
UNIT 4 RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

The Unit deals with the political thought of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. He was an eminent religious and social reformer of the 19th century India. He was the founder of Liberal tradition in Indian political thought. After going through this unit, you should be able to :

- appreciate the role of socio-religious reform movements in the making of modern India,
- understand the crusade started by Roy against the cruel and barbarous social practices, and
- explain the meaning and significance of Liberalism in shaping modern Indian political thought.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) was one of the makers of modern India. He is generally hailed as "the father of Modern India". Though Roy was modernist in his approach, he always tried to link modernity with tradition. He attempted the creative combination of secularism and spirituality, of Western and Eastern philosophy. His attitude towards religion was eclectic. He wanted to present the concept of universal religion by combining the best features of all leading religions of the world.

4.2 ROY AS A RELIGIOUS REFORMER

A review and revaluation of religion was Roy's primary concern. He was of the opinion that rationality and modernity needed to be introduced in the field of religion and that "irrational religion" was at the root of many social evils. The socio-political progress of this country, according to him, depended mainly on the

successful revolution in the religious thought and behaviour. He was interested not only in reforming the Hindu religion, but also tried to remove the discrepancies among the various religions of the world. He undertook a serious study of comparative religions and realised in due course that true Hinduism, true Islam and true Christianity are not fundamentally different from each other. He hoped that the universal religion for mankind could be established by combining the best elements of all religions. This concept of universal religion meant not merely religious tolerance, but also transcending all the sectarian barriers of separate religion. Roy, thus attempted a spiritual synthesis, stressing the unity of all religious experience. He became a confirmed monotheist. In 1828 he established the Brahmo Samaj. The Samaj acted as a forum for religious and philosophical contemplation and discussion. Roy's criticism of religious antagonised the priestly classes of all organised religions. Time has, however, proved beyond doubt the relevance of Roy's thoughts and deeds.

4.2.1 Influences that Shaped Him

Besides Bengali and Sanskrit, Roy had mastered Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Greek, Latin and 17 other leading languages spoken in the world. Roy's familiarity with such diverse languages, exposed him to a variety of cultural, philosophical and religious experiences. He studied Islam thoroughly. The rationality and the logical consistency of Arabic literature in general and the mutajjil in particular impressed Roy greatly. The Sufi poets like Saddi and Haafiz made a deep impact on Roy's mind. The Quranic concept of Tauhid or Unity of God fascinated Roy.

Thus, in this context, when Roy examined the Hindu religious texts and practices, he was greatly disturbed. He found polytheism, idolatory and irrational superstitions absolutely intolerable. He decided to fight against these age-old evils.

A Sanskrit scholar, Ram Mohan had studied the Hindu scriptures in depth and thus he got the inspiration to free the orthodox Hinduism from its obscurantist elements. Roy also had studied the teachings of the Buddha Dhamma. It is said that in the course of his travels he reached Tibet. There he was pained to see how the principles of Buddhism were blatantly violated and how idol-worship, which had no place in the Dhamma of Lord Buddha, had come to be accepted. He strongly criticised these practices.

As a Dewan in the revenue department, when the Raja was required to go to Rangpur, he got an opportunity to study the Tantrik literature as well as the Jaina's Kalpasutras and other scriptures. He also mastered the English language and acquainted himself with political developments and ideas like rationalism and liberation in England and Europe. The knowledge of English not only facilitated Roy's contacts with Englishmen but also opened up a whole new world to him. In Roy's own words, he now gave up his initial prejudices against the British and realized that it was better to seek help from these enlightened rulers in ameliorating the condition of the ignorant and superstitious masses. He became a strong advocate of English education and a supporter of British rule.

Roy admired the Bible as much as he did the Vedanta and the Quran. Many of his critics thought that two major features of Roy's Brahmo Samaj, namely, the opposition to idol-worship, and the practice of collective prayer were borrowed from Christianity. Roy was charged of Christianising Hindustan in a surreptitious manner. It is true that Roy advised Indians to imbibe Christ's ethical teachings. Roy himself admitted, "I found the doctrine of Christ more conducive to moral principles and better adopted for the use of rational beings than any other which have come to my knowledge." He also compiled "The Precepts of Jesus" with a view to proving how the teachings of Christ could be better adapted to rational man's use. At the same time it has to be noted that he was no blind admirer of the Christian faith. He rejected the doctrine of Christ's divinity (arguing that if Christ is divine, so is Rama) and the doctrine of Trinity preached by the missionaries.

