

# RAJA RAMMOHAN ROY

(22 May 1772 - 27 Sept 1833)

## KEY THEMES

- Religious reforms
- Modern education
- Freedom of press



## RAMMOHAN ROY: IDEAS ON MODERN EDUCATION

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy and his ideas on modern education can be rightly regarded as the precursor of the modern system of education in India. He worked tirelessly to promote and champion the cause of modern system of education in India.
- He made an ardent plea for the introduction of modern education in India to the British Lord Amherst.
- According to him, for the British rulers language, literature, manners, customs, and ideas of India are almost entirely new and unfamiliar. Hence, they cannot easily become intimately acquainted with the real circumstances in this country. Therefore, Indians should be able to give them the proper information so that the British rule can devise calculated and beneficial measures for India. In order to do that, he wanted Indians to be given modern liberal education.

# HIS APPROACH

- His attitude towards western education was very different from conservative as well as radical Bengali intellectuals.
- Conservatives like Radhakanta Deb favored western education merely for its instrumentality for career advancements in the professions and services under the British rule. However, Rammohan Roy regarded western modern education as a means of social transformation.
- When the Company rule became the paramount power in India, many Indians realized that to get jobs under the new government they would have to learn English, even though Persian continued to be used for official purposes well into the nineteenth century. The more farsighted among them was Rammohan Roy because he saw that tremendous advantages could be gained by direct contact with the whole corpus of modern Western education.

- He welcomed the effort of British people to establish a new school in Calcutta for the promotion of modern education.
- He wanted that Britishers should employ English gentlemen of talent and with liberal education to instruct the natives of India in Mathematics, Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy and other useful Sciences because they according to Roy had attained a degree of perfection in those fields.
- He raised his voices against the archaic education policy of the company: The East India Company, in its initial years were cautious to temper with the indigenous system of education. They wanted to leave the traditional bases of Indian society undamaged as far as possible. Therefore they had decided, as early as in the 1770s, to sponsor Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit studies in India. Rammohan Roy strongly opposed the efforts by the government to establish Sanskrit schools under Hindu pundits/priests.

## REASONS FOR OPPOSING ESTABLISHMENT OF SANSKRIT SCHOOLS:

- They impart only traditional knowledge and therefore people can not expect to learn any practical knowledge for the society. They can learn only those things that are already commonly taught in all parts of India.
- The Sanskrit language is so difficult that almost a life time is necessary for its perfect acquisition. For Rammohan Roy this can not make any contribution towards establishing a modern liberal society. According to him, no improvement can be expected from inducing young men to consume a dozen of years of the most valuable period of their lives in acquiring the knowledge of Sanskrit Grammar and language.
- No essential benefit can be derived by the students by learning the themes taught there for it cannot improve their mind after they have learned those themes.

## THE CONTEXT

- During his time, initial enthusiasm for English, especially among educated Hindus, is evident from the great popularity of Hindu College professor Henry V. Derozio, who taught Western-style secular rationalism. But the relation of western to Indian learning was becoming a problematic issue.
- Rammohan Roy was in many ways a staunch Anglicist: he championed English law, literature, and reformist ideas. Yet he also resisted British hypocrisy, criticized Christian preachers, and turned to Hindu scriptures for wisdom and guidance.
- In the celebrated controversy between the Orientalists and Anglicists he fought vigorously for English Education, wrote the famous letter on education to lord Amherst.

- He also worked hard for improving and enriching Bengali language. It is interesting to note that the address that he presented to Lord William Bentinck was in Bengali. It showed his deep love for his mother tongue and vernacular languages.
- He helped many people including David Hare, especially Dr Duff in their effort for spread of English education in the country.
- He believed that modern western education would enlighten the Indians from the superstitions and prejudices of religious orthodoxies.

