

# A Critical Analysis of Regeneration of the Society: Raja Rammohan Roy's Approach and its Effects

## Abstract

When the British started their rule in Bengal, the society was heaped under ignorance. All the higher education was confined to study of classical Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian. The traditions had given birth to number of vices and abuses. Raja Rammohan Roy heralded a new position for the society based on the introduction of education on the lines of West. This stirred the people and roused them from the slumber of ages. A critical view on past and new aspirations for the future marked this awakening. Reason and judgment took the place of faith and belief. Since modern education was introduced in India to meet the needs of Britain and to supply the English knowing personnel to the British apparatus, mass education had been neglected throughout. Its progress had been seriously restricted for the Indians. The approach, Roy tried to adopt, was however criticized by Nationalists as portraying the British as civilizers of India and glorifying them.

**Keywords:** Modern, Democracy, Liberty, Regeneration, Progressive, Masses, Ignorance

## Introduction

In the Pre-British period, the people of India were heaped under all sorts of evils of superstitions and abuses. The major chunk of population belonged to Hindu community which was a caste-stratified society. As the lot of masses was deplorable, society needed a man with a firm conviction capable to remove all darkness hovering over it. The Modern India saw in Rammohan Roy all such attributes. He saw the vision of New India.

As the people in India were ignorant and unaware and therefore the only recourse left to undo this was Education. The introduction of liberal education on modern lines was one of the main factors that caused the Indian awakening. Roy's emphasis was on liberal education of western type. Further this awakening required the acceleration from rational thoughts presented by Press free from any restrictions. This approach was to go a long way in rousing the masses from slumber, rapid transformation, and regeneration of the society.

## Aim of the Study

The Research paper aims at drawing upon the factors that led to the decadence of the society and the solution thereof. The solution however was fraught with numerous pitfalls. The paper discusses at length the merits of these solutions as also the challenges it offered in the colonial regime. There have been efforts to utilize the state of society to suit the vested interest. The present paper is a humble attempt to give an insight of this. It will be an attempt to reflect the state of affairs of the society which forced it to entrench in status quo.

## Research Methodology

The proposed study draws heavily from both primary and secondary sources. For the purpose of analyzing the data critical method has been employed. The study was done on the basis of synthesis of the data. The methodology encapsulates those aspects which require chronological analysis of the events. The information so collected of the secondary source was further tested and verified with the contemporary and original writings.

## Review of Literature

V.D. Mahajan in Modern Indian History, S. Chand Publication, New Delhi, 1993 gives the glimpses of various reform movements that were undertaken in the country. The work mentions the efforts of these



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reformers in the underlying areas but fell short of analysis when comparing them with the other works.

Percival Spear in *A History of India*, Vol. II, Penguin books, London 1978, harps on the national movements of political and cultural character. But this work lacks a systematic analysis of the turn of events of the period that led to reforms. The work further requires an in depth analysis to make the things concrete.

G.S., Chhabra in *Advanced Study in the Constitutional History of India*, Prakash Brothers, Ludhiana, 1964 fails to give an insight of the reforms undertaken in India on modern lines.

N.S., Bose in *The Indian Awakening and Bengal*, Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1960 factually describes the efforts of Raja Rammohan Roy. However it fails to narrate its effects on the masses and the people at large. This further requires a research on the issue.

Ramchandra, Guha in *Makers of Modern India*, Penguin, New Delhi, 2010 is a good work which minutely analyzes the events and rationale for these said reforms. However the comparative view and its utility have been neglected in this much acclaimed work.

Partha, Chatterjee in *The Black Hole of Empire*, Permanent black, Ranikhet, 2012, is also a good work critically evaluating the efforts of Rammohan Roy. But this work also failed to narrate the rising criticism of the nationalist in their bid to criticize the modern education.

Madan Mohan Mandal and Santosh kumar Behera in *Raja Rammohan Roy as an Educational Reformer: An Evaluation*, in *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Studies*, Vol. I, Issue IV, Jan.2015, has dealt on the contribution of Raja Rammohan Roy as a social Reformer. However he has not analyzed the events relating to subsequent reforms undertaken by later leaders and their approach in comparison to Rammohan Roy.

Sekhar, Bandyopadhyay in *From Plassey to Partition and After*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2016 is a noteworthy work and has also given a critical account of the liberal education.

