, their humaneness and their veneration of the Vedas, Dayananda and Rammohun knew the same truths and saw the future of India in much the same intellectual focus. Merely their styles differed, which is explained by the separate intellectual climates of the Punjab and Bengal.

What these examples point to is the common feature of all modernising movements in India, whether designated as social reform movements or not. The new spirit exemplified by Roy transcended the causes and apparatus sponsored by Roy's acknowledged followers; it informed all of India's impulses toward modernity.

IV

But the preachments of social reformers in the Roy tradition had no provable relationship to the modernising changes that society at large was experiencing. Small groups such as the Brahmo and other reformist samajs remained isolated from the masses of the people that they sought to transform, sometimes by choice and always because of the immense social gap and great discrepancy in size in India between the educated and uneducated portions of the population. Not an original insight, it does however counter

[11]Sarda, *Life of Dayananda Saraswati* (Ajmer, Vedic Yantralaya, 1946), p. 507.

the generally accepted view of many writers on Indian reform movements and the so-called "renaissance" in this country. Erudite proclamations on questions of national reform are blithely recited by those perpetuating the myth that India's modern intellectual history is the same thing as its modern social history. One gets the impression from some writers that Roy's campaign against sati, for example—which, incidentally faltered badly at the end and required Lord Bentinck's stronger stomach for offending high caste sensitivities—succeeded overnight. The words of the reformers and the deeds of society—and of the reformers themselves—give two very different impressions.

A viewpoint more critical than this, if also more doctrinaire from the standpoint of another school of historical scholarship, about the educated elite's relationship to reform and modernisation stressed its inherent class interests, which lay in opposition to the masses. The Westernised elite, fairly restricted in locale to the large Europeanised metropoli, according to Arabinda Poddar, "were raised out of one society without any recognized place in another... they continued to have an existence in between two worlds. They were denizens of neither, and so... they remained embodiments of weakness." Their alienation from their own society, partly because of adoption of English as their major professional language, and their identification with the established centres of authority made their talk of freedom or progress, "mere intellectual conceits, empty cliches." Under such leadership an Indian "renaissance which assured the people neither a recognition nor a place in the manifestation of its will was from its very inception a distorted sapless renaissance."[12]

The term, renaissance, as applied to the European cultural efflorescence seems imprecise as a description of the quality and scope of cultural changes in 19th century India.[13] Above all,

[12] Poddar, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

[13] The writer's preference is to use "renaissance" to refer only to Italy in the 14th to 16th centuries, as Will Durant does in *The Story of Civilization*, part V (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1953), p. vii. For Durant, "the word does not properly apply to such native maturations, rather than exotic rebirths, as took place in France, Spain, England, and the Lowlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and even in Italy the designation lays undue stress on the revival of classic letters which was of less importance than the ripening of its economy and culture into their own characteristic forms."

Bengal and India failed to experience that "ripening" of economy and culture with a fairly deep base in the populous which rebirth should suggest. Shri Asok Sen has made this point in his discussion of the economy in Roy's time. Nevertheless, the intellectual outpouring of a small group of culturally distinct Indians was not frosting on an unleavened loaf of custom and orthodoxy. Somehow the apparently superficial evocations of new ways of life (supported by certain classical authorities) beginning in Roy's day coincided with, or just preceded, real social changes on a limited scale, which turned out to be neither abortive nor transitory, but stamped the character of modern society up to the present day.

By the end of the 19th century that flagrant gap between an 'alienated' elite and its less 'advanced' countrymen became the main hindrance to nationalism's gathering sufficient force to impress the British Raj. Indian political leaders realised that they must close the gap and moved to do so by identifying themselves with popularly recognisable religious ideas and symbols, some of which had to be revived from intellectual semi-oblivion. The public controversy in the last decade of the 19th and in the early 20th century that affected the social reform movement swirled around the supposed dichotomy between a revived Hindu religious culture and reform of contemporary social life. Involving almost all the great national figures of the day, the debate on revival versus reform was stimulating to onlookers and participants alike, and probed sufficiently into the problems of modernisation so that a psychological adjustment of the whole intellectual community to the changing times was probably eased thereby.

Perhaps only in Russia before the Bolshevik revolution—though it may have occurred in Japan as well—have the moral and intellectual dilemmas attendant upon the rapid uprooting of customary ways of life and their replacement by novel, often imported, social arrangements been so explicitly and sometimes agonizingly set forth as they were in pre-World War I India. The openness of expression, the uninhibited verbal fury of the debate at times, acted as a catharsis leading to sane and pragmatic accommodations in future generations. Modern Indian society emerged at that time, as a peculiar synthesis of tested and approved attitudes and innovations compatible with the contemporary world.

Roy's example had been partially forgotten by the 20th century.

But the style of the modern cultural synthesis that was emerging had Roy's example stamped upon it. Between Roy and the nationalist social and religious reformers at the turn of the century Indian intellectuals had passed through a brief epoch (which also saw the unquestionable consolidation of the British Raj) of "alienation" from Indian spiritual and intellectual resources, which Arabinda Poddar and others have seen. Not so much brown sahibs, many of the 19th century leaders were proper Victorians, and their political and social advocacies were better suited to English than to Indian audiences. Social reform through most of the 19th century lay in areas that affected this class: abolition of sati, widow remarriage, raising the age of consent and marriage, girls' education. Emphasizing individual emancipation, the reformers looked to legislation to break open the tightly guarded customs of upper caste Hindus. This meant reliance on British agencies for reform of Hindu society, a weakening and in the long run ineffective mechanism.

Reconstructed nationalist reform by the early 20th century adopted a style of popular religious revivalism that was admirably adapted to the redefined goals of the leaders of society. No longer limited to individual, high caste (or even middle class) social reform the messages of men such as Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghose, Bepin Chandra Pal and Lajpat Rai called for a massive regeneration of society, from the bottom upward, as it were. Aurobindo saw the corrective measures of the new social reform movement as leading away from Victorian ideals for Indian society toward timely national goals. "An Anglicised India," he wrote, "is a thing we can no longer view as either possible or desirable,—and it could only, if pursued to the end, have made us painful copyists, clumsy followers always stumbling in the wake of European evolution and always fifty years behind it. This movement of thought did not and could not endure...."[14]

Although the language of the so-called revivalist reformers posed the dichotomy of alien versus indigenous sources and goals for social reform, in fact the changes they urged in Indian society differed scarcely at all from those advocated by Rammohun Roy and his followers. The contrast lay in the scale and the methods

[14]Aurobindo Ghose, *Renaissance in India*, articles in the *Arya* of 1918, reprinted, p. 35.

of change. Reform in individual lives had by the early 20th century become commonplace among intellectuals, who as a group constituted a grand "samaj," informed by modern rational standards for itself. Nationalist reformers, a part of this "samaj," saw no hope in transforming Indian society as a whole by the process of modernisation of individuals, within the time-table set by the needs of rapid political and economic change. So they shifted the scale of operations, so to speak, to try to arouse the masses to a new level of consciousness of the requirements of national social transformation. The means, as Lajpat Rai put it, should no longer be appeals to "rationality," but to "nationality."

In synthesising reformist goals with Indian traditions the Roy method of selecting authentic Hindu scriptural reinforcements for contemporary prescriptions for change coincided with that of the revivalist reformers. Roy might well have embraced the new school of social reform—even if it lacked his rational religious foundations and his alliance with the British Government—because of its fervent revival of ancient ideals.

The revivalist reformers, like Roy, appeared to believe that as intellectuals they could direct changes in mass culture with appeals to ideas. But although their audience was vastly larger than Roy's or the mid-19th century reformers', it was still limited to the educated classes. Their relationship to the modernising changes going on in the whole society was as uncertain as that of the 19th century social reformers, unless we establish a linkage between the increasingly numerous body of educated people, to whom they appealed, and the masses.

That such a linkage existed, on the limited scale of personal example, shall be acknowledged later. But before trying to outline that mechanism for social change it will be convenient to proceed one step further in the history of the social reform movement, to Gandhi's era. Gandhi was India's greatest social reformer in modern times, because he shook up the greatest obstacle to reform, caste requirements for individual behaviour The irrationalism of castes' imposing sanctions against a person's desires to communicate with others, improve his economic condition, or more freely to take advantage of what the country offered came across to the uneducated people of India through Gandhi's direct actions and simple words. His social reforms went deep into the life of his people through his genuine dialogue with the masses. Gandhi

broke the pattern of elite, intellectual leadership of the social reform movement, and he also introduced goals for reform more economically and politically pragmatic than earlier reformers.

The Roy tradition of social reform, like the Liberal tradition of politics to which it was joined, ended as a significant public movement with Gandhi. Its ideals extended forward into the public policies of independent India, however, via reformist leaders of Congress and particularly Jawaharlal Nehru. Those who fought through the great legislative reform enactments of the Special Marriages Act (1954) and the Hindu Code Bill (1955) were Rammohun Roy's followers. Some of those who opposed those Acts rightly considered themselves followers of Gandhi. Gandhi's social reforms worked on the bottom of society, the concrete needs and behaviour of ordinary people. Legislation on social matters hardly affects this level. Gandhi opened the way for the "revolt of the masses," which is inexorably taking place in India today. Expressions of it in labour agitations, peasant strikes, students' power over their universities, receive public attention, but more subtly the "revolt" is quiet, and is largely accommodated by those whose interests are adversely affected, simply because of the peculiarly Indian will to survive in the face of forces that cannot be diverted.

V

Social changes take place in India through personal example, and the verbiage is secondary. The social reformers before Gandhi gave no indication that they appreciated this fact, although they acknowledged that the rebellious words of anyone could easily be tolerated by his community and family, while his deviant behaviour brought severe sanctions. The position of Roy and other reformers in social history is more impressive because of what they were, liberated men, than what they espoused. In Roy's time to live a public life based on reason, and not on the repetition of customs, gave a nudge to others toward modernising their ways. In fact Roy's example would have carried social weight in any country in the 1820s. Today, in contrast, intellectuals living thoroughly modern lives surprise no one, and intellectuals sense that merely by exemplifying their modernity they are not making the kind of impact that society felt from early reformers, whose

style of life was novel.

The most effective reformers in the Roy manner have been all those who, usually without any intellectual stimulation from his writings, shook up their families and caste groups and local communities, forcing people to apply their reason to a sharp deviation from custom. The modernisation of India has depended on those innovators, of whom we all know a great many. They are not intellectuals, necessarily, but they are usually educated in some degree along modern lines.

Today those who are reforming society are people on the periphery of modern society, the penetrating edge where a person deviating from expected behaviour is immediately challenged and thus has an audience he can influence by his actions. Intellectuals are today often far removed from the action centres of social innovation, cushioned by their intimate professional and familial involvements with others like themselves, and thus they have no operational influence. The masses, touched by Gandhi's example, are not looking to the intellectuals for verbal guidance and do not come sufficiently into contact with them to be influenced by personal example.

"Our intellectuals have failed us," said Nehru, referring perhaps to their inability to provide the Olympian credos that political leaders and historians like to grapple with. But how can they be expected to do so, in a nation of such diversity as this? No one can possibly set standards for all Indians. Modernisation for one person or caste does not resemble the contemporary needs of other persons or communities, and India could not be made to follow an authoritarian programme for social reform. As it happens, social change is progressing toward goals that the social reformers advocated—individual freedom from caste restrictions on behaviour, women's emancipation mostly through education but also through legislation and new economic opportunities, social services for the poor, elimination of the worst abuses against low castes. The parallel between the reformers' goals and modernity is the result of the same economic inducements and intellectual persuasions working on the educated reformers and on society as a whole, one far in advance of the other.

Modern intellectuals everywhere see their position eroded, their ideals diluted or rejected, but in India anyway they do not become alienated, expatriated in the manner of some Western

intelligentsia.[15] They do not stand fast against the "revolt of the masses"—as exemplified by their acceptance of Gandhi, although his programmes went against their interests in many areas. And this perhaps is why—to touch a note of modern scholarly concern —there is no real fight between tradition and modernity. If those terms mean the old-fashioned customs and the new ones that coincide with contemporary world cultural standards, the people upholding the one set of values seem to be trying to adjust to those following the other set, and most Indians are probably somewhere in between.

[15]Edward Shils' famous study, *The Intellectual Between Tradition and Modernity: The Indian Case* (The Hague, Mouton, 1961), p. 61, found Indian intellectuals firmly rooted in their own culture and not bifurcated personalities. The writer is inclined to think that Jawaharlal Nehru indulged in a kind of self romanticising when he wrote: "I have become a queer mixture of the East and the West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere. Perhaps my thoughts and approach to life are more akin to what is called Western than Eastern, but India clings to me as she does to all her children. . . . I am a stranger and alien in the West. I cannot be of it. But in my own country also sometimes I have an exile's feeling." *An Autobiography* (London, 1963), pp. 597-98. Shils would probably say of this statement that intellectuals are always set apart from the popular cultures of their societies.

SATI : A NINETEENTH CENTURY TALE OF WOMEN, VIOLENCE AND PROTEST

ASHIS NANDY

I. AUTHORITY AND DEFIANCE

To cope with changing external realities, a civilisation must walk the razor's edge between makeshift adjustments and total collapse. This demands the capacity to generate new concepts, symbols and structures of authority and the ability to concurrently renegotiate terms with one's older gods. Hence the importance of the person who evolves new sources of legitimacy and designs alternative controls of transgression and yet makes his innovations reflect the unique history and genius of his people. If the society simultaneously helps him to take care of his private conflicts, gives him the chance to relate his world-view to the needs of his contemporaries, and appreciates his interpretation of traditional authority as relevant to contemporary realities, a creative anastomosis between the man and the society is established. Social change then comes to mean not only changes in rites, rituals and practices, but also a changed relationship between cultural symbols and individual motives.

This paper explores the dynamics of a reform in nineteenth century India to illustrate how a man's private conflicts with immediate authorities can get intertwined with aggregate responses to public issues, how older controls of transgression can become a threat and a challenge to the individual, and how the individual's personal ethics and private symbols can become valid tools of social engineering. The reform involved the abolition of sati or the

ritual suicide of widows after the death of their husbands. The following section analyses the culture of sati in historical and psychological terms and shows how this ritual became a battle-ground between the old and the new, the indigenous and the imported, and the Brahmanic and the folk. The remainder of this essay is an attempt to show how the most important Indian opponent of this rite, Rammohun Roy, subverted this ritual by introducing his society to alternative symbols of authority, which constituted not merely the first serious reinterpretation of Hinduism in modern times, but also carried the intimations of a new life style more compatible with largescale industrial, social and economic changes then taking place in the Indian society.[1]

To sharpen the analysis, this paper avoids the well-known details of the history of the reform and Rammohun's public and private lives. Instead, it seeks clues to Roy's implicit theory of reform in his early interpersonal environment and socialisation, and in the "inner" meaning which these experiences gave to the crises of his people and his time. It was this meaning which influenced Roy's private responses to the older symbols of authority involved in the rite of sati, and his public struggle to introduce new authority symbols more congruent with the emerging psychological and cultural realities in his community. To the extent he succeeded in his historical role, it was again this meaning which cut across numerous levels and sectors of human behaviour, offsetting private history against collective identity and personal synthesis against a diffused collective response to environmental change.

[1] In this context, the recent controversy over who was ultimately responsible for the decision to legally proscribe the rite is both misleading and irrelevant. The fact remains that Roy was an embodiment of the anti-sati movement to both the anti-sati and pro-sati groups as well as to the British rulers. And, it was only he who provided a consistent explanation of the practice and a theory of reform which could be understood by all these three groups. In fact, one may guess that it was this ability to sum up in his personality not merely the hostilities of the reformers, but also the latent ambivalence of the society, towards the rite which makes Rammohun Roy a symbol of nineteenth century reform movements. To initiate a search for the roots of this reformism in his personal life is also therefore an attempt to locate the major psychological needs behind the social forces which might have powered the rite and then rendered it anachronistic.

II. THE LOGIC OF A RITUAL

Sati, literally a virtuous wife, was operationally the practice of widows burning themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands (though sometimes they took poison or were buried alive too). The rite had been prevalent amongst upper caste Indians for at least two thousand years. It is not clear when and how the rite first gained a place in Indian culture. A number of studies show that remarriage of widows was definitely sanctioned by ancient Hindu laws and the most venerated sacred texts were, if not actually hostile, certainly not well-disposed towards the rite. Many reasons for its gradual legitimisation are mentioned. Some of the more important of them are: deliberate mis-translation of the texts by Brahmans, the difficulty of protecting women in times of war, particularly in the middle ages, decline of Buddhism in India, contagion with some tribal and other cognate cultures which believed that comforts of the dead in his after-life could be ensured by burying with him his wives, jewellery, slaves and other favourite possessions.[2] By the seventeenth century, however, the rite had become mainly voluntary and took place generally during times of war when it became difficult to protect women. In fact, by the beginning of eighteenth century, it had become a rare occurrence. It was only towards the end of the eighteenth century and in Bengal that the rite suddenly came to acquire the popularity of a legitimate orgy.[3] Soon widows were being drugged, tied to the often-putrid cadavers of their husbands, and forced down with bamboo sticks on the pyres. The burning was preceded by Kali puja and, otherwise also, had distinctly Shakto features. In more subtle ways too, the rite came to depend upon some of the structural and cultural characteristics of eighteenth century Bengal. To understand the nature of the reform, one must therefore first understand, even if in a gross fashion, some of the institutional factors which might have led to the popularisation of this rite in a given region and at a given time.

[2] Upendra Thakur, *The History of Suicide in India* (Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1963).

[3] See detailed district-wise statistics on sati in Sophia D. Collet, *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, edited by D.K. Biswas and P.C. Ganguli (Calcutta, Sadharon Brahmo Samaj, 1962) pp. 83-84, 200, 258.

