Chapter –VI

THE ROLE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF RAJA RAMMOHAN ROY AS A SOCIAL REFORMER
6.0 Introduction

Raja Rammohan Roy believed in an ideal society, free from social inequality and oppression. Raja Rammohan Roy was opposed to all sorts of social malpractices and useless customs. He believed in a society based on fraternity of interdependent individuals. The very basis of an ideal society as per Raja Rammohan Roy was unity and equality. He first made an organised movement against one of the malignant disorders of popular Hinduism, Sati. He was conscious about the property rights of women, which was reflected through his tracts ‘Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females according to the Hindu Law of Inheritance’. He was well aware of the evil effects of polygamy, Kulinism and practice of selling girls in marriage. He vehemently opposed the caste system. As a skilful lawyer, he advocated for Saiva marriage, as he was against of sectarian bias in the society. He made his tireless efforts to purify Hindu religion. He founded Brahma Samaj based on the worship of one true God. He propagated Universal religion. He made his endeavour in establishing Atmiya Sabha, Unitarian committee and Brahma Samaj. There is hardly any field in social reform, where he did not traverse. Such a man was Raja Rammohan Roy, who made multifarious contributions to uplift our countrymen and to purify our Hindu religion.

The activity which will be linked all time with his achievements was the abolition of Sati. That cruel, horrible custom excited his compassion and indignation. He, out of his anxiety and shame, took the vow that he would not take rest unless and until that practice was banned from the society he, with his tireless efforts and zeal abolished that practice for ever as an enlightener, as a reformer.

Historically as early as in 1772, that fearful custom came into the notice of the British Government, but they were reluctant up to 1812. In 1813, they promulgated regulations relating to Sati, which were strengthened in 1815 and in 1817; those regulations were finally issued as a collected form. As against those, the orthodox circles of the society promptly submitted a petition to Government. The orthodox circles strongly appealed for reconsidering the regulations. Those orthodox circles were in favour of retaining the cruel practice of Sati in the society. That appeal was made by the learned scholars and
the educated leaders of the *Hindu* society. Among whom, the name of Raja Radhakanta Dev and Dewan Ramkamal Sen deserved to be mentioned.

### 6.1. Battle against Sati

#### 6.1.1. Petition by Raja Rammohan Roy

As against that by submitting a counter petition, Raja Rammohan Roy started his battle against that cruel rite. In the counter petition, Raja Rammohan Roy expressed that the mode by which Sati ceremony was performed in the country was nothing but a wilful deliberate murder. He expressed his confidence that any person having common sense and common intelligence could easily understand that such a practice in the name of religion was prevalent to destroy the lives of the women. He further advocated that such a horrible and cruel rite could not be sanctioned by the *Hindu Shastra*, rather it would be considered by every *Shastra* as a ritual suicide of the women in the name of religion.

#### 6.1.1.1. Raja Rammohan Roy’s Outlook in his Counter Petition

Raja Rammohan Roy wrote his counter petition to declare the verdict of the highest law giver, *Manu*, the essence of the *Vedas* and also of the *Gita*. Everywhere, Raja Rammohan Roy showed that it has been prescribed that widows should live a life of virtue, devoid of sensual gratifications and they should not perform acts for temporary future rewards. *Smriti Shastra*, en inferior authority also prohibited all violent deaths. Not only those *Shastric* authorities, but also the authority on inheritance, *Mitakshara* declared and preferred the life of a virtue to dying on the funeral pyres of dead husbands. Raja Rammohan Roy believed that all those authorities were sufficient enough to conclude that the cruel practice of *Sati* was not supported anywhere and consequently Government order for its prohibition would be in higher estimation among the *Hindus*.

A more official account of the matter of RajaRammohan Roy’s eagerness for the suppress of *Sati* was given by the India Gazette of July 27, 1929 as:- "An eminent
native philanthropist who has long taken the lead of his countrymen on this great question has been encouraged to submit his views of it in a written form, and has been subsequently honoured with an audience by the Governor General, who, we learn, has expressed his anxious desire to put an end to a custom constituting so foul a blot.” (Collet, 1988, pp 251).

6.1.2. First Tract on Sati by Raja Rammohan Roy

In August, 1818, the counter petition was presented to Lord Hastings. Following that counter petition, Raja Rammohan Roy published an imaginary dialogue between advocate and opponent of the practice of burning widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands. In that tract Raja Rammohan Roy took the side of the opponent, as he was vehemently opposed to the practice of cruel rite of Sati. At the end of November 1818, he made the English translation of the tract and published it under the name of ‘A Conference between an Advocate for, and an Opponent of, the Practice of Burning Widows Alive’.

In its brief preface, it was stated that the tract was literally translated from its Bengali version. Raja Rammohan Roy, to make his countrymen aware of the consequences of that horrible rite of Sati, had circulated the Bengali version extensively in those parts of the country where the prevalence of that practice of burning widows alive was most acute. He, many times had distributed his tracts free of costs, just to arouse public opinion and public consciousness regarding that matter. He actually wanted to direct his countrymen’s attention to those occurrences. So he wrote that tract where the arguments were retained in a dialogue form.

The first conference on Sati began by expressing doubt regarding the validity and regarding the obligatory nature of the duty of concremation and postcremation by the widows. The tract also set out its doubt regarding the authenticity and sanguinity of such self-immolation by the Hindu Shastras. At the beginning of that tract, the advocate expressed his surprise for the opponent as the later was endeavouring to suppress the practice of Sati. The advocate opined that the sacred duty of performing concremation and postcremation had been sanctioned by the authorities of Hindu
Shastras. So, under such a situation, such opposition to that practice was really surprising. The advocate established his point of view by quoting several sacred writers like Angira, Vyas, etc. The advocate opined that those ancient saints had sanctioned the practice of burning widows on the funeral pyre of their dead husbands in their holy scriptures. Afterwards, he mentioned all those blessings which could be secured by the widows for herself and also for her loved ones, if she performed the sacred duty of concremation and postcremation. Like that woman who performed the practice of self-immolation would have ascended to the heaven as equal to Uroondhooti. She could also enjoy heavenly pleasures for an indefinite period. She, by such act, raised the power of her husband and lived in a state of delight with him. Not only that but also, that virtuous act would help the woman to make up the sins of her father, mother and her family. Another surprising and vague argument in favour of Sati was that by such an act a woman as if could compensate the greatest crime of her husband that was the crime of killing someone. Therefore the opponent concluded that under such a situation, a virtuous woman could not perform any other duty as sacred as the duty of Sati after the death of her husband.

As against that, in the voice of the opponent, Raja Rammohan Roy advocated that the views of the greatest of the Hindu law givers, Manu and the sage Yajnavalkya were not at par with the recommendations of certain ancient sages as quoted above by the advocate. The opponent of Sati declared that the highest Hindu law givers, Manu and the sage Yajnavalkya hold the views that a widow could achieve the path of salvation and could secure joy and heavenly pleasure for her and for her loved ones if they would have performed the true path of duty. But, if they would have undertaken the spectacular character of that act of self-immolation, they would have escaped the nobler means of attaining the path of salvation. Later, the opponent quoted the recommendations of the highest Hindu law givers, Manu and the sage Yajnavalkya as: “Let her emaciate her body, by living voluntarily on pure flowers, roots and fruits, but let her not when her Lord is deceased, even pronounce the name of another man. Let her continue till death forgiving all injuries, performing harsh duties, avoiding every sensual pleasure, and cheerfully practising the incomparable rules of virtue followed by such women as were devoted to one and only husband.” (Singh, 1958, pp 201).
Raja Rammohan Roy in the voice of opponent wanted to establish the point that after the death of the husband, a widow should lead a life of an ascetic. She should not destroy her life under the cover of religion and further mentioned that as the laws of the lesser lights like Ungira and others were contradictory to what recommended by the highest law giver, Manu, that recommendations of the ancient sages should not be accepted. To establish his point, the opponent said: - *Veda* declares “Whatever *Manu* has said is wholesome.” Again the opponent mentioned what *Brihaspati* declared:- “Whatever law is contrary to the law of *Manu* is not commendable.” (Singh, 1958, pp 201).

As the imaginary arguments continued, the advocate agreed that Sati is not an obligatory duty, but is an option to the Hindu widows and also for those poor spiritual women who could not conquer their sensual desires. Later however, from a complete opposite direction the advocate declared that though the practice of burning widows alive might be sinful or otherwise, but the widows should perform it as the most virtuous act, otherwise, they would refrain from the path of truth and devotion. In other words, if they did not perform the rite, “they might go astray”. (Singh, 1958, pp 202). After the death of the husband, the advocate continued, if the widows performed the practice of self-immolation, they could free the minds of her family and relations from the fear of going astray. Not only that but also, before the death, if the husband could become sure about the self-immolation of his virtuous wife, he could die in peace without any fear of the misconduct of his wife.

The opponent however considered that reasoning a vague one and considered it a cruel act “to commit the sin of female murder” (Singh, 1958, pp 202). The opponent argued that there was every possibility of going astray even during the life time of her husband especially “when he resides for a long time in a distant country”. (Singh, 1958, pp 202). Further, the opponent mentioned that under such a situation of staying at abroad, it would not be advisable for the husband to kill his wife before leaving home so that at abroad there would be no disturbance in his mind regarding the virtue of his wife. The only nobler means, as recommended by the opponent, which could keep the widows on the right path of virtue was “the suggestions of wisdom and the fear of God.” (Singh, 1958, pp 202)
Both the Advocate and the Opponent through the conference sustained a discussion. At the end, the advocate agreed to put his reason and reflection over that matter of Sati. The opponent expressed his satisfaction at the advisory’s readiness to forsake the prejudices and to his reflection on the Shastras, by means of which, the opponent expressed his belief that “…..the evils and disgrace brought on this country by the crime of female murder will cease.” (Singh, 1958, pp 202)

In writing that first conference, Raja Rammohan Roy had an objective of bringing the matter of that cruel custom to the public, to arouse public controversy on the subject, which was so far received nothing but silence.

6.1.2.1. Appreciative Notes on First Tract

Raja Rammohan Roy through his tract of first Conference between an Advocate for and Opponent of Burning widows Alive brought before the notice of the public the cruel mode of performing the rite of sati. Most of the people were unaware of such horror. So he first mentioned that the performance of the act of self-immolation could not be a voluntary act. In the mode of imaginary arguments, between the advocate and opponent, he showed that first the widow was binded along with the corpse of her dead husband, and then a large quantity of wood was kept over her. Before setting light on fire, large bamboos were used to press her down, so that they could not escape from the flame. Therefore, Raja Rammohan Roy concluded that such an act could not be done voluntarily. Instead of that, the rite of Sati was a deliberate female murder.

Through his tract, another interesting point which has been raised by Raja Rammohan Roy was that that willful murder had a limited practice in a small part of Hinduism. So, it could not be the custom of the country. Anyone, he continued, possessing commonsense, could easily interpret that that is a deliberate female murder and therefore must be stopped as that cannot be a guiltless activity. So long the Hindu Shastras had been misinterpreted, but that did not mean that crime would be supported. He further added that the plundering habit of inhabitants of forests and mountains was also a crime. That was not supported, so why one should follow the Shastras blindly.
and should support the mode of Sati for the destruction of female sex only for future reward.

The first tract of Raja Rammohan on Sati was appreciated by Calcutta Gazette on December 24, 1818 in the following ways:- In this tract, Raja Rammohan Roy truly interpreted the religious law, “which has stained the domestic history of India for so many ages with blood, will no doubt diminish, if not extinguish the desire for self-immolation”. This true interpretation had made a “rigid investigation of the rules of the conduct” laid down in the sacred books of the Hindus with great “assiduity, anxiety, and care and the consequence has been a decision hostile to the ancient custom”. The tract was also translated in English. (Majumdar, 1983, pp 114).