From what has been said above, it should be clear that it is unfair to charge Roy with seeking to Christianise Hinduism. Rather it was Roy's ardent desire to revive

Hinduism in its pristine, pure and universal form. He pleaded for an Advaita philosophy which rejected caste, idolatory and superstitious rites and rituals.

Thus, Roy was someone who had gone beyond narrow divisions of religious faiths. He embraced all that was the most valuable and the most inspiring in Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.

4.2.2 Reinterpreting Hinduism

Roy devoted all his energies to fighting sectarianism and other medieval tendencies prevailing in the Hindu society, such as polytheism, idolatory and superstitions. He was a firm believer of the Advaita philosophy which left no scope for such tendencies. Roy was quite sure that unless the Hindu society underwent a religious and social transformation, it would not become fit for political progress. According to him, the then prevailing religious system of the Hindus was ill-suited for the promotion of their political interests. The multitude of religious rites and ceremonies and the unnatural distinctions of caste and laws of purification, Roy argued, had deprived the Hindus of any kind of common political feeling. Hindus must accept some changes in their religion at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort. Reinterpretation of Hinduism, to Roy, was thus the starting point for the programme of socio-political reform. Roy sought to combine the deep experiences of spiritual life with the basic principle of social democracy. He denounced all superstitions and the evil practices based on them because he was convinced that these longstanding customary practices really did not form the core of their religious faith. They, in fact, had no place or support in the religious texts of the Hindus. Roy wanted to draw the attention of his countrymen to the ancient purity of their religion. To him, this purity was well reflected in the Vedas and the Upanishads.

In order to prove that blind faith and superstitious beliefs and practices had no basis in the pure Hindu religion, Roy undertook the difficult task of translating the Upanishads into English and Bengali. He gave elaborate notes and comments with these translations and distributed them free of cost amongst the people.

At the age of 16, Roy wrote a book challenging the validity of the practice of idol-worship, which according to him was the root cause of many other social evils. It led to the multiplication of deities and also a multitude of modes of worship. This, in turn, had resulted in dividing the society into innumerable castes and groups, each worshipping an idol different from others. The process of division and subdivision was unending. Roy considered idolatory to be opposed to reason and common sense. Besides, it had no sanction in the ancient religious texts. Roy preached monotheism and a collective prayer from the platform of the Brahmo Samaj.

Roy fought against the superstitions which had resulted in evolving many inhuman and cruel customs and traditions in Hindu society. He tried to convince the people that the superstitions had nothing to do with the teachings of original Hinduism. Roy not only preached but also practised what he preached. Travelling across the ocean was considered to be a sin by the orthodox Hindus. Roy was the first Hindu to break this superstition. He himself undertook overseas travel. This courage of conviction on his part made Roy's efforts more effective.

Check Your Progress 1

Note : i) Use the space below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

1) Identify the influences that shaped Roy as a reformer.

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2) What were the grounds on which Roy objected to idolatry?

Raja Ram Mohan Roy

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4.3 ROY AS A SOCIAL REFORMER

Next to religious backwardness, according to Roy, the factor responsible for the political deterioration of India was her social decadence. He had no doubts that here the social reform was an essential precondition of political liberation. He did pioneering work in the field of social reform.

Roy started his public life in 1815 with the establishment of the Atmiya Sabha. This sabha vehemently protested against the prevalent practice of selling young girls to prospective husbands due to some pecuniary interests, in the name of the Kuleen tradition. It also opposed polygamy and worked for the removal of caste disabilities.

Roy believed in the progressive role of the British rule in India and sought government help in the matter of social reforms, especially in the form of socially progressive legislations. For instance, Roy was convinced that without the active support of the government it would be almost impossible to eradicate the inhuman practices of sati.

Roy's aim was the creation of a new society based on the principles of tolerance, sympathy and reason, where the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity would be accepted by all, and where man would be free from the traditional shackles which had enslaved him for ages. He yearned for a new society which would be cosmopolitan and modern.

Roy's methods of social reform were multifaceted. He combined all possible means, including even those which were commonly believed to be incompatible. He appealed to the rational faculty of his compatriots, and often quoted from the scriptures, lines and verses in support of the proposed reforms.