Let us argue the economic historian's case first. There is no doubt that the rite was a primitive Malthusian means of population control in famine-ridden Bengal. Previously, high mortality rates and prohibition of remarriage of widows had helped the society to limit the number of mothers to below the level of available fertile women. However, at times of scarcity, these controls became inadequate and, at times of anomia, the widows at certain levels of consciousness seemed "useless" drags on resources. Eighteenth century Bengal had both the scarcity and the anomia. After about 150 years of relatively famine-free existence, from 1770 onwards at short intervals, large-scale scarcities challenged the traditional Bengali concepts of benevolent mother deities presiding over various aspects of a benevolent nature. And anomia too was widespread in the growing urban world of greater Calcutta, particularly amongst the upper caste Bengali gentry. The colonial system had generated in them a sense of rudderlessness by forcing them to maintain their traditional social dominance on almost entirely new grounds.[4] For example, among the Bhadraloks the new land settlement system was displacing the landed aristocracy by a new group of men. These men had defied their caste identity to enter commerce—a profession which in Bengal was typical of the lowest castes—and were merely investing in land the money they had earned from business in the cities. These new landlords derived social status from British patronage, instead of from traditional social relations. In addition, monetisation was already eroding older caste-specific obligations and thus depriving the Bhadraloks of the historical allegiance to them of artisans, service castes and peasantry and forcing them to work more and more within the framework of impersonal, contractual, social relations.[5] Finally, though the new system favoured Brahmanic skills for the growing tertiary sector, for the upper castes this became a competitive, acquired advantage rather than an inherited asset.

In their own inefficient, biased and naive fashion some of the

[4] Under the new regime, they still owned three-fourth of all estates in Bengal, dominated both politics and administration, and controlled most of the trade which was in the hands of the Indians.

[5] N. K. Bose, *Culture and Society in India* (Bombay, Asia, 1967), pp. 358-368; N. K. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal*, vol. II (Calcutta, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1965), p. 206.

missionaries did relate this crisis of values to the dynamics of sati.[6] Marshman, for instance, felt that "the increasing luxury of the high and middling classes, . . . and their expensive imitation of European habits" made them eager to avoid the expense of maintaining widows. Indirect support for such an interpretation is also provided by the fact that the rite was becoming popular not amongst the rural poor or the small peasantry, but amongst the urban *nouveaux riches* who had lost part of their allegiance to older norms and had nothing with which to fill the void. One can never be certain how far such an economic interpretation explains sati, but one thing is certain. Rammohun Roy himself considered this to be one of the main motivating forces behind the rite.[7]

Secondly, sati helped some people to manipulate the distribution of property in a culture which emphasised rigid property rules. Under the *dayabhaga* system of Hindu law operating only in Bengal, right to property did not arise at the birth of a male co-sharer, but on religious efficacy. Furthermore, a son had a right to separate or dispose of his property before partition and a widow succeeded to her husband's property on his death without a male issue even if the family was undivided.[8] This relatively liberal attitude to women in Bengal was mainly derived from the region's institutional flexibility, its non-Brahmanic (mainly tribal and Buddhist) traditions and the greater emphasis which the regional culture placed on the feminine principle in the godhead.[9] All this gave women a stake in property as wives as well as mothers who could influence the decision of her children-copartners. These

[6] The mistake of the missionaries was to relate sati to Hindu culture and orthodoxy, when it was manifestly a sequel of the society's inability to cope with modern inputs. We shall come back to this.

[7] Rammohun perhaps had a personal reason to see economic motives behind the ritual. While neither his father's surviving wives nor any other widows in his family had committed sati when the family was prosperous, once their fortune started wobbling, things changed. Rammohun's elder brother's widow burnt herself in 1811, it is said, before his eyes. This fact has been challenged, but if true, this might have established a link in his mind between economic uncertainties and the rite.

[8] P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, vol. 3 (Poona, Oriental Research Institute, 1946), pp. 558-59.

[9] S. C. Mitra, "On the Origin and Development of the Bengal School of Hindu Law," *Law Quarterly Review*, 1905, *21*, pp. 380-92; and 1906, *22*, pp. 50-63; quoted and discussed in Kane, *loc. cit.*

were, however, dangerous privileges to have in a culture where survival was not easy and where there was a high chance that a widow would inherit property or use it for bargaining purposes. Inducing the surviving wife to commit suicide was an efficient way of checking this.[10]

Thirdly, for families deviating from paths of traditional virtue due to the seductiveness of the new system, sati became a means of securing social status and renown for virtue. That is why even when the family of the suicide was prosecuted, there was no loss of caste, infamy or disgrace; they in fact gained in social stature and were "backed with applause and honour."[11] Duress exerted on the prospective sati was therefore a demonstration of the piety of the family. No wonder the practitioners of the rite were most ruthless with the widow who after making the fatal decision to commit sati later wavered.

A part of the status acquired through sati attached to the suicide herself. The incentive value of this status was high because of the humiliation and bullying that were generally the widow's lot. Economic freedom for her was virtually out of question; it could be bought only through prostitution or other such extra-social ventures. In addition, there were taboos on her attendance at festive and religious occasions and severe restrictions on food, dress and adornments which could make her attractive. Thus, the sheer misery of a widow's life partly negated the prospective suicide's fear of death. The feared future seemed even worse because of childhood prejudices and phantasies about the widow as a bad omen and an evil presence.[12]

Fourthly, it seemed to some that Brahmans were deliberately misleading their community by claiming sacred sanctions behind sati

[10] Interestingly, Rammohun Roy provides a more or less similar interpretation both in his famous appeal to the governor general and in his treatise on women's property rights in India. See *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, I, edited by Kalidas Nag and Debojyoti Burman (Calcutta, Sadharon Brahmo Samaj, 1945-48), pp. 1-10; and Roy's letter to Mrs. Woodford, *Ibid*, 1832, IV, pp. 90-91.

[11] Rammohun Roy quoted in P. K. Sen, *Biography of a New Faith* (Calcutta, Thacker, Spink, 1950), pp. 34-35; R. C. Majumdar, "Social Reform," in R. C. Majumdar, A. K. Majumdar and D. K. Ghose (eds), *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, Part II (Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), p. 270.

[12] These attitudes had deeper ramification; see below.

which did not exist. This conspiracy theory had wide circulation amongst the observers of Indian society.[13] Given contemporary sensitivities, it went unnoticed that the Bengali Brahmans were not merely religious leaders and interpreters of texts, traditions and rites, but major landholders and financiers who were being increasingly coopted by the colonial system. Also, they were the caste most exposed to westernisation and the growing conflict between the old and the new.[14] Thus, not merely as Brahmans but as the most exposed sector they were vulnerable. In the new system many of them had to maintain traditional status on the grounds of a new set of values and not as a part of their older, more internally consistent, life style. As a result, material and status gains in them were often associated with moral anxiety and some amount of free-floating rage at adaptive problems. And they began to see all restrictions on ritualised expressions of these feelings as further threats to their lifestyle. The movement against sati constituted such a threat for them. In their desperate defence of the rite they were also trying to defend their self-esteem and traditional identity.[15]

But underlying these were other reasons, even less amenable to conscious control and less accessible to contemporary consciousness. And it is with these that this analysis is mainly concerned.

Firstly, the rite had anxiety-binding functions in groups rendered psychologically marginal by their exposure to western impact. These groups had come under pressure to demonstrate, to others as well as to themselves, their ritual purity and allegiance to traditional high culture. To many of them sati became an important proof of their conformity to older norms at a time when these

[13] For example, Thomas Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of Countries Round the Bay of Bengal, 1069-1679*, edited by R. C. Temple (Haklyuyt Society and Kraus Reprint Ltd., Neudelul Leichtensteim, Series 2), vol. 2, pp. 197-205. Rammohun himself in a general way believed in this conspiracy theory; see his *English Works*, II, pp. 43-44, 48-49.

[14] This was primarily because the colonial system needed the brahmanic skills of reading, writing and accounting and the legitimacy which only Brahmans when coopted by the system could give to it.

[15] A. F. Salahuddin, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal, 1818-1835* (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1965), p. 126, mentions pride and economic discontent as two possible causes of support to sati.

norms had become shaky within. Some contemporaries as well as later chroniclers recognised the pattern. For instance, Lord Hastings, not otherwise known for his sensitivity to matters of mind, attributed the increase in sati in 1821 "to the fanatic spirit roused by the divided state of feeling among the Hindus."[16] And Collet too, in saying that the rite was prevalent among passive people and not among the "bold and manly" type,[17] indirectly draws attention to the difference between the exposed easterners, feeling increasingly impotent ritually, and the unexposed northern and western parts of India, still mainly outside direct British rule and yet undisturbed in their traditional life style. It was also noticed by others that there had been only one instance of the wife of a dead Indian soldier of the colonial army committing sati.[18] The higher incidence of sati in urban areas, among high castes, and in areas more exposed to western impact seem to support this.[19] Taken together, they confute the belief that sati somehow represented the hard core of Hindu orthodoxy.

Secondly, sati could express the community's deepest hatred towards woman and womanhood. The earliest available myth about the ritual speaks of a Rajput wife who poisoned her husband. From this "crime," Diodorus Siculus said in B.C. 314, the "institution took its rise."[20] But the myth only summarises the deeper fears of aggression and annihilation that had always been associated with Indian and particularly Bengali concept of womanhood, along with deep longings for nurturance and benevolent mothering. A brief digression at this point is necessary.

The dominant authority image in the peasant cosmology of Bengal, as in peasant cultures all over the world, had always been that of a mother goddess who was the original or basic power, Adyashakti, and the ultimate principle of nature and activity, Prakriti. The personification of this principle was Chandi, the traditional goddess

16 Sen. *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35.

17 Despatch of August 15, 1822, quoted in Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 258-59.

19 See also J. H. Harrington, cited in K. Ingham, *Reformers in India, 1793-1833* (Cambridge, Cambridge University, 1956), p. 50.

20 W. H. Carey, *The Good Old Days of Honourable John Company, Being Curious Reminiscences During the Rule of the East India Company from 1600 to 1858*, (1882) (Calcutta, Quins Book, 1964).

of the region.[21] Coincidentally, the rise in the popularity of sati coextended with the gradual bifurcation of the Chandi image. One wonders why that bifurcation became necessary at that point of time. Perhaps, the frequent natural calamities and invalidation of the traditional assumptions of living by the colonial culture needed a new psycho-ecological balance in which the aggressive aspect of cosmic motherhood was better recognised. In any case, by the end of the eighteenth century, the sacred authority image of Bengal came to be clearly defined by two coordinates: Durga, the demon-killing protective mother as well as the giver of food, and Kali, the unpredictable, punitive mother, till then the goddess of a few marginal groups like dacoits, thieves, thugs, prostitutes and now—increasingly and revealingly—of the exposed *babus* of greater Calcutta. The former, an unknown goddess only a few decades back, became the most popular deity and made Durga Puja the most popular religious and social festival of the region. The latter became the new symbol of a treacherous cosmic mother, eager to betray and prone to aggress. She also came to be associated with almost all the other major rituals generally cited as instances of the cultural decadence of the age, and against each of which Rammohun himself and almost every reformer of the region fought.[22] As if, some crucial sectors of the Bengali society had lost all faith in the sustaining feminine principle in the environment and, in reaction, had built a more powerful symbol of womanly betrayal, punishment and rage.

It was this new psychological environment which made plausible the implicit theory of sati that the husband's death was somehow due to the wife's performance and her fate. It seemed to impute that the wife somehow brought about the death of the man under her protection, by not performing her rituals and her religious role or by withholding or failing to maintain her latent ability to

[21] Some of these cultural parameters have been identified by S.B. Dasgupta, *Bharater Shakti Sadhana o Shakto Sahitya* (Calcutta, Sahitya Samsad, 1960); J.C. Roy Vidyanidhi, *Puja-Parban* (Calcutta, Viswa-Bharati, 1951); Chintaharan Chakravarti, *Banglar Palparban* (Calcutta, Viswa-Bharati, 1953); and *Tantrakatha* (Calcutta, Viswa-Bharati, 1955).

[22] No wonder, the cause of woman, like the breaking of food taboos, was to become in nineteenth century Bengal a major symbol of defiance.

manipulate natural events and fate.[23] All deaths consequently seemed to be failures in propitiation and instances of the wife's homicidal wishes magically coming true.

This demonology also produced two major rationalisations of the rite: the fear that without the authoritarian control of the husband, the widow would stray from paths of virtue and the imputation that women in general were virtuous only because of external enforcement rather than through internalisation of norms. The contemporary pro-sati literature repeatedly mentions the frailty of woman, her "subjection to passion," lack of understanding and quarrelsomeness, and "want of virtuous knowledge." All these allegedly made her untrustworthy and fickle.[24]

Sati was therefore also an enforced penance, a death penalty through which the widow expiated for being responsible for her husband's death. Simultaneously, it reduced the sense of guilt in those face to face with their rage against all women. Punishment by authority became, in an infantile morality, a proof of culpability.[25] Sati thus perpetuated the phantasy of feminine aggression towards the husband, bound anxiety by giving substance to vague fears of women, and contained the fear of death in a region where death struck suddenly and frequently (due to what by popular consensus were whimsical feminine principles in cosmic powers).

Finally, one is tempted to relate this scapegoating and fear of womanhood to the culturally typical myths and early experiences surrounding mothering. The widows apparently invoked the infantile rage towards personal mothers who had failed and towards cosmic mothers who at that point of history tended to confirm the "great betrayal" of the former. The "vague rage" generated by adaptive impotence—the "fanatic spirit roused by divided feeling"

[23] This was evidenced in the attitude towards widows in general, the various mores they had to conform to, their self-hatred and self-inflicted sufferings.

[24] See Collet, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-95; also Rammohun Roy, *Granthabali*, vol. III, edited by Brajendranath Bandopadhyay and Sajanikanta Das (Calcutta, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, no date), passim.

[25] On punishment as an infantile proof of guilt, see J. Piaget, *Moral Judgement of the Child* (Glencoe, Ill., Free Press, 1948). See an excellent review of available research on this subject in L. Kohlberg, "Development of Moral Character and Moral Ideology," M. L. and L. W. Hoffman (eds), *Child Development Research* (New York, Russel Sage Foundation, 1964) pp. 383-431.

which Hastings speaks of may have underwritten the process further.[26] We shall come back to this.

To the extent women shared these phantasies about their role, and the concept of their responsibility the death of their husbands, sati was also associated with the introjection of the terrorising maternal aspects of femininity, guilt arising from this self image, and the tendency to use the ego defence of turning against one's own self in atonement.[27]

All these forces converged in the culture of the *babus*. Borrowing from some of the recessive aspects of the Bengali folk culture and from particularised Brahmanism,[28] it was this *babu* culture which made a sadistic sport out of sati. And to the extent this culture was itself a product of western and modern encroachments upon the traditional life style, sati was the society's weirdest response to new cultural inputs and institutional innovations. In 1818 one Oakely, an administrator at Zilla Hooghly near Calcutta, tried to explain the higher incidence and growth rate of sati in greater Calcutta in the following words:

> It is notorious that the natives of Calcutta and its vicinity exceed all others in profligacy and immorality of conduct; and while the depraved worship of Kali, "the idol of the drunkard and the thief," is "scarcely to be met with in distant provinces," it abounds in the metropolis. Elsewhere, none but the most abandoned will openly confess that he is a follower of Kali. In Calcutta we find few that are not....By such men, a *suttee* is not regarded as a religious act but as a choice entertainment; and we may conclude that the vicious propensities of the Hindus in the vicinity of Calcutta are a cause of the comparative prevalence of the custom.[29]

[26] On rage as a response to adaptive impotence, see E. H. Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility* (London, Faber and Faber, 1964), p. 214.

[27] On turning against self as defence, see Anna Freud, *Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (London, International Universities, 1946).

[28] This particularisation of the greater sanskritic traditions in Bengal was the other reinterpretation taking place in the community. It is, however, beyond the scope of this paper.

[29] Collet, *op. cit.*, p, 85. The higher incidence of sati in Calcutta area is borne out by published statistics. See Collet, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-84. Also Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

Grant also, seeking clues to Hindu "insensibility" in general and cruelty to women in particular, found them in the cruelty and licentiousness of gods, particularly Kali, the increasingly popular goddess of the Calcuttans.[30] None noticed that the goddess, in her new incarnation, was neither intrinsic to the Brahmanic traditions nor to its Bengali variant. Nor could they know that the much maligned Kali puja was not even mentioned in any of the well-known Tantrik texts of the region and was a newly institutionalised practice.[31]

But the more interesting question is whether Rammohun Roy accepted this equation between sati and the content of new Hinduism. Apparently he did. It was "the peculiar practice of Hindu idolatry which," he felt, "more than any other pagan worship, destroys the texture of the society."[32] That is why to him complete legal prohibition of sati was not enough. In fact, by itself, it even did not seem very attractive.[33] The root of the pathology was that "advocates of idolatry and their misguided followers . . . continue, under the form of religious devotion, to practice a system which . . . prescribes crimes of most heinous nature, which even the most savage nation would blush to commit . . . ."[34] Not only that. This interpretation had to be tenaciously built into an abstract general proposition:

> . . . the natural inclination of the ignorant towards the worship of objects resembling their own nature, and to the external forms of rites palpable to their grosser senses . . . has rendered the generality of the Hindoo community . . . devoted to idol worship, —the source of prejudice and superstition and of the total destruction of moral principle, as countenancing criminal intercourse, suicide, female murder, and human sacrifices.[35]

[30] Charles Grant, "Observations on the state of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, Particularly with Respect of Morals, and on the Means of Improving It," written in 1792, *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 1812-1813, 10, Paper 282, pp. 1-112, particularly pp. 60-66.

[31] Chakravarty, *Tantrakatha*, *op. cit.*

[32] Rammohun Roy, 1816, *English Works*, II, p. 60.

[33] Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 75. It is this hesitancy, more than anything else, which has created recent doubts about Rammohun's anti-sati position.

[34] Rammohun Roy, 1819, *op. cit.*, II, p. 23, also p. 52.

[35] *Ibid.*, II, p. vii.

