

THE UNIVERSALISM OF RAM MOHAN ROY

From the beginning of the 19th century a group of great reformers were fired with the idea of raising India from the crisis, which for centuries, had subjected her to an ever growing religious, moral, intellectual and civil depression, and which, together with the political disorder that culminated in the disintegration of the Moghul Empire, had held her back from big historical renovations.

This state of inertia seemed even more intolerable to the educated Indian classes when, at the end of the 18th century an illuministic fervour came to life in the West, which was to be the basis for a rapid scientific and civil progress and through which dawned the awakening of peoples.

It is known that at the time two groups faced each other in India to accomplish the mission to reform her. One favoured a purely endogenous restoration consisting in the re-organising of already existing forces: a mere return to ancient sources in which any innovation whatsoever was alien and, still worse, which was diffident towards any eventual influence which the tumultuous evolution of western civilization could cause even if the presence and the ever growing penetrating role of the English in the subcontinent made this impossible to be ignored. The other group had recruited the most courageous spirits and fertile minds, who, while not seeking direct exogenous influence, of which was known the difficulties of integration in the very dissimilar Indian world, grasped the historic situation with new ideas and ideals, and set on radically moving away from the stagnant immobilism¹; they

1. « The comatose India of the late eighteenth century », S. D. COLLET, *The life and letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, edited by D. K. Biswas and P. C. Ganguli, Calcutta, 1962, p. 384; also U. N. BALL, *Rammohun Roy. A study of the life, works and thoughts*, Calcutta, 1933, pp. 190-91. Knowledge of this crisis reached Italy also, and some Roy's contemporary or nearly contemporary writers did not spare criticism on this regard. GIANDOMENICO ROMAGNOLI (1761-1835) in his footnotes in *Ri-*

aimed at adventuring into creating still inexistant forces, risking at times strong action by the two wings, the English and the Indian².

This second party was formed of a small minority: the initiator and animator was Ram Mohan Roy³. It was thanks to his pugnacious and ardent nature ever ready to accept challenge and controversy to the point of being heedless of unfavourable criticism and even of real persecution⁴; to his talent and untiring activity; to his culture⁵, which embraced theology and law, and was enriched by his knowledge of oriental, classic and European languages, so that he gave vent to his philological ambitions; thanks to his careful observation of a world that was as much Indian as Western and which involved him personally in his fatherland and spiritually elsewhere in the evolution of historical moment; thanks to his lucid reasoning coming from a logic worthy of the most rigorous and modern methods of research and scientific criticism⁶ (even if on theological issues certain premises led him to personal

cerche storiche su l'India antica, vol. II, par. II, Milan 1844, pp. 1085, 1228, 1230, 1268, 1363-64, deploras the chaos in all the religions of India not devoid of monstrous, irreverent, indecent and senseless manifestations and customs, and the ignorant backwardness in which even the priestly classes, officially delegated to the spreading of culture, live; the Indian people appear to him as « illiterate, without press and without scientific knowledge » (*ibid.*, p. 1343), that is completely cut off from the progress that was then taking place all over Europe. CARLO CATTANEO (1801-69) in his essay *Dell'India antica e moderna* (in « Opere scelte » di C. C., edited by Delia Castelnovo Frigessi, Torino, 1972, vol. II, pp. 494-544), is not less critical than Romagnosi: ascertaining the state of inglorious decline into which India had slipped after a period of precocious splendour, he defines opposed to the Vico's theory the « inflexible perpetuity » (*ibid.*, p. 494) of the decadent Indian situation which is in itself a denial of faith in the constant progress of the humanity of the 19th Century. The echo of the reforming work of Roy reached neither one or the other of these, although it had reached beyond the boundaries of India, and had been heard of not only in England, as was natural, but also in France from 1818; both these authors would certainly have accepted it with interest, finding (especially Cattaneo) many points of common aspirations for the modernizing of the civil, social, political institutions of peoples and their cultural renovation (see N. BOBBIO, *Una filosofia militante - Studi su Carlo Cattaneo*, Torino, 1971, pp. 99-102 et al.).

2. So far as concerne Roy's cft., *Speech by Ram Mohun Roy at the meeting of the Unitarian Association held in London in his honour*, june 1831, in « The English Works of Ram Mohan Roy », edited by J. C. Ghose (EWGh), vol. II, Calcutta, 1887, p. 62).

3. Cft. A. R. DESAI, *Social background of indian nationalism*, Bombay, 1946, p. 196, even if B. Majumdar attributes immediate forerunners to him (*Religious condition of India at the Beginning of the nineteenth century*, Journal of the Asiatic Society, VIII, 4, 1966, p. 245); BALL, *op. cit.*, p. 39; N. S. BOSE, *The indian awakening and Bengal*, Calcutta, 1969, p. 46.

4. I. SINGH, *Rammohun Roy. A biographical inquiry into making of modern India*, New York, 1958, p. 172.

5. « The most learned Indian of his generation », Preface to Part V of « The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy », edited by K. Nag and D. Burman (EWNb), Calcutta, 1948, p. III; « the most learned of the Hindoos », *A Vindication of the incarnation of the Deity as the common basis of Hindooism and Christianity against the scismatic attacks of R. Tytler by Ram Doss*, Calcutta, 1823 (EWNb, IV, Calcutta, 1947, p. 70).

6. Cft. SINGH, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

conclusions not universally acceptable)⁷, that he was among those who succeeded in orienting the rebirth of India beyond the confines of her traditions⁸, towards new ideas, that is to say, while respecting those values which in past centuries and over a long period of time, had given India the privilege of being an admired civilization, towards an understanding of universal values.

