Dr BIMANBEHARI MAJUMDAR MEMORIAL LECTURE, 1972

ON RAMMOHAN ROY

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THE ASIATIC SOCIETY
1984

First published in 1972
Reprinted in 1984

Published by
Dr. Chandan Roychowdhuri
General Secretary
The Asiatic Society
1, Park Street
Calcutta-700 016.

Printed by
M. Sarkar
M/s. Communik Media Service
50, Ashoke Avenue
Calcutta-700 047

Price Rs. 22.00
$ 3.00
£ 1.50

FOREWORD

It is a great pleasure and privilege for me in presenting to the scholars the reprint of the book *On Rammohan Roy*, written by Dr. R. C. Majumder, an eminent historian of our time. The book was first published by The Asiatic Society in 1972. The book which was widely acclaimed by research scholars and historians has long been out of print, we are happy that the book is being reprinted in the bicentenary year of the Society.

Publication of book of enduring value is one of the major programmes of our bicentenary celebrations. Hence, this book is being published as the second one in the series of our reprint scheme after the Tibetan translation of *Nyayabindu of Dharmakīrti*, a treatise on Buddhist logic edited by L. DE LA VALLEE POUSSIN

I thank my colleagues of the Publication Committee, Publication Secretary Dr. B. Gupta, Publication Officer Sri Nirbed Ray, the staff of the Publication Department and Messrs Communik Media Service for expediting the publication of this book.

25th December, 1984

Dr. Chandan Roychaudhuri
General Secretary

PREFACE

BEING appointed by the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, Bimanbehari Majumdar Memorial Lecturer for 1971, I delivered two lectures on the following topics on 4 and 5 February, 1972:

1. The Date of the Birth of Raja Rammohan Roy
2. Rammohan Roy's Contribution to the Renaissance of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century.

These two lectures are published here with a few additions and alterations and references in footnotes.

The reasons which impelled me to choose these subjects have been explained at the beginning of each lecture. As I anticipated, these lectures have provoked comments and criticisms in the shape of a large number of letters in the *Statesman*. I have deliberately refrained from replying to any of them, for no fair and critical judgment of my views on such a controversial subject, round which sentiment and prejudice have gathered for a long time, is possible without a very careful reading of the lectures in print.

The forthcoming bicentenary celebrations of Rammohan Roy offer the most suitable opportunity of making a proper estimate of the ideas, activities and achievements of this great son of India, unaffected by any spirit of hero-worship which has unfortunately stood so long in the way of a dispassionate study of the subject. I have tried to make a proper assessment of some aspects of Rammohan's life from a strictly historical point of view. Though my conclusions differ very widely from the current opinions on the subject, I hope they will at least serve the purpose of drawing attention of students of history to the great need of re-thinking on the life and work of Rammohan Roy. If these lectures lead to a dispassionate historical discussion on the subject, I shall consider my labour amply rewarded.

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25. 2. 72

R. C. Majumdar

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ON RAMMOHAN ROY

I

The Date of the Birth of Raja Rammohan Roy

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Perhaps I owe you an explanation for the choice of the subject of this lecture, namely the date of the birth of Raja Rammohan Roy. For this purpose I can do no better than read the following extracts of a letter addressed to me by Dr. Niharranjan Ray, dated 12 November, 1971.

"The Union Ministry of Education proposes to observe, in some form or other, the bi-centenary of the birth of Rammohan Roy. But, since there seems to be considerable difference of opinion as to whether Rammohan Roy was born in 1772 or in 1774 A.D. (the date of birth is still more uncertain), the Ministry of Education do not know when they should observe the occasion.

"The Ministry has therefore appointed a small Committee to go into the question and advise them as to which year they should adopt for the purpose.

"Recently (November 8, 1971) this Committee met for its first session at which whatever materials on the subject the Committee could lay its hand on, were placed on the table and discussed. It appeared that there was no direct and dependable contemporary or later evidence available on the subject, and whatever indirect and secondary or tertiary evidence was available, was weighed (*sic*) more or less evenly on both the sides, almost as much in favour of 1774 as for 1772. The Committee could not therefore take a decision.

"The Committee also noticed that knowledgeable public opinion in West Bengal, particularly in Calcutta, was very much exercised over the matter. Indeed, representations bearing signatures of very respectable and responsible citizens, have been made in this regard, to the Prime Minister and the Government of India.

"The Committee has therefore decided to hold its next meeting in Calcutta itself to seek your help, advice and guidance in this respect."

Being invited, I attended the meeting held in Calcutta on 6 Decem-

Rammohan. The Chairman, Dr. Ray, having ascertained this by asking the views of each member individually, closed the meeting and declared that there was no consensus of views in this matter.

In view of the importance of the subject I thought it desirable to discuss the whole matter from different points of view in a detached spirit and keep a record of it in writing so that the Government as well as the public may have a fair idea of both the sides of the question before the ultimate decision is made about the date of the bicentenary celebrations. Further, while listening to the debate I had a feeling that already the purely historical question has come to be influenced by a sort of sentiment in favour of the date already publicly accepted by the Government and the Brahmo community. This date, 1772, was accepted by them at a time when the question was not critically discussed, and as it always happens, there grows a tendency in such matters to accept the *fait accompli* and not disturb the current notion deeply rooted in men's minds. Whether my suspicion is right or not, it is certainly desirable to make a comprehensive critical survey of the whole problem from different points of view before any date is actually adopted for celebrating the bicentenary. This must be done at once, for according to the current view the celebration should take place on 22 May of this year. Curiously enough, I received the invitation of the Society to deliver two lectures about the same time that we discussed the matter in a Committee in Calcutta as mentioned above, and so I decided to take it up as the subject of my lecture.

It is a sad commentary on the historical instinct of the Bengalis that the date of the birth of one of the most eminent figures in the whole of India in the 19th century should have been forgotten immediately after his death which took place in 1833. What is perhaps still more strange is that various dates, almost all of which certainly were wrong, were current even during the lifetime of Rammohan. It would be better, therefore, to enumerate at the very beginning the different views entertained about the date of the birth of Rammohan in a chronological sequence.

1. In 1816 the *Missionary Register* reviewed a work of Rammohan entitled *Translation of an Abridgement of the Vedanta.* Incidentally, while giving a short account of the author, it remarks: "The author is a Brahman about 32 years of age" This would place the date of Rammohan's birth at about A.D. 1784. The Journal collected its information from India,

and Rammohan must have seen a copy of it, but it is not known if he contradicted the statement.

2. Two statements of John Digby, made in 1817, normally interpreted, would place the birth of Rammohan in 1774. This will be discussed more fully later.
3. On the basis of information supplied by the Editor of a Calcutta Journal, *The Times*, it was stated in the French Biographical pamphlet (*Monthly Repository*, 1820) that Rammohan "is not yet forty". This would place his birth about 1780.
4. In 1823 the London Unitarian Society published another book of Rammohan, namely *The Precepts of Jesus—the Guide to Peace and Happiness*. Dr. Rees, the Secretary of the Association, wrote in a Memoir attached to the book that Rammohan was born about the year 1780. Rammohan acknowledged receipt of the book and a letter from Dr. Rees dated 16 June, 1823, but did not contradict the date.[1]
5. Victor Jacquemont noted in his Diary on 25 June, 1829, that "Rammohan Roy is 50 years of age". This puts the date of Rammohan's birth in 1779-1780 (*Indian Messenger*, dated 29. 9. 1889, p. 35).
6. The obituary notices in the *Bristol Gazette* and *Bristol Mercury* give the date of Rammohan's birth as 1774, but some other obituary notices, e.g., in *Asiatic Journal* give the date as 1780.
7. Dr. Lant Carpenter, an intimate friend of Rammohan in London, published in 1833 *A Biographical Sketch of Raja Rammohan Roy* which contains the following statement: "Rammohan Roy was born, most probably, about 1774."[2]
8. James Sutherland, formerly Principal of the Hooghly College, a great friend of Rammohan and a fellow-passenger during the latter's voyage to London, states in an article published in the *India Gazette* of 18 February, 1834,[3] that the Raja died in his sixtieth year. This puts his birth in 1774.
9. Kishorichand Mitra, who knew the Raja very well, wrote in the *Calcutta Review* in 1845, that the Raja was born in 1774.
10. The Unitarian Society published Rammohan's *Precepts of Jesus* from Calcutta in 1858. On p. iv. of the Introduction it states that in 1814 Rammohan reached the age of 42 years. This would place his date of birth in 1772.
11. Rajnarayan Basu, another great leader of the Brahmo community, delivered a Lecture published in the *Tatvabodhini*

Patrika, the organ of the Brahma Samaj, in 1782 Saka, i.e., 1860 A.D., in which he stated that the Raja was born in 1695 Saka (1773-1774 A.D.).

12. Devendranath Tagore, who carried on the affairs of the Brahmo community in India after the Raja's death, wrote in 1864 that the Raja was engaged in the work of the Brahma Samaj from his 16th to the 59th year.[3a] This also means that the Raja died in his sixtieth year and was therefore born in 1774.
13. In an article in the fortnightly *Indian Mirror*, 1865, Keshab Chandra Sen, a great leader of the Brahmo community, said that Rammohan died in Asvin 1755 (1833) in the sixtieth year of his age, putting his birth in 1774.[3b]
14. The stone tablet fixed in the cemetery of the Raja at Arno's Vale, in 1872, if not earlier, mentions the date of Raja's birth as 1774. This point will be discussed later.
15. Ramesh Chandra Datta, a great Bengali writer and a member of the I.C.S., wrote in his book, *The Literature in Bengal*, published in 1877, that Rammohan was born in 1774.
16. The noted Bengali Journal *Somprakash*, in its issue of 22 Magh, 1285 B.S. (1879), says that Rammohan was born in 1774.[4]
17. G. S. Leonard, Assistant Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, wrote in his *History of the Brahma Samaj*, published in 1879: "Rammohan was born in 1774, corresponding with 1695 Saka Era and 1181 of the Bengali Sal." This book was reprinted by Kshitindra Nath Tagore in 1935 without any comment, far less any change of the date.
18. In the ninth Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1878), under the heading 'Brahma Samaj', Dr. W. W. Hunter wrote that "Ram Mohan Ray was born in the District of Burdwan in 1772."
19. In a letter published in the "*Sunday Mirror*" of 18 January, 1880, the Rev. C. H. A. Dall reported that Rammohan's younger son Ramaprasad Roy said in 1858 before a circle of friends and clients in Calcutta: "My father was born in May, 1772." The letter will be quoted later.
20. In a paper read before the Royal Asiatic Society, London, on 15th November, 1880, Prof. Monier Williams said that Rammohan was born in May 1772.

The bewildering divergence of views about the date of the birth

of Rammohan Roy, both during his lifetime and after his death, creates an intriguing historical problem, and we can only make an attempt to solve it by strictly following certain general principles of criticism which have been approved by a consensus of opinion among the historians, as applicable in cases of such differences among the primary sources of information. According to these principles the following factors must be taken into consideration in finding out the truth.

1. The comparative antiquity of the source. In other words, an earlier account should be regarded as more authentic than the later ones.
2. The reliability of the source, i.e., the opportunity available to the source for knowing or finding out the truth.
3. The character or nature of the source of information and the circumstances or occasions on which it was furnished.

By applying these tests we may narrow down the field of difference very considerably to the two theories referring the birth of Rammohan to 1774 and 1772 A.D. In these two cases alone the source of information may be regarded as fairly authentic. John Digby, Dr. Carpenter, and James Sutherland were all very intimately known to Rammohan for a fairly long time, and their statements, made at different times and places, unknown to each other, fully agree. The other view rests upon the statement of the son of Rammohan who is undoubtedly the most authentic source in a matter like this. But for the disagreement between these two sets of views, any one of them would have been taken as conclusive evidence of the date of the birth of Rammohan Roy. But as the difference does exist; we have to consider which is more likely to be true.

A broad review of the different statements about the date of birth of Rammohan, chronologically arranged above, leaves no doubt that up to about 1880 A.D. the view that Rammohan was born in 1774 A.D. was definitely held by almost all with the exception of a few who had no intimate or personal knowledge of Rammohan, and their suggested dates are so obviously wrong that they are not seriously considered by anyone today. The acceptance of this view therefore seems to be very reasonable. But as attempts are being recently made to discredit the evidences on which that view rests, it is necessary to discuss in some detail how far the critics have succeeded in diminishing their value or importance.

These evidences consist primarily of four statements made by three persons who knew Rammohan very intimately. Two of these statements were made during the lifetime of Rammohan, and the other two, respectively, one and two years after his death.

The first two statements were made by John Digby who was for several years Rammohan's superior officer and edited a reprint of Rammohan's translation of the *Kena Upanishad* and *Abridgement of the Vedanta* (London, 1817). In the preface to this reprint Digby says of Rammohan :

"Rammohan Roy is about forty-three years of age.....At the age of twenty-two he commenced the study of the English language, which not pursuing with application, he, five years afterwards, when I became acquainted with him, could merely speak it well enough to be understood upon the most common topics of discourse, but could not write it with any degree of correctness. He was afterwards employed as Dewan.....in the district of which I was for years collector."[5]

Now, according to the first sentence Rammohan as about forty-three in 1817 when the book was published, and therefore he was born about 1774. In order to discredit this view efforts have been made to show that this statement is contradictory to the other statement that Rammohan was 27 when Digby became acquainted with him. The argument may be summed up thus :

'It is unbelievable that on the first day of acquaintance Digby discovered that Rammohan "could not write English with any degree of correctness." It would be correct to say that Digby discovered this when Rammohan was first employed under him (1805), and not before that. This is confirmed by the fact that in a letter recommending Rammohan to the Dewanship of Rangpore, Digby says : "As from the opinion I have formed of his probity and general qualifications in a five years' acquaintance with him I am convinced that he is well adapted for the situation of Dewan of a Collector's Office."[6] It would thus appear, so it is argued, that the two met for the first time in 1805, and if Rammohan was then 27 years of age he must have been born in 1778 A.D. This criticism cannot be taken very seriously. The expression "when I became acquainted with him" does not mean 'the first day of meeting' and it is curious that the critics do not notice that Digby himself clearly says that there was an interval between this period when his knowledge of English was not very good and the time when he was employed as Dewan under him

by using the word "afterwards" in the above statement. It is certain, therefore, that the expression five years' acquaintance, evidently of an intimate nature which enabled him to testify to his qualifications for a high post, does not refer to his first acquaintance with him. It seems to be quite clear that Digby refers to three distinct and successive stages in Rammohan's life. First, the commencement of learning English at the age of 22; second, five years later when he met Digby before learning to speak English well; third, sometime later after Rammohan was employed as Dewan under Digby, when he evidently learnt English better as Digby was satisfied with his work and recommended him strongly for another post. There is therefore absolutely no contradiction between the two statements of Digby. Rather the agreements of these two statements may be taken to indicate that he had some definite information of his age; for otherwise he would not have gone out of his way to indicate the age of Rammohan at two different stages of his life. Reference to the age of Rammohan at the beginning of their acquaintance was not strictly called for in the preface of the book.