In other words, he too, like his contemporaries, thought Hinduism to be the culprit. Yet, it should be now obvious that the direction of the causal relationship must be reversed. It was rather a small group of exposed men who sought in Hinduism a support for their anomic response to structural changes. Sati, in its new and popularised version was their creation, and so was the new concept of a more terrorising cosmic motherhood which justified this act.

III. THE ROOTS OF DISSENT

However, a closer examination of Rammohun Roy's writings and personal history reveals deeper sensitivities. He not only linked sati to the community's mode of worship, he challenged its basis by suggesting new sex role norms and sexual stereotypes. The word sati is a derivative of the root *sat*, truth or goodness. The widow by dying with her husband proved that she was true to him and virtuous. Roy shifted the responsibility of demonstrating fidelity and rectitude to others. While men seemed to him "naturally so weak and so prone to be led astray by temptations of temporary gratifications," women seemed to him to have "firmness of mind, resolution, trustworthiness and virtue;" they were "void of duplicity" and capable of "leading the austere life of an ascetic."[36]

This was to have important implications for the history of reform movements in India. During the following one hundred years, nearly all such movements centered around women and the dominant models of social intervention were frequently attempts to work through the society's historical ambivalence towards woman. Roy's reinterpretations of the traditional concept of womanhood and the traditional relationship between male and female identities were thus aspects of a more durable theory of social reform.

The reasons for this linkage between Rammohun's model and the reforms of the next generation are not that obscure. The various structures introduced into India by British colonialism assumed a new symbolic system which, while being compatible with tradi-

[36] *Ibid.*, VI, p. 5; and III, pp. 87-137; and *Granthabali, op. cit.*, III, passim; Collet, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-95.

tions, would include within it new concepts of public activism and ethics, political power, interpersonal skills and professional participation. All these were deeply associated with definitions of masculinity and femininity in both the greater sanskritic culture and Bengal's folk version of Hinduism. It is to Rammohun Roy's credit that he was the first to sense this and delineate a model of reform in which a new definition of womanhood would be the central plank. This cultural sensitivity and this cognitive innovation were his main contributions to the emerging culture of modern India.

To understand the connection between the reformer and the reform of sati, one must, therefore, at some stage concentrate on the way in which Rammohun's personal history epitomised the society's basic problems at that point of time and the way in which the solution which the society found for itself in Rammohun's life bore the imprint of his personality. This brings one to Rammohun's earliest exposures to concepts of power, activism, motherhood and religiosity, his first conflicts centering around the inter-linkages amongst these concepts, the distinctive sex role images to which his family sensitised him, and the early validations and invalidations in him of the typical regional myths and phantasies centering around masculinity and femininity, on the one hand, and around nurturance, propitiation and defiance of authorities, on the other.

Rammohun was born in 1772 in a Vaisnava Kulin Brahman family located in a village about 100 miles from Calcutta. The family had been culturally atypical for at least two generations. Contemporary revenue records mention that after the death of his grandfather, his father and uncles "did not live together as a joint family, but were divided in food, estate and interests."[37] This complete nuclearity of the family astounds one. Not that in eighteenth-century Bengal the extended family was the norm, but it certainly was in many sections of the society, the normal ideal. And, even though a majority of Hindus stayed in partly-nuclear households, the nuclearisation rarely went to such limits amongst the prosperous, landed, upper castes.[38] Perhaps the Roys, as a

[37] I. Singh, *Rammohun Roy*, vol. 1 (Bombay, Asia, 1958).

[38] For a brief discussion of incidence of joint families in various social strata, see M. S. Gore, *The Impact of Industrialisation and Urbanization on the Aggarwal Family of Delhi Area* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1961, University Microfilms, Ann Arbor), chapter 1, pp. 2-59.

family of urban bureaucrats, were more fully exposed to the unsettling effects of the changing political economy of eastern India.

The impact of this deviation on Rammohun's early interpersonal world must have been deep as well as wide. We shall, however, take into account only two important features of a typical joint household which, because they were distorted by the process of nuclearisation, had a direct bearing on the way Rammohun conceptualised the problems of his society. The first of these was the tendency in an extended family to expose the growing child to a number of adult authorities and, simultaneously, discourage him from distinguishing between "near" and "distant" relations amongst these authorities. The aim was to deter the growth of "emotionally exclusive" loyalty towards one's own nuclear unit within the larger family. Within such a pattern of diffused authority and joint responsibility, the father particularly played a distant and noncommittal role in relation to his children. One might in fact say that the culture tended to neutralise him as an immediate, intimate authority with manifest and direct interest in his children. Once again, the aim was to blur the boundaries of the nuclear units.

The emotional restrictiveness of the father-son relationship did not, however, apply in the joint family to the mother-child intimacy.[39] In fact, the culture took some care to see that the decisive memory trace for the individual remained the primordial intimacy he had had with the only effective figure he had known within the family: his mother. The son, in his "relationship to the other members, ... was categorized by his sex and age role. He was judged by standards which were impersonal.... It was the mother who tried to individualise ... him."[40] The culture also strengthened this intimacy by "idolising"

[39] See P. Spratt, *Hindu Culture and Personality* (Bombay, Manaktalas, 1966). On warm non-demanding intimacy in mother-son relationship in the early years of growth see also G.M. Carstairs, *The Twice-Born* (Bloomington: Indiana, 1958) passim., particularly, pp. 157-58; *The Annals of American Academy of* Dhirendra Narayan, "Indian National Character in the Twentieth Century," *Political and Social Science* (March 1967) 370, pp. 124-32; and Gore, *op. cit.* p. 11.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 36. This happens also because, to regulate conjugality, a patrilineal or patrilocal society cannot easily minimise the role of the genitor. It therefore emphasises perforce the role of the mother and underplays the role of the woman (*Ibid.*, p. 11-12). See also Margaret Cormack, *The Hindu Woman* (New York, Columbia University, 1953), pp. 150-51; Aileen D. Ross, *The Hindu Family in Its Urban Setting* (Toronto, University of Toronto, 1961), pp. 101-103.

woman as a mother (to contain her conjugal role as wife and to stop fissures developing along the margins of nuclear units) and by devaluing wifehood (which induced her to look at her son as one who would give her status). Being necessarily the sole immediate source of power, nurturance and wrath in early childhood, it was the mother who became the ultimate symbol of authority as well as the ultimate target of defiance.

The resulting ambivalence linked the concept of maternal authority to that of an undependable nurturant, prone to betray and eager to aggress.[41] In personal phantasies and cultural myths it produced a deep preoccupation with maternal warmth and a persistent anxiety about motherly fickleness, aggression and counter-aggression. It also produced strong counterphobic attempts to glorify constancy in mothering and to rationalise its fluctuations as due to human frailties and aggression towards mother or her symbols, which could be corrected by suppliance, sacrifice and restitution.[42]

The impact of these forces on young Rammohun's personality can only be guessed. For instance, it is probable that the culturally prototypical mother-son relationship might have become a source of heightened ambivalence within a nuclear household. And both the mother and the son may have found themselves face to face in a situation where there were few structural constraints on within-family behaviour and expressive style. Again, the father might have become not merely the sole male authority and role model within the family, but also an immediate interpersonal reality, thus underscoring the need for a stronger, more involved, intervening, paternal authority who would delineate, for himself and his sons, a clearer social identity. Strangely, this deduced pattern neatly fits what little we know about Rammohun's earlier interpersonal environment. Somehow both the parents of Rammohun appear to be exaggerated versions of traditional parents, with only some aspects

[41] For other sources and aspects of this ambivalence see studies of traditional Indian system of childrearing in Carstairs, *op. cit.*, passim., particularly, pp. 152-69; J. T. Hitchcock and Leigh Minturn, "The Rajputs of Khalapur," Beatrice Whiting (ed.), *Six Cultures* (New York, Wiley, 1963), pp. 203-361; Leigh Minturn and W. W. Lambert, *Mothers of Six Cultures* (New York, Wiley, 1964), pp. 230-239; Spratt, *op. cit.*, passim.

[42] See some instances in *ibid.*, pp. 226-27, 232-36; Carstairs, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-59.

of their personalities heavily underscored by the demands of a nuclear family.

Mother Tarinidevi, whose turbulent relationship with her son is now accepted history, was the fervently religious daughter of a priestly family. She wielded, it is said, "considerable influence over her husband" and was the "real power at home."[43] Not only did she "set the general tone of family life," but directed practical affairs normally not within the prerogative of Indian women.[44] However, it is principally a certain ruthless fidelity to a cause which made Tarinidevi the most effective figure within the family. Iqbal Singh comes nearest to the maternal figure we intend to invoke. Tarinidevi was, he sums up,

> ... a remarkable woman but in quite a different and unconventional sense. She was ... cast in a much stronger mould than the other two wives of Ramakanta .... Whatever convictions Tarinidevi held she held strongly and with all the tenacity of a woman's will, though it is true that these convictions were not illumined by any deep understanding or moderating charity of judgement. Equally, she did not lack firmness of purpose, though, again, this firmness was not tempered by any quality of compassion and perceptiveness .... "[45]

This tenacious fidelity to convictions had a history. Before marriage Tarinidevi had been a devout Shakto and, hence, not exposed to the emotionally tinged glorification of passivity and aggression-denial which has always been an important part of Vaisnavism all over India. After marriage she changed her allegiance —heartily, according to some, and with a vengeance, according to others—to her husband's denomination, "as was expected of a good wife."[46] Whatever be the social and familial pressures behind that innocuous and euphemistic statement, by a number of accounts it was this overnight transformation which encouraged Tarinidevi to make intense overt conformity to the family denomination the keynote of her self-image.

[43] Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 4; Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

[44] *Loc. cit.*; R.C. Dutta, *Cultural Heritage of Bengal* (Calcutta, Punthi Pustak, 1962), p. 91.

[45] Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 20; Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

But rejected loyalties die harder than that. The Shakto commitment to forms and rituals, which Tarinidevi brought into the Vaisnava culture of the Roys, only forced her to model her Vaisnava self on her aggressive, ardent, anti-ascetic, Shakto identification. And the constraints of the pacifist asceticism of Vaisnavism only ensured the indirect but ruthless manner in which her persistent Shaktoism was expressed after marriage.

The symptoms of obsession-compulsion went even further than that. The "hard core of intractibility verging on ruthlessness," with which Tarinidevi sought and defended her ideological purity, was also reflected in her mothering. The children were not only drawn into her "intricate web of ceremony and form," her "almost neurotic attention to every minute detail of worship and observance," and her "delirium of pieties,"[47] they had little protection in a culture where such traits were often considered aspects of feminine virtue.[48]

The correlation between power and fiery purism that the mother demonstrated might have carried other associations too. The son may have sensed early that power did not reside in the apparently patriarchal forms, but in the personalities that gave substance to them. And, the substance in this case was Tarinidevi's authoritarian ritualism which made traditions not merely a way of life but an ideology. Nuclearisation of the family must have given salience not only to this pattern of dominance, but also to the associations amongst power, intervention in the real world of events, feminine identification and feminine cause.

Thus, Tarinidevi was perhaps destined to become the ultimate target as well as the model of rebellion for her son. Along one axis, she was likely to generate in him a sweeping hostility towards women, towards the cultural symbols associated with mothering, and a defensive rigidity towards the mother-worshippers of Bengal. This hostility did not follow his exposure to Christian, Buddhist and Islamic theologies; it was merely endorsed by these alternative

[47] Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 20, 22-23.

[48] See a comparable situation in the childhood of a later-generation Brahmo in the author's "Defiance and Conformity in Science: The Identity of Jagadis Chandra Bose," *Science Studies* (1972), 2(1), pp. 31-85.

systems.[49]

This hostility hounded modern India's first theoretician and activist for the economic, social and religious liberation of woman throughout his life. No one who reads about Rammohun's troubled relationships with his three wives, his extra-marital peccadillos, his long and bitter legal battle against his mother, his lonely life in a separate house away from his orthodox wives and orthodox children, can fail to sense the depth of this rage against women. When ultimately he left India in 1830 to defend the proscription of sati in the Privy Council (whatever be technically his "job" in England) he began his journey for the cause of Hindu women by "forgetting" to inform his youngest wife of his departure. If one thinks that this is the final evidence of Rammohun's latent disdain towards women, there are the questions he wrote to be put to his mother, in the Calcutta High Court, after she had filed a false law suit against him:

> . . . have you not instigated and prevailed on your Grandson the Complainant to institute the present suit against the said Defendant, as a measure of revenge; because the said defendant hath refused to practice the rites and ceremonies of the Hindu Religion in the manner in which you wish the same to be practiced or performed? Have you not . . . estranged yourself . . . from all intercourse with the Defendant . . . ? Have you not repeatedly declared . . . that there will not only be no sin but that it will be meritorious to effect the temporal ruin of the Defendant . . . .? Have you not publicly declared that it will not be sinful to take away the life of a Hindoo who forsakes the idolatry and ceremonies of worship.? . . . declare solemnly on your oath, whether you do not know and believe that the present suit would not have been instituted if the Defendant had not acted in religious matters contrary to your wishes and entreaties and differently from the practices of his ancestors? Do you not in your conscience believe that you will be justified in your power to effect the ruin of the

[49] Much earlier, in his latency, he was already intolerant of the concept of a weak god subservient to a female deity. He would start crying, it is said, whenever a particular scene of the folk play *Manbhanjan* was enacted. The scene depicted Krishna, the supreme god of Vaisnavas, placating Radha, his consort, by weeping and clasping her feet, while his peacock headgear and clothes lay rolling in the dust. Collet, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

> Defendant and to enable the Complainant to succeed in the present suit . . . ?[50]

This perceived homicidal vindictiveness of the mother and the fury it engendered in the son had their inevitable corollary in a haunting sense of guilt too. More so, because Rammohun had, in the ultimate analysis, defeated his mother decisively in every instance. Defeats are dangerous, but so is total victory:

> Whenever he spoke of his mother, it was with warm affection and 'a glistening eye.' The glistening eye itself was, perhaps, a screen for something too deep for tears. Behind it a more perceptive observer might well have registered the febrile pulse of a remorse for which even the most convincing intellectual essays in self justification could offer no effective therapy.[51]

One suspects that it was this failure of the well-tried defence of rationalisation which linked Rammohun's sense of guilt to a deep-seated demand for more large scale reparations. We shall describe in a little while the manner in which his reformism did ultimately erect a magnificent structure of public atonement.

Along a second axis, Tarinidevi was perhaps bound to generate in her son a sharp awareness of the power, individuality, capacities and rights of women. We have already mentioned that Rammohun tried to reverse the traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity in his culture. But this awareness was relevant in another sense too. When his contemporaries assess Roy as "shrewd, vigilant, active, ambitious and pre-possessing in his manners,"[52] one is tempted to relate this image to descriptions of Tarinidevi—purposeful, active, authoritative and self-confident—managing the affairs of the Roys and fighting a continuous battle against all outer and inner encroachments on her newfound identity. This was a part of his self the reformer could ill afford to waste.

It was this combination of rage, guilt and admiration in him which established an inverse relationship with the authority images around which his community's faith was organised. Rammohun

[50] Cited in Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-81.

[51] *Ibid.*, pp. 183-84.

[52] Missionary Register, Church of England, September 1816; quoted in Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

had to try to topple Bengal's transcendental symbols of motherliness; and it *had* to be for the sake of Bengal's suffering women.

Let us now turn to the mother's lack-lustre consort and the family's grandest failure: Ramkanta Roy. Occupied with opportunities, profits and possibly profiteering,[53] Rammohun's father was in many ways a typical product as well as a representative of the Bhadralok response to new social forces. Or so atleast it might have seemed to his son. In this sense, Ramkanta's failures as an authority-figure were perhaps, for his son, the failures of the first adaptive attempts of the community.

Ramkanta was, in the mellow and euphemistic language of an earlier generation, "an upright and estimable man," and "noted for his quiet and retiring disposition."[54] This disposition, some say, was an outcome of his unhappy work experiences. He was the son of an urban bureaucrat, and had been a functionary in the Nawab's court at Murshidabad. According to some accounts, he was sacked for inefficiency and dishonesty a short time before Rammohun was born. It has been also suggested that this failure was "one of a series which ended only with his death."[55] We do not know how far this history demonstrated, to him and to his sons, his ineffectiveness as an urbanite, as a member of the growing tertiary sector, and as a male authority. But we know his reaction to these failures. He defended himself by an interpersonal withdrawal which was almost pathetic. He "was often so disgusted with the treatment he received that he would neglect his affairs for a while, and retire to meditate and tell *Harinam* beads in a garden of *Tulsi* plants."[56] Another biographer is more explicit. Ramkanta, he says, "... did not command any great ability or resourcefulness ... when things did not go well ... (he) retreated into the brittle shell of his Vaisnava devotionalism ...."[57] Apparently, both in the family and in the outside world, he remained "singularly colourless, almost inchoate and lacking in clear focus, when contrasted with the granite figure of his second wife."[58] In these, the Vaisnava idealisation of passive

[53] Singh, *op. cit.*; S.K. De, *Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Calcutta, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1962), 2nd edition, p. 503.

[54] Sivanath Shastri, 1911, quoted in Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

[55] Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

[56] Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

[57] Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

submission and deindividualisation provided him with an important consensual validation of his personal life-style and self-concept.

