

Introduction to Modern Indian Political Thought
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Lecture – 02
Raja Rammohan Roy: Religious Reforms

Hello everyone! In this lecture, we are going to discuss the first thinker in our syllabus that is Raja Rammohan Roy.

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And from Raja Rammohan Roy, we will be looking at three key themes in his thought and works. That is - religious reforms, modern education, and freedom of press. So, today, we are going to discuss his social and religious reforms, and his ideas about religion, society and how he actually, conceptualized the role of religion in the larger context of social and political space and spheres in India.

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INTRODUCTION

- He is considered as the 'father of modern India'.
- Through his memoranda, books, public activities for religious, social, educational, economic and political reforms he inaugurated liberal reformist modernization in India.
- A cosmopolitan thinker as well as a nationalist reformer who believed in rationalist thinking.

So, Raja Rammohan Roy, as many of you are aware, is considered as the father of modern India. Now, why is it so? Why is he regarded as the father of modern India? What is his contributions? And there, one can look at his role not just in responding to the colonial challenges that was there. So, the context in which he was writing and articulating his thought and ideas; was a kind of situation where Britishers had established their rule in India.

And then there is a kind of challenge to the Indian counterparts as they do not have really a religion worth the name and that religion is full of idolatry, superstitions and all kind of ritual practices, which does not really help in cultivation of mind, cultivation of good human being and things like that. And so, he was articulating, thinking and operating in a time, where there was a kind of colonial dominance, not just military or the physical, but more so, in the intellectual sphere as well; where everything which is Western and European is considered and regarded as superior not just by the colonials, but also, by many Indians.

So, Raja Rammohan Roy was thinking in that context. Here, he was trying to establish or assert the good practices and the worthwhile ideas that were there in Indian intellectual traditions, including Hinduism, at the same time, when he is actually criticizing many evil practices or bad practices within Hinduism. So, more than that, he was also, arguing about the western concepts and ideas especially, his views on modern education and freedom of press that we are going to cover in the next lecture. He provided some kind of

legacy for the subsequent thinkers to think about, articulate and develop on from the idea he was articulating in such contexts.

So, that is the reason, he is considered as the father of modern India. In a sense, his focus was not on just believing and practicing something because it had been practiced for many generations or for millennia, but because it was rationally convincing. So, his focus was on the rational approach to religion, to social reforms, to polity and to the political process also. So, that is the reason, he is regarded as the father of modern India.

In what ways, he was contributing and articulating his ideas. So, he was actively, engaged in many ways, not just in his official capacity of a Munshi, but also as a landlord, and a petitioner, and also as someone who was deeply engaged in the social political and religious issues of his time. So, through his memoranda, books, public activities for religious, social, educational, economic and political reforms, he inaugurated liberal reformist modernization in India.

So, he was actually writing his text; he was actually debating with his contemporary peers and intellectuals; and thinking about the social, educational, economic and political reforms, which in a way establish a kind of liberal thinking in India and began a new era of rational enlightenment discussion and debates about social and political issue in India. And that is also perhaps, one of the reasons, why he is categorized as or considered as the father of modern India.

Now, in his thought, what you see and that is something related to the first introductory lecture, we have had, is this kind of continuous evolution from a nationalist localized understanding or approach to the cosmopolitan international approach as well. So, again, in Raja Rammohan Roy, you will find him as a cosmopolitan thinker, at the same time, a nationalist reformer, his focus being on the rationalist thinking.

So, in his approach, while he is leading or a kind of break from the Indian intellectual tradition in the modern era, is his focus on the rationalist thinking, rational approach to reform society, to reform religion, to reform polity, to respond to the colonial domination and so on. So, in his thought also, you will see a kind of deeper emotional intellectual engagement, with the social and religious issue that concerns the national polity. That is his nation.

So, he is a nationalist reformer in that sense. At the same time, his approach towards monotheism that we will discuss later, and he is actually a cosmopolitan thinker. So, here, his understanding of men, religion, society, and polity is not just limited to his nation, but also, can be applicable to other nations as well. And that is the approach, in most of the modern Indian political thinkers, as we will discuss in the next set of thinkers, when we will discuss further.

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INFLUENCE ON HIS THOUGHT

- He drew his thoughts from Perso-Arabic, Classical Greek, Vedantic as well as modern western thought.
- He was influenced by many contemporary events such as the French revolution and the freedom movements in Spain, Ireland and Latin America.
- He had learnt as many as ten languages – Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, English, Urdu, Hindi, Hebrew, Greek, Latin and French.

IMPORTANT WORKS :

- *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhiddin (A Gift to Deists)*
- *The Precepts of Jesus: A Guide to Peace and Happiness*

Now, if we look at the influence on his thought, we will see a different kind of sources or intellectual tradition which influenced his thought. So, that includes Perso-Arabic, classical Greek and Vedantic as well as the modern western thought. So, in Raja Rammohan Roy, you see a kind of movement away from a narrow particularistic kind of understanding about religion, society and the role of men, to a kind of broader approach in his thought that comes from his familiarity or understanding of different traditions or intellectual traditions of thought which include Perso-Arabic. Because, he was very familiar with the Perso-Arabic and Islamic traditions. His father and himself, being very closely related to the Mughal empire, and also because three generations of his family had served the Mughal empire. So, they were well aware of that tradition, and also because of his education, he knew Perso-Arabic which we will discuss in a moment. He was well aware of the Perso-Arabic thought, the classical Greek and the modern western thought that he learned on his own through his education, through his familiarity with the

colonial administration and Western thinkers. And also, his deeply emotional intellectual engagement with the Indian traditions of thought, particularly the Vedantic thought.

So, in a way, in his thought, you will find the amalgamation of all these different traditions that allowed him to think about religion and society in a broader way. And not in the narrower, limited way of understanding. The second is he was also influenced by the many historical incidents that were happening, especially the French revolution and the freedom movements in Spain, Ireland and Latin America. So, these historical movements also influenced to a greater extent, his belief in the liberal ideas of individual, society, religion, etc.

