

Introduction to Modern Indian Political Thought
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Lecture – 04
Raja Rammohan Roy: Freedom of Press

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Hello! everyone. Today, is the concluding lecture on Raja Rammohan Roy. In the previous two lectures, we have discussed his thoughts on religious reforms and also on modern education. Today, we are going to discuss his thoughts on freedom of press, political and civil rights, and finally, conclude by assessing his contributions in modern Indian political thought and thinking.

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RAJA RAMMOHAN ROY
(22 May 1772 - 27 Sept 1833)

KEY THEMES

- Religious reforms
- Modern education
- Freedom of press

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Today's key theme is his ideas on freedom of press, which I will conclude and in the next lecture, we will pick up a new thinker and some of the key themes and through that key themes, we will try to understand the contribution of that thinkers in modern Indian political thought.

Raja Rammohan Roy is more relevant for us even today, when you think about lot of limitations, regulations and censorships; that is there whether by the government or by some kind of self-censorships. So, before, I begin this discussion on freedom of press and Raja Rammohan Roy's idea on freedom of press, one needs to understand the relevance and the significance of this idea for modern democracy, citizenship, rights and the whole artifice of liberal democracy.

So, you see in our contemporary times, the prevalence of so many fake news, paid news, social media and 24 into 7 electronic or print media. The task, the challenge before the media, for the government and also for the citizens has become enormous. And especially, when you have a kind of situation where it is hard to distinct; which is fake and which is real, which is paid and which is not, which is paid news in disguise of news.

So, this becomes a challenge for an informed citizen, because the task of media historically, is to create public opinion on certain issues. And to highlight some of the wrong doings or abuse of power on the part of the executive, and report it to the higher authority and that is how liberal democracy correct itself and learn from its own

mistakes, rectified the mistakes, and then, again a new kind of public opinion on certain issue is formed.

But in contemporary times there is this discourse which highlight some issues which may or may not be relevant. And conceal some issues, which is very relevant. So, in this situation, the idea of free press as an agent or as an instrument to hold the government accountable and also to shape the public opinion on certain political and social issues that are relevant to that society is extremely relevant.

And in contemporary times also, there are lots of regulation, a kind of censorships on media by the government or also some kind of self-censorships that is there, and that remind us of the significance of a free press, freedom of speech and expression which is inevitable in a liberal democrac. And Raja Rammohan Roy was articulating about the necessity and relevance of freedom of press in the very beginning of our so called cultural or political renaissance or in the very beginning of social and political awakening.

So, we will discuss more on how Raja Rammohan Roy was articulating the idea of freedom of press in situation which was not a democratic set up, when India was under the British rule. And British rule was promising to provide liberal rights to the citizens. And at the same time, denying certain rights which were available to the colonial people in their home country. And Raja Rammohan Roy, was articulating about the relevance of such ideas in that context and that makes him a more fascinating thinker.

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Historical Context

- ❖ Rammohan Roy was an ardent supporter of freedom of press.
- ❖ When Lord Hastings relaxed the press censorship in 1819, he started several journals and magazines such as The Brahminical Magazine(1821), Samvad Kaumudi(1821) and Mirat-ul-Akhbar(1822).
- ❖ Displeased by Buckingham, the publisher of "Calcutta Journal", on 14th March, 1823 the then Governor-General in Council John Adam suddenly issued a press regulation restricting the freedom of press.
- ❖ The ordinance imposed restraints on all publications without the prior sanction of the government.

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What you find in Raja Rammohan Roy was not just a great social and religious reformer and promoter of modern liberal education, but also someone who is deeply involved in scientific or rational outlook about politics, society, citizens, and their civil and political rights. And he was an ardent supporter of freedom of press which for him was *sine qua non*; that means, absolutely, necessary for any kind of representative, responsible or liberal democracy or liberal government.

So, to contextualize his ideas, he was articulating and supporting, what freedom of press is, when there was a kind of initiative on the part of colonial administrator to promote some kind of native press or printing, which will enable them to represent and articulate their opinion on many issues and express their grievances and authority will try to address such grievances.

So, when Lord Hastings, somewhat relaxed the press censorship in 1899, Raja Rammohan Roy began publishing three magazines or journals; namely, Brahminical Magazine in 1821, *Samvad Kaumudi* again in 1821, and *Mirat-Ul-Akhbar* 1822. So, Raja Rammohan Roy in a way was someone who grasped the relevance of free press and role of press in shaping public opinion on matters of religion, society, politics, economics, etc.

And he utilized such relaxation, when Lord Hastings initiated or relaxed some kind of press censorship in 1819, but in 1823, there was a news report published in *Calcutta*

Journal published by Buckingham. And that somehow, did not go well with the then governor general in consul who was John Adams.

And he issued a press regulation which restricted the freedom of press in India and in a way, censored any kind of publication without the prior approval of the government. So, this ordinance imposed certain restrictions on the freedom of press which was relaxed by Lord Hastings in 1819. And just in four years, the authority again passed a regulation which restricted any kind of publication without the prior approval of the government.

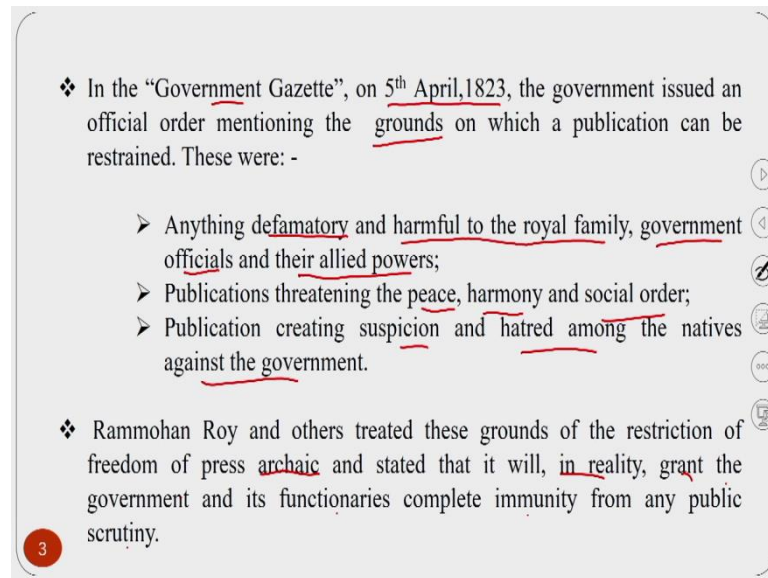
Now, in this context, one needs to always understand that those who are in power, those who are in the authority, they will always hold some information. So, *Official Secret Acts* or some kind of regulation on press or printing was imposed. Most contemporary example was during the time of emergency in India from 1975 to 1977. We have seen how press was strangled or censored by those who are in the authority Press and its role is absolutely, critical in a liberal democracy. And in India, we have a kind of long history for struggle or fight against the restrictions on the freedom of press, to challenge, question, and interrogate any kind of authority, authoritarian or official censorship on freedom of press.

