

RAJA RAM MOHUN ROY

By NALIN C. GANGULY



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RAJA RAM MOHUN ROY

*From a portrait by R. A. Briggs, R.A., in the Bristol Museum. By courtesy of
The Modern Review, Calcutta.*

Dedication

TO THE SACRED MEMORY OF

MY FATHER,

BHUDHAR C. GANGULY

BHARATI, VIDYARATNA

AND OF

MY TEACHER,

J. N. FARQUHAR, M.A., D.LITT., D.D.

PREFACE

THESE pages present only a brief sketch of the life of Raja Ram Mohun Roy, the greatest Indian reformer of modern times. It is not possible, within the scope of this series, to give a full account of his many-sided activity or of his 'virile and versatile personality.' An attempt has been made to offer a critical estimate of his ideals and philosophy in general, as well as of the policy that he stood for in his own day; but controversial matters have been avoided as far as possible. In the spelling of Indian names, diacritical marks have been omitted for the sake of simplicity.

The manuscript was completed early in 1928, but along with the author it has passed through many vicissitudes before publication. The thanks of the author are due to Miss G. Stevens, of Bristol, the late Mr. D. N. Pal, Messrs. Ramananda Chatterjee, Sudhir Lal Banerjee, Amal Home, Alin C. Ganguly, Pratul C. Shome, Dr. Kalidas Nag, and Dr. H. Bolton, of the Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol, for kind assistance in various ways.

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I

1772—1794

BIRTH, PARENTAGE AND EDUCATION

RAM MOHUN ROY, 'the greatest Indian of modern times,'¹ and even more appropriately styled 'the father of Modern India,'² was born at Radhanagar, a village near Khanakul-Krishnagar, in the District of Hooghly, on the 22nd May, 1772,³ two years before Warren Hastings was appointed the first Governor-General of Bengal. His father, Rama Kanta Roy, was the grandson of Ray-ryan Krishna Chandra Banerjee, from whose title of Ray-ryan⁴ the family name Roy was derived. This title was given him for his work in the government of the Nawab of Bengal, a hint of which is found in an autobiographical letter of Ram Mohun himself. It seems that Krishna Chandra's father was the first in the family to deviate from the Brahmanical life of religious practices to that of a mundane profession, some time during the reign of Aurangzeb. And if it be true that the founder of the

¹ J. C. Ghose, *Introduction to Ram Mohun Roy's Works*, p. 14.

² So called by Gokhale.

³ Three dates have been assigned to his birth, viz. 1772, 1774 and 1780. The last is found in the second edition of his *Precepts of Jesus*. But almost all his biographers accept 1772, on the authority of his son, Rama Prasad Roy (see N. N. Chatterjee, *Life of Ram Mohun Roy*, pp. 697 ff., Appendix; Home, *R.M.R.*, p. 28).

⁴ It is shortened into Roy-Roy in Miss Collet's *Life of Ram Mohun Roy*. It occurs also in *Seir-ul-Mutakherin*, I, pp. 326, 337.

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family was the well-known Narottam Thakur,¹ one of the disciples of the Vaishnava leader, Chaitanya, the change was great indeed, when considered in its orthodox setting of those days. The original family settlement was at this time in the village of Sankasa, within the jurisdiction of Murshidabad, whence Krishna Chandra removed to Radhanagar. The reason for this is discovered in the simple fact that when Krishna Chandra was ordered by the Nawab to Khanakul-Krishnagar, in connection with the zemindary settlement of Ananta Ram Chowdhury of that place, he chose Radhanagar as a suitable spot to live in because of its nearness to the famous Gopinath image, which had been installed by the well-known Vaishnava saint, Abhirama Goswami, on the left bank of the river Darkeswar, opposite Krishnagar. Krishna Chandra was a Vaishnava himself, as we can judge from his own family traditions and connections with the sect. This may be one of the reasons for pointing out one of Chaitanya's followers, Narottama, as the remotest known ancestor of Ram Mohun. But nothing definite can be said on this point, for want of accurate historical evidence.

Of the three sons of Krishna Chandra—Amara Chandra, Hari Prasad, and Brajavinod—the last served at Murshidabad in the government of Siraj-ud-daula, the Nawab of Bengal. Brajavinod was a rich man, pious and generous, and noted for strength of character. He resigned his post because of some injustice done to him, and spent the rest of his life in retirement at Radhanagar. It was at the death-bed of this devout Vaishnava, when he was removed to the bank of the sacred Ganges, to

¹ Leonard, *History of the Brahma Samaj*, cited by N. N. Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 10, footnote.

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breathe his last in sight and touch of the holy waters, in conformity with the orthodox custom of the day, that he was approached with a petition by one, Shyam Bhattacharya, from the neighbourhood of Serampore. Brajavinod could not refuse such a man, who was known to be of the family of Desha-gurus, or preceptors of the country, and this at a time when he was conscious that he himself was about to leave the world for good. Yet the request was a difficult one, indeed almost impossible from the orthodox standpoint; for it asked for one of his sons in marriage to one of the daughters of the Bhattacharya, in spite of the differences of pedigree and sect. The Roys were Vaishnavas and Kulins, of distinguished social standing; while the Bhattacharyas were Saktas who for some reason had fallen from the Kulin status, and were known as 'broken-Kulins.' However, Brajavinod agreed to the request, and his fifth son consented to carry out his dying father's promise, so a matrimonial alliance was established between the two families. This fifth son was Rama Kanta, the father of the reformer whose biography is attempted in these pages.

Following in the footsteps of his father, Rama Kanta entered the Nawab's service at Murshidabad. He, too, met with similar treatment to that which had made his father retire from work. Further, his relations with the Burdwan Raj were at this time strained over some village properties, and he became very indifferent to worldly affairs, spending most of his day in repeating the name of Hari (God) in a sacred *tulasi* garden, and attended to his other duties only at his convenience. The increase of the Roy family led him to settle with his own family away from Radhanagar, in the adjoining village of Langulpara.

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Ram Mohun's mother, Tarini Devi, the daughter of Shyam Bhattacharya, was familiarly called 'Phul-Thakurani' in the Roy family. She was a woman of deep religious temperament and resolute nature. She had one daughter and two sons, Jaga Mohun and Ram Mohun. The girl, whose name is not available, was married to one Sridhar Mukherji, whose son, Gurudas, was the first disciple of Ram Mohun in later years. Rama Kanta had another wife, and a son, Ramlochan by name, who was junior to both of his step-brothers, Jaga Mohun and Ram Mohun.

Of Ram Mohun's mother, it is said that nothing mean or sordid could ever find favour with her. Being an earnest believer in Hindu orthodoxy, she made late in life a pilgrimage to Puri on foot, and did not even take a maid-servant with her to attend to her comfort. For a whole year before her death she could be seen sweeping the yard of the temple of Jagannath—a practice which was considered to secure for the devotee great religious merit. Though born of a Sakta family, she adopted the Vaishnava faith of her husband, according to the practice which is always regarded as the duty of the wife, if she wishes to be really a partner in married life. She was not only an ideal wife, but also an ideal mother; strict and stern, yet affectionate and sympathetic. She was very severe towards her sons, but at the same time considerate. On larger issues her sense of duty was not allowed to be swayed by her maternal affection; and, with an intellect which was keen as well as strong, she was above the ordinary run of woman-kind. It was natural for Ram Mohun to have inherited these qualities from his mother; and if the lives of many great men of the Western world, such as Napoleon

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and Washington, Luther and Wesley, were actually moulded by their mothers' influence, it is no less true of the great Indian reformer's career. Nothing is so striking in his character as the traits bequeathed by his mother. When she advanced in years and understood something of her great son's views, she admitted their cogency and correctness, but confessed her own inability to change her old ideas about idolatry, having devoutly entertained them all her life.¹

While Ram Mohun was yet a mere boy, his father married him three times; and this fact coloured his whole after-life. The first wife died at a very early age, but after her death, 'his father, while he was only about nine years of age, married him within an interval of less than a twelve-month to two different wives.'² The second wife was the mother of his children, while the third survived him. Hindu marriages in those days, as at the present time, were contracted by the guardians of the parties in their childhood, when they could have no sense of responsibility or of the seriousness of the action.

Ram Mohun was a precocious child. Early in life he gave many evidences of his wonderful memory and intellectual powers. Persian was the court language of the day, and had to be learnt, together with Arabic, by all who claimed to have 'a gentleman's education.' After having his first lessons in Bengali and Persian at home, he was sufficiently advanced in his ninth year to be sent to Patna for higher studies in Arabic. This city was then the centre of Islamic culture in India, and was

¹ Max Muller's *Chips from a German Workshop*, Vol. II, p. 33; cf. *Introduction to Precepts of Jesus*, p. 8 (London ed.).

² William Adam, cited by Collet, p. 6.

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quite famous on this account. The boy Ram Mohun was there for full three years, availing himself of the education which this seat of Moslem learning could give him. His naturally keen wit became keener by reading Euclid and Aristotle in Arabic translations. Probably it was at this time that he got his first inspiration towards monotheism, from his study of the Koran in the Arabic original as well as from direct and close contact with Moslem Moulvis of noted ability and scholarship. Islam produced a great effect on his later life; and, possessed as he was of ardent emotions, he was simply fascinated by Sufi poetry and mysticism, which even today are admired by great intellects all over the world. Hafiz, Rumi, Shami Tabriz were among his favourite and oft-quoted authors, and he frequently repeated their poems with evident marks of appreciation. His mind was early charged with their best thoughts, and these paved the way for that spiritual vision which made him one of the greatest souls ever produced in this world. He used to be called 'Moulvi Ram Mohun' and the 'Zabardast Moulvi,' for his Arabic and Persian learning, on which he was considered an authority.

At the age of twelve he was sent to Benares for the study of Sanskrit.¹ There he mastered the fundamental principles of Hinduism, which in time became the basis of his reforming propaganda. He spent there about four years at this time.² His sojourn at Benares, the citadel of Hindu orthodoxy, became the turning-point of his life; for in consequence of this he became a confirmed enemy of the idolatrous practices of his nation. Mr.

¹ Collet, p. 16.

² Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 17.

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Chatterjee has remarked that the monotheism of Muhamadan theology and the Brahma-knowledge of the Hindu sacred books were both responsible for the change of his views. In any case, this change of outlook actually happened, as was proved by events that followed, in his remarkably original mind, just at this time when his mind blossomed into maturity. This orthodox Hindu boy, who never sipped water without repeating daily a portion of the holy *Bhagavata*, and whose masculine heart was pained at the sight of the unmanly conduct on the part of his hero, Krishna (in the Indian play of *Man-bhanjana*, where the lover is made to fall at the feet of the beloved Radha), became transformed, intellectually and spiritually, as the result of his own strenuous studies in the highest thoughts of Eastern lore. He began to say clearly that the popular Hinduism of the day was not at the highest and best level of that religion itself, and that idolatry and superstition had usurped the place of spiritual purity. A new leaf was turned over in his thought-life with the close of his studies at Benares.

He came back to his village home at about the age of sixteen,¹ a changed and altered person; quite different from what he was before Islamic theism and Brahma-knowledge had completely shaken his belief in Hindu orthodoxy. Gradually a difference arose between the father and the son over religious views. The father naturally grew tired of the son's refutations of every statement, which were invariably introduced with a 'but . . .' and is reported to have said in disgust: 'Whatever argument I adduce, you have always your *kintu*' (Bengali for 'but'), 'your counter-statement . . . to oppose me.'²

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.F.*, p. 17. ² Adam, *Memorandum* (1879).

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While yet only sixteen years of age, Ram Mohun wrote a treatise condemning Hindu idolatry;¹ this brought matters to a head, and he had to leave his paternal home for some time. He travelled to Tibet through several provinces of Hindusthan, and acquired during this tour an extensive knowledge of other vernaculars, and of many Indian religious movements, such as those of Nanak, Kabir and Dadu. He explains this rather sudden decision, in his autobiographical letter, as due to his desire to leave the country which was occupied by foreigners (the English), and to be in the free atmosphere of an independent country; but it is also well known that he had at the age of fourteen strong ascetic tendencies, and he would have perhaps taken permanently to that type of life of homeless wandering, if he had not been checked by his mother.

The extent and duration of his travels and stay in Tibet are not precisely known; probably he spent about four years in the Trans-Himalayan region, and came into close contact with the Lamas or priests, from whom he learnt a good deal of Buddhist faith and practice. His criticism of the 'man-worship' (i.e. worship of the Lamas) by the common people almost cost him his life, but he was saved from this catastrophe by the kindness of a certain Tibetan woman, who helped him out of the situation; and this had a lasting effect on his life. Miss Carpenter has traced Ram Mohun's high respect for womanhood and deep confidence in womankind to this incident, which the reformer recounted with expressions of gratitude.² From Tibet he visited other places

¹ D. C. Sen, *History of Bengali Literature*, p. 943, Autobiographical letter; Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 17.

² Carpenter, *Last Days*, p. 3.



RAJA RAM MOHUN ROY

From a pencil-sketch after a coloured steel-engraving from plates to Researches into the Physical History of Manind, by James Coules Prochard, M.D., F.R.S. (Vol. III. Third Edition). Published by Sherrinun, Gilbert and Pigoz, Paternoster Row, London, 1847. By courtesy of The Modern Review, Calcutta.

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beyond the Himalayas, which were recorded in his paper, the *Samvada Kaumudi*, but no copies of this are now procurable.¹ His wanderings came to an end when he was twenty years of age. Men had already been sent out by his father to North-west India to search him out and bring him back; and the young rebel was lovingly welcomed when he retraced his steps homeward.

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 26; Collet, p. 7.

II

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BENARES, MURSHIDABAD, RANGPUR AND CALCUTTA

AFTER his return from Tibet, Ram Mohun set himself to the study of Sanskrit, as if in preparation for his future life-work. His father was anxious about him, especially as he came to understand more and more the tendencies of his son's mind. He realized that the natural paternal expectation of the son's implicit obedience to the traditions of the race, was not to be fulfilled in this case; for Ram Mohun had the courage and capacity to stand against the prevailing customs and superstitions. He had, therefore, to give up again the shelter of the family roof, and to remove to Benares, where, according to William Adam, 'he was obliged to reside for ten or twelve years . . . at a distance from all his friends and relatives, who lived on the family estate at Burdwan.'¹ His father used to help him with a little money, and he in his turn earned a part of his living by copying manuscripts.² Perhaps his income had to be supplemented in this way, for his father's gifts amounted to very little. His vast erudition in Sanskrit is generally ascribed to this period, which was perhaps the most trying in his life. 'So strongly were his feel-

¹ Adam, *Memorandum*. But probably not continuously. Ram Mohun's mother's father, Shyam Bhattacharyya, lived at Benares for some time (Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 602). ² Collet, p. 9.

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ings wrought by the alienation which then commenced, that through life, under the pressure of dejection and disease, the frowning features of his father would rise unbidden in his imagination.¹

Ram Mohun's elder son was born in 1800,² which was the year of his reconciliation with his father. His father died in 1803 and his elder brother in 1811. He was present by his father's death-bed, and was profoundly impressed by his 'fervour of pious devotion,' even when life was ebbing out inch by inch.

The family property was divided among the three sons, and after his brother's death Ram Mohun became naturally the head of the family, according to Indian custom. This led to a law-suit between his mother and himself,³ and in later years with the Burdwan Raj. His mother brought the suit against him, in conformity with the law of the age, in the Supreme Court, in order to disinherit him, on the ground of his apostacy from Hindu orthodoxy. Ram Mohun, however, came out successful; but out of generosity he did not claim any portion of the estate. In later years, when Maharaja Tejchand sued him for arrears of land rent in the Calcutta Provincial Court, he explained away this lapse by pointing out that he had taken nothing from his ancestral property. Phul-Thakurani, Ram Mohun's mother, conducted all the business of the estate; and, in order to be scrupulously just in everything, she used to have before her the family idols Radha-Govinda, and a number of stones representing Narayana, while such business was transacted in the usual fashion.

¹ Fox, *A Discourse on the Death of Raja Ram Mohun Roy*, p. 16.

² Natesan, *Ram Mohun Roy*, p. 9; Collet, p. 8.

³ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, pp. 23, 24.

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While at home, Ram Mohun pursued his studies strenuously. An anecdote relates how he was engaged in the reading of the *Ramayana* of Valmiki, and went on the whole day with it, without food or rest. He finished the whole book at a stretch. Another story shows the growth of his determination to abolish the cruel custom of *sati*. In 1811 Alak-manjari, the widow of his elder brother, Jagamohun, followed her husband to the funeral pyre. She was much esteemed and loved by Ram Mohun, and he tried his utmost to save her, but was unsuccessful. He saw with his own eyes the whole heart-rending affair. 'The flames leaped up ferociously, the drums were beaten madly, so that the cries of the unfortunate woman could not be heard, her efforts to rise up were suppressed by long bamboo poles held across her, and she was smothered to death.'¹ The heart of the future reformer was stirred to its depth at the sight of this inhuman orgy, and, like Gautama before the dead body, or Lincoln before the driven slaves, he vowed to put a stop to this shocking wickedness, as far as it should lie in his power to do so.

After the establishment of the Supreme Court in Calcutta in 1774, English education was considered useful for young men in Bengal. But Ram Mohun's father had given him the kind of education that was necessary for work in the Nawab's government, and never foresaw the possibilities of English as a court language. But at about the age of twenty-two or twenty-four, Ram Mohun began to learn English,² which had a supreme significance not only for his own life but also for

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 27.

² *Ibid.*, p. 32. Cf. Rolland, *Life of Ramkrishna*, p. 106; R. N. Sarnadhar, *Raja Ram Mohun Roy*, p. 1.

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the future of his nation a whole. For about five or six years, however, he could not give proper attention to it, as is attested by Mr. Digby.¹ He was at Murshidabad about 1803, and published there his *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhiddin, A Gift to Monotheists*. It was in Persian, and was 'a bold protest against the idolatrous elements in all established religions.'² The argument pointed out that, while all religions were founded on belief in God, the superstructure built on this belief was often only the work of imagination. The treatise is important as the earliest available expression of Ram Mohun's mind, and as showing his eagerness to bear witness against established error; though as a treatise it is naturally immature. Then followed another work in Persian, continuing the same strain, called *Manazarutul Adyan* ('Discussions on Various Religions'), not available nowadays. In both of these works are found the traces of his Patna training, and a sympathy with, and appreciation of, the strict monotheism of Muhammadanism, together with its ever present under-current of iconoclastic zeal. Yet he was not biased or uncritical; for it is said he criticised even the founder of Islam on certain points in his second brochure, and was therefore disliked by the Muhammadans at that time, among whom there was a considerable stir on this account.² His admiration for Muhammad led him, later on, to undertake to write a *life* of the prophet of Arabia, which, unfortunately, was never finished for want of time.

An extract from the *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhiddin* is given below, to illustrate Ram Mohun's early style and thought:

The followers of different religions, seeing the paucity of the number of monotheists in the world, sometimes boast

¹ Collet, p. 10.

² Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 28; Collet, p. 14.

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that they are on the side of the majority. But it may be seen that the truth of a saying does not depend on the multitude of sayers, and the non-reliability of a narration cannot result from the small number of its narrators. . . . In the beginning of every religion it had very few supporters, viz. its founder and a few sincere followers of his.

The poor people who follow these expounders of religion . . . always boast of it. The fact is, that habit and training make men blind and deaf, in spite of their own eyes and ears. . . . To believe in the real existence of anything, after obtaining proof of such existence, is possible to every individual, but to put faith in the existence of such things as are remote from experience and repugnant to reason is not in the power of a sensible man.¹

It is probable that before accepting any employment, he was at Uttarpara (N.-W. of Calcutta) studying *Tantra* and its practices. His sojourns at Murshidabad and Uttarpara belong to the same period approximately. From Uttarpara he seems to have arranged for service in the Company, and was sent to Jessore. His teacher at Uttarpara was Mahendra Vidyanidhi (senior), and the house he used to live in can be seen yet, standing on the old site; and the room occupied by him, though newly-plastered, retains its old appearance.²

At about this period (1803) the reformer entered the Bengal Civil Service as a clerk. The relation between the Government civilians and the clerks was then rather unsatisfactory; on the one side there was unnecessary and unnatural haughtiness, while on the other there was suppressed chafing without hope of redress. But Ram Mohun managed to have such matters cleared between

¹ Obaidulla El Obaid's translation, (Allahabad ed.) also quoted by Collet, pp. 11, 12.

² From Sachi Pati Roy of Jagamohun's line, who is the owner of the house at Uttarpara. Cf. Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 697.

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himself and his immediate superior, Mr. John Digby. It was understood that he would not be required to remain standing when he came to his departmental head for business transactions, and that no order should be passed on him such as those on ordinary clerks. He worked in the service of the East India Company from 1803 to 1814, and rose to the position of a *dewan*,¹ nowadays called *sheristadar*. Mr. Digby was at Rungpur from 1809 to 1814, and before that at Bhagalpur from 1808 to 1809, and at Ramgarh from 1805 to 1808. Ram Mohun was with him at all these places, as may be learnt from his statement in the suit brought by the Burdwan Raj.

In Rungpur all his spare time was spent very fruitfully, and evidently his plans were being elaborated. Every evening he used to have a meeting of friends in his own house, where religious discussions were held regularly. He explained to them the futility of idolatry and the need for the pure knowledge of Brahman, the Absolute. Many Marwari merchants joined these meetings, a fact which made Ram Mohun study their sacred literature, the *Jaina Kalpa-Sutra*, etc., which also stood him in good stead.

Opposition, as usual, raised its head against the future reformer, and this came about through a certain Govinda Kanta Bhattacharya, who wrote a book named *Jnananjana*, which was revised and published long afterwards, in 1838, after Ram Mohun's death. This man was the *dewan* of the Civil Court, and rivalry was natural between the two *dewans* for more reasons than that of religious conviction. Many were on the side of

¹ It appears, according to tradition, that Ram Mohun was at Jessore before going to any other place, and his letter of appointment at Rungpur bears the title of *Dewan*, under Digby's signature (*Modern Review*, September, 1928).

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orthodoxy, but not one was successful against the keen intellect of Ram Mohun. A number of small Persian tracts were produced, and some part of the *Vedanta* was translated in Rungpur, as well as the *Kena Upanishad*. Ram Mohun's friendship with Mr. Digby became gradually mature in this period; and an interesting estimate of him by Digby is given in the Introduction to the *Abridgement of the Vedanta*:

Ram Mohun Roy . . . is by birth a Brahman of very respectable origin in the province of Bengal, about forty-three years of age. His acquirements are considerable; to a thorough knowledge of Sanskrit (the language of the Brahmanical scriptures) he has added Persian and Arabic; and, possessing an acute understanding, he early conceived a contempt for the religious prejudices and absurd superstitions of his caste. At the age of twenty-two he commenced the study of English, which, not pursuing with application, he five years afterwards (1805), when I became acquainted with him, could merely speak it well enough to be understood upon the most important topics of discourse, but could not write it with any degree of correctness. He was afterwards employed as *dewan*, or principal native officer, in the collection of revenues in the district of which I was for five years Collector in the East India Company's Civil Service. By pursuing all my public correspondence with diligence, as well as by corresponding and conversing with European gentlemen, he acquired so correct a knowledge of the English language as to be enabled to write and speak it with considerable accuracy. He was also in the constant habit of reading the English newspapers, of which the continental politics chiefly interested him, and from them he formed a high admiration for the talents and prowess of the late ruler of France and was so dazzled with the splendour of his achievements as to become sceptical, if not blind, to the atrocity of his crimes, and he could not help deeply lamenting his downfall, notwithstanding the profound respect he ever possessed for the English nation; but when the first transports of his sorrow subsided, he considered that part of his political conduct which led to his abdication

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to have been so weak and so madly ambitious, that he declared his future detestation of Bonnaparte would be proportionate to his former admiration.

About this time a gentleman of Isapara, in Hooghly district, gave his daughter in marriage to Ram Mohun's son, Radha Prasad; and this caused agitation in Hindu society in the neighbourhood of Ram Mohun's Burdwan estate. Ramjaya Batabyal, a neighbour from Ramnagar, began likewise to annoy Ram Mohun in a curious way. With a number of men he resorted to Ram Mohun's house very early every morning and imitated the crowing of cocks, and again at nightfall threw cow-bones into the house. The cock and the cow-bone being abominations to orthodoxy, the womenfolk were greatly disturbed, but Ram Mohun was not at all agitated, and the whole affair subsided gradually. Yet internal troubles increased, though the external ones came to a stop. Phul-Thakurani became disgusted with these happenings day after day, and determined to turn her son out of the house, together with his wives and the new daughter-in-law. Ram Mohun consequently built himself a house at Raghunathpur, a village near by, on a forsaken burning-ground. A pulpit was raised in front of this house for the purpose of worship, with the words *Om* (the mystic syllable), *Tat-Sat* (He is Truth) and *Ekamevadvityam* (the One without a second) engraved on three sides. A burning-ground being nobody's land and above sectarianism, the reformer's step in this direction was significant. Here by the side of the pulpit, his youngest wife asked him the memorable question, like Gargi of old: 'Which religion is the best?' And the pithy yet illuminating reply was: 'Cows are of different colours, but the colour of the milk they give is the same. Different teachers

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have different opinions; but the essence of every religion is to adopt the true path, i.e. to lead a faithful life.'

In his ten years of government service Ram Mohun had saved enough money to become fully independent in every respect, and he laid by something with a view to acquire property of his own. He retired from his post when Mr. Digby left for England at the end of 1814, and took up his residence in Calcutta, at Manicktolla, on the Circular Road, where a house¹ was built under the supervision of his step-brother, Ram Lochan. It was well-furnished in European style, and he had another house in Amherst Street, a locality then known as Simla. Ram Mohun's guests and friends, European and Indian, were received here. Fanny Parks, who saw him many a time in Calcutta, related that 'everything was fitted out in European fashion except the owner.'² Mrs. Heber, the wife of the famous bishop, was present at one of the reformer's parties at this place. There was nothing of asceticism in the man or in his house, but the natural hospitality of a pious soul. His welcome was friendly to all, without distinction of colour, creed or profession.

From here the gauntlet was finally thrown down and the war-bugle was openly sounded that ushered a new age into India. 'Calcutta was in an uproar—even the whole of the province of Bengal was on a wave of agitation. In the parlours of the babus, in the *chatus-patis* (teaching settlements) of the pandits, in the *chandi-mandaps* (worshipping halls) of villages, in fact everywhere, Ram Mohan was talked of—it penetrated even the inner apartments of ladies, where it did not

¹ This house is now a police station.

² *Wanderings*, Fanny Parks; cf. Chatterjee, *R.M.R. and Modern India*, p. 16.

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rest!'¹ The magnetic personality of the stalwart fighter attracted kindred spirits, who were longing for change and freedom, and many were won over by his wonderful powers.

He gathered round himself men of the highest calibre and station of the time, among whom were notable figures like Gopinath Tagore (father of the famous Prasanno Kumar Tagore), Baidya Nath Mukherjee (father of Justice Anukul Chandra Mukherjee), Jaya Krishna Singha, Kasi Nath Mullick, Brindaban Mitra (son of Raja Pitambar Mitra, and grandfather of Raja Rajendra Lal Mitra), Gopi Nath Munshi, Raja Badan Chandra Roy, Raghunath Siromoni, and Hara Nath Tarkabhusan. A political group² was formed with Hara Nath Deb, Tarachand Chakravarty (both of the Burdwan Raj Council) and Ram Gopal Ghose. Moreover, Nanda Lal Basu, Bhairab Chandra Dutt (secretary to the Bethune School), Braja Mohun Mazumdar (author of *Pauttalik Prabodha*), Raj Narayan Sen, Haladhar Basu, Madan Mohun Mazumdar, Ananda Prasad Mukherjee (zemindar of Telinipara) and Kali Nath Roy (zemindar of Taki) used to come to the reformer constantly for advice and assistance. Others, such as Nilratan Haldar (the author of *Jnanaratnakara*), Raja Kali Nath Ghosal of Bhukailash, Dwarka Nath Tagore and Prasanna Kumar Tagore eagerly sought his company. There were also the great Tantric ascetic and scholar, Hariharananda Tirthaswami, his brother, Ram Chandra Vidyabagish, and the 'benevolent rationalist,' David Hare, the educationist. Miss Collet has aptly remarked that the extreme Eastern side and the extreme Western side of Ram Mohun's

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 39.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 40 ff.

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society were represented respectively by the Hariharanda Tirthaswami and David Hare.¹

Some of his friends felt obliged to leave his company, owing to his protest against idolatry; for Hindu orthodoxy was up in arms against him on account of his iconoclastic protestantism. His heterodox life of comparative comfort was an eyesore to them, inasmuch as few in those days lived as Ram Mohun did, inviting all to his house without distinction or discrimination. Their audacity went so far as to suspect that he sold 'justice' in order to become rich; and such suspicion was in the atmosphere of Bengal everywhere, since the days of Clive and Mir Jafar. In the *Calcutta Review* of December, 1845—years after Ram Mohun's death in a foreign land—Kishory Chandra Mitra attacked him on this score, though the attack did not attract any public notice. Remembering the fact that Mr. Digby's reputation as a very successful officer was based on the good administration of the district by all his subordinates, such a charge was base, as well as baseless, on the very face of it; and it was refuted by Leonard, in his *History of the Brahma Samaj*. He points out that, 'had Mr. Digby's dewan been so corrupt, . . . Mr. Digby himself would never have attained renown for justice and probity.'² Miss Collet has observed that 'the insinuations of K. C. Mitra, in the absence of all positive evidence, have unhappily been repeated from the early memoir by later writers, and were reproduced so lately as 1888 in the *Saturday Review*. So difficult it is to rectify a false impression once given.'³

Ram Mohun went on undaunted, as was his wont, with his propaganda, writing and constructive work.

¹ Collet, p. 35.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

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His method was like that of Socrates—first to convince people by conversation and discussion, secondly to rouse the public conscience by writing and publication, thirdly to gather together firm and faithful kindred spirits into associations, and fourthly to establish schools for education and culture.¹ These roughly covered all the objects which he desired to carry out in his own life, and to which his energies were truly and completely devoted henceforward till his death.

His fully developed character now came to the notice of men; not only of those closely associated with him, but also of others who were either indifferent or positively antagonistic. One of his disciples gave the following sketch from personal knowledge:

In his body there was strength as in his mind power. Whatever ideas became clear in his own vast and brilliant knowledge, he used to convey these to the people, thoroughly analysed by his sharp intellect. All men used to respect him naturally for his learning and self-control, and were equally attracted by his humility, amiability and politeness. He was an extraordinary man in strength and courage, learning and humbleness, intelligence and experience. He had no rest from discussing religious topics. Strict devotion to truth, deep faith in God, strong belief in after-life, uncommon kindness to men, were his natural qualities. He was very energetic in spreading the pure worship of God, and was similarly given to doing good to others.²

* * * * *

According to Vidyasagar, he was master of ten languages: Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Urdu, Bengali, English and French.³

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 43.

² *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, 1787 (Saka).

³ Vidyasagar's *History of Bengal*, cited in Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 498.

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Physically he was a very strong man. Being six feet in height and firmly built, he was considered a good-looking person. He had a very large head. His head-dress (*pagri*), which was brought to Calcutta after his death by Pandit Sivanath Sastri, shows the enormous size of the skull it used to cover. There was something in his appearance which indicated greatness at the very first sight. According to Miss Carpenter, the people of England who came in contact with him were pleased to see his tall and well-built figure, and spoke well of his general appearance.¹ He was a voracious eater, and could eat a whole kid at one meal. He used to drink twelve seers of milk every day, and would easily take in season 50 mangoes for his tiffin, while he is reported to have eaten a whole bunch of cocoanuts! It is no wonder that he could travel to Tibet on foot, and stand very hard labour. In the midst of the agitation against him, when his very life was in danger, he had courage to say that he knew none in Calcutta strong enough to kill him, and he went firmly on with his reforming programme.

His was not a narrow or shallow puritanism, which offended people and made them his enemies. He loved life, vigorous, joyful and natural; he had an æsthetic taste in dress and clothing; he liked music, both for worship and for its own sake. He had no objection to drinking for the purposes of health, and approved of dancing and singing as arts. And, although several writers² have taken exception to him on this score, it may be said that in a comprehensive nature of his type all these were held in their proper place and proportion from the standpoint of strict morality.

¹ Carpenter, pp. 57, 121.

² N. N. Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, pp. 225, 295; R. Chatterjee, *R.M.R. and Modern India*, p. 15.

III

1815-1820

HIS FIRST CAMPAIGN—FIVE-FOLD ACTIVITY

THE year 1815 is the most decisive in the reformer's life. It revealed the whole trend of his reforming career, and opened the field of battle before him. His many-sided onslaught was launched at this period against idolatry and *sati*, ignorance and superstition. The first two were the objects of his direct attack, while the others had to be overcome by constructive works of education and spiritual teaching. He had to wield his powerful pen against image-worship and the cruel custom of burning widows; he had to found schools to supply modern education to the future generation, and to form societies for purer forms of worship. These were all intimately connected with one another in his plans; for the reforms which he wanted to inaugurate constituted an all-round programme, if measured by the needs of the time.

‘To Ram Mohun’s mind, the root-evil of the whole wretched state of Hindu society was idolatry,’¹ and the obnoxious superstitions necessarily attached to it. His own study and research convinced him that popular Hinduism was but a modern growth; its current form was grossly corrupt, and, if compared with the spiritual depth

¹ Collet, p. 25.

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and philosophical height of the ancient religion of the *rishis* (sages), it was absolutely worthless. His object was to revive this old faith, which had changed beyond recognition; and to build anew on this old foundation, adding those elements which it needed and enlarging the places where it was narrow. Necessarily he moved along the line of least resistance, as Pandit Sivanath Sastri has pointed out;¹ for he did not wish to destroy the fabric erected through the ages and he was aware of the dangers of drastic action. His genius was essentially constructive, and never lost sight of the importance of the past, while keeping at the same time a keen eye upon the future. The *Vedanta* was found by him to be exactly what he wanted as the most suitable medium for such a purpose. Besides being a highly logical system of thought with vast potentialities, it was accepted by the most orthodox and its dictates were binding upon them. If its teaching could be inculcated by means of the printed page, progress could be expected in freer thinking in spiritual spheres; for it was of 'unquestionable authority in matters of Hindu theology.' But with the general decline of learning, these writings had fallen into disuse, and there were very few men who were reputed to be learned in them or who were familiar with their contents. Further, in order to reach the masses they had to be translated into Bengali. Ram Mohun did not take long to discern this need or to take the decision. He used the English language to approach the world outside India, and the vernacular to touch his own country. Mr. Chatterjee says that he always hoped to establish pure Brahma-worship through the sacred

¹ *History of the Brahma Samaj*, I, p. 67 f.

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books of all the nations of the world;¹ and from this point of view his first duty lay at home.

In 1815 the *Vedanta-Sutra Bhashya*, the classical commentary by Sankaracharya, was translated by Ram Mohun from the original Sanskrit and published in Bengali. 'It had been his wish to render a translation of the complete Vedanta into the current languages* of the country';² and in this respect he followed the same method as Gautama Buddha and Jesus Christ, who preferred the vernaculars to the classical languages of their ages. Another important move was the establishment of the *Atmiya Sabha* (the Friendly Association) in the same year as the formation of the nucleus of a group of kindred spirits, drawn from those who had already gathered round Ram Mohun, attracted by his personality. The fact of the publication of this great book and the founding of this religious club, were, so to speak, the first steps towards further work. In the following year (1816) a summary of the *Vedanta* was published by Ram Mohun, in Bengali, English and Hindustani editions. It was called the *Vedant Sara* ('The Abridgement of the Vedanta') and is the most original of all his works. It has nothing to do with the Sanskrit book, of the same name, by Sadananda. His first religious discussion took place in this very year, with Mahamahopadhyay Utsavananda Vidyabagish, who was afterwards converted to the new views.³ The *Kena* and the *Isha Upanishads* were published in Bengali and English in 1816, and, similarly, the *Manduk*, *Katha* and *Mandukya* in 1817—but the last was not translated into English. The publisher of Ram

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 45.

² Collet, p. 25.

³ See the present author's article on the Utsavananda controversy, in *Prabasi*, September, 1930.

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Mohun's works says: 'Though we have more recent, and perhaps, in some sense, improved translations . . . still, considering that his were somewhat independent interpretations of these ancient scriptures, wherein the different schools were sought to be harmonised in a higher synthesis, they may justly claim to have a value of their own.'¹ All these works were brought out, with introductions and comments, at Ram Mohun's own expense, and were given away free of charge. His chief object evidently was to rouse the spiritual sense and thirst of the country, by distributing such literature far and wide. He revealed his ultimate aim when he said: 'My constant reflection on the inconvenient, or rather injurious, rites introduced by the peculiar practice of Hindu 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, and, by making them acquainted with their scriptures, enable them to contemplate with true devotion the unity and the omnipresence of Nature's God.'²

Mr. Digby was now in England on leave, and he reprinted there, in 1817, with a preface from his own pen, Ram Mohun's *Abridgement of the Vedant, or Resolution of the Vedas*, together with the translation of the *Kena Upanishad*. These works were 'hitherto unknown,' in the language of the publisher,³ and it is not possible at present to find out how they were received by the English public. That they roused considerable interest is easy to imagine. Already Ram Mohun was

¹ English Works, I, p. i.

