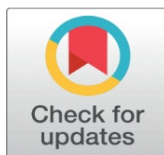
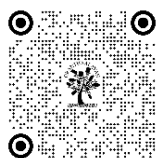


RAJA RAMMOHAN ROY: AN ANALYSIS OF HIS LIBERAL THINKING

Mahirul Islam ¹✉

¹PhD Research Scholar, School of International Relations and Strategic Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata



Corresponding Author

Mahirul Islam,
mahiofficial222@gmail.com

DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.1932](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.1932)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2024 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

Liberalism is one of the dominant political ideologies in the Nineteenth Century in Europe and today globally. Locke, Bentham, Mill, and all other liberalists seek to establish individual liberty and rights of the individuals. These are the core political values of liberalism. However, in the history of Indian political thought, Raja Rammohan Roy was a social reformer, the father of India's Renaissance, the inaugurator of Modern India, and the 'prophet of humanity', had provided his liberal political views and argued it was the best ideology for the development and progress of India and its societies. He also speaks for individual liberty, freedom of the nations, rights of the individuals and their education, faith in democracy and constitutionalism, international coexistence, liberal perception of law and legislation, etc. All these made him a truly liberal thinker in India.

Keywords: Liberalism, Rammohan Roy, Liberty, Rights, Education, Democracy, Constitutionalism, International Coexistence

1. INTRODUCTION

Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833) was born in a Brahmin Bengali family. His father was Ramakanta Roy and his mother was Tarini Devi. The Mughal Emperor Akbar II conferred him the title 'Raja' in 1831. Raja Rammohan Roy was an important figure in Indian history, better known as the father of the Indian Renaissance. He is called the 'Prophet of Humanity' by Acharya Brajendranath and 'the inaugurator of the Modern Age in India' by Rabindranath Tagore. Roy had learned and had proficiency in several Oriental and European languages like Persian, Arabic, English, and Sanskrit. Roy was a social reformer, deeply concerned with the eradication of social evils like child marriage, sati, polygamy, etc. He had a great role in education and establishing the Hindu College. Roy was deeply influenced by several religion's basic elements like the deism of Sufism, the anti-idolatry of Islam, and the ethical teaching of Christianity. He had a sympathy for democracy and liberal ideas, especially on the question of individual rights, liberty, freedom, etc. He seems India and its people only would be developed if liberal ideas were adopted. Some scholars compared him to the position occupied by John Locke in the case of European liberalism and democratic tradition (Karmakar, 2015). However, before going into the discussion of Roy's liberal thought, need to briefly discuss liberalism and next about his ideas.

2. BASIC IDEAS OF LIBERALISM

Liberalism is a dynamic and oldest political ideology in the world. Based on the Encyclopedia (2024), “liberalism is an idea which committed to freedom as a method and policy of the government as an organizing principle in society and a way of life for individual and community”. Generally, Liberalism has been classified into classical liberalism, modern liberalism, and contemporary liberalism (Acharya, 2017). The theoretical bases of classical liberalism come from the book *‘Two Treatises of Government (1690)’* by John Locke (1632-1704), who is the ‘father of Western liberal ideology’. Locke argued, in his second treatise that, the government aims to protect the life, liberty, and private property of the individuals. These are natural rights and consequently, should be protected by natural laws. A limited constitutional government based on the consent of the people was the basis of his political liberal philosophy. From the economic perspective Adams Smith in his book *‘An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations’ (1776)* emphasized ‘laissez faire and sought to establish the limited role of the state. He argued state should not interfere with the economic activities of individuals and ‘invisible hand’ will lead to social welfare (Mukhopadhyay, 2019). Many individualists like Harbert Spencer, Adam Smith, and Bentham, argued state is evil but rendered necessary on account of the selfishness and rapacity of man (Mahajan, 1988). Jeremy Bentham based on his utilitarian philosophy argued in favor of the greatest good of the greatest number. The state and its institutions aim to take pleasure in the individuals. He was in favor of representative government (Mukherjee and Ramaswami, 2018). However, after the Second World War, the great depression started, consequently many political scientists came up with their views on the positive role of the state in securing a dignified life for individuals. They are known as modern liberalists. The main proponents of modern liberalism are John Stuart Mill, T. H Green, L. T Hobbes House, Harald Laski, etc. Andrew Heywood argued modern liberalism exhibits a more sympathetic attitude towards state as the unregulated capitalism merely produces a new form of injustice. J.S Mill, known as an individualist, comes with the view of ‘self-regarding and other-regarding concept’ and argues that state intervention is only on the other actions of the people (Mukherjee and Ramaswami, 2018). T. H Green came up with the concept of ‘Collective Liberalism’ and said ‘will, not force, is the basis of state’ and argued the state is not an end in itself. Laski in his book *‘A Grammar of Politics’ (1925)* argued in favor of the service state. MacIver in his book *‘The Web of Government’ (1947)*, *‘The Modern State’ (1926)* said the state as an agent of the society creates rights of the peoples. However, J. M Keynes in the 1930s and William Beveridge in the 1940s were strong supporters of this branch of liberalism. Keynes argued state control of the economy is not unwarranted as it adds power and prosperity to a liberal society. Beveridge opined ensuring the social security of the citizens is the main duty of the state (Mukhopadhyay, 2019). The contemporary version of classical liberalism is neo-liberalism/ libertarianism or neo-classical liberalism. In the second half of the twentieth century F. A Hayek (1899-1992), Milton Friedman (1912-2006), Robert Nozick (1938-2002), and others realized that the concept of welfare state, state intervention, and its control on economic activities is inimical to individual liberty. Consequently, to restore individual liberty, they sought to restore laissez-faire not only in economic activities but also in social and political activities. In a nutshell, they rejected the view of the positive role of the state. In the contemporary world, Liberalization. Privatization and Globalization have become the practical manifestation principles (Gaub, 2016).