So, Raja Rammohan Roy in a way, even, when he accepted and supported the British rule and we will discuss, why he supported the British rule in a few moments. He was someone who was a true champion, true fighter for the freedom of press. And he was the first leader perhaps to understand the role of press in creation of public opinion or in resolving a lot of social, political and economic issues in India.

So, his appeal or articulation about freedom of press started with this regulation passed by John Adam in 1823.

Now, what this Gazette says?

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❖ In the “Government Gazette”, on 5th April, 1823, the government issued an official order mentioning the grounds on which a publication can be restrained. These were: -

- Anything defamatory and harmful to the royal family, government officials and their allied powers;
- Publications threatening the peace, harmony and social order;
- Publication creating suspicion and hatred among the natives against the government.

❖ Rammohan Roy and others treated these grounds of the restriction of freedom of press archaic and stated that it will, in reality, grant the government and its functionaries complete immunity from any public scrutiny.

In this Gazette of 5th April 1823, the government issued an official order mentioning the grounds on which a publication can be restrained or restricted from publication. And these grounds were basically three. The first ground was that anything defamatory and harmful to the royal family that means king of England, government officials and their allied powers. This is a very broad restriction on any kind of publication which is considered in the discretion of the official - defamatory or harmful to the royal family, government official and their allied powers will be restrained, and restricted from publication. The second round of restriction was those publications threatening the peace, harmony and social order. Again, this is too broad canvases to precisely or define what threaten, and what do not threaten social harmony, peace and order.

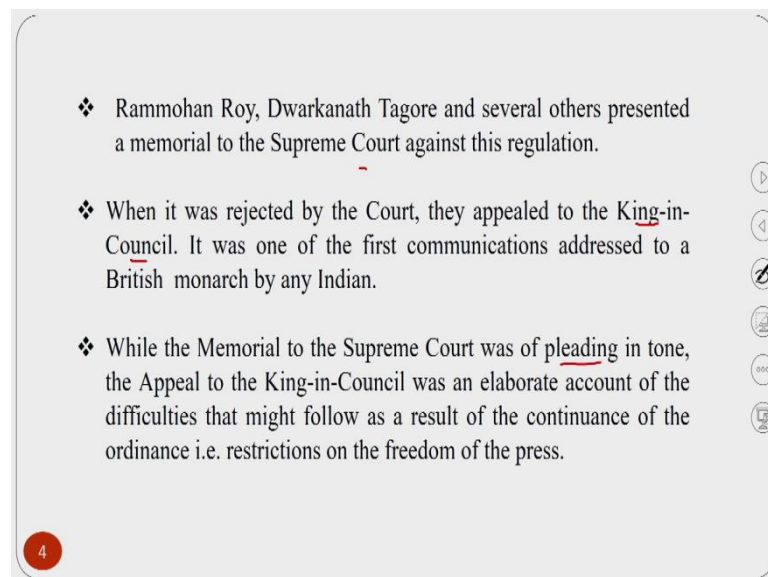
So, again, the officials have enormous discretion to restrain any publication on the grant of that it may threaten social peace, order and harmony. Then the third ground, for restriction was publication that creates suspicion and hatred among the natives against the government. So, on these three grounds, the government through this regulation restrained the freedom of press in India which was relaxed by Hastings, just four years ago.

Rammohan Roy and many others, treated these grounds of restriction on freedom of press archaic, that means, outdated. That means, not very substantial, not very convincing enough. And he stated, that it will, in reality grant the government and its

functionaries complete immunity from any public scrutiny. So, one of the features of liberal democracy is any act of government or the executives are subject to public scrutiny. That means, any policies framed or implemented should be subjected to public debate and discussion. And should be subjected to public scrutiny; that means the criticism of government acts are not just promoted, but legitimate in a liberal democracy. It is an essential part of liberal democratic process of governing and governance. So, Raja Rammohan Roy was very quick and many of his colleagues were quick in understanding that this kind of regulations on the freedom of press will, in reality give enormous powers to the government and its functionaries and complete immunity from any kind of public scrutiny.

So, any public scrutiny of public government officials and its functionaries could be easily clubbed in any of these three grounds and could be restrained from publication. And that was their objection, and they went to the Supreme Court and then King-in-Council that we will discuss in the next slide. Like Raja Rammohan Roy, Dwarkanath Tagore and several others presented a memorial to the Supreme Court against this regulation.

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- ❖ Rammohan Roy, Dwarkanath Tagore and several others presented a memorial to the Supreme Court against this regulation.
- ❖ When it was rejected by the Court, they appealed to the King-in-Council. It was one of the first communications addressed to a British monarch by any Indian.
- ❖ While the Memorial to the Supreme Court was of pleading in tone, the Appeal to the King-in-Council was an elaborate account of the difficulties that might follow as a result of the continuance of the ordinance i.e. restrictions on the freedom of the press.

