



Comparison of Political Concepts through Social Reforms by Rammohan Roy and Vidyasagar and its Relevance

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Abstract. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar were two remarkable personalities in the 19th century India, known for their progressive and advanced thoughts and concepts within the British colonial rule. As India had been ruled by Muslim rulers for a long period, the political rights, freedom of individuals, rights of education had come to a standstill. The traditional Indian society as a whole, had been surrounded by rituals, superstitions, poverty and illiteracy, where liberalism, civil rights, right to equality, free expression of one's own opinion etc. have received scarce importance and are neglected. However, the British government in India introduced certain Western styled Constitutional political rights and reforms over time, although these were limited for Indian citizens. Owing to the constant instigation of spirited outstanding individuals in the form of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, the British colonial Government was compelled to rethink on several political issues. This paper seeks to show that Roy and Vidyasagar not only played a progressive role in breaking the barrier of prejudice of orthodox mentality but also built a ground breaking change and created a new modern era in political spheres through socio-educational approach. This paper is also conducted to show a comparison of ideas and perception in between Roy and Vidyasagar's and relevance of their contributions towards political aspects in the 21st century where India gained and restored a good position in modern constitutional politics.

Index Terms- Social reforms, Educational reforms, Revolutionary reconstruction, Modern Constitutional approaches.

I. Introduction

The 19th century was a crucial period in Indian History, memorable for a significant transformation in Indian stagnant culture and tradition due to the impact of Western influence. It was mainly Western impact that restored past values, tradition



and provided opportunities to linking up of the past values with present values in a creative effort to create a new era. As a result, a new revolutionary reconstruction had been started in all spheres of our society. From the revolutions that had swept Europe up to the expansion of colonial empires, the period was marked by an advancement of social and educational reforms, introduction of a new perception of political ideologies and the emergence of new forms of governance. These developments had wide ranging implications, shaping the course of modern politics and influencing the orbit of our nations forever. This revolutionary epoch does not come easily in the 19th century, it came with the continuous and relentless effort, and the hearty support of a few memorable Indian personalities such as Raja Rammohun Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and many other great personalities.

In exploring the political perceptions of the two great influential personalities in Indian History, Raja Rammohun Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, one dives into a rich tapestry of concepts and ideas that have left a remarkable impact on India's sociopolitical landscape. Not only did they share an influential commitment towards the upliftment of our conservative, orthodox society but also amplified their political conceptions and ideas on grounds like liberty, individual rights, freedom, education for women and many more. Roy's political perception was deeply rooted in the ideals of liberalism, humanism, rationalism and educational development. On the other hand, Vidyasagar's political perception was mainly based on social equality, women empowerment, liberalism and specially based upon moral and ethical values of individuals. Despite their slightly differences in approaches, both Roy and Vidyasagar sought to challenge the equilibrium position of our society, and bring about a significant change in stagnant medieval political ideologies through social and educational reformation. In spite of challenges and setbacks, India has broadly sustained and preserved these ideas, maintaining a multicultural society where every human being without any discrimination, is free to practice faith and express his/her opinion.

II. Liberty

According to Rammohun Roy, liberty means freedom of expression and action. He thought that freedom is the main component of liberty. Roy realized that all restrictions come from religion and culture, so it is necessary to modify and reconstruct our customs and traditions that completely restricted individual liberty. Roy realized that the free exchange of ideas and conceptions are necessary for challenging against the conservative and irrational society and to follow the path of intellectual thinking. Roy was a firm supporter of the free press and media because the press acted as a potent tool for rising awareness and mobilizing public opinions towards the pros and cons of British administration. Roy believed that free press had never caused a revolution in any part of the country because people expressed their opinions and grievances through different media and the government had to know the actual situation and take necessary steps to solve the masses. As a result, the distance between the ruler and the ruled is gradually reduced and create a friendly bonding between the ruler and the ruled. Roy was a big critic of religious superstition and orthodox mentality. He believed that the freedom of expression is necessary to



promote a rational and scientific society, because through the media every person is allowed to freely discuss about the ill effects of religious superstition of our society.

All these kinds of discussion can be made possible only when the press and media can work freely without the restrictions imposed by the colonial government. Later the British Government had to realize the importance of the free press. As a result, the colonial government passed the unpopular Vernacular Press Act in 1878 and The Indian Press Act in 1910 where the British Government banned all types of radical and intellectual articles, especially those which boldly criticized the policy and activities of colonial government. Here Roy's view regarding liberty in politics was that it should be related towards Indian administration and he tried to create independent and united opinions among the Indians regarding the positive and negative aspects of Colonial rule as well as eradicate religious superstitions and stagnant mentality of Indians.