Now, the other point that you will see in Raja Rammohan Roy is his mastery over various languages. And that is also something, which allowed him to think about and read from various sources, from various traditions and then develop his ideas on religion and society. So, he is a polyglot in the true sense of the term. Where, he is not just confined to any one tradition or any one language. And he had no narrow chauvinistic kind of ideas. So, he was very comparative, very broader in his understanding and articulations. So, he is considered to have mastery over 10 languages, which include Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, English, Urdu, Hindi, Hebrew, Greek, Latin and French. So, this mastery allowed him to think about these ideas of religion, monotheism, pantheism and other things in a broader and comparative ways.

Now, if you look at his scholarly works, these are basically, there are numerous tracts he wrote, but the most significant work is *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhiddin* which is also translated as *A Gift to the Deists*. That conceptualized his major thinking and articulation about religion and the role of religion in social reforms or the rational thinking of human being. He was also responding to other challenges, especially the Christianity and the Christian missionary. So, this text *The Percepts of Jesus: A Guide to Peace and Happiness* is another important work among his scholarly works.

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A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH

PERIOD: 22 May 1772 - 27 September 1833

- He was born into a high ranking orthodox Brahmin family in West Bengal that had the distinction of serving the imperial Mughals for three generations.
- The family's long standing services under the Mughals explains his familiarity with indo-persian culture.
- He first entered the service of Europeans in the year 1803 as Munshi (private secretary) to the collector of Murshidabad.

His period was from 1772 to 1883. He was born into a high ranking orthodox Brahmin family in West Bengal. And his family has the distinction of serving the imperial Mughals for three generations. And that is why, his familiarity with Arabic, Persian, Islamic sources and traditions. This long standing service under the Mughals explains his familiarity with the Indo-Persian culture.

Now, it is interesting, to know about his education. He was educated in Persian and Arabic tradition in Patna. He studied many works including Quran and was made to learn Persian and Arabic. And then, he moved on to Banaras. And in Banaras, he studied many Hindu texts, including many Vedas and Upanishads, and Katha Upanishad has significant influence in his thought.

And he began, to understand the Vedanta or Advait Vedanta philosophy in Banaras and began to think seriously about these texts and philosophic traditions. And because of his prior knowledge or familiarity with Persian and Arabic tradition, he began to also seriously think and reflect upon a lot of Hindu texts and traditions. And then, his professional life began with his European service in 1803 when he became the Munshi or the private secretary to the then collector of Murshidabad.

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- It was during this time he was seriously drawn into a study of the English language and the developments in contemporary Europe.
 - By 1814, he chose to settle down in Calcutta and for the next fifteen years he was embroiled in furious debates with Hindu pundits and publicists over the true basis of Hinduism and debated over various important issues like sati abolition, introduction of modern education, freedom of press etc.
 - During 1814-33, he authored more than 60 tracts and pamphlets in English, Bengali and Sanskrit languages.
- Derozio

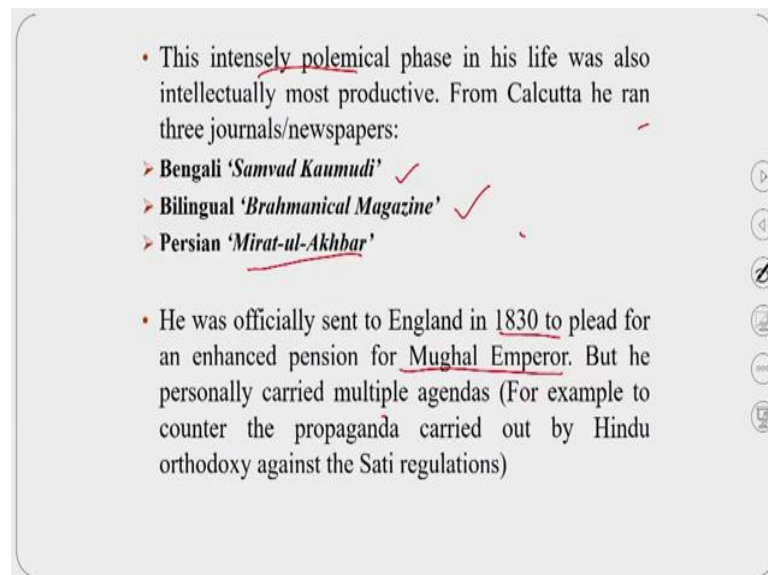
And that allows him to seriously, study English language as well as the developments in contemporary Europe that is the ideas of Bentham or Utilitarian philosophy, and the focus on greatest benefit to the greatest number. So, in his approach, he was actually very broad in terms of his understanding about society and religion. Because of his familiarity with different intellectual traditions, as I was saying in the beginning. Then in 1814 after serving in colonial administration for a decade or so, he decided to settle down in Calcutta.

And for the next 15 years, he was engaged in furious and at times very reactionary kind of debates with the orthodoxy, especially, with Hindu pundits and the publicists over the true meaning of Hinduism, and many issues including, the sati abolition, modern education and freedom of press. So, on modern education and freedom of press, we are going to discuss it in our next two lectures, but here, we will confine to this idea on social and religious reforms, that he was advocating and articulating, debating with many of his conservative friends. And here, I will just wish to name some of the thinkers.

So, on the one hand, he was responding to the conservatives among the contemporary intellectuals. Where they were arguing that we should learn modern education and that modern education should not interfere with our glorious or superior Hindu tradition or Hinduism. So, he was in a sense engaged with the Hinduism and Hindu thought, but also aware of the many evil practices in Hinduism and that challenge which he posed to such practices and such evil practices infuriated many of his conservative friends. He was also in that sense challenged by many radicals like Derozio. He was again a radical figure

among his contemporaries, who argued that it was very difficult to ascertain Raja Rammohan Roy's position. Because on the one hand, he seemed to criticize or attack Hinduism; at the same time, he wanted to bring out the true meaning or true philosophy of Hinduism. and so, it was a difficult proposition for many of his radical friends to ascertain what position he was taking. The period between 1814 to 1830's was a very productive period in his life, in terms of his intellectual contribution and also, in terms of his mobilization of social and political opinions for abolition of a lot of evil practices including Sati which we will discuss in a moment. So, during this period, as I was saying the most productive phase of his life; he authored more than 60 tracts and pamphlets in all the three languages of English, Bengali and Sanskrit.