² Introduction to *Vedant Sarsa*, p. 6.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

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becoming to a certain extent known in the West. According to Miss Collet, the first English notices of him were: (1) in the *Periodical Accounts* of the Baptist Missionary Society, Vol. IV, of the year 1816, pp. 106-9; (2) A fuller statement was given in the *Missionary Register of the Church of England*, of September, 1816, p. 370; (3) The *Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature*, of 1816, p. 512, gave a short account of the *Abridgement of the Vedant*; (4) the Rev. T. Belsham, of Essex Street, London, wrote a letter about the reformer in 1817, as an introduction to a letter from an Indian Christian, William Roberts, of Madras; (5) a French pamphlet, by the Abbé Gregoire, formerly Bishop of Blois, which was afterwards inserted in the *Chronique Religieuse*; its biographical part was communicated by M. D'Acosta, Editor of the *Times* at Calcutta; (6) The *Journal of a Route across India, through Egypt to England*, in 1817-18, by Lieut.-Col. Fitzclarence, afterwards Earl of Munster, had a notice of this 'wonderful Brahman.'

Side by side with the spread of his fame far and wide beyond the limits of India, opposition increased in his own country. Hostility to his reforms was natural from the orthodox community, and this was fully anticipated by the reformer himself. But his firmness was unconquerable in the face of odds. He wrote, with a pathos almost Miltonic, in his *Vedant Sara*: 'By taking the path which conscience and sincerity direct, I, born a Brahman, have exposed myself to the complainings and reproaches even of some of my relations, whose prejudices are strong and whose temporal advantage depends upon the present system. But these, however accumulated, I can tranquilly bear; trusting that a day will arrive when

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my humble endeavours will be reviewed with justice—perhaps acknowledged with gratitude. At any rate, whatever men may say, I cannot be deprived of this consolation: my motives are acceptable to that Being who beholds in secret and compensates openly.’¹ These words echo those of Milton’s Sonnet, in which he expresses the hope that the discharge of his duty will ever be ‘in the Great Task-Master’s eye.’ In fact, Ram Mohun could not have kept up his courage had he not had this constant and burning conviction. Writing to Digby at the time when he reprinted the *Abridgement*, Ram Mohun described his position with reference to the attitude of his countrymen, some indeed friendly but the majority vigorously inimical. He discloses in this remarkable letter the inner spring which moved him towards his mighty task. He says:

I, therefore, with the view of making them (the Hindus) happy and comfortable, both here and hereafter, not only employed verbal arguments against the absurdities of the idolatry practised by them, but also translated their most revered theological work, namely, *Vedant*, into Bengali and Hindusthani, and also several chapters of the *Ved*, in order to convince them that the Unity of God and the absurdity of idolatry are evidently pointed out by their own scriptures. I, however, in the beginning of my pursuits met with the greatest opposition from their self-interested leaders, the Brahmans, and was deserted by my nearest relations. I consequently felt extremely melancholy. I, now, with the greatest pleasure inform you that several of my countrymen have risen superior to their prejudices; many are inclined to seek for the truth; and a great number of those who dissented from me have now coincided with me in opinion.²

His great idea of ‘making men comfortable,’ or

¹ *Vedant Sara*, p. 5, Introduction.

² Collet, p. 37.

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promoting *lokasreya* (the good of man), is further explained in his introduction to the *Kena Upanishad*, where, besides pointing out that 'many respectable persons enquire into the truths of religion,' he added that he hoped

to correct those exceptionable practices which not only deprive Hindoos in general of the common comforts of society, but also lead them frequently to self-destruction, or to sacrifice of the lives of their friends and relations.¹

In the meantime the *Atmiya Sabha* (the Friendly Association) was holding its meetings in Ram Mohun's garden-house at Manicktolla. It met once a week, and particularly on Hindu festival days, according to the *Calcutta Gazette*, in order to keep its members away from idolatrous worship; and its object was the spiritual improvement of the members. 'Its proceedings consisted in the recitation of texts from the Hindu scripture, and the chanting of theistic hymns composed by Ram Mohun and his friends. Ram Mohun's pandit, Siva Prasad Misra, was the first reciter, and a paid singer, Govinda Mala, was the first 'chapter-clerk.'² The texts were not explained then, but were only read. This shows that from the very beginning it was moulded somewhat like a regular religious service, though its features were not sharply outlined. It was, of course, limited to the reformer's personal friends, and was not a public function. These were surely men who rose above their own time, and they were necessarily few in number, since many kept dropping away. Special mention may be made of Dwarka Nath Tagore, Braja Mohun Mazumdar, Halodhar Bose, Nanda Kisore Bose and Raj Narayan

¹ *Kena Upanishad*, p. 47.

² Collet, p. 32.

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Sen. There was also the remarkable personality of Hariharananda Tirthaswami, whose younger brother, Mahamahopadhyay Ram Chandra Vidyabagish, became the first minister of the Brahma Samaj. It is said that Ram Chandra was defeated by Ram Mohun in argument before he was converted to progressive views. He was sent from the Tagore house to pluck flowers for worship from Ram Mohun's garden, and the occasion enabled the two men to meet for a whole day, without food or rest. The dispute turned on the simple query, 'Who is worshipped with those flowers?' Later on Vidyabagish became a pandit of the Sanskrit College. David Hare did not belong to this religious group, but he came uninvited, of his own accord, to attend one of the reformer's meetings against idolatry, in order to be in close touch with Ram Mohun.¹ This produced an affinity at once, for both were bent on doing good to the country through the spread of education and culture.

'Hare found an intimate friend in Ram Mohun. He had begun to spread theism and denounce idolatry, was moving heaven and earth for the abolition of the suttee rite, and advocating the dissemination of English education as the means for enlightening his countrymen. . . . Hare submitted that the establishment of an English school would materially help their cause.'² The members of the Atmiya Sabha 'acquiesced in the strength of Hare's position, but did not carry out his suggestion.' With the help of Chief Justice Sir E. Hyde East, who had heard the news from Baikuntha Nath Banerjee, secretary of the Atmiya Sabha,³ a committee

¹ *Ram Tanu Lahiri, etc.*, p. 83.

² Pyarichand Mitra, *Life of David Hare*.

³ *Ram Tanu Lahiri, etc.*, p. 48.

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was formed early in 1816 to give effect to Hare's idea. The meetings of this committee were held in the house of the Chief Justice, and a resolution was passed that 'an establishment be formed for the education of native youth.' Ram Mohun Roy was on this committee, for it seemed natural to have him connected with a scheme of this type. Leading Hindus of the time were consulted on the point, and every effort was made to enlist their sympathy and co-operation.

Ram Mohun's name was on the list as one of the promoters of the educational propaganda; but to this Hindu orthodoxy raised a strong objection. It was reported to Sir Hyde East that the Hindus would gladly support the proposed college, if Ram Mohun's connection with it were cut off altogether. Their contention was that they would have nothing to do with 'the apostate.' The reformer had expected such a crisis, and in order not to hinder the success of an object so close to his own heart, he abstained from attending the meetings in Sir Hyde East's house; and eventually, when Hare communicated to him the position of the whole affair, he saw clearly how his presence would only defeat the accomplishment of the useful project. He allowed himself to be thrust aside rather than impede progress in such an important concern. Miss Collet has remarked: 'So soon had Hindu orthodoxy taken alarm, and so early had Ram Mohun been called to exercise that self-effacingness with which, many a time in his life, did he withdraw his name from benevolent schemes for which nevertheless he worked, in order to smooth their acceptance by the general public, to whom his name was an offence.'¹

¹ Collet, p. 36.

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The Hindu College was opened soon after, in January, 1817. In the same year Ram Mohun was called upon to defend his publications. That they had exerted widespread influence and attracted considerable attention was evident from attacks on the writer: first in the *Madras Courier* of December, 1817, by Sankara Sastri, head English teacher in the Madras Government College; and secondly in a pamphlet, *Vedanta Chandrika*, by Mrityunjaya Vidyalankar, head pandit of the Fort William College in Calcutta. Ram Mohun at once replied to the former in a defence of Hindu theism, and to the latter in a second defence of 'the monotheistical system of the Veds.' Both were masterly expositions of the theistic system of thought, based on ancient Hindu writings, and contained trenchant criticism of the orthodox position.

The years 1817 and 1818 were marked by a sudden increase in the number of *satis*, or widows burnt with their husbands on the funeral pyre. This followed the attempts of the Government to check the evil practice, by means of an elaborate set of rules formulated by the Nizamut Court in 1817. A petition was accordingly sent up to Lord Hastings, by the orthodox community in Calcutta, to have all regulations against sati repealed, on the ground of its being a religious rite. A counter-petition was therefore filed, which bore the traces, palpable and sure, of Ram Mohun's hand. It called into question the right of the first petition 'to represent the principal inhabitants of Calcutta,' and said:

Your petitioners are fully aware, from their own knowledge or from the authority of credible eyewitnesses, that cases have frequently occurred when women have been induced, by the persuasions of their next heirs, interested in their

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destruction, to burn themselves on the funeral pyre of their husbands; that others, who have been induced by fear to retract a resolution, rashly expressed in the first moments of grief, of burning with their deceased husbands, have been forced upon the pile, and there bound down with ropes and pressed with green bamboos until consumed with the flames; that some, after flying from the flame, have been carried back by their relations and burnt to death. All these instances, your petitioners humbly submit, are murders according to every shastra, as well as according to the common-sense of all nations.¹

This petition, couched as it was in forcible language, was direct and definite in its references to sati, and it prayed for 'further measures relative to the custom of burning widows,' as expected from 'the known wisdom, decision and humanity' which distinguished his Lordship's (Hastings) administration.

Ram Mohun's influence on this issue began to be definitely felt from now. His first tract on sati appeared in November, 1818, called *A Conference Between an Advocate for and an Opponent of the Practice of Burning Widows*. It was brought out first in Bengali, and was translated into English after extensive circulation. In February, 1820, a second *Conference* was produced, and was dedicated to Lady Hastings. This was also translated from the Bengali original. Ram Mohun's intention clearly was to enlighten his own countrymen of the real injunctions of their sacred books, and to inform the rulers of the country of the real conditions with regard to the evil practice. This end was successfully achieved by the almost simultaneous publications of his tracts on the subject, both in English and in Bengali.

Quite a memorable event occurred in December, 1819,

¹ Collet, pp. 48, 49.

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in connection with the Association of Protestant Hindus. Interesting discussions were arranged by it on religious topics, which drew all classes of people. The greatest one of this kind took place between Ram Mohun, representing advanced views, and Subrahmanya Sastri, of Madras, standing for the conservative position. The challenge was public, and the reformer gladly accepted it. A largely attended meeting was called at the house of Behari Lal Chowbay, in Baghbazar, North Calcutta, where Raja Radha Kanta Deb, the acknowledged leader of the orthodox community, watched the proceedings, with well-known pandits and learned men of the town and suburbs. Nothing could stand before Ram Mohun's genius, and the Sastri had to acknowledge his defeat. His contention had been that the Vedas should not be read at all in Bengal, as there were no really pure Brahmans available to do it in that province. The news of this debate naturally spread like wild-fire, and intensified the enmity of the orthodox against Ram Mohun's whole group, who were abused as atheists by the conservatives. There were two other discussions, with a Vaishnava Goswami in 1818, and a nameless poet in 1820; but no record exists to show whether they were conducted orally, face to face, or by mere correspondence, as they are published in Bengali works of the reformer.

At about this period of his career, Ram Mohun was drawn into a law suit, on the ground of his heterodoxy, by his nephew, Govinda Prasad, over some ancestral property; and this affair occupied much of his time for nearly two years. Though Ram Mohun came out successful, and Govinda Prasad apologised to him, all the troubles connected with such a legal dispute had to be put up with. Consequently Ram Mohun had to discoo-

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tinue the meetings of the Atmiya Sabha, which were being held in his own house at Manicktolla, and afterwards in his other house at 'Simla.' Its periodical sittings were henceforward called in the houses of Brindaban Mitra, Raja Kali Sankar Ghosal, and Behari Lal Chowbay. The Rev. K. S. Macdonald, of the Presbyterian Mission of Calcutta, explained this change as due to Ram Mohun's fear of rousing greater prejudice against his worldly interests; but he seems to have forgotten that, during the latter part of this period, the reformer was busy with an even more heterodox movement, viz. the Unitarian Committee, associated with Rev. William Adam, and was in regular attendance openly at its religious services. Prejudice could not have been aroused against him more violently; for he had already incurred more than his full share of it, partly from legitimate agitation by the orthodox but mostly from false ideas wilfully circulated against him. Even some of his own friends fell away at the time of need, when public disfavour was strongly stirred. Jaya Krishna Sinha¹ was such a one, having joined the idolators, under pressure of circumstances, just at this time.

An interesting sidelight is thrown on the progress of the reform propaganda by an incident in a law court, in the beginning of 1820, when Ram Mohun's *Second Tract on Sati* was published. A man was called as a witness, whose deposition had to be recorded, and as a matter of course he was asked to take the regular oath, by means of the holy water of the Ganges. On his refusal point-blank, he stated that he was 'a follower of Ram Mohun Roy,' and consequently 'did not believe

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 229.

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in the imagined sanctity of the river,' like the ordinary Hindus. He was allowed to proceed in the Quaker way, by simply affirming the truth of what he wanted to say. This shows a very highly 'advanced' position, in view of the general education and culture of the age. Ram Mohun's influence may indeed be said to be the forerunner of the movement for abolition of oaths in law courts in India.¹ His own position regarding this matter is fully explained in his *Appeal to the King in Council* for the liberty of the Press. The young man who had the courage to stand firm in a public court of law was Rashik Krishna, of the famous Mullick family of Sinduriapatti. He was a good speaker, and delivered a notable speech at the Calcutta memorial meeting after Ram Mohun's death.² He used to edit the *Jnananveshana*, a paper of good circulation.

In his letter to Mr. Digby, Ram Mohun already expressed in unequivocal terms his sincere appreciation of Christianity, and his deep admiration for its founder. His study of it was the crowning experience of his life, and showed him the way to religious synthesis and moral perfection. He stated his conviction clearly and forcefully, affirming that his own studies in several religious systems had led him to this conclusion:

The consequence of my long and uninterrupted researches into religious truth has been, that I have found the doctrines of Christ more conducive to moral principles, and better adapted for the use of rational beings, than any others which have come to my knowledge.³

He was evidently studying Christianity carefully for some time, as references to Christ and His teachings were

¹ See Collet, p. 40.

² *Ram Tamu Lahiri*, etc., p. 130.

³ Collet, p. 61.



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*Reproduced from a steel-engraving to the Second London Edition of the
Precepts of Jesus. 1834.*

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made by him in his Introduction to the *Kena Upanishad*, and his reply to Sankara Sastri. In order to understand the Bible thoroughly he had to learn both Hebrew and Greek, which he mastered in a short time.

The compilation of the teachings of Christ was a natural outcome of his study of Christianity. In a letter to an un-named friend, 'Col. B.,' dated the 5th September, 1820, he explained his object in collecting together the precepts of the New Testament:

I have compiled several passages of the New Testament which I thought essential to Christianity, and published them under the designation of *The Precepts of Jesus*.¹

This book, which was published early in 1820, was the second greatest work of Ram Mohun. Its full title is: *The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness, Extracted from the Books of the New Testament ascribed to the Four Evangelists, with Translations into Sanskrit and Bengali*. It is not known whether the translations were actually published, though Mr. Chatterjee has spoken of a Bengali version of it.² In the second English edition of the book the translations are mentioned in the introduction.

The Serampore missionaries, who had their settlement established jointly by Carey and Marshman in 1799, took exception to this work, which in their opinion contained nothing of Christian dogma but only the ethical teachings of Christ. But Ram Mohun wanted to spread the moral idealism of Christianity, and not its theology, however necessary the latter might appear to missionary organisations. Dr. Schmidt's review of the *Precepts of Jesus* was from this missionary standpoint; it appeared

¹ Collet, p. 64.

² Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 212.

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with an editorial note by Dr. Marshman in *The Friend of India*, then a missionary paper, and it led to the publication of Ram Mohun's *An Appeal to the Christian Public*, in defence of the *Precepts*, about the middle of 1821. The theology of the Serampore missionaries at this time was of a somewhat strict and conservative type. Carey's linguistic genius and intellectual power stood almost alone among missionaries, 'Henry Martyn was dead, and Heber had not yet arrived.'¹ It may be noted here that Dr. Macdonald considered that this criticism of the *Precepts* and its author was neither happy nor wholly justifiable.

¹ Collet, p. 59.

IV

HINDU 'SPIRITUAL THEISM'

RAM MOHUN'S LINE OF ARGUMENT AND DEFENCE

BEFORE Ram Mohun Roy there had been religious reformers of influence and power in India, who had tried to liberate Hinduism from its trappings of custom and ritualism, which were not only meaningless but even detrimental to its best interests. They had endeavoured to interpret to the masses the real import of religion itself, and to direct popular ideas towards higher ends. Kabir, Nanak and Dadu are honoured names in this field; and some of their followers, too, are well known. The famous poems of the weaver of Benares show how much pioneer work was done by him. So, also, some of the verses of Nanak reveal the spirit of protest that went forth from the religious idealists of mediæval India. This movement was not limited to the north only; once and again voices were raised, all over the country, in favour of purity of heart and worship. Chaitanya in Bengal had led the propaganda of devotion and freedom from caste and bigotry; but the bondage of orthodoxy was not altogether broken. Yet while Ram Mohun had not thus been without fore-runners, a philosophical and learned opposition to Hindu orthodoxy, based on logic and scholarship, found its first systematic expression in his teachings. He is

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different from his predecessors, in respect of the wide outlook and erudition, combining the knowledge of the East and the West, which he effectively applied against ignorance and superstition. He is a direct lineal descendant of the poet-reformers, inasmuch as 'against the rabbinism of the Hindu religion he appealed to its prophetism.'¹ Like Zwingli, he wanted 'to interpret the scriptures by means of the scriptures themselves, independently of tradition and custom.' But it is remarkable that all such protests in their own time tended ultimately to establish a new sect, if not an altogether new religion; whereas Ram Mohun's was a reaching-out to the universal in every religion, with a view to a world-movement.

The *Vedanta Grantha* was the first production of Ram Mohun's that indicated in clear terms which way the reformer's thoughts were turning, and what ground he was preparing for his future programme. It is the bulkiest volume produced by him, running to 113 pages, and it became the foundation of all types of 'free thought' for those who thought freely. In Sankara's original Sanskrit there are 558 *sutras* (aphorisms) on which he wrote his commentary. Ram Mohun condensed the argument, and abridged the *sutras* according to their relative importance, adding his own contribution wherever necessary. The book has four parts, each with four sections, making up the original total of 558 *sutras*. It forms a thesis or a volume of principles, which may be applied to problems of the day in conformity with the demands of the circumstances.

¹ Collet, p. 87. In a lecture by Rajnarain Bose in 1863, this majestic conception of the unity of faiths was set forth as a fact clearly realized by the spiritual descendants of the reformer. See Ch. ix.

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In the *Vedanta Sara*, which was published in 1816, these principles were brought in relation to the needs of India at that time. Starting with the thesis that Brahman (the Absolute) is unknowable in its absoluteness, he took up Sankara's position of 'super-imposition' or 'transference of qualities' in the act of knowledge. It is Brahman who desired to be many, and hence came the pluralistic world, which seems to be the only reality, but which is yet 'in the shelter of Brahman.' Name (individuality) and form came to their sure end, and cannot therefore be independent. The existence of Brahman is deduced from the birth (cause) of the world, according to the second aphorism of the first section of the first part of Sankara's *Bhashya*. He is the creator of the world, as both the *Taittiriya* and the *Kaushitaki Upanishads* say: 'He is Brahman, from whom the whole world has risen'; 'He is Brahman, who is the maker of the individuals and the world.' *Prakriti* (energy) is only the instrumental (or material) cause of the world, and not the first cause. If Brahman has created the world by His own will, then He is ultimately both the first and the instrumental cause.

The method of pure worship is likewise pointed out on the same authority of the Vedas, and evidently has little in common with the crude forms of adoration resorted to by modern Hindus, in the wrong belief that the right thing is being done. 'Real worship' is also founded on the Vedantic system of thought.

'To God we should approach, of Him we should hear, of Him we should think, and to Him we should attempt to approximate,' according to the *Vedanta*, XLVII, 4. 3. Constant practice of devotion is necessary, it being represented so by the *Veda*.' We should adore God till we approach Him,

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and even then not forsake His adoration, such authority being found in the Ved (*Ab. of Vedant*, p. 19). He who knows God thoroughly adheres unto God (*Ibid.*, 20).

Other implications follow necessarily from this type of worship, which the keen insight of the reformer was not slow to bring to the forefront. From the social standpoint these are very important, giving, as they do, that 'freedom from law,' and from rites and ceremonies, which St. Paul loved to emphasise. That the *Vedanta* freed the soul from the chains of custom and tradition was an essential part of Ram Mohun's conviction, and he worked it out to the fullest in the famous *Trust Deed* of the Brahma Samaj. The following results are pointed out as being in agreement with the trend of Vedantic worship:

The *Vedanta* shows that moral principle is a part of the adoration of God, viz. a command over our passions and over the external senses of the body, and good acts, are declared by the Veds to be indispensable in the mind's approximation to God; they should, therefore, be strictly taken care of and attended to, both previously and subsequently to such approximation to the Supreme Being (27. 4. 3).

The adoration of the Supreme Being produces eternal beatitude, as well as desired advantages, as the Vedant declares. It is the firm opinion of Vyas 'that from devotion to God all the desired consequences proceed' (1. 4. 3). 'He who is desirous of prosperity, should worship the Supreme Being' (*Mundaka Upanishad*).

It is optional, to those who have faith in God alone, to observe and attend to the rules and rites prescribed by the Ved, applicable to different classes of Hindus and to different religious orders respectively. In the case of the true believers neglecting those rites, they are not liable to any blame whatever. . . . And the Vedant says: 'Man may acquire the true knowledge of God, even without observing the rules and rites prescribed by the Ved for each class of

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Hindoos, as it is found in the Ved that many persons who had neglected the performance of Brahmanical rites and ceremonies, owing to their perpetual attention to the adoration of the Supreme Being, acquired the true knowledge respecting the deity' (36. 4. 3).

Thus far the advance of thought was not very dangerous to orthodoxy, and strict Hindus could accept the position, in theory at least; but this Vedantic radicalism does not stop here. Its inherent logic has vast possibilities of revolutionising Hindu life and thought still further, taken in its entirety. It propounds other radical doctrines, that seemed intolerable to those who held to established practices and long-standing beliefs. Social rules based on such observances were challenged by Ram Mohun's exposition on the points given below, his object being the liberation of mind from meaningless superstitions and social abuses, due to the uncriticised authority of traditions.

1. That he who has true faith in the Omnipresent Supreme Being may eat all things that exist, according to the *Chandogya Upamishad*.

2. Devotion to the Supreme Being is not limited to any holy place or sacred country, as the Vedant says: 'In any place wherein the mind feels itself undisturbed men should worship God, because no specific authority for the choice of any particular place is found in the Ved, which declares "in any place which renders mind easy, man should adore God"' (11. 1. 4).

The significance of these doctrines carried far-reaching effects, on which Ram Mohun evidently meant to establish the Theistic Church in India—which, in fact, he did found at a later date; and it was but natural that he should resort to the 'Positivism' of the Vedanta for his authority and inspiration. Moreover this served to pro-

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mote the initial weeding out of those false notions and observances which stood in the way of the freedom of the spirit. As a preparation for the pure form and method of worship which he wanted to introduce, the implications of the Vedanta were of priceless value.

A true knowledge of the sources of this Vedanta, which was so important and necessary as the basis of religious culture and conviction, had similarly to be given to the public, so that men might realise what Hinduism used to be in former days. Apart from their literary and philosophical value, the Upanishads had great devotional significance. Ram Mohun's vision enabled him to appreciate the utility of such literature, and he began to draw from them original arguments for his purpose. In the masterly introductions to the Upanishads translated by him, he deduced, from the whole range of Sanskrit religious literature, his scheme for monotheistic worship and the consequent freedom from traditions and superstitions. In this respect his object was identical with those of the *Vedanta Grantha* and the *Vedanta Sava*. He desired above all to bring about a better and purer type of worship, resting directly upon the authority of the Vedas, so that orthodoxy might have no loop-hole of escape. The Vedas were authoritative, and accepted by the idol-worshippers as revealed truth; and anything connected with them could not be brushed aside easily and without consideration.

The assumption was made, by all Hindus, as a matter of course, that 'nothing could be done with him who does not recognise the Veds.' Now, the drift of the reasoning attached to the *Ishopanishad* is against the

¹ Introduction to *Kama Upanishad*, p. 50.

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system of worship according to the Puranas and Tantras, which are clearly idolatrous, in spite of the better elements to be found in them.¹ The discovery of this teaching was a matter of search and interpretation, which was carried out by the translator himself. The following summary will illustrate his position:

1. As to the worship of idols, the question is, Who are required to do this? It is cogently proved, with quotations from authorities, that it is a very low type of worship, unworthy of intelligent man. 'He who has claim to the (real) worship of God has no use of "imaginary worshipping" (by means of images).' Proofs from sacred authorities point out—

2. The words of Jamadagni—'Imagining the forms of Brahman, who is pure intelligence without a second, without form and qualification, is due to the particular need of the worshippers, and in giving form gods have to be fancied as bodily, male or female.' But it is otherwise in reality.

3. The lines from the Vishnu Purana—'He (Brahman) can be predicated as only existent, who is unqualified by any indication of form, and has no end, nor change, nor birth.'

4. Again, 'Common people perceive God in water, the educated in the stars of the sky, fools in stocks and stones; but the wise in the *atman*' (self).

Those who consider austerity to be practised by bathing at a holy place, and think of images as gods, can never see, perceive, salute or adore the feet of the great Lord of Yoga.

He who considers the *atman* to be the body pervaded by bile, phlegm and wind, and to be in wife and children, and God to be in things made of earth, and holiness in water—ideas which are never possible in the knowers of truth—is verily a cow (an idiot).

5. *Mahanirvana Tantra*: 'Thus according to qualities various forms and methods have been imagined for the good of the worshippers of little understanding. Mantras, and the presiding gods of the mantras, are enslaved when the actionless, indestructible Brahman is known. If Brahman is

¹ *Works*, I, pp. 87, 96, 103.

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known, no rule is necessary, just as when the wind blows no fan is necessary.'

Another important question is discussed in this connection, which logically rises out of this teaching which was meant to do away with idolatry. This is, whether direct Brahma-knowledge (knowledge of the Supreme Being) is really possible. The antithesis assumes that 'although such knowledge is mentioned, yet it is not possible; and hence worshipping God by means of images is a necessity.' This sort of argument is advanced even now, as it was in the days of the reformer, and Ram Mohun, by meeting this objection, removed one of the greatest obstacles in the way of reform. His answer is, that had it been really impossible, then the sacred texts, such as, 'The atman is to be heard about and thought of,' 'Worship the atman alone,' would not have encouraged the practice of Brahma-knowledge; for it is clear that the *sastras* (sacred writings) cannot point to the impossible as something to be attempted and attained.

Such pure worship might also be objected to, on the ground that it is possible only for ascetics and not for householders. In anticipating this sort of opposition, Ram Mohun was really trying to make the way clear for the acceptance of his purified worship by all types of men. The obvious reply to this objection is, that there are many evidences in the Vedas, the Vedanta, Manu, and other sacred books, that the adoration of the atman is a duty of the householder; it is not limited to mendicants.¹ Besides what the Vedanta has said in support of this, in III. 4. 48 of Sankara's *Bhasya*, Manu, the greatest of law givers, has the following:

¹ See Manilal Parekh, *Rajarsi Ram Mohun Roy*, p. 136.

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The Brahmana ought to care for worshipping the Brahman, disciplining the senses, *pranava*, the Upanishads and the Veda Bhashyas, even by giving up all works enjoined by sacred law.

(Those householders, who know the rules of external and internal sacrificial rites, never attempt the external, but carry out the five compulsory sacrifices by suppressing the five senses, such as the eye, the ear, etc. (The meaning of this is that some Brahma-knowing householders, instead of performing the five sacrifices on the outside, do them inside by controlling the five senses by the power of attachment to the Absolute.)

Further, some householders, who are faithful to the Absolute, undertake all the sacrifices prescribed for the householders in the sacred books by means of Brahma-knowledge alone. They have come to realise through the eye of knowledge that all the five sacrifices are centred in the Brahman, i.e. all the sacrifices are fulfilled in (spiritual) knowledge for the householders attached to Brahman.

Yajnavalkya, another great law-giver, who is second only to Manu, has declared in the same strain:

Those householders, who accept gifts from the good for their earning, and are given to entertaining guests hospitably and the carrying out of daily works of piety, and always speak the truth and earnestly meditate on the [mystery of the] atman, will surely find release, even if they are householders.

This shows that not only are ascetics meant for salvation, but householders as well.

The conclusion from these texts of unassailable authority is, that while there is a prescription for daily works of piety on the part of the householder, it is also indicated that after performing such works, or even giving them up altogether, the worship of the atman is compulsory. It is the kernel of all approach to the Supreme Being, and is the essential element in devotion.

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It is laid down, in various passages in the sacred books that salvation is not possible simply by pious rites, without the adoration of the Absolute. When the essential is mixed up with the non-essential, confusion is bound to follow, and hence the ground was thoroughly cleared by Ram Mohun on the basis of the sacred texts themselves.

That faith alone is enough to lead to the desired fruit is another assertion of an uncritical religious attitude, which is controverted by Ram Mohun at some length, since it is used to support both idolatry and empty ceremonies. If it is supposed that worshipping images with faith is, after all, tantamount to worshipping God, since worship is directed to God through the images, which are only symbols, the reply is, that the position is really untenable, because 'While for temporal things, that are easily obtainable, great consideration is held to be necessary before acceptance or purchase, spiritual matters, which are of the greatest value and good, need not, according to this view, be weighed properly, either by means of the sacred texts or through reason. They may be accepted by some according to family tradition, or recognised by others according to the breadth of their mind, and the explanation is readily given that a good result will follow, "if there is faith only"! But the quality or the effect of anything is not changed by individual faith; just as it may be easily seen that when poison is taken in the firm belief that it is milk, nevertheless the poison surely produces its effect.' Wrong beliefs, that were prevalent then, and are going on still almost in the same fashion, were thus tested by Ram Mohun on the touchstone of reason, to be rejected in the long run as incompatible with the advance of knowledge and culture.

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The irrational contention, that tradition and custom, when they have been handed down from generation to generation, ought to be respected and observed, had also to be met and removed by Ram Mohun, in the interest of those who clung to them. He therefore shows that many works are regularly performed by Hindus which are not traditional or customary, or may be even directly opposed to old tradition, e.g. the rules of *kulinism* or pedigree, which are altogether new compared with ancient social regulations. Similarly, religious celebrations, such as the *Jagaddhatri* and *Rotanti* pujas, or the worship of the images of Mahaprabhu and Nityananda, are not in accordance with ancient injunctions. If it is said that these are in conformity with sacred rules, though not with tradition and custom, it may be asked, Why then should the worship of the atman, which is in accord with all sacred writings from time immemorial, from generation to generation, not be considered valid and obligatory, even though its practice is seen to be limited to certain places and times? The point is, that if viewed from an impartial angle of vision, the higher worship of the atman is sanctioned by ancient tradition more than anything else, however attractive the latter may be to the popular mind, which generally fails to grasp the importance and import of that higher worship.

It is sometimes urged that, as a result of misunderstanding, some people say that the worshippers of Brahman, seeing that they are to regard all things as Brahman (according to the principles let forth in sacred writings), ought to consider mud and sandal-paste, heat and cold, thieves and saints, to be all equal and the same, without any judgment of value. The reply to this has already been given in the *Vedanta Grantha*, that those who were

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very much attached to Brahman and realised Brahma-knowledge in life, like Vasishtha, Parasara, Sanat Kumara, Vyasa, Janaka and others, even while faithfully following Brahman, were given to worldly knowledge, including politics, and behaved like householders. Krishna himself, as a god, taught Brahma-knowledge to Arjuna through Gita, although Arjuna was a householder; and this made him better able to discharge his political duties, and did not divest him of knowledge about the world. Vasishtha himself told Ram Chandra:

O Rama, conduct your worldly affairs with all external activities, but internally without desire, showing yourself as the agent, to outward view, but in the heart knowing yourself as not the agent.

This is adduced in order to illustrate how wrong the idea is that pure worship is impracticable for those who live natural lives in the world. Such a limitation really makes worship impossible for most men, but there had been none to challenge it before the reformer. In fact, even the worshippers of Bhagavati and Vishnu say, respectively, that Bhagavati is the mistress of all, having all forms, and that the world is pervaded by Vishnu, yet they recognise a difference between mud and sandal-paste! The same will hold good in regard to those who worship Brahman. This is but a rational conclusion.

On the other hand, if it is argued that Brahma worshippers do not attain to their expected standard of perfection, then the charge is true, and must be admitted as such, from the standpoint of practice. We are, indeed, all at fault there; but yet there is hope, as the Gita says:

Failure of practice on the part of the people attached to Brahman does not lead them to hell. For never, O son, does the doer of good enter ruin.

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In fact, if all worship is a failure when it is not carried out in perfection, whose worship can be said to be successful? When some say that Brahma-worship should not be adopted unless complete purity is established within the heart, it ought to be understood that the very desire to worship Brahman is possible only when the heart has already to some extent become pure. Therefore the desire in any man to adore Brahman means that his heart is latently pure.

The line of thought laid down by Ram Mohun, from the definition of Brahman to the method of approaching him, contain, philosophically the essence of all worship, and is grounded on the sound intuition of the human race. Their full development is seen in his 'Creed,' if it may be so called, of the famous Trust Deed. Yet he rightly feared misunderstanding on the part of his own countrymen and others, but was at the same time conscious of his mission. At the end of the introduction to the *Vedanta Sara* he laid his mind bare before his readers, taking them, as it were, into his confidence on the basis of their sympathy for a great cause, which called for a supreme effort on the part of all who desire to claim true culture for themselves and their country. Like Milton's immortal words, about leaving 'something so written to aftertimes that they should not willingly let it die,'¹ Ram Mohun's expectation is a remarkable utterance,—'That a day will arrive when my humble endeavours will be viewed with justice—perhaps acknowledged with gratitude.'²

¹ *Epitaphium Damonis, 1639*; Pamphlet No. 4; Pattison, *Milton*, p. 168 (English Men of Letters Series).

² *Works*, I, p. 6.

V

1821-1824

RAM MOHUN'S CONTROVERSY WITH CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES; UNITARIAN PROPAGANDA

THE publication of the *Precepts of Jesus* involved Ram Mohun in a controversy with the Christian missionaries, particularly with Dr. Marshman of Serampore. In this controversy Ram Mohun's own intention was twofold: first, to interpret Christianity from his own point of view; and, secondly, to defend Hinduism on the basis of its best and noblest thoughts. His avowed object was to set forth the highest truths of all religions, which have some common features of an ethical and spiritual character, in such a way as to lead to a synthesis which should be broad as well as deep. The totality of these features formed, in his judgment, the greatest common measure of all the religions in the world. Evidently he was not a votary of any particular system—a fact which caused much confusion in the later estimates of his religious faith.

In his *Precepts of Jesus* the reformer had taken his stand on the general position, which may be best depicted in his own words:

By separating from other matters contained in the New Testament the moral precepts found in that book, these will be more likely to produce the desirable effect of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasions and

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degree of understanding. Moral doctrines tending merely to the maintenance of peace and harmony of mankind at large are beyond the reach of metaphysical perversion, and intelligible alike to the learned and the unlearned. . . . This simple code of religion and morality is so admirably calculated to elevate men's ideas to high and liberal notions of one God, who has equally subjected all living creatures, without distinction of caste, rank or wealth, to change, disappointment, pain and death, and has equally admitted all to be partakers of the beautiful mercies which He has lavished over nature, and is also so well fitted to regulate the conduct of the human race in the discharge of their various duties to God, to themselves and to society, that I cannot but hope the best effects from its promulgation in the present form.¹

It is clear from the above extract that Ram Mohun was not taking a shallow view of Christianity; since to his mind it was the very best expression of moral and social idealism. But he was trying to steer clear of the theological differences which existed among the Christian sects themselves in regard to man's spiritual advancement; and he laid special stress on the moral side of Christ's teaching, as the most practical path to progress and culture. Miss Collet has remarked that 'the very last thing Ram Mohun desired or anticipated for his book was theological controversy.'² In fact, his own position was clear and explicit:

This essential characteristic of the Christian religion I was for a long time unable to distinguish as such, amidst the various doctrines I found insisted upon in the writings of Christian authors. . . . Among these opinions, the most prevalent seems to be that no one is entitled to the appellation, Christian, who does not believe in the divinity of Christ and of the Holy Ghost, as well as in the divine nature of God, the Father of all created beings; . . . whilst some require from

¹ *Precepts of Jesus*, p. vi.

² Collet, p. 59.

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him who claims the title, 'Christian,' only an adherence to the doctrines of Christ as taught by Himself, without insisting on implicit confidence in those of the apostles as being, except when speaking from inspiration, like other men, liable to mistake and error. . . . That they were so is obvious from several instances of differences of opinion amongst the apostles recorded in the Acts and the Epistles.¹

What he actually cared for was the 'ideal humanity' of Christ—an idea which permeates the Christian faith; and this, according to him, was its 'essential characteristic,' calculated to secure 'the peace and harmony of mankind at large.'² He was very modern in his outlook; for there is a growing feeling today that the metaphysical part of Christian doctrine has very little to do with the solution of world problems; while at the same time the ethical teachings of Christ, though admitted to indicate evident ways of escape from all types of difficulties, have not as yet been courageously adopted, or practically given effect to, anywhere on the face of the earth. Ram Mohun revered these moral principles as containing potential victory.