## Discussion

The Pre- British Indian society had the knowledge of the world at a lower level than that achieved by modern humanity. The Brahmin by caste alone had the privilege to acquire higher religious and secular knowledge. The medium of instruction was Sanskrit, the sacred language of Hindus, in which only, all religious and higher secular knowledge was expressed.<sup>1</sup> By introducing modern education in India, the British brought the Indian people in contact with the extensive and profound achievements of the modern west in the sphere of scientific and social scientific knowledge.<sup>2</sup> In fact it was the political, administrative and economic necessity that forced the British government to open schools and colleges in India. The progressive Indians played a crucial role in rolling over the sweeping changes for the masses. Raja Rammohan Roy was forerunner of this ideology. He hailed the English education as the key to the

treasures of scientific and democratic thoughts of modern west.<sup>3</sup> He declared that perpetuation of the old system of education in India would only perpetuate superstition and authority.<sup>4</sup> With this end in view he tirelessly made efforts for the promotion of modern education in India, though being a great Sanskrit and Persian scholar.<sup>5</sup>

He founded Hindu College with the assistance of his friend David Hare in 1816 for imparting education in the Science and Literature of Europe. Hare was a close friend of Rammohan Roy and by most accounts a non conformist and free thinker. His practice of education was conducted on the principle of excluding religion in general.<sup>6</sup> The College was opened in 1817. As the next step he started an English School, known as Anglo-Hindu School where Western Science, Philosophy, and Literature were taught. From 1839, the school was renamed the Indian Academy led by Purna Chandra Mittra.<sup>7</sup> To further give fillip to his efforts, he invited the Christian Missionaries to the field of education. In 1823 he requested the Church of Scotland Assembly to send out competent teachers to spread English education in India. As a result, noted missionary educationist Dr. Alexander Duff came to India and given warm welcome by Raja Rammohan Roy and he rendered him all possible help in starting an English school.<sup>8</sup>

Roy believed that Sanskrit had exclusively become the domain of Hindu pandits. "The Sanskrit language, so difficult that almost a life time is necessary for its perfect acquisition, is well known to have been for ages a lamentable check on the diffusion of knowledge".<sup>9</sup> When he came to know that the East India Company was required to set apart a sum of money for the promotion of Education of natives he wrote a letter to Lord Amherst in December 1823. He made an urgent plea for the introduction of modern education in India. He urged the government to 'promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy with other useful sciences'.<sup>10</sup> In 1823, he protested against the proposed foundation of Sanskrit College under Hindu Pandits.<sup>11</sup> He viewed that Sanskrit is so difficult that almost a life time is necessary for its perfect acquisition and therefore it creates tremendous check on the diffusion of knowledge. Further it prevents the natives well versed in law and custom of British nation from communicating to fellow subjects knowledge of admirable system of government established by British and their impartial administration of justice.

Roy argued to Lord Amherst in Dec. 1823 that as the government was willing to spend money on the improvement of education, it should be on western education. He argued that Sanskrit system of education is calculated to keep the country in darkness. "If it had been intended to keep the British nation in ignorance of real knowledge, the Baconian Philosophy would not have been allowed to displace the system of the schoolmen, which was best calculated to perpetuate ignorance. In the same manner, the Sanskrit system of education would be

best calculated to keep this country in darkness, if that had been the policy of the British Legislature. But as the improvement of native population is the object of government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry and Anatomy, with other useful Sciences which may be accomplished with the sum proposed by employing a few gentleman of talents and learning educated in Europe, and providing a college furnished with the necessary books, instruments and other apparatus.”<sup>12</sup> This further created the controversy between Anglicist and Orientalist on the question of educational policy to be pursued by the government. His stand was however accepted by the government after a long debate between them in 1835. The rationale given by him was that only the western education could help to remove the darkness of ignorance and help in the progress of society. As the society was heaped in the practices of superstition and all sorts of abuses, western education was the only resort which could rationalize the minds of Indians. Further, the English Education alone could enable the Indians to take part in the administration of the country and public activities for the benefit of the people.

However, the stand taken by Rammohan and his severe criticism caused indignation among the majority of the Indians. Arya Samaj, Gandhiji and others criticized Roy's model of secular nature of education and added religious instructions in the institutions they organized. Some others criticized the textbooks used in the government or missionary schools as promoting an attitude of depreciation of India's past or for being divorced from the realities of life.<sup>13</sup> Despite this Arya Samaj the militant foe of alien influences, accepted and taught modern education, and recognized its value, only adding to its religious instruction, such as the teaching of the doctrine of infallibility of the Vedas which in fact contradicted the very spirit of the liberal education which they imparted, the keynote of which was to appraise things by experiment and reason.<sup>14</sup>

The people at large could not understand the rational and liberation component of the modern culture and mistook it for leading towards a materialistic lifestyle. A sort of chasm developed between youths educated on modern lines and on conventional lines. Those trained in modern education leveled the people with traditional knowledge as barbarous and those with English education were denounced as Anglicized and denationalized. But, the exaggerated importance to the English led to widening of this gulf. All this prompted the educated Indian to disorient from the Indian people, to feel himself identified with the ruling nation and harbor contempt for the common people.<sup>15</sup> The Nationalist group comprising of Bipin Chandra Pal and Gandhi criticized the liberal school of Roy's education for depreciating Indian culture. The indigenous village schools were neglected by the company government as it was the only source of mass education. The Anglicists believed in the 'downward filtration' theory

i.e. a theory which held that knowledge would percolate from the educated classes to the masses through the independent efforts of the former.<sup>16</sup> It was not meant for the masses, but for "the rich, the learned, the men of business", as C.E. Trevalyan described them, as they already had a literate tradition, had eagerness as well as means to learn and above all had sufficient leisure.<sup>17</sup>