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• This intensely polemical phase in his life was also intellectually most productive. From Calcutta he ran three journals/newspapers:

- Bengali '*Samvad Kaumudi*' ✓
- Bilingual '*Brahmanical Magazine*' ✓
- Persian '*Mirat-ul-Akhbar*'

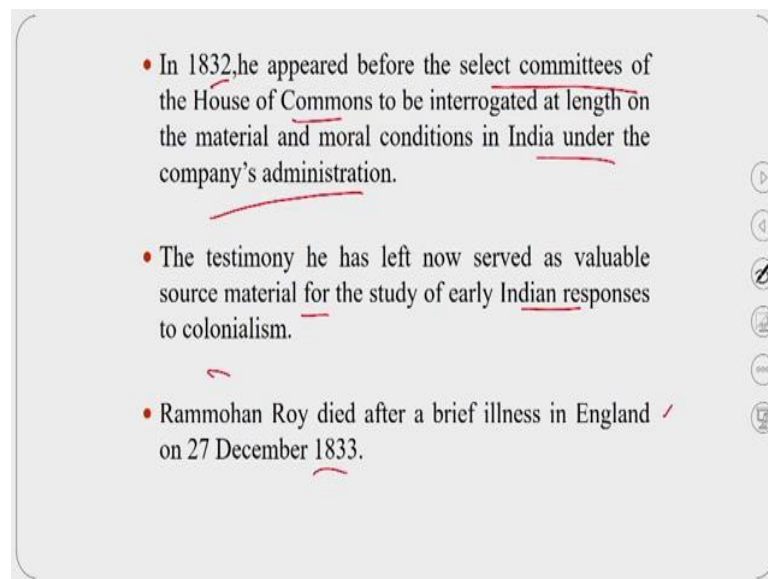
• He was officially sent to England in 1830 to plead for an enhanced pension for Mughal Emperor. But he personally carried multiple agendas (For example to counter the propaganda carried out by Hindu orthodoxy against the Sati regulations)

So, this was most productive period in Raja Rammohan Roy's life. This period was also intensely polemical and very productive, and he published along with those 60 tracts which I was telling you, three journals or newspapers in Bengali, also, in a bilingual that is English in Bengali and also, in Persian. So, in Bengali, he published *Samvad Kaumudi*, in bilingual he published *Brahmanical Magazine*, and in Persian, he published *Mirat-ul-Akhbar*. He wrote most of the contents in all these newspapers or journals. And through papers, he was articulating the modern liberal reformist ideas on religion, religious practices and challenging many orthodoxy fundamentalist approach about religion and society.

Now, in the later part in 1830s, he went to England to plead on behalf of Mughal emperor to enhance his pension. And he successfully, argued enhancement of the pension for the Mughal emperor. And it was increased by 30,000 Pounds on and he has a wide network in England with MPs, with the leaders and he also met the king there. But besides that petition, he also has his personal agenda, too.

So, while in India, he was talking about lots of liberal ideas and modern political discourse and developments that were taking place in Europe and elsewhere in the world. In England, he was writing more about the economic circumstances, social circumstances and challenges of colonialism in India for the England. So, he was also intentionally, engaged in the intellectual discussions and debates about the future of India, the condition of India and how that can be reformed or enhanced or how people can be empowered and that intellectual engagement, he continues to promote even when he went to England.

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- In 1832, he appeared before the select committees of the House of Commons to be interrogated at length on the material and moral conditions in India under the company's administration.
 - The testimony he has left now served as valuable source material for the study of early Indian responses to colonialism.
 - Rammohan Roy died after a brief illness in England on 27 December 1833.

Now, in 1832, as I was saying, he appeared before the select committee of the House of Commons to be interrogated at length on the material and the moral conditions in India under the company administration and he wrote a number of tracts about such economic conditions in India. Now, this testimony that he gave to the select committee is a very valuable source material for the study of early Indian response to colonialism. Now, Raja Rammohan Roy was very conscious or aware of the fact that he was living in a situation

when India was ruled by a foreign power, the British. The colonialism was the reality of Indian political and civil life.

Now, in that condition, how Indian intellectuals articulated and responded to such colonial rule or colonial challenges. Raja Rammohan Roy was one of the towering figures among the intellectuals who responded to the challenges of colonialism. Where he imbibed certain liberal principles or values that was there in the modern European political thought and thinking. At the same time, he deeply engaged or reflected upon Hinduism and its value in the modern times. Raja Rammohan Roy died after a brief illness in England where he was buried.

So, Rammohan Roy, in his short life, the most productive life he had had was in India from 1815 to 1833, where he wrote a number of treatises, had argumentation with conservatives as well as the radicals. And also, his intellectual works like *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhiddin*, I was telling you and the other works, he produced during that time; and also, he led the political and social mobilization for the abolition of Sati, modern education and other reforms in modern India.

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RELIGIOUS REFORMS

"There is always an innate faculty existing in the nature of mankind that in case any person of sound mind, before or after assuming the doctrines of any religion, makes an enquiry into the nature of the principles of religious doctrines.." -R.R.ROY

- The social and religious degeneration of his time was the 'immediate problematic' for Rammohan Roy.
- Ignorance, superstitions, idolatry, polygamy and infanticide were some of the major problems in the society that led to the self degeneration of the people.
- For him religious reforms can bring both social reform and political transformations in the society.

Now, if we talk about his religious reforms, one can reflect on his approach to religion from this quotation. He writes that, "there is always an innate faculty existing in the nature of mankind, that in case any person of sound mind before or after assuming the doctrines of any religion makes an inquiry into the nature of the principle of the religious

doctrines". Now, it is a very significant quote where he is arguing about the role of rational decision, on the part of individual before conforming, before following or before accepting any religious doctrines or principle of religious doctrines. So, he considered such inquiry as a result, and he is very selective in his word that sound mind. So, you should not follow any religious practices or religious principals because, it is written somewhere or because it is being followed for generations or for centuries. Until and unless, you use your own faculty, which he calls innate faculty to rationally decide, to rationally understand, to rationally argue, to rationally inquire, until and unless, you are convinced through your rational inquiry about the principles of any religious doctrines, you should not follow it and that is his rational approach towards the social and religious reforms movement.