Calcutta Journal, December 25, 1818 reported that in this tract, Raja Rammohan Roy made something which can influence (if anything can influence) the opinion of the Hindus in that particular practice. The native philanthropist, Raja Rammohan Roy, to prove the irrelevancy of that practice, had truly made arguments drawn from the sacred books of the Hindus to establish the fact that the practice “is not necessary to future happiness”. (Majumdar, 1983, pp 114)

6.1.3. Second Tract on Sati

Actually the first conference was his preparation for developing a full scale attack later on that subject. It took no more time. A second and much longer conference he wrote following the first. It was also first published in Bengali. In February 20, 1820, it was published in English and dedicated –“To the Most Noble the Marchioness of Hastings, Countess of Loudoun, & c. &c.” to appeal “reason in behalf of humanity”. (Singh, 1958, pp 204). Raja Rammohan Roy dedicated his tract to the wife of the Governor General for seeking her protection for the female sex of the country, so that the benevolent purpose should carry on. (Singh, 1958, pp 204).

Second tract on Sati was based on Raja Rammohan Roy’s reasoning, disinterest and humanism. He intended to motivate the wife of Governor General to influence her husband regarding the suppression of Sati as he knew that Lord Hastings, though was
not unresponsive to the matter, but might be unable to move the matter in a positive
direction because of the pressure of the conservative officials of the Company as well
as because of the orthodoxy of the conservative Hindus who had already started
thinking that their religion is in danger. Actually Raja Rammohan Roy wanted to
relieve the Government from that perturbed situation.

For the first eight sections, in a scholastic manner, the essay only pointed out and
underlined the discussions made in the first conference with no advancement further.
However in ninth section, the discussion took a new more where the advocate
mentioned “the real reason” regarding burning widows alive by pointing out their
moral and intellectual inferiority and social and legal disabilities, as they are unworthy
of trust, passionate and they do not possess virtuous knowledge.

6.1.3.1. Defence of Women in Second Tract

As against that, the opponent refuted every point of the advocated which the later had
affixed to the nature of women and denied advocate’s every argument in favour of the
misconduct of women. The opponent vigorously defended the women and said that the
faults which the advocate had attached to the nature of women were vague, not valid
and under extreme injustice and doubt. such faults and impurities which as per the
advocate were the true nature of the women were not correct. Because the opponent
believed that such faults were not imputed in the constitution of the women by nature,
rather the society, social condition and the educational backwardness were responsible
for the constant miseries of the women. The opponent did not support the advocate’s
views of sending the women to death merely from precaution. Moreover, the opponent
asserted that the then society used to treat the women as contemptible and mischievous
creatures. So, under such a situation, it would be peculiar to support their death in the
name of religion. To establish his point of view, Raja Rammohan Roy made the
following remarks.

Firstly, the opponent mentioned that men were superior to women only in bodily
strength and energy. With that they used to take undue advantage of their corporal
weaknesses and deprived them from exercising their natural merits and talents. Later
the male part of the society denied the capability of the women regarding the acquisition of such talents. So, the opponent surprised and mentioned that if women were deprived of the opportunities of knowledge and freedom, how one could conclude about their understanding and wisdom. The opponent continued by saying that “If, after instruction in knowledge and wisdom, a person cannot comprehend or retain what has been taught him, we may consider him as deficient; but as you keep women generally void of education and acquirements, you cannot, therefore, in justice pronounce on their inferiority….” (Singh, 1958, pp 207).

Raja Rammohan Roy cited some examples of distinguished women from India’s legendary past who “are celebrated for their thorough knowledge of all the shastrus.” The opponent also reminded us of Yajnavalkya who imparted “divine knowledge of the most difficult nature to his wife Muitreyee”, and mentioned that his wife “was able to follow and completely attain it.” (Singh, 1958, pp 207).

Secondly, by rejecting the charges that women lack resolution and were devoid of trustworthiness, in the same tract, the opponent argued that in the name of death, where men were afraid of, women boldly faced it. So, it could not be said that they were devoid of resolution. He continued by saying: - “we constantly perceive, in a country where the name of death makes the male shudder that the female, from her firmness of mind, offers to burn herself with the corpse of their deceased husband…..” (Singh, 1958, pp 207).

The opponent pointed out that “With regard to their trustworthiness…..If we enumerate such women in each village or town as have been deceived by men, and such men as have been betrayed by women, I presume that the number of deceased women would be found ten times greater than that of the betrayed men.” (Singh, 1958, pp 207.)

Raja Rammohan Roy further mentioned that Men in the society got an exposure to reading, writing and public affairs and therefore accordingly were subject to such faults “as women occasionally commit” (Singh, 1958, pp 207), which, the opponent mentioned, proved their lack of trustworthiness and that made the life of women so miserable that they even were subject to death.
Regarding the question of passion, the opponent remarked, that the estimation of the passion in the nature of men and women should be made based on the custom of marriage as to the respective sexes. He further said that where one man was married to ten, twenty, thirty wives, one woman after marrying to a single man may even forced to shake off life at the cost of all worldly enjoyments. Women were not devoid of virtuous life. Not only that but also, the opponent added, after marriage the virtue of the women made it possible for them to support unbearable pain, slighting, contempt and what afflictions. In most of the cases, the Kulin Brahmans, after marriage remained absent and the wives remained dependent on their father and brother, for economic reasons. Still they continued to preserve their virtue. And after the death of their absentee husband, they were often agreed to practice the cruel rite of self-immolation out of their same virtue.

In conclusion, the opponent pointed out the fact that the advocate is well aware of the tragedies and sufferings of women but still was not sufficiently compassionate to “exempt them from being tied down and burnt to death.” (Singh, 1988, pp 208)

6.1.4. Another Pamphlet by Raja Rammohan Roy on Sati

Among the tracts and papers which were published by Raja Rammohan Roy in England was found one with the title. “Some Remarks in Vindication of the Resolution Passed by the Government of Bengal in 1829 Abolishing the Practice of Female Sacrifices in India.” That pamphlet was written by Raja Rammohan Roy in 1831, after the abolition of Sati by Lord William Bentinck.

Raja Rammohan Roy began that pamphlet by expressing his gratitude to Lord William Bentinck for abolishing the practice of burning widows alive on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands in 1829. He believed that by such noble act of the Governor General, the unfortunate, deluded and weaker sex had been completely saved from destruction for a period of two years and upwards. To convince others that such abolition had, by no means, attacked the religion of the Hindus, Raja Rammohan Roy offered some remarks as :-
1. If such abolition had really attacked the sentiments of the Hindus and clashed the principle of humanity, its effect could be seen immediately after the measure was adopted in the alter end of the year 1829. But, practically as per the accounts, after two years and upwards from the establishment of the act of abolition, violating the Government regulation, no widow had been burnt.

2. The removal of such odium gratified a number of influential and intelligent Hindus as they were relieved from such a curse which was attached to their character as a nation. They were so much grateful and impressed at that action of the Governor General, that they presented a congratulatory address of thanks to the Governor General, Lord William Bentinck on 18th January, 1830.

3. Another important fact which was raised by Raja Rammohan Roy was that with the course of time many debasing religious practices like the perambulation of the streets by the Nagas, infanticide, public burning of lapers and human sacrifices etc had been prohibited by the Government. That time also that was not an exception. The Government regulation in the matter of suppresses of a cruel rite was precisely the same with the above practices.

6.1.4.1. Reasons for Sati Expressed by Raja Rammohan Roy in this Tract

In that tract, Raja Rammohan Roy maintained the fact that the real reason behind the performance of Sati was the worldly interest of the Brahmins, relatives of the widows and others in the society. So the practice was a mockery in the name of the religion. No religious devotion could sanction such a cruel rite. The actual reason, now Raja Rammohan Roy expressed as:-

The law of inheritance (the Dayabhaga) accepted widow’s property right and their equal share in their property of deceased husband, without regards to his condition in life. Therefore, if the widows, after the death of her husband, remained alive, the share of the father, mother, brothers, sisters and the daughters of the deceased would be destroyed. There would be a complete bar to the claims of all. Accordingly they possessed a direct interest in the destruction of the widows. That was the case of the Lower Provinces. But in the upper provinces, in the law of inheritance given by Mitakshara, the rights of the surviving wife were more restricted. So, the relatives of
The husband were not much interested in her death. As after the death of the deceased, their worldly interests were not hampered or interfered. Accordingly in those provinces it was found that the Sati is comparatively very rare.

The Appendix to this tract read: “I cannot, I think, be irrelevant to the subject, to bring under the notice of the British public, that the abolition of the practice of burning Hindu widows alive, on the funeral pyres of their deceased husbands, was a measure not indiscreetly or rashly adopted by the Governor General of Bengal, but it was recommended and officially suggested to lord William Bentinck, by the members of the Supreme Council – the judges, who are most deservedly entrusted with the power of life and death, over the millions of the Natives of India- by the officers of the Government, holding responsible position, and possessed of the best local information- as well as by the long resident Europeans of the first intelligence and unquestionable respectability; with the exception of six individuals out of the whole British public living in India.” (Krishnayya, 1969, pp 63).

One copy of that was given by Raja Rammohan Roy to the President of the Royal Asiatic Society, Sir Alexander Johnstone, and another copy was given to Lady Johnstone on behalf of the females of India.

6.1.5. Vigilance Works by Raja Rammohan Roy

Not only literary works, but also Raja Rammohan Roy endeavoured to stop the practice of Sati personally without caring for his risk. He was a great humanist, so without caring for the comments of orthodox Hindus and the ignorant priests and relatives, whenever he came to know that a Sati ceremony was going to happen in the neighbourhood, he rushed there to put a stop to that practice to save a life.

A report in the Asiatic Journal for March 1818 reflected the fact that once Raja Rammohan Roy went to a scene where the Sati ceremony was going to happen. The deceased had two wives who were ready for performing the Sati ceremony. After setting light to the piles, by the priest, Raja Rammohan Roy hoped that the widows would rethink before entering into flames. But he was surprised to see that one after
another, without any fear, cheerfully both the widows cheerfully went through death by fire. Another point he noticed that the younger of the two wives, after the death of the first, before entering into the flames, addressed the crowd, and warned them not to prevent Hindu women from burning on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands, otherwise she said that it would be a curse upon the entire society.

The factuality of the above story may be under doubt, but the moral of the story was that at that time, to deal with the anti-Sati mission, was really a difficult work.

6.1.6. Three Important Points by Raja Rammohan Roy Regarding Sati

In his essay, “The Abstract of the Arguments regarding the Burning of Widows Considered as a Religious Rite”, which was issued in 1830, Raja Rammohan Roy mainly grouped the important points under three heads, those important points which had been scattered through many essays and tracts. Those were: -

1. Not obligatory but at most optional.
2. Not the most commendable but the least virtuous act a widow could perform and
3. Must be a voluntary ascending of the pyre and entering into the flames- a mode never practised in the conventional Sati.

6.1.7. Raja Rammohan Roy’s Campaign for Sati through Atmiya Sabha, Sambad Kaumudi and through his Writings

In 1815, Raja Rammohan Roy established the Atmiya Sabha, a society of like-minded people, where religious, social and contemporary issues were discussed. In the meetings of Atmiya Sabha, discussions on Sati also took place to make people conscious and attentive in that matter. The saplings which were planted by Raja Rammohan Roy on the fertile soil of Indian tradition became a mighty forest with the course of time. The spirituality of the East and the democracy of the West are actually reconciled in Raja Rammohan Roy’s reformatory activities. Through the discussions, controversies and arguments, Raja Rammohan Roy always wanted to mobilise public opinion regarding that cruel practice and wanted to arouse the consciousness of the
people. That was the style of his reformation so that the people could understand about that horrible practice and sympathise the condition of the widows.

For giving the rite a further public awareness, on July 1819, Raja Rammohan Roy started his Bengali journal, *Sambad Kaumudi*. In his real paper, he boldly criticised the practice to make the people realise the depth of his campaign. He at that time also had some other newspapers like, *Samachar Darpan* and *Bangadut*.

Raja Rammohan Roy wrote a number of tracts and showed through his writings that the two principal causes behind the miserable condition of the women in the society were the marriage of *Kulin Brahmins* and acceptance of large amount of money in the marriage. After marriage with the lame, blind, idiot and lunatic, the wives remained dependent on their father and mother for economic insolvency and for the absence of their married husband. That was not the end of misery of the female part of the society. After the death of husband, the widows were forced (in most of the cases, as the term voluntary sati was practically non existent) to terminate their existence, under the cover of religion, which was named as *Sati*.