Naturally enough, Ram Mohun was misunderstood by the missionaries, and they found out quite early the trend of his thought, which threatened to destroy their propagandist work. Though some, such as Dr. Macdonald of the Presbyterian Mission, are of opinion, that sympathy might have saved the situation,³ yet the very incisiveness of the reformer's criticisms, his range of study and intensity of zeal, proved that his mind moved in a different intellectual region, and sympathetic handling alone would have produced little impression on him. He was of a different metal from the missionaries, and his mental

¹ *Precepts of Jesus*, p. iv. ² *Collet*, p. 59. ³ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

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constitution was moulded on other lines. Marshman spoke of him as merely 'an intelligent heathen,' in a 'Note' to which Ram Mohun took strong exception in his first Defence, declaring that he had already given up idolatry and accepted Christ's moral excellence. Besides, he was cut to the quick and roused to vigorous action for being called 'an injurer of the cause of truth';¹ for this was really the last thing which he could have brooked. That he had the highest and deepest reverence for Jesus is undoubtedly true; and this not merely in the sense in which Mr. Parekh has understood it.² Yet this close point of contact with Christianity was of little value in the eyes of those who cared only for their own type of Christianity, and whose theology was fundamentally Calvinistic. When they entered the lists with the 'heathen giant,' he quoted against them Christ's own words, in St. Matthew's Gospel, 'he who is not against Me is with Me.' Ram Mohun, by himself, was intellectually more than a match for the combined forces of orthodox Christianity, and the lines of his attack were similar to those of his attack on the orthodox Hinduism of his age.

The achievements of missionary proselytism were not then very successful; and probably Ram Mohun was the first man of his time to point this out plainly. He stood for the Christian spirit, but was opposed to formal 'conversions.' As to the method employed, his criticism was searching and severe. He showed how the missionaries, after distributing numberless copies of the complete Bible among Indians with a view to promoting Christianity, 'could not be altogether ignorant of the

¹ *Works*, II, p. 346.

² Parekh, *R.M.R.*, p. 62.

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cause of their disappointment . . . but that he had seen with regret that they had completely counteracted their own benevolent efforts.¹ He understood very well the inwardness of the situation, and his explanation may partly hold good in this age as well. He was not wholly against the missionaries; but in his opinion they were given to 'addressing instructions as if they were reasoning with persons brought up in a Christian country.' This want of touch with the people of India, their country, and their customs was untrue to the spirit of the Christian religion, and has been the greatest defect of missionary work from its beginning; and the failure of missionary policy was described by the reformer in the following words:

I am not aware that we can find a single respectable Moosulman or Hindoo, who was not in want of the common comforts of life, once glorified with the truth of Christianity, constantly adhering to it.²

Notwithstanding the severity, and probably the exaggeration, of this statement, he was fully conscious that missions and missionary efforts were great assets in the progressive evolution of the Indian nation. His request for the sending of more Presbyterian missionaries, in the Memorial to the Scottish General Assembly, to which he was one of the signatories, and his subsequent connection with Alexander Duff, bear ample testimony to his practical appreciation of Christian work in this land. In the *First Appeal* he openly expressed his admiration for the ideal which stood behind Christian enterprise:

From what I have already stated, I hope no one will infer that I feel ill-disposed towards the missionary establishments

¹ *First Appeal*, p. 113. ² *Ibid.*, p. 114.

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in this country. This is far from being the case. I pray for their augmentation, and that their members may remain in happy enjoyment of life, in a climate so generally inimical to European constitutions; for, in proportion to the increase of their number, sobriety, moderation, temperance and good behaviour have been diffused among the neighbours, as the necessary consequence of their company, conversation and good example.¹

The pointed argument of the *First Appeal* disclosed the weakness of much of the criticism levelled against the *Precepts*, as well as the unnecessary narrowness of the missionary publicists. Dr. Marshman tried to defend himself by means of a rejoinder in *The Friend of India*, May, 1820. But it was weak and halting; and Marshman's disavowal of anything uncharitable and unsympathetic in the use of the word 'heathen,' with reference to the author of the *Precepts of Jesus*, did not do much to bring about the desired reconciliation, since he refused to regard anybody as a Christian, who did not accept 'the divinity and atonement of Jesus Christ and the divine authority of the whole of the Holy Scriptures.' It was probably true, as he subsequently explained, that the word 'heathen' was not applied by him as a 'term of reproach'; but his limitation of the term Christian left the way open for the continuation of the controversy. His was a 'singularly negative version of Christianity,'² and the reason for this lay in the basis of Calvinistic theology upon which it rested. The orthodox Christian view stressed the following points:

The leading doctrine of the New Testament may be summed up in the two following positions: that God views all sin as so abominable that the death of Jesus Christ alone

¹ *First Appeal*, p. 119. ² Collet, p. 64.

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can expiate its guilt, and that the human heart is so corrupt that it must be renewed by the Divine Spirit before a man can enter heaven.¹

In the first number of the Quarterly Series of *The Friend of India*, of September, 1820, Dr. Marshman endeavoured to prove this version of his faith from the sayings of Jesus.²

But very few observers, then or since, have clearly understood Ram Mohun's real position in respect of Christian doctrines. Mr. Parekh and Miss Carpenter have taken pains to prove him formally a Christian;³ but Ram Mohun was in every sense above these distinctions of caste and creed, which are so often associated with the word religion. He was a truly 'spiritual cosmopolitan'⁴ of the frontierless Kingdom of God. The very last sentence of the *First Appeal* discloses the directness and comprehensiveness of the reformer's mind, in a noble utterance not common in the history of religious controversy.

May God render religion destructive of differences and dislikes between man and man, and conducive to the peace and union of mankind!⁵

The *Second Appeal*, which came out in 1821, followed by the *Third* in 1823, was a reply to Dr. Marshman, and is full of abstract theological discussion. The three, taken together, remind one of the three great controversial works of Luther just before his break with the Church and the inauguration of the Reformation. Indeed, the events that happened in the wake of the publication of the Appeals signalise directly Ram Mohun's final breach

¹ Collet, p. 65.

² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

³ Parekh, *R.M.R.*, p. 93; Carpenter, pp. 85, 251.

⁴ See Rolland, *Life of Ramkrishna*, p. 1

⁵ *First Appeal*, p. 125

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with the Christian missionaries, and indirectly his doubtful relation to orthodox Hinduism. In a land of numberless religions, he went forward not only to reform, reconstruct and readjust the ancient faith of his fathers, but also to purify the dross in every religion, with a sublime conception of 'the universal' in all human spiritual experience. A careful survey of the controversy reveals that his was not merely an attack, but a real synthesis. He defended Christianity from what he considered 'the Christian perversion' of it, against its natural implication and the mind of its Founder. In respect of scholarship, these documents are still of value, and make us wonder that one born and brought up a Hindu could gain such a thorough command in those days of the most abstruse portions of Christian theology. Had the author been any less informed in the subject than the Serampore scholars, defeat would have been unavoidable. But the mind of 'the greatest Indian of the modern age' was gifted with extraordinary powers, which made him an authority in ten languages, and 'the founder of the science of comparative religion,' in the opinion of H. H. Wilson; though Dr. Macnicol has hesitated to allow the claim, but without mentioning any other name in this connection.¹ His exposition was that of a scientific intellect, fully trained in the theologies of other religions. He puts his view clearly, in a few simple sentences, in the *Second Appeal*:

It is my reverence for Christianity and for the author of this religion, that has induced me to endeavour to vindicate it from the charge of polytheism, as far as my limited capacity and knowledge extend. It is indeed mortifying to my

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 633; N. Macnicol, *Raja Ram Mohun Roy*, (Pamphlet), p. 14: Monier Williams is quoted here.

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feelings to find a religion, that from its sublime doctrines and pure morality should be respected before all other systems, reduced almost to a level with Hindu theology merely by human creed and prejudices, and from this cause brought into a comparison with the paganism of ancient Greece.¹

Ram Mohun held that the difference between Hinduism and Christianity consisted in 'a few multiples of the number three,' and that the Trinity contained nothing more than the idea of *bhyuha*² (emanations) of the *Pancharatra* system, which had four gods contained somehow in one godhead. He stated in the Tyler controversy that 'the same omnipotence which makes three one and one three can equally reconcile the unity and plurality of three hundred and thirty millions, both being supported by a sublime mystery which far transcends all human comprehension.'³ The argument from Miracles did not impress him much; for he knew equally, or perhaps more, wonderful ones recorded in the Indian scriptures; and he questioned if mere wonderfulness went to prove anything, so long as the ethical ends were common in both cases. His stock example was of the sage who drank up the whole ocean and threw it out again. Christian dogma was similarly of no interest to him, and he considered that a transference from one set of dogmas to another would have helped his soul very little. To him Christ's message itself was divine enough, and the divinity of his person lent no additional weight to these, though he honoured him, as well as all the prophets of the ages, as their own adherents did, by using seriously and sincerely the honorific titles of 'lord,'

¹ *Second Appeal*, p. 293. ² *Ibid.*, p. 296.

³ *Works*, p. 893. See Natesan, *R.M.R.*, p. 25.

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'master' and 'saviour.' With reference to all—Christ, Sankara, Chaitanya and others—he employed them much in the same way and spirit as the Muhammadans speak of 'Rasul-Allah,' or the prophet of God. There would be otherwise no meaning in his yielding divine epithets to all the three, and he was aware that later on he would be interpreted by the votaries of different faiths in their own way, as a Hindu, a Muhammadan, or a Christian.¹ This synthetic attitude was the one which was afterwards taken up and worked out fully by Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who worshipped the deity according to the creed and custom of every religion, in order to realise God's purpose and revelation at different times and places.

To Ram Mohun, the Christian doctrine of the Atonement rested on a false argument, for it made Christ more merciful than God, and thus conflicted with the ontological proof of God's existence.² It postulated philosophically the possibility of a being who was greater than God in one quality at least, that of mercy; and this was impossible from the very definition of the Highest Being. He maintained that the self-evident perfection of God's nature stood in the way of the doctrine of the Trinity. He was well versed in the history of Christian dogma, and in regard to the pre-Nicene theology, affirmed that in the 'first and purest ages of Christianity, the followers of Christ entertained different opinions on the subject of the distinction between Father, Son and Holy Ghost.' His exegetical methods were those of the Unitarians, supported by his own thorough knowledge of Hindu and Moslem theology. The main passion of his

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 614.

² *Second Appeal*, p. 160; *Final Appeal*, pp. 421, 523.

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life was in reality to maintain the unity of the Godhead in the strictest sense.¹

It was the mystic element in his religious experience, backed by his rationalistic speculation in the field of faith, that placed the reformer on the solid ground of philosophical criticism. Few in the world after him had the advantage of combining Eastern and Western acumen against the background of ancient and modern thought, and very few used their knowledge so sincerely for the service of God and man. Absolutely free from preconceived ideas, his stern logic pressed him forward in the quest of truth, in whatever shape it might lie hidden, and he courageously accepted only whatever satisfied his intellect and his heart.

A singularly striking event took place in the year following, that is, at the beginning of 1821. Ram Mohun was engaged in translating the Bible, with the Rev. William Yates and the Rev. William Adam, both of the Serampore Mission. Mr. Adam, in a letter to the Baptist Missionary Society, dated the 11th June, 1821, said that 'the two Bengali translations of Dr. Carey and Mr. Ellerton are declared by Ram Mohun Roy to abound in the most flagrant violations of native idioms, and he accordingly applied to Mr. Yates and myself for our assistance in translating them anew from the original. This we readily have given.' A difficulty arose, in doing the Fourth Gospel, over the rendering and interpretation of the Greek particle '*dia*,' which might mean 'through' or 'by' in English in the verse, 'All things were made *through* Him,' or '*by* Him.' The alternative renderings changed the meaning, according to the force of the two propositions. In this case the word 'through' was allowed

¹ Collet, p. 66.

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to stand; but the translation committee in its session afterwards discovered that this lent colour to Arianism, which was heresy in the eyes of the orthodox. The translation was wrecked, but it naturally 'drew the heretic and the heathen into an intimacy frequent and confidential,'¹ with the result that Mr. Adam finally gave up orthodox Christianity, and declared himself a thorough-going Unitarian. Throughout the discussions of these days, Ram Mohun was seen to sit pen in hand in dignified reticence, 'looking on, listening, observing all, but saying nothing,' as described by Adam.² His nature was made of the toughest elements, and nothing is ever known to have ruffled his mind, even under the most trying circumstances.

It is almost certain that the *Second Appeal to the Christian Public*, which came out about this time, considerably helped Mr. Adam to come to a definite decision. In a letter to N. Bright, of 7th May, 1821, he described how he resolved to discard his old religion:

It is several months since I began to entertain some doubts respecting the supreme deity of Jesus Christ, suggested by frequent discussions with Ram Mohun Roy, whom I was trying to bring over to the belief of that doctrine, and in which I was joined by Mr. Yates, who also professed to experience difficulties on the subject. . . . I do not hesitate to confess that I am unable to remove the weighty objections which present themselves against this doctrine. . . . The objections against it, compared with the arguments for it, appear to me like a mountain compared with a mole hill.³

The news of this conversion became known a little later, and the new convert was nicknamed 'The second fallen Adam.' That an ordained Christian missionary,

¹ Collet, p. 68.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

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and an Englishman among Europeans, was thus converted by 'an intelligent heathen,' attracted great interest both among the Europeans in India and among Indians themselves. A biographer observed that an unbiassed study and examination of the scriptures by an open-minded Hindu had showed to the missionaries what could be done with the Bible in India. Their animosity, according to Mr. Chatterjee,¹ was consequently sharp as well as deep, and their counter-attack on Hinduism now engaged the best part of the reformer's attention and energy.

Bishop Middleton, of Calcutta, who saw that Ram Mohun believed in Christ's teachings, suggested to him all the worldly advantages that would result from his accepting Christianity, and 'the grand career which would open to him by a change of faith.' 'He would be honoured in life and lamented in death; honoured in England as well as in India; his name would descend to posterity as that of the modern apostle of India.' The bishop's meaning [adds Miss Collet] was doubtless innocent enough; but the keen, truth-loving Hindu seemed to feel it as a modern version of the Tempter's 'All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.'² The bishop was not mistaken; for had Ram Mohun become Christian, the history of that religion would probably have undergone a thorough change, on Indian soil at least; and with his many gifts, his erudition, and his prolific productions, he would have ranked with the greatest of the church fathers. The incident happened in the bishop's house, where the reformer had an interview with him. The refined and sensitive Hindu nature was acutely hurt at the suggestion of worldly gain, and on leaving the

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, pp. 213, 216.

² Collet, p. 70.

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church dignitary, Ram Mohun entered Adam's residence somewhat agitated, took some refreshment, went home, and never saw the bishop again. Mr. Adam recorded that 'the sting of the offer was this: he was asked to profess the Christian religion not on the force of evidence, or for the love of truth, or for the satisfaction of conscience, or for the benefit of his fellowmen, but for the sake of the honour and glory and fame it might bring him. This was utterly abhorrent to Ram Mohun's mind. It alienated, repelled and disgusted him.'¹ This one event proved to those who expected him to be a Christian in the fullness of time, that their anticipation was wrong, and had no foundation in any correct understanding of his religious views.²

In September, 1821, partially as the result of Adam's conversion, the Calcutta Unitarian Committee was formed, with some European and Indian gentlemen of influence and substance. They were its first members, and the following names are found in its membership: Theodore Dickens, a barrister of the Supreme Court; James Gordon, of Mackintosh & Co.; William Tate, an attorney; W. B. Macleod, a surgeon of the East India Company; Mr. Norman, an accountant in the Company's service; Dwarka Nath Tagore and Prasanna Kumar Tagore, of Calcutta; Ram Mohun Roy and Radha Prasad Roy. Adam was naturally the Unitarian minister, and was supported by the reformer, who was fully conscious of the responsibility in converting the missionary. It is quite in keeping with the innate nobility of Ram Mohun's character that, besides bearing Adam's expenses, he later on made provision in his will

¹ *A Lecture on the Life of R.M.R.*, pp. 21 ff., quoted by Miss Collet.

² See Parekh, *R.M.R.*, p. 69.

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for him and his family¹ and it is a fine testimony to the friendship that grew up between the two, and the cause which both supported at so much cost and sacrifice. The Unitarians in England and America were, as a matter of fact, delighted to hear of these new and important accessions to their ranks, and a new enthusiasm for missionary enterprise on Unitarian principles was the result. Regular correspondence between them went on henceforward, though nothing very important came out of it in this period to determine the course of events.

Amidst the engrossing activities to which Ram Mohun was incessantly committed these days, he was visibly moved by an event which had nothing to do with India, but which showed how universal was his sympathy and how intense his love of freedom. The people of Naples, who were fighting for their liberty, were forced back to their former state by the combined influence of the kings of Russia, Prussia, Austria and Sardinia, even after they had succeeded in wresting a suitable constitution from their own king. The large heart of Ram Mohun, which conceived and formulated a universal religion for the world, felt this keenly and deeply, and he expressed himself to Mr. Buckingham, in a letter dated August 11, 1821:

I am obliged to conclude that I shall not live to see liberty universally restored to the nations of Europe, and Asiatic nations, especially those that are European colonies, possessed of a greater degree of the same blessing than what they now enjoy. Under these circumstances, I consider the cause of the Neapolitans as my own, and their enemies as ours. Enemies to liberty and friends of despotism never have been, and never will be, ultimately successful.

¹ Adam's Letter of October 14, 1826.

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Miss Collet says that this trait of his character is a mark of the universal spirit that was in him and that raised him above his fellowmen, and quotes the ideal superbly portrayed by Lowell:

In the gain or loss of one race, all the rest have equal
claim;

. wherever wrong is done

To the humblest and weakest 'neath the all-beholding
sun,

That wrong is also done to us.

VI

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THE DEFENCE OF HINDU PHILOSOPHY; EDUCATIONAL AND JOURNALISTIC ACTIVITIES

RENEWED polemical activity marked the period that immediately followed Mr. Adam's change of faith. Ram Mohun could neither be defeated nor reconciled by the apologetic writings of the missionaries, whose attacks were now directed against Hinduism as a whole. The *Samachara Darpana*, a magazine of the Serampore Mission, launched a vigorous criticism of the *Vedanta* philosophy as countenanced by the reformer, including also in their attack the other systems of Hindu thought, such as the *Sankhya* and the *Nyaya*. Its contention was in the main that the pantheism of the *Vedanta*, while it counteracted polytheism, was at the same time inconsistent with the nature of the universe and its reality; it logically destroyed the responsibility of the human soul and the perfection of the Godhead. The magazine invited replies to this criticism, and Ram Mohun accordingly sent in his own views on the subject. It was refused publication, with a strange lack of fairness. But the reformer determined that some reply should be made, and he had no alternative but to issue a *Brahmanical Magazine*, under the name of his pandit, Siva Prasad Sarma,¹

¹ Other instances of *noms de plume* were those of his friends, such as Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Chandra Sekhar Deb and others, and even of Rama Prasad Roy (Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 167).

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with 'the vindication of the Hindu religion against Christian missionaries' as its motto and object.¹ It ran to twelve numbers, after which a regular periodical was started by him,² with the Bengali title of *Brahman-Sevadhi*; it was printed in English on one side of the page, and in Bengali on the other. Only four numbers are found in Ram Mohun's collected works, but the others can no longer be traced. The editor not only refuted the arguments of the *Samachara Darpana*, but put counter-questions as well on the concepts of the Christian religion.

The missionaries who attacked the Vedanta only possessed a superficial knowledge of it. This was not unnatural, since a thorough study of the system would usually take a whole lifetime, and the missionary pioneers only prepared the ground for further investigation and research. In comparison with them, Ram Mohun was a master of Sanskritic lore, unequalled perhaps even now by any scholar, and an original thinker on religious lines. His reply to the missionaries was given with a foreword on the general character of the Christian propaganda. First, he contended that it was not in accord with the professed policy of 'religious neutrality,' by the British Government, to allow the preaching of the religion of the conquerors in public, and to permit the religion of the people to be denounced. Secondly, it was wrong to produce pamphlets or to lecture simply for the purpose of emphasising the weak sides of Hinduism and Muhammadanism. Thirdly, it was unworthy to make converts by offering them worldly advantages.—'Bengali subjects of the Government,' says he, 'are weak and

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 187.

² *Ibid.*

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poor; they become frightened at the name of the English. . . . To force these people, with the help of political power, is awfully blameworthy.'

In addition to all this, the missionaries were decrying the religion and the culture of the land. 'History,' he says, 'has illustrated the fact that the conquerors have always ridiculed and derided the faith and the customs of the conquered, e.g. Chengiz Khan in North-western India, the Maghs in Eastern India, the Romans and their attitude to the Jews. Nor is this all; the method of preaching Christ *indirectly* by the help of the sword (or, in this instance, the gun) is recorded in the islands of the Pacific, where the missionaries were reinforced by soldiers.' An illustration such as this indicated that the reformer was viewing the whole missionary history of the world, apart from the truth or untruth of any particular religion, and analysing the primary causes, which lie at the root of religious differences. His main point was, that for common and unthinking men, political and religious superiority went together; for they rarely take the trouble to study and compare the different presentations of truth which are found in various religions.

As to Hindu philosophy itself, Ram Mohun, in defending it, added to it many of his own conclusions and interpreted it in the light of his extensive knowledge of comparative religion. The fresh enrichment thus brought about is certainly to the credit of his supremely original mind. The subtle conception of *Maya* was the great stumbling-block to the Serampore scholars. It was explained by Ram Mohun, in reply, as a power or attribute of God, but never equally powerful with God Himself; it had no separate existence of its own, accord-

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ing to the Vedanta. It was wrong to make it a *tertium-
quid*, a 'third thing,' besides God and the Universe. To
the contention that in view of the identity of Brahman
the absolute, and Jiva the created relative, the fruits of
actions (according to Hinduism) should logically go to the
Creator alone, the answer was given that the Atman
(Brahman) is reflected in the created beings, and, just as
the quivering of water does not affect the sun reflected in
it, the Atman is not influenced by the works of men. This
stock argument of the Vedanta, it must be remembered,
opens a difficult problem of philosophy concerning the
freedom of the individual will. Is the world only an
illusion? Ram Mohun's reply was an emphatic negative.
It is not an illusion, in the common understanding of
that word, since no being is possible outside the being
of Brahman, the Absolute God. All things exist in the
existence of God; He is the Ultimate Being; therefore
all things are considered unreal, and non-existent, only
apart from the being of Brahman,¹ who is the source
and support of all things.

Other problems of the Samkhya, Mimamsa, Patanjala
and Nyaya systems, and of the Puranas and Tantras,
were similarly dealt with by Ram Mohun. His explora-
tion of Sanskritic lore went on continuously. And he
synthesised the different systems, in order to make them
intelligible to European enquirers and the common people.
For instance, the *Prakriti* and *Purusha* of the Samkhya
were shown to be really equivalent to *Brahman* and *Maya*
of the Vedanta, with the names changed but with the un-
derlying principles remaining ultimately identical, when
thoroughly analysed. Again, *karma* (ritual) and *yoga* (medi-

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 173 f.

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tation) were subsumed under the class of *work* (activity), on the basis of Sankara's exposition. The real distinction between them was pointed out to lie only in their aims, the one having for its aim this enjoyment of heaven, while the other aimed at final release without the taint of desire. The attribution of forms to God, as in the Puranas and Tantras, had been disposed of long ago in Ram Mohun's previous works; but when the point was again raised by the missionaries, Ram Mohun argued that much of the symbolism of the Hindus was of the same kind as that of the Christians, though in the latter case it was more limited in extent. It was, after all, an *adhyasa*, superimposition of qualities (in the words of Sankaracharya), whether on a living being or on an inanimate object. It is this which gave the shape of a dove to the Holy Ghost, and divinity to Jesus on earth. If these were accepted, why should objection be taken to the idolatry of the Puranas, gross though it was? Moreover, he contends that the difference between the 'Three Persons' of the Godhead in Christian theology, and the plurality of gods in the Puranas, is only numerical. His argument is closed with a quotation from the *Mahabharata*:

O king, people are prone to observe in others defects of the size of the mustard seed, but not one's own, though it may be as large as a *bel* fruit.¹

In 1819 the Press Regulations were relaxed, and the very strict censorship uniformly imposed by the British Government was removed to a great extent. Ram Mohun was at once on the alert, seeking to use the opportunity to the utmost, and to try what could be done for

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 176 f.

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journalism conducted along Indian lines. His many-sided polemics had already taught him something of the power of the press. His *Sambad Kaumudi* (Moonlight of Information) was started, in 1821, as a purely Indian venture and concern. Its prospectus, which had appeared in the same year in the *Calcutta Journal*, edited by Mr. Buckingham, showed that its scope was pretty elastic, and included a number of interesting subjects. The *Calcutta Journal* of 1821 gave publicity in its columns to 'the prospectus of a Bengali weekly newspaper, to be conducted by natives, printed and circulated in Bengali and English.' It was to deal with 'religious, moral and political matters, domestic occurrences, as well as local intelligence.'¹ The monthly subscription was two rupees only. The aim of the paper was described in terms designed to attract public sympathy, at a time when there was practically no one interested in such enterprises:

To enable us to defray the expenses which will necessarily be attendant on an undertaking of this nature, we humbly solicit the support and patronage of all who feel themselves interested in the intellectual and moral improvement of our countrymen. . . . We pledge ourselves to make use of our utmost efforts and exertions to render our paper as useful, instructive and entertaining as it can possibly be.²

The weekly was henceforward printed in the Sanskrit Press in 1821. Mr. Long's *Catalogue* of 1852 gives the date of its first publication as 1819, and Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen gives the same date for it.³ There is certainly a confusion here, which it seems impossible to clear up, though the 'continuator's note,' in Miss Collet's biography, has tried to prove that the earlier date is

¹ Collet, p. 94.

² *Ibid.*, p. 94.

³ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 718 f; *History of Bengali Literature*, p. 909.

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correct. One Bhawani Charan Bannerjee used to collaborate with the reformer in editing the paper, which was meant for all sorts of people in general, but he severed his connection later on, because of the heterodox tendency introduced into it, and used his pen in favour of *sati*.

In the meantime, the work of the Unitarian committee was going on in full swing. Adam put his whole heart and energy into it. Its aim was explained by him to be the removal of ignorance and superstition, and the furnishing of all needful information respecting the evidences, the duties and the doctrines of the religion of Christ; but not direct proselytism. For this purpose education, discussion and publication of books were necessary.¹ In January, 1822, a house (the upper flat of the Harkara office, in Dharamtolla²) was rented, in which they had 'Christian service regularly conducted by the Unitarian missionary, Mr. Adam.' A school was opened, called the Anglo-Hindu (Indian) School, for English education of children, and a press was added to the Unitarian establishment, under the name of the Unitarian Press. In all these undertakings Ram Mohun was the prime mover, and supplied the required funds. The printing press was his personal property, which he had established after the Baptist Mission Press (of Serampore) had refused to print his writings. Ram Mohun bought his own types and got his own men to run the press, of which Mr. Adam wrote: 'Several pamphlets and tracts have been and continue to be printed, almost all bearing on the Unitarian controversy, or tending to promote philanthropic objects.'³

¹ Adam's Letter to R. Dutton, June, 1827.

² Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 205.

³ Letter of July 27, 1816, cited in Collet, p. 78.

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Another weekly was started by Ram Mohun in the same year (1821), intended for the intelligentsia, and was called the *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* (The Mirror of News). It was published on Fridays, while the *Sambad Kaumudi* came out on Tuesdays. Its language was Persian, which was still in favour in the courts, but not with the common people, who spoke Bengali.

On 30th January, 1823, Ram Mohun's *Final Appeal to the Christian Public* was issued. It is the largest of the author's controversial publications, running to 256 pages. Its tone is a little less conciliatory than that of the other two Appeals, perhaps because of the attitude of the missionaries recorded above. Of the *Final Appeal*, Miss Collet says: 'The methods of exposition of the Hindu are more modern than those of his Christian opponents, . . . and the acquaintance which he shows with Hebrew, Greek and expository literature is, considering his antecedents, little less than marvellous.'¹ But even this estimate is less enthusiastic than that of an accredited authority on theological matters, the editor of the *Monthly Repository*, which was the organ of the Unitarians in England, who wrote, in reviewing the *Final Appeal*, that 'it is in our judgment the most valuable and important of all the Hindoo reformer's works. . . . He has studied most diligently the great question between the Unitarians and the Trinitarians, and he defends the general doctrine of the former with a degree of ability rarely exceeded by the most practised polemics of this country.'² A contemporary Editorial Note in the *India Gazette*, commenting on Ram Mohun's *Final Appeal*, remarked that: 'Among all men he must

¹ Collet, p. 79.

² *Monthly Repository*, Vol. XVIII, p. 473.

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ever be distinguished for his philanthropy, his great learning and his intellectual ascendancy in general; . . . a combatant who, we are constrained to say, has not as yet met with his match here.¹

Before the turmoil of this long-drawn-out theological combat could settle down, others were impending, which made the year 1823 the most polemical in the reformer's life.² A certain Dr. Tytler, a medical man, came forward in print, and challenged 'the Unitarian Goliath' to a theological fight. With his usual humility, Ram Mohun asked that the controversy should be carried on in writing. The attack of the doctor was published in the *Bengal Harkara* of 30th April, 1823; and Ram Mohun's reply was published almost at once, in May of the same year. The correspondence went on for some time, and was printed by Ram Mohun, in a collected form, under the long title of *A Vindication of the Incarnation of Deity as the common basis of Hinduism and Christianity, against the schismatic attacks of R. Tytler Esq., M.D.* Here, too, the reformer used a pseudonym, as was his wont, instead of his real name. To Dr. Tytler Unitarianism was an 'abomination.'³ But Ram Mohun claimed to prove that both Hinduism and Trinitarian Christianity rested on the common assumption of God appearing in the flesh, and drew a parallel between the incarnations of Rama and Christ; maintaining that both the Christian Trinity, and the almost infinite multiplicity of the Hindu god-head, were only matters of faith, never acceptable to reason. An undercurrent of satire marked the whole reply, which drove the fighting doctor to a frenzy of abuse. He called 'Ram Doss,' the pseudonymous writer,

¹ Carpenter, *Last Days*, p. 20. ² Collet, p. 107. ³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

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‘the wretched tool of the damnable heresy of Unitarianism,’ and himself ‘your inveterate and determined foe in the Lord.’ It is interesting to note that Tytler, who had the hardihood to challenge the greatest Indian intellect of the age, considered all the Hindu scriptures to be rather recent—that is, not earlier than the time of the Mussalmans; and the lives of Buddha and Krishna to be merely corrupt copies of the life of Christ!¹

*A Dialogue between a Missionary and Three Chinese Converts*² was a small tract of Ram Mohun’s belonging to this period, and illustrative of the satirical mood roused in him by the Tytler controversy. But a more serious piece of work was produced in the fourth number of the *Brahmanical Magazine*, in which the Vedantic system was defended and the doctrine of the Trinity was again examined in its different forms, varying from the Sabellian view of Dr. Wallis to the explanation of Bishop Heber of Calcutta. In defending his own position, Ram Mohun closed this number of the magazine with a fine passage:

In conformity with the precepts of our ancient religion contained in the Holy Vedant (though disregarded by the generality of the moderns), we look up to ONE BEING as the animating and regulating principle of the whole collective body of the Universe, and as the origin of all individual souls, which in a manner somewhat similar, vivify and govern their particular bodies; and we reject idolatry in every form and under whatever veil of sophistry it may be practised, either in adoration of an artificial, a natural, or an imaginary object. The divine homage which we offer consists solely in the practice of *daya*, or benevolence towards each other, and not in a fanciful faith or in certain motions of the feet, arms,

¹ Collet, p. 81.

² Another part has recently been found by Mr. Brojendranath Bannerjee (*Modern Review*, November, 1933).

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head, tongue or other bodily organs in a pulpit or before a temple.¹

This noble message of the reformer is permeated with Christian idealism; for, after all, his contact with Christianity had not gone in vain; indeed, it had enabled him to see the whole range of Hindu thought from a different angle of vision, and to find new significance in long-forgotten or otherwise unnoticed texts. Next followed another tract, equally important from the standpoint of his faith, which reached its climax in the *Trust Deed of the Brahma Samaj* in 1830. This was the *Humble Suggestions* to his countrymen who believe in one true God. The object of the pamphlet is laid down as:

My object in publishing this tract is to recommend to those to whom it is addressed to avoid using harsh and abusive language in their intercourse with European missionaries, either respecting them or their object of worship, however much this may be countenanced by the examples of some of these gentlemen.²

His broad sympathies are in this tract shown in the advice that the ten classes of Sankarite *sannyasis*, and the followers of Kabir, Nanak, Dadu, and others should be treated as brothers, as a matter of unquestionable duty for all Indians. Again, 'Among foreigners, those Europeans who believe God to be in every sense One, and worship Him in spirit alone, and who extend their benevolence to man as the highest service to God, should be regarded by us with affection, on the ground of the

¹ *Works*, I, p. 283. From this passage Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore seems to have formulated his great doctrine—'Doing things which please Him is worshipping Him.' See also *History of the Brahma Samaj*, I, p. 79.

² *Ibid.*, I, p. 298.

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object of their worship being the same as ours.’¹ Even towards Trinitarian Europeans, he insists on the duty of friendly treatment; viewing them with the same tolerance as must be extended to his own countrymen who worship in a different way from himself. Here too, Christian influence is predominant, even though liberal thought on the same lines was available in the Hindu scriptures. The depth and intensity came to him from Christ’s teaching, on a subject of this nature where the whole of mankind was concerned.

Amidst his Unitarian activities, already noticed, Ram Mohun was required to explain why he attended Unitarian services. A treatise, named *Four Questions*, was published by orthodox Hindus, under the authorship of one who styled himself ‘An Establisher of Faith.’ He was no other than the famous Mrityunjaya Vidyalkar, already noticed as the author of the *Vedant Chandrika*—an attack on the reformer. The reply, *Answers to Four Questions*, was brought out by Ram Mohun in 1822, about the middle of February. The evident object of the questions was to outcaste the reformer, and to attack all his associates, but it was shown in the *Answers* that the strict rules of Hinduism were not really (and, indeed, could not possibly be) followed to the letter by anyone, even of the so-called ‘strict Hindus.’ On the publication of a rejoinder by the author of the *Four Questions*, Ram Mohun’s *Pathya Pradana* (Diet for the Sick) was produced in 1823, covering a good number of pages. He was busy at this time with the law suit brought against him by the Raja of Burdwan; but this did not keep him quiet under polemical attacks, and could not prevent his con-

¹ See *Works*, II, p. 299, ‘*Humble Suggestions*.’

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troversial activities. He came out successful when the suit was concluded, after its eight years' course from court to court. The cause was futile, for it is said that only malice was at the bottom of it, and that not exactly against the reformer himself, but against his son-in-law, who had acted as a pleader to the widowed Ranis of Burdwan, and exacted their dues from the Raja; which provoked the prince to take legal action on the slightest pretext.

In December, 1823, Ram Mohun joined the Presbyterians in drawing up and despatching to Scotland a minute of St. Andrew's Kirk Session, on the need for missionaries in India. His own statement was: 'If the prayer of the memorial is complied with, there is a fair and reasonable prospect of this measure proving conducive to the diffusion of religious and moral knowledge in India.'¹ In the year after this he was called upon to answer a number of questions from Rev. Henry Ware, Unitarian minister of Harvard College, Cambridge, U.S.A. The point at issue was the desirability of converting Indians to Christianity. Ram Mohun submitted that 'in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted by Him, in whatever form of worship he may have been taught to glorify God'; but he added, as he believed and as he had stated in other connections, that 'Christianity, if properly inculcated, has a greater tendency to improve the moral, social and political state of mankind than any other known religious system.' He was glad that a great people like the Americans had an influential body of men for 'purifying the religion of Christ from those

¹ Collet, p. 89.

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absurd idolatrous doctrines and practices with which the Greek, Roman and Barbarian converts to Christianity have mingled it from time to time.¹ He was also eager to see the North and the South of the United States reconciled 'in a perpetual union . . . under one general government,' after the Missouri Conference of 1821, which brought together the freedom-loving Northerners and the slave-trading Southerners. Last of all, he wished for 'able teachers of European learning and science and Christian morality, unmingled with religious doctrines, to spread knowledge gratuitously among the native community, in connection with the Rev. Mr. Adam.'² He was hopeful that 'Christianity, when represented in its genuine sense, in any language whatsoever, must make a strong impression on every intelligent mind, specially when introduced by persons of education and respectability.'

The Unitarian Committee was now named the Unitarian Mission perhaps owing to the prospect opened before it through its foreign connections. Its funds were augmented by subscriptions; Ram Mohun himself contributed Rs. 5,000, Dwarka Nath Tagore Rs. 2,500, Prasanna Kumar Tagore Rs. 2,500. Its condition in this period is revealed by an extract from a letter which the reformer wrote to Dr. T. Rees, of the Unitarian Committee of London, under the date of 4th June, 1824.

As to the state of the Unitarian Society in Calcutta, our committee have not yet been able to purchase a suitable piece of land for a chapel and a school. They will, I hope, soon succeed in their endeavours. We have collected, partly by purchase and partly by gift, a great number of works, and established a pretty respectable library in Calcutta.³

¹ Collet, p. 90.