And when it was rejected by the Court, they appealed to the Kings-in-Council in London where it was again rejected, we will discuss that why, but significance of this memorial and appeal to the King-in-Council is something which we need to understand, because

this was perhaps, first official or first communication addressed to a British monarch by any Indian. So, that has its significance and actually interesting part of this kind of development was that it was by the natives responding to the regulations by the administrator of a nation which claimed to be a liberal advanced civilized nation.

And they were articulating the liberal thought, liberal principles and cautioning the government or its official that depriving the natives or the colonized from this liberal principle which they cherish in their home country, but denied and deprived the natives in their state that will lead to some kind of challenges or resistances to the British rule itself.

So, it was this development which was really significant given the historical context in which Raja Rammohan Roy was articulating and developing his thought on the freedom of press. So, while the memorial to the Supreme Court was of pleading in nature, so, there is also the change in the tone in their articulations. In the memorial, they were more or less like pleading that the ban or restrictions on the freedom of press should be lifted.

But their appeal to the King-in-Council was more elaborate in terms of providing the difficulties that might follow as a result of the continuance of this ordinance that is the restriction of press. So, what could be the possible repercussions or consequences of this restriction on the freedom of press was elaborately discussed. And the reason, for its removal was given in a very detailed manner in this appeal.

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Memorial to the Supreme Court (1823)

- ❖ In the beginning of the memorial, Rammohan Roy presented an account of the loyalty and attachment of the natives towards the British government and that there was no ground for accusing them of misusing/abusing the freedom of press.
- ❖ He argued that it was the wisdom and liberties displayed by the government which was the basis of legitimacy of British rule in India.
- ❖ He viewed printing and publishing as the means of free discussion among the natives that could contribute to the improvement of their material and mental conditions.

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So, if we discuss, these two major texts which argue for the freedom of press, one by one, we will find, the memorial to the Supreme Court was presented in the same year in 1823. And in the beginning of this memorial, and which reflected why Raja Rammohan Roy and many of his contemporaries were favourable or loyal to the British rule in India. And at this point, one also needs to understand that Raja Rammohan Roy was someone who was initially very apprehensive or critical of the British rule in India.

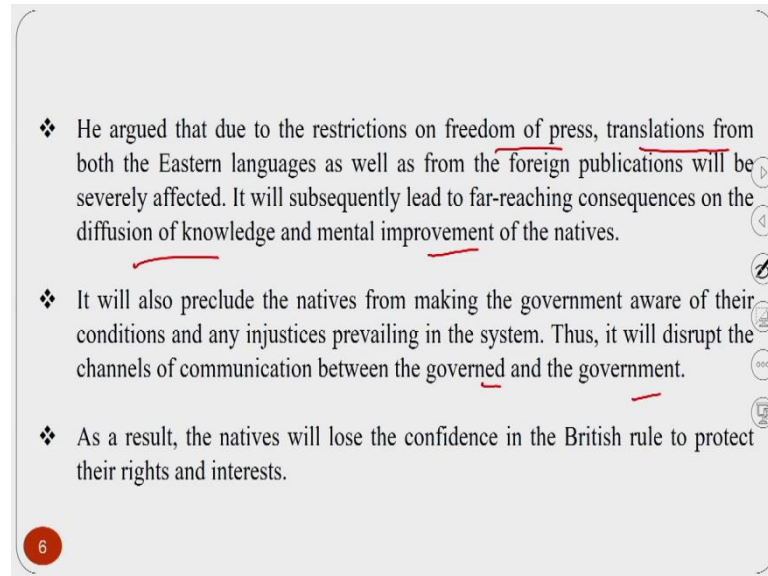
He considered it as a kind of foreign yoke on the shoulder of Indians. But gradually, when he developed interactions or friendships or came to know about their ideas or thought, principle of governance, promises of justice or the ways in which they administered the country, somewhat he got convinced that that British rule was good for the country. So, in the beginning of this memorial, which he wrote to the Supreme Court, he presented an account of the loyalty and attachment of the natives towards the British government.

And he also, asserted that there were no grounds for accusing them; that means the natives of India, of misusing or abusing the freedom of press that was provided to them. In the very beginning, he explained to the British that they were loyal subject to the British crown. And there were no grounds, no misuse or abuse of freedom of press that a government or British government could accuse the natives of. So, he argued, that it was the wisdom and liberty displayed by the British government, which was the basis of legitimacy of British rule in India.

So, a support or legitimacy of the British rule in India, in the opinion of Raja Rammohan Roy and some of his contemporaries was that British rule was based on good intentions. And that intention was to bring about social, political and economic transformations in society and improve the material and the mental conditions of the Indian subjects. So, that was the basis of legitimacy for British rule in India.

And he viewed printing and publication as the means of free discussion among the natives that could contribute to the improvements of their material as well as the mental conditions. So, for Raja Rammohan Roy, this publication and printing, or freedom of the press was essential for improvement in the material and mental conditions of Indian subjects; which in any case, in British rule in India was intended or intending for.

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- ❖ He argued that due to the restrictions on freedom of press, translations from both the Eastern languages as well as from the foreign publications will be severely affected. It will subsequently lead to far-reaching consequences on the diffusion of knowledge and mental improvement of the natives.
- ❖ It will also preclude the natives from making the government aware of their conditions and any injustices prevailing in the system. Thus, it will disrupt the channels of communication between the governed and the government.
- ❖ As a result, the natives will lose the confidence in the British rule to protect their rights and interests.

So, he argued, that due to the restriction on the freedom of press, translation from both the western languages as well as from the foreign publications would be severely affected. It would subsequently lead to far reaching consequences on the diffusion of knowledge and mental improvements of the natives. So, the other arguments that he provided for freedom of press was that, that once you have freedom of press in a country it would allow one to translate the texts from other languages, other Eastern languages and also from the foreign publications. So, the texts published in other countries, especially, European, or American countries that cannot be translated, if you, have restrictions on the freedom of press. And if you, do not allow such translations or publications of the texts published in other languages or by the foreign publications, then, it would have far reaching consequences on diffusion of knowledge which British government through its promotion of modern liberal education was trying to achieve in India and improving the mental improvements of the natives.

