



Raja Ram Mohan Roy and His Contribution to Contemporary Social Change

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Introduction

Raja Ram Mohan Roy is universally celebrated as the "Father of the Indian Renaissance" and the pioneer of modern Indian political and social thought. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Indian society was deeply entangled in rigid caste structures, religious dogmas, and oppressive social customs. Rational thinking was often overshadowed by blind faith, and the vulnerable sections of society, particularly women, faced severe exploitation. In this dark phase of history, Raja Ram Mohan Roy emerged as a visionary leader who sought to transform society through reason, education, and social reform. He strongly believed that political freedom and economic progress could only be achieved if the underlying social evils were eradicated. Unlike many traditionalists of his time, he did not reject Western knowledge; instead, he skillfully bridged Eastern philosophy with Western scientific and democratic ideals. His vision was not to blindly imitate the West, but to purify Indian society by removing its harmful practices while preserving its core philosophical strengths. The primary objective of this paper is to explore his life, his monumental campaigns against social injustices, and the lasting impact of his progressive ideas. By critically analyzing his efforts, we can understand how his foundational work paved the way for the modernization of India. He proved that true religion is based on universal morality and compassion, not on destructive rituals. Ultimately, his intellectual courage and tireless activism initiated a wave of awakening that shaped the future of a democratic and secular India.

Personal Details

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was born on May 22, 1772, in the village of Radhanagar in the Bengal Presidency, into a traditional Bengali Brahmin family. His early education was highly diverse and laid the foundation for his broad worldview; he studied Persian and



Arabic in Patna, which exposed him to Islamic theology, and later went to Kashi (Varanasi) to study Sanskrit, the Vedas, and the Upanishads. He also learned English, which opened his mind to Western democratic, liberal, and scientific thought. Blessed with an extraordinary intellect, he was a polyglot who could fluently speak Bengali, Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, and English. He briefly worked for the British East India Company, gaining a practical understanding of British administrative and revenue systems. Despite his orthodox upbringing, his extensive reading of different global religious texts made him question idolatry, caste rigidity, and meaningless religious rituals from a very young age. In 1828, he took a major step in institutionalizing his ideas by founding the Brahma Samaj, a socio-religious reform movement. The title of "Raja" was bestowed upon him by the Mughal Emperor Akbar II, who sent him to England as his ambassador to represent his grievances to the British Crown. Sadly, during his stay in England, he contracted meningitis and passed away in Bristol on September 27, 1833, leaving behind a legacy that would forever change Indian history.

Contribution in Social Change

1. **Abolition of Sati:** Raja Ram Mohan Roy launched a relentless and courageous campaign against the brutal practice of Sati, where widows were forced to burn on their husbands' funeral pyres. He translated ancient Hindu scriptures to prove to the orthodox society that this cruel practice was not religiously mandated. His persistent efforts and petitions ultimately led Governor-General Lord William Bentinck to legally ban Sati in 1829.
2. **Foundation of Brahma Samaj:** In 1828, he established the Brahma Samaj, a pioneering socio-religious reform movement that promoted monotheism and rational thinking. The movement strictly rejected idol worship, animal sacrifices, and the rigid caste system, aiming to purify Hinduism of its superstitions. It provided a platform for progressive Indians to gather, pray, and discuss social reforms.
3. **Advocacy for Women's Education and Rights:** Roy was a fierce champion of women's rights, strongly advocating for the education of women as the primary tool for their social empowerment. He fought against the traditional mindset that kept women confined to the home, arguing for their right to inheritance and property ownership. He



believed that society could never progress if half of its population remained uneducated and oppressed.

4. **Opposition to the Caste System:** He fiercely criticized the rigid and discriminatory caste system, which divided Hindu society and promoted inequality. Roy promoted the idea of human equality and universal brotherhood, arguing that a person's worth should be judged by their character, not their birth. He actively worked to break down caste barriers to create a more unified and compassionate society.