According to the accepted canon of historical criticism, if two statements made by one and the same person appear to be inconsistent, care should be taken to see whether there is any reasonable way of reconciling them. In this case, the discrepancy, if any at all, is merely apparent, and admits of easy solution as shown above on the authority of Digby himself. Brajendranath Banerjee has shown good grounds for the view that Rammohan and Digby probably met each other for the first time in 1801.[7] This may not be regarded as definitely proved, but in view of what has been said above, it is quite reasonable to hold that Digby and Rammohan met each other shortly after the arrival of the former in Calcutta in 1800, but it was only from 1805 when Rammohan served under Digby that there was such an intimate acquaintance between the two, as would justify Digby in recommending him for the post of Dewan of Rangpur. In any case, for the reasons stated above, there is no reasonable ground whatsoever for rejecting the statements of Digby on the ground of inconsistency. But whatever may be the date of the first acquaintance between Digby and Rammohan, the clear statement in unambiguous term that Rammohan was 27 years of age when the two met, definitely proves that Rammohan was not born in 1772, for in that case the date of the meeting would fall in 1799, whereas Digby arrived in Calcutta in December, 1800. There is hardly any doubt that this

is the reason why such desperate attempts are made to reject this very important piece of evidence by supposing, unnecessarily, an inconsistency between the two statements. This agreement between the two statements of Digby, referring to different times and different circumstances, point out unerringly to 1774 as the most probable date of the birth of Rammohan, particularly as the other view was not put forward till forty years or more had passed.

As mentioned above, Dr. Lant Carpenter, another intimate friend of Rammohan, also says that Rammohan was born, most probably, about 1774. Here, again, it is pointed out by the supporters of 1772 theory that the two words "about" and "most probably" take away the value of the evidence as a convincing one. But it must be admitted that the words certainly make the date 1774 a very probable one, though we may not regard it as a conclusive evidence. This probability is heightened by the fact, mentioned above, that both Sutherland and Devendranath Tagore agreed that Rammohan died in his sixtieth year.

We next come to the evidence of the stone tablet in the cemetery of Rammohan which clearly states that Rammohan was born in 1774. Those who are not prepared to accept this date rely upon the fact, stated in Collet's book,[8] that the tablet was added much later. As this is a very important piece of evidence it may be elaborated a little.

The *Bengal Spectator*, conducted by Ram Gopal Ghosh and Peary Chand Mitra, both very well-known and leading citizens of Calcutta, wrote in its issue of 24 August, 1843:

"The remains of Rajah Rammohan Roy, who died at Stapleton Grove, near Bristol, the residence of M. H. Castle Esq., several years since and was buried in the ground adjoining the House, have been removed to the cemetery at Arno's Vale, and interned in that portion appropriated to dissenters. A sum of money has been forwarded from India for the purpose of erecting a Stately monument on the spot."

That Dwarakanath Tagore took a leading part in this matter is clearly stated by Miss Mary Carpenter, who writes: "It was right that the public should have access to his (Rammohan's) grave, and should see a befitting monument erected over it. This could not be done at Stapleton Grove, which had now passed out of the Castle family. The Rajah's friend, the celebrated Dwarakanath Tagore desired to pay this mark of respect to his memory and it was therefore arranged that the case containing the coffin should be removed to the beautiful cemetery of Arno's Vale, near Bristol. This was suitably

accomplished on the 29th of May, 1843, and a handsome monument was erected in the spring of the year following by his friend, the enlightened and celebrated Dwarakanath Tagore. A visit was afterwards paid by him to the spot and recently by his grandson Satyendranath Tagore."[9]

This is also corroborated by Miss Collet. After referring to the removal of the coffin to Arno's Vale, she writes: "There the Rajah's great friend and comrade, Dwarakanath Tagore, who had come over from India on pious pilgrimage to the place where the master died, erected a tomb of stone. It was in 1872 that this inscription was added."[10]

The inscription, which is quoted in full by Miss Collet, is too long to be quoted here. After paying eulogies to the Rajah's various qualities of head and heart in 17 lines it concludes as follows:

"This Tablet records the sorrow and pride with which his memory is cherished by his descendants. He was born in Radhanagore, in Bengal, in 1774, and died at Bristol, September, 27th, 1833."

Normally speaking this should have been treated as the most important evidence regarding the date of Rammohan's birth. For great men of Bengal were associated with it and it is difficult to believe that those who engraved it should not have been sure about the date before they inscribed it on such a solemn occasion in a Christian cemetery where the mention of the real dates of birth and death was a formal but almost regular feature of the ceremonial tablets.

In this case, again, efforts have been made to minimise the importance of the record on several grounds. Some have even gone to the extreme of trying to prove that Dwarakanath Tagore had nothing to do with the monument at Arno's Vale.[11] The grounds stated are that though Dwarakanath visited England in 1842, his tour diary, the contemporary newspapers and even his biography by Kishorichand Mitra do not refer to his visit to Bristol where the monument was located. It is hardly necessary to point out that such negative evidence cannot demolish the positive statements made by Carpenter and Collet and a tradition referred to by many writers in India that one of the cherished objects of Dwarakanath's visit to England was to rescue the tomb of Rammohan from neglect and oblivion. It is interesting to mention in this connection that a public meeting was held in the Town Hall, Calcutta, to bid farewell to Dwarakanath on the eve of his journey to England. From the report of this meeting

published in the *Englishman* in its issue of 8 January, 1842, we learn that Mr. Henry Piddington, in the course of his speech, expressed the hope that one of the early activities of Dwarakanath should be directed towards saving the cemetery of Rammohan from the present state of neglect and building a monument which would inform his countrymen where his last remains were laid.

Far more cogent is the argument that according to Collet the tablet on the monument was fixed up long after, in 1872. This is really an intriguing problem. The question naturally arises who put this tablet on behalf, and in the name, of the descendants of the Raja thirty years after the erection of the monument on which it was fixed. A far more intriguing question is whether there was or was not any tablet at all in the original monument. It would, indeed, be a very strange thing if such a beautiful monument over the grave of an eminent Indian in a foreign country, erected, to use the words of Piddington, to inform his countrymen where his remains lay, should not have even a word to indicate whose memory it perpetuates. In support of the view that there was no tablet in the original monument it is argued that Miss Mary Carpenter mentioned the monument but made no reference to any tablet. This is not a conclusive argument. For if it were a very short record mentioning the name of Rammohan and the dates of his birth and death and only a few words more, she might have thought it unnecessary to mention such a formal or common thing.

If it proves anything at all it may be simply this that there was no tablet bearing such a long and elaborate record which could not fail to draw the visitor's notice. Attention may be drawn to the words used by Collet, namely, "It was in 1872 that this inscription was added." I would like to emphasize the word *this*, meaning thereby that an old, perhaps very short record, mentioning only the name and dates of birth and death, was originally fixed to the monument in 1844, but later this more elaborate record was substituted. For, otherwise we have to accept the almost absurd situation in which a funeral monument was erected without indicating in any way whose tomb it was, particularly when he was such a distinguished and great man, and a foreigner.

There is a definite evidence in support of the above theory that there was a tablet in the original cemetery. In Dr. P. K. Sen's book entitled *Biography of a New Faith*, on page 49, there is a photograph of the original site in Stapleton Grove where Rammohan's remains

were first interred. The photograph shows a fenced upright stone slab with an inscription of five lines engraved on it. Though they cannot be read there is hardly any doubt that it recorded the dates of his birth and death, if not anything else.

It is also interesting to mention in this connection that in an Address delivered at the City College Hall, Calcutta, on 27 September, 1889, on the occasion of the anniversary of the death of Rammohan Roy, Satyendranath Tagore refers to the visit of his grandfather Dwarakanath Tagore in 1843 to the cemetery at Stapleton Grove, removal of Rammohan's coffin to Arno's Vale cemetery because Dwarakanath desired to pay his mark of respect to the Raja's memory, and the fulfilment of this desire by the erection of a handsome monument in the spring of the following year. Thus Satyendranath Tagore corroborates the tradition mentioned above. But he does something more. He says that he made a pilgrimage to the spot in 1863, a fact mentioned by Mary Carpenter in her statement quoted above. But the most interesting point in the same address by Satyendranath Tagore is that he not only refers to the tablet but quotes the whole of the inscription engraved on it. If the tablet were not there in 1863 when Satyendranath visited it, it is very likely that he should have mentioned that it was added after his visit. So there is a strong presumption that the monument referred to by Mary Carpenter and Collet contained the inscribed tablet in 1863. But whatever we might think of it, the photograph of the cemetery stone at Stapleton Grove makes it almost certain that a short tablet recording the dates of birth and death was already existent before the coffin was removed to Arno's Vale.

If we accept this view the tablet on the monument does not lose its value as an evidence of the date of birth, for it is almost certain that the date would have been taken from the earlier and discarded tablet.

But even if we do not accept this view and hold that the whole record was added later and there was no tablet before 1872, it certainly proves that even so late as 1872 the tradition in the Raja's family, on whose behalf the tablet was added, was that the Raja was born in 1774. But this inevitable conclusion also discredits the only solid foundation on which rests the theory that Rammohan was born in 1772, to which we may now turn. This is a letter written by Rev. Dall and published in the *Sunday Mirror* on 18 January, 1880. It runs as follows:

"There need be no doubt whatever as to the year and the month

in which Rammohan Roy was born. His son Roma Pershad Roy, Chief Pleader of the Supreme Court, made the matter perfectly clear to a circle of visitors and clients, in 1858, at his residence, the well-known house of his father in Calcutta. Kishory Chand Mitter was present and Dr. Rajendra Lal Mitra, and I was one of the listeners. I put the words on record at the time and here they are: "My father was born at Radhanagar near Krishnagar in the month of May, 1772, or according to the Bengali era in the month of Jaishta 1179." I asked for the day and Roma Pershad replied—'that I cannot tell without consulting the horoscope, which at the distance of time, is not easy to be found.'

"After this, it need not be surmised that the great Rammohan was born 'in 1774' or 'in 1780'.

"We need not guess, since we have the highest authority for saying that Rammohan was born in May, 1772."

Normally speaking, in the absence of anything to the contrary, one would be justified in accepting the view expressed by Rev. Dall. But several facts have to be considered before we draw this obvious conclusion. In the first place, this is the first time that we hear of the date 1772 as emanating from source having intimate knowledge of Rammohan. But, unfortunately, we have no direct evidence of what Ramaprasad said, and have to rely solely on the statement of a foreigner, published 22 years after he heard it. He says that he kept a record of it, but how the record was kept intact for such a long period and why Rev. Dall kept it a close secret for so many years, are mysteries that cannot be solved. There seems to have been a conspiracy of silence on the part of both Dall and Ramaprasad to keep the date strictly to themselves, for evidently neither the members of Rammohan's family nor the public knew of it, as they believed 1774 as the date of Rammohan's birth till at least 1880. In any case Dall's statement should be treated as a hearsay evidence, and cannot rank with the direct statements made by Digby and Carpenter from their personal knowledge. It is also not clear whether the alleged statement of Ramaprasad was casually made or there was a regular discussion, previously arranged or not, for the purpose of ascertaining the true date of the birth of Rammohan. The former seems to be the case from the tenor of Dall's account. It is surprising that Kishorichand Mitra who, according to Dall, was present in the meeting, did not raise any objection, for he wrote, only thirteen years before, that Rammohan was born in 1774. What is stranger still is that within a few

years Kishorichand Mitra wrote another article in 1867 on Rammohan in which he referred to his previous article for information about the early life of Rammohan without in the least alluding to the difference between the date of birth mentioned by him in that article and the one alleged to be stated by Ramaprasad in his presence.