So, this will have consequences on this project of diffusion of knowledge and improving the mental faculty of the natives in India as well. It will also prohibit the natives from making the government aware of their conditions and the injustices prevailing in the system.

Now, one of the significance of freedom of press is government can learn the grievances of the people and know about their issues and concerns, if they, allow the freedom of

press. Freedom of press not just scrutinize government policies or implementation, but also, express the concerns and issues that is relevant for the people.

So, Raja Rammohan Roy understood this point and he believed that restrictions on press would prevent the natives from making the government aware of their conditions. And also to the injustices that was prevalent in the system. Thus, it would disrupt the channels of communication between governed as well as the government. So, Raja Rammohan Roy was arguing for a kind of continuous communication between governed and the government. And that was about the issues relevant for the governed and as well as their understanding of the prevalent injustices in the system which government could rectify, if it allows the freedom of press.

So, that is why he supported and expressed why freedom of press was absolutely necessary for legitimacy of the British rule in India and eventual development of liberal democracy and representative democracy in India. So, he believed that if such restriction was allowed the natives would lose the confidence in the British rule to protect their rights and interests.

So, why Indians were loyal or had faith in the British? Because they believed that British rule was for the improvement of the material as well as the mental conditions of the people, and also it was based on just principle, liberal principle and it provided certain civil and political rights to the citizens. And if such restrictions were allowed, then people may eventually lose confidence in the British government.

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Appeal to the King-in-Council (1823)

- ❖ He states that the disregard of the subordinate authorities as the reason for their appeal to King-in-Council who was the guardian of their “lives, property and religion”.
- ❖ He viewed the ordinance on the restriction of freedom of press as an invasion of their civil rights.
- ❖ He stated that the enjoyment of civil rights was what distinguished the British from the previous Muhammadan rule. Civil rights were one of the sources of legitimacy of British rule and by invading them the ordinance had posed a threat to their rule itself.

Now, in this appeal to the King-in-Council, he states that disregard of the subordinate authorities was the reason for their appeal to the King-in-Council who was the guardian of their lives, property and religion. So, that was the expression of their loyalty to the crown. And he believed that the King-in-Council was superior or supreme authority to protect or to promote the onslaught on the freedom of press, or any civil or political rights guaranteed under law.

And if, it was taken away, then the concerned person could go to the King-in-Council and get their grievances redressed. So, when the Supreme Court rejected their memorial, they went to the King-in-Council, and there Raja Rammohan Roy again, argued in a very elaborate way about the pros and cons of this restriction on the freedom of press.

He considered in this appeal that this ordinance on the restriction of renowned press as an invasion on their civil rights. And the civil right was something, which Raja Rammohan Roy considered absolutely necessary for the mental development and improvement of individual as well as the community. So, the civil right would be invaded, if such restriction was allowed. And he stated that enjoyment of civil rights was what distinguished the British from the previous Muhammadan rule in India. And civil rights were one of the sources of legitimacy of the British rule and by invading them, the ordinance had posed a threat to their rule itself.

The civil right was something which was new for the natives, which they did not enjoy in the pre-colonial rule during the Mughals, or under the many princely states like Rajputs and Marathas. So, civil rights was something, absolutely, necessary for the growth of the individual which they learned and they came to know about from the British.

And they considered that the protection of civil rights was something that distinguishes the British rule from Muhammadan rule in India. And therefore, the restriction on the freedom of press invaded this civil right, which ultimately led and posed a threat to the very legitimacy of the British rule in India, the very source of legitimacy of British rule.

His defence of the freedom of press can be better understood from this quotation.

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His defense of freedom of press:

"Your Majesty is well aware that a Free Press has never yet caused a revolution in any part of the world, because, while men can easily represent their grievances arising from the conduct of the local authorities to the supreme Government, and thus get them redressed, the grounds of discontent that excite revolution are removed; whereas, where no freedom of the press existed, and grievances consequently remained unrepresented and unredressed, innumerable revolutions have taken place in all parts of the globe, or if prevented by the armed force of the Government, the people continued ready for insurrection"

Rammohan Roy, "Appeal to the King-in-Council"

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This quotation is from the appeal made to the King-in-Council, where he says, that "your majesty is well aware that a free press has never yet caused a revolution in any part of the world, because while men can easily represent their grievances arising from the conduct of the local authority to the supreme government and thus, get them redressed on the grounds of discontent that excite revolutions are removed". So, this is a very powerful articulation in support of the freedom of press by Raja Rammohan Roy.

So, what he basically, says is that he was in a way reminding or representing before the crown, the case for freedom of press while saying, that the existence of free press has never caused revolution in any country. Revolution is something which challenged the

existence of a status quo and brings about a rupture, from the existing system of control and rule to a new kind of rule. And it happens, when the grievances of the people are not redressed by the authority or by the people in the position of power.

So, he is arguing that a free press has never caused a revolution in any part of the world, because men can easily represent their grievances. So, if you have the free press, then, it gives you the platform, the space to represent your grievances against the local authorities. So, most of the time, the lower level of administrative machinery against whom people have a lot of grievances, and if such grievances get the platform to be expressed, and then the superior authority take into account such grievances and rectify those grievances, then it will sustain or it will help in the durability of that rule. So, Raja Rammohan Roy was arguing about that thing. So, if the grievance was redressed, then it removes any ground for the discontent that excites the revolution.

Now, where no freedom of press existed and grievances consequently remained unrepresented and un-redressed, innumerable rebellions and revolutions have taken place in all parts of the globe, or if, prevented by the armed forces of the government, the people continue to get ready for insurrections. So, he was arguing, that when the freedom of press is non-existent, then there is no scope for representing the grievances.

And once the grievances is underrepresented or un-redressed, that lead to innumerable revolutions in many parts of the globe. And even if, the government suppressed such revolutions or insurrections against the rule for the time being, people continue to be ready for insurrection in the future, when circumstances present. So, the freedom of press is absolutely, necessary for the sustainability or durability of the rule and it is absolutely critical for a liberal form of government.

Now, Roy also, presented some other arguments in support of the freedom of press.