The great scholar of Sanskrit that he was, Roy could easily counter the objections of the advocates of status quo by quoting elaborately from the original Sanskrit texts. For instance, while condemning polygamy, Roy cited Yagnavalkya who permitted a second wife only on 8 specific grounds viz. if she had the habit of drinking, suffered from incurable disease, barrenness etc. Nevertheless, he maintained that no book was a work of God and hence infallible. He wrote scholarly essays on topics of social reform and also translated and reinterpreted the important religious texts. He sent memoranda and appeals to the rulers inviting their attention to the social evils. From the platforms of the organized forums, he presented before the people the models of exemplary behaviour in religious and social matters. He took keen interest in and supported each and every movement aimed at human liberation anywhere in the world. He even had the courage of conviction to declare that he would renounce his connection with English, if a particular reform bill pending before the Parliament in England was not passed by it. He established or helped in several ways the social organizations catering to the needs of destitute widows and penniless students.

4.3.1 On Caste System

Raja Ram Mohan Roy's strongest objection to the caste system was on the grounds that it fragmented society into many divisions and subdivisions. Caste divisions destroyed social homogeneity and the integrated texture of society and weakened it

politically. Caste divisions deprived the people completely of political feeling, i.e. the feeling of commonality, of solidarity. A people so divided become incapable of undertaking any great task. Besides the divisive role of caste system, Roy was also critical about its discriminatory nature. He was against the inequities inherent in the traditional caste hierarchy. He thought it to be illogical to assess the worth of an individual on the basis of birth and not on his merits. He was in favour of intercaste and inter-racial marriages, which he thought, could effectively break the barriers of the caste divisions.

4.3.2 On Women's Rights

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a champion of women's rights in India. He laid the foundations of the women's liberation movement in this country. He revolted against the subjection of women and pleaded for the restoration of their rights. The condition of the Hindu women in those days was very pitiable. They were subjected to different kinds of injustices and deprivations. According to Roy, the root cause of the all-round deterioration of Hindu women was the complete denial of their property rights. The Hindu girl was not given the traditional right to share with her brothers the property of her deceased father. The married Hindu woman was refused the right to share with her sons the property left by her deceased husband.

In 1822, Roy wrote a book entitled *Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Right of Females*. He pointed out that the ancient Hindu Lawgivers gave the mother the right to have an equal share with her sons in the property left by her husband; and the daughter to have 1/4 part of the portion which a son could inherit in the property left by the father. Roy indicated how these rights were gradually taken away by the modern lawgivers. He tried to prove that all these deprivations were blatant violations of the provisions in the ancient texts written by the authorities such as Yagnyawalkya, Narad, Katyayana, Brihaspati and others. The utter helplessness and humiliation of the Hindu widow was one of the major reasons that prompted the inhuman practice of Sati.

Women completely robbed of their property rights quite naturally lost their independence and became the slaves of the male members of the family. They were thought to have less intellectual capabilities than the males. They were supposed to have an existence only at a physical level. Men were free to marry as many women as they thought fit for the satisfaction of their lust. Women however were not allowed to marry a second time. As equality of sexes was an article of faith for Roy, he could not accept that women were inferior to men in any respect. He believed that they were even superior to men in some respects. Whatever inferiority seemed to be on their part was the result, Roy argued, of keeping them away for generations from the sources of knowledge and the opportunities to shoulder different responsibilities in life.

Roy vehemently opposed polygamy and with utmost vigour brought to light, its shameful evil consequences. He pleaded for an enactment allowing a Hindu male to marry a second wife only after getting a clearance from the magistrate. Roy was in favour of the remarriage of women under certain circumstances. Brahmo Samaj which he founded paid special attention to women's education.

4.3.3 On Sati

Perhaps the greatest social reform with which Roy's name will be permanently associated is the abolition of the cruel practice of sati. Roy used all the means at his disposal to stop this inhuman practice, which forced the helpless widow to burn herself alive on the funeral pyre of her husband.

In 1818, Roy wrote his first essay on sati in which he argued that the woman had an existence independent of her husband and hence, she had no reason to end her life on the demise of her husband. The society had no right over her life. Right to life of both men and women was equally important. That the practice of sati was centuries old could be no argument to make it just. All that comes through centuries need not always be right. All customs need to be adjusted to the changing circumstances, if

they are to survive. According to Roy, Sati was nothing short of murder and was therefore a punishable offence under the law.