In the meeting of the small Committee, mentioned above, held recently in Calcutta on 6 December, 1971, much stress was laid on the fact that since we have got the statement of the son about the date of birth of his father that must be accepted without any further question. When a learned scholar, sitting on my right, grew eloquent over this view, I asked him, 'will you kindly tell me the date of the birth of your father ?' and he had to admit that he did not know. I then requested the Chairman, by way of testing the strength of the argument, to ascertain from the members present how many know the date of the birth of their father, admitting at the very outset that I did not know it. Not a single member directly replied to my question, but it was suggested that though in modern days we do not care about the date of birth of our parents, things were very different in the days of Rammohan. Of course this is a mere assertion without proof. Such ignorance is not very unnatural. For a child has seldom any occasion to inquire into the date of birth of the father, but usually remembers the date of his death, for the event generally takes place when he was an adult and the annual Sradh ceremony keeps alive the memory of the date. There is no such reason for knowing or remembering the date of the birth. In this connection reference may be made to the very interesting fact that in a law-suit, viz., the case, *Govindaprasad Roy vs. Rammohan Roy* in 1819, two witnesses testified on behalf of Rammohan Roy to the age of his son Radhaprasad. One said that he was born in 1207 B.S. while the other said he was born in 1208 B.S.[12] It would thus appear that even in that age, in the family of Rammohan himself, the exact date of birth was not a thing that was regarded very seriously as worth remembering. I mention all this in order to show that we need not put implicit faith in the statement of a son about the birth of his father, particularly when there are contemporary evidences, not only by persons intimately known to him but also by other members of his family, which differ from that statement. As mentioned above, even if we accept that the tablet in the funeral monument at Arno's Vale was added in 1872, we are bound to admit that the descendants of Rammohan who had it

recorded or on whose behalf it was done (as expressly stated in the tablet), believed, 14 years after the alleged statement of Ramaprasad Roy, that Rammohan was born in 1774. It has been argued that no tablet was set up by Dwarakanath Tagore,[13] and there is no definite evidence who set up the present tablet, and as such no importance should be attached to the date of birth mentioned in it. According to all canons of historical criticism nothing but the strongest positive evidence should induce us to believe that a monument on the burial ground erected by or on behalf of the descendants of Rammohan Roy and explicitly referring to the sorrow and pride with which his memory was cherished by them, would bear a date of birth without their sanction and different from the tradition current or accepted by them on good authority. The occasion was more solemn from all points of view than a drawing-room gathering, and one may be excused therefore in putting greater faith in it than the reported statement of a son of Rammohan recorded by a foreigner and brought to light twenty-two years after it was made in the course of a drawing-room talk with friends and clients, whether casually, or seriously after some discussion or inquiry, we have no means to determine; particularly as the date so openly mentioned in 1858 does not seem to have been known during 22 years to any other member of the family nor to any friend or eminent person outside who took deep interest in Rammohan Roy. This conclusion gathers strength when we remember that the date in the tablet agrees perfectly with the dates independently mentioned by at least three most intimate friends of Rammohan, namely, Digby during the lifetime of, and Carpenter and Sutherland shortly after the death of Rammohan, and further that these were recorded more than forty years before anybody ever heard of 1772 as the date of Rammohan's birth.

It may be mentioned that so far as Indian opinion is concerned there is no reference by anybody to the birth of Rammohan in 1772 before the publication of Dall's letter in 1880. Even long after the publication of this letter eminent persons like Shibnath Sastri (in 1903) and Nagendranath Chatterji, the biographer of Rammohan, mentioned 1774 as the date of birth of Rammohan though they changed their views later in deference to the date accepted officially by the Brahmo community. Many distinguished writers including Jogesh Chandra Bagal, an eminent authority on the 19th-century Bengal, adhered till the last to the date 1774. Bagal refers to an additional evidence, namely, a case in the Supreme Court against

Rammohan in which Rammohan was fined one rupee. Bagal also cites other evidence from the Court records. Unfortunately his recent death prevents me from the advantage of his help in tracing these records.[14]

These are the grounds that induce me to hold that according to all probability, based on a reasonable assessment of all the evidence available to me, the date of Rammohan's birth is 1774, and not 1772. Of course this cannot be regarded as final, and our views may change with the discovery of new data, such as the lost horoscope of Rammohan or an affidavit signed by him in one of the various litigations in which he was engaged, stating his age, or some positive data for ascertaining it definitely.

In conclusion, I may refer to the final decision of the Committee, appointed by the Government of India, to which I have referred at the outset. They have accepted the alleged statement of Ramaprasad as the most decisive evidence on the dispute on the ground that it represented the tradition as known to and recognised by the nearest kin of the Raja, and resolved that unless some definite and positively conclusive evidence to the contrary were found, the month and year of the birth of the Raja given in the family tradition should not be disturbed.

Without questioning the administrative propriety of the decision, it is difficult to agree with it from a strictly historical point of view. For, as shown above, the date 1772 cannot be regarded as the family tradition; rather the contrary is true. Nor can it be regarded as such a settled tradition that it would be unwise to disturb it.[15]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Cf. *English Works of Raja Rammohan Roy* published by the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj (1947), part IV, pp. 87-8.

2. The biographical sketch was published, first in the *Bristol Gazette*, then in the *Bristol Mercury*, and finally in the form of a book entitled *Review of the Labours, Opinions, and Character of Rammohan Roy* (1833).

3. The article was originally published in the *Literary Gazette*.

3a. Lecture at the Calcutta Brahmo Samaj on 'Account of the twenty-five years of the Brahma Samaj' (in Bengali), in 1786 Saka (1864).

3b. The article was republished in the *Brahmo Samaj—Discourses and Writings of Keshub Chandra Sen* (1904), p. 75.

4. Benoy Ghosh, *Sāmayikpatre Bāṅglār Samāj-chitra* (in Bengali), vol. IV., p. 605.

5. Sophia Dobson Collet, *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*. Edited by D. K. Biswas and P. C. Ganguli. Third edition, 1962, pp. 23-4.

6. Board of Revenue Proceedings, 15 January, 1810, No. 10. Cf. R. P. Chanda and J. K. Majumdar, *Selections from Official Letters and Documents relating to the Life of Raja Rammohan Roy*, p. 42.

7. *Rammohan Roy* (Sāhitya-Sādhak Charitamālā) by B. N. Banerji, p. 21.

8. Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

9. Mary Carpenter, *The Last Days in England of Raja Rammohan Roy* (1866), p. 182.

10. Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

11. This point has been argued at length by Suresh Prasad Niyogi in an unpublished article.

12. Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

13. See footnote 11.

14. In an article, published in a Bengali Journal *Satarupā* (vol. I, no. 3, Baisākh-Āsādh, 1377 B.S.), Shri Nirmal Khan has argued in favour of the theory that Rammohan was born in 1774, and quoted the views of a large number of Bengali scholars in support of this theory. The views of Jogesh Chandra Bagal are given on pp. 275-6. Bagal has referred to a judgment of the Supreme Court in 1830 which supports the theory of 1774 as the date of Rammohan's birth. Shri Khan has stated (p. 262) that Rammohan had abused Mr. Wyatt, the Government pleader of the Supreme Court, for having referred to the Indians in contemptuous terms. For this offence he was tried and fined one rupee, and in the judgment Rammohan's date of birth is given as September, 1774. Shri Khan has cited the *Sambād Kaumudī*, 1237, 27 Kartik, as reference. I could not find any copy of this paper in the National Library and wrote to Shri Khan, asking, where he got the paper. It would be a very valuable evidence, but I have not included it in the text of the lecture as I have not yet received any reply from Shri Khan, and could not verify his reference.

15. I express my obligations to the following gentlemen for supplying valuable materials for preparing this lecture :

1. Shri Chitta Ranjan Banerji, Librarian, Central Reference Library, National Library, Calcutta.
2. Shri Gorachand Mitra
3. Shri Devavrata Rakshit.
4. Shri Suresh Prasad Niyogi.

II

Raja Rammohan Roy's Contribution to the Renaissance of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century

RAMMOHAN Roy is regarded by common consent as one of the most outstanding personalities of the 19th century, not only in Bengal but in the whole of India. This view rests upon his manifold activities in religious, social, literary, educational and political spheres, backed by a robust intellect and a high degree of rational thinking which enabled him to rise above current beliefs and prejudices and extend his vision to a distant horizon far beyond the general conception of the time. In particular, his lifelong crusade against belief in, and the worship of the images of a multiplicity of gods; his strenuous endeavours to abolish the cruel rite called Sati, i.e., the burning, either voluntary or forcible, of the widow along with the dead body of her husband; the establishment of English schools and strong advocacy of the introduction of Western learning in place of classical subjects; starting of journals both in Bengali and Persian; writing quite a large number of books and tracts in English, Bengali and Persian, constitutional fight for the freedom of the Press and improvement of the system of trial by Jury; and, above all, the establishment of the Brahmo Sabha, a tiny plant, which in the course of time grew into a mighty tree—all these accomplished within a short space of fifteen years and the presentation of the case of India before the British Parliament in London made his name famous from one end of the country to the other. Those who knew him more closely were deeply impressed by his inherent love of liberty which was not confined to India but extended to the whole mankind. All these are universally recognized and have secured for him a permanent niche in the temple of History.

The object of this lecture is not to review the life or make an assessment of the personality of Raja Rammohan Roy. It is more limited and strictly confined to an estimate of the contribution made by him to the all-round development in Bengal in the 19th century which is usually described as Awakening, Regeneration, Renaissance, or New Age. It almost always happens in the case of a great personality, that myths and legends grow around him and it becomes difficult to

separate the truth from the fiction by which it is enveloped. So it has been also with Rammohan, and his admiring followers assert, and have sought to prove, that practically all that was good or great in the 19th century and made the Renaissance possible, must be traced to Rammohan. There is no doubt that this will form the theme of the discourses on the occasion of the bicentenary celebration of the Raja within a few months, and it is high time therefore to approach the question from a strictly historical point of view untramelled by any sentiment or tradition or current public opinion. It is a universal truth that *Vāde vāde jāyate tatvabodhaḥ*, i.e., truth emerges from discussions. It is only in this spirit that this discourse is given, and let me hope, should also be taken by the audience.

If we have to single out the most important contributory factor to the Renaissance of Bengal in the 19th century it is the English education and the Western ideas that flowed along with it. Among the other important factors may be mentioned the growth of Bengali prose literature and Bengali journals, social and religious reforms, rise of national consciousness, patriotic feeling and organised efforts to acquire more and more political and administrative rights from the unwilling hands of our foreign rulers. As regards English education the Hindoo College may be regarded as the premier institution which was mainly instrumental in spreading English education and Western ideas among the young generations of Bengal in the first half of the 19th century, whose personalities, activities and achievements mainly contributed to the gradual development of the New Age. Accordingly it has been claimed on behalf of Rammohan that he was the pioneer of English education in Bengal, founder of the Hindoo College, father of Bengali prose literature, first in the field of Bengali magazines or journals, pioneer of nationalism and patriotism, and leader of political agitation and political organization for achieving political rights and administrative reforms.

I may now proceed to discuss the legitimacy of these claims one by one. The case of the Hindoo College may be taken up first, and treated in some detail, because the gradual growth of the myth of its foundation by Rammohan furnishes a striking example how the desire to give undue credit to Rammohan for everything that was good or great in the 19th century violated every accepted principle of reconstructing true history. It also proves the force of blind faith, prejudice and preconceived notions which induce highly educated people and even eminent historians to continue to cherish the old

wrong beliefs though it is conclusively proved to be absolutely without any foundation whatsoever. As far back as 1955 I published a long article in the *Journal of The Asiatic Society*[1] proving with the help of positive and conclusive evidence that Rammohan had absolutely nothing to do with the establishment of the Hindoo College, and since then I have repeated it in many books and journals. But while the idea is gradually gaining ground that Rammohan was not the founder or prime mover, attempts are still being made to associate Rammohan with the college, and even in the *History of Bengal*, published by the Calcutta University in 1967, we read that the Hindoo College was "the brain-child of David Hare and Rammohan Roy",[2] without the least reference to the arguments advanced against this view. I am quite sure that in the forthcoming bicentenary celebrations of Rammohan Roy this myth will be repeated from every platform and find a prominent place in all books and articles published on the occasion. No apology is therefore needed for again stating the essential points for judging the question whether Rammohan has any valid claim, singly or jointly, to the credit of founding the Hindoo College, or, as another eminent historian puts it, being, along with others, "zealously associated with its origin and early progress".[3]

It is a rare good fortune of the students of Indian history that they have now access to a contemporary account of an unimpeachable authority on the question at issue. This is a letter dated 18 May, 1816, written by Sir Hyde East, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Calcutta, to his friend J. Harrington, then in England, giving a detailed account of a meeting held at his house on 14 May, 1816, i.e., only four days before. The full text of this letter is published in my article in the *Journal of The Asiatic Society*, mentioned above, and here I shall draw special attention only to those points which fully expose the growth of the myth, by gradual stages, that Rammohan was the founder of the Hindoo College.

At the very outset Hyde East describes the circumstances under which he summoned a meeting at his house which decided upon the foundation of the Hindoo College. As this disproves most of the assumptions made at a later date about the foundation of the Hindoo College, this portion of the letter may be reproduced *in extenso*:

"An interesting and curious scene has lately been exhibited here, which shows that all things pass under change in due season. About the beginning of May, a Brahmin of Calcutta, whom I knew, and who is well known for his intelligence and active interference among the

principal Native inhabitants, and also intimate with many of our own gentlemen of distinction, called upon me and informed me, that many of the leading Hindus were desirous of forming an establishment for the education of their children in a liberal manner as practised by Europeans of condition; and desired that I would lend them my aid towards it, by having a meeting held under my sanction. Wishing to be satisfied how the Government would view such a measure, I did not at first give him a decided answer; but stated, that however much I wished well, as an individual, to such an object, yet, in the public situation I held, I should be cautious not to give any appearance of acting from my own impulse in a matter which I was sure that the Government would rather leave to them (the Hindus) to act in, as they thought right, than in any manner to control them; but that I would consider of the matter, and if I saw no objection ultimate to the course he proposed, I would inform him of it; and if he would then give me a written list of the principal Hindus to whom he alluded, I would send them an invitation to meet at my house. In fact, several of them had before, at different times, addressed themselves to me upon this topic, but never before in so direct a manner.

"After his departure I communicated to the Governor-General what had passed, who laid my communication before the Supreme Council, all the members of which approved of the course I had taken, and signified through His Lordship, that they saw no objection to my permitting the parties to meet at my house." (p. 44)

Before proceeding further reference may be made to some definite and obvious conclusions which go counter to the assumptions or opinions of a later date giving credit, first to David Hare, then jointly to David Hare and Rammohan, and finally to Rammohan alone, for being the prime mover of the Hindoo College. Sir Hyde East clearly says that a Brahmin, *whom he knew*, first approached him on behalf of a large number of leading Hindus with the proposal of founding a College.