Through his writings, which were circulated in India and England in both English and Bengali, Raja Rammohan Roy made another point clear, that was the practice of burning widows alive was inconsistent with the doctrines of the *Hindu Shastras*. The torture of the *Brahmins* played a significant role there. The *Brahmins*, though ignorant about their *Shastric* interpretation, often forced the widows to give her consent for *Sati* ceremony during the time of grief, intoxication and inanition for lack of food. Once she gave her consent, she could not get it back. Consequently they were forced to be a *Sati* by being binded down with the ropes to the pyre, which prevented their escape from the funeral pyre as against the freedom of sacrifice. Therefore it was clear, according to Raja Rammohan Roy, that the mode of performance of *Sati* could not be reconciled with the *Hindu* law, where the freedom of sacrifice was held. *Hindu Shastras* also abandons self immolation. Those *Shastric* injections by Raja Rammohan Roy helped Governor General to issue his anti *Sati* decree and a tribute of humanity, boldness, fearlessness and unflinching exertions were required to be paid to Raja Rammohan Roy in an everlasting remembrance.
The above points which Raja Rammohan Roy made clear in his writings demanded a consciousness on the part of the elite as well as general class with particular consequences for women. Accordingly Raja Rammohan Roy traversed in every form of reform and upheld the cause of social reform and advocated women rights as the first and foremost man of Renaissance. He made it a point to disclose that women should be given opportunity to exhibit their natural capacity by removing the curtain of apathy and indifference of the public. The condition of the helpless sex always touched his heart. He also made an appeal in the form No. VI of the Sambad Kaumudi to the rich Hindus of Calcutta to follow the principles of the Civil and Military Widow’s Fund established by order of Government to ameliorate the condition of destitute widows by constituting a society for them. Raja Rammohan Roy made numerous translations of the sacred books of Hindus namely, Upanishads and an abridgement of the Vedanta directly from Vedic Sanskrit into Bengali, Hindustani and English. The main intentions of Raj Rammohan Roy was to acquaint his countrymen with the pure theism of their religion, free from orthodox myths.

6.1.8. Translation of Upanishads by Raja Rammohan Roy and his Comments Thereon

Raja Rammohan Roy was aware of the fact that the root cause of all social evils was idolatry. His main intention was to oppose the perversion of Brahmanism. He wrote in 1815, Vedanta Grantha and in 1816, Vedanta Sar. Vedanta Grantha was a Bengali commentary on the Vedanta and Vedanta Sar was in Bengali which he rendered into English as An Abridgement of the Vedant. His original elaborate works on the Vedanta Shastras, entitled Vedanta Grantha was translated into Hindusthani and distributed free of costs among his countrymen. (Collet, 1988, pp 72). Once he mentioned that “during the interval between my controversial engagements with idolators as well as advocates of idolatry, I translated several of the ten Upanishads of which the Vedanta or principal part of the Veds consists.” (Collet, 1988, pp 72). Between 1816 and 1818, he made Bengali and English translations of the Kena, Isha, Katha, Mundaka and Mandukya Upanishads. Of those the Kena and Isha Upanishads appeared in 1816 and the Katha, Mundaka and Mandukya Upanishads in 1817. All of those except the last, he translated in English also. He published those works with introductions and comments and
distributed them free of costs among his countrymen to make them aware of the spirit of their religion, so that they could proceed towards social transformation. In 1817, he wrote Defence of Hindoo Theism, in English. That mainly contained a controversy with one Sankara Sastri of Madras. Raja Rammohan Roy truly interpreted the Hindu Shastras and in this tract, he presented “the degrading character of the legends attached to so many of the Hindu incarnations, and pointed out how mischievous must be the effect of regarding such narratives as sacred records.” (Collet, 1988, pp 80). The Head Pandit of the Government College at Calcutta, Mrityunjaya Vidyalankara, defending the absurdities of Hinduism, published a tract, entitled Vedantachandrika. To that Raja Rammohan Roy replied in ‘A Second Defence of the Monotheistical System of the Veds’. In that tract also he sustained the same arguments as he put before but that time with “greater fullness and force” (Collet, 1988, pp 80). Raja Rammohan Roy’s numerical oral discussions and conversations with his friends, disciples, and opponents strengthened his writings and each time enriched him with a new notion.

In 1818, another controversy was published in Bengali with Goswami. In 1820 he published two more controversies in Bengali with Kabitakar and Subramanyam Sastri. The second of which he translated as ‘An Apology for the Pursuit of Final Beatitude, Independent of Brahmunical Observances’. His First and Second Conference were in the dialogue form. The same dialogue form he maintained in his short tract which he wrote in 1823 as A Dialogue between a Missionary and Three Chinese Converts.

Thus during those four years between 1817-1821, Raja Rammohan Roy published nearly a dozen tracts and translations in Bengali and Sanskrit and English also. In 1819 Raja Rammohan Roy made his English translation of the Moonduk and Katha Upanishads, after which he published his Second Defence of Hindu Theism. In the introduction to the Moonduk Upanishad of the Atharva Veda, he declared: - “The public will, I hope, be assured that nothing but the natural inclination of the ignorant towards the worship of objects resembling their own nature, and to the external forms of rites palpable to their grosser senses, joined to the self interested motives of their pretended guides, has rendered the generality of the Hindu community”. (Singh, 1958, pp 189)
In the preface to the *Katha Upanishad* of the *Ujoor Veda*, he expressed his extreme optimism regarding the good understandings of his countrymen. He believed that with such understanding, they would be able to understand the truth of their doctrines, as contained in that work of Raja Rammohan Roy and in his other works which he had already presented before his countrymen. He was sure of the fact that his countrymen would be free from all prejudices one day. With that enlightened mind, he knew that his countrymen would understand the erroneous concept and the immature nature of idol worship, grossly prevalent in their religion, which they were following blindly. Those gross errors, Raja Rammohan Roy concluded was destroying the pure spirit of their religion.

However he admitted that still there were many “advocates of idolatry and their misguided followers, over whose opinions, prejudices and obstinacy prevail more than good sense and judgement.......and therefore continue, under the form of religious devotion, to practice a system which destroys, to the utmost degree, the natural texture of society .........” (Singh, 1958, pp 189)

Raja Rammohan Roy however was sure about the fact of quick realisation of the true notion of God by his countrymen which, he knew would show a right path of religion to the natives. That true notion would help them to incline friendly towards their fellow creatures’ true love and respect towards God would help his countrymen to enrich their mind with humility and charity. At the same time Raja Rammohan Roy knew that such pure system of religion would make the mind of his countrymen independent, pure and sincere.

In another short tract, entitled ‘An Apology for the Pursuit of Final Beatitude, Independently of Brahmunical Observences’, he expressed that ritualistic formalities could not bring any spiritual illumination.

In his Second Defence of the Monotheistic System of the *Vedas*, written in 1817, Raja Rammohan Roy defended and advocated for securing women rights. In the same tract he held the *Brahmins* responsible for moral crimes like *Sati*, child marriages, multiple marriages by *Brahmans (Kulinism) etc.*
In the introduction to *Kena Upanishad*, Raja Rammohan Roy expressed the thought that “this work will, I trust, by explaining to my countrymen the real spirit of the *Hindu* scriptures, which is but the declaration of the unity of God, tend in a great degree to correct the erroneous conception which have prevailed with regard to the doctrines they inculcate.” (Nag and Burman, 1946, PP 11). In his translation to *Kena Upanishad*, Raja Rammohan Roy wanted to make his countrymen aware of the true nature of God. He opined that God could not be defined with language, and could not be specified by any specified thing of worship.

Regarding the work of *Katha Upanishad*, in the preface, also Raja Rammohan Roy condemned polytheism and promoted invariably the knowledge of the unity of God to improve the intellectual principle and condition of his countrymen. In that work also Raja Rammohan Roy taught his countrymen how they could direct and attach their mind towards the worship of the sole regulator of the universe.

At that time idolatry was practiced in the then society under the strict ground that it was sanctioned by the customs. Putting his opposition to that fact, Raja Rammohan Roy said that a man of common sense and intelligence could easily understand that for any country, custom or fashion differed from divine faith. He further said that divine faith was something which was based on spiritual authorities and which inculcated the application of the correct reasoning, but custom or fashion was something which was the product of vulgar caprice.” He further advocated that people who used to follow idolatry, under the false name of religion, were those persons who violated their customs and religions and pretended to be a correct follower of a false religious system.

Raja Rammohan Roy concluded by guiding his countrymen to reject the association of those people who used to conceal the real doctrines of the scriptures and induced them to believe in prevalent customs and traditions blindly without judging them with their reason faculties. Moreover, Raja Rammohan Roy advised them to follow the scriptures and their comments after reconciling with their reasoning abilities. That would help them to lead to the path of rational performance of duties and would enlighten them with the knowledge of the sole creator of the universe.
Raja Rammohan Roy gave his comments in the introduction to *Isopanishad*, as :-

“From considerations like these, it has been that I (although born a Brahmin, and instructed in my youth in all the principles of that sect), being thoroughly convinced of the lamentable errors of my countrymen, have been stimulated to employ every means in my power to improve their minds and lead them to the knowledge of a purer system of morality. (Nag and Burman, 1946, pp 50).

The main aim of Raja Rammohan Roy in his translation of an Abridgement of the *Vedanta*, was establishing the unity of Godhead. He believed that such feeling of unity would illuminate the darkness of the mind of his countrymen with the light of true meaning of worship. Those enlightening ideas would eradicate all supersitious practices, which were debasing the base of the society and were responsible for weak texture.

The religious ideas of Raja Rammohan Roy which were the root cause of social upliftment had the basis of the *Vedas and the Upanishads*, rightly termed *Vedanta*. (or the Resolution of all the *Vedas*, the most celebrated and revered work of Brahmanical Theology), which held the view that the Supreme Being is incomprehensible and his worship alone is the source of unity and of all happiness. Those could lead to Eternal Beatitude. In 1817, there also appeared in English “A Defence of Hindu Theism” and “A Second Defence of the Monotheistical system of the *Vedas.”

6.1.8.1 Appreciative Notes on Raja Rammohan Roy’s Translation of *Upanishads*

An appreciative notice of Raja Rammohan Roy’s pamphlet entitled “Translation of an abridgement of the *Vedant.*” by Government Gazette, on February 1, 1816 is as follows:-

“.......The singularity of this translation arises chiefly from its being the production of a learned Brahmin of great wealth and respectability, and whose acquirements in the languages of Europe, as well as Asia, add to the weight of his opinions, and importance to his name. - ........the pamphlet .......displays the deductions of a liberal, bold and intrepid mind”. (Majumdar, 1983, pp3).
6.1.9. True Shastric Interpretation by Raja Rammohan Roy

Raja Rammohan Roy wrote a number of tracts where he pointed out how Shastras were misinterpreted by the orthodox circle of the society. He proved by his arguments that in front of ignorant countrymen, the orthodox society presented them as the true interpreter of religion, but in practice they performed a number of activities, which clearly showed their ignorance to the real doctrines of Hindu scriptures. In support of his views, Raja Rammohan Roy mentioned that, although Vedas and Manu prohibited strictly an acceptance of money or of a present in the marriage contract of a daughter, yet, two thirds of the Brahmans of Bengal, though considered them as the highest knowledge giver, used to practice the sale of female children in the name of marriage. Not only the Brahmans, but also their followers used to follow that practice to weak the texture of the society.

He continued his examples and advocated that as per the authority of Yajnavalkya, a man could marry for the second time if and only if his former wife is found to have misconduct and misfortune, but violating that rule, in actual practice, Kulin Brahmans, devoid of all sorts of knowledge, used o marry thirty to forty women only for the sake of money. So, though the Kulin Brahmans were sick, infirm or lunatic, but got married to satisfy their monetary needs or to gratify brutal inclination

Manu prescribes that “respect and distinction were due to a Brahman, merely in proportion to his knowledge;” (Sen, 1967, pp, 12), but in reality, certain families of Kulin Brahmans, devoid of virtue and learning and responsible for the decay of the society were given exclusive honour.

