Chapter - V

LINGUISTIC AND LITERARY CRITIQUE OF RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY'S PERSIAN WRITINGS

It has already been said that Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin begins with a short preface in Arabic which shows that the author was well acquainted in Arabic. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, as is evident from the prose of Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin and his writings in his newspaper Mirat-ul-Akhbar had two distinct styles of writing. Whatever he has written in his newspaper is in simple Persian language for it was meant for common people. Contrary to Persian language in Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin is comparatively difficult. Its basic reason is the subject dealt with in this book.

Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin is highly a scholarly work. The author in this work has deal with the beliefs of the followers of various religions particularly Islam and Hindu religion. While expressing himself in this subject, Raja Ram Mohan Roy has used the religious Terminology from both Islam and Hindu religion. Hence, his text can be followed only by those who are conversant with such Terminology. It should however be submitted that the style in which the work has been written and the technical Terminology used in it, definitely go to show the author's mastery over the Persian language. Quotations from the
Quran, Hadith and Arabic literature has also made the text of Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin more difficult.

The very opening lines in Persian show the difficult style of the author:

وگرچه اوچات کسانی که تصدیق می‌کنند که در اثبات از عاریت کنترت موانست خاص است و تغییر صفات که مقتضیات نظرات انز و مزاج شخصی است می‌دارند و رفتار حق بطلان مقدمات خنفره اهل مذاکب شیعی

The translator of this work into English Maulvi Obaidullah El Obaide has very rightly said about the style of this work that “the book was written in an abstruse oriental style and full of Arabic logical and philosophical terms.”

Raja Ram Mohan Roy has logically analyzed every religion, its truths and falsities.

In this regard the following extract from the Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin shows his style, manner of pleading and selection of words for expressing himself:

پیان نهایت که به پیام ریک مسئول خصوص بازی
تشک و سپاهم زنی سلیم امیدی مع علوم اکتسبه

1Quoted in Indo-Iranica, Vol. IV, no. 1, July 1950, p.3.
Raja Ram Mohan Roy was born and grown up in Indian at time when Persian language and literature had lost its earlier glory. But even at this juncture of time, the Indian style (سکه‌نری) of Persian writing was in vogue. The author was also trained to use the same style. Hence all the merits and demerits of Indian style of Persian writing are evident in the prose of Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin.

Though the author has not quoted many verses in his prose, but only a few verses quoted by the author give freshness to his style. Similarly these verses are properly in the prose and enhance the aim of the author.
Raja Ram Mohan Roy quotes the following verses:

The author, as referred to earlier, has quoted from the Quran, Hadith and proverbs in Arabic. The quotations, on the one hand, proves the author’s knowledge of these Islamic Sciences and on the other hand, such quotation have rendered the Persian prose a bit difficult. It means, a person who is well versed both in Arabic and Persian can appreciate it.

The followings are the quotations in Arabic:
It should also be mentioned here that Persian prose of Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Tuhaft-ul-Muwahhidin is Arabicised. He has used immemorable Arabic words in his Persian prose.
Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin (1804), The first extant-work of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, was written, like words worth’s “The Prelude”, as an introductory philosophical statement for an extensive discourse on religions Munazaratul-Adyan. And incidentally both these works were written more or less at the same time but neither “The Recluse” not the Munazra came to be written as conceived by their authors. Wordsworth published “The Excursion” in 1814 as a portion of “The Recluse”. Of Munazaratul Adyan, we do not have even a portion unless we consider some of Roy’s discussions of Christianity and Hinduism as fragments of that more comprehensive work.2

“The Prelude” came to be acknowledged as Wordsworth’s masterpiece. And in my opinion, Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin, too, should be

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considered a key text in Roy's canon, as it contains in a nutshell his most cherished and radial views on religion, morality, human potentialities and social commitments. Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin has been variously admired for its radicalism, uncompromising rationalism, devastating Aristotelian logic, and its frontal attack on religious orthodoxy and obscurantism. Iqbal Singh characterizes it as "one of the most significant publications in the first half of the nineteenth century and also symptomatic".  

As for the currents of thought in Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin, it has been generally felt that Islam, with Tauheed or monotheism as the foundation of its faith, was the chief inspiration of this work. Rajat K. Ray, however, suggests that:

It would be more on the mark to define the early (Muslim) influence as Perso-Arabic influence, which included, besides Muslim theology, secular Aristotelian and other non-Islamic influences.

And in this connection, he mentions the currents of change in Islamic thought under the influence of Shah Waliullah and his school. Sumit Sarkar, on the other hand, suggests that "A comparison of Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin with Dabistan-e-Mazahib might prove quite illuminating." This seventeenth century text by a non-Muslim Iranian writer was a comparative study of five major religions discourses in

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3 Ibid. p. 43.
Akbar's court which might have influenced Raja Ram Mohan Roy in some way. Similarly, a comparison with the two seminal works of the Sufi prince, Dara Shikoh, viz. Sirre Akbar (The Great Mystery) and MajmaulBahrain (Meeting of Two Great Oceans), may also be illuminating. The former (Sirre Akbar) is a Persian translation of selections from the Upanishads, underlining its monotheism and proclaim in it to be the first Heavenly Book with a universal message. And the latter (Majmaul Baharain) is a comparative study of Islam and Hinduism, underlining the similarities between the two.