Naturally, given his retreatist style, Ramkanta did not pay much attention to his children. For them he remained a distant, detached and impersonal symbol of authority.[59] But the type of nuclear household he established and the exposures to which his family was subject, demanded an altogether different type of male authority figure. The need for an authority who would show some competence in handling the contradictions within the Bhadralok life style almost certainly must have been felt by his growing children, sensitised to exactly these needs by the family and subcultural experiences and searching for a more viable male identity. Instead, Ramkanta continued to play with them the traditional roles of the father as an "intruding stranger" and as a "castrated victim of an aggressive mother."[60]

The very distance between Ramkanta and his son, however, meant lesser intimate rancour. It also probably led to a latent empathetic awareness in the son that the father was fighting a battle not unlike his own. Not surprisingly, therefore, in adolescence, when concerned with his own problem of self-definition, Rammohun always argued with his father respectfully and without the bitterness he showed towards his mother.[61] And the two well-known instances of separation between the father and the son both ended in the latter being accommodated (the worldly-wise son did not opt for reconciliation in a third instance when reconciliation would have meant economic disaster for him). As a result, though adult Rammohun, whenever he was tense, dejected or ill, would see "the frowning features of his father rise unbidden on his imagination,"[62] he could recount in his middle age, humorously and without rancour or disrespect, his differences with his father.[63] Evidently, Ramkanta and his son found each other more acceptable antagonists than Tarinidevi and her son. To some extent at least, in

[59] *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

[60] Carstairs, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

[61] Rammohun cited in Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 38; Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

[62] W. J. Fox, *A Discourse on the Occasion of the Death of Raja Rammohun Roy* (London, 1833). Quoted in R. Chanda and J. K. Majumdar, *Selections from Official Letters and Documents Relating to the Life of Raja Rammohun Roy*, vol. I (1791-1830) (Calcutta, Oriental Book Agency, 1938), p. xxxiii.

[63] Collet, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7; Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

spite of all the discouragement which Ramkanta's personality provided, Rammohun did try to move towards the father, to establish communication with him, and to see in him a possible source of support and a design of identity.[64]

IV. THE DESIGN OF REFORM

How did Roy relate these first contradictions to the processes of cultural change, in general, and the reform of sati, in particular? A number of guesses can be made. First, his earliest interpersonal experiences and conflicts had convinced him that religion was the key to the process of social change in India.[65] Not that he himself was a man of religion. If anything, he probably found all religions equally full of deceit.[66] But he had seen the central role religion played in the lives of his parents and his culture. He also knew, from personal exposures, that religion could be a great divider, that it was as at the level of religion that authorities could be most intimately faced and successfully defied.

No wonder, Rammohun's first contribution to the nineteenth century model of reform was the awareness that his community's form of mother worship and correlated deeper concerns with mothering—expressed, as he saw it, in "the peculiar mode of diet" that had become "the chief part of the theory and practice of Hinduism" —constituted the crux of traditions in Bengal. In this he was a precursor of a second generation of reformers who were to make heterodoxy in food and in attitude to women the major symbols of defiance in nineteenth century Bengal, and conformity to commensal and other oral taboos the first criterion

[64] This ability of the father to tie his son to himself "in such a way that overt rebellion or hate was impossible" has been hypothesized to be a source of reformism. See Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility, op. cit.*, pp. 202-03.

[65] R. C. Majumdar, in *Glimpses of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century* (Calcutta, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1960), p. 27, describes how in opposition to David Hare's idea of establishment of a college, Rammohun pleaded for the establishment of a Brahma Sabha. Though he also took part in the propagation of western education in India, it was without rejecting the primacy of religious reform. One also remembers that Rammohun founded in 1822 an Anglo-Hindu school, being dissatisfied with the secular education provided by the Hindu College.

[66] See Sumit Sarkar, pp. 46-68.

of orthodoxy.[67]

The equation which he made between the anomic *babu* life style which he saw around him and the new contents of religion in Bengal was the second theme in his model. It is this linkage which Rammohun tried to break through a new theology and a new projective system incorporating new authority images. Sati, to him, was only part of a wider syndrome. More basic was the obsessive rigidity and the deadly seriousness of rituals, organised around the image of mother deity that was a constant internal threat. These rituals had to be rejected exactly as the *Manbhanjan* play was once rejected decades earlier. Both as a psychological defence and as an ideology, the cultural symbols of motherliness could not maintain their "working balance" with the nuclear phantasies in one who had faced so much maternal hostility and held in store such deep anger against her. The image of a powerful, irrascible celestial mother—who was propitiated only when the self-castrated son identified with his ineffective father—was authentic, but had to be vehemently denied.

Invalidated by the new social presses, the Hindu pantheon became for Roy a perversity, a source of magics which did not work. But, this rejection of maternal symbols was also bound to arouse moral anxiety. It, therefore, had to be counter-balanced by a spirited battle to protect women from men's aggression, by fighting for their rights in different sectors of life and, at a more trivial level, by being impersonally polite and courteous to all women.[68]

Roy's Brahmoism incorporated both these themes. At the first level, it tried to banish the older gods from the lives of all Bengalees. Each god became to him and to the Brahmos a part of a "heathen mythology" and represented "the gross errors of a peurile system of idol worship (not) becoming the dignity of human beings."[69] He

[67] Sivanath Shastri, 1903, *Ramtanu Lahiri o Tatkaleen Bangasamaj* (Calcutta, New Age, 1957), pp. 85-88, 101-103, 170-73; Rajnarayan Basu, *Atmacharit* (Calcutta, Kuntaline, 1908), passim; N.K. Bose, *Modern Bengal* (Calcutta, Vidyodaya, 1959) p. 48.

[68] One does not have to be a psychologist to sense the uncertainty towards women in one who always stood up from his chair when his wives entered his room, particularly when the whole world knew that the wives were on the worst of terms with Rammohun and, being aggressively orthodox, could never appreciate this formal western gesture.

[69] *English Works*, II, p. 92.

rejected Kali because in her worship "human sacrifices, the use of wine, criminal intercourse, licentious songs are included" and "because debauchery . . . universally forms the principal part of her followers;"[70] he rejected Shiva because he was a "destroying attribute" and a family man;[71] and he rejected Krishna because he seemed a "debauch" and had killed his nurse-maid by sucking her blood while being breast-fed.[72] In other words, not only the themes of homicidal mother and acquiescent father, but also the themes of matricide and "infanticide" had to be eliminated from the Hindu projective system. Instead, the concept of deity for the first time in a modern Hindu sect was sought to be made patriarchal. Apparently, what Ramkanta could not do for his son, the semeticised Brahmo concept of godhead could: it projected a paternal authority—firm, reliable, and convincing—that could be offset against the fearsome inner authority of his mother.[73]

Simultaneously, Brahmoism managed to give to the wifely role of Bengali woman an importance and dignity it never had before. It attacked the matriarchal status of woman by emphasising her role in the world of public activities and it sabotaged the sacred symbols and images by identifying with which the Bengali women compensated for their narrow and constricted lives. Instead of their magical powers and magical capability of doing harm, they had in Brahmoism the justification for wielding real and direct power as individuals who had the right to live their own lives.[74]

These seemed eminently sensible to many who were being introduced to a variety of effective, impersonal, organisational authorities—authorities that were unresponsive to one's acts of propitiation, sacrifice and ritual conformity. Their rewards were based on criteria irrelevant to anchored values: personal autonomy and initiative, denial of the fated and the ordained, shrewd competitiveness, and ambitious this-worldliness. These were making apparent the latent

[70] *Loc. cit.*

[71] Letter to Estlin, 1827. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 90; also *Ibid.*, II, p. 23.

[72] *Ibid.*, II, p. 92.

[73] These imageries, however, dissociated Brahmoism from some of the basic symbols of both the greater sanskritic culture and Bengal's folk Hinduism. Later Brahmos tried to remedy this to some extent. But that is another story.

[74] *Ibid.*, I, passim., particularly the tract on property rights of women, pp. 1-10.

need for a new male identity at the centre of which could be a new self-sex identification. The Brahmo godhead tried to meet this need and helped Rammohun's publicised phantasies to establish an inverse association with the grand myth of Bengali ethos. By toppling the absolute maternal authorities, he successfully coped with his nuclear conflicts and tried to sabotage the tradition's symbolic core.

In this attempt, the monism of *advaita* came in handy. Rammohun gave a new meaning to this monism by "misinterpreting" Shankaracharya's ultimate objective as the revival of monotheism in India on the basis the Vedanta.[75] This was logically absurd because Vedanta posited an attributeless Brahman and rejected all forms of prayer in favour of pure contemplation of God.[76] Rammohun, on the other hand, actually succeeded in invoking the image of a patriarchal God, "the author and governer of the universe"—*"He*, by whom the birth, existence and annihilation of the world is regulated."[77]

This monothesised monism served two crucial purposes for the following generations of reformers. First, this metaphysics had often traditionally smoothened the acceptance of dissent, new religious cults and alternative interpretations of sacred texts and justified them as diversities that were part of a larger transcendent unity. By giving salience to Sankara's system, therefore, Rammohun not only opened a new debate amongst his contemporaries on Hinduism as an unified religious system and as a single cultural strain, he also made available for the next generation of reformers a powerful tool of social engineering. Second, the Vedas and Upanishads were a sufficiently vague and complex authority to stand new interpretations. Like the fluid psychocultural system that greater Calcutta had become, here was a collection of fluid sacred authorities too, on which a reformer could impose his personal meaning. In addition to giving salience to a particular interpretive

[75] Rammohun Roy, quoted by R. C. Majumdar, in Majumdar, Majumdar and Ghose, *op. cit.*, II, p. 101.

[76] Max Muller says, " . . . Rammohun Roy himself, when . . . he fortified himself behind the ramparts of Veda, had no idea what the Veda really was. Vedic learning was at a low ebb in Bengal, and Rammohun Roy had never passed through a regular training in Sanskrit." *Biographical Essays*, 20, VIII, in Sen, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

[77] *English Works*, II, p. 174.

system, Rammohun therefore also gave centrality to texts which were best suited for universalist and modern reinterpretations.

In the ultimate analysis, however, Rammohun's use of *advaita* was no less instrumental than his use of other religions. And perhaps only Adam, his collaborator and friend, had an inkling of it:

> Rammohun Roy, I am pursuaded, supports this institution (Brahmo Samaj) not because he believes in the divine authority of the Ved, but solely as an instrument for overthrowing idolatry. To be candid, . . . he uses Unitarian Christianity in the same way.[78]

We, on this side of history, now have a better idea of which "goddess" Roy was trying all along to overthrow and which "god" he wanted to instal in her place. To say this is not to flaunt one's uncompromising psychologism. It is to recognise the fact that no reform is entirely a public event. By its very nature, it is also a private statement. Rammohun Roy too, in his reform, made such a statement. It is not incidental that his reform was his last compliment to his father and the final gesture of reparation to his mother. We have seen that the parents were something more than the parameters of a personal history: they also represented the contradictions of an age and a culture. Incidental was only the fact that this reform happened to be the only success Ramkanta Roy ever attained and the only victory Tarinidevi ever won.

[78] Quoted in Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

RAMMOHUN ROY AND BENGALI PROSE

PRADYUMNA BHATTACHARYA

Rammohun thrives on controversy. While alive, he excelled as a controversialist. After death, he remains a centre of contention. Is he the father of Bengali prose? Did he write better Bengali than his predecessors? These are some of the moot questions, often debated with passion and heat. Any attempt at estimating the Raja's contribution to Bengali language and literature must therefore begin by clarifying one's answer to these questions.

To take up the first question.[1] The point is that the question itself is wrong; for it rests on the false assumption that a single individual can beget the prose of a nationality.

Evidently, Bengalees spoke in prose since long before Rammohun's advent. Nor did he produce the first prose-book in Bengali. His first two volumes of prose, *Vedānta-Grantha* and *Vedānta-Sār*, were

[1] On this issue the literary historians are divided. One group ascribes the parentage of Bengali prose to Rammohun. R. C. Dutt (AR CY DAE), for instance, wrote in his *Literature of Bengal* in 1877 that Rammohun "formed the Prose Literature of Bengal." Next year Rajnarayan Basu hailed Rammohun as the "father of Bengali prose." See Basu, *Bāṅgālā Bhāsā O Sāhitya Viṣayak Bakṛta* (Calcutta, 1878), p. 22. The other group holds that this ascription is illegitimate. Brajendranath Bandyopadhyaya, for example, would like to bestow the title upon Mṛtyunjay Vidyalamkar; Sushil Kumar De seems to take the view that both Carey and Mṛtyunjay have better claims to this title. See Bandyopadhyaya, *Rammohan Ray* (in Bengali), *Sahitya-Sadhak-Caritmala*, no. 16, 3rd edition (Calcutta 1350 B.S.), p. 70 and De, *Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd edition (Calcutta, 1962), pp. 140-43 and 543-45. Sukumar Sen, however, sensibly enough, does not at all seek a father-figure of Bengali prose. See Sen, *Bangala Sahitye Gadya*, 3rd edition (Calcutta, 1356 B.S.).

published in 1815, before which a number of prose-books had already appeared.

To set the perspective, I should, at this point briefly review the state of Bengali prose before 1815.[2] Till the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Bengali literary mind expressed itself, almost exclusively, through the vehicle of verse. Even history, biography and philosophical tracts were written in *payār*, the predominant Bengali metre. The earliest specimens of Bengali prose, that are still extant, do not date from beyond the sixteenth century. And they are all in manuscripts; for "no printing press," as Jadunath Sarkar writes in his *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, "not even the cheapest and smallest lithographic stone was installed" by our royalty and ruling classes, who imported only luxury goods from Europe.[3] These manuscripts are an indispensable source material for reconstructing the prehistory and early history of Bengali prose. The use of prose in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was confined to letters, deeds and documents, and cryptic philosophical notes, known as *deha-kaḍacā*, relating to esoteric Vaisnavite cults. It appears that Bengali literary prose was being formed in the early part of the eighteenth century. In this century several Sanskrit-texts—*nyāya, smṛti, jyotiṣa* and *āyurveda* tracts—were translated. An eighteenth-century translation of *Bhāṣā-Paricceda*, a standard work on *nyāya* is quite worthy of note. I will have occasion to quote from this manuscript at the next section of this essay.

Beginning from the middle of the seventeenth century, the Portuguese missionaries made some attempts at writing Bengali prose; the earliest one being that of Dom Antonio, son of a Bengali Zamindar, kidnapped by pirates and later converted to Roman Catholicism. Dom Antonio's book is a catechism of the Christian doctrine in the form of a dialogue between a Brahman and a Roman Catholic. The next notable attempt, made by Manoel da-Assumpcam, an

[2] I have heavily drawn upon the researches of Sukumar Sen, Sushil Kumar De, Brajendranath Bandyopadyaya and Sajanikanta Das in giving this rapid survey of early Bengali prose.

[3] Jadunath Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, vol. IV (Orient Longman's 1st edition, Calcutta, 1972), p. 345. "It was left to the Portuguese . . . to be pioneers in the field of printed book production as well. Information available to us indicates that early in the 16th century two printing presses were imported into Goa and set up there." See M. Siddique Khan, "William Carey and the Serampore Books (1800-1834)," *Libri*, vol. 11, No. 3 (1961), p. 197.

Augustunian friar, is *Crepar Xaxtrer Orth, Bhed* (Lisbon, 1743). This is perhaps the earliest printed book in Bengali. The text was transliterated in Roman script—Bengali types were not yet available —in accordance with their phonetic value in Portuguese. *Crepar Xaxtrer Orth, Bhed* thus mirrors the phonology of the Bengali language of the first half of the eighteenth century.

The year 1778 marks a watershed, when Nathaniel Brassey Halhed published at Hooghly his *Grammar of the Bengali Language.* For Halhed's *Grammar* Bengali types were fabricated by Charles Wilkins, with the able assistance of Pañcānan Karmakār, a talented mechanic. This event heralded a new era, the era of Bengali printing, and opened up vast new possibilities for the development of Bengali prose. Four books of laws and regulations (including the famous Cornwallis Code), in Bengali translation, were published before the close of the eighteenth century.

The year 1800 constitutes another landmark, when two institutions —Serampore Mission and Fort William College—were set up. The first Bengali Bible (1800-01) and prose text-books were printed from the Mission press at Serampore. The College of Fort William was founded with the professed aim of training the civilians from "Home" in the languages and literatures of India. Reverend William Carey headed its Bengali department. Under his guidance and drive the following textbooks came out between 1801 and 1815.

1801. Rāmrām Basu, *Rājā Pratāpāditya-Caritra.* Historical sketch of Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore.
William Carey, *Kathopakathan.* A compilation of "colloquies or dialogues intended to facilitate the acquiring of the Bengalee language."

1802. Goloknāth Śarma, *Hitopadeś.* Translated from Sanskrit.
Rāmrām Basu, *Lipimālā.* Formally, a collection of letters; but, really, "a composition in Bengali prose in the epistolary form".[4]
Mṛtyuñjay Vidyālaṃkār, *Batriś Siṃhāsan.* Translated from Sanskrit.

1803. Tāriṇīcaraṇ Mitra, *Oriental Fabulist.* "Bungla version" in the Roman character of Aesop's and other ancient fables.

[4] Buchanan's description cited by De, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

1805. Caṇḍīcaraṇ Munsi, *Totā Itihās*. Literally, tales of a parrot, it is a translation from a Persian original.
Rājīvlocan Mukhopādhyaya, *Mahārāj Kṛṣṇacandra Rāyasya Caritram*. Though purported to be a historical sketch of Rājā Kṛṣṇacandra Rāy, "the memoir is more of a tissue of fables and traditionary tales."[5]

1808. Mṛtyuñjay Vidyālaṃkār, *Rājāvalī*. A "history of kings based more on tradition than on authentic history."[6]
Mṛtyuñjay Vidyālaṃkār, *Hitopadeś*.
Rāmkiśor Tarka-cuḍāmaṇi, *Hitopadeś*.

1812. William Carey, *Itihāsmālā*.
A compilation of stories collected from diverse sources. It is not officially recorded to be a publication of Fort William College.

1815. Haraprasād Rāy, *Puruṣa parīkṣā*. Translated from Vidyāpati's Sanskrit work of the same title.

Among the writers of the Fort William period, Carey and Mṛtyuñjay are most eminent. Carey was more an efficient promoter of the language than a proficient writer in Bengali. His own prose, as is evident from the last edition (1833) of the Bengali Bible, *Dharmapustak*, issued during his life-time, never quite lost its un-Bengali ring.[7] Mṛtyuñjay, however, was a talented writer, a self-conscious craftsman, who experimented with different styles.