Because of his initiative and foresight he was given the most flattering and merited names; he was, in fact, called « Patriarch of modern India », « Father of modern Indian renaissance »⁹, pioneer « of Indian Nationalism »¹⁰, « Pole star » of Indian awakening¹¹, a « versatile advancer », « an ancestor of the welfare state »¹², the « founder of the science of comparative religion » for India¹³, and even « by much juster title than the missionaries the apostle of Christianity »¹⁴, pioneer of « a real encounter between the Christian and the Hindu faith »¹⁵, a « giant »¹⁶, « present in history as the living bridge over which India marches from her unmeasured past to her incalculable future », as « the arch which spanned the gulf that yawned between ancient caste and modern humanity, between superstition and science, between despotism and democracy, between immobile custom and a conservative progress, between a bewildering polytheism and pure, if vague, theism »¹⁷, « India's first dreamer of politica independence in the modern age »¹⁸, « Father of constitutional agitation in India »^{18bis}, « Erasmus of India »¹⁹,

7. Pp. 7-9. His critical approach to Christian Scriptures was from the Christian point of view his chief weakness. He was sympathetic with Unitarianism.

8. « By cutting the dead wood of tradition », M. K. GANDHI, *Anguish of « A hindu Youth »*, in « Collected Works » (CW), vol. 41, 1929, p. 143.

9. J. K. MAJUMDAR, *Raja Rammohun Roy and Progressive movements in India. A selection from Record (1775-1845)*, edited by J. K. M., Calcutta, 1941, p. XVIII.

10. DESAI, *op. cit.*, pp. 287, 433; J. K. MAJUMDAR, *op. cit.*, p. V.

11. BOSE, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

12. SINGH, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

13. SINGH, *op. cit.*, p. 268; Preface to part V of EWNB, p. III.

14. J. C. L. SISMONDI, *Revue Encyclopédique*, 1821, quoted by SINGH, *op. cit.*, p. 269; S. C. SARKAR, *Rammohun as Herald of the New Age*, in CV, 1933, p. 355; « I am... anxious to support them (i.e. the Christian doctrines according his interpretation!) even at risk of my own life », cft. Extract from a letter addressed by R. M. R. to a gentleman of Baltimore, dated Calcutta, october 27, 1822 (EWGh, II, p. 62). Cft. also *Second Appeal to Christian Public in defence of « The Precepts of Jesus »*, EWGh, II, p. 235.

15. A. CAMPS, *Indian Theologians on Revelation in Hinduism*, in « Offenbarung, geistige Realität des Menschen », herausgegeben von G. Oberhammer, Wien, 1974, p. 222: « He started a line of theological enquiry and statement which has continued to develop until the present day ».

16. J. K. MAJUMDAR, *op. cit.*, p. XVIII; R. S. SAHNI, *Rammohun's Passion for Liberty*, in CV, 1933, p. 309; GANDHI, CW, vol. 28, p. 429.

17. COLLET, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

18. COLLET, *op. cit.*, p. 388.

18bis. BALL, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

19. J. K. MAJUMDAR, *op. cit.*, p. LIV; BALL, *op. cit.*, pp. 38, 174.

« dialecticien irresistible »^{19bis}, « one of Indian's great seers who age after age appeared in the arena of our history with the message of Eternal Man »²⁰, « a precursor, an archetype, a profet of coming humanity »^{20bis}.

In the light of these acknowledgements are to be seen the many sided plans of the work, and is reflected the many sided personality of this man, committed to the religious, social and civil education of his countrymen, to their political redemption, sensitive to the rich variety offered by all the positive ferment of his times, with the curiosity and unitary conscience of all authentic reformers.

J. K. Majumdar²¹ analytically distinguished these plans: religious, moral, social, educational, and literary, political, juridical, economical administrative. These aspects are closely connected and are epitomized in his humanity, living and outliving with results or just simply with indications useful to the planning of modern India which was, at his time, still far off.

From childhood he rejected the anachronistic fatalism still dominant in India when all the western world is illuminated with new rays of culture, of progress, of freedom, and being fully aware of the conditions under which India had struggled for years, still very young he begins his crusade from the religious motive, like other reformers before him.

His family life had given him the opportunity of negatively reflecting on the rites practised by tantric Hinduism²². When his father sent him as a boy to Patna, the impact with Islamic worship and theology (the first more austere, the second simpler than Hindu worship and theology), sowed in his mind the seeds of anticonformism and contestation towards the hinduism of his times, even if not yet clearly defined because of his youth.

His orientation becomes clearer through the suffering caused by interior and family doubts and conflicts, through study and research into the origins of the religions of India, of Islamism and Christianity and it finds expression in the certainty that a unifying principle is at the basis of all religions; this forms the « common denominator »²³ of man's spiritual patrimony and pruned as it may be of the superstructure of superstitions, institutions, dogmas and rites which differed from

19bis. V. JACQUEMONT, *Voyage dans l'Inde*, Tome I, Paris, 1841, p. 183 (from COLLET, *op. cit.*, p. 392).

20. The Address delivered by Rabindranath Tagore at the Preliminary Meeting of the Rammohun Roy Centenary, Calcutta, 1933 (in CV, 1933, part II, p. 3).

20bis. SINGH, *op. cit.*, p. 1; B.N. SEAL, *Rammohun Roy: The universal man*, in « The Father of Modern India. Rammohun Roy Centenary Volume » (CV), 1933, edited by S.C. Chakravarty, Calcutta, 1935, part II, p. 96.

21. J. K. MAJUMDAR, *op. cit.*, pp. XVII-CVI.

22. SINGH, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

23. SINGH, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

one religion to the other and are creators of exclusivism²⁴ it could become the basis of a Universal religion acceptable to all peoples beyond the dividing barriers of various beliefs and of manifold races.

Already in past centuries — from the 15th century on — Kabīr, Nānak and others²⁵ had in the same way been convinced of the equality and brotherhood of all men, which were expressed in their mystical hymns without, however, entering into all the possible implications, while Akbar had tried to create a source of opportunistic political and social conciliation from the universalism of religion.

Roy goes further: while feeling that it would be difficult, to put such a high ideal into practice, he dreams, beyond every ephemeral and dangerous barrier, of a universal peace founded on the complete religious and political freedom of each people, of each individual and upon reciprocal conscious respect in the name of a common belief in the supreme Principle creator of the universe. « Freedom » as he understood it doesn't seem to consist so much in the freedom of choice that frees from any bond whatsoever, as in the voluntary bond of all men among themselves^{25bis}. By virtue of his love for the divinity of the Universe he feels tied to the world, to all men: this conscience of his becomes love for man, acceptance of every man²⁶, openmindedness in grasping inspiration from every human event and experience to be tried by himself with the aim of leading to an ever better live.

