

RAJAH RAMMOHUN ROY'S MISSION TO ENGLAND

BASED ON UNPUBLISHED RECORDS

**BY
BRAJENDRANATH BANERJI**

**N. M. RAYCHOWDHURY & Co.
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TO

S. S. BOSE, Esq.

AS A TOKEN OF SINCERE REGARD

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In the Imperial Record Office, Calcutta, I have succeeded in unearthing several documents relating to Rajah Rammohun Roy's journey to England. The letters, which passed between the East India Co. on the one hand, and the nominal Padi-shah of Delhi and Rammohun Roy on the other, are here printed for the first time with the kind permission of the Government of India, and they may be of interest to those who are inclined to gather all particulars about the father of modern India.

As an introduction to this last stage in the Rajah's career I have reproduced his autobiographical sketch, written just before he went to France, which is supposed to have been addressed by him to his friend, Mr. Gordon, of Calcutta. This sketch first appeared in the *Athenæum*, and in the *Literary Gazette*.

14, PARSİ BAGAN,
Calcutta, May, 1926. BRAJENDRANATH BANERJĪ

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

In conformity with the wish you have frequently expressed, that I should give you an outline of my life, I have now the pleasure to give you the following very brief sketch.

My ancestors were Brahmins of a high order, and, from time immemorial, were devoted to the religious duties of their race, down to my fifth progenitor, who about one hundred and forty years ago gave up spiritual exercises for worldly pursuits and aggrandisement. His descendants ever since have followed his example, and, according to the usual fate of courtiers, with various success, sometimes rising to honour and sometimes falling; sometimes rich and sometimes poor; sometimes excelling in success, sometimes miserable through disappointment. But my maternal ancestors, being of the sacerdotal order by profession as well as by birth, and of a family than which none holds a higher rank in that profession, have up to the present day uniformly adhered to a life of religious observances and devotion, preferring peace and tranquillity of mind

* Reprinted from Mary Carpenter's *The Last days in England of the Rajah Rammohan Roy* (1875), pp. 17-20.

to the excitements of ambition, and all the allurements of worldly grandeur.

In conformity with the usage of my paternal race, and the wish of my father, I studied the Persian and Arabic languages,—these being indispensable to those who attached themselves to the Courts of the Mahommedan princes ; and agreeably to the usage of my maternal relations, I devoted myself to the study of the Sanscrit and the theological works written in it, which contain the body of Hindoo literature, law and religion.

When about the age of sixteen, I composed a manuscript calling in question the validity of the idolatrous system of the Hindoos. This, together with my known sentiments on that subject, having produced a coolness between me and my immediate kindred, I proceeded on my travels, and passed through different countries, chiefly within, but some beyond, the bounds of Hindostan, with a feeling of great aversion to the establishment of the British power in India. When I had reached the age of twenty, my father recalled me, and restored me to his favour ; after which I first saw and began to associate with Europeans, and soon after made myself tolerably acquainted with their laws and form of government. Finding them generally more intelligent, more steady and moderate in their conduct, I gave up my prejudice against them, and became inclined in their favour, feeling persuaded that their rule, though a foreign yoke, would lead more

speedily and surely to the amelioration of the native inhabitants ; and I enjoyed the confidence of several of them even in their public capacity. My continued controversies with the Brahmins on the subject of their idolatry and superstition, and my interference with their custom of burning widows, and other pernicious practices, revived and increased their animosity against me ; and through their influence with my family, my father was again obliged to withdraw his countenance openly, though his limited pecuniary support was still continued to me.

After my father's death I opposed the advocates of idolatry with still greater boldness. Availing myself of the art of printing, now established in India, I published various works and pamphlets against their errors, in the native and foreign languages. This raised such a feeling against me, that I was at last deserted by every person except two or three Scotch friends, to whom, and the nation to which they belong, I always feel grateful.

The ground which I took in all my controversies was, not that of opposition to Brahminism, but to a perversion of it ; and I endeavoured to show that the idolatry of the Brahmins was contrary to the practice of their ancestors, and the principles of the ancient books and authorities which they profess to revere and obey. Notwithstanding the violence of the opposition and resistance to my opinions, several highly respectable persons both among my own

relations and others, began to adopt the same sentiments.

I now felt a strong wish to visit Europe, and obtain, by personal observation, a more thorough insight into its manners, customs, religion, and political institutions. I refrained, however, from carrying this intention into effect until the friends who coincided in my sentiments should be increased in number and strength. My expectations having been at length realised, in November, 1830, I embarked for England, as the discussion of the East India Company's charter was expected to come on, by which the treatment of the natives of India, and its future government, would be determined for many years to come, and an appeal to the King in Council, against the abolition of the practice of burning widows, was to be heard before the Privy Council ; and his Majesty the Emperor of Delhi had likewise commissioned me to bring before the authorities in England certain encroachments on his rights by the East India Company. I accordingly arrived in England in April, 1831.