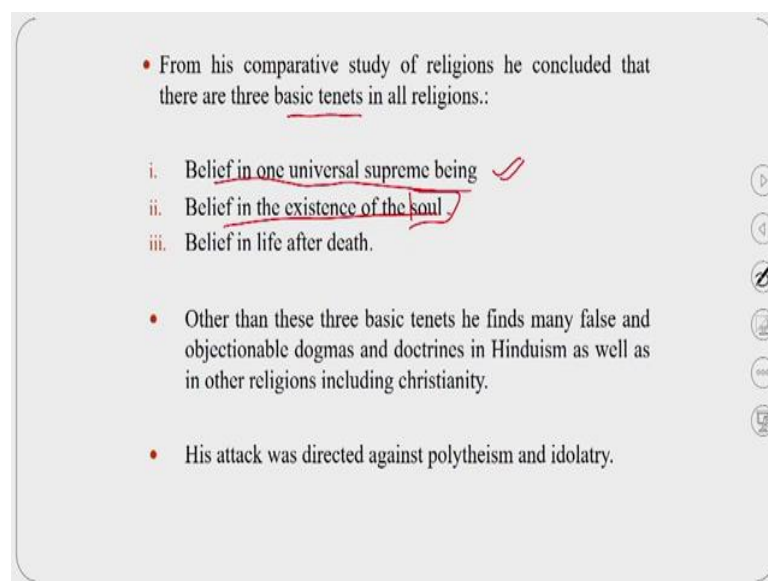
Now, for Raja Rammohan Roy in the historical context which he was articulating and arguing, the immediate problematic was the social and religious degeneration that he saw around his existence or his local communities or in India at large. Now, this social and religious degeneration, one can understand by the wide prevalence of ignorance, superstitions, idolatry, polygamy and infanticide. So, this is some of the major challenges that Raja Rammohan Roy faced and he thought that the very capacity, the innate faculty to reason, to argue, to inquire, is actually degenerated because of this wide prevalence of some of the challenges, that is mentioned here and even the idolatry as well.

So, people are deeply, religious but that religiosity does not come from their rational approach to that religion. And so, what happens here, in this kind of practices, is that you follow a religion, and you claim to be deeply religious, but that religiosity does not help you to cultivate your mind, to cultivate your thinking, to help you to develop morality, to help you to have better ethics. So, for him, then what you have here is a kind of form of religion which is widely practiced, believed in and followed, but it lacks the very spirit which helps you to develop morality, to develop ethics, to develop individuality, to think about social and political issues in a rational manner. So, Raja Rammohan Roy was finding these practices as major challenges. And significant reasons for the political or the social degeneration of his own people and he was challenging, he was responding, not just to the colonial administrators and their domination about Hinduism or the debasedness or what is called this inferiority or superstitions and other practices in India,

but also, he was challenging or responding to the widely prevalent evil practices in his society.

Now, in his idea, religious reforms can also lead to social reforms as well as transformations in the society. So, for him, religious reform is not just a personal matter, limited to the individual and through that one can achieve or accomplish spiritual heights or other things, but for him, the religious reform is at the center of social as well as the political transformations in Indian society.

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- From his comparative study of religions he concluded that there are three basic tenets in all religions.:
- i. Belief in one universal supreme being
- ii. Belief in the existence of the soul
- iii. Belief in life after death.
- Other than these three basic tenets he finds many false and objectionable dogmas and doctrines in Hinduism as well as in other religions including christianity.
- His attack was directed against polytheism and idolatry.

Now, from his wide ranging or comparative study of religions in the world, he considered the three basic tenets of all religions. And these three basic tenets are in all religions, particularly in Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism and other major religions of the world. The first is the belief in one universal supreme-being. And from here, he developed his thought on monotheism which we will discuss later. Then, the belief in the existence of the soul. So, for him, the soul is as significant in human being as his material, social and political well-being and the existence. So, the soul and especially, when he talks about religion and religious reforms. So, he was critical of practices and rituals or ceremonies, which merely satisfy the form of any organized religion. He was more concerned towards the soul or the spirit of religion which enables the individual to develop morality, to develop ethics and then better contribute in his personal and also, in his community, social life. So, for him, the religious reform in that sense is at the basis of

both social and political transformations, including the cultivation of human mind thinking, developing morality and ethics. So, for him, the soul which he believes is the part of the basic tenets in all the religions, which believes in the existence of soul. And finally, believe in the life after death. So, he considered these three principles as the basic tenets that are present in all the religions.

And he, as I was saying in the beginning, was well familiar with the many religious texts including that of – Islamic, Christian, and Hinduism. Raja Rammohan Roy developed his ideas on Hinduism or the role of religion from the wide ranging understanding or comparative understanding of religions in the world. Now, what he also found in the most of the religions, besides these three basic tenets. And you will find that this kind of thought is also, there in Vivekananda or in Aurobindo, or many other modern thinkers including to some extent Gandhi, the *Ishwar Allah Tero Naam Sabko Sanmati de Bhagwan*. So, for him, this God in any religion is One.