After quoting the above examples, Raja Rammohan Roy pointed out that what Shastras had preserved for the Hindus. Like Vedanta says that for acquiring the knowledge of God, performance of Brahanical rites and ceremonies were not required, rather absorption to the Supreme Being alone was required. He opined that those doctrines of the Vedanta were similar to what Manu said. Again he pointed out that in the Bhashya or Commentaries on the Isoponishad and on the other Upanishads of the Vedas the illustrious Sankaracharyya declared that Brahmanical ceremonies could not help one
to attain the faith in God. His or her adoration of the Supreme Being was everywhere required and by doing that, they would be free from spiritual leathery.

He gave examples of religious rites, sufficient to demoralise the texture of the society as the singing of obscene songs, the use of wine and human sacrifices. Absurdities, superstitions and errors, as per raja Rammohan Roy were decaying the literature and philosophy and were darkening the understanding of the people. Under such a circumstance they were required to go through their real scriptures and understand its true spirit as is held in Veda and Sruti that the performance of duties could lead to the attainment of Brahmanjan. For that constant hearing, reflection and meditation were necessary. Desire for future fruition would be fruitless there. Not only that, but also the Hindu scriptures should be reconciled with the reasoning abilities of the Hindus. After that they would be able to understand what Manu and Brihaspati had declared. In those two scriptures, as per Manu and Brihaspati, it was held that work should not be performed for future fruition. Lastly Raja Rammohan Roy showed that the same notion was explained in Upanishad also.

In Raja Rammohan Roy’s social thinking, truth, justice, humanity moral Government of the church and goodness of the Almighty power always took priority to miracles or intermediate agencies or prophets. To clear the superstitious ideas of the man, Raja Rammohan Roy also took the help of the eternal ideas from Vedas and the Upanishads. He fixed the basis of judging Hindu laws as the welfare of the society, instead of spiritual authority. To Raja Rammohan Roy, a mass of decaying dogmas and doctrines are not the religion of the Hindus. Their religion was a pure, rational and regulating principle.

6.1.9.1. Raja Rammohan Roy’s Views on Rituals and Ceremonies

Rituals and ceremonies were not important in the social reformation of Raja Rammohan Roy. Coinciding with the Vedanta, Raja Rammohan Roy also championed the fact that the acquisition of the knowledge of the God was not dependent on the exercise of rules and rites. Rites and rituals should be performed in accordance with their inner significance, but not in accordance with mechanical pursuits. Enlightenment
of the spiritual life of the Hindu was dependent on the worship of the Supreme Being, not on the outward conformity of the rituals. He reconciled eastern spirituality with western thoughts and ethical values. He believed in politics, sociology and economic freedom.

He made multifarious researches in the various sacred books of India and realized that how the popular Hinduism had been corrupted from the earlier forms of Hindu faith and practice. He wanted to purify and elevate the minds of the Hindus and for that; he referred to the venerated, ancient, spiritual and unquestionable authorities of the Hindu theology and made Hindus aware the misinterpretation of their Shastras. For that purpose he studied the original Sanskrit texts.

As per Raja Rammohan Roy, human beings were social animals and they were required to be lived together socially. That society, he believed should be based on the understanding of the individuals for the true interpretation of the rules. For that there was no necessity of hundreds of useless hardships and privations regarding drinking, eating, purity, impurity, auspiciousness’ and inauspiciousness etc. So, he opined that those useless mechanical rites were to be eliminated and man must enquire into the true nature and requirements of their religious doctrines and must free them from meaningless rites, ceremonies, superstitions and rituals.

Raja Rammohan Roy, in his tracts wrote that every action had a cause and effect relations. If one was ignorant of the cause, he or she might have subjected to some superstions or miraculous things, a notion, completely devoid of truth, sound mind and justice. Raja Rammohan Roy believed in socially useful rituals. He believed in simplicity and significance in the rituals and customs. He was very much opposed to socially destructive rituals which, he believed were responsible for destroying social happiness. Raja Rammohan Roy accordingly rejected all those rituals for the benefits of his countrymen. He accepted those symbols, customs and traditions which belonged to truth and always rejected those symbols which were sufficient to degrade the truth, reason and intellectual faculties of the individuals.

He had always defended Hinduism, Islam and Christianity each against the attacks of the champions of orthodoxy. He always emphasised on the pure pristine form of each
of those three historic doctrines, free from hatred, fanaticism and ignorance. For that reason he did not separately any one of the three religions, rather combine them into one universal religion, guided by Lokasreya or public good. The ruling idea behind the Brahmo Samaj was that a man coming from Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jew, Jaina or Buddhist wings of life could join in the common prayer of God. For that they would not be rejected by their own religious tradition, Sampradaya or church. By that, a man would move towards universal convergence and would strengthen the social solidarity of religion. The strengthening of the basis of the society, Raja Rammohan Roy knew was possible only when natives were freed from idolatry and polytheism and were attentive towards the belief of the unity of Godhead and universal brotherhood.

6.1.10. Company’s Efforts on Sati

6.1.10.1. Sati Figure Rose Due to Company’s Order

In 1812/1813, when the Company issued an order regarding the practice of Sati, whereby it is ordered to "Regulate it" instead of its prohibition, it took the lives of a huge number of widows between 1815 and 1818, statistically the figure rose from 378 to 839 in the six divisions of Calcutta, Dacca, Murshidabad, Patna, Benaras and Bareilly.

The records of the first four years (from 1815-1818) are described below:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area / Year</th>
<th>1815</th>
<th>1816</th>
<th>1817</th>
<th>1818</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Division of Calcutta</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>1528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division of Dacca</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division of Murshidabad</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division of Patna</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division of Benares</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division of Bareilly</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>707</td>
<td>839</td>
<td>2365</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General Summary of Suttes from 1815 To 1818 (Collet, 1988, pp 88)
If one looks at the table minutely, then three points will easily strike one’s mind as:

1. in different localities, there were great variations in the number of *Sati*.
2. In the Calcutta division, the number of *Sati* was nearly double as compared to the rest of the localities.
3. From year to year, there was a sharp increase in the occurrences of the event. Finally, the year 1818 gave a picture which showed more than double increase in the number in more or less all the localities (except Dacca division and in Bareilly) as compared to the year 1815.

### 6.1.10.2. Reasons for the High Rise

The reason for that high rise in the figure of *Sati* could be easily drawn. That was the real difficulty of drawing a line of distinction between voluntary and involuntary *Sati*. In fact in the then society, voluntary self-immolation was practically non-existent. That fact was pointed out by a police officer from Lower Bengal, Mr. Ewer, and some years later he mentioned that “there are many reasons for thinking that such an event as a voluntary suttee very rarely occurs.” (Singh, 1958, pp 197).

### 6.1.10.3. Statistics Regarding *Sati*

In early 19th century south India rarely witness *Sati* as we know from Dubois It took place frequently in Rajasthan and in certain gangnetic districts. In the north in Sahabad District annually 25 *Sati* sacrifices took place. In a report of *Samachar Darpan*, it was published that that practice was prevalent prominently in Rajasthan. The cases of *Sati* were mostly frequent in the district around Calcutta. in May and June, 1812, between Cossimbazar and the mouth of Hooghly, out of 69 *Satis* it was found that 25 were *Brahmins* and the rest were gardener, washer man, baghdi and other low cast women ranging from 16 to 60. The total number of children left by them were 183.

No fewer than 2365 widows had been burnt alive between 1815 and 1818. Of those 1528 were inhabitants of Calcutta and its surrounding districts. An estimation of the annual sacrifice of human life was received from the return made by the Police to the Bengal Government for a single year, which showed that in the year 1823, the number...
The Role and Contributions of Raja Rammohan Roy as a Social Reformer

of widows who burned on the funeral pyres of their deceased husbands within the Bengal Presidency was totally 575, which was represented as:- of the Brahmin caste, 234, of the Kayasthas caste 35, of the Vaisya Caste 14, of the Sudra Caste 292, and total 575. Of those total 340 widows were thus reported within the limits of the Calcutta Court of circuit. The data given was only for the immediate neighbourhood of Calcutta, the number of lives sacrificed beyond that limit, as per the return were much greater than what was reported. The return also included the ages of the different individuals. Like, of the 575 victims of 1823, above sixty years of age were 109, from forty to sixty was the age of 226 victims, from twenty to forty was 208, and less than twenty years of age was 32. So, from the return anybody could guess that annually five to six hundred females were sacrificed. In the year in which Brahmo Sabha was established, that means in 1828, as many as 309 widows were burnt alive with their husbands within the jurisdiction of Calcutta.

6.1.10.4. Causes of the Variation in the Statistics

An analysis of one of the causes of variation in the figure of Sati especially in Burdwan and Hooghly regions, where the figure of Sati cases was high was the fact that in those regions, people did not observe the practice of Sati as a virtuous duty or act; rather they considered it as a choice entertainment. Such entertainment used to give sensational feelings and thrill to the spectators.

Another important cause was the sudden interference of the Government in the matter of Sati. Previously when the Government was silent regarding the religious conventions of the natives, they would not also have lodged any complaint to their Lordship in Council. But as soon as the company issued an order regarding the sanguine performance of ten Sati, the native would have recognised that action of the Government as an interference to their religious matter. They took the feeling that Government was as if supporting their misinterpretation of the Hindu Shastras and was allowing the inhuman practice.

Finally the Governor General also agreed with the matter that the interference of the Government had really increased the number of Satis instead of its decrease and therefore suspended any additional regulations for the time.
6.1.10.5. Lord Amherst and Abolition of Sati

The gradual rise in the Sati figure, as for example, in 1825, the annual tale of Sati, raised from 577 to 639 an advance of more than ten percent. That necessitated the urge for putting more emphasis over that matter. That time judges of Nizamat Adalat were required to think over the matter again. Now Judge Smith supported by Judge Ross was insisted on immediate and entire prohibition of Sati and the latter judge believed the fact that it would not dissatisfy the natives: But before their minute, Vice President, Bayley recommended (on January 13, 1827) that Sati should be abolished in the territories where the earlier regulation was not in force like in the territories of Delhi,; Sangor, Nerbudda, kumaoon and Rangpur and that proposal of Bayley was recommended to be immediately adopted by the Vice President Combermere on March 1st. That proposal, however was not accepted by Lord Amherst, the then Governor General. He mentioned the following three reasons. Like, first, he believed that in the districts or territories mentioned above the rite was not prevailed. Secondly, half measures cannot bring any desirable results. Thirdly, he himself was not in favour of the total suppression of Sati. He believed that the infusion of the western knowledge among the natives would enlighten them regarding their superstitious rite and will help its slow eradication. For this reason, he declared that He "Would rather wait a few years" (Collet, 1988, pp 248).

After two months, he left India. He was actually interested in "general instruction and the unostentatious exertions of our local officers" to cause the diminution "at no very distant, period the final extinction of the barbarous rite". (Collet, 1988, pp 248).

6.1.10.6. Lord Bentinck on Sati

After his leaving from India, the charge of Governor General ship was taken by Lord William Bentinck, who unlike Lord Amherst was not ready to “wait a few years.” He , soon realising the direction and the depth of the situation, made confidential enquiries from 49 experienced officers who elicited the fact that 24 out of 49 officers favoured immediate and entire abolition.
Further he mentioned that “of the 463 suttee cases occurring in the whole of the Presidency of the Fort William, 420 took place in Bengal, Behar and Orissa, or what is termed in the Lower Provinces, and of these latter 287 in the Calcutta division alone”. He continued by saying “that in a population of so many millions of people, as the Calcutta division includes, and the same way be said of all the Lower Provinces, so great is the want of courage and of vigour of character.” (Majumdar, 1983, pp 143).

He also pointed out the fact that “in the report of the *Nizamut Adawlut* for 1828, four out of five judges recommended to the Governor General in Council the immediate abolition of the practice. The two superintendents of police for the Upper and Lower Provinces, Mr. Walter Ewer and Mr. Charles Barwell have in the strongest terms expressed their opinion that the suppression might be effected without the least danger.” (Majumdar, 1983, pp 144).

