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THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS
OF
RAMMOHUN ROY

A survey of his writings on religion particularly
in Persian, Sanskrit, and Bengali

by

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CONTENTS

Preface and acknowledgements

Chapter I
- Background
  Society
  Religion
  Thought

Chapter II
- Rammohun: the man and the reformer.

Chapter III
- A survey of his writings on religion.

Chapter IV
- The Brāhma Samāj and the Dharma Sabha.

Chapter V
- Rammohun's religious ideas: analysis, evaluation and conclusion

Appendix A
- Jawāb Tuhfatu'l muwāhidīn
  Introduction
  Text
  Translation
  Notes

Appendix B
- Letter of Satya-Sadhun

Bibliography
The religious ideas of Rammohun Roy and his role as a reformer have not yet been properly evaluated. Two extreme and contradictory views about his achievements are often found. The one elevates him too high in the category of a superman, and the other denounces his efforts as a complete failure.

The present thesis tries to analyse Rammohun's religious ideas and to determine how exactly these ideas contributed primarily to the new conception of Hinduism that would emerge. It therefore

1. "To him, all mysteries were unveiled, and all idols broken. He was the peer of the Voltaire and the Volneys, the Diderots and the Herders across the seas; and he had seen and travelled beyond them all, a modern Ulysses voyaging in the land of the setting sun, and descending— not once not twice, but many times into dark underworld, to bring messages from the old prophets in the Night of ages". Brajendranath Seal. *Rammohun: the universal man*. Calcutta, 1933. p.28.

Or, "In this dark gloom of India's degeneration Rammohun rose up, a luminous star in the firmament of India's history, with prophetic purity of vision, and unconquerable heroism of soul. He shed radiance all over the land; he rescued us from the penury of self-oblivion". Rabindranath Tagore's address on Rammohun. In Amal Home (ed.) *Rammohun Roy: the man and his work*. Calcutta, 1933, p.3.

2. "The pertinent question in the present context is 'what was the extent of his success in laying thereby the foundation of the present Bangasamaj and dispelling the darkness by light?' The reply is writ large in blazing letters upon the illuminated gates of two thousand Durga Puja pandals in Calcutta whose loud-speakers and *phak* or trumpets proclaim in deafening noise, year after year, the failure of Rammohun 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". R.C. Majumdar. *On Rammohun Roy*. Calcutta, 1972. p.40.
 excludes the consideration of socio-religious problems like satī, and the question of his immediate impact on nineteenth century society. The sources used are mainly his own writings on religion, the writings of his contemporary opponents, and the results of recent researches on him. The Persian influence which was so important in the development of his ideas, but which is often neglected by his biographers, has been taken into account. The probable connection between a 17th century Persian tract and his first published work the Tuhfat al muwāhidin has been explored, and the Jawāb Tuhfat al muwaḥḥidin which is often ascribed to him (though wrongly), has been translated with text, introduction and notes in Appendix A. The Jawāb gives some interesting information about him, his admirers, and his critics, and shows the nature of religious dispute during the time.

Chapter one of this thesis gives the social and religious background, and the trend of rationalistic thoughts in the country and abroad, while Chapter two outlines Rammohun as a man, and his emergence as a reformer. Chapter three surveys his writings on religion and his controversies with his opponents, and Chapter four deals with his Brāhma Samaj and the Dharma Sabha of the orthodox Hindus. An analysis of his religious ideas and its evaluation form the contents of Chapter five, which also includes the concluding part of the thesis. A letter believed to be written by Rammohun under the assumed name Satya-Sadhun, and published in the Calcutta Journal is in Appendix B.
My thanks should go to the authorities of the Library, A.N.U. for making this study possible, to my colleagues in the Library for their help and encouragement, to my two supervisors, Dr. Rizvi and Dr. Jordens for their guidance, advice and useful suggestions, to Mrs. Bayin and Mrs. Ingleton for typing the thesis, and to my wife Sally who by finishing her thesis recently, has induced me to finish my own. I also thank the Trustees of the British Museum for the permission to reproduce the Jawáb Tuhfatu’l muwahhidin.