- He argued that Sanskrit system of education would be best calculated to keep this country in darkness:

*“ As the improvement of the native population is the object of the Government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry and anatomy, with other useful science [s] which may be accomplished with the sum proposed by employing a few gentlemen of talents and learning educated in Europe, and providing a college furnished with the necessary books, instruments and other apparatus”*

-R.R Roy

(Letter on education to Lord Amherst)



## HIS CONTRIBUTION IN THE FIELD OF MODERN EDUCATION:

### ➤ **The Foundation of Hindu College**

- Raja Rammohan Roy supported David Hare who brought the proposal for the establishment of a seminary for teaching the natives liberal, modern and progressive system of education. That proposal emphasized the need for improvement and betterment of the natives through modern education people. Ultimately it led to the establishment of Hindu college in 1817.
- Opposition from Orthodox Circles of Hindu society compelled Raja Rammohan Roy to withdrew his Name from the Project.

## ➤ Establishment of Anglo-Hindu School:

- In 1816, he founded an English school. Though he withdrew his name from the project of Hindu College to avoid unnecessary clashes or altercations, but in reality he did not stop his educational exertions and in 1822 for free instruction of Hindu boys, he reconstructed the earlier English school from his own expenses. Since then that school came to be known as Anglo Hindu School.
- For the cultivation of the vernacular dialects/language of Bengal, few educated native youths of Calcutta formed a native literary society at Raja Rammohan Roy's Anglo Hindu School, Calcutta. That was intended to raise the intellectual character of the natives and to improve the language thoroughly. The name of the society was *Sarvattawwa Dipika Sabha*, also known as the society for the diffusion of all branches of knowledge.

### ➤ **Establishment of Vedanta College:**

- In 1825, Raja Rammohan Roy started Vedant college in which the study of western knowledge was combined with that of the Indian learning. Raja Rammohan Roy's Vedanta College was a great seat of learning for Vedanta and other Indian intellectual traditions as well as modern Western thought with a scientific outlook. For developing rationalism, a study of Unitarianism in Hindu as well as in Christian thoughts was emphasized upon in the teaching curriculums.

### ➤ **Missionary Efforts in the Field of Education:**

- He cooperated with Alexander Duff in promotion of modern education. With his cordiality and help, Alexander Duff opened the Scottish Mission Secondary School, which was developed later into a college, the famously known Scottish Church College.

## EFFECT OF HIS CONTRIBUTION:

- The British Committee on Public Instruction was slow to react to the growing demand for a new educational system in India. When Thomas Babington Macaulay was made its president in 1834, the committee was hopelessly divided between the “Anglicists,” who favored Anglicizing the education and government of India as much as possible, and the “Orientalists” who believed that there was much wisdom to be gained from so-called Oriental, or Indian, texts and traditions. And thus they were resisting the efforts of “Angilicists”. Macaulay ended by supporting the “Anglicists”.
- No single act of British policy has had such lasting influence on Indian mind and also on the evolution of modern Indian thought than this decision in 1835 to use government funds to support education in the English language, and to adopt the curriculum prevalent in English schools.

- English education also provided, for the privileged handful who could take advantage of it, specialized scientific knowledge, such as that offered in Calcutta from 1835 at the first British medical college of India; it also offered a common language and cultural background. Such conditions of all-India unity gave birth to political self-consciousness and eventually contributed to the rise of Indian nationalism.
- It is an undeniable fact that Ram Mohan Roy played a significant role in the promotion of modern English education in India.
- However, he was also the one who believed in the wisdom and worth of Indian thought as well. And wanted it to be made accessible to larger public through the translation of Sanskrit texts into vernacular languages.

# RESOURCES

1. 'Political thought in modern India' by Thomas Pantham and K. L. Deutsch.
2. 'Indian political thought: themes and thinkers' by M.P singh and Himanshu Roy.
3. 'Makers of Modern India' by Ramchandra Guha.
4. 'Sources of Indian tradition' edited by Rachel Fell Mcdermott, Leonard A . Gordon, Ainslie T. Embree, Frances W. Pritchett & Dennis Dalton.

# ASSIGNMENT FOR THE WEEK

- Read *Swaraj in Ideas* by K C Bhattacharya and write a paragraph in about 500 words summarizing the key ideas and concerns raised there in.