On the other hand, Vidyasagar's opinion about liberty was not deeply related to political aspects but it was more focused on social equality and moral values of individuals. Vidyasagar was always against caste rigidity. He believed that liberty means freedom from the limitations of caste hierarchy, where every human being is judged by his/her merit, not by his/her birth. Vidyasagar believed that true liberty comes from our own mind and ethics. His opinions on liberty were progressive for his time and focused more on individual freedom, women empowerment and social equality. Here Vidyasagar used the term liberty but in a different way. In his opinion, it should be used more for individuals rather than related to political aspects. But both of them agreed that liberty should be related to freedom and openness of our society. Raja Rammohun Roy and Vidyasagar both agreed that liberty means freedom of expression and thought of individuals which means ethics. Mainly they are deeply concerned about the improvement and welfare of our society. We agreed that both tried to achieve the same goal, to create a new radical society for our nation. While they shared many common goals, they also had slight differences in their approaches. Here Roy mainly emphasized that liberty implied more political aspects rather than social or moral aspects. But Vidyasagar pointed out that liberty means social equality without imposition of any social rigidity.

III. Civil Rights

Roy was the pioneer of concepts like civil rights. According to him, civil rights mean political, social freedom and equal opportunities among the Indians. Roy was attempted to create awareness about the importance of the true meaning of civil rights. Firstly, he advocated for the abolition of discriminatory laws and practices, especially laws which are based on their religion, caste or colour. Here we can say that Roy emphasized upon universal and neutral law and practices. Secondly, Roy fought relentlessly against social evils like sati, polygamy, child marriage, caste discrimination and many more. Every human possesses right to life, so why should a young widow immolate herself on their husband's funeral? Roy had to present this question in front of our irrational society. As a result, for the first time, the Bengal



conservative and orthodox society started to think of a new form of perception about social evils like sati. In the year 1829, the sati system was abolished. The abolition of sati system is thus, a relevant example of human civil rights in our nation.

Roy was a memorable personality in 19th century during the British colonial period. He boldly criticized the forcible conversions of Christian missionaries. He advocated for religious tolerance and also believed that every person belongs to his/her own religion. He realized that conversion should be based on true understanding and acceptance of a religion, rather than coercion. Roy wanted to promote the importance of religious harmony and emphasized on religious tolerance because he realized that India is a multicultural, multi ethnic and multi religious society. According to Roy's point of view, "It is true that the apostles of Jesus Christ used to preach the superiority of the Christian religion to the natives of different countries. But we must recollect that they were not the rulers of these countries where they preached." Roy realized that religious conversion is a violation of the right to freedom of religion.

Rammohun Roy also advocated for political reforms that would grant Indians for greater active participation to Indian administrative work. He urged for the establishment of a new representative institution and the extension of civil liberty within the colonial framework. He appreciated the British colonial government because according to the British Constitution, the colonized countries which are under the British government have also benefited by the same civil rights which are enjoyed by the British citizens. That is the reason why Roy demanded that the British parliament before finalizing any legislation relating to colonial India, the British government should discuss the same with the opinions and views of the Indian intellectual class. He pointed out that direct and active participation in the administrative work is actually related to the political rights of the Indians in the colonial period.

On the other hand Vidyasagar was a remarkable person who was a strong supporter of civil rights. According to his opinion, civil rights were mainly based on social equality and social reformation. His opinions on civil rights were rooted in the principles of fairness, social unity and the developments of marginal communities. Here we can say that both Roy and Vidyasagar's perception on civil rights are quite similar. They both protested against the discrimination of colonial law and practice. Both of them fought relentlessly to establish women rights in our nation. Similar to the abolition of sati, Vidyasagar's most memorable contribution was his tireless efforts for widow remarriage. In the 19th century in our society widows faced several social restrictions and were often deprived of basic rights and privileges. He urged that denying widows the opportunity to remarry was an ignorance of their fundamental rights and perpetuated unnecessary suffering. Here both of them urged for women's opportunities and strengthening their position in our society. This was the greatest example to protect women's fundamental rights and both of them wanted to remove gender discrimination in our society.



Rammohun Roy, often recognized as the Father of the Indian Renaissance, contributed significantly in the judicial and revenue system in colonial India. Roy advocated for a modern and impartial judicial system that was free from any kind of biases. He urged that only proper and effective communication should provide a good and neutral administration which created a bonding between the ruler and the ruled. He stressed on vernacular language to maintain proper administration, because he realized that Indian languages would make government policies more accessible and understandable for Indians. This is another important concept for modern constitutional criteria. Another radical and intellectual message given by Roy was to execute proper administration which was the codification of law. Roy pointed that codification of law should be related to long standing Indian customs and culture, especially those customs and cultures which are directly related to the betterment and welfare of our nation. Roy also criticized the existing legal framework which was mainly based on traditional Hindu and Islamic laws. Roy emphasized for unified laws which are free from any limitations and barrier of religious and caste rigidity. Actually Roy realized that codification could provide a clear, neutral justice for all among the Indians and this would help the individuals understand their rights and limitations. This is another concept of modern constitutional aspects which was told by the great Raja Rammohun Roy.