² *Ibid.*, p. 91.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

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Mr. Adam was automatically designated the 'Unitarian missionary in Bengal,' while he pushed forward the work of the Unitarian Committee with characteristic vigour. The *Precepts of Jesus* and the two *Appeals* were reprinted by the London Unitarian Committee. Ram Mohun was happy to know that he was appreciated so much in England, but was disappointed to learn that King George IV was not able (even if he had wished!) to free the Established Church from the Thirty-nine Articles and the minatory clauses of the Athanasian Creed. Writing to Mr. Belsham on this subject, he expressed his surprise, rather than polemical animosity, that the learned clergy of the Church of England subscribed to these uncritically on assuming office.¹ The progress that was made by the Unitarians in India was due to the reformer's spirit of unity, which tried to combine the 'Christian Unitarians' and the 'Hindu Unitarians,' as far as possible, into one body. The influence of this group of men was strong enough to cause Bishop Heber, who came to India in 1823, to admit that 'our chief hindrances are some deistical Brahmins, who have left their old religion and desire to found a sect of their own, and some of those who are professedly engaged in the same work with ourselves, the Dissenters.'² This he wrote, on arrival in India, to the Dean of St. Asaph.

¹ *Modern Review*, March, 1932, p. 284. The original letter is in the possession of Mr. R. Chatterjee, Editor of the *Modern Review*, Calcutta.

² *Collet*, p. 92.

VII

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THE LIBERTY OF THE PRESS AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY

IN 1822 Lord Hastings' term of office as Viceroy came to a close, and when he laid down the reins of government, the Hon'ble John Adam acted as Governor-General for a short time. The conservative tradition of the Indian Civil Service was a great hindrance to a liberal policy in administration and Mr. Adam carried this tradition with him to the high office which he temporarily filled. Moreover, it is natural for a man to be over-cautious, when he is for a short time raised to a high position, which he knows he will not occupy permanently. Mr. Adam was no exception to this rule. It is not surprising, therefore, that 'this temporary elevation of an inferior official was marked by characteristically official measures for the restriction of liberty.'¹ The liberal policy of Hastings was practically undone by the Acting Governor-General on taking over charge, and the little advance that had been made in progressive thought was checked during his term of office. An indirect criticism of the Government irritated its proverbial sensitiveness, and led Mr. Adam to adopt a reactionary policy that was adverse to freedom of speech. In parti-

¹ Collet, p. 99.

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cular, one official measure of Mr. Adam offered a serious setback to the growing liberty of the press. It came about in this way, under rather unfortunate circumstances.

The Government had appointed a Scotch missionary, Dr. Bryce, to a salaried position of responsibility in the Company's service. This appointment was criticised by the *Calcutta Journal*, on the ground that it was unbecoming that a Christian minister should accept such a position. Mr. Adam's Government found fault with these remarks, and ordered the editor, Mr. Buckingham, to leave India within two months. This high-handed action on the part of the officiating head of the administration caused some agitation, and Ram Mohun's paper, the *Mirat-ul-Akhbar*, described the incident in the lines quoted below:

The eminently learned Dr. Bryce, the head minister of the new Scotch Church, having accepted the situation of Clerk of the Stationary belonging to the Honourable Company, Mr. Buckingham, the editor of the *Calcutta Journal*, observed directly, as well as indirectly, that it was unbecoming of the character of the minister to accept a situation like this; upon which the Governor-General, in consideration of his disrespectful expression, passed an order that Mr. Buckingham should leave India for England within the period of two months from the date of the receipt of this order, and that after the expiration of that period he is not allowed to remain a single day in India.¹

For the justification of a drastic step of this nature Mr. Adam's Government had to fall back on the revised Regulation of Lord Hastings, which, after doing away with the rule of press censoring before publication, nevertheless subjoined a few clauses in order to impose some limitations on the liberty of the press; while much

¹ Collet, p. 100.

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was left to the prudence and discretion of the editors themselves. The clause prohibiting 'animadversions on the actions of government' was interpreted in its strictest sense, and this accordingly led to proceedings being taken against the Editor of the *Calcutta Journal*. But the matter did not stop here; about the end of 1823, the *Journal* was suppressed, and the assistant editor, Mr. Arnot, was arrested and sent back to England. A strict Press Ordinance was then issued by the Acting Governor-General, so that every newspaper, including all periodicals, was required to obtain a license for publication from the head of the Government, under the signature of the Chief Secretary. This rule was also applied very rigorously, for, according to the official statement, matters tending to bring the Government into hatred and contempt and to disturb the peace of society had been frequently published and circulated.¹ This political nervousness on the part of the authorities was regarded by the leaders of the people with distrust and disfavour, but the Government cared nothing for any such agitation.

This Press Regulation had to be put up for three weeks in the Supreme Court, in accordance with the requirements of the law, before it could be passed and enacted. This was done on 14th March, 1823; and a couple of weeks later protests against it were allowed to be heard. The Acting Chief Judge, Sir Francis Macnaghten, of the Supreme Court, fixed 31st March, for considering objections, and also suggested a memorial to the Government authorities on the subject, explaining at length all the points at issue. Ram Mohun was the leader of the party

¹ Collet, p. 97.

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which took strong exception to this infringement of popular liberty. He was indeed the foremost of the objectors, in the opinion of Miss Collet; for he could see through the regulation all kinds of evil effects that would naturally come in its train. His was a mind ever free, whether politically or religiously; and he loved freedom for its own sake. His strong stand against the Press Regulation was not mere political agitation, but the outcome of his earnest desire to see the nation articulate its political aspirations. The line then laid down by Ram Mohun, at the dawn of India's modern life, has proved a model for future constitutional agitations.

Ram Mohun collected his friends to arrange for the proposed petition, which was to be drawn up as a memorial in Bengali and in English. Considerable time was taken up by discussions and suggestions, as was to be expected from the very nature of the subject. At last it was ready, on the 30th March, just the day before its submission. It was signed by fifteen leading Indians, who were in close touch with the reformer. But when it was sent to the Government, there was actually no time for them to take any action, even if there had been any favourable inclination. However, this inner circle of Indian politicians was not at all crushed by this failure, for a second memorial was prepared with the greatest haste, almost immediately after the Government attitude had been realised. Only five signatures could be attached to this, and it was presented before the Supreme Court through a counsel, Mr. Fergusson, who practised in Calcutta, and was conducting Mr. Buckingham's case. The signatories were Ram Mohun's personal friends, viz. Chander Coomar Tagore, Dwarka Nath Tagore, Ram Mohun Roy, Hur Chunder Ghose, Gowree Churun Bonnerjee, Prosonno

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Kumar Tagore.¹ It was read before the Registrar on the 31st March, 1823, and the Regulation was registered by the Supreme Court. Subsequently another appeal was sent, through Mr. Buckingham, to the King in Council in England, signed by many Indian gentlemen of good family and recognised status.²

These two memorials marked a new era of Indian political awakening, and pointed out the political rights of Indians, as well as the constitution desired (as yet, perhaps, unconsciously) by the Indian people. They were documents revealing the very birth of Indian politics, and indicating the conditions under which alone the Company's Government was acceptable to India. In the first memorial Ram Mohun made the following pointed comment:

The natives of Calcutta and its vicinity have voluntarily entrusted Government with millions of their wealth, without indicating the least suspicion of its stability and good faith; hoping at the same time that their interests would be as permanent as the British Power itself.³

The suspicion of disloyalty, with which the Indians were charged, and against which the Press Regulation was meant to be directed, was due, in the opinion of the reformer, to the ignorance displayed by the Government with regard to the affairs of the country and the feelings and sentiments of its inhabitants. But there were, he believed, persons 'desirous of misrepresenting the people and misleading the Government, both here and in England, for unworthy purposes.'

As the spokesman of his nation, Ram Mohun was outspoken in his claims on behalf of his countrymen,

¹ *Works*, II, p. 277.

² *Ibid.*, p. 278, Editor's note.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 379.

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while at the same time affirming that in their case self-interest coincided with loyalty:

Nor is it at all wonderful that they should in loyalty be not at all inferior to British-born subjects, since they feel assured of the possession of the same civil and religious liberty which is enjoyed in England.¹

But, on the other hand, supposing such legitimate rights were ignored, nay, suppressed, by a policy of gagging the press and disallowing liberty of speech, then the consequence would be incalculable harm to the nation and its progress. It would have the effect of smothering popular political consciousness, relaxing governmental control of officers in the absence of criticism, and cooling down the growing loyalty to the Throne of England, because of constant political disappointments. Ram Mohun indicated the underlying principle in the following words, which reveal his insight into sound political philosophy:

That 'the more a people are kept in darkness, their rulers will derive the greater advantage from them,' . . . is but a short-sighted policy. Whereas a people naturally disposed to peace and ease, when placed under a good government from which they experience just and liberal treatment, must become more attached to it.²

The reformer's use of the word 'good' in connection with political matters is significant, and though he does not define it, there is little doubt that he attached a comprehensive meaning to it—something 'Platonic' in its significance, and of wider import than its ordinary sense. He was a political idealist through and through, and in this respect also was much in advance of his time.

In the Appeal to the King in Council, the thread of the

¹ *Works*, II, p. 281. ² *Ibid.*

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argument is drawn out in further detail, bolder pronouncements punctuate the trend of thought, the diction becomes more serious and restrained, and a dignified faith in the justice of the cause dominates all other ideas. A prophetic vision broke forth, as it were, in Ram Mohun's mind, when he looked into the political future of his country. No other man in India can be said to have possessed this insight to the same extent. His sane political idealism never allowed him to be pessimistic, even though he emphatically pronounced the circumstances to be 'painful,' and was unwilling to surrender to 'the local authorities . . . power of legislation in matters of the highest moment.' He felt that such a relegation would be contrary to law, and did not hesitate to declare that 'it would deprive us of an invaluable privilege, firmly secured to us by laws of the land . . . showing the rule and ordinance to be both illegal and inexpedient.'¹ The grounds for this contention were then set out carefully, as given below:

The baneful results, says the Appeal, will ultimately be that, by means of the Press Regulation, the Government and all its functionaries, from the highest to the lowest, will have 'complete immunity from censure or exposure respecting anything done by them in their official capacity,' because of 'the suppression of public remarks on the conduct of public officers of the Government of India.'² 'The very object which such a restriction is calculated to attain will therefore be defeated.'³ The objection that otherwise the Government would be brought into hatred and contempt, as imagined by the authors of the Regulation, is answered in a short yet

¹ *Works*, II, pp. 297, 298. ² *Ibid.*, p. 298. ³ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

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pungent sentence: 'Government can only be brought into contempt and hatred by its own acts.'¹ It is almost the final thought of the reformer on this subject, that, in an atmosphere of proper publicity, 'public resentment cannot be transferred from the delinquents to the Government itself,'² unless the Government wishes to shield them. The stern logic of this argument left nothing more to be said from the side of the people, and at the same time it exposed the weak reasoning of the authors of the notorious Regulation.

On the contrary, adds the Appeal, history has given the verdict that 'a free press has never yet caused a revolution in any part of the world.'³ It is the only safety-valve of the body politic to let out ill-humours. There is always a fair chance of the timely removal of the grounds of grievances, when public criticism is allowed to play its part. But when things come to the worst, it has been seen in the past that, though 'prevented by the armed force of the government, the people continue ready for insurrection.'⁴ 'It is well known that despotic governments naturally desire the suppression of any freedom of expression which might tend to expose their acts to the obloquy which ever attends the exercise of tyranny and oppression; and the argument which they constantly resort to is, that the spread of knowledge is dangerous to the existence of all legitimate authority.'⁵ But this picture is, in turn, contrasted with its opposite, namely, the good result of good government: 'But those [sovereigns] who have done so [submitted their actions to the judgment of the subjects], instead of falling into hatred and contempt, were the more loved

¹ *Works*, II, p. 303.

² *Ibid.*, p. 306.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

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and respected while they lived, and their memory is still cherished by posterity.”¹ Certainly ‘the idea of the possession of absolute power and perfection is not evidently necessary to the stability of the British Government in India.’²

The reformer could be very caustic when he liked, and the last sentence is a case in point. But, above all, his fearlessness and sincerity are the most prominent elements in his political utterances. Here he is not inferior to any Indian patriot who has taken the field after him. With the reasonableness of Gokhale he combined the boldness of Naoroji and the eloquence of Surendranath Banerjee, in his pronouncements on the political situations and the issues before the country. His robust and healthy optimism strikes a note of hopefulness and confidence, which rose from his essentially spiritual nature, and unswerving faith in God and mankind. Consequently, in his opinion,

the publication of truth and the natural expression of men’s sentiments, through the medium of the press, entail no burden on the State.³

‘Legal restraints, but not arbitrary power,’ should be, according to him, the limitation and check under such circumstances; for otherwise he knew no means ‘to prevent the abuses that are so liable to flow from the possession of arbitrary power.’⁴ His ideal was to make government constitutional by establishing it on law.

The example of Canada is prominently brought forward by the leader of the memorialists, and its loyalty is held up as an instance to supply the key to a situation which was similar in certain respects. It is a wholesome

¹ *Works*, II, p. 303.

² *Ibid.*, p. 304.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

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lesson in statesmanship, which should not be forgotten in India; and, if a generalisation may be made from it, Ram Mohun's conclusions have proved to be true, in the light of subsequent events:

In these countries that have made the smallest advance in civilisation, anarchy and revolution are most prevalent; while, on the other hand, in nations the most enlightened, any revolt against the governments, which have guarded inviolate the rights of the governed, is most rare: and the resistance of a people advanced in knowledge has ever been, not against the *existence*, but against the *abuses* of the governing power.¹

Again:

It may be fearlessly averred that the more enlightened a people become, the less likely are they to revolt against the governing power, as long as it is exercised with justice tempered with mercy, and the rights and privileges of the governed are held sacred from any invasion.²

Ram Mohun called this 'the lesson derived from history,' and compared the state of India before the British occupation with that after it. His unshaken confidence in the British nation encouraged him at least to hope in the future for the same treatment which was received by Canada. Something of what is now called 'Dominion Status' for India seems to have been his ambition as an Indian patriot, in all his political and legal writings, when they are interpreted in the right way. He repeatedly referred to the government of the Colonies, and obviously thought in terms of colonial prestige and privilege. His later writings in England are profusely suggestive of the self-determining nation-hood envisaged for his country, even up to the extent of complete independence.³ He never minced matters on a question

¹ *Works*, II, p. 308.

² *Ibid.*, p. 308.

³ See Ch. xi and *Works*, II, p. 119.

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of this kind, or indulged in a jugglery of empty words. Plainly and straightforwardly he warned the authorities, with some light sarcasm, not to treat India as a mere piece of property or booty after conquest, but ever 'to preserve the union existing between England and this country.'¹ Here are some forceful passages, which reminded the British Government that the Indian people even then had the courage to speak out their mind:

If Your Majesty's faithful subjects could conceive for a moment that the British nation, actuated solely by interested policy, considered India merely as a valuable property, and would regard nothing but the best means of securing its possession and turning it to advantage, even then it would be of importance to ascertain whether this property be well taken care of by their servants, on the same principle that good masters are not indifferent about the treatment of their slaves.²

* * * *

Notwithstanding the loss of political rank and power, they [Indians] consider themselves much happier in the enjoyment of civil and religious liberty than were their ancestors; but if these rights that still remain are allowed to be unceremoniously invaded, then the basis on which they have founded their hopes of comfort and happiness under the British Power will be destroyed.³

* * * *

Every good ruler, who is convinced of the imperfection of human nature, and reverences the Eternal Governor of the World, must be conscious of the great liability to error in managing the affairs of a vast empire; and therefore he will be anxious to afford every individual the readiest means of bringing to his notice whatever may require his interference. To secure this important object, the unrestrained liberty of Publication is the only effectual means that can be employed. And should it ever be abused, the established Law of the

¹ *Works*, II, p. 119.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

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Land is very properly armed with sufficient powers to punish those who may be found guilty of misrepresenting the conduct or character of Government, which are effectually guarded by the same laws to which individuals must look for protection of their reputation and good name.¹

The comprehensive outlook displayed in the passages quoted above is a prominent landmark in the political advance of India. Strong, yet sustained, as well as restrained in thought, the two memorials form an organic whole of well-reasoned argument, characterised by real insight and statesmanlike vision, which is constructive as well as vindictive, free from emotional outbursts of any sort or mean insinuating malice. Miss Collet has paid a deservedly high tribute to it as a magnificent piece of English composition: 'It may be regarded as the *Areopagitica* of Indian history. Alike in diction and argument, it forms a noble landmark in the progress of English culture in the East.'² Indeed there was a kinship of spirit between Milton and Ram Mohun. For both men, truth was the ultimate criterion, God's throne was the highest court of judgment, and laws and governments were means to ends. How earnestly Ram Mohun's great Indian heart longed, like that of Milton, for a national regeneration in truth and liberty, no record can say; but at least his hope was expressed in language that may truly be called Miltonic:

Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing itself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking its invincible locks. Methinks I see it as an eagle muing its mighty youth and kindling its undazzled eyes at the full mid-day beam, purging and unscaling its long-abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance.³

¹ *Works*, II, p. 286. ² Collet, p. 101.

³ *Areopagitica*, p. 49 (Clarendon Press).

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Nevertheless, the Press Regulation was passed, in the teeth of this opposition; and the pleading of men like Fergusson and Turton failed to produce the least effect in Calcutta; just as was the case, later on, with the memorial to King George IV in England on this vital issue. It came to be known that the Acting Chief Judge had already committed himself to Government to sanction its procedure. The agitation was absolutely ignored, and not even referred to in Court or in Council. The missionary organ of Dr. Marshman, *The Friend of India*, threw its weight on to the Indian side, praising the Indian press for its good service to the community and for its moderation in never abusing the liberty enjoyed by it. But 'argument and eloquence proved of no avail against the Anglo-Indian dread of native criticism.'¹ In November, 1825, the Privy Council declined to take any action on the Appeal, which had been sent through Mr. Buckingham, the editor of the *Calcutta Journal*, against the Press Act of 1823.

Ram Mohun's Persian paper, *Mirat-ul-Akhbar*, was discontinued just a few months after the passing of the Press Act. It may be that he, as editor, stopped its publication as a practical protest against what were considered by him to be 'most degrading conditions.' The cessation of the paper did not pass unnoticed; and the *Asiatic Journal*, representing the over-sensitive Anglo-Indians of the day, depicted it 'as having a direct tendency to reflect on the action of the Government.'² Even a negative protest of this kind led some of the Government officials to find a sinister meaning in an action that was simply prompted by self-respect; and

¹ Collet, p. 105.

² *Ibid.*

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many European friends were lost in consequence of this agitation. The harm done by the Regulation was incalculable, since the *Mirat* was intended for the intelligentsia and was conducted on a higher standard than the *Sambad Kasmudi*, which addressed itself to the common people. Indian education and journalism would have surely gained a good deal, and advanced sooner and farther, if the Press Act had not intervened and interfered with their natural progress. But the Government adhered to its own policy, without regard to the thoughts and aspirations of the governed.

In the same year in which Lord Hastings vacated his office, and just before the Press Act was passed, another phase of Ram Mohun's activity found expression in the development of his educational policy for the country at large. As usual, it gave rise to a controversy into which the reformer threw himself with his wonted energy. He had already done what he could as coadjutor of Sir H. E. East and the famous David Hare; but more had to be done. The direction and aim of Indian education had to be re-orientated and readjusted. He had a strong conviction of the benefits of education, or, to put it in Miltonic language, of 'the privilege and dignity of learning.'¹ The urgency of the need for spreading it on right lines could not be overlooked or over-rated. In 1822 an Anglo-Indian (Hindu) School, as it was called then, was started by Ram Mohun for Hindu boys, in order that education might be imparted in English. The funds were mainly supplied by him, though some subscriptions were also raised from among his friends.

¹ *Areopagitica*, p. 34.



DAVID HARE

A Statue in College Street, Calcutta.

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Mr. Adam, the Unitarian missionary, was one of the visitors of this school, but his connection with it did not last for long. He had to resign his position in 1828, when his plan for making it a thoroughly public institution, under the Unitarian Committee, was finally rejected by Ram Mohun. Miss Collet remarks on this incident, that it was 'a collision with Ram Mohun's strong will.'¹ It is still unknown why the reformer did not like to solicit public aid for his school, and did not favour its control by the Unitarian Committee, with which he was himself so much identified. Mr. Adam's report on the school shows that it had 'two teachers, on Rs. 150 and Rs. 70 a month, and about 60 to 80 boys, who were instructed in English.' Further, he adds, 'The doctrines of Christianity are not inculcated, but the duties of morality are carefully enjoined, and the facts belonging to the history of Christianity are taught to those pupils who are capable of understanding general history.'² The school curriculum reflects Ram Mohun's personal faith, and the type of religion he wanted for the country.

In the year following the Government turned its attention to the promotion of Indian education, as some money sanctioned from England was to be devoted to this purpose. The moot point was the kind of education most desirable and necessary for the uplift of the masses, and whether it should be intensive, in the sense of improving and deepening the method already in vogue, or whether an altogether new system should be boldly introduced, comprising European science and culture. Those who advocated the old ways of Oriental study came into conflict with the innovators, among whom

¹ Collet, p. 107.

² *Ibid.*, p. 106.

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Ram Mohun figured prominently. The no-changers earned the good name of 'Orientalists,' while the liberals were nicknamed 'Anglicists.' It was a real dilemma for Government, which was not till then committed to Macaulay's policy of 'making the Indians more English than the English themselves' in the matter of education. The establishment of a Sanskrit college found favour with the authorities, and the discussion was hotly pursued by both parties. This led Ram Mohun, in 1823, to address to Lord Amherst, the new Governor-General, a letter on English education; even though his former appeals had been abortive and had given him nothing but disappointment. Undaunted by his defeat on the Press Act, he went forward again to fight the battle of Indian education. His was an indomitable nature, to which strength came from reasoned faith in the rightness of his principles and ideals. Like Plato, he was a staunch believer in education and in the 'educability' of human nature, while the modernity of his outlook gave him a range far in advance of his time and compeers.

He strongly objected to the use of the new grant for the purposes of 'imparting such knowledge as is already current in India,'¹ because, he thought, such oriental studies could easily enough be encouraged and promoted by grants-in-aid to the institutions already existing in the country for such purposes, namely the *tohs* for Sanskrit and the *mukhtabs* for Persian and Arabic, where Oriental lore was extensively cultivated. Mr. Chatterjee is of opinion that this attitude showed his great love for Oriental knowledge, in which he was one of the most learned men of the day.² The Indian institutions spoken of resembled

¹ *Works*, II, p. 324.

² Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 390.

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those in Europe before Lord Bacon's time,¹ but they did not meet the needs of the nation, under the circumstances ushered in by the advent of the British. The new culture of the West was already setting the horizon ablaze, and the light had caught the eyes of this man, who towered head and shoulders above his contemporaries. On the surface he contradicted himself over his educational policy, and a seeming lack of consistency may be observed in his rigid opposition, which appeared strange to many, to the teaching of Indian systems of thought and grammar in the old scholastic fashion. At the very time when he was refuting European (missionary) criticism of the Vedanta, Mimamsa and Nyaya, in the *Brahmanical Magazine* (the fourth number of which corresponded in date to this memorial on education), he was also emphatically condemning in the Memorial itself these very systems of philosophical thought and grammatical training, as mere speculation and linguistic nicety, having no bearing on the practical needs of life!

He said: 'Neither can much improvement arise from such speculations as the following, which are the themes suggested by the Vedanta: "In what manner is the soul absorbed in the Deity, what relation does it bear to the Divine essence?" Nor will youths be fitted to be better members of society by the Vedantic doctrines. . . . Again, no essential benefit can be derived by the student of the Mimamsa from knowing "what is it that makes the killer of a [sacrificial] goat sinless by pronouncing certain passages." The student of the Nyaya Shastra cannot be said to have improved his mind after he has learned from it "how many ideal classes the objects of the

¹ *Works*, II, p. 325.

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universe are divided into.”¹ These are all characterised as ‘imaginary learning,’ compared with the achievements of science and literature in Europe,² and he added that, ‘in presenting this subject to His Lordship he was discharging a solemn duty which he owed to his countrymen.’

His argument on education is summed up in the extract subjoined here:

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 Sanskritic system of education would be calculated to keep this country in darkness, if such had been the policy of the British Government. But 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, Astronomy, with other useful sciences, which may be accomplished with the sums proposed, by employing a few gentlemen of talent and learning, educated in Europe, and providing a college furnished with necessary books, instruments and other apparatus.³

This educational pragmatism was the result of his deep study of Western civilisation. He was against scholasticism, whether European or Indian and he wanted science to be wedded to culture. This synthetic ideal explains the apparent contradiction between his advocacy of European scientific training, with all its modern spirit, and his devotion to Hindu philosophy which did not advocate the weeding out of Sanskrit, as will be shortly seen from another apparently inconsistent incident. His was a synthesis between the East and the West, between

¹ *Works*, II, pp. 326, 327.

² *Ibid.*, p. 327.

³ *Ibid.*

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theory and practice, science and culture, the past and the future. Eastern culture and Western science together formed for him a whole which went to make up the totality of knowledge. It is no wonder, therefore, that Bishop Heber, who took this letter to Lord Amherst, spoke in 1824 in terms of genuine appreciation of the Memorial, 'which for its good English, good sense and forcible arguments is a real curiosity, as coming from an Asiatic.'¹

In February, 1824, the Hindu College was added to the Sanskrit College, and was housed in the same building. Mr. Jogendra Chandra Ghose says, 'It was owing perhaps to this agitation that the foundation stone of the building intended for the Sanskrit College was laid in the name of the Hindu College, and the Hindu College was located there together with the Sanskrit College.'² Ram Mohun was on the committee of the Hindu College, but when the supporters of Western education gained their point, and the orthodox Hindus became suspicious of the reformer's presence among the members, he resigned his position magnanimously, rather than hamper the cause and progress of the newly-founded institution. 'I do not desire the honour,' he remarked, 'if my presence on the committee should do the least harm to the college.'³

Another institution to which Ram Mohun directed his attention and energy, after the establishment of the Hindu College, was his own Vedanta College, for inculcating the principles of monism. It was founded in 1826, in a house in North Calcutta, No. 74 Manicktolla Street.⁴ It was his personal property, which was sold after his

¹ *Heber's Journal* p. 219; cf. Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 386.

² *Works*, II, p. 325, Editor's note.

³ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 394.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

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departure to England. Mr. Adam, writing in July of the same year, said:

Ram Mohun has lately built a small but very handsome college, which he calls the Vedanta College, in which a few youths are at present instructed by a very eminent pandit in Sanskrit literature, with a view to the propagation and defence of Hindu Unitarianism. With this instruction he is also willing to connect instruction in European science and learning, and in Christian Unitarianism, provided the instruction is conveyed in the Bengali or Sanskrit language.¹

This important pronouncement, in an equally important context, lays bare the reformer's mind on the whole problem of education, his theory and method, object and goal. It exhibits a comprehensiveness much larger than that of Macaulay, in his famous minute of 1835, under Bentinck's administration. It admits of a satisfactory explanation, and reconciles the superficial contradictions in the divergent versions of his views. If it is agreed, as Miss Carpenter maintains,² that to Ram Mohun, Hindu philosophy was really superior to Western philosophy, his educational ideal becomes clear and consistent. His opposition to mere Oriental studies, divorced from Western scientific knowledge, is seen to issue out of a sound principle, even in face of Akshay Kumar Dutt's testimony that he had with all his strength advocated help to Sanskrit institutions, in order to keep alive both the pursuit and inculcation of Hindu learning.³ Miss Collet, though calling the whole procedure 'a paradox,' has incidentally disclosed the inner motive of the complex situation when she says: 'The Vedanta was the lever by which Ram Mohun hoped to lift them [the Indians] into

¹ Collet, pp. 109-10.

² Carpenter, *Last Days*, p. 51; Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 391.

³ *Upashak Sampradaya* (Religious Sects of India), II, p. 30.

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a nobler and simpler faith, . . . and he provided for a discriminating instruction in the ancient system, which should have the approval of liberal Hindus and liberal Christians.¹ This attitude illustrates Ram Mohun's sense of continuity with the historic past of India, and, at the same time, his faith in her progressive future yet to come.² To realise this was the mission of his life, and of this he constantly dreamed.

¹ Collet, pp. 110, 111.

² *Ibid.*, p. 112.

VIII

SATI

RIGHTS OF WOMEN, LITERARY SERVICES

THE despatch of Lord Hastings, of 15th August, 1822, indicated the reasons why the Government was slow in taking a decisive stand on the difficult problem of *sati* (the burning of widows at the time of their husbands' funeral) and the crying need for prohibitory legislation. There had been none to oppose the prevailing Hindu law, which had been solidified by long practice into accepted custom, and even in the 19th century its spirit was not being re-interpreted in agreement with the standpoint of changed moral demands. Hence the Government had been delaying for a long time, when the field was taken by the Indian reformer. It was admitted by Government that 'His Lordship in Council does not despair of the best effects resulting from the free discussion of the matter by the people themselves, independently of European influence and interposition; . . . and it only remains for him to watch carefully the indication of a change of sentiment amongst the people . . . and to encourage to the utmost every favourable disposition.'¹ Miss Collet's suggestion is that the authorities were suspicious of 'the fanatical spirit roused by the divided state of feeling among the Hindus'²

¹ Collet, p. 116.

² *Ibid.*

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on a question of such vital importance. The reference is, of course, to Ram Mohun's agitation, two years ago. When Hastings left India he hoped for a change of attitude among Indians towards sati—a fact which was also noticed by Bishop Heber.¹

Soon after his settlement in Calcutta, and years before the arrival of Hastings, Ram Mohun had played the part of a herald, awakening his countrymen on this matter by his own writings, namely, the two *Conferences on Sati*, already noticed above.² His unparalleled knowledge of Hindu law, which was amply displayed in these two works, proved to the hilt the iniquity, barbarity and guilt of the cruel custom, and the atrophy of feeling and the collapse of conscience which were implied so long in Hindu society by its toleration. They were not only masterpieces of legal interpretation, but also mighty defences of the real spirit of Indian culture in respect of womanhood. Gradual degeneration and corruption in the exegesis of *smṛiti* (sacred legal) literature—considerable as it was in bulk and number—had robbed the Hindu mind of its power to readjust itself on a sound basis of social justice; it had forgotten to think, and had allowed wrong and cruelty to be sanctioned by religious custom. But better elements were there, and these the reformer reconstructed, first by discovering sacred authorities, and then by re-interpreting the current arguments. After Raghunandana, the famous law-giver of Bengal, whom Ram Mohun accepted in the spirit and the letter, none treated law in India from such a bold and original standpoint as this champion against sati.³

¹ *Heber's Journal*, p. 108 ² See Ch. iii, above.

³ The history of the custom of sati shows that its traces are found in Vedic times. The *Atharvaveda* has reference to it, though

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'Sati is not an absolute or unvarying command of Hindu law on duties of widowhood'—so declared Ram Mohun to his benighted countrymen; and simultaneously he actually armed the Government with an authority that lay dormant in ancient Hindu legal sanction. The use of force, he urged, was illegal from the Hindu point of view, when wives were compelled to die with their husbands. The foreign administration, unused to the customs and practices of the nation, had long sought haltingly for some legal instrument of the right type to authorise the exercise of its executive power. The Indian reformer furnished Government with this sanction from Hindu law itself, so as to silence the orthodox on the one side and to strengthen the heterodox on the other. His reasoning was close, his argument powerful, and his sympathy practical, as well as broad and deep. It is true that attention had before this been drawn to this custom, which still continued to exist as a menace to the humane side of society. But Ram Mohun was the first to make it an Indian question among Indians, and to transform it into an issue of national importance. He forged the Archimedean lever with which he moved the whole Indian world for days to come.

it is absent in the earlier *Vedas*. Barth, in his *Religions of India*, says: 'It is not sanctioned by Vedic ritual, though certain hints in the symbolism connected with funerals, particularly in the *Atharvaveda*, came very near it, and in a measure foreshadow it . . . in the *Atharvaveda* we see the widow could marry again under certain conditions, which in the course of time orthodox usage strictly debarred her from doing. . . . As early as the days of Alexander, the Greeks found it was observed among one of the tribes at least of the Punjab. The first Brahmanical testimony we find to it is that of the *Brihad-devata*, which is perhaps of quite remote antiquity. In the Epic poetry there are numerous instances of it' (p. 59). Dr. Das is of opinion that it is nowhere mentioned in the *Rigveda* (*Rigvedic Culture*, p. 256). See *Atharvaveda*, xviii, 3, 1.

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The memorable booklet, *The Sutte's Cry to Britain*, by J. Peggs, and *The Wanderings*, by Fanny Parks, had impressed the authorities with the gravity of the situation and the horrors of heartlessness that it exhibited; but they, like the Moghul rulers, tried only to obstruct the custom, without offending Hindu religious sentiment, rather than to remove the causes of it. Akbar the Great was himself very keen on the question, and later the Peshwa was similarly disposed.¹ They tried themselves to dissuade widows from performing sati, when such cases reached their ears. The Dutch, the Portuguese and the French moved in the same direction in their colonies, but with no appreciable success. Officials and magistrates reported against it from their jurisdictions, but nothing more could be done. The efforts of centuries left the problem exactly where it was, practically unsolved, and theoretically unassailed; for the simple reason that there was no one to criticise it in a pointed way on the ground of Hindu *shastra* itself. The opinion of one or two large-hearted pandits sank into insignificance in the face of widespread ignorance. The position, as days passed, was no better than in the time of Lord Hastings, who allowed the practice in those cases in which it was countenanced by the Hindu religion, but prevented it in others in which it was by the same authority prohibited;² even though reports of cases and requests for instruction from British officials were not wanting from every part of India. The legal question of sanction or prohibition of the practice, according to Hindu sacred law, was a problem which eluded the authorities, and perhaps was also outside the jurisdiction of Government

¹ *Asiatic Journal*, January, 1824.

² *Hastings' Instructions* of 17 April, 1823.

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officials, as it was surely beyond their power. Ram Mohun's campaign took the matter in hand at this stage, and 'it is Ram Mohun's distinctive glory that he relieved the British Government from this deadlock.'¹

The nation (if it could then be so called) on the one hand, and the Government on the other had to be convinced and prepared for restoring righteous treatment to the womanhood of India, long maltreated, unheard and undefended. This was the larger challenge which was involved in the movement, and which the reformer faced courageously. The action taken by him dealt quite simply with the standing disgrace of sati. He showed from the sastras that the rite was not an absolute injunction, not a categorical duty, the non-performance of which might lead to the direst consequences in after-life. There were equally important and authoritative alternatives, pointed out in Hindu law itself, and higher and nobler paths of self-sacrifice and self-culture. The rejection of the first method of self-sacrifice in favour of the second did not go against the Hindu religion; in fact, the second would be the higher way, both on orthodox and rational grounds; while suicide can never be recognised as a virtue in itself, nor can murder be a spiritual act, inasmuch as the highest end of life can be attained only by continuous striving after truth and righteousness. The consequences of sati could only be an unnecessary and insane waste of life, which ought to be utilised in the service of God and man. The reformer's argument opens thus, in caustic irony:

Those who have no reliance on the shastras, and those who take delight in the self-destruction of women, may well

¹ Collet, p. 148.

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wonder that we should oppose that suicide which is forbidden by all shastras and by every race of man.¹

If sati falls under the general category of 'suicide,' as it surely does, it has no sanction anywhere. But the advocate for sati may easily point out the particular injunctions of Angira, Vyasa, Gautama, and the *Brahma Purana*, on the duty of the widow's cremation with her dead husband, or cremation after her husband has already been cremated. The passages generally cited are:

That woman who, on the death of her husband, ascends the burning pile with him, is exalted to heaven as equal to Arundhati. She who follows her husband to another world shall dwell in a region of joy for so many years as there are hairs on human body. The woman who follows her husband [to death] expiates the sins of three races—her father's line, her mother's line, and the family of him to whom she was given a virgin. There is no other way known for a virtuous woman except ascending the pile of her husband, . . . there is no other duty whatever after the death of her husband.²

This preposterous standard of judgment needed at this stage to be refuted by a wider appeal to the Hindu scriptures, rather than a mere condemnation, which would have spoiled the case and defeated the object. The keen eye of Ram Mohun saw the need, and with his usual cogency he first refuted and then condemned the whole reasoning, as well as the shameful custom.

An ordinary man would have shuddered to call into question the great authorities cited in favour of sati; but not so the reformer. He was well aware of his own grounds, and the lurking weakness, fallacy and sophistry of his opponents. His first step was, therefore, to bring forward parallel, if not superior, texts from the scriptures

¹ *Works*, II, p. 123.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 124-25.

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on the same question, enjoining just the opposite course. This was to face Greek with Greek, and to draw the logical and unavoidable conclusion between differing authorities, indicating the optional character of sati, and its inferior position in the scale of religious obligations. Of Hindu authorities on religion Manu is the greatest, the most famous and trustworthy, a law-giver whose weight alone would be equal to any dozen others put together. Hence the following rejoinder is added to show what Manu dictates in opposition to the practice of sati:

But attend to what Manu and others say respecting the duty of widows.—'Let her emaciate her body by living voluntarily on pure flowers, roots and fruits, but let her not when her lord is deceased even pronounce the name of another man. Let her continue till death forgiving all injuries, performing harsh duties, avoiding every sensual pleasure, and cheerfully practising the incomparable rules of virtue, which have been followed by such women as were devoted to one husband only.¹

Again, according to Yajnavalkya, the second great pillar of Hindu law, generally followed in north-west India, was this:

A widow shall live under the care of her father, mother, son, brother, mother-in-law, father-in-law, or uncle, since otherwise she will be liable to reproach.²

But midway between the conflicting views, one in favour of and the other definitely against sati, there is another stratum of Hindu legal thought, which did not escape the notice of the reformer, and which affirms the essentially optional and alternative nature of sati at the

¹ *Works*, II, p. 127; cf. *Manu*, V, 158.