Sir Hyde East's letter was first referred to by Major B. D. Bose in his book *History of Education in India under the Rule of the East India Company* (p. 37), probably published in the thirties of this century, though the date of publication is not given in the book. He quoted many extracts from this letter and omitted some passages indicating the omission by asterisks. Now, in a footnote to the word 'Brahmin' in the passage "a Brahmin in Calcutta whom I knew" at the very

beginning, B. D. Bose remarked that "the reference is of course to Rammohan Roy." It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that he deliberately omitted a passage, occurring later in the same letter, which clearly said that Hyde East did not know Rammohan nor had any communication with him. The whole passage will be quoted later and the asterisks preceding and following the omitted passage in question leaves no doubt that the omission was a deliberate one and not an error or accident. The motive is obvious. For that passage would go against his conclusion that Rammohan was the Brahmin who saw Hyde East and was therefore the prime mover in founding the Hindoo College. But perhaps far more strange is the fact that a reputed and critical scholar like Brajendranath Banerjee put the name of Rammohan Roy within brackets in the text of the letter itself after the word 'Brahmin' though in the text of the letter published by him, the passage omitted by B. D. Bose is put in its proper place. But the mischief was done. When I pointed out that the 'Brahmin' referred to by Hyde could not possibly be Rammohan and therefore there is no ground for holding Rammohan as the founder of the Hindoo College or its prime mover on the basis of Hyde's statement, many persons seem to have been shocked or scandalised at my statement, and for months together there was a regular campaign of vile abuses against me in a Bengali Weekly named *Desh*, the authority cited being Brajendranath Banerjee, than whom, I was told, I should not regard myself as a greater authority on Rammohan. Some eminent writers, including one who was my fellow-student in the College and a life-long friend, also joined the hostile group. When I pointed out that Brajendranath Banerjee himself had realised his error and changed his views in the second edition of the book with an apology that he was misled by the omission of the crucial passage by B. D. Bose, my letter was not published and the campaign of abuse continued. I must add that Brajendranath's excuse cannot be accepted in view of the fact that though the very letter which he himself published contained the passage omitted by B. D. Bose, he went even beyond B. D. Bose by adding Rammohan's name within brackets after the word 'Brahmin'. I have great respect for both B. D. Bose and Brajendranath Banerjee who have made rich contributions to the history of Bengal and are well-known for their critical acumen, and I can explain their lapse in this matter only as a striking illustration of the spell which the myth of Rammohan cast upon the people even up to the present time.

The second important but obvious conclusion from the portion of Hyde's letter quoted above is that the idea of founding a college for imparting education on Western lines did not emanate from any single individual, but it was the fruition of a great desire entertained for a long time by the leading Hindus of Calcutta, including also principal Pandits to whom Hyde East refers in his letter to be quoted later. This definitely disproves the statement made at a later date that the idea was first mooted in a meeting of the 'Atmiya Sabha' at the house of Rammohan, that David Hare prepared a plan and Hyde accepted it with a few minor changes, and Hyde East requested Baidyanath Mukherji to ascertain whether his countrymen were favourable to the establishment of a college for the education of the Hindu youth in English literature and science. This is diametrically opposed to the statement of Hyde in his letter that 'A Brahmin had represented to him the desire of the leading Hindus to establish a College' and far from immediately agreeing to a proposal to the effect he took time to consider the matter, and in the meantime asked the 'Brahmin' to submit a list of the principal Hindus who wanted such a College. He also sought the permission of the Government and the Governor-General informed him that the Government had no objection to his permitting the parties to meet at his house. Pearychand Mitra who made the above statement about David Hare further adds that it was later reported to Hyde East by the Brahmin that 'he sounded the leading members of the Hindu Society and they were agreeable to the proposal', whereas East himself says that he moved in the matter only after he was informed of the desire of the leading Hindus to establish such a college. Kishorichand Mitra goes one step further and in order to prove his thesis that Rammohan shared with David Hare the credit of originating the idea of the institution of the Hindoo College, almost from its inception, states that David Hare "urged on the leading members of the native community to consider the necessity and importance of establishing a great seat of learning in the metropolis." If we remember the first part of the letter of Hyde East quoted above, there can be no hesitation in rejecting all these later assumptions as pure fancy or imagination evolved in the sixties and seventies of the 19th century, in order to support the Rammohan myth.

We may now proceed with the account of the meeting given by Hyde East in his letter: "The meeting was accordingly held at my house on the 14th of May, 1816, at which 50 and upwards of the most

respectable Hindu inhabitants of rank or wealth attended, including also the principal Pandits; when a sum of nearly half a lac of Rupees was subscribed and many more subscriptions were promised." After commenting how this seemed very unusual to him, Hyde East continues: "Most of them, however, appeared to take great interest in the proceedings, and all expressed themselves in favour of making the acquisition of the English language a principal object of education, together with its moral and scientific productions." (pp. 44-5)

This shows that long before Rammohan Roy settled in Calcutta there was a large section of leading Hindus in Calcutta who needed no urging on the part of anybody and were themselves very eager to have an institution for teaching English. What is more surprising is that even the Sanskrit Pandits showed no less eagerness, and East gives a long account of his talks with them before the meeting actually commenced, when they "offered a number of small sweet-scented flowers to him, saying, that those were the flowers of literature".

Immediately after this occurs the all-important passage for our present purpose and I quote it in full:

"Talking afterwards with several of the company, before I proceeded to open the business of the day, I found that one of them in particular, a Brahmin of good caste, and a man of wealth and influence, was mostly set against Rammohan Roy, son of (a *pattanidar* under)[3a] the Raja of Burdwan, a Brahmin of the highest caste, and of great wealth and rank (who has lately written against the Hindu idolatry, and upbraids his countrymen pretty sharply). He expressed a hope that no subscription would be received from Rammohan Roy. I asked, 'why not?' 'Because he has chosen to separate himself from us, and to attack our religion.' 'I do not know', I observed, 'what Rammohun's religion is (I have heard it is a kind of Unitarianism)—*not being acquainted or having had any communication with him*;[4] but I hope that my being a Christian, and a sincere one, to the best of my ability, will be no reason for your refusing my subscription to your undertaking.' This I said in a tone of gaiety; and he answered readily in the same style, 'No, not at all; we shall be glad of your money; but it is a different thing with Rammohun Roy, who is a Hindu, and yet has publicly reviled us, and written against us and our religion; and I hope there is no intention to change our religion.' I answered, that 'I knew of no intention of meddling with their religion; that every object of the establishment would

be avowed, and a committee appointed by *themselves to regulate* the details, which would enable themselves to guard against everything they should disapprove of ; that their own committee would accept or refuse subscriptions from whom they pleased" (p. 45).

Apart from definitely establishing the fact that the Brahmin of Calcutta who approached Hyde East with the proposal, as stated at the very beginning of the letter, could not be Rammohan Roy, the letter, specially the last sentence, clearly shows, as could be normally expected, that the general rules and regulation were drawn up by the meeting and the Committee appointed by it, and it demolishes the statement made at a later date that David Hare saw Hyde East with a readymade plan which he approved with slight alterations.

The same thing is more defintely proved by the following passage in the letter :

"The principal objects proposed for the adoption of the meeting (after raising a subscription to purchase a handsome piece of ground, and building a college upon part of it, to be enlarged hereafter, according to the occasion and increasing of funds), were the cultivation of the Bengalee and English languages in particular; next, the Hindustanee tongue, as convenient (*sic*) in the Upper Provinces; and then the Persian, if desired, as ornamental; general duty to God; the English system of morals (the Pandits and some of the most sensible of the rest bore testimony to and deplored their national deficiency in morals); grammar, writing (in English as well as Bengalee), arithmetic (this is one of the Hindu virtues), history, geography, astronomy, mathematics; and in time, as the fund increases, English belles-letters, poetry, etc., etc.

"One of the singularities of the meeting was, that it was composed of persons of various castes, all combining for such a purpose, whom nothing else could have brought together; whose children are to be taught, though not fed, together.

"Another singularity was, that the most distinguished Pandits who attended declared their warm approbation of all the objects proposed; and when they were about to depart, the head Pandit, in the name of himself and the others, said that they rejoiced in having lived to see the day when literature (many parts of which had formerly been cultivated in their country with considerable success, but which were now nearly extinct) was about to be revived with greater lustre and prospect of success than ever.

"Another meeting was proposed to be held at the distance of a week; and during this interval I continued to receive numerous applications for permission to attend it. I hear from all quarters of the approbation of the Hindus at-large to the plan; they have promised that a lakh shall be subscribed to begin with. It is proposed to desire them to appoint a committee of their own for management, taking care only to secure the attendance of two or three responsible European gentlemen to aid them, and see that all goes on rightly" (pp. 45-6).

That the account given above regarding the foundation of the Hindoo College was accepted without demur till 1830 is proved by both positive and negative evidence. The first is an account of the farewell meeting held in honour of Sir Hyde East on the eve of his retirement and departure from India, published in the *Samācār-darpaṇ* on 19 January, 1822. The meeting was attended by many distinguished persons, and the Address was written on a parchment with gilded borders, in three languages, Bengali, English and Persian. Among other encomiums bestowed upon Hyde East it was stated that the people have been very much benefited by the Hindoo College *founded by him.* A separate Address presented on behalf of the students of the Hindoo College also contained the following: "We are sorry at your departure because it is due to your favour that we have had the opportunity to acquire knowledge."[5]

The second positive evidence is furnished by the following statement made by the Hon'ble Sir Edward Ryan in the course of his Address to the Grand Jury at the opening of the Supreme Court on 3 December, 1827:

"At no very distant period, I trust there will be found, in this place a sufficient number of intelligent Hindus... qualified to become jurymen, both in civil and criminal cases. I think the expectation will not be considered unreasonable when the progress the Natives are making in the knowledge of our language and institutions through the medium of the Anglo-Indian College established in this place, is considered. That Institution first set on foot through the intervention of Sir Hyde East, in 1816, has since received the most liberal support from the Government here."[6]

It may be noted here that the Hindoo College was also known as 'Anglo-Indian College' and 'Vidyalay'. The statement of Sir Edward Ryan therefore proves that even in 1827 Sir Hyde East's name was associated with the foundation of the Hindoo College.

When in 1830 a statue of Sir Hyde East, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Calcutta, and a portrait of Dr. Wilson were placed in the premises of the Hindoo College, the Editor of the *India Gazette* pointed out in an Editorial that though Mr. David Hare was the prime mover in founding the College, nothing has been done to perpetuate his memory, simply because he occupied a much humbler position than the two above gentlemen.[7] This probably induced the members of 'Young Bengal', led by Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyaya to activity. In any case, on 17 February, 1831, an Address was presented to David Hare, signed by Dakshinaranjan and 564 other members of 'Young Bengal', and a photograph of David Hare was taken. The Address referred to manifold qualities of his head and heart and even specifically mentioned his efforts to spread education. But no reference was made or any credit given to him for founding the Hindoo College. This is particularly significant in view of the newspaper campaign in favour of David Hare's claim to that credit that had just started, and the fact that the statue of Hyde East was placed in the Hindoo College with an inscription engraved on it that he was the originator of the Hindoo College. Hence the Address of the 'Young Bengal' may be regarded as a strong evidence, though of a negative character, in favour of the claim of Hyde East, and against that of David Hare.

The press campaign to uphold the claim of David Hare to be the founder of the Hindoo College probably began with the Editorial in the *India Gazette,* mentioned above, and an immediate rejoinder, as the following letter published in the *Calcutta Gazette* on 24 June, 1830, will show.

"To the Editor of the *Government Gazette*

"Sir,

"I was quite surprised to read a Paragraph cited in the *Hurkurah* from the *India Gazettee*, positively denying that Sir Edward Hyde East was the originator of the Hindoo College, and ascribing the merit of it to Mr. David Hare, in consequence of which I (as a Director of the Institution from its very foundation) deem it my duty to point out the error into which the writer has fallen, and to remove the doubts that might arise in the minds of the Public.

"On the 4th May, 1816, a very respectable Meeting of the Hindoos assembled, by the invitation, and at the house of the Honourable Sir Edward Hyde East, for the purpose of subscribing to, and forming

an Establishment for the liberal education of their children. Sir Edward alone addressed the Meeting as to the benefit that His Lordship considered would be derived by the country at large, from forming an establishment for the education of their youth. This proposal was explained by W. C. Blaquiere, Esq., and received with the unanimous approbation of all the Natives present, including the most eminent Pundits, who sanctioned it with their express support and recommendation, and a large sum of money was immediately subscribed. Under this circumstance, it clearly appears that Mr. Hare was not the originator of the Hindoo College, and in humbly showing that gratitude to the present and to future ages, by the erection of a statue of Sir Edward Hyde East, they have not robbed any man of his reputation to enrich Sir Edward's; and have given the Palm to him who deserves it.

"A Director of the Hindoo College."[8]

Presumably a rejoinder to the above letter was published to which the following reply was given in the *Calcutta Gazette* on July 1, 1830.

"To The Editor of the *Government Gazette*

"Sir,——I should not trouble you with any notice of the article headed "Hindoo College" which appears in the *India Gazette* of the 25th Instant, were it not to refute the charge brought against me of having suppressed facts connected with the establishment of the Hindoo College, which would reflect merit on Mr. Hare. . . . . .I repeat again, that Edward Hyde East was the Originator of the Institution.

"With regard to the questions put by the writer, I will only in answer say that I for one am not aware of any proposals in writing for the formation of the Hindoo College having been circulated before the Meeting at Sir Edward's house or of its having been handed to Sir Edward East, by a Native gentleman; and since the article appeared in the *India Gazette*, I have enquired of most of the other Directors—and they, like myself, are ignorant of the circumstance—I have also searched among the records of the College, and find no allusion to any thing of the kind.

"It is not a fact that Sir Edward East disclaimed the honour of being the Originator of the College, upon the occasion of the Address being presented to him: as proof, I cannot do better than refer the writer and the public to the Address itself, and to Sir Edward's

reply thereto on that occasion, which may be found in the *Government Gazette* of the 17th January, 1822.