Roy believed that proper and equitable revenue system was necessary to execute for the social upliftment and welfare of the society of rural peasants. Roy criticized that under the permanent settlement, the zamindars often exacted a huge amount rents from the tenant agriculturalist, leaving them in a cycle of perpetual poverty and indebtedness. As a result peasant communities faced hardships to lead a normal life. Here Roy stressed on the agro economical condition of the rural area. Even Roy criticized the lack of security and stability in Zamindari system, because he thought that it led to economic instability for agricultural communities. As a result, the total amount of production was significantly decreases. Roy pointed upon the economic condition of poor peasants even he stressed upon the production of the nation which was very important measure for economically independent for nation.

Unlike Roy, Vidyasagar also believed that provincial or vernacular languages would make the judicial system more comprehensible to the majority of the population. Both of their opinions on judicial and revenue systems reflected their commitment towards social equality without any discrimination and based on neutral justice.

Vidyasagar boldly criticized the evil effects of intermediary system in agricultural sector. He supported the system of direct tax collection from cultivators to colonial government because he believed that this is the best way to reduce the burden of huge taxation and maintain a friendly relationship between cultivators and colonial government. In this context, it can be said that Vidyasagar was the supporter of the Ryotwari revenue system although during the time of Vidyasagar, in Bengal province the Permanent Settlement was the popular revenue system which was brought in to effect by the East India Company. He realized that the intermediary system led to the



economic disparities by concentrating wealth and money in the hands of some marginalizing communities and it directly affected the tax burden for poor peasants. Roy did not specifically define the purpose of education but he stressed on the combination of education from east to west. Roy introduced western education which he thought as a means of challenge against the traditional social practices and would help to promote political awareness among the Indians, which would ultimately lead to proper administrative representation of an independent India.

He established the Vedanta College and the Anglo Hindu school to provide modern oriental education in the light of the superiority of western education. In the year 1833, Macaulay proposed that English should be used as a medium of instruction in our nation. Here we mentioned that the concept and views of Rammohun's is widespread and universal. Roy was one of the greatest pioneers who introduced women's education in our society. That is the reason the Brahmo Samaj contributed to remove superstition against women education that was prevalent in the Indian society. Introducing women education in our society is the greatest example of human rights in 19th century India. He also advocated the adoption of western scientific education to keep India advanced in relation to International trends.

On the other hand, Vidyasagar is hailed as a shining star in the history of education for his remarkable contributions in various fields from primary education to higher education. Vidyasagar was the bearer and carrier of women's education in our nation. Unlike Roy, Vidyasagar was also realized that spreading of education was the only practical method to eradicate the deprivation and humiliation of women in the 19th century. As a result he established the first unpaid school for women in our society with help of Drinkwater Bethune. Not only in the urban city but his efforts also laid the foundation for the development of rural education in our society. He established 35 schools in various rural areas like Hoogly, Nadia, Midnapore and Burdhaman district. He wanted to spread the light of education in every sphere of our society. This is the greatest example of human's civil rights. Even Vidyasagar urged to establish night schools to provide the minimum elementary education for rural adult masses. His efforts helped to expand access to education for all segments of our society. He emphasized the idea of equal opportunities. It can also be noted that both of them are strong supporters of western education. This is the reason why Vidyasagar arranged for Sanskrit College students to learn English.

Rammohun and Vidyasagar were both prominent figures in the Indian social and intellectual landscape during the 19th century, but they have some ideological differences. Vidyasagar was a firm supporter of vernacular languages as the medium of education. He was a moderate follower of English language. On the other hand, Rammohun Roy was the extreme supporter of English language and wanted to establish English as the medium of instruction. But it is true that during the 19th century most people lived in rural area and barely from hand to mouth, hardly sustaining their necessities. However in the rural society where more traditional communities are there and the acceptance of the English education was mixed. This explains why Vidyasagar wanted to provide vernacular language as a medium of



education at the village level. His aimed to make education accessible to a wider population and relevant to the masses. In rural areas most of the population remains dependent on agriculture. But both of them stressed on the right to education of the people of India during the British period without any discrimination.

IV. Present Day Relevance

The concepts of Roy and Vidyasagar, ideas and perceptions remain valuable and pertinent in present day where India is independent and internationally advanced country; Roy established the Hindu college which eventually evolved into Presidency University at Kolkata. Similarly Vidyasagar was the founder of the Metropolitan institution which eventually evolved into Vidyasagar College in present day.

Raja rammohun and Alexander Duff collaborated to establish Scottish church college in Kolkata. This educational institution maintained a renowned position in NIRF ranking 100 in 2023. Similarly Vidyasagar is associated with India's famous reputed women educational institution, the Bethune College in Kolkata. This is the first women college in India as well as Asia. Bethune college secured 78th rank in NIRF ranking 2023 under college category.