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Roy presented several other arguments in support of a free press:

- ❖ In order to counter the missionaries' continuous attempts to disrepute the native religion and promote religious conversions, the natives should be guaranteed the weapon of press to protect their own faith.
- ❖ Guaranteeing the British citizens liberal rights and freedom while depriving such rights to the natives of India will provoke them to question and resist the British rule in India.
- ❖ It is unjust to punish the natives for a crime they did not commit. If at all, any fault was committed, it was by the "Calcutta Journal". And therefore, to punish the natives of India for such a fault is totally unwarranted.

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The other support he provided was that many Christian missionaries involved in religious conversion, where it was also promoting or disputing the native religion. And Raja Rammohan Roy believed that if the freedom of press was available to the natives, they could also protect their own faith from the malign propaganda by the missionaries about the religion and faith of the citizens. At this point, one needs to understand also, the significance of religion and religious rights in Raja Rammohan Roy.

So, we have discussed about this in the previous lecture on his ideas on religious reforms, along with civil, religious rights which is absolutely, critical for Raja Rammohan Roy. And this was something to do with the historical times, in which he was writing or mobilizing the public opinion. And he considered British rule more just because he felt that in comparison to the Muhammadan rule, or the Muslim rules, subjects of India felt more secured. Not just about their civil rights, but also, about their religious rights under the British rule.

So, the religion and protection of religion, promotion of one's religion, and of course he was also aware of the many evil practices in the religion which he wanted to rectify like Sati Pratha, and the promotion of women education or abolition of idol worship etc. So, he wanted to remove those evil practices. At the same time, he was also aware of the worth or the significance of the native religion. So, he believed that if the freedom of press was provided to the natives, they could also protect their religion from the

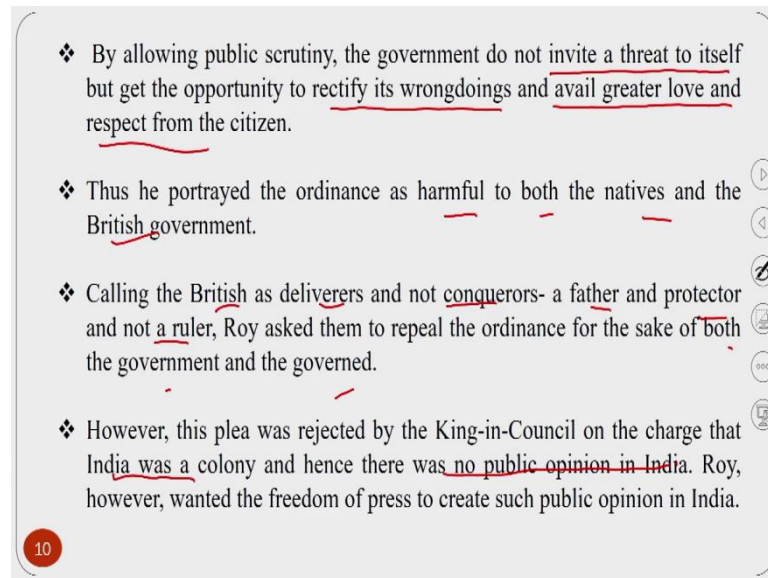
maligning campaigns or propaganda of the Christian missionaries to disrepute their religion.

His other argument, which was more significant was about the duality in the nature or hypocrisy among the British, where they championed or protected liberal rights in their home country but deny that rights to the colonized country. And against that Raja Rammohan Roy have argued that guaranteeing the British citizens liberal rights and freedom while depriving such rights to the natives of India would provoke them to question and resist the British rule in India.

And also, question or interrogate the intention of the British rule which claimed to be a kind of benevolent, more progressive government in this country, which would be hard to believe, if the same government protect and promote such rights in their home country, but deny and deprive the Indians of such rights here. So, that duality was something which was very problematic and it could provoke resistance to the British rule in India.

He also gave one specific reason that was related to the restriction on the freedom of press. That was, it was unjust to punish the natives for a crime they did not commit. And what was the crime? If at all any fault was committed it was by the *Calcutta Journal*. So, if you remember, why this regulation on the freedom of press was initiated, this was because of some publication in *Calcutta Journal* which was published by Buckingham and the whole controversy started from there. So, Raja Rammohan Roy was arguing that it was unjust to punish the natives for a crime they did not commit. And therefore, to punish the natives of India for such a fault was totally unwarranted. It was against the whole premise of natural justice. So, Raja Rammohan Roy was arguing for the freedom of press on these grounds as well.

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- ❖ By allowing public scrutiny, the government do not invite a threat to itself but get the opportunity to rectify its wrongdoings and avail greater love and respect from the citizen.
- ❖ Thus he portrayed the ordinance as harmful to both the natives and the British government.
- ❖ Calling the British as deliverers and not conquerors- a father and protector and not a ruler, Roy asked them to repeal the ordinance for the sake of both the government and the governed.
- ❖ However, this plea was rejected by the King-in-Council on the charge that India was a colony and hence there was no public opinion in India. Roy, however, wanted the freedom of press to create such public opinion in India.

He was also arguing that by allowing public scrutiny, the government did not invite a threat to itself. So, usually, those who yield power or are in the position of authority, they do not want to share, they do not want to invite any criticism to their performance, to their implementation and execution of policies. They do not want to share such information with the public.

But Raja Rammohan Roy is arguing that this allowing of public scrutiny, the government do not invite a threat to itself. But it get the opportunity to rectify its wrong doings, and also avail greater love and respect from the citizen. So, the whole question of legitimacy of a rule is dependent on the provision of subjecting government policies and implementation to public scrutiny. And that public scrutiny gives the government chance to rectify its wrongdoings and to correct its measures. And also earned the respect and love of its citizens which endure the rule.

So, he portrayed the ordinance as harmful to both the natives as well as to the British government and that is quite clear. So, the natives would not be able to express their grievances and government would never understand the grievances of the people and therefore, it could not rectify or redress such grievances which would ultimately harm the legitimacy of British rule in India.