² *Ibid.*, p. 184; *Mitakshara*, I.

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stage, before it finally degenerated into a universal rule for all widows. Vishnu directed that, 'after the death of her husband, a wife should either live as an ascetic or else ascend his pile.'¹ But this was a 'closed option,' in the opinion of the reformer;² for on the higher spiritual grounds adduced later on there could be but one choice between two such alternatives. They are not alternatives suggested by Ram Mohun himself in these passages, as some tried to make out. The higher and greater imperative had to be reasoned out and commended by proper legal criticism and exegesis. The passage from the selfish to the unselfish course of action, as the highest rule of being, was the principle underlying sacred law. So the exposition goes on:

Here Manu directs that after the death of her husband the widow should pass her whole life as an ascetic. Therefore the laws given by Angira and others . . . being contrary to the law of Manu, cannot be accepted. . . . The words of Angira and the rest are to be set aside. Manu, Yajnavalkya and others have then, in their respective codes of laws, prescribed to widows the duties of ascetics only.³

If one set of laws is opposed by another, equally or even less authoritative, nothing but an open alternative would come out as the result. This was realised by Ram Mohun, as in the case of Vishnu above. Consequently the reformer, after supporting Manu and Yajnavalkya with quotations from the *Rik*, the earliest of the Vedas, which indicate the spiritual nature of the sacrifice expected of the widows, reminded his readers first of Manu's high position as a legal authority and then of the great Vedic command:

¹ *Works*, II, p. 187.

² *Ibid.*, p. 128.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

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The Ved declares whatever Manu has said is wholesome; and Brihashpati says: 'Whatever law is contrary to the law of Manu is not commendable.' The Ved specially declares: 'By living in the practice of regular and occasional duties the mind may be purified. Therefore by hearing, reflecting and constantly meditating on the Supreme Being, absorption in Brahman may be attained. Therefore, from a desire during life of future fruition, life ought not to be destroyed.'¹

No clearer condemnation of the practice of sati could be desired than these last words. By thus publishing the views of legal commentators before Ram Mohun regarding the sacredness and authority of the custom of sati, a flood of light was incidentally thrown on the worthlessness of the tradition which sanctioned and upheld it. The obnoxious and adventitious excrescence became simply unjustifiable; and the reformer was determined to cut it off from the body of Hindu society, now that he had traced its vicious growth out of illegitimate law. He examined both Vijnanesvara and Raghunandana, whose legal expositions governed social custom and action, both within and outside Bengal, on the lines of Manu and Yajnavalkya. This provided a final blow from the well-equipped armoury of the reformer; and after this there was no quarter for those who, in the name of orthodoxy, were doing things that had been proved to be really most unorthodox in the eye of Hindu law. If these great commentators found no sanction for the self-destruction of widows, no later authority could suffice to prove its validity.

From the time of the Vedas, religious life has always been reckoned more honourable than self-immolation, and courage to live the life of the spirit has been considered

¹ *Works*, II, p. 127.

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superior to the cowardice of suicide. The primacy of the moral life devoted to God and to the good, was pronounced to be the final goal of the life of the widow, as well as of the man. The widow is not different from other human beings. The commentators, Vijnanesvara and Raghunandana, left no doubt on this point of interpretation, and it was taken up by the reformer to adduce further proofs for his case. The *Mitakshara* explicitly says that sati is an act of low religious value:

The widow who is not desirous of final beatitude, but who wishes only for a limited term of a small degree of future fruition, is authorised to accompany her husband.¹

But even this permission is again limited by the citation of the famous text already quoted, 'from a desire during life of future fruition, life ought not to be destroyed';² and this holds good with regard to both con-cremation and post-cremation. Raghunandana was forced to contrast the teaching of Angira with that of Vishnu, the one injunction being absolute, while the other is only permissive, and emphatically declared that con-cremation had been given 'an exaggerated importance,'³ over the natural procedure. That he never countenanced the rite is certain, for he was more conversant with the spirit of Hindu law than the moderns, who were further removed from the Vedic usages.

Finally Ram Mohun contended that rites and ceremonies, even of the highest type, and however useful to society, if judged from the inmost springs of action, cannot be placed on the same high level as the pure life of the

¹ Ch. i; cited in *Works*, II, p. 144. ² *Ibid.*, p. 185.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 145, 185.

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spirit. Sati, as a rite, suffers from this defect, whatever may be the sacrifice involved in it; as indeed all rites fall below the highest kind of existence according to the teaching of the Vedas. Rites are symbolic of a low stage of culture, having for its object selfish enjoyment in the after-life or the satisfaction of the desires of life after death. To be desireless means to be unselfish, and therefore purified to the highest degree through self-sacrifice for others; and this leads ultimately to union with God, or absorption into the Absolute. Ram Mohun quoted the *Gita* in this connection, and said, 'The *Bhagavat Gita*, whose authority is considered the most sacred by Hindus of all persuasions, repeatedly condemns rites performed for fruition, as in the case of consecration.' A few passages are quoted from the same book:

All those ignorant persons who attach themselves to the works [rites] of the *shastras*, that convey promises of fruition [in future life], consider those extravagant and alluring passages as leading to real happiness, and say that besides them there is no other reality. Agitated in their minds by these desires, they believe the abodes of the celestial gods to be the chief object, and they devote themselves to these texts, which treat of ceremonies and their fruits and entice by promises of enjoyment. Such people can have no real confidence in the Supreme Being.¹

Just as in the case of idolatry and superstition, so in the case of the rite of sati, the reformer led his countrymen to higher standards of thought, making for purer life and ideals. He warned them, in the language of Raghunandana, that 'learned men should not endeavour to persuade the ignorant to perform rites which hold out promises of fruition.'² Later interpretations were then

¹ *Works*, II, p. 187.

² *Ibid.*, p. 150.

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ruthlessly exposed as expressions of low morality of interested parties, directed towards the promotion of their own maintenance and inheritance.

Defeated and crestfallen, his opponents placed themselves behind the shelter of 'expediency.' They brought forward reasons, based on imaginary fears, of widows lapsing from purity, if allowed to live after their husbands' death. Ram Mohun asked, 'What surety or remedy there was against this, in the case of wives whose husbands live in distant countries? or what control was possible against evil thoughts, words and actions?' The solution of the problem was asserted to lie in proper spiritual education for women, and not in sinful murders.¹ The concluding lines of the third work on sati, called *An Abstract of Arguments Regarding the Burning of Widows*, published after abolition of the rite, are worth quoting here:

We should not omit the present opportunity of offering thanks to heaven, whose protecting arm has rescued our weaker sex from cruel murder under the cloak of religion, and our character as a people from the contempt and pity with which it has been regarded on account of this custom by all civilised nations on the surface of the globe.²

The lesson of the battle against sati was not lost on this champion of Indian womanhood, nor did it pass unnoticed, for the reformer's convictions always found expression in some form or other. He searched for the causes which encouraged and sustained the wicked practice, and saw them to lie in the social and economic relations between men and women, in various aspects of life. Other bad customs were also exposed by him in this connection, but they were not of primary impor-

¹ *Works*, II, p. 137.

² *Ibid.*, p. 192.

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tance here, for he was trying to go down to the very roots of the trouble. In his *Brief Remarks Regarding the Rights of Females*—a short treatise of great legal value—he expressed the wish that ‘the attention of the Government will be directed to those evils which are the chief sources of vice and misery, and even of suicide, among women.’¹ His analysis was right, and he touched the roots of the causes, which had led to the gradual enslaving and the consequent helplessness of Indian womanhood. He had shown with regard to sati how woman lost her real position in India. ‘Women are in general inferior to men in bodily strength and energy, consequently the male part of the community, taking advantage of their corporeal weakness, have denied to them those excellent merits that they are entitled to by nature.’²

But more than this was the heartlessness of men themselves, who allowed such conditions to be fixed on society and to rule their minds, to the detriment and decay of the nation. If they had only looked into their ancient books, they could have easily realised ‘from height fallen to what pit thou *seest*.’³ Ram Mohun redirected their thoughts to such urgent questions. He traced the causes of the woeful condition of Hindu women to their legal disability to inherit property, according to the current usage of Hindu law, or, in other words, to become independent economically. This in its turn reacted on the social system itself. ‘Restraints on female inheritance encouraged in a great degree polygamy,’⁴ in the opinion of the reformer. Then there was the ‘sale of daughters’ for marriage,⁵

¹ *Works*, II, p. 206.

² *Ibid.*, p. 177.

³ *Paradise Lost*, I,

⁴ *Works*, II, p. 201.

⁵ *Ibid.*

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consequent upon their destitute condition, among the less respectable classes. Moreover, marriage 'to men having natural defects, or worn out by old age or disease, merely from pecuniary considerations,'¹ brought about the most disastrous results, such as early widowhood or unredeemed misery. When all these social defects are counted together, and their baneful effects carefully totalled in a systematic survey, the distress of womanhood is adequately depicted in the language of the reformer:

To these women there are left only three modes of conduct to pursue after the death of their husbands. First, to live a miserable life as entire slaves to others, without indulging any hope of support from another husband. Secondly, to walk in the paths of unrighteousness for their independence and maintenance. Thirdly, to die on the funeral pile of their husbands, loaded with applause and honour from their neighbours.²

Ram Mohun challenged the validity of the existing law dealing with the natural right of women to ancestral property. As compared with Muhammadan and Christian law on this point, Hindu law was decidedly weak, having somehow fallen away from the ancient legal pronouncements of its own accredited authorities. This injustice he placed before the public, by collecting all the available legal maxims that were intended to remedy this defect, and yield to women their natural dues. Such lawgivers as Brihaspati, Vishnu, Manu, Yajñavalkya and Katyayana,³ all agreed to allow a portion of ancestral property to the daughters; they sanction, roughly speaking, a fourth part; but this is never so distributed in practice in modern times; for this injunc-

¹ *Works*, II, p. 205.

² *Ibid.*, p. 201.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 201-4.

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tion of the law is never recognised and followed. The cause of female destitution mainly lies in this custom, which has transferred all property to the male issue. If the old law could be somehow reinstated, a ray of hope might appear in the otherwise utter darkness of the lot of Hindu women. The sale of daughters to prospective husbands was similarly condemned, on the authority of ancient sages, such as Manu and Kashyapa, as being contrary to the accepted dictates of sacred law.¹ But most pronounced was his abhorrence of polygamy, which was dealt with by him under this context with the utmost vigour, in spite of the fact that he himself had been married in childhood to more than one wife, and was therefore open to the charge that he was not himself a monogamist. It was a source of many shameful evils, and therefore needed the severest treatment, especially in view of the general practice of monogamy in all civilised countries.

The sanction for a second wife, according to the shastras or sacred law, is justifiable only on grounds of 'reasonable and intelligible necessity,' and not on mere custom. A serious step of this type should never be based on a tradition accepted without criticism. There ought to be a special reason for taking a second wife. Such grounds, according to Yajnavalkya, are the following faults on the part of a first wife: (1) the vice of drinking; (2) incurable sickness; (3) deception; (4) barrenness; (5) extravagance; (6) the use of offensive language; (7) producing only female offspring; (8) hatred towards her husband.² Apart from these, marrying again at will was not in accordance with the spirit of Hindu law;

¹ *Works*, II, p. 205 f.

² *Ibid.*, p. 202.

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though it is also said that 'she-[the first wife] may be superseded by another wife with her own consent.'¹ Ram Mohun added to this context that, 'had a magistrate or other public officer been authorised by the rulers of the empire to receive applications for his sanction to a second marriage during the life of the first wife, . . . the above law might have been rendered effectual, and the distress of the female sex in Bengal, and the number of suicides, would have been necessarily very much reduced.'² It would have also to a certain extent brought marriage regulations into line with those of Christian nations; for, said he, 'this horrible polygamy among Brahmans is directly contrary to the law given by ancient authors.'³ He would probably have liked some State action in the matter, in order to put a stop to those abuses, which degraded women to the position of slaves. Yet this was in a land where, as he knew full well, women were in theory regarded as co-equal partners of man's spiritual life, and were declared by Manu and the *Mahabharata* to be so in unmistakable terms. He was decidedly in favour of *Saiva marriage*, which allowed inter-caste unions.⁴ His motive is clear, in that there might be a fusion of the many divisions in Hindu society into a solid and homogeneous body and even of definitely non-Hindu elements. He also favoured *widow re-marriage*,⁵ though he wrote nothing on the subject; and condemned the dowry system.

He was sure of his ground on textual criticism and interpretation, and he courageously pointed out the cause of the 'law's delay' in this case, where the subject was

¹ *Works*, II, p. 203.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Bengali Works*, pp. 225, 331; Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, pp. 225, 228.

⁵ *R.M.R. and Modern India*, p. 11.

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not as yet carefully studied or well known among the officials responsible:

There were among European gentlemen so very few acquainted with Sanskrit and Hindu Law, that it would have been hardly possible to have formed a committee of European Oriental scholars and learned Brahmins capable of deciding on points of Hindu Law.¹

Perhaps his experience gained in the anti-sati movement taught him how little could be naturally expected of the foreign officials, who ruled a people whom they had not properly come to know within so short a time. When such was the case, the codified law in English lacked agreement with the spirit of law recognised in the land, and was not equal to the occasion, nor capable of equitable application to all the cases which were presented to it from time to time.

Ram Mohun's personal life bore glowing testimony in practice to the respect paid by him to womanhood. One of the beautiful traits of his character was his careful treatment of women, whether daughter, mother, wife, or one who was no relation. He would never remain sitting as long as any woman stood in his presence. It is also said that, in the midst of his incessant activities and severe studies, he regularly gave up some time to conversation with his wives and daughters and other female relations. When he entered the inner apartment, he used to stand before his assigned seat until his wives took their seats. Then some time was given to conversation on various domestic and other topics.² This happened usually in the evenings, when the reformer took some

¹ *Works*, II, p. 207.

² This anecdote was heard from Mrs. Hemlata Devi (Ram Mohun's great-grand-daughter), and N. N. Roy, of Radhanagar, a descendant of the Roy family, in June or July, 1925.

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rest from the hard work of the day. The ladies of the house had to come neatly dressed, and an atmosphere of loving intercourse of thought and feeling was retained throughout. This period used to be highly appreciated by the whole household, and they looked forward to his ennobling company at the end of their daily duties. The training in the family was consequently of the highest standard, because the ideals of the reformer were practised first of all at home. The elder wife, who was the mother of his children, was by nature very shy, and she would only join a little in the conversation, which was generally led by the younger co-wife; but both of them fully understood the greatness of their illustrious husband.

In 1824, when Ram Mohun was busy fighting for the cause of Indian womanhood in general, his elder wife died suddenly, at her father's place in Krishnagar, leaving behind her two sons and a daughter. A memorial pillar was erected by the reformer on the spot where she was cremated.¹ From Adam's letter² it is gleaned that his married life in earlier days was not very happy, because of the weight on his conscience that his father had married him to two child-wives; which was not in keeping with his own ideal; for he was always a thorough-going monogamist in theory,³ and now he became one in practice, after the passing away of one wife. He cannot rightly be blamed for events which were not of his own doing. He had the strongest and the most determined antipathy to polygamy, as Mr. Adam said in his letter; and, moreover, he went so far as to insert 'clauses in his will, disinheriting any son or remote descendant who had more than one wife at the same time.'⁴ For

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 422.

² Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 374.

³ Collet, p. 115.

⁴ Collet, p. 115.

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some time, during the days when agitation rose to the highest against him, he had to live apart from his wives.¹ Even by them he was considered an outcaste, while he on his side hesitated to interfere with their religious susceptibilities. The *Asiatic Journal* of November, 1833, corroborated this fact in its obituary notice, when Ram Mohun died in England. Miss Collet, in her estimate of his relations with his wives, says: 'All the more commendable, therefore, is his uniform and chivalrous championship of womanhood.'² That he had a highly refined susceptibility goes without doubt, a fact which made him oppose any kind of force in any sphere of action. He believed in the free development of mind and character, in order to bring about the desired result in human life.³

A terrible famine was raging at about this time in the South of India. The Deccan was very badly affected, particularly in its southern districts. An appeal was sent out for collecting funds in aid of the sufferers. It is most interesting to find that a great advance was made here, through Ram Mohun's influence—in concerted action by the people, and, more than this, in religious catholicity. Fourteen signatures were attached to this appeal, which indicates how widely Ram Mohun's 'inter-religious views were radiating.'⁴ The establishment of 'charitable inns' for Hindus, Mussalmans and Christians was the object of this manifesto, which was couched in liberal and sympathetic language.

We conjure those of the three faiths of Christians, Mussalmans and Hindus, in the name of our Common Creator and God, to show the affection that man, as a com-moner of nature, should bear to his fellowman, by relieving

¹ Collet, p. 116.

² *Ibid.*, p. 115.

³ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 416; Collet, p. 147.

⁴ Collet, p. 113.

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so many individuals of these three religions, who are dying daily for want of their usual sustenance.¹

Almost immediately after the famine relief activities, Ram Mohun's new religious tract, on *Different Modes of Worship*, came out, in 1825. He was never at rest with regard to religious questions, and was, by the innate logic of his nature, reaching out, as if unconsciously, to the idea of the Universal Religion, which it was his glory to establish and to formulate definitely in the *Trust Deed* of the Brahma Samaj. His *Bengali Grammar* was published just a year later, in 1826, signalling not only his invaluable service to the Bengali language and literature, but in addition giving proof of his great love for his own mother-tongue. It was first done in English and afterwards in Bengali,² and was written 'with a view to facilitate intercourse between Europeans and Indians.' The Bengali edition was published by the School-book Society in April, 1833, and reprinted four times.³ Like Buddha, the first protagonist of vernacular dialects in India, like Wycliffe in England, or Luther in Germany, Ram Mohun deeply felt the need of propagating his thoughts through the language spoken by the masses. 'The despised dialect of the common people was made the vehicle of the highest ideas, and became thereby permanently elevated. Reformation in religion has often proved to bring ennoblement in language. Indeed, Bengali owes much to Ram Mohun.'⁴

There were grammars of the Bengali language before the reformer attempted his own, but they were not of the type which served to bring out the best features of the dialect used in Bengal. Holhed wrote one, in

¹ Collet, p. 119.

² *Ibid.*

³ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 302.

⁴ Collet, pp. 112-13.

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the style which would be expected of a foreigner; and those that the pandits produced were more Sanskritic than Bengali in character. Ram Mohun discarded Sanskrit in his *Grammar*, and addressed himself to forms and idioms in Bengali proper. Dr. Sen says: 'It bears the impress of his great genius,' and 'is a highly original publication.'¹ In view of all the services rendered by him to the cause of Bengali literature at its nascent stage, Mr. Long has fittingly called him the 'Augustus of the East';² and in fact he was 'the father of Bengali prose,'³ in the sense of having been the first to use it powerfully and profusely in giving to his countrymen the most difficult concepts of philosophy, law and morals. Bengali was not a literary language before his time, except in poetry. In creating Bengali literary prose he changed its outlook, and placed it on the high road to its present position. His own works in Bengali numbered no less than thirty. 'The vast learning which he displays in each of these productions, together with the closeness of argument, and his sincere and ardent desire for truth, gives them an importance second to none in our literature.'⁴ In reality, he ridiculed 'the Johnson of Bengal' (Mrityunjaya Vidyalankar) for writing unintelligible Bengali, and thus deceiving those who had not the good fortune of understanding big Sanskritic words.⁵

'How to read prose' was one of the important directions given by him, besides the introduction of regular punctuation. Before his time there was no punctuation in Bengali except the full-stop, which had probably

¹ *History of Bengali Language and Literature*, p. 974.

² *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 970.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 962.

⁵ Introduction to Discussion with Bhattacharya, discovered by Messrs. Alin C. Ganguly and Sudhir Lal Bannerjee (*Prabasi*, Calcutta, September, 1929).

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descended from Sanskrit. Commas and semi-colons were first adopted by him in his *Grammar*, and they became current when their utility was thoroughly demonstrated. Further, he published text-books on Geometry, Geography, etc.,¹ in order to have these subjects in current Bengali. Born educator as he was, he could not stop with his *Grammar*, seeing that in the interior of the country these subjects could never be imparted in those days through the medium of English. It was in conformity with his theory of education that he saw the need for suitable text-books for new subjects.

At heart he was also a poet, and one of no mean order, from the criterion of thought and originality. Prose was not his only contribution to his mother-tongue, though it was the most important in the estimate of many. Equally important are his hymns, which occupy a pre-eminent position, after the exquisite religious lyrics of the Vaishnava masters and Ram Prasad, who left his songs on almost every tongue. Mr. Ramananda Chatterjee has rightly remarked that Ram Mohun was the first to write and introduce theistic hymns into Bengali.² Bengal was, indeed, flooded with lyrical poetry, and Ram Mohun himself once playfully remarked that 'Bharat Chandra's achievements in Bengali poetry were such as forbade any competition';³ yet the Vaishnava and Sakta lyrics, though sung to music, could not in any sense take the place of pure theistic hymns, even if some may be interpreted that way, on the ground that they were originally meant for other purposes. It may be safely accepted that before Ram Mohun there were no theistic hymns in Bengali in the strict sense.

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 407. ² *R.M.R. and Modern India*, p. 19.

³ Collet, p. 139.

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The philosophical and theological words popularised in these hymns have proved to be important additions to the Bengali vocabulary. When all his productions are taken together, it will be found that he gave 'a permanent, literary expression'¹ to Indian theism as a whole, and added a new type of literature to his mother language.

Ram Mohun was about to begin a *Life of Muhammad*, on the same plan as that of the *Precepts of Jesus*, when grave anxiety was caused by a charge of embezzlement against his son. Had this work been produced it would have proved an important contribution to the religious evolution of India, but it was not so ordained by the fates and the proposed biography never saw the light. His son was, however, honourably acquitted in February, 1826, while the case against Ram Mohun, though of a different type, went on till 1833. The negligence of his son's employer, the Collector of Burdwan, and the envy of fellow-workers, were responsible for the legal proceedings. The young man had a good education—in fact, the best that his father could give him—and there was neither necessity nor likelihood of his doing things mean and heinous. The method employed by the reformer, as a practical educator, in training his children was exemplary. He never used any force; they were left free to grow in reason and conscience. Mr. Adam wrote:

He gave them a good education, by his personal demeanour secured a place in their esteem and affection, set them an example in his life and writings, and then left them to the influence of idolatrous associations on the one hand and to unfettered exercise of their reason on the other.²

It may be added here that his younger son, Rama

¹ Collet, p. 141.

² *Ibid.*, p. 120.

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Prasad, who became the first Indian Judge of the High Court of Bengal, led his elder brother, Radha Prasad, to abandon idolatry and superstition, in order to join their father before his death in his work of reformation and redemption.

IX

1827-1828

THE FOUNDATION OF THE BRAHMO SAMAJ

THE activity of the Unitarian Association was in the year 1827 renewed with increased vigour, like the last glow of a dying flame. Its religious services had been suspended for some time, owing to various reasons. In Adam's letters of February and October, 1826, it was said that Ram Mohun did not 'attend anywhere,' meaning that he did not join in Unitarian worship or the meeting of the Atmiya Sabha, which had ceased to operate and exist; though at the same time he made in his will a provision for Adam's family.¹ But by 1827 the reformer was free from the vexation of the law suits which ultimately vindicated his son's character, and he had consequently time to devote to the advancement of Unitarian worship. The *One Hundred Arguments for the Unitarian Faith*, reprinted in 1826 in the Calcutta Unitarian Press, from a copy sent out by the American Unitarian Association, indicated the reformer's unflagging zeal for Unitarianism. He liked it so much that it was published at his own expense, and at his own press, for free distribution.

Mr. Adam, as before, acted as the missionary of the society, and conducted his own journal, called the

¹ Collet, p. 125.

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Calcutta Chronicle. This periodical was, as already related, suppressed by the Government some time in 1827. Morning services were resumed in this year, on Sunday, the 3rd August. A room had to be rented for this purpose by the Unitarian Committee, in the office of the *Harkara* newspaper and library. Ram Mohun's son, Radha Prasad, had already offered a site for building a chapel and school near the Anglo-Hindu School. The cost was estimated to be from three to four thousand rupees, which Mr. Adam thought the reformer would be able to collect from his friends.¹ Before this the British Unitarians had sent about Rs. 15,000 to help the Indian work, and this money was set apart for the proposed building and other expenses. Miss Collet holds that this was Ram Mohun's second attempt to found a Unitarian Church² in Calcutta, but that it did not go far will be seen from the incidents of the following year. The fact was that the reformer tried to help every theistic effort or movement to go forward towards that Universal Theism, which was his own ideal.

An estimate of his religious faith of this time, and his connection with Unitarianism, is furnished by Adam, in two letters to Dr. Tuckerman, of Boston. One Mr. Tippin enquired through Dr. Tuckerman if Ram Mohun was really a Christian. Mr. Adam replied:

He is both a Christian and a Hindu—a Christian with Christians, and a Hindu with Hindus. And before you say I am contradicting myself, or that he is insincere in his religion, you must candidly weigh all the circumstances in which he is placed. . . . His relinquishment of idolatry is absolute, total, public and uncompromising; and while he employs caste,

¹ Adam's letter to Rev. J. W. Fox, 1 August, 1827.

² Collet, p. 126.

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property, influence, everything, to promote, not the nominal profession merely, but the enlightened belief and salutary influence of Christianity, his claim to be a practical, though not a nominal, Christian would seem to be undoubted. From this point of view Hinduism furnishes the antidote to his own inherent intolerance. . . . The profession of Christianity would identify him, in the opinion of the Hindus, . . . with the low, ignorant and depraved converts recently made by the English, or long since made by the Portuguese missionaries; and in the opinion of the Mussalmans, who hold him in high esteem, with the Trinitarians generally. In other words, the profession of Christianity would inevitably, in the present circumstances of the country, identify him with persons from whom he differs as widely as from those with whom he is now identified.¹

Again—

You . . . enquire whether Ram Mohun Roy is a Unitarian Christian, or only a theist. . . . He permits me to say that, failing the male heirs of his own body, of whom there are two, he has bequeathed the whole of his property to our mission, and, while he regrets the appearance of ostentation which this statement may bear, he leaves it to yourself to judge whether he would have been likely to do so if he did not sincerely embrace the Christian religion and ardently desire to extend its blessings to his countrymen.²

The complex mind of the reformer was thus a problem to his closest friends in India and abroad; and such confusion was not unnatural, since few could view things as he did from so comprehensive a standpoint. He looked at different faiths from the summit of his own Universalism; and so far as each had elements of truth he identified himself with it, and appeared accordingly, in turn, Hindu, Muhammadan and Christian. He himself said, just before leaving for England, to Nanda KISSORE

¹ Collet, p. 122.

² *Ibid.*

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Bose, the father of the late Rajnarayan Bose, the Brahmo leader, that after his death he would be claimed as Hindu, Muhammadan and Christian by the respective votaries of these religions.¹ Rajnarayan Bose says that 'the catholicity of Ram Mohun wore a triple aspect, that of Vedantism towards the Hindus, that of Unitarianism towards the Trinitarian Christians, and a still purer form towards the Muhammadans, in whose case he has not to contest with the doctrines of multiplicity and trinity. He cited the authority of the Vedas while writing against popular Hinduism, that of the Bible while disproving the doctrine of the Trinity, and that of the Koran in attacking the absurdities of Muhammadanism; but he was neither a Hindu nor a Muhammadan nor a Christian in his opinions.'² Yet it would probably be true to say that he got his moral inspiration from Christianity, his metaphysical background from Hinduism, and his theological tendency from Muhammadanism.³

It is not new in India for a synthetic genius to be so claimed, for Kabir is a standing example, known far and wide, though in a much smaller measure than Ram Mohun. But, as Miss Collet has remarked: 'His impartial attitude towards other faiths was not yet understood by his Unitarian allies.'⁴ No wonder that a mind of such calibre and penetration should be judged like this from the narrow grooves of particular religions, but the truth was that he rose to that sublime height from which he could easily pick out the 'universal' from the particular. In the estimate of Dr. Macnicol, he was the first Indian reformer who earnestly and seriously

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 614.

² *Defence of Brahmanism* (1863), p. 16.

³ See B. N. Seal, *Bangalore Lecture*, p. 10.

⁴ Collet, p. 125.

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betook himself to Christ's teaching,¹ followed by Keshab Chandra Sen, who brilliantly interpreted the claims of Christ in terms of Indian spiritual aspiration. Kabir, Chaitanya, Nanak and Ramananda were not touched by Western influence, but Ram Mohun was permeated with the ideal of pure worship in spirit and in truth, and by an altruistic 'urge,' which overleapt the boundaries of race and religion. He found elements of priceless truth in his analysis of the gospel of Jesus, and also in the neglected strata of Hindu thought, in fact, in all religions, more or less. In him Hinduism, Christianity and Muhammadanism met in an organic unity, in order to bring to birth an altogether new conception, that is the 'least common measure' of all religions, which culminated in the universal religion formulated by him for the Brahmo Samaj, and it has not been as yet surpassed, or even equalled, by any other human attempt.

Ram Mohun lived among the Hindus like a Hindu, even observing externally some harmless rules of the caste system, although he had no faith in it. His motive in following out these rules was to preserve unimpaired his own usefulness to the society which he wanted to serve and improve. In a letter to Dr. Tuckerman, dated 24th June, 1827, Mr. Adam gave a description of the reformer's policy in these matters of eating and drinking and family rites:

This is the only remnant of the rules of caste to which he still adheres, and even this remnant I have reason to know he frequently, but secretly, disregards. . . . Both in the marriages and deaths that happen within his domestic circle, he rigidly abstains in his own person from every approach to the idolatrous rites usually practised on such occasions, although

¹ Macnicol, *R.M.R.*, p. 30.

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he does not prohibit the other members of his family from engaging in them, if they think proper.¹

And later on, during the close of the last century, Rama Krishna Paramahansa followed a diametrically opposite line of thought, by advocating 'the greatest common measure of all religions' in an eclecticism of the greatest imaginable magnitude. Scientifically regarded, Ram Mohun's 'minimum' admits of no further reduction, and below it religion can scarcely be distinguished from individual opinion; while Rama Krishna's 'maximum' stretches up to the very edge of the vast indeterminate, effacing all differences. But in both cases religion is bounded by rational faith, living devotion and highly mystical experience.

Yet it was a well-known fact that Ram Mohun was against the tyranny and invidious distinctions brought about by the caste system. His whole doctrine of a universal religion was a movement to rise above these distinctions, and consequently to remove them. It allowed equal spiritual privileges and opportunities—the same type and quality of Brahma-knowledge—to everybody, and after this the rest was a natural corollary. Indeed, the very idea of caste was extremely distasteful to him, not only on spiritual grounds but also from consideration of its evil effects. 'He considered caste to be one of the gravest of many ills under which his country laboured.'² In one of his own letters he expressed his mind clearly and emphatically on this social question:

I agree with you, that in point of vices the Hindus are not worse than the generality of Christians in Europe and America; but I regret to say that the present system of religion adhered to by the Hindus is not well calculated to

¹ Collet, p. 123.

² *Ibid.*

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promote their political interest. The distinction of castes, introducing innumerable divisions and subdivisions among them, has entirely deprived them of patriotic feeling, and the multitude of religious rites and ceremonies and the laws of purification have totally disqualified them from undertaking any difficult enterprise. . . . It is, I think, necessary that some change should take place in their religion, at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort. I fully agree with you, that there is nothing so sublime as the precepts taught by Christ, and there is nothing equal to the simple doctrines He inculcated.¹

This conviction against caste on the part of the reformer was based on a prophetic vision of his nation's future. Caste is not simply a spiritual matter, as is demonstrated by Ram Mohun in his *Pursuit of Beatitude Independent of Brahmanical Observances*; its implications embraced political and social philosophy. He was the first Indian to point out its disintegrating tendencies, when viewed from the standard of modern national organisation and unity. He tried first of all to destroy its roots by means of the principle of a spiritual democracy, embodied in the Brahma Samaj, and founded on the best teachings of the greatest ancient seers of the nation itself. His effort to infuse Christian idealism into Hindu life and society was one of the strongest desires of his own life, not for the purpose of turning Hindus nominally into Christians but in order that life in general should conform to the highest known truth, wherever it may have expressed itself. And truth being one, it was only natural for him to look back to those golden times, when India was free from caste and idolatry and those ills of recent growth, which he wanted to counteract by means of a synthesis of Eastern and Western idealism.

¹ Letter of 23 January, 1828; see *R.M.R. and Modern India*, p. 13.

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The true reason for his keeping some vestige of caste in his own life is explained by J. Young, who was a friend of Jeremy Bentham, and was in India for some time. It is found in a letter of introduction from Mr. Young to the English philosopher, bearing the date 14th November, 1830—the year in which Ram Mohun sailed for England. In this letter Young says that

he [Ram Mohun] has externally maintained so much, and no more, of Hindu custom as his profound knowledge of their sacred books enabled him to justify, relaxing, however, little by little, yet never enough to justify his being outside the pale. I need not say that in private it is otherwise, and that prejudices of all sorts are duly condemned by our philosopher.¹

This means that the reformer stood for a steady, firm and continuous progress in this matter, being aware, as he was, of its hold on the people. His programme for his nation was essentially constructive, and there may have been in his mind a lurking suspicion of the danger of destructive forces being let loose all at once. But his own criticism of caste was in itself destructive enough in the realm of theory, apart from its practical effects.

His publication of a translation of an ancient Buddhist work in Sanskrit, *Bajra Suchi*, by Mrityunjayacharya, indicates Ram Mohun's keenness on the caste question. It was published by the reformer in 1827, with the original and its translation, which set forth the futility of the caste system. The object of printing a work of this character was evidently to prove that the attitude of the ancients was similar to that of the reform movement inaugurated by him. It gave him support from the past

¹ Collet, p. 124.

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as well as connection with it, and showed that his was not merely a destructive propaganda against the existing social organisation, or subversive of the accepted beliefs of the people, but was rather a revival of what had been lost in course of time.¹ Further, it illustrates anew Ram Mohun's readiness to borrow thoughts and arguments, and even books, from any religion—Muhammadan, Buddhist or Christian—if only thereby he might purify Hinduism.² Yet he was not a mere eclectic, for he was fired with the vision of the living and lasting unity of all truth—religious, political and social—and of the whole body of human knowledge which made it. He looked at everything from all points of view, and through all its ramifications; and this led him to examine and adopt what was suitable to the building up of an ideal society, as far as possible or even practicable.

In the same year (1827) he brought out his pamphlet on the *Gayatri*, the most ancient theistic formula of the Hindus, under the title of *Divine Worship by Means of Gyuttree*, in which the very essence of worship is laid down based on this hoary text. When translated it runs as follows:

Let us adore the supremacy of that divine Sun, the god-head, who illumines all, who recreates all, from whom all proceed, to whom all must return, whom we invoke to direct our understanding aright in our progress towards His holy seat.³

Some writers, including Dr. J. N. Farquhar,⁴ and Mr. Manilal Parekh, have considered Ram Mohun to have been a mere Deist, and nothing more. But it has been already seen that this estimate does not adequately

¹ See Parekh, *R.M.R.*, p. 136.

² Collet, p. 124.

³ *Works*, I, p. 122.

⁴ *Modern Religious Movements in India*, p. 29; Parekh, *R.M.R.*, p. 91.

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appraise Ram Mohun's real position, which seems to have been based upon his own abstract Vedantic philosophy. In 1828, he wrote a pamphlet, entitled *The answer to the question, Why do you frequent a Unitarian place of worship, instead of Established Churches?* It was on the line of the *Answer to Four Questions* of 1822, but was positive in its arguments and bears the mark of his growing dissatisfaction with polemics, and indicates the close of his polemical writings. A sentence in it shows, like one in the *Brahmanical Magazine*, that he was now mentally in a region far remote from that of religious and sectarian differences and distinctions. The negative side of the cross-questionings directed to him from time to time, made him say: 'I feel weary of the doctrine of God-Man and Man-God, frequently inculcated by Brahmans in pursuance of their corrupt traditions; and the same doctrine of Man-God, though preached by another body of priests, better dressed, better provided for, and eminently elevated by virtue of conquest, cannot effectually tend to excite my anxiety or curiosity to listen to it.'¹ In fact, priests, whether of the destitute Brahmanical or of the well-groomed Christian type, had little attraction for him; nor had the doctrines on which they lived. But his own criticism did not end with this assertion. He considered such doctrines to be, in his own words, 'ideas in the Western and Eastern heathen mythology,' and contended that there was a parallel between the divine appearance 'in the form of a parti-coloured kite' and 'on another occasion in the bodily shape of a dove.'² Such ideas tended, according to him, 'to bring the deity into ridicule under the shield of

¹ *Works*, I, p. 288.

² *Ibid.*

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religion.' Similarly, the doctrines of the Christian Trinity and of the Hindu Tri-Theism (which he called the 'Trinity') were both rejected by him. He said, 'The mind which rejects the latter as a production of fancy cannot be reasonably expected to adopt the former.'¹

His main reasons for attending Unitarian worship are given below:

Because the Unitarians reject polytheism and idolatry under any sophistical modification, and thereby discountenance all the evil consequences resulting from them. Because Unitarians profess and inculcate the doctrine of divine unity—a doctrine which I find firmly maintained both by the Christian scriptures and our most ancient writings, commonly called the Veds.²

Miss Collet observes that 'the *Answer* simply amounted to saying that in a Unitarian place of worship he heard nothing of incarnation, union of two natures, or the Trinity doctrines, which he regarded as only a variant of anthropomorphic and polytheistic mythology of popular Hinduism.'³ Moreover, he made no secret of this in the *Brahmanical Magazine*, which, after the three *Appeals*, sets forth his theological views on these matters. It is a wonder that notwithstanding such statements, scattered as they are all over his writings, efforts were still made to prove him a Christian, or a Hindu, according to the particular bias of the writer. Ram Mohun left no point undiscussed, in regard to which there could be the least doubt or misunderstanding, as to his estimate of both Hinduism and Christianity.