Both were focused on freedom and individual liberty during the 19th century. After the independent Indian Constitution provide articles includes 19 to 22, which protect basic fundamental liberty of our citizens, like freedom of speech, freedom of personal liberty, freedom to live a life with dignity and many more. So it is easily realized that the thoughts and concepts of Roy and Vidyasagar are quite widespread and continue to influence on independent India's political aspects even in the present day.

Both of them emphasized on providing equal opportunity and discarded any religious and caste rigidity. Article 16 of the Indian Constitution assures equal opportunity without any discrimination on the basis of religion, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.

Both of them fought relentlessly to provide education for women and wanted to protect the rights of women in our society. In the Indian Constitution, Articles 14(d) and 15(3) ensure the right to education for women and protect the interests of women in our nation.

Both of them had firmly fought against the anti disciplinary social evils like polygamy. In the year 1956, the Indian government announced that polygamy rituals are illegal. In this way our nation had to protect women's respect and dignity in our society.

Vidyasagar emphasized on adult education during the time of colonial period. His progressive ideas and concepts were ahead of his time in many respects. Even in the present day the adult education programme is a crucial and challenging



task for the Indian government. In the year 1978, the GOI declared National Adult education programme (NAEP) for the first time. The NEP (2020) also stressed upon adult education. Even during the time of Covid-19, the GOI sponsored a scheme for Adult education that is Padhna Likhna Abhiyan (PLA).

Roy and Vidyasagar both were focused on spread of English language among the Indians. Roy established the “Anglo Hindu School” to include English into education. On the other hand, Vidyasagar arranged for Sanskrit college students to learn English after realizing the importance of this language. In the present day we see many school board such as CBSE, CISCE providing English medium schools all over the country. Even the 2020 NEP highlighted the multi-linguistic concept where English as a language gained a special importance.

Roy and Vidyasagar both of them are great pioneers of Western education. They emphasized on practical application of combined eastern and western thoughts in their educational aspects. Especially Roy was the first person to shared Indian tradition, values, culture with foreign society. This is an international aspect of his educational thought. In the present day, NEP 2020 GOI also invited foreign universities to establish campuses in our nation.

Rammohun Roy and Vidyasagar emphasized the importance of scientific education alongside traditional education. They started to advocate for a blend of modern western scientific education and Indian cultural heritage. In the present day the GOI particularly concerned about the progress of scientific and technological education. The government of India introduced their 5th STIP (Scientific and Technical information Program) of India where new policies, schemes, provide for the improvement and advancement of science and technology in our country. Even in the year 2015, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam launched Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan (RAA) encouraging school children to learn and develop their interest in Mathematics, Science subjects and along with other social science subjects.

Both Roy and Vidyasagar were remarkable personalities in the Indian socio political landscape, albeit some differences in their perceptions. Roy advocated for socio political reforms with an emphasis on liberalism, modernity, western education and removed stagnant mentality. On the other hand, Vidyasagar stressed more on social reformation and women’s empowerment. Roy’s political perception leaned towards advocating for the adoption of western progressive ideas, concepts, and the reconstruction of our Indian society, while Vidyasagar stressed on grassroots level reforms within the existing framework. This explains Vidyasagar’s emphasis on providing adult education to the poor and rural society.

Both Roy and Vidyasagar were reformers who challenged traditional norms and sought to modernize our nation. Roy’s ideology was more reformist, and he integrated Indian values and western values and focusing on principles of international approach. On the other hand, Vidyasagar’s ideology was based on combined approaches of reformism and revivalism. Henceforth, both are known for



their rational and critical approaches towards adopting ideas, rejecting the blind acceptance of them. Their contribution towards our society played a remarkable and significant role in shaping the discourse on governance and administration in future independent India.

V. Conclusion

Raja Rammohun Roy and Vidyasagar were both prominent leaders to create a new modern era in our nation. With their great knowledge of scientific temper, broad outlook, liberal mentality they tried to establish equality and humanism in Indian society. Both were among the very few Indians who have realized the importance of human rights and human equality in our nation during the 19th centuries. They realized that the objective of human civilization is dependent on human rights and liberty. Both of them wanted to establish a healthy and prosperous society, although they focused on different aspects of society and had different approaches to change. But their opinions on human rights, women's education and liberalism approaches have given rise to a new perception of Indian society, culture and religious change. In the eyes of enlightened future young generations, both of them represent the ideological foundations of modern India. Their political and sociological approach based on scientific view, openness and neutral mentality led the Indian society on the magnificent path of equality and humanism which is still cherished in the present day. Their contributions towards our society played a remarkable role in shaping the discourse on Indian administration and constitution in future independent India.

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