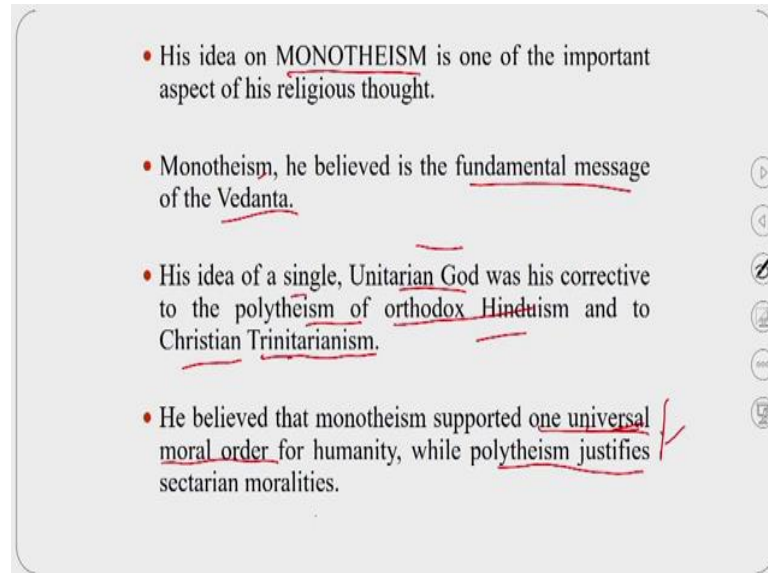
And at the same time, in many Hindu traditions there is this belief that there is only one God, different people call Him by different names, but essentially the existence of God is in Singular that is there is only one God. So, that is his understanding. But what he also found in all the religions, is that, there are many false and objectionable dogmas and doctrines including in Hinduism as well as in many other religions including in Christianity and Islam.

Now, specifically, in Hinduism his attack was on polytheism and idolatry. So, the idol worship was considered as the major religious or representative of the religiosity or religious behavior of the individual. And the polytheism, you know the kind of Gods that you have in India, and he believed that this was polytheism or polytheistic Gods, that actually created sectarian morality in India. Sectarian morality means ethics or morality that are limited to one locality or one community. And that kind of things, not about the universal or modern rational men living and contributing in larger society, starting in his or her nation state, but also thinking globally, or universally, responding and contributing to some of the global and international challenges.

So, his approach and that is why, he is not just a nationalist reformer, but also a cosmopolitan thinker because his approach is towards the universal or the global. So, in his religious doctrine, now, we will discuss about the objectionable dogmas or practices

that he had found in Hinduism. And the two is polytheism and idolatry, now, these practices are there in other traditions as well, but we will focus more on Hinduism.

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- His idea on MONOTHEISM is one of the important aspect of his religious thought.
 - Monotheism, he believed is the fundamental message of the Vedanta.
 - His idea of a single, Unitarian God was his corrective to the polytheism of orthodox Hinduism and to Christian Trinitarianism.
 - He believed that monotheism supported one universal moral order for humanity, while polytheism justifies sectarian moralities.

Now, in his articulation of religion and true religion, he focused on the monotheism. There is only One similar and to a greater extent, it is influenced by Islamic idea of Allah as one supreme-being, and by many Hindu treatises as well. So, this is one of the most significant aspects of his religious thought. Now, he believed that monotheism is the fundamental message of Vedanta.

So, the pantheism, the idea of millions of Gods and which led Christian missionaries to criticize Hinduism, because there was so many Gods and Goddesses, and there was no one organized religion or text or philosophy and that puzzled them. That made them believe in the superiority of Christianity and this belief that there is only one true religion, that is Christianity, and that is why they promoted religious conversions.

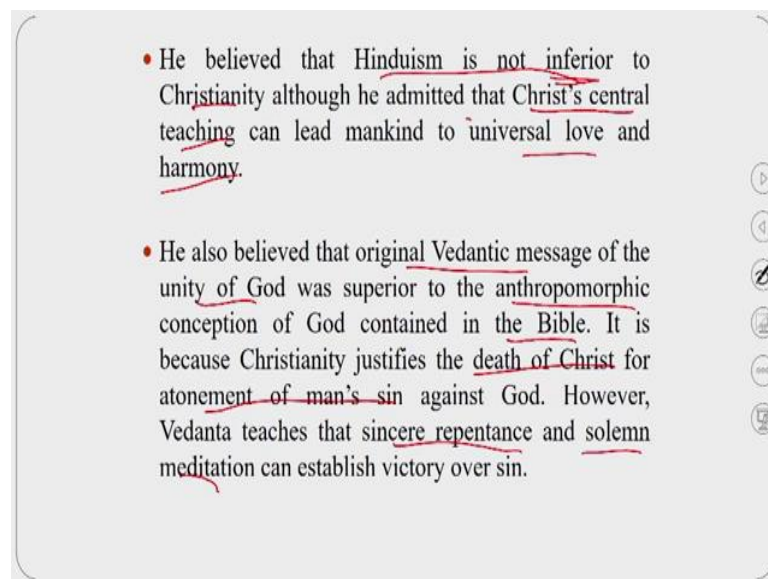
So, for Raja Rammohan Roy in Hinduism particularly, he considered Vedanta and its message of the one singular God, as the basic source for his understanding of monotheism. And he continuously promoted this understanding of monotheism, rather than pantheism that was widely prevalent and was supported by lot of his conservative friends and intellectuals. And Raja Rammohan Roy had to suffer because of his believes in monotheism and against idolatry. He was actually excommunicated and he had to

constantly fight this conservative argument about maintaining the status quo about religion and religious practices especially, by the orthodoxy.

So, his idea of a single Unitarian God was his corrective to the polytheism of orthodox Hinduism and also to Christian Trinitarianism. So, in Christianity also, there developed, this idea of Trinitarianism and in Hinduism we are well aware of the existence of millions of Gods. So, he thought that this monotheism, this Unitarian God is a corrective measure for such kind of beliefs, especially as promoted by the orthodox section of Hinduism.

So, he believed that monotheism supports one universal moral order for humanity, while polytheism justifies sectarian morality. Different communities, having different Gods and the their understandings, their moral ethical behaviors, guided by such practices, were actually sectarian in their approaches, whereas Raja Rammohan Roy was arguing about what is a morality or ethics that is universal or applicable to the whole humanity. And that is a kind of shift from a nationalist approach to a cosmopolitan global approach in his thought even on religion, religious morality and ethics. And that makes him a very fascinating and the first modern Indian thinker to articulate his ideas about religion, society and politics in a very rational and modern way.

