



## Raja Ram Mohan Roy

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the **father of Modern India's Renaissance** and a tireless **social reformer** who inaugurated the age of enlightenment and **liberal reformist modernisation** in India.

### Life

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy was born on **22 May 1772** in an orthodox Brahman family at **Radhanagar** in Bengal.
- Ram Mohan Roy's early education included the study of **Persian** and **Arabic** at Patna where he read the Quran, the works of Sufi mystic poets and the Arabic translation of the works of Plato and Aristotle. In Benaras, he studied **Sanskrit** and read Vedas and Upanishads.
- Returning to his village, at the age of sixteen, he wrote a **rational critique of Hindu idol worship**.
- From 1803 to 1814, he worked for East India Company as the **personal diwan** first of **Woodforde** and then of **Digby**.
- In 1814, he resigned from his job and moved to Calcutta in order to devote his life to **religious, social and political reforms**.
- In November 1830, he sailed for England to be present there to counteract the possible nullification of the Act banning **Sati**.
- Ram Mohan Roy was given the title of **'Raja'** by the titular Mughal Emperor of Delhi, **Akbar II** whose grievances the former was to present before the British king.
- In his address, entitled **'Inaugurator of the Modern Age in India,'** Tagore referred to Ram Mohan as **'a luminous star in the firmament of Indian history'**.

### Ideology

- Ram Mohan Roy was greatly influenced by western modern thought and stressed on **rationalism** and **modern scientific approach**.
- Ram Mohan Roy's immediate problematique was the **religious and social degeneration** of his native Bengal.
- He believed that **religious orthodoxies** have become causes of injury and detrimental to social life and sources of trouble and bewilderment to the people, instead of tending to the amelioration of the condition of society.
  - Raja Ram Mohan Roy concluded that religious reform is both **social reform** and **political modernisation**.
  - Ram Mohan believed that each sinner must make restitution for his sins and it is to be done through **self-purification** and **repentance** and not through sacrifices and rituals.
- He believed in **social equality** of all human beings and thus was a strong opposer of the caste system.
- Ram Mohan was attracted to **Islamic monotheism**. He said that monotheism is also the fundamental message of **Vedanta**.
  - His idea of single, unitarian god was a **corrective to the polytheism** of orthodox

Hinduism and to **Christian trinitarianism**. He believed that monotheism supported one **universal model for humanity**.

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy believed that unless women were freed from unhuman forms of oppression like illiteracy, child marriage, sati, purdah, Hindu society can not progress.
  - He characterised sati as the **violation of every humane** and **social feeling** and as symptomatic of the **moral debasement of a race**.

## Contributions

### ▪ Religious reforms:

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy's first published work **Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhiddin** (a gift to deists) published in 1803 exposed irrational religious beliefs and corrupt practices of the Hindus as the belief in revelations, prophets, miracles etc.
- In 1814, he founded **Atmiya Sabha** in Calcutta to campaign against idolatry, caste rigidities, meaningless rituals and other social ills.
- He criticized the ritualism of Christianity and rejected Christ as the incarnation of God. In **Precepts of Jesus** (1820), he tried to separate the moral and philosophical message of the New Testament, which he praised, from its miracle stories.

### ▪ Social reforms:

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy conceived reformist religious associations as instruments of social and political transformation.
  - He founded the **Atmiya Sabha** in 1815, the **Calcutta Unitarian Association** in 1821, and the **Brahmo Sabha** in 1828 which later became the **Brahmo Samaj**.
- He campaigned against the caste system, untouchability, superstitions and use of intoxicants.
- He was well known for his pioneering thought and action on the emancipation of women and especially on the **abolition of sati** and **widow remarriage**.
- He attacked **child marriage, illiteracy of women** and the degraded state of widows and demanded the right of inheritance and property for women.

## Brahmo Samaj

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy founded **Brahmo Sabha** in **1828**, which was later renamed as **Brahmo Samaj**.
- Its chief aim was the worship of the eternal God. It was against priesthood, rituals and sacrifices.
- It focused on **prayers, meditation and reading of the scriptures**. It believed in the unity of all religions.
- It was the **first intellectual reform movement in modern India**. It led to the emergence of **rationalism and enlightenment** in India which indirectly contributed to the nationalist movement.
- It was the forerunner of all social, religious and political movements of modern India. It split into two in 1866, namely **Brahmo Samaj of India** led by **Keshub Chandra Sen** and **Adi Brahmo Samaj** led by **Debendranath Tagore**.
- **Prominent Leaders:** Debendranath Tagore, Keshub Chandra Sen, Pt. Sivnath Shastri, and Rabindranath Tagore.

### ▪ Educational reforms:

- Roy did much to disseminate the benefits of modern education to his countrymen. He supported **David Hare's** efforts to find the **Hindu College** in **1817**, while Roy's English school taught mechanics and **Voltaire's philosophy**.
- In **1825**, he established **Vedanta college** where courses in both Indian learning and Western social and physical sciences were offered.

### ▪ Economic and Political Reforms:

- **Civil liberties:** Roy was impressed and admired the British system of constitutional government for the **civil liberties** it gave to the people. He wanted to extend the benefits of that system of government to Indian people.
- **Press freedom:** Through his writings and activities, he supported the movement for **free press in India**.
  - When press censorship was relaxed by Lord Hastings in **1819**, Ram Mohan found three journals- **The Brahmanical Magazine** (1821); The Bengali weekly, **Samvad Kaumudi** (1821); and the Persian weekly, **Mirat-ul-Akbar**.
- **Taxation reforms:** Roy condemned oppressive practices of Bengali zamindars and demanded **fixation of minimum rents**. He also demanded the **abolition of taxes on tax-free lands**.
  - He called for a **reduction of export duties on Indian goods** abroad and the abolition of the East India Company's trading rights.
- **Administrative reforms:** He demanded the **Indianisation of superior services** and **separation of the executive from judiciary**. He demanded equality between Indians and Europeans.

### Literary Works of Raja Ram Mohan Roy

- Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin (1804)
- Vedanta Gantha (1815)
- Translation of an abridgement of the Vedanta Sara (1816)
- Kenopanishads (1816)
- Ishopanishad (1816)
- Kathopanishad (1817)
- A Conference between the Advocate for, and an Opponent of Practice of Burning Widows Alive (Bengali and English) (1818)
- Mundaka Upanishad (1819)
- A Defence of Hindu Theism (1820)
- The Precepts of Jesus- The Guide to Peace and Happiness (1820)
- Bengali Grammar (1826)
- The Universal Religion (1829)
- History of Indian Philosophy (1829)
- Gaudiya Vyakaran (1833)

### Conclusion

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was one of the few people in his time to realise completely the significance of modern age. He knew that the ideal of human civilization does not lie in isolation of independence, but in the brotherhood of inter-dependence of individuals as well as nations. His attempt was to establish Indian people in the full consciousness of their own cultural personality, to make them comprehend the reality that was unique in their civilisations in the spirit of sympathetic cooperation.