Historically, therefore, Rammohun cannot be called the "onlie begetter" of Bengali prose. The prose in Bengali is the product of a process in which Rammohun, amongst others, played a major role. This role I will try to describe in this essay.

Now, to take up the second question: Did Rammohun write better prose than his predecessors? Some literary historians hold that some of the earlier writers, Mṛtyuñjay in particular, had a superior prose-style.[8] I should preface this discussion by pointing out that the scope for comparative style-study is limited. In fact, a major trend both in linguistics and in literary criticism inclines to

[5] De, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 192.

[7] Sen, p. 19. As an example of the kind of sentences that Carey wrote, I cite this from the chapter on syntax in his *Grammar* (4th edition, 1818, p. 93): *Amar kichu taka nay*=I have no money.

[8] See, for example, De, *op. cit.*, p. 544.

the view that formally different expressions differ in meaning, and, therefore, are not comparable.[9] Whether one accepts this view or not, it serves as a caution against the practice of drawing improper comparisons, much too prevalent among our critics and historians.[10] Any exercise in comparative style-analysis, to be meaningful, should fulfil two conditions. First, two texts, if they are to be compared at all, must have at least an analogous theme. Secondly, they must be of comparable date: there is no point in comparing the immature piece of one writer with the maturer piece of another.

Accordingly, I choose Mṛtyuñjay's *Vedānta-Candrikā* (1817) and Rammohun's *Bhaṭṭācāryyer Sahit Vicār* (1817) for comparison. These two pamphlets have a common subject-matter, seen from opposite view-points: the former argues for, while the latter against, the Hindu practice of idol-worship. There is, however, one difference: Mṛtyuñjay's tract belongs to his maturer phase; but that of Rammohun represents his earlier period and style of writing.

I am not comparing Mṛtyuñjay and Rammohun—I would like to emphasize—in order to make judgements of worse and better; I am making the comparison simply to elucidate their respective characteristics.

I will now cite two passages, one from *Vedānta-Candrikā* and the other from *Bhaṭṭācāryyer Sahit Vicār*.

> Evaṃ ei sūtre sarvvapadopādānahetuk Brahmajijñāsottar niṣkām karmānuṣṭhāne mumukṣur mokṣer hāni hay nā yehetuk phaladvārāi bandhak karmma hay svarūpata hay nā tathāpi alpāyucapalacittādi doṣayukta idānīntan puruṣerder phalābhisandhirahit karmmasvarūp nirvvāha karaṇe tattvābhyāser kṣatisambhāvanāte Brahmajijñāsottar niṣkām karmmānuṣṭhāne varavighātāya kanyodvāhaḥ ei nyāy upasthit hay ataev yathāvidhi sannyās arthāt karmmer phalata o svarūpata parityāgrūp sādhansampanna haiyā Vedāntaśravaṇ śāstrācāryyopadiṣṭārther manan arthāt yuktite avadhāraṇ o avadhāritārthe cittapravāhīkaraṇarūp nididhyāsan o āśramocita karmmarūp dharmmānuṣṭhānetei debapātparyyanta kāl yāpan sannyāsīr karttavya. Āsupterāmṛteḥ kālāt nayedvedāntacintayā ityādi śāstraprāmāṇyaprayukta. Ihāte

[9] Graham Hough, *Style and Stylistics* (London, 1969), p. 4.

[10] See, for instance, Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, *On Rammohan Roy*, (Calcutta, Asiatic Society, 1972), pp. 44-45, 53-55.

vividiṣār pūrvvei parityakta niṣiddhācaraṇer niṣṭhutāvalehavat [*sic*] prasaktii ki ataev niṣiddhācārī anek sannyāsī svaśiṣyake ācāryya svāmī parityāg kariāchilen tāhārder matānusārī daśanāmā nāme ek prakār lok adyāvadhi lokete prasiddha āche e vividiṣāsannyās karaṇe asamarther prati bahūdak kutīcakra nāme dui prakār sannyās vihita āche tāhāte niṣkām karmmācaraṇ yāvajjīva karttavya hay. Evaṃ ati durlabh tattvajñān lābh Isvarājñāprāpta karmmayog o cittaikāgratāparamaphalak Vedāntapratipādita kupitakapikapolavarṇapadmākṣamūrttyādyupāsanātei sulabh haiyā avidyā tatkāryya prapañcasakaler unmūlan kariyā jīvābhinna Brahmasākṣātkār kare. Ei sākṣātkār dehapātparyyanta jīvanmukti dehapātottar nivrvvāṇamukti hay. Evaṃvidha tattvajñānīr daṇḍavinirmmokottar saṃskārvaśata kulālacakrabhramivat pūrvvapūrvvacirābhyastatattadanuṣṭhānabalāt saṃskārvaśata anuvarttamān hay.

(Mṛtyuñjay Vidyālaṃkar, *Vedānta-Candrikā*[11])

Jagate Brahma haite bhinna vastu nāi ataev ye kona vastur upāsanā Brahmoddese karile Brahmer upāsanā haite pāre e yuktikrame ki devatā ki manuṣya ki paśu ki pakṣī sakaleri upāsanār tulyarūpe vidhi pāoyā gela tabe nikaṭastha sthāvar jaṅgam tyāg kariyā dūrastha devatā-vigraher upāsanā kaṣṭasādhya evaṃ viśeṣ prayojanābhāv ataev tāhāte pravarta haoyā yuktisiddha nahe. Yadi bala dūrastha devatā-vigraha evaṃ nikaṭastha sthāvar jaṅgamer upāsanā karile tulyarūpei yadyapi ai Sarvvavyāpī Parameśvarer ārādhanā siddha hay tathāpi śāstre ai sakal devavigrahe pūjā karibār anumatir ādhikya āche ataev śāstrānusāre devavigraher pūjā kariyā thāki tāhār uttar yadi śāstrānusāre devavigraher upāsanā karttavya hay tabe ai śāstrei kahiyāchen ye yāhār viśeṣ bodhādhikār evaṃ Brahmajijñāsā nāi sei vyakti keval cittasthirer janya kālpanik rūper upāsanā karibek ār buddhimān vyakti ātmār śravaṇmananrūp upāsanā kariben ataev śāstra mānile sarvvatra mānite hay. Evaṃ guṇānusāreṇa rūpāṇi vividhāni ca. Kalpitāni hitārthāya bhaktānāmalpamedhasām. Eirūp guṇer anusāre nānāprakār rūp alpabuddhi bhaktadiger hiter nimitte kalpanā karā giyāche *Iśopaniṣader* bhūmikāy ihār viśeṣ pāiben ār ātmār upāsanā keval śravaṇmananasvarūp hay ihār vivaraṇ. (Rāmmohan Rāy, *Bhaṭṭācāryyer Sahit Vicār*[12])

[11] Mrtyunjay Vidyalamkar, *Vedanta-Candrika*, *Rammohan-Granthavali*, edited by Bandhyopadhyaya and Das, vol. I, Vangiya Sahitya Parisat, Calcutta, n.d. (referred to henceforward as *Granthavali*), p. 133.

The following table shows the proportion of Sanskrit or *tatsama* words and compounds in each passage:[13]

Vocabulary	Mṛtyuñjay	Rāmmohun
Total number of words	153	151
Number of compounds	59	21
Compounds with 2 components	39	19
Compounds with 3 components	12	2
Compounds with 4 components	6	0
Compounds with 5 or more than 5 components	2	0
Tatsama and Sanskrit loan-words	127	106
Tadbhava words	26	45
Deśi words	0	0
Videśi words	0	0

Thus one can see, Mṛtyuñjay makes a larger use of compounds, particularly of longish compounds, than does Rammohun. Mṛtyuñjay's *kupitakapikapolavarṇapadmākṣamūrttyādyupāsanātei* is truly sesquipedalian. Rammohun avoids such compounds. He has a definite tendency of splitting the compound; he writes, for instance, *guṇer anusāre* instead of *guṇānusāre*. Also note how he repeatedly disjoins the compound *sthāvar-jaṅgam*.

The Mṛtyuñjay passage bears the marks of his avowed Sanskritism. However, the more important point to note is: not how many, but, what kind of Sanskrit words Mṛtyuñjay and Rammohun use. For Rammohun, too, makes a liberal use of the *tatsama* element; his diction is also Sanskrit-based. But there is one big difference. The words that occur in the Rammohun passage are not difficult, one can read the entire passage with—quite possibly even without—the aid of *Calantikā*, the standard dictionary of current Bengali; while Mṛtyuñjay is fond of pedantic words, one cannot, for instance, find the meaning of such words as *vividiṣāsannyās* or *niṣṭhātāvalehavat* or *kutīcakra* in *Calantikā*.

I will close this analysis by quoting two more extracts from

[12] Rammohan Ray, *Bhattacharyyer Sahit Vicar Granthavali*, vol. I, pp. 177-78.

[13] See S. K. Das, *Early Bengali Prose* (Calcutta, 1966) for similar tables. I have found his analysis generally useful. He is, however, mistaken in listing *Utsavananda Vidyavagiser Sahit Vicar* as one of Rammohun's Bengali books (p. 134). *Utsavananda* is a Sanskrit work, which Rammohun never translated into Bengali.

Vedānta-Candrikā and *Bhaṭṭācāryyer Sahit Vicār*, that throw light on their authors' characteristic attitudes to and ideals of Bengali prose.

> Āro yeman rūpālaṃkārvatī sāddhvī strīr hṛdayārtha-boddhā sucatur puruṣerā digambarī asati nārīr sandarśane paraṅmukh han temani sālaṃkārā śāstrārthavatī sādhubhāṣār hṛdāyartha-boddhā satpuruṣerā nagnā ucchṛṃkhalā laukik bhāṣā śravaṇ-mātretei paraṅmukh han.
>
> (*Vedānta-Candrikā*)[14]

(..and as the intelligent, who are admitted to converse with an adorned beautiful and virtuous woman, turns [*sic*] away disgusted at the very sight of a naked and wanton female, so those who are acquainted with the secrets of the ornamented and beautiful language of the Shasters, turn away in disgust at hearing the unembellished and immethodical style of vulgar language.—*An Apology for the Present System of Hindoo Worship*, *Mṛtyuñjay-Granthāvalī*, Calcutta, 1346 B.S., p. 28)

> ....Saṃskṛta tyāg kariā bhāṣāte Vedānter mat evaṃ Upaniṣadādir vivaraṇ karibār tātparyya ei ye sarvvasādhāraṇ lok ihār arthabodh karite pāren kintu pragāḍha pragāḍha Saṃskṛta śabda-sakal icchāpūrvvak diyā granthake durgam karā keval lokke tāhār artha haite bañcanā evaṃ tātparyyer anyathā karā hay ataev prārthanā ei ye dvitīya Vedānta-Candrikāke pratham Vedānta-Candrikā haite sugam bhāṣāte yena Bhaṭṭācāryya likhen yāhāte loker anāyāse bodhagamya hay.
>
> (*Bhaṭṭācāryyer Sahit Vicār*)[15]

(The doctrines of the Vedānta and the contents of the Upaniṣads are put into the vernacular—without having recourse to Sanskrit—with the purpose that the common people may understand their meaning. But if a book is made difficult by a deliberate use of abstruse Sanskrit words, the people are deprived of the meaning and, thereby, the purpose is defeated. I therefore entreat the learned Brahmin to write the second *Vedānta-Candrikā* in a language easier than that of the first.)

[14] Vidyalamkar, *op. cit.*, p. 152.
[15] Rāy, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

II

The fact remains, the Fort William group of authors, for all their worth, were essentially text-book writers. Their books, highly priced and meant for the British civilians, remained beyond the reach of the reading public. In any case, a series of publications, identified too closely with the apparatus of an alien imperialism, was not likely to attract, much less to enthuse, the people. The contents of these text-books were, naturally, trivial. What these authors wrote were primers of history and biography, besides colloquies and anecdotes; they "provided *ersatz* entertainment from Sanskrit, Persian and English fables."[16] Rammohun not only wrote for a wider public but brought a new content. Of this new content, one can get an idea even by going through the chronological catalogue of his prose works in Bengali:[17]

1. *Vedānta-Grantha*, 1815. A commentary on the *Vedānta-Sūtra*, which, in the words of Rājnārayan Basu, "became a *brahmāstra*" in Rammohun's hands.
2. *Vedānta-sār*, 1815. An abridged and easier version of *Vedānta-Grantha*.
3. *Talabakāropaniṣat* or *Kenopaniṣat*, 1816. Bengali translation based on *Śāṁkara-Bhāṣya*.
4. *Īśopaniṣat*, 1816. Bengali translation based on *Śāṁkara-Bhāṣya*.
5. *Bhaṭṭācāryyer Sahit Vicār*, 1817. *Śāstric* disputation with Bhaṭṭācāryya on idol-worship, a rejoinder to Mṛtyujñay Vidyālaṁkār's *Vedānta-Candrikā*. The title of the English version: *A Second Defence of the Monotheistical System of the Vedas*.
6. *Kaṭhopaniṣat*, 1817. Bengali translation based on *Śāṁkara-Bhāṣya*.
7. *Māṇḍūkyopaniṣat*, 1817. Bengali translation based on *Śāṁkara-Bhāṣya*.

[16] Amales Tripathi, "Bengali Literature in the 19th Century," *The History of Bengal* (1757-1905), edited by N. K. Sinha (University of Calcutta, 1967), p. 483.

[17] I owe much to the bibliographies prepared by the editors of Collet's *Rammohun* and Brajendranath Bandyopadhyaya. See S.D. Collet, *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, edited by D.K. Biswas and P.C. Ganguli, 3rd edition (Calcutta, 1962), pp. 526-32; Bandyopadhyaya, *op. cit.*, pp 82-93. See also *Granthavali*, vol. 7, *Parisista*, pp. 69-72.

8. *Gosvāmīr Sahit Vicār*, 1818. Śāstric disputation with Gosvāmi on monotheism.

9. *Sahamaraṇ Viṣaye Pravartak o Nivartak Saṃvād*, 1818. "A Conference between an Advocate for, and an Opponent of, the Practice of Burning Widows Alive."

10. *Gāyatrīr Artha*, 1818. An explanation of the *Gāyatrī* mantra.

11. *Muṇḍakopaniṣat*, 1819. Bengali translation based on *Śāṃkara-Bhāṣya*.

12. *Atmānātmaviveka*, 1819 (?). Śaṃkarācārya's (?) text along with Bengali translation.

13. *Sahamaraṇer Viṣay Pravartak O Nivartaker Dvitīya Saṃvād*, 1819. "A Second Conference between an Advocate for and an Opponent of the Practice of Burning Widows Alive." In this polemical tract Rammohun gives his rejoinder to Kāśīnāth Tarkavāgīs' *Vidhāyak Niṣedher Saṃvād*, an apology for *Sati*.

14. *Kavitākārer Sahit Vicār*, 1820. *Śāstric* disputation with Kavitākār.

15. *Subrahmaṇya Śāstrīr Sahit Vicār*, 1820. *Śāstric* disputation with Subrahmaṇya Śāstrī. The title of the English version: *An Apology for the Pursuit of Final Beatitude, Independently of Brahmunical Observances*.

16. *Brāhmaṇ Sevadhi: Brāhmaṇ O Misinari Saṃvād* (Numbers 1, 2 & 3), 1821. The title in English: *The Brahmunical Magazine: The Missionary and the Brahmun*. In *Brāhmaṇ Sevadhi* Rammohun refutes the attacks of the Christian Missionaries upon Hinduism.

17. *Cāri Praśner Uttar*, 1822. Answers to four questions put by an advocate of orthodox Hinduism.

18. *Prārthanāpatra*, 1823. The English version was entitled *Humble Suggestions to his countrymen who believe in One True God*.

19. *Pādri O Śiṣya Samvād*, 1823 (?). Written in the form of an imaginary conversation between a Trinitarian Missionary and three Chinese converts, this polemical tract exposes the fallacies of Trinitarianism.

20. *Gurupādukā*, 1823. The text, a rejoinder to a pseudonymous polemic, has not yet been traced. Its preface was reprinted in *Choṭo-Galpa*, 1 Paus, 1340 B.S., Vol II, No. 24.

21. *Pathyapradān*, 1823. "Medicine for the Sick, Offered by One who Laments His Inability to Perform All Righteousness." In *Pathyapradān*, perhaps his longest polemic, Rammohun pillories

a scurrilous pamphlet, *Pāṣaṇḍapīḍan* ('A Torment to the Irreligous"), written by Kāśīnath Tarkapañcānan on behalf of the orthodox opinion.

22. *Brahmaniṣṭha Gṛhasther Lakṣmaṇ*, 1826. This short tract analyses the characteristics of a householder faithful to Brahman.

23. *Kāyasther Sahit Madyapān Viṣayak Vicār*, 1826. *Śāstric* disputation with a *kāyastha* on drinking wine.

24. *Vajrasūcī*, 1827. Sanskrit text along with the Bengali translation of *prathama-nirṇaya* of *Vajrasūcī Upaniṣat* (a Mahayana Buddhist work) which shows that, in the final analysis, *Brāhmaṇa* means a believer in *Brahman*.

25. *Gāyatryā Paramopāsanāvīdhānam*, 1827. An exposition both in Bengali and in Sanskrit of the mode of divine worship through the chanting of the *Gāyatrī*.

26. *Brahmopāsanā*, 1828. Another tract on the mode of divine worship.

27. *Anuṣṭhān*, 1829. A catechism that expounds Rammohun's doctrine of divine worship.

28. *Sahamaraṇ Viṣay*, 1829. Rammohun's last polemic on *Sati*.

29. *Gauḍīya Vyākaraṇ*, 1833. Bengali grammar.

These books constitute, in part (the Bengali part), what may be called the canon of Rammohun. Among his apocryphal texts, the popular pamphlet *Brāhma-Pauttalik Saṃvād* or *A Dialogue between a Theist and an Idolator*, 1820, merits particular mention.