From this stems his interest in Western civilization, his love for and trust in those who were bringing it to India²⁷, his spiritual partici-

24. *The Universal Religion - Religious instructions founded on the sacred authorities*, Calcutta, 1751 S' (EWNB, II, Calcutta, 1946, p. 130); *Letter to dr. T. Ress* of London, dated 1824: « ... Catholic Faith which except a man believes faithfully, he cannot be saved » (EWGh, II, p. 629).

25. Quoted by Roy for their rejection of idolatry in *A defence of hindoo theism in reply to the attack of an advocate for idolatry at Madras*, Calcutta, 1818 (EWNB, II, p. 89); *Humble suggestions to his countrymen who believe in the one God*, Calcutta, 1823 (EWNB, II, p. 200); *Answer of a hindoo to the question « Why do you frequent a unitarian place of worship instead of the numerously attended established churches? »* (EWNB, II, p. 193).

25bis. Cft. P. ROSSANO, *Lordship of Christ and Religious pluralism*, in « Bulletin » of Segretariatus pro non Christianis, Città del Vaticano, 1980, XV/I, 43, p. 20 and *passim*.

26. He shows his universal tolerance in his unprejudiced attitude towards Christian and Mussulmans (*Humble suggestions*, EWNB, II, p. 200). Cft. *Relatio super declarationem de libertate religiosa*. Conclusio: « Cohabitatio pacifica in universali Familia humana hodie dari non potest sine libertate religiosa in societate » (Acta Synodalia Sacrosanti Concilii Ecumenici Vaticani II, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1974, vol. III, p. 347).

27. L. CARPENTER, *A Review of the Labour, Opinions and Character of Raja Rammohun Roy in a Discourse on occasion of his death*, delivered in Lewin's Mead Chapel (Bristol, 1833, p. 54). R. M. Roy, after a period of dislike (cft. also J. N. FARQUHAR, *Modern religious movements in India*, New Delhi, 1977, p. 31) declared to be indepted to English and revealed himself open to the encouragement of colonisation of Europeans in India; cft. also *Additional queries respecting the condition of India*, Calcutta, 1831 (EWNB, III, Calcutta, 1947, p. 67); *Vindication of the incarnation of*

pation in the yearning for freedom of all peoples even if geographically distant from his ²⁸ and above all, the unceasing effort to get the Indians to start accepting the new ideas and involve them gradually but surely in the universal march, which is also the path of man to eternity: because man mustn't succumb without fighting to the strain of time, but always will engage himself in unceasing progress using his infinite possibilities for the common good (*lokaśreyas* ^{28bis}) and universal harmony.

The principle of Roy's universalism is therefore based on religious thoughts, but it is sustained by an absolute faith in reason, which in the first stages of his research he considers the « surer guide » ²⁹, also in topics of religious speculation for the promotion of intellectual and moral human faculties ³⁰ and which, with the first passing of his youth ³¹ no longer guided him to a renunciation of the world but brings all his efforts together in accomplishing a collective and truly democratic work.

His research is linked into inseparable sequences; his knowledge of the relationship between God and man, between the Eternal and temporal prepares, in fact, his debut into the scene of social and political reforms; his religious speculation spreads into humanitarianism, open to the human needs of justice and liberty because the « forming » of universal man, which to him is the most attractive mirage, marking the transition from utopia to living reality, exacts a totalized interpretation of society, a global revision of the existing structures and, if it is anywhere multiform, as man's being is, in India it will be harder and longer than elsewhere.

Around 1814, when he definitely settled in Calcutta, his research begins to show full results.

His belief in one only God comes to him rather than from the sacred books, from which he nevertheless seeks testimony ³² (sometimes extrapolating from them independent conclusions which were a source of contestation against him as they were not always clear and free of

the Deity (EWNB, IV, p. 71); *Final Appeal to the Christian Public in defence of « The Precepts of Jesus »*, Calcutta, 1823 (EWGh, I, Calcutta, 1885, p. 19); *The Brahmunical Magazine or the Missionary and the Brahmun to be continued occasionally*, Nr. IV, Calcutta, 1823 (EWNB, II, p. 189).

28. Letter to Mr. Buckingham (EWGh, II, p. 631); cft. also EWGh, II, Introduction by the Editor, p. VIII; COLLET, *op. cit.*, p. 130, 163, 501; BOSE, *op. cit.*, p. 43. 28bis. BALL, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

29. *Translation of the Cena Upanishad*, Calcutta, 1823 (EWNB, II, p. 15).

30. *A defence of hindoo theism* (EWNB, II, pp. 15, 89); *The Universal Religion* (EWNB, II, p. 129); also *A second defence of monotheistical system of the Vedas in reply to an apology for the present state of hindoo worship*, Calcutta, 1817 (EWNB, II, pp. 105, 106, 109).

31. M. M. GARAI, *Rammohun Samay jiban sadhana*, Calcutta, 1966, p. 29.

32. *Translation of the Ishopanishad*, Calcutta, 1816 (EWNB, II, pp. 42-3); also *A defence of hindoo theism* (EWNB, II, p. 87); *A Second defence of the monotheistical system of the Vedas* (EWNB, II, pp. 101-104-5, 115); *An Apology for the pursuit of final beatitude, independently of brahmunical observances*, Calcutta, 1820 (EWGh, I, p. 15, etc.).

contradiction³³), from his observation of the universe³⁴ in its immense, astonishing and generous varieties which appear even richer due to scientific discovery: from something, therefore, that satisfies his sensorial experience and reason; only this one and invisible God, transcending all comprehensible power and splendour, could be the Lord and regulating Power of creation³⁵ spreading his spirit everywhere³⁶. It is in the hope that the rational cult of the God of nature be embraced as suggested by the Veda and confirmed by the dictates of « common sense » that he places his knowledge of the Sacred Scripture of India at the disposal of his Hindu co-religionaries so as to make noticed the puerile prejudices, the gross errors and the grave misdeeds³⁷ that came from a lack of understanding of these Sacred Scripture.