In the meantime a Unitarian service in English was begun in Calcutta, in the hope of increasing and strengthening the Unitarian Committee and its life and

¹ *Works*, I, p. 289.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Collet*, p. 127.

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work. This move, in August, 1827,¹ did not produce the desired result. In November of the same year an evening service on similar lines was tried, but proved a failure. Both were very indifferently attended, and had little practical support even from avowed Unitarians.² The evening attendance fell from 80 to almost nothing in a short time. The proposal to erect a chapel for regular service in the Bengali language similarly failed, as was bound to be the case, in the face of such lukewarm sympathy from those, who were supposed to be supporters of Unitarianism. There was a strong sentimental objection to the very idea of conducting services in Bengali instead of English. The vernacular was, unfortunately, considered unfit for 'respectable use,' and, in Adam's own words, their plea was that 'anything said or written in the Bengali tongue will be degraded and despised, in consequence of the medium through which it is conveyed.'³ Only classical languages, such as Sanskrit and Persian, could command respect in the eyes of the people, together with English, the language of the rulers. Yet the Brahmo Samaj services succeeded quickly, indeed almost at once; probably because of the tincture of Sanskrit scripture reading. This tendency on the part of the educated people, illustrated in a positive contempt for their own mother-tongue, revealed the significance of Ram Mohun's efforts to encourage the use of the spoken language, and to raise it to a literary status, which neither the 'panditic' adaptations nor the 'sahebi' translations of the Fort William College could give to it. It was in reality a landmark in the history of Bengali literature, which has found a new career opened

¹ Adam's letter to Dr. Tuckerman, of Boston, 30th November, 1827.

² Collet, p. 127. ³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

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before it, ever since the days of the great Indian reformer.

Mr. Adam was now forced to take to a different method of rallying round him the loose combination of Unitarians, which was gradually dwindling away. Its cohesiveness required strengthening and deepening by some means at this critical juncture. On the 30th December, 1827, he asked the Unitarian Committee to reorganise themselves into a more comprehensive body, by connecting their association with the Unitarians in England and America. His proposal was somewhat of an affiliation, 'intended to deepen the *esprit de corps*,'¹ and to bring about a closer unity among Unitarians all over the world. This 'more complete organisation,' to use Adam's own language, was to be called 'the British-Indian Unitarian Association.' It was probably under the auspices of this body that he started fresh lectures on the 'First Principles of Religion,' in order to make up for the lack of attendance at the regular services. This, too, did not fare well, though the discourses were given 'for the exclusive benefit of the natives . . . in the native part of the city,' i.e. in the Anglo-Hindu School of Ram Mohun.² He used to have only about twelve to twenty-five to hear him, and after some time scarcely even one. The reformer himself could never attend, because of pressure of multifarious duties. This sorry state of things discouraged Adam to such an extent, that he proposed that he should be sent to Madras on a missionary tour. Ram Mohun had to oppose this, because of the lack of available funds and the importance of Adam's presence in Calcutta, and this led the committee to refuse their sanction.

¹ Collet, p. 127. ² Letter to Tuckerman, 1st September, 1823.

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There was perhaps some suspicion, if not doubt, about the connection of Christianity with Unitarianism, or whether the name 'Christian' could go along with the word 'Unitarian,' and this may account for the next step taken by Mr. Adam in resuscitating his declining congregation. A separate group, described as 'Hindu Unitarians,' was being formed, to function with the Unitarian Association in an auxiliary capacity. Adam helped this group to grow and to act in its own way. Ram Mohun called himself a 'Hindu Unitarian' until the Brahmo Samaj was founded, and his followers also imitated his nomenclature.¹ In a letter dated 5th February, 1828, Adam wrote to J. Bowring, of London:

I am endeavouring to get the Hindu Unitarians in Calcutta to unite in forming an association auxiliary to the British Indian Association, and for the establishment of the public worship of One God among themselves. . . . To prevent prejudice from being excited, it will be necessary to keep Christianity out of view at present in connection with this auxiliary, but it will be (what perhaps it may not be nominally) an auxiliary to our views, and a highly valuable one too, if I can succeed in creating the necessary degree of interest to begin and carry it on.²

It was evidently Adam's last hope that this subsidiary body might revive the smouldering embers of Unitarianism in Calcutta, that the Hindu and Christian sides might ultimately coalesce, and that Christian principles might be introduced and prevail in the long run. But that the Hindu side became the more prominent in consequence of some lurking objection to, or natural lack of interest in, the Christian side, is beyond doubt.

¹ *History of the Brahmo Samaj*, I, p. 36.

² Letter to J. Bowring, London, 5th February, 1828.

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The Hindus, under Ram Mohun's leadership, were feeling their way forward, and developing a line of their own. The service for the Indians was consequently discontinued, as Adam reported in one of his letters to Dr. Tuckerman, dated 2nd April, 1822. He said:

Since then I have been using every endeavour in my power to induce Hindu Unitarians to unite among themselves for the promotion of our common objects, and I am not without hopes of succeeding, although I have a great deal of apathy to struggle against.¹

The common object spoken of is, of course, Unitarian worship, or the worship of one God, to which Adam wished to add something of Unitarian Christianity. But in about the middle of the year 1823 Adam found that there was nothing for him to do in Calcutta. His congregation did not come to the service, his lectures were unattended, he had no place in the Anglo-Hindu School, and no prospect ahead of working in any capacity in the city. Unitarianism had entered a blind alley, and he had only to face the failure courageously. He asked the Unitarian Committee to suggest some possible mode of service in which he could somehow engage himself, in return for the money received by him; for otherwise, he said, he saw no reason why he should draw his salary without any task assigned to him. But the committee was at a loss to find out any suitable opening for him, and Adam had to resign his post and retire, 'heart-broken.'

It has been suggested that Adam was 'balked by Ram Mohun's autocratic will,'² both in his connection with the Anglo-Hindu School, and in his endeavour to move to Madras. This is probably true, though it is to

¹ *Collec.*, p. 131.

² *Ibid.*, p. 123.

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be added that the reformer did not wilfully or maliciously thwart the efforts of his friend and convert. Obviously, the mind of the reformer was reaching out toward something profounder than the activities of Adam and the Unitarian Committee, and the smaller was eventually engulfed by the greater. He had seen that Unitarian Christianity did not suffice for his friends who breathed the Indian atmosphere of spiritual realisation. The burning passion for a god unlimited by human definitions, yet recognised by all, and the insatiable hunger for a religion comprehending all types of spiritual experience, could not be satisfied with Unitarianism alone, any more than with any other of the religions in the field. In the crucible of his mind, the three religions, Hinduism, Christianity and Muhammadanism, acted like chemical re-agents and yielded the tested resultant of universal religion.¹ He was pressed onwards by the growing demands of his mind, which was at this time surcharged with mighty spiritual explosives gained from long study and living experience, until presently the flash-point came through the influence of his friends. Like a pent-up volcano, he was waiting with throbbing expectation to give out the fire that was consuming him within—a fire that changed his country and his nation in innumerable ways for good, within about a score of years. He was not simply groping vaguely and unconsciously after something apart from Unitarianism or the Vedanta or Sufism—his treasure was the dearest and the most precious gift he had to make to the world; it was above and beneath them all, yet including them within itself, together with every kind of known faith.

¹ This simile was suggested by my friend, Mr. Asoke Chatterjee, in a conversation on the subject.

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On a memorable day the required psychological moment arrived, when Ram Mohun was returning from one of the Unitarian services which he attended, 'with his sons, distant relations and two disciples, Tarachand Chakravarty and Chandra Sekhar Deb.'¹ On the way, Tarachand and Chandra Sekhar said to the reformer, 'What is the need for us all of going to a foreign place of worship? We ought to establish a place of worship of our own.'² These two 'young disciples complained of the necessity of attending a Unitarian place of worship in the absence of one entirely suited to their views and principles. Ram Mohun took this complaint to heart.'³ Evidently this appeal immediately went home and produced the desired effect. The reformer, who was indeed waiting for such an incentive, at once consulted his friends Dwarka Nath Tagore and Kali Nath Munshi of Taki and others on the admirable proposal,⁴ which was just the germ of the Brahmo Samaj.⁵ A meeting was called by the reformer in his own house, in order to proceed with the matter in a systematic way and to discuss the pros and cons. Those who joined the meeting were Dwarka Nath Tagore, Kali Nath Munshi, Prasanna Kumar Tagore and Mathura Nath Mullick of Howrah. They promised to advance this great object by every means in their power. Chandra Sekhar Deb was charged with the duty of negotiating the purchase of a piece of land, on the south of Siva Narayan Sircar's house, in the 'Simla' area of Calcutta; but the place was not considered suitable, and it also involved the

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 303.

² *Little Stories about R.M.R.*, quoted by Collett and Chatterjee.

³ *History of the Brahmo Samaj*, p. 39.

⁴ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 303.

⁵ Collett, p. 129.

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immediate building of a house. So a house belonging to Kamal Lochan Basu, on the Chitpore Road, in the Jorasanko locality, was selected, and rented from the owner.¹ Here the meeting for worship was established, on the 20th August, 1828; and the great spiritual idea of the reformer found its embodiment. This little band of seekers after truth became on this day, as if by the touch of a magic wand, a regular community, breathing an independent life of its own, and having a corporate existence apart from the originator and founder.

The meeting for worship was held every Saturday evening, from 7.0 to 9.0 p.m. The elements of the service were, recital of the *Vedas*, reading of the *Upanishads*, a discourse on the Vedic texts which had been read or recited, and hymn singing. Two Telugu Brahmans recited portions of the *Vedas*, Mahamahopadhyaya Utsavananda Vidyabagish used to read from the *Upanishads*, Mahamahopadhyaya Ram Chandra Vidyabagish explained the Vedic texts by means of sermons, 'Kisto' and his brother 'Bistoo' sang hymns (mostly of the reformer's own composition), and a Muhammadan, 'Golam Abbas by name, accompanied with instrumental music.² Occasionally Muhammadan and Eurasian boys were brought to sing Persian and English hymns, and European visitors joined the services at times. Tarachand Chakravarty was its first secretary, but was succeeded some months after, and before Ram Mohun's embarkation, by Biswambhar Das, who, unlike his predecessor, was a non-Brahman.³

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 304.

² Adapted from Chatterjee's *R.M.R.*, (pp. 321, 729 f.) with additions from *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, and Maharshi D. N. Tagore's *Reminiscences in the Symposium* (p. 17 f.).

³ *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, Asrin, 1769 Sak. (See Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 321.)

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Many orthodox Hindus presented themselves at such meetings for worship.¹ Both Utsarananda Vidyavagish and Ram Chandra Vidyavagish were Ram Mohun's converts. The former had discussed Vaishnavite philosophy with the reformer before his conversion,² and the latter's case has already been described. Both men illustrate Ram Mohun's superb power of bending and conquering the best Brahmanical intellects of the day. The inaugural sermon, by Ram Chandra Vidyavagish, was on the spiritual worship of God, and was a fitting piece of philosophical exposition. 'His text, which was taken from various parts of the Hindu scriptures, read: "God is one only, without an equal, in whom abide all worlds and their inhabitants." Thus he who mentally perceives the Supreme Spirit in all creatures acquires perfect equanimity, and shall be absorbed into the highest essence, even unto the Almighty.'³ This sermon was translated into English by Tarachand Chakravarty, and was sent by the reformer to a friend, Capt. A. Froyer, with the remark that 'it exhibited the simplicity, comprehensiveness and tolerance which distinguish the religious belief and worship formerly adopted by one of the most ancient nations on earth, and still adhered to by the more enlightened portion of their posterity.'⁴

Miss Collet has observed that 'the share which Unitarianism had in the birth of the Brahmoo Samaj was distinctly maieutic, not maternal,' and that 'it was upon the ruins of the Unitarian Mission that the new Theistic Church was reared.'⁵ On a superficial view this statement does not seem to need any qualification, but the remark of Ram Mohun, just quoted above, when coo-

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 321.

² See author's article in *Prabasi*, September, 1929.

³ Collet, p. 133. ⁴ *Ibid.* ⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 129, 132.

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sidered together with the trend of his thought in his various writings, will surely reveal another side of his mind, which was always busy with creation and construction. Perhaps it will be more scientific to say that in the mind of Ram Mohun, Hinduism, Christianity and Muhammadanism stood in a catalytic relation to the Universal Theism, which he sought to enunciate. Eclecticism is not at all the character of the truth which he worked out. His was just the opposite process—a process that consisted in more than a mere juxtaposition and conglomeration of religious ideas from all directions. It was a synthetic analysis, going to the rock-bottom of religious experience itself; and its positive character, which depended on the evolution of religion as an organic process throughout the consciousness of humanity, was stamped by him with the mark and colour of individuality. What he gave to the world was the widest and the most universal conception of religion—a type of Theism free from any moorings in books and customs, personalities and traditions. An achievement of this kind is of the greatest value to the ever-advancing spirit of man. Theism, before Ram Mohun, was either the Monism of the Vedanta in the East or the Unitarianism of Christianity in the West, save the quality of universality. He placed Theism, on its own evidences, as natural and necessary to all religions, inasmuch as it was the greatest common denominator of them all, and was indeed their vital essence.

Mr. Chatterjee's remark, that the service in the Brahma Samaj was copied from the procedure of Unitarian worship, needs examination.¹ It is to be

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 314; cf. Farquhar, *Mod. Rel. Mov. in Ind.*, p. 37.

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remembered that Ram Mohun had opposed and shut out Christian doctrine in his Vedic school, and Christian influence in the Anglo-Hindu School, and had coined the term, 'Hindu Unitarian,' for himself and his friends. He was fully aware of the different orders of worship obtaining in different religions—Hindu, Muhammadan and Christian. In formulating a mode of worship he did not simply take up what he found in Unitarianism; because in Hinduism itself there was the quasi-religious procedure of *Hari-sabhas*, *Kirtans* and *Kathakathas*, and all these partially satisfied the communal instinct of congregational worship, if that is simply the feature alleged to have been borrowed from Unitarian Christianity. Again, text-reading, discoursing, hymn singing and *Sankalpa* (prayer) were elements of Hindu worship that could not have passed unobserved by him. There was also the *Chakra-sadhana*, which was practised in the Tantric group-culture in his time. It cannot, therefore, be said that he simply imitated Christian worship; knowing, as he did, the eight-fold *sadhana*, or spiritual exercise according to the *Yoga* system, and the Vaishnava methods of worship. The five elements of *udbodhana* (awakening), *aradhana* (adoration), *dhyana* (meditation), *prarthana* (prayer) and *upadesha* (sermon) are enough to illustrate the constructive side of spiritual worship which was evolved in the Brahmo method. That these purer forms were evoked partly by the presence and example of Christian worship is beyond doubt; but the development was in accordance with the principle of adaptation, and not of mere grafting. The idea that Hinduism had no congregational worship in its theory and practice, and so could not supply the reformer with any data, requires qualification, in view of the methods that are known to

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obtain among Buddhists, Vaishnavas and Saktas. Ram Mohun did not add (nor could Christianity have furnished) anything more than the ordinary text-reading, discoursing, hymn-singing, and meditating on the Supreme Spirit, as integral parts in a combined shape in the whole procedure. But these elements could also be found in ordinary *kathakatha* in rudimentary form, and they needed only spiritualisation and systematisation.

Mr. Adam considered that the establishment of the Brahmo Samaj was 'a step towards Christianity'¹; and he added: 'The friendly feeling which happily exists between Christian and Hindu Unitarians should be preserved.' A sum of Rs. 500 was consequently recommended by him as a grant from the Unitarian Committee. He also attended the Brahmo service at times, and showed the deepest and sincerest sympathy with the movement. Yet there were in it things that were not, and could not, be approved by him; for though he had given up Trinitarianism, he had not thereby risen at once to the Universal Theism which was Ram Mohun's objective. In writing to Dr. Tuckerman, on 22nd January, 1829, he stated clearly his objections to the Hindu character of the Brahmo service. A portion of his letter, bearing on the subject, is given below:

There has accordingly been formed a Hindu Association, the object of which is, however, strictly Hindu and not Christian, i.e. to teach and practice the worship of one God on the basis of the divine authority of the *Ved*, and not of the Christian Scriptures. This is a basis of which I have distinctly informed Ram Mohun and my other native friends that I cannot approve.²

Mr. Chatterjee says that Adam's eyes were now open-

¹ Collet, p. 131.

² *Ibid.*

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ed' as to the 'far-off aim of the reformer';¹ and though 'he and all his associations were spiritually begotten by Ram Mohun,' in the words of Miss Collet,² the difference noted in the letter already quoted is too radical to be easily overcome. Adam added, further, with reference to the call to all Unitarians—Christian and Hindu—to organise themselves, that

Ram Mohun supports this institution, not because he believes in the divine authority of the *Veds*, but solely as an instrument for overthrowing idolatry. . . . He employs Unitarian Christianity in the same way, as an instrument for spreading pure and just notions of God, without believing in the divine authority of the gospel.³

The Brahmo Samaj represented and embodied the truth which was rightly described by Adam to be 'pure and rational theism,' without the aid of faith in authority and revelation. This was far removed from the average religious thought of the world. In rational thought the reformer was much influenced by the Muta'zalas⁴ (Moslem Rationalists) and the Absolute Vedanta, as well as by Locke, Rousseau, Hume, and the Encyclopædists;⁵ yet he 'was above all and beneath all a religious personality,'⁶ with his Hindu spiritual nature deepened by the contact with Christianity and Muhammadanism. He used Unitarianism as a means to an end—a fact which was interpreted by the *John Bull* of Calcutta, dated 23rd August, 1828, in its report on the foundation of the Brahmo Samaj, as 'sliding from Unitarianism into pure Deism.'⁷ But the actual fact was that 'the foreign exotic' did not thrive on the Indian soil, and died a natural death.

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 308. ² Collett, p. 132. ³ *Ibid.*, p. 134.
⁴ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 545. ⁵ *Ibid.* ⁶ Collet, p. 134.

⁷ *Ibid.*

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Ram Mohun diagnosed early its weakness, caused by transplantation, while his own mind was rising gradually to the sublime conception of a Universal Religion quite different from mere syncretism. The Brahmo Samaj was the focus of the reformer's ideal, and he made it spread its long arms in many directions. Miss Collet has appropriately translated the name, 'The Society of God,' the social implications of the title being indeed inherent in the ideal itself. It was then mentioned in the deed of land transaction¹ of 1829 indifferently as 'the Brahmo Samaj,' which was corrupted later on into 'the Brahmo Sabha,' in imitation of 'the Dharma Sabha' of 1830. Compared with the 'Atmiya Sabha,' a private institution of 1815, it was a great achievement of a public nature, with the clear stamp of a permanent community; in short, an organic unity of the highest order, with a latent power that was to influence the whole continent of India in after years.

Speaking of these early theistic co-adjutors of the founder of the Brahmo Samaj, Dr. Macnicol has observed that 'they were building better than they knew, or perhaps better than we today can as yet realise. They were claiming an inheritance in India far wider than can even now be estimated.'² Ram Mohun's spiritual descendants, headed by Rajnarayan Bose, envisaged the great future of this new-born religion. For them it was a unique event in the world, destined to be the source and ideal of a universal faith calling humanity to a unity of belief and worship. 'The Adi Brahmo Samaj is the first theistic church established not only in India but in the world. . . . A time will come when theistic

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 305.

² Macnicol, *R.M.R.*, p. 17.

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churches will be established in all parts of the world, but the Adi Brahma Samaj must be considered the parent of them all.’¹ This declaration of Raj Narain Bose rang through the length and breadth of the country, especially through the hearts of those who were inspired by the teaching of the reformer and dreamed with him of a spiritually and socially regenerated India. In his *History of the Brahma Samaj*, Pundit Sivanath Sastry has portrayed the spiritual discovery in his own simple yet forceful style: ‘The sum total of the Raja’s teachings . . . seems to be that the doctrine of the one true God is the universal element in all religions, and as such forms an article of faith of the universal religion for mankind; but the practical applications of that universal religion are to be always local and national. As a herald of the new age . . . he held up before men a new faith, which was universal in its sympathies, but whose cardinal principle was that the “service of man is the service of God.”’²

Such free movement of thought on the part of Indians, tending away from any form of Christianity, aroused criticism in many quarters; amongst others, from the *John Bull* of Calcutta, which failed to understand what was really meant by the foundation of the Brahma Samaj. Ram Mohun had already lost a good number of European friends, owing to his agitation in favour of the liberty of the Press. He was essentially a great lover of freedom, and could not restrain himself from doing what he did, in all spheres of activity, whether religious, social or political. Col. Young, in a letter to Bentham,

¹ *The Adi Brahma Samaj as a Church*, Valmiki Press, Calcutta (1873), p. 25.

² *History of the Brahma Samaj*, p. 79.

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dated 30th September, 1828, portrayed Ram Mohun's position among the Indians and the Britishers of that age:

His whole time almost has been occupied for the last two years in defending himself and his son against a bitter and vindictive prosecution, which has been got up, against the latter nominally, but against himself and his abhorred free opinions in reality, by a conspiracy of his own bigoted countrymen, and encouraged, not to say instigated, by some of ours, influential and official men who cannot endure that a presumptuous 'black' should tread so closely upon the heels of the dominant 'white' class, or rather should pass them in the march of mind. . . . It is strange that such a man should be looked upon coldly, not to say disliked, by the mass of Europeans; for he is greatly attached to our regime. . . . Not only has he no equal here among his own countrymen, but he has none that at all approach to equality, even among the little 'sacred squadron' of disciples whom he is slowly and gradually gathering round himself, in despite of all obstacles.¹

Even in the midst of such cross-currents and under-currents against him and his reforming activities, Ram Mohun's iron nerves knew no discomfiture. The Unity of the Godhead and the Brotherhood of Man were passions with him, and he believed in them with all the warmth of his mighty heart. They were not mere intellectual conceptions, but convictions, on which he staked his all, including life itself. Whenever he had occasion to speak 'of his Universal Religion, he was so much moved that tears came out of his eyes.'² Hearing of a man who had from a theist turned atheist, he rejoined humorously: 'And later he will become a beast.'³ This vein of humour was characteristic of him, and he could tolerate all types of men. One of his most intimate friends,

¹ Collet, p. 140.

² N. N. Chatterjee's Letter of 2nd January, 1883.

³ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 515.

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Prasanna Kumar Tagore, was practically a sceptic, but was at the same time closely attached to him and the Brahma Samaj. He was called by the reformer 'a rustic philosopher,' in a loving and good-humoured fashion. Being thoroughly acquainted with the writings of Rousseau and Hume, he knew how strong was their influence on his friend; and so the master would banter and condemn, without alienating, an unbelieving disciple.¹ These traits of his character attracted men, and the Brahma Samaj soon drew within its fold a large number of members, and a large sum of money to its fund. It went on increasing by rapid strides, and became a force in the national life of Bengal. The intimate friendship and inspiring confidence of Ram Mohun formed the cementing principle of the group, which, like the thin end of a wedge, successfully cut into the heart of Hindu society. This progress was in striking contrast to the utter failure of the Unitarian Association.

The reformer was much attached to his disciples; and they in their turn fully reciprocated his love. They respectfully called him *dezari*, according to the title used by Mr. Digby—for he was not given the title of 'Raja' as yet—and he affectionately called them *beradar*, a Persian word from the same root as 'brother.'² Everybody was addressed as 'brother' by him, as they came to be attracted to him. He constantly advised his disciples and helped them to go forward, demanding the strictest discipline from them in every respect. But he was at times reminded of his own advice by his intimate friends and followers. One example of this is well-known. Tarachand Chakravarty once noticed that he

¹ Collet, p. 135.

² Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 507.



TARA CHAND CHAKRAVARTY
First Secretary of the Brahma Samaj, 1828.

By courtesy of Messrs. S. K. Lahiri & Co., Calcutta.

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gave rather too much time to brushing his hair, which was rather long, and dressing it in the usual Muhammadan fashion. At once he quoted to Ram Mohun a line of his own famous song: 'How long will you with care see your own face in the mirror?'—with the caustic enquiry, if this was meant for other people only and not for the composer himself! The reformer, with his transparent frankness, admitted the force of the observation, and rejoined, 'Ah! brother, you are quite right!'¹

Ram Mohun's dress was thoroughly Muhammadan, as that used to be the fashion in his days. It consisted of a twisted turban, with a long *choga* and trousers; and he insisted that all should come in this dress to divine worship. His opinion was that good and clean dress ought to be used in 'God's Darbar,' i.e. in a meeting where God is present. A member of the Brahma Samaj was once warned through another, because he had attended the service in ordinary Bengali clothes, *dhuti* and *chaddar*. It was an essentially Islamic idea that the reformer tried to introduce; but it did not last long. Personally he himself kept to it throughout his life, as is seen in his popular portrait. It had its undoubted utility, from the standpoint of formality. His æsthetic taste was evident in matters of clothes, for he never liked to see anyone shabby or careless. He walked to the services, as a sign of humility before God; but returned in his own carriage. His daily life was accurately punctual in minute details, as all strenuous lives are bound to be. He was a very early riser, and always regular in his constitutional walks. In the Indian way, he used to get himself oiled and shampooed before his

¹ Collet, p. 135.

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bath every morning, by two strong servants, while he read the Sanskrit grammar, *Mugdhobodha*, in parts, day after day. After this he had his bath, and breakfast of rice, fish and milk, and then took nothing till his evening meal. He worked till 2 p.m., and then went out visiting friends. His meal in the evening, at about eight, used to be in English fashion, with Muhammadan dishes.¹

Another account, from Ram Mohun's own servant, Ram Hari Das, gives a fuller picture of the ways and habits of the reformer, probably in his later life at home. It is reproduced here verbatim:

He used to rise very early, about 4 a.m., to take coffee, and then to have his morning walk, accompanied by a few persons. He would generally return home before sunrise, and, when engaged in morning duties, Gokul Das Napit would read to him newspapers of the day. Tea would follow; gymnastics; after resting a little he would attend to correspondence; then have his daily bath, breakfast at 10 a.m.; hearing newspapers read; an hour's siesta on the bare top of a table; getting up, he would pass his time either in conversation or in making visits. Tiffin at 3 p.m.; dessert at 5 p.m.; evening walk; supper at 10 p.m. He would sit up to midnight conversing with friends. He would then retire to bed, again eating his favourite cake, which he called *halila*. When engaged in writing he would be alone.²

But, above all, he was a truly pious man. His cook, who knew him long, and accompanied him to England, bore eloquent testimony to his 'punctual piety'; and 'the worship of God was Ram Mohun's first daily work.'³ His religion made him a man of thoroughly democratic ideas, as may be illustrated by an incident in his later

¹ See Collet, p. 137; Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 727.

² Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 728; Collet, p. 138. ³ Collet, p. 138.

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life. While walking one morning in Bowbazar, the central Calcutta of those days, he saw a vegetable-seller, just like those occasionally to be found even now in that quarter, looking for someone to help him with his load, so that it might be placed on his head to be carried to its destination. No man was low in Ram Mohun's eyes, and without the least hesitation, and with a natural grace, dressed as he was in nice clothing, he advanced and lifted the basket to the head of the man. There were many men taking their morning walk—but how many would have revealed the inward man through such a simple act of kindness?—an act such as Wordsworth speaks of:

. . . that best portion of a good man's life,
His little nameless unremembered acts
Of kindness and love.¹

¹ *Tintern Abbey.*

X

1829-1830

ABOLITION OF SATI; UNIVERSAL RELIGION; DEPARTURE FOR ENGLAND

LORD AMHERST left India in March, 1828, and Lord William Bentinck came as Governor-General. Amherst's 'otiose optimism' in spite of the sudden increase of sati (from 577 to 639 cases) in 1825, was a fact which did not escape the practical vision of Bentinck, whose name is immortalised by the abolition of the wicked custom. It was not in the nature of Amherst to take prohibitory action, though it had been recommended individually by Judges Smith and Rose, of the Calcutta Nizamat Court, in November, 1826; but by 1829 all the judges were unanimous, as well as most of the officers in the country, as to the necessity of putting a stop to the barbarous practice. Resident Britishers were no less anxious to see it somehow discontinued, now that Indian opinion had undergone considerable modification through Ram Mohun's agitation. The matter was consequently left to Bentinck to deal with in his characteristically practical way.

The new Governor-General first made enquiries regarding the attitude of the military to the question. He wanted the sympathy and support of the Indian Army in his action, knowing that it might rouse great

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and extensive opposition in the country. He was satisfied that the sepoy, who fought for the British, had no strong feelings over the continuance of the rite, and that the army officers were mostly in favour of its contemplated suppression. But Indian opinion in general could not be easily and properly gauged, for the simple reason that such an attempt involved a knowledge of the feelings and disposition of the people at large, which were difficult to estimate, though it must be remembered that Ram Mohun's efforts had cleared the ground a good deal since 1815, especially among the educated classes. Ram Mohun had now a strong and influential following of educated men, who acted from their convictions and were ready to face opposition.

Ram Kamal Sen, the grandfather of Keshab Chandra Sen and Rashomaya Dutt (afterwards a judge of the Small Cause Court), showed that courage which was necessary on the part of real well-wishers of reformation. At a farewell meeting arranged purely by Indians for the first time, in honour of Lord Hastings, a resolution was stopped by these two young men, for it praised the Governor-General for allowing widow-burning. The meeting was going to be wrecked in Hastings' presence, and hence the last words of the resolution were changed into 'non-interference with Hindu rites.'¹ An incident like this testifies to the reformer's powerful influence on his countrymen.²

Bentinck naturally fixed his eyes on the great champion of Indian womanhood, whose name was now so widely known and honoured, and who combined in himself the

¹ *The Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward*, p. 271; *Heber's Journal*, p. 131 (selections).

² *Suttee*, p. 70.

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best in both Eastern and Western civilisations. So the reformer was sent for by the Governor-General; but Lord Bentinck was not till then aware of the steel elements in the make-up of this man of so kindly a disposition. What the Sanskrit poet has said was true of Ram Mohun: 'His heart was softer than a flower, but at the same time harder than the thunderbolt.'¹ The incident was narrated by Dr. Macdonald, of the Calcutta Presbyterian Mission, in his lecture on Raja Ram Mohun Roy, in 1879:

Lord William Bentinck, the Governor-General, on hearing that he would very likely receive considerable help from the Raja in suppressing the pernicious custom of widow-burning, sent one of his aides-de-camp to him, expressing his desire to see him. To this the Raja replied, 'I have now given up all worldly avocations, and am engaged in religious culture and in the investigation of truth. Kindly express my humble respects to the Governor-General, and inform him that I have no inclination to appear before his august presence, and therefore I hope that he will kindly pardon me.' These words the aide-de-camp conveyed to the Viceroy, who enquired, 'What did you say to Ram Mohun Roy?' The aide-de-camp replied, 'I told him that Lord William Bentinck, the Governor-General, would be pleased to see him.' The Governor-General answered, 'Go back, and tell him again that Mr. William Bentinck will be highly obliged to him if he will kindly see him once.' This the aide-de-camp did, and Ram Mohun Roy could no longer refuse the urgent and polite request of his lordship.²

It was a happy occasion when both these magnanimous men met, on the common ground of their magnanimity. How appropriate to this episode are the lines of Kipling! 'There is neither East nor West. . . . When two strong

¹ Bhavabhuti, *Uttara Ramo Charita*.

² Lecture on Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Calcutta, 1879.

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men stand face to face.' The unpopularity of the reformer among the English residents in India was largely counter-balanced by the human attitude of Bentinck. The reformer's first refusal to see the Governor-General was doubtless due to the widespread antagonism of the British community to his reforming activities and to the Indian movement for freedom in general. His appeals against the Press Act had particularly brought him into conflict with them and their nascent imperialism, and this was increased by his open *Letter on Education*. A tinge of disappointment had thus been produced in Ram Mohun, who, though never daunted by failures, was probably embittered by the unsympathetic official attitude of the British. Miss Collet traces the refusal to Ram Mohun's aversion to all showy court functions,¹ which were childish in his 'spiritual' eyes. But the cause was certainly deeper; yet when Bentinck approached him as a man, he accepted him as 'a man for a' that'; for 'deep called unto deep' in both men. The *India Gazette* of 27th July, 1829, gave an official version of the incident, which is almost beyond recognition. It is as follows:

An eminent native philanthropist, who has long taken the lead of his countrymen on this great question, has been encouraged to submit his views of it in a written form, and has been subsequently honoured with an audience by the Governor-General, who, we learn, has expressed his anxious desire to put an end to a custom constituting so foul a blot.²

The *Gazette* went on to advise that the Government could choose between three alternatives in dealing with sati, viz. (1) strict application of existing regulations,

¹ Collet, p. 146.

² *Ibid.*, p. 146.

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(2) suppression in Bengal and Behar, or (3) total abolition in the provinces.

The result of the meeting between Bentinck and Ram Mohun is recorded in the Governor-General's Minute of 8th November, 1829. The reformer was always cautious, like a consummate statesman, in everything he said or did; and this quality is revealed in his advice to Lord William Bentinck. He pointed out the possibility of popular excitement if drastic measures were suddenly introduced. This was also feared by Mr. Horace Wilson, the Sanskrit scholar; and Bentinck's Minute could not but take this danger into account:

I must acknowledge that a similar opinion, as to the probable excitation of a deep distrust of our future intentions, was mentioned to me in conversation by that enlightened native, Ram Mohun Roy, a warm advocate for the abolition of sati and all other superstitions and corruptions engrafted on the Hindu religion, which he considers originally to have been a pure deism. It was his opinion that the practice might be suppressed quietly and unobservedly, by increasing the difficulties and by the indirect agency of the police. He apprehended that any public enactment would give rise to public apprehension, and the reasoning would be: 'While the English were contending for power they deemed it politic to allow universal toleration and to respect our religion,' but, having obtained the supremacy, their first act is a violation of their profession, and the next will probably be, like the Muhammadan conquerors, to force upon us their own religion.¹

Miss Collet thinks that this cautious advice was due to Ram Mohun's 'constitutional aversion to coercion.'² This estimate is quite true; but another side of the truth lies in the fact that the reformer's method went deeper,

¹ Collet, p. 147.

² *Ibid.*

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because he tried to remove the cause. He wanted to eradicate the evil, (a policy which many critics have failed to realise),¹ and not simply to stop it. It was also noticed that the lower provinces showed more cases of sati than the upper, Calcutta alone accounting for 287 out of 464 cases in the year 1828. Yet the lower provinces were more submissive and less sturdy, and 'insurrection or hostile opposition,' according to the reformer, would be almost unimaginable in this field, unlike the upper provinces, where danger was probable to a certain extent. 'But as the faculty of resistance had all but died out of the chief practicers of sati, apprehensions and suspicions might be safely disregarded.'² This hint was, of course, enough for a strong man of action of Bentinck's type; and on 4th December, 1829, he did away with sati altogether, by passing the Anti-Sati Regulation, which declared the rite illegal, and consequently criminal, and punishable as an offence against law. Its preamble showed distinct traces of Ram Mohun's influence, and ideas, and even language, drawn from his writings on sati. The following lines bear unmistakable resemblance to passages in Ram Mohun's two *Conferences on Sati*, and were evidently taken out of them:

The practice of sati, or of burning and burying alive the widows of Hindus, is revolting to the feelings of human nature; it is nowhere enjoined by the religion of the Hindus as an imperative duty; on the contrary, a life of purity and retirement on the part of the widows is more specially and preferably inculcated. . . . It is notorious that in many instances acts of atrocity have been perpetrated which have been shocking to the Hindus themselves, and in their eyes unlawful and wicked; . . . and the Governor-General in Council is deeply impressed with the conviction that the

¹ *E.g.*, E. Thompson, *Suttee*, p. 78.

² *Ibid.*, p. 148.

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abuses in question cannot be effectively put an end to without abolishing the practice altogether.¹

These phrases, ideas and arguments leave no doubt that Bentinck had been fully convinced by Ram Mohun and had read the reformer's works carefully. Dr. Thompson's conclusion has failed adequately to appraise the reformer's share in this decision.² Miss Collet considers that, 'but for the researches and agitation carried on by Ram Mohun, it is a question whether this preamble could have been written at all.'³ At least, it is certain that the authority of Hindu sacred law, quoted by Bentinck, would have had no influence upon the people, had not the ground been thoroughly prepared by the reformer, and the truth driven home by his writings in books and newspapers and through his speeches and conversations.⁴ After all, Lord Hastings' delay had not been in vain. The fight had to be fought for long before any effect could be produced on the Indian mind of the time, so as to make the suppression and abolition possible and safe. Both the stalwart champions deserve the everlasting gratitude of the nation for their bold stand and strong action. And indeed, as Akshay Kumar Dutt observes, 'There ought to have been by now a statue of Ram Mohun beside that of Bentinck on the Calcutta *maidan*.'⁵ Under their lead an evil more obnoxious than the slave trade was removed from India, three years before slavery was finally abolished in

¹ Thompson, *Sattie*, p. 149. N.B.—Widows met their fate in conformity with the practices of burning or burying the dead of the families (Sakta or Vaishnava) they belonged to.