Rammohun, it is pertinent to remember, also wrote in periodicals, a medium that catered to a wider public. He published, for instance, his first tract on *Sati* (*Sahamaraṇ Viṣaye Pravartak O Nivartak Saṃvād*, 1818) in *Bāṅgāl Gezeti* or *Bengal Gazette*, one of the earliest Bengali newspapers. The columns of *Saṃvād Kaumudī*,[18] with which Rammohun was closely associated, covered a considerable area of contemporary life.[19] Thus one can see, Rammohun gave to Bengali prose a nobler and a wider content—from Vedanta to

[18] "Rammohan Roy was not only the principal promoter but the *de facto* editor of this periodical [*Samvad Kaumudi*], and articles from his own pen often appeared in it." Brajendranath Banerji, "Rammohun Roy as a Journalist," *Modern Review*, April 1931, p. 409.

[19] For a translation of the contents of the *Samvad Kaumudi* see J. K. Majumdar, *Raja Rammohun Roy and Progressive Movements in India* (Calcutta, 1941), pp. 285-94. The files of the *Samvad Kaumudi* are not available now.

day-to-day problems of social life he made the subject-matter of his writings.

His methodology, too, enhanced the content of his prose and introduced a note of high seriousness. He turned prose into a vehicle of conceptual analysis and rigorous logic, accepting *Śruti, Vedānta-Sūtra,* inference, perception and common sense as *pramāṇa* or essential means of arriving at valid knowledge.[20] The way he proves Manu to be more authoritative than Aṅgirā, Hārīt and other *smṛtis,* shows that he was adept in the mechanics of higher criticism.[21] In his logic-based discourses, Rammohun, however, does not spin metaphysical cobwebs.[22] He employs his immense machinery of reasoning mainly for some down-to-earth purposes: abolition of *Sati,* for instance. Thus his prose acquires a social content. Tagore perhaps thought of this rich and varied content when he said that Rammohun had put Bengali literature upon a granite structure.[23]

Now, let us look into the form of his prose.

Those who underestimate or reject Rammohun's literary achievements *en bloc,* seem to view his prose as a particular kind of writing with fixed features, that underwent little or no change.[24] Such a view, however, is unhistorical and wrong. As the bibliography, I have just given, shows: all his Bengali works, with one exception, came out between 1815 and 1829; *Gauḍīya Vyākaraṇ,* appearing, after a gap of four years, in 1833. Rammohun's prose, therefore, developed over a period of years; in other words, it, too, has a history.

In his first book, *Vedānta-Grantha,* one can find the faltering

[20] For a discussion of Rammohun's system of *pramana* see Dilipkumar Biswas, "Rammohan Ray O Vedanta," *Visva-Bharati Patrika* (Kartik-Paus, 1379 B.S.), pp. 137-78.

[21] *Sahamaraner Visay Pravartak O Nivartaker Dvitiya Samvad,* 1819.

[22] Jacquemont writes: "Logic is also a weapon of which he [Rammohun] makes frequent use and he does not like to put it away . . . but Ram Mohan Ray is a practical man. He is not a passionate idealist who attempts to realise impossible theories; all that he wants to do is to bring about the possible good; and however limited the measure of the possibility for the good may be, he is resigned to concentrate his efforts within the channel in which it will be useful." See Victor Jacquemont, "A Portrait of Rajah Ram Mohan Roy" (translated from the French by N. C. Chaudhuri), *Modern Review* (June 1926), pp. 689-692.

[23] Rabindranath Thakur, "Bankimcandra," *Rabindra-Racanavali,* vol. XIII, W.B. Govt., centenary edition (Calcutta, 1368 B.S.), p. 892.

[24] See, for example, De, *op. cit.,* p. 545, where he says: "Rammohun was the father, not of Bengali prose, but of the particular kind of stilted prose which he created and which now remains isolated as a mere curiosity."

steps of the beginner. Take, for instance, the sentence which he himself adduced as an illustrative example while instructing his readers how to understand prose:

Brahma jāhāke sakal Vede gān kareṇ ar jāhār sattār avalamban kariyā jagater nirvvāha caliteche sakaler upāsya hayen.

(*Vedanta-Grantha, Anuṣṭhān*, 1815, p. 13)

Violating the normal Bengali word-order, here, the antecedent, *Brahma*, precedes the relative clause. As a result, *Brahma jāhāke sakal vede gān kareṇ*, becomes, by itself, a simple sentence, conveying a sense, quite the contrary of Rammohun's intended meaning. Moreover, *sattār avalamban kariyā* and *nirvvāha caliteche* are unidiomatic collocations. The final copula, *hayen*, too, violates Bengali usage.

Let us take a longer passage:

Manuṣya jāhār sat asat vivecanār buddhi āche se ki rūpe kriyār doṣguṇ vivecanā nā kariyā svavarge kareṇ ei pramāṇe vyavahār evaṃ paramārtha kāryya nirvvāha karite pāre eimat sarvvatra sarvvakāle haile par pṛthak pṛthak mat e paryyanta haita nā viśeṣata āpnāder madhye dekhitechi je ekjan vaiṣṇaver kūle janma laiyā śākta haiteche dvitīya vyakti śāktakūle vaiṣṇav hay ār smārtta bhaṭṭācāryyer pare jāhāke ek sata vatsar hay nā yāvatīya paramārtha karmma snāndān vratopavās prabhṛti pūrvvamater bhinna prakāre haiteche ār sakale kahen je pañca brāhmaṇ jekāle edeśe āisen tāhāder pāyete mojā evaṃ jāmā ityādi veś evaṃ goyān chila tāhār pare pare se sakal vyavahār kichui rahila nā ār brāhmaṇer yavanādir dāsatva karā evaṃ yavaner śāstra pāth karā evaṃ yavanke śāstra paṭh karāṇa kon pūrvva dharmma chila ataev savarge je upāsanā o vyavahār kareṇ tāhār bhinna upāsanā karā evaṃ pūrvva pūrvva niyamer tyāg āpnārāi sarvvadā svīkār karitechi tave kena emata vākye viśvās kariyā paramārther uttam pather ceṣṭā nā karā yāy ॥ 2 ॥

(*Vedānta-Grantha, Bhūmikā*, 1815, pp. 5-6)

In this passage, too, some of the deviations which I have already noted, recur. But what I want to point out here is the inordinate length of the sentence: the whole passage is one single sentence comprising 156 words, strung together by conjunctions *evaṃ* and *ār*. This joining device reminds one of George Campbell's precept that

"Of all the parts of speech, the conjunctions are most unfriendly to vivacity."[25] The next, and an important, point to note is the complete absence of all punctuations except a double *dāḍi* or double stop at the end. Now, punctuation is a reflector as well as a controller of structure and rhythm. This lack of punctuation indicates Rammohun's as yet incomplete mastery of Bengali sentence-structure. In fact, punctuation is an important index of the progress of his prose.

The punctuation system of *Vedānta-Grantha* like that of other early Bengali books printed in Bengali characters—the case being quite different with Bengali books printed in Roman script[26]—is closely modelled on the traditional punctuation system of Bengali manuscripts. Thus *Vedānta-Grantha* has only those punctuation marks that one finds in a Bengali manuscript: *dāḍi* (।), double *dāḍi* (॥), *kasi* (—), a *kasi* after a single *dāḍi* (।—) or after a double *dāḍi* (॥—) and a circle between two double *dāḍis* (॥ ০ ॥). The *dāḍi* is the Bengali counterpart of the full stop. Besides, in *Vedānta-Grantha*, it serves (like the double *dāḍi*) the functions of the quotation marks, the colon and the dash as well. Rammohun usually clinches an argument with a double *dāḍi* and indicates the close of a chapter or section (*padaḥ*) by a ॥ ০ ॥ or a ॥ ০ ॥— mark. The *bhūmikā* or introduction to *Vedānta-Grantha* closes with a ॥— sign. He begins the book by writing the *mangalācaraṇ, om tat sat*, between double *dāḍis*, traditionally regarded in West Bengal as auspicious. Pancānan Tarkaratna in an illuminating article in *Haraprasād-saṃvardhan-Lekhamālā* has explained the *tāntric* symbolism and *naiyāyik* significance of such use of the double *dāḍi*.[27]

Subrahmaṇya Śāstrīr Sahit Vicār (1820) may be taken as a representative work of the middle period. In this polemical tract, printed at Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, Rammohun makes an ampler use of the English punctuation system and also shows a greater command over his medium. In an authoritative account of

[25] George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, vol. II (London, 1801), p. 287.

[26] We are getting Roman punctuation marks in Bengali books printed in Roman characters from as far back as 1743.

[27] For the undercurrent of the *tantric* element along with its characteristic emphasis upon this-worldiness in Rammohun's thought-process, see Dilipkumar Biswas, "Rammohan Rayer Dharma-Mat O Tantra Sastra," *Visva-Bharati Patrika* (Baisakh-Asadh, 1882 Saka), pp. 225-48.

puncuation marks in Bengali printing, Dr Sukumar Sen, our leading literary historian, states that Rammohun introduced the quotation marks, but he says that he cannot affirm—as he has no evidence at hand—whether Rammohun used the comma and the semicolon also.[28] However, a first edition copy of *Subrahmaṇya Śāstrīr Sahit Vicār*, available at Carey Library, Serampore, conclusively proves that Rammohun did use, besides the quotation marks and the English full stop, the comma and the semicolon as well.[29]

> Brahmavidyār prakāśer nimitta varṇāśram karmmer anuṣṭhān kartavya bate, ye hetuk ekathā Vedādi śāstrer sahit viruddha nahe, sutarāṃ āmrāo ihā svīkār kari; kintu ihā sarvvathā amānya hay, ye varṇāśram karmmer anuṣṭhān vyatireke Brahmajñāner utpatti hay nā, yehetuk Bhagavān Vedavyās varṇāśramkarmmahīn vyaktirdero Brahmavidyāte adhikār āche, ihā sūtre likhiāchen, se ei dui sūtra.
>
> (*Subrahmaṇya Śāstrīr Sahit Vicār*, 1820, p. 2)

As one can see from this passage, Rammohun's punctuation in *Subrahmaṇya Śāstrīr Sahit Vicār* is structural and logical. It is structural in that it both mirrors and controls the structure of the sentence. It is logical in that it indicates the steps of the argument and highlights the relationship and the meaning by ordering and shaping the expression.

Rammohun's prose has become altogether more mature in *Subrahmaṇya Śāstrīr Sahit Vicār*. The faltering steps of *Vedānta-Grantha* are no more; perhaps the language still creaks a little—note the archaisms of *yehetuk*, *vyaktirder* and the awkward copula, *amānya hay*—but the movement is vastly easier than it was in the *Vedānta-Grantha* period.

I cannot possibly trace here the development of his prose from

[28] Sukumar Sen, "Chapa Bamla Racanay Yaticihna, "*Visva-Bharati Patrika* (Magh-Caitra, 1885-86 Saka), pp. 284-96.

[29] A copy of the original edition of *Sahamaraner Visay Pravartak O Nivartaker Dvitiya Samvad* in the keeping of Sahitya Parisat Library, shows that the comma, the semicolon and the full-stop appeared in 1819. However, in the next book *Kavitakarer Sahit Vicar* (1820) there are no English punctuation signs, except the quotation marks. A possible explanation is that Haracandra Ray, from whose press *Kavitakar* came out, was perhaps not much equipped as a printer.

1821 to 1829 in any great detail. However, on the basis of available data I will put forward two generalisations:

1. From 1821 onwards there is a further progress in his prose: it becomes, generally, more lucid and more effective as a medium of logical discourse. His journalistic writings in *Saṃvād Kaumudi*, which began to appear from 4 December 1821, and intense polemicizing, helped him, I think, to evolve his language. Rammohun, indeed, forged his prose while fighting battles for social and religious reforms; the social battle-ground, thus, indirectly reflected itself into the form of his language. He therefore well illustrates C.V. Wedgwood's adage: "Nothing sharpens prose like the necessity to do battle with it."[30]

2. As a parallel development, the use of the punctuation-device tends to increase. In *Pathyapradān*, printed at "Sungscrit Press" in 1823, for example, almost the entire paraphernalia of the English punctuation system—the comma, the semicolon, the full stop, quotation marks, the note of interrogation, the paranthesis and the dash—is conspicuously present. I do not, however, mean to say that Rammohun's punctuation was as systematic or elaborate as that of Vidyasagar. Besides, in the early days of our printing, it seems, a lot depended upon the printers, not all of whom were equally equipped or sophisticated. That is why punctuation as well as printing varied from printer to printer.

As a specimen of his later style, I will cite a passage from *Anuṣṭhān* (1829):

1. Śiṣyer praśna. kāhāke upāsanā kahen
1. Ācāryyer pratyuttar. Tuṣṭir uddeśe yatnake upāsanā kahā yāy, kintu Parabrahma viṣaye jñāner abṛittike upāsanā kahi.

(*Anuṣṭhān*, 1829, p. 2.)

This passage reads almost like clean modern prose. I would, however, like to point out the similarity of method and structure of this passage with that of a manuscript treatise on logic, *Bhāṣa-pariccheda*.[31] The manuscript, which seems to be a free translation of a Sanskrit work of the same name, is dated 1181 B.S. (1774 A.D.).

[30] C.V. Wedgwood, *Seventeenth-Century English Literature*, second edition (Oxford, 1970), p. 71.

[31] *Sahitya-Parisat-Patrika*, vol. 4, (1304 B.S.), p. 325.

Gotam munike śiṣya sakale jijñasā karilen āmārdiger mukti ki prakāre hay tāhā kṛpā kariyā balaha. Tāhāte Gotam uttar karitechen. Tāvat padārtha jānilei mukti hay. Tāhāte śiṣyerā sakale jijñāsā karilen. Padārtha kato. Tāhāte Gotam kahitechen. Padārtha saptaprakār. Dravya guṇ karmma sāmānya viśeṣ samavāy abhāv. Tāhār madhye dravya nay prakār.

My point is that Rammohun did not build his logical language out of void; he had his roots in the traditional prose of the *naiyāyik*.

III

From what I have said thus far, it follows that the two prominent achievements of Rammohun's prose are rationality and lucidity. These two qualities are, indeed, interdependent. A language of rational discourse must needs be lucid; ambiguity is an enemy of logical thinking.

Rammohun generally communicates concepts, reasons and facts. He has, therefore, seldom recourse to the affective aspects of language. But at one or two places, his rational prose becomes charged with emotion. One such passage, an eloquent vindication of Indian womanhood, occurs in *Sahamaraṇer Viṣay Pravartak o Nivartaker Dvitīya Saṃvād* (November, 1819). The passage, first quoted fully by Rajnarayan Basu in his survey of Bengali literature (1878), has since become justly famous.[32]

I will cite another passage—a very extra-ordinary one, in the entire corpus of his writings. It is from *Anuṣṭhān*, written, as we know, ten years later, in 1829:

Ananta prakār vastu o vyakti samvalita acintanīya racanā-viśiṣṭa ye ei jagat, o ghatikāyantra apekṣākṛta atiśay āścaryānvita rāśi cakre vege dhāvamān candra sūryya graha nakṣatrādi yukta ye ei jagat, o nānāvidha sthāvar jaṅgam śarīr yāhār kona ek aṅga niṣprayojan nahe sei sakal śarīr o śarīrīte paripūrṇa ye ei jagat, ihār kāraṇ o nirvvāhakarttā yini tini upāsya han.

(*Anuṣṭhān*, 1829, p. 2.)

In the terminology of modern stylistics the totality of linguistic

[32] Basu, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-24.

phenomenon is known as a "sign". The sign is made of two constituents: the signified and the signifier. In this one-sentence passage, the signifier transmits not a concept, but an emotional and intellectual complex. The fact that Rammohun composed a hymn[33] on the same theme and in very similar diction, confirms that these words gushed forth from the entirety of his psyche.

The syntax is unusual; certain wordings (*acintanīya racanā-viśiṣṭa, apekṣakṛta atiśay āścaryānvitā*) are quaint; the inevitable copula *han* at the end, jars on the ear. Yet the structure, as an instrument of articulation, is strangely effective. Rammohun has to give the sentence a complex and uncommon shape not only because he wishes to articulate the relationships in it precisely, elaborately; but also because he builds up, compulsively, a sustained rhythmical unit: the whole sentence becomes chantable in one breath, as it were. And thus a catechism becomes a hymn.

The phrase *ei jagat* (this world) followed by a conspicuous comma, is repeated three times. This repetition, besides putting the characteristic accent upon this-worldliness, serves to unify, control and reflect the structure. Furthermore, the ordonnance operates by a tension between two concomitant but contrary strands of 'felt' thought; the sentence becomes a balance of opposites: the mystical intuition of the Supreme Being on the one hand, and the rationalist apprehension of the universe as a well-regulated machine, on the other. It is interesting to note how the mechanistic image of the universe as a clock—and the implied image of God as the ideal clock-maker—are mingled with such Vedāntic epithets as *ananta* (endless) and *acintanīya* (beyond thought). The exultation of the clock-image perhaps indirectly reflects Rammohun's strivings, urges for seeing a rule of law established in the temporal sphere.[34]

[33] See *Brahma-Samgit, Granthavali*, vol. IV, p. 61. Note the last four stanzas.

[34] "India requires," Rammohun says, "many more years of English domination so that she might not have many things to lose while she is reclaiming her political independence." See Jacquemont, *op. cit.*, p. 691. In this connection see also, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, edited by Nag and Barman, part I, p. 1, footnote, where he writes: "At present the whole empire (with the exception of a few provinces) has been placed under the British power, and some advantages have already been derived from the prudent management of its rulers, from whose general character a hope of future quiet and happiness is justly entertained."