Lord William Bentinck also then mentioned of some practical experiences where *Sati* was not permitted. Like, within the limit of the Supreme Court at Calcutta, not a *Sati* has taken place since the time of Sir John Anstruther. In the Delhi territory, Sir Charles Metcalfe never permitted a *Sati* to be performed. One of the districts of the Calcutta Division, in Jessore, because of the power of the acting Magistrate, number of *Sati* cases decreased. As in 1824, there were 30 number of *Sati* cases, in 1825, it became 16, in 1826, it was 3 and in 1827 and in 1828 there were none. Also, the report of the Acting Commissioner, Mr. Smith stated that in Ghazipore, by the persuasion or rather by the threats of the police, the number of *Sati* cases prevented were 16 (in 1828) and 7 (in 1829).

From an enquiry into the situation of *Sati* cases in the European territories, he found from Dr. Carey “that at Chinsurah no such sacrifices had ever been permitted by the Dutch Government. That within the limits of Chandarnagore itself they were also prevented, but allowed to be performed in the British territories.” (Majumdar, 1983, pp 144).

Lord William Bentinck mentioned further that out of the officers in the Military Department, only five of them expressed their opinion against the abolition of the
practice and against all interferences. Twelve of them wanted its abolition, but rejected absolute and direct prohibition under the authority of the Government. Eight of them were favourable to abolition but only the indirect interference of Magistrates and other public officers. But the good thing was that twenty eight officers were in favour of total immediate and public suppression of the practice.

6.1.10.6.1. Lord William Bentinck’s Acknowledgement for Raja Rammohan Roy’s Views on Sati

In the matter of taking right decision regarding the complete abolition of the rites of Sati, not only those records were there in the hands of Lord William Bentinck, but also, Lord William Bentinck received support and sanction for the eradication of that barbarous rite from the enlightened natives. Among those, the name mentioned by Lord William Bentinck in his Minute was Raja Rammohan Roy. A man all time considered as a learned native and a philanthropist. In his historic Minute, Lord William Bentinck also mentioned that Raja Rammohan Roy fought against all other superstitions and corruptions, practised by the Hindus in the name of their religion. Lord Bentinck further mentioned that however Raja Rammohan Roy was in favour of suppressing the rite without the direct agency of the police.

Raja Rammohan Roy supported the indirect agency of the police, as he was not in favour of any arbitrary measures on the part of the British. As a reformer, Raja Rammohan Roy was always opposed to any forcible suppression. As per the reason, Raja Rammohan Roy expressed that such legal suppressions could hamper the feelings of the natives and could give them the impressions that the British rulers were exercising force to impose their own religion upon the natives and by that, the natives would consider the foreign rulers as conquerors.

6.1.10.6.2. Lord William Bentinck’s Minute on Sati

However, whatever might be the case, three courses were open to the Government as per India Gazette of July 27, 1929.

1. To enforce the existing regulations rigidly.
2. To suppress *Sati* in the provinces of Bengal and Bihar where it was most prevalent, but where British rule was longest known and best appreciated and

3. To abolish it throughout the Presidency. (Collet, 1988, pp 251)

Time had actually come to adopt the third option. Probably Lord William Bentinck’s mind was also working on that line. He considered ameliorating the condition of the natives as his first and foremost important duty. Following the notions and views of Raja Rammohan Roy and keeping in mind the existing socio religious and educational darkness of the countrymen, Lord William Bentinck was trying to establish a pure system of morality, free from absurd religious beliefs and practices to save the society from blood and murder. He mentioned in his Minute that “......no innocent blood shall be split, there can be no exception” (Majumdar, 1983, pp 148). He was fully aware of the fact that when the native countrymen would be able to understand the pure and pristine form of their religion, they could illuminate their mind from all chains and shackles and thereby could place themselves among the modern civilizations of the world. Those very free thinking in the realm of religion, would release them from slavery of every foreign conqueror.

### 6.1.10.6.3. *Sati* Regulation Act

On December, 4, 1829, the *Sati* Regulation act was passed, banning *Sati* as a punishable criminal offence. Not only that but also the act prevented any person from experiencing or aiding to the sacrifice of a Hindu widow. The Act further proposed that whether the widow was willing or not and whether she had requested for self immolation or not did not matter here. Under no circumstance, such wilful deliberate murder would be considered as legal as it was detrimental to the feelings of human nature and therefore could not continue in the name of religion. The prohibitory regulation banned *Sati* as an imperative duty and mentioned that any person indulged or involved in such a practice would be considered as guilty as the practice of *Sati* was unlawful in the eyes of any man with common intelligence and humanity.

Needless to say that Raja Rammohan Roy’s prior *Shastric* interpretation and his arguments with the help of Hindu *Shastras* made the work of the British Government
easy to enact such law. By doing that, Raja Rammohan Roy made the works of British Government conducive for the moral and social upliftment of the people and relieved them from the problem of interference of the principles of religion in the matter of humanity.

6.1.11. Consequences of Sati Regulation Act

6.1.11.1. Petition by Orthodox Sections against Regulation

As against that act of abolition, a counter petition was sent to Lord William Bentinck under the initiative of Radhakanta Deb, Maharaja Kalikrishna Bahadur, Romgopal Mullick and others. The main point of their petition was that they were not ready to accept that the practice of Sati was not enjoined by the Hindu Shastra. Rather they mentioned that such a notion, where Sati had been banned was the views of those who had deviated from the pure path of the religion of their forefathers. The orthodox circles also advocated that such persons used to eat and drink forbidden things in the society of Europeans. Therefore, in the questing of accepting or rejecting a rite like Sati should not rest over such liberal minded natives. The Lordship in Council would be deceived otherwise. They humbly submitted that “In a question as delicate as the interpretation of our sacred books and the authority of our religious usages, none but Pandits and Brahmmins, and teachers of holy lives and known learning and authority ought to be consulted.”- not “men who have neither any faith nor care for the memory of their ancestors.” (Collet, 1988, pp 256).

They also suggested the Governor General to take their assistance and opinion in that serious matter. As they conceived them as the true interpreter of the Hindu Shastras. The petition of the orthodox experts of the society was signed by 120 Pandits. They expressed the opinion that Sati could not be banned under an erroneous conception. They emphasised over the fact that Sati was an imperative religious act. They further mentioned that a widow could perform the act of Sati, or could lead a life of ascetic. But, in between that two, those orthodox circles recommended for the performance of the rite of Sati, as the most virtuous act of the widows. In reply, Lord William Bentinck advised them to make an appeal to the King-in Council. He also assured
them that in his Minute and Sati Regulation Act, by no means he had attacked the Hindu religion and religious doctrines.

6.1.11.2. Congratulatory Address to Lord William Bentinck by Raja Rammoham Roy and Others

Two days after the receipt of the counter petition from the orthodox circles, the Governor General received two counter addresses - one from Christian inhabitants of Calcutta with 800 signatories and other from 300 native inhabitants of Calcutta under the authorship of Raja Rammohan Roy and his several well-known comrades.

Addressing Lord William Bentinck, Governor General of India, the congratulatory address was presented at Government House, Calcutta on the 16th January, 1830. In the meeting both numerous and respectable gentlemen of the Civil and Military services were present It took place at Town Hall. Lord William Bentinck and also Lady Bentinck were present. A contemporary account revealed the fact that the deputation was led by Raja Rammohan Roy himself. A friend and collaborator of Raja Rammohan Roy, Munshi Kalinath Roy of Taki, read the address in Bengali.

That address, authored by Raja Rammohan Roy referred to the fact that Sati was introduced as a practice of jealousy and selfishness. However that practice was prevalent for so many years under the cover of religion and was defended by most sacred authorities of the address. The author mentioned his gratitude to the Lordship for eradicating such a horrible rite used to perform for so many years in the name of religion in the Hindu society. Their utmost reverence for such abolition was actually mentioned in the address. The learned natives, who under the authorship of Raja Rammohan Roy sent that congratulatory address considered such an act of the Governor General as an everlasting obligation on the natives.

6.1.11.3. Dharma Sabha by Orthodox Sections

However the petition of the orthodox circle was sent earlier was turned down by Lord William Bentinck and he told them to appeal to the King in Council. For that the
orthodox circle, called up a meeting and formed the rival association of *Brahmo Sabha*, *Dharma Shabha*. They decided at that meeting to send an appeal to the King in Council in England. They subscribed 11, 260 rupees on the spot, and decided to erect a meeting place. The purpose of that association was “to unite and continually devise means for protecting our religion and our excellent customs and usages.” (Collet 1988, pp 258).

At the first meeting of *Dharma Sabha*, pointing the liberal Hindus of the community, the orthodox treasurers of that association remarked that “Those Hindus who do not follow the rites of Hindu religions should be excluded from the Hindu society.” (Collet, 1988, pp 258).

The meeting was held on February 6, 1830 and elected the following as committee members:

Maharaja Kali Kissein Bahadur, Ram Kamal Sen, Maharaja Ashutosh Dey, Ramgopal Mullik, Maharaja Gokulnath Mullik, Gopi Mohan Deb, Raja Radhakanta Deb, Tarini Churn Mitra. An attorney of the Calcutta Supreme Court, namely, Batthie, was being engaged by the orthodox circle to carry their appeal to England and prosecute there for a fee of Rs. 50000.

6.1.11.4. Counter Petition by Raja Rammohan Roy and his Voyage to England

At that action of the *Dharma Sabha*, Raja Rammohan Roy prepared a counter petition and decided to go for England to submit it there. He was successful; he went to England and presented his petition to the House of Lords. Before the Privy Council, when the hearing of the appeal of *Dharma Sabha* took place, Raja Rammohan Roy was also there as a regular attendant. Finally, however, after a due hearing the appeal was turned down by the King in Council too.

6.2. Evaluation of the Role of Raja Rammohan Roy in the Eradication of Sati

Mrs. Francis Keith Martin in a letter dated November 26, 1829, which was published in the *Bengal Harkaru* of November 28, 1829, pointed out “That while the Government of
Lord William Bentinck might be given its due share of credit for the final abolition of *Sati*, the great services of Rammohan Roy with regard to it, should never be forgotten. (Collet, 1988, pp 115).

To quote from her letter, she mentioned that “...the Indian widows in commemorating the amiable and the highly politic administration of Lord Bentinck, may they never cease to remember the glowing sympathy, intelligence and fearless energy displayed through a course of eighteen years, by their great and at length successful advocate, Rammohan Roy.” (Collet, 1988, pp 115).

The great historian, R.C. Majumdar, also interpreted the fact that at the time of legal enactment of the abolition of *Sati*, Raja Rammohan Roy opposed any legal enactment. But his ground of opposition was completely different. He knew well that by that legal step on the part of the British Government, mistrust would be created in the minds of the *Hindus* about the intention of the British. The fact was that he did not hesitate to put a stop to the abolition of *Sati*; as many times back, through his writings, Raja Rammohan Roy already championed the fact that self-immolation was a crime but and the persons viewed it as an entertainment were equally punishable. He only prescribed for no legal action in that matter from the perspective of a reformer. Again from the perspective of common public good, he was always opposed to the exercise of such rite by the people.

From the first number of Calcutta Magazine dated January 22, 1830, a quotation with approval of the tribute paid to Raja Rammohan Roy for his tireless efforts for the abolition of *Sati* can be read as follows:-

“For a long time the anomaly went on without, perhaps attracting so much notice as it ought to have done. Murmurs not loud, but deep, were heard against the custom as well in India itself as in different parts of Europe. At length out of the very body of *Hindus* themselves stepped forward an enlightened and intrepid assertor of the laws of nature and humanity. This was not however a mere well meaning, but ignorant zealot. No, the person in question was a man of extraordinary talents, and endowments, and of benevolence equal to his intellect. He was too, a *Brahmin*, a learned *Brahmin*, and he
proclaimed it to his deluded countrymen that suttee was nowhere enjoined in the Shastras!” (Majumdar, 1983, pp 168).

In evaluating the role of Raja Rammohan Roy in the matter of abolition of Sati practice, Bengal Harkaru in an editorial stated: “Let us not, therefore, offer our exclusive praise and gratitude either to Rammohan Roy or to Lord William Bentinck. The former would never have succeeded in his patriotic and enlightened labours without the cooperation of the latter, nor would Lord Bentinck have ventured on so desirable a measure, if the minds of the natives had not been prepared to abandon the worst of superstitions by the unwearied labours of their distinguished countrymen.” (Tagore, 1975, pp 93).