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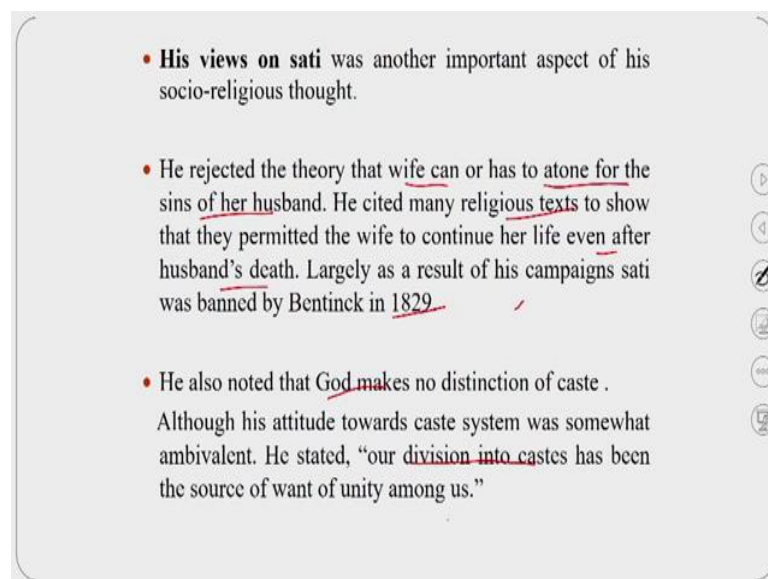
- He believed that Hinduism is not inferior to Christianity although he admitted that Christ's central teaching can lead mankind to universal love and harmony.
- He also believed that original Vedantic message of the unity of God was superior to the anthropomorphic conception of God contained in the Bible. It is because Christianity justifies the death of Christ for atonement of man's sin against God. However, Vedanta teaches that sincere repentance and solemn meditation can establish victory over sin.

Now, his argument with Christian missionary was to establish the strength of Hinduism, even when he himself had acknowledged some of the evil practices in Hinduism. So, he

believed that Hinduism is not inferior. The Christians or Christian missionaries were not happy with his approach, because for them it was the Christian or Christianity alone that is a true religion and that was the reason why did they promote religious conversions. So, Raja Rammohan Roy believed that the Hinduism is not inferior to Christianity, although, he admitted that the Christ's central teaching could lead mankind to universal love and harmony. So, while he acknowledges, the contribution of Christ which may lead the mankind, if followed truly, to universal love and harmony, to peace, to happiness; but, he refused to acknowledge Christ as a divinity.

So, he believed that the original Vedantic message of the unity of God was superior to the anthropomorphic conception of God contained in the Bible. It was so because Christianity justifies the death of Christ for the atonement of man's sins against God. However, Vedanta teaches that sincere repentance and solemn meditation can establish victory over sins. So, here, Raja Rammohan Roy is arguing against the Christian Biblical anthropomorphic understanding or conception of God, where one person sacrifices His life for the sins of others, for the empowerment of others. He believed in the Vedantic teaching which states that the sincere approach, sincere repentance and meditation will establish the victory over sins and every individual himself or herself is capable of overcoming such sins and evil practices.

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- **His views on sati** was another important aspect of his socio-religious thought.
- He rejected the theory that wife can or has to atone for the sins of her husband. He cited many religious texts to show that they permitted the wife to continue her life even after husband's death. Largely as a result of his campaigns sati was banned by Bentinck in 1829.
- He also noted that God makes no distinction of caste . Although his attitude towards caste system was somewhat ambivalent. He stated, "our division into castes has been the source of want of unity among us."

Now, so to briefly discuss his views on Sati, which he challenged not just politically or socially or emotionally, but also by using a number of religious texts. So, his approach to Sati which was a social problem, but it had religious sanction as well. And he rejected or challenged such practices, using the religion. So, religious reforms or his social religious thought was not just about scholastic debate over the meaning of true religion or true message of Hinduism, or the true meaning of Hinduism, but also, to remove, to eradicate widely prevalent practices like Sati. So, Sati and his views on Sati represent his social religious thought. He rejected this theory, that wife can or had to sacrifice herself for the sins of her husband and he cited many religious texts to prove that these texts, actually permitted the wife to continue her life even after her husband's death.

So, mainly, because of his arguments and for this, he was fiercely opposed by the orthodox sections of Hindu society including, his own family, especially his father. And he was giving the reasons for abolishing Sati using the religious texts and saint Hindu religious texts, which permitted women to live the life even after the death of her husband. And largely, because of his argument and political, public mobilization Lord William Bentinck legally banned Sati in 1829. So, this is the greatest contribution of Raja Rammohan Roy, perhaps in the history of modern India, where his approach to religion, religious practices helped in formulating a law which banned a widely accepted or prevalent practices of Sati in India.

If you look at his views on Caste, which is a bit ambiguous, he actually, practiced or used sacred thread all his life. And yet, he was very ambiguous about the practices of Caste in India. He believed in principle, that God makes no distinction of Caste and it was the man made distinctions. And he considered this division between and among the Caste as one of the reasons for want of unity among the Indians. So, he wanted Caste to be reformed and that was the basis, according to Roy for the overall unity among the Indians.

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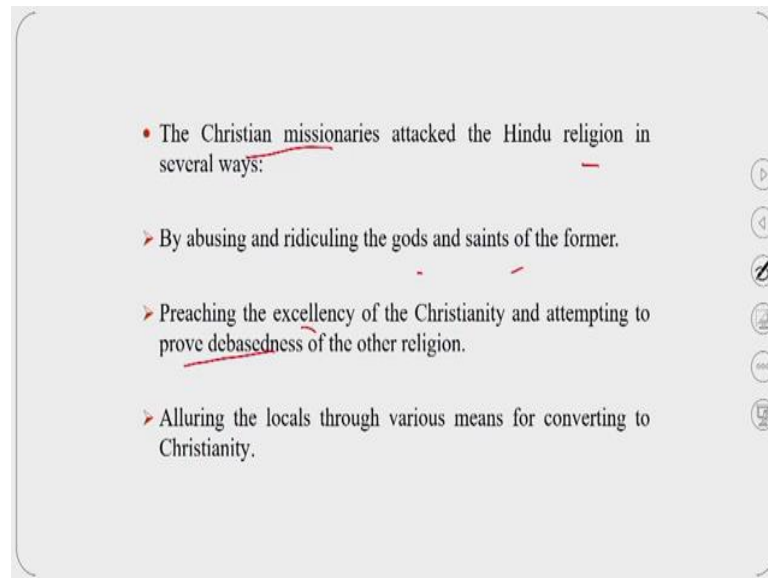
- He tried to protect the true spirit of Hindu religion from both internal and external threats.
- **Internal threat** came from the Brahmins while the **external was** from the Christian missionaries and their practices of conversion.
- He condemned the priestly class for propagating religious dogmas for their personal benefits.