"A Director of the Hindoo College."[9]

The *Samācār-darpan* wrote on 3 July, 1830, that it appears from the published letters that David Hare was the originator of the Hindoo College and drafted its first plan, though it gave some credit also to Sir Hyde East.[10] But a letter published in the same Journal on 15 October, 1831, refers to Sir Hyde East as the founder of the Hindoo College.[11]

The subject was discussed in detail in two issues of *The Calcutta Christian Observer*, published in June (p. 17) and July, 1832 (pp. 68-9).

The first issue contains the following passage:

"It is contended, on the one hand, by a Director of the Hindoo College, that on the 4th of May, 1816, Sir Edward Hyde East first convened a meeting of Hindoos at his house, for the purpose of subscribing to, and forming an establishment for the liberal education of their children. It was contended, on the other hand, by one of the teachers of the Hindoo College, the late Mr. Derozio, who, from his intimacy with Mr. Hare and the Native community, as well as from his knowledge of the proceedings of the College, certainly had good grounds for the assertion which he so resolutely maintained, that "*previous to the aforesaid meeting* being held, *a paper, the author and originator of which was Mr. Hare, and the purport of which was a proposal for the establishment of a College, was handed to Sir Hyde East by a Native* for his countenance and support". The learned Judge having made a few alterations in the plan, did give it his countenance and support by calling the aforesaid meeting. But giving support or sanction to a measure proposed by any one, is not the same thing as originating that measure. Now, if it be the fact, as seems warranted by good authority, that Mr. Hare did first conceive the plan in his mind, and then circulated it in writing amongst the Natives, by one of whom it was subsequently submitted to the learned Judge, for his approval, the merit of originating the Hindoo College must in justice be ascribed to Mr. Hare."

As doubts were felt by some as to the accuracy of the above account more details were added in the July issue (1832) of the same journal. The most important addition is that the idea of the establishment of the College was mooted by Hare at the house of Rammohan Roy

in 1815 in a gathering of a few friends as a counter-proposal to the one made by Rammohan Roy for the establishment of a Brahmo Sabha. The account continues:

"This proposition seemed to give general satisfaction and Mr. H. (Hare) himself soon after prepared a paper, containing proposals for the establishment of the College. Babu Buddinath Mookerjya, the father of the present native Secretary, was deputed to collect subscription. The circular was after a time put into the hands of Sir E. H. East, who was very much pleased with the proposal, and after making a few corrections offered his most cordial aid in the promotion of its objects. He soon after called a meeting at his house, and it was then resolved "That an establishment be formed for the education of native youth."

"Thus it appears that Sir Hyde East, though he had not the merit of originating the College, is nevertheless entitled to great credit for the very prompt and effective aid which he afforded. By his example, his high station, and estensive influence, especially among the Natives, many doubtless were induced to lend their assistance, who would otherwise have regarded the proposal with indifference.

"Besides holding frequent meetings at his house he, as well as Mr. Hare, contributed largely to the fund, and exerted himself in various ways towards the success of so useful an undertaking."

As has been shown above, this is quite inconsistent with the account of Hyde East and the only authority cited is that of Derozio who was dead at the time. Derozio was a lad of nine years when the Hindoo College was founded and could not have any personal knowledge. The proceedings of the College, from which he is supposted to have derived his information, definitely rule out any part played by David Hare as is proved by the letter of a Director of the Hindoo College, quoted above, and the statement of Radhakanta Dev, quoted later. Therefore no reliance can be placed on the account published in the *Calcutta Christian Observer*. The statement of Radhakanta Dev also shows that David Hare was associated with the College from 1819, and this fact, added to Hare's activities for English education no doubt was the origin of the whole story about Hare's being the founder of the Hindoo College. As regards the statement that Hare made the plan which was approved by Hyde East with a few alterations, after which the meeting was called at

Sir Hyde East's house, attention may be drawn to the Editorial of the *Calcutta Gazette*, dated July 4, 1816, which begins as follows:

"The plan for the Hindoo College is, we understand, in considerable progress; the sentiments of the principal Hindoos on the subject having been collected, and a digest of the whole prepared for further observations and improvements."

(The details of the plan follow).[12]

But the mischief was done and henceforth Hare's name came into prominence in connection with the Hindoo College. Thus Dwarakanath Tagore stated in 1835 that the institution of the Hindoo College was founded chiefly through the exertions of his friend David Hare and the natives.[13] Mr. Kerr, in his Review of Public Instruction in the Bengal Presidency from 1831 to 1853 says: "The Hindoo College was founded in 1816 by the Natives themselves in order to meet the growing demand for instruction in English.....Several European gentlemen also took an active interest in the establishment of the Institution particularly Sir E. H. East and David Hare."[14] The committee of Public Instruction also observed that Hare 'assisted in the formation of the School Society and of the Hindoo College'.[15] It is worth noticing that, as yet, none associated Rammohan with this institution.

On the other hand, Raja Radhakanta Dev held quite a different view. Being anxious to know whether David Hare was the founder of the Hindoo College, Pearychand Mitra wrote to him on the subject and the following is his reply, under date, the 4th September, 1847.

"On receipt of your letter of the 30th ulto, I have referred to the old records of the Hindoo College, and found no allusion therein of the late Mr. David Hare's having been the originator of the Institution. If the idea of founding the Hindoo College had originated with Mr. Hare, and been carried out through Sir Hyde East, as you have been informed, then the latter must have noticed it in his speech delivered at the first meeting of the Hindoo community held at his house on the 4th May, 1816, for the establishment of the Hindoo College and Hare must have consequently been appointed a member of the committee of 20 natives and 10 Europeans, at the second meeting held on the 21st of the above month.

"I have also found that Mr. Hare was nominated a Visitor of the College on the 12th June, 1819, and hence, as he gradually devoted his time and attention to promote the object of the Insti-

tution, he rose in the public estimation and was elected a Manager of the College, perhaps in the year 1825. Under these circumstances I have to conclude, that Sir Ed. Hyde East, and not Mr. D. Hare, was the originator or founder of the Hindoo College, for the commemoration of which His Lordship's statue has been erected in the Grand Jury room of the Supreme Court, at the expense of the Hindoo gentlemen of this Presidency."[16]

In spite of this clear statement, fully consistent with Hyde's letter quoted above, the story of David Hare as the originator of the idea of instituting the Hindoo College grew apace.[17] Though even in 1830, the address given by Dakshinaranjan and 564 other members of 'Young Bengal' group to David Hare did not refer to him as associated in any way with the Hindoo College, Kishorichand Mitra, in an Address delivered in 1862 on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of David Hare's death, narrated at length how David Hare took the initiative in founding the College.[18] Fifteen years later, the story was repeated with slight modifications by Pearychand Mitra in his biography of David Hare published in 1877. It runs as follows :[19]

"The first move he (Hare) made was in attending, uninvited, a meeting called by Ram Mohun Roy and his friends for the purpose of establishing a society calculated to subvert idolatry. Hare submitted that the establishment of an English school would materially serve their cause. They all acquisced in the strength of Hare's position, but did not carry out his suggestion. Hare therefore waited on Sir Edward Hyde East, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, who had taken his seat on the 11th November, 1813. Sir Hyde East gave him an audience, heard all that he had to say, and promised to think on the matter. Buddinath Mukerjee in those days used to visit the big officials. When he paid his respects to Sir Hyde East he was requested to ascertain, whether his countrymen were favourable to the establishment of a college for the education of the Hindu youth, in English literature and science. Buddinath belonged to a respectable family and his *poita* was his prestige. He sounded the leading members of the Hindu society, and reported to Sir Hyde East that they were agreeable to the proposal. Several meetings were held at Sir Hyde East's house, and it was resolved that "an establishment be formed for the education of native youth."

It will be noticed that during the interval of 45 years some important elements have been added to the original story, mentioned above.[19a] It was now Hare himself, and not a native of Calcutta

or Baidyanath Mukherje who visited Sir Hyde East with the proposal. Baidyanath Mukherje's role was merely to ascertain whether his countrymen were favourable to the establishment of a College, and it was only when he reported to Hyde East after sounding the leading members of the Hindu Society that they agreed, several meetings were held at his house, and it was *then* resolved to establish the College.

These accounts differ on almost every essential point from the letter of Hyde East. He says that he called the meeting *at the request of the Hindus who were very eager to establish a College for English education*, a fact which struck him as unusual, and the general plan of the College was settled *at the very first meeting*. According to the later accounts Hare makes the plan which is accepted by Hyde East with slight alterations; *after this*, inquiry is made *whether the Hindus were agreeable to the proposal of such a college*, and even then *several meetings* were held before it was resolved *to establish a College*. According to Hyde East he hesitated even to call a meeting at his house without the sanction of the Government, but according to later accounts *he approves of the whole plan*, without any hesitation, on his own responsibility, without even knowing whether the Hindus were agreeable to such a proposal or not. It is impossible to accept this later story unless convincing evidence is brought forward to prove that Hyde's letter is a forged document or he deliberately gave a false account.

As a corollary it follows that until either of this is proved on good authority, no credence should be given to the story of Rammohan as collaborator of David Hare which is a part of the same story.

Rammohan's name first appears in connection with the Hindoo College in a passing reference in Hyde East's letter to the fact that in the first meeting at his house, before the formal business began, one Brahmin told him that he hoped no subscription should be received from Rammohan Roy.[20] Next, in 1832, we hear that it was at Rammohan's house that David Hare first made the proposal of establishing a College as mentioned above.[20a] But up to 1862 the controversy about the founder of the Hindu College centred round Hyde East and David Hare, and Rammohan did not come into the picture at all. In that year Kishorichand Mitra in his Address on the occasion of David Hare's death anniversary mentioned above,[20b] while referring to Hare as the founder of the College, stated in passing that Rammohan shared with David Hare the credit of

originating the idea of the institution of the Hindoo College. Finally Pearychand Mitra, in continuation of his account of David Hare, quoted above,[20c] observes:

"It was subsequently reported that Ram Mohun Roy would be connected with the College. The orthodox members, one and all, said, that we will have nothing with the College. Buddinath was thrown into the shade. Sir Hyde was in a fix and the whole plan was upset.

"Hare, who had kept himself in the background, and was watching the movement with intense interest, bestirred himself in arranging with Ram Mohun Roy, as to his having no connection with the College, and thus secured the support of the orthodox Hindu gentlemen. There was no difficulty in getting Ram Mohun Roy to renounce his connection, as he valued the education of the countrymen more than the empty flourish of his name as a committee-man. But we must not lose sight of Hare's services. They were rendered quietly. A meeting was accordingly held on the 14th May, 1816. It was numerously attended by respectable Hindus and Pundits."

This is not only inconsistent with the account of Hyde East, but is curious in many respects. If Hare was the originator of the whole plan it is not easy to understand why he should "keep himself in the background". While Kishorichand divides the credit of founding the Hindu college between Hare and Rammohan, Pearychand says, that as Rammohan and his friends did nothing to carry out his suggestion of establishing a College, Hare himself saw Hyde East. As regards Rammohan, Pearychand merely refers to a report that Rammohan Roy would be connected with the College, thus practically asserting that Rammohan had no connection with the foundation of the College. As regards the report it is not difficult to see that the legend grew out of the fact stated by Hyde East that a Brahmin expressed the hope that no subscription should be received from Rammohan Roy.

Still more curious is the further elaboration of Pearychand's story by Shibnath Sastri in 1903. It may be summed up as follows:[21]

First he says that Rammohan, being expelled from the Committee of the Hindu College, himself established a school. Later, in a fuller account, he refers to the meeting at the house of Rammohan and says that it was decided at that meeting that efforts should be made to establish an English school (*vidyalay*). Then he adds: Perhaps Baidyanath Mukhopadhyaya carried this proposal of

Hare and Rammohan to Hyde East who himself also probably felt the need of an English school. So he received the proposal with alacrity, sent for Hare and Rammohan, and asked Baidyanath to ascertain the views of the Bengali gentlemen about the matter. Then a meeting was held at East's House, the subject was discussed and the enthusiasm for the establishment of the school was at its height, then the news spread that Rammohan would be a member of the Committee, and all the Hindus refused to have anything to do with the proposal. Hyde East was in a fix, sent for Hare who spoke to Rammohan and the latter immediately wrote to Hyde East to remove his name from the Committee. "Then another meeting was called on 21 May and it was decided to establish the School and a Committee was appointed."

Comment is superfluous except to draw attention to the brand new additions, namely, that Hyde East sent for Hare and Rammohan, and though it was only on 21 May that it was decided to establish the school, the Committee for its management must have already been constituted, for, otherwise, Rammohan could not have requested Hyde East to remove his name from the proposed Committee.

These stories only prove the gradual stages in the luxuriant growth of Rammohan-myth, from an individual's suggestion in the first meeting that no subscription should be accepted from Rammohan to his expulsion from the Managing Committee, there being an intermediate stage that Rammohan himself withdrew from the Committee. All this should make us cautious in accepting any statement about Rammohan in later times, even by eminent persons, without examining the source of information.

The final evolution of the Rammohan-myth came about thirty years later. As mentioned before, Sir Hyde East's letter begins by saying that a Brahmin whom he knew called upon him with a request to hold a meeting at his house for discussing the proposal to establish a College. Major B. D. Basu, who published this letter, in the thirties of this century[22] added a footnote that the Brahmin was, of course, Raja Rammohan Roy. Shri Brajendranath Banerji went one step further, and added in the text of the letter itself within brackets the name of Rammohan after the word 'Brahmin'[23]. Thus the conclusion was drawn that Rammohan was the prime mover in founding the Hindu College. Curiously, neither of these two distinguished scholars noticed that in that very letter Hyde East says, as mentioned above,

"I do not know what Rammohan's religion is, not being acquainted or having had any communication with him."[23a] Thus the 'Brahmin' whom Hyde East knew and who carried the proposal of founding a College, cannot be Rammohan Roy. Brajendra Babu realised his mistake and corrected it in the second edition of his book. But the mischief was done, and Rammohan now enjoys the credit of being the prime mover of the Hindoo College. Thus the legend of the founder of the Hindoo College completed its cycle: first, it was Hyde East; second, Hyde East and David Hare; third, David Hare and Rammohan; and last, Rammohan alone came to be regarded as the prime mover and founder of the Hindoo College.