The exposition of such deeply felt ideas take on a pedagogic significance and because of the fervour with which it is done, it becomes almost apostle-like³⁸: an invitation, rather a pressing urge to his co-religionaries to throw off the scoriae which had grown and become corruptive and depraved with the passing of years; to break with a way of life, that in his eyes, was a degrading degeneration of ancient precepts and customs, from the misinterpretation of ancient allegories which in the beginning were meant to guide men towards an ever higher concept of divinity³⁹ and which had then fallen to immoral and sinful levels because of human ignorance and blindness.

The meaning of ancient traditions, at which the Indians must always stare⁴⁰, can acquire a new significance only by stripping them of all disguise, arbitrary in his opinion, of contaminated stratifications. Only in this way can a true ideal recovery of the exemplary values of the Indian world and their healthy integration into the present historic context be brought about.

In this way his voice broke the age old silence of Hinduism, the mechanical passing on of traditions that had grown ambiguous and

33. P. K. Das, *Raja Rammohun Roy and the Brahmoism*, Calcutta, 1970, pp. 58-9, 65.

34. *Abridgment of the Vedant* (EWGh, I, p. 8); *A translation into english of a Sanskrit Tract inculcating the divine worship*, Calcutta, 1827 (EWGh, I, p. 96); *A defence of hindoo theism* (EWNb, II, p. 87); *A second defence of monotheistical system of the Vedas* (EWNb, II, p. 115); *The Universal Religion* (EWGh, I, pp. 96-7); *Answer of a hindoo to the question « Why do you frequent a unitarian place...? »* (EWNb, II, p. 193).

35. *Abridgment of the Vedant* (EWGh, I, p. 12); *Translation of the Ishopanishad*, preface (EWNb, II, p. 41).

36. *Abridgment of the Vedant* (EWGh, I, p. 11).

37. *Translation of the Kuth-Opunishud*, Calcutta, 1819 (EWNb, II, p. 23).

38. *Translation of the Moonduk Opunishud*, Introduction, Calcutta, 1819 (EWGh, I, p. 24).

39. *Translation of the Cena Upanishad* (EWNb, II, p. 14); *A vindication of the incarnation of the Deity* (EWNb, IV, p. 56).

40. Cft. *A defence of hindoo theism* (EWNb, II, p. 84); « In order... to vindicate my own faith and that of our forefathers, I have been endeavouring, for some time past, to convince my countrymen of the true meaning of our sacred books ».

even become denials of the truth, and it made up for the lack of an opportune, serious and competent criticism, setting fire to the fervour for research and controversy which is a symptom of vitality and of aspiring to progress and which, working a radical inversion can suppress the cult of imitation and keep off repulsion for modern ideas.

Intolerant of irrationality and unbiased in judgements his prose, while being contained within irreprehensible formal limits, sometimes has the lashing tone of a castigador of customs, which invokes the re-establishment of a morality that has been violated for years; and other times has an ironic-sarcastic rhythm⁴¹ which makes the weak points of opposers much more evident than a censor would. Both of these instruments which become also arms of defence, are sharpened both in the defence of a Hinduism « to be reconsacrated »⁴², and in his personal objections to the doctrine of Christian theology.

His work is long term and spreads over a wide range whose characters are defined in the search of knowledge so as to act, in the capacity to see things with a scientific, limpid and sure eye and to present them in the sharp clearness of their essential outlines, in the intolerance of abuse, of prejudice⁴³, of mediocrity and pure formalism, in the use of reason against all passionate abandonment, in a lively and never dismissed interest in the sciences, in the responsible, lucid and clear defence of his own opinions, in the enjoyment of philological and historical investigation, in a unexhausting polemical art.

On the religious side these prerogatives are carried out principally in two strong points: one was the battle against idolatry, polytheism, impure rites to bring Hinduism back to what he considers to be authentic; the other, an attraction — one could almost say a vocation — to the study of Christian doctrine for the perfecting of the ideal of a « universal religion ».

He wants to « purify » both — Hinduism and Christianity — from what he thinks does not strictly keep to these sublime aspirations⁴⁴; he would like therefore to clean Hinduism not only of the obligation of the observation of the brahmanical liturgy but also of the study of Veda, which was generally considered to be the first indispensable step to attain the knowledge of Supreme Being and then the Salvation⁴⁵.

41. Cft. *A vindication of the incarnation of the Deity* (EWNb, IV, p. 56).

42. D. KOFF, *The Brahmo Samaj and the shaping of the modern Indian mind*, Princeton, 1979, p. 44.

43. *Speech by R. M. Roy at the meeting of the Unitarian Association* (EWGh, II, p. 625).

44. « Corruptions of the hindoo religion are not more inconsistent with truth and reason than are the doctrines taught by the Missionaries as a part of their religion » (cft. *Second Appeal to Christian Public*, EWGh, II, p. 247). These Roy's ideas soon involved him in a great polemical dispute with his orthodox compatriots. Cft. BALL, *op. cit.*, pp. 17, 144.

45. *An Apology for the pursuit of final beatitude* (EWGh, I, pp. 152-53); *A second defence of the monotheistical system of the Vedas* (EWNb, II, p. 101).

He therefore proposes a substitution with « a spiritual, pure worship of the true God »⁴⁶ because he has learnt that « to know with the knowledge of the heart the only true God... is life eternal »⁴⁷.

This « adoration in spirit »⁴⁸ which springs from a pure heart, from an intellect disposed to see man as part of the Whole⁴⁹, must triumph over the deviating cult of idols and images; it implies « only the elevation of the mind to the conviction of the existence of the Omnipresent Deity, as testified by his wise and wonderful works and continual contemplation of His power », and is « not only possible, and practicable, but even incumbent upon every rational creature »⁵⁰. And he adds: « in this worship it is indispensably necessary to use exertions to subdue the senses » what signifies « an endeavour to direct... the conduct in such a manner as not only to prevent our own or other's ill, but to secure our own and other's goods; in fact, what is considered injurious to ourselves should be avoided towards others »⁵¹.