As the British policy of education was suited to their needs, it hardly could reconcile with the political, social and economic conditions of Indians.<sup>18</sup> In fact the government had appointed a committee to investigate the conditions of indigenous education in Bengal under William Adams. He described the miserable condition of the vernacular schools and the widespread ignorance and superstition prevailing among the masses.<sup>19</sup> In Bombay presidency the educational enterprise was undertaken by the Deccan Education Society. Here the English education developed on similar lines for the masses. But there was less keenness for English education and naturally more attention was paid to the improvement of indigenous schools and the spread of education through the vernaculars.<sup>20</sup>

However, by the end of nineteenth century the indigenous school rapidly declined. This may be attributed to two prime factors, firstly the absence of financial support from the state and secondly only those who received education in new schools on modern lines were eligible for government jobs. Even the private enterprises were in the need of youths trained in western education or if in indigenous education were required to have an adequate knowledge of western education and sciences. The modern education not only qualified the Indians for taking their share in the administration of the country but it also inspired them with those liberal ideas which were sweeping over England at that time.<sup>21</sup> The improvement of native people was the chief motive of Raja. Therefore, he helped the British government to promote a more liberal and enlightened system of education in learning.<sup>22</sup>

Wood's Dispatch of 1854 laid the foundation of new educational system to be developed subsequently in British India. For each Presidency town, University was to be set up for coordination in higher education. Stress was also to be given on importance of mass education, female education, and improvement of vernaculars and training of teachers. As the conditions unfolded the number of students studying in higher education institutions was 159,254 in 1941-2 or about 0.55 of the population.<sup>23</sup> The Nationalists criticized the costly nature of higher education for this deplorable condition. They criticized the government for insufficient expenditure on education which always remained the 'Cindrella of Services'. While one third of the total state revenue was on the average spent on the military, education was assigned a scanty sum.<sup>24</sup>

The Indian nationalists denounced the colonial system of education as not giving a true picture of Indian life, of political servitude and of the real causes of the economic and cultural

backwardness of Indian society. Gandhiji denounced the modern education as culprit of making the youths immoral and making them to leave the vocation of their parents.<sup>25</sup> On the contrary the scheme of national education enunciated by Nationalists did not succeed appreciably. Since the degrees of the universities were necessary for securing jobs both in government and private services, independent national educational institutions not affiliated to the government Universities did not draw a large number of students.<sup>26</sup> It is also believed that it proved detrimental to the interests of vernacular and regional languages. The British regime had created a class although rational in character but English in their taste and temperament. It also led to the ingrain of mass scale communalism in politics.<sup>27</sup>

However it must be admitted that Roy became pioneer of modern education and it was he, who motivated the Indians, although succeeded to a limited extent, to embrace it. This made people aware of the rich English literature, which subsequently inspired to wage the struggle against absolutism of the medieval state based on divine right of Kings. This laid the foundation of the theory of sovereignty of the people and the democratic state.<sup>28</sup> This also proclaimed the principle of individual liberty. In the political sphere, in social and religious spheres, everywhere Rammohan Roy was the first among the Indians who fought for the advancement of the country.<sup>29</sup> He made modern education a tool to achieve this end.

## Conclusion

Rammohan Roy's approach in enlightening the society through the means of modern education significantly changed the stagnant nature of the society. The society at once responded, although hesitatingly, to the clarion call of adoption of western education given by him. This became instrumental in the assimilation of modern democratic ideas of the west. The Nationalist leaders did not delay in adopting the ideal and this prompted them to give the national movement democratic forms and aim. The educated Indians imbibed the democratic principles and felt inspired to rebel against the reactionary social institutions of the plaguing society.

The nationalism, if not totally, was an offshoot of the ideas generated by Roy's approach of liberal and modern education on western lines. But still the fact remains that the modern education was the expedient employed by the British regime to suit their administrative apparatus. Hence it developed a sharp reaction among the people. The liberal thinking and freedom made the life of masses rather rebellious of the values inculcated by the rich Indian culture. It gave the semblance of degrading the pride of India by way of compromising its age old system of learning and thoughts. However, today India remains a state having different fields of knowledge. This diversity has earned for her the rationality in outlook and on the path of becoming a vibrant and developing state incorporating the traditional and modern education.

Thus modern education has significantly played a contradictory double role of meeting the

needs of Britain and unwittingly helping Indian nationalism in the struggle against British rule. Hence Roy's approach was testimony to the fact that practically all leaders of National and progressive movements were English educated, who imbibed the principles and made their organizations democratic. In this way his approach introduced India into a new age.

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