So, on the other side of it was their belief in the British rule. So, many of them believed the British as deliverers and not the conquerors, father or protector and not the ruler. So,

Roy asked them to repeal the ordinance for the sake of both government and the governed. So, their expectation from the British rule was that it would champion or it would protect civil and religious rights of the natives, and would help itself in sustaining its rule in India. However, this plea was rejected by the King-in-Council and that is the point, I said in the beginning, this appeal as well as the memorial of Raja Rammohan Roy for the promotion of freedom of press which was rejected both by the Supreme Court and also by the King-in-Council.

Now, the reason that they gave was that India was a colony and hence there was no public opinion in India. And that is something very interesting. So, the whole justification for British rule in India is that the Indians, I hope, many of you are aware of this 'white man's burden' philosophy, that is they were here not to rule, but to civilize the primitives or the uncivilized.

So, it was God given responsibility of the British or White men to civilize the primitive. So, their rule was not for the benefit of themselves, but for the benefit of those they have colonized. Now, in such argument, they considered the colonial people incapable of representing themselves or governing themselves. And that was the justification for their rule in a colonized country. So, they were subjected to the more civilized, progressive Crown or the countries of Europe. So, the whole edifice of colonial rule or imperialism was based on this principle.

So, the King-in-Council rejected this plea of Raja Rammohan Roy arguing that India was a colony. And it was a colony hence; there could not be a public opinion in India or legitimate public opinion in India. So, government knew what was in the best interest of the people, and what government did was in the best interest of the people and hence, there was no legitimate public opinion in India which should be promoted or protected through the freedom of press etc.

The irony is, Raja Rammohan Roy was arguing for the freedom of press, because that would help in the creation of such public opinion in India. So, when people will write, articulate, assert their grievances, it will gradually help in shaping or constructing the public opinion in India and without the freedom of press, the possibility of such creation was a non-start, it cannot happen. So, the irony was the British argument for the

restriction of press and Raja Rammohan Roy's argument for the removal of such restriction on the freedom of press.

Now, very briefly, on his views on civil and political rights, what we find is he was one of the first Indians who imbibed the spirit of constitutional government.

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Rammohan Roy on Civil and Political Rights

- ❖ He was one of the first Indians who imbibed the spirit of constitutional government.
- ❖ The sole reason of his justifying the British Rule in India was the practice of civil liberties.
- ❖ He insisted on the enjoyment of civil liberties for the moral and intellectual development of the people.
- ❖ Despite his continuous effort in protecting the civil liberties, he never thought of demanding political freedom from the British rule.

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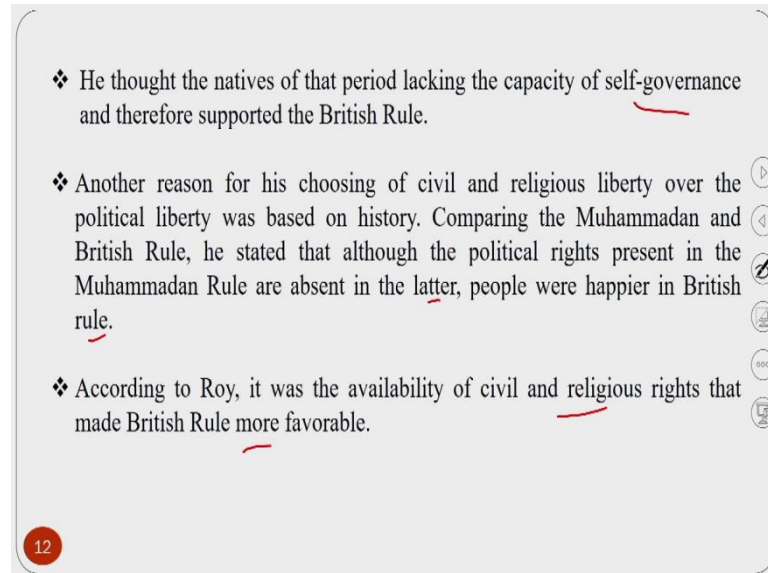
So, his appeal, memorial and support for modern education, all reflects, his belief in the liberal, responsible and accountable government. And he was, the first Indian to imbibe this spirit of liberal constitutional government in India.

And the sole reason for his justifying the British rule in India was the practice of civil liberties. So, they believed in the just nature and the true intention of the British rule in protection of civil as well as the religious rights. And he insisted on the enjoyment of civil liberties for moral and intellectual development of the people. He thought that without the civil rights, there could not be mental or intellectual development among the people and that was absolutely critical for modern representative liberal responsible government in India.

So, the other side of such support for liberal constitutional form of government was his continuous efforts in protecting the civil liberty, but he never thought of demanding political freedom from British rule in India. And that is something, which invites a lot of criticism against Raja Rammohan Roy. And we will discuss, in the concluding slides

why despite of his support for civil liberties, he never wanted political freedom from the British rule in India.

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- ❖ He thought the natives of that period lacking the capacity of self-governance and therefore supported the British Rule.
- ❖ Another reason for his choosing of civil and religious liberty over the political liberty was based on history. Comparing the Muhammadan and British Rule, he stated that although the political rights present in the Muhammadan Rule are absent in the latter, people were happier in British rule.
- ❖ According to Roy, it was the availability of civil and religious rights that made British Rule more favorable.