If we remember that Rammohan Roy's name was not associated with the foundation of the Hindoo College before 1862, i.e., nearly half a century after the inaugural meeting to establish it was held, that neither he nor David Hare was present at that meeting which was attended by "50 and upwards of the most respectable Hindu inhabtants of rank or wealth, including also the principal Pandits", that the request to Sir Hyde East to hold the meeting was made in the name, and on behalf, not of Rammohan or Hare, but 'many of the leading Hindus', and when somebody in the meeting proposed that no subscription should be accepted from Rammohan Roy no one protested against it by saying that he originated the idea, that Rammohan was not a member of the committee, consisting of 10 Europeans and 20 Indians, originally appointed to organise the College, and Hare joined it much later, it should be obvious to anybody that the credit given to Rammohan for the foundation of the College or any active part in it cannot be regarded as a historical fact. If, in spite of all these, and in the face of facts mentioned in Sir Hyde's letter written only four days after the inaugural meeting was held under his chairmanship to discuss the scheme, a professional historian holds that "Rammohun's hands and brain were behind the whole proposal", and that "it is obvious that the whole idea was first conceived and discussed at Rammohun's residence",[24] or the Hindoo College is described in a University publication in 1967 as "the brainchild of David Hare and Rammohun Roy",[25] one despairs of the triumph of historical truth over blind faith, propaganda and prejudice in this country. A cat has nine lives, but it seems a historical error concerning a great man has one hundred lives.

But there is one aspect of the question in which some devoted admirers of Rammohan have, perhaps unwittingly, done scant justice to

Rammohan. By way of explaining the absence of Rammohan in the meeting at the house of Sir Hyde East, one historian remarks, "Rammohan could have been well pre-occupied or he might have anticipated the orthodox opposition, and stayed away from the meeting. For that matter David Hare himself was not present in that meeting".[26] One might well wonder that if these two great educationists were really responsible for the whole scheme, they would fail to attend the meeting on such grounds. The very mention of the fear of orthodox opposition gives away the whole case, for it is an indirect admission of the dominance of orthodox Hindus in general, and not of individuals like Hare and Rammohan, so far as the scheme was concerned. I think that if any hypothesis is to be put forward for explaining the absence of Rammohan from the meeting, the one that is more in consonance with his liberal outlook and far-sighted vision is his knowledge that it was purely a scheme of orthodox Hindus, as is apparent not only from the attendance noted above, but also from the fundamental principle on which the College was based, namely that it was open only to the Hindus and no Muslim or Christian student could be admitted to it. Rammohan probably disliked this idea, and he had good reasons for doing so, as his vision of future India was not obscured by a narrow communal spirit. Of course, this is only a hypothesis—but perhaps a better one and more honourable to Rammohan than the one put forward by his blind admirers.

To sum up: The above discussion makes one thing clear. The early account of Hyde East is so incompatible with, and essentially different from, the later accounts about David Hare and Rammohan Roy as the founder of the Hindoo College, that we must choose one or the other as true.[27] As a student of history, and guided by such knowledge as I possess about the canons of historical criticism, I have not the least hesitation in accepting Hyde East's letter as giving the true account. For it is a direct evidence given by one of the highest dignitaries in the land who cannot be accused of any motive of distorting the truth about facts within his personal knowledge and events happening before his eyes, and written only four days after the event narrated in it, and was accepted without demur for more than thirteen years.

On the other hand, the later account is not based on any contemporary authority and like a rolling stone gathered momentum as it moved, new details being added with passing years, till it assumed a form whose absurdity lies on the face of it. To avoid misunderstand-

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priority to the other. The Rammohan-myth in this respect has found its best expression in the inimitable language of Rabindranath Tagore. As it is beyond my power to convey in English translation the charm of the language which has deeply implanted the myth in the hearts of the Bengalees. I quote a few sentences from the original Bengali and refer the reader to his famous essay on Rammohan Roy for the elaboration of the idea :

"রামমোহন রায় যখন ভারতবর্ষে জন্মগ্রহণ করেন তখন এখানে চতুর্দিকে কাল-রাত্রির অন্ধকার বিরাজ করিতেছিল। বঙ্গসমাজ প্রেতভূমি ছিল, শ্মশানস্থলে প্রাচীনকালের জীবন্ত হিন্দুধর্মের প্রেতমাত্র রাজত্ব করিতেছিল। রামমোহন রায় সমাজকে এই সহস্র নাগপাশ বন্ধন হইতে মুক্ত করিতে নির্ভয়ে অগ্রসর হইলেন...। তিনি তখনকার অন্ধকার হিন্দুসমাজে আলোক জ্বালাইয়া দিলেন। বর্তমান বঙ্গসমাজের ভিত্তি স্থাপন করিয়াছেন রামমোহন রায়। আমরা সমস্ত বঙ্গবাসী তাঁহার সম্পত্তির উত্তরাধিকারী তাঁহার নির্মিত ভবনে বাস করিতেছি।"
(রবীন্দ্র রচনাবলী, চতুর্থ খণ্ড, ৫১৩-৫১৯)

Thus continues the flight of poetic fancy. Now let us turn to positive facts. Rammohan's greatest religious reform or mission, to which he devoted his whole life and energy, was the crusade against belief in a multiplicity of gods and the worship of their images. The pertinent question in the present context is 'what was the extent of his success in laying thereby the foundation of the present *Baṅgasamāj* and dispelling the darkness by light ?' The reply is writ large in blazing letters upon the illumined gates of two thousand Durga Puja pandals in Calcutta whose loud-speakers and *Ḍhāk* or trumpets proclaim in deafening noise, year after year, the failure of Rammohan to make the slightest impression from his point of view on 99.9 per cent. of the vast Hindu Samaj either in the 19th or in the 20th century.

As regards social reforms, apart from his efforts towards the abolition of the cruel rite of the Sati, there is hardly anything to his credit which changed the foundation of the *Baṅgasamāj*. The plain truth is that he was constitutionally averse to any change in the prevalent social practices of the Hindus, though he did not like and sometimes even deplored some of them. This may appear somewhat strange to the devoted admirers of Rammohan, but it is definitely proved both by the statements of impartial friends and by his own writings. Thus Mr. Adam, a great friend and close co-worker of Rammohan, writes on 24 June, 1827: "All the rules in the present state of Hindu Society he finds it necessary to observe, relate to eating and drinking. He must not eat of the food forbidden to Brahmins nor with persons of a dif-

ferent religion from the Hindu or of different caste or tribe from his own."[28] Rammohan condemned the caste system as an obstacle to the national improvement, but did not start any agitation against it; on the other hand, he not only fully observed the rules of caste distinction, as Adam says, but even symbolised his spirit in this respect by keeping on his body the sacred thread, the distinctive mark of a Brahman, till his death in Bristol. Fortunately he has not left anybody in doubt about his own thoughts and ideas in this respect, as the two following passages from his writings will show :

"বিধবার বিবাহ তাবৎ সম্প্রদায়ে অব্যবহার্য হইয়াছে সুতরাং সদ্ব্যবহার করাইতে পারে না, কিন্তু বিহিত মদ্যপান ও বৈধহিংসা সল্লোকেদের মধ্যে অনেকের ব্যবহার্য অতএব তত্তৎপক্ষে সে সর্বথা সদাচার ও সদ্ব্যবহারে গণিত হইয়াছে।"

(প্রথা প্রদর্শন—১৮২৩ খ্রীঃ, রামমোহন গ্রন্থাবলী, সাহিত্য পরিষৎ সং, ৬ষ্ঠ খণ্ড, ১৪০ পৃষ্ঠা)

"যবনী কি অন্য জাতি পরদার মাত্র গমনে সর্বথা পাতক এবং সে ব্যক্তি দস্যু ও চণ্ডাল হইতেও অধম কিন্তু তন্ত্রোক্ত শৈব বিবাহের দ্বারা বিবাহিতা যে স্ত্রী সে বৈদিক বিবাহের স্ত্রীর ন্যায় অবশ্য গম্যা হয়। বৈদিক বিবাহের স্ত্রী জন্ম হইবা মাত্রেই পত্নী হইয়া সঙ্গে স্থিতি করে এমত নহে বরঞ্চ দেখিতেছি যাহার সহিত কোন সম্বন্ধ কন্যা ছিল না সেই স্ত্রী যদি ব্রহ্মার কথিত মন্ত্রবলে শরীরের অর্দ্ধাঙ্গ-ভাগিনী অদ্য হয় তবে মহাদেবের প্রোক্ত মন্ত্রের দ্বারা গৃহীতা যে স্ত্রী সে পত্নী-রূপে গ্রাহ্য কেন না হয় ? শিবোক্ত শাস্ত্রের অমান্য যাঁহারা করেন সকল শাস্ত্রকে এককালে উচ্ছন্ন তাঁহারা করিতে পারগ হয়েন এবং তন্ত্রোক্ত মন্ত্রগ্রহণ ও অনুষ্ঠান তাঁহাদের বৃথা হইয়া পরমার্থ তাঁহাদের সর্বথা বিফল হয়। খাদ্যাখাদ্য ও গম্যাগম্য শাস্ত্রপ্রমাণে হয় গো-শরীরের সাক্ষাৎ রস যে দুগ্ধ সে শাস্ত্রবিহিত হইয়াছে অতএব খাদ্য হইল আর গৃঞ্জনাদি* যাহা পৃথিবী হইতে জন্মে অথচ স্মৃতিতে নিষেধপ্রযুক্ত স্মার্তমতাবলম্বীদের তাহা ভোজনে পাপ হয় সেইরূপ স্মৃতির বচনে সত্য ত্রেতা দ্বাপরে ব্রাহ্মণ চতুর্বর্ণের কন্যা বিবাহ করিয়াও সন্তান জন্মাইয়াও পাতকী হইতেন না সেইরূপ সাক্ষাৎ মহেশ্বরপ্রোক্ত আগমপ্রমাণে সর্ব জাতি শক্তি শৈবোদ্বাহে গ্রহণ করিলে পাতক হয় না এ সকল বিষয়ে শাস্ত্রই কেবল প্রমাণ। শৈব বিবাহে বয়স ও জাতি ইহার বিচার নাই কেবল সপিণ্ডা না হয় এবং সভর্তৃকা না হয় তাহাকে শিবের আজ্ঞাবলে শক্তিরূপে গ্রহণ করিবেক (মহা-নির্বাণ)।"

(চারি প্রশ্নের উত্তর—১৮২২ খ্রীঃ, রামমোহন গ্রন্থাবলী, সাহিত্য পরিষৎ সং, ৬ষ্ঠ খণ্ড, ১৯-২০ পৃষ্ঠা)

The first passage means that in the opinion of Rammohan though both the remarriage of widows and the drinking of wine and eating

*রশুন, পিঁয়াজ প্রভৃতি।

meat have been prescribed by the *Śāstras* the first cannot be regarded as good conduct (*sadācāra*) because it is forbidden by all sections of people, while the other is good conduct because many men drink wine and eat meat as prescribed by the *Śāstras*.

In the second passage Rammohan supports the Saiva marriage according to Tantrik rites which would be regarded today as tantamount to concubinage. The net substance of this long passage is 'that in matters concerning marriage, food, etc., both Brahmanical and Tantrik Sāstras should be treated as equally authoritative and must be strictly followed without question, and those who do or think otherwise are guilty of heinous crime.' Those who are not blind followers of Rammohan can easily judge for themselves how far the above views conformed, far less contributed, to the New Age or Renaissance, or in the language of Rabindranath, how far he may be credited with the foundation of the present *Baṅgasamāj*. It is also pertinent to ask the question how far the above views, to which many others may be added, are compatible with the sturdy rational spirit, as opposed to current blind faith, with which Rammohan is usually credited, and on that account regarded as the creator of the New Age in Bengal in the 19th century.

The only instance in which Rammohan departed from his fixed principle of accepting, at least by outward conduct and practice, the social customs that were in vogue among the people in general, is afforded by his strenuous efforts for abolishing the cruel practice of burning widows along with their dead husbands, generally known as *Satī*. While it is impossible to minimise the importance of the great role played by Rammohan in the anti-*Satī* movement, we should remember two things in this connection which are generally forgotten, or ignored, in order to give Rammohan far greater credit than is really due to him. Thus while one historian begins by saying that Rammohan "was the pioneer of social reform movements in India", and regards the anti-*Satī* campaign as the most important among them, he adds immediately afterwards that this movement "had actually started before Rammohan took up the cause".[29] This is undoubtedly a fact and the writer himself and many others have traced the long history of the movement before Rammohan. It is not possible or necessary to recapitulate it at length beyond drawing attention to the following facts: From the beginning of the 19th century, and even before that, the Officers and Judges of the East India Company made serious efforts to stop the practice. The Sup-

reme Court of Calcutta tried to prevent the rite within their jurisdiction and between 1770 and 1780 the practice was forbidden in the territories then under the control of the Government of Bombay. Rules were passed by the Governor-General in 1812, 1815, and 1817 with a view to checking the evils, and everything possible, short of stopping the practice by legislation which the British Government did not dare to do, was done before Rammohan. Further, while the first tract of Rammohan against the *Satī* was published in 1818, Mrityunjoy Vidyalankar, a Pandit of the Supreme Court, in 1817 recorded his views on *Satī* in his official capacity "which anticipated most of the arguments later advanced by Raja Rammohan Roy".[30]

Finally, the Governor-General Lord William Bentinck took courage in both hands and decided to abolish the *Satī* rite by legislation. He consulted several persons one of whom was naturally Rammohan Roy who was known to be a great fighter against the evil. But to Bentinck's utter surprise Rammohan opposed the proposal to stop the evil by legislation. When I first mentioned this fact it was vigorously challenged by a writer in the *Radical Humanist*. Fortunately the *Radical Humanist* had the courtesy to publish my rejoinder, and then the writer had the goodness to admit his error with the observation that such a thing would appear almost incredible in view of the general attitude of Rammohan Roy on the question. Now, it is not necessary in the present context to discuss the wisdom or reasonableness of Rammohan's position, but in view of the fact that the movement had begun long before Rammohan, and the legislation, which alone could effectively prevent it as past experience had shown, was opposed by Rammohan, can anybody honestly maintain that "it was mainly owing to Rammohan's leadership that *Satī* was ultimately abolished?"[31] When it is remembered that all the facts about the *Satī*-movement stated above are to be found in a book, the author of which admits that "Collet's attempt to justify the action of Rammohan fails to satisfy altogether"[32] but nevertheless makes the statement just quoted and also the others mentioned at the beginning, namely, that 'Rammohan was the pioneer of the social reform movements in India', one gets a fair measure of the strength of the Rammohan-myth.