The main guiding philosophy of Raja Rammohan Roy’s social reform was the reconciliation of individual good with the good of the society. As pointed out by Brajendranath Seal: “The East had placed the group above the individual in social organisations, and the individual above all social bonds in the quest of summum bonum. The West had stressed the claims of the individual in social polity, and of the social good in the kingdom of God. The Raja held that individual progress is the touchstone as well as the measuring rod of social progress; but the individual’s progress could be secured only by organizing and establishing the conditions of social progress.” (Tagore, 1974, pp68).

Raja Rammohan Roy, a man of multidimensional personality, and a reformer took a reformatory style to eradicate one of the deep rooted diseases of the then Hindu society, Sati. For that, he made long and hard struggle, as he knew very well that overnight the abolition of that cruel practice was not possible. All he wanted was to give a widest awareness and publicity to that matter, so that his countrymen should be aware of the ill effects of that fearful customs. He arranged for open discussions and controversies for that purpose also. Consequently public opinion was mobilised towards a practical measure. Another point which was also very significant in that respect was his farsighted view. The main crux of his view was the intellectual development of his countrymen. He always hoped that such intellectual advancement with the help of
western knowledge and culture and literature could only put a stop to that cruel rite forever and could bring public good.

In the Editorial remarks of the “Bengal Hurkaru”. (November 28, 1829), the editor of the said paper appreciating the ardent philanthropic activities of the learned native Raja Rammohan Roy paid tribute to him. The tribute was mainly due to his unwearied exertions to prove his countrymen that the custom “…is not only abhorrent to every principle of humanity but is actually in contradiction to the Shastras or Sacred writings.” (Majumdar, 1983, pp 152). The editorial remarks also included the fact that it became possible for Lord William Bentinck to pass Sati regulation act because of the way, which Rammohan Roy had prepared by “the energy of argument, and the grace of eloquence.” - (Majumdar, 1983, pp 152).

Raja Rammohan Roy always quoted page after pages from the sacred books of Hindus in order to acquaint them with the true precepts of Hindu Shastras. He quoted passages from Sruti and pointed out that in the Veda, the most sacred authority of the Hindu Shastra, it had been declared that purification of mind was possible by performing regular and occasional duties, and for that, life should not be destroyed. That destruction of life could not be a mean for achieving future fruition. He also prescribed that Shastras should be interpreted with the reasoning abilities. Then only man would understand that Sahamarana could bring a widow least virtue, rather, the synthesis of rationalism and scriptural authority would work in that case.

Raja Rammohan Roy showed that the work was misunderstood by the Hindus as they meant by the work, religious rites and ceremonies whereas, in Christianity the word work signified ‘action of moral merit.’ He, pointing out Vedanta mentioned that the man might acquire true knowledge of God without even mechanically performing the rites and rituals. He also showed his countrymen that in the Bhashya or commentaries on the Isopanishad and on the other Upanishads of the Vedas the illustrious Sankaracharyya also declared that Brahmanical rites and ceremonies could not lead to the attainment of faith in God and the adoration of the Supreme Being. He pointed out that full absorption in those mechanical rites without understanding their true inner
significance could not lead to spiritual as well as social progress. He just wanted to shift the minds of his countrymen from mechanical observances to religious exercises.

After quoting passages from the commentators of law and Puranas, Raja Rammohan Roy made it a point to clear before his countrymen that rites and ceremonies must be in accordance with the usage of the country. Lokasreya or the good of humanity was the guiding principle of his all sorts of reformatory activities. His protests against modern encroachments on the ancient rights of females according to the Hindu law of inheritance, his careful analysis of the social implications of laws, his protest against the low estimates of women, his participation in the freedom of press, his attempts in awakening his countrymen from the dream of error, his tireless efforts for making his countrymen aware of the evil effects of social practices in the name of religion and his endeavour for the introduction of western education—all were directed towards the attainment of public good or Lokasreya.

6.3. Views on Property Rights of Women in Modern Encroachments

6.3.1. Property Rights of Mother by Ancient Law Giver

One of the causes for Sati practice as revealed by Raja Rammohan Roy was the deprivation of women from the property rights. So, prior to the enactment of Sati regulation act, Raja Rammohan Roy, in 1822, wrote his learned essay entitled ‘Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of females according to the Hindu Law of Inheritance’, where, he pointed out that on the basis of the opinion of ancient law givers, in the property left by the husband, the mother was entitled to a share equal to that of her son, so that they could spend remaining life happily and independently. To establish that Raja Rammohan Roy had mentioned passages of Yagnuvulkyu, Vishnoo, and Brihaspati. He showed that in those passages of ancient law givers, mother was entitled to an equal share of her husband’s property with her sons.

6.3.2. Property Rights of Mother by Modern Viewers

Raja Rammohan Roy had mentioned that the modern viewers, the modern expounders of Hindu Law, the author of the Dayubhaga had restricted the rights of widows to their
husband’s property and laid down that the economic solvency of the wives was fully dependent on their husband’s will.

The consequences of the above expositions made the male members of the family one and only property holder and the women became dependent on their sons and daughter in laws. The latter often insulted their mother by taking the sides of their wives and gave no right to their mother for disposing even of an article of least value. When family dispute took place, the sons used to treat very badly their step mothers who again are treated very badly by their sister- in laws having a son fortunately by their husband.

If the property rights of the widows, according to the modern expounder of Hindu law, were restricted, they became the actual financial burden of the family. The same thing happened to the case of the unmarried daughters also in their father’s family. One easy mean of curtailing that burden is to make provision for their marriage before their teenage with old, infirm and lunatic Kulin Brahmins, being the highest hierarchy of castes, though devoid of actual knowledge and understanding.

6.3.3 Property Rights of Daughters

Raja Rammohan Roy in the same tract quoting passages from Brihaspati, Vishnoot and Munoo showed that in the terms of ancient law givers, daughters were entitled to same share of the property as the sons. But according to the commentator on the Dayubhaga, daughters were denied of their father’s property. They were not entitled to any share of such property. No question of equal inheritance of father’s property with the sons had arisen in the modern commentary of Dayabhaga.

6.3.4. Raja Rammohan Roy’s Views in Modern Encroachments

In his tract “Modern Encroachments”, like a skilful lawyer, Raja Rammohan Roy interpreted the Hindu law. With his profound knowledge and familiarity with Sanskrit language and Hindu law books, he analysed the Hindu law in details and depth. In that tract not only he dealt with the sympathy for the widows, daughters and for the female sexes as a whole, but also cortically analysed the true essence of Hindu law by comparing
the views of the ancient and modern law giver. He did it for the administration of Hindu law in a rigorous and precise manner.

Raja Rammohan Roy, in the same tract again mentioned the case where the verdict of the authorities of Munoo had been violated. He mentioned that Munoo declared that “Let no father, who knows the law, receive a gratuity, however small, for giving his daughter in marriage; since the man, who, through avarice, takes a gratuity for that purpose, is a seller of his offspring.” (Nag and Burman, 1946, pp 7), but in reality, in opposition to that views of Munoo, fathers and brothers in the marriage of their daughter and sisters used to take large amount of money and in return used to sell their daughters and brothers to those lunatic, sick and incapable Kulin Brahmins who could provide them a sum sum amount of money. Being married to a person having natural defects, the wives became widow. After marriage, because of the bar to their share of rights to father’s property, the widows became claimless and that made their life full of distress and miseries. Out of grief and pain, they found one easy solution as termination of their life and as performing the religious horrible rite of suicide.

That essay was reprinted in 1856 by Mr. Rama Prasad Roy, a distinguished lawyer and the son of Raja Rammohan Roy, who rose to be a judge of the Calcutta High Court. The reprint of the essay contained the appreciation of the writings of Raja Rammohan Roy by his son. Rama Prasad Roy pointed out the fact that so far back in 1822, the sentiments on the subject of Kulin polygamy, which was held by Raja Rammohan Roy in that small tract, were similar to the sentiments of those who had joined in the legislative body to suppress the abomination of Kulin polygamy at Rama Prasad’s times. Rama Prasad Roy further asserted that the views of the legislature of his time were moving in the same direction of independency of prejudices as were held by Raja Rammohan Roy in his small tract so many years back.

6.4. Tract on Rights of Hindus over Ancestral Property Written by Raja Rammohan Roy

Raja Rammohan Roy was aware of the legal aspects of his countrymen too. on the issue of the ) Hindus power of alienation over ancestral property, Raja Rammohan Roy brought out a book on the ‘Rights of Hindus over Ancestral Property according
to the Law of Bengal’ in 1813. Where he showed that on the law of Hindu inheritance, there were two treatises one is Mitakshra whose command was accepted throughout the greater part of India and another one is Dayabhaga who was established as, paramount authority in Bengal. In Mitakshara’s command, there was restrictions over the Hindus to the subject matter of alienation of ancestral property if not consented by sons or grandsons while according to Dayabhaga, therewas complete freedom in case of alienation. Under the proponent of Dayabhaga, the concept of alienation was dependent on the desire of the natives. In British Bengal Court, Raja Rammohan Roy pointed out that the teaching of Mitakshra was followed. Raja Rammohan Roy however pointed out that Mitakshra permitted the alienation of ancestral property if not clashed with morality. That meant, alienation should not leave the family under distress or poverty. Then, Raja Rammohan Roy gave examples to distinguish between 'what is ethical and what is valid,' and to' justify the principal of "We ought to make that invalid which was considered immoral". He said that in the country, continuously many occurrences occurred, many incidents took place, which were immoral, but permitted under legality. Like he said that "to permit the sale of intoxicating drugs and spirits , so injurious to health, and even sometimes destructive of life, on the payment of duties publicly levied , is an act highly irreligious and immoral. Is the taxation to be, therefore, rendered invalid and the payment stopped?” (Collet, 1988, pp 264).

In his essay on the “Rights of a Hindoo over Ancestral Property according to the Law of Bengal”, Raja Rammohan Roy concluded that a man in Bengal could alienate even the ancestral property which he had inherited only under such a condition that such sale of property should not deprive his family and should not keep his family under poverty.

6.5. Tract on Religion by Raja Rammohan Roy

That was not an end; Raja Rammohan Roy was a man of multi-dimensional personality, so he never forgot the root of his reform. "To purify and elevate the fate of his countrymen.” (Collet, 1988, pp 264).

Raja Rammohan Roy published a tract in 1829, naming “The Universal Religion”: in that tract, he showed that men should worship a Supreme Being, who was the Author and
Governor of the Universe. He, in that tract wanted to acquaint his countrymen with the pure form of worship as mentioned in their Sacred Authorities. Pointing out the sacred writings of Hinduism, Raja Rammohan Roy held the view that man should devote his life to the worship of one true God who was indefinable. He wanted to make it clear to his countrymen that they should worship the invisible Author and Governor of that visible Universe as the Supreme Being. He also mentioned that they must reconcile that view of worship with the sacred writings of the Shastras in the light of reason.

Raja Rammohan Roy was in favour of reason, which he had applied for uprooting all sorts of social evils. He wanted that his countrymen should judge the validity of all sorts of social customs and rituals with reason and rationality. Truth was the main essence of his religious reformation. Raja Rammohan Roy in that tract also mentioned that for that worship, “a suitable place is certainly preferable, but not necessary”; “in whatever place, towards whatever quarter or at whatever time the mind is best at rest, that place, that quarter, and that time is the most proper.” (Collet, 1988, pp 265). Raja Rammohan Roy possessed lofty and pure ideals of religion. He utilised his religious ideals for progressing the texture of the society. He actually introduced the pure theism of universal religion in the old orthodoxy of Hinduism.

6.6. Atmiya Sabha and Raja Rammohan Roy

At that time, social reformation demanded spiritual upliftment of the natives. Degraded society where the position of women was so miserable required the purification of the minds of the Hindus. For that reason, Raja Rammohan Roy formed Atmiya Sabha for spiritual improvement.