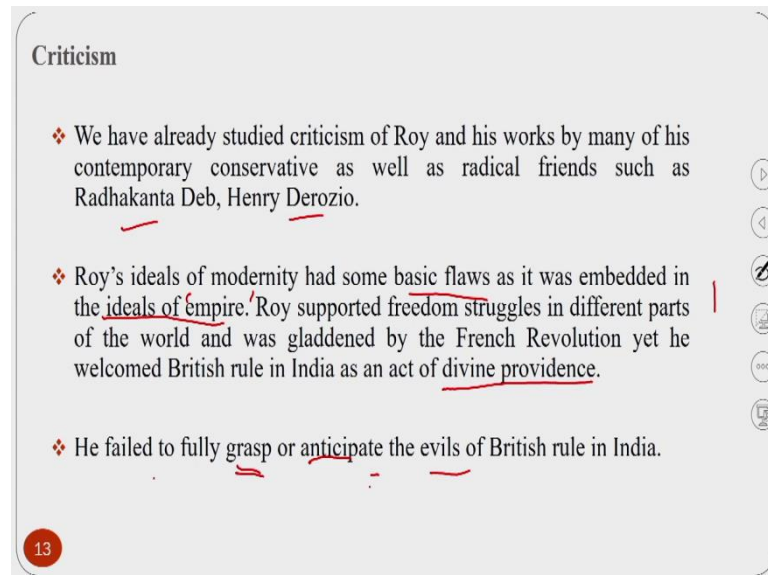
Because he thought the natives of that period, the historical circumstances in which Raja Rammohan Roy was articulating his ideas on freedom of press, both the political and civil rights, lack the capacity of self-governance and therefore he supported the British rule.

And another reason for his choosing of civil and religious liberty over the political liberty was based on history; as I was saying, that comparing to the Muhammadan and British rule, he stated that although, the political rights present in the Muhammadan rule are absent in latter. People were happier under the British rule. So, his argument is basically, during the Muhammadan rule many Indians enjoyed superior authority. They had the political rights which was by and large absent during the colonial rule. And yet people were happier in the British rule, because of some guarantee or protection of these civil and religious rights which was plundered or insulted many times by the pre-British rule including Muhammedans and Rajputs.

So, Raja Rammohan Roy was arguing for the civil and religious rights over the political liberty and freedom because of the historical circumstances in which people were caught in. And Raja Rammohan Roy was also someone who was carried away by such kind of belief in giving priority to civil and religious rights over the political freedom. So,

according to Roy, it was the availability of civil and religious rights that made British rule more favourable, and that is the point we have just discussed.

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Criticism

- ❖ We have already studied criticism of Roy and his works by many of his contemporary conservative as well as radical friends such as Radhakanta Deb, Henry Derozio.
- ❖ Roy's ideals of modernity had some basic flaws as it was embedded in the ideals of empire. Roy supported freedom struggles in different parts of the world and was gladdened by the French Revolution yet he welcomed British rule in India as an act of divine providence.
- ❖ He failed to fully grasp or anticipate the evils of British rule in India.

Now, if you look at the criticism against Raja Rammohan Roy, what we find is, and some of the criticism against Roy, as we have discussed in previous two lectures, especially, from his conservative as well as the radical friends like Radhakantha Deb and Henry Derozio, are basically about his positions on religious reforms and modern education, as we have discussed in the previous lectures.

The other criticisms of Roy is that Roy's ideals of modernity. He wanted India to modernize, to develop scientific and rationale outlook about religion, society, politics and economy. But his ideals of modernity had some basic flaws, as it was embedded in the ideals of the empire. The ideas of the empire, he did not really, question or interrogate it, or try to alter and articulate these. So, his ideas were in contrast with the ideals of empire.

So, the ideals he had were deeply, embedded with the ideals of empire and the way, he wanted India to modernize itself was deeply embedded in the ideals of empire. An empire has its own rationale, its own interest, and he failed to understand such interests and ideals. And therefore, there were some basic flaws in his ideals of modernity in India.

The other criticism is like he supported the freedom struggles in different parts of the world. So, when Latin American countries were fighting against the Spanish or Ireland or when many other countries were fighting against their colonizers. He was very supportive of such struggles. He was deeply gladdened by the French revolution.

But when it comes to India, he welcomed the British rule and did not really ask the question of political freedom from the British rule. And he considered it as the divine providence, it was something which was regarded as a God gift. And only through British rule, India could modernize. So, there is a kind of basic flaw in his ideals of modernity. So, many people argue but we have to be very careful in such criticism. I will discuss about it in the concluding slide.

The other criticism against Raja Rammohan Roy is that he failed, to fully grasp or anticipate the evils of British rule in India. So, many scholars argued that Raja Rammohan Roy did not really understand or grasp the rationale, or *raison d'être* of British rule in India and also the evil consequences of such rule.

Now, to conclude, we have to acknowledge, that he was the first great liberal and constitutional reformer in modern India.

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Concluding Remarks

- ❖ The first great liberal and constitutional reformer in modern India. He played a critical role in promotion of modern liberal education, religious reforms and in protection of freedom of press in India under the colonial rule.
- ❖ His support for the British rule can be explained through his historical context in which British appeared to be more just and harbinger of change in a decaying society and economy like India in comparison to the tyrannical rules of Rajputs and Mughals.
- ❖ And therefore many questions which was historically available latter such as the question of autonomy or freedom from the British rule were historically absent when Raja Rammohan Roy was developing his thoughts and fighting for religious reforms or promoting modern liberal education in India. He believed that material and moral progress of India was achievable under the 'just' rule of British.
- ❖ He was willing to accommodate and learn from different traditions be it Islam, Christianity or Vedantic philosophy of Hinduism and promoted modern scientific outlook towards society, religion and politics among his natives. And he was equally supportive of the universal brotherhood and interdependence among Individual as well nation rather than independence and isolation.

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And he played a critical role in promotion of the modern liberal education, religious reforms, and in protection of the freedom of press in India under the colonial rule. This is

his remarkable contribution as a first modern Indian political thinker, in terms of not just reforming the religion and the evil practices that was carried out in the name of religion.

But also, in the promotion of liberal education and through liberal education, scientific and rationale outlook, which ultimately led to some kind of responsible and representative government in India. And the freedom of press is complimentary to his vision of future India that he wanted to achieve under the British rule.

Now, his support, for the British rule can be explained through his historical context, in which British appeared to be more just and harbinger of change in a decaying society and economy like India, in comparison to tyrannical rules of Rajputs and Mughals. So, if you, understand his support for British rule historically, only then, we will be able to understand why did he supported the British rule. And also, historically speaking, when he was articulating his thoughts, these circumstances were in transition, where one set of ruler or ruling dynasties were on the decline be it Mughals, Marathas or Rajputs. And Britishers were on the verge of consolidating its rule in India on the basis of certain legal sound principles or predetermined principle of rules and administration.