We may next discuss the case of Bengali Prose Literature. As Brajendranath Bandyopadhyaya has pointed out in his biography of Rammohan Roy, many writers have claimed the latter to be the creator of Bengali prose. But though Brajendranath pointed out the

erroneous character of this view by positive evidence[32a] it still reigns supreme. Thus we find the following in the Second Edition of the *Contemporary Indian Literature* (p. 19) published by the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi: "The first really powerful Bengali prose came from the pen of Raja Rammohan Roy in the pamphlets he published advocating thorough-going reforms in religion, morals, and social practices. .... In fact it was mainly Rammohun's ideas and endeavours that were responsible for the Renaissance in Bengal in the nineteenth century."

How far Rammohan deserves credit for these "thorough-going reforms" has been discussed above; the credit for being the first to write powerful Bengali prose rests on equally weak foundation, and is belied by patent facts. His first two prose books, *Vedāntasār* and *Vedānta-grantha*, were published in 1815, followed by several other books. On the other hand, at least three Pandits of the Fort William College wrote a number of prose books before him. The *Batris Siṁhāsan*, *Hitopadeśa* and *Rājābali* by Mrityunjay Vidyalankar were published, respectively, in 1802, 1808 and 1808. He was preceded by Ramram Basu whose *Rājā Pratāpāditya-Caritra* was published in 1801, and followed by Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya whose *Mahārāj Kṛṣṇacandra Rāyasaya Caritram* was published in 1804. These five books are as good specimens of prose, if not better, than those of Rammohan Roy. This may be judged from the extracts quoted in the Appendix. At the head of all the above writers was William Carey, who composed, in 1801, Bengali translation of the Bible and a Grammar of the Bengali language, and also *Itihāsamālā* in 1812. Dr. Sukumar Sen, the author of the *History of Bengali Literature* does not expressly say that Rammohan was the father of Bengali prose literature, but seeks to convey that impression by saying, "Rammohan Roy (1774-1833), who was in many ways the forerunner of the new age that was dawning in India, was the first writer of Bengali prose outside of text books—in his translations of two Vedanta treatises (1815) and of the Upanishads and in his polemical tracts in support of social and religious reformation (1818-23)."[33] It is difficult to understand the real import of this statement, and it may be taken to imply, though in a subtle manner, that Rammohan was the creator of respectable prose literature. But a book written, or prescribed as a text, for the British Administrators does not cease to be literature any more than Vidyasagar's or Bankimchandra's book or even Shakespeare's dramas lose their

value and prestige if prescribed as texts. The only test from our present point of view is the style of Bengali prose in those books, and text books from this point of view are certainly not lower in prestige or importance than translations or polemic tracts. The specimen of prose written by Rammohan even so late as 1822 as quoted in the Appendix, and the two passages quoted before (p. 41) may be compared to the extracts from the Fort William College Pandits' text books in the Appendix, and the reader can easily judge for himself which is better prose from the point of view of literary style, as this alone is the subject of our present inquiry.

It may be mentioned in this connection that as far back as 1834 when Rammohan-myth had not yet begun and men had not, like Dr. Sukumar Sen, been obsessed with the idea "that Rammohan was in many ways the forerunner of the new age that was dawning in India", Dewan Ramkamal Sen, in his *Dictionary in English and Bengalee*, observed as follows: "I must acknowledge here that whatever has been done towards the revival of the Bengalee language, its improvement, and in fact the establishing it as a language must be attributed to that excellent man Dr. Carey and his colleagues amongst whom the late Mrityunjay Vidyalankar was the most eminent. From their time forward writing Bengalee correctly may be said to have begun in Calcutta."[34] This has been repeated in much stronger language in modern times by Dr. S. K. De, the author of the *History of Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century* and Brajendranath Banerji in his critical biography of William Carey. Dr. De writes: "To Carey belongs the credit of having raised the language from the debased condition of an unsettled dialect to the character of a regular and permanent form of speech, capable, as in the past, of becoming the refined and comprehensive vehicle of a great literature in the future."[35] Brajendranath Banerji remarks: "Many people have hailed Rammohan as the creator of Bengali prose. But the Pandits of Fort William who have made the richest (lit. unlimited) contribution to the foundation of Bengali prose all preceded Rammohan. In particular we should remember the name of Mrityunjay Vidyalankar in this connection. He was the first to attempt to give literary form to Bengali prose. He also made experiments with colloquial form of Bengali prose. So he has the best claim to the credit of being the father of Bengali prose."[36]

We may next take up the question of Bengali Journals. The current popular view is thus expressed by Shivnath Sastri: "The missionaries

of Srirampur started the first Bengali Journal named *Darpaṇ* (*Samācār-darpaṇ*), but it was edited by Englishmen and its language was European Bengali. In reality Raja Rammohan Roy was the pioneer of Bengali Journals edited by the Bengalis. It was he who published the Weekly *Sambād Kaumudi*."[37]

The known facts may be briefly stated as follows:

Periodicals in Bengali language did not appear till 1818 when a monthly paper, *Digdarśan*, and a weekly paper *Samācār-darpaṇ*, edited by J. C. Marshman, were published, respectively, in April and May of that year. *Digdarśan* had a very brief existence, but the *Samācār-darpaṇ* had a long and very useful career. Although Marshman was the nominal editor till the end of 1841, it was really conducted by the Indian Pandits. This is established by a notice issued in the paper on 26 October, 1833, that "as our Pandits will not return from home before Monday, no new news would be published till then, for which we crave the indulgence of our readers." Another weekly paper *Bāngāl Gazeti* was published in May, 1818, and there is a controversy whether it preceded or followed the *Samācār-darpaṇ*. I have recently tried to prove on definite evidence that the *Bāngāl Gazeti* was published before the *Samācār-darpaṇ*.[38] The *Bāngāl Gazeti* was edited by either Gangakishore Bhattacharya or Harachandra Ray, if not jointly by both, and it did not continue for more than a year. The weekly *Sambād Kaumudī*, mentioned above, was started on December 4, 1821. Rammohan Roy was very closely associated with this paper and regularly contributed articles, but it was edited and published in the name, first of Bhavanicharan Dutt, three months later of Harihar Datta, and after May, 1822, of Govindachandra Konar. But the paper had to be closed down in 1822, though it was revived later under other management and Rammohan had no connection with it. So he was associated with it for less than a year. The position then, briefly is this: At least three Bengali Journals were started in 1818, one of which had a long and useful career for more than 20 years; its nominal editor was an Englishman but it was really conducted by the Bengali Pandits. The second, lasting for about a year, was edited by a Bengali, or jointly by two Bengalis. More than three years later, a new Bengali paper was started which was practically conducted by Rammohan Roy but its nominal editor was a different person. This paper did not last even a full year. It would thus be obvious that Rammohan has hardly any claim to be the pioneer of Bengali Journals.

We may now discuss the last item, namely, that Rammohan was the fountain source of political regeneration, development of national consciousness, and growth of genuine patriotism which marked the New Age or Renaissance in the 19th century. This is too complicated a question to be discussed at the end of this long lecture and I can only refer to a few facts which must be taken into consideration in properly assessing the popular and generally accepted views in the matter.

1. The most outstanding element in Rammohan's political ideas is his abstract love of liberty which was universal and cosmopolitan.

2. So far as India was concerned Rammohan had an unbounded faith in the sense of Justice and goodness of the British Government, and accepted the British rule as an act of Divine Providence to deliver India from the tyranny of its Muslim rulers. But, curiously enough, he was enamoured of the colonization of India by the British and glorified the role played by them for civilizing the Indians.

In a meeting at Calcutta Town Hall on 15 December, 1829, Rammohan publicly expressed his "conviction that the greater our intercourse with European gentlemen, the greater will be our improvement in literary, social and political affairs." Rammohan even went to the length of highly praising the role of the British Indigo Planters who have earned undying notoriety in the history of Bengal in the 19th century. "As to the indigo planters", said he in the same meeting, "there may be some partial injury done by the indigo planters; but on the whole they have performed more good to the generality of the natives of this country than any other class of Europeans whether in or out of the service."[39] Comment is superfluous, save to point out that there was at least one great Bengali who appreciated the noble service rendered by the indigo planters to benefit the hapless Bengal peasants.

Rammohan practically reconciled his love of freedom in the abstract with India's subservience to the British rule. The philosophy behind this was clearly expounded by Rammohan to Victor Jacquemont. "Is not", he asked Jacquemont, "this fiery love of national independence a chimera ?" Then he added, with reference to India, "Conquest is very rarely an evil when the conquering people are more civilized than the conquered, because the former bring to later the benefits of civilisation. India requires many more years of English domination so that she may not have many things to lose while she is reclaiming her political independence."[40]

It is unnecessary, in the present context, to discuss the wisdom or propriety of this doctrine, or to ask whether this view about India is consistent with Rammohan's great jubilation at the liberation of Spanish Colonies of South America which he celebrated by illumination and an elegant dinner to a large number of Europeans. Nor is it necessary to discuss the extent to which the above political theory of Rammohan was due to his profound contempt for the Hindus who, in his opinion, "have subjected themselves to disgrace and ridicule by the worship of idols, very often under the most shameful forms, accompanied with the foulest language, and most indecent hymns and gestures."[41] But whatever might be his justification for supporting India's long subservience to British rule, or condemning the worship of images by the Hindus in language which a Christian missionary could hardly excel, it is certain that the mentality displayed by the above precepts and practical attitude to British rule could not serve as an inspiration for, far less contribute in any way to, the dawning of the New Age or National Resurgence in Bengal in the nineteenth century based on the glory of the past and hope for the future, and marked by a sturdy spirit of Hindu nationalism.

3. Rammohan never shrank from registering protest in strong language against what he considered as wrong or unjust on the part of the Government. This is well illustrated by his protest and vigorous campaign against the Press Ordinance of 1823 and the Jury Act of 1827, which paved the way for the constitutional agitation as a regular weapon in political struggle for reforms within the frame-work of British administration throughout the 19th century. But his ideas and protests never took the form of, or indirectly led to, anything like political organisation which formed the most distinctive characteristic of the regeneration of political life in India in the 19th century ending in the formation of the All-India National Congress.

4. As regards patriotism in the sense in which we understand the term, we have no evidence that he gave expression to, far less preached, it in any conspicuous manner which left a deep impress upon posterity, and inspired them with patriotic fervour, which was one of the most distinctive characteristics of the Renaissance. For actual expressions of such patriotism in his days, we have to refer to Derozio and his pupil Kashiprashad Ghosh who composed the first odes to Motherland.

5. To Derozio, again, must be given the credit for inculcating patriotic and anti-English national ideas among the younger generations

of Bengalis through his pupils of the Hindoo College, and we can clearly trace the spread and development of these ideas from generation to generation of students and young men in a continuous process of development. Rammohan's cosmopolitanism or internationalism may be a greater or higher virtue, but it is different from nationalism, and for this combination of patriotism and national consciousness, which marked the New Age, the Bengalis are perhaps indebted to Derozio even more than the abstract ideas of freedom cherished by Rammohan, though they were very liberal and noble.

But though Rammohan was not a pioneer in the all-round political development of the Renaissance, he played a distinguished part in the political field in many ways. Similarly though he was not the founder of the Hindoo College, he was a staunch advocate of, and founded schools for, English Education. Though his famous letter to Lord Amherst on this subject had no decisive effect on the Government and its ideas were anticipated by the Hindoo College, it was a great and noble document which must have inspired the people. Though Rammohan was not the creator of the Bengali prose literature, he made rich and significant contribution to its development. Though his religious and social views did not produce any deep impression upon the people at large, yet it had very great influence upon a small section of the elites, both in Bengal and outside. His political views were far in advance of the age and his conception of international brotherhood, though it had little effect in the 19th century, may be said to have inspired even the great Rabindranath in the present century. To sum up: Rammohan Roy did not create the New Age, but he was one of the greatest representatives of that age and reflected in himself many distinguished features that heralded Renaissance in Bengal.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I know from my past experience that my views will be denounced and I shall be abused for them, but as in the past, so in the very short period of the future that still remains to me, I will take consolation from the wise saying of the great poet Bhavabhuti that "perhaps, some day, at some place, some person will agree with me, for the world is vast and the time is eternal".