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Roy fought against the practice of sati on three fronts: The first and the most important was that of public opinion. Roy through writings, speeches, agitation and discussions prepared the minds of the people in favour of the abolition of sati and explained how the practice had no support in any of the religious texts and hence governmental action in the matter could not be an interference in religious affairs. Secondly, he tried to convince the rulers that it was their responsibility as civilized rulers to put an end to the cruel custom. The third front was the inquiry into the causes that led a Hindu widow to commit Sati and to make arrangements to eliminate those causes. Roy found that ignorance of the women about their legitimate rights, their illiteracy, customary denial of the property rights to the widow and the consequent helplessness, dependence, misery and humiliation were some of the causes behind this practice. Roy pleaded strongly for the restoration of property rights of the women as well as for facilities for women's education.

Check Your Progress 2

Note : i) Use the space below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

- 1) What were the major concerns of the Atmiya Sabha launched by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1815?

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- 2) Describe the three fronts on which Roy had to fight for abolition of the practice of Sati.

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4.4 ROY'S POLITICAL LIBERALISM

Roy can be described as the earliest advocate of liberalism and the precursor of the liberal movement in India. Liberalism had emerged as the most valuable product of renaissance and reformation in Europe. It captured some of the best brains in the 19th century Europe and America. It became the dominant ideology of the first phase of religious and social reform in India. Liberalism, in brief, stands for the value and dignity of the individual personality; the central position of Man in the historical development; and the faith that people are the ultimate source of all power. Quite naturally liberalism insists on the inviolability of certain rights of the individual without which no human development can be thought of; it insists on human equality and also on the tenet that the individual should not be sacrificed for the sake of society. In liberalism, there is no scope for arbitrary and despotic use of authority in any field whether it be religious, social, political or economic.

Roy advocated liberal principles in all walks of life. In the religious field Roy stood for tolerance, a non-communal approach to all problems and secularism. He valued the freedom of the individual to follow the dictates of his conscience and even to defy the commands of the priestly class. Politically, Roy was a supporter of the impersonal authority of law and opposed all kinds of arbitrary and despotic power. He was convinced that the existence of constitutional government is the best guarantee of human freedom. He insisted on the use of constitutional means as when required to safeguard the rights. He preferred the gradual improvements of the condition of this country because, to him, such improvements were more lasting and profound.

True to the liberal principles in the economic sphere, Roy believed in the sanctity of right to property. Similarly, he believed that a strong middle class had an important role to play in socio-political dynamics. He was for the emancipation of poor peasants who were exposed to the exploitation of zamindars. He wanted the government to reduce its demands on landlords. He wanted to preserve the ryotwari system and rural basis of Indian civilization and also establish modern scientific industry. He however differed from the other western liberal thinkers in one important respect, viz. role of state and sphere of state activities. In his scheme of things, the state is expected to bring about social reform, in protecting the rights of the tenants against the landlords etc.

4.4.1 On Liberty

Liberty was a pivot around which the entire religio-socio-political thought of Roy revolved. His protest against idolatry, his agitation against Sati, his demand for modern western education and his insistence on freedom of press, right of women, and his demands for "separation for powers" and for the codification of laws were all expressions of his intense love for liberty. For him, liberty was a priceless possession of mankind. He was the first to deliver the message of political freedom to India. Although Roy recognised the positive gains India would get from British rule, he was never in favour of an unending foreign rule in India. He considered the British connection necessary for India's social emancipation. Political freedom was bound to follow.

His love for liberty however was not limited to one nation or community. It was universal. He supported all struggles which aimed at human freedom. Freedom for him was indivisible. He celebrated the establishment of constitutional governments in Spain and Portugal and was pained when such a government collapsed in Naples in 1821.

Freedom was the strongest passion of Roy's mind. He believed equally in the freedom of body and mind, so also the freedom of action and thought. He shunned all restrictions imposed by consideration of race, religion and customs on human freedoms.

4.4.2 On Rights of the Individual

Roy was the first to create an awareness for civil rights amongst the Indians. He was grateful to the Britishers because they made available to Indians all those civil rights which were enjoyed by the Queen's subjects in England. Though Roy did not specifically enlist the civil rights, he seems to include in it the following rights. Right to life and liberty, right to have opinions and freedom of expression, Right to property, Right to religion etc.

Roy gave the greatest importance to the right to freedom of opinion and expression. To him it included the freedom of creativity of mind and intellect, as well as the freedom of expressing one's opinions and thoughts through different media. According to Roy, freedom of expression was equally useful to the rulers and the ruled. Ignorant people were more likely to revolt against all that the rulers did, they could turn against authority itself. In contrast an enlightened public would be opposed only to the abuse of power by authority and not to the existence of authority itself. The free press, the Raja argued, had never caused a revolution in any part of the world. But many examples could be cited where, in the absence of a free press, since the grievances of the people remained unrepresented and unredressed, the situation had become ripe for a violent 'revolutionary' change. A free and independent press alone could bring forth the best in the government as well as the people.