The spiritual worship, which realises the beatitude, is therefore of a double nature: one consisting in mystic meditation and contemplation⁵² redeeming the soul from all human passions and bringing it to its original divine perfection; the other which is carried out not in sterile ritualism but accompanying the faith in the God of all perfection through the practice of charity towards all creatures, all equal because in each one the only Divinity lives⁵³: « Charity to the needy, honour to others, friendship and an equal regard to all »⁵⁴. In this way the faith in the God's unity become through human brotherhood, bearer of harmony and peace⁵⁵ between all men.

And it is in this, documenting himself especially from the Old and New Testaments, that he ties up with Christian doctrine to which he gives merit « to have accomplished an unspeakably great improvement in the general character of society, whenever it has prevailed »⁵⁶. But

46. *A second defence of the monotheistical system of the Veda* (EWNB, II, p. 115)

47. L. CARPENTER, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

48. *A second defence of the monotheistical system of the Vedas* (EWNB, II, p. 115). Cft. S. SASTRI, *History of the Brahmo Samaj*, Calcutta, 1974, p. 8.

49. « Everything is in God » (*A second defence of the monotheistical system of the Vedas*, EWNB, II, p. 116).

50. *A second defence of the monotheistical system of the Vedas* (EWNB, II, pp. 113-15); *The universal religion* (EWNB, II, p. 132). Cft. « ... nec aliter veritatem sese imponere nisi vi ipsius veritatis (Declaration *Dignitatis humanae* by Second Vatican Council) ».

51. *The universal religion* (EWNB, II, p. 131).

52. *A second defence of the monotheistical system of the Vedas* (EWNB, II, pp. 113-15); *The universal religion* (EWNB, II, p. 132).

53. *Translation of a sunskrit tract on different modes of worship by a Friend of the Author*, Calcutta, 1825 (EWNB, II, p. 197-98); *The universal religion* (EWNB, II, p. 132).

54. *Humble suggestions* (EWNB, II, p. 200).

55. *Humble suggestions* (EWNB, II, pp. 200-1).

56. L. CARPENTER, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

his rationality rejects the mystery⁵⁷ and makes of him a man who is unable to accept any humanly incomprehensible bond; the dogmas therefore appear unacceptable to him; from this springs his long and fierce controversy with the Baptist Missionaries of Śrīrāmpur, who in their turn accuse him of heathenism⁵⁸ disapproving the plan adopted by him in separating the moral doctrines of the New Testament from the mysteries and historical matters. The moral doctrines of the Gospel which he takes pains to divulge⁵⁹ seem to be sufficient on their own to salvation; intelligible to all, learned and unlearned⁶⁰, they are, in fact, something more than just a simple code of ethics; they form a perfect universal Law, « fitted to regulate the conduct of the human race in the discharge of their various duties to God, to themselves and to society »⁶¹. The moral precepts of Jesus, the best « guide to peace and happiness » of all moral laws distinctly sanctioned by all religions⁶², make Jesus « the greater, heaven-sent inspired Teacher of ethics of all times, the image of the perfect man, the Messenger⁶³ and Mediator between God and man⁶⁴, sent by God to diffuse the divine teachings, he who, not because of a Divine nature⁶⁵ (which was denied in the strong dispute widely developed in the « Appeals to Christian public », by putting forward philological suggestions uncommon in India with critical skill and sagacity⁶⁶), but through unity of will, design, affection, operation with God is rightly called Son of God⁶⁷.

From the denial of the Divine Nature of Christ follows the dismantling of all the cardinal principles of Christian theology, which are placed under discussion so as to « purify » also this from all posthumous « corruption »⁶⁸ and to take it back to what he considers the most pure essentiality, which « represented in its genuine sense in any language

57. *An appeal to the Christian Public* (EWNB, V, pp. 57, 69).

58. *An appeal to Christian Public* (EWNB, V, p. 64).

59. *The Precepts of Jesus. The guide to peace and happiness, extracted from the books of the New Testament ascribed to the four Evangelists*, Calcutta, 1820 (EWNB, V, pp. 3-4); *An appeal to Christian Public* (EWNB, V, p. 66).

60. *Precepts of Jesus*, Introduction (EWNB, V, p. 4).

61. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

62. *Ibid.* (EWNB, V, p. 3).

63. *Humble suggestions* (EWNB, II, p. 200); *Second appeal to Christian Public* (EWGh, II, pp. 144-45).

64. « His mission was to preach and impart divine instructions » (*Final appeal to Christian Public*, EWGh, II, pp. 306, 314, 320); *A second appeal to Christian Public* (EWGh, II, p. 162-63). He holds under different consideration the figure of Mohammed (cft. M. CARPENTER, *Last Days in England of Rajah Rammohun Roy*, Calcutta, 1915, p. 31).

65. *A second appeal to Christian Public* (EWGh, II, pp. 126-27, 142).

66. Cft. *A second appeal and Final appeal to Christian Public*.

67. *A second appeal to Christian Public* (EWGh, II, pp. 125-27).

68. L. CARPENTER, *op. cit.*, p. 79; *Final appeal to Christian Public* (EWGh, II, pp. 252, 280); « in attempting to free the originally pure, simple and practical religion of Christ from the heathenish doctrines and absurd notions gradually introduced under the Roman power » (*Letter to dr. T. Rees*, EWGh, II, p. 629).

whatever, must make a strong impression on every intelligent mind »⁶⁹; although he would maintain his countrymen in the doctrines of their monotheistic religion⁷⁰, the acknowledgement of the divine authority of Christ seems to him in itself in no way inconsistent with the maintenance of that ancient hindu faith⁷¹, because the Christian doctrine « properly inculcated, has a great tendency to improve the moral and political state of mankind than any other known religious system »⁷².

He is therefore substantially tied to the great sources of philosophical-religious speculation^{72bis}; and from this bond comes his social ideology and his willpower to involve himself in the field of all human problems. It seems that he feels and wants to elude the dangers involved in a static abstract preaching, and placing emphasis on charity as the instrument for reaching God⁷³ almost more efficacious than faith itself, he projects it onto other fields to raise the « man » at all levels.