² *Sattie*, p. 77. Also see Bentinck's reply to the address of 16th January, 1830 (Natesan, *R.M.R.*, p. 10).

³ *Ibid.* ⁴ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, pp. 340, 363.

⁵ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 523.

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England through the labours of Wilberforce and Buxton.

Just before the abolition of sati by the Government, Ram Mohun had to tackle another problem, which was essentially political in character, involving the rights of Indians as a nation. This was in connection with the Jury Act, which came within sight in 1827. Like the increase of sati in 1825, it was an indication of the political atmosphere of the country. It was Mr. Wynn, the late president of the Board of Control, who did this signal disservice to India; for the infamous Act—called 'famous' by Ram Mohun—was of his making. He was one of those who thought, in comfortable self-complacency, that Indians could be moulded in any fashion by the ruling authorities. Ram Mohun saw the mischief caused by unnecessary discrimination between the followers of different religions, on which the Act was based, and forthwith took steps to counteract it by means of agitation in England, through English friends and well-wishers. He wrote to Mr. J. Crawford, and sent him petitions against the Act, signed by Hindus and Muhammadans, to be submitted before both Houses of Parliament. There was nothing to be done except to oppose this measure at its source, as it threatened to take away the equal rights of non-Christians in matters of trial by jury. The reformer's letter, which is quoted at length by his English biographer, is reproduced below:

In his famous Jury Bill, Mr. Wynn, the late president of the Board of Control, has, by introducing religious distinctions into the judicial system of this country, not only afforded just grounds for dissatisfaction among the natives in general, but has excited much alarm in the breast of everyone conversant with political principles. Any natives, whether Hindu or Muhammadan, are rendered by this Bill subject to

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judicial trial by Christians, either European or Native, while Christians, including native converts, are exempted from the degradation of being tried either by a Hindu or Mussalman juror, however high he may stand in the estimation of society. This Bill also denies, both to the Hindus and Mussalmans, the honour of a seat in the Grand Jury, even in the trial of fellow Hindus and Mussalmans. This is the sum total of Mr. Wynn's late Jury Bill, of which we bitterly complain.¹

The Bill expressed a claim to permanent racial superiority, which no self-respecting Indian would admit; and indeed the Bill was founded on no sound political principle. The reformer's political philosophy was surely sounder than that of such British legislators as Mr. Wynn, who evidently depended rather on party favours than on an appeal to the nobler elements in human nature. Ram Mohun not only held broad views on questions of immediate public and national importance, but his vision penetrated also the distant future, even to an extent which does not seem even yet to have been attained by the majority of modern politicians in India. Today, after over a century, the Indian nation seems to be just beginning to realise that the great reformer was not simply a visionary with chimerical notions. An extract is given below, from the same letter of Ram Mohun, already under quotation, illustrating his forward-looking politics:

Supposing that some hundred years hence the native character becomes elevated, from constant intercourse with Europeans and the acquirements of general and political knowledge, as well as of modern arts and sciences, is it possible that they will not have the spirit, as well as the inclination, to resist effectively unjust and oppressive measures serving to degrade them in the scale of society? It should

¹ Collet, p. 153.

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not be lost sight of that the position of India is very different from that of Ireland, to any quarter of which an English fleet may suddenly convey a body of troops that may force its way in the requisite direction, and succeed in suppressing every effort of a refractory spirit. Were India to share one-fourth of the knowledge and energy of that country, she should prove, from her remote situation, her riches and her vast population, either useful and profitable as a willing province, an ally of the British Empire, or troublesome and annoying as a determined enemy.¹

Mr. Ramananda Chatterjee has remarked that 'the letter cited above is remarkable for its far-sighted glance into the future. Herein is to be found the germ of those national aspirations which are now breaking forth into demands for a greater measure of self-government than the people now enjoy.'² 'Here, again, Ram Mohun stands forth as the tribune and prophet of the new India.'³ But, above all, Ram Mohun's words, like those of Burke, resting on similar reasoning under a different context, are a prophetic warning to all who rely only on the security of the sword and brute force, that some day the cords of restraint may break if in their intoxication of power they forget to be human.

The reformer explained the situation further in course of his letter, and it is interesting to find that no less a man than Lord Shaftesbury, the philanthropist, who, as a commissioner of the Board of Control, directed the attention of the Government to the position in question on 5th June, 1829, 'acknowledged the advantages which had been derived from admitting the natives of India to take part in the administration of justice.'⁴

¹ Collet, p. 154.

² Collet, p. 155.

³ *R.M.R. and Modern India*, p. 30.

⁴ *Ibid.*

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Ram Mohun's partiality to British rule was due to his sincere belief that the national welfare would be promoted in the future by the British connection; but this did not imply that the people should always put up with things done against their wishes. His letter says in closing:

In common with those who seem partial to the British rule, from the expectation of future benefits arising out of the connection, I necessarily feel extremely grieved in often witnessing Acts and Regulations passed by Government without consulting or seeming to understand the feelings of its Indian subjects.¹

The political principles referred to by the reformer are laid down here as involving a government in which the popular voice is well-represented, and therefore respected. Ram Mohun here supplied the key-note for such later national watchwords as 'India for the Indians,' 'Home Rule for India,' and 'Representation of India in the Imperial Parliament.'² And indeed it was so, for his political philosophy was a part of his spiritual message of the freedom of the human soul. His criticism of the Company's rule disclosed in detail this attitude of his powerful mind in the closing days of his life.

In 1829 there was a public meeting in Calcutta, in which Ram Mohun had to play an important part, that showed another side of his political thought in relation to economic principles. It was called in the Town Hall on 15th December, exactly ten days after the passing of the Anti-Sati Act, to consider the question of the settlement of Europeans in India. The immediate cause was the outcry against the indigo-planters, who soon afterwards became notorious in Bengal. The reformer,

¹ Collet, p. 154.

² *Ibid.*, p. 165.

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however, supported the planters, for economic reasons which were quite sound at the time, and favoured such European trading settlements in India. He believed that these would improve the condition of the ryots and the labouring classes by means of the inflow of foreign capital and the introduction of scientific improvements; and he was right. Ram Mohun had no hesitation on this point; although later on, partly perhaps with the degeneration of character due to the Indian climate, the planters spoiled their own case, in the famous days of Dinabandhu Mitra and his *Nildarpan*. Even in his own day, Ram Mohun had to condemn not only the zemindars and banians for their unprincipled actions, but also the planters for their 'hasty disposition and want of discretion,' which made them 'obnoxious'; but he added, like a true statesman and political thinker, that 'no general good can be effected without some partial evil.'¹ He pointed out how a little compromise could be made of real service in this business, in this reminding one partly of another modern statesman of high principles, John Morley. The condition of the masses was his actual concern, but political idealism was his ultimate motive. His nationalism was not of the narrow type, which could not see the good elements in the European connection. While he boldly stood for the interests of the down-trodden working classes, he courageously advocated for their welfare the necessary presence—even if it was a necessary evil—of those 'aspersed Europeans,' as he called them in his speech, whose presence benefited the people in their poverty-stricken condition. On another occasion he defended the rights of the well-

¹ *Works*, II, p. 343.—'There may be some partial injury done by the planters.'

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to-do classes on well established legal grounds; but here he defended the labourers against the landed proprietors, in order that the nation's equipoise might be preserved. His views may be summed up thus:

The indigo planters have done more essential good to the natives of Bengal than any other class of persons. . . . From personal experience I am impressed with the conviction that the greater our intercourse with European gentlemen, the greater will be our improvement in literary, social and political affairs.¹

This same year witnessed two other events of great significance, which are vitally connected with the life of the reformer and the history of his time, and were among the most notable incidents in a career of many-sided activity. The one was the bestowal upon him of the title of 'Raja,' by which he is commonly designated even today, and the other the publication of his treatise on *Universal Religion*.

His decoration with the title of 'Raja' was not of his own seeking. He was making at this time preparations for his departure for England, which he had long wished to visit, but had been prevented by business and necessity. The Emperor of Delhi, who was now entirely in the hands of the English, having heard of his intention to go to England, as well as of his fame, wanted to use Ram Mohun's influence in his own favour. The emperor considered that he was not receiving a sufficient allowance from the East India Company, and desired his case to be represented before the authorities in England. Consequently, he appointed Ram Mohun as his envoy to the British King. One, Dabir-ud-daula, was sent to the reformer to settle the arrangement,² and in

¹ *Works*, II, p. 343.

² *R.M.R.'s Mission to England*, p. 2.

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August, 1829, the title of 'Raja' was conferred on him by the emperor. Ram Mohun selected Mr. Montgomery Martin as his assistant, in carrying out this particular task of pleading the emperor's case. Martin was the editor of an English paper, the *Bengal Herald*, which came into the possession of three Bengali leaders in 1829—Dwarkanath Tagore, N. R. Haldar and Ram Mohun Roy. But it came to an end in the same year, owing to a libel suit brought against it by a Calcutta attorney. Ram Mohun courageously pleaded guilty in this case, in conformity with his straightforward nature.

The booklet on *Universal Religion*, which saw the light now, gave to the world the reformer's spiritual ideal as embodied in the Brahma Samaj. After expounding the principles of a scientific study of comparative religion, it proceeded to lay down the basis of a common religion for all mankind. It maintained that all religions have a common spiritual and moral content, more or less, and that the pure essence can always be separated from the dross, which is carried down with the stream of thought.

Historically, *Universal Religion* is vitally connected with two other works of the reformer, *The Pursuit of Final Beatitude Independent of Brahmanical Observances* and *Different Modes of Worship*. It really stands between these two, maintaining that universality is secured by freeing religion from particular contexts and from the scaffoldings of traditions, customs and rites, and then deepened and realised by internal and external culture in relation to the individual soul and other fellow-beings. A different estimate of the trend of Ram Mohun's teachings will be found in the writings of Dr. Farquhar and Mr. Parekh; but the present writer's estimate is based upon this central element in Ram Mohun's

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philosophy.¹ The idea of a Universal Religion is one of the most distinctive characteristics of the modern age; though even yet it is not fully appreciated, except by a few highly-intellectual individuals. Indeed it holds a place in the domain of theology, as important as that of Newton's 'law of gravitation' in physical science, or Kant's 'intuition of time and space' in philosophy. The principle on which the reformer worked out his thesis is made clear in the following lines:

To this worship no one can be opposed on sufficient grounds, for as we all worship the Supreme Being, adoring him as the Author and Governor of the Universe, it is impossible for anyone to object to such worship; because each person considers the object whom he worships as the Author and Governor of the Universe; therefore in accordance with his own faith he must acknowledge that this worship is his own. . . . And in China, in Tartary, in Europe, where so many sects exist, all believe the object whom they adore to be the Author and Governor of the Universe; consequently they must also acknowledge, according to their own faith, that this our worship is their own.²

On this passage Miss Collet remarks: 'The infinitely diverse religions of the world will scarcely yield as their common denominator a theism so pure and lofty as Ram Mohun's universal religion. This is a bold statement to make in the face of the facts of fetichism and kindred cults'³—and, let it be added, the strong dogmatic exclusiveness of Christianity and Brahmanism. Yet truly it is here that Ram Mohun figures, in the words of Dr. Macnicol, as 'India's Columbus in the discovery of a new continent of truth.'⁴ Pandit Siva

¹ See Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, pp. 37 ff.; Parekh, *R.M.R.*, pp. 91, 136.

² *Works*, I, p. 190 f. ³ Collet, p. 158.

⁴ Macnicol, *R.M.R.*, p. 29.

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Nath Sastri complains that it was not an adequately 'constructive theism.'¹ True, it was not drawn out at length, but all first principles are of this character. It is 'Euclidian' in its constructive simplicity, with infinite potentiality. Sir B. N. Seal has indicated its real nature when he says that 'Ram Mohun's universalism in religion passed on to a historic synthesis.'² But besides this, Ram Mohun perceived an evolution of religious consciousness, leading on to the time when all religions would meet together in practical worship, by gradually casting off their old trappings. This was his ideal of the Brahmo Samaj, or Society of God.

As Ram Mohun was busy proclaiming the principle of universal religion, another type of fermentation was going on in the public mind, in this very period when sati was done away with by a stroke of Bentinck's pen. It indicates how the leaven of liberal thought, implanted by the reformer, was working in a different field. The Hindu College at this time became the centre of the most heterodox and radical principles, under the influence of the famous Derozio, one of its teachers, who imbibed the maxims of the French Revolution and preached them quite freely. The Hindu community of Calcutta was, as it were, sandwiched between the two currents of liberal thought—the older, well sustained and spiritual, springing from Ram Mohun, and the new, erratic and atheistic, from Derozio. There was no direct connection between the two, but the young teacher certainly looked up to the great sponsor of the college and the hero of hundred battles, who was still in the field. Beginning with the years 1821 up to 1831, says Pandit Siva Nath

¹ *History of the Brahmo Samaj*, I, p. 75.

² Bangalore Lecture, p. 10.

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Sastri,¹ constant warnings were given to this young enthusiast, but to no purpose, until he was removed from his post. The students and teachers, young and old, caught the spirit of the new thought and carried it far and wide, in spite of opposition. The foundation which had been laid by Ram Mohun for fostering and propagating freedom of the spirit paved the way for an agitation of dangerous import among the rising generation. Its excesses were not in consonance with the time and circumstances, but its ideal of freedom had a worthy protagonist in the Ram Mohun of 1817. Consternation in society was the logical result, for it flouted everything religious, Hindu or Christian, and was atheistical in its tendency. Derozio had been thrown off his balance by his study of the Encyclopædists, while the stable and deep intellect of Ram Mohun only used their rationalism for his own purpose. A year after Ram Mohun brought in Duff, who was the right person to counteract the influences of the Hindu College.

Turning back now to the sati controversy, it is found that what happened in the wake of the abolition of sati may be easily summarised from the newspapers of the time. The orthodox Hindu community was not prepared to let it go without remonstrance, and their organ, the *Samachara Chandrika*, raised a great outcry over it. According to the *India Gazette* of November of that year, a petition against it was prepared with great haste. Ram Mohun's paper, the *Sambad Kaumudi*, which had already wielded its strong pen against sati, supported the action of the Government, and was followed by another liberal paper, the *Banga Dut*. The *Asiatic Journal*² considered that the authori-

¹ *History of the Brahmo Samaj*, I, p. 8.

² *Collet*, p. 150.

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ties had taken action after proper consideration and sure conviction, and when it asserted that the majority of Indian opinion was solidly against the practice, it was, in fact, attesting to the effectiveness of the journalistic activities of the reformer during the past years, in creating a public sentiment against the inhuman character of the rite—a sentiment which was really based on the best findings of Hindu law itself. Ram Mohun was highly praised by the *India Gazette*, just five months before the anti-sati enactment, for his efforts in this direction, and his services were fully and gratefully acknowledged.¹

The *India Gazette* expected that the liberal papers would be able to set right the misconceptions prevalent among the less educated sections of the community. But such a change was not so easy. On the 14th January, 1830, the orthodox leaders drew up a petition against the Act of Abolition, signed by eight hundred inhabitants of Calcutta, who went so far as to say that the Governor-General was misled by renegade Hindus—meaning, of course, Ram Mohun and his followers. Another small petition was appended to it, with the signatures of one hundred and twenty pandits, to show that sati was a religious duty, and that the Governor-General and his Council were arrogating to themselves 'the difficult task of regulating the conscience of a whole people.'² A third petition had three hundred and forty-six signatures, of 'respectable persons' from the interior of the country, with that of twenty-eight pandits. Counter-petitions became necessary in the face of such facts, and one was forthwith presented to Bentinck, by the Christian inhabitants of Calcutta, with eight hundred signatures, just two days after the

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 362. Dr. Thompson seems to have failed to notice this incident and its significance.

² *Ibid.*, p. 151.

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last orthodox representation. Ram Mohun himself sent another, which had three hundred signatures, including those of his well-known friends. Ram Chandra Vidya-bagish, the preacher of the Brahmo Samaj, would not sign this application for fear of molestation from the Hindus.¹ Ram Mohun himself was threatened with his life, for his 'anti-Hindu' action; but he all along retained a calm and persevering patience, like that of Wilberforce under similar conditions. At last Bentinck had to allow the orthodox to appeal to the King in Council, if they thought the decision of the Governor-General and his Council was unsatisfactory. This was done at once; and Ram Mohun had to expedite his departure in order to be in England in time to fight the cause of Indian womanhood. The public address presented to Bentinck, by the reformer and his friends, expressed 'the deepest gratitude and utmost reverence'² for the service rendered by him to the country through his courageous and determined action.

On the 7th January, 1830, an orthodox organisation, called the *Dharma Sabha* (Religious Society), was formed in opposition to the Brahmo Samaj of Ram Mohun, which was the representative of progressive views. Many rich persons joined it, so that a sum of Rs. 11,260 was subscribed quite easily. Its aim was to counteract Brahmo influence, and to out-caste from society any who did not adhere to Hindu rites. A permanent house for it was in contemplation, but did not materialise. They said 'they would crush the Brahmo Samaj, as a fisherwoman crushes a small fish under her thumb.'³ Only six days after the foundation of this Sabha the new building of the Brahmo Samaj was consecrated, its

¹ *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, Asvin, 1769 Sak. ² *Works*, II, p. 329.

³ Collet, p. 152.

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Trust Deed having been executed only a fortnight before. Raja Radhakanta Deb was the leader of the Dharma Sabha.

In 1830 the reformer brought out an *Abstract of the Arguments Against Sati*, in order to arouse public interest and attention. The *Rights of Hindus over Ancestral Property* was published in the same year. As a piece of legal exposition it occupies a very high place; it was occasioned by Sir H. E. East's decision to limit the power of Hindus in respect of the alienation of ancestral property. The *Dayabhaga* system of law was accepted by the reformer as the one prevalent in Bengal, and he laid down the famous legal maxim, that 'we ought to make that invalid which is considered immoral.'¹ In it is indirectly found Ram Mohun's opinion on the drink problem, and his discipline for his own disciples illustrates the same question. When he refused to see for some time one of his disciples, on account of his excessive drinking, the Raja acted from a strong conviction of his own on the subject.²

On the question of the general principle involved he raised the following point:

To permit the sale of intoxicating drinks and spirits, so injurious to health, and even sometimes destructive of life, in the payment of duties publicly levied, is an act highly irreligious and immoral. Is the taxation to be, therefore, rendered invalid and payments stopped?³

Yet it is to be remembered, in regard to the problem of drinking, that the reformer, in his *Discussion with a Kayastha*, countenanced moderate drinking, as long as it was kept strictly within proper bounds, i.e. used as a

¹ Collet, p. 157.

² Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 296; Collet, p. 157.

³ Collet, p. 157.

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tonic or for medicinal purposes. In fact, he had no extreme views on the subject.

His legal position was sound, though the *Harkara* criticised him, under the caption of 'a Letter from a Hindu.' The *Sudder Dewani* (Civil) Court in 1831, and later on the Privy Council, had to act on the problems of property according to this interpretation; and actually there was no other way out of it. Mr. Ghose thinks the result to have been in large measure due to Ram Mohun's writing.¹ In the opinion of the late Justice Sir G. D. Bannerjee, anyone who could give such expositions of law had in reality a great legal mind.²

The Raja, as he prepared himself for the coming voyage, saw the necessity of giving 'a local habitation' to the Brahmo Samaj founded by him, its reputation being already established as a growing institution. It was by now also an independent community, having out-grown the merely institutional position of the Atmiya Sabha and the Unitarian Association, both of which had ceased to exist. It was functioning with all its members, and influencing national life in many ways. Its funds made it possible that it should have a house of its own, instead of paying rent for one in which its services and meetings were conducted. Accordingly, a piece of land was bought in Chitpore Road, on 6th June, 1829, and a building was erected by subscriptions from members.³ The word *Samaj*, with a deep and wide social significance, in a sense quite distinct from the word *Sabha*, was first used in the document of this land transaction. A Trust Deed was then drawn up on 8th January, 1830, by which the whole property, including land, building and

¹ *Works*, II, p. 221, footnote

² Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 304.

³ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 505.

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cash, was transferred into younger hands. From Dwarka Nath Tagore, Kali Nath Roy, Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Ram Chandra Vidyabagish and Ram Mohun Roy, the Brahma Samaj passed into the charge of Baikuntha Nath Roy, Rama Prasad Roy (Ram Mohun's son) and Rama Nath Tagore. The secretaryship of the Samaj had a year before gone to Bisvambhar Das, a non-Brahman, owing to Tarachand Chakravarty's absence from Calcutta, and now it was taken up by Rama Prasad Roy.¹ A nominal sale paid to the vendors only fifteen sicca rupees in all, while an endowment of Rs. 6,080 was kept in custody of Messrs. Mackintosh & Co.² In Smith's *Life of Duff*³ it is stated that Ram Mohun himself erected the building, and this fact is attested by *A Sketch of the Brahma Samaj*, published in 1873.

The Trust Deed is an important document, for more reasons than one. Its retrospective and preservative clauses show the forethought of the leaders of the Samaj with the reformer at the head. As a legal instrument it secured the uninterrupted continuity of Brahma worship in the future. Theologically it gave the best extant definition of Theism, and indicated that the mind of man in India had gone far ahead of Unitarianism in the West, or the dry abstractions of the Vedanta of Indian soil. Miss Collet has designated it 'the original creed of the Brahma Samaj.'⁴ A few extracts from it are given below:

A place of public meeting of all sorts and descriptions of people, without distinction, as shall behave and conduct themselves in an orderly, sober, religious and devout manner. . . .

For worship and adoration of the Eternal, Unsearchable

¹ *Tattavabodhini Patrika*, Asvin, 1769 Sak.

² Collet, p. 159.

³ p. 247.

⁴ Collet, p. 160.

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and Immutable Being, who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe; but not under any other name, description or title, particularly used for and applied to any particular Being or Beings, by any man or sect of men whatsoever. . . .

And that no graven image, statue or sculpture, carving, painting, picture, portrait, or the likeness of anything shall be admitted within . . . the premises, and that no sacrifice, offering or oblation of any kind or thing shall ever be permitted therein, and that no animal or living creature within or on the said message, building or land . . . be deprived of life, either for religious purposes or for food.

And that no sermon, preaching, discourse, etc., be delivered . . . but such as have a tendency to the promotion of the contemplation of the Author and Preserver of the Universe, to the promotion of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue and the strengthening of the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds.¹

On 23rd January, 1830, the building was consecrated and opened. Mr. Montgomery Martin, the author of the *History of British Colonies*, was the only European present at this ceremony. He recorded that many Brahmans were given gifts on this occasion, and many Hindus attended the function. It was no longer an 'evanescent group of atoms,' but a solid community. Compared with it, the Dharma Sabha was only a club, and had nothing of the light and strength of new-found truth. The tug-of-war between liberal and orthodox thought, between men of vision and stereotyped supporters of the past, has been graphically described by Pandit Siva Nath Sastri, in his *History of the Brahmo Samaj*. It caused a great stir in the community, rival newspapers of the two sections writing from their own standpoints, and carrying on their

¹ *Works*, I, p. 308.

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propaganda day after day, with an influential following on either side.

Even the common people became participators in this great conflict; for the tracts of the reformer, mostly written in the simplest Bengali, appealed to them as much as to the enlightened classes. In bathing ghats of the river-side, in market places and public squares, in the drawing-rooms of influential citizens, everywhere the rivalry between the two associations became the subject of talk. Lines of comical poetry, caricaturing the principles of the great reformer, were composed by the wags of the time and passed from mouth to mouth, until the streets rang with laughter and ridicule. The agitation spread from Calcutta to the interior, and everywhere the question was discussed between the two parties. A large number of Brahmans, who accepted presents from the members of the Brahma Sabha, were excommunicated by the other party on that account, and the duty of supporting them devolved upon the rich amongst Ram Mohun's friends, who cheerfully undertook it. It was in the midst of these furious party contests that Ram Mohun opened his church in 1830.¹

Indeed, so great was the enmity aroused that the Raja's life was in danger, and he had to go about with armed companions. Two attempts were made on his life and he was constantly shadowed by spies. Mr. Martin began to live with him at this time, and the whole household was fully armed by him for the sake of safety.

The great educational missionary, Alexander Duff, arrived this year, and the Raja was the first man to lend him a helping hand. In fact, Duff's arrival was the result of Ram Mohun's support to the application for missionaries from St. Andrew's Kirk, of Calcutta, about six years ago. Duff's object was the spread of education

¹ *History of the Brahma Samaj*, I, p. 42.

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in Bengal, and he found in Ram Mohun its co-initiator as regards method and policy. Duff saw the 'Erasmus of India'¹ in his own house, in order to explain to him the plan of work. 'All true education,' said Ram Mohun, 'ought to be religious, since the object was not merely to give information, but to develop and regulate all the powers of the mind, the emotions of the heart, and the workings of conscience.'² Though not himself a Christian, he recommended the Bible as the best book for moral instruction; and as a theist he wished that all daily work should be taken up after invoking the blessing of God, and that the Lord's Prayer, as a standard, should be recited in the proposed school. He admitted to the great missionary that

having read about the rise and progress of Christianity in apostolic times and its corruption in succeeding ages, and then the Christian Reformation, which shook off these corruptions and restored it to its primitive purity, I began to think that something similar might take place in India, and similar results might follow here from the reformation of popular idolatry.³

Dr. Macnicol says that the scepticism of the Hindu College, under Derozio's influence, made the Raja welcome the Christian missionary, and he accordingly assisted in the establishment of the Presbyterian College, just as he had assisted in the foundation of the Hindu College a few years ago.⁴

Duff did not know much of Calcutta, and, being in immediate need of a suitable house for his school, he appealed to the Raja to solve the problem for him. The rented house of the Brahma Samaj, which was about to

¹ See Smith's *Life of Alexander Duff*, p. 59.

² Collet, p. 261.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Macnicol, *R.M.R.*, p. 25.

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be vacated for the new and permanent Samaj building, was at once secured for the missionary, on a rent reduced by about Rs. 15, for the Brahmo Samaj was paying Rs. 75 a month. Through the personal influence of the Raja, the first pupils were secured, after which, on the 13th July, 1830, the school was formally opened. Duff repeated the Lord's Prayer in Bengali, and gave copies of the Bible to his students. When a murmur arose among them Ram Mohun immediately asked them to remember that

Christians like Dr. Horace Hayman Wilson have studied the Hindu shastras, and you know that he has not become a Hindu. I myself have read all the Koran again and again, and has that made me a Mussalman? Nay, I have studied the whole Bible, and you know that I am not a Christian. Why then do you fear to read it? Read it, and judge for yourselves.¹

The Raja afterwards attended the school every day at the time of the Bible lesson, at 10 a.m., for he was keen to see Duff succeed. His friend Kali Nath Roy Chowdhury, of Taki, offered buildings, appliances and expenses for a similar school under Duff. In an introductory letter to Dr. Chalmers, Duff said of the Raja: 'He has rendered me the most valuable and efficient assistance in prosecuting some of the objects of the General Assembly's Mission.'²

The Raja's departure from India had to be expedited for two considerations of a pressing nature. The first was the renewal of the East India Company's Charter, and the second the petition of the infuriated pro-sati Hindus. Ram Mohun felt that he would be able to use his influence to counteract these machinations, and place

¹ Collet, p. 163.

² *Ibid.*

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before the authorities in England reasonable grounds to mould their judgment in favour of the cause of India. On the 8th January he informed the Governor-General of his contemplated voyage and the title given him by the Moghul Emperor, as well as the position of envoy, together with the seal specially made for that purpose at Delhi. He wrote to Bentinck:

I beg leave to submit to your Lordship . . . that His Majesty has appraised your Lordship of my appointment as his *elchee* [envoy] to the Court of Great Britain, and of his having been pleased to invest me, as His Majesty's servant, with the title of Raja, in consideration of the respectability attached to that situation. . . . Not being anxious for titular distinction, I have hitherto refrained from availing myself of the honour conferred on me by His Majesty. . . . I therefore take the liberty of laying the subject before your Lordship, hoping that you will be pleased to sanction my adoption of such title accordingly, . . . consistent with former usage, as established by a Regulation of Government on the subject in 1827.¹

But the Government did not sanction the title nor recognise the appointment, and on 15th June, 1830, a reply to this effect was sent through Mr. Stirling, Secretary to the Government. The heir-apparent of Delhi then brought some false charges against the Raja, but this did not produce any effect like the legal proceedings of the Raja of Burdwan. But Ram Mohun became suspicious lest the Indian Government should refuse him a passport, and hence he decided to proceed to England as a private individual, divesting himself of all public character and capacity.² The very day after the receipt of the refusal from the Government, the reformer took the lead in presenting a congratulatory

¹ Bannerjee, *R.M.R.'s Mission to England*, pp. 14-15.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 20.

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address to Bentinck for passing the Sati Act. So after all, 'The rebuff did not hinder Ram Mohun from appearing at the Governor-General's with the anti-sati address of congratulation.'¹ Indeed, he was too big for such common feelings of resentment as might have crossed the mind of ordinary people. His letter of September, 1830, in reply to Bentinck, breathes a spirit of nobility and goodness:

Having at length surmounted all the obstacles of a domestic nature that have hitherto opposed my long-cherished intention of visiting England, I am now resolved to proceed to that land of liberty by one of the vessels that will sail in November, and, from a due regard to the purport of the late Mr. Secretary Stirling's letter of 15th January last, and other considerations, I have determined not to appear there as the Envoy of His Majesty Akbar the Second, but as a private individual. I am satisfied that in thus divesting myself of all public character, my zealous services in behalf of His Majesty need not be abated.²

The Raja's companions on this momentous voyage to a distant land were two of his servants, Ram Hari Das and Ram Ratan Mukherjee, and his adopted son, Raja Ram, a boy of twelve. Ram Ratan was the cook, whose duty it was to prepare food in the orthodox fashion. Raja Ram was said to be his illegitimate son by a Muhammadan mistress,³ but Dr. Carpenter found out,

¹ Collet, p. 166.

² Collet, p. 165.

³ Ram Mohun was a man of sterling virtues and the purest character. Chandra Sekhar Deb must have been misled by the Raja's enemies. (Collet, p. 170.) That he never kept any mistress is attested by his own people in his native village of Radhanagar, who would have certainly known of it if there was the least suspicion about it. He was very fond of music and gave musical nautch parties to entertain his friends. The good singers whom he liked for their art were called popularly 'Ram Mohun's singers,' just as Pandit Siva Prasad Sarma was known as 'Ram Mohun's pandit.' Few in those days cared to know the real name of this scholar, such was the fame and magnetism

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on enquiry, that he was a destitute orphan boy of Hardwar, who was taken under his protection by the Raja from one Mr. Dick, a retired civil servant of the Company.¹ Evidently the enemies of the Raja were at the bottom of such pernicious rumours. With these companions he sailed, on the 19th November, by the *Albion*, from Calcutta, being the first Bengali Brahman to cross the sea. The passport entries showed the following:

The secretary reports that an order for the reception on board the *Albion* of a native gentleman, named Ram Mohun Roy, proceeding to England, was granted on the 7th instant, on an application made by him for the purpose. (Public Body Sheet, No. 95, of 12th October, 1830.) Orders for reception granted to Ram Rutton Mukerjee, Hari Charn Doss and Sheik Buxoo, 15th November, proceeding to England in attendance on Ram Mohun Roy on the *Albion*. (Public Body Sheet, 16th November, 1830.)²

The difference in each of the two names is explained by Mr. Chatterjee, on the authority of the writer of *Little Stories about Ram Mohun Roy*, as an alteration purposely adopted by the Raja.³ Mr. Bannerjee seems to support the view.⁴ Nothing can be definitely suggested

of Ram Mohun's personality, and his benevolence always supported with gifts of money and land all those who served him. This happened in Rungpore, where the people still remember Ram Mohun. Details of this explanation were obtained from the late D. N. Bagchi, (poet and critic) who criticised Ram Mohun's religion, but admired his character. Even hereditary enemies of Ram Mohun's family in the villages adjoining Radhanagar had not a whisper against the purity and integrity of his character.

Miss Collet says: 'We have not come across the remotest semblance of evidence to sustain this charge.' (p. 169.)

The articles by Mr. Brajendra N. Bannerjee in the *Prabasi* of 1336 (Bengali year) pass from hypothesis to hypothesis, so that no logical conclusion is possible.

¹ Collet, p. 169.

² *R.M.R.'s Mission*, p. 22.

³ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 435.

⁴ *R.M.R.'s Mission*, p. 22.—Sheik Buxoo may have been the Raja's

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as to the reason for the alteration of Ram Hari Das's name; but it is probable that 'Sheik Buxoo' was a representative from Delhi, who was dropped at the last moment, together with the cancellation of the Delhi connection, and young Raja Ram (already known by this name, since 1826)¹ had to be put in his place.² Before the *Albion* left Calcutta, news was received of the 'famous three days' (July 27—29, 1830) of the French Revolution.³ The Raja, with his cosmopolitan sympathy, was deeply interested in it, and constantly and enthusiastically talked about it. He was not at all troubled with the thoughts of the long separation from home. When the ship was on the point of weighing anchor he said to his son, Rama Prasad, 'Why do you cry? Are you not the son of a man?'⁴ Rama Prasad was there to see his father off on his long voyage, which took him away for ever from his own land.

washerman or servant, as two milch cows were taken on board by the Raja. (Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 439.)

¹ *Reminiscences of Maharshi Debendra N. Tagore*, (Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 731). *Life of Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore*, pp. 11, 324.

² A suggestion from late D. N. Pal, Secretary, R.M.R. Memorial Society.

³ Collet, p. 177.

⁴ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 517.

XI

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EMBASSY TO EUROPE; BRITISH UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION;
COMMUNICATIONS TO PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE;
LAST DAYS IN BRISTOL

RAM MOHUN'S visit to Europe has been rightly designated 'a landmark in the general history of civilisation. The West had long gone to the East; with him the East began to come to the West. India has followed in his wake, and Japan and even China have followed in the wake of India.'¹ On the surface it may seem as if there were nothing more in it than the coming and going of people from different latitudes and longitudes. But the far-reaching results of this traffic were very great and of enduring value. 'As a consequence the East is being rapidly Occidentalised, and there are signs, not a few, of a gradual Orientalising of the West.'² The interchange of ideas was thus the first step to mutual understanding and the growth of an international mind in the world. But even more is found when it is examined carefully from the standpoint of the world as a whole. Ram Mohun's was a life-long mission of synthetic re-interpretation of the mind of man. There was only one man before him in England, or even in Europe, who understood this problem in some measure,

¹ Collet, p. 176. ² *Ibid.*

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and that was Edmund Burke. 'This movement towards the healing of the schism, which has for ages divided mankind, and the effort to intermingle more thoroughly the various ingredients of humanity, are rich in promise for the humanising and unifying of man. The rôle which Ram Mohun Roy had played in this world-drama among his own countrymen was fittingly crowned by his presence in the chief city of the globe.'¹ Through this event the new England, after the Reform Bill, first came to know the new India after the foundation of the Brahma Samaj; though intercourse between the countries had dated from the days of Akbar and Elizabeth. With Ram Mohun, India took her seat among the nations in the open forum of the world.

Ram Mohun arrived at Liverpool on the 8th April, 1831, six months after he had set sail from Calcutta. He called at Cape Town in January, in course of the voyage. Some incidents during the voyage are described in the *India Gazette* of 18th February, 1834, by James Southerland, who was a fellow-passenger and friend of the Raja, and afterwards principal of Hooghly College. He gives the details of his life on board the *Albion*:

On board the ship the Raja took his meals in his own cabin, and there was some inconvenience because of a common *choola*, or fireplace, for cooking; his servants fell seasick, though he was remarkably free from the disease. He read the greater part of the day, but in the afternoon took an airing on the deck, and always got involved in animated discussion. After dinner he would join in conversation and take a glass of wine. There used to be quite a competition as to who would pay him the greatest attention, such was the esteem of all on board. His equanimity was quite surprising. More than once his cabin was afloat, owing to the sea washing

¹ Collet, p. 177.

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in, but it never disturbed his serenity. He used to be anxious for getting on, lest the great question of the Company's Charter should come on before his arrival in England.¹

At Cape Town he had a bad accident, which kept him lame for some months. It was due to the gangway ladder being insecure from mere carelessness, but even with this hurt he boarded two French steamers, under the revolutionary flag, 'the glorious tri-colour,' which he wanted to salute. His enthusiasm for the liberty gained by France made him disregard his bodily suffering. His reception on the vessels was also worthy of the French character and of him, and he returned to his own ship repeating the words, 'Glory, glory, glory to France!' Some distinguished men of the Cape—excepting, however, the governor—left their cards for him at the hotel. Near the Equator, the change of Ministry in England, i.e. Lord Grey in place of the Duke of Wellington, was learnt from papers supplied by a ship coming from the opposite direction. Ram Mohun was glad to learn this bit of information, as he probably hoped for beneficial effects from it as regards the prospects of his own country. Close to the Channel, the news of the second reading of the Reform Bill was given by another passing vessel. 'The effect of this contagious enthusiasm of a whole people,' says Southerland, 'in favour of a grand political change, upon such a mind as his, was of course electrifying.'² When he arrived at Liverpool his fame had already preceded him, and every man of note in the city came to him. He had to be out morning, noon and night; and was at all times, even at breakfast and dinner, surrounded by people with whom there was

¹ Collet, p. 177.

² *Ibid.*, p. 179.

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constant discussion on religion and politics. It is not surprising that the excitement and strain injured his health considerably, and ultimately hastened his end.