Roy, however, was not against the reasonable restrictions on the freedom of press. He even accepted some additional restrictions on the Indian Press, which were not imposed on the press in England. Such restrictions, he believed, might be necessary here as some Indians were likely to encourage hatred in the minds of the natives towards the British rulers. Roy also justified the restrictions imposed with a view to check the seditious attempts of creating hostilities with neighbouring friendly states. He, however, strongly objected to the restrictions imposed by the bureaucracy in

India. These restrictions, in his opinion, were arbitrary and uncalled for by the circumstances in this country.

4.4.3 On Law and Judicial Administration

Law, Roy claimed, was the creation of passionless reason. It was the command of the sovereign. Hence, even the highest officer in the East India Company did not possess the competence for enacting the laws for India. The king-in-Parliament alone could have that authority. What is more, Roy argued that the English parliament, before finalising every piece of legislation relating to India should take into account the views of the economic and intellectual elites in this country.

Another important idea that Roy has contributed in the context of law relates to the codification of law. He thinks that such codification was in the interest of both the rulers and ruled. He suggested that the codification should be done on the basis of the principles common and agreeable to all groups and factions in the society. In the course of codification, the long-standing customs of this country should not be overlooked. Of course, only those customs which are reasonable and conducive to general welfare of the people should be picked up. Codified law should be simple, clear and exact. Codification would make the interpretations of laws more impersonal and its application more uniform.

Roy had a clear perception of the distinction between law, custom and morality. He accepted that evolving customs were an important source of law, but the two could not be identified. He also made a distinction between law and morality. Some laws, according to Roy, might be legally valid, but morally indefensible. Conversely, some practices might be morally sound but could not be given legal force. Principles of morality are relative to the social realities and any law to be effective must take into account these ethical principles prevalent in a given society.

In his book entitled 'An Exposition of Revenue and Judicial System in India' Roy presented a profound discussion on urgent reforms in administrative and judicial matters. He stressed the point that the administration could not be efficient and effective unless there were official speaking in the language of the masses. There should also be several channels of communication between the administration and the people.

Roy's suggestions of reform in the judicial field are more numerous because for him an efficient, impartial and an independent judiciary was the supreme guarantee of liberty. Roy believed that the association of the natives in the judicial process had to be an essential feature of judicial administration. Other measures advocated by him included: constant supervision of the judicial proceedings by a vigilant public opinion, substitution of English for Persian as the official language to be used in the courts of law, appointment of Indian assessors in civil suits, trial by jury, separation of judicial from executive functions, and the constant consultation of the native interests before the enactment of any law that concerned them. He also suggested the revival of the age-old Panchayat system of adjudication. Roy thus urged several reforms and corrections in the Indian Judicial system in keeping with political liberalism.

4.4.4 On Sphere of State Action

Though Roy was a liberal thinker, he did not believe in the policy of laissez-faire. He could never accept that the sphere of state activity was limited only to the political field. He had appealed repeatedly in his writings to the state authorities to undertake many social, moral and cultural responsibilities which did not strictly come under the category of 'political'. He wanted the state to protect the tenants against the landlords, to make arrangements for the useful and liberal education, to eradicate the ugly practices like Sati and to give equal protection to the lives of both males and females, and to make efforts to create a new social order based on the principles of liberty, equality, fraternity and social justice. To Roy, the existence of any government becomes meaningful only if it performs all these functions besides the functions for which it originated.

4.4.5 On Education

Roy believed that unless the educational system of this country was overhauled, there was no possibility of the people coming out of the slumber of so many

centuries. His ambition was to change the educational system completely. He was convinced that only a modern, science education could instill new awareness and new capabilities in the Indian people. Without this kind of education, social reform in India would be very weak and the country would always remain backward. Though Roy himself was a great scholar of Sanskrit, he always felt that the Sanskrit learning was irrelevant to modern India and hence he strongly opposed it. He appealed to the rulers that instead of perpetuating irrelevant Sanskrit learning, they should help equip the new generations of Indians with useful modern scientific knowledge. Roy wanted instruction in useful modern sciences like chemistry, mathematics, anatomy, natural philosophy and not load young minds with grammatical complexities, and speculative or imaginary knowledge, Roy's views and activities were really pioneering in giving a new turn to the educational system in India. He was the first eminent advocate of women's education.