5. **Promotion of Western Education:** Understanding the need for modernization, he strongly supported the introduction of Western scientific education and the English language in the Indian academic curriculum. He played a crucial role in the establishment of the Hindu College in Calcutta in 1817 to modernize Indian minds. He believed that combining scientific knowledge with traditional wisdom was the only way to uplift the nation.

6. **Championing Freedom of the Press:** As a pioneer of Indian journalism, he fought fiercely for the freedom of the press, believing it to be essential for educating the public and checking government power. He published several journals, including the Bengali weekly *Sambad Kaumudi* and the Persian paper *Mirat-ul-Akbar*, to voice public grievances. He successfully used the press to spread scientific ideas and debate social reforms.

7. **Campaign Against Child Marriage and Polygamy:** He actively opposed the prevalent customs of child marriage and polygamy, recognizing them as gross violations of human rights. He argued that these unnatural customs destroyed the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of young women. His writings generated widespread public awareness that eventually helped later reformers push for legal age limits for marriage.

8. **Economic and Political Reforms:** Beyond social issues, Roy demanded the Indianization of superior government services and the separation of the executive from the judiciary to ensure fair governance. He strongly highlighted the economic exploitation of poor Indian peasants by the Zamindars and the British revenue policies.



His petitions laid the early groundwork for the political demands of the Indian national movement.

9. **Promotion of Religious Tolerance:** Through his deep, comparative study of various world religions, he highlighted the underlying moral unity of all faiths. He promoted a spirit of universal brotherhood, mutual respect, and secularism among different religious communities. He firmly believed that the core of every religion taught love and humanity, not division and hatred.

10. **Translation of Ancient Scriptures:** To break the monopoly of the orthodox priests over religious knowledge, he translated the Vedas and Upanishads into Bengali and English. He wanted to make the ancient spiritual wisdom accessible to the common people so they could read and interpret the texts themselves. This empowered the masses to question irrational rituals that were falsely claimed to be religious laws.

Relevance of Contribution

The contributions of Raja Ram Mohan Roy remain highly relevant in contemporary society because the fight for human rights, gender equality, and rational thinking is an ongoing global process. His progressive ideas laid the strong ideological foundation for the modern, democratic, and secular Republic of India. Today, when society still occasionally grapples with issues like caste-based discrimination, gender violence, and religious intolerance, his teachings on universal brotherhood and rationalism serve as a much-needed guiding light. His emphasis on modern, scientific education as a tool for social upliftment continues to be the driving force behind modern India's educational policies and its success in the global technology sector. The constitutional values of liberty, equality, and fraternity deeply resonate with the socio-religious reforms he courageously championed centuries ago. By combining the best of both Indian philosophical traditions and Western modernity, he showed a balanced path for national development that avoids both blind orthodoxy and cultural loss. His fearless journalism set a permanent benchmark for a free, objective, and responsible press, which is absolutely crucial for the survival of any healthy democracy. Therefore, his legacy is not just a chapter in a history book, but a living, breathing framework for continuous social change and human improvement.



Conclusion

To conclude, Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a monumental historical figure whose visionary efforts successfully initiated the modernization of Indian society. He fearlessly stood alone against centuries-old dogmas and oppressive customs, facing immense backlash and threats from the orthodox sections of his own community. His greatest and most celebrated victory, the abolition of Sati, remains one of the most significant milestones in the history of human rights and women's empowerment in India. Through the establishment of the Brahmo Samaj, he provided a rational, progressive, and inclusive platform for spiritual and social evolution. He was far ahead of his time, accurately recognizing that India could not progress politically or economically until it cleansed itself of internal social evils and embraced modern scientific education. Roy was a true internationalist who envisioned a world united by reason, compassion, and mutual respect, rather than divided by borders and beliefs. His life was a powerful testament to the power of knowledge, moral courage, and unwavering determination in the face of intense societal adversity. The seeds of social reform, women's empowerment, and modern education that he planted in the 19th century have grown into the vast democratic nation we see today. Recognizing his immense and selfless contributions, history rightly and proudly remembers him as the Maker of Modern India. His life's work continues to inspire modern generations to question injustice, fight for equality, and strive to build a more rational and humane world.

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