Two Quaker families of good circumstances in Liverpool, the Bensons and the Coopers by name, brought him into touch with people of various persuasions; but the first place visited by him was, fitly enough, a Unitarian Chapel¹ where a Mr. Grundy preached a sermon which was much appreciated by the Raja. At the close of the meeting the whole congregation gathered round him as he went out of the church. There were many with whom he had to shake hands, and who waited for him expressly for that purpose. Here the Raja saw the memorial tablet to Mr. Tait, whom he knew in India, and he was visibly moved with grief to know that his friend was gone.² In the evening an Anglican service was attended by the Raja. He had an invitation from William Roscoe, the historian, who was then on his death-bed. They had had some correspondence before; and hence the interview was longed for by both. So these two brilliant intellects met and interchanged salutations.

After the usual gesture of Eastern salutation, and with a mixture of Oriental expression, Ram Mohun said, 'Happy and proud am I—proud and happy to behold a man whose fame had extended not only over Europe but over every part of the world!' 'I bless God,' replied Mr. Roscoe, 'that I have been permitted to live to see this day.'³

Southerland has observed that the meeting of Ram Mohun and Roscoe will never be forgotten by those who witnessed it.⁴ Their conversation naturally turned on the Raja's object in visiting England. The leading men of

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 444; Collet, p. 180.

² *Ibid.*, p. 181.

³ Collet, p. 179,

⁴ *Ibid.*

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Liverpool were surprised and amazed to find in the Raja a man well conversant with the principles of liberty, civil and religious, and deeply versed in the Christian scriptures, out of which he quoted text upon text with ease and facility, thereby 'proving himself more familiar with their sacred books than they themselves.' At one of the Quaker houses, he met High Churchmen, Baptists, Unitarians and Deists; at the house of Mr. Rathbone he came to know Spurzheim, the phrenologist, in whose science he expressed no faith, but with good humour and friendly sympathy. The Rathbones tried to draw out of him his exact religious position, but could not succeed, even though their conversation with him was on various subjects, including theology and politics.

After a few days' stay in Liverpool, the Raja made for London at about the end of April, in order to be present in the House of Commons at the second reading of the Reform Bill. He came through Manchester, where the workmen left their work and thronged to see 'the king of Ingee.'¹ 'The "great unwashed" insisted on shaking hands with him, and some of the ladies, who had not stayed to make their toiles very carefully, wished to embrace him.'² So great was the rush that the aid of the police was necessary. On the road to London at every stop crowds came to see him. He reached London in the evening and went to the Adelphi Hotel, as his rooms in Newgate Street were not satisfactory. The English philosopher Jeremy Bentham called on him that very night.³ It was appropriate that these two thinkers came so close to each other and so soon. Ram Mohun had to remove to 125

¹ *Calcutta*, p. 182.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Chatterjee, R.M.R.*, p. 444.

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Regent Street, where he lived like an informal ambassador. 'The most distinguished men in the country crowded to pay their respects to him. . . . His door was besieged with carriages from eleven in the morning till four in the afternoon. . . . This constant state of excitement . . . actually made him ill, when his physician gave positive orders to his footman not to admit visitors.'¹

The Duke of Cumberland introduced him to the House of Lords, and for some time he associated considerably more with the Tories than with the Whigs. The Dowager Duchess of Cork, who was a celebrated 'lion-hunter,' marked this new Indian 'lion' for her prey.² While in Tory company, Ram Mohun succeeded in dissuading the Tory peers from voting in favour of the notorious Jury Bill for India. He came into the closest touch with Lord Brougham, to whom he was introduced by William Roscoe, and their intimacy was of a warm and confidential nature.³ Yet he was never in agreement with views of the Tories on the Reform Bill, and lost no opportunity of pointing out to them their narrowness in opposing reform. It is a wonder that they were still so very hospitable to him; but his character commanded respect even from those who held views opposite to his own. A special meeting of the Unitarian Association of London invited him at this time, and he was welcomed by Dr. Carpenter and others as 'brother and fellow-worker.' The full report of this meeting was published in the *Monthly Repository*, the organ of the Unitarians in England. Dr. (afterwards Sir) J. Bowring, who spoke after the Rev. Robert Aspland, said that 'they have

¹ Collet, p. 183.

² *Ibid.*

³ Carpenter, *Last Days*, p. 84.

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endeavoured to imagine what would be their sensation if a Plato or a Socrates, a Milton or a Newton were unexpectedly to honour them with their presence.' He was compared with Peter the Great, with the remark that 'Peter had to overcome no prejudice,' like Ram Mohun.¹ The Raja was ill, and hence he made only a short but suitable reply. He said he was 'too unwell and too much exhausted' to take any active part in the meeting, and thanked Dr. Kirkland and Sir J. Bowring. He referred to his experiences, adding, 'The Hindus and the Brahmans to whom I am related are all hostile to the cause [of reform]; and even many Christians there are more hostile to our common cause than the Hindus and the Brahmans.' 'Generally speaking,' he added, 'there is a battle going on [in the world] between reason, scripture and commonsense, and wealth, power and prejudice; but I am convinced that your success, sooner or later, is certain.'²

Ram Mohun continued to the last in close communication and personal fellowship with the chief Unitarian families of the time—the Estlins, the Carpenters, the Foxes, and the like.³ His social engagements at this period were very numerous. In a letter to Mr. Fox, dated 31st May, 1831, he promised to interchange visits as soon as he was thoroughly recovered; and on the 13th June he had breakfast with him, together with his little adopted son, Raja Ram. He also carefully studied the contents of the *Monthly Repository*, as is corroborated from a note of his to his bookseller, dated 1st May, 1832. His first Sunday in London was given to Unitarian as well as Anglican services. He humorously described

¹ Carpenter, *Last Days*, pp. 93, 94. ² *Ibid.* ³ Collet, p. 186.

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the Rev. Dr. Kenney, vicar of St. Olave's, as 'his parish priest,' and had a great admiration for him because of his 'benignity, charity, liberality to the creeds of others, and his honesty in the great political struggle for reform.'¹ He was by no means prepared to identify himself completely with the Unitarians—an attitude which greatly surprised them.² But in fact, he never identified himself with any known creed, except the creedless Universal Religion formulated and founded by himself. His connection with Dr. Kenney was based on human reasons, and the 'universal' in him easily fraternised with this incumbent of the Established Church.

The East India Company adhered to its refusal to give official recognition to Ram Mohun's title of 'Raja' and his mission as an ambassador from the Moghul Court. On the other hand, the ministers of the British crown 'recognised his embassy and his title, as the ennobled representative of the Emperor of Delhi.'³ But a much more important fact was that the people of England, in their own spontaneous way, acknowledged him as the 'ambassador from the people of India'; and it so happened, in accordance with the changeableness of human nature, that 'the very same men who had treated him with scorn in India now eagerly courted his acquaintance.'⁴ Nothing succeeds like success; and Ram Mohun was given a dinner by the East India Company on 6th July, 1831. It was called 'a family dinner,' to save the face of the authorities; but it was quite a 'state affair.' The East India Company showed thereby some consistency in diplomacy, though not in moral principles! The chairman and the

¹ Collet, p. 188.

² *Ibid.*

³ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 452; *Asiatic Journal*, No. 1833.

⁴ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 452; Collet, p. 190.

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deputy chairman presided, and a toast was proposed to the distinguished visitor. Eulogies were exchanged on both sides. The chairman said that he hoped other distinguished and influential Hindus would visit England after Ram Mohun; and he replied by acknowledging the benefits of British Rule in India, referring especially to Bentinck, but omitting the name of Amherst. The Raja did not touch anything but rice and cold water, while the others feasted on turtle, venison and champagne.

The Select Committee of the House of Commons, re-appointed in June after its first panelling in February, took up now the question of the renewal of the Company's Charter. The Raja was consequently invited to appear before it and to give his evidence. The Raja declined the request, though the reason for this is not definitely known. Probably his experience of the 'ethics of imperialism' had taught him to be exceedingly careful in committing himself to Government officials. But in successive communications he gave to them his opinions and suggestions on the various problems of Indian administration, with reference to revenue, judiciary, land, ryots and the condition of the country, which duly appeared in the *Blue Books* and were also published by him separately. Like all his writings, they reveal a thorough command of the subject, a careful mastery of the principles involved, and a remarkable stock of information, together with a foresight that is marvellous. Mr. Ramananda Chatterjee, in his *Ram Mohun Roy and Modern India*, says, in appreciation of the Raja's political pronouncements, that he 'laid the foundation of all the principal modern movements for the elevation of

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the people.’¹ A review of his communications to the Board of Control bears out the truth of this remark. This group of the political writings of the Raja comprised six papers in all; even the appendix is extremely useful.

The first communication was under date 19th August, 1831, on the *Revenue System of India*, in two parts, viz. Answers to Questions and New Proposals. Here the Raja espoused the cause of ‘the rack-rented ryot or cultivator.’ ‘Such,’ he said, ‘is the melancholy condition of the agricultural labourers, that it always gives me the greatest pain to allude to it.’² He proposed that rent should not be raised any more, and stipulated that a reduction of revenue should be made by the zemindar, thus ensuring a corresponding reduction in the payment made by the ryots; for rents were so exorbitant that the ryots were in a continuous state of misery.³ The consequent decrease in revenue could be met from taxation of luxuries⁴ and things which are not necessities of life, and the employment of low-salaried Indian collectors instead of highly-paid Europeans.⁵ He also advocated, in this connection, the settlement of a few model landlords from England, but not drawn from the lower classes, so as to counteract the drain by an inflow of capital. He wanted the resources of the country and of the cultivators to be improved by superior methods of cultivation and the proper mode of treating labour. He indicated clearly ‘the overwhelming poverty throughout the country,’⁶ and the drain of wealth from India, that is, ‘from Indian revenues expended in England,’ and ‘the

¹ *R.M.R. and Modern India*, p. 39.

² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

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aggregate of tribute, public and private, so withdrawn from India.¹ In an appendix² he pleaded for 'the indefeasible rights of the ryot in the soil' as a fact of imperial utility.³

His remarks on the judicial system bear the date 19th September, 1831. This document is equally important, illustrating the Raja's political thought just as the former shows his economic ideas. His advocacy of the use of the English language finds prominence here. 'Its gradual introduction in the courts would prove ultimately beneficial, by promoting the study of English.'⁴ He recommended higher judicial posts for Indians, and pointed out that the European judges, for lack of knowledge of the language, manners and customs of the people, are not generally expected to discharge judicial duties satisfactorily independent of native assistance.⁵ He advised the adoption of the *panchayat* jury system, with qualified Indian jurors. In his opinion it was not difficult 'to find, with proper management, qualified persons among natives for any duty that may be assigned to them.'⁶ The power of issuing the writ of *Habeas Corpus* was also demanded by him for the *Sudder Dewani Court*. The separation of judicial and executive functions, over which so many Indian politicians have expended their eloquence in vain, was first of all shown by him to be a rational necessity, instead of 'an incompatible and injurious union of offices.'⁷ He was also the first man to put his finger on a serious defect in the Civil Service, viz. that the highest responsibilities were given to 'callow youths

¹ *R.M.R. and Modern India*, p. 36.

² *Works*, II, pp. 57 ff.; *Collet*, p. 193;

³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁶ *Works*, II, p. 16.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

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from England,'¹ simply because of their belonging to 'the heaven-born service,' as it is called in India today, which, he said, was contrary to ordinary common-sense. The age 24 to 25 was considered by him to be the minimum suitable for such responsibilities.

His *Queries Respecting the Condition of India* were issued on 18th September, 1831. The principles followed in these were based on solid facts and statistics, and they revealed the essentially practical side of his mind. He was no less of an economist than a politician or reformer. The depth of his analysis will strike anyone even today, as much as the extensive field of data covered by him. His political thought rose to its highest in the three demands made in these communications to the India Committee, and still remain for India, after a hard and continuous struggle for a century, the 'eternally longed-for consecration of a poet's dream.' Indeed, he saw truth, as a poet does, in all its beauty, glory and perfection, in every sphere of life, including even economics and politics; for truth was for him the texture of life and of the universe. No Indian politician has as yet outstripped him in the length and depth of his vision, and these three demands for his country are classical enunciations of national rights.

First, he wanted both the educated and uneducated classes to be closely associated with the Government of the country as a whole, by throwing open high places in administrative service to the former, and by establishing a militia force for the latter. With reference to the former, he states 'that the only course of policy which can ensure their attachment to any form of government

¹ *Works*, II, p. 47.

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would be that of making them eligible to gradual promotion, according to their respective abilities and merits, to situations of trust and responsibility in the State.¹ He was aware of 'undue advantages' possessed by Europeans over Indians, and of their 'entertaining a notion of European superiority' over the Indians.² But, he submitted there were also Indians who would 'consider it derogatory to accept the trifling public situations which natives are allowed to hold under the British Government.'³ So much for the intelligent classes, who had not as yet been properly appreciated by the Government in England, whatever might be the protestations in parliamentary speeches from public men. For the people at large, his recommendation was the formation of a militia force in which they could serve, and thus relieve the large standing army. 'The saving that might be effected by this liberal and generous policy, through the substituting of a militia force for a great part of the present standing army, would be much greater than any gain that could be realised by any system of increasing land revenue that human ingenuity could devise.'⁴ But a foreign government is always suspicious, and this advice of the greatest Indian of modern times fell on deaf ears. He was right in thinking that common people should be made to love the Government, for the future good of both; for, after all, as the Persian sage Sadi said, 'To an upright prince his people is an army.'⁵

His second and most comprehensive scheme was that for local autonomy, which was put by him in the way least offensive to Government, yet not without his usual

¹ *Works*, II, p. 98.

² *Ibid.*, p. 117.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

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touch of pungency and plain speaking, 'In such matters as those of peace and war,' he said, 'it may sometimes be necessary that the local government should act on its own discretion and responsibility, according to existing circumstances, notwithstanding the opinion of the Government in England. But . . . in matters of legislation, . . . judicial and revenue matters, . . . the local government might still remonstrate against them to the home authorities.'¹ He added further, in the light of the then prevailing conditions, that 'his scheme would not confer upon them [the people] any political power,' but would 'give them an interest in the government, and inspire them with greater attachment to it.'² Even at the present day the problem of autonomy is a moot point of crucial importance, and great leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Surendra Nath Banerjee, and G. K. Gokhale spent their lives struggling for its extension.

The Raja lived at 125 Regent Street up to 13th June, 1831, and at 48 Bedford Square from 27th January, 1832.³ In September, 1831, he was presented to the King by Sir J. W. Hobhouse, the President of the Board of Control, the first Indian to be so honoured in England; and he had a place assigned to him at the Coronation among the ambassadors.⁴ He had to take to a high style of living at this time, because of his constant contact with the celebrities of the age. Mr. Sandford Arnot, late assistant editor of the *Calcutta Journal*, acted as his secretary. It was owing to this gentleman that he was unwarily induced to live in this over-expensive way, which he thoroughly disliked and which was opposed to his nature. But soon afterwards he went

¹ *Works*, II, p. 103.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *India Gazette*, 18th February, 1834; Carpenter, p. 90.

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to live in Bedford Square with Mr. Hare, the brother of David Hare of Calcutta, and he continued there while he was in London, keeping only a plain carriage like a private gentleman, "though still courted by the first men in the kingdom."¹ The *Court Journal* of 5th October, 1833, had the following account of him:

The Raja in the outer man was cast in nature's finest mould; his figure was manly and robust; his carriage dignified; the forehead towering, expansive and commanding; his eyes, dark, restless, full of brightness and animation, yet liquid and benevolent, and frequently glistening with a tear when affected by the deeper sensibility of the heart; the nose of Roman form and proportions; lips full and indicative of independence, the whole features deeply expressive, with a smile of soft and peculiar fascination, which won irresistibly the suffrages to whom it was addressed.

His manners were characterised by suavity blended with dignity, verging towards either point according to the company in which he might be placed. To ladies his politeness was marked by the most delicate manner, and his felicitous mode of paying them a compliment gained him very many admirers among the high-born beauties of Britain. In conversation with individuals of every rank and of various nations and professions, he passed with the utmost ease from one language to another, suiting his remarks to each and all in excellent taste, and commanding the astonishment and respect of his hearers.

It was in argument, however, that the exalted Brahman was most conspicuous: he seemed to grapple with truth intuitively, and called in invective, railery, sarcasm, and sometimes a most brilliant wit, to aid him in confuting his opponent; if precedent were necessary, a remarkably retentive memory and extensive reading in many languages supplied him with a copious fund, and at times with a rough, unsparing, ruthless hand he burst asunder the meshes of sophistry, error and bigotry in which it might be attempted to entangle him.²

¹ Chamberjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 470.

² Collet, p. 197.

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Many society functions claimed the Raja's presence in London, at which he was always 'the perfect Indian gentleman,' admired by all, and honoured as a man of versatile capacities. His dignified and graceful manner, especial deference to womanhood, natural modesty and uniform simplicity won all hearts. Yet a certain type of Englishman from India could not put up with him. Mrs. le Breton relates how, at a party, Capt. Maulverer, a friend of the Raja, overheard the remark from an officer of rank, 'What is the black fellow doing here?'¹ Miss Collet, commenting on this incident, says, 'Such is the folly which pride works in the less worthy members of a conquering race. Here was a scholar and statesman, philanthropist and religious reformer, the friend and superior of many a governor and minister, yet to this military bully he was only "that black fellow," to be chivied out of genteel society.'² Such incidents, then as now, set back the efforts to promote the social approach of the two nations. In fact, the foolish of every nation sometimes do more harm than really wicked men. But there were those in England who understood Ram Mohun properly, and his real worth as a towering personality. He himself spoke without fear or favour to those with whom he mixed freely—especially the young Tories, 'not hesitating to rate them soundly as "vagabonds," and worse, for impeding the progress of reform.'³ This was at the time of the rejection of the Second Reform Bill by the Lords, on 8th October, 1831. Fanny Kemble, the famous actress, came to know the Raja at about this period, and persuaded him to witness the play 'Isabella,' in which she played the main part. The Raja

¹ Collet, p. 198.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

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was in the Duke of Devonshire's box, and was moved to tears many a time—according to the actress's Diary, under date 22nd December, 1831. Mrs. Kemble was presented by the Raja with a copy of Kalidas's *Sakuntala*, the greatest Sanskrit drama, together with a translation of it by Sir William Jones. On 6th March, 1832, she danced at the Montagus, where the Raja was present.

Robert Owen, 'the father of British Socialism,' was another famous figure met by the Raja in London, at Dr. Arnot's house. There was a discussion between the two reformers, in which we are told the religious reformer got the better of the economic reformer, who lost his temper, but soon regained his Scotch friendliness. At the Rev. D. Dawson's house the Raja was seen in a much homelier atmosphere. Mr. Dawson's son was named 'Ram Mohun,' after the Raja, and as his namesake, was a dear object of the Raja's love. He would frequently visit little Ram Mohun Dawson after his baptismal ceremony. Mrs. Dawson recorded that his visits to her were generally paid in her nursery, as he insisted on coming up there, so as to visit his little namesake and at the same time not interrupt her.¹ It is one of the sweetest phases of Ram Mohun's character, this extraordinary fondness for children. Mr. Chatterjee has described how his adopted son, Raja Ram, used to jump upon his strong chest, while he took rest, without causing even a single outburst of annoyance. In spite of the whirl of business and the mass of his social engagements, the Raja never forgot the feelings of his own countrymen. His letter to a friend, dated 27th January, 1832, showed that he was conscious of 'Indian

¹ Carpenter, *Last Days*, p. 132.

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criticism' of his manner of life in England. He attended the anniversary of the Unitarian Association, in defiance of the positive advice of medical attendants. But his anxieties were not only on the grounds of health. 'I have before explained to you,' he adds, 'how much attending public dinners might be injurious to my interests in India and disagreeable to the feelings of my friends there.'¹

At the end of March, 1832, the Third Reform Bill was carried through the House of Commons. The Raja was eagerly awaiting the result, ever since it had been introduced by Lord John Russell, in March, 1831, when the reformer was nearing England. The Second Bill, after the dissolution of Parliament, was rejected by the Lords in October of the same year. The whole of England was in a state of feverish excitement over it, and indeed on the verge of a civil war; Ram Mohun shared this excitement with the people to the fullest, as if he were an Englishman, so great was the love of freedom ingrained in his nature. He wrote to Miss Kiddell, of Bristol, on the prospect of the Third Reform Bill in the Upper House, with the warmth of feeling which was natural to him. He spoke of it as 'the cause of reform, on the success of which the welfare of England, nay of the whole world, depends.'² Miss Collet says, 'He felt that it was no mere British affair, but that it vitally affected the fortunes of all mankind, and in no place more than in India.'³ He saw in it the hope for a new world—a reformed world, in which his own country had a stake and a share. He also saw in its failure the defeat of truth and freedom, and in that case a country where such

¹ Collet, p. 201. ² Carpenter, p. 89. ³ Collet, p. 202.

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a thing could happen would not be, in his mind, a fit object of love. He was moved over this matter to such an extent that he designated the struggle, in a letter to Mrs. Woodford, as 'between liberty and oppression throughout the world, between justice and injustice, between right and wrong';¹ and in a letter to Mr. Rathbone, he added, 'I publicly avowed that in the event of the Reform Bill being defeated, I would renounce my connection with the country.'² For according to him, 'the nation can no longer be a prey of the few who used to fill their purses at the expense of—nay, to the ruin of—the people.'³

This principle of moral separation—or 'non-coöperation,' in the language of Mahatma Gandhi—was Ram Mohun's 'moral equivalent' for the application of force against inequity.⁴ He repeated this idea most emphatically in another connection, with reference to the affairs of India, so loved by him. It was not simply a stray thought with him, on the contrary it was a principle necessitated on ethical grounds. If we may judge from a letter from Miss Aikin to Dr. Channing, the Raja felt deeply and keenly on the questions of trial by jury, and the settlement of British capitalists in India; and he expressed himself unequivocally on these issues. 'It is his business here,' wrote Miss Aikin, 'to ask two boons for his countrymen—and should he fail in obtaining these, he speaks of ending his days in America,'⁵ which was then idealised as the 'home of freedom.' It is strange that Mahatma Gandhi has characterised Ram Mohun, the originator of the very principle of

¹ Carpenter, *Last Days*, p. 23.

² *Ibid.*, p. 87.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Suggested by Mr. Ramananda Chatterjee in a conversation.

⁵ Carpenter, p. 134.

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non-coöperation, as 'a pygmy,'¹ Rather do the facts proclaim him, in the words of the author of *Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward*, to have been 'a veritable prodigy. Certainly Ram Mohun was never a 'pygmy' in any department of life, and the great modern Indian leader seems to have forgotten that he himself has been really working out Ram Mohun's whole propaganda, with alterations here and there. It was the Raja who postulated, long before the Mahatma, 'that the three countries in Europe which appear even less prepared than Asia for a liberal system of religion are Spain, Portugal and England.'² Clearly the Raja was no blind admirer of everything English. Of his threat to 'non-coöperate' with England, Miss Collet says: 'It was the most pronounced protest the Hindu reformer could make; and at a time of world-crisis, as he conceived it, he must strike his heaviest stroke . . . Should the Bill be defeated, he was resolved on leaving England and transferring himself and his allegiance to the United States.'³ It proves in which way Ram Mohun's mind was working, and his policy in this matter was not directed against England alone. Mahatma Gandhi, like Homer, has indeed 'nodded' in his estimate of Ram Mohun's intellect, especially in the sphere of religion; for the results show how Brahmoism has influenced the thought of India, and to a certain extent of the world as well. Dr. Macnicol has rightly remarked:

He looks forth upon us from the opening years of that century with habitually grave countenance, serene and alone, like some legendary hero, scattering the night of superstition

¹ 'An Unmitigated Evil,' *Young India*, 13th April, 1921.

² Carpenter, p. 122.

³ Collet, p. 205.

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by the lucid shafts of day. There is an elevation of spirit and a breadth of charity in his words that truly represent something which gives him, among other and no less distinguished reformers in India, an aloofness and distinction of his own.¹

Ram Mohun's Nationalism, sturdy, vigorous and radical, led him to the complementary truth of Internationalism, sound and wide, as well as deep. It was a corollary, following naturally from the truth he found in Nationalism. A self-governing India must necessarily allow Europeans their rightful place in her life. In his *Settlement of India by Europeans*, of 14th July, 1832, he laid stress on the importance of Europeans in this country. He laid down nine advantages, and five disadvantages. He was aware of British feeling over such a proposal, especially with reference to happenings in America² and the Indian feeling over the possibility of race-mixture.³ But he was above all narrowness, and—as in taking up the side of the planters in 1829—he had in mind, in this respect, the economic, cultural and political good in general. He viewed life as a whole, and this never allowed him to make the fallacious separation of culture from economics, or politics from any other human interest. Yet he was a believer in the legitimate greatness of the East and the potentiality of Asia. His study of world-history and the cyclic rise and fall of nations had taught him the facts of human nature from nature's own school. While he was deeply distressed at the degradation of the character of Orientals, he considered weakness had impaired their constitution through over-civilisation. 'The cause of such degradation has been our excess in civilisation, and

¹ Macnicol, *R.M.R.*, p. 18. ² *Works*, II, p. 119. ³ *Ibid.*

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abstinence from slaughter of animals.¹ 'With respect to science, literature or religion,' he added, 'I do not acknowledge that we are placed under any obligation; for by a reference to history it may be proved that the world was indebted to our ancestors for the first dawn of knowledge which sprang up in the East.'² He concluded by saying, that 'almost all ancient prophets and patriarchs . . . nay, even Jesus Christ Himself, a divine incarnation and the founder of the Christian faith, were Asiatics.'³ Further he believed in the 'superiority of Eastern philosophy over Western systems of thought, and that Arabian logic was superior to every other,'⁴ and he held Sanskrit to be the fundamental language⁵ for the purposes of comparative study of religion and theology.

In the autumn of this very year (1832) the Raja went to France. One of the Hare brothers accompanied him to Paris, where he was more than once a guest at the table of Louis Philippe. He was detained in France, and could not go to Italy and Austria as he had desired.⁶ He learnt French with a Frenchman, had dinner with Sir Thomas Moore, and was elected a member of the French Asiatic Society. He returned to England at the beginning of 1833.⁷

His *Remarks on the Settlement of Europeans in India* was produced at a time when the English atmosphere was charged with great political heat over home affairs. Between the Reform Bill and the Charter to the Company, 'Ram Mohun, alive to the finger tips with the

¹ *Works*, I, p. 204.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 123—'the mother of Greek.'

⁷ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 466 f.

³ *Works*, III.

⁴ Carpenter, *Last Days*, p. 36.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

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significance of both phases of imperial reconstruction, was naturally most concerned with what directly affected his own countrymen.'¹ Nor was he in the slightest degree indisposed to contemplate the prospect of India as a nation politically independent of Britain. He showed, pointedly and clearly, the kind of India desired by him. He wished to see her free and self-determining in every sphere. In his own words:

If, however, events should occur to effect a separation between the two countries, still the existence of a large body of respectable settlers (consisting of Europeans and their descendants), speaking the English language in common with the bulk of the people . . . as well as possessed of superior knowledge, scientific, mechanical and political, would bring that vast empire in the East to a level with other large Christian countries in Europe . . . enlightening the surrounding nations of Asia.²

And then he added the example of Canada, as 'a standing proof that an anxiety to effect a separation is not natural, with a people tolerably well ruled.'³ Moreover, the political relation was to his mind the least and lowest of the many kinds of connections—such as cultural, commercial, etc.—that can subsist between and bind together the nations of the world. Miss Collett observes: 'Never has the spokesman of the new India been so outspoken before. Never has he drawn so liberally on the future. . . . "Indian independence" was not exactly the prospect most agreeable to British susceptibilities! Yet it is calmly advanced as a future possibility.'⁴ But he was thinking on international and inter-religious lines:

Yet, as before observed, if events should occur to effect a

¹ Collet, p. 205.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Works*, II, p. 115.

⁴ Collet, pp. 208, 209.

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separation (which may arise from many accidental causes about which it is vain to speculate or make predictions), a friendly and highly advantageous commercial intercourse may be kept up between two free and Christian countries, united as they will then be by resemblance of language, religion and manners.¹

Such a statement from the Raja made many halt for a while. Miss Collet wrongly thinks that he was speaking implicitly of the ultimate victory of Christianity, in this important document which lays down his international ideal. But a little reflection on the 'frontierless religion' of the Raja will suggest that he only wanted to throw open the gates of his own country to the West. This issues logically out of the theism he held so sacred and dear; for him the whole of India was 'the larger Brahma Samaj,' where all people of every creed and colour might live and worship and be at home. Rabindranath Tagore, one of the greatest lyrical poets of the world and a typical representative of the modern age, has admitted gracefully the great influence of this 'greatest and noblest Indian' on his own outlook on international life.² And when this, 'Ram Mohun's Last Will and Testament to the people of India,' as his English biographer calls it, is read, in the light of all the claims made by him for his country, there remains no doubt that he was fully conscious of his mission and position as 'an ambassador from the Indian nation, even though Messrs. John Company refused to recognise him as an envoy from that impotent tool of theirs, whom they still liked to call "the Emperor of Delhi."' "

The Raja had the satisfaction of bringing the cause of the King of Delhi to a successful end before he left

¹ *Works*, II, p. 119.

² *Sankalan*, p. 93 (edited by Prof. P. C. Mahalanobis).

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London finally. The ministers of the Crown accepted a compromise, by which £30,000 were added to the stipend of the Moghul.¹ On 11th July, 1833, the Appeal Against the Abolition of Sati was rejected by the authorities; and Ram Mohun had the satisfaction of seeing the final blow thus given to the cause of sati. The East India Company's Charter now came up before the Parliament in the shape of a Bill, after the presentation of the report by the Select Committee, in August, 1832, and its acceptance by the Court of Directors, in April, 1833. Its third reading was over on 24th July, and the Raja wrote to Miss Kiddell that he 'will lose no time in ascertaining how it will stand in the Upper House.' The Royal Assent was given to the East India Bill on 20th August, and virtually it was the Company's last Charter. The Reformed Parliament did not satisfy Ram Mohun in its legislative activity, probably because of the terms of the new Charter for the reform of India government; although the Factory Act and the Abolition of Slave Traffic were carried by the new Parliament at about this time.

Thus 'the series of brilliant services which mark out Ram Mohun as the pioneer of Indian freedom may be said to have ended when King William [IV] gave his assent to the East India Bill.'² Indeed, the crowning part of his life work was done in England. H. H. Wilson³ found that 'Ram Mohun had grown very stout at this time, and looked full and flushed; it appears also that mental anxiety aggravated his complaint. He had also become embarrassed for money, and Arnot threatened him to

¹ *R.M.R.'s Mission*, pp. 36, 44; *Asiatic Journal*, June, 1833, p. 208.

² Collet, p. 220.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.



STAPLETON GROVE, BRISTOL
(Now Beech House)



GROUNDS OF STAPLETON GROVE WHERE
RAJA RAM MOHUN ROY WAS BURIED

Both Illustrations by courtesy of Miss G. Saxe's, Bristol.

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claim all his writings as his own. His sons in India could not supply him in time with the necessary remittances. He was living with the Hares, whence, after long correspondence with Miss Kiddell, he moved over to Bristol. His last letter, received by her at Bristol from him in London, was dated 22nd August, 1833, from 48 Bedford Square, London.

Early in the month of September, 1833, the Raja arrived at Stapleton Grove, near Bristol, accompanied by Miss Hare and his two Indian servants. Raja Ram had already gone there from Mr. Davison's house, under Miss Kiddell's care, for his education. About eight years earlier, there had been some correspondence between the reformer and the Unitarians of Bristol, who had helped the Unitarians of Calcutta, and hence the Raja was not quite unknown there. In the quiet house of Miss Castle, Ram Mohun found some rest after the stress and strain of London. Stapleton Grove belonged to Miss Castle's father, who was a rich merchant of Bristol, and after his death Dr. Carpenter and Miss Kiddell were acting as guardians to the young daughter left by him. The Raja heard the Rev. W. Jay preach at Rowland Hill's chapel, on 17th June, 1832; his sermon being on 'The riches of His goodness.' A sermon by the Rev. R. Warner, on 'Charity, the greatest of Christian virtues,' was dedicated to the Raja and published in 1832.

On two successive Sundays the Raja attended the service conducted by Dr. Carpenter in Lewin's Mead Chapel, and on the third Sunday Rev. R. B. Aspland took the place of Dr. Carpenter, and made an appeal on behalf of the Manchester New College, to which the Raja promised some monetary help through Mr. Estlin. This was the last Christian worship in which the

Raja Ram Mohun Roy

reformer joined, while the first was in Carey's house, seventeen years before, where he was presented with a copy of Watt's *Hymns for Children*, which he always read before going to service. The celebrated essayist John Foster met the Raja in Bristol, for he was then living in a house adjoining Stapleton Grove. Foster had had a strong prepossession against him, but this vanished at the very first interview. A large party was invited on the 11th September to meet the Raja, who spoke to the guests continuously for three hours, 'standing the whole time, and replying to all the enquiries and observations that were made'¹ on the moral and political condition and prospects of India, and on certain dogmas of Indian philosophers. In conversation with those who were present, the Raja expressed his belief in the divine mission of Christ, but not in His divinity; and in His resurrection and miracles,² though his own explanation of them is wanting under the present context.

On the 12th September the Raja had dinner at Stapleton Grove with Dr. Gerard Simons, John Foster, Aspland and Estlin, and there was conversation as to how he had arrived at his religious views. On the 13th September, accompanied by Misses Kiddell, Castle and Carpenter, he went to Dr. Carpenter's house, 47 Park Street, and saw the bees there. Six days after this visit, on Thursday, the 19th September, the Raja was taken ill with fever, and developed brain symptoms. The next day his condition was worse. Miss Hare nursed him like a daughter, for which he expressed his deepest thanks. Drs. Pritchard and Carey treated him, as did also Mr. Estlin. On the 26th tetanus developed, and on

¹ Carpenter, p. 152.

² Collet, p. 223; Carpenter, pp. 154 ff.

1831—1833

Friday, 27th September, 1833, at 2.25 a.m., he breathed his last. The last word uttered by him was the mystic syllable *Om*, and he passed away in an attitude of prayer, with his holy Brahmanical thread on his person.¹

¹ Chatterjee, *R.M.R.*, p. 483; Carpenter, *Last Days*, p. 2.



RAJA RAM MOHUN ROY AT THE TRIAL OF COLONEL BRERETON

By Miss Rolinda Sharples. By courtesy of Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol.

APPENDIX A

THE TRIAL OF COLONEL BRERETON

*Extract from Dr. Bolton's letter of 10th July, 1928,
to the present author, with enclosure*

THE picture of the *Trial of Colonel Brereton*, by Miss Rolinda Sharpless, which is preserved in the Bristol Art Gallery and here reproduced shows Ram Mohun as a visitor at its last session, in the Merchants' Hall, Bristol. Among local notabilities, mentioned in the note on the picture, are 'Miss Castle and her brother, Mr. Hare, the under-sheriff, and C. B. Hare. Raja Ram Mohun Roy is seated between two chairs in the left-hand corner; to his right is Mrs. Rowlands, to his left is the Duchess of Roxburghe with her son, and just behind is standing Mr. Castle, the brother of Miss Castle.'

Colonel Brereton was tried by court martial for his negligence in handling the troops at his disposal during the Bristol riots in 1831. The prosecution began on the 9th January, 1832, but after four sittings was suddenly brought to a close by the suicide of the defendant.

APPENDIX B

TOWARDS A LEAGUE OF NATIONS

ONE of the boldest pronouncements of those times on the subject of Internationalism was made by Raja Ram Mohun Roy, in his letter to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, before his visit to Paris. He had been required to procure the necessary passport, which seemed to him a sign of uncalled-for suspicion, unworthy of civilized nations; and his attention was drawn to the fact that all the Asiatic nations, except China, were then free from it. In this connection, the Raja in his letter enunciated with clearness a principle which was much in advance of the general opinion of his age:

It is now generally admitted that not only religion, but unbiassed common-sense, as well as the accurate deductions of scientific research, lead to the conclusion that all mankind is one great family, of which the numerous nations and tribes existing are only various branches. Hence enlightened men in all countries must feel a wish to encourage and facilitate human intercourse in every manner, by removing as far as possible all impediments to it, in order to promote the reciprocal advantage and enjoyment of the whole human race.¹

Further, the Raja felt keenly the need of an instrument for securing and guaranteeing political peace in the world. On this vital problem, which affects the whole future of civilization, he thought in terms of all

¹ *Modern Review*, October 1928, p. 468.

Appendix

branches of the human race and their 'reciprocal advantage and enjoyment.' He hoped that religion would bring peace to mankind, and hated any recourse to arms for the settlement of international disputes. Being a man of peace, not simply on spiritual but also on rational grounds, he suggested the formation of a central organization or congress of all nations, where international differences might be smoothly and amicably arbitrated. The Editor of the *Modern Review* has remarked that the Raja thus anticipated in some measure, however small, the ideal of a League of Nations.¹ This is indicated in the following prophetic sentences of the Raja's:

But on general grounds, I beg to observe that it appears to me the ends of constitutional government might be better attained by submitting every matter of political difference between two countries to a congress composed of an equal number from the parliaments of each; the decision of the majority to be acquiesced in by both nations; the chairman to be chosen by each nation alternately for one year, and the place of meeting to be one year within the limits of one country, and next within those of the other. . . . By such a congress, all matters of difference, whether political or commercial, affecting the natives of any two civilized countries with constitutional governments, might be settled justly and amicably, to the satisfaction of both; and profound peace and friendly feelings might be preserved between them from generation to generation.²

¹ *Modern Review*, October 1928, p. 486.

² *Ibid.*, p. 468.

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