His most audaciously reformistic demands are the most profoundly incisive on the structure of the hindu society. First of all they make him a champion of women's rights; with new, always rigorous methodologies he states problems against which no influential campaigns had ever been fought: polygamy and the rite of *satī*⁷⁴, the female infanticide, the child-marriage, the remarriage of widows. His efforts made him prevent the women from vexations of all sorts⁷⁵ to which they were subjected in gradual degradation through the centuries⁷⁶ and to restore

69. A letter (to Rev. H. Ware, Cambridge [USA]) on the *Prospects of Christianity and the means of promoting its reception*, Cambridge (USA), 1824 (EWNB, IV, p. 51).

70. He brought out, in fact, the inappropriateness of divulging christian doctrines among the ordinary people in India, which would, if divulged, be destined to being blindly accepted and therefore subdued to misunderstandings and rebellions (*An appeal to Christian Public*, EWNB, V, pp. 65-6).

71. Besides he mentions an agreement between Upaniṣad and Jewish and Christian sacred Scriptures in attributing « to God the perfection of those moral attributes which are considered among the human species excellent and sublime » (*An appeal to Christian Public*, EWNB, V, p. 70).

72. *On prospects of Christianity* (EWNB, IV, p. 43).

72bis. « The consequence of my long and uninterrupted researches into religious truth has been that I have found the doctrine of Christ more conducive to moral principles, and more adapted for the use of rational beings, than any other which have come to my knowledge », Letter to John Digby, England (EWGh, I, p. 39); COLLET, *op. cit.*, pp. 71, 109.

73. *An appeal to Christian Public* (EWNB, V, p. 63: « In this description [Matthew, XXV, 31-46] of the day of judgment it is clearly announced that the merciful Father of the universe accepts as manifestation of love towards himself, every act of charity and beneficence performed towards his creatures »).

74. The regular campaign against this custom has begun about 1818; the English Government as the hindu orthodoxy have remained silent over this matter up to that time. At november 8th, 1829, Lord Bentinck decided to prohibit by legislation the rite.

75. Also sale of girls in marriage and restraints of inheritance rights.

76. *Brief Remarks regarding modern encroachments on the ancient rights of females according to the hindoo Law of inheritance*, Calcutta, 1822 (EWGh, I, pp. 365-68); *Essay of the Rights of hindoos over ancestral property, according to the*

them to their due rank, rights and influence in society according to the ancient sources of the indian law: therefore he advocated their rights to an equality of education so as to belie their presumed innate inferiority⁷⁷.

In order to enlighten his countrymen, to communicate to them all the progress that thought has made among the Europeans and to create among the Hindu a new common conscience⁷⁸, he must start from a very distant point. Many other delicate and enormous problems, among them the abolition of caste and the restoration of equal, social, religious and cultural rights to the untouchables⁷⁹ (a true escalation of aims) have in fact come under discussion.

The charity and the love of God⁸⁰ are the « primum movens » of his intervention; under this impulse his thought becomes constructive while his « closeness of reasoning » keeps faith with the scientific method⁸¹.

He recognises above all with regret the ignorance and uninformatio-
tion of the most part of his generation⁸²: hence the necessity to cultivate and improve wisely « the understandings⁸³ of the native children of all classes and castes » in order to prepare and send forth into society men of cultivated and independent minds, who, by their examples, « may infuse a spirit of inquiry and a love of knowledge into all around them... and thus working on the great mass of the community, may pave the way... in the most efficient manner, for the complete triumph of true

Law of Bengal, Calcutta, 1830 (EWGh, I, p. 385); *Abstracts of the arguments regarding the burning of widows considered as religious rite*, Calcutta, 1830 (EWNb, III, p. 131 segg.); *Translation of a conference between an advocate, and an opponent of, the practice of burning widow alive*, Calcutta, 1818 (EWNb, III, pp. 93-4).

77. *A second conference between an advocate for, and an opponent to, of the practice of burning widows alive*, Calcutta, 1820 (EWNb, III, p. 125). See BALL, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-4.

78. *Abstract of the arguments regarding the burning of widows considered as religious rite*, Calcutta, 1830 (EWNb, III, p. 136).

78bis. BALL, *op. cit.*, pp. 59, 195-97.

79. « Our division into castes, which has been the source of want of unity among us » (*The Brahmunical Magazine or The Missionary and the Brahmun beeing a vindication of the hindoo religion against the attack of Christian Missionaries*, Calcutta, 1821, EWNb, IV, p. 49); *On the Prospects of Christianity* (EWNb, IV, p. 49); also DESAI, *op. cit.*, p. 288. Nevertheless, at least in public he respected the rules of the caste (S. SARKAR, *Rammohun Roy and the Break with the Past*, in « Rammohun Roy and the process of modernization in India », ed. Joshi, Delhi, 1975, p. 53).

80. *Conference between an advocate, and an opponent of, the practice of burning widow alive* (EWNb, III, p. 96).

81. See all the writings (articles and letters) concerning the hindu law of inheritance.

82. « The natives of Hindoostan, in common with those of other countries are divided into two classes, the ignorant and the enlightened. The number of the latter is, I am sorry to say, comparatively very few here » (*On the Prospects of Christianity*, EWNb, IV, p. 49).

83. From L. CARPENTER, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

religion »⁸⁴. The native people must be enabled « by the diffusion of knowledge to estimate by comparing one religion with another, their respective merits and advantages and to relinquish their divisions, as destructive of national union as of social enjoyment »⁸⁵.

The aim of culture seems therefore to be religion but in the meantime the idea of national unity emerges^{85bis}: the individual is absorbed by the community, he must live for the community: an idea that opens new and important perspectives for the future of India but which in the light of the present situation causes the delicate relations with the rulers to be treated differently from the past.

The plan to open India to the horizons of the most modern European life is pressing in him because equality in destinies can be reached only through the equality of intelligences.

In such a frame the singular capacity of his to grasp also the social and political value of linguistic instruments is expressed. While proposing the establishment of new schools — and he himself establishes a few —, he hopes for the formation of a new, more liberal system of education which, different from the indigenous village schools, which imparted limited rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic as well as from the policy of the British Government which, in the main, favoured the academic oriental studies⁸⁶, would integrate new teachings to the old order.