Apart from these Perso-Arabic sources of inspiration in Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin, the influence of Nanak cannot be ruled out. Raja Ram Mohan Roy mentions Nanak with respect and appreciation in this work, and some aspects of Guru Nanak's teaching could not have failed to impress the Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Nanak believed in the common essence of all religions. He preached that there was only one God, who was known by many names. Salvation he believed, can not to be achieved by asceticism and rituals. It can only be gained by truthful living and service to humanity, and an honest life within the family could lead to Godliness and salvation. He also stood for freedom of conscience and expression. It has to be kept in mind that Raja Ram Mohan Roy was not exactly a believer in Islam. So these "Islamic influences" are more in the nature of independent assimilations and moral and intellectual perceptions.
Raja Ram Mohan Roy was evidently a great admirer of the Quran. In Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin he has quoted the Quran i.e., verses four or five times. And even in his later writings he often quoted from the Quran. For example, to make his point in course of the controversy over "The Precepts of Jesus", he quotes the entire Suratual Fateha in a beautiful English translation of his own.

Tauheed or monotheism is the primary principle of Islam and is persistently emphasized in the Quran. God is everywhere, described as one and the only God, Unique and Incomparable, Supreme and Absolute, Gracious and Bountiful, Just and Wise, Eternal And Powerful, Vast and Unlimited and yet closer to man than his vital veins.

As pointed out above, monotheism is also the foundation of the simple humanistic faith, described as a natural and universal tendency by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin. And his conception of monotheism is quite close to the Islamic concept of Tauheed. The attributes of the Supreme Being, who is the fountain of harmonious organization of the universe, are also quite close to the Quranic attributes of God.

We may also note in passing that the Islamic concept of monotheism was retained by the Raja up to the end of his life. It was further confirmed and depended by his study of the Upanishads. But we may note that his selections and interpretation of these ancient
scriptures were somewhat colored by his Islamic moorings. Indeed, the Islamic concept of Tauheed and worship was also assimilated in his conception and programme of the Brahmo Samaj, as is evident from the Trust Deed of Brahmo Samaj.

The second point of similarity between Quranic teaching and Raja Ram Mohan Roy's views in the Tuhfat is that man is endowed with intellectual powers and this divine gift should not be wasted away. And the next point of similarity is that the Supreme being can be known by a close observation of nature and by an apprehension of balance, harmony and wisdom in the working of the universe.

The last point is similarity between Quranic teaching and Raja Ram Mohan Roy views is a strong denunciation of idolatry. Idol worship is denounced in the Quran, time and again as a sinful perversion, and emancipation from this form of mental slavery is the first step towards true faith and spiritual enlightenment. The Raja, too, considered idol worship as an absurd, sinful and socially detrimental form of worship. This crusade against idolatry began with Tuhfat-ul-Muwaahhidin, and the influence of the Quran is quite striking.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a tolerant man. But there was one thing on which he was absolutely uncompromising. He refused to countenance image worship in any shape or form, which shown the influence of

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4 Ibid. p. 49.
Islam at a tender and impressionable age. His approach to religion was humanistic and sociological, and he felt that idolatry destroyed the texture of society and undermined compassion for one's fellow beings. But the seeds of this aversion were sown in course of his serious study of the Quran.

Another kind of Islamic influence can be seen in the rationalism and radicalism of this work, which can be traced back to several rationalistic and non-conformist movements is Islamic thought. And from the evidence available, the more likely source of his rational and sociological approach appears to be certain recent and remote reform movements of a radical nature in Islamic thought.

Among the recent movements, the impact of Shah Waliullah and his school is, perhaps, the most important. Shah Waliullah’s reform movement based on the concept of Ijtihad was a comprehensive crusade to revitalize Islamic society. On the one hand, he denounced "alien influences" and obscurantism rituals and upheld the Quran as the primary source of Islamic teachings, and on the other, he proposed a comprehensive programme of reform in education in social and economic structure and in governmental institutions.

It may be mentioned briefly that Shah Waliullah’s enlightened views and reform movement were like a breath of fresh air in a rather closed and depressed society. It would be surprising if Raja Ram
Mohan Roy, who was generally ahead of his contemporaries in almost everything, we to be unaware of this significant stir in stagnant waters. But Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin leaves us in no doubt that he was impressed by some aspects of Shah Waliullah's thought and made good use of them from his own point of view.  

Those radical and non-conformist movements could not have failed to impress Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The influence of Mutazil, ( ) however, seems to be more pervasive. Mutazil is man who stands apart. And these Muslim such Scholars and theologians broke away from the conservative and rigid religious establishment and upheld the spirit of free inquiry and primacy of reason of religious matters.