Among a series of social efforts and social contributions for uplifting the intellectual condition of the people by Raja Rammohan Roy, the establishment of a friendly association of likeminded people, Atmiya Sabha deserved to be mentioned first. In 1815, he founded that Atmiya Sabha, which was a Hindu institution of learned men believing in one only God. For the first two years his Atmiya Sabha held its meeting in the garden house of Raja Rammohan Roy at Manicktala.

The members of the Atmiya Sabha met once in a week to deal with the recitation of texts from the Hindu scriptures and the Chanting of Theistic hymns composed by Raja
Rammohan Roy and his friends. The first reciter, a paid singer and the first chanter were Sivaprasad Misra and Govinda Mala respectively. Dwarkanath Tagore, Brahamohan Majumdar, Nandakisore Bose and Rajnarayan Sen used to attend the meetings of Atmiya Sabha. A remarkable man, believer in the unity of God and a friend of Raja Rammohan Roy, at that time was Hariharananda Tirthaswami. His brother was Ramachandra Vidyabagish, who was the first minister of Brahmo Samaj. Raja Rammohan Roy was influenced by the eastern side of Hariharananda as well as by the western side of David Hare. The society, after two years, firsts was removed to Raja Rammohan Roy’s Simla house, now situated on the Amherst Street, and subsequently to other places and finally to the house of Behari lal Chaubay at Barabazar, where a celebrated debate took place between Raja Rammohan Roy and a Madras Brahman, Subrahmanya Sastri in 1819, on the subject of idol worship. In the debate, the leading citizens of Calcutta were present. Out of whom, the name of the leader of the orthodox Hindus, Radhakanta Deb deserved mention. Raja Rammohan Roy was said to have defeated his adversary because of his reasoning power.

In his History of Brahmo Samaj, pandit, Sivanath Sastri states: - “At times the Atmiya Sabha got up interesting discussion meetings which would attract all classes of people. Collet, 1988, pp 81).

6.6.1. Contributions of Atmiya Sabha

The meetings of Atmiya Sabha seem to have been discontinued after 1819. Atmiya Sabha dealt with all kinds of social absurdities which were enjoyed in the then society in terms of polytheism and idolatry, apart from religious principles. Various discussions on various social and religious contemporary issues at the sabha’s meetings were at par with the social philosophy of social reformer Raja Rammohan Roy. He wanted to purify the debased form of Hindu religion and wanted to manifest its true nature before the world. He was an adherent advocate of monotheism and national religions of the Hindus and wanted to establish the Hindu scripture and doctrines in their original pristine and genuine meaning. Atmiya Sabha was established for reforming society by discarding all social, religious and educational undesirable and unreasonable beliefs and practices.
6.7 Raja Rammohan Roy and Unitarianism

A little later a group was formed by Rev. William Adam and Raja Rammohan Roy stressing Unitarianism rejecting Trinitarianism. Unitarianism mainly stressed on the unity of Godhead. Unitarian committee or association was formed to reject any tendency to destroy ignorance and superstitions and bigotry and fanaticism. They were intended to propagate in British India, the knowledge, belief and practice of Unitarian Christianity. By enlightening the minds of the countrymen with such knowledge and wisdom of one true God, they meant to benefit the natives, to raise the standard of intellect and to purify their theories of morals. They included universal charity and practical benevolence within their curriculum. The committee aimed at improving the physical condition of the numerous native populations. Diffusion of the knowledge of useful arts and of industrious was their another aim. Thereby the committee would enrich their social and domestic comforts.

6.7.1. Calcutta Unitarian Association

In 1821, with the wholehearted association of Rev. William Adam, the Calcutta Unitarian Association was formed. They had their office adjacent to that of Bengal Hurkaru. the main building rock of such association was Christian thought. However from the proceedings of the body it was revealed that Raja Rammohan Roy, being an universalist by heart and mind was actively associated with that association. He, actually was the life and soul of that association, which was a distinctive mark of his life and a remarkable addition to his many-sided reformatory activities. Though William Adam had principal association with that committee, but practically was very much dependent on Raja Rammohan Roy financially. Raja Rammohan Roy had rendered his support, assistance and help towards the successful workings of the committee.

6.7.2. British Indian Unitarian Association

On 30th November, 1827, Calcutta Unitarian Association was changed to British Indian Unitarian Association to emphasise on the unity of Godhead as a complete
organization. It was an organization of likeminded Indians and Europeans. Its founder was Raja Rammohan Roy. Monotheism for Christians as well as for the Hindus was sought for. He rejected both polytheism and trinitarianism and wanted to infuse the ethical principles of the Christ into the Indian men.

6.7.3. Raja Rammohan Roy’s Views on Christianity and Unitarianism

Raja Rammohan Roy fully supported the ethical teachings of Christ. On October 27, 1822, in a letter to “a gentleman of Baltimore”, Raja Rammohan Roy expressed his hope of revealing the truths of Christianity from heathen doctrines and practices. He believed that such doctrines and miraculous practices were created by the followers of Christ later on. He considered the ethical doctrines of the Christ as free from human inventions were entirely consistent with reason. So, Raja Rammohan Roy was anxious to support those teachings at the risk of his own life. However he was opposed to all dogmas and doctrines created by the missionaries later on for their personal benefits. He viewed Christianity as a doctrine “representing all mankind as the children of one eternal Father, it enjoins them to love one another, without making any distinction of country, caste, colour or creed...........” (Collet, 1988, pp 139).

Every Sunday morning, Raja Rammohan Roy used to attend Unitarian service which was held in a hall in the buildings then occupied by the Bengal Hurkaru Office. That activity of Raja Rammohan Roy, no doubt, gave rise to public criticism. And that was used by his enemies as a weapon against him. To that as a reply Raja Rammohan Roy published in 1827, in the name of one of his disciples, Chandra Sekhar Deb, the tract, called “The answer of a Hindu to the question: Why do you frequent a Unitarian place of worship instead of the numerously attended Established churches?” and in that tract, among other reasons, he advocated the reason as “Because, Unitarians believe, profess and inculcate the doctrine of the divine unity, a doctrine which I find firmly maintained both by the Christian Scriptures, and by our most ancient writings commonly called the Vedas.” (Nag and Burman, 1946, pp 194.)

As regards the causes of Raja Rammohan Roy’s association with Unitarian Christianity, it can be said that
1. Raja Rammohan Roy mastered the comparative religion and came to the conclusion of unity of Godhead of the *Vedanta* and the stand of monotheism of the *Muslim* scripture. The same doctrine of monotheism he discovered in Unitarian Christianity also.

2. Raja Rammohan Roy had a profound faith in the ethical teachings of Christ and wanted teaching in the non-sectarian manner. At the same time he preferred European Science and technology, which he wanted to be taught by the Unitarian teachers from the West. By that, the Indian masses would be familiar with the ethics of Christ and could teach the Indian students European Science and Literature. However, Raja Rammohan Roy had emphasised over the term ‘non-sectarian’ so that Christians should not impose their doctrines and dogmas over the *Hindus*.

### 6.7.4. Precepts of Jesus by Raja Rammohan Roy

Raja Rammohan Roy was a great religious reformer. As religion was the basis of social upliftment, looking at the then religious condition, which was impure and hostile, Raja Rammohan Roy wanted a simple doctrine of Christ which could bring social comfort and happiness. For this reason, he compiled and published ‘Precepts of Jesus’

As per the opinion of Raja Rammohan Roy, the moral precepts would more likely to produce the desirable effects of improving the hearts and minds of men of different understanding. He had separated those moral precepts from its historical dogmas, as he believed that such miraculous dogmas were liable to the doubts and disputes of free thinkers and anti-Christians and were therefore carrying little weight with them.” The miraculous dogmas of Christianity had always been regarded by Raja Rammohan Roy similar to *Hindu* mythology.

However, as Raja Rammohan Roy left out miracles and emphasised over the moral doctrines only, in his ‘Precepts of Jesus’, he was attacked by the chief missionaries of the day in their periodical, *The Friend Of India*, where Raja Rammohan Roy faced a lot of controversies and those lasted for years.
6.7.5. Relationship of Raja Rammohan Roy with Baptist Missionaries

Before the publication of ‘Precepts of Jesus’, the relationship of Raja Rammohan Roy with the Baptist missionaries was very good. Their “Periodical Account” of Dr. Carey and Marshman, Baptist missionaery of Serampore for the year 1816, recognised Raj Rammohan Roy as a man of respectability and profound Sanskrit scholar. The periodical also mentioned the well verse knowledge of Raja Rammohan Roy in Persian and his accuracy in the language English. In the said periodical, his one or two philosophical works had also been mentioned. Serampose missionaries had also pointed out that Raja Rammohan Roy had made Bengali publication also. Lastly the chief missionaries mentioned that all those works of Raja Rammohan Roy deserved credit as they were meant to lead his countrymen to renounce idolatry.

The good relation of Raja Rammohan Roy with the Baptist missionary became faded away because of his publication of the ‘Precepts of Jesus’. however, whatever may be the effect, Raja Rammohan Roy tirelessly attempted to inculcate the doctrine of Unitarianism in both Hinduism and in Christianity. The Calcutta Unitarian Committee began to fade away as soon as Raja Rammohan Roy and his associates founded the 
Brahmo Samaj. (1828).

6.8 Brahmo Samaj and Raja Rammohan Roy

In British Indian Unitarian Association, under the instruction of Raja Rammohan Roy, William Adam conducted morning divine service in English. That, being not popular, William Adam started evening divine service. But here also he failed to attract many. That repeated failure to attract people for Unitarianism on the part of Adam, made it necessary to search for a solution and the solution was reflected through the formation of Brahmo Samaj.

The idea of forming a place of worship, in accordance with the tradition of Hinduism was given to Raja Rammohan Roy by his disciples,Tarachanad Chakraborty and Chandrasekhar Dev. After that Raja Rammohan Roy thought to organise the idea in a comprehensive manner. In that thought, Raja Rammohan Roy’s friends Dwarkanath
Tagore, Kalinath Munsi, Mathuranath Mullick and others assisted him and decided to materialise his thoughts in a meeting. That was the starting point of the foundation of *Brahmo Samaj*. After consulting with his comrades’ Dwarkanath Tagore and Roy Kalinath Munshi and on their approval, Raja Rammohan Roy called a meeting in his house when those and other friends mainly Prasanna kumar Thakur and Mathuranath Mullick agreed to carry it out.

First an acquiring of a place in Simla, in central part Calcutta was thought of but it was not suitable. Then the work was started in a hired house, house at Jorasanko, in the Chitpur Road, which was then the property of Ramkamal Basu of Chandernagore. It was that house which was given to Alexander Duff for starting his college and educational mission after the removal of the *Brahmo Samaj* to its new site.

The work of the new *Samaj* was started on 20th August, 1828. On the occasion, *Pandit Ramchandra Sarma* (Vidyabagish) was the chief priest. He preached a sermon on the spiritual worship of God after reciting the sacred texts from various *Hindu* books. It was believed that the sermon was written by Raja Rammohan Roy himself. The main essence of the discourse was “God is one only without an equal, in who abide all worlds and their inhabitants. Thus he who mentally perceives the Supreme spirit in all creatures, acquires perfect equanimity, and shall be absorbed into the highest essence, even into the Almighty.” (Collet, 1988, pp 222). That sermon was translated by Tarachand Ckakravarty in English and it was distributed among the people. Raja Rammohan Roy described that sermon as simple, comprehensive and capable of distinguishing the religious belief and worship. *Brahmo Samaj*, literally a Society of God, was founded by Raja Rammohan Roy for spreading true and just notion of God through the mode of common worship irrespective of caste, colour etc. such a notion of universal religion, Raja Rammohan Roy possessed.

### 6.8.1. Trust Deed of *Brahmo Samaj*

The Trust Deed of the *Brahmo Samaj* was acquired in 1830. The Trust Deed did not mention for any new religion or creed. It was a formal document delivering the purpose of the work. In the Trust Deed also it was held that the building would be a place of
public meeting for all kinds of people irrespective of their class, caste and other qualities. That again meant *Brahmo Samaj* would be a meeting ground for all sorts of people without distinction.