But in his practices, he continued to wear sacred thread and that is why, perhaps his views on Caste remained somewhat ambiguous. His approach and if we assess, his thought and his religious thought, what we find is that he tries to protect the true spirit of Hinduism and he fought orthodoxy on the one hand and the external force on the other.

So, he protected the true spirit of Hinduism or Hindu religion from both the internal and external threats. The internal threat came from the Brahmins or the orthodoxy, or the orthodox sections of Hindu society which tried to protect the Hindu or Hinduism and that did not allow the large section of Indians to understand - what was the true meaning and what is the true message of the text; because that was in Sanskrit which was in the position of the Brahmins alone. So, he was trying to protect Hinduism from the Brahmins on the one hand, that was the internal threat, and the Christian missionaries and their practices of conversions that was the external threat from outside.

So, for the practices of dogmas and other ritual ceremonious and practices, he considered the priestly class, especially the Brahmins, for the promotion and maintaining the status quo, because it helps in their personal benefits and not in the benefit of those who are actually doing such practices, rituals and ceremonious practices. Because ultimately, the role of religion is to uplift the men, to enable the men to develop certain morality and ethics which will come once that the person or individual approach the religion and religious doctrine rationally. And, on that basis, develop certain ethics and morality that was what he was focusing on and not on the practices of rituals and dogmas that were promoted by the priestly class.

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The Christian missionaries were operating in different parts of India. They attacked Hinduism on several counts, by abusing and ridiculing the Gods and saints in Hinduism. They believed in the excellency or the superiority of Christianity. And there is nothing worthy enough in Hinduism to be followed or accepted by the men.

And actually, if such practices, that means different Gods, saints, their believes and values were to be practiced it will not help in the cultivation of the better things in human being or in the individuals; it may actually turn out to be the major reason of their degeneration. So, that was the Christian missionaries understanding of Hinduism and Hindu practices. Now, they also had certain allurements in terms of material benefits to convert Hindus to Christianity.

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THREE APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS REFORMS:

- Exposing the irrational religious practices and dogmas.
- Promoting western liberal education.
- Seeking state action in support of these programmes.

What was the approach for religious reforms in Raja Rammohan Roy's thought? First, he exposed irrational religious practices and dogmas. So, while he was establishing the superiority or not the superiority, but the true meaning, the true message of Hinduism, he was also articulating or identifying the irrational practices and dogmas in Hinduism. So, that was his one approach.

The second was to promote western liberal education. We will discuss it in the next lecture. And he was also identifying or acknowledging the rule of state to support these two programs, to eradicate the social and religious dogmas and superstitions; and also in the promotion of western liberal education. He acknowledged the role of state, and that is why, he is the first modern Indian political thinker in a way which believes in and acknowledges the role of the state in reforming society, religion, bringing about liberal education, that is something which helps in the overall development of individual and society in general.

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- He believed in religious associations as the instruments for social and political transformation.
- In 1815 he founded a new religious society known as the *Atmiya Sabha*, *The Calcutta Unitarian Association* in 1821 and the *Brahmo Sabha* in 1828 which later became the *Brahmo Samaj*.
- The theological basis of the organization that Rammohan Roy founded in 1828, the *Brahmo Sabha* was his theistic reading of the *Upanishads*, which he interpreted as promulgating a non-ritualistic, interior worship of the One True Being.

So, they are the three approaches, we can find in Raja Rammohan Roy, about social and religious reforms movement. He also believed and established some associations too as instruments for social and political transformation. So, in 1815 he established *Atmiya Sabha*; in 1821 he established the *Calcutta Unitarian Association*; and in 1828 he established *Brahmo Sabha* which is later came to be known as the *Brahma Samaj*. And this was something, which remained or contributed in transforming the individual and the community, about their views on true religion or enables them to fight the superstitions, irrational dogmas and practices that were so widely prevalent.

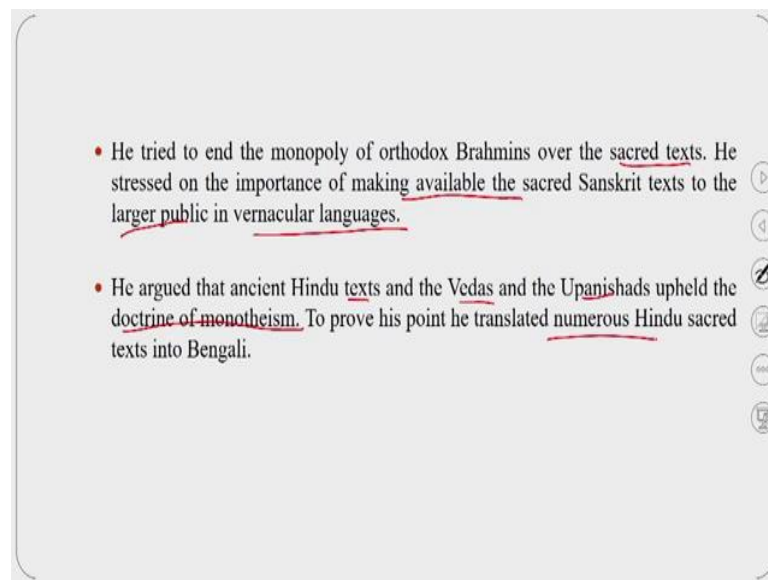
So, he considered these Sabhas as a kind of instrument for social and political transformations in the society. So, these kinds of Sabhas and associations promoted his ideas of monotheism, religion, spirit of religion which helps in the establishing or developing morality or cultivating morality and ethics in individuality. There, he did not follow any kind of creed or any kind of divisions on the basis of caste, religion or any such social affirmative identities. So, these Sabhas and associations were open for all sections of society including, men and women. So, that was his major contribution.