And Raja Rammohan Roy, somehow, believed and also many of his contemporaries believed in the just nature or the right intention of the British rule in India which promoted or protected, articulated certain inalienable civil and religious rights of the people which were denied by the pre-British rule in India.

And therefore, many questions were historically available later. So, in the later period, there are many questions such as the question of autonomy and freedom from the British rule. These questions of autonomy and freedom of British rule are simply, historically absent when Raja Rammohan Roy was developing his thoughts and fighting for religious reforms or promoting modern liberal education or supporting the freedom of press in India.

So, it is easy for us today, to ask why, he could not support or articulated for political freedom from the British rule in India. But if you look at historically and situate him and his thought in his historical time, in that time and expectation of horizon, certain expectations, and questions were simply absent. And that is why, the question of autonomy and freedom from the British rule was historically, in their imagination, in

their intellectual articulation and thought was absent. And therefore, they really did not imagine or articulated the political freedom from the British rule in India.

And they believed that material and the moral progress of India were achievable under the just nature of British rule in India. Now, at this point, one can also make a comparison between some of his thoughts, and the later thoughts that developed, so many of you might be aware of Dadabhai Naoroji's, *the Unbritish rule in India*.

So, the question is not against the British or their intention, but the un-britishness of their rule in India. So, for a very long time, the Indians or many Indian thinkers or political activists were convinced about the just or the liberal principles of government of the British, but they were critical or they were questioning or challenging the un-britishness or the duality of their rule in India.

So, therefore, the question of autonomy and political freedom which came much later in 1920's and settled in thirties during the Lahore session of the congress. We will discuss about some other thinkers in India. But in historical imagination or historical circumstances in which Raja Rammohan Roy was articulating his thought, this question of autonomy and freedom was simply absent. And therefore, they wanted India to progress, to modernize under the British rule.

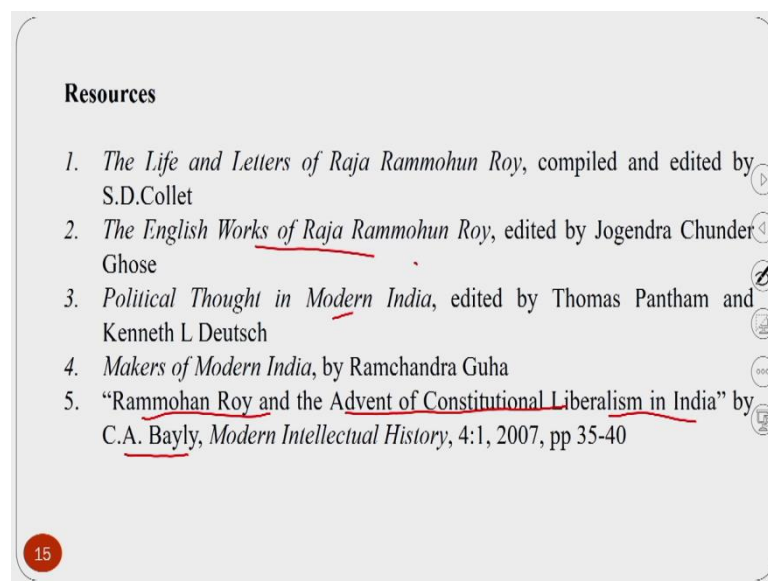
Now, the other characteristic of Raja Rammohan Roy was he was willing to accommodate and learn from different traditions, be it Islam, Christianity and Vedantic philosophy of Hinduism and promoted modern scientific outlook towards society, religion and politics among his fellow natives. So, as we have discussed in our first lecture, Raja Rammohan Roy was a widely, read person. Knower of a number of languages, he knew almost 10 languages, and he can read and write in many languages.

And this vast reading and comparative studies enabled him to accommodate and learn from different intellectual traditions and have a kind of thought which is accommodative of many good principles or ideas from different intellectual traditions. And that is, his broader comparative outlook that enabled him to develop in himself and he promoted it in the natives of India, to develop a scientific, rationale outlook to society, religion, economics and education, etc.

And he was equally, supportive of the universal brotherhood, and interdependence among individual as well as nation rather than independence and isolation. So, Raja Rammohan Roy was also someone who wanted to engage, to interact, and that engagement and interaction will ultimately, help in the overall improvement of material as well as the intellectual conditions of the people. And both can learn from each other, and he was supportive of such thoughts, especially, many other thinkers like Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo Ghosh carried such ideas from Raja Rammohan Roy.

So, in conclusion, what we can learn from Raja Rammohan Roy is despite of his support for British rule, he began to thought, a process or intellectual tradition, which many of the subsequent thinkers inherited from Raja Rammohan Roy and carried it forth in the intellectual as well as in the political field of India. And that is why, he remains a very powerful, very relevant figure, in terms of thinking about the modern Indian political thought.

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Now, for this lecture, you can look at some of these texts like, S. D. Collet on the *Life and Letters of Raja Rammohan Roy*. Then, from the *English Works of Raja Rammohan Roy* which is edited by Joginder Chandra Ghosh, you can read these two memorial that was sent to the Supreme Court and appeal to the King-in-Council. And the other texts you can look at, is Thomas Pantham and Kenneth L Deutsch (edited) text; and *Makers of Modern India* by Ramchandra Guha.

And if some of you are very interested in locating Raja Rammohan Roy in the modern Indian intellectual tradition, you can also look at this text by C. A. Bayly, *Rammohan Roy, and the Advent of Constitutional Liberalism in India*. He studied his thought and activities in the larger constitutional, liberal, and intellectual traditions in India at the beginning of such traditions in modern India. So, Raja Rammohan Roy is a very fascinating or influential thinker, in terms of his understanding or theorization of the modern Indian political thought. So, that is all on Raja Rammohan Roy. In the next lecture, we will discuss some other thinkers. Till then, thank you. Bye.

Thanks for listening.