In the terms of the Trust Deed, it was mentioned that the *Samaj* would be a ground for holding meeting with the publics coming from all sorts of descriptions without distinction. The main intention of the said *Brahmo Samaj* was held as acquainting public with the true spirit of worship, which was worshipping Eternal, Unsearchable, and immutable Being. Following the idea of universalism, Raja Rammohan Roy’s *Brahmo Samaj* always emphasised over the worship of one true God, being the Author and Preserver of the Universe. To the *Brahmoes*, such Supreme Being was without any name, designation, or title.

*Brahmo Samaj*, as per the Trust Deed should not recognise any animate or inanimate object as the object of worship. All the sermon, preaching, discourse, prayer or hymn in the said *Samaj*, were recommended to be directed to the worship of one God promoting a sense of unity. That union of different religious sect, as per the founder of the *Brahmo Samaj*, would Promote the charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue, and strengthened the bond of unity between men and men. No matter from where the men were coming, no matter what was their *sampryadaya*, the *Brahmo Samaj* would always unite people from different religious persuasions and creeds.

The Trust Deed further mentioned that any person, following the lines of the terms and conditions of the Trust Deed would be considered as a man of good repute and knowledgeable. Such a man would lead his countrymen towards piety and morality. The trustees must employ such knowledgeable man as a resident superintendent. Who would also superintend the purpose of worship performed.

**6.8.2. Opening Ceremony of Brahmo Samaj**

On the 20th August, 1828, the *Brahmo* society was itself founded. The building was opened on the 23rd of January 1830. The date 23rd of January came to be observed as
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the proper anniversary. The Brahmos have generally reckoned from 1830, the era of the Samaj. (Collet, 1988, pp 268).

The opening ceremony of the Samaj was revealed from the records of an eye witness, Mr. Montgomery Martin. That was held on 23rd January, 1830. In his History of the British Colonies, Mr. Martin declared that the opening ceremony was led by none other than the founder of the Samaj, Raja Rammohan Roy in 1830. Among the persons present, five hundred Hindus were approximately there. Among the Hindus, many were from the caste Brahmins. The Brahmins were mainly present to conduct the prayers and singings of hymns. That opening ceremony had been described as a sort of Griha-prabhes or house-warming ceremony, where Bidaya or parting gifts were given to the Brahmins guests.

6.8.3. Brahmo Samaj V.S. Dharma Sabha

Dharma Sabha was an opponent association of Brahmo Samaj, founded by the orthodox circles of the Hindu society. The mouthpieces of the two circles (liberal and orthodox Hindus) as Sambad Kaumudi and Samachar Chandrika created a great deal of conflicts among the common people. As pointed out by Sivanath Sastri in his History of the Brahmo Samaj that the common people because of the publications of those newspapers, entered into great conflict on the divergent issues used to happen at the then society. Since the tracts of Raja Rammohan Roy were written in simple Bengali, common people used to ascertain their meanings easily and participated in a great stir of conflicts in the bathing ghats of the river side, in market places and public squares and also in drawing rooms of influential citizens. Rivalry between Brahmo Samaj and Dharma Sabha and the editorial remarks of their two organs became the subject of talk. Not only that but also their conflict, controversies and agitation moved from Calcutta to the interior.

6.8.4. Contributions of Brahmo Samaj

In accordance with the divine (Vedas) Hindu scriptures and Christian doctrines Raja Rammohan Roy established his Brahmo Samaj for the worship of one God. As Raja
Rammohan Roy was fully aware of the causes of social degeneration, he emphasised over the non-sectarian aspects of universal outlook and to build that, he took the help of the self-knowledge of *Upanishads*, the social message of Buddhism, the emphatic monotheism of Islam, and the ethical teachings of Jesus Christ. The unknown, forgotten or neglected part of the *Vedas* had become known before the public with the help of the *Brahmo Samaj*.

An account of the establishment and proceedings of the *Brahmo Samaj* as quoted by Asiatic Journal, January 1832 is as follows:

“.........the chief objects of this institution are to deliver the *Hindus* from the thraldom of superstition and idolatry, to lead them to the worship of one God, and to improve their moral character by instructions calculated to raise their ideas from grovelling objects., which only appeal to the senses, to those which are of a mental nature, and which raise the soul to a Being who is a Spirit, and who wishes that all who worship him should worship him in spirit and in truth.” (Majumdar, 1983, pp 90).

Pointing out the non-sectarian approach of Raja Rammohan Roy, the renowned journalist and *Brahmo* leader of the period, Ramananda Chatterji remarked: “at the time when he established the *Brahmo Samaj* he meant it to be simply a meeting ground for people of all sects who wished to unite for divine worship.” (Tagore, 1974, pp 47).

Mr. Satish Chandra Chakravarty, in a speech on “Rammohan the man”, said:-
“Rammohan’s idea was that his *samaj* was to be not a temple of a new sect, but the unifier of all India, through the common worship of one God by the members of all denominations. .......”- . (Tagore, 1974, pp 48).

In the writings of American writer, Moncure Daniel Conway, the influence which Raja Rammohan Roy had exercised in the formation of the British and foreign Unitarian Association were also mentioned. In 1894, in an article published in the Chicago Open Court, Conway wrote that “It was Rammohan Roy who really caused the organisation of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association”. (Tagore, 1974, pp 43).
The Brahmo Sabha was based on the idea of Unitarianism and for the worship of Divine unity. It was a “congregation of non Sectarian monotheistic worship.” (Tagore, 1974, pp 48).

In 1865, in Indian Mirror, Keshub Chandra Sen, who was highly responsible for spreading the idea of Brahmo Samaj outside Bengal, wrote that Raja Rammohan Roy “belonged to no existing sect; nor did he seek to found a new sect or originate a new creed, however refined and unexceptionable. His great ambition was to bring together men of all existing religious persuasions irrespective of the distinctions of caste, colour or creed into a system of Universal worship of One True God.....” (Tagore, 1974, pp 48).

In one of his letters, Mr. Adam once declared regarding Raja Rammohan Roy’s Brahmo Samaj as :- “Rammohan Roy, I am persuaded, supports this institution not because he believes in the divine authority of the Veda, but solely as an instrument for overthrowing idolatry.............he employs Unitarian Christianity in the same way, as an instrument for spreading pure and just notions of God, without believing in the divine authority of the Gospel.” (Collet, 1988, pp 224).

Raja Rammohan Roy actually wanted to unite people of different classes and communities through a monotheistic flavour. In the Trust Deed of Brahmo Samaj, also he mentioned the same notion of united worship. That notion of unity in worship was really praiseworthy and significant. He wanted to formulate a religion of harmony, synthesis and universality. Those thinking, one could understand were important to what extent for social reformation. Brahmos believed in a truth which was the evaluation of their scripture. To the Brahmo, truth was the ultimate reality. They did not bother for the source of truth. It might come from the East, or could be derived from the West. But the truth must be the eternal scripture and was considered as sacred to the Brahmos. In Brahmo Samaj, the concepts of God, scripture and truth all were based on the idea of universality that meant knowledge in on true God.

The very basis of the social ideals of the Brahmo Samaj was humanity, irrespective of the class, colour and creed and the divine principle of brotherhood of humanity. Indian
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caste system, social inequalities and social disabilities were always a matter of opposition in Brahmo Samaj. Brahmo Samaj had always recognised equality to the womankind, equal rights of men and women. Women under that Samaj was free from all kinds of degradation, disabilities and were subject to social liberty and religious culture. Brahmo Samaj emphasised on women emancipation, justice, righteousness and love. The religious basis of Brahmo Samaj was spiritual worship of the spirit, God. Man was not recognised there as high or low but as the children of God. Women got fullest opportunity to their intellectual, moral and spiritual life. Brahmo Samaj was a religious community, but no where it was intended to form a separate sect.

6.9. Raja Rammohan Roy and the Caste System

Raja Rammohan Roy was equally vocal in the abolition of the caste system. He considered the division of caste and sub castes in the society was responsible for two factors:- on one hand such distinction with caste was causing the degradation and degeneration of the society and on the other hand, such division was the causes of disunity and sectarian bias. So, according to Raja Rammohan Roy, caste system was nothing but a curse to the human society.

Raja Rammohan Roy was well aware of the root causes of the degeneration of the society. He knew very well that the present the then system of Hindu religion was not well estimated for securing their political interests and social freedom. He believed that such caste system with so many divisions and sub divisions were the symbol of Hindu’s sectarian feelings. Caste system was totally in opposite direction to nationalism and patriotic feelings. Raja Rammohan Roy was opposed to multitude of religious rites and ceremonies and the laws of purification, which he knew very well were designed to pull them back and would disqualify them from undertaking any difficult enterprise. Therefore, he suggested for some changes in the then religious system of the Hindus to secure political, social and educational advantage.

Raja Rammohan Roy in 1827, published with a Bengali translation, the first chapter of a Sanskrit work against caste, named “Vajra Suchi” or “The Needle of Adamant.” by Mrityunjayacharyya.
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For the eradication of caste system and for a significant progress of the society, Raja Rammohan Roy was very much in favour of *Saiva* marriage, which he held in the same rank as that of *Vaidik* marriages. He preferred that marriage as that marriage gave no importance to the discrimination of age and caste or race. Moreover, that marriage was applicable to the widows also. Raja Rammohan Roy was a passionate advocate of freedom, so, he held that marriage in high esteem.

Raja Rammohan Roy was truly a reformer. He had a patriotic heart, sound mind and good reasoning power. He was a lawyer. He scrutinised the ancient laws of the *Hindu Shastras* analytically. He criticised the present social, educational and religious conditions of his countrymen and made tireless efforts for providing a better, freer, and more liberal orderings of things.

Raja Rammohan Roy always expressed his doubt regarding the justification and validity of the caste system as that system was at the root of all disunion. He advocated that the country’s slow progress, subjection to foreign conquerors, separation of man from man and obstacle to national unity- all were responsible for that caste system. That vague system also helped to keep separate race from race and province from province. He believed that the caste system was “one of the gravest of many ills under which his country laboured.”- (Collet, 1988, pp213). In one of his private letters of that time, Raja Rammohan Roy mentioned that “multitude of religious rites and ceremonies, without any social significance, have totally disqualified his countrymen from undertaking any difficult enterprise. (Collet, 1988, pp 214).

6.10. Raja Rammohan Roy and Polygamy

Raja Rammohan Roy equally fought against polygamy. He was very much conscious about the property rights of the women because he knew that without his right, the women could never be made independent. Widows were the burden of the then society, so an easy solution to remove that burden was *Sati* system. Raja Rammohan Roy using the platform of *Atmiya Sabha* and the printing press was always held that if anyone wished to marry second time, having his first wife alive, he could do so under eight circumstances as prescribed by the *Hindu Shastras*, only under eight circumstances on
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the part of his first wife. Which were: “1. The vice of drinking spirituous liquors. 2. Incurable sickness. 3. Deception. 4. Barrenness. 5. Extravagance. 6. The frequent use of offensive language. 7. Producing only female offspring and 8. Manifestation of hatred towards her husband.” (Nag and Burman, 1946, pp 5).

6.11. Conclusion

Thus, it can be said that in a truest sense, Raja Rammohan Roy was a man of multidimensional personality. It is a matter of wonder that how Raja Rammohan Roy found time to write masterly treatises on so many subjects. He believed that pure religious beliefs could eradicate many social evils and could free the minds of the people from the superstitious rituals and rites. He was a serious student of comparative religions. His interest was to free his native countrymen from the fetters of Hindu orthodoxy. “He was the hero of the truest type, a great big-minded, and big-souled religious reformer.” (Krishnayaya, 1969, pp 68)

However, it would be a great mistake if anyone just calls him as a religious reformer. There was hardly any field, where Raja Rammohan Roy did not traverse. He was one of those men, who dedicated his life to the welfare and progress of the individual in particular and to the society in general. By his multifarious activities and reforms, he promoted human happiness and increased it for the cause of improvement and civilization.
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“All true education, ought to be religious, since the object was not merely to give information but to develop and regulate all the powers of the mind, the emotions of the heart, and the workings of the Conscience.”

Raja Rammohan Roy