Now, the theology, if we talk about. So, *Brahmo Samaj* remained and played a very significant role in reforming a lot of social and religious evil practices in Bengal. And also, in other parts of India and it was the first association which really, helped in the organization of traditional and orthodox society, to think or articulate about religion in a very different way. So, the theological basis of organization that Rammohan Roy

founded in 1828 that is *Brahmo Sabha* was the theistic reading of the Upanishads which he interpreted as promulgating a non-ritualistic interior worship of the One true being.

So, that was the focus of *Brahma Samaj*, where there was no idol worship, no scripture, no preaching. It was like individual engagement with the one supreme-being which was the spirit or the true meaning of any religion which he believed. So, there was no ritual ceremonial practices that existed in the *Brahmo Sabha*. It focuses on the interior worship, the personal worship of One true being that comes from his monotheistic belief.

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He tried to end the monopoly of orthodox Brahmins over the sacred texts. Now, that was also his significant contribution in social religious reforms. Here in India, you have a very small section of society which controls over the access of religious texts to the larger sections. This was so because these texts were in Sanskrit and learning of Sanskrit was limited to a particular section. Raja Rammohan Roy opposed to such restrictions as far as the access to religious texts and sacred texts in Hinduism was concerned.

He wanted to make such texts available to the larger public in their vernacular languages. And he argued that the ancient Hindu texts and the Vedas, including Upanishads upheld the doctrine of monotheism. And to prove this point, he actually translated many Hindu sacred texts from Sanskrit into Bengali. And that was the beginning, when you find in many modern Indian languages; there is the translations from the original Sanskrit in the local languages. So that people themselves can read such texts in their own languages

and then develop their understandings or find out the true meaning or the true message of Hindu religion.

So, that is the overall understanding of Raja Rammohan Roy and his believes in religious reforms and why religious reforms was the basis in his opinion for the social and political transformations as well. And against the colonial regime also, this is the interesting point to note that the response of Indians to the colonial domination or hegemony, not just in military, political or physical sense, but also, in the intellectual space, the response that came was from the vocabulary which was deeply religious.

Now, and that was there on the both sides, the Christian missionaries and colonial administration promoting and patronizing such Christian missionary on the one hand, and many Indian intellectuals and thinkers articulating about this true meaning, the superiority in a sense of Hinduism, on the other. You find Raja Rammohan Roy somewhat, uncomfortable with this assertion on the part of Christianity or Christian missionaries that Christian or Christianity alone is the true religion. On the other hand, he also criticized the conservatives which believed in the status quo, idol worship or in fact, sanctioning certain evil practices like Sati and many other ritualistic ceremonial practices in Hinduism, which in no way was helpful for individual self-improvement or empowerment.

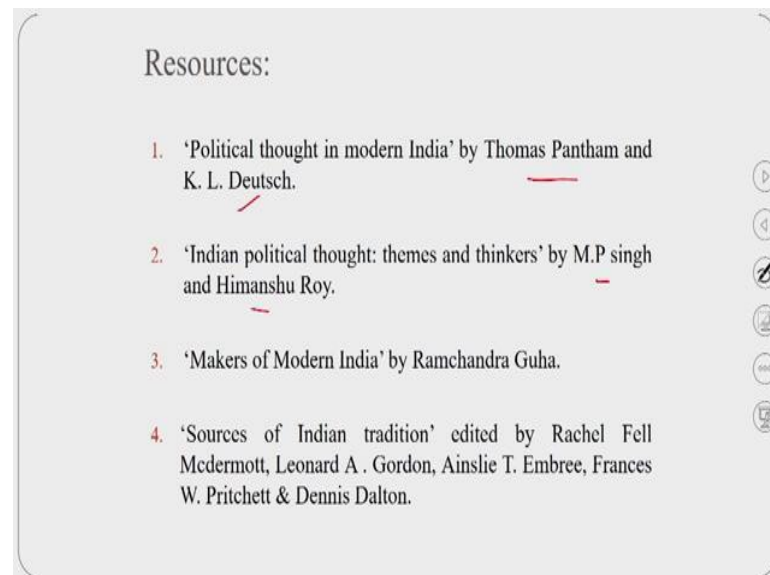
Raja Rammohan Roy was using rational approach to understand the true meaning of any religion. Yet he was against this assertion of superiority on the parts of Christians. There is one anecdote which helps us to understand this more. There was one kind of rumor, that he, because of his criticism to idol worships or irrational practices in Hinduism, was converted to Christianity. And there was one Christian missionary which sent him a kind of pleasing or greetings and welcomed him in the true fold or true religion or superior religion of Christianity, to which Raja Rammohan Roy replied, that he was not someone who was going to leave one kind of superstitions and irrational practices to join other kind of superstitions and irrational practices.

He was very uncomfortable with the irrational superstitions or ignorant practices and belief systems in all religions. Yet, at the same time, he was establishing the true meaning of all the religions as more or less same, which you will find is there in other thinkers as well like in Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghosh, to some extent in Tagore and

also certainly in Gandhi. So, he was actually trying to establish the true meaning of religion which could help in the empowerment of individual as well as the society and the community.

So, he considered the religious reforms in India as the basis for social and political transformations as well. So, using the idiom to respond to the colonial challenges in the in the idioms of religion, where the true meaning of religion is there in the monotheism and Brahma Samaj. And certainly, Brahma Samaj did play a very significant role in promotion of his ideals.

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So, on the theme of religious reforms in the thinking of Raja Rammohan Roy, you can look at the following texts: *Political Thought in Modern India*, by Pantham and Deutsch. You can also look at M P Singh and Himanshu Roy's book on *Indian Political Thought: Themes and Thinkers again*; from Ram Chandra Guha's *Makers of Modern India* you can also find a chapter on Raja Rammohan Roy. And in this book, you can also find some of the original excerpts from Raja Rammohan Roy about the religious reforms, monotheism, colonial response and so on. So, that was all for today.

Thank you.