3. RAMMOHAN ROY AND HIS LIBERAL IDEAS

In this section, the basic elements of Rammohan Roy’s liberal views have been discussed. The first and most important is Roy’s argument in favor of liberty. It has been the core political value in his entire socio-political thought (Nithya, 2019). Like Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Mill, he had a passionate attachment to the concept of liberty (Das, 2018). He was the first to deliver the message of political freedom to India. Roy acknowledged the positive gains from the British rule in India but he opposed the concept of unending foreign rule in India. His aspirations of liberty or human freedom are not only limited to one nation or community but across the world. *He supported all the struggle that aimed at human freedom* (Nithya, 2019). He understood neglecting human freedom no human can progress in society. After receiving the news of the liberation of South Africa from the tyranny of the Spanish, Rammohan celebrated an occasion and gave a dinner party to his friends (Tagore, 1966). However, in India, he wanted to establish freedom of individual thought and also wanted to establish the freedom of the press. Roy argued liberty of thought would facilitate for individual’s advancement. This is one of the most important elements of his liberal thinking. He believed every citizen should have the right to liberty of thought. It would facilitate the Indian people to get their social justice and rights (Das, 2013). Roy not only emphasized the liberty of thought of the individuals but also, he seeks to establish freedom of the press. Rammohan himself founded two weeklies namely *‘Sambad Kaumudi’* in Bengali and *‘Mirat -ul-Akhbar’* in Persian during

1821-22. He had written an article in praise of trial by Jury and in defense of the freedom of the press. Tagore argued (1966) that Rammohan championed the struggle for freedom and democratic rights not only for India alone but for every country of the world. Rammohan tried to convince the British that the freedom of the press was essential for the democratic functioning of the government. It would provide not only a device for the ventilation of grievances, but it would also ensure the government takes steps for their redressal (Chakrabarty and Pandey, 2009). The company, however, had a fear of public criticism under free- press. Rammohan became successful in convincing the government that freedom of the press would not be harmful to the government. Free press was helpful for both Indian peoples and the government as the free press would act as a channel of communication. Rammohan argued free press would act as a safety valve and didn't give any scope for sudden outbursts (Rekha, 2021). However, on January 9, 1823, when John Adams appointed as the acting Governor General of India issued an ordinance imposing various sanctions on newspapers, Rammohan strongly protested against it in the Supreme Court with the assistance of an English Lawyer on 17 March. However, the protest was rejected by the Supreme Court. Subsequently, Roy with his colleague Dwarkanath Tagore, submitted a petition to the Privy Council but the appeal too met rejection. Consequently, Roy ceased the publication of *Mirat-ul-Akhbar*. Although this Gagging act could not be thwarted during that time Indian people remained against the act. In 1835, Governor General Metcalfe repealed the obnoxious 1823 ordinance which was named 'liberation of the Indian press' (Khosla, 2018).