He was the first to understand the importance of cultivating European science and literature⁸⁷. He asks therefore the English Power to encourage the employment of European teachers⁸⁸. Through investigation and mere intuition he asserts, in fact, that « the desire of educating children in the English language and in English arts is found even in the lowest classes of the community » and that « at least two thirds of the native population of Bengal would be exceedingly glad to see their children educated in English learning »⁸⁹.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

85. *On the Prospects of Christianity* (EWNb, IV, p. 49).

85bis. BOSE, *op. cit.*, p. 198; Ph. H. ASHBY, *Modern Trends in Hinduism*, New York, 1974, p. 92.

86. He judges « vain and empty subtleties, of no practical use, the metaphysical speculations and grammatical niceties, which were imparted in the seminaries of oriental education » (*A letter on English education*, Calcutta, 1823, EWGh, I, p. 471); in *Additional queries respecting the conditions of India* (EWNb, III, p. 67), he refers to the very irregular education imparted by other seminaries still supported by the native princes and other opulent inhabitants. (See also S. PIANO, *Lingua, dialetti, società*, in « *Atti del Convegno della Soc. It. di Glottologia* », Pisa, 8-9 dic. 1978, p. 64).

87. From L. CARPENTER, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

88. *A letter on English education* (EWGh, I, pp. 469-73): « Education should embrace Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy and others useful science, which the natives of Europe have carried to a degree of perfection that had raised them above the inhabitants of other parts of the world » (*ibid.*, p. 470).

89. *On the Prospects of Christianity* (EWNb, IV, p. 51).

He himself, on the other hand, forms a literary language (Sādhū-Bhāṣā)⁹⁰ from the vernacular of the people of his country, and he manipulates it to interpret the thought, the science and history of Europe: realizing the benefits that a wide use of this language would have in igniting a national identity⁹¹ he improves the Bengali, enriching it with new words from Sanskrit and other languages and publishes a Bengali grammar both in Bengali and in English to help the native youth as well as the Europeans in a proper knowledge of this language.

His battles spread with the founding of newspapers in various languages⁹²: he has in fact esteem for the press, on the one hand as a rational instrument in the control of truth, on the other hand as an ideal tool for the educated classes to carry on renewal at all levels, to diffuse an awareness of the new among the masses⁹³, to enlighten and prepare them for battle on a national scale, awakening in them the conscience of rights, the sentiment of freedom, in other words to form their political conscience. Therefore he energetically refuses all restrictions to press freedom.

Thus various aspects of knowledge are connected which, working together, could nourish new forces, capable of not being taken in surprise by events. Only education promoted in every possible way could have remedied the paralysis of intelligences and willpowers that afflicted the peoples of India. Stirred and united that these new forces may be, the fundamental principles of the transformation of the society and the freedom of man first and then of the nation would be laid not through the brusque overthrow of the existing order, but through prudent revolution⁹⁴. This is how he sees the plan which in its logical and ideological aspects appears to be the basis of an autonomous governing of the country and of the beginning of the realisation of universalism.

His interest in religious, social and cultural questions shows, in fact, his concern for the political problem, because religion and science, when applied become political, especially in India where religion and social structures were « organically interwoven »⁹⁵.

90. Cfr. J. K. MAJUMDAR, *op. cit.*, pp. 278-80; D. ZBAVITEL, *Bengali literature*, Wiesbaden, 1976, pp. 209, 214).

91. He was called « Father of bengali prose » (J. K. MAJUMDAR, *op. cit.*, p. LIII); about the importance of the hindu quest for identity during the « intercivilizational encounter under British dominance », see KOPF, *op. cit.*, p. 176 f.; BOSE, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-201.

92. Sambad Kaumudi, the first bengali newspaper (1821); Mirat-al-Akhbar (1822); he was also associated with the Baṅgladut (1829).

93. *Memorial to the Supreme Court (Petitions against the Press Regulation)*, Calcutta, 1823 (EWGh, I, p. 34); *Contents of Sambad Cowmoody* (The moon of intelligence), J. K. MAJUMDAR, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-94; *Translations of contents of Mirat-al-Akhbar*, J. K. MAJUMDAR, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

94. *Petitions against the Press Regulation* (EWGh, I, pp. 435, 437; see J. K. MAJUMDAR, *op. cit.*, p. CI).

95. DESAI, *op. cit.*, p. 282, 285. See concept of *dharma*.

In this light the interventions that brought him into the heart of the judicial debate must be seen. There is a dignity to defend: national pride moves him to attempt to eliminate discriminations so as to gradually insert the native people not only at every level of the juridical order but in every state department⁹⁶, claiming for his countrymen the same guarantee of civil rights enjoyed by the English⁹⁷; he intervenes, always through a careful study of the times and needs, and with a strong authority⁹⁸ (even if not always with immediately favourable results) with regards to all important points connected with the internal administration of British India⁹⁹.

Without direct contact with the masses but near to them intuitively, he actuated a political programme without ever having had an official part in politics. He preferred instead to open himself to proselythism and in a prophetic tone based on the awareness of the vital motivating force of his work¹⁰⁰ (even if he never wanted to see himself as a reformer¹⁰¹) he sought to prolong the work of historic development in India beyond the temporal limits of the present moment and of his lifetime.

The establishment of the Ātmīya Sabhā (1814) with religious and theological purposes, followed in Calcutta in 1828¹⁰² by that of Brāhmo Samāj are testimonies: the activity of this reform movement, started not as a « party » but as a « church », is defined in the theological document which is the Trust Deed: stimulated by humanitarian and national considerations, it started from the sphere of religious faith and worship, from the « promotion of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue, strengthening the bonds of union between all religions, persuasions and creed »¹⁰³ (because the religion must help all the human activities) and inaugurated a new era (the preliminary stage in the Renaissance of India) by democratizing all social institutions and relations on the basis

96. *Appeal to the King in Council (Petitions against the Press Regulation)* (EWGh, I, p. 459) (i.e. in all judicial, military, revenue and civil offices: see J. K. MAJUMDAR, *op. cit.*, pp. XLV-VI); B. DE, *Political and Economic Ideas*, in « Rammohun Roy and the process of modernization in India », p. 144 segg.