4.4.6 On International Co-existence

Thoughts of Ram Mohan Roy on this subject are the expressions of his future oriented imagination and insight. He has portrayed a beautiful picture of international co-existence. He was perhaps the first thinker of the 18th century who had a clear vision of internationalism. This vision might have occurred to him in the course of his search for universal religion. Roy, the prophet of universalism, argued that all nations of the world must be placed on an equal footing in order to achieve global unity and a sense of broad fraternity. It is only then that the contradiction between nationalism and internationalism can be ended.

Roy held that the different tribes and nations were merely the branches of the same family and hence, there must be frequent exchange of views and frequent give and take in all matters among the enlightened nations of the world. This, according to Roy, was the only way to make the human race happy and contented. Differences in political perspectives could be eliminated by thrashing out the differences on the common platforms composed of equal number of delegates from each of the contestant countries. Such a common forum could also be useful for the settlement of all international issues, which would enable mankind to live in peace for generations together.

Roy's ideas in this respect proved prophetic, the League of Nations and the UNO are in a sense institutional expressions of these ideas.

Check Your Progress 3

Note : i) Use the space below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

- 1) How did Roy apply the principles of liberalism to all walks of life?

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- 2) Summarise Roy's views on Freedom of Expression.

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4.5 LET US SUM UP

Raja Ram Mohan Roy is hailed as "the Father of Modern India". He attempted to combine the western and eastern philosophy. His writings and ideas are an example of a synthesis of ancient Indian ideas with modern Western Political Principles.

A review and revaluation of religion was Roy's primary concern for which he

established the Brahmo Samaj in 1828. The Samaj provided a forum for religious and philosophical contemplation and discussion.

Roy was familiar with diverse languages, cultures and philosophies and all these influences shaped his writing and ideas. He conducted a deep study and analysis of Hinduism in order to re-interpret the basic tenets of religion. In doing this, Roy wanted to prove that blind faith and superstitious beliefs and practices had no basis in the original Hindu religion.

According to Roy, another factor responsible for the deteriorating political and social milieu was the social decadence of the Indian society. He wanted to build a new Indian society where principles of tolerance, sympathy, reason, liberty, equality and fraternity would be honoured. In all this, he believed that the support of the British government was essential.

Roy opposed the caste system and the practice of Sati. He was one of the greatest champions of women's rights. He believed in the efficiency of a clearly limited constitution that could control the state and safeguard the rights and liberties of the individuals. He was one of the first Indians to accept and popularize the idea of internationalism.

A multi-faceted personality, Roy carried on a relentless crusade against all kinds of injustices, exploitative practices and superstitions.

4.6 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

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4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Roy was influenced by the literature in Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, English and about 17 other languages. Islam had a deep impact on his mind.

He became an opponent of polytheism and idolatory under this influence. He studied in depth the ancient Indian literary sources and translated some Upanishads into English and Bengali. He was also impressed by Christianity, particularly its moral message. He learnt liberalism from the writings of English liberals.

- 2) Idolatory was to Roy the root cause of many social evils. It leads to multiplication of deities, multitude of modes of worship, and this, in turn, results in social fragmentation. Idolatory was opposed to reason and common sense. It had no sanction in the ancient religious texts.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The major concerns of the Atmiya Sabha launched by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1815 were to remove the practice of selling young girls to prospective husbands

due to some pecuniary interests and the practice of polygamy.

- 2) The first front was public opinion. Roy tried to educate public opinion using all possible means. Secondly, he tried to convince the rulers and reminded them of their responsibility in the matter. The third front was the enquiry into the causes and their elimination that led Hindu women to commit Sati.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) In the religious field, Roy laid emphasis on tolerance, a non-communal approach to all problems and secularism. He considered the dictates of one's own conscience to be more important than the do's and don'ts of the priestly class. In the political field, Roy supported the impersonal authority of law and opposed all kinds of arbitrary and despotic powers. He thought that constitutional government and constitutional means provide the best guarantee of human rights. Roy was in favour of Right to Property. He, however, did not endorse the laissez faire philosophy.
- 2) Freedom of Expression, for Roy, was the most important right of man. It is equally useful to the rulers and the ruled. By exposing the abuses of power in time, the free press helps the rulers to correct their mistakes and makes possible the redressal of people's grievances.