Secondly, Rammohan did speak of rights, which were largely civic and religious, not political. Rammohan Roy had tried to create awareness for civil rights among Indians, though he didn't enlist the civil rights, he seems to include the right to life and liberty, the right to have opinions and freedom of expression, the right to property, the right to religion, etc. Rammohan did not want to eliminate women from enjoying civil rights. Roy was very well aware of the social status of women. During that time in Hindu society, the condition of women was very pathetic and very dire in society. Roy tried to emancipate women from this condition and tried to provide basic social rights to women. He condemned the subjugation of women and he opposed the traditional notion of women's inferiority to men. He was the champion of women's liberty in the society. He doesn't support the polygamy caste rigid and child marriage but, he supports the widow's remarriage and opposes men's multi-marriage. He also does not believe that only men will enjoy property rights as during that time girls had no rights to their father's property (Priya, n. d). In fact, after the death of her husband, the property was transferred to the children but not to the women. He advocated the girl's property rights and their education. He understood that without universal education for men and women, a society could not be progressed. During that time the Brahma Samaj (1828) paid attention to the girl's educations. However, Roy in his book 'Ancient Rights of 1822' argued that girls in ancient society had equal access and opportunities to property rights as men (Baugh, 2021). Roy consequently influenced the British Government to bring the necessary modifications to the existing laws (Dey, 2023).

Thirdly, Roy has a positive view towards *democracy and constitutionalism*. In the 19th Century was an outstanding personality, as a pioneer of modernity and a visionary of liberal democracy not just for Bengal or India but for the whole world. He believed in democratic rights and faith was in favor of Parliamentary democracy and constitutional government. He believed that individual liberty could be ensured only by establishing a constitutional government. He preferred constitutional monarchy or limited monarchy like the British government (Dey, 2023). Roy was in favor of practicing the separation of power and he tried to give Parliament the ultimate power of any kind of administrative change in the country. Aristocracy or despotism was hated from his heart but he supported the democratic institutions and claimed the democratic government reflected the Western liberal ideas. Roy argued the representative government was the most suitable form of government for India. Ramachandra Guha in his book "The Makers of Modern India" argued Roy was the first Indian liberal whose ideas influenced the post-independent period of India (Das, 2018).

Fourthly, Rammohan was in favor of free trade, and entry of foreign capital in growing the wealth and prosperity in India (Karmakar, 2015). However, he was against the limited role of the state. In his writing repeatedly Roy appealed to the state authorities to undertake many social, moral, and cultural responsibilities. He wanted state intervention to protect the property of the individuals. The government should take a positive role in protecting the peasants from the tyranny of the landlords. He was well aware of the consequences of Lord Cornwallis's permanent settlement in 1793. Hence, he sought to intervene with the British authority in the affairs of the 'Zamindars to protect the peasant'. Rammohan also seeks to establish property rights for Hindu women (Dey, 2023).

Fifthly, he had a *liberal perception of law and judicial administration*. The rule of law and separation of power were other liberal ideas of Rammohan Roy. He was inspired by the idea of Montesquieu's separation of power concept (Karmakar, 2020). According to Roy, law was the creation of passionless reason, it was the command of the sovereign. The King in Parliament alone could have that authority but not should be vested in the hands of the East India Company. British Parliament should take into account the views of economic and intellectual elites before finalizing any laws relating to India. He advocated the idea of codification of law in the interest of both the rulers and the ruled. It will be clear, simple, and exact, which would make the interpretations of laws more impersonal and their application more uniform. He differentiated between law, customs, and morality and he accepted some evolving customs are the source of law, but the two could not be identified. Roy also wanted to reform administrative and judicial matters. He believed that the independent judiciary would ensure the supreme guarantee of liberty. Furthermore, he speaks for the constant supervision of the judicial proceedings by public vigilant opinion, the requirement of appointment of Indian assessors, trial by jury, etc., (Nithya, 2019).

Sixth, Roy had tried to synthesize the Eastern and Western cultures and he was the first thinker who realized the Western science and thought as well as relevance of the English education for India's youth. He also emphasized the modern Indian language. He also emphasized on women's education in India. One of the most significant contributions of Raja Rammohan Roy in establishing the Hindu College at Calcutta in collaboration with David Hare. He founded the Anglo-Hindu school (1822) and Vedanta College (1826) where he insisted that his teaching of monotheistic doctrine be incorporated into the modern western curriculum (Mondal and Behera, 2015).