IV

It is, however, not my contention that Rammohun has left behind a model prose. The archaisms and lapses in word-order that I have already noted, were perhaps, to some extent, unavoidable in the formative period of our literary prose. But a certain negative feature of his prose-style, which cannot be thus explained away, is that his prose is sundered from the current of common speech. The written language is never quite the same as the spoken language, nor is it perhaps easy to expound *śāstric* arguments in the daily language of the people; but one of the elements that determines the quality of a style is its remoteness from or proximity to colloquial speech, the life-sustaining blood-stream of prose literature. From this point of view, there is a marked difference between Rammohun and Luther, with whom he is customarily compared. Collet, for example, writes: "As by . . . Luther in Germany, so also by Rammohun in Bengal, the despised dialect of the common people was made the vehicle of the highest ideas and became thereby permanently elevated."[35] Interestingly enough, even Dr Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, who is now out to explode the "Rammohan-myth," declared in 1960: "The standard of revolt he [Rammohun] thus raised against the medieval tyranny of dogma unleashed forces which created what may be called Modern India and makes him worthy to rank by the side of Bacon and Luther."[36]

Luther is a maker of German literary prose; his translation of the Bible is the most important work, "not only in the history of the Reformation, but also in the history of languages."[37] Luther came of a peasant stock. And though during the peasant uprising, he instigated the nobles to "stab, knock, strangle them [the peasants] at will", he deliberately based his prose upon the language of the people.[38]

> He [Luther] drew his inspiration from popular idiom, from metaphors, . . . phrases and aphorisms current among artisans and peasants, popular proverbs, aphorisms and sayings which he

[35] Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

[36] Ramesh Chandra Majumdar *Glimpses of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century* (Calcutta, 1960), p. 53.

[37] G. R. Elton, *Reformation Europe* (London, 1963), p. 289.

[38] Cited in Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany* (*German Revolutions*), edited by Leonard Krieger (Chicago, 1967), p. 42.

loved, sought for and collected. He had some of them written on the walls of his room and in the margins of his psalter so that he could read and re-read one or other every day. He made a collection of popular proverbs which was printed in 1900. And he was delighted when he found he could use any of them in his translation of the Scriptures when he came across a thought or sentiment which his beloved Germans had expressed in popular language .... Even for theological expressions he avoided Latin, turning to his beloved fifteenth-century Rhenish mystics, and, if necessary having recourse to metaphor.[39]

But Rammohun took to an altogether different course. He made the language of the *bhadralok* or elite the foundation of his prose: even though in his Sanskrit-based diction, he generally avoids the elephantine compounds and the pedantic elements, his prose is, none the less, moulded upon *sādhu-bhāṣā*, i.e., the so-called elegant Bengali. In the preface to *Vedānta-Grantha*, he expressly acknowledges that his prose is not the easy language of common speech (*sāmānya ālāper bhāṣā*) and states that people with some knowledge of Sanskrit and *sādhu-bhāṣā* will be able to pick it up with a little effort.[40] Now, what is this *sādhu-bhāṣā*? Suniti Kumar Chatterji in his *Origin and Development of the Bengali Language* aptly describes it as "doubly artificial" and adds, hitting the nail on the head, "with its forms belonging to Middle Bengali, and its vocabulary highly Sanskritized, it [*sādhu-bhāṣā*] could only be compared to a 'Modern English' with a Chaucerian grammar and a super-Johnsonian vocabulary, if such a thing could be conceived."[41]

Unlike Luther, Rammohun is not known to have a passion for popular idioms and proverbs; nor does he use them much in his own writings. Seldom has he recourse to the concrete, sensuous vocabulary and metaphors of popular language. He tends to become abstract, rather than concrete; and uses similes rather than metaphors. It is significant to note how often in his translations he changes a metaphor into a simile. Take for example, this famous

39 Frantz Funck-Brentano, *Luther*, translated by E. F. Buckley (London, 1936), p. 291.

40 Rammohan Ray, *Vedanta-Grantha, Anusthan* (Calcutta, 1815), p. 12.

41 Suniti Kumar Chatterji, *The Origin & Development of the Bengali Language*, vol. I, (London, 1970), p. 134.

passage from *Īśopaniṣat* :

Hiraṇmayen pātreṇa satyasyāpihitaṃ mukham. Tattvaṃ pūsannāpāvṛṇu satyadharmāya dṛṣṭaye.[42]

(The face of truth is covered with a plate of gold. Remove it, thou sustainer of the universe, and reveal the truth to the seeker.)[43]

Rammohun renders it thus :

He sūryya svarṇamay pātrer nyāy ye tomār jyotirmay maṇḍal sei maṇḍaler dvārā tomār antaryāmī ye Paramātmā tāhār dvārke ruddha kariyā rākhiāchа tumi sei dvārke tomār upāsak ye āmi āmār prati atmajñān prāptir nimitte kholo.[44]

His rendering is more an explication than a translation; he himself significantly calls his translations *bhāṣā-vivaraṇ*. *'Hiraṇmayena pātreṇa'* (with a plate of gold) becomes *svarṇamay pātrer nyāy ye tomār jyotirmay maṇḍal* (thy spendour, which is *like* a plate of gold).

"I do not know," Heinrich Heine says, "how Luther's language came into being, but I do know that through his Bible the Lutheran language has spread throughout Germany. It is still supreme there ... and this old book is a source of constant rejuvenation for our language. All the expressions, all the phrases found in Luther's Bible are German; writers can make use of them, and since this book is in the hands of the poorest of the people there is no need for them to be given technical instruction in order to express themselves in a literary form."[45] Luther's Bible, it may be added, ran into 377 editions before his death.[46] Rammohun's works never enjoyed a comparable popularity; nor did they reach the masses of the people.

Being sundered from living speech, Rammohun's language

[42] Rammohan Ray, *Isopanisat, Granthavali*, Vol. I, p. 210.

[43] T.N. Sen's translation. See Sen, "Western Influence on the Poetry of Tagore," *Rabindranath Tagore: A Centenary Volume*, (New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 1961), p. 253.

[44] Ray, *Isopanisat, Granthavali*, p. 210.

[45] Cited in Funck-Brentano, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

[46] Elton, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

becomes estranged from its run and rhythm as well. And as a concomitant of this estrangement, his prose lacks flow. He builds his prose in a succession of self-sufficient sentences; there is no flowing-over of the rhythm from one sentence to another. One might say, borrowing Coleridge's words, the sentences in a page of Rammohun have the same connection with each other that marbles have with a bag; they touch without adhering.[47] Not that his sentences have no movement. They have; but these movements do not merge with and dissolve into the more sustained—and symphonic, contrapuntal—movement of the paragraph.[48] In this connection one cannot fail to note that in his prose-books, particularly in the earlier ones, the paragraph indentations are few and far between. And even when a paragraph occurs, it indicates either a phase of logic or an additional breathing space, more often the former than the latter, but never a rhythmic unit. Any page of *Pathyapradān*, marked by a greater use of the paragraph as a punctuation-mechanism, will illustrate this point.

A solid accumulation of independent sentences—often each of them representing a logical step—without the all-embracing sweep of a wider movement, tends to become monotonous. And this seems to be the real reason why Rammohun's prose weary the reader's attention. I, therefore, find it difficult to agree with Pramatha Chaudhuri's observation that Rammohun's style has not been accepted in Bengali literature because he proceeds, like the ancient *bhāṣyakāras*, by stating the opponent's argument at every step.[49] Vidyasagar, and even Tagore also, take to the same procedure in their polemical pieces; but their prose nowhere tires our patience. What animates and shapes their writings, is this rhythm, this *gest*—to borrow Brecht's terminology—that articulates itself into plastic paragraphs.[50]

[47] S. T. Coleridge, *Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London, 1835), p. 209.

[48] Here my analysis is based on Herbert Read's observations on the paragraph in *English Prose Style*, first Indian edition (Ludhiana, 1968), pp. 52-65.

[49] Pramatha Chaudhuri, "Abhibhasan," *Prabandha Samgraha*, vol. I, (Calcutta, 1959), p. 52.

[50] Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, edited and translated by John Willet (New York, 1966), p. 104.

V

The points that I have been trying to make, may be corroborated by a study of his *Bengalee Grammar in the English Language* (1826) and *Gauḍīya Vyākaraṇ* (1833). The latter, written in Bengali, is based on the former.

Space does not permit me to make a detailed analysis of his two grammars, which they deserve. I will concentrate only on those features that have a bearing upon my main argument.

I should briefly note some matters of fact before I give my estimate of Rammohun's grammatical writings. Before Rammohun, a number of European authors wrote treatises on Bengali grammar. Among his European predecessors, Manoel da-Assumpcam (1743), Halhed (1778), Lebedeff (1801) and particularly Carey (1801) deserve mention. It seems, in the days of Rammohun there was an avid demand for Bengali grammar. Thus, a curious request appears in the *Calcutta Gazette*, April 23, 1789, beseeching "any gentleman" to undertake for public benefit the composition of a Bengali grammar (Seton-Karr, *Selections from Calcutta Gazette*, ii. 497).[51] In a similar vein, the *Vaṅgadūt* of 20 February 1830 exhorts its "learned readers" to find ways and means for producing a Bengali grammar for the benefit of *āpāmar sādhāraṇ* or general public.[52]

Till recently, scholars were hailing Rammohun "as the first Bengali to write a grammar of the mother tongue."[53] But he seems to have been dislodged from this position of pre-eminence in 1970, when Shri Tarapada Mukhopadhyaya published a manuscript grammar supposedly written between 1807 and 1811.[54] The manuscript was found among the papers of John Leyden (1775-1811), the brilliant orientalist. Shri Mukhopadhyaya has given it the title *Bāṅgālā Bhāṣār Vyākaraṇ* and ascribed its authorship to Mṛtyuñjay

[51] De, *op. cit.*, p. 72n.

[52] Brajendranath Bandyopadhyaya, *Samvad Patre Sekaler Katha*, vol. I., second edition (Calcutta, 1344 B.S.), p. 63.

[53] Suniti Kumar Chatterji, "Rammohun Roy as a Grammarian," *English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy (Social & Educational)* (Calcutta, 1934), Note IV, pp. 25-30. Dr Chatterji, however, no longer holds this view. For his recent views see his essay in Bengali, "Vyakarankar Rammohan," *Manisi Smarane* (Calcutta, 1972).

[54] Tarapada Mukhopadhyaya (ed.) *Bangala Bhasar Vyakaran* (authorship ascribed to Mrtyunjay Vidyalamkar), (Calcutta, 1377 B.S.).

Vidyālaṃkār on some external and internal evidences. Carey's *Grammar*, it may be added, bears an amazing resemblance with *Bāṅgālā Bhāṣār Vyākaraṇ* both in matter and in treatment.

There is also an apparent similarity between Rammohun's *Grammar* and that of Carey's. Rammohun perhaps used Carey's *Grammar of the Bengalee Language* as his working model. I will give here just one example to substantiate my point. Carey describes the pronunciation of the Bengali consonant *ta* thus: "The sound of the first of these letters [*ta*] is expressed in the provincial pronunciation of *butter* in Yorkshire."[55] Rammohun's description is almost identical: "The provincial sound of *t* in the word *butter* expresses *ta* exactly."[56]

However, though Rammohun owes much to Carey, his is the superior work. His *Grammar* is partly prescriptive and partly descriptive; in fact, the latter element preponderates over the former. It means: Rammohun is not so much out to legislate, to promulgate a set of more or less arbitrary rules. On the contrary, his attitude to the linguistic phenomenon is permeated with self-consciousness: he stands, it will be truer to say, he tries to stand, "objectively outside the language he is studying."[57] The "rules" are therefore not what he had to obey blindly; but what he observed when he examined how his contemporary Bengalees actually used their mother tongue. One reason why Rammohun could take up and sustain this attitude is that he wrote his *Bengalee Grammar in the English Language* for foreigners—for "European philanthropists," to use his own words. It is a paradox: you come to know your own language, when you teach it to a foreigner. Whatever the reason, this attitude led him largely to a discovery of his own language: Bengali is to him, not a mere replica nor an aberration of Sanskrit, but a distinctive language with a genius of its own. This linguistic sense and sensibility mark him out not only from Carey or Mṛtyuñjay, but from most of the later grammarians also. Indeed, this sensibility, this awareness, pervades his grammatical conscience and has left its stamp upon his technique as well as upon his

[55] W. Carey, *A Grammar of the Bengalee Language*, fourth edition (Serampore, 1818), p. 4.

[56] Rammohun Roy, *Bengalee Grammar in the English Language* (Calcutta, 1826), p. 7.

[57] Otto Jespersen, "Grammar," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. X (London, 1963), p. 615.

collection of language material.

In evaluating a grammar the basic criterion is the language material. If the material collected by a grammarian is not sufficiently representative, his description of the language will necessarily be inadequate. And precisely in this respect, Rammohun is —I repeat—far ahead of all his predecessors and most of his successors in the field of grammar-writing. There is a refreshing rationality in the way he, most of the time, puts the emphasis fixedly upon the native Bengali element as distinct from the Sanskrit element, and upon the living speech as distinct from the fossilized and "imitation-antique" forms of *sādhu-bhāṣā*. Naturally, this makes his language material more representative and his grammatical description more adequate.

I find the logic of this same approach in operation in his treatment of cases, compounds and genders. Carey—or Mṛtyuñjay for that matter—accepts the Sanskrit model and states: "There are seven cases [in Bengali]: the Nominative, Accusative, Instrumental, Dative, Ablative, Possessive, and Locative, which answering to the Sungskrita cases, are placed in the same order as in that language."[58]

Rammohun, on the other hand, can clearly see that Bengali, unlike Sanskrit, has only four cases: "In Bengalee, cases may be reduced to four; the nominative, accusative, locative and genitive."[59] Accordingly, the paradigm of the noun that he gives, has only four inflected cases :[60]

Singular

Nom.	*goru*	a Cow
Acc.	*goruke*	a Cow or to a Cow
Loc.	*gorute*	in a Cow
Gen.	*gorur*	of a Cow or a Cow's

Plural

Nom.	*gorusakal*	Cows

[58] Carey, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.
[59] Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Acc.	*gorusakalke*	Cows or to Cows
Loc.	*gorusakale* or *gorusakalete*	in Cows
Gen.	*gorusakaler*	of Cows

While Carey and Mṛtyuñjay make a six-fold classification of *samāsas* or compounds, Rammohun writes: "those [*compounds*] may be reduced to four classes."[61] What is more important, the examples (*hāthbhāṅgā gāchpaka* etc.) given by him represent the purely Bengali element; but those of Mṛtyuñjay are mostly Sanskritic. One such example, common to both Mṛtyuñjay and Carey, is a little long : *pallava-phala-puṣpa-stavaka-mañjarī*, and, characteristically, it occurs in Mṛtyuñjay's *Batriś-Siṃhāsan*. In his *Gauḍīya Vyākaraṇ* Rammohun has plainly stated that compound words cannot be much used in Bengali.[62] For he knew full well that long-drawn-out compounds do not quite suit its genius.

On adjectives or *viśeṣaṇa*, Carey maintains: "A *visheshuna* must be of the same gender with its *vishishya*."[63] Here too Carey misunderstands the structure of Bengali in his attempt to make it conform to the model of Sanskrit. Rammohun, on the other hand, very sensibly writes: "When nouns are expressed, the adjectives that join them admit no variation of case, number or gender; as *baḍa manuṣyerā* superior men; *baḍa kanyāke* to the elder daughter; except those Sungskrit adjectives that are used in Bengalee, which frequently admit of the variation of gender; as *jyeṣṭhā kanyāke* to the eldest daughter; *jyeṣṭha putrake* to the eldest son."[64] Again, on page 59, he states categorically: "Bengalee adjectives have no distinction of gender."

Not everywhere, however, is Rammohun's description of the facts of Bengali language correct or consistent: to err is natural for one, who breaks new ground. There is therefore no point in making a list of his blunders; I will discuss only those that throw interesting sidelights or show an insufficient comprehension of the living speech.

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 38.
[62] Ray, *Gaudiya Vyakaran, Granthavali*, vol. 7, p. 21.
[63] Carey, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
[64] Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

"Prepositions," Rammohun writes, "may be defined to be such words, as, when correctly placed before or after a word, express the relation of another attribute or noun to that word; as, *Se nagar haite gela* he went from the Town, expressing relation between the act of going out and the Town, the motion having had its beginning in the Town."[65] This definition, however, is self-contradictory. How can a *pre*position be placed *after* a word? The indeclinable *haite* is, in fact, not a preposition, but a post-position; the notion of the preposition is irrelevant in Bengali. Rammohun makes this mistake because he imports a category of English grammar into the grammar of Bengali. Nothing really is so little useful "as reasoning by analogy from Europe to India."[66]

An instance of Rammohun's inadequate comprehension or incomplete acceptance of the living speech is his insistence upon retaining the copula. A sentence, he insists, must have a verb.[67] The Bengali—as well as the Sanskrit—usage, however, is to leave the 'be' verb generally understood. Thus, *Rām bhālo chele* (Ram good boy=Ram is a good boy) is good Bengali; while, *Rām bhālo chele hay* (Ram good boy is) is unidiomatic. Rammohun persistenty wrote the latter kind of sentences.

Nothing reveals Rammohun's insufficient appreciation of the rhythm of Bengali more than the chapter on prosody, where he affirms, "the natives of Bengal have neither music nor a language well adapted for poetry."[68] This statement betrays his ignorance not only of his native folk-poetry and folk-songs but also of Vaiṣṇava lyrics.[69] (This, again, shows his difference with Luther whose knowledge of and passion for German musical tradition is well-known. "Please collect for me all the German metaphors, rhymes and songs, as well as all the poems of the *Meistersingers* [German lyric poets and musicians of 14th-16th centuries, organized in guilds] which have been described, put into verse, composed and printed by your poets and draughtsmen in Nuremberg," he wrote in 1535, to his friend

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 118.

[66] Canning to the Court of Directors, quoted in Bishnu Dey, *Michael Rabindranath O Anyanya Jijnasa* (Calcutta, 1967)), p.1.

[67] "Javat kriya na paiben tavat paryyanta vakyer ses angikar kariya artha karibar cesta na paiben." (*Vedanta-Grantha, Anusthan*, 1815, p. 13).