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Journal of The Asiatic Society*, Letters, vol. XXI, pp. 39-51. Pages within brackets, after quotations, refer to this article.
2. *The History of Bengal* (1757-1905), edited by N. K. Sinha, and published by the University of Calcutta, 1967, p. 436.
3. K. K. Datta, *Dawn of Renascent India*, 2nd edition, 1964, p. 18.
3a. These words or some words like these have evidently been dropped.
4. Italics mine.
5. The account is given in the *Samācār-darpaṇ* of 19 January, 1822. Reproduced in *Sambādpatre Sekāler Kathā* (referred to hereafter as *S. S. K.*) by B. N. Banerji, vol. I, 3rd ed., pp. 225-9.
6. *The Days of John Company—Selections from Calcutta Gazette*, 1824-1832, compiled and edited by Shri Anil Chandra Das Gupta (hereafter referred to as *Calcutta Gazette*), p. 241.
7. *S. S. K.*, vol. II (Ist ed.) p. 30.
8. *Calcutta Gazette*, pp. 535-6.
9. Ibid., p. 538.
10. *S. S. K.* II. p. 30.
11. Ibid., p. 337.
12. *Calcutta Gazette*, p. 742.
13. Pearychand Mitra, *Biographical Sketch of David Hare* (hereafter referred to as *Hare-Biography*), p. 40.
14. Ibid., p. 41.
15. Ibid., p. 42.
16. *Selection from the Records of the Bengal Government*, no. XIV, p. lv, Appendix no. VI.
17. Cf. Obituary Notices in the *Bengal Spectator* and the *Friend of India*, quoted in *Hare-Biography*, pp. 75, 78.
18. Ibid., Appendix, pp. xii-xiv.
19. Ibid., pp. 5-6.
19a. See p. 30.
20. The passage has been quoted above, p. 25.
20a. See p. 25.
20b. See p. 33.
20c. See p. 33.
21. Shibnath Sastri, *Rāmtanu Lāhirī O Tatkālin Baṅgasamāj* (in Bengali; originally published in 1903), New Age edition, pp. 62, 78-9.
22. B. D. Basu, *History of Education in India under the Rule of the East India Company*, Calcutta (date of publication not given), p. 37.
23. *JBORS*, vol. XVI, p. 155. See above, p. 21.
23a. The whole passage has been quoted on p. 25.
24. N. S. Bose, *The Indian Awakening and Bengal*, 2nd edition, 1969, p. 91.
25. See notes and references 2
26. N. S. Bose, *op. cit.*
27. My view about the share of David Hare in the original plan of the Hindoo College, as expressed in my article in *J.A.S.* vol. XXI (1955), p. 49, has been somewhat changed by the discovery of new materials.
28. Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 212.
29. N. S. Bose, *op. cit.*, p. 169.
30. Ibid., p. 171.
31. Ibid., p. 173.
32. Ibid., p. 175.
32a. *Sāhitya-Sādhak Caritamālā*, pp. 70-71.
33. *History of Bengali Literature*, p. 182.
34. Quoted in "*William Carey*" (in Bengali, *Sāhitya-Sādhak Caritamālā*), p. 24.
35. Ibid., p. 56.
36. *Rammohan Roy* (in Bengali, *Sāhitya-Sādhak Caritamālā*), pp. 70-71.
37. Shibnath Sastri, *op. cit.*, p. 226.
38. *Calcutta Review*, vol. I, no. 2, October-December, 1969, p. 213; no. 4, 1970, p. 519.

39. *Royal Asiatic Journal*, vol. II, New Series, May-August, 1830.
40. Arabinda Poddar, *Renaissance in Bengal—Quests and Confrontations*, 1800-1860. (Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 1970), pp. 61-62.
41. Ibid., p. 70. Incidentally it may be remarked that in view of such opinion about the Hindus expressed by Rammohan Roy to a foreigner, a Brahmin might well be excused for refusing to accept subscription from Rammohan for the Hindoo College proposed to be established by the orthodox Hindu community (see above, p. 25). These Hindus have been severely condemned by many modern writers for refusing to associate Rammohan with the Hindoo College in any way, though, strangely enough, they still give the credit of founding the Hindoo College to Rammohan Roy.

It may also be pointed out in this connection that Rammohan's severe castigation of Hindu religion is hardly in keeping with his enthusiastic and respectful reference to Tantric religion, about some scriptures of which Rajendra Lal Mitra made the following comments: "The professed object is the devotion of the highest kind, but in working it out, theories are indulged in and practices enjoined which are at once the most revolting and horrible that human depravity could think of. The work is reckoned to be the sacred scripture of millions of intelligent beings" (*Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal*, Calcutta, 1882, p. 261.)

Shri Saumyendranath Tagore, in his lecture on Raja Rammohan Roy in the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, on 17 March, 1972, defended Rammohan's tolerant attitude towards the Śaiva marriage sanctioned by the Tantric texts on the ground that he had great respect for the opinion and practices of the multitude, even though they might be objectionable from his point of view. Is it not very strange that Rammohan did not show the same liberal or tolerant attitude to the Hindu religious texts and the worship of images in deference to the views of hundreds of millions of the Hindus (as against barely a million of the Tantriks) who followed this religious practice for at least two thousand years?

APPENDIX

বাংলা গদ্যসাহিত্যের নমুনা

১। রামরাম বসুর 'প্রতাপাদিত্য চরিত্র' (পৃঃ ৪৮)

"একদিবস রাজার বাহির গড়ের সেনাপতি কমল খোজা নামে একজন মহাপরাক্রান্ত এবং রাজার কাছে বড়ই প্রতিপন্ন হাতজোড় করিয়া নিবেদন করিল রাজার গোচরে। মহারাজা আমি দুই তিন দিবস হইতে দেখিতেছি রাত্রি দুই প্রহরের পরে ঐ জঙ্গলটাতে অকস্মাত অগ্নিআকার প্রজ্বলিত হয় বড়ই দীপ্তিকর প্রচণ্ড অনলের ন্যায় তাহাতে প্রথম দিবস ঠাওরাইলাম বুঝি কোন রাখাল ইত্যাদি লোক এ বনে অগ্নি দিয়া থাকিবেক তাহাতে রাত্রে প্রজ্বলিত হইয়াছে। প্রাতে ঘোড়শোয়ারিতে যাইয়া দেখিলাম বন পূর্বের মতই আছে বরং অধিক তেজস্ব। দুই তিন দিবস হইতে আমি এই মত দেখিতেছি। মহারাজা আমাকে ভ্রান্ত জ্ঞান করিবেন এ পরাভয় প্রযুক্ত নিবেদন করি নাই।"

২। মৃত্যুঞ্জয় বিদ্যালংকার

(ক) বত্রিশ সিংহাসন (পৃঃ ৪)

"অবন্তী নাম নগরেতে ভর্তৃহরি নামে এক রাজা ছিলেন তাঁহার অভিষেককালে শ্রীবিক্রমাদিত্য নামে তাঁহার কনিষ্ঠ ভ্রাতা কোন অপমান পাইয়া স্বদেশ ত্যাগ করিয়া বিদেশে গেলেন। শ্রীভর্তৃহরি অভিষিক্ত হইয়া পুত্রতুল্য প্রজাপালন দুষ্টের দমন এইরূপে পৃথিবী পালন করেন। সেই নগরে এক ব্রাহ্মণ ভুবনেশ্বরী দেবীর আরাধনা করেন আরাধনাতে সন্তুষ্ট হইয়া দেবী প্রত্যক্ষ হইলেন ও কহিলেন। হে ব্রাহ্মণ বর প্রার্থনা কর। ব্রাহ্মণ অনেক স্তব বিনয় করিয়া কহিল হে দেবী আমার প্রতি যদি প্রসন্না হইয়াছেন তবে আমাকে অজরামর করুন।"

(খ) রাজাবলি (পৃঃ ১৪১)

"কান্যকুব্জ দেশের রাজা জয়চন্দ্র রাঠোর মহাবল পরাক্রম ছিলেন এবং বড় ধনী ছিলেন কাহাকে বলেতে কাহাকে প্রীতিতে এইরূপে প্রায় কুমারিকাখণ্ডস্থ সকল রাজাকে আপন বশীভূত করিয়াছিলেন তাঁহার অনঙ্গমঞ্জরী নামে অপূর্ব সুন্দরী এক কন্যা ছিলেন তাহার বিবাহের নিমিত্তে যে যে বর উপস্থিত হয় তাহারদের মধ্যে কেহ তাঁহার মনোনীত হইল না। পরে রাজা এক দিবস উদ্বিগ্ন হইয়া কন্যাকে জিজ্ঞাসা করিলেন রাজকন্যা কহিলেন আমি এই মনে করিয়াছি আপনি এক রাজসূয় যজ্ঞ আরম্ভ করুন তাহাতে সকল রাজারদের নিমন্ত্রণ করুন তবে সকল রাজারা অবশ্য আসিবেন সেই রাজারদের মধ্যে আপন মনোনীত যে রাজাকে দেখিব তাহাকে স্বয়ং বরণ করিব।"

৩। রাজীবলোচন মুখোপাধ্যায়ের "মহারাজ কৃষ্ণচন্দ্র রায়স্য চরিত্রং" (পৃঃ ৩৪)

"একদিবস জগৎ সেটের বাটীতে রাজা মহেন্দ্র প্রভৃতি সকলে বসিয়া রাজা কৃষ্ণচন্দ্র রায়কে আহ্বান করিলেন দূত আসিয়া রাজাকে লইয়া গেল যথাযোগ্য স্থানে সকলে

বসিলেন। ক্ষণেক পরে রাজা রামনারায়ণ প্রশ্ন করিলেন আপনারা সকলেই বিবেচনা করুন দেশাধিকারী অতিশয় দুর্বৃত্ত উত্তর ২ দৌরাত্ম্যের বৃদ্ধি হইতেছে অতএব কি করা যায়।.....

"পশ্চাৎ কৃষ্ণচন্দ্র রায় নিবেদন করিলেন এ দেশের উপর বুঝি ঈশ্বরের নিগ্রহ হইয়াছে নতুবা এককালীন এত হয় না প্রথম যিনি দেশাধিকারী ইঁহার সর্বদা পরানিষ্ট চিন্তা এবং যেখানে শুনেন সুন্দরী স্ত্রী আছে তাহা বলক্রমে গ্রহণ করেন এবং কিঞ্চিৎ অপরাধে জাতি প্রাণ নষ্ট করেন দ্বিতীয় বরগী আসিয়া দেশ লুঠ করে তাহাতে মনোযোগ নাই তৃতীয় সন্ন্যাসী আসিয়া যাহার উত্তম ঘর দেখে তাহাই ভাঙ্গিয়া কাষ্ঠ করে তাহা কেহ নিবারণ করে না।"

উপরে উদ্ধৃত চারিটি রচনা পাঠ করিলে ইহা যে বাংলা গদ্য সাহিত্যে অগ্রদূত সে সম্বন্ধে কোন সন্দেহ থাকে না। বস্তুতঃ খুব সামান্য দু'একটি পরিবর্তন ও ছেদচিহ্ন যোগ করিয়া ইহাকে বর্তমান যুগের গদ্য রচনা বলিয়া চালান অসম্ভব নহে।

রামমোহন রায়ের ভাষার নমুনা

(১) "এস্থানে এক আশ্চর্য এই যে অতি অল্পদিনের নিমিত্ত আর অতিঅল্প উপকারে যে সামগ্রী আইসে তাহার গ্রহণ অথবা ক্রয় করিবার সময় যথেষ্ট বিবেচনা সকলে করিয়া থাকেন আর পরমার্থবিষয় যাহা সকল হইতে অত্যন্ত উপকারি আর অতি মূল্য হয় তাহার গ্রহণ করিবার সময় কি শাস্ত্রের দ্বারা কি যুক্তির দ্বারা বিবেচনা করেন না আপনার বংশের পরম্পরা মতে আর কেহ ২ আপনার চিত্তের যেমন প্রাশস্ত্য হয় সেইরূপ গ্রহণ করেন এবং প্রায় কহিয়া থাকেন যে বিশ্বাস থাকিলে অবশ্য উত্তম ফল পাইব।"

(২) "দেখ কি পর্যন্ত দুঃখ, অপমান, তিরস্কার, যাতনা, তাহারা কেবল ধর্মভয়ে সহিষ্ণুতা করে, অনেক কুলীন ব্রাহ্মণ যাহারা দশ-পোনর বিবাহ অর্থের নিমিত্ত করেন, তাহারদের প্রায় বিবাহের পর অনেকের সহিত সাক্ষাৎ হয় না, অথবা যাবজ্জীবনের মধ্যে কাহারো সহিত দুই চারিবার সাক্ষাৎ করেন....."(সহমরণ বিষয়ে প্রবর্ত্তক নিবর্ত্তকের দ্বিতীয় সম্বাদ ১৮১৯ নভেম্বর)।

উচ্চতর চিন্তার বাহনরূপে বাংলা ভাষার নমুনা

১। রামমোহনের ভাষা :

"কেহ কেহ কহেন ব্রহ্মপ্রাপ্তি যেমন রাজপ্রাপ্তি হয়। সেই রাজপ্রাপ্তি তাঁহার দ্বারীর উপাসনা ব্যতিরেকে হইতে পারে না সেইরূপ রূপগুণ বিশিষ্টের উপাসনা বিনা ব্রহ্মপ্রাপ্তি হইবেক না.....ব্রহ্ম সর্ব্বব্যাপী আর যাঁহাকে তাহার দ্বারী কহ তেহো মনের অথবা হস্তের কৃত্রিম হয়েন কখন তাঁহার স্থিতি হয় কখন স্থিতি না হয় কখন নিকটস্থ কখন দূরস্থ অতএব কিরূপে এমত বস্তুকে অন্তর্যামী সর্ব্বব্যাপী পরমাত্মা হইতে নিকটস্থ স্বীকার করিয়া ব্রহ্মপ্রাপ্তির সাধন কহা যায়।"

(বেদান্ত গ্রন্থ—বঙ্গ সাহিত্য পরিচয়, পৃঃ ১৭৫৪-৫)

২। মৃত্যুঞ্জয়ের ভাষা—

"আর যদি মন্দির মসজিদ গীর্জা প্রভৃতি যে কোন স্থানে যে কোন বিহিত ক্রিয়া দ্বারা শূন্য স্থানে ঈশ্বর উপাস্য হন তবে কি সুঘটিত স্বর্ণমৃত্তিকা পাষাণ কাষ্ঠাদিতে ঐ ঈশ্বরের উপাসনা করাতে ঈশ্বরের অসম্মান করা হয় কিম্বা দৃষ্টি কৌরূপ্য হয়... কিম্বা সর্বত্রগ সর্বজ্ঞ পরমেশ্বর অন্যত্র প্রতিমাদিতে পূজাস্তবাদি যাহা যাহা হয় তাহা দেখিতে পান না ও শুনিতে পান না।" (বেদান্ত চন্দ্রিকা, ২০৭ পৃঃ)