The Muwahhidin, too, could not have failed to impress the Raja as he even borrowed the title of this treatise from them. They emphasized the unity of God and purity of religious experience. They were highly critical of the formal aspects of religion and unnecessary rituals, and emphasized the need for a direct relationship between man and God without the imposition of intermediary authorities.

Last, but not the least in importance, is the impact of Islamic mystic tradition Tasawuf and of Sufi poetry of great masters like Rumi, Hafiz and others. Tasawuf was a passionate creed characterized by spiritual and moral awakening and a profound mystic experience which

5 Ibid. p. 52.
is felt to be beyond the reach of words. But the great Sufi poets were able to give subtle lyrical expression to this realm of the inexpressible and translate their highly personal experiences into vivid and colourful imagery.

But Tasawf was also, and essentially, a protest movement that rejected both the religious dogma and the powers that be. It glorified a direct and loving relationship between man and god, and upheld love and concern for humanity as the essence of faith.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a lover of the Sufi poetry of great Persian masters. But we should not look for lyrical flights of imagination or spiritual ecstasy in his work. He was particularly impressed by two aspects of this tradition, viz its universal humanistic creed and strong denunciation of the clergy for its narrow-minded and hypocritical approach to religion.

So we may conclude that Raja Ram Mohan Roy's involvement in Persian poetry, rich in humanistic and ethical content, and strongly critical of the hypocrisy, formalism and twisted logic of the clergy, added a new dimension to Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin and is responsible for much of its warmth and human concern as also for its attack on the corrupt clergy and religious orthodoxy.
In conclusion, we may say that the Tuhfa is a key text in Roy's canon. It goes without saying that it incorporates the core element in Raja Ram Mohan Roy's religious thought.

It is wrong to presume that Ram Mohan Roy did not translate the Tuhfa in Bengali or English because he did not attach much importance to it. Persian was a highly respectable language at that time and a popular medium of intellectual discourse. And the original Persian text of the Tuhfa did make waves, not only in Bengal, but also elsewhere. Even in Delhi, which was an important seat of learning, the Tuhfa was well received and widely discussed. And several Muslim intellectuals and reformers, including Sir Sayed Ahmad Khan, were considerably impressed by the Raja Ram Mohan Roy's approach. Even Ghalib, after his famous journey Calcutta, was highly impressed by the intellectual ferment there, and the Raja's role in this reawakening. And we may safely presume that the Persian texts, particularly Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin, contributed much to his favorable opinion about the Bengali Renaissance.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, of course knew that no improvement could ever come where self-interest was so deeply involved. Tuhfat was meant not only for the Muslim priestly class, but also for the people in general whether Mohamedans or Hindus with a similar bent of mind.
Tuhfat shows how Raja Ram Mohan Roy was influenced by European ideas such as, utilitarianism, deism and historical criticism. It is a work in which Raja Ram Mohan Roy argued against closed minds dominated by preconceived ideas. The book discloses his utter aversion to accepting the traditional aspects of religion without questioning their importance and the socially injurious practices without any criticism.

The nineteenth century has witnessed a great boom in the history of Indian Journalism. The central figure of this historic development was Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Raja Ram Mohan Roy with typical background and the issues persuaded him where the main focus of nineteenth century journalism. Raja Ram Mohan Roy as a great social reformer sought after the potential means to reach his mind among the common people against the worst social evils manifested in his time. Raja Ram Mohan Roy wanted the people to be reformed by means of strong press, especially the press which he though would move the traditionally infested society into an enlightened and enriched society. In this context, Mirat-ul-Akhbar played an unprecedented role in reflecting the logical ends of Raja Ram Mohan Roy over the Indian Society. Since the Persian was the court language and the language of discourse among the elites of society and also to a degree among the Hindus. He wanted also to perculate the literary and political knowledge through Mirat-ul-Akhbar among the people.
The common standard in terms of language he advocated for Mirat-ul-Akhbar was of mixed nature i.e. of both high order and medium order. Mirat-ul-Akhbar from the inception possessed a degree of higher intellectual gravity. Roy was himself and editor as well as writer, and he wrote himself a politico-religious and ethical problems and discussed them extensively.

With this the Mirat-ul-Akhbar was shot into prominence and enjoyed wider acceptability across the predominance of Persian speaking people. The issues of Mirar-ul-Akhbar used to consist in the matters relating to manners, habits, pleasure and even the perversities of its citizens. Besides taking on literary, historical, and religio-scientific subjects, Mirat-ul-Akhbar in order to be temptative in the society was laced with modern enriched teachings in both arts and science. It also discussed in an artistic manner the causes of discontent among the Irish people.

Mirar-ul-Akhbar was the first publication in the entire country to be coloured with high nationalistic and democratic progressive orientation. And also treated to be the major organ of religio-philosophical problem. Finally, the role Miart-ul-Akhbar played in rolling the traditional society into a fully modernized and civilized society was of great significance in the nineteenth century India.