I hope you will excuse the brevity of this sketch, as I have no leisure at present to enter into particulars ; and

I remain, &c.,
RAMMOHUN ROY



Ram. Mohan Roy.

APPENDIX

GOVERNOR-GENERAL BENTINCK ON RAMMOHUN TO THE COURT OF DIRECTORS.

HONOURABLE SIRs,

We have the honour to submit for your information copy of a letter and its enclosures from Rammohun Roy, a native inhabitant of Calcutta of distinguished literary repute, announcing his intention of proceeding to England in the capacity of Agent to the King of Delhi, and as the bearer of a letter from His Majesty to the address of the Sovereign complaining of the violation by the Hon'ble Company of their engagements with the late Shah Alam.

2. On the receipt of this communication we directed the Resident at Delhi to intimate to His Majesty, the surprise with which we had perused it, and more especially our astonishment at the unmeasured and unfounded accusation which it advances against the Hon'ble Company of having violated its engagements with the Royal Family. We further desired Sir E. Colebrooke to ascertain from the King whether he acknowledged Rammohun Roy as his Agent.

3. Your Hon'ble Court will find in the Resident's reply, copy of which is submitted, both the King of Delhi's distinct recognition of Rammohun Roy as his Agent, and his explanation of the grounds on which he has thought proper to adopt the extraordinary procedure of deputing that individual to England as the champion and advocate of his pretended wrongs.

4. The subject of the King of Delhi's claim to an augmentation of stipend which is the chief point at issue, is fully discussed in paragraphs 66 to 75 of our General Letter dated 3rd July 1828, and we have nothing to add on this occasion to the complete and detailed examination of the merits of the

question, contained in Sir C. Metcalfe's dispatch recorded as per margin [Pol. Con. 27th July 1827, No. 7], the substance of which is exhibited in the paragraphs above cited.

5. With respect to His Majesty's complaint of the insult offered to him by the alteration of style adopted by the late Governor General Earl Amherst, in his correspondence with the Court of Delhi, we solicit the attention of your Honourable Court to paragraph 64 of our letter already referred to, and the papers therein cited, as containing the fullest explanation of the grounds and occasion, on which this change was introduced.*

Sd. W. C. Bentinck
W. B. Bayley
C. T. Metcalfe

* *Political Despatch to the Court of Directors, dated 22nd May 1829.*

RAJAH RAM

The following incident of the employment of Rajah Ram at the Board of Control, which Sir William Foster was the first to recall in an article read before the Royal Historical Society on 10th November 1916, will be found interesting to the reader:—

"After his father's death, Rajah Ram came to London and applied to Sir John Hobhouse, who was then President of the Board of Control, for an appointment in his office, 'requesting that the opportunity may be afforded him previously to his return to his native country of acquiring an insight into the mode in which the public business is transacted in England.' He was appointed in August 1835 for one year as an extra clerk on a salary of £100, but a writership in Bengal was refused to him. In *Alexander's East India Magazine* for July to December 1836 (vol. 12, p. 568) the following extract from the *Hurkuru* may be found—

'We hear that the Court of Directors have refused to confirm the nomination to a Bengal writership by the President of the Board of Control, of the adopted son of the late respected Rammohun Roy : and that the refusal of the Court will be brought before Parliament.'

Rajah Ram, however, retained his post in the Board's office for nearly three years : and when he then expressed a desire to return to India, he was allowed to draw his salary to the end of the third year and received in addition a donation of £100 'in consideration of his

diligence in the discharge of his duties and the circumstances under which he accompanied his father to this country.' Details of his subsequent career are wanting." (*Bengal Past & Present*, Oct.-Dec. 1925).

THE BENGAL HERALD

G. SWINTON, Esq.,

Chief Secretary to Government.

SIR,

I have the honor to inform you for the information of Government that Rammohun Roy and Rajkissen Sing have ceased to be proprietors of this newspaper, entitled the *Bengal Herald*, from the present date.*

I have, etc.,

CALCUTTA,
30th July, 1829.

(Sd.) R. M. MARTIN,
Principal Proprietor of the *Bengal Herald*.

* Public Proceedings, 4th August, 1829, No. 52.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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"Bombay Chronicle" (Bombay) says :—

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It contains a good deal of information which will be new and instructive even to many Indian Mussalmans.

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Even a cursory glance at the pages of the book is sufficient to convince any one that the book would serve as a complete Khilafat guide.

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