97. *Remarks on settlement in India by Europeans* (EWNb, III, p. 81, 83).

98. See the *Exposition of the practical operation of judicial and revenue system in India*, London, 1832 (EWGh, II, pp. 511-97); *Additional queries respecting the condition of India* (EWNb, III, pp. 64-77).

99. In effect, he did not succeed in doing a lot for the masses (R. K. RAY, *Introduction*, in « Rammohun Roy and the process of modernization in India », p. 14; BALL, *op. cit.*, p. 209).

100. « A day will arrive when my humble endeavours will be viewed with justice, perhaps acknowledged with gratitude », *Abridgment of the Vedant* (EWGh, I, p. 5); see also J. K. MAJUMDAR, *op. cit.*, p. CV; COLLET, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

101. *A defence of hindoo theims* (EWNb, II, p. 84); see BALL, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

102. In between these events he patronized the Unitarian Indian Association foundations.

103. *The Trust Deed of the Brahmo-Samaj*, Calcutta, january 8, 1830 (EWGh, I, pp. 492-93).

of the fundamental unity and harmony of all religions. All these were the items of the constructive Roy's programme.

The motif of Brāhmo Samāj was the national progress, but he himself was not only a nationalist; he did not believe in the existence of a real antagonism between nationalism and internationalism¹⁰⁴: his outlook and character were really cosmopolite¹⁰⁵: his theme was, in fact, that which was common to European thinkers and writers of the 18th and 19th centuries¹⁰⁶.

The results of this multiform and wide sowing were very slow in maturing, due to the actual situation at that time; about a century later his dream of the awakening of the masses was continued in the gandhian dream of the individual svarāj premise to the hindu svarāj. But certainly in the passing of the century a new gleam had been lit in the history of mankind and of ideas, even if there was still much to be changed¹⁰⁷.

Hence, while L. Carpenter said at the funeral prayers that Roy's intellect « will influence in death as much as in life and perhaps still more so »¹⁰⁸, his germinating influence gave an impetus to further creative reformers¹⁰⁹ who continued to stretch their energies to the utmost for the modernisation of India.

His belief, in fact, was neither a mystical vision nor a mere theoretic conviction of the need to develop in the mind of man the « faculty of universalism »¹¹⁰; it was « a living faith in a living God »¹¹¹: religion is no longer only the centre of individual life, as was customary in the indian milieu, but it has become the centre of universal history¹¹².

Even if the evaluations and criticisms given to his personal contributions by followers and critics were several these are, undoubtedly, a

104. B. MAJUMDAR, *History of political thought from Rammohun to Dayananda* (1821-84), vol. I: *Bengal*, Calcutta, 1934, p. 21.

105. KOPF, *op. cit.*, p. 250; R. C. MAJUMDAR, *On Rammohan Roy*, Calcutta, 1972, pp. 47, 49.

106. See note 1.

107. SAROJINI NAIDU, *Tribute to Rammohun*, in CV, 1933, p. 236; RAY, *op. cit.*, p. 14; BALL, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

108. L. CARPENTER, *op. cit.*, p. 6; also S. RADHAKRISHNAN, *A philosophic Modernist*, in CV, 1933, part II, p. 341: « We are today able to realise the peculiar relevance of his message much more vividly than at the time of his death ». And Gandhi (CW, vol. 64, 1936-37, p. 155): « The influence of such persons as... Rammohan Roy... still persists today ». Also R. TAGORE, *Rammohun, a Traveller on India's Path*, in CV, 1933, p. 233; SASTRI, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

109. Cft. GANDHI, CW, vol. 5, p. 66; CL. H. HEIMSATH, *Rammohun Roy and social Reform*, in « Rammohun Roy and the process of modernization in India », p. 152.

110. R. TAGORE, *The Call of Truth*, in « Towards universal man », Santiniketan, 1961, p. 271 (« faculty of universality »); *The unity of education* (*ibid.*, p. 249).

111. GANDHI, CW, vol. 68, p. 57.

112. See COLLET, *op. cit.*, p. 396.

sign of unpredictable originality at his time¹¹³. It can be said that through his own energy become generating power his very thought was transformed into history¹¹⁴. His religious meditations in youth were the basis on which he built, his constant faith made him use his intellectualism as a tool to study man in society so as to bridge the gaps among peoples¹¹⁵.

His unconditioned trust in the indefinite human progress made him not only a protagonist of the history of his time, but an inexhaustibly modern thinker, a messenger of universal optimism to India and to the world: the hope in the triumph of the kingdom of « free man » on the principle that the service of God is above all service of man¹¹⁶.

113. He was not without detractors and his own disciples later re-interpreted his original inspirations (L. JOSHI, *Preface*, in « Rammohun Roy and the process of modernization in India », p. V; KOPF, *Rammohun Roy and the Bengal Renaissance*, *ibid.*, p. 45; BOSE, *op. cit.*, p. 54; R. C. MAJUMDAR, *op. cit.*, pp. 40, 45, contests the « Rammohan myth », even if later he generically recognises Roy's merits and admits his universalism.

114. See p. 311, note 15; BOSE, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-68.

115. « May God render religion destructive of differences and dislike between man and man, and conducive to the peace and union of mankind », *Appeal to Christian Public* (EWGh, II, p. 97). Cft. BOSE, *op. cit.*, p. 51; this inspiration seems to-day almost as a premonition of the interreligious dialogue promoted by Second Vatican Council.

116. « The divine homage which we offer, consist solely in the practice of *Daya* or benevolence towards each other » (*Brahmunical Magazine*, Nr. IV, EWNB, II, p. 189); « ... My prayer, that a day may soon arrive, when religion shall not be a cause of difference between man and man, and when every one will regard the Precepts of Jesus as the sole Guide to Peace and Happiness » (*Second appeal to Christian Public*, EWGh, II, p. 242).