Seventhly, He was a supporter of international coexistence and cooperation among nation-states. Rammohan in his writing *On the Unity of Mankind (1831)* spoke for the friendship and more broadly unity of all men across the world. Not only this, but another important element of liberalism, 'religious tolerances' has been emphasized by Roy (Das, 2018).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion it is clear he was a true liberalist, not only theoretically but also practically as he was seeking to establish the availability of liberal values in Indian society during that time. He understands India's future progress and development would happen if a Western type of liberal government was established. However, in his vision of education, abolition of the *sati system*, the rights, and individual liberty of women, and more broadly in the emancipation of women, the role of Rammohan Roy in Indian society was immensely important in the transition process from middle age to modern India during that time. He was the inaugurator of modern India.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None

REFERENCES

- Acharya, A. (2017). Liberalism in the edited book *Political Theory: An Introduction* by Rajeev Bhargava and Ashok Acharya. *Pearson*, Delhi. ISBN 9789332568839.
- Bag, A (2021). Raja Rammohan Roy's Contributions to Women's Rights and Education: Its Current Relevance. *Journal of Towards Excellence*, September, Volume 13, Issue 3, ISSN 0974035X. Available at Anup Bugh.pdf
- Chakrabarty, B and Pandey, R. K. (2019). *Modern Indian Political Thought: Text and Context*. *Sage Texts*, SBN 9788132102550 (PB).
- Das, Dr. PK (2018). Raja Rammohan Roy: A Harbinger of Indian Liberalism. *International Journal for Research in Social Science and Humanities*. Volume-4, Issue 11, November. ISSN: 2208-2697. Available at file:///C:/Users/Mahirul%20Islam/Downloads/green-publication,+Journal+editor,+758%20(2).pdf.
- Das, P. G (2013). *Bhartiya Rasta Chinta o Jatiyo Andalon*. *New Central Book Agency Private Limited*. Kolkata. ISBN 8173815747.

- Dey, G. (2023). Background to the Great Revolt: Rammohan's Historical-Social Thought and Steps. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)*. February, Volume 11, Issue 2, ISSN: 23202882. Available at <https://ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2302495.pdf>
- Gouba, O.P. (2014). An Introduction to Political Theory, *Mayur Paperbacks*, Seventh Edition. ISBN 978-81-7198-126-7.
- Karmakar, A (2015). Economic Thought of Raja Rammohan Roy: The Earliest Spokesman of Free Trade in India. *International Journal Research of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies*. February, Volume 1, Issue 1, Page 103-106. ISSN : 23947969. Available at <https://oaji.net/articles/2015/1707-1424926732.pdf>
- Khosla, Dr. R. (2018). Raja Ram Mohan Roy : The First Modern in the Book of Political Theory and Thought: Western and Indian Tradition. Edited by Krishna Menon. Accessed from <https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/psp07/chapter/raja-ram-mohan-roy-the-first-modern/>
- Mahajan, V. D. (1988). Political Theory. Fourth Edition, *S Chand and Company LTD New Delhi*. ISBN 8121903696.
- Mandal, M. M & Behera, S. K. (2015). Raja Ram Mohan Roy as an Educational Reformer: An Evaluation, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)*. Volume-1, Issue-IV, January. ISSN: 23496959 (Online). Available at <https://oaji.net/articles/2015/1115-1422637614.pdf>
- Mukherjee, S & Ramaswami, S. (2018) A History of Political Thought: Plato to Marx, *PHI Learning Private Limited, Delhi*. ISBN 9788120343894.
- Mukhopadhyay, A. K. (2019) An Introduction to Political Theory. *Sage Texts*. ISBN 9789353283018 (PB).
- Nithya, N. R. (2019). Modern Indian Social and Political Thought, *School of Distance Education, University of Calicut, Kerala*.
- Priya, S. (N. d). Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the abolition of the sati system in India. *International Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Studies (IJHAS)*. Volume-1, No-2. Available at <https://airccse.com/ijhas/papers/1216ijhas08.pdf>.
- Rekha, H. G. (2021). Role of Press as Campaign of Social Reforms by Rajamohan Roy. *International Journal Research and Analytical Reviews*, November, Volume 8, Issue 4. E-ISSN 2348-1269. Available at <https://ijrar.org/papers/IJRAR21D1545.pdf>
- Tagore, S (1966). Raja Rammohan Roy. *Sahitya Academy. NEW DELHI*. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/tagore/1966/rajarammohunroy.pdf>