[68] Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

[69] See Chatterji, "Rammohun as a Grammarian," p. 29. and Bipin Chandra Pal, *Beginning of Freedom Movement in India* (Calcutta, 1954), p. 53.

Link, who happened to be in that town.[70]) Naturally, Roy could describe only three metrical patterns: *payār, tripadī* and *toṭak*. He obviously did not make a systematic classification of the Bengali metre; he did not attempt it, either. Even then, his analysis of the *payār* is far from complete. The *payār*, he says, has fourteen *akṣars* or letters and not less than seven or more than fourteen syllables.[71] However, the Bengali rhythm, whether in verse or prose, is not a matter of letters, not even of syllables as such; but of a configuration of open and closed syllables. The *payār*, which approximates the speech-rhythm, is a pattern of such syllables. And the peculiarity of the pattern lies in that a *payār* line has two feet: the first having eight and the second six *mātrās* or moras.

VI

I have tried to describe the important role that Rammohun played in evolving the discursive prose in Bengali. Further I have shown that his contributions in this field were not without certain deeply contradictory aspects. In the first place, his prose, being moulded on the *sādhu-bhāṣā*, is divorced from the living speech. Secondly, though in his *Grammar* he goes very far in accepting the living speech, he hardly resorts to its natural and indestructible resources in his own writings. There is thus a contradiction between Rammohun's theory of prose as a grammarian and his practice as a prose writer. Thirdly, while he largely succeeds in making his prose an efficient vehicle of reason, he fails, in general, to enliven it with the all-pervasive sweep of a wider rhythm. In a way the history of modern prose of the Bengali language differs fundamentally from that of some other languages—of English, for example. Historians of the English language say that the English sentence took the modern form during the end of the seventeenth century. In the seventeenth century, the century of English revolution, the English prose moved towards the common speech. The Puritan and Protestant tradition, the political pamphleteers and

[70] Funch-Brentano, *op. cit.*, p. 291.
[71] *Gaudiya Vyakaran*, p. 66.

journalists, the scientists, and even the Royal Society "preferring the language of artisans, countrymen and merchants"[72] to that of wits and scholars, added their influences to this massive movement towards the common speech. Modern Bengali prose, on the other hand, in its formative period, based itself upon the ossified forms of the *sādhu-bhāṣā*, and moved towards an opposite direction.

Historically, this disjunction between the living speech and the *sādhu-bhāṣā* constitutes the basic contradiction, that has determined the development of Bengali prose in modern times. The question inevitably arises: why, at all, did this cleavage take place in the days of Rammohun? Why did our "modern" prose become estranged from the common speech? I cannot possibly embark upon a full-scale analysis of the causes here. But I believe, the cleavage cannot be explained in literary terms alone; to find anything like a complete answer, one must go beyond the frontiers of literature. For prose, like language, is a social product. And, therefore, the contradictions of our nineteenth-century prose reflect the dialectics of our nineteenth-century society: the estrangement of our prose from "the language of artisans, countrymen" mirrors the alienation and identity crisis of the newly emergent urban *bhadralok*.

[72] Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society of London*, (1667), p. 113, quoted in Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution*, (London, 1972), p. 129.

APPENDIX

BENGALI PASSAGES OF THE TEXT IN BENGALI SCRIPT

1

এবং এই সূত্রে সর্ব্বপদোপাদানহেতুক ব্রহ্মজিজ্ঞাসোত্তর নিষ্কাম কর্ম্মানুষ্ঠানে মুমুক্ষুর মোক্ষের হানি হয় না যেহেতুক ফলদ্বারাই বন্ধক কর্ম্ম হয় স্বরূপত হয় না তথাপি অল্পায়ুচপলচিত্তাদি দোষযুক্ত ইদানীন্তন পুরুষেরদের ফলাভিসন্ধিরহিত কর্ম্মস্বরূপ নির্ব্বাহ করণে তত্ত্বাভ্যাসের ক্ষতিসম্ভাবনাতে ব্রহ্মজিজ্ঞাসোত্তর নিষ্কাম কর্ম্মানুষ্ঠানে বরবিবাতায় কন্যোদ্বাহঃ এই ন্যায় উপস্থিত হয় অতএব যথাবিধি সন্ন্যাস অর্থাৎ কর্ম্মের ফলত ও স্বরূপত পরিত্যাগরূপ সাধনসম্পন্ন হইয়া বেদান্তশ্রবণ শাস্ত্রাচার্য্যোপদিষ্টার্থের মনন অর্থাৎ যুক্তিতে অবধারণ ও অবধারিতার্থে চিত্তপ্রবাহীকরণরূপ নিদিধ্যাসন ও আশ্রমোচিত কর্ম্মরূপ ধর্ম্মানুষ্ঠানেতেই দেহপাতপর্য্যন্ত কাল যাপন সন্ন্যাসীর কর্ত্তব্য। আসুপ্তেরামৃতেঃ কালাৎ নয়েদ্বেদান্তচিন্তয়া ইত্যাদি শাস্ত্রপ্রামাণ্যপ্রযুক্ত। ইহাতে বিবিদিষার পূর্ব্বেই পরিত্যক্ত নিষিদ্ধাচরণের নিষ্ঠুতাবলেহবৎ প্রসক্তিই কি অতএব নিষিদ্ধাচারী অনেক স্বশিষ্যকে আচার্য্য স্বামী পরিত্যাগ করিয়াছিলেন তাহারদের মতানুসারী দশনামা নামে এক প্রকার লোক অদ্যাবধি লোকেতে প্রসিদ্ধ আছে এ বিবিদিষাসন্ন্যাস করণে অসমর্থের প্রতি বহূদক কুটীচক্র নামে দুই প্রকার সন্ন্যাস বিহিত আছে তাহাতে নিষ্কাম কর্ম্মাচরণ যাবজ্জীব

কর্ত্তব্য হয় এবং অতি দুর্লভ তত্ত্বজ্ঞান লাভ ঈশ্বরাজ্ঞাপ্ত কর্ম্মযোগ ও চিত্তৈকাগ্র্যপরমফলক বেদান্তপ্রতিপাদিত কুপিতকপিকপোলবর্ণ-পদ্মাক্ষমূর্ত্তাদুপাসনাতেই সুলভ হইয়া অবিদ্যা তৎকার্য্য প্রপঞ্চসকলের উন্মূলন করিয়া জীবাভিন্ন ব্রহ্মসাক্ষাৎকার করে। এই সাক্ষাৎকার দেহপাতপর্য্যন্ত জীবন্মুক্তি দেহপাতোত্তর নির্ব্বাণমুক্তি হয়। এবম্বিধ তত্ত্বজ্ঞানীর দণ্ডবিনির্ম্মোকোত্তর সংস্কারবশত কুলালচক্র-ভ্রমবৎ পূর্ব্বপূর্ব্বচিরাভ্যস্ততদনুষ্ঠানবলাৎ সংস্কারবশত অনুবর্ত্তমান হয়।

মৃত্যুঞ্জয় বিদ্যালংকার, বেদান্তচন্দ্রিকা, ব্রজেন্দ্রনাথ বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় ও সজনীকান্ত দাস সম্পাদিত রামমোহন-গ্রন্থাবলী, প্রথম খণ্ড, বঙ্গীয়-সাহিত্য-পরিষৎ, কলিকাতা (অতঃপর "রামমোহন-গ্রন্থাবলী" নামে উল্লিখিত), পৃষ্ঠা ১৩১।

2

জগতে ব্রহ্ম হইতে ভিন্ন বস্তু নাই অতএব যে কোনো বস্তুর উপাসনা ব্রহ্মোদ্দেশে করিলে ব্রহ্মের উপাসনা হইতে পারে এ যুক্তিক্রমে কি দেবতা কি মনুষ্য কি পশু কি পক্ষি সকলেরই উপাসনার তুল্যরূপে বিধি পাওয়া গেল তবে নিকটস্থ স্থাবর জঙ্গম ত্যাগ করিয়া দূরস্থ দেবতাবিগ্রহের উপাসনা কষ্টসাধ্য এবং বিশেষ প্রয়োজনাভাব অতএব তাহাতে প্রবর্ত হওয়া যুক্তিসিদ্ধ নহে। যদি বল দূরস্থ দেবতাবিগ্রহ এবং নিকটস্থ স্থাবর জঙ্গমের উপাসনা করিলে তুল্যরূপেই যদ্যপি ওই সর্ব্বব্যাপী পরমেশ্বরের আরাধনা সিদ্ধ হয় তথাপি শাস্ত্রে ঐ সকল দেববিগ্রহে পূজা করিবার অনুমতির আধিক্য আছে অতএব শাস্ত্রানুসারে দেববিগ্রহের পূজা করিয়া থাকি তাহার উত্তর যদি শাস্ত্রানুসারে দেববিগ্রহের উপাসনা কর্ত্তব্য হয় তবে ঐ শাস্ত্রেই কহিয়াছেন যে যাহার বিশেষ বোধাধিকার এবং ব্রহ্মজিজ্ঞাসা নাই সেই ব্যক্তি কেবল চিত্তস্থিরের জন্য কাল্পনিক রূপের উপাসনা করিবেক আর বুদ্ধিমান্ ব্যক্তি আত্মার শ্রবণ মনন রূপ উপাসনা করিবেন অতএব শাস্ত্র মানিলে সর্ব্বত্র মানিতে হয়। এবং গুণানুসারেণ রূপাণি বিবিধানি চ। কল্পিতানি হিতার্থায় ভক্তানামল্পমেধসাং। এইরূপ গুণের অনুসারে নানাপ্রকার রূপ অল্পবুদ্ধি ভক্তদিগের হিতের নিমিত্তে কল্পনা করা গিয়াছে ঈশোপনিষদের ভূমিকায় ইহার বিশেষ পাইবেন আর আত্মার

উপাসনা কেবল শ্রবণমননস্বরূপ হয় ইহার বিবরণ ।

রামমোহন রায়, ভট্টাচার্য্যের সহিত বিচার, রামমোহন-গ্রন্থাবলী, প্রথম খণ্ড, পৃষ্ঠা ১৭৭-৭৮।

3

আরো যেমন রূপালঙ্কারবতী সাধ্বী স্ত্রীর হৃদয়ার্থবোদ্ধা সুচতুর পুরুষেরা দিগম্বরী অসতী নারীর সন্দর্শনে পরাঙ্মুখ হন তেমনি সালঙ্কারা শাস্ত্রার্থবতী সাধুভাষার হৃদয়ার্থবোদ্ধা সৎপুরুষেরা নগ্না উচ্ছৃঙ্খলা লৌকিক ভাষা শ্রবণমাত্রেতেই পরাঙ্মুখ হন ।

মৃত্যুঞ্জয় বিদ্যালংকার, বেদান্তচন্দ্রিকা, রামমোহন গ্রন্থাবলী, প্রথম খণ্ড, পৃষ্ঠা ১৫২।

4

.....সংস্কৃত ত্যাগ করিয়া ভাষাতে বেদান্তের মত এবং উপনিষদাদির বিবরণ করিবার তাৎপর্য্য এই যে সর্ব্বসাধারণ লোক ইহার অর্থবোধ করিতে পারেন কিন্তু প্রগাঢ় প্রগাঢ় সংস্কৃত শব্দসকল ইচ্ছাপূর্ব্বক দিয়া গ্রন্থকে দুর্গম করা কেবল লোককে তাহার অর্থ হইতে বঞ্চনা এবং তাৎপর্য্যের অন্যথা করা হয় অতএব প্রার্থনা এই যে দ্বিতীয় বেদান্তচন্দ্রিকাকে প্রথম বেদান্তচন্দ্রিকা হইতে সুগম ভাষাতে যেন ভট্টাচার্য্য লিখেন যাহাতে লোকের অনায়াসে বোধগম্য হয় ।।

রামমোহন রায়, ভট্টাচার্য্যের সহিত বিচার, রামমোহন-গ্রন্থাবলী, প্রথম খণ্ড, পৃষ্ঠা ১৫৫।

5

ব্রহ্ম যাঁহাকে সকল বেদে গান করেণ আর যাঁহার সত্তার অবলম্বন করিয়া জগতের নির্ব্বাহ চলিতেছে সকলের উপাস্য হয়েন ।

রামমোহন রায়, বেদান্তগ্রন্থ, অনুষ্ঠান, ক্যেরিস অ্যাণ্ড কোম্পানির প্রেস, কলিকাতা, ১৮১৫, পৃষ্ঠা ১৩।

6

মনুষ্য জাহার সৎ অসৎ বিবেচনার বুদ্ধি আছে সে কি রূপে ক্রিয়ার দোষ গুণ বিবেচনা না করিয়া স্বধর্ম্মে করেণ এই প্রমাণে ব্যবহার এবং পরমার্থ কার্য্য নির্ব্বাহ করিতে পারে এইমত সর্ব্বত্র সর্ব্বকালে হইলে পর পৃথক পৃথক মত এ পর্য্যন্ত হইত না বিশেষত আপনাদের মধ্যে দেখিতেছি জে একজন বৈষ্ণবের কুলে জন্ম লইয়া শাক্ত হইতেছে দ্বিতীয় ব্যক্তি শাক্তকুলে বৈষ্ণব হয় আর স্মার্ত্ত ভট্টাচার্য্যের পরে জাহাকে একমত বৎসর হয় না যাবতীয় পরমার্থ কর্ম্ম স্নানদান ব্রতোপবাসপ্রভৃতি পূর্ব্বমতের ভিন্ন প্রকারে হইতেছে আর সকলে কহেন জে পঞ্চ ব্রাহ্মণ জে কালে এদেশে আইসেন তাঁহাদের পায়েতে মোজা এবং জামা ইত্যাদি বেশ এবং গোযান ছিল তাহার পরে পরে সে সকল ব্যবহার কিছুই রহিল না আর ব্রাহ্মণের যবনাদির দাসত্ব করা এবং যবনের শাস্ত্র পাঠ করা এবং যবনকে শাস্ত্র পাঠ করাণ কোন পূর্ব্ব ধর্ম্ম ছিল অতএব স্বধর্ম্মে জে উপাসনা ও ব্যবহার করেণ তাহার ভিন্ন উপাসনা করা এবং পূর্ব্ব পূর্ব্ব নিয়মের ত্যাগ আপনারাই সর্ব্বদা স্বীকার করিতেছি তবে কেন এমত বাক্যে বিশ্বাস করিয়া পরমার্থের উত্তম পথের চেষ্টা না করা যায় ॥ ২ ॥

রামমোহন রায়, বেদান্তগ্রন্থ, ভূমিকা, ফেরিস অ্যাণ্ড কোম্পানির প্রেস, কলিকাতা, ১৮১৫, পৃষ্ঠা ৫-৬।

7

ব্রহ্মবিদ্যার প্রকাশের নিমিত্ত বর্ণাশ্রম কর্ম্মের অনুষ্ঠান কর্ত্তব্য বটে, যে হেতুক এ কথা বেদাদি শাস্ত্রের সহিত বিরুদ্ধ নহে, সুতরাং আমরাও ইহা স্বীকার করি ; কিন্তু ইহা সর্ব্বথা অমান্য হয়, যে বর্ণাশ্রম কর্ম্মের অনুষ্ঠান ব্যতিরেকে ব্রহ্মজ্ঞানের উৎপত্তি হয় না, যেহেতুক ভগবান্ বেদব্যাস বর্ণাশ্রমকর্ম্মহীন ব্যক্তিরদেরও ব্রহ্মবিদ্যাতে অধিকার আছে, ইহা সূত্রে লিখিয়াছেন, সে এই দুই সূত্র.

রামমোহন রায়, সুরক্ষণা শাস্ত্রীর সহিত বিচার, ব্যাপটিষ্ট মিশন প্রেস, কলিকাতা, ১৮২০, পৃষ্ঠা ২।

8

১। শিষ্যের প্রশ্ন। কাহাকে উপাসনা কহেন।

২। আচার্য্যের প্রত্যুত্তর। তুষ্টির উদ্দেশে যত্নকে উপাসনা কহা যায়, কিন্তু পরব্রহ্ম বিষয়ে জ্ঞানের আবৃত্তিকে উপাসনা কহি।

রামমোহন রায়, অনুষ্ঠান, কলিকাতা, ১৮২৯, পৃষ্ঠা ২।

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গোতম মুনিকে শিষ্য সকলে জিজ্ঞাসা করিলেন আমারদিগের মুক্তি কি প্রকারে হয় তাহা কৃপা করিয়া বলহ। তাহাতে গোতম উত্তর করিতেছেন। তাবৎ পদার্থ জানিলেই মুক্তি হয়। তাহাতে শিষ্যেরা সকলে জিজ্ঞাসা করিলেন। পদার্থ কতো। তাহাতে গোতম কহিতেছেন। পদার্থ সপ্তপ্রকার। দ্রব্য গুণ কর্ম্ম সামান্য বিশেষ সমবায় অভাব। তাহার মধ্যে দ্রব্য নয় প্রকার।

ভাষাপরিচ্ছেদ, খণ্ডিত পুঁথি, ১১৮১ বঙ্গাব্দ বা ১৭৭৪ খ্রীঃ।

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অনন্ত প্রকার বস্তু ও ব্যক্তি সম্বলিত অচিন্তনীয় রচনা-বিশিষ্ট যে এই জগৎ, ও ঘটিকাযন্ত্র অপেক্ষা কৃত অতিশয় আশ্চর্য্যান্বিত রাশি চক্রে বেগে ধাবমান চন্দ্র সূর্য্য গ্রহ নক্ষত্রাদি যুক্ত যে এই জগৎ, ও নানাবিধ স্থাবর জঙ্গম শরীর যাহার কোন এক অঙ্গ নিষ্প্রয়োজন নহে সেই সকল শরীর ও শরীরীতে পরিপূর্ণ যে এই জগৎ, ইহার কারণ ও নির্ব্বাহকর্ত্তা যিনি তিনি উপাস্য হন।

রামমোহন রায়, অনুষ্ঠান, ১৮২৯, পৃষ্ঠা ২।

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